The Insistence of Art

Paul A. Kottman

Published by Fordham University Press

Kottman, Paul A.
The Insistence of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy after Early Modernity.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/51041

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1947406
“All Art Constantly Aspires to the Condition of Music”—Except the Art of Music: Reviewing the Contest of the Sister Arts

Lydia Goehr
For David Rosand

Musick is certainly a very agreeable Entertainment, but if it would take the entire Possession of our Ears, if it would make us incapable of hearing Sense, if it would exclude Arts that have a much greater Tendency to the Refinement of humane Nature: I must confess I would allow it no better Quarter than Plato has done, who banishes it out of his Commonwealth.

—JOSEPH ADDISON, The Spectator, 1711

... but a silent Harmony is not true Music.

—JOHANN MATTHESON, 1713

I

W. J. T. Mitchell opens his essay “Going Too Far with the Sister Arts” by noting Emerson’s remark “that [in Mitchell’s words] the most fruitful conversations are always between two persons, [and] not three.” Mitchell uses this remark to explain why, when the sister arts have “set out to argue,” poetry and painting have “held the stage,” leaving the art of music “something of an outsider to the conversation.” Mitchell explains music’s outsider status in two ways: that music has renounced the contested “territory” of poetry and painting, of “reference, representation, denotation, and meaning,” and that music’s exclusion from the conversation has suited a “war of signs” construed according to a basic binary opposition between word and image. To the extent that this war has sought a resolution, it has drawn on a unifying semiotic theory that still, in Mitchell’s way of putting things, has found no place for music.

One might think that by beginning this way, Mitchell would return music to the conversation. But he doesn’t, at least not in this essay. He retains music as an outsider, prompting one to wonder why he mentions
music at all. Still, he does remind his readers that, although music has been excluded, “all the arts” have long been held “to aspire to the condition of music.” He says no more, leaving one wondering what his reminder might mean. Perhaps he means that, in the quarrel of the sister arts, being an outsider is not to music’s disadvantage, or that, construed somehow as “a condition,” perhaps a divine or metaphysical condition, music affords a way of thinking about art that helps a semiotic theory that wants to overcome the alienation of image from word. To assign music this role would not be an odd thing to do; it has long been assigned this role in the history of the paragone—the contrasting and competing arts. As the old song goes, verbally and visually meaningless the art of music may be, yet construed as a harmonizing metaphysical condition, music carries the true significance of all the arts as, indeed, of the entire world. Nevertheless, as I will show, there is a deep problem in construing music as a condition, given how often it has meant excluding and denigrating music construed as an art.

When Mitchell wrote in 1987 that “all the arts may aspire to the condition of music,” he had in mind what Walter Pater had written a century earlier, in 1877. Pater had looked back to the paintings of the Italian Renaissance, specifically to the “School of Giorgione” so that he could declare that not “all the arts” but “all art,” and not that “all the arts may aspire” but that “all art constantly aspires to the condition of music.” Only having made this statement had Pater then written that to the condition of music’s “perfect” and “consummate moments,” “all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire.” The transition between “all art” and “all the arts” and the idea of “constant aspiration” were both crucial to Pater’s argument. If, as he presumed, music has a certain condition, then music need not constantly aspire to attain it. This means in turn that “all the arts” refers to “all the other arts,” and music retains its outsider status. If, however, all art, and thereby every art also constantly aspires to a general condition of art, as Pater claimed in addition, then music is included as one of the sister arts. At the end of this essay, I show how Pater’s view moves in subtle ways between the exclusionary and inclusionary claims so that he can hold onto both. This is not an original claim among Pater scholars and especially among those who have situated Pater’s work in a Victorian context. I, however, set the claim, with much greater historical breadth, against the persistent and singularly intriguing matter of what it has meant for all the arts when music, with one hand, has been raised to a condition and, with the other, demoted as an art.

Pater produced his argument when, as he saw it, the art of music had consummated the condition not just of music but of all art, the condition
amounting to an “indivisible unity” of an artwork’s content and form. Yet his argument misleads if one thereby assumes that, already in the Renaissance, the art of painting was aspiring to music regarded as an art, because, in this period, the art of music had not yet reached this consummate condition. Pater was assuming the terms of a modernist teleological narrative, according to which, for much of its history, when music was regarded less well as an art, it tried to raise its status by aspiring to what the other arts were already achieving within the territory of reference and representation. Only when the art of music renounced this territory, more or less around 1800, was it accepted as a fine or beautiful art on its own terms—the terms that unified its form and content—after which all the other arts turned around to emulate it. However, to this teleological narrative, Pater offered a twist. The subtle historical incongruity between his “premodernist” Renaissance examples drawn from the “School of Giorgione” and his nineteenth-century, romantic-modernist aesthetic claims allowed him to show how painting, without relinquishing the territory of representation, could aspire toward the unifying condition of music before the art of music had actually achieved this condition. This had the consequence, first, that aspiring to the condition of music was not, as it might seem, to praise or rank music above the other arts, and second, that although the art of music would finally meet a condition to which all the other arts aspired, the condition of music could also be seen in a way that separated it from music regarded as an art.

My essay outlines a competitive discourse about the sister arts that extends back past the Renaissance to antiquity. It juxtaposes earlier and later claims in part to show that the watershed years around 1800 made a difference, but not that great a difference, with regard to the particular tension between treating music as a condition and as an art. For reasons mostly of space, I do not treat in any detail the competitive claims of the other arts, of poetry, painting, sculpture, or architecture, to be the highest art; nor do I situate Pater’s work in the very rich field of Pater scholarship, musicological and art-historical. This essay only selects, more or less chronologically, some particular moments and examples—and mostly painterly ones—that show the impact of the distinction between “music” considered as a condition and as an art. This way, I reveal both the tension in Pater’s so oft-quoted statement and the oddness of the claims of the competing arts. Many read Pater’s work with regard to issues pertaining either to music or to the other arts; I read it, according to the paragone, on both sides.

The arts, variously conceived, have long been ranked and placed into hierarchies, even if “the sister arts” have not always been “systematized” as
a distinct class of “fine arts” for the West. Music has been placed sometimes at the bottom and sometimes at the top, but also sometimes beyond the top, “orphaned” as Robert Schumann once used this term, as though it were without father, mother, or even sibling. One reason that music has had this odd history, and one rather different from the “other” arts, is that it has been either inflated or deflated with the aim sometimes to identify and sometimes to separate the condition and the art. The more the condition of music has been identified with music as an art, the less the other arts have had a claim on the condition, which is why perhaps Pater was so eager to prove in the 1870s that they still did. But the more that the condition has been separated from music as an art, the more the other arts have been able to claim without paradox, as poetry and painting claimed in the Renaissance, that they have the capability to aspire to the condition in ways subtly different from and arguably even better than the art of music.

