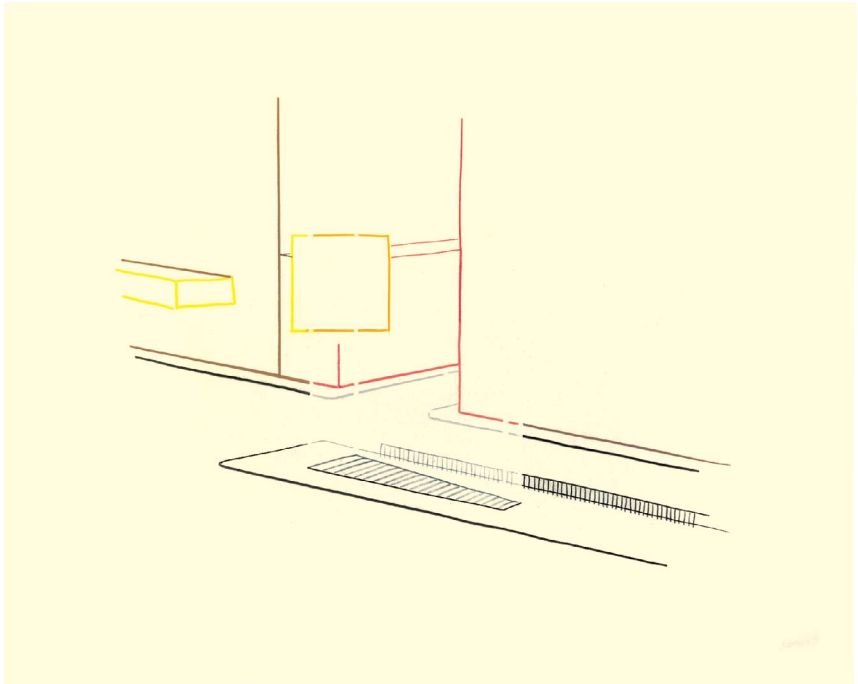


# Dia:



Max Neuhaus  
*Times Square, 1977*  
Triangular pedestrian plaza at Broadway  
and 7th Avenue south of 46th Street  
New York, New York

**Max Neuhaus**  
*Times Square, 1977*

The work is located on a pedestrian island: a triangle formed by the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, between 46th and 45th Streets, in New York City's Times Square.

The aural and visual environment is rich and complex. It includes large billboards, moving neon signs, office buildings, hotels, theaters, porno centers and electronic game emporiums. Its population is equally diverse, including tourists, theatregoers, commuters, pimps, shoppers, hucksters and office workers. Most people are in motion, passing through the square. The island, as it is the junction of several of the square's pathways, is sometimes crossed by a thousand or more people in an hour.

The work is an invisible unmarked block of sound on the north end of the island. Its sonority, a rich harmonic sound texture resembling the after ring of large bells, is an impossibility within its context. Many who pass through it, however, can dismiss it as an unusual machinery sound from below ground.

For those who find and accept the sound's impossibility though, the island becomes a different place, separate, but including its surroundings. These people, having no way of knowing that it has been deliberately made, usually claim the work as a place of their own discovering.

—Max Neuhaus

Max Neuhaus's *Time Square* (1977) sits beneath a triangular pedestrian plaza on Broadway between 45th and 46th Streets in New York. A pedestrian walking through this heavily trafficked area can hear, emanating from below a grate in the street, a deep and slightly pulsating droning that changes in pitch, timbre, and tone with shifts in bodily position. Installed in 1977, shut off in 1992, and reactivated in 2002, *Times Square* is a key example of both Neuhaus's environmental work with sound and the broader postwar embrace of the medium in art. Today, under Dia Art Foundation's stewardship, it is audible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, an ongoing interlocutor with the city's mercurial topography.

Born in New York in 1939, Neuhaus began at age 14 to develop his prodigious talents as a percussionist within the city's jazz scene. While training at the Manhattan School of Music, he encountered the work of experimental American composers John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Harry Partch, and later toured with pioneering European serial-music composers Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

In 1968 Neuhaus left the music world for what he saw as the expanded possibilities of the visual arts. Like the works of such peers as Richard Serra and Gordon Matta-Clark, who also pushed the aesthetic boundaries of site, Neuhaus's early art of the mid-1960s

explored the sonic contingencies of physical locations relayed through technological and media experimentation. For the four-day duration of *Fan Music* (1967), for example, Neuhaus amplified sounds from atop buildings on New York's Bowery using solar-powered cells behind rotating fan blades. The weather controlled the rotation of the blades and, by extension, the work's sonic intensity. The work inaugurated the artist's *Place* series, in which the physical realities of a site condition the aesthetic experience. Neuhaus also engaged specific urban architectures, as in *Walkthrough* (1973–77), wherein a series of mobile clicks and pings could be heard in the arcade of the Jay Street–Borough Hall (now Jay Street–MetroTech) subway station in Brooklyn. As the artist succinctly described such works: "I use sound to change the way we perceive a space."<sup>1</sup>

For *Times Square*, Neuhaus again adapted New York's transit infrastructure for aural effect. The project took four years to realize—the artist began negotiations with the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and the city's largest energy company, Consolidated Edison (ConEd), in 1973. As the MTA would not collaborate with a private individual, Neuhaus founded the nonprofit Hybrid Energies for Acoustic Resources (HEAR) to facilitate production. To construct *Times Square*, he climbed into a ventilation shaft beneath a street grate and installed a loudspeaker and homemade electronic sound generators. The internal subway voltage proved too high to power the work and ConEd refused to join an electrical connection to MTA property, forcing him to hire an independent maintenance company to improvise a line to a nearby streetlight. The end result, completed in September 1977, was a subterranean tone audible on the street, a sound Neuhaus later likened to an "after ring of large bells."<sup>2</sup> The artist refused any public signage so that *Times Square* would operate in total anonymity for the everyday pedestrian.

