

ovalprocess US 2k lecture v0.2

## workflow

The oval musical approach has always been focussed on the observations of technical aspects of a typical productivity workflow - as opposed to an approach dealing with the discussion of musical concepts on a level of content or culture - I have, instead of trying to inscribe myself into some „musical“ heritage or historical music discourse, instead relied on the irrelevance of even trying to provide „groundbreaking“ artifacts, but to offensively engage with the standards of one typical workflow in digital productivity media. This way, I deliberately create quite transitory, „just-in-time“ by-products of my personal accommodation process with the given operating systems and user-interface-technology of digital music. Instead of contributing to a electronic musical legacy or experimental music history, my music tries to introduce a new definitely standard, something like a revised Music-2.0-category, that would do justice to the substantial technical transitions electronic music production (not necessarily the musical result) has undergone in recent years.

Today's contemporary range of musical possibilities are to be evaluated rather in terms of a tightly integrated, complex workflow and to be seen as a navigational effort from within music productivity media (centered around a range of software applications, which, each in their own right, allow for even increased complexity through interchangeable file formats) rather than to be interpreted through the personality of the artist.

Having said that, it is equally clear that there is of course a long row of evolutions in music hardware and software technology on which I, as a recording artist, in my work by principle rely on quite offensively - and thus far each single software update seemed well capable of instantly altering the entire range of all underlying musical paradigms at once - but I rather see my task as not to artistically explore, but to vigorously comment on these substantial transitions music-making has undergone.

## music / software

With electronic music production in general increasingly depending on graphic user-interfaces, symbol analysis and pattern-recognition - especially since the computer has been serving as the universal meta-medium, capable of integrating and providing access to all former, residual media under one iconic „desktop“ - electronic music productivity software has become clearly visible as an universal container merging all formerly developed „dedicated“ musical hardware into one tightly integrated environment, effectively determining (and limiting) the range and scope of any eventual contribution to the musical discourse by the producer.

Albeit potentially universal, most of these music productivity software environments do only serve as a vehicle for a certain kind of conceptualization of musical heritage, an implemented container for musical legacy in the traditional sense of the word. Music pro-



ductivity software is serving as a universal, conceptual container for the remnants of musicality in the late age of audio.

The vast majority of these music software applications is designed and implemented along critical and historically obsolete music metaphors like metrum, tempo, tonality, scales, which are residing in the music metaphors (studio-, tape metaphor etc.). Despite all the potentially liberating tendencies of this productivity software, I myself am much more focussed on the massive standardization involved in this workflow instead of the "creative" possibilities.

Experience has shown that the resulting outcome gains an at times unacceptable degree of predictability and therefore only signifies the already somewhat deplorable state of the technical discussion of this workflow. All recent affordability and dramatically increased accessibility of musical equipment has provided a dramatically larger group of content creators with the means to cultural production, musical or otherwise. First and foremost, this introduced transition situation provides us with the clear benefit of transforming the definition of the musical category itself quite fundamentally, effectively defining as some sort of work-in-progress - within certain boundaries, conceptual and otherwise - that have to be discussed alongside the musical result- but this is rarely the case.

The downside of this equalizing tendency is that the resulting electronic music appeared as the mere common ground that can be easily agreed upon in advance: as soon as one used these „virtual studio instruments“ it was fully ensured that the outcome was going to be of at least some musical value. The problem with discussing a term like music is that it is largely overshadowed by notions of creativity, authorship, and intentionality and largely conceals the relevant questions. Oval methods and strategies are instead pointing to the blind spots of electronic music production, fully aware of the fact that any such analytic effort in this field of digital media is necessarily affirmative and contributing to the optimization of human-computer-interaction, which is of course problematic.

#### oval audio

In stark contrast, my own personal approach is rather determined by the offensive use of standards. Standards (file formats, file transfer protocols, compression standards, codecs and operating systems) are much more crucial elements of my working process than any eventual „experimental“ usage of digital (music) media, because they have proven to be the determining underpinnings of what can be done in general. Instead of overcoming any eventual limitation imposed by imperfect software, I was always ambitious to explore the overcome the distinctions between features and bugs and try build up an alternative semantic on top of imperfection.

