

An Implication of an Implication

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Carter Ratcliff, one of the most frequent commentators on Max Neuhaus's art, once characterized its politics as "an implication of an implication."¹ Reading through the not-insignificant literature devoted to Neuhaus's sound works only reinforces such an impression. On account, perhaps, of the formal, even formalist nature of his molding of acoustic material—an impression additionally fostered by the elegant drawings by which his sound works are insufficiently (as the artist noted) represented—critics have been led to discuss his work predominantly, if not solely, in aesthetic and experiential terms.² Yet, as with others of Neuhaus's generation of Minimal and Postminimal sculptors, composers, and filmmakers, the impetus behind his art was, in fact, thoroughly political; indeed, politics, as we shall see, was the very precondition of his move from the realm of music into that of art. It is therefore worth while to investigate Neuhaus's practice, as it emerged in the 1960s and continued until his death in February 2009, from this angle. In order to bring out this aspect of his production, however, we will begin neither with an artwork nor with a musical performance but with a *New York Times* editorial Neuhaus published on December 6, 1974.

I. Listen

Submitted as "Noise Pollution Propaganda Makes Noise" and appearing under the unfortunately cartoonish title "BANG, BOOoom; Thump, EEEK, tinkle," the editorial by Neuhaus, identified only as "a composer," responded to a pamphlet published by the Department of Air Resources of the New York City Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "Noise Makes You Sick."³ Noise pollution had been in the news frequently over the preceding months, owing to the repercussions of the federal Noise Control Act of 1972. New Jersey public-utilities officials opened 1974 with an inquiry into excessive

noise produced by the Erie Lackawanna Railway's freight lines.⁴ In March, the nation's first toll-road noise regulations were implemented on the New Jersey Turnpike, an action followed in October by the federal EPA's issuing noise-control standards for interstate-highway trucking.⁵ In June, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development misapplied noise regulations intended for airport traffic in order to refuse funding for government-subsidized housing in the predominantly African American New York neighborhoods of Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Brownsville.⁶ Earlier that month, the *New York Times* had weighed in with an editorial against excessive automobile horns during parade-route traffic jams, declaring that "noise pollution is a serious affront to city dwellers" and that there was no "excuse for allowing a flagrant and unnecessary assault on the population's ears and nerves."⁷ Reports in October indicated that the city EPA was in turmoil under incoming mayor Abraham David "Abe" Beame, with "Civil Servant clerks . . . from the Air Resources Department's Bureau of Noise Abatement . . . doing nothing, because . . . the professionals they worked for are gone," a situation that did little to deter letter writers from likening noise to smoking and calling for suppression of "the plague of transistor radios" in public space.⁸

Neuhaus's Op-Ed ran distinctly counter to the tide of public opinion, declaring in its first line, "The popular concept of 'noise pollution' is a dangerously misleading one."⁹ Neuhaus indicated that the Department of Air Resources's pamphlet discussed noise in purely physiological terms, bypassing the social dimension of sound within the "public environment." According to the city EPA, loud sounds, regardless of source or context, have detrimental effects on the ear, brain, glands, and internal organs. (In actuality, as Neuhaus noted, "the reaction doesn't normally go as far as the glands and internal organs.") "Through extreme exaggeration of the effects of sound on the human mind and body," he contended, "this propaganda has so frightened people that it has created 'noise' in many places where there was none before, and in effect robbed us of the ability to listen to our environment." In contrast to physiology, Neuhaus emphasized people's capacity to adapt to acoustic shocks, observing, "A human being conditions himself fairly quickly to what is 'loud or unexpected' in his particular environment," and, "certainly the modern urban dweller is not put in a state of fright (except of course when there is actual danger) very often by the sounds around him."

Neuhaus did not speak out indiscriminately against noise abatement. He noted that the environment contained truly "ear-damaging sounds" and granted an evident "need to be able to rest from sound just as we do from visual stimulation." Instead, what he contested was the establishment of rigid distinctions between proper and improper sounds, allowable and excluded noises. "Surely," he maintained, "several hundred years of musical history can be of value: At the very least, they can show us that our response to sound



Donald Laird, "Experiments on the Physiological Cost of Noise," 1929. From the *Journal of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology*, no. 4 (January 1929), p. 253, fig. 1.

is subjective—that no sound is intrinsically bad. How we hear it depends a great deal on how we have been conditioned to hear it." Needless to say, the subtlety of Neuhaus's argument was lost on many readers. Nicholas Bergman of Citizens for a Quieter City responded angrily, denouncing Neuhaus's position and, citing the dangers of hearing loss, all but proposing a ban on amplified music in the name of public safety.¹⁰

