

From Poetry to Music. The Paradigms of Art in German Aesthetics of the 19th Century

di Francesco Campana*

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes a decisive moment in the German aesthetics of the nineteenth century, that is, the passage from a view that considered poetry (i.e. literature) the most perfect art within the system of the individual arts to one in which music is the art *par excellence*. On the one hand, we find the philosophical perspectives of the first half of the nineteenth century (Hegel, Solger, Schelling). On the other hand are the views that, beginning with Schopenhauer, dominate the second half of the century with Nietzsche and Wagner. The aim of this paper is to show the meaning of this historical-philosophical moment in order to produce an interpretation that concerns both the theoretical consideration of art and the general philosophical approach of these authors. I intend to read this transition as one of the initial moments of the upheavals that affected art in the twentieth century, which some recent interpreters have read, in Hegelian terms, as the “end of art”.

KEYWORDS

Poetry, Music, Classical German Philosophy, System of Arts, End of Art

The present contribution aims to examine a decisive – even if not sufficiently considered – moment in the German aesthetics of the nineteenth century.¹ I will examine the passage from a view on art that has literature as its point of reference to one that sees music as the major art. My purpose is to consider this turning point in the conception of the individual arts, trying to understand both its intrinsic meaning and its consequences for subsequent conceptions of art. Indeed, I will place the discussion of some of the most representative authors of the period in a broader perspective, thus connecting them with contemporary debates. In particular, I will interpret this shift as the first of the fractures that led to the upheavals of twentieth century art. After framing this moment as the

* Università degli studi di Padova (IT), francesco.campana@unipd.it

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premise of a possible version of the so-called “end of art” (1) and after underlining the philosophical value of the discourse on genres within German aesthetics around 1800 (2), I will examine some decisive authors of the time (3) and analyze the specific features of this episode in the history of aesthetics, trying to explain it and grasp its deepest theoretical meanings (4).

1. *The Beginning of the End*

In order to explain the great changes in art history during the twentieth century, the last decades have witnessed a revival of the well-known Hegelian thesis on the so-called “end of art”.² Far from meaning an actual interruption of artistic production, this formula has taken on many meanings, departing, sometimes in a significant way, from the version closest to Hegel’s words. In this regard, we find in Hegel’s *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* the fact that, in the modern world, art has become “a thing of the past”,³ that is, it has lost the leading cultural, political, and spiritual role it had in the ancient world, for example, in classical Greece. Contemporary interpretations have caught different aspects of this thesis, have emphasized some features over others, and have consistently developed it in different directions, from ones that identify a secularization of art to others that point out its transformation into something philosophical.⁴ Despite these differences, contemporary revivals of the thesis share the definition of a caesura, clear and apparently irreversible, between the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, on the one hand, and that which preceded them, on the other; all the variants that have occurred have indicated an unbridgeable gap between the way art was conceived, produced and enjoyed in the past and the contemporary emergence of different, often unusual, and in any case radically new artistic phenomena.⁵

² Among the most significant contributions, think for example of the reflections of A.C. Danto, H. Belting, A. García Düttmann or R.B. Pippin.

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 13, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 25; Eng. trans. by T.M. Knox, *Hegel’s Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, p. 11.

⁴ For comprehensive studies on revivals and reworkings of the thesis on the end of art see, among others: E. Geulen, *Das Ende der Kunst. Lesarten eines Gerüchts nach Hegel*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2002; F. Vercellone, *Dopo la morte dell’arte*, il Mulino, Bologna 2013; K. Vieweg, F. Iannelli, F. Vercellone (eds.), *Das Ende der Kunst als Anfang freier Kunst*, Fink, München 2015.

⁵ This is the point of view of most scholars. It is worth noting recent countertrends, such as the position of Salvatore Settis, who prefers to underline the aspects of continuity

One of the ruptures of contemporary art, especially after the artistic attempts of synesthesia and intermediality put into play by the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements, is that it has generated territories that had never before been imagined, new ways of comprehending and categorizing specific forms of production within the artworld. In other words, contemporary art has exploded the traditional modern system of the arts and reconfigured it through artistic genres and forms that are difficult to codify within traditional frames. Not only photography and cinema, but in more recent times conceptual art, installations, performance art, street art and land art are just some of the clearest examples of how the advent of the age of the “end of art” has also meant the end of the traditional system of the arts and the constitution of an unprecedented plurality of artistic forms.⁶ The transformations experienced by the art of the last century as well as the current one have led to the breakdown, blurring, and hybridization of the boundaries between artistic genres. Additionally, new possibilities have emerged that often require novel interpretive frameworks to be understood. In a sense, through the exploration of new forms and modes of expression, art has sought out and proposed new ways of conceiving itself and the world, and through these processes, new kinds of rationality have emerged that do not correspond to those previously conveyed through art. This has led (and is leading) to a modification not only of the individual arts themselves, but of the very concept of art in general. This is because contemporary art has consolidated itself precisely through the traditional modern system of the arts. The upheaval of this system has decisive consequences for what we mean by art in the era “after the end of art”.⁷

I here propose to identify a decisive premise of contemporary art’s situation in the shift that takes place in the art conceptions of nineteenth-century German aesthetics from a system of the arts

between contemporary art (especially figurative art) and the past in S. Settis, *Incursioni. Arte contemporanea e tradizione*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2020.

⁶ Recent and comprehensive analyses, carried out from a philosophical point of view, of some of these new artistic genres produced by contemporary art can be found, for instance, in J. Rebenitsch, *Theorien der Gegenwartkunst zur Einführung*, Junius, Hamburg 2013 and E. Caldarola, *Filosofia dell’arte contemporanea: installazioni, siti, oggetti*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2020.

⁷ I obviously borrow the expression of an epoch “after the end of art” from Arthur Danto, who identifies the epochal fracture in the artworld starting from the second half of the twentieth century and identifies, from then on, an epoch, which he calls “post-historical”, in which the teleological structures of the previous epochs (for example, the tension towards mimesis that characterized the history of art until the end of the nineteenth century) are lacking and which is dominated by an unprecedented freedom and a radical pluralism in the forms of artistic expression (A.C. Danto, *After the End of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997, pp. 125-126).

in which literature has the main position to one in which music is central. The hypothesis in the background is that the modalities, dynamics, and in part even some deep meanings of this modification belong, on a larger scale, to twentieth-century upheavals as well. Before considering the specific authors of the time, however, it is useful to make a last preliminary point on the concept of the system of arts as a philosophical problem, especially with regard to German aesthetics around 1800.

