market. Like TINNITUS, where a ringing in the ears perceived in the absence of external noise soon becomes unbearable, contemporary art's prosecution of silence is in the process of lastingly polluting our representations. [...]

Paul Virilio, extracts from *La Procédure Silence* (Paris: Éditions Gallilée, 2000); trans. Julie Rose, retitled in English *Art and Fear* (New York and London: Continuum, 2003) 69–70; 77–8.

Paul Hegarty
Noise/Music//2007

According to Walter Benjamin, Western art moves away from having a sacred value towards having exhibition value. Art's value becomes secular, aesthetic and social. It moves from sacred buildings to private ones and gradually becomes more public: aristocrats and monarchs build collections of art and curious objects, which are displayed to their peers; the bourgeois class follows suit and the public museum is created. Eventually, the public, including members of the lower classes, are allowed in, to be educated into the great heritage of the culture that sits atop them: exhibition value constrains works to being portable, of recognizable form (e.g. a framed painting, a statue on a plinth), and exchangeable. From the late seventeenth century onwards, art as an institution develops, including galleries, museums, criticism and a public of connoisseurs. This setting of art excludes noise – audiences must behave correctly, demurely; buildings must clearly show works that are autonomous and simultaneously part of a narrative. Far from disrupting this, modern art leads to a booming of the art institution and fuels the idea of art history as a narrative, where we move from one picture to the next. But modern art does introduce noise, in the form of avant-gardism. Even if ultimately this adds to the teleogical story of art, at any given stage from the 1850s onwards, some part of art was regarded as noise – as not carrying meaning, lacking skill, not being appropriate, being disturbing of morals, and so on.

Music, too, is harnessed in the modern concept of a concert where the audience sits silent, except for regulated participation, and the musicians are separated, elevated in more than one sense. Even as late as the eighteenth century, audiences at musicals are raucous, but gradually they are disciplined, and however we might imagine a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a sort of noisy crossing of artforms, it completes the subjugation of the audience. Sound is totally

banished from the gallery – where art is to remain visual. The framed painting on a wall allows rational contemplation, and so massages the verticality of appreciation and analysis over the potential messiness of horizontality. Futurist and Dada performances occurred elsewhere – with their collisions of theatre, early sound poetry, film, dance, shouting, music and fighting happening in theatres for the most part, but also on many occasions outside of any cultural institution. It is only really with Fluxus in the late 1950s that sound is tentatively staged in galleries. Where Dada's radicality was in not being in a gallery, Fluxus, as a second generation of the same impulse, was able to be radical precisely for performing in official art settings (as well as elsewhere). This is the early days of performance art (also in Japan), and Fluxus flows into the outpouring of movements or approaches of the 1960s: conceptual art, Happenings, installations, body art, performance. As well as the acceptance of art's radicalization and disrespect for categorical borders between artforms there is also the question of technology. Sound creeps into galleries in the wake of affordable technologies, notably in tape technology in the 1960s, and the development of video in the late 1960s. This is the first point at which, I would claim, we can begin to talk of sound art, and, just as the (temporally amorphous) advent of Japanese noise music authorizes a retrospective rethinking of 'precursors' in noise, so the sound installations that begin to appear in the late 1960s allow or suggest ways in which sound was used to construct art, or was made as art rather than as music.

The Centre Pompidou proposed an intimate connection between sound and modern art in its 'Sons et lumières' exhibition (2005), examining how artists were inspired by music (like Kandinsky), made sound-producing sculptures (Moholy-Nagy), or incorporated sound as content. Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise* plays with the possibility but unlikelihood of the trapped ball of string etc. producing audible sound. Duchamp's actual musical experiments do not produce sounds that are particularly challenging. Kurt Schwitters' sound poetry is there of course. The second part of the show looks at actual sound performances/installations/objects that were designed for the gallery setting, and usually had been located there in the first place. I am not complaining about the hindsightfulness of the show, rather using it to show a problem at the heart of definitions of sound art: namely, that it comes to apply to pretty much anything that has to do with both together. Sound art, like 'noise music', is a noisy genre, something porous and very hard to define, but [...] it is too self-contained, and sets up the listener as self-contained, in order to challenge not sufficiency but only the way in which it has been constructed (i.e. it's going to 'make you think', and in so doing reveal to the listening subject some part of a hitherto hidden sound reality).

