Discussion with members of the International Academy of Philosophy of Art, Bern, 1998

Arthur Danto: We have a speaker 'hors de serie' and in a sense he's not likely an artist to be known to many people here. I thought I should say a few words since my acquaintance with Max Neuhaus now goes back some distance. He's not an artist you can find out anything about by looking at books because his art is incapable of photographic treatment. There can't be a record from which you can have access to what he creates, and if you don't know it from having experienced it at the very site where it was made there's no way in the world except through somebody's descriptions you can get any idea of Max Neuhaus' work.

As a critic in New York I'm constantly meeting artists of a sort that I never imagined the possibility of, and such was the case when Max called me up and we met and I thought what he had to say was so fascinating that I wrote an article about him in 'The Nation'. Max has a background as a musician. He played with Stockhausen. He was a percussionist, a virtuoso percussionist, and gave solo percussion concerts at Carnegie Hall. But at a certain moment he decided that he was much more interested in certain questions that arise in connection with sculpture, and he saw an opportunity to shape sound in the way in which up to this point people have shaped marble or people have shaped clay or bronze. One of his first efforts was to put into actual practice some of his ideas about the shaping of sound. This is what appealed to me so much.

He also invented a siren for fire engines and police cars, a siren which had a shape which up to this point they have not had, where you could tell the direction from which the vehicle was moving, presumably the speed at which it was moving; and in a city like New York where you've got buildings and the sounds bounce off, it's impossible when you're in an automobile and you hear a siren to know which direction it's coming from and how fast. So this would have been a great contribution to urban life at least, but it was difficult to sell to the police department and difficult to sell to the fire department.

Max Neuhaus: Not so much difficult to sell to the police department but difficult to sell to the monopoly which makes sirens.

Danto: The siren monopoly which nobody knew existed before Max tried. I used to take people to experience one of Max's works in Times Square in New York. It had the title Times Square. Times Square in New York is a crossing of Broadway and 7th Avenue, and there are some little islands in there. Max appropriated one of those islands and from a subway vent created a column of sound that came up. Not everybody necessarily knew that that was a work of art. A lot of people walked through it without even knowing that it was anything except the noise of the subway, but a certain group of people found that they had encountered something profound. Max described it to me as a graffiti-proof work of public art. You couldn't paint slogans on the side. Unfortunately I think I've experienced only three of Max's works: Times Square, there was a wonderful piece at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and his piece in Documenta in 1992, which does still exist. It is blocks of sound which mark the floors in a Treppenhaus.

Bern is one of the cities that has had the wisdom to commission Max and when I found out that he was going to be in Bern, I said, I'm going to be in Bern and maybe you can come to this meeting, and it's even more appropriate in that one of the commissions that he now has has to do with the millennium and since that is the subject of our conference, I will now turn it over to Max.

Neuhaus: Thank you Arthur; it was really a very nice introduction, as always. As I've never spoken to a group of philosophers of art before I would like to proceed in the following manner: to state quickly what I do and then open the floor up to questions because in that way the conversation can be relevant to your interests.

First I'll read two paragraphs of a short essay of mine called Sound as a Medium (1).

In our daily lives, our eye and ear are constantly working together as a closely linked team to form our perception of the world. Traditionally practitioners in the plastic arts have adjusted this perception through vision, forming with shape and color. I on the other hand work with our sense of hearing.

The world of sound which we inhabit daily contains only a minuscule part of the sound universe which our ear minds are capable of understanding. The part of it that is literal is limited to the things in our world which make sounds -- footsteps, cars, dogs, and the like. Its other part is made up of two codified areas, spoken language and music. Both of these occupy only small points in the spectrum of sound possibilities. The sounds I create are in the large sound space around and in-between these sounds of everyday life.

I recently started looking back at my work and began to form categories for the diverse ways that I've used sound over the last forty some odd years. One of the main categories that surfaced is one which I now call Place. The work in Times Square which Arthur just described falls into this category.

The Place works proceed from an unusual premise. For all of us from the time we are born sound is always connected to an event. Every experience of sound in our world exists in time; it marks an event. It's the door closing, the word you've just said. In fact sound is bound by time or it exists only in time. My idea for the Place works was to remove sound from time and instead use it to build place.