2. *The System of Arts as a Philosophical Problem*

Passages on the system of the arts, usually coming after the more deeply theoretical and conceptual parts of the aesthetic treatises of the time, can be erroneously perceived as additional and unnecessary sections; they may seem a place where theories are perhaps tested, but which we could do without. Actually, reflections on the system of the individual arts – mostly composed of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature, in some cases with the exclusion of some of these or the addition of other arts such as dance or gardening – are essential to the discourse on art and, in modernity, constitute one of its founding moments.

Thinking of art as a system of individual arts is a significant operation from a philosophical point of view. First of all, grouping the single expressions under an overall term such as “art” means highlighting the common features of different forms which, in previous centuries, were perhaps not considered the result of the same intent or were not perceived as the result of practices that are even remotely comparable (think of the historically troubled relationship between poetry and the other forms of art).⁸ Second, organizing the individual arts into a single articulated system means in most cases giving them a hierarchical order, arranging them according to a specific criterion, and identifying the artistic forms that serve as models for the others and which are needed to describe the meaning of the general category “art”.⁹ To move at a systematic level with respect to the different forms of expression that will then fall within the group of the arts, therefore, does not mean stating something trivial or neutral, but making a profound argument about the

⁸ Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics*, Polish Scientific Publishers, The Hague *et al.* 1980, pp. 73-120.

⁹ On the role of the hierarchical organization of the arts in the evolutionary process of the arts system see N. Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2017, pp. 292-294; Eng. trans. by E.M. Knodt, *Art as a Social System*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2000, pp. 179-180.

nature, ontology, and meaning of what we understand when we use the word “art”. The organization of individual arts into a system is a true device of knowledge aimed at specific arts and, at the same time, at the concept of art in general, which expresses a rationality of its own and tells us a lot about the aesthetic view of those who produce it, but also about their view of the world in general.¹⁰

It was in the German context at the turn of the 1800s that the system of the arts established itself as an essential part of theoretical treatises on art and consolidated its specifically philosophical dimension.¹¹ The theoretical codification of art as a system is slightly earlier and goes back to the eighteenth century, especially in the French context. The work that is usually taken as a reference for its foundational character regarding this aspect is *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* (1746) by Charles Batteux.¹² Here, for the first time in modernity, the individual arts are structurally catalogued according to an empirical-inductive perspective that follows a specific organizational criterion. Together they produce what can be called a system, understood as the sum and articulation of different artistic expressions that make up a whole.¹³ However, with German aesthetics between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this system takes on a speculative dimension that did not belong to it previously, and which becomes central in posing the very question of a system of the arts.

¹⁰ Although decisive, the system of individual arts has been seldom addressed from a theoretical or philosophical perspective. Fundamental were the two articles on the subject by Paul Oskar Kristeller, who, however, analyzed the topic from antiquity to the seventeenth century (P.O. Kristeller, *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I*, in “Journal of the History of Ideas”, 12, 4 (1951), pp. 496-527; P.O. Kristeller, *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (II)*, in “Journal of the History of Ideas”, 13, 1 (1952), pp. 17-46), and equally notable is the volume by Thomas Munro, *The Arts and Their Interrelations* (The Liberal Arts Press, New York 1951), which, on the basis of a vast historical and philosophical framework, proposes a complex and rich classification of contemporary art. More recently, it is worth mentioning the volume of Giuseppe Di Liberti, *Il sistema delle arti. Storia e ipotesi* (Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2009), which articulates the organization of the arts through four models (catalog, classification, comparison and, indeed, system). With regard to the era under consideration here, one volume that addresses these issues, with particular attention to the concept of “symbol” in the constitution of arts systems, is M. Titzmann, *Strukturwandel der philosophischen Ästhetik 1800-1880. Der Symbolbegriff als Paradigma*, Fink, München 1978.

¹¹ Cf. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics*, cit., p. 65.

¹² With respect to Batteux’s work, Kristeller speaks of a “decisive step towards a system of the fine arts” (Kristeller, *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (II)*, cit., p. 20).

¹³ Kristeller writes, “only the eighteenth century produced a type of literature in which the various arts were compared with each other and discussed on the basis of common principles, whereas up to that period treatises on poetics and rhetoric, on painting and architecture, and on music had represented quite distinct branches of writing and were primarily concerned with technical precepts rather than with general ideas” (Kristeller, *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I*, cit., p. 497). Cf. Munro, *The Arts and Their Interrelations*, cit., pp. 14-20.

The configuration of the arts into a system, making possible a unitary and organic concept of art, has also made possible the overall philosophical reasoning on art as a discipline. The fact that art is constituted as a system emerges concomitantly with the affirmation of a philosophy of art as a determined and recognized branch of scientific knowledge. Starting from the eighteenth century, therefore, the system of arts makes possible the philosophy of art as a coherent and unitary theoretical reasoning on art.¹⁴

With the German philosophers around 1800, the system of individual arts becomes, probably for the first time, a real philosophical problem, taking on a full speculative dimension. Prior to this, the unitary coherence of the single arts in a system was given by a criterion deduced in a mostly empirical and descriptive way, which gave a picture of the field of art and showed possibilities of application at a mainly technical-practical level. In classical German philosophy, the system becomes both the precipitate of reasoning expressed in the previous parts of the philosophical essays on art and exhibits a further, properly theoretical development. To summarize, with the German authors at the turn of the century, the system of the arts acquires more and more centrality and the possibility of a real philosophy of the arts emerges, in the terms of a philosophy of the system of the arts, where the unifying criterion that innervates the system is given more by the fundamental theoretical approach than by an inductive description of the material in the field. In this sense, the final parts of the art treatises of the period become increasingly necessary for understanding the underlying theoretical concepts, and do not constitute merely secondary appendices at all.

