



MAHLER'S
SYMPHONIC
SONATAS

SETH MONAHAN

OXFORD STUDIES IN MUSIC THEORY

Mahler's Symphonic Sonatas

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For Gloria Littlefield Hull, whom I miss even now

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ABOUT THE COMPANION WEBSITE

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Annotated Short Scores

To conserve space, the text contains no extended musical examples. Instead, I have prepared short-score reductions of each of the four movements discussed in Parts Two and Three (Symphonies nos. 3/I, 4/I, 6/I, and 6/IV), annotated to accompany my analyses. Readers are invited to consult these scores often while reading Chapters 4 through 7; the pdfs can be viewed online, downloaded, and/or printed as necessary. I have also prepared reductions of Mahler's three earliest sonata forms (Symphonies nos. 1/I, 1/IV, 2/I). These are less extensively annotated, but they should prove useful in conjunction with discussions of these movements throughout the book, especially in Chapter 1.

The reductions reproduce as much detail as possible from Mahler's orchestral scores in a two- to four-stave format. Readers will find all of Mahler's notes, in register (including all octave doublings) and with the proper articulations and sensibly simplified dynamics. There are only three consistent omissions: (1) cumbersome textural arpeggiations in the harp, celeste, and occasionally strings; (2) grace notes used merely to thicken string textures; (3) most nonpitched percussion. Given the immensity of this transcription project, wrong notes are inevitable. But they are also easily fixed. I would be grateful to hear from readers about any inaccuracies or typographical errors.

Larger Diagrams and Figures

To fit in the book's printable dimensions, a number of my diagrams have been printed with smaller type than is ideal. I have therefore made a pdf that includes all sixty figures, expanded to fit letter-sized pages—a size increase of up to 144 percent. These can be viewed online or printed at readers' discretion.

Mahler's Symphonic Sonatas

Introduction

We cannot remain indifferent to knowing what an ingenious man like Mahler had in mind with each of these movements and how he would have explained their puzzling coherence.

—Eduard Hanslick on Mahler's First Symphony (1900)¹

Half a century after his “renaissance” of the 1960s, Mahler's star is still on the ascendant. Remarkably, his time continues to come. As the twenty-first century winds into its second decade, a steady stream of essays, monographs, dissertations, and recordings suggests that the wave of interest in his life and music has yet to reach its peak. And yet for a composer of his stature and cachet, Mahler has received only cursory attention from the music-analytical community. With only a few notable exceptions, Anglo-American music theorists have remained curiously resistant to the Mahler bug.²

The reasons are many and complex. One could cite the purely practical dimension, that Mahler operates on a scale and level of detail that vastly outstrip what one can hope to encapsulate in a modestly sized article. There is also the question of equipment—that the composer's eclecticism and rhetorical artifice seem designed to frustrate analytical tools built to detect coherence, integration, or unity. But there may be something even more fundamental about Mahler's idiom that repels certain analytical temperaments: an impression that by engaging his music, one is led inevitably away from the cherished detail-work of music theory to broad and unruly questions of biographical, programmatic, and narrative meaning.

If such an impression exists, it may have less to do with the music itself than with reception traditions that have sometimes been too sporadic in their attention to musical specifics. Robert Samuels writes that Mahler's music prevents us from “disentangling” questions of “narrow musical detail” from a those of

1. *Neue Freie Presse* 20 November 1900; cited in Painter and Varwig, eds. 2002, 289.

2. Though hardly neglected, Mahler has enjoyed nothing like the analytical attention lavished on his iconic contemporaries Brahms and Schoenberg. Consider that prior to 2011, two of the discipline's flagship journals—*Music Theory Spectrum* and the *Journal of Music Theory*—had never published an article on Mahler's music. And in recent decades, some of the most interesting readings have come from authors who do not self-identify as music “theorists” at all—e.g., Mark Evan Bonds (1996), Julian Johnson (2009), Raymond Knapp (2003), and Martin Scherzinger (1995).

a “general philosophical scope” (1995, 90). While it is clear what Samuels means—to sideline such philosophical questions would be to miss the point of Mahler’s entire enterprise—we might well argue that history has shown it all too *easy* to disentangle these spheres. Generations of critics have energetically tackled the broadest issues of meaning in Mahler, but they have often rushed into high-flying hermeneutics without a penetrating consideration of the musical facts on the ground. Excellent and valuable work abounds, but questions of program, autobiography, and intellectual milieu have often preempted the vigorous scrutiny of the musical trace. Indifference, it seems, is a two-way street, and one ample enough for theory and Mahler studies to swerve wide of each other for decades, with only the occasional passing glance.

This book is my attempt to break that stalemate, to bridge these scholarly cultures by bringing a new analytical rigor to the task of interpreting Mahler. It is, above all, a study about the composer’s complex and career-long relationship with that most hallowed Beethovenian institution, the symphonic sonata-allegro. But it is driven throughout by a far broader concern as well, and one that took on a kind of evangelical intensity as the project gained steam: the conviction that after more than a century, we have only begun to scratch the surface of these remarkable works. Though it will pay plenty of interpretive dividends ahead, this is not a hermeneutic claim *per se*. Rather, it is a basic epistemic argument: I’m suggesting that we literally don’t *know* the symphonies as well as we may think we do, and certainly not on a level of detail that does justice either to their narrative complexity or to their coherence as an evolving corpus.

For some, I know, this might seem an unfair appraisal. After all, Mahlerians are nothing if not devout listeners, and the scholars among them have long had a firm grasp of the symphonies’ musical basics. Still, there is no denying that Mahler’s enthusiasts have spent far more time admiring complete symphonies from a distance than rolling up their sleeves to dig into individual movements. And it is easy to see why: more than any symphonist before or since, Mahler built his multimovement works to be grasped as integral teleological wholes. It is only natural that his champions would follow suit. But in their preoccupation with transsymphonic storytelling, Mahlerians have given ironically short shrift to the related—and equally vital—question of narrative design *within* movements.

This is crucial, and worth clarifying. It is well known that Mahler’s moment-to-moment vicissitudes elicit a powerful narrativizing response in many listeners.³ And we can be sure that connoisseurs have a well-developed sense of how these localized narrative envelopes join to form a given movement’s gestural/expressive totality. But for all their merits and utility, these sorts of ad hoc, impressionistic narratives are also limited in several key respects. First, they are likely to pass over critical elements that are *not* evident on casual or even close listening—the sorts of “deeper” patterns and processes that have long been the coin of the theorist’s realm and which Mahlerians have generally been slow to pursue. Second, they will

3. This was noted already in the composer’s lifetime. In 1905, Max Kalbeck observed that his admired colleague composed “as if he would compel us to manufacture a logical or narrative connection” between the music’s disjunct surface events (McCull 1996, 182; see Chapter 3).

tend by their very nature to shed little light into the broader grammar of plot that links any given movement with siblings in the same corpus.

My aim in this project is to overcome exactly these limitations, by engaging Mahler's single-movement narratives with uncommon precision and intertextual scope. Before getting into specifics, though, it is worth noting that such an approach offers both the incentive and the means to press through the broader "epistemic" impasse noted earlier. For if one is serious about understanding a movement as a integrated, purposeful whole—the natural end of any narrative inquiry, I think—then one must try to come to terms with each of its moments, all of its many internal events.

With works as vast as Mahler's, though, such comprehensivity requires an entrepreneurial spirit that is seldom seen in the scholarly literature. To put it plainly: when Mahler's interpreters have zoomed in on telling details, they have tended to revisit passages discussed extensively in earlier literature—often embroidering observations first made decades before—and even while vast symphonic expanses remain all but uncharted. This is true even of a critic as widely admired as Theodor W. Adorno, whose epochal 1960 monograph draws its examples mainly from excerpts first examined by Bekker and others in the 1920s (Metzger 2007, 210).

What is more, these familiar analytical vignettes tend to give little consideration to how the music at hand fits into a wider context or narrative arc. Thus we read endlessly about the morbid symbolism of the Sixth Symphony's hammer blows, but never about their crucial role in the repulsion of the Finale's would-be secondary key, D major—an intricately wrought story spanning over three hundred bars. Thus the countless invitations to marvel at the Fourth Symphony's elided retransition, but never a consideration of how it relates to the graphic—and, for Mahler, entirely atypical—suppression of the primary-theme incipit *throughout* the development and recapitulation. Thus the widespread awe at the Third Symphony's cataclysmic expositional rupture (m. 363), but no notice that its harmonic progression—a common-tone LP shift from D to B \flat —is an explosive reversal of the one that set the exposition's thematic process into motion over two-hundred bars prior.⁴

I could go on—but the point, I hope, is clear: even the passages that we think we know best can often be made richer and more resonant when placed in an expressively meaningful, musically robust plot trajectory. And if we want these insights often, we need to cultivate a spirit of discovery, a willingness to pose new questions and to range widely through the superabundant, never-incidental particulars of Mahler's scores, ever watchful for new inroads and insights. That is no mean feat, to be sure. I can only hope that by the end, readers will agree that the rewards are well worth the effort.

In the meantime, though, the specific task ahead of us is to better understand the role of sonata form in Mahler's creative imagination. So let us get to it. In what

4. I discuss all of these subplots in Chapters 5 through 7, on Symphonies nos. 4/I, 3/I, and 6/IV, respectively.

follows, I argue that sonata form was many things to Mahler over the years: a playground for programmatic caprice; a symbolic stage for modeling social realities; an archaic institution to be blasted cheerfully apart; or an authoritarian ritual to be grimly reenacted. But underlying each of them is his reliance on sonata form as a narrative vehicle, a means of musical storytelling. Predictably, this view runs headlong into some age-old biases. For many twentieth-century writers, the idea that Mahler—the master architect and modernist titan—would have placed any serious stock in a scheme so anachronistic and dramatically inert would have seemed perplexing, even paradoxical. Many actively resisted it: sonata form might be a vestigial scaffolding or background presence—a “husk,” as Adorno once wrote (1992, 77)—but it could never be the main event.

Chapter 1 offers a fundamentally new view: that sonata form factored crucially into Mahler's creative vision from his earliest completed works. There, I argue that the genre's defining teleological arc, the establishment and eventual resolution of tonal tension, gave Mahler a flexible plot-schema that could be adapted for any number of narrative/expressive scenarios—including those in which that resolution is never actually achieved. Far from being superfluous or vestigial, sonata form is often at the very heart of the matter, as a process whose success or failure is closely mirrored in the pathos and exaltation of the musical surface.

Note also that this key thesis is based not on any single piece but rather on patterns found across Mahler's corpus. This is crucial. For of the book's four principal aims—all discussed below—none is more vital than its attempt to grasp the deeper grammar of Mahler's sonata-form dramaturgy, often by looking past superficial differences in tone and expression to underlying similarities of *design* and *process*. To this end, my analyses are regulated by a kind of doubly intertextual framework. As just explained, I shall be concerned throughout with the ways in which a dynamic but also fairly traditional sonata-concept informed and shaped Mahler's narrative thought. Borrowing James Hepokoski's (2001) well-known term, I shall argue that each of Mahler's sonatas engages in a kind of “dialogue” with Beethovenian convention, one that is most often revealed in the close connection of modulatory processes and long-range expressive shaping.

At the same time, though, I shall be equally concerned with the intertexts that link Mahler's sonata forms to one another. Mahler habitually revived the constructive problems and premises of his earlier works, such that later sonatas can often be heard as “recompositions” of earlier ones—even despite marked differences of style and scale. Chapter 1 concludes with an aerial perspective on these recompositional schemes, and each of my analytical chapters engages them to some degree. But we shall find them especially useful when dealing with complex and/or highly contested forms, since they impose a key interpretive constraint: when options arise, we shall always prefer the reading that brings a movement into the closest alignment with Mahler's broader practice, the “grammar” of plot described earlier.

Curiously, such an approach has few precedents. On the whole, studies of Mahler's music have tended to treat discrepancies of formal understanding lightly, at least where individual movements are concerned. At times,

irreconcilable readings have coexisted for generations without a word of debate on how or why we might choose between them. In all likelihood, this nonchalance relates to the broader modernist tendency to dismiss the *Formenlehre* as a matter of sterile architectonics, out of touch with the transcendent singularity of the masterwork. (If all conventional labels are culpable of misrepresentation, then one application might be as good as the next.) Like many today, though, I believe that form itself can be a vital source of meaning—especially when it is conceived dynamically, as an unfolding dialogue with generic conventions and the imagined expectations of acculturated listeners. In such a conception, the details *matter*, since even a slight difference in schematic understanding can have profound narrative consequences. Thus the need for reliable, intertextually grounded answers to long-standing interpretive dilemmas.

But this brings us to a larger question still: if form is to be a locus of narrative meaning, what *kinds* of meanings might it encode? What sorts of stories might we hear in Mahler's symphonic sonatas? No single answer will do. For on the one hand, I shall be interested in these works as intramusical narratives, which is to say those in which *the execution of sonata form itself* provides the music's main dramatic/teleological backbone. In this sense, they will be abstract dramatic scenarios: expressive but not illustrative, volitional without depicting extrinsic agents.⁵

On the other hand, though—and this brings us to the project's second broad aim—we will always be eager to hear these single-movement narratives in light of the poetic content of the works embedding them. In this, the study finds an unexpected link back to the interpretive mainstream, which has long heard Mahler's symphonies encoding a vast range of programmatic, philosophical, and/or autobiographical meanings. Only some of these well-worn reception tropes originate with the composer, of course; others are postmortem accretions or embellished apocrypha. But they are all so deeply entrenched that one must either give them a wide berth or confront them head-on. If choosing the latter puts us at odds with certain marquee critics—especially Adorno and his abstemious acolytes—there is still more to be gained than lost. For in virtually every case, we will find that the inner plot dynamics of Mahler's sonatas resonate powerfully with programmatic concerns of the surrounding symphony. Remarkably, it seems that his dialogues with traditional single-movement forms were themselves shaped by the broader narrative themes guiding his works at large.

While on the topic of Adorno: a third broad objective ahead will be to reconsider how that thinker's celebrated critical program might feed into a rigorous, modern hermeneutics of form. Naturally, this requires some special care. Adorno's impact on the discipline has of course been profound; the image of Mahler as a critic of bourgeoisified Romanticism is now common currency, as is the idea that his works strategically subvert traditional forms as a matter of

5. Well, not entirely: each of my readings implicates an extramusical *composing* agent, a kind of "fictional" Mahler who could be understood to have staged these musical dramas as I describe them. For an account of the complex agential mechanics underlying my analyses—and countless others—see Monahan 2013a.

course. But there is no getting around his notoriously slippery stance toward musical analysis per se, his odd intermingling of advocacy and apprehension. Time and again, he urges us on with assurances that “all criticism . . . of any value is founded in analysis. . . . [A]ny statement about content remains mere verbiage unless it is wrung from technical findings” (2002c, 168; 1998a, 5). But in practice, he cannot bring himself to do it: his aversion to fixing music's meaning in words is just too powerful. Thus his writings are fraught by a paradoxical compulsion “to identify or measure” precisely what he insists must be “unidentifiable and unmeasurable” (Barham 2011, 261), leaving his promises of analytical fruition to dissolve repeatedly into a wash of tantalizing poetics and figurative language.

Still, Julian Johnson is right to insist that while there is no “blueprint” for an analytical method hidden in Adorno's writing (1995, 300), there is much to inspire analysis all the same—particularly if we move past the latter's cultish commitment to ineffability. Most broadly, this means a vision of interpretation that is “philosophically and historically critical yet rooted in the scrutiny of the text” and which views itself “as a stage in a process of understanding” rather than “as a fetished end in itself” (300, 311). If this all sounds rather abstract, we can take heart that in Mahler's case, Adorno gives us more concrete leads to work with as well. His book's central trope—symphonic form as emancipatory critique—is grounded in a range of demonstrable musical processes, which I examine closely in Chapter 2. And it is there that we arrive at two of the study's core interpretive themes: (1) the image of Mahler's intensely deformational idiom as a “nominalist” indictment of prefabricated forms; and (2) the notion that his music arises from dialectical tensions between a centripetal, top-down organic logic and a discursive, centrifugal, or “novelistic” heterogeneity.

Pursuing Adorno's “novelistic” vision of symphonic form naturally brings us into the much-contested sphere of musical *narrative*. I make no apology on this point: my analyses are narrative through and through. And like all such readings, their final justification lies in whether they are illuminating and eloquent, not in proofs that the music “narrates” per se (cf. Klein 2013, 22). But since pretensions of rigor demand transparency, I have devoted Chapter 3—the conclusion of the book's methodological suite—to the project's fourth and final aim, which is to reflect on the broader narrative hermeneutics underwriting each of the essays. There, I try to bring some order to the messy business of Mahlerian hearing by mapping out the narrative domains that interact most productively with the movement-spanning sonata plot. This includes a range of subordinate processes that are organized by—but also help to articulate—the overarching sonata story: gesture, transformed repetition, and so on. But it also includes those transsymphonic narratives that Mahlerians hold so dear, which entrain and occasionally rend open these notionally closed sonata forms. The aim will be to arrive at a more richly layered image of Mahler's narrative discourse, one that embraces its complex and often synergistic interaction of story-levels.

Before setting out, a few words are in order about the book's organization and interpretive style. Broadly speaking, I see musical hermeneutics as a twofold pursuit. In addition to sharing our interpretation of a given work, there looms

the larger task of laying bare what Michael L. Klein calls its underlying “poetics of meaning.” Analyses, in this sense, are not just commentaries on particular texts, but also testimonials on how we “grope to understand” such texts in general (2004, 52). But how best to balance these tasks is hardly self-evident; one needn’t look far to find readings so engrossed in methodological reflection that the analytical object risks seeming incidental or even superfluous. Because my aim here is ultimately to share *readings* of *pieces*, I have opted (to use Klein’s terms) to keep my “groping” more or less distinct from the fruits of my “understanding.” That is to say, though I find questions of method and meaning endlessly fascinating, I have drafted my own interpretive poetics up front so that the readings, freed from the ungainly rhythms of constant self-justification, might move vigorously and spontaneously, never losing focus on the music at hand.

Similar issues attend my analytical prose. Experience suggests that some readers may find my interpretive language less than circumspect in places. But this directness is less a mark of unilateral commitment than of stylistic economy. With a project of this scale, one can hardly qualify every hermeneutic assertion or genuflect in advance of every potential disagreement. Cautious locutions like “I believe it is possible to hear *x* in manner *y*” or “one might interpret these events thus and so” quickly grow cumbersome and—to my ear, at least—make for tedious writing. I will therefore trust readers not to mistake briskness for narrowness. Differences of opinion are an occupational hazard for analysts of all stripes, and no amount of confident posturing can head them off. As Klein warns, “with so many variables in history and intertext, semiotics and hermeneutics, ideology and subjectivity, hopes seem dim in arriving at interpretations that might foster agreement among competent listeners” (52).