We perceive a given place visually but equally aurally, although we're much less conscious about the aural part of it. The example which I like to use to bring home the power of the aural is the experience of walking into an anechoic chamber. An anechoic chamber is a special room used to make acoustic measurements. It is without sound, and any sounds made inside it have no reflections. For the eye this space is completely plausible, but for the ear the complete absence of sound activity is something it has never experienced and the constant checking between eye and ear breaks down. Most people, even though this room is quiet and not threatening in any other way, feel extremely uncomfortable in it -- the voice of the ear has been silenced -- half of the team is missing.

The Place works operate on the premise that we perceive a given place visually but equally aurally. They use sound to transform a given space into a place, to change its character.

I'll read a little more from an essay called Notes on Place and Moment (2).

I often make a sound which is almost plausible within its context when you first encounter it. The point where a person realizes that it is not plausible is when he jumps into the piece; he's swimming on his own from then on. It is a way of working which I use often in the place pieces; it is usually the way I build the entrance to the work.

I call it the entrance, because if you do not go through this refocusing you do not get through to the work. Some people call my work meditative because of this need to focus. I don't like the baggage the word carries. These works demand only attention; they cannot be consumed in passing.

With each place and each condition it is a different kind of problem to get that to happen. To get it to happen in a museum is more difficult. In the work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, there is exactly that situation: everyone knows the piece is there, but many people walk through it and do not hear it.

This is an important point, a deliberate point of making the sound almost plausible within the space. It also leaves it hidden and means you can only find it by bringing yourself to the point where you can hear it. A beautiful thing about the piece in Chicago is that, although its sounds are huge and loud, because of the plausibility of these sounds, many people still after fourteen years deny it exists.

On the other hand, I sometimes construct an almost physical place with sound. The piece in Times Square is a good example; it is outside, in the middle of a large open plaza. It's a large block of sound, which you walk into. Even though invisible and intangible, it is like a solid place in the middle of this open space.

Arthur mentioned that I have a project for Bern. It's actually still in the proposal phase although it's been enthusiastically endorsed by the art commission of Bern. This work falls into another category which I call Moment.

These 'moment' or 'time' pieces are art works which take the form of communal sound signals. The basic idea here though is to form a signal with a silence rather than a sound. Instead of a bell which begins with a sudden clang and gradually dies away, this concept is the opposite. The sound is introduced gradually; beginning inaudibly it grows over a period of minutes and at its height suddenly disappears. The long subtle emergence of the sound causes it to go unnoticed; its becomes apparent only at the instant of its sudden disappearance creating a sense of silence.

More from Notes on Place and Moment (2)

This idea is not something that happens in nature; continuous things do not disappear suddenly in this way. Yet it happens in the modern world. The most startling example for me in everyday

life has always been the coffee-grinding machine in a cafe. When somebody turns the machine on in a noisy cafe, you do not register it. It just seems to make talking a little harder.

That is quite amazing in itself, because the sound is quite loud. But your mind just puts it in the class of the sounds that are an expected part of the cafe and goes on with what it was doing.

Then, when it is finished and suddenly stops, there is a huge silence which envelopes the cafe, even though it is still very noisy.

The moment or time pieces are also connected to ideas we may have always had in societies about sounds: signals. Concepts about sound are not well articulated in history. Most writing about history is more about visual and social environment than about sound. It is very hard to find out what our sound world was like before sound recordings. How can you know about a sound made a thousand years ago? There are no records.

But it is clear that, in Western culture twelve hundred years ago, sound signals from the church were an early form of broadcasting. Cities were divided up into parishes whose borders were fixed by the range of their church bells. If you were outside the sound of the bell, you had no information; you were outside the community.

A sound signal is a unifier and communicator over a whole area simultaneously. It is perhaps the first concept of large scale broadcasting, the concept of a medium that many can get information from without actually being in one place, that the information can be transmitted to many places at the same time, unifying them.

