

Anne Zeitz

## ***Akustische Räume, Für Augen und Ohren, Musique en conteneur, Der befreite Klang***

### **Retracing the Heard and Unheard Curatorial Practice of René Block from the 1960s to the 1980s**

It started with an envelope: on its front side a graphic score, with orange, blue and green blobs of colour replacing the notes and the printed inscription “abgesagt – cancelled” crossing the score diagonally. On the back, the indication of the context and sender covered by a black cross.

Apparently, the envelope is related to an exhibition entitled *Der befreite Klang, Kunst für Augen und Ohren* (Liberated Sound, Art for the Eyes and the Ears) planned by the German gallerist, curator and publisher René Block in collaboration with the Austrian art historian Wieland Schmied in a castle in Austria in 1988 that was cancelled at short notice (the concept was finalized and the communication materials had been printed). In 2018, thirty years later, in the rooms of the gallery and publishing house Edition Block, I tried to understand this curatorial project, which was never realized. The planning of the exhibition in the 1980s had mainly taken place by telephone, which is why there are only few elements to be consulted or read. René Block himself only remembers a couple of artists he had wanted to involve. During our discussions and the consultation of documents, we go back to past exhibitions and concerts, publications and performances, exchanges and friendships that influenced and constituted the curatorial practice of Block, a major actor in the field of contemporary art since the 1960s.

Mainly based on the personal archives of Block<sup>1</sup> and the archives of the Paris Biennale,<sup>2</sup> this research questions the possibilities of analysing past sound practices that have not – or only partially – been recorded and maybe not even remembered or never heard. It seeks to reconstruct at least part of *Der befreite Klang* by exposing the projects that preceded the conceptualization of this exhibition which has remained unrealized and unheard.



Fig. 01: Detail of the envelope conceived by René Block for the exhibition *Der befreite Klang*, 1988, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

Starting from the 1960s, Block had concentrated on the link between aural and visual perception in contemporary art, as well as the ways to confront artistic and musical practices in the context of actions, events and happenings, installations, concerts and exhibitions, which were often related to each other. If realized, *Der befreite Klang* would have been his last large-scale exhibition in this field although Block has continued to show, produce and collect sound works until today.<sup>3</sup> Block curated major exhibitions on sound practices whilst always transcending boundaries and categories. From a very early stage, his projects reflect a particular concern for sonic and musical elements and for the way works can transform by aural means spaces as diverse as galleries and museums, containers and, potentially, a castle. At the same time these projects show that he was never interested in defining sonic practices, or notions of sound art. As his early projects reveal, he was rather concerned with “sonic spaces”, as described by Paul Hegarty, “produced inside and outside the artistic work, [...] accidental, heterogeneous by its own means to confuse comprehensive listening”.<sup>4</sup>

René Block was born in 1942 in Velbert in North Rhine-Westphalia. In 1964, at the age of 22, he opened his first exhibition space, the Galerie René Block, in former West Berlin’s Schöneberg district.<sup>5</sup> The first exhibition in September 1964 was entitled

*Neodada, Pop, Decollage, Kapitalistischer Realismus* and included works by Gerhard Richter and Wolf Vostell. Vostell is one of the artists that accompanied Block's projects starting from the 1960s, and more generally the loose and heterogeneous group of artists and musicians around Fluxus. Block was also very much influenced by Joseph Beuys, with whom he collaborated closely and organized the legendary "Action" *I Like America and America Likes Me*<sup>6</sup> in 1974 in his New York gallery, and by John Cage whose works were shown and performed at the Berlin gallery in the 1960s and 1970s on several occasions, but he was also involved in later projects.

Sound was there from the very beginning.<sup>7</sup> But it was the propagation, as well as the transcription of sound, its realization, as well as the evocation of its presence or its absence that interested Block. As mentioned by Eva Scharrer, the inaugural exhibition of the Galerie René Block was accompanied by the publication of *Piano Piece for Terry Riley #1* by La Mon-

te Young.<sup>8</sup> The text-score,<sup>9</sup> written in 1960 and indicating the action of pushing a piano against, or even through walls until exhaustion, was described in the introduction of the exhibition catalogue. Gestures and actions tackling prevailing modes of musical practices were an integral part of Block's following projects throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Before he conceived the *Der befreite Klang* project, Block had organized three important exhibitions evolving around aural perception that will be exposed subsequently: *Akustische Räume* (Acoustical Spaces), a series of solo shows in his second Berlin gallery in 1970, *Für Augen und Ohren* (For the Eyes and the Ears) a large-scale exhibition in 1980 at the Akademie der Künste Berlin and a reduced form at the Musée d'art moderne in Paris in the same year, and *Musique en conteneur* (Container Music) as part of the sound section of the last issue of the Paris Biennale in the Halle de la Villette in 1985.

Letters, sketches, invitation cards and photographs from the archives describe and show elements of the

Fig. 02: Invitation, opening concert of the series *Blockade '69*, Joseph Beuys and Henning Christiansen, February 1969, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.



three exhibitions and of the last concept. The exhibitions from the 1980s are reflected in catalogues, from the Akademie der Künste, the Musée d'art moderne and the Paris Biennale. Several films – one concerning part of *Akustische Räume* and two concerning *Für Augen und Ohren* as well as a recording of a radio broadcast – provide a visual and aural insight. The sequences and recordings only give a partial impression and the catalogues and archives are not complete. In the following, the exhibitions will predominantly be analyzed based on concepts and letters, hints and descriptions, images and testimonies. Only few works could be heard and, in the best of cases, photographs, as well as descriptions and sketches, make it possible to imagine the sonic elements. This need to fill the gaps by presumptions on what could have been heard particularly concerns the last projects from the 1980s examined here: the Biennale participation *Musique en conteneur* and the concept of *Der befreite Klang*.

#### “Machine guns and violins”<sup>10</sup>

*Akustische Räume*, Block's first project focusing on sonic perception, took place from April to October 1970 in the new rooms of the Galerie René Block, which had moved to the district of Berlin-Wilmersdorf in 1966. René Block invited seven artists to transform the gallery space acoustically. The year before, Block had proposed a similar project with *Blockade '69*. Each artist involved in this series of exhibitions was asked to question and modify the perception of the gallery room in Schaperstrasse.<sup>11</sup> The space measured approximately 4 by 7 metres with all walls, except one, running diagonally. Beuys was the first artist to participate in *Blockade '69* with a work at the gallery prepared by the performance *Ich versuche Dich freizulassen (machen)* (I try to liberate you [make you free]) at the Akademie der Künste.<sup>12</sup> The performance took place in collaboration with the Danish composer and Fluxus artist Henning Christiansen. It involved a grand piano, a tape recorder, music stands and different everyday objects such as a bucket filled with sauerkraut. By activating these different elements and confronting them with each other, Beuys generated the object to be exposed, the *Konzertflügeljom (Bereichjom)*: the piano devoid of its legs accompan-

ied by the parts of the violin and a music stand covered in the food.

As described by Michael Glasmeier in his article “Raumdenken”,<sup>13</sup> the *Blockade* series already pointed to the reflection on the sonic transformation of space, starting from the introductory performance by Beuys and Christiansen. For the third *Blockade* edition, K.H. Hödicke (mainly working with painting and associated with neo-expressionism in his later works) installed a white chicken coop under the ceiling. The sounds of the clucking and scrabbling animals were meant to be heard whilst one was in the gallery.

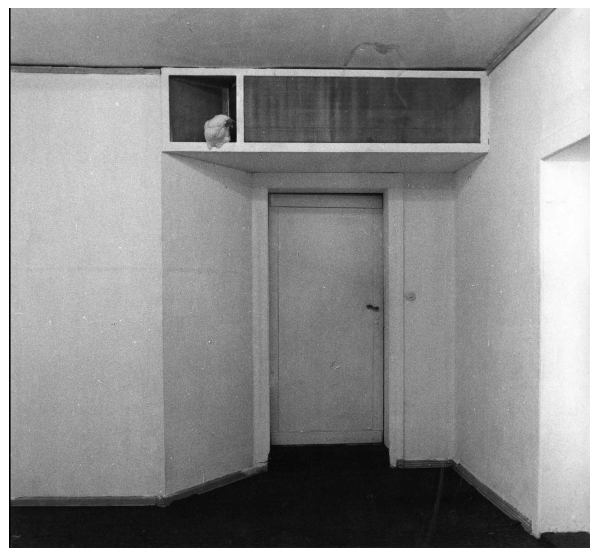


Fig. 03: Photograph of the installation *Verschlag für 10 Legehennen, Blockade '69, Raum III*: K. H. Hödicke, 1969, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

*Acoustical Spaces* in the following year was built on the experience of the *Blockade* series. The full title of the project was *Serie 2: Elektronische, Technische, AKUSTISCHE RÄUME (A.R.)* (Series 2: Electronic, Technical, Acoustical Spaces [A.R.]) and involved Wolf Vostell, Markus Raetz, Konrad Schnitzler (later spelled Conrad), K.H. Hödicke, Nam June Paik, H.J. Dietrich and Mauricio Kagel. The works questioned the relationship between the listener, sound and the space it propagates in. They also insisted on the links and discrepancy between visual and aural perception, the thresholds of the audible, as well as the way technological devices transform the transmission and reception of sound.