In other words, you can’t please everyone. But perhaps I can temper some reservations in advance by casting off any pretense of definitive, final readings. Since it is beyond anyone’s reach to fix Mahler’s meaning in perpetuity, my aim here is simply to initiate a new round of critical discussions, contentions and all. A century out, Mahler’s distrust of verbal exegesis can seem quaint, even a bit naïve. But he was right to warn that no single account, however ambitious or far-reaching, could ever fully plumb his music’s depths. Like the great works he revered, his symphonies were to be inexhaustible; they could and should mean something different to every listener. If this is true, then perhaps the best tribute we can pay him is to keep asking new questions, to continue seeking out fresh perspectives on his works and creative ways to meet their Herculean demands. We are drawn to Mahler for his willingness to take expressive risks, to forgo the comforts of orthodoxies. Allergic to half measures, his instinct was always to go all in, even against long odds and at the expense of decorum. I can hardly imagine a more inspiring model for the analysis of his music, or one more apt to do him justice.

PART I

Interpreting Mahler's
Sonata Forms

CHAPTER **O**ne

Sonata Form in Mahler's Narrative Imagination

This movement . . . has the same scaffolding, the same basic groundplan that you'll find in the works of Mozart and, on a grander scale, of Beethoven. . . . Its laws must indeed be profound and eternal; for Beethoven obeyed them, and they're confirmed once more in my own work.

—Gustav Mahler on the opening of his
Third Symphony (1896)¹

I. Rethinking Mahler's Sonata Forms

Analysts have long been ambivalent about the role that sonata form should play in our understanding of Gustav Mahler's music. Although no one has seriously disputed his use of inherited genres (sonata, rondo, minuet/trio, and so on), Mahlerians have typically defaulted to what Mark Evan Bonds (1991, 13–14) calls a “generative” conception of form—one that downplays a composer's dependence on preformatted plans in favor of what is original, uniquely motivated, or (to use Robert Hatten's term) “strategic” to the individual work (1994, 29–30). The result has been a widespread reluctance—whether anxious or merely pragmatic—to bring sonata form into the analytical foreground, at least in a positive or normative sense.

Such generative thinking tends to come in three varieties. Most often, critics treat sonata form as an inconsequential or innocuous “given” of first-movement design—a broad rhetorical template, but little more. Hard-line generativists have occasionally gone further, questioning the relevance of the sonata concept altogether. Donald Mitchell, for instance, has urged us at times to “forget . . . all about” Mahler's vestigial sonata patterns to focus instead on the “real forms” built atop them (2007, 391).² Still others, especially Adorno and his advocates, have preferred to understand traditional forms as reference points for purposeful deviation—semantically significant, but mainly in a negative capacity.³ For all three positions, the assumption has been that if we are interested in what is

1. Bauer-Lechner 1980, 66.

2. Mitchell refers here to 6/IV (i.e., Symphony no. 6, fourth movement; this nomenclature is used throughout the book). But he says much the same about 5/II, where “to summon up a sonata scheme” would “prevent us—grotesquely—from hearing what Mahler was really up to” (1999a, 285–86).

3. See, e.g., Adorno 1992, 1998; Sponheuer 1978; Newcomb 1992, and Buhler 1996.

singular, expressive, or remarkable in Mahler's music, the traditional sonata concept will do us little good; we will simply have to look elsewhere.

This skepticism is hardly surprising when one considers the low esteem in which ossified *Formenlehre* models were held throughout the last century. The notion of sonata form as an inflexible, prescriptive "mold" is difficult to square with Mahler's highly personalized idiom. Indeed, his symphonic sonatas are idiosyncratic enough that analysts have been hard pressed even to reconcile them with each other. Only a generation ago, a critic as perceptive as John Williamson could legitimately wonder whether *any* single "principle" could govern so diverse a repertory (1975, 203).

My goal in this opening chapter is to correct these two durable but problematic generative assumptions: (1) that each of these movements is guided primarily by its own unique internal logic, and (2) that traditional sonata protocols have little bearing on the matter. Indeed, I hope to counter both in a single stroke. I will argue that a surprisingly "traditional" concept of sonata form informs all of Mahler's early and middle-period symphonies—not as a rigid or binding schema, but as a *paradigmatic tonal and thematic drama*, one that was capable of underpinning Mahler's many highly individualized realizations. We will find, contrary to received wisdom, that the central teleology of the Enlightenment sonata—the resolution of long-range tonal tension—is a central concern in these works, and one that is intimately bound up with issues of expression and narrative arc.

I begin by reviewing what James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy call the essential "trajectory" of the eighteenth-century sonata, its purposive drive toward several vital tonal/cadential arrivals (2006, 17). In the three sections that follow, I then show the relevance of this model to Mahler's corpus. Section III lays out the chapter's main thesis, the correlation of expressive outcome to recapitulatory "success" or "failure" in Symphonies nos. 1–6; it then pauses to consider a range of methodological issues, including Hepokoski's much-debated notion of sonata-form "deformation." Section IV shows my thesis at work: there, I offer analytical vignettes on Mahler's three earliest sonata forms (1/I, 2/I, and 1/IV), revealing the close ties between affect and tonal plot, as well as the suggestive relation of both to the works' poetic/programmatic content. Section V then turns to Mahler's late (post-1904) sonata forms, to show his dialogue with the traditional sonata (and its defining tonal "tension") growing palpably fainter. In closing, Section VI shifts gears to examine the cyclical aspect of Mahler's creativity, his reuse of various mid- and long-range organizational devices, often after a gap of many years and in works with little external resemblance.

II. The Sonata as Plot Paradigm

Let us begin at the beginning, then, with a view of the sonata as it stood a century before Mahler. Our model will be Hepokoski and Darcy's Sonata Theory, which invites us to understand the form less as a rigid mold or schematic template than as a dynamic *process*, structured around a set of genre-defining *tasks* or *goals*. For

these authors, the eighteenth-century sonata is an “expressive/dramatic” linear unfolding, a paradigmatic musical plot organized around the attainment of two “generically obligatory” perfect authentic cadences (PACs) (2006, 13).⁴ Figure 1.1 illustrates the “essential trajectory” of a standard (“Type 3”) sonata, with these load-bearing cadences—the moments of EEC (essential expositional closure) and ESC (essential structural closure)—shown at the dotted arrows’ convergencies.

A brief tour through Figure 1.1 will orient us and introduce essential nomenclature. The expositional drama launches with a characteristic primary theme (P), which establishes the tonic key and then proceeds, often by way of a transitional zone (TR), to a mid-expositional break or “medial caesura” (MC).⁵ At this point a secondary theme (S) enters, to propose a new tonic and eventually to secure it with a definitive perfect authentic cadence—the EEC, the exposition’s tonal/rhetorical goal. From there, the music will often lead to a closing theme or themes (C), which reinforce the newly attained key with additional cadential rhetoric.⁶ Barring extensive recomposition, the recapitulation will proceed similarly—except now, of course, the secondary theme will be in the home key, driven toward the tonic-cadential ESC, the telos of the sonata plot as a whole. Another closing zone and/or a coda may follow.

At first glance, this simple scheme might seem a meager recipe for musical drama—especially on a Mahlerian scale.⁷ But each of these zones can be vastly expanded and elaborated, their generic goals forestalled, ramified, or evaded in any number of ways. Rather than serving as a Procrustean “mold,” the sonata now acts as what Almén (2008, 164) would call the “primary narrative level”—an overarching dramatic framework that organizes and gives context to more localized details and gestures. Far from reducing away the unique details of individual works, this plot-paradigmatic conception gives us better traction to creatively engage and interrelate them.

A process-based model offers three further advantages in the face of Mahler’s dauntingly heterogeneous corpus. First, it allows us to overcome the greatest

4. Colloquial descriptions of sonata form as “dramatic” are of course legion (e.g., Tovey 1927, 135), but the idea has rarely been explored in depth outside of Rosen’s seminal works (1988, 1997) and never conjoined with such a rich analytic/hermeneutic apparatus. Other studies to consider the sonata as a paradigmatic plot include Newcomb 1987, Treitler 1989, Maus 1991, and Almén 2008.

5. Expositions lacking a medial caesura are said to be “continuous,” distinct from the “two-part” format described here. Though lacking a well-defined S-zone, continuous expositions observe the same tonal/cadential protocols as their two-part cousins and are similarly directed toward the moment of EEC. See the analyses ahead of 1/I (this chapter) and 3/I (Chapter 6).

6. Technically, Sonata Theory’s P, TR, S, and C refer to “zones” or “action spaces,” not to specific themes. This nomenclature is well suited to eighteenth-century practice, in which a single rhetorical function may be shared by a succession of distinct themes or modules. I use the singular term “theme” here and elsewhere (i.e., “primary *theme*,” etc.) both as a shorthand and a means of reflecting Mahler’s more characteristically Romantic tendency to organize sonata form around two discrete, integral, and contrasting subjects.

7. Though neither has published on the topic, Hepokoski and Darcy have long advocated the relevance of Sonata Theory to Mahler’s corpus in the classroom and in personal correspondence. I am grateful to both authors for discussing various movements with me and to Hepokoski for allowing me to audit his undergraduate Mahler seminar at Yale University in 2004.

limitations of “spatial” or “architectural” models of form: their literal fidelity to the acoustic surface and their resulting tendency to accentuate schematic *diversity*. Content simply to depict what happens, they are powerless to weigh the significance of what does *not*—a critical factor in Mahler's discourse of obstruction, deflection, and staged collapse. The shift to a plot-paradigmatic approach permits greater intertextual nuance, allowing us in many cases to view the sonatas' unique formal features as complications or disruptions within *shared* processes or teleologies.

Second, a dynamic, plot-based approach provides the entry point for a systematic and long overdue examination of Mahler's long-range tonal/cadential strategies. Given Mahler's career-long propensity to dramatize the attainment and evasion of cadences, it is surprising that issues of closure have received so little focused attention.⁸ Even the most attentive analysts rarely take stock of which themes attempt to cadence, or in what key—even when such attempts spin out over dozens or even hundreds of bars. With its abiding concern for “expressive/dramatic” cadential trajectories, Sonata Theory attunes us to these processes and to the harmonic narratives that they help to articulate.

Finally, Hepokoski and Darcy's model offers a much-needed interpretive framework for these “harmonic narratives” themselves, by situating them in relation to certain classical and/or *Formenlehre* norms. Though Mahler's key plans are well documented, thoughtful interpretations have been rare and largely ad hoc; most analyses offer only unnuanced description. A handful of critics have even challenged the idea that tonal plot would be a motivating factor in this music at all—the assumption being that Mahler's gestural, rhetorically microarticulated forms are meant to “replac[e]” Beethovenian “goal-oriented” tonal plots (Micznik 2001, 226).⁹ But in fact, Mahler just as often used his battery of discursive, “novelistic” techniques to *dramatize* the imperative tonal arc of the Enlightenment sonata. The difference, of course, is that the consummation of this tonal arc is by no means a foregone conclusion. Success and failure are now vital stakes in the unfolding narrative.

III. Mahler's Recapitulations, Dialogic Form, and the Drama of Tonal Resolution

The “imperative tonal arc” of the traditional sonata leads, of course, back to the tonic. For Hepokoski and Darcy, this arc is directed specifically toward the tonic-cadential ESC, which closes off the secondary theme area and announces the completion of the sonata's “generic mission.” However, if it happens that no ESC is forthcoming—if S cannot produce a proper tonic cadence, or if it crystallizes in a non-tonic key—the result is what these authors call a nonresolved, or

8. Hopkins's (1990) study on Mahlerian closure is noteworthy in this respect, but partly because it equates cadential infrequency with diminished rhetorical importance. (I believe that the music suggests the opposite—that frequency and importance might vary inversely.)

9. Cf. Adorno 1992, 43 and 48.

“failed,” recapitulation (2006, 245). (By the same logic, a non-cadencing exposition would also be said to “fail” [177–79].) In such cases, the burden of tonal closure generally falls to the coda and thus outside of “sonata space” proper.¹⁰ Nonresolving recapitulations are rare in the eighteenth century and appear only sparingly, and to striking effect, in early and middle-period Beethoven.¹¹ But the technique turns up increasingly throughout the Romantic era; for Bruckner it even became a default strategy, a means of prolonging tonal/dramatic tension deep into the coda (Darcy 1997).

As a broad interpretive axiom, the equation of nonresolution with processive/expressive “failure” is not without problems; I touch on some of these below. But its relevance to Mahler strikes me as beyond debate. Surveying his first eight sonata forms (1888–1904), we see a remarkably consistent linkage of tonal plot and affect: affirmative/major-mode sonata endings tend to follow properly functioning recapitulations (or, in two cases, post-sonata spaces that nullify or counteract a tonally defective reprise), while tragic/minor-mode conclusions will typically follow failed or malfunctioning recapitulations—those unable to effect the proper tonal resolution and achieve closure. In other words, the breakdown of the sonata process will tend to parallel a more general “failure” of the music to reach an agreeable major-mode conclusion.

That these sonata dramas tend to hinge on the resolution of the *secondary theme* (S) is especially striking, given that music’s special status in Hepokoski and Darcy’s model. For these authors, S is privileged as the theme that enacts a sonata’s “most defining” events—that is, the cadential moments of EEC and ESC (2006, 117). To capture its purposive drive toward these goals, they fashion S as an anthropomorphic musical “agent” on a kind of “mission” (17). This subjectivized view of S accords well with the psychodynamics of Mahler’s sonata designs. In many cases, we can hear the composer’s P-themes as objective or situational; they depict the “world” in which the drama unfolds. By contrast, his S-themes often carry hyperbolized affective traits suggesting a musically embodied persona negotiating that world and reacting to its stimuli. The analyses ahead show what we gain by merging these conceits, by imagining the Mahlerian S-theme as a musical agent bent on controlling its own modal/tonal fate, seeking to secure closure in the tonic major while avoiding a “tragic” collapse into minor (tonic or otherwise). Mahler is rarely subtle about these matters: in most cases, “failure” will be less a matter of cadential niceties than of S finding the tonic key at all; in a few others, protracted efforts to pin down a glimpsed tonic major will fall spectacularly to pieces.

In Section III, I will show these tendencies in action with a series of analytical vignettes. First, though, we must attend to a number of methodological questions, since skeptics will want to know: Is it not anachronistic to evaluate Mahler

10. Within Sonata Theory this distinction between sonata and non-sonata (or “parageneric”) spaces is fundamental. See Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 281ff.

11. Hepokoski and Darcy (2006, 246–47) cite no instances prior to the slow movement of Beethoven’s Piano Trio in G, op. 1/2 (1793–94); Hepokoski (2001–2, 136–44) discusses this work at length, as well as the “Egmont” Overture, Op. 84 (1810).

according to “normative” practices that are several generations old? And if tonal resolution is, by a small margin, the *exception* among Mahler's secondary themes, why should we privilege it as a “norm”?

To address these concerns, we should step back to consider two of this study's foundational concepts: Hepokoski's “dialogic” conception of form and its attendant (and controversial) notion of structural “deformation.” In a dialogic analysis, “each work, at each of its moments, is understood to imply a dialogue with a constellation of normative sonata options within the genre at that time and place in its history” (2009, 181). The individual work is neither the mere exemplar of some reductive schema nor the *sui generis* fruit of a free-ranging imagination. Rather, it is the product of a composer's productive, dialectical negotiation with the “backdrop” of compositional options that are generically “available” in his or her historical moment (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, vi).¹² When a composer ventures beyond this horizon of perceived norms, the result is what these authors call a “deformation”—a “stretching or distortion of a norm beyond its understood limits” or a “pointed overriding of a standard option” (11). Deformations range broadly in scope, from isolated syntactic features to entire formal designs, and are usually understood to serve some distinct expressive purpose.

This last point is key: by tracking a work's divergence from an ideal type—and by supposing those deviations to serve some communicative purpose—deformational hearings often bring added drama and semantic depth. But they are not without hazards; as Richard Taruskin warns, the more extreme a putative deformation, the greater our chances of mistaking mere dissimilarity for meaningful deviation (2005, 200–201). Naturally, the issue here is one of norms: a dialogic conception is only as convincing as its hypotheses for what “normative sonata options” actually *were* at a particular time and place. This is the question Hepokoski and Darcy's monograph sets out to answer with regard to the late eighteenth-century sonata. Their success owes much to the period's comparatively uniform practice; in that era, composers' reliance on a shared formal/syntactical vernacular was extensive enough that one can often speak convincingly of universally “common options” and variously ranked “generic defaults” (2006, 8).

But after Beethoven, two new factors—the fixation of the canon and the reification of formal schemes—complicate matters considerably. Setting his or her pen to paper, a composer of Mahler's generation might be entering into dialogue with (which is to say imitating, quoting, troping, negating, or “misreading”) a daunting array of models: idiosyncratic masterworks of the past, “rule of thumb” abstractions derived from (but often bearing limited resemblance to!) the latter, and increasingly diverse contemporary trends. So as we cross over into the later nineteenth century, the assessment of any single work's dialogical orientation is bound to be more speculative than before. We may also find that it is less plausible to reconstruct a single, universally applicable “backdrop” of norms for most

12. As Webster points out (2009, 99–100), this view is hardly without precedents; comparably fluid, dialectical views of form appear, e.g., in the writings of Adorno, Carl Dahlhaus, and Anthony Newcomb.

points on the post-Beethovenian timeline; beyond certain generalizations, questions of normative construction might better be addressed on a case-by-case basis, drawing on our knowledge of a composer's style, influences, and aesthetics.

My assumption throughout this book is that Mahler's works were informed by some kind of idealized, transcendent "sonata-concept"—one acting in the capacity of a Kantian "regulative idea" (Hepokoski 2001, 447) and within which recapitulatory resolution would have been a recognized norm. I also presume that Mahler expected musically literate listeners to be mindful of the same. Though this might seem a matter of common sense—how could Mahler *not* have been in possession of such an idea?—this line of thinking has recently come under fire. In an ongoing critique of deformation theory, Julian Horton and Paul Wingfield have challenged the utility and even the existence of such a concept, on the grounds that we can locate neither a "normative model" of sonata form in contemporary treatises, nor a "normative repertoire" in which that model is consistently realized (Horton 2005–6, 10–11).¹³

The first charge misfires, of course, since neither Hepokoski nor Darcy has ever suggested that nineteenth-century symphonists would have acquired their sonata-form understanding primarily from textbooks. Quite the opposite: their theory is manifestly concerned with the influence of *music*—individual works and broad repertoires, both past and present—on composers' conscious and unconscious decisions at various points in history.¹⁴ (For Hepokoski, as for many of us, locutions like "the *Formenlehre* sonata" are clearly just conveniences.) Horton's demand for a "normative repertoire" is no less a diversion, since the function of such "ideal types" is heuristic, not categorical: their explanatory power lies not in their ability to predict *all* features of *all* works to which they are applied but rather to account for *many* features of *most* of them.