Neuhaus was entering an area of long-standing contention. The Society for the Suppression of Unnecessary Noise was founded in New York City in 1906, and in 1929 New York's health commissioner appointed the nation's first noise-abatement commission in response to studies such as those by Donald Laird, which documented a connection between noise, inefficiency, and detrimental physiological response.¹¹ Despite economic and physiological justifications, however, civic noise regulations, as Emily Thompson has argued, were thoroughly political and disproportionately applied to lower-class and minority populations. In the 1930s, as Thompson has shown, distinct anxieties about recent demographic changes crystallized around the discursive treatment of jazz, which likened the urban mechanical noise of modernization to the music of the city's increasing African American population.¹² Legal constraints on so-called noise pollution were written and subjectively enforced so as to target populations and avocations that did not fit with the white "middle-class vision of a well-ordered city."¹³

As a virtuoso percussionist, Neuhaus had participated throughout the 1960s in an avant-garde music scene wherein issues of noise, sound, and social discrimination were explicitly debated.¹⁴ In "Lecture on Nothing," of 1950, avant-garde composer John Cage had pointedly, if subtly, likened the issue of noise to that of social justice,

declaring, "I liked noises just as much as I had liked single sounds. Noises, too, had been discriminated against; and being American, having been trained to be sentimental, I fought for noises. I liked being on the side of the underdog."¹⁵ Earlier in his career, Cage had briefly aligned his percussion aesthetic with that of jazz, seeing in the latter both advanced rhythmic structures and a laudable political model of collective improvisation.¹⁶ By the late 1940s, however, he had distanced himself from jazz, subtly disparaging it (and folk music) as "not cultivated species, growing best when left wild."¹⁷ By 1964, the political implications of avant-garde music had been taken up by artist, composer, and radical philosopher Henry Flynt, who pressed Cage and others by arguing that a truly progressive avant-garde had to ally itself explicitly with oppressed populations, particularly African Americans, by approaching not only jazz but also indigenous forms of blues and rock and roll. Anything less could only be considered—as Flynt charged in public protests against Karlheinz Stockhausen—"Racism in Music."¹⁸ Neuhaus could hardly have been unaware of Flynt's position; not only did the two travel in some of the same circles but Neuhaus performed in both concerts that Flynt and associates had picketed under the guise of Action against Cultural Imperialism.¹⁹ By the end of 1974, when Neuhaus's Op-Ed appeared, both Stockhausen and Cage would be under attack from an increasingly politicized group of composers, most notably Cornelius Cardew, whose positions Neuhaus would likely also have known.²⁰

In addition to resonating with the contentious history of noise abatement in New York and the political debates in the musical avant-garde, Neuhaus's Op-Ed also alluded to his own contemporary production. His call to rectify misleading antinoise propaganda by "showing people other ways to listen to their surroundings" indirectly referenced his *Listen* pieces (1966–76), in which he posterized acoustically interesting sites such as the Brooklyn Bridge with signs reading "LISTEN" or stamped the word on individuals' hands and led them on "field trips thru found sound environments" to enhance their auditory appreciation.²¹ Neuhaus's initial *Listen* event—which he considered his "first independent work as an artist"—took place in February 1966.²² Beginning on East Fourteenth Street in Manhattan's East Village, Neuhaus led listeners through the "spectacularly massive rumbling" of the Con Edison power plant that rises on both sides of the street between Avenues C and D, continued along the automobile-filled East River Drive, passed "through the Puerto Rican street life of the lower east side," and ended at his studio for a percussion concert.²³ The itinerary formed an implicit manifesto, equating percussion music to urban environmental sounds and allying machine noise with the soundscape of an ethnic-minority neighborhood. Such interconnections made explicit what was tacit in Neuhaus's Op-Ed: the aesthetic refusal to

distinguish between proper and improper sounds relates to a political refusal to discriminate between “proper” and “improper” inhabitants of the urban public sphere.

II. Times Square

By the end of 1974, when his Op-Ed appeared, Neuhaus had been planning the sound work that would become known as *Times Square* (1977–92; 2002–present) for more than a year. Located at the north end of a small triangular traffic island between Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth streets at the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, the piece, completed in 1977, consists of a range of closely related tones that well up from beneath a metal subway grating. In today’s art world, filled with officially sanctioned, site-specific Postminimal sculpture, it is difficult to conceive of how odd Neuhaus’s proposal initially seemed. Henry Romney called it “the zaniest” proposition ever received by the Rockefeller Foundation (which nonetheless awarded Neuhaus a grant of \$4,525 toward its completion).²⁴