The basic idea of the moment works is to be without place; they encompass places rather than being only in one. That is the real difference. For a place work you have to go to the place; for a moment work you can be in any of many places at the moment.

These terms 'place' and 'moment' which I use and within which I work have evolved into general forms - two complementary areas within which I group individual works. The thing that makes moment pieces different from place pieces is that the moment pieces are in all places, but only occur for a moment in all those places; while the place pieces are only in one place, but are continuums which are always there.

The moment pieces don't construct places, but they cause this realization of place to happen when they disappear. In the same way the place pieces do not construct time, but they allow your own realization of time to happen within their static nature.

Each one generates in the perceiver the opposite of what it is: moment pieces generate an instant of being in one's own place; place pieces generate a period of being in one's own time. They are two opposites; each one is what the other is not.

G. Seel: What you are doing reminds me of the phenomenon of the fountain. Have you gotten inspiration from that phenomenon? I think indeed that the sound of a fountain is a kind of art work, very much like your sound works.

Neuhaus: Indeed, except they are visual as well as aural, and their sound possibilities are limited. I think that the very long tradition of fountains is fascinating, though. The physical presence of moving water in a city, but also that people were interested in shaping the sound of the fountain -- taking into consideration sound in constructing a city, as part of urban design.

I also have some interests in the field. The project of mine with the police cars I place in a category which I call 'invention' because I wasn't acting as an artist, but as a designer. I was taking a special knowledge I had about how people react to sound and my specialized knowledge about shaping sound -- the idea of building a moving sound image whose location and orientation you can hear even though you can't see; I was solving an urban problem, not making art.

It's only recently that we've had the means to shape sound in the way that we've had the means to shape visual images. We've been able to make lines on rocks for God knows how long, but we haven't even been able to catch a sound -- to record it -- before seventy years ago. I think we are entering a different time; and we need different considerations about how to build houses, how to build cities. Not to think of them only from one dimension -- the visual -- but aurally as well.

L. Goehr: I was interested in the description of making sound as almost plausible within a space. Do you know the criterion that's used to judge something to be Muzak is that it has to be almost recognizable as something you already know. The legal criterion is that it can't be actually recognizable as Mozart for example, even though it's almost recognizable as such. So they change it just enough, and I wondered if you knew that or had thought about Muzak.

Neuhaus: Indeed, but I didn't mean plausible as a piece of music, but rather plausible as a sound in a given place. In fact in the beginning of these ideas people tried to convince me that I should go and see Muzak, so I did some research.

Muzak was started by a retired army band leader at the turn of the century. Before the age of recordings he had this idea that he could make money by piping music to hotels and businesses over telephone lines. In New York very good musicians used to supplement their income by going to the Muzak studios where live musicians played Muzak all day long. Now they market themselves with pseudo scientific studies which convince businesses that they can get more efficiency from their workers if they buy Muzak. Yes, of course it can't be recognizable; they would have to pay the copyright fees. Muzak certainly isn't art; it's the exploitation of music and musicians.

For a place work I have to find a way to make the sound disappear; if it's going to change your perception of a place, it has to be part of the place in some way. The work in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago as I said was loud, but many people even after fourteen years insisted that it wasn't there. One of the reasons why certain people couldn't hear it was its plausibility. Its low sounds resembled the sounds of moving air, something you expect in a public building.

My problem is always finding a way of embedding the work into the place I have chosen. It is an aesthetic task and has to do with what your expectations are. Sometimes it is easier than others. One thing that Arthur didn't mention about Times Square is that it is anonymous, unmarked visually in any way. The sound of its block of sound has been most often described as like a continuous after-ring of a group of bells except that it doesn't die away. It never starts and it never ends; it's always there. This sound coming out of a grating in the middle of Times Square is completely implausible, but the context was so strong. I took a sound that was completely implausible; but no matter what I had put there, it would be plausible because it's such a strong site one; accepts that anything could happen there.

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. Making it anonymous, not identifying it as art, went further and removed people's preconceptions about art from the experience.