More relevant here is Horton's rush to discredit any kind of widely shared sonata-form "ideal type" as a distortive anachronism. In the last third of the nineteenth century, he writes, there is in fact "no single, fixed definition around which [deformations] of the form might orientate themselves" (2004, 154). Whether or not this is literally true, it is surely relevant that many late-Romantic composers would likely have disagreed. Both Mahler and Strauss, for instance, refer to sonata form as though it were a single, communally shared constructive principle, one that was both ubiquitous and stable since the time of the Viennese

13. Cf. Horton 2004, 154 and Wingfield 2008, 154.

14. It must be said: Horton's misplaced textbook emphasis raises the question of how fully he grasps the concept he means to debunk. He writes: "Given that the earliest example of a consensus model of sonata form is usually taken to be Marx's treatise of 1845–7, how is it possible that deformational procedures have their foundations in the music of . . . Beethoven, Weber and Schubert?" (2005–6, 9). I have trouble believing that any sensible historian (Horton included, of course) would stand behind the actual implications of this claim—e.g., that without the aid of Marx's "consensus model," Beethoven would've had *no sense at all* that the off-tonic recapitulation of his "Egmont" Overture was (or might be perceived as) "strikingly nonnormative" for the time, or that Schubert could have led the exposition of his D. 784 piano sonata from A minor to E *major* without deliberately breaking from established routines.

classics.¹⁵ Though each would have come across textbook representations, we can assume that these would have been useful only to the degree that they corroborated or informed what could be heard in Beethoven and his lineage. For these composers, at least, sonata form was no mere “didactic standard” or latter-day analytical contrivance (Horton 2005–6, 11). It was a palpable reality, a link to tradition that artists could choose to adopt, transform, or discard as they saw fit.¹⁶

Of course, what Strauss rejected as anachronistic, Mahler would come to embrace with open arms. Imbibing little of the New German dogma about instrumental music's inadequacy, he saw his symphonic enterprise continuing the Beethovenian legacy, not superseding it. Even before the anti-programmatic turn that produced the neo-classical Fourth and Sixth Symphonies, he had declared to Natalie Bauer-Lechner that the “laws” of Haydn's and Beethoven's symphonic forms were surely “profound and eternal” (1980, 66).¹⁷ Soon after, he would admit, “I'm quite happy if I can . . . pour my content into the usual formal mould, and I avoid all innovations unless they're absolutely *necessary*” (131). Naturally, we should be careful not to take this intimate musing for a career-spanning credo. But it is still revealing that so accomplished a modernist would ever set his creative enterprise against the backdrop of century-old traditions and even hint at the special significance of suppressed norms.

This brings us to the second, no less pressing, complication of a dialogic approach: *interpretation*. For even if a composer knew that certain procedures departed from the widely recognized sonata-form schema, the question remains: should we regard these as “deformations” in the strongest possible sense, such that *the nonnormativity itself* is a leading source of meaning? This too brings us into contested territory; it also leaves us having to sift through some inconsistencies in Sonata Theory itself.

Usually, Hepokoski and Darcy are quick to stress the contingency of deformations on style change: a procedure that is novel at one point, they explain, may gradually become a recognized feature of the style—an “available” default—and thus *no longer* a deformation (2006, 11). In some cases, though, we find techniques granted deformational status more or less indefinitely, even after widespread adoption. These contradictions point to tensions between two competing models of historical influence. On the one hand is a linear paradigm, in which compositional devices follow a natural life span through novelty, normalcy, and finally cliché. On the other is what Dahlhaus calls a “circumpolar” model, in which some cultural watershed exerts a direct, disproportionate, and

15. Mahler's comments are recorded by Bauer-Lechner (1980, 66; cf. this chapter's epigraph). For Strauss's, see Schuh and Trenner, eds. 1955, 82–83.

16. Again, whether each conceived of this “basic groundplan” (Mahler's term) in *precisely* the same way is beside the point. What matters is that certain elements would have been basic to both—e.g., a three-part form with optional coda; an exposition whose second part modulates away from tonic; a recapitulation that reinstates the home key; and so on.

17. Mahler refers here both to “traditional” forms and to the phrase structures within them: “The only difference is that, in my works, the sequence of the movements is not the same, and the variety and complexity within the movements is greater” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 66).

undiminished influence across successive generations (1989, 152).¹⁸ When Hepokoski and Darcy refer to nonresolving recapitulations as “deformations” irrespective of decade or context—even when, as with Bruckner, they are a first-level default (Darcy 1997, 258)—we see evidence of a circumpolar view, one in which the early-Romantic (i.e., Beethovenian) sonata serves as a dialogic referent for composers of several generations. The glitch, of course, is that a term intended to connote the “strikingly nonnormative” (Hepokoski 1992, 143) can come to label procedures that are, statistically, anything but.

Clearly, this is a frame-of-reference issue: if our expectations are guided by some idealized *Formenlehre* scheme, reprises like Bruckner’s will indeed be “strikingly nonnormative.” If, by contrast, our criteria are “epistemically specific” to that corpus, as Horton advises (2005–6, 17), then nonresolution would be foreseeable and ordinary. Which view we favor will depend on our analytical aims and what we think the composer asks of us as listeners. But even if we agree with Hepokoski and Darcy (and many others!) that many nineteenth-century works use our understanding of traditional sonata form as dramatic leverage or a basis for “communicat[ive]” distortion (Schmalfeldt 2011, 6), we still must ask: what should their deformations *mean*?

Hepokoski and Darcy have strong opinions on the matter—strong enough, perhaps, to rankle detractors. For instance, they urge us to hear nonresolving recapitulations as “powerfully expressive” malfunctions, disposed to create “a sense of unease, alienation,” or “futility,” and indicative of a sonata’s “insufficien[cy]” to fulfill its own “generic demands.”¹⁹ Undoubtedly, such colorful descriptives would prove too narrow or hyperbolic in some contexts; I would resist applying them arbitrarily. The same goes for the term “failure” itself, which seems to me dramaturgically mismatched to nonresolving reprises like those in the finale of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony or the opening of Brahms’s Third. But with Mahler, the most pointed question we could ask of Sonata Theory—whether sonata failure *itself* could really produce a sense of “unease” or “futility”—turns out to be irrelevant, since his structural failures are always tied to broader, easily perceived topical/expressive narratives.

IV. Recapitulatory “Success” and “Failure”: Three Case Studies

A brief flyover of Mahler’s three earliest symphonic sonatas (all composed in 1887–88) should help to make this coordination of tonal plot and expression especially clear. With these vignettes, my first aim is to show that recapitulatory resolution—and with it, sonata form in general—was a central narrative/dramatic concern for Mahler from the very start. No less important, though,

18. Dahlhaus cites Beethoven, but Rosen makes a similar—and undoubtedly related—case about the hypostatized *Formenlehre* sonata itself (1998, 365–66).

19. Quotations are from Darcy 1997, 258; Hepokoski 1993, 94n17; and Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 245.

I want to show that hearings centered on the dramatized achievement or evasion of tonal goals can mesh suggestively with the works' poetic/programmatic designs. We begin with the opening movements of the First and Second Symphonies, which offer straightforward cases of sonata "success" and "failure," respectively.

Symphony no. 1 in D major: mvt. I (1887–88)

At first, Symphony no. 1/I might seem an unlikely candidate for a model of "normative" sonata form.²⁰ The exposition is among Mahler's most unusual: a single stream of lyrical melody, based on the *Wayfarer* song "Ging heut Morgen über's Feld," unfolds in three broad stanzas, without conflict or contrast (see Figure 1.2). The development's eccentricities are just as numerous: a lengthy return to the slow introductory music; a tumultuous premonition of the F-minor finale (m. 305); and the first of Mahler's famed *Durchbruch* passages (m. 352), one that barrels forward so forcefully that it overwrites the recapitulation of the main theme.

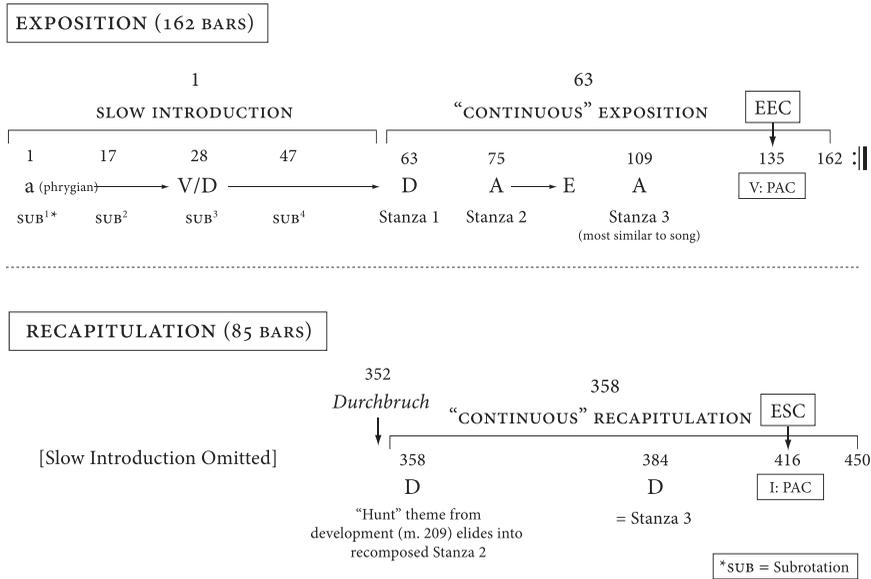
But despite its schematic idiosyncrasy, the movement is absolutely straightforward from the standpoint of sonata *process*; its tonal/cadential trajectory could hardly be spotlighted more emphatically. The exposition's hundred-measure stringendo is aimed directly at a single cadence: the dominant-key EEC in m. 135. And in the recapitulation, Mahler brings this same music back to serve up the correlative, tonic-key ESC in m. 416—an ecstatic arrival well suited for the "generic goal" of an entire movement. Understandably, analysts have tended to pass over this conventional tonal scheme in favor of more distinctive features. But in so doing, they have neglected to consider its strategic role in the movement's overall conception. Given the harmonic sophistication of Mahler's other sonata-form movements from the same year (discussed later), we can hardly attribute its simplicity to inexperience. I would argue instead that this blithe, "naïve" sonata design is programmatically motivated—no less so than the form's more striking or singular features.

On the whole, the movement inhabits the same expressive/programmatic world as its source song, depicting an adolescent traveler in buoyant communion with his spring surroundings.²¹ The sonata's structural and processual properties are crucial to this psychological characterization. Being both monothematic and "continuous," the exposition proper (m. 63ff.) lacks any significant element of contrast; it portrays a mind both self-absorbed and -assured, prior to any

20. Some analysts resist using sonata terminology at all. For Barham, it is only "ostensibly" in sonata form (2007, 60); Roman (2007, 85ff.) apprehensively labels its sections with scare-quotes ("exposition," and so forth).

21. Mahler's original title for this movement was "Frühling und kein Ende!"; the entirety of Part I (movements I–III) was called "Aus den Tagen der Jugend." The slow introduction was intended to depict "the awakening of nature from a long winter's sleep" (1893 program; see Mitchell 1995, 157–59), a theme Mahler would revive a decade later in 3/I.

Figure 1.2 Mahler, Symphony no. 1/I, simplified overview (development omitted)



confrontation with an oppositional Other—whether fate, foe, or female.²² The sonata-protagonist’s goals are rustically unpretentious and smoothly attained, with little trace of conflict or impediment; notice how the main theme reaches the dominant in only *eight measures*, with glib ease of a schoolboy jumping a fence. (Indeed, modulation by fifth is so effortless that Mahler goes a notch too far—note the expanse of *E major* in mm. 92–108—and must sheepishly retreat back to *A major* for stanza three.) This is not music that has transcended struggle; it is a music too credulous to foresee that conflict is inevitable (in life no less than the late-Romantic symphony).

Of course, glimpses of turmoil will not be lacking. But these will only serve to bring the deliberately guileless sonata plot into greater relief. In the development, there appears a new *cantabile* cello theme whose circumspection and modal instability suggest the awakening of a more sober, adult sensibility (mm. 167–202). The music, it seems, would feign to grow up. Repeatedly, the major-mode pastoral sphere tries to absorb this “mature” topic (mm. 221, 257, and 291), making it more amenable to the wayfarer’s juvenile escapades. But in m. 305 the new theme’s true colors emerge: it is the seed of the finale’s F-minor

22. As later in 3/I, the movement’s primary contrast is between the sonata- and non-sonata spaces (in this case, song-based *gemächlich* sections and the slow “introductory” music) rather than between elements of the sonata itself.

“wounded heart” music, which begins to unfold here in a terrifying prolepsis.²³ It is in response to this dark premonition that Mahler unleashes the bombastic tonic-key *Durchbruch* (m. 352).

Raymond Knapp smartly suggests that the ensuing recapitulation—a perfunctory affair, despite the addition of a few new twists—might represent a retreat from this maturational arc back into the “oblivious cheerfulness” of the exposition (2003, 169 and 174). This image of the formulaic recapitulation as a kind of avoidance behavior is attractive for several reasons. It allows us to hear the mannered triumphalism of the recapitulation's new “hunt” theme (m. 358) as willfully rather than incidentally naïve—as if in defiance of adulthood's unpleasant revelations.²⁴ It also sheds new light on the most crucial difference between the orchestral movement and its source song: the omission of the latter's off-tonic *Abgesang*. There, Mahler equates tonal nonclosure with expressive deflation: the wayfarer ends up stranded in a melancholic F# major, alienated from the bucolic D major of the opening. Here, the tonic-major reprise derives much of its meaning from its ability to resist this kind of tonal/affective malaise. The springtime of youth may not be “endless,” as the program suggests. But by consummating the sonata plot, Mahler ensures for the moment that his hero's ordeals lie safely over the horizon.

Symphony no. 2 in C minor: mvt. I (1888)

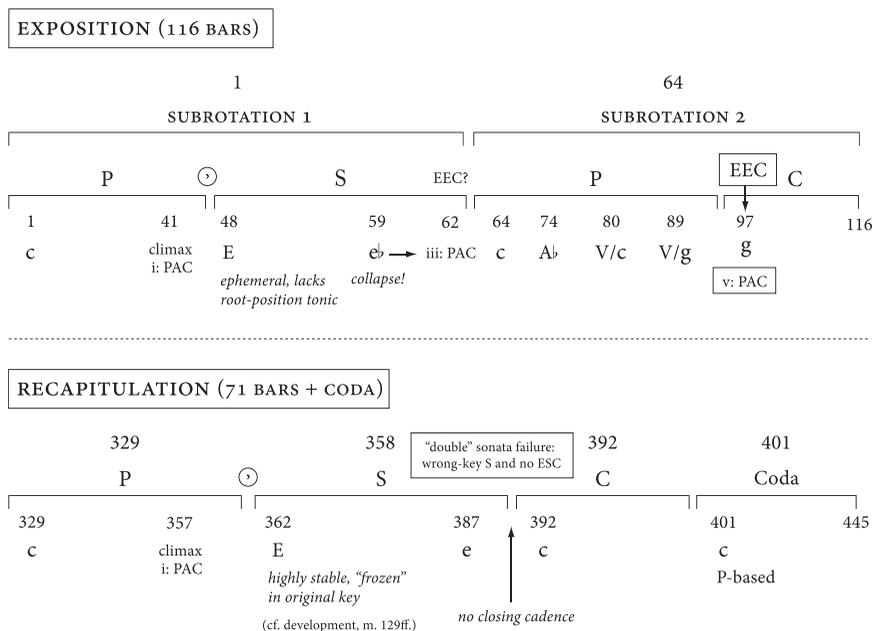
Though the First Symphony soon moves on to weightier matters, Mahler was not through with his portrait of the wayfarer-hero's idyllic youth. Remarkably, it would be a topic of the Second Symphony's opening movement as well—now as a series of flashbacks amid the hero's funeral rites (*Todtenfeier*).²⁵ Here we encounter a sonata design that is diametrically opposed to the one just discussed; it is episodic, contrast-riven, and structurally unsound, culminating in a graphic and programmatically motivated sonata failure. Figure 1.3 shows the movement's outlines, again with the development omitted. The topmost brackets divide the exposition into two broad subrotations, each beginning with a presentation of P in

23. Compare to 1/IV, mm. 62, 86, *et passim*. Mahler described this finale theme as “the most terrible of battles . . . with all the sorrows of this world” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 240), one that began with the “sudden eruption of a heart wounded to the quick” (1893 program; see Mitchell 1995, 158). Measures 305ff. in 1/I specifically foreshadow 574ff. in the finale.

24. This theme first appeared in the development (m. 209; also in D), where it is recognizable as a regressive simplification of the affectively complex “maturational” theme that precedes it (mm. 167–202). There too, it composes over the rotationally expected return of the P-theme.

25. Mahler explained that in this movement “it is the hero of my D-major Symphony who is being borne to his grave, his life being reflected, as in a clear mirror.” The Andante, too, was to be “a memory . . . out of that hero's life” (Martner, ed. 1979, 180; emphasis original). These same themes appear in his program for the symphony; see Mitchell 1995, 179–84. (Mahler composed the *Todtenfeier* movement at roughly the same time as the First Symphony [1888]; he would complete the Second in 1893–94.)

Figure 1.3 Mahler, Symphony no. 2/I, simplified overview
(development omitted)



the tonic and culminating in a minor-mode PAC.²⁶ The first subrotation establishes the movement's main rhetorical opposition: the C-minor funeral march (P), signifying the bitter present and its anguished uncertainties ("Why did you suffer? Is it all only a vast, terrifying joke?"), and the luminous E-major "Gesang" theme (S), a poignant reminiscence of the hero's former "passions and aspirations."²⁷

As discussed, the generic task of this pastoral S would be to secure the secondary key, E major, with a strong PAC. However, Mahler takes pains to portray the theme as ephemeral and unstable: he withholds any root-position tonic (the music hovers over a series of dominant pedals) and leaves the three-flat tonic key signature in place, giving the music a precarious, transient look even on the printed page. Ultimately, S proves unable to substantiate its proposed tonality; in m. 59 it collapses into E♭ *minor* for an ominously conclusive PAC.²⁸ Unwilling to accept so symbolically bleak a key for expositional closure, the music makes

26. Double-subrotational expositions are a staple of Mahler's style, appearing in 3/I, 4/I, 8/I, 9/I, 10/I and possibly 7/I. Cf. Williamson 1983, 27–30.

27. The quotations are Mahler's; see Martner, ed. 1979, 180 and Mitchell 1995, 183. On rotational form (and the concept of "subrotations"), see Chapter 3.

28. E♭ minor is the modal inverse of the symphony's goal tonic. In the development, the movement will lose itself in an E♭-minor underworld for nearly a hundred measures (mm. 244–320), searching for—and occasionally catching—glimpses of the finale's emancipatory E♭ major (mm. 282–88).

a second pass: P returns, launching the second subrotation (m. 64)—but now, except for a briefly galvanized major submediant (m. 74), the music remains trapped in the minor mode, eventually settling on a grim EEC in G minor (m. 97), the portal to a progressively enervated closing zone (C).