As Neuhaus's career shifted to European commissions, he could no longer adequately supervise the maintenance of *Times Square*. Powering the piece continued to be a problem, and in 1992 the work was disconnected. A decade later, as American critical attention returned to Neuhaus's oeuvre, *Times Square* was permanently revived through a collaboration with the artist, gallerist Christine Burgin, MTA Arts for Transit, Times Square Business Improvement District, various unaffiliated individuals, and Dia. In relaunching the project Neuhaus amplified its volume to account for the area's increased noise. Inspired by Neuhaus's interest in site specificity and durational sound, Dia later commissioned *Time Piece Beacon*, a permanent sound installation that was realized in 2005 at Dia Beacon in the Hudson Valley.

*Times Square* refuses the total assimilation of art into everyday life that was endorsed by Neuhaus's contemporaries in Fluxus and related movements. Instead, the work addresses the nature of public experience. The artist described the sounds

of his installations as “plausible” in a given location.<sup>3</sup> In the case of *Times Square*, the drone registers as possibly part of the city’s soundscape. The work invites passersby to reflect on what is customary to an urban environment and what is mutable. “I wanted a work that wouldn’t need indoctrination,” Neuhaus once stated. “The whole idea is that people discover it for themselves. They can’t explain it. They take possession of it as their own discovery.”<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

This epigraph appears in Max Neuhaus’s circumscription drawing for *Times Square* (1977), which was made in 1992.

1. Max Neuhaus, “Lecture at the Seibu Museum Tokyo,” in *Max Neuhaus: Sound Works*, vol. 1, *Inscription* (Ostfildern, Germany: Cantz, 1994), p. 60.
2. Neuhaus’s circumscription drawing.
3. Max Neuhaus, “Notes on Place and Moment,” in *Sound Works*, p. 98.
4. Neuhaus, quoted in Sam Roberts, “Something Fresh Wafting up from a Times Square Grate: Art,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/26/nyregion/something-fresh-wafting-up-from-a-times-square-grate-art.html>.

## About the artist

Max Neuhaus was born in 1939 in Beaumont, Texas, and spent most of his childhood in Fishkill, New York. From 1957 to 1961, he studied music at the Manhattan School of Music. In 1958 Neuhaus met John Cage; this encounter determined his decision to become a professional percussionist. After a solo tour in Europe in 1965, he began developing projects that went beyond the strictly musical realm; among them were site-specific pieces that he was the first to call “sound installations.” As Neuhaus started a research residency in 1968 at the Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey, he ceased performing as a musician and fully devoted himself to sound art. Since then, his work has been exhibited internationally in museums and galleries, including solo shows at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1978); Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris (1983); and Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland (1989). He was also included in Documenta in Kassel, Germany; Venice Biennale; and Whitney Biennial, New York. In 2008 an exhibition of Neuhaus’s drawings was organized by the Menil Collection, Houston, which coincided with the inauguration of a new installation, *Sound Line*. Neuhaus passed away in Maratea, Italy, in 2009.

## Further reading

Biserna, Elena. “Site-Specific Exhibition and Reexhibition Strategies: Max Neuhaus’s Times Square.” In *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives*, edited by Vinzenz Hediger, Barbara Le Maître, Julia Noordegraaf, and Cosetta G. Saba. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013, pp. 370–375

Cooke, Lynne, and Karen Kelly with Barbara Schröder, eds. *Max Neuhaus*. New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2009.

Cox, Christoph. “Enduring Work: Max Neuhaus.” *Artforum*, May 2009, pp. 49–52.

Neuhaus, Max. *Max Neuhaus: Sound Works*. Ostfildern, Germany: Cantz, 1994.

Tomkins, Calvin. “Hear.” *New Yorker*, October 24, 1988, pp. 110–120

## Checklist

**Times Square, 1977**

Digital sound signal  
Dia Art Foundation

Dia Art Foundation is committed to advancing, realizing, and preserving the vision of artists. Dia Beacon in the Hudson Valley presents Dia's collection of art from the 1960s to the present as well as special exhibitions, new commissions, and public programs. Dia Chelsea in New York presents temporary exhibitions, new commissions, performances, lectures, and readings. Dia also maintains several long-term sites, including Walter De Maria's *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* (1977), Joseph Beuys's *7000 Eichen* (7000 Oaks, which was inaugurated at Documenta 7 in 1982), all of which are located in New York; Dia Bridgehampton, the Dan Flavin Art Institute (established in 1983), on Long Island, New York; De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977) in western New Mexico; Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76) in the Great Basin Desert and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in Great Salt Lake, Utah; Cameron Rowland's *Depreciation* (2018); and De Maria's *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) in Kassel, Germany.

### Dia Beacon

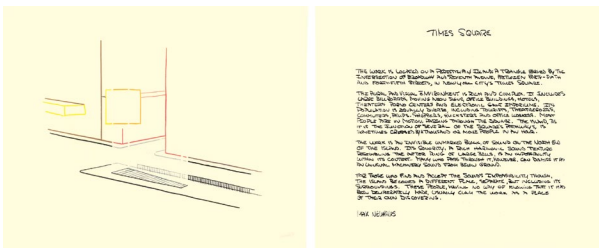
Riggio Galleries  
3 Beekman Street  
Beacon, New York

### Dia Chelsea

537 West 22nd Street  
New York, New York

### Dia Bridgehampton

The Dan Flavin Art Institute  
23 Corwith Avenue  
Bridgehampton, New York



Cover: Max Neuhaus, *Times Square* (detail), 1992. Dia Art Foundation. © The Estate of Max Neuhaus