As Neuhaus explained to fellow sound artist Christina Kubisch, his decision to leave concert performance behind to erect soundscapes within more freely accessible public spaces was “political,” conditioned by “his realization that music had to communicate with a different public in different spaces.”²⁵ Voicing an anti-institutional position at one with the times, Neuhaus told Amy Hiffner in 1974 that it was “ridiculous to be cooped up in a concert hall situation” when there were “tremendous opportunities for making music accessible to people.”²⁶ As he reiterated his thinking more recently:

My premise in leaving Carnegie Hall and going to Times Square was that I felt that I could deal, in a serious way, with a broad spectrum of people who were not necessarily culturally initiated, not by reducing or simplifying what I did but by using an uncodified language, not assuming any specific knowledge of the listener and taking the new context seriously, building upon what was really there, not for a context that was not, like a museum or concert hall.²⁷

Unmarked, unsigned, apparently unauthored, *Times Square* aims to instantiate an explicitly antiauthoritarian form of public art, refusing to dictate the terms of aesthetic experience or even that the experience is, per se, aesthetic. Kubisch described the effect as advancing a “strong tendency towards Intimism . . . excluding any personal relationship with the author. Thus, after having been in the spotlight for a long time, the artist is running away from the field of action, leaving his work to stand on its own.”²⁸ “Having no way of knowing that it has been deliberately made,” asserted Neuhaus of *Times Square*, uninformed percipients “usually claim the work as a place of their own discovering.”²⁹

By the time he conceived of *Times Square*, Neuhaus had already created several works that would come to be called sound installations: *Fan Music* (1967), in which photovoltaic cells behind rotating fan blades activated loudspeakers across the rooftops of four buildings on the Bowery, the sounds' volume and tonal color dependent on the sun's brightness and angle; *Drive-in Music* (1967), in which radio transmitters placed along a roadway leading from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, constructed a topography of sound heard only on car stereos; *Southwest Stairwell* (1968), at Ryerson University in Toronto, where visitors in making their way up or down a four-story staircase could perceive a succession of graduating timbres; and *Walkthrough* (1973–77), where partially weather-controlled acoustic clicks and pings filled an entryway of Brooklyn's Jay Street–Borough Hall subway station. Neuhaus had also experimented with installation-like situations within the context of musical performances, as in *Three Hours of Sound Construction* (1968), an audio-visual presentation involving "14 speakers positioned strategically—diabolically, even—about the auditorium" of Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, and a 1966 rendition of Morton Feldman's *King of Denmark* (1964) performed, not onstage, but in the stairwell of the Arts Club of Chicago.³⁰ Thomas Willis of the *Chicago Tribune* reported of the latter, "The audience obediently sat on the steps, clustered along the railings, and stood near the exit door. The percussionist was playing the blocks and bells with his fingers from a score taped to the wall. What was audible made an interesting obbligato to the traffic noise coming thru the glass wall."³¹

Neuhaus's most sustained investigation of what he called a "sound-oriented piece in a situation other than the concert hall" would be the seventeen Water Whistle events, staged in swimming pools between 1971 and 1974 and continued by three Underwater Music "concerts" between 1976 and 1977.³² In them, Neuhaus rigged up a series of underwater hoses capped with whistles of various pitches. Lasting up to fifteen hours, and leaving the swim-trunk-clad audience free to enter and leave at will, Neuhaus's underwater concerts were already, as he called them, "sound environment[s]."³³ According to the comments of those who experienced them, the pieces rewarded sustained auditory attention (a form of attentiveness that would appropriately be described, were it not for the unfortunate pun, by composer Pauline Oliveros's term "deep listening"). Al Brunelle wrote in *Art in America*, "The ear, focused effortlessly on the ongoing stimulus, reacted with increasing discrimination. After five or ten minutes, the increase in interior variation of the drone was startling, and it moved toward further differentiation of already tiny parts. Microscopic dramas flooded the sound and were themselves invaded or effaced."³⁴ The geometric enclosures of water defined by the contours of the pools—labeled on Neuhaus's related drawings "polyhedral