Strong closure notwithstanding, this exposition is still perhaps best understood as a rhetorical failure. After the promise of an E-major EEC, the minor-dominant ending (delivered by the “wrong” theme, and in the “wrong” key) offers only cold comfort and has unavoidably tragic implications. What is remarkable, though, is that for all its transience, the S-theme's E-major tonality (the “true” secondary key) shows striking resilience. Undaunted, S will return twice in this key, each appearance longer and more robust than the last: first in the development (m. 129), then in the recapitulation (m. 362).²⁹ And yet its ephemeral character continues: neither sounding is ever validated by a proper four-sharp key signature, and each disintegrates into minor without cadencing. In the latter case, this results in a “doubly” failed recapitulation (see Figure 1.3): a “wrong-key” S unable to produce an ESC. And as the last light of E major fades (m. 388), the failed S-reprise quickly yields to the bleak C-minor of the closing and coda zones. As anticipated, structural failure points the way to expressive failure.

But just as we should not mistake correlation for narrative causality (it makes little sense to say that the movement ends tragically “because” S was reprised off tonic), neither should we arbitrarily equate “failure” here with the worst of all possible outcomes. This secondary theme may be tonally “alienated,” to use Hepokoski's term (1993, 94)—it is excluded from the tonal resolution—but it has at least been permitted to retain its ardent major-mode character. Surely a more dire outcome would have been a presentation of S in the tonic *minor*, suggesting an emptying of its redemptive potential and a full capitulation to the relentless march. (Mahler would resort to this blackest of options only once, in 6/IV; see Chapter 7.) Instead, we have a more ambivalent situation. Frozen in the past tense, the hero's idyllic E-major memories remain happily untouched by the grim reality of the C-minor present. But neither are they able to transfigure that reality and lift the music into a more affirmative C major. Their function here is mainly a bittersweet valediction.³⁰ Death, they seem to reassure us, cannot divest us of our most cherished recollections. But neither can we take the things remembered with us when we cross to the other side.

Symphony no. 1 in D major: mvt. IV (1887–88)

The two movements just discussed set the precedent for several to come: 3/I and 4/I offer additional instances of sonata-form “success” (see Chapters 5 and 6),

29. The first of these appearances features an eight-measure lead-in in the *tonic major* (mm. 117–29). There is only one other full instance of S, a developmental episode that wanders through F, C, B \flat , and E \flat minor (m. 208).

30. Mahler writes this leave-taking directly into the music, as a series of Wagnerian allusions: the *Liebestod* (m. 364) and Wotan's farewell to Brünnhilde (mm. 370 and 384).

while 5/II provides an even more disastrous case of “failure”—one in which the tonic A minor is lost mid-recapitulation and only restored two-hundred bars later (m. 557), shortly before the coda’s dying gasps.³¹ Our last vignette shows something altogether more intricate: a recapitulation whose failure is so comprehensive that the sonata apparatus is abandoned altogether.

Like that of 2/I, the exposition of 1/IV is built around a riveting thematic contrast: here, a violent, *stürmisch* P, unfolding in four long paragraphs, gives way in m. 175 to its redemptive counterpole—an ardently lyrical submediant S that arcs broadly toward a single culminating PAC in m. 221 (see Figure 1.4). Initially, this S appears to be absent from the development, where fiery P-based episodes (mm. 254 and 317) link a disjointed series of flashbacks and premonitions. During the last of these, the music arrives on a C dominant (m. 436), suggesting imminent retransition. But in its place, there unfolds an extended presentation of S *in the tonic major*, over a sustained dominant pedal (m. 458). Merely to call this passage a “recapitulation,” however, is to miss a carefully crafted ambiguity.³² A more nuanced hearing might start from the fact that this F-major secondary theme (anticipating the “ephemeral S” topos of 2/I) is powerless to substantiate itself: as its dominant pedal draws out to maddening lengths, refusing to resolve, the music’s placid lyricism gives way to agitation, outrage, and finally enervation. After rising to a minor-mode shriek in m. 496, S subsides and vanishes forever (ca. m. 513–16), unconsummated.

Figure 1.4 places this ill-fated S within the development, partly because its pseudo-retransitional dominant does, after eighty-four measures, lead to a tonic reprise (m. 533).³³ But it is perhaps better heard occupying a space that is neither development nor recapitulation, a borderline region outside of the sonata proper. Mahler’s own comments can help to clarify. In 1894, Richard Strauss voiced concerns to his colleague about an apparent redundancy in this movement. As the dotted lines in Figure 1.4 show, the *Durchbruch* climax is foreshadowed twice in the development: the first is in a subdued C major (m. 290), but the second is longer, more resolute, and (critically) already in the target key of D major (m. 375). Mahler explained to Strauss that the first D-major passage was “merely” a proposed “solution” to the movement’s turmoil; it was to be the *idea* of the breakthrough, without being the thing itself.³⁴ “My intention,” he wrote, “was to show a struggle in which victory is furthest from the protagonist just when he believes it closest” (Blaukopf, ed. 1984, 37).

These comments point to a rhetorical category—I call it “hypothetical music”—that proves indispensable for interpreting Mahler, who so often requires us to distinguish between what is merely wished for and what is conclusively

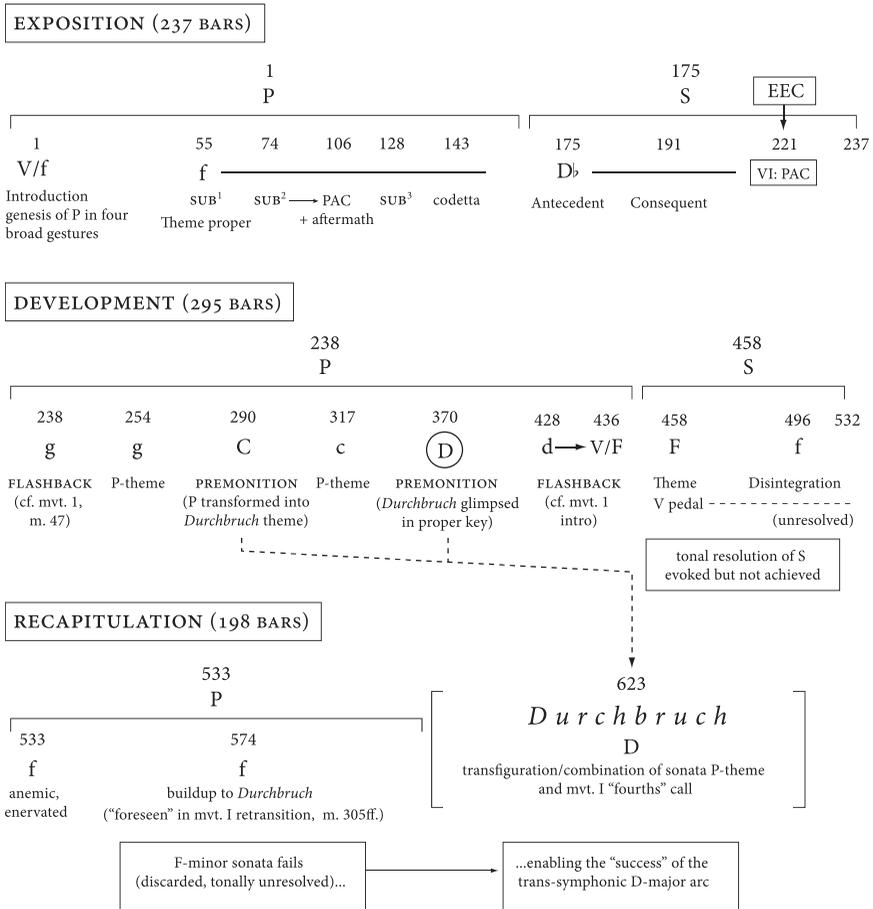
31. For a more detailed reading, see Monahan 2011b, 45–46.

32. See, e.g., Floros 1993, 45; Mitchell 1995, 205; Buhler 1996, 140; McClatchie 1996, 114; and Almén 2006, 152. Hepokoski and Darcy hear this passage in dialogue with (but not reducible to) what they call a “Type 2” sonata, one that features a “tonal resolution” consisting solely of S and C elements rather than a full recapitulation (2006, 364).

33. This music was originally both longer and *a step higher*, strengthening the case for its exclusion from the recapitulation; see McClatchie 1996, 113–24.

34. Buhler discuss this passage and its reception at length (1996, 125–28).

Figure 1.4 Mahler, Symphony no. 1/IV, simplified overview



attained. I submit that this would-be “recapitulation” is exactly this kind of “hypothetical” music: the sonata dreams of a tonic homecoming for S, but the resolution remains out of reach, and the dream darkens into nightmare. Worse still, the music awakens to find the “real” recapitulation tainted by the knowledge that S has *already* expended its one opportunity for a tonic-key presentation. It has failed before it has even begun.³⁵ P enters accordingly (m. 533), its hedging pianissimo a reflection of perceived futility. (Mahler first had the theme return with its original vehemence, but then thought better of it [Mitchell 1995, 205].)

35. This hearing plays off the fact, noted by Rosen (1988, 288), Hepokoski (2002, 131), and others, that classical conventions seemed to prohibit “redundant” tonic-key presentations of S-materials: if some portion of S appeared in the tonic prior to the recapitulation, it will tend to be omitted from the latter. This principle may also be relevant to the failed recapitulation of 5/II; see Monahan 2011b, 46.

And it is amid this stalemate that the D-major *Durchbruch* springs forth (m. 623), resetting the tonality to that of the opening movement and declaring the F-minor sonata a lost cause.

Only twice would Mahler follow a failed recapitulation with so unambiguously triumphant an ending. Years later, in 6/I, he would rely on the coda to deliver S into the tonic, amending the sonata on its own terms and thus making for a belated processive “success” (see Chapter 4). Here we find something different: an intervention that comes from without, a kind of transcendent epiphany. And once again, this deformation carries strong programmatic implications. In his letter to Strauss, Mahler compared this movement to the most profound of “spiritual struggles.” His symphonic protagonist would achieve what he called a “true victory,” but only at the ultimate cost—his very “essence” would need to be “broken down” through various trials and conflicts (Blaukopf, ed. 1984, 37). The finale’s short-circuited recapitulation and jarringly non-sequitur ending seem to reflect just such a redemptive/transformational struggle: the overtaxed F-minor sonata (the movement’s “essence”) is driven to “break”—that is, fail—before our very ears. But its exertions and sacrifices are in fact necessary to unlock the transfiguring power of the breakthrough, whose announcement of the global tonic D major induces a higher state of tonal/structural “awareness,” liberating us from the unscrolling F-minor present and granting insight into a higher-level, trans-symphonic unity. In such a conception, the sonata would *have to* fail, so that the symphony as a whole could succeed.

V. Turning Point: The Seventh Symphony and Beyond

These productive correlations of sonata process and expressive/programmatic design are consistent throughout Mahler’s early maturity, reaching their high-water mark in the Sixth Symphony (1904), the composer’s most emphatically “classical” work and one in which his dialogue with traditional forms comes into sharpest relief. There, as Chapters 4 and 7 argue, the central teleology of the Enlightenment sonata—the tonal/cadential resolution of S—rises to the level of a work-spanning “program” in its own right, anchoring the symphony’s overarching tragic drama.

But after the Sixth, we see a broad shift in Mahler’s practice, such that it becomes harder to hear sonata form as the music’s expressive/teleological backbone. The change begins as early as the Seventh Symphony (1905). As in Mahler’s earlier minor-mode sonatas, the recapitulation of 7/I dramatizes the S-theme’s denial of tonal closure: after a wrong-key launch in the mediant G major (ca. m. 466), S manages to secure an active V7 of the *major* tonic (m. 483)—replete with a four-sharp signature!—only to collapse into minor four measures later, its anticipated ESC lost to the whirlwind closing zone (m. 487). But this transgression does not, as it might once have, lead to a broader expressive failure. With nothing like the belated tonal resolution of S in 6/I, Mahler grants the movement a last-minute modal reprieve (m. 543—only five bars from the end!), and a triumphant E-*major* conclusion emerges in the face of what, in comparison to his earlier sonatas, seems an unacceptable number of loose ends.

This disengagement from the classical tonal plot progresses across Mahler's last three sonata-form movements. By the standards of his earlier works, the tonal/thematic organization of the Eighth Symphony's (1906) unwaveringly affirmative sonata would only seem chaotic and corrupt. As Williamson writes, the sonata "fails to provide a systematic tonal antithesis," in large part due the "overwhelming dominance" of the tonic E♭ major (1983, 30 and 35). The long-range tonal tensions that motivated the earlier works are neutralized, and the secondary theme is lost entirely as a narrative focal point. Its extended, rondo-like S-complex (mm. 46–107) presents a cluster of ideas that are subsequently scattered, seemingly at random, across the movement. Not only is there no tonic-key presentation of the S-complex in the recapitulation, there is no presentation *at all* (which is only so odd, considering that two of the three S-themes appear in the tonic before the exposition is even over).³⁶ From these and other anomalies—the exposition's culmination in a massive active V7 of the tonic, the prominent recapitulatory transposition of P1 to the dominant, and so on—the sense is no longer that the sonata is strategically malfunctioning (as in 5/II, with its dramatized search for a lost tonic), but that it has grown indifferent, at least from a procedural standpoint, to its own status as a sonata.

Much the same can be said of 9/I (D major; 1909) and 10/I (F♯ major; 1910), neither of which strays from the tonic long enough to establish a long-range tonal tension. In 9/I, the S-themes do usher in the secondary key (B♭ major), but not until the end of the second expositional rotation, after all of the movement's themes have been exposed in the home key.³⁷ Symphony no. 10/I presents a still more drastic scenario: by the time Mahler establishes the pro forma secondary key (B♭ minor), almost halfway into the movement, we have heard its serpentine *S* twice in the tonic (mm. 28 and 81). When the secondary key finally crystallizes, its effect is less that of a purposeful arrival than a fleeting and superficial displacement of the F♯ major/minor that so "saturate[s]" the movement (Agawu 1986, 227).

More even than tonal plot, though, it is the rhetorical/topical surfaces of these last two movements that distance them from everything that came before. Aside from a handful of key junctures (most notably their glowing moments of recapitulatory return), neither of these massive slow movements *feels* much like a sonata. In each, continuous variation within a broad, five-part rotational design obscures the form's customary functional zones.³⁸ As Adorno writes, it is only with "retrospective listening" that we can piece together a vestigial ternary scaffolding (1992, 157). The thematic discourse is also far removed from that of the

36. S1 is initially exposed in both subtonic and subdominant (mm. 46 and 66); in the recapitulation it passes through tonic for only *two measures* (mm. 525–26). Themes S2 (m. 56) and S3 (m. 80) both appear in the tonic in the exposition: the former at m. 156 and the latter (replete with an imperfect authentic cadence [IAC] in the tonic) at m. 89.

37. The S-materials in this movement are perhaps Mahler's least characteristic, consisting of three unrelated ideas (first presented in mm. 29, 39, and 44) that are permuted differently in each of the movement's five complete rotations.

38. Both movements rotate through their P and S materials five times, culminating in a half-rotational (P-based) coda. Principal sonata sections are two rotations long, with one exception in each: the recapitulation of 9/I is single-rotational, as is the development of 10/I. Many analysts have heard variation as the leading formal principle here, trumping even sonata form. See Floros 1993, 277 and 303 for overviews of analytic trends.

early works. In the search for a more supple and affectively complex language, Mahler dispenses with the bald thematic dualisms that underpinned—and aided in the navigability of—his earlier sonatas. In their place is a “discursive” language of finely articulated contrasts that directs our attention away from the architectonic (155). So while the sonata principle is not quite “abandoned” here, as Adorno would have it (95), it is often driven below the perceptual surface, disengaged as the music’s main narrative engine.

For these reasons, the sonatas of 1905–11 play only a marginal role in what follows. But even to recognize this stylistic shift is to bring a host of new research questions to light. Setting aside 7/I as a transitional work, we might still ask: Are there reasons to consider the last three sonatas as a coherent group? Might there be deeper links between 8/I—which preserves many of the traditional rhetorical markers of sonata form—and the equally tonic-fixated slow movements 9/I and 10/I? To what extent do these last two movements draw on the tonal or thematic processes of Mahler’s earlier (non-sonata) symphonic Adagios? And if tonal “tension” no longer motivates these vestigially sonata-like movements, can we hear them as consistently teleological in some other domain or domains? Only future study can tell.

VI. Recomposition and Plot Types

One of my aims in this chapter—and in the book at large, of course—is to illuminate Mahler’s dialogue with sonata-form convention, to show how century-old tonal imperatives might be heard to underwrite his expansive musical dramas. But there are other, equally revealing exchanges to listen for as well: his works’ dialogues with *one another*. By the time of the Third Symphony (1896), Mahler had already begun to revisit and rework the organizational strategies of his earlier sonatas. This habit, which endured until his last works, offers something of an analytical windfall. For by teasing out these hidden recompositions, we gain insights into Mahler’s evolving practice while also bringing the works themselves into ever sharper focus. In this section, I offer some general thoughts on how Mahler’s sonata forms can be viewed as strategic responses to those that came before, laying the groundwork for more detailed intertextual readings in the chapters ahead.

The first thing to notice is that major recompositions tend not to occur between adjacent works; Mahler was more likely to react *against* his most recent creations than to imitate or rework them. Indeed, when Adorno writes that each of Mahler’s symphonies “criticizes” the one before, he might well have had the composer’s sonata forms in mind (1992, 84). As Donald Mitchell notes, the opening of the Second Symphony seems decidedly straightforward after the two unusual sonatas bookending its predecessor (1995, 262n41). Similarly, Adorno saw Mahler “tak[ing] fright” after the monstrously aschematic sonata of the Third and responding with the “tautened” neoclassical Fourth—just as, half a decade later, the two sonatas of the Sixth would finally “confront” the classical

tradition so strenuously “resist[ed]” by the audaciously modernist Fifth (1992, 77 and 96).

The pattern that emerges here—a steady alternation of conservative and experimental impulses—cuts squarely across the conventionally recognized style periods and balances out the composer's own invitation to hear mainly smooth continuity from work to work.³⁹ Figure 1.5 maps out this vacillation in Mahler's first nine sonata forms. The movements appear chronologically from top to bottom and horizontally along an sliding scale of opposed “experimentalist” and “conservative” impulses: sonatas closer to the right margin hold more faithfully to the traditional sonata plot, while those toward the left more resolutely undermine or obscure it. Glancing from the top down, we can see Mahler “zigzagging” between the two poles, with 3/I and 6/I representing the outer extremes.