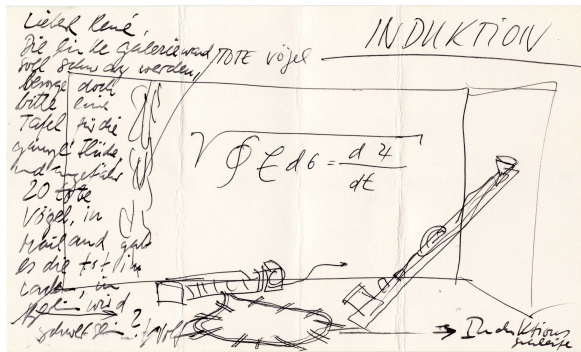


Fig. 04: Concept of *Induktion* sent by Wolf Vostell to René Block for *Akustische Räume: I*, 1970, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

Wolf Vostell inaugurated the project with the work *Induktion*<sup>14</sup> concentrating on electromagnetic translations of everyday gestures.<sup>15</sup> The invitation card of the exhibition, as well as the ones of the following six projects, shows the floor plan of the gallery space integrating a drawing by the artist and a text. On one of the walls, Vostell hung a black cloth with silver embroidery of a formula used in physics. In a corner of the gallery, a glass box contained a dead partridge and a transmitter. A cable coming out of the box formed an approximate circle on the floor of the exhibition space. The artist qualified his work as a “psychological-electronic space”.

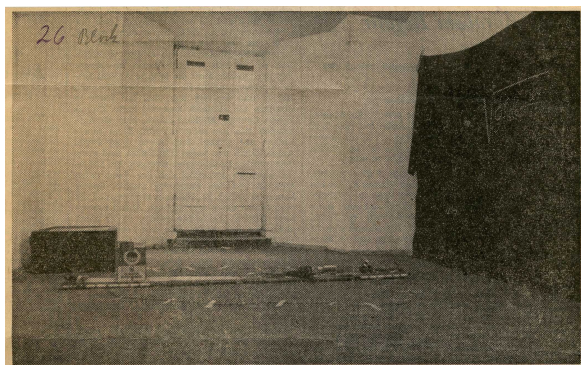


Fig. 05: Image of *Induktion* published by Camilla Blechen, “Elektroakustische Leberwurst, Sieben ‘Akustische Räume’ in Berlin”, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (28 October 1970), René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

He created electromagnetic fields using different frequency generators and induction coils. The fields were made audible by two amplifiers mounted on a portable wooden board which could be manipulated by the visitors. The board comprised other technical, but

also everyday objects and elements: black pudding, spaghetti, induction coils, a handle, electronic pieces integrated into a galantine, a stuffed bird, amplifiers integrated in a can of sardines and in a mousetrap, as well as speakers. As one walked around the gallery with the board, the electromagnetic fields were translated into strident sounds emerging from the speakers.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 06: View of the installation *Stereo Plastik, Akustische Räume IV: K. H. Hödicke*, 1970, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

K.H. Hödicke participated in this new series with the work *Stereo Plastik* (Stereo Sculpture). Two paintings showing loudspeakers were hung on each side of the wall facing white plastic chairs aligned as for a concert. With this piece Hödicke wished to create a Cagean situation of listening to non-intentional sounds<sup>17</sup> whilst confronting them with the different elements constituting the infrastructure of the reception of sound and music.

Nam June Paik proposed an action, which was not to be realized. The invitation card indicates: “1. Collect all the politicians from the World from Afghanistan to Zambia and put them inside the circle. 2. Activate 23 machine guns at the same time. 3. Politicians could be substituted by effigies or photos.” Sound was thus only suggested.<sup>18</sup>

Conrad Schnitzler<sup>19</sup> linked twelve violins to twelve radios for the installation *Elektrische Eruption, Kluster Musik*. The amplification of the string instruments via contact microphones and their propagation “on air” depended on the visitor’s interpretations of the installation.

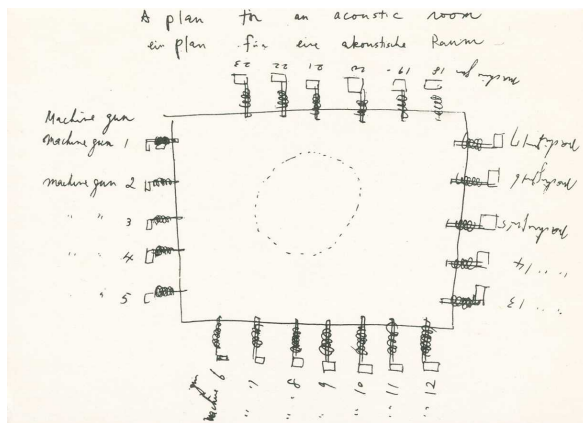


Fig. 07: Detail from the Invitation for *Akustische Räume V: Nam June Paik*, 1970, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

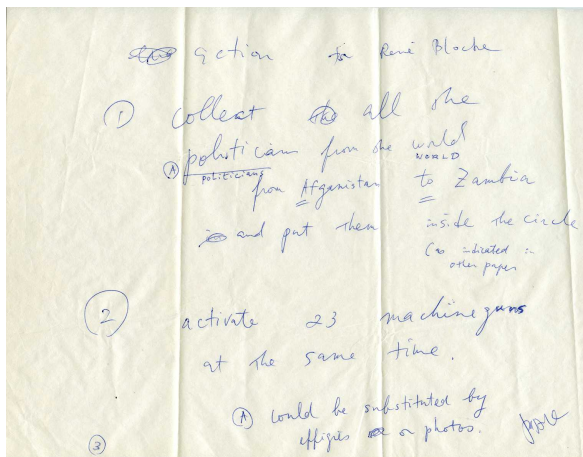


Fig. 08: Concept by Nam June Paik for *Akustische Räume V*, 1970, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

The Argentinian composer Mauricio Kagel realized the last exhibition of *Akustische Räume* with his work *Rahmenharfe: Unter Strom*<sup>20</sup> (Frame Harp: Under Current). Kagel installed an eight-metre long instrument formed by five guitar strings crossing the gallery space from one end to the other diagonally and creating a “room” or “frame harp”. The sound created by the plucking or striking of the strings by the artist as well as the visitors with their hands or different objects (violin bow, bamboo sticks, kitchen utensils) was amplified and transmitted into the space, which became resonator. A performance by Kagel took place during the opening.

Programming the space with artistic and musical

proposals, installations, actions and objects to be activated, the different projects show that René Block was not interested in sound as such, nor in immersive and contemplative sonic experiences. Bypassing categorisations, it was the relationship between aural and visual perception that he put forward. He also insisted on the way the works reveal and transform the spatial and acoustical qualities of the gallery. The technical dimension of sound production and reception was also an important part of the series.

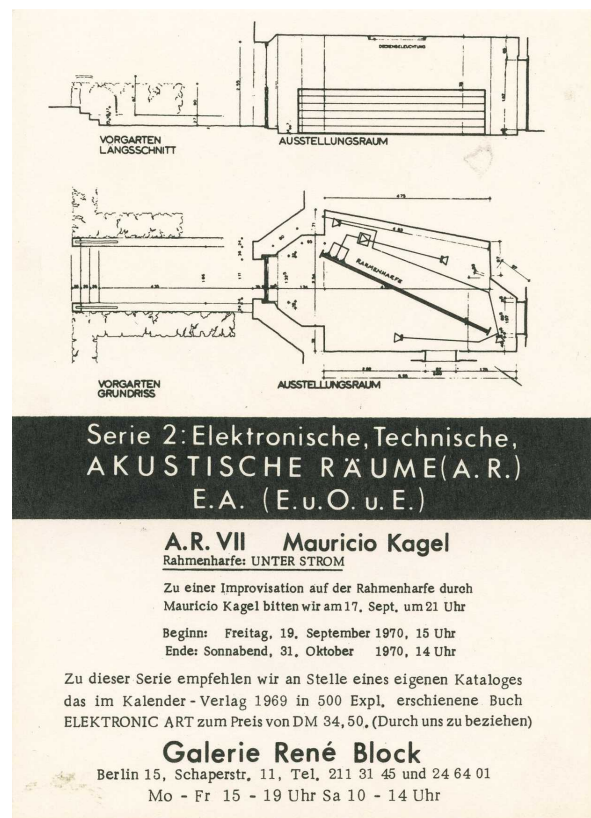


Fig. 09: Invitation for *Akustische Räume VII: Mauricio Kagel*, 1970, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

All of the works concentrate in one way or another on the devices sound passes through, that create sound or determine its perception – from loudspeakers, radios and electromagnetic transducers to the machine gun. *Akustische Räume* was very much characterized by Block’s interest in Fluxus and the experience of Fluxus events in the 1960s. In 1966, he had organized several evening programmes including Wolf

