



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

On Some Relationships between Music and Painting

Author(s): Theodor W. Adorno and Susan Gillespie

Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 66-79

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742517>

Accessed: 05/10/2010 08:03

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=oup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

On Some Relationships between Music and Painting

Theodor W. Adorno

Translated by Susan Gillespie

For Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler on his eightieth birthday, in profound respect and friendship¹

The self-evident, that music is a temporal art, that it unfolds in time, means, in the dual sense, that time is not self-evident for it, that it has time as its problem. It must create temporal relationships among its constituent parts, justify their temporal relationship, synthesize them through time. Conversely, it itself must act upon time, not lose itself to it; must stem itself against the empty flood. The old aim of secular music, that of the *divertissement* that distracts from boredom, testifies to this, a fact that lives on in the relationship to time of autonomous music, which binds itself to time at the same time as it sets itself against it, antithetically. Here, as there, *Zeitkunst*, the temporal art, is equivalent to the objectification of time. This applies to the individual events, or musical content, to the extent that they come together in a context by means of the organization of their sequence, rather than dissolving as they pass away; and to the temporal dimension itself, which aims, potentially, at its own self-transcendence, based on the strength of the unity of what occurs within it, following the example of certain movements of the truly symphonic Beethoven, whose virtual effect is as if they lasted only a second. If time is the medium that, as flowing, seems to resist every reification, nevertheless music's temporality is the very aspect through which it actually congeals into something that survives independently—an object, a thing, so to speak. What one terms musical form is therefore its temporal order. The nomenclature “form” refers the temporal articulation of music to the ideal of its spatialization.

It is no less true that painting, *Raumkunst*, the spatial art, as a reworking of space, means its dynamization and negation. Its idea approaches transcendence toward time. Those pictures seem the most successful in which what is absolutely simultaneous seems like a passage of time that is holding its breath; this, not least, is what distinguishes it from sculpture. That the history of painting amounts to its growing dynamization is only another way of saying the same thing. In their contradiction, the arts merge into one another.

Not, however, through gradually becoming more similar, through pseudomorphosis. Music that "paints," which nearly always suffers a loss of temporal organization, lets go of the synthesizing principle through which, alone, it assumes a form approaching space; and painting that behaves dynamically, as if it were capturing temporal events, as the futurists desired and many abstract painters attempt to do with circling figures, exhausts itself, at best, in the illusion of time, while the latter is incomparably more present in a picture where it has disappeared among the relationships on the surface or the expression of what has been painted. The moment one art imitates another, it becomes more distant from it by repudiating the constraint of its own material, and falls into syncretism, in the vague notion of an undialectical continuum of arts in general. Busoni's dedication "To the musician in words" was a bad compliment for Rilke: it identified with deadly accuracy precisely what is bad, driveling, about the latter's poetry, which makes things all too easy for itself where the meanings of the words are concerned. The arts converge only where each pursues its immanent principle in a pure way.

In music, even after the rejection of Wagner and the neoromantic principle of synaesthesia—"I hear the light"—the movement toward painting has continued among the anti-Wagnerian tendencies: proof of its subterranean staying power. The pseudomorphosis toward painting, one of the key categories for Stravinsky² and a continuation of the direction taken by Debussy, who came of age in the overwhelming shadow of the French painting of his era, must be understood, today, as a stage in the process of convergence. To this extent, it obeys the romantic principle against which it is rebelling, by pursuing the spatialization of time in a merely fictitious manner, treating time without consideration, as if it were space, with all the inconsistencies that characterize the magician's act. This is also the teaching of Stravinsky's court estheticians. Today's turn makes the tendency's emancipation from that "as if." It has been driven to [the point] where literal convergence arrives at the limits not only of the individual arts, but of art as something antithetical to reality. Time is not