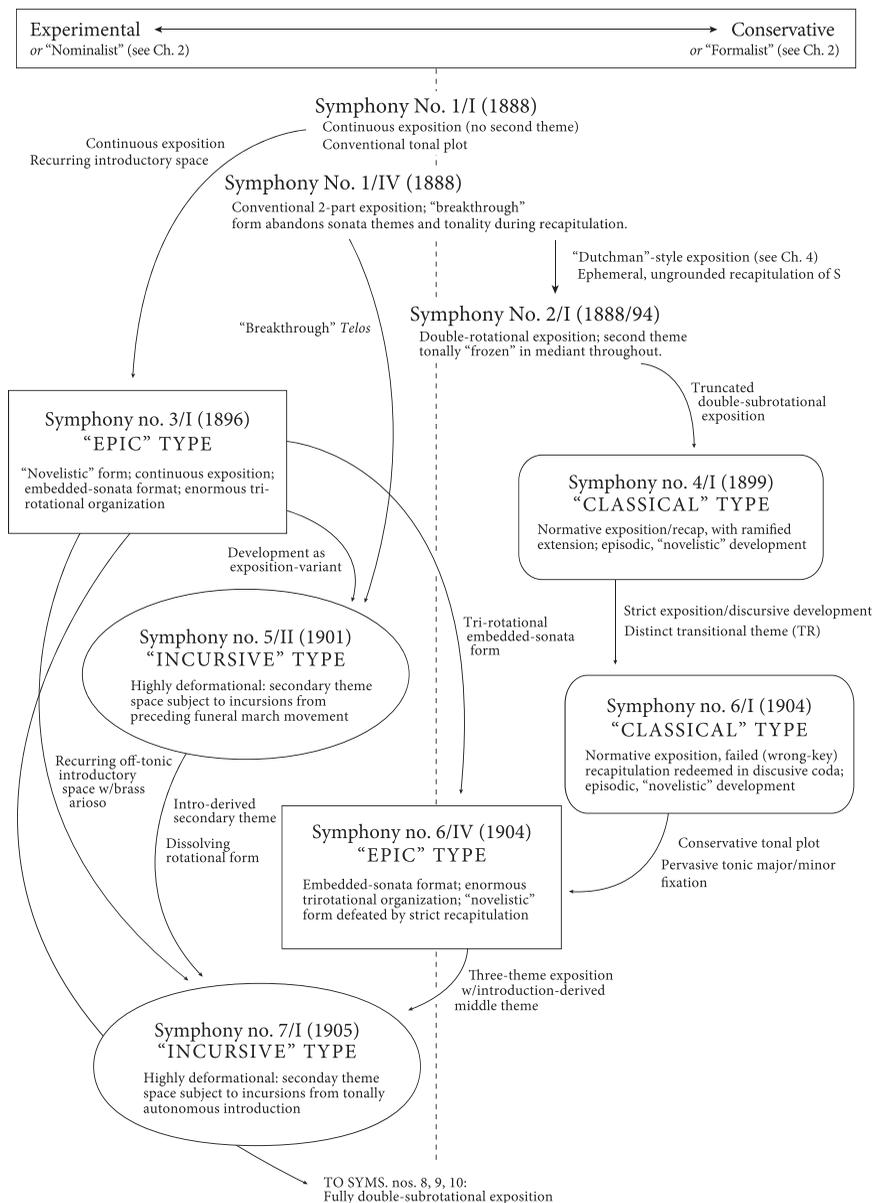
A more important, less impressionistic function of Figure 1.5 is to sketch some of the many “recompositional arteries” linking earlier works with later ones. Beneath each movement appears a short summary of its most characteristic structural/narrative features; the downward-flowing arrows then show Mahler's reuse of these (and other) important devices in works to come. Naturally, the diagram is far from complete; there are many more shared devices than those shown, and no doubt many more still undiscovered. But it should still give a general sense of how indebted his later sonatas are to those that came before.

When these debts run especially deep, we might well hear a later movement recomposing an earlier one more or less in toto, adopting and reworking its predecessor's deepest organizational premises. I describe sonatas with this special bond as sharing a common “plot type.” These plot types play an important role in the book's structure. Part Two deals with the constituents of Mahler's “classical” type, 4/I and 6/I (see the rounded rectangles in Figure 1.5). Though starkly opposed in tone and outlook, both movements are strongly shaped by their engagement with the traditional sonata prototype. Accordingly, they share a number of distinct and/or unusual features: crisp, multisectional expositions with clearly delineated TRs; episodic developments that prefer rigorous motivic dissection and the generation of new themes to integral statements of the exposition subjects; and relatively faithful recapitulations—at least for Mahler.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore these sibling movements and their underlying similarities in detail. Part Three, in turn, examines instances of Mahler's “epic” type: the sprawling, improvisatory opening of the Third, and its tragic descendant, the Finale of the Sixth. In Chapter 6, I argue that both employ an “embedded sonata” format—one in which the sonata proper unfolds in discontinuous chunks, divided by extended non-sonata interstices. Other shared features include prominent, rotation-initiating “marker” complexes; mid-developmental

39. “In each new symphony, I pick up more or less where I left off in the preceding one” (letter to Schiedermaier, 2 November 1900; see de La Grange 1995, 522). The allure of using style periods as a basis for sweeping assessments remains strong; see, e.g., Samuels 2011, which, in my opinion, too eagerly reifies these divisions in an attempt to track Mahler's changing approach to trans-symphonic narrative.

Figure 1.5 Recompositional arteries and plot-types in Mahler's early and middle-period sonatas



“fantasy episodes”; and extended, showpiece marches that transform the exposition's main subjects nearly beyond recognition.⁴⁰

It is worth stressing that these “plot types” are my own contrivance, both heuristic and esthetic in nature; we should be careful not to reify them unduly or suppose that Mahler was conscious of them at any point. Still, seeking out deep-organizational parallels of this sort can be a valuable exercise, especially between outwardly dissimilar movements. Since space here is limited, I shall simply sketch a few more pairings, leaving interested readers to pursue these (and others) on their own.

The ellipses in Figure 1.5 show instances of what I call the “incurative” type, found in Symphonies nos. 5/II and 7/I. These sonatas share a key feature: each draws actual or potential S-theme material from the non-sonata music that precedes it. But these borrowed musics consistently stand in a problematic relationship to the sonata that absorbs them—failing, for example, ever to be reconciled with the tonic key, and even leaving the movement vulnerable to violent and/or regressive incursions from without—hence, the name. In 5/II, Mahler's S-spaces implode repeatedly (mm. 266 and 392) into direct quotations of the funeral-march movement (5/I) where its S-theme originated. The opening of the Seventh is more complex: there, music that we might initially take for S—a seemingly new theme in the dominant, following a decidedly MC-like break in m. 76—turns out to be a sonata-form anomaly: it leads merely to a reprise of P and then to the “real” TR and S.⁴¹ The “incurion” it spurs arrives in the development (m. 174ff.): there, the theme gradually morphs back into its source material—the lugubrious main theme of the movement's off-tonic introduction—while threatening to shut the entire rotation down prematurely.⁴²

In Chapter 7, I show that a single movement might be heard to recombine two of its antecedents at once. (There, 6/IV revisits the “epic” plot type of 3/I while also reviving key constructive principles of 6/I.) It is also possible for a single movement to share one plot schema with a predecessor and another, based on a different feature set, with a successor. The *Hauptsatz* of the Fifth is one such case: while providing a template for its “incurative” sibling 7/I, it also recomposes the finale of the First, which stages an equally calamitous sonata failure that culminates in a transcendent off-tonic *Durchbruch* (see earlier). The opening of the Third Symphony can be analyzed along similar lines. On the one hand, it provides the template for the “epic” sonata that concludes the Sixth. But in many respects, it is a massive structural *and* programmatic recomposition of 1/I: in both, Mahler depicts the springtime awakening of dormant nature by leading a generative, off-tonic introduction into a continuous exposition whose steadily

40. See Figure 6.5 for more detail.

41. This image of the m. 80 theme as a kind of “S imposter” plays out nicely when that music and the “real” S (from m. 118) come into extended conflicts (mm. 226–40 and 338–68).

42. These movements also share an unusual structural feature: double-rotational developments in which the first rotation closely follows the exposition but which yields to progressively freer treatment in the second rotation. In 5/II, the developmental rotations begin in mm. 141 and 254; in 7/I, they begin in mm. 145 and 212.

broadening dynamic envelope culminates in a thrillingly energetic EEC. (And the key of each movement's EEC is the parallel major of the slow introduction's local tonic; in the First, the A-minor opening gives way to an A-major EEC; in the Third, D minor yields to D major.)

Finally, there is the possibility that a sonata might share important structural/narrative features with an earlier *non-sonata* movement. We see this, for instance, with Mahler's two "epic" sonatas, which can be heard to descend from the massive choral finale of the Second Symphony. Though its tonal plot is sui generis, 2/V shows a loose schematic dialogue with sonata form, one that points directly to the expansive trirotational structures of 6/IV and especially 3/I (which would inherit its fanfare-based rotational markers—the *Schreckenfanfaren* adopted from Beethoven's Ninth—and recurring, episodic introductory spaces).⁴³

I close with two additional points about plot types and their relation to the book's structure. The first is that my choice of *which* types to discuss has distinctly Adornian underpinnings. Adorno saw Mahler's music arising from the intersection of two opposing forces: a top-down, order-imposing formalism and an anti-schematic, emancipatory "nominalism." Though Chapter 2 explores this dialectic in detail, we should simply note for now that these categories are roughly homologous to the "conservative" and "experimentalist" impulses tracked horizontally in Figure 1.5. Scanning the figure's outer edges, we see that each of my chosen plot types includes a movement from the extremes of Adorno's dialectic: the intensely classicist Allegro of the Sixth (right edge) and the waywardly epic Part One of the Third (left edge)—one being an object lesson in "discipline," the other being the very "objectification of chaos" (Adorno 1992, 96 and 78).

My second point is that Parts Two and Three are arranged so that these two movements—which I take to be the "purest" instances of their respective plot types—each come first. (This accounts for the antichronological ordering of Part Two.) The second work in each pairing then offers something of a hybrid. While resembling 6/I in many key respects, the opening of the Fourth is more ambivalent about its own classicist pretensions, repeatedly undermining its sonata process with what Adorno would call "novelistic" digressions of various sorts. And as Adorno himself points out, the Finale of the Sixth may have "inherited" the question of epic form from its predecessor in the Third, but it responds by setting that impulse into conflict with "inexorable construction" of a distinctly "Beethovenian type" (1992, 79 and 97). So where the one presents the nominalist loosening of a classical plot, the other presents the formalist tightening of an epic one. In both, Adorno's dialectic of freedom and determinism can be heard to play out with vivid urgency. So let us now turn to Adorno himself, for a broad introduction to his Mahler critique and a closer look at its fascinating central allegory—that of a composer using inherited materials to subvert the very traditions that nourished and sustained him.

43. I thank James Hepokoski for pointing this out.

CHAPTER TWO

Adorno's "Novel-Symphony"

The Dialectic of Freedom and Determinism

What . . . fascinated me at once in Mahler's music was its total lack of academicism. It all sounded like an exciting novel which again and again took a new and unexpected and surprising turn.

—Erwin Stein (1930), recalling his youthful experiences of Mahler's symphonies¹

I. Adorno: *His Time Has Come*

Four decades ago, John Williamson divided twentieth-century Mahler scholarship into three broad phases: the early advocacy of the composer's personal acquaintances like Specht and Bekker; a resurgence of interest in the decades surrounding the Second World War; and a "modern" period inaugurated by Adorno's 1960 monograph *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1975, 6–14). His choice of texts to demarcate the modern era was prescient. At the time, few Anglo-American scholars had grappled with Adorno, and those who had—including Williamson himself—were at best ambivalent about what Donald Mitchell called this "alarmingly unreadable" little treatise (1960/61, 95). Yet the past generation has witnessed a slow but unrelenting ascendance of Adorno's estimation in English-speaking Mahler circles. Even five years after the publication of Edmund Jephcott's revelatory translation (1992), Peter Franklin could still wonder whether Anglo-American scholars were not still trying to "maneuver around" Adorno (1997a, 272).² But in the two decades since, a steady procession of books and articles has shown that the era of Adorno is still upon us and that his perceptions of Mahler, once regarded as occult and eccentric, have come to define a broad swath of the interpretive mainstream.

The appeal of Adorno's *Physiognomy* lies in its unusually productive balance between sociocultural critique and engaging discussions of actual musical works.

1. Stein 1995, 115.

2. This in contrast to the situation on the continent, where, even a decade earlier, Eggebrecht had observed that "the current understanding of Mahler is utterly preoccupied with Adorno, and any alternative is immediately confronted with the task of dealing with that preoccupation" (1986, 8; cited in Metzger 2007, 213).

Predictably, Adorno hears Mahler's music disclosing essential truths about its society of origin. Like all great art worthy of the name, its unresolved inner tensions and contradictions—its frictions between part and whole, between material and technique—carry within them sharp indictments of social ills, particularly those stemming from coercive and/or exploitative uses of power. For by refusing to strong-arm its materials into a falsely harmonious totality, such a work lodges protest against an economic and political systems that reduce individuals to functional objects while pacifying them with illusions of individuality and fulfillment. Yet in his Mahler writings Adorno gives these familiar conceits an unusually thorough grounding in close reading and deeply perceptive style analysis, such that the sociological element often gives way to a rapt and deeply humanizing character sketch, one that brims over with startling insights into Mahler's idiosyncratic poetics and musical culture at large. To those familiar with the curious inflections of Mahler's dialect, Adorno's vision of music staging its own brokenness as an act of self-transcendence finds an uncanny fit with the basic paradox of the composer's style—that a Romanticism so overtaxed, ironized, and hyperbolized could end up the unlikely vehicle of a voice so disarmingly earnest.

The challenges of Adorno's style are familiar to all his readers: it is oblique, elliptical, and aporetic, fraught with intentional self-contradictions designed to repel paraphrase or reduction. So it comes as no surprise that his Mahler writings offer nothing like an analytic method in the modern sense. For that we shall have to look elsewhere. Instead, Adorno's thought will provide us with a broad hermeneutic framework—a landscape to explore and a compass to guide us. Though Adorno himself would have been wary of my systematic methods and unequivocal claims, the readings that follow would scarcely be imaginable without him.

That being said, one of my aims here is to provide an analytical context in which Adorno's insights—many of them stray comments scattered throughout his forbiddingly dense monograph—might be gathered to make a more straightforward or coherent kind of sense.³ And as it turns out, there are many elements of his Mahler project that *can* be folded into something like a rigorous analytic approach. This is particularly true of his “novelistic” image of the composer's music, which weaves together insights into many aspects of the music's technical execution and construction. Thus our task in this chapter will be to develop a hermeneutics of plot that is broadly consonant with Adorno's thought without forfeiting the precision and navigability of modern analytic prose.

On this point, it should be said, a certain amount of distortion is necessary and even desirable. It is the nature of Adorno's expression, brimming over with electric antinomies, that to validate any one of his ideas concretely is all but to guarantee the negation of another. Yet we can be faithful, I think, to the spirit of

3. Franklin notes that the *Physiognomy* often reads like “a series of aphorisms extracted from a longer, subsequently hidden argument” (1993, 147). My impression is much the same: grasping Adorno's meaning, even on a single point, often requires one to connect conceptual dots lying dozens or even hundreds of pages apart.

what Adorno hoped to celebrate in his image of Mahler without making a fetish of obfuscation or placing undue stock in the patently irreducible. Any attempt to paraphrase or discipline his effusions is doomed at least to partial failure; Adorno can never be entirely contained or two-dimensionalized. But at the same time, even partial successes can help us come to terms with what this remarkable thinker might have been getting at.

Sections II through IV in this chapter explore key aspects of Adorno's Mahler critique: "novelistic form," the "variant" concept, and musical "logic," respectively. Section V then examines the many points of contact between Adorno's dialectical image of Mahlerian sonata form and the one espoused by Sonata Theory in Chapter 1. There, I lay out the study's central hermeneutic premise: that Adorno's master trope of opposing impulses—that of "novelistic" freedom and "formalistic" restraint—can map suggestively onto Hepokoski and Darcy's categories of "deformational" and "generic" construction, such that the emancipatory allegory of Adorno's novel-symphony can be reimagined *as a function of the sonata drama itself*. That is to say, I will take up Hepokoski and Darcy's view that the execution of sonata form can be a work's central expressive/dramatic focus, but I shall often interpret Mahler's dramatized departure from (or capitulation to) generic demands through an Adornian lens, hearing each movement as a real-time playing-out of the dialectic of freedom and determinism that Adorno thought so fundamental to this oeuvre. In closing, Chapter 6 pauses to reflect on the construction we call "Adorno's Mahler" and the challenges it poses for analysis and reception.

II. The Novel-Symphony

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Adorno's Mahler project is its commitment to demolishing both sides of a cultural polemic in a single blow. Midcentury critics were sharply divided on the Mahler question. While naysayers derided his symphonies as banal, overblown, or naively sentimental, advocates canonized him as a master in the grand tradition—Bruckner's worthy heir—and championed his works as riveting personal confessions or quasi-programmatic depictions of the Romantic-heroic everyman.⁴ For Adorno, these positions were equally inadequate; to rehabilitate Mahler according to venerable canons of coherence and organic wholeness was scarcely better than writing him off altogether. So with characteristic deftness, he turned both reception traditions squarely on their heads. Mahler's music, he insisted, revolted against the grand tradition and its institutions from the inside, by straining the materials and forms of the Austro-German symphony past the breaking point. As Leon Botstein points out, this is exactly what Mahler's early *critics* saw him doing, much to their loathing

4. Significantly, both schools heard the symphonies reflecting their composer's inner psychology, with Mahler alternately venerated as a "saint" (Schoenberg 1983, 4) or maligned as a neurotic, a Jew, or both.

(2002, 20ff.). But in Adorno's scheme this critique is a form of truth-saying, the only ethically sanctionable position for a composer in Mahler's shoes to occupy.

At the heart of Adorno's reappraisal we find a startlingly simple, yet "epoch-making" assertion (Pecker Berio 2002, 99): Mahler's symphonies bore a closer resemblance to nineteenth-century prose *novels* than to the instrumental symphonies of his predecessors. It is worth pausing to grasp what Adorno means here, since he is certainly *not* inviting us to chase down specific parallels between Mahler's symphonies and the works of Dostoevsky or Flaubert.⁵ Rather, this thesis of "novelistic" construction is a loose aggregate of ideas about Mahlerian form, melody, and process, gathered around the unifying themes of temporality, expectancy, and freedom. With it, Adorno likens Mahler's symphonies to literary novels in at least three related spheres: the gestural, phenomenological, and allegorical. The gestural dimension is the most straightforward, denoting a kind of mimetic homology with the literary genre. The hyperbolic contours of Mahler's music "call to mind the great novel, . . . rising to great situations, collapsing into itself," and so forth (1992, 69). The phenomenological comparison, in turn, addresses the kinds of orientations that works of art demand from their perceivers. As we will see, one facet of Adorno's meaning is that *listening* to Mahler requires a hermeneutic attitude closer to that demanded by the novel, whose narrative devices—discontinuities, ellipses, non sequiturs, perspective shifts, and so on—stand in stark opposition to the predictable symmetries of classical music's rounded, repetitive forms.⁶ "To understand Mahler," Adorno explains, "means to cast off, as far as is possible, the listening crutches afforded by the traditional patterns" (1998b, 87).

