

Ordinary Music Archives (OMA) is both the title of my catalog raisonné, and the name of a private venue, exhibition space, and parleur for music-related art and art-related music that I have been running in downtown Budapest since spring 2021, with three to four events a year.

The OMA manifesto

It is our conviction that contemporary art and music must unite in a conceptual space that forms the basis of an intermedial transfer of ideas. This space establishes the intellectual conditions under which art and music are produced today, and perceived as such, and it must be permanently reformed by all participants in the discourse - artists, curators, theorists, historians and observers.

Currently, in our society, art and music are separate domains, each with their own discourses, their own spaces of presentation, and their own audiences. Additionally, within music there is still the categorical distinction of Pop and so-called 'Art Music'. In this respect, the discourse of visual art seems to be more progressive; it aims to embrace the diversity of artistic forms by focusing on the evaluation of the individual approach rather than establishing general categories. This makes it easier for artists to transcend the sphere separation of popular and so-called 'high culture', if not generally ignore it.

On the other hand, in music this separation seems to be practically justified to a certain degree, because Pop and Classical Music are not only different styles, but in fact different artistic media, each requiring a completely different form of presentation, and a completely different listening behavior. Transcending the categories is possible, yet it does not seem to lead to a new norm, but only to the formation of new subgenres. In our opinion, the key issue of any ambitious music today should be how to generate its own appropriate listening behaviour, by virtue of its inherent expressive possibilities, without involving itself in staging rituals that already anticipate a categorical classification even before the first note sounds. Furthermore, there are also tendencies to transcend the categories of art and music; in the past this has led to the formation of diverse artistic and musical subgenres, such as sound installation, sound sculpture, sound art, visual music, graphic score and not least experimental music.

The latter is often accused of not being music at all; and this accusation is quite accurate. John Cage already answered: "You don't have to call it 'music', if the term shocks you". Regardless, we will have to continue calling it 'music' as long as we have no other term to name an art form that explicitly addresses listening. Experimental music, however, cannot be considered 'music' in the everyday language sense, since it has turned away from the semantic tradition of the medium, and its constitutive elements of melody and rhythm. In fact, in its basic conception, it represents the literal opposite of music, in that it is dedicated to exploring the nature of music, and the most effective way to explore the nature of a thing is the attempt to imagine its exact opposite.

Once this is found, we can approach the issue from the two ends of that continuum that spans between the thing in question and its diametrical counterpole, and thus determine the point of distinction. Consequently even experimental music can always draw on traditional musical elements, as in the minimal music of the 1960s. In principle, experimental music can contain both musical and non-musical elements, in each case under the premise that these are not employed in the service of entertainment, but in the service of exploring the medium.

Accordingly, experimental music is defined not by its material but by its compositional approach. Whereas the traditional composer, much like a writer of prose or poetry, more or less follows the dictates of an inner monologue, the experimental composer, much like the conceptual artist, follows a self-imposed procedural model. Experimental music may contain improvisational elements, but so-called 'Free Improvisation', which spreads across the entire continuum of musical and extra-musical sounds without imposing any conceptual constraint on itself, cannot be classified as 'experimental' as long as it does not provide verifiable data on the nature of the medium.

If we take a look at the historical state of music in the 1960s, it certainly resembles that of the visual arts in the 1910s; the period in which the decisive course directions were made that will, in all likelihood, shape the centuries to come. The current state of music, however, resembles that of the visual arts of the 1960s; the period in which conceptual thinking, and accordingly the priority of idea over metier, gradually prevailed.

The starting signal may have been given in 1914 by Marcel Duchamp, who with the 'Bottle Rack' placed the diametrical opposite of a traditional artwork into the context of art: an everyday object; an object that was no longer shaped, but only chosen by the artist. According to Marcel Duchamp, the medium of the readymade symbolizes not only a new form of art, but altogether a new form of being. Since any form of art or music can be seen as a model of the human condition, any shift in the boundaries of art also changes the perspective on other areas of social life, such as politics, science, and not least the world of work. Once we replace the categorical distinction of art and non-art with a continuum, any human being, through any form of production or performance, can approach the realm of art, provided that it is accompanied by a notion of aesthetic behavior.

The condition that everyone has access to art, however, in no way makes professional artists and musicians superfluous; just as the condition that everyone can engage politically does not make professional politicians superfluous. But with the elevation of the viewer or listener, from a mere consumer, to an active participant in the art event, the self-conception of professional artists and musicians must of necessity also change: if the processes of viewing and listening become an essential factor in the creative act, professional artists and musicians must also devote themselves more to the forms of viewing and listening, and less to the fabrication of objects and narratives.

OMA wants to embark on the adventure of linking to a discourse that challenges both the concepts of art and music. We believe that art and music are currently distracted to a great extent through the digital technologies. The expressive possibilities of these technologies may be infinite, but at the same time they are always limited to what is technically feasible. The medium itself becomes form, to the extent that it limits the user's range of motion. By using media that it has not developed itself, through its own traditions, art makes itself the vicarious agent of an economic system that targets the undermining of the autonomy of art - which is always also a model for the creative freedom of the individual - in order to subordinate it to the consumption dictatorship of technological progress. We want to encourage artists and musicians to create their own intellectual tools instead of hanging on to a development that they themselves are not in control of.

We are convinced that it is the task of art and music to create spaces that are independent of contemporary production conditions; spaces to which the global economic conspiracies have no access. The noblest quality of the arts was and is their timelessness. Timelessness is not a privilege, but the preservation of integrity, in a permanent struggle with the spirit of the age.

This being said, we do not want to banish any form of art or music that uses contemporary technologies in one or the other way. We simply demand that the creative act remain an act of autonomous thinking that for its recording virtually requires no material or device other than pencil and paper.