G. Boehm: I experienced one of your works. Arthur's story of the work in Kassel reminded me of it. As I remember it was very important to the experience of the work to be inside it; to be inside it was part of the whole experience, which was at the same time dense and diffuse so to say. The whole experience one had, seeing, looking outside, going around was changed. Well, that's a part of my question: Is it your goal to transform the experience of the people living in these spaces, or is it that we should be aware of the work that we are concentrated on? The difference between presence and event, that is my point. Should it be an event or should it be a presence?

Neuhaus: Both. An idea that I work with when I'm outside a museum situation is that the piece should be able to be ignored. You should have the freedom to enter the work or not. Often the way I do that is with the level of subtlety. Three to One, the work in Kassel, was inaugurated as a permanent work; it's been there for six years now. The people working in that building are free to walk through that stairway and listen or not listen to it. It's always there as a presence; but if someone chooses to stop and listen it becomes an event for them, beginning when they start and ending when they finish.

I'm very happy that you said that one had to be there. I build place. I use sound to build the place; the physical space is what I build it on. If we took that sound out of that place it would have no meaning. This contradicts the habit we have of being able to transport sound by recording it. You confirm my points by saying that one has to be there and that the experience was visual as well as aural.

G. Seel: If we compare your art to the art of a sculptor or an architect I would like to know to what extent you can do the same as they. For instance the sculptor can make special objects with clear-cut border lines. Do you have some technical device which allows you to have border lines made out of sound such that a man walking through that space is able to distinguish a cube from a pyramid?

Neuhaus: Yes, Times Square was quite startling that way. You really could be two meters away from it and hear nothing, yet the moment you stepped on that grating you were in another world. Surprisingly for many you stayed in that world no matter what the external sounds were, even if a fire engine went past. The work didn't cover the fire engine, but sound is a little like color. If you mix two colors you get a third color. So you can put just a little of one color and change a very strong color into another color.

I became fascinated with the idea of being able to construct an aural topography, a topography with sound. And yes it's possible. In Times Square I did it by resonating the cavity. Of the techniques we have for making a topography one of the most powerful ones is the utilization of resonances because you get nodes and antinodes; by selecting the frequencies you can build complex topographies.

But also the dispersion of sound can be controlled very precisely. Naturally most of the research about sound dispersion is about dispersing it as much as possible because people installing sound systems want to use as few loudspeakers as possible. I turned some of that upside-down and developed ways to focus sound. I could put a sound in this room that you wouldn't hear until you were this far away from it.

H. Ihne: First, what you told us reminds me a little bit of Murray Schaefer's soundscape projects. And secondly you're dividing two elements of your work, the place pieces and the moment pieces. Could you imagine that you combine both to a kind of symphony of sound, is it in your mind to do that, and that you define a form in which you can represent, let's say, universal problems of being a human being?

Neuhaus: To respond to the first part of your statement, Schaefer's soundscape ideas were not about creating sound works but listening to the sounds of the world: sound as landscape. The only common point is perhaps that we both present new ways of focusing on sound.

In response to the second part, I would never try to combine these things because they're wonderfully opposite. I like their contradictions. Speaking of symphonies, though, strikingly enough, one of the major problems I had, when I had the idea to change the sounds of sirens, was that people accused me of wanting to make a symphony for the city. It was so antithetical to the way I think. For me the project was a technical problem that I believed I could solve.

Getting support to do it turned out to be the real problem. I went to the artistic community and they said, well, this is a technical project. And I went to the scientific community and of course they said, well, what are you doing here, you are an artist. I finally managed to convince someone to put up enough money to let me work in the Californian desert for six weeks. I found a site with similar acoustics to a city -- a very reflective, very tortured canyon. I worked by remote control, generating sounds which were projected by cars driving back and forth through the canyon.

I still remember the day that I succeeded in building a sound image where I could hear the difference between front and back. This is a field where there was no scientific knowledge. Acoustics is just now getting concrete enough to predict things in the real world; but they still

don't know enough to build a successful concert hall every time, even though this is a much more simple acoustic situation than making a moving sound image.

I had found a sound which I thought would work and I told my assistant to drive a mile down this canyon and start turning the car in a circle. I heard it get softer and softer and softer; he was a mile away and then, all of a sudden, I 'saw' it turning down in the canyon and I knew I had it.