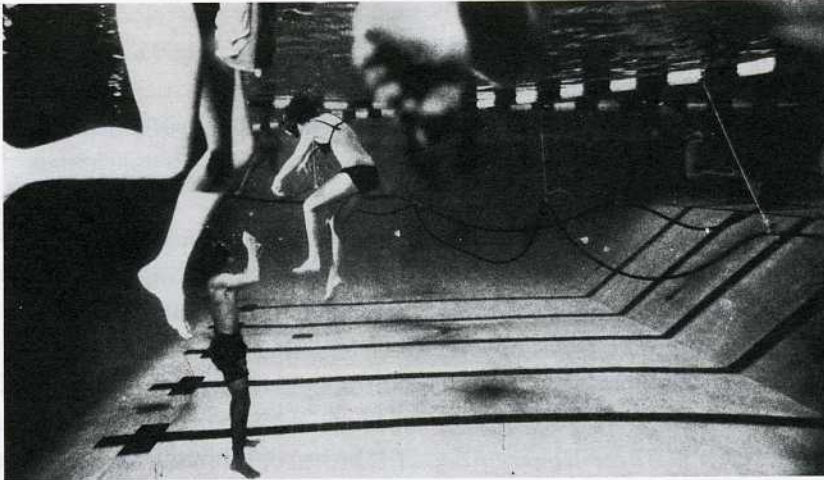


Photo by Tom Bennett of Max Neuhaus's *Water Whistle*, 1974

volumes”—along with the implicit recreational invitation to swim, emphasize the spatialization of the acoustic phenomena, which could only be heard underwater. Swimmers dived or floated through overlapping zones of acoustic variation caused by the whipping, water-filled hoses, variations that brought to mind not only spatial and environmental associations but also specifically sculptural and architectural ones:

Texture is not just a metaphor with underwater sound; this sound had a tactile quality that slowly became quite apparent to Neuhaus' audience. The flux of his music was set against the stability of architecture, so that the entire volume of water in the pool seemed completely charged with sound. At first, the undifferentiated tactile sensation was felt uniformly by the body; when this progressed to differentiation, the sculptural responses set in; somehow the musical variations seemed volumetric or at least sculptural; different parts of the body seemed to touch different frequencies.³⁵

Neuhaus's *Times Square* was originally presented under the title *Underground Music(s) I*, indicating the connection between it and the earlier Underwater Music series.³⁶ Like its aquatic predecessors, *Times Square* activates a virtual space, in this case above the traffic island, as though the air-filled “polyhedral volume” of a swimming pool has been upended. The result is a topography of sound waves through which listeners swim, albeit on dry land. Within an environment such as *Times Square*, it is not solely the electronically produced sound that is the focus of perception, nor even the interaction of the sound with the site's acoustic (and visual) context, but the very act of perceiving itself, as differences in frequency and timbre slowly and subtly reveal

themselves, less by their own transformation than by the force of concentration and as a result of perambulations across the acoustically activated zone. The listener is surrounded by acoustic material, and the locus of the experience is his or her own corporeality. As Hal Foster wrote of Neuhaus's *Five Russians (A Tuned Room)* (1979), "In effect, one's body became the index to one's perception as, say, a weathervane is an index to the wind's direction; and yet because one was 'inside' the signification process, it was impossible to orient oneself in the space by the pitches." "One felt," he concluded, "at once very fine and very inadequate as a register."³⁷

Implicitly linking Neuhaus to the concerns of a number of Minimalist musicians and sculptors, Brunelle observed, "What is especially admirable is that the underlying foundation for [Neuhaus's] work is not esthetic convention or philosophical theory but basic human perceptual structure."³⁸ In a way that parallels Robert Morris's appraisal of viewers' interactions with his sculpture, Neuhaus understood the phenomenological perceptual engagement induced by his sound installations to be integral to their political character.³⁹ In addition to shedding the elitist confines of the musical establishment for a public space accessible to all, regardless of musical skill or knowledge, *Times Square* allows the listener, rather than the composer or artist, to instigate and control the ultimate acoustic experience, to the point even—and this was important to Neuhaus—of ignoring or bypassing it altogether.⁴⁰ Neuhaus distanced himself from popular notions of interactivity (particularly attractive, he said, to "culture bureaucrats"), which instrumentalize subjects in the name of participation.⁴¹ "The ideas that I am involved with," he explained,

are contrary to that—giving each person the possibility to make a work for himself, but for himself only. For instance, by making a work that has a topography, one can move through that topography at one's own pace, stop where one wants to. One has the freedom to form an experience of the work for oneself but not impose it on anyone else.⁴²

Far from incidental, Neuhaus's concern to free the listener from authorial imposition underlay what was for him the fundamental distinction between music and sound art: placing sounds in the realm of space rather than that of time. "Traditionally composers have located the elements of a composition in time. One idea which I am interested in is locating them, instead, in space, and *letting the listener place them in his own time*."⁴³

To a certain degree, Neuhaus's sound installations resemble La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's *Dream Houses*, proposed as early as 1962 and first realized at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1968. In a *Dream House*, standing waves produced by amplified chords of varying complexity transform an architectural enclosure into an acoustic environment tinted by Zazeela's intricate, psychedelic lighting effects.⁴⁴