'Sons et lumières' goes on to gloss over the longstanding incompatibility of sound with the gallery/museum setting. Sound in the gallery is noise – not only

inappropriate until recent times but something that spreads beyond its location, or the demands of a sense of location that a painting, say, requires. Sound-based art in an exhibition can be overbearing, and if there are several pieces they risk clashing. Contemplation of any given piece is disrupted, and in turn the sound piece becomes an ambience rather than a discrete work. To get round this, space can be allocated away from other works – a sort of quarantine. Alternatively, the piece can be totally isolated and accessed through headphones. So sound art continually raises the question of noise, even if often to be closed off (sometimes by the artists themselves). Once it is safely positioned, it then becomes a highly appreciated commodity of the gallery, as a CD, sound files, or even messier older media are transportable, convenient and probably not unique (however aleatory the actual playing out of the piece might be). This convenience must be part of art's acceptance of sound art in its most restricted form. Sound art takes many forms: sound installations, performances, recordings, whether for direct public consumption, or as purchasable objects to listen to domestically, interactive pieces, pieces designed for headphone use, transmission of sound (often from other locations). Each one of these has many variants. The sound source could be the most important factor, or the process of listening it establishes. Sound art is not just sound working as art. Brandon LaBelle notes that

> In bridging the visual arts with the sonic arts, creating an interdisciplinary practice, sound art fosters the cultivation of sonic materiality in relation to the conceptualization of auditory potentiality. While at times incorporating, referring to, or drawing upon materials, ideas and concerns outside of sound per se, sound art nonetheless seems to position such things in relation to aurality, the processes and promises of audition, and sonic culture. (*Background Noise*, 151)

The communal element of performance might be what counts, or the connection between the enclosedness and peculiar isolation of headphones. It can also basically just be experimental or avant-garde music brought into an art location. This is part of this music's attempt to get away from music and its standard settings, but, again, it is also a way of getting music heard that maybe does not function in concert settings, and that has found a new outlet. Sound art often reflects on its own production, and this can be the effective content of the piece (1960s/1970s art using tape recorders is fond of this). It does this in combination with an exploration of sound – as in Paul Kos' *Sound of Ice Melting* (1970), which has blocks of ice in the gallery, surrounded by microphones. Here sound becomes spectacle of its own production. Sound art extends this into a questioning of listening, and the position of the listener. LaBelle insists that the importance accorded listening and sound production means sound art is process at least as much as product (sound consumption requiring the time of its playing feeds into this): 'sound art as a practice harnesses, describes, analyses, performs and interrogates the condition of sound and the process by which it operates' (*Background Noise*, ix). That this often supplants the 'what' of what is being listened to might be a problem on occasion, but it is essential to the process. Sound art is also about space, he argues, writing that it is 'the activation of the existing relation between sound and space' (ix). Sound and space are inherently linked, as sound for us is what disturbs air, and that is not going to happen in the absence of space, but sound also structures space, and sound art aims to both illustrate that and do it. Space is not fixed, but permanently forming and reforming, with sound as one of its constituent parts, and this occurs through human intervention and perception (as far as we can hear: humans cannot functionally have any other perspective). Following on from that, 'the acoustical event is also a social one' (x) – it is not just the interaction of human subjects with an object world; it is also interactivity as society. Hence, from these three points, the centrality of Cage's *4' 33"*, which opens these perspectives. Once we have these ideas as ways of thinking and listening, then our whole body is involved, as it is not just a matter of deciphering an encrypted block of sound – i.e. a musical piece. [...]

Paul Hegarty, extract from *Noise/Music: A History* (New York and London: Continuum, 2007) 77–9 [footnotes not included].