spatialized into a geometric coexistence, but rather—precisely as time—planned, disposed of, organized from the top down *as a whole*, as only visual surfaces once were. Equivalent to the large-scale procedure that so disposes, that treats time like a cartoon, there is a no less painterly procedure on a small scale. It expresses itself most clearly in electronics, but can also be observed in the realm of music that makes use of more or less traditional methods of sound production. Composers are operating with individual tones the way painters operate with individual color values; although as a rule the tones may no longer be separated from each other, like dots, but may be more densely layered, still they represent almost the entirety of the composition. The integration of total planning and the atomization into tones correspond. The unit of construction is reduced to the relations among these tones. The form³ of this kind of music is thoroughly homophonic; it is composed, as people like to say nowadays, of “blocks.” The concept of line is not applicable to it, any more than it knows true polyphony; in its place, the sounds, in their simultaneity, have become extraordinarily nuanced and differentiated in themselves, exploiting discoveries made by the early Stravinsky, among others. The things that in traditional music, including Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, apply specifically to the temporal dimension—the entire art of development and thematic transition—become irrelevant to the composers; at best, tone progressions in the sense of the newly available continuum still retain something of that art. The most recent musical production is so uniform, where these characteristics are concerned, that one is almost tempted to suspect some external compulsion, although one cannot help hearing a certain impoverishment, the withering away of numerous musical elements in favor of the manipulation of the overvalued tones. In general, in the most recent development, an extreme measure of differentiation, of sophistication in the use of means, goes hand in hand with primitivism, a kind of forgetting of what has been achieved. The apologetic argument that in the history of music one dimension has always been developed at the expense of the others falls flat. History had transcended precisely this particularity and was getting ready to begin a profound, all-sided development of all its elements, and it is hard to believe that this would be abandoned. Otherwise the idea of integral composition would literally merge into disintegration. The convergence of music and painting also opens up the possibility of crass infantilism, at least in music; it is able to stave off this element only to the extent that it reflects it within itself, as an expression of decay, and composes it out, so to speak.

As time itself, as a medium, is transformed purely into a material, and as the things that occur in it are reduced to tonal materials, the way is paved for spatialization: space as identical with absolute material. Yet the unfathomable difficulty, the true ceiling of the most recent development, in Messiaen's formula, is to be sought in the fact that time, by its very nature, cannot be forced into identity with space; that anything organized via temporal organization is not simultaneous, but successive; the facts cannot be expressed otherwise than tautologically. The constitution of time, in contradiction to Kant, always involves reference to temporal things and is never a completely independent and pure, hence "timeless" form. Hegel's insight into the nonidentity of identity maintains its claim even at the crux of aesthetics. If the tendency toward the spatialization of music defends itself, with good reason, against the dictum that insists on the invariant anthropological nature of the senses—as established by nature the eye is always an eye, the ear an ear—at the same time it must not refuse, in the rage for identity, to recognize its Other. Compositionally, this would seem to mean that music should not only organize itself from above, from construction, but also from below, from the individual impulse in time. This is the true intervention of the subject in music, as a determination that belongs to it objectively.

In a picture, everything is simultaneous. Its synthesis consists in bringing together things that exist next to each other in space, in transforming the formal principle of simultaneity into the structure of the specific unity of the elements in the painting. Yet this process, as a process that is immanent in the thing itself, and by no means belongs merely to the mode of its production, is essentially one of tensions. If these are lacking, if the elements of the painting do not seek to get away from each other, do not, indeed, contradict each other, then there is only a preartistic coexistence, no synthesis. Tension, however, can in no way be conceived without the element of the temporal. For this reason, time is immanent in the painting, apart from the time that is spent on its production. To this extent, the objectivization and the balance of tensions in the painting are sedimented time. In the context of his chapter on schematization [*q. v.*], Kant observes that even the pure act of thinking involves traversing the temporal series as a necessary condition of its possibility, and not only of its empirical realization. The more emphatically a painting presents itself, the more time is stored up in it.