Young and Zazeela aim to control the sensory atmosphere of sound, light, and (via incense) smell to produce an otherworldly setting, one with its own impression of space and time. Carefully adhering to the mathematical ratios of just intonation, which represent for Young something akin to the harmony of the spheres, a Dream House is to induce specific and repeatable affective states and transport visitors into transcendental realms. "There is evidence that each time a particular frequency is repeated it is transmitted through the same parts of our auditory system," Young has explained. "When these frequencies are continuous, as in my music, we can conceive even more easily how, if part of our circuitry is performing the same operation continuously, this could be considered to be or to simulate a psychological state. My own feeling has always been that if people just aren't carried away to heaven I'm failing. They should be moved to strong spiritual feeling."⁴⁵

Commentators have often approached Neuhaus's installations, including *Times Square*, from a similar perspective, as meditative and even transcendental. Shortly after its inauguration, Richard Lorber of *Artforum* described *Times Square* in terms suggesting spiritual union:

In the cacophonous ambience of Times Square, mecca of the honky-tonk world, *Times Square* functions as something of an oracle, an autochthonous voice which makes sacred the profane environment. Passers-by in earshot of the unexpected, groaning drone often looked distractedly about, up into the air, or into the traffic, seeking some mechanical, if not ethereal, source. . . . Those few who were diverted from their passage seemed to engage in a most private dialogue with the sound, as though in an insulated environment, introspectively detached from assaulting sensations in the most exhibitionistic of public spaces.⁴⁶

Despite such a reception, Neuhaus's work always related more firmly to a Cagean aesthetic of acoustic immanence, accepting and exploring indeterminate responses and a "transparency" between his installations and the sites they inhabit (recall his stairway percussion concert at the Arts Club of Chicago that incorporated the outside traffic noise).⁴⁷ Rather than deducing his sonorities from transcendent harmonic ideals, Neuhaus derived them inductively from the sounds inherent to the sites themselves. In the case of *Times Square*, electronically processed traffic sounds form part of the piece's ringing tones, which further resemble the sounds that might issue from the kinds of machinery expected to exist beneath such metal grates. Neuhaus's acoustic material was, as he said, "almost plausible within its context."⁴⁸

Although the sounds Neuhaus added to the environment could be so unobtrusive as to be missed, they were not, for all that, identical to those issuing from the site before

his intervention. As he explained, “The sounds I build grow out of that situation, but they aren’t of that situation.”⁴⁹ Jean-Christophe Ammann well characterized this aspect of experiencing Neuhaus’s installations:

We first perceive noises and sounds and we are quick to identify them with what we already know. Only later do we discover a displacement—sometimes more, sometimes less apparent—between our perception and that with which we have identified it. This displacement is like a gap, a sonority-space-image that becomes fixed in our minds as a memory.⁵⁰

It is such a doubly split attentiveness—between the actual acoustic environment and the addition of artificial tones, on the side of the sound work, and between perceptual immediacy and mnemonic comparison, on the side of the listener—that defines (at minimum) any encounter with Neuhaus’s art.

Entering a Neuhaus installation, then, one is within neither a meditative, transcendent sphere nor a pure state of perceptual immediacy, the two poles between which so much writing on the artist unsteadily vacillates.⁵¹ At the same time, however, while one is undeniably within a mundane environment, one’s perception is nonetheless slightly displaced. Rather than outside this world, in a state of transcendence, one finds oneself both within and beside it, in a space neither sacred nor profane. Such a state, in all its complexities and from which religious associations cannot entirely be eliminated, may be likened to what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has described by the prefix *para-*:

neither a simple existence nor a transcendence; it is a *para*existence or a *para*transcendence that dwells beside the thing (in all the sense of the prefix “para-”), so close that it *almost* merges with it, giving it a halo. It is not the identity of the thing and yet it is nothing other than the thing (it is *none-other*).⁵²

Neuhaus’s so-called Place installations may be described in much the same manner: almost but not quite merging with the sites from which they are nonetheless inextricable and which they provide with an acoustic “halo.”

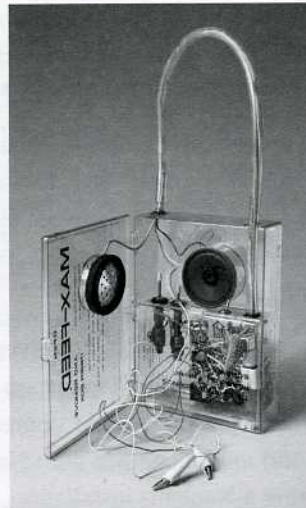
III. Max-Feed

Neuhaus’s first art object was the *Max-Feed* (1966), a small electronic device produced by MassArt, a company that pioneered the artist’s multiple.⁵³ MassArt, which also issued Allan Kaprow’s LP *How to Make a Happening* (1966), as well as an inflatable chair, shared many of Neuhaus’s goals: antielitism, accessibility to a wider audience, and a presence outside recognized cultural institutions. In the words of