Consider, now, that if we declare that poetry and painting aspire to the condition of music, or that sculpture and architecture so aspire, we seem to be saying something substantial. Yet what are we saying beyond tautology, if we can meaningfully say it at all, that the art of music aspires to the condition of music? Are we saying, teleologically, that music aspires to be itself, to be perhaps free or independent, or to realize its essence as an art? But if so, why then wouldn’t we say of poetry or painting that each similarly aspires to its own essential condition? Some of course have said this: that poetry aspires to a condition of “lyricism” or “Poesie,” and painting to a condition of Art (with a generalizing and capital A) as though Art were exhausted by the art of painting. If, after this, we still say that painting and poetry aspire to the condition of music, are we not now saying that they aspire to a condition that is not their own? Or is the point that the condition of music applies to all the arts because in the end it is just what makes art essentially Art? But if this is correct, why then is the sister art of music excluded from the conversation—because it is a condition? Or, put differently, why is it included only then to demote it as a sister art? And what, further, is meant by “aspiration” if not that an art can fail either generically or given a specific example? And if this, can music as an art fail to meet its own condition? And if it can, might this happen when it “mistakenly” tries to step into the “territory” of the “other” sister arts, of reference and representation? Many have articulated music’s failure as an art in these latter terms and thus its success in reaching the condition of music as depending on its renouncing this territory. But does this now mean that all the other arts ought also to renounce this territory, to relinquish their powers of reference and representation to achieve a condition
more “musical”? Or might it be that they ought rather constantly to aspire to reach the condition of music from within this territory, given that the territory of reference and representation allows them to be the particular arts that they are? But then, finally, why not let the art of music reenter this territory too, to see if it can constantly try to mean in ways that the “other” sister arts mean without this compromising what makes music the particular sister art that it is?

2

Attending to music as an art and as a condition helps clarify the confused role that music has had in the contest of the sister arts: the “musical” terms with which and for which the “rival arts” have competed. The confusion has been productive, destructive, and sometimes even deadly. When the condition of music has been most separated from music as an art, the consequences for this art and for all the other arts have often been severe enough that those who have produced art have been exiled from a city or punished by death. Exile or death has followed from when the condition of music has been treated as a normative standard to guide artists as to how to act as citizens and how to produce their art. The condition of music has specified the “correct” character, value, and meaning of all art produced. Nonetheless, artists of all sorts have often found ways to resist the disciplinary or standardizing tendency of the condition. They have found ways within their arts to reconstrue the condition to suit themselves, perhaps to produce arts that simultaneously challenge or even mock the condition while seeming obediently to oblige it. In different terms, the two sides of the Platonic legacy, the moralizing or censorious and the strategic or ironic, have long inflected a history in which the arts have competed both with one another over their terms as art and with a condition that has too often been articulated as though suspended above them in judgment.

So suspended, like a laurel branch, the condition of music has been conceived of as a standard, principle, or law drawn variously from metaphysics, morality, divinity, and, eventually, a more modern aesthetic theory. Deriving from the ancient notion of mousikē, the condition of cultivating the mind, body, and soul has allowed all the sister Muses to inspire all the arts to aspire to the parental Apollonian condition—without exception. With this derivation, the condition of inspiration has far extended the sister arts to stand for a complete cosmological harmony and order to which all human activities have had constantly to aspire, even philosophy, and
perhaps philosophy most of all, as Plato often tells us. To comprehend how the ancient quarrel of philosophy and the arts inflected the later quarrels of the sister arts is to understand, first, how the condition of mousikē became uniquely the condition of music, but, second, how it also became the broader condition of the museum that allowed most of the sister arts to enter through its doors before ever it allowed the art of music to enter. In this essay, I treat the first development more than the second, given that I have already treated the second extensively elsewhere.

In 1985, the French philosopher Michel Serres made this exemplary statement: “La musique, venue de toutes les Muses, ne peut passer pour un art; elle somme tous les arts. Aucun d’entre eux ne réussit, à son tour, s’il n’a la musique; elle garde chacun d’eux et le fait exister.” “Music, which comes from all the Muses, cannot be held to be an art; it is the summation of all the arts. Without music, not one of them can achieve its goal; music watches over them all, it is the condition of their existence.” Serres illustrates his claim, given here in the published translation: “Without [music], poetry is at best pedestrian; architecture, a pile of stones; sculpture, inert matter; and prose, mere noise.” Where, we may ask, is music in this list? Surely if music as an art were without its music—i.e., without the condition of art’s existence—wouldn’t it be pedestrian, dead matter, or mere noise? Serres would likely say yes. In fact, he does say yes, yet the English translation adapts the sentence when he does so. Serres writes: “Elle-même retombe dans les notes, le calcul plat, sans elle-même”—“She [Music] herself relapses into notes, flat/banal calculation, without herself.” The printed translation reads: “Eloquence deprived of rhythm and the modulations of singing evocation collapses into gibberish and boredom.” In referring to eloquence instead of music, the translators subtly accommodated Serres’s seemingly conflicted claims, both that music “cannot be held to be an art,” and that music is an art, subject, as all the arts, to the condition of music. Still, Serres would have been clearer in his double claim had he written, “Music, which comes from all the Muses, cannot be held to be only an art; it is also the summation of all the arts,” or even better, “Mousikē, as standing for all the Muses, is not exhausted by music as an art, but is the condition of all the arts including ‘la musique.’”

Yet Serres does not write this way because he doesn’t have to. He can identify mousikē with la musique—the condition with the art—because it is now common to do so, given how many have done so before him. But precisely this identification has licensed music’s exclusion from the conversation as the translators unwittingly exclude it, or it has encouraged
thinkers like Serres to find ways for all the arts to be “musical,” since, on
his view, without “music,” they are all meaningless, pedestrian, or com-
monplace. Indeed, they are not even art.

Serres’s view of what makes art art is motivated by his interest in the
early Siren song of the Muses and in the “musical” and “mythic” figures of
Apollo, Orpheus, and the like. He notes that originally there was no Muse
specifically of the art of music, because, had there been, the sister muses
would have lived in a mutual jealous rage, each trying to claim the closest
relationship to their sister: la musique. Always therefore a condition and not
a sister, he continues, music lived among the Muses, bringing them to ac-
cord, ensemble, and even following a Rousseauian line to social assembly
or contract. After this, as a condition of pacification and community, music
worked by secret and mysterious ways corresponding to a universal and
metaphysical law of proportion and harmony, which, after antiquity, came
also to be associated, as, say, in Leibniz’s view, with the divine attributes of
a monotheistic (and Christian) God.

In writing of music first off as a condition, Serres allows the terms of
melody, harmony, and rhythm to attach themselves naturally to some sort
of divine or higher metaphysical law, which in turn raises a tense question:
Do such terms attach literally to the art of music and only metaphorical-
ly to the condition, or vice versa? And does it become a normative as-
sumption that there is finally no distinction between “the literal” and “the
metaphorical,” if and when music as an art, or indeed any other art, “con-
summates itself” in and as the condition? When Pythagoras first plucked
those strings, did he discover in the intervallic resonances his concept of
universal harmony or did he find only an illustration of a concept or con-
viction that he already had? But if the latter, would he not then have been
able to design his experiments, as many Renaissance thinkers later did, by
means of arts other than the art of plucking strings? For does not the per-
spective or symmetry of design or the arrangement of colors in a painting,
or the rhythmic ordering of words and stanzas in a poem, or the placement
of stones, wood, and glass in a cathedral resonate also with the harmony of
nature and the world? Serres thinks so, and so do many, many others.