Analyzing the theories of literary genres of the time, Peter Szondi speaks of a radical “leap [*Sprung*]”¹⁵ – which takes place just between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth in the German context – from a model of induc-

¹⁴ Peter Kivy effectively emphasizes this epochal passage and it is useful here to read his words: “Without the modern system there could not be *the* philosophy of art – only philosophizing about things that were later to be seen as of a piece. Before they were seen as of a piece, however, there was nothing for *the* philosophy of art to be about, that is to say, *the* philosophy of all *the* arts. I am not, of course, saying that the arts of music, painting, literature and the rest did not exist before the eighteenth century. What did not exist was the belief that they formed a separate class: that they belonged with each other. And it was that belief that made the discipline of aesthetics possible: that gave it its subject matter, *the* arts, all of them, and the task of saying why they were *they*” (P. Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts. An Essay in Differences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York-Melbourne 1997, pp. 3-4). Cf. Di Liberti, *Il sistema delle arti. Storia e ipotesi*, cit., p. 34 and p. 140.

¹⁵ P. Szondi, *Von der normativen zur spekulativen Gattungspoetik*, in P. Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1974, pp. 7-183, p. 97.

tive-normative kind of classicist and Aristotelian derivation, whose intent was to make order in reality and create compartments, the “*Klassifizierungen*”, which were useful in artistic practice, to a deductive-speculative model, in which the division, the “*Einteilung*”, into literary genres was drawn from the conceptual determinations of literature and art.¹⁶ This conceptual shift, which takes hold at the moment when reflection on art consolidates once and for all as a philosophical discipline, indicates a general perspective, aims to describe aesthetic thoughts in question as a whole and, going far beyond the poetics of literary genres, can also be extended – as I have tried to indicate here – to the articulation of artistic genres.¹⁷

For this reason, it seems meaningful to investigate this juncture in the history of aesthetics in order to identify its significance and then read it, in a retrospective way, as a premise to the more general upheaval and caesura of the “end of art” identified, in this case, as the explosion of the traditional system of individual arts in the twentieth century.

3. *From Poetry to Music*

In his reflection on the relationship between art as a general notion and the individual arts, and within his considerations on the shattering of the arts system in the contemporary era, Theodor W. Adorno briefly dwells on the nineteenth-century attempts to order the multiplicity of individual arts into an organic concept of art that unfolds into a system. Adorno’s suggestion can be taken as a first approach to the trajectory that I intend to outline here:

The great philosophers, Hegel and Schopenhauer among them, have labored, each in his own way, at the question of heterogeneous multiplicity and have attempted to provide a theoretical synthesis. Schopenhauer did so in a hierarchical system, crowned by music; Hegel’s attempt took the form of a historical, dialectical system that was supposed to culminate in poetry.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Szondi, *Von der normativen zur spekulativen Gattungspoetik*, cit., p. 10. Cf. also P. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy, *L’Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1978, p. 11 (Eng. trans. by P. Barnard and C. Lester, *The Literary Absolute. The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, SUNY, Albany (NY) 1988, p. 3).

¹⁷ As noted, among others, by Gérard Genette, it is always difficult to clearly separate the empirical-inductive plan from the speculative-deductive one, when talking about literature and art in general (G. Genette, *Introduction à l’architexte*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1979, pp. 70-71). What I want to emphasize here, however, is a tendency that identifies a shift of focus from one side to the other.

¹⁸ Th.W. Adorno, ‘Die Kunst und die Künste’, in Th.W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10.1, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1967, pp. 432-453, p. 436; Eng. trans. by R. Livingstone, ‘Art and the arts’, in R. Tiedemann (ed.), *Can One Live After*

From Adorno's point of view, Hegel and Schopenhauer are the two most representative thinkers regarding the systems of the arts in the nineteenth century. In particular, they are the models of reference for which individual art is chosen to stand at the head of the hierarchy of the arts, a choice that marked the passage of an era. Two tendencies are indicated: the former finds in poetry the art *par excellence* and the latter, which stands as an alternative, places music in this role.

In effect, in the Hegelian proposal most of the reasoning that had been carried out in the decades preceding him (as often happens with Hegel) and that was characterized in the terms of a system of the arts with "literary traction" is concentrated and articulated in a complete and evident way; Schopenhauer's view, on the other hand, does not come at the end of the development of a trend that precedes him, but constitutes the shift from one paradigm to another. In order to elaborate Adorno's discourse – and in this way to fully understand and give the right value to these two positions in the general perspective of the theoretical production on art in the nineteenth century – it may be useful to take a closer look at both and also at some of the other most relevant positions of the century in the German context.

3.1 *The Literary Paradigm*

With respect to the first tendency, poetry – which is how literature was most commonly referred to at the time, from epic to drama – stands as the apex in the three systematic philosophies of art of the first part of the century, those that Michelet extolled as the most representative aesthetic thoughts of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century: Hegel's perspective and the earlier proposals of Schelling and Solger.¹⁹ Although these three aesthetic views are different from each other and are the product of specific perspectives (which for reasons of space I cannot analyze here in detail), on this point they seem to speak the same language and for this reason it is interesting to recall some passages from them.

As far as Schelling is concerned, it is in his lectures on the *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802-1803) that we find a complete picture of the division of art into individual forms. In those pages poetry is treated at the end of the set of individual arts and is described

Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, pp. 368-387, pp. 371-372.