If one wanted to clarify the equally constitutive relationship of music to space, it is not even necessary to reflect on the fact that

music occurs in space and that as a result spatial relations fall within the musical phenomenon itself—something that is of concern [in] a number of contemporary compositions. It suffices to recall that the act of notation is essential to art music, not incidental. Without writing [there can be] no highly organized music; the historical distinction between improvisation and *musica composita* coincides qualitatively with that between laxness and musical articulation. This qualitative relationship of music to its visible insignia, without which it could neither possess nor construct out duration, points clearly to space as a condition of its objectification. The process of composition has continued, intermittently, to bear this out, from the double choirs of San Marco to Stockhausen. But even where music forgot its spatial aspect, it did not divest itself of it. Bruckner's orchestra would not be what it is, in purely musical terms, if it lacked the element of the embracing, of the forest of tones that arches over the listener. And the graphic representation is never merely a sign for music, but also resembles it in some respects, as the neumes once did. On the other hand, the stubborn object-relatedness of painting, which was not eliminated until quite late, and then in a way that is not beyond dispute, must be thought of together with time. The isolated elements of the picture, transposed from the empirical world, are temporal like it. They bring more of time with them into the picture than mere associations, and hence also the very element whose antithesis to the purely painterly principle serves to ignite the painting's power. Its spatial nature, for all that it appears to exist a priori, is not that alone, but is always, at the same time, also a result; the absolute space of the painting a temporal differential, the moment in which temporally disparate elements are concentrated. No simultaneity without time. If nowadays, as the term *écriture* indicates, painting approaches writing, this means nothing else than that the painting's latent temporality is showing through, like everything subcutaneous in contemporary art; perhaps because the painting is no longer equal to it. It lets go of the illusion of absolute timelessness along with other illusions. Writing is timeless as an image of the temporal. As it fixes the temporal, it is translated back into time through the act of reading, which it prescribes. It "is certain that the language of art can only be understood in the most profound relation to the theory of signs."⁴ The adequate viewing of a painting, far beyond triviality, already bears witness to the fact that even what hangs on the wall as something absolutely spatial can only be perceived in temporal continuity. The appropriate view of the painting, which concludes the act of standing in front of it, awakens, *idealiter*, the time that is implicit within it. The naive comment that

when looked at intensely a painting, the flesh of a Rubens nude comes alive, connotes more than that one thinks the woman represented there is alive. This will hardly be the case, and certainly not where significant paintings are concerned. What is alive is rather the paintings themselves, what is painted, not what has been painted.

If painting and music do not converge by means of growing similarity, they do meet in a third dimension: both are language. "There is a language of sculpture, of painting, of poetry. As the language of poetry is grounded—if not exclusively, then at least in part—in the naming language of men, so it is quite conceivable that the language of sculpture or painting, for example, may be grounded in certain kinds of object languages, that in them what we find is a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language, but perhaps, after all, one that belongs to the same sphere. We have to do here with name-less, non-acoustic languages, languages from the material; here one should reflect on the material commonality of things in their communication."⁵ The convergence of the various media becomes evident through the emergence of their character as language. But this is the opposite of linguistic gestures or speaking behavior, or of music or painting, to the extent that they are about telling a story. Painting and music speak by virtue of the way they are constructed, not by the act of representing themselves; they speak all the more clearly, the more profoundly and thoroughly they are composed in themselves, and the figures of this essential form⁶ are their writing. What can be designated as such with some justification, in each case, is the stamp of a quality, immanent character, not the communication of something external to this complexion of the work. The similarity to language increases with the decrease in communication. The breaking off of intention through the creation of the artwork—"making things of which we know not what they are"—is what lends the work its character as a sign. It becomes a sign by virtue of a break between it and everything designated. *Écriture* in music and painting cannot be direct writing, only encoded writing; otherwise it remains mere imitation. Hence *écriture* has a historical character; it is modern. It is set free on the strength of what in painting, with a devastating expression, people have taken to calling abstraction, through distraction of attention from its object-relatedness. In music this has occurred through the mortal contraction of all its imitative moments, not only its programmatically descriptive elements, but its traditional expressivity, as well, which requires firm conventions linking what is expressed with its signifier. It is plain to see that, in fact, music and painting become more closely related, the more thoroughly