Adorno himself, however, places the most emphasis on the conceit's elaborate metaphorical apparatus, one that amplifies this basic phenomenological principle—a form that appears to come spontaneously into being—into an allegorical image of symphonic process as emancipatory critique. In Adorno's view of cultural history, the literary novel was an emblem of otherness, a current that diverged sharply from the main stream of Enlightenment thought. Since the time of Kant and Beethoven, he argues, German music and philosophy constituted a "single system," centered on an inexorable logic that forcibly excluded all remainders. Music in this tradition aspired to an "integral oneness" that "abolished multiplicity" and would "shun" anything that it could not assimilate: "its correctness was that of a system without contradictions, . . . a pure tissue of deductions" (1992, 9, 14, and 72). The literary novel stands outside this main stream, arising as a vital refuge for all that this musical/philosophical system "could not embrace" (64): the detritus of objective life, fortuity, the slack temporality of indirect paths.⁷

5. Though some critics have done just that, and with fascinating results; see Newcomb 1992 and Samuels 1995, 150–51.

6. Botstein develops this thesis at length (2002, esp. 33ff.).

7. Cf. Adorno 1998a, which argues that the "logical, profound aesthetic" of "pure, strict" art (i.e., that modeled on classical music) is fundamentally at odds with the novel and all "significant literature" (7).

Here we find Adorno taking up a view that traces back to György Lukács's seminal *The Theory of the Novel* (1916). For Lukács, the novel stood apart from those genres that took their own harmonious coherence and closure for granted. The form arose, he believed, in response to the distinctly modern problem of how to achieve "immanence of meaning" when totalities "that can be simply accepted" are "no longer given to the forms of art" (1971, 38). As Michael McKeon writes, the novel in Lukács's theory has a "problematic attitude" toward its own construction: its "basic premise" is the irresolvable dissonance arising between the pursuit of form, on the one hand, and the impossibility of its definitive attainment on the other (2000, 180). With a flair for the paradoxical that directly anticipates Adorno, Lukács argues that the sought-after "immanence of meaning . . . is attained precisely when the author goes all the way, ruthlessly, towards exposing its absence" (1971, 71–72). That is to say, the central task of the novel (like the novel-symphony after it) would be to cast off the false security of seemingly harmonious, well-rounded, or tightly knit genres and to thematize its own search for form, its own process of seeking and becoming.⁸ Indeed, as Lukács saw it, "becoming" is the end state to which the novel aspires.

The influence of Lukács can be felt throughout Adorno's writings, as several recent studies have shown (Hall 2006, O'Connor 2004). For our purposes, his most important contribution may be the notion that non-novelistic genres might themselves be "novelized"—that they could, to use McKeon's terms, be "drag[ged] . . . into a zone of contact with reality" (2000, 330). With this insight, Adorno came to see Mahler's music undertaking a strikingly similar project to that of the great novelists. The composer's triumph, he believed, lay in his liberation of music from an integration-aesthetic that had governed the Beethovenian tradition—that is, from the thematic and formal protocols that underwrote music's image as a closed system "without contradictions," an irresistibly logical and self-confirming dynamic structure (1992, 23). Mahler's music, by sharp contrast, was a heterogeneous tissue of individualized impulses, amassed in defiance of the synthetic meaning that could no longer be assured by the "ritual execution" of ossified formal schemes (49). Disdaining any path predetermined by the classical "ontology of forms," the long, convoluted arc of the Mahlerian novel-symphony unfolds according to the unique dictates of its thematic constituents, which are energized by the tense forcefield of their collective non-integration and ultimately brought to pronounce a higher truth (62). In such a conception, the whole no longer controls its parts, as it does in the tightly knit classical conception, but is *determined* by them—a virtual byproduct of their seemingly fortuitous collusion and collision (49, 62).

Adorno refers to this inversion of the part-to-whole relationship as composing from the "bottom up" (1998b, 87), rather than from the top down. It is this bottom-up construction that occasions the symphonies' spontaneous, mercurial, and eclectic character, as it allows the kinds of graphic juxtapositions

8. This formal dilemma is mirrored on the level of content as well: in aiming to recuperate or reconstruct "the concealed totality of life," it nevertheless affirms "the fragile and incomplete nature of the world as ultimate reality" (Lukács 1971, 62 and 71).

and commingling of antitheses that are elemental to the literary novel but unthinkable in the top-down construction of the Viennese classical symphony, whose “seamless identity” shuns anything whose assimilation would disrupt its “integral oneness” (1992, 13 and 9). In the case of Mahler’s sonata forms, the novelistic impulse represents the intrusion of individual freedom within an event-field that is virtually “de-temporize[d]” (35) by the ponderous symmetries of traditional sonata design. Indeed, Mahler’s “improvisatory” impulses are defined precisely to the extent that they strain against these prefabricated architectonic constraints.⁹ In so doing, they reinvigorate music’s temporal presence, its capacity to arise vitally, from “its own enactment,” rather than through rote pattern completion (93).

As it suits him, Adorno extends this novelistic analogy to the themes themselves, which he fashions as the novels’ “characters.” Like subjects in prose novels, he argued, Mahler’s themes possess a core identity that is transformed outwardly by context, duration, and experience: “Mahler’s themes are recognizable, like characters in a novel, as developing themes that retain their essence unchanged. . . . Driven on by impulses, as the same beings they yet become different, shrink, expand, even age. . . . Time passes into the characters and changes them as empirical time alters faces” (72). These thematic characters are crucial to Adorno’s overall conceit, since it is in their progressive transformation that we hear the passing of novelistic time. That is to say, they do not merely reside *in* novelistic time; they are the very manifestation of it. But, as Adorno observes, this role requires that their “essence[s]” remain “unchanged,” even over the greatest symphonic expanses. This, he believed, was ensured on a technical level by what he called Mahler’s “variant” technique.

III. Teleological Coherence (I): The Variant Technique

In the wider picture of his Mahler critique, Adorno’s own breakthrough comes not with the observations that Mahler’s music ran roughshod over received forms, unfolded with the apparent non-linearity of complex prose, or employed incessant thematic transformation. This had all been noticed before.¹⁰ Rather, it is his conviction that the music joins these attributes in a system that brings broad formal gestures and isolated musical details into demonstrable, causal interrelation. The real significance of the novel-symphony is its presumption that Mahler’s music not only follows a “novelistic curve” in its gestural-mimetic language, but that the

9. The image of Mahler “improvising” his forms is a prominent leitmotiv in Adorno (1992, 37, 78, 87, 91, 98, 117, and 150; see also 2002b, 613).

10. Erwin Stein used the “novel” metaphor as early as 1930 (1996, 115; see this chapter’s epigraph), and comparisons of music and novels were common even in Schumann’s time (Newcomb 1987, 168). Many had noted Mahler’s proclivity for complex thematic transformations—including the composer himself (1896 letter to Max Marschalk; see Martner, ed. 1979, 182). Analogies between themes and literary characters date at least to Friedrich Schlegel (Danuser 1975, 110).

"logic" of this curve could be corroborated on a material level—that later happenings, down to their smallest inflections, might be understood as the consequence of earlier events. For all of its apparent irregularity, the sequence of Mahler's musical configurations "is subject to a certain organic teleology which can be studied down to the very last interval. . . . Nothing is unaffected by succession. What happens must always take specific account of what happened before" (1998b, 95; 1992, 52). Thus it is not just the characteristic "rise and fall of passion" that Mahler's music inherits from the novel, but also the power to channel currents of implacable necessity beneath "unexpected" and "seemingly coincidental" surface events (1998b, 87).

As mentioned, Adorno believed this teleological, novelistic coherence to be legible mainly in the symphonies' thematic "characters," whose core identities remain unaltered despite constant superficial change. This ontological stability is guaranteed by what he terms Mahler's "variant" procedure. Mahler's materials, he argues, resist the classical inclination to break down into smaller units. Instead of dissolving its subjects into motivic debris, only to reassemble them for the purposes of recapitulation, the novel-symphony preserves the main outlines of its themes as indivisible "gestalts" with shifting intervallic content and expressive exteriors.

At times, variants are little more than rhetorical or topical reframings of an easily recognizable melody. But in more dramatic examples, the variants are so differentiated that they seem at first blush to be new themes altogether. We see this in Figure 2.1, which shows a network emerging from the funeral march theme of 5/I. The top staff shows the theme at its first appearance, and the bottom two show two later variant incarnations—one later in the same movement and one in the next. The rhythmic outlines of the original theme echo audibly through the others, while the brackets along the bottom trace the deeper sentential organization that defines the underlying gestalt. Similarly, Figure 7.5 shows several seemingly new themes spawned from segments of the chorale near the start

Figure 2.1 Variants of the march theme in Symphony no. 5/I

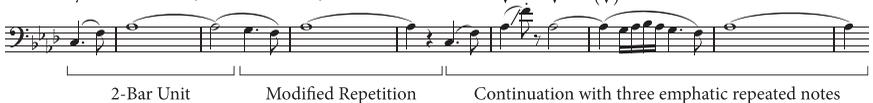
March Theme (5/I, mm. 35–42)



March Theme B-Section (5/I, mm. 119–26)



Secondary sonata theme (5/II, mm. 79–86)



of 6/IV. There, the variants preserve the rhythm of the original while altering its contour, sometimes dramatically.¹¹

Adorno believed that by preserving themes' essential gestalt-characteristics—rather than divesting their identity through motivic fragmentation—Mahler could foreground their continuous semantic reframing and thus facilitate “a hearing encompassing the far distance” (1992, 87). This long-distance hearing, in turn, allows *form* to arise from the novel-symphony's “hastily bundled profusion of impulses” (63)—not a prefabricated, finite, closed form, but an alternate tectonics arising largely through retrospection (87). This, in turn, allows Adorno to draw the variant technique into his allegory of novelistic emancipation, by suggesting that the technique itself might help to undermine the rigid formalism of the classical style. Where the variation assumes a secure reference point, Mahler's variants are all variants equally of one another, all the same distance from some unstated center: “No theme is positively, unambiguously there, none is ever quite definitive” (88). The result is not only the disruption of any discernible hierarchy—an erosion of the binary between originals and derivatives—but also the collapse of any architectonic scaffolding erected on that distinction. This is critical, since in the case of sonata form, the variant technique serves to undermine the constituent sections' defining rhetorical characteristics: “Because Mahler's themes, being relatively stable, are not altered in a continuous development, they are not initially expounded either” (88). In other words, the variant technique, which ensures that the themes will remain integral throughout the structure, weakens the ability of developments to *be developments* (in the traditional sense) and, as such, the ability of expositions to be expositions as well.¹² But most important, it is the traditional conception of the recapitulation that Mahler's praxis undercuts most emphatically. If, as Adorno suggests, the recapitulation is not entrusted to reassemble the sonata's themes after developmental fragmentation, then it cannot provide that incriminating moment of ritual “self-confirmation” so integral to “Utopian identity” of the classical sonata (63, 11). Narrative logic trumps architectural logic again.

As always, though, we should be careful not to take Adorno's pronouncements at face value, since he rather exaggerates the prevalence of these gestalt-transformational processes. Just as often, we find Mahler using the same sorts of “Beethovenian” techniques he is supposed to have transcended. A host of phenomenological concerns loom as well. We may wonder, for instance, how a listener might distinguish these variant procedures from similar thematic transformations in Liszt, Strauss, and others,¹³ or whether it is even possible *not* to hear the first instance of a theme as “definitive” in relation to later variants.

11. Naturally, the single-staff excerpts in Figures 2.1 and 7.5 omit striking textural/harmonic differences as well.

12. Adorno's ideas echo Mahler's own understanding of “development” (in the traditional sense) as something archaic and foreign to his own work—and to Beethoven's as well. See his comments to Josef B. Foerster (cited in Floros 1993, 58).

13. The answer may well be “not at all”; see, e.g., Wattenbarger 2001–2, 327. The Adornian party line—that Liszt's and Strauss's transformations are merely arbitrary, serving no greater teleological function—is polemical and far from convincing (1992, 95).

Another problem, which I return to later, lies in Adorno's conviction that the variant principle, when applied to entire formal complexes, would necessarily undermine the perception of traditional formal schemata.

Before then, however, we must go deeper into the variant principle and ask a number of questions that Adorno's critique raises tacitly and answers only obliquely: what kind of "coherence" *do* the variants ensure? And what kinds of "organic teleologies" do they help to articulate?

IV. Teleological Coherence (II): The Functions and Limits of Adorno's "Musical Logic"

Of the many facets of Adorno's Mahler critique, the most crucial for the present study is his promise that a discernible (if often "subterranean" [1992, 35]) logic winds through the musical novel, tying together its most distant chapters. For with this conceit, Adorno seems to bring us to the threshold of a genuinely plot-based conception of Mahler's music, one in which the work's specific material configurations realize a coherent, temporally purposive narrative and thus a final consummation of the "novel" metaphor.

But then he backs away. For all his advocacy of a process-based conception of this music, Adorno rarely offers a convincing rationale for *how* it is goal-oriented in any but the most tautological sense. To see why this is the case—to understand the disconnect between what Adorno seems to promise and what his interpretive framework actually delivers—we shall want to examine this load-bearing concept of musical logic in some depth. For this, we must pause our discussion of the novel-symphony and grapple with the more esoteric sociocultural mechanisms at the heart of Adorno's aesthetic program. Only then will we be able to understand why this "logic" is so deeply problematic from the perspective of applied analysis.¹⁴

Adorno thought it incumbent upon authentic artworks to resist the instrumental (i.e., ends-driven) reason and progressive domination of late Enlightenment society. They accomplish this by positioning themselves outside, or as other than, empirical reality, by organizing themselves according to an alternative, "aesthetic" rationality—a logic that both imitates instrumental reason (in the domination and manipulation of its own intrinsic artistic materials) and also criticizes it, by marshaling that domination in the service of nonpurposive ends, in accordance with the autonomy claims of the bourgeois artwork (Paddison 1993, 140; cf. Adorno 1997, 289). This aesthetic

14. If I linger here on aspects of Adorno's Mahler-image that I *cannot* use, this is only because we should, to use an Adornian turn of phrase, understand how the parts of his theory relate to the whole. If "the whole" in this case is hardly a tightly knit system—any such whole being "false" by his celebrated aphorism (1978, 50)—it is still a coherent constellation of ideas that should not be plucked casually from their contexts.

logic reveals itself primarily through the medium of *form*. As Max Paddison explains, Adorno's concept of form encompasses two dialectically interactive "levels": form in terms of the received materials with which a composer works (which have been socially "formed"—i.e., which are not natural) and form as manifest in particular artistic instances, where it refers to the immanent laws governing a given work, the "the totality of moments through which a work is organized meaningfully" (1993, 150). In this way, Adorno's form-concept reflects the dialectical interaction of universals and particulars embodied in his project's organizing conceit: the productive confrontation of the subjective composer and the objective (that is, socially constructed and historically saturated) materials with which he or she must negotiate.

This dualism of particulars and universals is mirrored recursively throughout Adorno's thought. Just as works realize form on two different levels, an artwork's "logic" is realized in two different but related capacities. As Adorno repeatedly stresses, the very materials a composer inherits are suffused with "objective tendencies," their own "inner necessity," entirely independent of the creative artist's intentions (1992, 133 and 6). But in addition to this inherent logic, there is also the "immanent logic of form" projected by the individual concrete work—a particular, internally consistent technical response to the demands of the materials and the "problems" they embody. This response emerges from what Paddison calls the "articulation, organization, and recontextualization of the historically available 'layers' of material to give them new meaning at the level of the individual composition" (1993, 150).

At this second stage, the artist's own creative agency would seem to be critical, since it is only in the tension between these two levels of form that art's "truth content" can emerge. But Adorno leaves little doubt that it is, in fact, the "objective logic" of the materials themselves—residues and echoes of their past conventionality—that is most decisive in shaping any individual work. As Paddison explains, any individual composition for Adorno "should be in effect an indicator of the stage reached by the musical material at any historical period" (1993, 152). Accordingly, the composer's primary task is to *submit* to the demands of the material. The master composer does not fabricate a constructive logic from scratch, or impose form arbitrarily on his or her materials, but rather obeys the "objective logic" of the artwork in development, intuiting the formal response necessary to mediate the tensions and contradictions inherent in the material and effectively reducing himself or herself to an "executive organ" (Adorno 1992, 129). It is a theory of artistic production that, much like Mahler's own, relegates the composer's conscious intentions and awareness to a marginal, sometimes even epiphenomenal role.¹⁵

Another conceptual hurdle lies in the historical instability of this "logic." Rooted in both the prehistory of a work (through its materials) and its contemporary social-historical site (through the "problems" the individual work confronts),

15. Mahler might have been pleased by Adorno's image of the composer "drawn along by the objective forces inherent in his work as if he were his own detached spectator" (1992, 133). Elsewhere, Adorno tempers this trope of the somnambulistic genius, hinting that Mahler was at least *conscious* of his task (85–86, 113).

Adorno's logic evolves with its parent medium, coming eventually to supersede and even to criticize its own past incarnations. So there is not one musical logic, but a seemingly infinite array of logics, manifested immanently in as many works. And yet it is striking that Adorno stresses time and again the categorical break between Mahler's "logic" and all that comes before—one significant enough to warrant talk of a "second" species, serving as a "corrective" to the earlier paradigm (1998b, 87; 1992, 64).

Before looking at this unique and "superior" logic (1998b, 87), it will be helpful to make a few broad generalizations about the logic of music prior to Mahler's. Among all the arts, the music of the common-practice period offers perhaps the easiest opportunity to grasp Adorno's notion of an ineffable (or para-linguistic) aesthetic logic, since we are well accustomed to understanding its autonomy-character as arising from its hermetic, intrinsic "laws," and it is partly on this basis that we grant it the capacity to generate apparently self-referential "meanings." Though Adorno resists explicating this repertoire's logic in detail, he does indicate that on the level of its materials it corresponds loosely with the norms of Classical praxis, the syntactic and formal "rules" of the Western compositional system and its various genres and materials at a given historical moment—all the familiar attributes that give music a "language-character" without propositional content.¹⁶

Mahler's "second and superior" logic criticizes these earlier constructive forms as ideologically tainted marks of subsumptive reason, monolithic "top-down" structures increasingly at risk of curtailing their materials' "objective tendencies." It achieves this critique by imparting a new species of novel-like coherence to the wayward successions that would be senseless under the ossified logic of the Viennese tradition, where music "composed itself as a seamless identity, an analytic judgment" (1992, 13). So in one important sense, the function of this "second" logic is to interrelate Mahler's sundry thematic impulses in terms of a higher-level but still coherent unity.

But here we face an apparent contradiction: was not the whole point of the novel-symphony its "bottom-up" approach to form, one that *deprivileged* integrated totalities in favor of the "fortuitous" intermingling of individual impulses (1992, 62)? Yes, but we would be wrong to assume that Adorno was against compositional wholes outright. Indeed, the very appeal of novelistic construction lies precisely in its potential to reinvigorate the whole, to imbue it with more than a tautological, self-confirming meaning. For Adorno, the classical totality proves the "a priori ground of the composition," one that the individual details exist merely to realize (49).¹⁷ By contrast, the Mahlerian whole "crystallize[s] from the individual impulses without regard to preconceived types"—it is a "task" to be

16. "Language-character" is Christian Lenhardt's rendering of "Sprachcharakter" (Adorno 1984, 167). Robert Hullot-Kentor uses "character of eloquence" instead (Adorno 1997, 112), but also reflects at length on the concept's essential untranslatability (371n5).