The proposal for a moment piece for Bern has quite a history. I built a model of the idea almost ten years ago at the Kunsthalle here in Bern; it was 'heard' over an area one kilometer in diameter around the building and ran continuously for three years. The plan was to demonstrate the subtlety of the work and then implement it for the city as a whole. Somehow that never happened. Now we plan the full realization and to inaugurate it at the start of the millennium.

H. Ihne: What are the criteria for your material, where do you find the material?

Neuhaus: I invent it. The only practical means to realize a sound work of mine is through electronics. I can't have musicians sitting somewhere twenty four hours a day like Muzak. A mechanical system has limited sound possibilities and wears out. Over the past thirty years electronic circuitry has offered solutions which allowed me to model sound in a non-physical medium.

H. Ihne: What was that, all samplers?

Neuhaus: No, there were no samplers when I began. At first, I built my own systems in hardware; now I build them in software.

These works have unusual requirements. For example I have to be able to shape a sound completely in the work's place. I don't conceive anything in my studio. I walk into the place and begin to build the sound of the work there. In the case of something the scale of a moment work I have to be able to shape sound from anywhere in a city. I also design my own tools -- interfaces that let me work intuitively with my ear as a visual artist works with his eye.

E. Moutsopoulos: What you are talking about seems to be very fascinating. You have tried to make time and space interchangeable in a way. But since after all we are talking about music, could we hear something concrete, right now? I see you have a tape recorder there.

Neuhaus: That's to catch you on tape, not to play back something.

L. Goehr: You never use the word 'music'?

Neuhaus: It's a common point of confusion about what I do. I was a musician until I was 28 when I made a record for Columbia Masterworks and with that stopped performing. There was no way to move in the new directions I was going in and remain a virtuoso musician at the same time. I still have certain activities which relate to music, but these two categories Place and Moment do not.

Edgar Varese coined one current definition of music as 'organized sound'. I would go one step further now to 'organized sound in time'. Meaning in music appears only as its sound events unfold note by note, phrase by phrase, from moment to moment over time. You can't have music without time.

These Place pieces on the other hand are continuums of sound which never change; they don't develop in time. It was my taking sound out of time for these ideas which was remarkable. The reason Varese probably didn't include time in his definition of music is that sound has never existed outside of time before.

E. Moutsopoulos: Anyway I still do not see what this is all about when it does not result in a sound organization.

Neuhaus: Well, the sound is very carefully organized. But it's not organized in time, this primary definition of music; it's organized in space.

E. Moutsopoulos: Does it correspond to arts for example?

Neuhaus: Yes indeed, that's why the Place pieces are in museums and in the context of the plastic arts and not in concert halls or even around concert halls.

It's a difficult point to make because for most of history every artist who works with sound has been called a composer or a musician. In my case it's further complicated by the fact that I was trained as a musician and was a well known one. This was one of the reasons I had to stop being a musician; there was no way to convince people that these works weren't music if I was still functioning as a musician.

D. Henrich: I am fascinated by your remarks on auditory topography and I would like to ask you, what would be the ideal commission you could possibly get, you would long for?

I could imagine several possibilities. One, a beautiful town invites you to decorate all the squares and significant sites with your sculpture. Another possibility might be that you could provide the basic design for a city which then would be built by a city planner according to the sculptures you imagine as the main places of such a city. Another possibility would be a sound gallery which a famous important architect builds for your works or maybe a historical architect, Alhambra for instance is one I could imagine. Or perhaps also in the Mexican subway, you know, where the stations have symbols which are animals because you are not expected to be able to read. And then you could create an alliance with a smell artist and lots of things like this.

Strawson was a philosopher who tried to design an auditory universe, a space of sounds; but in his portrait the sounds are moving in space, so that the space is created by the movements of the sounds in space. You would, I think, suggest the opposite, a space where the listener moves, and the sounds remain static. Is such a thing imaginable; where there are only sounds is there still a space? No, but these are just remarks really. What's your idea of an ideal commission?