they alienate the naive person's feelings by means of what he or she perceives as the abstract. Music and painting become writing through their renunciation of the communicative, which is precisely the element, in both media, that is in truth unlinguistic, because it suggests what is merely subjectively desired. In both media, however, what may justifiably be experienced as abstraction depends on the constructive principle. To the degree that the latter dominates the work, it wrests the work away from communicating anything as a symbol. The constructive principle would like to stamp the work as writing derived from its own language, in painting as in music.

At the same time, one must not seek the convergence of painting and music exclusively in the constructive principle; but rather in the polarization that, in painting as in music, occurs between the two elements that in traditional art are combined in illusory synthesis—a polarization that points, on the one hand, toward the constructive element, which divests itself of familiar objects in painting and of the familiar idiom in music; and, on the other, toward a changed form⁷ of the expressive. For nonobjective painting, like atonal music that abandons itself to its impulse, has an affinity with pure expression; independent not only of its relation as a signifier to something that is meant to be expressed, but also of its kindred relation to an expressive subject that is identical with itself. This affinity reveals itself as a break between the sign and what it signifies. What is groping toward expression in this way, in painting and music, is no longer the old synthesizing I, behaving as if it were in unbroken command of the material and of itself in the *Gestalt*. Both arts become schemata of a nonsubjective language. But because the latter is veiled, not immediately present and possible, it is possessed of the broken-off, hieroglyphic character that, in the origins of painterly écriture, in Paul Klee, still exerts fascination today. If painting or music were simply lacking the expressive element, the element of an expression without anything concrete to be expressed, the work would no longer intend toward something that is not its own phenomenon and that cannot be hidden in symbolic unity, either within it or anywhere outside it. Then its character as writing would be lost. The work would regress, as innumerable examples do today, to a preartistic state; it would no longer crackle with electricity. This crackling with electricity is perhaps the most tolerable approximation to what should be understood by the work's character as writing and by the convergence of painting and music.

It would not be erroneous to term this character of writing seismographic. It is induced by the distant, similarly premonitory trem-

bling during catastrophes. In reaction to it, the arts are startled; the traces of these startle reflexes, retained in the works, are the graphic characters in them. As such seismograms of involuntary occurrences, they mark the incursion of the early mimetic behaviors that precede all objectivized art and that all art secretly dreams of objectifying. Graven characters, they retain the elusive responses, which are still perceptible in human beings in such reactions as blushing or goose-flesh, and lend them duration, without surrendering them to the seemingly objective rationality of the prevailing signs. This rationality, over the course of art's long history, has amalgamated itself with the mimetic element. But also falsified it. For it cannot bring it into perfect unison with the other. The more expression has been constrained by the semiotic systems of esthetics, in the form of conventions, the more profoundly art's mimetic aspect is falsified. Kitsch is nothing but mimesis rendered false by reification. Even the return of an undistorted mimetic moment, however, is in thrall to the rational element of artistic progress: its power of disposition over the material, which is nearing the absolute limit. For as long as art, its materials and their reified forms, remain heterogeneous, in contrast with and alien to each other, art will not be able to abandon itself to its mimetic impulse in a pure way. In *écriture*, for the first time, it is free to do so, by dint of its sovereign control over the natural material—rationality [as] the immanent condition of the nonrationality of fully developed art. This is the threshold where its advanced and its increasingly archaic aspects converge.