17. Adorno goes so far as to suggest that Beethoven's forms (and by extension his contemporaries' as well) show an "artistically planned indifference" to their own materials (2002c, 167). Elsewhere, he writes that "the history of great bourgeois music at least since Haydn is the history of the interchangeable . . . no individual thing exists 'in itself,' and everything only in relation to the

accomplished anew for each movement (128, 49). In this sense the whole is only meaningful *by virtue* of its “irreplaceable” details (19)—through their individual characters and, more important, their tense interrelationships. And yet a second, emergent meaning transcends these alienated fragments, leaping from them like a spark (62). It is at this higher stratum that Mahler’s “organic teleology”—the logic that penetrates the music down to the “very last interval”—emerges as well (1998b, 95).

But the circuit is still not complete: for just as a higher meaning emerges from the whole through its parts, so do the parts take on new meanings through their function *within* that totality. This is how Adorno justifies the symphonies’ use of seemingly “archaic” musical materials. Adorno’s project placed Mahler in a fundamentally new role—the composer as necromancer, one whose music, like Eurydice, is “abducted from the realm of the dead” (1992, 56). Worn threadbare over generations of use, Mahler’s materials no longer have the immediacy of historically viable musical objects; they are “petrified,” their objective tendencies frozen within them (58). It is only the specific configuration or manifest form of the whole that catalytically releases the sedimented meaning in these “dead” materials, allowing them to “stir anew under the staff of the composition and feel their strength.” They are at once “reduced to elements of the composition” and at the same time “freed from their thing-like rigidity” (58).¹⁸ Thus even the residual meanings in his inherited materials and forms are transfigured by the immanent logic of each unique piece. Where we encounter debris from the past (dances, marches, chorales, sonata forms), they no longer bear unmediated the communally constructed logic they might once have embodied. The “second and superior” logic seems even to penetrate these materials retroactively, readying them for the novel-symphony’s chaotic and effusive mass assemblage.

This, then, is how Mahler restores a vital reciprocity between part and whole: the whole is produced by a linear stream of contingent, spontaneously unfolding details, yet at the same time it achieves a synthetic meaning that binds these details—often despite themselves—into a conceptual singularity. But by traditional standards, that singularity is riven with paradoxes. The parts and whole, though mutually determinative, never “harmonize” in the traditional sense, and the whole itself strenuously avoids the “rounded completeness” that was a precondition for the classical totality (1992, 49–50).¹⁹ Indeed, Adorno often depicts Mahler’s materials in an antagonistic relationship with the synthesizing

whole” (1998a, 34). Paddison traces Adorno’s views on this point to the influence of August Halm’s *Von zwei Kulturen der Musik* (1913), which examines the “bureaucratic mentality” of the Classical sonata (1993, 73–74).

18. It is on these grounds that Adorno answers the charge of “banality” in Mahler’s music: the individual elements might have been justifiably called banal in their former lives, but reinvigorated and catalyzed by the totality, they transcend this status and acquire a critical voice (1992, 58–59). This type of apology, with its emphasis on use over quality, goes back at least to the time of Bekker (1969) and Specht (1913).
19. On this key point, Adorno’s debt to Lukács is especially clear. Of the novel’s paradoxical antagonism between part and whole, the latter notes that the parts “can never lose their inexorable, abstract self-dependence”; their connectedness is not “organic.” Yet, in order “not to destroy the

whole. The latter can only transcend the sum of its parts by virtue of the materials' apparent non-integration, yet these elements can only be "synthesized" at this higher level "if they are already informed by the potential of the whole, and for this the composition must have discreet, invisible control." To this end "an element of deception cannot be excluded." This violence has palpable traces in the music as the "stigmata of contrivance," which "testify to the impossibility of reconciling general and particular in a form exempt from the compulsion of a system" (128).²⁰

Mahler's power, then, is not to heal what is broken, to redeem his materials by force-fusing them into the "seamless identity" of some Platonic archetype. Rather, it is to forge an entirely new kind of whole, one that catalyzes a higher, albeit "negative" meaning from reanimated and unreconciled fragments (1992, 13, 50, and 125).²¹ And it is in these paradoxes that we glimpse, if indirectly, the novelistic "logic" Adorno champions. It is the very forcefield that holds these fragments together—one that allows the Mahlerian totality to resist the centrifugal forces pulling it apart from within and to mediate the breaches that would have brought music fashioned within the older system to the point of disintegration.

In many respects, Adorno's "novelistic" logic offers a striking musical analog to the kind of "polyphonic" design that his contemporary, Mikhail Bakhtin, championed in Dostoevsky. For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's writings struck a singular and unprecedented balance between authorial control and submission to his material. Rather than objectifying his characters, reducing them to use-objects for the sake of a "monological" (Adorno might say "top-down") unity, he granted them full ideological autonomy, allowing them to speak with a voice not necessarily his own. By refusing to "diminish" his characters to elements of his own "dominating consciousness" (Booth 1984, xxiii), Dostoevsky was able to achieve a degree of "heteroglossia"—a multiplicity of voices, not all of them mutually reconcilable—that would have been inimical to traditional literary genres. Bakhtin's "heteroglossic" ideal is similar to Adorno's "bottom-up" construction in that the form's constituent parts (Dostoevsky's subjects, much like Mahler's own thematic "characters") are not curtailed or manipulated artificially for the sake of the whole. They have substance beyond that of mere function.

whole," the parts' fusion must be compelled by a higher logic, one that imbues them with "strict compositional and architectural significance" (Lukács 1971, 75–76). And for Lukács, like Adorno, the means by which the novel conjoins these autonomized parts is fundamentally obscure, lying beyond verbal formulations: it is "a process whose ultimate content cannot be rationalized" (73).

20. And later: "Violence is sometimes done to the melodies for the sake of the whole, which Mahler's memory, for all his obsession with detail, never for a moment lets out of sight" (1992, 132).
21. This image of Mahlerian praxis encapsulates the paradox at the heart of Adorno's wider aesthetic theory: "a successful work is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (1981, 32).

And yet, as with the novel-symphony, authorial control is preserved, if also transformed: like Adorno's Mahler, Bakhtin's Dostoevsky retains mastery of the proceedings, but at a higher, more abstract level—his “consciousness . . . is constantly and everywhere present” and “active . . . to the highest degree” (Bakhtin 1984, 67–68), acting as what Booth describes as a “centrifugal” counterbalance to the “centripetal” forces inherent in heteroglossic form (1984, xxi–xxii). This new vision of authorial control, deferential as much to the autonomy of the part as to the integrity of the whole, is Bakhtin's equivalent of the “logic” Adorno heralds in Mahler's novelistic style.²² For both critics, as for Lukács before them, novelistic form presents a powerful but elusive organizing force—one that is different in kind, not just in degree, from its historical precedents, and which embraces, unflinchingly, all of the irresolvable ideological conflicts of objective life. Indeed, to be “novelistic”—regardless of the genre—is to elevate these dissonances to a first principle of form.

If the foregoing helps to clarify the conceptual basis of Mahler's novelistic logic, it also shows how little it resembles anything like a tool for applied analysis. Realizing itself anew in each of Mahler's works and constituted as the negative image of most familiar categories of musical coherence, this logic becomes virtually impossible to articulate or comprehend in any positive sense. We might assume that a logic meant to account for the contingent, aschematic unfolding of Mahler's music would rise or fall on its ability to assert *causality*. If we wish to explore Mahler's “nominalism” (Adorno 1992, 62)—his commitment to compositional specifics, such that every detail is chosen with “extreme precision” (47) and in direct response to everything that precedes—then our query will inevitably arrive at a series of “why” questions: Why *does* the exposition of Symphony No. 4/I end in the tonic? Why *would* the development of 5/II reprise a large section of the preceding movement? Why *does* 7/I appear to have two secondary sonata subjects? And so on. If the parts and the whole are as intimately and purposefully related as Adorno claims, then these bigger questions ought to be essential to any inquiry about the local meaning of this or that variant transformation.

But the “logic” that governs Adorno's scheme is something altogether different; it offers no answers to such questions, provides for no determinate causality. Indeed, by defining his aesthetic logic in opposition to instrumental reasoning, Adorno dispenses with all that we habitually understand the concept of “logic” to encompass—rational, systematic argumentation, and falsifiable or testable claims. Reinstating Mahler's own cult of the ineffable, Adorno declares that “the true language” of artworks is “mute” (1997, 112). The meanings seemingly inscribed in their formal logic cannot be made explicit, cannot be transcribed into natural language. To force the issue would be to reduce art to the very

22. The parallels between Adorno's Mahler and Bakhtin's Dostoevsky are all the more striking given that the historical Mahler apparently thought that reading Dostoevsky's novels would be more important for budding composers than studying counterpoint (Reich 1965, 32; see also Alma Mahler 1969, 126). For further commentary on the relevance of Bakhtin's Dostoevsky to Mahler's music, see Johnson 2009, 196–98; see also 130–34 and 166–67.

instrumental reason it seeks to resist. For Adorno, "to explain is to explain away" (Bernstein 1991, 8). So for all his emphasis on materiality and immanence, the foundations of Adorno's aesthetic system are unmistakably metaphysical, since the constructive mechanics of artworks—the very rationalities justifying their existence *as artworks*—lie in large part beyond the purview of explanation, emulation, or even detection.

Not that this should come as a surprise. For Adorno, to make music a "semiotic system" linking back to fully clarified and cogently graspable concepts would only be a degradation (1998c, 1). Its ideas are "explained only by each other," forever repelling our verbal incursions (1998a, 12).²³ But one cannot help but be struck by the disconnect between what Adorno's theory of "organic teleology" promises and what it delivers in terms of critical insight. Adorno may depict this logic as manifested demonstrably in concrete musical details, but it only flourishes in the allegorical sphere of his writings, where it is separated by several degrees of abstraction from actual musical happenings.

The general (and much-noted) problem is Adorno's flimsy linkage of the analytic and speculative spheres of his critical enterprise. Simply put, he never explains how analysis—which he nevertheless deems an "essential element of art itself" (2002c, 169)—can actually corroborate or uncover the kinds of esoteric knowledge so vital to his high-flying interpretations. In the case of the novel-symphony, the impasse emerges when Adorno suggests that Mahler's logic is not just a metaphysical attribute, as explained earlier, but an *epistemic* category. That is to say, the disconnect comes with Adorno's assurance that the listener will find this logic apperceptible and, indeed, might become so attuned to its immanent teleological presence—the "directional tendency" in "each single element" of the music—as to foresee the music's goals in advance (2002c, 175).²⁴

But there is nothing in the theory that accounts for specific musical successions at all—a fact made awkwardly evident when Adorno calls on individual passages to illustrate his claims. Typically, his only means of linking temporally distinct events is the facile assurance that the later one is the inevitable result of some "inner tendency" in the first. Modern hermeneutic appetites are unlikely to be satisfied by such empty explanations, which create a phantom image of process where none is shown and which beg two key interpretive questions: (1) that of the criteria that actually define Mahler's processive logic, and (2) that of the competencies the listener would need to apprehend these teleologies as they unfold.²⁵

23. Spitzer puts it nicely when he organizes Adorno's musical/critical writings around "a point so simple as to be breathtaking: the instant we consider music as a document (of a theoretical model, a semiotic code, a hermeneutic window, a cultural unit, a social practice) it ceases to be music" (2006, 6).

24. Indeed, Adorno states explicitly that it is "the task of future formal analyses . . . to demonstrate [the core themes in his own Mahler-image] in the concrete." He also believed that this responsibility fell equally to performers (2002a, 606).

25. For a typical example, see Adorno 2002c, 175. The one time in the Mahler writings Adorno *does* aspire to explain this logic with any thoroughness, the results are wholly underwhelming; see his discussion of 4/I (1992, 90–91).

So despite what Adorno implies, this chimerical “logic” fails to be much of an analytical category, let alone a yardstick for assessing aesthetic merit.²⁶ If our interest is in articulable teleology, we shall instead require a more comprehensible and determinate theory of musical plot. For that, we return now to Sonata Theory, which will let us deal more concretely with musical processes and particulars while also keeping the pillars of Adorno’s “novelistic” hermeneutic more or less intact. Our task in the next section is to explore the various points of contact—some of them unexpected—between these two seemingly divergent approaches.

V. Toward a Plot-Based Model of Novelistic Construction

That Adorno’s novelistic vision might be compatible with certain recent theories of form should hardly surprise, since it routinely points beyond the modular/taxonomic views of his contemporaries toward a more modern, dynamic understanding—“form” as an unfolding transaction between composer and listener, one that draws semantic capital from the fulfillment and deflection of expectations. As already explained, the inspiration for the novel-symphonic principle arises in the vicissitudes of the listening experience itself, as a response to the “second and superior logic” of Mahlerian discourse, which dictates the listener “abandon himself to the flow of the work, from one chapter to the next, as with a story when you do not know how it is going to end” (1998b, 87–88). This entails a radical shift of emphasis, from form as an objective, immanent attribute to form as a process, an emergent quality. Because it unfolds in a state of constant generative tension, a novelistic form cannot be collapsed into *any* static, ontologically binding schema. And yet we cannot entirely dispose of these conventional templates: “Mahler’s innovations,” Adorno urges, “are not comprehensible without reference to the norm from which he deviated” (81). The traditional forms are not wholly expunged, but neither are they directly to be heard. They are always mediated by their own brokenness or their relegation to the fringes of our retrospective awareness.²⁷ They are constitutive of the work’s meaning, but only indirectly, through their apparent absence.

Although the *Physiognomy* hints that this processive form-concept might be unique to Mahler, the late essay “On the Problem of Musical Analysis” (1969) elevates it to a general condition. There, Adorno laments the rarity of truly processive formal theories, because while “Becoming” in music is actually “illusory,”

26. For more insights on the inadequacies of Adorno’s “logic” as an evaluative tool, see Wattenbarger 2001–2, 327–29. In toto, these shortcomings should remind us that much of the time, Adorno means something fundamentally different from what we mean by “analysis.” Beyond the most mundane fact-gathering (assessing motivic relationships and the like), “analysis” for Adorno quickly elides into philosophy—a sphere that does not deal in “statements of fact” and in which “nothing is meant quite literally” (2000, 110).

27. Adorno often writes of formal attributes or functions becoming actualized only “retrospectively” (1992, 11, 80, and 96).

it is only when music is *conceived* temporally that it comes to be coherent (2002c, 171). That same study also amplifies the nascent dialogic elements in Adorno's Mahler project, culminating in a declaration that might well have appeared in Hepokoski and Darcy's writings a half-century later: "Analysis, as the unfolding of the work, exists in relationship to the work itself and to its genre or 'compositional archetype.' . . . The task we have before us [as analysts] . . . is the realization of this already complex relationship of *deviation* to *schema*, rather than just one or the other alone" (Adorno 2002c, 169 and 164–65).²⁸

This is not the only parallel between Adorno's thought and that of Hepokoski and Darcy. In the broadest sense, Sonata Theory's injunction to pursue musical meaning in both immanent and relational domains has strong parallels in Adorno's idiosyncratic approach to analysis in general. Adorno seeks music's meanings "through the complicated interplay of the work's own specificity . . . and meaning that results from the social-historical site the music occupies, both in the time of its making and in the ever-changing present" (Leppert 2002a, 74). Such a framework is broadly isomorphic with that underlying Hepokoski's dialogic form, with its bifocal interest in concrete compositional choices on the one hand and socially constructed, historically situated genres on the other.²⁹ So in certain respects, simply approaching Mahler in a Sonata Theory-based framework already puts us in partial accord with Adorno's analytical vision.

Still another overlap between Adorno's thought and Sonata Theory is a hierarchic, holistic perspective on musical form, one that treats entire movements as privileged semantic units and which seeks to read local events in terms of their meaning within the unfolding whole. Section III in this chapter dealt with the mutually determinative relationship that Adorno saw linking parts and wholes. While hardly formulated as a guideline for applied analysis, his model has clear implications for any close reading: we must pursue Mahler's meaning through the local and the global at the same time, so completely do they interpenetrate. A perspective on the whole that fails to account for the unique configuration of its parts is destined to be as inadequate as an account of individual details that fails to ask what kind of sense they make together.

A similar ideal lies at the heart of dialogic form and thus the entire Sonata Theory enterprise. For Hepokoski and Darcy, the listener's engagement of a complete musical work passes first and most vitally through the filter of genre, which serves critically as "the decoder of an otherwise unintelligible or free-floating musical message" (2006, 606). Because they construe the sonata as a single through-composed process—one that is normally coextensive with an entire

28. However, Adorno reserves this proto-dialogical form-concept for works he deems sufficiently complex and self-conscious—i.e., those guided by a "specific, sustaining structural idea" (2002c 177). Lesser music, which operates entirely "within a pre-existing medium and with pre-existing forms," is exempted (168).

29. The difference is that nothing in Adorno's framework provides a stable regulating function comparable to that of *genre*, which gives Hepokoski and Darcy a more rigorously delimited layer of mediation between the musical trace and its social-historical context. See Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 603–10.

movement—attending to a work's “dialogue” with genre means assessing the role its successive moments play in the execution or realization of that whole; the most convincing interpretations, they argue, will be “closely congruent with every moment of the music” (254). So, as with Adorno's ideal of novelistic construction, Hepokoski and Darcy's image of form seeks to preserve a sense of expectant, spontaneous unfolding (the sonata as “utterance” [10]), while recognizing that the narrative or dramatic meaning of individual details is always to be reckoned against their place within the totality that they generate. It is in this ideal, of construing all of a movement's diverse events as contributive to a single teleological meaning—one greater even than the sum of its parts—that these two conceptions of form most explicitly intersect.

All this being said, taking up Sonata Theory as our main analytical tool also requires us to part ways with Adorno in several important respects. Many of these have to do with his deeply entrenched generativist biases against traditional forms in general and sonata form in particular. Even conceding that Mahler's novelistic impulse could only make itself palpable through a dynamic engagement with the old schemata—recognizing that Mahler could never entirely dispense with “preconceived forms and elements”—Adorno was quick to trivialize these historical remnants, relegating them to mere “accidental” debris, “ruins” upon which Mahler's own distinctive “architecture” was built up (67). The crux of his bias is an almost hysterical aversion to musical repetition—one that far outstripped even Mahler's own. For Adorno, the very idea of sonata form was so tainted by its large-scale repetitions that he appeared to view those symmetries as its defining element; for the devout generativist, to “recapitulate” meant to recapitulate *exactly*, making the procedure—like the form to which it belongs—little more than a liability.

With so restricted a notion of the genre in hand, Adorno could declare triumphantly that Mahler's oeuvre “[stood] apart from the sonata principle as something disparate” (95). But this same viewpoint leads to some untenable claims about how we hear and experience Mahler's sonata forms. At the end of his “Variant-Form” chapter, Adorno explains that the variant procedure applies not only to themes but to entire formal complexes as well, ensuring that Mahler could build his forms around long-range “autonomous connections” without having to rely on “fixed schemata” (83).³⁰ A central leitmotiv in that discussion is Mahler's use of transformed repetition to undermine the “static” symmetry of a sonata form's outer sections (95). Adorno believed that through extensive recomposition—through a principle of “permanent modification” that would blur the functional differences between developments and reprises—Mahler's opening movements were effectively able to “rid themselves” of their recapitulations, to drive them below the “surface of perception” and thus to neutralize the unfolding sonata form itself on a fundamental level (95, 77, 93).