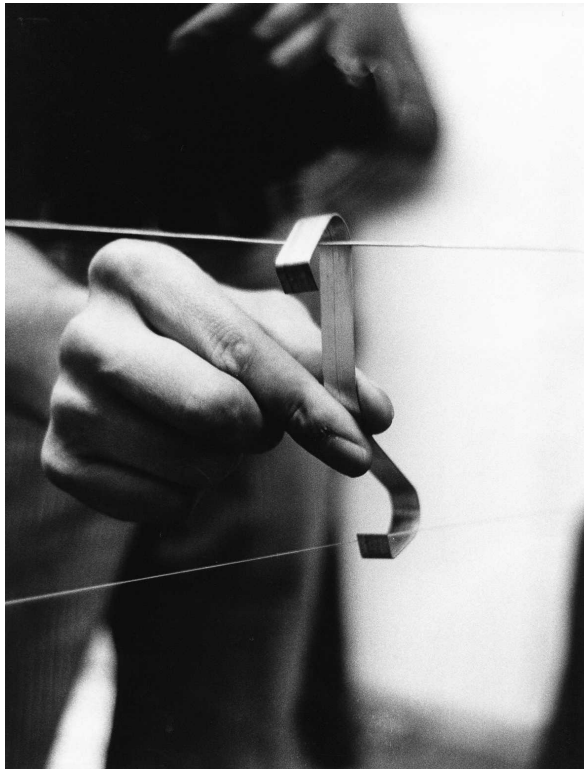


Fig. 10: Photograph of *Rahmenharfe: Unter Strom, Akustische Räume VII: Mauricio Kagel*, 1970, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

Vostell and Nam June Paik, in the following years he repeatedly collaborated with Alison Knowles, Dick Higgins, George Maciunas and Ben Patterson, and in 1970, just after the *AR* exhibition series, he realized the “Festum Fluxorum” with Robert Filiou and Charlotte Moorman amongst other numerous events. In 1982, Block organized the first major Fluxus retrospective, followed by other events and exhibitions in the 1980s and 1990s, most importantly the series he conceived as the Fluxus Trilogy.<sup>21</sup> The way Fluxus “explored borderline states of audibility”,<sup>22</sup> the physicality of sounds and the articulation between discreet and loud sounds influenced the conception of the exhibition series on acoustical spaces. The works proposed by Paik with his unrealizable concept and Vostell with the transformation of electromagnetic fields tackled the understanding of the threshold of perception, at once inaudible or almost imperceptible and potentially very loud (the suggested shots of the machine guns, as well as the high frequencies suddenly emitted by the induction device when it met the fields).

### For the eyes and the ears

Six years later<sup>23</sup>, Block was commissioned to organize his first large-scale exhibition and concert programme concerning sonic artistic practices for the Berliner Festspiele in collaboration with the Akademie der Künste Berlin and Nele Hertling of its departments of music and performing arts: *Für Augen und Ohren: Von der Spieluhr zum akustischen Environment* (For the Eyes and the Ears: From the Music Box to the Acoustical Environment) that took place from January to March 1980 in the spaces of the Akademie der Künste. It was shown in a reduced form four months later that same year at the Musée d'art moderne in Paris, in collaboration with Suzanne Pagé, with the title *Écouter par les yeux* (Listening with the Eyes). “Widely held to be the first dedicated sound art exhibition”,<sup>24</sup> *Für Augen und Ohren* took place in a period in which different exhibition projects – in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York – put forward sonic practices.<sup>25</sup> But Block’s concept was the only one of these to develop a historical dimension to this degree and to concentrate on musical practices, methods and instruments from past centuries whilst also showing contemporary artists. René Block did not use the term “sound art”, nor its German version “Klangkunst” in the title or the commentaries. This is certainly due to the fact that these terms had not been conceptualized in the beginning of the 1980s by artists and scholars to define works that integrate sound, as Volker Straebel shows in his article *Vom Verschwinden der Klangkunst*.<sup>26</sup> Apart from that, Block’s ambition was never to define or categorize works. Even in later projects, and although he organized numerous exhibitions including sonic practices as well as performance and concert programmes, these terms did not appear either in his titles or in his texts. The tackling of existing categories that he was interested in especially reflect in the title *Für Augen und Ohren*, but also *Der befreite Klang* from 1988.

The historical part of *Für Augen und Ohren* questioned the way devices and apparatuses transformed musical and sonic practices. Block went back to the music boxes of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, integrating them, as well as other objects, such as phonographs and mechanical organs in the in-

troductory part of the exhibition. Over sixty works, objects, installations and performances by contemporary artists, composers and musicians working with mechanical instruments and sound reproduction techniques – from the futurists to Fluxus and beyond – responded to this historical dimension of *Für Augen und Ohren*.



Fig. 11: Nam June Paik installing a reconstruction of *Exposition of Musik*, in *Für Augen und Ohren*, Akademie der Künste Berlin, 1980, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

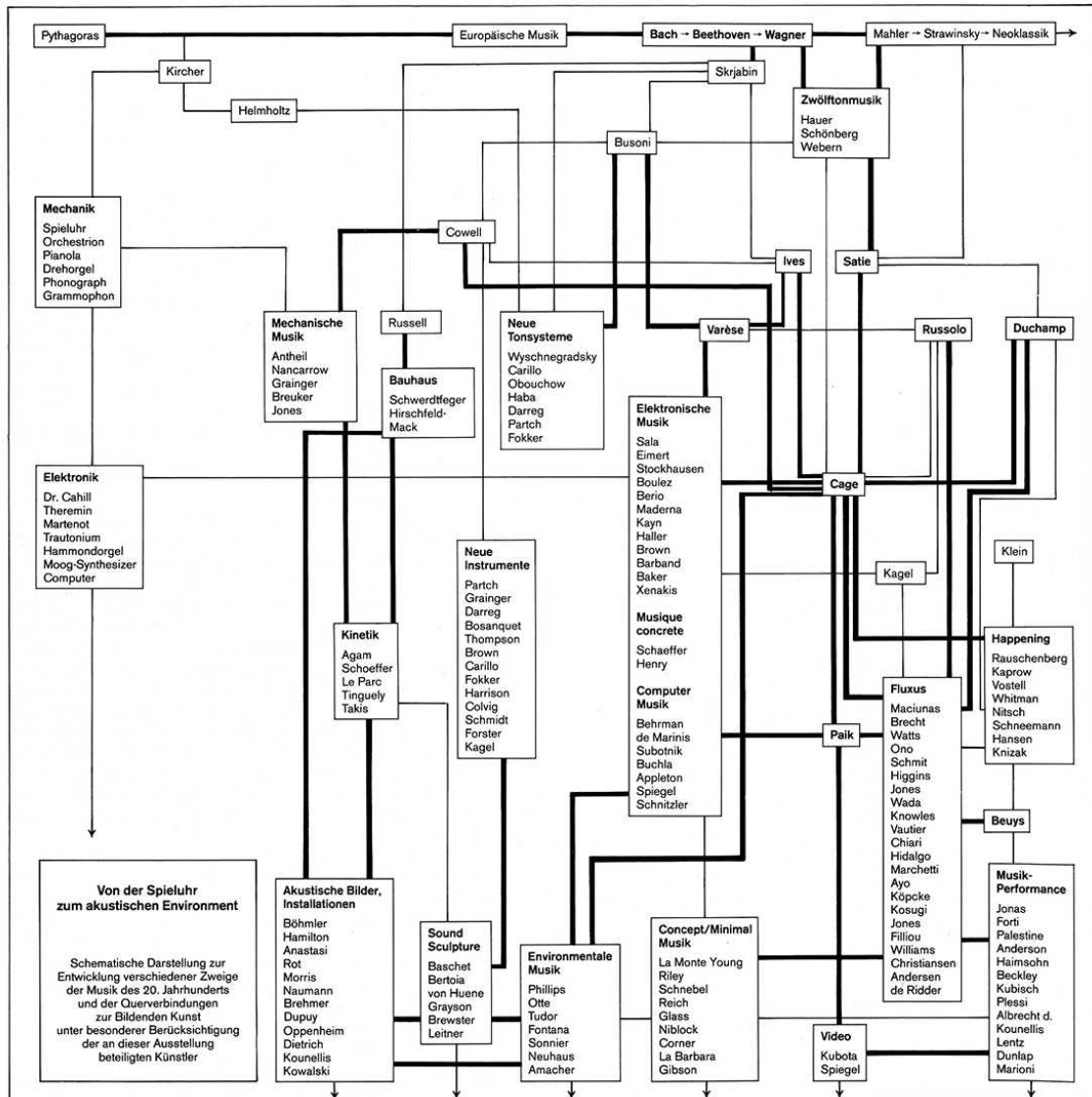
The exhibition catalogue<sup>27</sup> is introduced by a schema drawn by René Block, which reflects his approach and understanding of sonic practices. This “schematic representation of the development of different branches of twentieth-century music and its links to fine art, taking into account the artists of the exhibition”<sup>28</sup>, connects philosophers, composers, engineers, musicians and artists starting from Pythagoras, Athanasius Kircher and Hermann von Helmholtz to contemporary artists and musicians, especially those selected for *Für Augen und Ohren*. These were indicated in interconnected fields entitled “Acoustic Images, Installations”, “Sound Sculpture”, “Environmental Music”, “Concept, Minimal Music”, “Video” and “Music Performance”. The different fields or units are, as mentioned above, less elaborated to define approaches, than to show the ways in which the works evolve *in between* categories. The schema is a network, an interconnection of “branches”, in which for example the box “Acoustic Images, Installations” is related via a thick line to “Sound Sculpture” both of them being related to other developments and techniques. The drawing reveals the floating borders<sup>29</sup>

between the different forms of the works – installations, sculptures, objects, concepts, instruments, performances, concerts – that were presented at the Akademie der Künste. Block wished to trace back contemporary sonic practices in regard to developments in mechanics and electronics that transformed the way music could be composed and interpreted. He was not so much concerned with visual representations of sound and music, or the translation of the visual into the aural and vice versa. As outlined in his catalogue text *Die Summe aller Klänge ist grau*<sup>30</sup> (The Sum of all Sounds is Grey), it was rather the ways the history of music and of art intermingled and their “often intertwined bypaths”<sup>31</sup> that he wished to put forward. He concentrated on composers and musicians, such as Harry Partch and Conlon Nancarrow,<sup>32</sup> who challenged prevailing methods and classical models of musical practices and the way they influenced future generations. With *Für Augen und Ohren*, Block pursued the questioning of the link between technical, socio-cultural and artistic developments, as well as the emphasis on works integrating a sonic dimension produced by instruments, objects or devices, recorded, replayed, felt, seen or imagined on a larger scale.