Neuhaus: That's in a way like asking a painter what's his favorite picture. I can clarify, I think, by explaining what usually happens when someone wants to commission me. For me, the ideal situation is when they don't have anything in mind. The terrible situation is when they've heard a piece of mine and found the place just like it. Because the place itself is my point of departure -- I don't begin to conceive a work without a place -- finding the place is the first creative step and not a matter of somebody selecting a location. I must 'find' it myself. In the best situations I'm invited and I go for two days and I say, okay, where are the limits and I sniff for two days. Usually there are four or five points where the bell rings and I say, okay, this there, this there and this there.

Usually I don't have a justification for why a place is interesting to me.

I didn't have a justification for Times Square. I happened to be walking through the square one day, I crossed the island, I saw this grating and I knew that I would make a work there. I didn't have any idea what the work would be or if it will take five years or any idea about a block of sound or what the sound would be. But I knew that it would be there and it would be done. And that's the ideal way.

I think for the artist the most powerful part of the mind is indeed the intuition and the most difficult technique as you gain more experience in being an artist is keeping yourself from knowing what you're doing -- knowing only exactly what to do, but not allowing yourself to know why.

So I don't think I would like to take over a city at all. I would be much happier planting works in different parts of the world as I do. The idea for a city-wide moment piece for Bern is not about taking over the city. It's something which is very subtle. It could happen every hour or it could happen once a day, but it is something that's always available there for the people who live in the city. It's a work that can't be visited. I mean if you came to hear the moment you would probably be disappointed. It begins to have meaning when you live with it every day, day in and day out, forget about it, find it, refind it, dismiss it; that's the way I envision it functioning.

M. Frank: Like all of us I'm extremely curious to attend one of your works or to have an invisible glimpse of one of your sculptures. Our perplexity lies in there not being the possibility of exemplification here. In this perplexity we are searching for precursors or paradigms.

I think Wagner listening to your talk would be extremely fascinated and would ask you questions with a quite technical interest. You remember perhaps the fascinating scene in Parzifal, where Parzifal goes, is walking or seems to be walking, it's totally unclear what's happening, and the music insists on suppressing any movement. And he says: "Ich gehe kaum, doch duenk ich mich schon weit" (I'm scarcely walking and in fact I feel to be far away already). And G... replies: "You see my son time is spatialized here" (... es ist mein Sohn, zum Raum gehoert hier die Zeit). The time is becoming space. And his immobility is illustrated in sounds, some sounds; but it's difficult to say that that is a kind of music.

Neuhaus: I think Wagner and I might also have had a discussion about the definitions of music. Music is, as I said at one point, a highly codified sound language. The means I use, sound character, is not and has no musical meaning by itself, but only in combination with other musical dimensions - harmony, rhythm, etc. Alone it's outside of the language of music. Certainly his language - Wagner's - was musical language, he worked within that.

There are musicians who work with space, though. This idea of being able to move sounds in the space, from the fifties on we've had orchestras split around the room, part of it is behind you, part of it is in another place, but these ideas are really just additions to the vocabulary of musical language; they're not dealing with space the way I do.

Probably the best test is that most musicians are insulted by my use of sound in the Place and Moment pieces because I use sound instead of making a work out of sound that you listen to. I use it to make a place or moment; for them I misuse it.

L. Goehr: I am also going to give you a parallel with Wagner. In the construction of Bayreuth he describes a sense of acoustic space that's related to a visual space. I am giving you that comparison because Wagner brings about the end of an idea of art having a particular kind of function to transfigure audiences. You've already said that you don't work within the language of music, but I suspect that you don't work with any language at all. I want to ask, do your works have any meaning? I don't mean this in a critical sense, but I suspect the answer is No. Is that right?

Neuhaus: Yes and no. Of course my works do not have literal meanings and neither do they have specific functions, but one part of my premise that I didn't go into before because I wanted to be sure to have time for this discussion concerns my means, something I call sound character.

It's not something new; it's, I think, an inborn form of communication that we all have. It's manifested in verbal language as a tonal emphasis; it's another layer of meaning on top of the verbal meaning, the meaning of the words. It is manifested in music as tone color. I spent the first fourteen years of my life as an artist dealing with sound character. As a solo percussionist tone color was a large part of my means of conversing with what I call the many-headed beast -- the audience of a thousand faces that you engage single-handedly as a soloist -- I was talking with it through sound color.