¹⁹Cf. C.L. Michelet, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der neuesten Deutschen Philosophie mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den gegenwärtigen Kampf Schellings mit der Hegelschen Schule*, Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, Berlin 1843, pp. 219-220.

as “the manifestation of the *essential nature* [*An-sich*] of all art”.²⁰ Characteristic of poetry is the limitlessness of possibilities and the universality of content that it, compared to other arts, can fully manifest. This aspect is due to the use of the word and language, which allows a margin of maneuver in the representation of reality that the more material arts cannot provide. Schelling clearly expresses the hierarchical superiority of poetry with respect to the other arts, when he compares it with the figurative arts that, in his system of individual arts, precede poetry:

All art is the direct reflection of the absolute act of production or of the absolute self-affirmation. Figurative art, however, does not allow this act to appear as something ideal, but rather only through an other, and thus as something real. Poetry in contrast, by being essentially of the same nature as figurative art, allows that absolute act of knowledge to appear directly as cognitive act. Poetry is the higher potency of formative art to the extent that in the artistic image itself it yet maintains the nature and character of the ideal, of the essence, of the universal.²¹

It is thanks to this ability not to be limited by matter and to have a cognitive potential articulated in verbal language that poetry is able to act as a driving force for all the other arts and to correspond to that general meaning of art that Schelling, a few years earlier in 1800, had placed at the top of the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* as the keystone, capable of uniting the subjective and objective dimensions, of his general philosophical system.²²

A similar role is reserved for poetry in Solger’s work, in which art is the main way through which essence comes into existence. In both his most famous works, namely *Erwin* (1815) and the posthumous *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* (1829), when Solger speaks of “art”, he most often means “poetry”. In the third dialogue of *Erwin*, the character Adalbert – the author’s alter ego – describes the role poetry assumes of presenting itself as a synthesis with respect to the multiplicity of the other individual arts:

If, therefore, poetry is a particular art, it is, however, the only one that is at the same time the whole of art, and therefore we can in no way consider it as any other particular thing nor as a particular concept, but only as the very idea of beauty that

²⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Nachlass 6. Philosophie der Kunst und weitere Schriften (1796-1805). Teilband 1*, ed. by C. Binkelman and D. Unger with the collaboration of A. Wieshuber, in F.W.J. Schelling, *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by T. Buchheim, J. Hennigfeld, W.G. Jacobs, J. Jantzen and S. Peetz, Frommann Holzboog, Stuttgart 2018, p. 322; Eng. trans. by D.W. Stott, *The Philosophy of Art*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1989, p. 202.

²¹ *Ibid.*, modified trans.

²² On art as the “keystone” of the Schellingian system see, among others, D. Jähnig, ‘Die Schlüsselstellung der Kunst bei Schelling’, in M. Frank and G. Kurz (eds.), *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1975, pp. 329-340 and T. Griffero, *L’estetica di Schelling*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1996, especially pp. 65-67.

is self-revealing, that is, as the art that now, in all its existence, has become poetry.²³

Here, too, there is the idea of an art which is particular, but at the same time has in itself and represents all the individual arts. Even in this case, the privileged position in the systematic organization is conferred by the verbal aspect of producing an art in the medium of language. Compared to the other arts, finally, for Solger, too, poetry is invested with the greatest universality:

Poetry is the universal art; it is the idea that modifies and determines itself. The opposites of reality in it cannot form different arts, but only different kinds of poetry. However, the idea cannot be considered as an abstract idea; it must have its entire existence in itself, present itself entirely in reality, limit itself by means of its opposites and thereby become objective. Also poetry and the idea that lives in it must assume a reality, which appears, however, only as the reality of the active idea, not of the object. If we did not recognize the active idea everywhere, poetry would not be the way through which the idea creates reality for itself.²⁴

Nevertheless, it is in Hegel's work and, specifically, in the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (both in the edition published by Hotho between 1835-38/1842, and in all the manuscripts of the students' notebooks) that the guiding role of poetry comes to light in all its power, reaffirming what was present in previous systems of art. This allows us to attribute to the Stuttgart philosopher, by the extension and clarity in his proposal, the role of the representative of this tendency, attributed to him by Adorno in the statement presented at the beginning of this overview.

For Hegel, poetry is “the most accomplished art, the art κατ'ἐξοχήν”.²⁵ One of the characteristics that determines it as the main art of the system is how it moves more and more away from the sensible aspect to approach, more than the other arts, the spiritual dimension. Freeing itself from the “importance of the material”,²⁶ the internal relationship between imagination and the external world is modified: poetry's medium is not constituted by something sensibly material, but imagination itself becomes the material that

²³ K.W.F. Solger, *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst*, ed. by W. Kernmann, Fink, München 1971, p. 223; my trans.

²⁴ K.W.F. Solger, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, ed. by G. Pinna, Meiner, Hamburg 2017, p. 184; my trans.

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel, im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler*, ed. by A. Gethmann-Siefert and B. Collenberg-Plotnikov with the collaboration of F. Iannelli and K. Berr, Fink, München 2004, p. 197; my trans.

²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 15, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 232; Eng. trans. by T.M. Knox, *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, p. 966.

poetry elaborates. Its content is “the spiritual presence-to-self existing in an element that belongs to spirit itself”.²⁷ This makes poetry reach the highest level of depth and freedom in relation to what constitutes the essence of art:

For the nature of poetry coincides in general with the conception of the beauty of art and works of art as such, since the poetic imagination differs from the imagination in the visual arts and music where, owing to the kind of material in which it intends to work, it is restricted in its creation in many ways and driven in separate and one-sided directions. The poetic imagination, per contra, is subject only to the essential demands of an Ideal and artistically adequate mode of representation.²⁸

The intimate contact with what is most authentically close to the concept of art allows poetic art, compared to the other arts, to develop more freely and in multiple directions.²⁹ For this reason, the breadth of its possibilities in terms of expressive capacity and the richness of the choice of representational content is almost unlimited and makes it the “total art”.³⁰ Because of its spiritual dimension poetry belongs, from a systematic point of view, to the romantic arts, but the absence of limitations means that it does not have to historically identify itself with a specific art form (symbolic, classical, romantic); poetry effectively crosses them all, thus becoming “universal art”.³¹ Here, too, the aspects of universality and completeness draw poetry’s profile. Literary art sums up in itself the characteristics that were dispersed in the other determined arts and, in this, lies the leading role of poetry.³²

²⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst I. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1820/21 und 1823* (Nachschrift Hotho 1823), in G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 28, 1, ed. by N. Hebing, Meiner, Hamburg 2015, pp. 215-511, p. 486; Eng. trans. by R.B. Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art. The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2014, p. 407.

²⁸ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, cit., p. 238; Eng. trans., p. 971. Cf. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik*, cit., p. 197; G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst. Vorlesungen von 1826*, ed. by A. Gethmann-Siefert, J.-I. Kwon, and K. Berr, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2005, p. 223.