Although offered in 1985, Serres’s view of how something common-
place is transfigured into art by means of “music” may be read as resuming
other contemporary views, say, Arthur Danto’s view, as articulated in 1981
in his book The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. Serres’s view draws on
an age-old mysticism and metaphysics of mousikē and music to explain the
condition that makes all the arts art. Danto’s view secularizes and discards
this mysticism by teleologically reading the metaphysics as a “disenfran-
chising” history of what has been claimed about art until the moment when art realizes its own essence (in the 1960s), after which the condition of art’s existence becomes a much more deflated but philosophically and artistically acceptable condition of how art meaningfully exists in an art world that is saturated by history and theory but no longer by a musical divinity. Read this way, Danto’s view, as Mitchell’s, excludes music only insofar as music is regarded as an inflated condition. The obvious next step is then to reintroduce music into the art world as a bona fide sister art.

In a moment before dying, Socrates asks after the meaning of an instruction given to him in a dream: that he ought to practice mousikē (Phaedo 60e). He asks whether, by this term, he should engage in what the poet-musicians do or whether he should continue to do as he has done lifelong: in name, philosophy. In setting up the choice, he grants that there is both a common and a higher meaning of mousikē. He considers composing a common song, but when he realizes that he is without inspiration in this task, he borrows a verse from Aesop. For Socrates, to borrow a song is preferable to composing one: It fits his view that to aspire to the condition of mousikē is to strive for excellence in one task alone, and he is a philosopher not a verse maker. It also suits his strategic need to identify with an ugly man who survives on the common street by his verse, fable, and wit, until brought, as Aesop, to his death. To make a claim on mousikē is to evidence one’s attempt to harmonize body and mind, and to show, most significantly for the present essay, that the instrument, medium, or means of one’s chosen or natural task or art accords with its end. Aesop’s song suited his life; by borrowing it, Socrates evidenced what was “musical” about his own life despite any merely common or ugly appearance to the contrary. By borrowing the song or the fable, the commonplace meaning of music was reattached, in reflection, to the divine meaning of “mousikē” at the moment of the philosopher’s death.

Another moment, this one from The Republic (399e), finds Socrates borrowing from a myth about a musical contest that later comes to play an extraordinary role in the quarrel of the sister arts. Socrates borrows the judgment issued by the divine Apollo, when Apollo punishes the satyr Marsyas (here, conflated with Pan), when, with hubris, Marsyas threatens a disharmony in the city by playing a Phrygian or Lydian type of music on a common wind instrument. Socrates uses Apollo’s judgment to distinguish instruments of the musical art to be retained in the city from those to be
left outside the city walls. In part he bans wind instruments and retains instruments with strings, but then acknowledges that stringed instruments, when they have too many strings, can also produce a discordance. He thus leaves us wondering what exactly the perfect instrument is.

Surely it is the one that Apollo uses in the contest, but what instrument is this? Is it really an instrument of the musical art or one transfigured, as we see in Socrates’ arguments, to serve a higher condition? The contest of Apollo and Marsyas may be read variously, but here I read it as showing how the art of music comes to be so severed from the condition of music that the art is first demoted before it can be raised, if it can be raised at all. To so interpret the contest is not to focus on the hubris that leads Marsyas, a lowly human or satyr, to challenge a god; it is to invert the contest’s meaning so that we may understand why Apollo, like Socrates, agrees to enter into a contest with someone common or low when the god’s victory is guaranteed. The guarantee is stamped by the fact that, as well as being a participant, Apollo assumes the position of the judge, suggesting thereby that the interest in the contest is not in who wins but in how the inevitable victory is achieved. The achievement, however, does not follow a straight path: It follows from rhetorical yet “noble” tricks, employed by those in the know, to expose the opponents’ tricks that are (allegedly) but mere crooked and artful deceptions. To turn a common contest into one that reveals something noble or divine involves a subtle renegotiation of its terms: here, one that turns a common music into mousikē.

In the contest, the judges are the Muses, of whom Apollo is their leader—\textit{Apollôn mousègetês}—but there are other judges who join them so that there will be at least one, named Midas, who renders the allegedly incorrect judgment. On the common street, Marsyas produces the better music, or at least the common audience is taken in by his tune. He performs well since he has all the talent of a performing artist. Midas is so taken by Marsyas’s performance that he declares him the winner. Apollo then punishes Midas for being taken in by only the mere or artful appearance. He gives Midas the ears of an ass. Yet why does Marsyas’s music sound better than Apollo’s music to Midas’s ears? Because when Apollo plays, what he plays can neither be heard nor comprehended by those whose ears are deaf to the divine. Not able or wanting to win by the art of music, Apollo displaces the art by a condition of metaphysical or divine truth. He turns his stringed instrument “upside down,” as one version has it, which means, as I am reading it, that he inverts to reveal the true ordering within the total concept of music. He transfigures his stringed instrument into a perfect Pythagorean symbol of universal harmony, rendering his instru-
ment qua instrument now redundant as an instrument of art. Or to the extent that he continues to play an instrument, he shows that to which all should now constantly aspire, to grasp the symbol or condition above the art. Contrarily, when Marsyas turns his pipe upside down, he finds that he has turned his apparent music into a merely pedestrian production of wind: mere noise.

Apollo could have stopped here, but he doesn’t. He shows Marsyas also that, with his own beautiful mouth freed from an all-too-human-looking instrument, he can speak divine words through poetry and song, and presumably, had he had more time, he could have produced divine images through the arts of sculpture or painting. Contrarily, Marsyas, with his mouth full (as Oscar Wilde once put it with his usual wit) cannot speak the name of the divine, rendering Marsyas impotent. Having won the contest, Apollo takes charge of the punishment: thereby becoming participant, judge, and executioner. As we learn from many later poems and paintings, by hanging Marsyas upside down and by taking his skin, Apollo displays his intent to invert equally the instrument of the musical art and the body of the musician. By cutting beneath the surface, Apollo reveals Marsyas to be a corporeal bellowing windbag although, in some accounts, he thereby offers the terms of his redemption through the revelation of Marsyas’s strings. Were Marsyas to focus less on wind (charm) and more on producing harmony (truth), he would reveal his potential to be divine. Such a doubled image is also offered of Socrates when, in the Symposium [215b], he is presented by Alcibiades as the ugly Marsyas on the outside, who, even if speaking constantly through his windpipe with words that confuse his would-be lover, might be harboring something divine on his inside.