Its meanings are not discrete like those of words of course; they are continuums as multifaceted as those of visual color. Even though I could never explain its meanings I know how to 'talk' with it. It has two wonderful characteristics as an artistic vehicle: the process of understanding it is unconscious and it is pan-cultural.

L. Goehr: I would have preferred that the answer was No.

Neuhaus: My answer was no. Sound character is not a language because it is uncodified; it doesn't have specific meanings. But it is a means of communication.

G. Seel: It was exactly on that line that I wanted to ask a question. Could you paint a room with sound colors and have once a color, say a dark color, which makes us feel sad or depressed and

then another sound color which makes us just feel easier? In this way, moving through that space, we move from the dark side to the light side or the other way around.

Neuhaus: Not quite that simple actually, but we have someone else here who has heard the work from Documenta 9. Mr Boehm is part of your group and speaks German. I would like to ask him to describe his experience of the work.

G. Boehm: Wenn ich eine Bemerkung machen darf. Es waere in de Tat sehr hilfreich, wenn er beschreiben wuerdet die Qualitaet dieses Tons. Der Ton ist an der Grenze der Wahrnehmung, er ist ziemlich hoch, aber nicht unangenehm hoch und er ist in dem Raum gegenwaertig, ohne dass man sieht er kommt von irgendwo. Man dasich also keinen Lautsprecher vorstellen sondern der Raum ist in einer sehr subliminalen Weise erfuellt von diesem Geraeusch, aber sie koennen auch durchgehen und sie hoeren's ueberhaupt nicht. Wenn sie beschaeftigt sind, hoert man es gar nicht. Deswegench ihn gefragt, ist es gedacht zuzuhoeren oder ist gedacht anwesend zu sein.

A. Danto: I want to offer a possibility of subverting what you've been doing and helping people with an example. I think I have a fairly good idea how the moment pieces work. There was the Whitney Museum, the clock, and what Max did in that piece was to augment certain ambient sounds that everybody knows about, taxis and buses and police-whistles or whatever was outside, which then suddenly stopped. And there was a moment of silence. Every fifteen minutes instead of hearing a gong we heard a silence. Now, my subversion that I want you to respond to is this: as the millennium approaches I begin to write articles in the Bernese newspaper that at such and such a moment there will be the silence that marks the millennium. People will come with their little tape recorders, and at a certain moment there'll be a hole in the universe after which we are in the next millennium. I mean, does it depend on the ignorance of the audience?

Neuhaus: The work at the Whitney was not quite as you described it. I put a microphone on the street, and over a fifteen-minute period I recolored the sounds that occurred and mixed them again with the live sounds. In this way everything that happened gradually had another color added to it. Every fifteen minutes I suddenly took the accumulated coloration away, and the normal sound that remained seemed silent. This, by the way, is an unusual way for me to work. I don't usually use real sounds. I usually build the sounds as a painter builds color. I build sound color by ear.

With the project for Bern, you are right though Arthur. It is not like the opening of an exhibition which needs to be promoted. It is the opposite; it needs to become part of daily life, an everyday feature of the city, not something spectacular but something subtle and ever-present. Rather than initiate it at midnight on December 31st, it's probably more appropriate for the work to begin at sunrise on January 1, 2000.

Note:

In mid-1999, the millennium project's sponsor withdrew claiming new administrative policies and a focus on sports rather than culture. In May of 1999 Neuhaus' commission from Kunst im

ˆffentlichen Raum, Stadt Bern, Suspended Sound Line, was inaugurated on the GIBB Campus at Lorrianstrassee 1-5.

(1) 'Sound as a medium', Three to One, Max Neuhaus, Brussels: La Lettre Volee 1997

(2) 'Notes on Place and Moment', des Jardins, Gregory, ed., Max Neuhaus, sound works; volume I, inscription (Ostfildern-Stuttgart: Cantz 1994)

First published in End of Art - Endings in Art (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2006)