²⁹ Cf. S. Vizzardelli, *La trasversalità estetica della poesia in Hegel*, in “Quaderni di Estetica e Critica”, I (1996), pp. 41-66, p. 47.

³⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 14, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 262; Eng. trans. by T.M. Knox, *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, p. 627. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst I. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1820/21 und 1823* (Ascheberg 1820/1821), in G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 28, 1, ed. by N. Hebing, Meiner, Hamburg 2015, pp. 1-214, p. 290.

³¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, cit., p. 233; Eng. trans., p. 967.

³² I have tried to set forth a more thorough description of the model role of poetry in Hegel in F. Campana, *The End of Literature, Hegel, and the Contemporary Novel*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2019, pp. 135-144. Cf. also F.D. Wagner, *Hegels Philosophie der Dichtung*, Bouvier, Bonn 1974, pp. 73-125; M. Ophälders, ‘Poesia e morte dell’arte’, in M. Farina and A.L. Siani (eds.), *L'estetica di Hegel*, il Mulino, Bologna 2014, pp. 213-228.

However, poetry's role as a model for the other arts is by no means non-problematic, and its very position at the apex of the system makes its guiding role somewhat ambiguous. Its liberation from sensible materiality, which is the proper character of the spiritual form of art, brings it dangerously close, one might say, to the other two forms of absolute spirit, namely religion and philosophy, which share with poetry (and not with the other individual arts) the use of the verbal medium.³³ Even if the high degree of spirituality succeeds in bridging the negative treatment of the sensible dimension, it belongs to its very nature to be at risk of stepping outside the boundaries of its proper form and mutating into something other than what it is.³⁴ In this condition, of model and exception, is expressed the paradoxical character of poetry in Hegel, that is, of the art that is supremely art but, at the same time, of the art closest to what can be considered its own end.³⁵

Hegel therefore represents – in this peculiar and partly problematic way – the tendency of the first half of the century to conceive art as a system that has poetry as its culmination. The three positions that have been quickly touched upon, even in the diversity of their general philosophical approaches, almost seem to echo each other in emphasizing the centrality of poetry. In order to show the predominance of the paradigm in the first half of the century even in authors not strictly belonging to the same political-cultural context, it is worth at least remembering that the same tendency, with different modalities and intentions, is also present in a large part of early Romanticism. Just think of the theory of “progressive universal poetry” in fragment 116 of Schlegel's “Athenaeum”, in which poetry does not represent or lead in relation to other individual artistic genres, but has the more general task of crossing and including – almost encompassing, one might say – the scientific disciplines and other areas of culture as a whole.³⁶

³³ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 14, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 261; Eng. trans. by T.M. Knox, *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975, p. 626-627.

³⁴ In the version of the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* published by Hotho, we can read: “poetry appears as that particular art in which art itself begins at the same time to dissolve and acquire in the eyes of philosophy its point of transition to religious representation as such, as well as to the prose of scientific thought. The realm of the beautiful [...] is bordered on one side by the prose of finitude and commonplace thinking, out of which art struggles on its way to truth, and on the other side the higher spheres of religion and philosophy where there is a transition to that apprehension of the Absolute which is still further removed from the sensuous sphere” (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, cit., pp. 234-235; Eng. trans., p. 968, modified trans.). Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst I. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1820/21 und 1823* [Nachschrift Hotho 1823], cit., p. 486-487; Eng. trans., p. 408.

³⁵ Cf. Campana, *The End of Literature, Hegel, and the Contemporary Novel*, cit., p. 142.

³⁶ Cf. F. Schlegel, *Die Athenäums-Fragmente*, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*,

3.2 The Musical Paradigm

Within this frame, which represents the philosophical reflection on art of the first part of the nineteenth century in a significant – although not exhaustive – way, Schopenhauer's proposal exhibits the second trend in this discourse. His view on the subject does not play the same role as the Hegelian one; that is, it does not represent a great synthesis of a previous season already widely developed, but rather initiates a subsequent season. In his work music takes the place of poetry as a paradigmatic art. In this context occurs the shift – in some ways epochal, although not as radical as those that will take place in the next century – within the system of arts. Although some premises in this direction had already appeared,³⁷ it is with Schopenhauer that we are faced with a turning point in the conception of the systems of individual arts and in the general concept of art. If, for Hegel, poetry is the art that more than any other represents the general concept of art and, at the same time, expresses the paradoxical condition of being an art on the border with something else that is not art, so too in Schopenhauer music has a leading role, but is positioned almost outside the field of arts. After having considered the other particular arts, in §52 of Book III of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819)³⁸ Schopenhauer addresses music, noting that it “remains excluded, and was bound to be excluded, from our consideration, for in the systematic connexion of our discussion there was no fitting place for it”.³⁹ The somewhat exceptional character that was explicitly attributed to poetry by Hegel is now attributed to music. Music finds itself isolated from the other arts, because for Schopenhauer, at least on the surface, it is not possible to find in music the imitative character present in the other arts. As had happened with

vol. 2.1, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I* (1796-1801), ed. by H. Eichner, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, München-Paderborn-Wien, Thomas Verlag, Zürich 1967, Fr. 116, pp. 182-183; Eng. trans. by P. Firchow, *Philosophical Fragments*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 1991, pp. 31-32.

³⁷ The most significant proposals of Romanticism concern literature, but it would be wrong not to consider it as a multifaceted phenomenon, within which there are also thinkers, such as for example W.H. Wackenroder and E.T.A. Hoffman, who had already placed music at the center of their view and will have a considerable influence on the second part of the century. Cf. P. D'Angelo, *L'estetica del romanticismo*, Bologna, il Mulino 1997, pp. 182-191; E. Fubini, *L'estetica musicale dal Settecento a oggi*, Einaudi, Torino 2001, pp. 115-120 and pp. 139-146.

³⁸ The first edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* is dated 1819, but as known will have a considerable success only towards the middle of the century.