cofounder Phil Orenstein, “You have no idea how exciting it is to get a product out of your studio and into, say, a supermarket.”⁵⁴ Despite its populist ambitions, however, the *Max-Feed* did not integrate itself seamlessly into the commercial realm; it inhabited it only to *detourn* it. Neuhaus’s contraption operated via much the same means as his *Fontana Mix–Feed* performances (1965–68), in which he “played” the feedback caused by placing contact microphones on percussion instruments just in front of loudspeakers. Nominally realizing Cage’s score for *Fontana Mix* (1958), Neuhaus manipulated the volume levels of the waves of amplified feedback, which varied at each performance because of the spatial configuration of the concert hall (or, in one instance, Central Park).⁵⁵ The high volume and spatial conditioning of the piece were duly noted by Theodore Strongin, who wrote that it “was not the kind of electronic music that emanates distantly from the speakers. It felt as though one’s own head were part of the feedback circuit.”⁵⁶

With the *Max-Feed*, Neuhaus aimed to incorporate a similar effect into a convenient, take-home package. Set beside a hi-fi stereo, Neuhaus’s box would distort its sound into a wail of amplified feedback. No longer a passive forum for commercial radio, the *Max-Feed* purchaser’s living room was transformed into an indeterminate and phenomenologically activated installation. (Not limited to radio, the *Max-Feed* could also “infiltrate a TV set with a clap of thunder.”)⁵⁷ The *Max-Feed* was, in effect, a portable avant-gardizer that went well beyond the indeterminate manipulations of treble, bass, and volume dials proposed by Cage and Lejaren Hiller’s *HPSCHD* LP (1971) and formed a domestic counterpart to Neuhaus’s interventions into radio broadcasting such as *Public Supply I*, which also debuted in 1966.⁵⁸

Although nearly forgotten within the literature, *Max-Feed* proves symptomatic of Neuhaus’s project as a whole. Set within an increasingly commercially mediated public realm, in which, via both advertising and entertainment, listeners are interpellated into preformed acoustic imaginaries, Neuhaus’s small electronic device provides a contrasting perceptual experience: indeterminate and individual, contingent on the time and space of the listener’s particular phenomenological engagement. Approached from this perspective, Neuhaus’s selection of Times Square as the site for his first permanent sound installation also reveals itself as symptomatic: often referred to as the



Max Neuhaus, *Max-Feed*, 1966

“Crossroads of the World,” Times Square is one of the most commercialized of public spaces, an arena of incessant advertising, entertainment, and solicitation, of kinds licit and, at the time of the work’s construction, illicit.

Neuhaus’s principal rhetorical adversary, however, was neither advertising nor commercial radio, but their more insistently instrumentalized acoustic conflation, Muzak.⁵⁹ In this, Neuhaus once again proved close to Cage, who repeatedly proclaimed his distaste for Muzak’s piped-in background music.⁶⁰ Indeed, the earliest version of Cage’s infamous silent composition *4'33"* (1952) explicitly sought to provide a momentary reprieve from the corporation’s soundscape. Cage described the work in terms of his desire “to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to Muzak Co. It will be 3 or 4 1/2 minutes long—those being the standard lengths of ‘canned’ music—and its title will be *Silent Prayer*. . . . The ending will approach imperceptibility.”⁶¹

Muzak is nothing other than the instrumentalization of sound for the aims of increased production and profitability. The corporation makes its goals explicit under the banner of the term “Audio Architecture”:

Audio Architecture is emotion by design. Our innovation and our inspiration, it is the integration of music, voice and sound to create experiences that link customers with companies. Its power lies in its subtlety. It bypasses the resistance of the mind and targets the receptiveness of the heart. When people are made to feel good in, say, a store, they feel good about that store. They like it. Remember it. Go back to it. Audio Architecture builds a bridge to loyalty. And loyalty is what keeps brands alive.⁶²

By its own admission, Muzak manipulatively targets listeners’ sense of place (which it defines as a commercial space, the store), affect (as a noncognitive response, an almost subliminal inducement of mood), and memory (converted into feel-good brand loyalty).

Neuhaus explicitly objected to Muzak’s acoustic management, its “claims that these melodies raise production in factories and calm people” and its support of such claims with “dubious scientific studies,” the extension and counterpart, no doubt, of Laird’s efficiency analyses of the 1920s.⁶³ It is against the backdrop of an increasingly regulated and commercialized public sphere (exemplified by, but by no means limited to, Muzak) that Neuhaus’s sound installations—which are almost point-by-point inversions or refutations of Audio Architecture—achieve their full import and potentially critical vocation.