Fig. 12: View of *The Handphone Table* by Laurie Anderson in *Für Augen und Ohren*, Akademie der Künste Berlin, 1980, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

The selection of works for this exhibition again reveals Block’s aim to concentrate on interconnections rather than on categories, on influences and inspirations rather than on definitions and disciplines. The artists he had worked with earlier such as Joseph



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Fig. 13: Schema conceived by René Block for the exhibition catalogue *Für Augen und Ohren*, Akademie der Künste Berlin, 1980, p. 06, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

Beuys, Mauricio Kagel and Nam June Paik were shown besides instruments and objects by Luigi Russolo and Man Ray, performances by Bruce Nauman, installations by Jean Tinguely and Dennis Oppenheim and sculptures by Takis and Robert Rauschenberg, to name only a few. Some of the artists have become important references for contemporary sonic practices like Robert Morris, Bernhard Leitner, Laurie Anderson, Christina Kubisch, Bill Fontana and Takehisa

Kosugi. The recording of the radio broadcast *Ode to Gravity* from 1980 leads the listener through a couple of rooms of the exhibition space with works by Dick Higgins and John Cage whilst describing the visual elements before remaining in the installation of David Tudor's *Rain Forest* from 1973 for over 10 minutes.<sup>33</sup> The *Rain Forest* performance (by Bill Viola amongst others) was integrated in a dense programme of evening events including concerts, readings, conferences, discussions and other performances. Part of this programme were Mauricio Kagel's *Unter Strom*, that he had installed at the Galerie René Block ten years earlier, and John Cage's "Rozart Mix" interpreted by Tu-



dor and Dieter Schnebel. Besides these works from the 1970s, the focus was put on compositions from the beginning of the twentieth century with the interpretations of works by Harry Partch, François and Bernard Baschet, George Antheil, Conlon Nancarrow, György Ligeti, Charles Ives, Edgard Varèse and Erik Satie. René Block also created an entire room for Satie's *Furniture Music* with loudspeakers hidden behind the wallpaper diffusing the piece permanently. It was important for the curator to bring the initial instruments realized by composers like Nancarrow and Antheil to Berlin for the interpretations, that were documented besides impressions of the exhibition space and other performances and concerts in a film made by Detlef Michael Behrens.<sup>34</sup> One corner of the Akademie der Künste was dedicated to a collection of artist's records that could be consulted and listened to.<sup>35</sup> With *Für Augen und Ohren*, Block also wished to allow artists like Nam June Paik, Allan Kaprow and Joe Jones to reconstruct installations having emerged in the context of early Fluxus that had not been preserved and to contextualize them with past and following works and objects. Joe Jones, for example, installed the instruments and storefront from his famous "music store"<sup>36</sup> and Nam June Paik reconstructed objects used in his *Exposition of Music* from 1963.

The way Block included these works differed very much from the precedent *Akustische Räume* series which was based on the modification of the Galerie René Block by aural means. For the *Für Augen und Ohren* exhibition, he rather put emphasis on the re-



Fig. 14: View of Joe Jones in front of the reconstruction of his *Music Store* with the artists (from left to right) Dick Higgins, Alan Kaprow, Bob Watts and Shigeko Kubota, *Für Augen und Ohren*, Akademie der Künste Berlin, 1980, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

consideration of artistic practices in regard to preceding works and to open up to what Block called "sonic environments" including "objects, installations and performances"<sup>37</sup> that emerged at the end of the 1970s.

### Container music

With *Musique en conteneur* (Container Music), Block revisited his earlier *Akustische Räume* concept in the context of the Biennale de Paris and its sound section five years later in 1985. In the meantime, Block had been nominated director of the gallery of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 1982, as well as of its music department (1984) organizing numerous exhibitions, concerts and festivals.<sup>38</sup> The 1985 Paris Biennale was the last edition to take place and was situated in the Grande Halle de la Villette. Marie-Noël Rio and Monique Veaute, who had already participated in the preceding Biennale, curated its sound section.

The section was composed of two parts that were interconnected: the concert and performance programme elaborated by the two curators and the exhibition *Musique en conteneur* conceptualized by

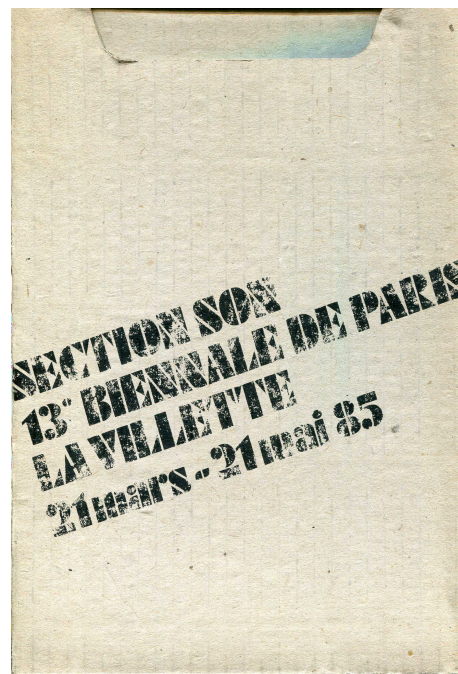


Fig. 15: Cover of the catalogue *Section Son, 13e Biennale de Paris, La Villette, 21 March-21 May 85, 1985*, Folder *Section Son*, 1985 — Fonds Biennale de Paris 1959–1985, © INHA-collection Archives de la critique d'art.

Block. Formally, *Musique en conteneur* was based on the installation of industrial containers in the entrance hall<sup>39</sup>, each container being associated with one artist. The following artists are indicated in the catalogue of the sound section, a little cardboard box containing loose cardboard pages conceived by Rio, one for each artist: Maryanne Amacher, Laurie Anderson, Connie Beckley, John Cage, Philippe Fenelon, Bill Fontana, Terry Fox, Rolf Julius, Michel Waisvisz and Z'EV. Amacher, Anderson as well as Waisvisz finally did not participate due to budgetary problems which can be inferred from letters in Block's archives. The work of Z'EV is neither mentioned in the last dated preparatory documents concerning the sound section, nor illustrated by photographs. The catalogues of the sound section as well as of the Biennale (seemingly printed before the confirmation of the different proposals) contains no photographs and there are no recordings of the works, which is why some of the descriptions of the proposals and final installations remain uncertain and some artists and works indicated do not correspond to what had been effectively shown. Photographs from Block's as well as Terry Fox's archives help to clarify some, but not all, the aspects of *Musique en conteneur*. A list of technical material confirms the participation of B. Fontana, P. Fenelon, R. Julius, T. Fox, C. Beckley as well as Hans Otte (misspelled Hotte on the list).

Technical devices and developments present in *Akustische Räume* as well as *Für Augen und Ohren* were not so much an issue here, nor did Block integrate a historical or retrospective dimension as in the 1980 exhibition. *Musique en conteneur* was rather based on the questioning of the cultural and socio-political dimension of listening, in the context of the increasing commercialization of urban space. In his short introductory text, Block mentions two main starting points concerning the realisation of the project. The first one is the reflection on ambient music (from Satie to commercial applications) and its impact on artistic and musical practices of the second part of the twentieth century. In this regard, *Musique en conteneur* ironically responds to "canned" music, transforming the symbolical containment of music in specific formats employed in commercial contexts to augment consumption into an entity of artistic pro-

posals elaborated from within and without the concrete spaces of industrial containers as segments of the exhibition space. The second point is the questioning of the possibilities to associate and install different sound works side by side, allowing their perception individually whilst being able to confront them with each other. Block had always refused to isolate works, proposing spatial transformations of the exhibition space as well as connections with concerts and performances. But in the context of the Biennale he was confronted with a huge semi-covered space that was open to the outside adjacent to the main hall. By placing containers in this entrance hall, he did not wish to separate works but rather to permit focal points. Most of the containers remained open and the works could also take place around or even on top of them.<sup>40</sup>

John Cage participated in the Biennale with two works, a work conceived for one of the containers – which remained empty referring to his concept of listening to unintentional sounds – and the performance of his piece *Postcards from Heaven* composed in 1982. *Postcards from Heaven* involved the musician Brigitte Sylvestre and her ensemble of twenty harpists. The players were installed in the Halle de la Ville, and as Daniel Charles describes: "By extending the harps' resonances by using electronic 'pedals' capable of activating, through an electromagnetic field, a specific attack or sustain, a specific grain or texture, the composer of *Postcards from Heaven* obtains a 'floating' music".<sup>41</sup>

Fig. 16 : Image showing (from right to left) John Cage, Brigitte Sylvestre and her ensemble of harpists, undated, Folder Section Son, 1985 — Fonds Biennale de Paris 1959–1985, © INHA-collection Archives de la critique d'art.