The contest between Apollo and Marsyas suggests a development that either severs the art of music from the divine condition or redeems the musical art via its transfiguration into the condition. There is also a second development, one that opens up a space for the other arts to enter the contest so that they, too, may aspire to and reach the condition. However, to write this way makes it seem as though the art of music has always had a special or prior claim on the condition or that it was always a singular or unified art with which the other arts could compete. This is not the case. The contest also tells of how putting wind against strings was to put two sorts of musical activity together—wind and string performances—that were not, in any sense, on an even keel: that, with different instruments, very different modal and national melodies could be produced, and sometimes ones that accompanied poetic verse and others that did not. Yet this is, and always was, all very tricky. First, because perhaps, in the contest, there weren’t
two different instruments at all, but only one, the pipe, the other being the strings of transfiguration. And second, because had Marsyas brought a friend along—his student Olympus—he could have asked him to sing while he piped, which means that Apollo would have had to devise another trick. Of course, Apollo had infinite arrows in his quiver, though this is no longer our concern. We only need to know that, in this early period and in the early myths, there was no umbrella concept of music that covered everything that we now count as music as an art to the exclusion of all else. There was, rather, an umbrella concept and condition of mousikē on which so much more than music as an art could and did make a claim.

4

Consider Titian’s famed painting *The Flaying of Marsyas* (Figure 1). Here we see a self-portrait of the painter identified with the unlikely figure of Midas. Though depicted with the ears of an ass, the figure still apparently has eyes insightful and even melancholic enough to watch and understand Apollo who is seemingly doubled up as participant and executioner. Bolstered by at least one version of the myth and suggested by some modern interpreters of the painting,11 the visual ordering of the instruments—the pipes above the strings and with the string player looking up at the pipes—indicates a certain remorse on arguably Apollo’s part for his having won as he won. Might Marsyas have impressed not only Midas’s common ears but Apollo’s divine ears as well? Had Marsyas really produced only a noisy wind, would the contest have ever gotten off the ground? The thought of remorse fits what may also be said about Socrates: that, while devising arguments to deflate the arts for the good of the state, he hears in Homer something divine in his fully embodied and performed art. To the extent that Titian identifies with this Apollonian remorse, he does, I am suggesting, by identifying with the critic who perhaps recognizes something that the other judges do not: namely, *all* in an art that makes art art. Perhaps Midas knows how to judge an art also as an end activity in itself and not only instrumentally as an aspiration toward a higher condition. If art—the making and the product—is always also an embodying and embodiment of the condition, then the production matters as much as the aspiration, and perhaps, for the artist, it matters more. It is not only that one aspires; it is also how one aspires or the medium and means by which one aspires. Thus, even if the contest questions whether Marsyas has the “that”—the aspiration at all—Titian is more preoccupied with the “how,” how the aspiration shows itself in art, and, now, in his specific art of painting.
What Apollo shows by destroying and transfiguring the art of music with the knife, Titian repeats with the brush. Yet he does this, competitively, to displace the contest between music and mousikē with a contest, first, between the painter-artist and the god, and, second, between the arts of painting and music. By transfiguring music as an art according to the terms of painting, painting shows, first, its own and its maker’s aspiration to the higher condition of divine harmony to prove its value as an art and, second, its equality to, if not also its superiority over, the performed actions of the musical art.

Figure 1. Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), Flaying of Marsyas, 1570–75. 212 × 207 cm. Archbishop’s Palace. Photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, N.Y.
Another painting, an earlier painting by Raphael may be read to a similar end. It is not, however, Raphael’s own Apollo and Marsyas, but his Cecilia of 1514 (Figure 2). It shows Cecilia on her ecstatic way to becoming a saint. But is her sainthood—the purification of her soul and body—achieved at the expense of music as an art? Given that she is said to be the patron saint of music, this is a pressing question. First, we are shown all the instruments of the musical art falling to the ground. Broken, they can no longer be used and are revealed to be merely the material out of which they are made. If music as a condition is withdrawn from the instruments of the art, the instruments cease to be musical and become merely commonplace things. To give music a proper place in the passage toward sainthood, it must be converted as Cecilia is converted, rendered a medium suitable for transmitting only the pure and heavenly harmony. Raphael finds this medium in the angelic choir that Cecilia hears with her right ear directed upward. Yet though this medium must be pure as heaven is pure, Raphael retains something of music’s earthly means of production: namely, the songbooks. We do not need to see what the books show—words or notes, or both—or must we believe that the angels need songbooks to sing the heavenly song. The mere presence of the books is enough to suggest that Raphael, true to his times, is looking in the art of music for something beyond its instruments that might prove that music, though a purely temporal art in performance, has an endurance or permanence suitable for embodying the eternal harmony. By focusing on the means of the musical art, Raphael again displaces our attention not away from the sacred but still toward the secular. He asks us to attend less to music’s and more to painting’s ability to raise a musical means of music’s production to render painting itself a purified and enduring medium. Through the visual transfiguration of the musical art, he aims to prove painting’s capability to transfigure and thus contain or embody the eternal harmony in secular forms. He wants to show how painting internalizes into its own enduring visual embodiment the dynamic passage of a woman who once engaged the musical art as an earthly art, but who will now, in her sainthood, sing only the heavenly song.

Through what early theorists term “invisibilia per visibilia,” or Leonardo, a “longing for harmony,” or Goethe and Pater, much later, a yearning for “affinity,” or, even later, Serres, a transfigurative and aesthetic “mingling” of all the senses, any art may aspire to what the condition of music demands: that the only means and meanings that count for any given art are those that can be enduringly contained by the pure medium, this way rendering the containment—the artwork—an end in itself.
Figure 2. Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), *Saint Cecilia*. 1516–17. 220 × 136 cm (87 × 54 in). Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna. Photo credit: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.
Many painters, especially in the Renaissance, who aspire to the condition of music, are influenced by a Pythagorean-Platonism as articulated by the early Christian philosopher Boethius. Boethius offers a tripartite ranking of the concept of “musica.” First there is *musica mundana*, the unifying harmony of the cosmos among its many diversities, movements, and modulations; second, *musica humana*, standing for how poets tell of persons who move and are moved morally in the world with respect to their bodies and souls; and, third, *musica instrumentalis* designating the melodic and rhythmic movement of voices, strings, winds, and timpani. In this schema, does Boethius favor music over the other arts? Yes, as a condition but not so obviously as an art.

In defining “the musician” (*musicus*), he argues that every art and discipline is ennobled the less it has to do with the hand and labor of craft. Nobility lies in knowing over doing, understanding over skill. Physical labor is only “the handmaid” to reason who is “the mistress.” How much more admirable, he writes, is “the science of music” than “the musical deed.” “Quanto igitur praeclarior est scientia musicae in cognitione rationis quam in opere efficiendi atque actu!” He accordingly distinguishes a music yielded by playing instruments, another by inventing song, and a third: the judgment. The judge alone, he maintains, can speculate on what the practitioners do, since the latter are without reason. They are but servants to those who speculate as philosophers. Whereas instrumental musicians are “entirely consumed” by their physical or corporeal effort—their mouths and hands are full—the singing poets invent either from a natural instinct or inspiration. For these reasons, he concludes, the lower two classes must “be separated from music [segregandum est],” leaving the judge who measures the rhythm and melody of a song as a whole as the true musician (*veri musicus*), because only in wholeness is music finally justified as rational.