Neuhaus was concerned with noncognitive, affective responses to auditory stimuli, akin to the effects of Muzak. He termed the nonreferential, uncodified acoustic material with which he worked “sound character” and saw it as a powerful, though nearly subliminal, communicator of information and impressions.⁶⁴ Unlike Muzak, however,

Neuhaus's installations are indeterminate of the listener's response. As he wrote about his Place works in general:

I see these works not as definers of a single frame of mind for all individuals, but as catalysts for shifts in frame of mind. I am not concerned with a specific individual's frame of mind. . . . I am concerned with the catalyst, the initiator; their individual pathways are very private, their own.⁶⁵

Intricately and inextricably drawn from the environmental noises, incidental sounds, and unique acoustic resonances of a place, Neuhaus's installations are site-specific in a way that explicitly opposes the infinitely replicable acoustic environments that Muzak fashions for the commercial realm. Ultimately determined by the visitors (by how attentive they are to the sound, how they happen to move through the environment, how long they stay), the impact of Neuhaus's installations differs for each person, catalyzing in them individual responses—responses that are substantively theirs and not the result of any interpellation or identification with a commercial enterprise or brand.

Through manipulating acoustic affect, Muzak aims to link consumers' memories to particular commercial spaces, producing an automatic and indelible bond between them. Neuhaus, by contrast, engaged memory not only to draw listeners' attention to the site, thereby connecting the two, but also simultaneously to induce a slight distinction. As Ratcliff has perspicaciously noted, however close the acoustic connection between the site and the installation, Neuhaus's "need" was always "to establish a difference—not a telling similarity—between the sounds of the piece and the sounds of its place."⁶⁶ Memory, as described by Ammann above, is invoked via the comparison of Neuhaus's acoustic additions, once discerned, with the listener's previous (mis)perception of the sounds as belonging to the environment. Memory is also involved, as Brandon LaBelle explains, in providing depth to the type of phenomenological engagement Neuhaus's installations necessitate:

The activation of perception through sound may draw attention to space, its material presence, and any perceptual phenomena, and it does so by activating our memory of spatial experience, of the event-space happening there, for sound installation is distinct by offering up information that is simultaneous and yet durational, present and passing: I glimpse the given installation as a set of information that is there all at once and yet that only comes to the fore through my movements, through my listening to, my attending to its evolution, as embedded within and conversant with space.⁶⁷

In more recent works, such as *A Bell for St. Cécilien* (1989–91), in which a sound reminiscent of a carillon issues from the vicinity of a disused church in Cologne, and *Time*

Piece Stommel (2007–present), situated at the site of one of the few German synagogues to avoid Nazi destruction, Neuhaus further linked his work to issues of historical memory and memorialization. If, as Guy Debord maintained, the “pseudo-cyclical time” of spectacle (which would almost certainly have to include Muzak) is marked by a false immediacy, which bears the spectator along without access to either history or a conceptualization of their situation, Neuhaus’s installations allow memory to operate differently, effecting a more complex perceptual experience, involving splits and shifts that contribute not only to a certain depth (phenomenological and, potentially, historical) but also to a cognitive difference, the type of heightened perception necessary for any form of critical reception.⁶⁸

IV. Moment

Although all Neuhaus’s installations operate similarly according to acoustic shifts, bifurcations, divisions, and doublings, the subtleties of their invocations of perception and memory are often overlooked in accounts that build up (or, rather, reduce) the experience to one of pure presence: an almost mystical resolution of the listener with the site (whether immanent or transcendent) and with themselves via the agency of the sound. As though in response to such readings, Neuhaus’s so-called Moment works, such as *Time Piece Graz* (2003–present) and *Time Piece Beacon* (2005–present), revolve not around presence but rather around absence.⁶⁹ Like the *Max-Feed*, Neuhaus’s Moment works initially took the form of an unusual consumer product (never put into production): a silent alarm clock he designed in 1979. As Neuhaus described it, the device measured “two by sixteen by one inches with a time display and control buttons on the left side of the larger surface and a round screen covering a small speaker on the far right.”⁷⁰ Before the time set to awake its listener, the alarm would begin to emit a continuous tone, carefully pitched at the upper limit of the sleeper’s range of hearing, a frequency that, Neuhaus explained, “has a very special character. It is there but at the same time almost not there—more of a presence than a sound.”⁷¹ Starting at an almost imperceptibly low level, the tone would gradually increase in volume until, at the appointed time, it would suddenly shut off, the abrupt cessation of acoustic stimulus being what would induce wakefulness. Neuhaus’s seemingly paradoxical device brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s description of “an alarm clock that in each minute rings for sixty seconds.”⁷² Invoked at the end of his essay on Surrealism, Benjamin’s image illustrated the revolutionary face of the new human subject, in whom media technologies thoroughly interpenetrated and enervated the body. Muzak’s affective management, which began five years after the publication



Max Neuhaus's 1979 design for a silent alarm clock

of Benjamin's essay, is only one, and not the most nefarious, technological attempt to regulate the body on a micropolitical register. Neuhaus's alarm clock, however, reverses the effect of such enervation: the acoustic stimulus is noticed, jolting the sleeper awake, only when it abruptly ceases.

