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Music Beyond Digital : A Mooc, or How to Create what to Listen to

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- 1 This edition of *Hybrid* is dedicated to Listening, and allows us to put out online 10 pieces of stereophonic electroacoustics, that were selected amongst the works of the Mooc learners *Music beyond digital*, a project which was set up on the platform Fun-Mooc during Fall 2018.¹
- 2 *Music beyond digital*...The title of this Mooc, produced as part of the *So Culture* program² of the ComUE Paris Lumières, in collaboration with l'INA GRL and the CICM, can seem enigmatic. In a certain sense, it was meant to underline the fact that beyond electroacoustic techniques and the relationship to digital audio technologies, music remains a matter of human mediation. At a time of mass digital development, music continues to create itself, between humans. Even through learning methods and knowledge sharings such as a Mooc.
- 3 Because the general audience has access to many creative tools via the internet, this Mooc gave us the opportunity to share knowledge, how to hear, how to listen, which are all at the heart of experimental music traditions that surfaced after World War II thanks to sound recording systems, that have since constantly evolved, integrating in its organology, musical computing and digital audio from the 1980s. What makes music, in a given environment, whether it be cultural or organological, is the act of listening, a human and social activity, that constructs and shares sensible knowledge, that fuels imagination and makes sense of interactions with a listening community.
- 4 In electroacoustic music, listening guides an operational activity, in an electroacoustic work environment that is mainly digital, a computer emulation of the recording studio. In a DAW, *Digital Audio Workstation*, where multiples softwares and tools are at play, listening determines the montage choices, transformation, mix, the setting of sound material.
- 5 Nowadays, you can make *pop* and *electronic* music with a cellphone, or you can use the said phone as a microphone. It was not the subject of the Mooc, but we should take a

critical look at these approaches, because they lead us to a world of “ready to compose” music, where the automation of loops and the automatic processing of the electroacoustic chain give a completely standard result, preprocessed, pre-styled, to the point where it is possible to produce on a very professional level. But the creativity of listening, based on learning and knowing how to make sensitive choices from sound materials and their transformations, producing sensitive forms at various time levels of the musical moment being invented, is practically excluded from these trends, which also do not allow to produce historical and cultural connections other than based on stylistic mystifications *storytold* by the economy of the fan. As of today, listening tends to be something that carries you away, and is guided by digital rules with its streaming offers regulated by recommendation algorithms and a profiling of the listener. But that’s another story.

- 6 Our approach was based on an introduction to creative music, learning by doing and experimenting, listening to sound material by working on its transformations, in a historically situated framework, that of electroacoustic music, from 1945 to present day. As always in music, learning through practice is crucial, based on the trial-and-error loop of make-listen and the sensitive choice deciding in the moment. Immersion in a community of listening and practice, sharing a reference repertoire, and ways of doing things, is essential. Anne Sedes and Dominique Saint-Martin have cross-compared our experiences in order to offer an educational sequence of 7 sessions that form an initiation course to electroacoustic music through practice. This course is conform to Anne Sedes’ introductory class to electroacoustic, which is taught over the duration of a semester in the second year of musicology degree (Undergraduate) at Université Paris 8. It can also be thought of as an educational sequence such as the kind that high school music teachers set up to organize their lessons.
- 7 Each session included the following sections :
 - Background
 - Key Work
 - Step by Step
 - Your Turn
 - For Further Information on this Subject
 - Session 0 : Preparing your Studio !
 - Session 1 : Concrete Music
 - Session 2 : Recording, Mixing, Editing
 - Session 3 : Tape Music
 - Session 4 : Sound Synthesis
 - Session 5 : Granulations
 - Session 6 : Transformations
- 8 The filter of distance education courses could cause major difficulty. The forum, animated by Christine Webster (An electroacoustic composer, sound designer and who’s well-versed in digital platforms.), made it possible to organize a continuous and constructive dialogue, between teachers and learners.
- 9 During each session, the learners were invited to post personal composition works, in response to specific instructions. To continue, they had to listen to and evaluate at least three works from their fellow peers, based on a few technical criteria such as ensuring compliance with the writing constraints of the session as well as the instructions, and the artistic quality.

- 10 Each week, the twenty best evaluated works would remain accessible for collective listening.
- 11 The final task consisted in creating a 5-minute piece, which covered most of the course, and the 10 best pieces, selected by peers and teachers would give place to a concert listening. 1365 learners followed this Mooc. 65 learners participated in the final selection.
- 12 The concert took place on January 18, 2019 during the evening of the Symposium « Sciences of Music » in the Auditorium of MSH Paris Nord, which has been specially conceived for electroacoustic music. This symposium, organized by scholar societies in music, brought together many specialists in various musical disciplines, from ethnomusicology to musical analysis through music computing. The quality of the pieces in terms of artistic, formal and technical quality impressed the entire audience.
- 13 For the Second Session, which opened in Fall 2019, in addition to optimizing the offered content, we opted for each learner to post their work on an online listening platform, where the whole community could freely comment. We are thus responding to a request from learners, who were not fully convinced by the peer review system of the FUN-MOOC platform.
- 14 We are pleased to present below the selection of pieces from the said concert.

NOTES

1. <https://www.fun-mooc.fr/courses/course-v1:parislumiere+142001+session01/about>.
 2. A collaboration with GRM, the musical research group of l'INA, and the CICM, the centre de recherche en informatique et création musicale/Musidanse of Université Paris 8 So Culture is a partnership between Paris Lumières, Université Paris 8 – l'INA GRM (Institut national de l'audiovisuel - Groupe de recherches musicales), the Ile-de-France region and the European Union.
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AUTHORS

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She teaches electroacoustic composition for undergraduate students in musicology, in the « computer assisted » department of Paris 8. She co-wrote with Dominique Saint-Martin the Mooc « Music Beyond Digital », which is part of the *So Culture* program of the ComUE Université Paris Lumière.

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He is a musician and percussionist, pedagogue and head of the digital publishing projects of INA/GRM.

CHRISTINE WEBSTER

She is an electroacoustic composer, a sound artist as well as a tutor animating the forums of the Mooc learning community. A specialist in virtual worlds, she is also a doctoral student in aesthetics, sciences and technologies of the arts, with a specialty in music at Paris 8 and at the Spatial Media Lab of ENSAD. She has been working on the VRAS project at EUR ArTeC since 2019.