To say that all the arts and all human actions aspire to the condition of music is for all, in this schema, to aspire to please the judge: the metaphysical or divine disciplinary conditioner that constantly looks down on practitioners, and practitioners especially of the arts, either to exclude them or to put them in their place, or to redeem them by destroying or inverting their lowly means into something higher. The history that follows this conditioning of the human world is as much one of violence and destruction as of purification and deliverance. All these characteristics are contained, as Socrates explains in his dialogue on names (*Cratylus 405*), by a singular name, and that name is Apollo. Boethius justifies his schema inter-
Interestingly by analogy to what we remember in the erecting of monuments: We acknowledge the glory and the triumph that comes from authority and reason and not, he says, the labor and slavery that gave the monument its mere corporeal form.

In the notes of Leonardo da Vinci, which later give to the entire debate the name “paragone,” Boethius’s schema is endorsed but then inverted for the sake of art (in a way foreshadowing later Marxist critiques of the concealment of mechanism and labor). First, “la musica” stands for a liberal art or science to which all the arts aspire—a mathematics and geometry of proportion and harmony. Second, its stands for a practiced art or a producing sister art, which Leonardo can then declare to be both the “youngest” and “unhappiest,” by comparison at least to painting. And third, although spirit or reason remains the mistress to which the deed of art is but the handmaid, without the deed, Leonardo rightly reminds us, there would be no art.

In comparing painting with music, Leonardo argues that if “la musica” is put among the liberal arts (arti liberali), “either you should put painting there too or else take music away” (o tu vi metti questa, o tu ne levi quella). Or, if you insist on maintaining painting as a merely mechanical art, then you must downgrade music to the same. Continuing, he plays on the double meaning of the term “music” with the aim to raise the status of both arts, though painting now above music. Whereas music as an art can be debased to its manual labor or mechanism, the science or measure of music cannot. So why not claim the same of painting? Thinking of what produces imperfection in music regarded as a sister art, he argues that its harmony is less noble than painting’s, meaning that what painting offers to the eye is superior to what music offers to the ear. Music, he maintains, shares with the energetic art of poetry the ability to produce in sound and tempo only something that “dies” at the very moment of its birth. That music’s earthly temporality might mirror the eternal temporality, or that poetry, in expressing its Ideas without manual labor, might best approach a pure medium of the mind, are reasons reduced in significance when, in Leonardo’s vision, we come to see the harmonious measure that painting achieves, first, when it rewards the eye with a perfect proportion and tempo of a human figure and, second, when it rewards the mind with a beauty and nobility that neither passes away in transience nor is destroyed.

Leonardo acknowledges that paintings may materially be destroyed when buildings or walls that house the paintings fall by fire, weather, or war. He also notes that many of the ancient artworks that didn’t survive were preserved by sketches and descriptions in texts that did survive. Yet
he has few qualms in drawing on Plato’s worry that writing, as notation, is but a merely mechanical means or manual matter, so that he may conceive of poetry and music as living and energetic arts that only temporarily address the ear, whereas painting and sculpture enduringly address the eye through the plastic simultaneity of their parts. To address the eye means more, in his claim, than plasticity or enduring physicality: It also means a staging or dynamic movement that shows us not only that a model is represented but how it is represented. It shows us how something external becomes internally contained and reoriginated as art. For Leonardo, this movement is made more transparent in painting than in sculpture, in the representation of a three-dimensional model in a two-dimensional plane. Yet he does not think that this representation falls into either an empty abstraction or a mere conventionality, the latter of which he associates with the verbal signs of poetry. Through the simultaneity and harmonious measure of its parts, in a way true to both art and nature, painting displaces, he writes, that which it externally represents. It retains the natural proportion of the model’s form so as to move us away from the particular beauty and toward a general harmony that is both whole and rational. In Leonardo’s claim, therefore, painting as an art reaches the condition of mousikē/musica, a perfect internalized and embodied union of medium and means, content and form, that displaces, better even than the ancient sculptures of Apollo, that which is represented in nature or the world. As the art of design and science of perspective, painting meets what, or most of what, Pater later specifies as the unifying condition of music to which all art aspires—including, for Leonardo, the still unhappy sister art of music.

Many early arguments appeal to a condition of music—harmony, proportion, order, reason, and endurance—to measure one sister art as standing above or below another. Many artworks refer to or represent instrumental musicians or singing poets as indicating with their ears, eyes, fingers, or bows to what the artworks themselves aspire to as art while setting aside the instruments as “broken” or “fallen” in a world of transience, imperfection, or sin. Dividing music into its “liberal-divine” side and its “mechanical” or “instrumental” side is a dominant way the “other” arts elevate their own status. But with this, the agonistic question arises whether the art of music can stage the same division in music’s concept. With word and image, poetry and painting, it is said, can reflect on the art and condition of music, but can music, as a pure “art of tone” reflect or self-reflect, as we
may now begin to say, on its own condition? Can it step into the territory either of reference or representation to reflect on its own capability as an art? Or is it enough to make the point performatively, for example, when, in music's performance, instruments are shown as thrown away to convey an upward mobility toward the “silence” of the heavens or when musicians are removed from sight, so that, concealed behind a screen or under a stage, they are separated from the purely sounding medium that is now delivered in aesthetic isolation to the ear? All these proposals are considered the more the “art of tone” seeks its way, sometimes separately and sometimes in union with its sister arts, to meet a condition of “mousikê” that, over the centuries comes to be termed either “musicality” or, to further compound the confusion, simply “music.”

During the eighteenth century, the art of music is caught between seeking the terms of its independence and the terms that will continue to ally music to the “other” arts. Tending toward becoming a language of emotion or passion, music confronts what poetry confronts: whether its potential semiotic capability renders it a merely conventional language of signs, or whether, through or despite its conventional signs, it maintains a direct or immediate relation to nature. Or, tending toward workhood and objecthood, the art of music seeks increasingly the terms of its permanence or endurance, without, however, its compromising its energetic temporality. Or tending toward reconciliation, music seeks a union with its sister arts, housed as opera under the total roof of architecture: the “frozen music” par excellence. All these tendencies contribute to what I have called an “imaginary museum of musical works,” a museum that not only tries to bring the time of art to an eternal standstill, but does so in such a way as to suggest that, by entering this museum, one enters a world that is entirely permeated by the condition of music.