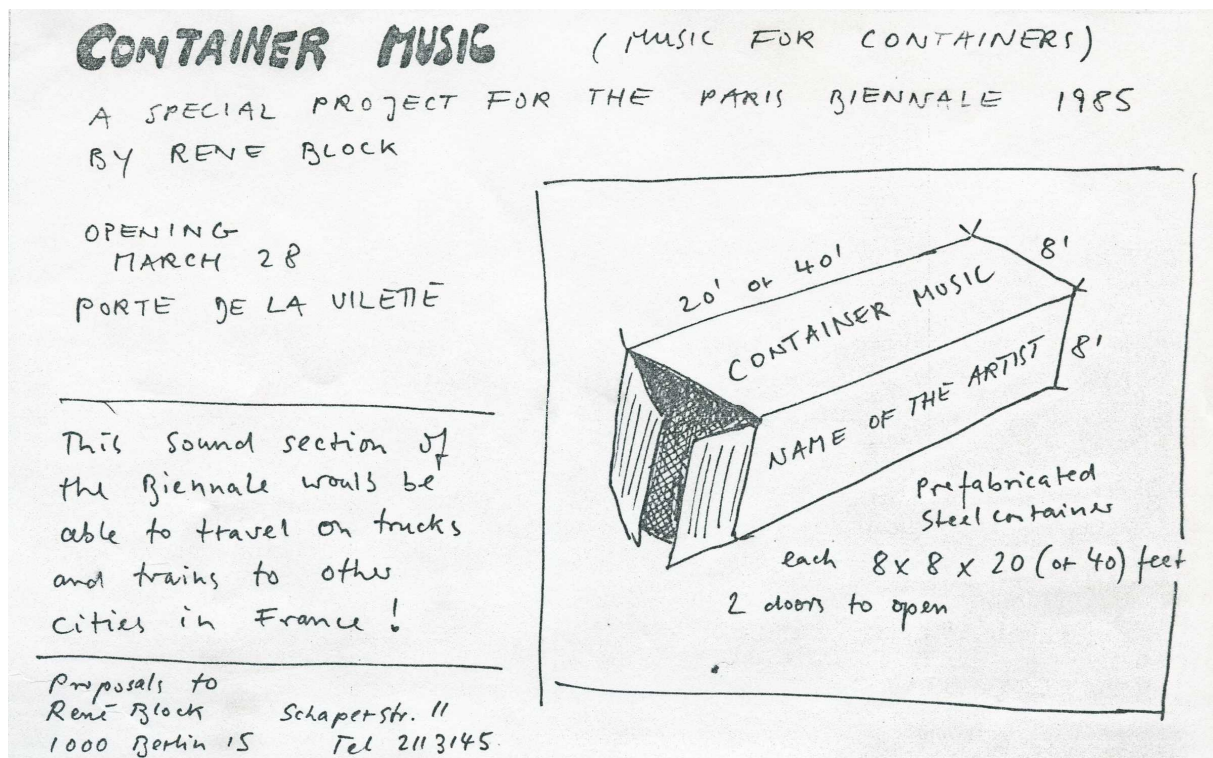


Fig. 17: Drawing *Container Music* for the preparation of *Musique en conteneur*, René Block, 1985, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

Terry Fox had initially proposed to transform the container and exhibition space into a sound box by installing piano wires on its outside walls as well as wires on its roof in order to create an aeolian harp.<sup>42</sup> A letter written one month before the Biennale, as well as the photographs from Block's archive, show that Fox completely modified his proposal and created the work *NATO (MB)*<sup>43</sup>.

Inside his container, he placed a car (a Citroën 2CV) from which amplified tape sound was emitted via loudspeakers. Piano wires were attached between the car and the container's walls in order to transform the car into an "instrument", to use the artist's term. Terry Fox had recorded the radiophonic speech by the cult preacher Jerry Falwell – that the artist introduces as "leader of the Moral Majority (friend and adviser to Ronald Reagan, George Bush, etc. speaking of 'The Rapture' and prophesy of Ammegeidon"<sup>44</sup>, – describing the end of the world as experienced by a car driver finding salvation. This recording was to be heard in the container. The inside walls of the container were covered by a white handwritten text in bold

letters. The text seems to be inspired by the speech, and some parts extracted from it, each letter being inscribed in a grid like structure forming words such as "own", "teeth" and "sex", succeeding each other without gaps. This work on the manipulative speech of Falwell was related to the language-related objects and drawings Fox started developing from the 1980s. His series of drawings *Berlin-Naples-Minneapolis (1981–84)* for example was mainly based on words

Fig. 18: View of the container of Terry Fox with the work *NATO (MB)*, in *Musique en conteneur*, La Villette, Paris, 1985, photographed by René Block, René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block and Estate Terry Fox, © Estate Terry Fox.



heard on radio programmes relating to the socio-political context of the Cold War. In these drawings, as in *NATO (MB)*, the beholder is brought to a “reading performance”, “a prolonged and laborious process where the content can only be grasped through very time-consuming, individual effort”.<sup>45</sup>

Bill Fontana concentrated on the historical context of the Grande Halle de la Villette, which had been an important abattoir and meat market since the middle of the nineteenth century until its renovation and transformation into a cultural space just before the Biennale. Fontana wished to transmit to his container either the sounds of the new food market that had moved to the outskirts of Paris, in Rungis, or of a cow/cattle market somewhere in France. The final choice of the sound is not specified in the final documents. A spatial and temporal deferral by the means of sound was already present in the project *Distant Trains* that Fontana created in Berlin in 1984. Invited by Block, who was working for the DAAD at that time, *Distant Trains* was situated around the ruins of the Berlin Anhalter Bahnhof that had been destroyed during the Second World War. By playing back sounds of departing and arriving trains, recorded at the train station of Cologne, alongside the former railway lines, he had superimposed the past soundscape on the present urban space. Block mentions the project, which had inspired the Biennale project as Fontana had used a container in Berlin for the technical material and power supply on the open field of the former train station. Due to the lack of documents, it is not possible from the letters only to infer the exact content and form of the final container work.

Connie Beckley realized an installation intertwined with a performance. Beckley had participated in *Für Augen und Ohren* with the installation of two keyboards of electrical organs suspended in parallel and at a distance of a couple of metres in the exhibition space. One after the other the organs transmitted G minor and G flat major chords, sounding and dying away successively. For the Paris Biennale, Beckley prepared the performance *Passerelle* taking place on a suspension bridge and a work for the inside of the container Beckley constructed two “sound towers” with scaffolds and loudspeakers which she linked to

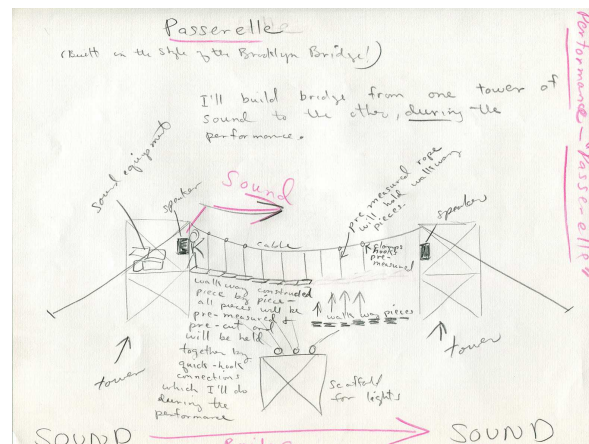


Fig. 19: Connie Beckley, Drawing of the performance “Passerelle” sent with a letter to Monique Veaute, 22 February 1985, Folder Section Son, 1985 — Fonds Biennale de Paris 1959-1985, © INHA-collection Archives de la critique d'art.



Fig. 20: View of the containers of *Musique en conteneur*, La Villette, Paris, 1985, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

each other with the bridge that she crossed. The character of the sound and her – most probably – vocal practice as she was working on “game-dialogues with her recorded voice”<sup>46</sup>, is not detailed in the texts and drawings concerning the performance. She describes the inside of the containers covered by “hundreds of feet of speaker wire” and exposed with bright light in the following way: “Through changes in fullness, dynamics, harmony, and text, this contained environment will alternately suggest characteristics of an Amazon rainforest, the overwhelming dimension of celestial space and the mystery of scientific/ alchemical laboratory.”<sup>47</sup>

In regard to the participation of Rolf Julius, the list of material, as well as two photographs showing the artist during the installation in his container, reveal the use of cassette players, transducers and small loudspeakers. The concept of the work entitled *Rosa Musik* (Pink Music) is developed in three drawings with the short text “I will glue small, round, pink, coloured, yellow, green loudspeakers on the inner walls of the container”.<sup>48</sup> (Fig. 23) Seemingly, twelve loudspeakers are spread around the four walls and the only hint in concern to the sound one could hear is the word “percussion” on one of the drawings. Julius had been part of *Für Augen und Ohren* where he had installed a series of photographs showing a dike on a rainy day and two loudspeakers emitting “series of sounds, that differ slightly”.<sup>49</sup> Julius wished the work to create the impression of a “silent movement”.<sup>50</sup> In the beginning of the 1980s, the artist concentrated more and more on discreet sounds, minimal actions and fragile objects. Regarding his residency experiences at PS1 in New York in 1983, he explains: “My visual works became ever more invisible. They disappeared to the same degree as the sound accompanying them became more important.”<sup>51</sup> The development from the photographic elements as part of his work in 1980 to the Container concept show this movement but also reveals that the visual aspects – particularly the colours he associated to his works – nevertheless remained very important for Julius.