According to the software/music industry, any new generation of available audio authoring environments offers a vast range of "creative possibilities" granting the artist powerful means of precise control over his or her composition. In opposition to this, Oval audio heavily relies on a vast, contingent filesystem of arbitrary 16-bit audio files, which



in the recent past has widely proven to be quite capable of successfully replacing concepts like creativity, invention and artistic subjectivity all at once - well, almost. Instead of artistically exploiting all these admittedly „new“ possibilities (possibilities more in a logistic than artistic sense of the word) I instead try to present people with one possible, innovative and above all else alternative new standard in audio artifacts, centered around a re-defined music 2.0, allowing me to draw and introduce new distinctions into an otherwise largely overestimated field (called electronic music) in order to build up a new, potentially critical stance that engages with the concepts and notions underlying the software metaphors.

Oval music is far less occupied with music-as-it-was than it is an analysis of contemporary concepts and notions of music or music metaphors residing in current software environments. Since I am engaged with the technical implementations of music according to graphic-user-interfaces and on-screen-editing. Since music in the age of affordable personal desktop multimedia authoring appears as a plain entry-level technology to a vast field of work in digital aesthetics in general, I decided to focus on the actual editing process within a deliberately limited scope in order to reveal new distinctions that are still appealing in musical result as well. Of course this process is structured and deliberate to a certain extent, however the emphasis doesn't lie on the creative configuration of a smooth, linear succession of sounds by adding up to a musical „sound space“: instead a constant, single-mindedly determined workflow has proven to be much more responsible for the quality of musical outcome.

#### process

Conceptually, ovalprocess is meant to serve as a release / productivity platform in its on right, taking different forms and incarnations over time and therefore, from a retail point of view, takes the form of a series of releases and incarnations all presented under the name of process. Furthermore, process will attempt to comprise a succession of documents of broadening my work into different fields. The work on the software alone introduced many new considerations and interdisciplinary factors and demanded (for my standards, anyway) and, above all else, a new level of creative dialogue and connectivity. For obvious reasons, ovalprocess opens the series as an audio CD, but will take other forms and use different formats in the near future, most of that being worked on right now.

On a statement-level, ovalprocess equally represents an exact model of the oval methodology and general approach. Therefore, process can display the "creative" potential as well as the deliberate limitations underlying the overall oval musical platform - as much as it represents a fully functional, thoroughly designed interactive multimedia software clearly delineating that contemporary electronic music itself nowadays has to be discussed through the means of software design.

ovalprocess will also be serving as the frontend / software interface to a new oval sound installation concept which is centered around a publicly accessible sound terminal, running ovalprocess on a PowerMacintosh & LCD monitor residing in a custom-built front-



end of information-terminal style and proportions - providing intuitive and easy access to the provided oval audio content via a trackball interface.

The ovalprocess software currently is targeted at serving as an engine for (currently 3) sound installation objects. For now, I have pursued the possibilities that lie within formatting ovalprocess as an audio CD that corresponds with a real-world installation object in the public space capable of creating communicative situations in the real world among real people. The clear benefit of collaborating with this Berlin-based architecture company, skotoparc, was the insight into a world that in every possible respect was organized very differently.

The first ovalprocess sound installation object is part of a music theme park called "music box" (with an emphasis on interactive/educational music applications and exhibits, targeted at a broad audience, more on a family-entertainment level) at the newly built SONY of Europe HQ in Berlin. In the few weeks it has been on display there, some 500.000 visitors have seen (and probably tried out) ovalprocess (and almost all of those longer than the 30 seconds the SONY market researchers had predicted as the expected duration of a typical first contact).

With this rather "unspecific" setting and audience like this SONY exhibition, which gives me no selectivity as far as the demographic/interest of the visitors (which are supposedly mainly tourists and students), ovalprocess is truly a target of a completely unspecific, almost random form of public access, which I see as an unprecedented, priceless benefit - and a substantial change over targeting "specifically interested" audiences as with my concerts or workshops/lectures... The sheer prospect of having to deal with this situation at SONY - a massive, random audience demographic with very little or no knowledge about/insight into electronic, let alone my music in a setting that at best relies on a very traditional definition of "music" - imposed certain factors mostly technical requirements from the side of the SONY floor management) on my work on the project that I see as the main progress that I have made over just recording one more audio CD sold in the usual record stores.

Generally, however, both sound objects will of course be displayed in more "specific" contexts and circumstances and will find a more computer-literate audience, possibly even already familiar with my music work in a way. In any case, however, according to the definition of the ovalprocess software as an intuitive productivity tool and the terminals being designed as this front-end to a "public access"-type of approach to the software, all components and interfaces involved must always remain designed suitable for all audiences. The more important factor, however, is that the ovalprocess software and the sound object serving as a front-end providing access to my sounds is at all defining a means for discussing this endeavor and music productivity in general beyond the point of just purchasing a product, like and dislike of an audio CD. Process (the software) should instead provide a basis to (re-)consider music productivity and aspects of workflow - just as much as it in return newly introduced considerations of user-guidance, usability, functionality and workflow ergonomics into my own work.