In an influential treatise of the early sixteenth century, *De Harmonia Musicorum Instrumentorum Opus,* Gaffurius reminds his readers, as Serres later, that although many say that all the muses were born from the head of Apollo, it was more important that they were taught by him because this is how and why Apollo himself was named or came to contain the condition of mousikê/musica. Gaffurius then describes the divine numerical and proportional qualities of Apollo’s instrument in a way that suits all the arts. Nearly three centuries later, in 1785, the German philosopher Herder takes up the same mantle, although he seeks, as many of his contemporaries also seek, to bring the contest of the sister arts to an end in a proclamation finally of their Enlightened equality. Still, he cannot resist downgrading the art of music on his way.
Herder stages a contest, a *Göttergespräch*, or “divine dialogue,” in which “the condition of music” is again the judge: Apollo.\(^\text{17}\) The contest is staged to show that the freer and more independent music has become, the more this sister art has shown a hubris in identifying itself with a music conceived as a condition for all the arts. Figured as the father, Apollo generally aims to pacify his competing daughters. He allows painting, poetry, and music—image, word, and tone—to run through their (Lessing-like) claims as to what each can achieve or mean in virtue of their plastic or energetic mediums and by their mimetic ways of representation, reference, and expression. With these claims, Apollo evidences no particular favor; on the contrary, he shows pride in their different abilities, until suddenly he sees fit to chide his daughter music for thinking that, without words or by means solely of instruments—as a *Tonkunst*—music can mean without needing the meaning that is given by the other sister arts. When *Tonkunst* pleads that, by its instrument alone, it can produce a perfect accord with what Apollo plays on his, he tells *Tonkunst* in no uncertain terms that he could just as much have proved his separation from music as from all the other sister arts had he taken up the metaphysical brush or the pen. No sister art has a special claim on him. He wants them all only to sit with him, circling around him in a dance, but always a little below him as obedient daughters.

Behind the curtain of this contest, however, Herder is laughing in the shadow of Socrates at the pretensions of any judge who thinks that he can really so dictate the terms of the sister arts. He describes these critics elsewhere (and with a nice mixture of Apollonian-Marsyan terms) as Apollonian “windbags,” who with all their inflated talk manage to murder anything that rightly goes by philosophy’s name. There are two sorts of windbag: the barbarous aestheticians who now, he says, rule the roost in Germany and the pedants who preoccupy themselves in the “empty controversy” that constantly aims to determine the superiority of one sister art over another. “It is a pity,” he continues, that “instead of simply elaborating the difference” between painting, poetry, and music, theorists indulge in “the empty fancy to determine an art’s priority of one to the other. A mere order of rank between completely different things boils down to a schoolboyish contest [*ein Schülerhafter Wettstreit*] of the kind,” he adds bitingly, “that the arts were recently obliged to enter ceremoniously into some years ago under the supervision of a magistrate of world-wisdom [*Weltweisheit*].”\(^\text{18}\) Although Herder has in mind a particular magistrate now forgotten, one Wolfgang Ludwig Gräfenhahn from Bayreuth, he reveals his willingness elsewhere to name the far better known Mastersingers of
Nürnberg. It is inconceivable that Richard Wagner was not a little inspired by Herder’s humor when he came later to compose one of the most agonistic, comic-tragic operas ever produced about the conditions of producing a truly inspired art.¹⁹

Given the enlightened status of the fine arts more or less around 1800, one would think that contests over their disciplinary ranking would subside. To the contrary: Their contest remains acute for artists, critics, and philosophers. However much the condition of music is articulated in the more secular or enlightened terms of “the aesthetic,” it never loses its spirit (Geist). This spirit continues to sever for all sorts of ends its more disciplinary Apollonian side from its more ironic or satyr-like side, a side that is associated increasingly with Marsyas’s brother-in-kind: Dionysus. With the two sides in play, the “spirit of music” continues to give the rule and inspiration to the arts, but it also serves as a spirit for contemporary society as a whole to retrieve something from antiquity that it believes it has lost. At this moment, too, the question regarding specifically the art of music becomes more urgent not less, whether, as the “highest art” or as separated entirely from all the other arts because it has finally reached its condition as music, it can mean as well or as fully as the “other” arts can mean as art. Propelled above the arts to a condition or spirit, what music achieves as an art continues to be a problem as it has always been. The urgent recognition of the problem gives rise to the “the philosophy of music,” as we still know it today.

Having moved through all “the other arts,” according to what each can achieve in the world experienced through representation, reference, and (Platonic) Ideas, Schopenhauer concludes the third book of his World as Will and as Representation by turning to the “one art” that has so far been “excluded from consideration”—namely “music.” Although he describes music as standing entirely “apart from all the other” arts, and as belonging alone to the world experienced from the most truthful and profoundest perspective of Will, he finds that music has limits as an art. He argues, for example, that no actual music heard in the world is entirely pure, given how its movement of unfolding must take a dissonant path before resolving itself. And no music, he shows, can reflect on or render self-conscious the relation in which art in general stands to the will, as the other arts can. In the world of representation, the other arts remain captivated by how the will is objectified or articulated and seek constantly or endlessly
to rearticulate the will in works of art. Yet these arts are limited too, for the experience of beauty they afford is never such as to separate those who experience the works from a bondage to the will in anything more than a temporary way. Does music then have the advantage in having relinquished this search? Only in part, and this is the point. Finding limits on both sides, of music and the “other” arts, Schopenhauer eventually turns away from all the arts toward morality and toward a pure philosophy. He does not find in Raphael’s *Cecilia* a subtle philosophical reflection on music or painting as arts. He finds instead an object of aesthetic experience that allows him to set aside all the symphonic and dramatic torments of the world equally. Still, out of the artwork then steps the most metaphysically musical of moral saints: Cecilia, to lead him in silence into the final movement of his own metaphysical symphony.

In a fragment on “Music and Words” of 1871, Nietzsche grapples with Schopenhauer’s view, mixed up now with Wagner’s. Whereas music can “father” or “beget” ideas and images within song or opera, so as to elevate poetry and painting to the “mysterious castle” of music, poetry and painting cannot elevate themselves by themselves. Nietzsche asks us to contemplate Raphael’s *Cecilia* as she listens “enraptured, to the harmonies of the angelic choirs.” “No sound,” he remarks, “issues from this world”—the world presumably of the painting. But imagine, he continues, that by a miracle we could hear the music: Would not all the figures in the painting, even the angels, leave our sight, “pale and vanish like shadows?” We would no longer see with the eyes of Raphael, he concludes: We would rather, “even as the instruments of this world lie broken on the ground, be conquered by something higher”—namely, music. After this, Nietzsche presents arguments that we know from his *Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* regarding how the Apollonian vision finds or gives way to a more profound and shattering Dionysian musical expression. Yet the example of the painting asks us to consider whether, in imagining the actualizing of the angelic song, our ears would be filled with a music that was given by its art or a music given only by a metaphysical or moral thought. Would we hear a music such as produced by Beethoven or Wagner, a music with or without words, or a music that, born out of the spirit, or Geist, of music, is such as to produce a thought or feeling of total and living community? For the early Nietzsche, it is no longer a matter of either/or. An art of music reborn “out of the spirit of music,” be it a symphony or a musical drama, is, in his times, the only true containment or vessel of this spirit, surpassing now both metaphysics and morality. The “spirit of music” conveyed through music’s art, is what Nietzsche now identifies with “the aesthetic”
as justifying life as a whole. But, in this life, all the other arts are included: poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, and dance.