The tradition already offers numerous hints of this convergence. Thus, musical theory simply cannot manage without the quasi-optical term "tone color." One need only try to replace it with another term. There is none to be found. It is as if with the coloristic dimension, to which music has only relatively recently begun to pay attention, painting had penetrated into the innermost composition of music, at least from that moment on when people began to demand that music's dimensions be unified, and hence to articulate each one separately as such. Tone color always existed—incidentally, as it were—but reflection about it, disposition over it, is an aspect of awareness of the musical continuum, and it is this awareness that first uncovers the smallest optical unit, among other things. Later on, analogous developments seem to have occurred in painting; Kandinsky was probably the first to have talked about sounds in his paintings. Yet this very example seems to demonstrate how imperfect the equation between the two spheres is. "Tone color" has something compelling about it; whereas the term "picture tone" harks back to a kind of arts-and-crafts

modernism, rather like the “color tone music” people wrote during the 1920s. The games that were played under this rubric, to which anyone who has convinced himself of the immanence of convergence is doubly allergic, go back to the synesthesia that was familiar, in increasingly differentiated forms, to the art of the mid-nineteenth century of *Tristan* and Baudelaire. What is bad about synesthesia is identical with what is unobjective; it is subject to Loos’s verdict.⁸ The person who makes a principle of synesthesia would like to say twice, by linking various media and exploiting various—dubious—analogies between their phenomena, what has already been said once; as a solo trumpet, breaking in on a string choir, sounds louder than four. The convergence of music and painting is the opposite of such tautology. It occurs in the speaking, not in what is said. Still, the superfluous and sectarian “color tone music,” like a number of other apocryphal experiments, gave evidence of a genuinely new experience in distorted form. Even the Schoenbergian program of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, whose authenticity is beyond doubt, bears traces of this apocryphal element. The borderline between the immanent relation of one medium to the other and a syncretistic combination in the style of Scriabin’s *Prometheus* runs along the same meridian that marked the earlier one between *Jugendstil* and Expressionism. The Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its derivatives were the dream of that convergence as abstract utopia, before the media themselves permitted it. It failed by mixing media, instead of making the transition from each to the other by way of its own extremity.

The difficulty is grounded in the fact that the convergence is not located only in procedures, tensions, linguistic elements (although, admittedly, it can only be realized in them); the materials themselves are pushing in that direction, although they make sport of those artists who expect convergence to come from them, rather than from the articulation process. In music, perhaps following the example of musical notation, we inevitably speak of line, with the compelling paradox that precisely its temporal dimension can be fixed only as spatial, that is graphically. We also speak of volume, this time in the sense of the real fact that music, as always appearing in space, always also possesses spatial formal qualities. On the other hand, in painting, concepts like harmony and color dissonance are not mere metaphors, if only on account of the complementary colors. In painting, the tension within the momentary cannot be named otherwise than musically, that is with temporal expressions. Still, music, as something that by empirical necessity occurs in space, can probably be more compellingly related to space than painting to time. This may help explain the lack of

terminological consistency between the two media examined under the aspect of their convergence. Seen from the decisive aspect, that of their essential composition,⁹ there is scarcely any difference. They converge as something spiritual. The established boundaries that set the spatial and the temporal art in opposition to each other derive from the need to classify, to order; people are especially insistent on them in periods of classicist esthetics. The classicist esthetic wants to break the resistance of things that belong to different categories to the unifying culture; just as, on the other hand, it satisfies the culture's need to unify by establishing a realm within which limits are set whose internal division serves only to affirm the One, ruling concept from which its terms are derived. Something in the individual arts has always rebelled against this simultaneously unifying and dividing thrust. Why, can be seen most clearly—as in Lessing's "Laocoon"—by extracting from the division the esthetic criteria that are meant to decide the dignity of the artwork from on high, that is, in a way that transcends its individual constitution. The dividing up of the arts was complicit with the normative commonplaces that academicism has always imposed on concrete artistic needs. Nowadays, academicism also employs psychological reflection for this purpose, for example by referring to gestalt theory, whose laws supposedly exclude the meaningful apperception of atonal music, and hence the immersion in monodological works of art that are free of general conventions. Yet it is only when the work commits itself to its uniquely singular circumstance, in the way that atonality first makes possible, that the condition exists for it to transgress [the boundaries of] its genre, no longer boxed within it. To have recourse to the sensory apparatus is no more binding than it once was to refer to the supposedly immutable laws of the beautiful, and just as reactionary; to do so nowadays is to privilege conservative composers like Hindemith at the expense of those who advanced. If, in the act of hearing, only a single human being were capable of adequately imagining radically emancipated music and hearing the coherence of its elements as meaningful—and the number of those who can is no longer small—this would suffice to disprove the taboos that have been decreed by the psychology of perception. Should the latter defend itself by referring to the average listening of the majority of human beings, it would, perhaps unconsciously, be introducing the societal element that prevents that majority from listening in the way that up to now only some have been able to. The latter, however, prove that it is by no means necessary, according to unvarying laws of anthropology or the immutable nature of the human beings, for it to be thus, and not otherwise than the current norm.