Along these lines, one could easily assume that the ovalprocess software would now successfully replace both myself and oval audio in general. But this will not be the case



for several reasons. One being, that ovalprocess is meant to serve as a conceptual bracket, capable of documenting the oval work in a much broader sense than only audio recordings, effectively already effortlessly overcoming the . In this respect, ovalprocess is effectively taking the role of something between an oval record label / release platform and an edition/series.

## problems

What remains most important however, is my ambition, to point to other, more problematic factors in music making than to those tedious concerns, related to historical baggage carried by music productivity software or the authoring principle in general. Instead of relying on dubious concepts like subjectivity or „inspiration“ I rather left the „creative“ part to the contingency of the implemented parameters involved in the digital music workspace components themselves. Oval is far less occupied with music-as-it-was than it is an analysis of contemporary concepts and notions of music or music metaphors residing in current software environments. As soon as one starts working according to digital musical media immediately introduces multiple time modes, contingency-on-the-spot and a complex workflow. All I want is under these circumstances is to draw and introduce new distinctions into an increasingly widely overestimated field of electronic music production in order to build up a new, potentially critical stance. Besides, a constant, single-mindedly determined workflow has proven to be much more responsible for the quality of musical outcome than any concept based on inspiration.

In short, oval audio is dealing with the technical implementations of music according to the paradigms behind contemporary graphic-user-interfaces and on-screen-editing than with contributing to an audio narrative or musical legacy. Of course this effort is structured and deliberate to a certain extent, however the emphasis doesn't lie on the „personal“ configuration of a smooth, linear succession of sounds by adding up to a musical narrative in the generic sense.

Music in the age of affordable personal desktop multimedia authoring appears to me as a mere entry-level technology and an accommodation process to a much wider field of work in digital media authoring aesthetics in general. The emphasis of my work lies heavily on observations of my own workflow. And since my overall aesthetic ambition is pointing more towards an analysis / comment on user-interface technology than towards music in the emphatic sense of the – and using already predetermined fragments off any arbitrary CD I get sent by people surely is a good point to start from.

Along these lines and strictly speaking, all contemporary electronic music production could therefore certainly be regarded as some sort of public beta testing process, that only on a retail level of finalized product takes the form of music, and otherwise remains an affordable and at best more or less documented personal adaptation process to the specifics (and workarounds) of the utilized productivity environment.

Unfortunately, this very popular point of view is effectively concealing the most relevant questions. One of the most tragic shortcomings of current electronic music discourse remains the notorious lack of a common-sense-type-of familiarity with the technological



underpinnings of current electronic music production so that even the artist has blown away several musical paradigms at once with a single track, gets reduced to his/her contribution value to the sound domain.

Unlike the field of video games, contemporary music as I observe it does not seem to trigger any public recognition, let alone discussion of the technological paradigms underlying its production. Furthermore, a major part of the discussion of productivity software seems to revolve around its shortcomings or limitations. Until very recently, those famous „limitations“ for Oval had proven to be - rather than musically constraining these equally famous „musical possibilities“ - the only guarantee that things got finished after all, since it was not even worth trying to wait for any new piece of software or update respectively, since they were implemented according to obsolete musical categories. Now, with music as a widely exploited terrain increasingly inferiorized by digital visual. From a producers perspective, the audio domain as a whole gets visible as a something like a very limited terrain, not any longer capable to provide any new distinctions and in return apparently meeting all the criteria of an „old“ medium.

#### conclusion

Most importantly, however, custom software will continue to be part of the problem and not the solution as long as the actual understanding and practical use of this software does not substantially change. Today's commercially available software does already allow for an in my opinion very contemporary, very legitimate and also critical stance on the producer's part, but the somewhat deplorable state of the overall discussion of productivity tools prevents the overdue change of paradigms. As long as the public perception and mediation of a discussion of the music productivity workflow does not substantially change, the benefit of such "signature" software is much into question and will not solve anything. It is rather the discourse of the technical standards underlying electronic music production that is in need of a drastic overhaul. Contributing a custom piece of software and only continuing to design or use it along worn-out conceptual paths or obsolete musical paradigms will not be of any help.