Not that far from Schopenhauer as some may think, and two decades earlier, the Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick resists any move that drives the contest of the sister arts toward their union if this means compromising the autonomy or freedom of spirit that each art and each artwork should have on its own terms. Like Schopenhauer, Hanslick begins: Although music “alone among the arts” still seems “incapable of achieving [the] objective” or autonomous “standpoint,” it now has the capability to do so, given his “revision” of its aesthetic estimation. Music, he explains, has long been burdened by a “false” theory that has tried to reduce music to a merely communicative or imitative language of human feelings. If all music has to do is promote feelings in human subjects, it deserves to be treated as any other merely pleasure-promoting form. If, however, it is to achieve the status that has rendered the other arts aesthetic ends in themselves, it must articulate for itself a medium that cannot be reduced to a merely instrumental means.

Hanslick thus describes this medium as constituted by purely instrumental tonal forms that define the genres of the symphony and sonata, but then and more important by forms that are, in “specifically musical” ways, “moved” by the spirit or power (Gebalt) that renders them purely beautiful. Following an argument that Herder and many others offer before him, the medium of music cannot be merely empirically regarded as a mere language of sounds, such that it can be found outside the musical art; it must be conceived of purely aesthetically, so that the experience it affords, even if it has to do with emotion, is entirely different from any mere effects found in the everyday world. The experience, as he describes it, is of a mysterious kind, resonant with the “chemistry” that Goethe finds in the “elective affinities” that draw unalike or different things into a likeness—a yearning—that is not however an identity. Hanslick finds this Goethean chemistry contained in the spiritual movement and power (Gebalt) that is sandwiched so as to become the paste or spiritual content between music’s tonal material and its forms, to render music’s pure aesthetic medium an “inseparable unity” captured by the phrase “tönend bewegte Formen.” The musically moving medium that moves listeners to so intense a degree alone renders music the beautiful and “specifically musical” art that it is. By specifying the aesthetic medium under the terms of a work’s inseparable unity of form and content, Hanslick produces what he regards the first adequate philosophy of music. At its core, the art of music qua aesthetic medium is identified with the condition of each musical work, such that to
this compounded condition all the other types of artwork, be they poems, paintings, sculptures, or buildings, now constantly tend and aspire.

With this view in mind, Walter Pater, finally for us and explicitly for him, begins his own account. Pater, too, sets music apart from the other arts. Whereas all the other arts constantly aspire to the condition of music, the art of music does not itself have to aspire, since the art is or just has (now) reached its proper condition. Music, he writes, “most completely realizes” itself in its “perfect identification of matter and form.” In its “consummate moments,” the end “is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other; and to it, therefore, all the other arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire.” In music, Pater adds, and not “in poetry,” we find “the true type or measure of perfected art.”

However, declaring music’s perfection of itself as an art does not persuade Pater to deem it the most perfect of the arts. Most of his argument turns on showing how all other arts aspire to music’s condition without this compromising what makes them the particular arts that they are. In the 1870s, he sees a movement toward an abstraction and formalism whereby all the other arts seem willingly to relinquish (as Mitchell later puts it) the territory of reference and representation, believing that, by doing so, they will mean as music now means, which means now not to mean referentially or representationally! Pater, however, does not entirely accept this relinquishing of territory. He looks back instead to what some Italian painters demonstrated in the Renaissance: namely, a capacity to transfigure and contain an external model or meaning such that the work itself becomes self-contained, unified, and indivisible. But precisely with such a capability, he then shows, an artwork may be seen also to point or yearn toward something beyond its own limits without this compromising the internal unity in any way.

For Pater, the artwork is neither “empirical” nor “mere.” That which unifies form and content is a pure aesthetic movement that he terms a “handling.” In this matter, he follows Hanslick and preempt Serres in declaring that the “mere matter” of a poem or a picture is “nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling,” though by “mere matter,” he finds not, as Serres does, words, noises, or bricks, but rather, with Hanslick, the external or everyday events or objects, incidents, or characteristics in their common particularities, which, only when represented or, better, con-
tained by an artwork, become wholly “penetrated” and thus transfigured by form.

One painting Pater looks at, he attributes to Giorgione, though many now think that it was painted by Titian. La Fête Champêtre, or The Concert (Figure 3), shows a pastoral musical scene that instructs us in what it means for a painting to assume a musical subject matter, but then how this matter is transmuted into a formed content unique to what painting achieves: (in my terms), a pictorial play between space and time, distance and nearness, a feminine nature rewarding a male urban desire, yet a play also harmonized by color and by imaginative intersensorial synthesis given to those who grasp what is produced by those in the image who play musical instruments. Having understood the transmutation of the musical subject matter into a self-contained painterly form, one henceforth knows, following this argument, how to look at any painting “musically” for its unbroken accord of form and content, whether or not the subject matter actually shows or engages the art of making music.\(^{23}\)

Figure 3. Titian, Pastoral Concert. 1509. 105 cm × 137 cm (41 × 54 in). Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo credit: Art Resource, N.Y.
Pater demonstrates a Platonism—a striving toward—that everywhere inflects his thought: that there is as much meaning in the “how” as the “that” of aspiration, if not more meaning. For Pater, the art of music meets its condition now by definition, by fulfillment or perfection of its nature. For Socrates, the arts meet the condition of mousikē, if ever they do, only when the artists are rewarded by the gods with inspiration. But neither construal counts as an artistic or human achievement, which is Pater’s point when he writes that one of the “chief functions of aesthetic criticism, dealing with the products of art, new or old,” is “to estimate the degree in which each of those products approaches . . . musical law” (15). But what, rhetorically put, does aesthetic criticism do if its object is a product of the musical art, for, with nothing to approach, there is nothing to criticize?

To temper the rhetoric, Pater turns the tables around. Each and every fine art, including music, has its own “incommunicable element,” its own “untranslatable order of impressions,” and its own “unique mode of reaching” what he terms “imaginative reason.” To reach this is what all arts do when any work of art is engaged as an end in itself. In this claim, the musical work is the exemplar for all other sorts of artworks to follow. Yet Pater also argues that even if a musical work shows the consummate unity of form and content, the free engagement of our imaginative reason is encouraged by all types of art equally and by each type of art in its own particular way. Pater rejects what he describes as the most profound of errors: to subsume all the separate arts under a generalizing aesthetic or metaphysical law of art, even, in some sense, the law of the musical work. One art is not as another art is; nor is any art a “mere translation” or “supplement” of a higher thing. But there is a dialectical twist: All arts are alike in their being also unlike as particular and singular types of art. And in this dissimilarity, as Herder argued before him, the ranking of the arts, including music, really makes no sense.