³⁹ A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 1, Haffmans, Zürich 1988, p. 509; Eng. trans. by E.F.J. Payne, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, Dover Publications, New York, 1969, p. 256.

poetry in previous authors, however, music acquires a deeper and more authentic meaning than the other arts. It is able to reveal us to ourselves in a more radical way; it gains the self of the world more authentically; it brings to expression something truer and more powerful because it is understood without mediation by all. And, in the specific terminology of the author, it is able to express the will in the purest way, because it does not express only the image of ideas – it does not express “a shadow”, says Schopenhauer, as other arts do – but goes to “the essence”⁴⁰ of things and becomes the objectification of the will itself.⁴¹ In this sense music becomes the individual art that in the highest degree expresses the potential of art with respect to the world of phenomena. In comparison with the other arts, it succeeds in having in itself that universality which until then was proper to poetry: music is “an entirely universal language, whose distinctness surpasses even that of the world of perception itself”.⁴² In this way, with respect to the other arts and with respect, for example, to conceptual formulations, it brings to light something original, absolute, preceding everything else; it is the universal art, first among the others, prior to all the arts and to the world itself, because it expresses a more hidden and primordial dimension of the world.

This view leads to a rather significant change in the conception of art and the arts system in the second half of the nineteenth century. In considering music the center of the system of arts Schopenhauer, first of all, abandons the primacy of the imitative quality as a relevant quality of the same system, since music is the least suitable for this purpose among the arts. Moreover, he does not consider as decisive the possibility of a verbal articulation similar to that of thought; consequently, he does not feel it neces-

⁴⁰ Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, cit., p. 513; Eng. trans., p. 257.

⁴¹ Schopenhauer expresses himself as follows: “Thus music is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself is, indeed as the Ideas are, the multiplied phenomenon of which constitutes the world of individual things. Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the Ideas” (Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, cit., p. 513; Eng. trans., p. 257). The idea of music as a more original language, capable of expressing a deeper dimension than the literary one, was already present in authors such as Herder and Hamann (cf. Fubini, *L'estetica musicale dal Settecento a oggi*, cit., pp. 109-115).

⁴² Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, cit., p. 521; Eng. trans., p. 256. Now it is music that takes on the greatest expressive capacity: “All possible efforts, stirrings, and manifestations of the will, all the events that occur within man himself and are included by the reasoning faculty in the wide, negative concept of feeling, can be expressed by the infinite number of possible melodies, but always in the universality of mere form without the material, always only according to the in-itself, not to the phenomenon, as it were the innermost soul of the phenomenon without the body” (Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, cit., pp. 521-523; Eng. trans., p. 262).

sary for art to be represented by that particular expression which could approach, precisely by means of the word, more traditional dimensions of (verbal) rationality. Here the model of art is revealing the substratum, the hidden or even unconscious level of that rationality. This is a view that will be established in the following decades, developing and deepening in various directions, first of all those of Nietzsche and Wagner.

Although we can distinguish different phases of Nietzsche's thought (and different phases of his relationship with Wagner, which in part also determine some variations among the moments of his thought), music stands as the constitutive and central art in the general concept of art from the beginnings until the end of his intellectual journey (a journey that also sees him as a discreet pianist, composer, and music critic for the "Deutsche Allgemeine"). Already in his *Das griechische Musikdrama* (1870) he speaks of music as "the true universal language that is understood everywhere"⁴³ and, shortly thereafter, it is precisely in the choral and musical dimension that Nietzsche identifies the Dionysian power that allows tragedy proper to come to light in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872).⁴⁴ In that context, the young Nietzsche identifies in music a sort of primordial principle of art, prior to any subsequent superstructure; music is the force that pervades an art that is gradually eroded by the representation of the everyday present in Euripides' tragedies, whose theater is nothing more than the "mask" of rationalism circulated by Socrates.⁴⁵ Here music is not so much the art that stands as the first among the arts because it includes *ex post*, at the end of a systematic path, all the other particular arts. In this case, it is the first of the arts, because it precedes the particular arts and gives the most original and authentic version of them, the version that has been lost with the passage of time, which corresponds to the truest idea of art that human beings have experienced and that could be recovered, in Nietzsche's

⁴³ F. Nietzsche, *Das griechische Musikdrama*, in F. Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari, vol. 1, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1988, pp. 515-532, p. 529; Eng. trans. by P. Bishop, *Das griechische Musikdrama. The Greek Music Drama*, Contra Mundum Press, New York 2013, p. 32.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche write, «the very element which defines the character of Dionysiac music (and thus of music generally): the power of its sound to shake us to our very foundations, the unified stream of melody and the quite incomparable world of harmony» (F. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I-IV. Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-1873. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München and de Gruyter, New York-Berlin, 1988, p. 33; Eng. trans. by R. Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. by R. Geuss and R. Speirs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge *et al.* 2007, p. 21).

⁴⁵ Cf. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I-IV. Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-1873. Kritische Studienausgabe*, cit., pp. 81-88; Eng. trans., pp. 59-64.

opinion at the time, precisely thanks to Wagner's work.

In the non-linear or systematic continuation of his thought, the conviction of the absolute priority of music remains: in several writings from 1888, we find a recurring and effective statement, namely, that "without music, life would be a mistake".⁴⁶ In his later considerations, Nietzsche goes beyond Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian views, distancing himself from them more and more, further articulating his position on the relationship between music and verbal language, but ultimately insisting on the need to make music prevail over words.⁴⁷

Certainly, the primacy of music in Nietzsche's work derives, from a theoretical point of view, from Schopenhauerian influence (especially in the first period of his work). But there is no doubt that it was also stimulated, precisely, by the figure of Richard Wagner, who constituted first a positive reference point and then a completely polemical one.