The information on Hans Otte’s participation is more than sparse. The artist can be seen on several photographs – elucidating nothing about the work – as he is standing between the containers in the Villette Hall. He is neither mentioned in the catalogue of the sound section, nor in the Paris Biennale catalogue. Otte did produce a work for one of the containers as his name is indicated on the list of material for the sound section and he asks for the reconsignment of his “sound objects” in a letter<sup>52</sup> written to René Block after the Biennale.

Block had conceived the containers as part of a mobile exhibition that was to travel. Nevertheless, the Paris exhibition remained the only version of *Musique en conteneur*. It was the last large-scale project Block realized as a curator<sup>53</sup> focusing on musical and sonic



Fig. 21: Image showing Hans Otte and Bill Fontana in front of one of the containers in *Musique en conteneur*, La Villette, Paris, 1985, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

practices. Three years after the Paris Biennale, he developed the concept for *Der befreite Klang*, which has never been realized and which was inspired by *Für Augen und Ohren* as well as *Musique en conteneur*.

### Liberated Sound

With *Der befreite Klang*,<sup>54</sup> René Block was to bring the sounds from containers to a castle. The national exhibition of northern Austria commissioned him and Wieland Schmied to propose a project for the inaugural event of the renovated Schloss Weinberg with its 1,600 m<sup>2</sup> space and a total of nineteen rooms. The exhibition was intended to run in 1988 for six months and would have been accompanied by a programme of concerts and performances. The concept was based on the experience of the large-scale exhibition *Für Augen und Ohren*.



Fig. 22: Image showing Schloss Weinberg, undated, René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

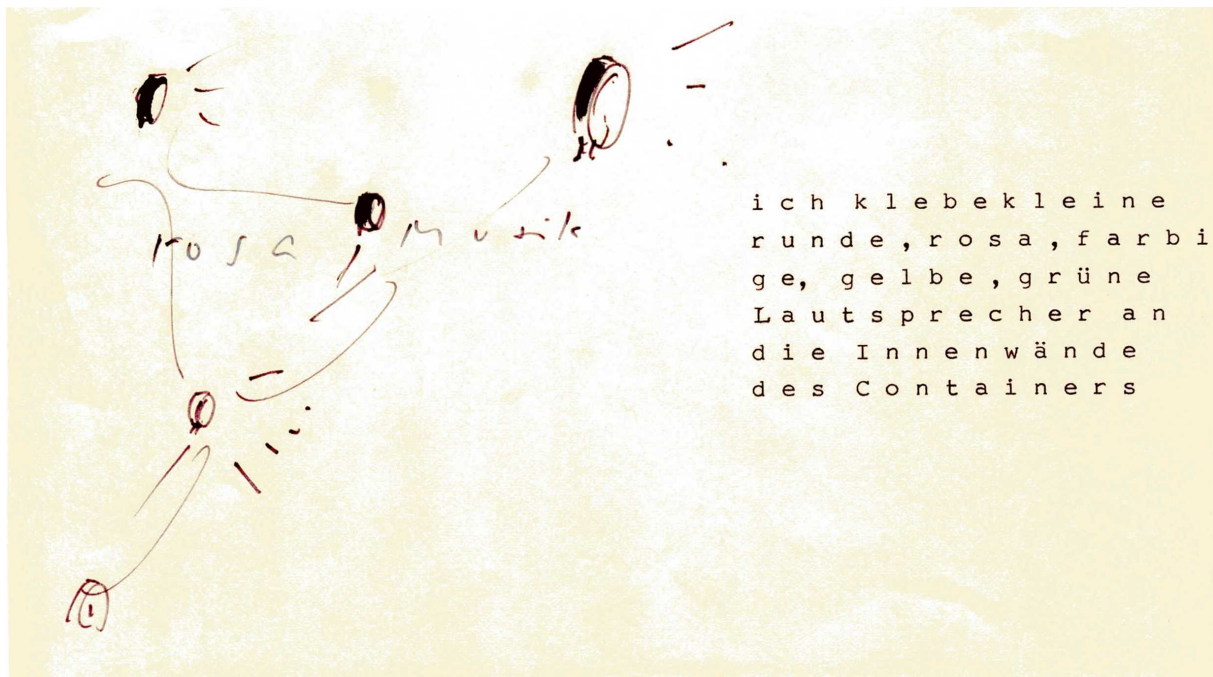


Fig. 23: Drawing and text by Rolf Julius sent to René Block for *Musique en container*, undated, René Block Archives, Courtesy of estate rolf julius and of René Block, © estate rolf julius.

But it didn't integrate a historical dimension and the artists were asked to produce new works reflecting on the space they were to resonate in. As for the containers, and the *Akustische Räume* series, the works were meant to transform the perception of their surroundings. The latest dated letter addressed to the curators in the archives of René Block, indicates the wish by the commissioners "to focus more on synaesthesia between music and art"<sup>55</sup> and the regret that the exhibition integrated too many musical proposals. This critique and demand to modify the selection of works seems to be in contradiction with the artists chosen for the project. The proposals for the castle can only be inferred from a couple of letters, documents and descriptions by Max Neuhaus, John Cage, Martin Riches, Dick Higgins, Hans Otte and Rolf Julius.<sup>56</sup> The documents do not specify the general concept or the works chosen and the way they were to take shape in the castle and its nineteen rooms and surroundings. Accepting this void as an invitation, I will offer an imaginary visit of the exhibition and of certain works – referring to the information found in the letters or revealed during the discussions with the curator. In my description I fathom at how they might have been,

had they been materialized. If every historical analysis is faced with "the danger", of the past "becoming somewhat distorted, beautified and coming close to free poetic invention",<sup>57</sup> the following description completely integrates this risk. At the same time, it doesn't transform a historical event but its potential realisation in the past, the way it could have been if it had sounded before fading away. Unrealized and unheard, a walk through *Der befreite Klang* is imagined in this last chapter, based on the partial documents and fragments of memory. It is inspired by the knowledge of Block's significant curatorial work starting from the 1960s with regard to sonic practices. All the information directly inferred from the documents is indicated in quotation marks and referenced in footnotes:

*The Gothic castle reconstructed in the Renaissance is situated on a hill adjacent to a small village in the Austrian countryside. As you approach its entrance, the first work you can hear, but only if you are there at the right moment and are particularly attentive, is Time Piece Kefermarkt, conceived by Max Neuhaus "for the castle and the surrounding countryside".<sup>58</sup> The work emits its sound during the exhibition but is also meant to remain installed afterwards. It is*