Following Hanslick’s bid to prove music an autonomous art, freed from a dependence on any other art, Pater draws on the condition of music, we may finally say, to prove every art’s independence. The achievement of any art is singular, dependent on how it finds its particular unification of content and form. But if this is correct, it also means that no art, qua particular type of art, exhausts all that art can be, even if there is a competitive aspiration for each type of art to exhaust the general concept of art. To reduce the competitive instinct, Pater explains how each art benefits from another art by borrowing or aspiring to qualities that it does not have, just as, as I wrote above, Socrates borrowed from Aesop to show an aspiration toward something “musical” that philosophy could not frame or contain.
in its own terms. Each art aspires to extend its capability beyond the limits of its own medium so that, as Pater writes, it can “partake” in “all art” as a whole. One art may join another art, as in song or opera, but, more important for Pater, each singular art engages what the German Romantics described as the “great Anders-streben,” the striving or yearning, or the electing of an affinity, of one thing to take on qualities of or to reach a union but not an identity with another thing. Each art, Pater writes, thus aims “to pass” into “the condition of some other art,” without however becoming what it is not: namely, the other art. An “alienation” from its own medium is thus wanted and necessary in his view, but only under the condition that the alienation remains “partial.” This means that an art’s assumption of something other to itself must finally be contained within itself so that its unity is not compromised. By striving from within itself to “the other,” each is lent, as Pater puts it, “a new force.” For an art to aspire beyond its limits is thus for the art to remain true to what it can do within its medium while aspiring to a condition that is perhaps higher, perhaps more general, or simply equal but other to itself.

The idea of limits (Grenzen) is drawn as much from Socrates as from later theories offered by Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Kant, and Hegel. It is a core idea of the modernist aesthetic, as is made explicit later on in a context of modernist crisis by the art critic Clement Greenberg and the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno. Hence, a painting or a poem aspires to the condition of music without compromising its medium—its limits—just as many of the “most delightful cases” of music, Pater writes, seem “always” to be “approaching to figure, to pictorial definition.” The condition of music, which is its indivisible form and content, does not therefore exclude an aspiration of any artwork to something that is more than itself. It only must exclude the aspiration for that more or extra to be regarded as external. Just as, for the German Romantics, a fragment is partial or limited yet suggestive of the whole, so an artwork is construed here in terms of what it internally aspires to beyond itself. In this argument, it is incorrect to read the term “extramusical” as nonmusical or outside or external to the musical territory or domain. It is to be read, as the romantic-modernists read it, with an ancient twist—as “aussermusikalisch”—as more than the art of music, that is, as the art of music or painting or poetry aspiring to a (higher) condition. Pater thus describes the tension between what remains external to the work and what is more within the work understood as a constant effort or continuous struggle for the former to surpass the latter, such that any distinction between form and content within the work is obliterated. In these romantic dialectical terms, and this is the final point, the musical
work participates in the struggle and the achievement just as much as any other sister art. All the arts, therefore, constantly aspire to what every artwork finally wants to be as art: singular regarding its medium, particular as a work, and exemplary of art as a whole. Music, having been excluded from the discussion of the other arts is ultimately reincluded by Pater as just another sister art.

I have traced a particularly Platonist history of some of the main moves between mousikē, musica, and music in terms of the elevation and deflation of music as an art. Elevated to a condition, music as an art, or no longer considered an art, has had to confront its status as a sister art to its both advantage and disadvantage. Silenced or broken, it has variously been denied its instruments, embodiment, notation, producers, sight, touch, and even its capacity to mean in a worldly way. Yet without its externalization, or what Adorno sometimes called its articulation, it has served as that to which not only the arts but humanity as a whole is meant to aspire. The denial of music’s articulation has come from those who have wanted to separate themselves from music, compete with music, or ally themselves with music; it has come from within and without the musical world. The denial has belonged predominantly neither to an earlier nor to a later historical period; the watershed moments have not, in this story, made a significant difference. What is written about music today often repeats the movement of the concept of music between music’s status as a condition and as an art as though the two were either identified or separated in an eternal cosmic tension. Of course, that masterpieces of art—in all the areas of art, including music—have been produced on the foundation of broken instruments must give us pause if, following my essay, one thinks that one ought to reject music as a condition for the sake of retrieving music as a complete art. However, allowing all of music as an art back in, as is the tendency of much theory today, obliges us to rethink the first questions we tend especially as philosophers to ask: after the definition, status, or meaning of “music” in relation to the “other” arts.

In the twentieth century, many key figures, Greenberg, Adorno, Danto, Fried, Clark, Mitchell, and Serres, to name just a few, have defended the specificity of medium of the art and the singular artwork against the tendency to break down the barriers between the arts altogether. Or they have urged the breakdown to fight the Platonist and then theological inheritance of a discourse of clarity and confusion, which, although in the
eighteenth century was rearticulated in terms suitable to the Enlightenment concept of the aesthetic, never lost its disciplinary or disenfranchising force. Many thinkers have also continued to ask which of the arts has been, to use Greenberg’s phrase, “the chief victim” in a comparison of the arts that has always also been a contest. To speak of a chief victim is, however, to use the wrong language if it inclines one to believe that the arts have not contributed to their own alienation as arts in favor of an elevation or inflation of their defining concepts. For arts to aspire to a condition that is philosophical or theological has demonstrated the enormous capability of the arts. But sometimes the aspiration has come with an extreme cost to all that makes an art art.

NOTES


10. Oscar Wilde appealed to the Apollo-Marsyas contest more than once, for example, in concluding his portrait of Dorian Gray.


15. See note 6 above. Ruth Tatlow recently showed me a perfectly illustrative statement coming from a quarrel over the concept of “harmony” around 1713 between Johann Heinrich Buttstett and Johann Mattheson (see her “Theoretical Hope: A Vision for the Application of Historically Informed Theory,” 51–52, *Understanding Bach*, 8, 33–60 © Bach Network UK 2013, https://www.academia.edu/3093583/Theoretical_Hope_A_Vision_for_the_Application_of_Historically_Informed_Theory?auto=download; http://www.bachnetwork.org/ub8/UB8_Tatlow.pdf. Mattheson charged Buttstett: “But Mr Organist, as you are so keen to prattle on about Distinctions and Explanations [Distinctionibus und Explicationibus], why don’t you distinguish excellently between what is properly called Harmony and Harmony in Music [Harmoniam propriè sic dictam, & Harmoniam in Musicis]? All your images, your grand and mighty Clavis B, the proportions of the Mercy Seat, of the Incense Altar etc demonstrate a Harmony, but a silent Harmony is not true Music [eine Harmoniam mutam, non vero Musicam an]. It may make a three or six-fold species of Musical Harmony, but so long as a thing does not sound, I cannot call it Musical Harmony [so lange mir ein Ding nicht klinget, kan ichs nicht Harmoniam Musicam nennen.] I will with the help of God in my third volume deal in more detail with Harmony, and be able to see how far the properties of this word can be stretched into music [wie weit sich des Wortes Eigenschaft in Musicis erstrecke]. All the panes in the windows have a Harmony, but nonetheless have no music in them, unless you call the noise music, when someone dubs a Cavalier a knight and smashes the window [Alle Scheiben in den Fenstern haben eine Harmonie, aber deswegen steckt keine Music darin, es sey denn, daß man den Lerm vor Music halten wolte, wenn etwan ein Cavallier daran zum Ritter wird und die Fenster einschlägt].”


22. All quotations are drawn from Pater’s essay “The School of Giorgione.”

23. This argument is also developed by Klaus Krüger, “Der stumme Klang des Bildes: Gemalte Musik,” in *Schweigen/Silence*, ed. Andreas Beyer and Laurent Le Bon (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013).

24. For more, see Pater’s lectures *Plato and Platonism* (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2006).