In his musical praxis, but also in his theoretical writings such as *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850), and *Oper und Drama* (1951) (whose positions cross and are inextricably intertwined with the artistic gesture), Wagner describes the project of conceiving musical drama in the terms of the "total artwork". The proposal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which – at least on a theoretical level – the perfect coincidence of words, notes and dramatic action is aspired to can be read as a further way of interpreting the organization of the arts system. In this case, the starting point is inevitably music and, compared to the views of Nietzsche and in part to those of Schopenhauer, the theoretical perspective proposed is not so much that of the priority of music as an eccen-

⁴⁶ This sentence occurs in the letter to Georg Brandes dated 27/03/1888 (F. Nietzsche, *Briefe. Januar 1887-Januar 1889*, in *Nietzsche Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari with the collaboration of H. Anania-Hess, 3, 5, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1984, p. 278-280, p. 280). A partially different version already appeared in a letter dated 15/01/1888 to Heinrich Köselitz ("Life without music is simply a mistake"; Nietzsche, *Briefe. Januar 1887-Januar 1889*, cit., pp. 231-233, p. 232). The sentence then occurs in posthumous fragments 15 [118] and 16 [24] of the beginning and summer of 1888 (F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. Anfang 1888 bis Anfang Januar 1889*, in *Nietzsche Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari, 8, 3, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1972, pp. 271-274, p. 272 e p. 284). It finally appears in *Twilight of the Idols*, written in 1888 and published the following year (F. Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner. Götzen-Dämmerung. Nachgelassene Schriften (August 1888-Anfang Januar 1889): Der Antichrist. Ecce Homo. Dionysos-Dithyramben. Nietzsche contra Wagner*, in *Nietzsche Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari, 6, 3, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1969, p. 58; Eng. trans. by J. Norman, ed. by A. Ridley and J. Norman, *The Anti-Christ. Ecce Homo. Twilight of the Idols. And Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge et al. 2005, p. 160).

⁴⁷ Cf. Th. Ahrend, *Das Verhältnis von Musik und Sprache bei Nietzsche*, in "Nietzsche-forschung", 2 (1995), pp. 153-166.

tric art with respect to the system (perhaps because it is original); rather, music, through scenic representation, is conceived of as a guide, which crosses the other particular arts and arises as a large enclosure in which the different arts present in it seek a balanced equilibrium among themselves as parts within the whole.⁴⁸ Wagner – who precisely theorizes a praxis that tries to realize – identifies the means by which to produce a unitary whole capable of resuming and reviving a mythical dimension now lost. We see this, for instance, in the elaboration of the so-called “endless melody”, intended to break the patterns of traditional Italian and French melodrama; in the use of the *Leitmotiv*, a connecting thread able to amalgamate different situations; and in the strategy of making the orchestra no longer a mere accompaniment, but a true protagonist of the musical action.⁴⁹ In some ways, this conception could be compared to the early Romantic concept of progressive universal poetry, in which, starting from a specific perspective (in that case poetic art), an attempt is made to encompass the entirety of artistic expressions. The meaning of the role of music in Wagner therefore seems partly different from that encountered in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but the starting point is the same. Indeed, there is no doubt that Wagner’s proposal is part of the trend of the second half of the nineteenth century in which music is at the center of the system, and it is clear that it further confirms the shift of the center of gravity of the arts system to a dimension that is no longer literary.

4. Meanings of the Paradigm Shift

The replacement of poetry by music in some of the most relevant aesthetic perspectives of the nineteenth century in Germany delineates an epochal moment in the conception of art. It is a retreat of literary art and an advancement of musical art that, if not yet definitively upsetting, begins in part to disturb the solidity of the very concept of art. This passage is an indication of the need to identify a different way of thinking about art and thinking through art; it expresses a change in aesthetic conception that is a change in

⁴⁸ With respect to the hierarchy of the arts and to the difference from the Hegelian approach, cf. C. Dahlhaus, *Wagners Konzeption des musikalischen Dramas*, Bosse, Regensburg 1971, p. 13. For a recent study of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, see H.M. Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016.

⁴⁹ Within the vast bibliography on Wagner, a recent volume that analyzes these Wagnerian artistic techniques (and their influence) is M. Bribitzer-Stull M., *Understanding the Leitmotiv. From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015.

the kind of rationality that is intended to be brought into play. This movement from one paradigm to another is quite significant within the artistic context and foreshadows, in minor but significant terms, the upheavals of the following century, the contemporary “end of art” as a radical rethinking of the artistic forms that describe the overall meaning of the word “art”.

From a strictly philosophical-artistic point of view, there are two noteworthy elements of this shift. First, there is the strong distance from the secular mimetic attitude of art. Music can mainly evoke or reveal something invisible to the eyes, maybe something original and profound, while to a lesser extent it is suitable for the description and imitation of reality. The mimetic attitude, mainly due to the emergence of cinema and photography, will later be one of the first elements to enter into crisis with the work of the twentieth-century avant-garde. In the second place, there is the choice of distancing oneself from the verbal articulation proper to poetry which, in the first half of the century, went hand in hand with the affirmation of reasoning on art, recently constituted as a scientific discipline. From the second half of the century onwards, the scientific level, based on a verbal dimension, and art will find it more difficult to intertwine and new kinds of rationality (or, in some ways, irrationality) will emerge in both cases. One could say that the scientific, rational and, above all, verbal dimension was no longer able to account for artistic experience, which seemed to enter territories less comprehensible to ordinary logic and capable of linguistic explanation. The search for a new rationality, non-linear and not directly recognizable, is also part of twentieth-century developments, for example, in the way in which artistic genres, mixing and mingling with each other, try to find new ways – not necessarily irrational, but productive of a different and new rationality – to express themselves, until they reach real languages difficult to categorize with conventional rationality and artistic models of the tradition.

This abandonment by art of the more classically rational dimension is also reflected in two further elements. On the one hand, philosophies of art with “literary traction” seek a largely systematic configuration. In the case of Schelling and, above all, Hegel, this is a necessary prerogative of the discourse on art in order for it to be valid, i.e., scientific.⁵⁰ The case of Schopenhauer, especially

⁵⁰ As far as Solger and the *Frühromantik* are concerned, the discourse is partly different, in the sense that the need for the system is more problematic and sometimes there is even an aversion to such a concept, but there is nevertheless an overall look that tries not to leave aside the aspects of reality in their multiplicity.

in the systematic structure and attitude of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, is indicative of his role as a watershed between one tendency and the other (in fact, the discourse of his later writings is different). On the other hand, we find Nietzsche and his search for the most authentic truth through the destruction of systematic unity, aphoristic writing, and only partially linear sequences of thought.⁵¹ The second element, then, that can be deduced from the constitution of the two groups of thinkers, is that of the belonging of the literary paradigm to the academic sphere (an aspect that goes hand in hand with the search for a systematic unity and a rational, conceptual and verbal attitude towards art), while the musical paradigm exhibits, in its representatives, difficulties with the university institution (Schopenhauer), or a progressive rejection of it (Nietzsche) or even a belonging of a different kind, more specifically artistic (Wagner).