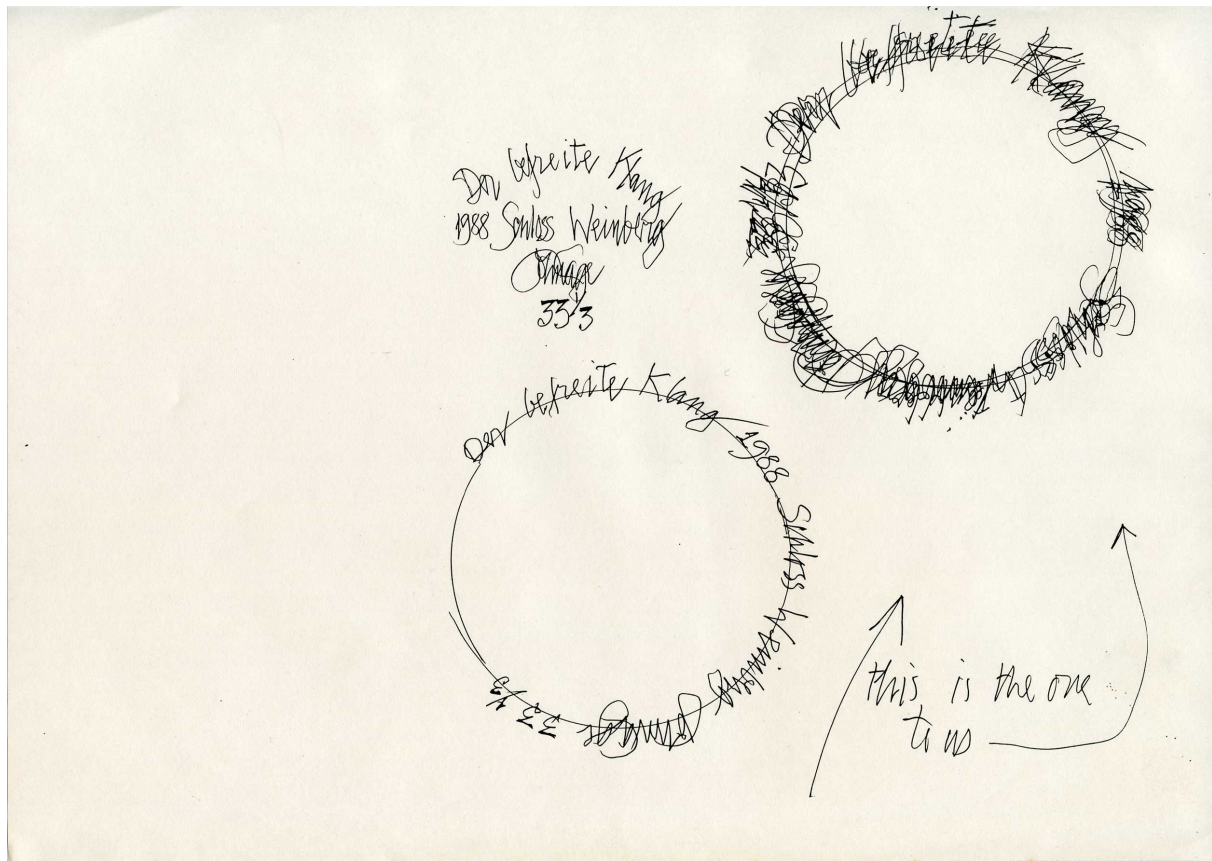


Fig. 24: Drawing by John Cage for *Der befreite Klang*, undated, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

part of a series of “public clocks, which mark time by creating a silence rather than a sound.”<sup>59</sup> Three months prior to the exhibition, Max Neuhaus had come to Austria in order to analyse the aural and visual surroundings of the castle and finalize the work.<sup>60</sup> The loudspeakers are hidden in gaps in the fortification walls, which makes it impossible to locate the exact source. Created electronically and based on the sounds that are already there, they appear very slowly and without being heard every hour in a crescendo and they can only be noticed the moment they disappear.<sup>61</sup>

Entering the castle, the programme and floor plan of the exhibition is assembled in a little catalogue. On its cover, a circular drawing by John Cage with a handwritten text in black-and-white superimposed in a way that renders the words illegible.<sup>62</sup>

The ground floor of the castle is dedicated to “Mechanical Instruments and Concerts”<sup>63</sup> starting with John Cage’s 33 1/3 from 1969 in the entrance hall. The use of twenty-four turntables and over two hundred LP records is proposed to the audience without any indication or limitation. The entrance hall leads to numerous separate rooms, one of them containing the environment *Luftsymphonie* by Dick Higgins. “A box, 4m deep, 3m wide, 2.5m high, painted royal blue. One opens a door in the side and goes in. It is totally lined, top, floor and all four sides with mirrors. The only light is blacklight. One hears eight cassette tape recorders playing bells and harpsichord.”<sup>64</sup> Another room contains a kinetic installation producing “a mechanical choreography”<sup>65</sup> by Martin Riches based on the work *Machine Dance*<sup>66</sup> which he developed in the beginning of 1987.

Works situated between the audible and the inaudible characterize the upper floor of the

castle. A series of rooms that are isolated from each other by large wooden doors create a succession of hearing experiences. Conceived by Hans Otte, the seven Hörräume (*Listening Rooms*), “reveal the basic characteristics of sound step-by-step and make them tangible.”<sup>67</sup> These spaces are entitled “NatureSoundRooms, EchoSpaces, HighFrequencyRooms, LowFrequencyRooms, NoiseRooms, Rooms with the different temporal and cultural scales”. The first room, for example, “exposes the process of the creation of sound based on low frequency impulses”. The seventh and last room contains “sounds, coming and going, as they exceed the human threshold of perception”.<sup>68</sup> At the end of a long corridor, a stairway leads to the single room on the last floor of the castle’s tower. The entrance is almost hidden. This small space integrates the work of Rolf Julius. The past years he had thought about the way “one can create rooms where one can withdraw and find rest, where one can see, hear and concentrate, where one is shut off from the external world and yet takes part in it”.<sup>69</sup> Julius’s Room of Silence is nearly empty. The “ambiance of stillness”<sup>70</sup> is created by the sound emitted from several loudspeakers facing the centre of the room: “A possibly square, dark, variously black sound, slowly moving, within itself, does not scream.”<sup>71</sup> The room is not “acoustically still”, it is “quiet in a higher sense”.<sup>72</sup> As part of a series of permanent Rooms of Silence the artist wished to create in the different countries he visited and worked, it is one space from “an ever-tighter net of such zones of calm”.<sup>73</sup>

If one listens closely, one might hear the disappearing sound of Max Neuhaus around Schloss Weinberg, or the stillness of Rolf Julius hidden in the castle’s tower. This imaginary listening experience potentially does not only concern *Der befreite Klang* but more generally all the works, their descriptions, concepts and drawings that did or do not effectively reach our ears

and the sounds we have forgotten. And as the unrealized works sound in our minds and converge with each other, they might be “liberated” from the commissioners’ request for synaesthesia and from any categorization, and still resonate for a long time to come.



Fig. 25: Envelope conceived by René Block for the exhibition *Der befreite Klang*, 1988, © René Block Archives, Courtesy of René Block.

## Endnotes

1. Situated in the spaces of Edition Block in Berlin.
2. The Paris Biennale (BdP) archives can be consulted at the Archives de la critique d'art in Rennes and at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky in Paris. For information on the BdP (in French) see: <<https://www.inha.fr/fr/recherche/programmation-scientifique/en-2017-2018/seminaire-1959-1985-au-prisme-de-la-biennale-de-paris.html>> (accessed 22 July 2019).
3. See the exhibitions and programmes organized in the Edition Block spaces in Berlin as well as in the Kunsthall 44 Møen in Denmark that Block has directed since 2008.
4. Paul Hegarty, “Vers l’environnement intermedia”, lecture at the symposium *Sound Art ? Construction et déconstruction historique d’un champ*, INHA Paris (13 December 2017). (Translated by the author).
5. This gallery was preceded by the Cabinet René Block at Kurfürstenstrasse 18 that he ran from April to July in the same year and which focused on graphic works.
6. In 1974, René Block opened a gallery in New York, René Block Gallery New York (May 1974–June 1977) in the building at 409 West Broadway. For its opening, he invited Joseph Beuys to perform. For this “Action”, Beuys was brought to the gallery space enveloped in a felt blanket inside an ambulance. From 23 to 25 May, he stayed in the gallery space behind a barbed wire fence with a coyote interacting with him. Beuys was brought back to the airport in the same way he had arrived.
7. This concerns his curatorial practice, but also his childhood and youth. In this regard see the discussion between René Block and Maria Eichhorn, “Variations on a Theme”, in *FRIEZE d/e*, no. 11 (September–October 2013), 105 where he explains: “It’s no secret that my first inroads into the world of culture from the mid-1950s were provided by the experimental night-time radio programme on NWDR, which usually played the latest electronic music from its legendary studio in Cologne. So I was more familiar with names like Hindemith, Nono, Berio, Cage and Stockhausen than with Klee, Kandinsky, Schwitters or Duchamp.” Also: “I remember that music always strongly attracted me starting from my very early youth.” René Block, *Kunstforum International*, Bd. 104 (1989), p. 254 (Translated by the author).
8. Eva Scharrer, “So langweilig wie möglich’ Block und Fluxus”, in René Block (ed.), *Weekend Zeitung* (Berlin: Edition Block, 2015), p. 10.
9. “Push the piano up to a wall and put the flat side flush against it. Then continue pushing into the wall. Push as hard as you can. If the piano goes through the wall, keep pushing in the same direction regardless of new obstacles and continue to push as hard as you can whether the piano is stopped against an obstacle or moving. The piece is over when you are too exhausted to push any longer. 2:10 A.M. November 8, 1960”.
10. In reference to the article “Maschinengewehre und Geigen, Die Serie der akustischen Räume in der Galerie Block”, *Die Welt* (26 August 1970).