Neuhaus's *Moment* works instigate the same process on a much larger scale, addressing a collective audience within a public realm. Beginning at a nearly inaudible volume, which increases progressively but so slowly as to avoid conscious notice, a tone is suddenly removed, leaving what the artist described as an "aural afterimage . . . superimposed on the sounds of the environment—a spontaneous aural memory or reconstruction perhaps, subtle and transparent, engendered by the sound's disappearance."⁷³ Felt by the body more than perceived by the mind, the sound, which disappears even though one did not realize it was there (much as, one imagines, how Cage's *Silent Prayer* might have impacted a restaurant or shopping mall), is doubly imperceptible: "inaudibility follows inaudibility, for the absence of sound comes after sounds produced but unheard."⁷⁴

In describing the *Moment* works, Neuhaus invariably emphasized the relationship between the works' acoustic reach and the geographic expanse of a community:

By the late 700s in western civilization, the church bell had become a dominant force in European communities. It not only announced church services, deaths, births, fire,

revolt and festivals but it was such a strong unifying force that in many cases the limits of the community were defined by its range. Four hundred years later the church bell had become united with the mechanical clock. The bell no longer just announced special events but provided a communal time base for the general coordination of activities. In present day society most of these minute by minute functions have been taken over by radio and television. The intrinsic nature of these media generalize and depersonalize these functions.⁷⁵

Faced with the replacement of the church bell by the mass media, Neuhaus's Moment works are, to some extent, compensatory. His aim was to restore "a common moment within a community, periodically throughout the day," outside the mediation of commercial spectacle.⁷⁶ The impetus was not, however, reactionary. For unlike the Christian church bell (or the voice of the muezzin calling the Muslim faithful to prayer from the minaret of a mosque), a Moment work does not seek to instill identification with any particular structure or ideal: civic, national, religious, or otherwise. Members of the community addressed or instated by Neuhaus's work are united solely by the sound's presence or—more correctly and specifically—by the periodic, collective experience of its disappearance. If there is any community formation, it is on the basis of this shared sense of absence alone. In *Time Piece Stommeln*, Neuhaus related the absence of the acoustic tone to mourning and loss, as the sound's disappearance recalls the eradication of the Jewish community that once congregated at the Stommeln synagogue. Yet, the notion of communion that Neuhaus's work models or informs may also have an anticipatory function, invoking what Agamben has called "the coming community": "Decisive here is the idea of an *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence."⁷⁷

As in all Neuhaus's work, the reception of a Moment work is indeterminate; every individual's experience is different, both from that of the artist and from those of the other listeners. Sought by Neuhaus was nothing other than a common being together in difference, a sense of communal belonging without predication on any *belonging to*—and, correlatively, free of any *exclusion from*. It is here that Neuhaus's last work connects back to and develops ideas proposed in his Op-Ed three decades earlier. In much the same way that Neuhaus refused to distinguish between those sounds that were proper and those that were improper within the urban environment, his instigation of community refuses any distinction between those who would be proper and those who would be improper to it: free of any structure of identification to which one must adhere, there are no criteria by which to be cast out. In Agamben's terms, Neuhaus's community would be one of singularities "mediated not by any condition

of belonging” but merely “by belonging itself.”⁷⁸ “Through this relation,” writes Agamben,

- singularity borders all possibility and thus receives its *omnimoda determinatio* not from its participation in a determinate concept or some actual property ([for example] being red, Italian, Communist), but *only by means of this bordering*. It belongs to a whole, but without this belonging’s being able to be represented by a real condition: Belonging, being-*such*, is here only the relation to an empty and indeterminate totality.⁷⁹

Agamben’s notion of coming community has been criticized as utopian, a term that might be equally applied to Neuhaus’s politics with all pejorative associations removed. For at their most profound, Neuhaus’s Moment pieces seek to bring into existence precisely such an “empty and indeterminate totality,” a community united by adjacency rather than identification with whatever exclusionary ideal. Built around an empty and indeterminate *tonality*, Neuhaus’s sound installations aim to engage in a coming politics, based on a disappearing sound that is always, also, to come.