The social training that consigns the majority to an outmoded level of hearing would have to be changed, in principle; listening would have to be changed. Nothing makes it impossible that something that still appears as a privilege, that the disadvantaged are all too ready to suspect as an anomaly in others, should belong to all. The true source of the most recent psychological error, however, is that music no more belongs to subjective perception alone than to physics alone. It gains its objectivity by virtue of the fact that these two poles are mutually mediated within it. Something of this kind must also be the case with painting. The attempts, in esthetics—already subjected to a lethal critique by Hegel—to conceive of art as *for* something else, rather than derived from within itself, become increasingly ideological, as the art industry relegates art to being for something else.

That art can be adequately understood even if it does not conform to the rules of being for something else, namely for the receptive subject, solidifies the difference between the determinable and experienceable thing itself and the causal relationship between artworks and their listener or viewer. For this reason, attempts to bring advanced art into line with so-called communications theory are thoroughly beside the point; they attempt, with the naive reflection of many practical artists, to make a critical authority out of the very thing against which the new art rebels. The latter gives the recipient his due by its richness and articulation, in other words by its own quality, not by adapting itself to his preformed modest level. Just as today all genre-derived criteria have become invalid—in esthetic theory, Benedetto Croce recognized this even before artistic practice had reached this point—so it is probably the esthetic signature of the present era that even the primary criterion—namely that the work of art must conform to the most general concept defining its realm—is coming under attack. In the permanent border crossing and unraveling of the arts—even the plural “arts” already has an obsolete ring—the destruction of art’s universals and their abandonment in favor of the essential composition¹⁰ of each individual work is consummated. This is the culmination of the rationalizing tendency within esthetics, as an aspect of progressive mastery over nature. It reduces the qualitative differences among art’s media, the birthright of the individual arts, to irrelevancy. The convergence of music and painting occurs at the expense of their merely natural differences, on the strength of the more powerful, form-giving processes that manifest themselves as an identical principle in the encounter with their materials.

That the media are drawing closer to each other, as *écriture*, is motivated by their own determination as divergence. They become

writing, in Kahnweiler's terminology, by "déformation"¹¹—of the naturalistic content of the painting, on the one hand, and of the [musical] idiom on the other. Their character as writing is linked to the awareness they share of difference—a difference that is stark. Works of art are writing in their flashing forth, and this suddenness has a temporal quality, as the transparency of the resulting phenomenon an optical one. As writing, the artworks divest themselves of their "thingness"; here the heterogeneous media are at one. It is questionable whether, if the thinglike object and the thinglike idiom have both utterly vanished, the *écriture*, and with it the convergence, remains. Kahnweiler's reference to "déformation" as "constructivist" has probably already identified an altered form of reaction—the reaction that presumes the reification of the artwork itself, irrespective of its reference to anything outside itself, in order to salvage the instant of writing by retaining it in the interest of duration. In the two cases, construction no longer has such a very different meaning. The methods of construction begin to become commensurable. In fact, painting and music do converge

as construction; *écriture*, however, becomes more mysterious as the process proceeds, if it does not fade away altogether.

