

## Moment

Historically the most important function of sound in communities has been as a signal. Sound has been used for simultaneous communication among the inhabitants of communities in both eastern and western civilizations since antiquity. In Europe, by the late 700s, more than a thousand years ago, the church bell had become a definitive force in communities. It not only announced church services, but also deaths, births, fire, revolt and festivals. It was such a strong unifying factor that the limits of the community itself were defined by its range – if you lived beyond where you could hear it, you lacked the daily information necessary to be a participant in society.

A sound signal is a communicator, the first form of broadcasting, a medium that carries information to people in many different places simultaneously. This is a form of unification.

I call one group of my sound works Moment or Time Pieces. They are artworks which take the form of communal sound signals. The basic idea of these works, though, is to form the sound 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 precisely the opposite. The sound is introduced gradually; beginning inaudibly it grows slowly over a period of minutes and, at its height, suddenly disappears. The long subtle emergence of the sound causes it to go unnoticed. It becomes apparent only at

the instant of its disappearance, creating a sense of silence. In this silent moment, for a few seconds after the sound has gone, a subtle transparent aural afterimage is superimposed on the everyday sounds of the environment, a spontaneous aural memory or reconstruction perhaps, shared by all who notice it, engendered by the sound's disappearance.

The idea of making a sound experience by removing a sound may seem strange at first, but in fact it occurs occasionally in daily life. An everyday example is the coffee-grinding machine in a café. When the machine is first turned on in a noisy café most don't consciously notice it; talking just seems to become a little more difficult. That is amazing in itself, because the sound is quite loud. It is also an expected event in the café, though, and the mind simply adjusts for it and goes on with what it has been doing. But, when the coffee-grinding is finished and the sound suddenly stops, the space is suddenly enveloped in an aural vacuum. What seems like a moment of complete silence occupies the café.

This silent moment is not really silent, though; the normal sounds of the café go on. But for a few seconds after the sound has gone, what one could call an aural afterimage is superimposed on the sounds of the environment – a spontaneous aural memory or reconstruction, subtle and transparent, engendered by the sound's disappearance.

Max Neuhaus