11. The integration of the exhibition space in the work and its transformation by artistic proposals was put forward the same year in the major exhibitions *Spaces* organized by Jennifer Licht (1969–70 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York including works by Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, Franz Erhard Walther, Pula S Group) and *When Attitudes Become Form* curated by Harald Szeemann at the Bern Kunsthalle in 1969.
12. See Birgit Eusterschulte, "Demonstrationen für die Kunst und ein Koffer fürs Weekend", in Marius Babias, Birgit Eusterschulte and Stella Rollig (eds.), *René Block, Ich kenne kein Weekend, Ausstellungsprojekte, Texte und Dokumente seit 1964*, n.b.k. Ausstellungen Band 18 (Cologne: Walther König, 2015), p. 18–19.
13. Michael Glasmeier, "Raumdenken", in Block, *Weekend Zeitung*, p. 24–25.
14. Vostell had already shown this work one year earlier in the Milan gallery Schwarz during the exhibition *Ambient*.
15. The first preparatory drawings show the installation of several doorknobs in the middle of the gallery space. The act of cleaning them, which refers to German bourgeois households, was to be translated into sound and amplified in the space.
16. With this work, Vostell wished to make inaudible and invisible elements tangible, to "make people aware of electromagnetic fields they cross" as cited in Camilla Blechen, "Elektroakustische Leberwurst, Sieben 'Akustische Räume' in Berlin", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (28 October 1970).
17. *Stereo Plastik* also resembled the conceptual work *Stereo Piece* from 1971 by the German Fluxus artist Tomas Schmitt. *Stereo Piece* is an envelope containing pieces of paper with the inscription, "Divide this sheet into halves and place the two halves as distant from each other as possible."
18. See Brandon LaBelle in concern to Fluxus event scores and sound events, in Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise, Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 65
19. Conrad Schnitzler was an early member of the group Tangerine Dream.
20. According to Camilla Blechen, it was Kagel's first installation in an exhibition space. In 1969, Kagel had composed the eponymous piece "Under Current" for three players which Björn Heile describes as "concerned with electricity and its sonic aspects while avoiding intentional electroacoustic sound production. The piece is for all manner of guitars and a 'frame harp', a 6-metre-long construction that Kagel had built himself, as well as megaphones, fans, coffee mills and the like", in *The Music of Mauricio Kagel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 82.
21. See Fluxus. *Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik*, Wiesbaden, 1982; *Fluxus da Capo*, Wiesbaden, 1992; and *Fluxus und die Folgen*, Wiesbaden, 2002, amongst others. These three projects were related to each other and referred to the major Fluxus event *FLUXUS: Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik* that took place in the same space and on the same stage of the Museum Wiesbaden in 1962.
22. Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), p. 226.
23. His numerous projects that took place at his gallery and other exhibition spaces and concert halls during the 1970s were accompanied by the organization of the large-scale exhibitions *Multiples* (Neuer Berliner Kunstverein) in 1974 and *New York – Downtown Manhattan: SoHo* at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin and other venues during the Berliner Festwochen in 1976.
24. Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.109.
25. See *Sound, An Exhibition of Sound Sculpture, Instrument Building and Acoustically Tuned Spaces*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1979; *Space, Time, Sound, Conceptual Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: The 70s*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1979; *Soundings*, Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, 1981; and *Sound Art, Sculpture Center*, New York, 1984.
26. Volker Straebel, "Vom Verschwinden der Klangkunst", in Peter Kiefer (ed.), *Klangräume der Kunst* (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2010), p. 53 ff.
27. The article is based on the German version of the catalogue. The French version also includes a schema, which differs from the first version.
28. René Block, Lorenz Dombois, Nele Hertling, Barbara Volkman, *Für Augen und Ohren* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1980). (translated by the author)
29. <<http://www.straebel.de/praxis/index.html?praxis/text/t-klan-graum.htm>> (accessed 22 July 2019).
30. Block, *Für Augen und Ohren*, p. 103 ff. In the catalogue of the Paris exhibition, Block replaced the term "grey" by "yellow". See *Écouter par les yeux : objets et environnements sonores* (Paris: ARC Musée d'art modern de la ville de Paris, 1980). The colour yellow appears again in the long-term project gelbe MUSIK, see footnote 35.
31. Block, *Für Augen und Ohren*, p.103.
32. Block met Conlon Nanarow at the end of the 1970s in Mexico City.
33. Broadcast *Ode to Gravity*, KPFA-FM (9 May 1980) <[https://archive.org/details/OTG\\_1980\\_05\\_19\\_c1](https://archive.org/details/OTG_1980_05_19_c1)> (accessed 22 July 2019).
34. This 1980 film documents some of the installations and part of the concerts and performances.
35. This collection was in fact the beginning of the gelbe MUSIK project directed by René Block's wife Ursula Block in Berlin, an important exhibition space and store focusing on records starting from 1981 and closed in 2014.
36. Opened from 1969 to 1972, it comprised musical elements hung in the window of his New York studio and apartment. The instruments were connected to seven bells that could be activated from the outside of the building. For the Berlin exhibition in 1980, he installed a reconstruction of the music store. The reconstruction is seen in the film by Behrens.
37. Block, *Für Augen und Ohren*, p. 6.
38. See the comments by Luca Cerizza on Block's interest in avant-garde music in "The Gallerist: René Block and Experimental Music, 1965–1980 (Part I/III)" *Art Agenda* (8 December 2015).
39. This part of the Biennale was voluntarily situated outside the main hall and the Biennale installations.
40. As the works by John Cage and Connie Beckley show. Also Z'EV's unrealized proposal included a performance on the roof of a container.
41. Daniel Charles, text printed in the catalogue of the sound section of the Biennale de Paris, *Musique en conteneur* cardboard page concerning *Postcards for Heaven* with the indication: "Extract from 'À l'orée du silence', 1980". (translated by Marc Feustel)
42. The initial proposal was written in November 1984. Terry Fox writes: "With the container empty and elevated, every environmental sound (airplanes, cars, etc.) should be very distinctly heard together with the wire sounds. The main idea is to turn the container into the sound box of its own instrument, like being inside the sound box of a guitar." Starting from the end of the 1970s, Fox had worked with piano wires, as in *Erossore* from 1978. In an interview from 1994 with M. A. Greenstein, he explains: "Like now, these piano wires – the piano wires don't make the sound. When it's being played, it not only transforms the physical space, but also the space itself is creating the sound. So the space becomes an instrument." M.A. Greenstein, "A Conversation with Terry Fox", *Artweek* 25, no. 4 (17 February 1994), p.15.
43. Concept sent with a letter to René Block (undated, received by Block on 19 February 1985).
44. *Ibid.*
45. Beate Eickhoff, "Terry Fox – Text and Language Works", in *Terry Fox, Elemental Gestures* (Berlin/Dortmund: Akademie der Künste/Verlag Kettler, 2015), p. 191.
46. The second page of a letter to René Block describing the installation (25 November 1984), René Block Archives.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Letter with drawing sent to René Block (undated).
49. Rolf Julius, "Deichlinie", in Block, *Für Augen und Ohren*, p. 202 (translated by the author).
50. *Ibid.*
51. Rolf Julius, "My Studio in PS-1", in *Small Music (Grau)* (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 1996), p. 75.
52. Letter from Hans Otte to René Block sent from Brasília (18 August 1985).
53. Among many other projects during his DAAD involvement, in 1988–89, he invited Ursula Block and Michael Glasmeier to realize the large-scale exhibition *Broken Music, Artist's Recordworks* in the DAAD gallery. He never lost interest in musical and sound practices as evidenced in the statement he made in an interview with Maria Eichhorn: "You want to know what music means to me in relation to fine art? Well, I could live without pictures, but not without music." Maria Eichhorn, *Variations on a Theme*, op. cit. p. 105.
54. "The Liberation of Sound" is the title of a lecture by Edgar Varese from 1936. The following expression of Varèse seems to be in resonance with the concept of *Für Augen und Ohren*: "I dream of instruments obedient to my thought and which with their contribution of a whole new world of unsuspected sounds, will lend themselves to the exigencies of my inner rhythm", in Edgard Varèse, "The Liberation of Sound", in Elliot Schwartz and Barney Childs (eds.), *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music* (New York: De Capo 1966), p. 195.
55. Letter from the commissioners to René Block (23 July 1987).
56. All the documents concerning the concept of *Der befreite Klang* have been consulted in the private archives of René Block. They include letters and concepts of the indicated artists, two photographs of the castle as well as a two-page concept and a letter from the commissioners.
57. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", in *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 70.
58. Letter from Max Neuhaus to René Block (21 July 1987).
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.* In July 1987 Max Neuhaus writes: "A look at the site is necessary fairly soon — I try to finish a work at least 3 months before it opens to the public."
61. *Ibid.*
62. John Cage's preparatory drawings on an A4 document reveal the following text: "Der befreite Klang, 1988, Schloss Weinberg, John Cage, 33 1/3".
63. This "area" is mentioned in a letter by Martin Riches to René Block (26 August 1987).

64. Concept by Dick Higgins sent with a letter to René Block. The concept is dated 1973.
65. Letter from Martin Riches to René Block (26 August 1987) including documents on past exhibitions.
66. *Ibid.*, description of the series *Machine Dance* attached to the letter.
67. Concept by Hans Otte sent with a letter to René Block. (translated by the author)
68. *Ibid.*
69. Concept sent to René Block with a letter (2 November 1987). Translated in Rolf Julius, "My Studio", 97.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*

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## Abstract

The starting point of this article is the exhibition *Der befreite Klang, Kunst für Augen und Ohren* (Liberated Sound, Art for the Eyes and the Ears) conceived by the German curator René Block in 1986 for a castle in Austria which was cancelled at short notice. Block had organized major exhibitions and concert programmes concentrating on sonic practices starting from the 1970s, notably *Für Augen und Ohren, Von der Spieluhr zum akustischen Environment* (For the Eyes and the Ears, From the Music Box to the Acoustical Environment) that took place in 1980 in the spaces of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and which was one of the first large-scale exhibitions dedicated to sonic practices and the intermingling of musical and artistic approaches. Mainly based on the personal archives of the curator as well as the archives of the Biennale de

Paris from the 1980s (INHA-collection Archives de la critique d'art), the article retraces René Block's curatorial practice and questions the ways one can write about past exhibitions and about sounds that remained unheard.

## Author

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## Titel

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