Moreover, from a more general point of view – which might be called the perspective of a philosophy of art history – a critic and literary theorist such as William Marx identifies in the nineteenth century a progressive affirmation of a “new paradigm”, that of music, within an epochal process of “devalorization”, of “loss of prestige” of literature, a tendency that puts literature in the background in the overall system of knowledge and leaves room for other forms, such as music.⁵² This tendency to “devalorization” is intuited also from the historical-conceptual point of view. As noted above, the authors of the first tendency, in fact, mainly use the term “*Poesie*”, in order to indicate the complex of literary art (while they use the term “*Lyrik*” to mean what we nowadays properly call “poetry”); usually, furthermore, “*Poesie*” is in a dialectical relationship with “*Prose*”, which generally indicates literature in its coming to terms with modernity and therefore in its progressive loss of its primordial character and power. Such authors tend not to use – especially on a technical level – the term “*Literatur*”. The latter will definitively abandon the generic description of *humanae litterae* (or *belles lettres*) and will assert itself, following a bumpy and tortuous road, in its current meaning only during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this way, also from a linguistic point of view, it is possible to perceive in the passage from “*Poesie*” to “*Literatur*” a process of disempowering literature in the context of the arts. On the opposite side, it is precisely in the course of

⁵¹ Cf. B. Greiner, *Friedrich Nietzsche. Versuch und Versuchung in seinen Aphorismen*, Fink, München 1972.

⁵² W. Marx, *L'adieu à la littérature. Histoire d'une dévalorisation XVIII^e-XX^e siècle*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2005, especially pp. 88-90.

the nineteenth century⁵³ that some of the fundamental concepts concerning music become established. As Lydia Goehr has shown, the very idea of “musical work”, as a complete and unique entity, written by an individual who is socially recognized as its author, is affirmed only after 1800 with the “Beethoven Paradigm” and gradually established itself over the course of the century.⁵⁴ There is therefore an opposite movement, taking up William Marx, of the “valorization” of musical art, which had never been seen before. And this, in addition to the philosophical-artistic reasons mentioned above, is for socio-cultural reasons, first of all the affirmation and widespread recognition of the figure of the composer, the foundation of music academies and public societies, and the large-scale spread of institutional spaces in which communities can enjoy music, from concert halls to opera houses.

The devaluation of literature and the corresponding valorization of music show, even on a socio-cultural level, how the traditional way of conceiving the system of arts (and therefore art in general), through a system based on literature as the main art, seems to no longer be sufficient to express the kind of rationality that the art of the time requires. The shift towards an art such as music, which expresses itself in a field that does not contemplate some of the main features of literature (from mimetic possibility to verbal articulation), shows the need to explore new and different approaches with respect to the way of thinking about the artistic fact. Through art emerges the need to change modes of reasoning and this emerges precisely from the way in which the systems of art and art in general are conceived. This is a need that, with decidedly greater force, we find in the context of art after the “end of art”, where the languages proposed are unconventional and where we often even have difficulty proposing categories to describe them. However, it is not a necessity that arises suddenly, and this first shift from poetic art to musical art, with the search for different ways to conceive art, can be interpreted as the first fracture that heralds subsequent upheavals.

5. Conclusions

As much as historically wide interpretations leave room for the possibility of identifying counterexamples and parallel histories that

⁵³ Cf. R. Rosenberg, ‘Literarisch/Literatur’, in K. Bark *et al.* (eds.), *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden. Medien-Popular*, vol. 4, Metzler, Stuttgart-Weimar 2002, pp. 665-693.

⁵⁴ L. Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works. An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 204-242.

remain below the radar with respect to general trends,⁵⁵ an attempt has been made in this article to show how there is an epochal shift from poetry (i.e., literature) to music between the first and second part of the nineteenth century, which seems rich in implications for what the art world experienced successively. This shift has many reasons and expresses various meanings that all contribute to producing a decisive upheaval within the system of the arts.

First of all, there are philosophical-artistic meanings, such as the abandonment of mimetic and verbal dimensions. These are accompanied by deeper reasons that could be summarized in the fact that the verbal, conceptual, and systematic (and consequently also academic) dimension no longer seems to be sufficient to deal with art, and instead there emerges the urge to explore more obscure, evocative, less directly comprehensible and even irrational levels. This has led to a de-valorization of literature and a parallel valorization of music. Finally, there is a whole series of historical-material reasons (from the creation of new spaces to the emergence of new social figures) that contribute to describe and, in part, encourage the shift from literature to music.

In general, shifting the center of gravity from literature to music is only a first step in the subsequently more thorough destabilization in the arts system, ruptures caused by what has been identified as the contemporary “end of art”. A movement of this kind expresses the need to find new and different ways to produce and enjoy art; this need has to do, more broadly, with the way of conceiving art and the world through art. The shift analyzed here represents the decisive beginning of such ruptures, enabling us to glimpse the logic behind some of the most significant changes in the concept of art in the twentieth century.

⁵⁵ Indeed, one can identify counterexamples to the proposed framework. On the one hand, there is the presence of a philosophy of music at the center of some discussions, for example, in the Romantic context (see the already cited examples of W.H. Wackenroder and E.T.A. Hoffman); on the other, one can identify the persistence of some aesthetic theories with literature at their peak even after the middle of the century (for example, F. Thierisch, F.T. Vischer, K.R. Köstlin, E. Hartmann, M. Schaller; cf. Titzmann, *Strukturwandel der philosophischen Ästhetik 1800-1880. Der Symbolbegriff als Paradigma*, cit., pp. 52-53 e 57-65; Di Liberti, *Il Sistema della arti. Storia e ipotesi*, cit., pp. 97-98). These cases, however, only further articulate a picture where the underlying tendencies, those that succeed in most faithfully restoring the complexity of an era, seem to remain those of a shift from a greater focus on the literary work of art, as far as the first part of the century is concerned, to that on the musical dimension, in the second part.

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