The concept of esthetic construction, which meanwhile has achieved unquestioned acceptance, derives from the visual realm. It may initially have been borrowed from iron construction. But it does have its nonsensual model in philosophy, specifically in Schelling, where it accords with the esthetic [concept of construction] insofar as he demands that a heterogeneous material—in Schelling this is the very nature that for the Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, as chaotic, reserved for an order whose structures are externally imposed—should be constructed in itself, according to its own nature. Nature itself is seen as an aspect of subjectivity. It is supposed to reveal itself to be as much at one with its material as [is] the ideal of art. In technology, as in philosophy, the concept of construction is borrowed from mathematics. It aims to introduce rational order into the material, but with the covert assumption that the conditions of such a possibility, if not the actual principles of construction themselves, are also preformed in the material. As a result, the concept of construction, which encourages convergence, becomes increasingly powerful as the arts find themselves more directly confronted with the naked material with which they work, without the intermediary layer of an object or idiom: unity not by means of a third, extraneous thing. It was not until quite late that the concept of construction migrated into music, where it would actually be much more natural thanks to

music's lack of concrete content; but the irrationalist ideology that was all the rage, especially in Germany, sabotaged the concept of musical construction.

As it reaches an extreme, the progressive tendency is transformed dialectically into an ancient one that is sharply opposed to the increasing domination over nature. If art is the recollection of nature in the midst of domination over nature, then it cannot be adequate to both in a pure, unbroken way; hence its imperfection. That the relationships of music and painting are not only relationships of their means, but also of their materials—and the two are always, inescapably mediated in each other—touches on the phenomenon of convergence. In it we suddenly see how strongly, at one time, the mimetic impulse—related to the chaotic element at the source of art without which it would not exist at all—must have resisted the neat separation, the wound left by the rational order. Today, affinities like the one between the musical and the theatrical enable us to experience something of the old undivided state. With the current convergence, the radicalization of the concept of art as applied to the arts, we also glimpse a condition more advanced than the arts, one that also reaches back before art as a separate sphere of activity. The forms created by some painters, wildly proliferating between patterns and organisms, as their makers play over into three-dimensionality—the illusion that nonperspectivist painting had destroyed—are evidence of this. It is no accident that the turmoil within them is so musiclike. The most extreme esthetic progress is intertwined with regression. What art becomes, depends on whether its progress retains power over the regressive element, or whether it succumbs to it with the barbaric literalness that triumphs equally in the cult of absolute methods or of absolute material. One cannot fail to hear such regression, which does not transform the concept of art into something higher, in many products of the most recent musical practice; it would not surprise the musician if complementary things were to be reported about painting.

Notes

This translation is based on the text in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), vol. 16. The essay "Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei" first appeared in a festschrift entitled *Pour Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (Stuttgart, 1965), 33–42. [Tr.]

1. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1884–1979) was a member of a German banking family who moved to Paris to become an art collector. He was an important supporter of Cubist artists including Picasso and Braques. A self-described neo-Kantian, he also wrote criticism and several important works on Cubism in German and French. [Tr.]

2. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, 2d ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1958), 176ff. Also in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 12, 174ff. Translated into English as *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973). [Tr.]
3. *Gestalt*. [Tr.]
4. Walter Benjamin, *Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1955), vol. 2, 418.
5. Benjamin, *Schriften*, 418.
6. *Durchgebildetsein*. This term, like the word *Durchgeformtes*, translated as “essential composition,” on page 75 of this essay, identifies form as the result of a process of profound transformation of the material. [Tr.]
7. *Gestalt*. [Tr.]
8. That ornament is crime. [Tr.]
9. *Durchgeformten*. [Tr.]
10. *Durchbildung*. [Tr.]
11. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Confessions esthétiques* (Paris, 1963), 176.