But even if we embrace Mahler's revised reprises as the grounds for long-range narrative or teleological hearing (and we shall!), there is no reason to suppose

30. See Chapter 3, Section III.

that they should neutralize sonata form as an experiential *presence* within his music. Indeed, Mahler often goes out of his way to make absolutely clear when we have reached the point of recapitulation, offering us the chance to compare what has passed with what is to come.³¹ In so doing, he lays bare the paradox of Adorno's position: the very same long-range "connections" that would (according to Adorno) make sonata form superfluous often line up exactly with a work's sonata-form sections and tend to be dependent on sonata-form cues (e.g., a clear recapitulatory onset) even to be perceptible.

So on the one hand, Adorno's sonata-concept proves far too rigid to adopt as our own, since it reduces analysis to a simplistic paternity question ("is this *really* a sonata or not?") while also stacking the deck so that Mahler's work will automatically and meritoriously fail to qualify. (It is exactly this kind of definitional narrowness that Hepokoski's dialogic form seeks to transcend, by defining the recapitulation as a flexible "action space" rather than as a particular thematic-modular patterning.) On the other hand, by exposing this rigidity, we also reveal an apparent conflict of interest to be illusory. For if we suppose (as many might) that construing Mahler's sonata forms as strongly teleological would put us at odds with Adorno, the situation turns out to be more complex, since the sonata-form telos he hears Mahler undermining is not "the recapitulation" as a broad formal region, but rather the ideologically freighted practice of *literal* recapitulation. In other words, in taking up Hepokoski and Darcy's sonata-concept, we are embracing a teleology of sonata form that has little to do with the one Adorno rejected. Indeed, by celebrating the often striking divergences between a sonata form's flanking sections, we shall be engaged in a maneuver that is, if anything, consummately Adornian. The difference is that we shall interpret these divergences—which Adorno and Sonata Theory would both regard as teleologically significant—as the dramatic manipulation and *intensification* of an unfolding sonata-form process, rather than an attempt to obscure some rigidly symmetrical sonata-form "mold" or "schema" into irrelevance.

The other difference is that we shall regard Mahler's sonata forms as *harmonically* teleological as well. On this point, I depart unapologetically from Adorno, who dismissed out of hand the idea that Mahler's sonata forms could be oriented toward tonal goals: since the composer "could no longer rely simply on tonality, fulfillments became for him a task of the purely musical form" (43; cf. 48). But as we saw in Chapter 1, this idea is wholly misguided with symphonies before the Seventh or Eighth. Mahler gives us every reason to believe that the imperative for tonal resolution was a decisive factor in his musical/dramaturgical thinking through at least 1904.

The last and most significant point of divergence between Adorno and Hepokoski/Darcy is the way the two approaches deal with musical *causality*. I have already suggested that Adorno's hermeneutic machinery struggles to articulate form as a process because it lacks a plausible species of causality, a framework that would let us propose consistent answers to the various "why"

31. One thinks especially of 2/I, 3/I, 6/I, 6/IV, 7/I, and 8/I.

questions that emerge during interpretation. Adorno's resistance to articulable causality relates broadly to his aesthetics of ineffability, but more specifically to his principled resistance to anthropomorphic description. In mainstream analytical language, conceits of causality often rely on agential or anthropomorphic metaphors: in the writing of Marx, Hanslick, Tovey, Kerman, and countless others, we very often perceive cause and effect because composers or themes or notes or instruments are imagined to be doing and intending, struggling and accomplishing.

Adorno resists these tropes at every turn. Consider, for instance, his ongoing campaign to desubjectify Mahler's music—to rule out questions of intentionality and to debunk the clichéd image of the symphonies as “seismogram[s]” of the composer's “soul” (1992, 25)³²—or, more broadly, his habit of divesting composers of their creative agency, displacing it onto the musical elements themselves, which are “driven on by impulses,” guided by “objective” tendencies at the local and global levels (72). Though in the latter case we might take Adorno to be vesting musical materials with volition, they end up being “agents” only in a peculiarly non-anthropomorphic sense. We are to understand them as driven to pursue certain courses, but their volition is nonspecific; they do not possess psychological traits that would render their actions meaningful in relation to the piece or to one another. We simply aren't meant to fathom (let alone articulate) what their intentions *are*.³³

By contrast, Sonata Theory expressly encourages agential/psychologicistic explanation, on the level of the composer as well as that of the musical elements themselves. By correlating theme-types to specific structural-dramatic functions, Hepokoski and Darcy invite us to understand a sonata's subjects as charged with particular cadential *tasks* or *actions*. This makes for a more richly anthropomorphic view of Mahlerian themes as “characters,” since we can view these entrusted tasks as behavioral norms—that is, goals toward which the characters aspire or obligations they may struggle to resist, depending on the interpretive context. In turn, this allows us to make more concrete and persuasive claims about how these themes, liberated from the execution of any “preconceived type,” determine novelistic form “from the bottom up,” since the concept of freedom is only relevant against a backdrop of obligation. When a theme behaves unconventionally, or achieves its prescribed goals in some remarkable way, complications arise in the standard sonata plot—complications we can then regard as the materials' “novelistic” freedom made palpable.

32. On the desubjectification of Mahler's music, see also Adorno 1992, 25, 74, 77, and 85–86; on intentionality, see 1992, 129 and 133.

33. In this regard, his scheme runs exactly counter to Fred E. Maus's well-known model of musical action and agency. For Maus, we begin by interpreting some musical event as an “intelligible action”—that is, by offering a coherent kind of “explanation” for the event. The fictional agent then arises as a repository for the psychological states that emerge from that explanation (1988, 66). In contrast to this, Adorno posits agents (and thus abstract agency) first, on a global level, but makes no effort to construe their actions as “intelligible”—that is, he refrains systematically from ascribing psychological states, and thus offers no comment on the kinds of intentions that might generically or specifically motivate his thematic agents or forms.

Ascribing agency in this fashion allows us to hear Mahler's music brimming with conflicted impulses in a manner that does justice to many of Adorno's most interesting claims. It is true that when comparing Mahler's music to the classical style, Adorno often relies on gross binaries: the former is "bottom-up" versus "top-down"; temporal versus "detemporized"; epic versus dramatic; heterogeneous versus homogeneous; self-actualizing versus prefabricated, and so on. But beneath this hyperbole we find a subtler and more compelling vision, one in which Mahler's music itself tensely embodies *each* of these binary terms. We read of an "epic impulse" that Mahler seeks to master through decisive "construction" (1992, 66);³⁴ of parts and wholes interacting in a hostile collision of top-down and bottom-up forces (97, 128); and of the "antagonism" between a "repetition-shunning fullness" and a "densely interwoven, advancing totality" that "informs every dimension of Mahler's technique" (107). Even Mahler's much-vaunted freedom is earned dialectically. Just as his "emancipation" from the sonata was "mediated by the sonata" (97), the liberation of his "formal imagination" as a whole was only achieved through pondering "duration" in terms of "construction" (135).

This image of Mahler's music embodying a conflict or contest between two broad impulses—a constructive formalism and an epic, emancipatory nominalism—is a central theme in each of my four analytical chapters. It takes its inspiration from Adorno but receives its analytical traction through Sonata Theory. In effect, I shall reimagine the basic mechanism of dialogic form—our experience of music as a fluid, real-time negotiation of expectations both fulfilled and deflected—as a drama that plays out within the music itself. The actors in this drama are the musical agents and characters discussed earlier, whose motivations and psychological states I infer through their dramatized conformity to, or resistance of, genre norms.³⁵

That being said, not all of the musical actions in a given movement can be understood directly (or solely) in terms of its overarching sonata plot. The ascription of "psychological states" must take equally into account various kinds of contextual clues: how themes interact with (obstruct, imitate, merge with) other themes, including those with no paradigmatic role within the sonata plot; how tenaciously or timidly they pursue their objectives; how they respond to ruptures or deflections; and the kinds of affective or gestural attributes they take on in

34. We should note that Adorno uses the term "epic" in two distinct capacities. On the one hand, it refers to a form that is the historical antecedent of the novel but also its antithesis. Just as Lukács believed that the true epic displayed a "total indifference to any form of architectural construction" (1971, 67), so Adorno heard the occasional "epic" ventures of Schubert and Bruckner "ebb[ing] unreflectively away," thanks to a lack of constructive vigor and "technical legitimation" (1992, 66). In this sense, Mahler's "novelistic" forms represent a decisive evolutionary leap forward. However, at other times, Adorno speaks casually of an "epic impulse" or "epic intention" in Mahler (66–67), meaning an inclination to compose on so grand a scale that the music could "abandon itself" to time (73). Such an impulse would be a precondition for—but not necessarily the *opposite* of—novelistic construction. It is in this second sense that I use the term as the title of the book's Part III.

35. On the function and wider implications of such anthropomorphic/animistic metaphors, see Monahan 2013a.

their successive variant-transformations. The realization and/or deflection of generic formal norms (i.e., the sort targeted by Sonata Theory) give us the scaffolding of a work's broad sonata plot, its basic "story" qua sonata. But given the immensity of the forms in question, the data of that plot are actually rather scant, pivoting on a handful of key junctures or "obligatory stations" (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 9). This is why the contextual details are no less crucial: they bridge the gap between that plot skeleton and the discursive totality of the movement, amplifying and ramifying the basic sonata plot and giving the music its characteristic narrative complexity. Without them we could never assimilate Mahler's daunting profusion of details. And because they are relationally determined, dependent in their meaning on parameters both local and global, they help to underscore how our interpretations, like the novel-symphony itself, can emerge only from the dialectic between parts and wholes. Because details only acquire meaning by way of their place in the detail-engendered totality, our analytic attention will shuttle continuously between the local and global until a coherent narrative image forms, one in which all the details resonate with an interdetemined meaning.

In Chapter 3, we return to these "contextual" parameters, with specific interest in how they generate various kinds of narrative effects within the broader sonata plot. Before then, however, I should like to close by reflecting on one last problematic in Adorno's Mahler project: its curious tendency to blur the lines between composer and critic, leaving us with a Mahler image that, despite its entrenched authority, often stands sharply at odds with the historical composer it would seem to commemorate.

VI. Postlude: Adorno, Mahler, and "Adorno's Mahler"

Anyone who spends enough time with Adorno's *Physiognomy* will start to notice striking similarities between the composer described there and the author describing him. As Franklin writes, Adorno seems to have viewed Mahler's musical agenda as an "enterprise almost parallel to his own" (1997a, 274). Indeed, "parallel" may be an understatement, since it implies a crisp differentiation of spheres that Adorno expressly labored to conflate. As discussed earlier, Adorno was taken to construing post-Enlightenment music and philosophy as a "single system," one that mistook the fruits of its own coercively self-confirming logic for transparent, absolute, and universalizable truth.³⁶ As he saw it, music and philosophy alike had turned their backs on the messy stuff of material reality—the contradictions and "remainders" not assimilable by their totalizing logic—while at the same time confusing themselves for unbiased representations of reality itself. The task of the critical theorist (or composer) would be to turn that "system"

36. It is this analogy that inspired his description of Viennese classicism as a "tissue of deductions": "for Beethoven's mighty logic, music composed itself as a seamless identity, an analytical judgment" (1992, 72, 13; see earlier discussion).

against itself, to lay bare the self-celebrating delusion at the heart of such claims to harmonious, self-sufficient wholeness.³⁷ Where the one challenged the sinister capacity for domination in post-Enlightenment rationality and bourgeois "common sense," the other staged a "revolt against bourgeois music" (Adorno 1992, 37), meant to expose the falsehood and indeed the "unfreedom" (94) lurking behind the apparent "naturalness" and self-evidentness of Western classical music's forms and systems.

Of course, Mahler is not the only composer we find conscripted to this critical agenda. Michael Spitzer, for instance, draws our attention to synergistic parallels between Adorno's philosophical project and the one he ascribed to late Beethoven (2006, 42–43). But the links between Adorno and "his" Mahler are more profound and more telling, extending even to idiosyncrasies of worldview and personal outlook. We find both figures, for instance, gripped by a deep and abiding pessimism, a pained awareness that happiness is evanescent and suffering inescapable. Unlike his historical namesake, Adorno's Mahler will have no truck with the comforts of Romantic transcendentalism. He is a "poor yeah-sayer" with a "subjective incapacity" for happy endings, one whose "voice cracks" when he "makes music as if joy were already in the world" and whose symphonies know happiness "only as something revocable" (Adorno 1992, 137 and 51). At the same time, though, we find both men haunted by the apparition of a hoped-for Utopian future, one whose roots lay in Edenic visions of youth. Just as Adorno's childhood provided a "model of happiness" that served as the measure for "all subsequent disappointments" (Jay 1984, 25), so Mahler's boyhood loomed large over all his mature works. His music, Adorno wrote, "holds fast to Utopia in the memory traces from childhood, which appear as if it were only for their sake that it would be worth living." But just as clearly, the symphonies recognize "that this happiness is lost, and only in being lost becomes the happiness it itself never was" (1992, 145 and 155–56).³⁸

The Mahler of the *Physiognomy* also inherits from his creator an enduring sympathy for the "victims" of musical and social "progress." "Desperately," Adorno writes, his music "draws to itself what culture has spurned. . . . The art-work . . . seeks to burst the chain [of culture] and show compassion for the derelict residue. . . . He pleads musically for peasant cunning against the overlords, for those who desert their marriages, for outsiders, the persecuted and incarcerated, starving children, forlorn hopes" (17, 38, 46). For both Adorno and his symphonic novelist, compositional "greatness" stemmed above all from "a sense of identification with those who are cruelly knocked about and forced into

37. Cf. Adorno 1978a: "Dialectical thought is an attempt to break through the coercion of logic by its own means" (150). In his Mahler writings, this notion of "turning the system against itself" appears most dramatically in his discussions of 6/IV. There, Adorno hears Mahler annihilating not only the immanent musical flow, but also the symphonic sonata as a cultural institution, by harnessing the implacable integration of the "Beethovenian" tradition as a destructive force (2002a, 609; 1992, 97; see Chapter 7).

38. Cf. Adorno 1998d: "Whatever one accomplishes in life is little other than the attempt to regain childhood" (209–10).

line by aesthetic norms and indeed by civilization itself. In short, he identifies with the victims” (1998b, 96).³⁹ And yet, as assimilated Jews, neither figure was fully at ease with the unsung throngs he championed: “Mahler’s music identifies . . . with the masses,” Adorno writes, but “it [also] fears them.” If fascist terror and genocide were the decisive experiences of Adorno’s maturity, premonitions of the same well up repeatedly in his predecessor’s symphonies, serving as nothing less than the “real source” of their “despair” (1992, 34; cf. 21, 150). Even the idiosyncrasies of Adorno’s discursive style themselves find expression in his Mahler, the dialectical composer who abandoned ontological “first principles,” who relied strategically on alienating or disarming “foreign words,” and who strove to dismantle the hierarchies that facilitate traditional musical/logical argumentation.⁴⁰

What are we to make of these parallels? Can this merely be a matter, as Franklin suggests, of a critic’s earnest emulation (1997a, 274)? Notwithstanding the sincerity of his tribute—and the fact that their aesthetic outlooks did align on several key points, most crucially on the ineffability of musical meaning—Adorno certainly opens himself here to charges of duplicity, of peddling a Mahlerian simulacrum whose attitudes and attributes are so often narcissistic projections of his own. At the same time, though, we must avoid oversimplification, since in many cases, the objects of Adorno’s admiration (and thus the vessels for these projected attributes) are in fact the symphonies themselves and not the historical composer at all. In one especially telling passage, he cites Mahler’s fundamentally un-Adornian belief that “music must always contain a yearning . . . for what is beyond the things of this world” only to brush it aside with the insistence that “*his symphonies discern better than he* that the object of such yearning is not to be represented as something higher, noble, transfigured. It would otherwise become a Sunday religion. . . . If the Other is not to be sold off, it must be sought incognito, among lost things” (1992, 17; emphasis added). So on the issue of disregarding Mahler’s Romantic aesthetics in favor of the symphonies’ own immanent claims, Adorno is defenseless. But at least he has the candor to acknowledge this, underscoring a point that cannot be repeated too often: the Mahler of the *Physiognomy* is a hermeneutic construct, not to be confused with the historical agent or any plausible reconstruction thereof.⁴¹

39. Cf. Leppert 2002b: “Corollary to Adorno’s dialectics is his concern to connect philosophy to . . . a particular kind [of history], one which chooses to remember what is conventionally forgotten: in essence, history’s victims” (40). And later: “Adorno distrusted any concept of culture that forgot its tainted origins in social inequality” (42).

40. On the issue of “first principles,” compare Adorno 1992, 124 (“He clings to no musical first principle”) with Martin Jay’s discussion of “constellation” structure (1984, 14–15) and Richard Leppert’s comments on the Adornian essay format (2002b, 65). Adorno’s identification of musical “foreign words” in Mahler (1992, 26–27) is illuminating in light of Leppert’s comments on the same in Adorno (2002b, 66). Finally, we might compare Leppert’s discussion of Adornian parataxis (2002b, 63) with Adorno’s own image of Mahler dissolving musical hierarchies—i.e., those that distinguish between originals and derivatives in the thematic realm or between expositions and developments in the formal sphere.

41. On the ways that analysts turn historical composers into Foucauldian author-constructs—fictional agents proposed to make sense of a musical work—see Monahan 2013a.

But merely keeping this distinction in mind hardly puts us in the clear, since the authority of Adorno's monograph has often taken on a life of its own, more or less independent of its grounding in historical/biographical facts. Understandably, this has caused no small concern among skeptics. Even before its English translation appeared, Williamson lamented the "insertion" of Adorno's *Physiognomy* "as a canonical text" between the symphonies and their critical reception, warning that musicology should not adopt a "passively acceptive stance" before the "theoretical construct [of] Adorno's Mahler" (1990, 405). Around the same time, Constantin Floros decried Adorno's influence on German-language reception. While conceding that the latter had "sharpened our understanding of many technical compositional features of Mahlerian music," he expressed dismay that Adorno had licensed a generation of scholars to "completely ignore . . . Mahler's authentic programs and, with them, the composer's own worldview" (1991, 188; cited in Franklin 1997a, 271).

Of course, one might disagree with Williamson's verdict that Adorno's book is merely "quirky . . . and finitely rewarding" (1990, 405). But the points he and Floros make are valid. Veneration often devolves into dogmatism, and Adorno's dogma, when accepted uncritically, can too easily become a caricature of itself.⁴² Along similar lines, it should be perfectly obvious nowadays that Adorno's stubborn disregard for Mahler's own aesthetics was, as a critical practice, both obstinate and unsustainable. I have therefore made it a priority at all points ahead to be wary of Adorno's uncanny tendency to ventriloquize, his penchant for using past composers and future critics alike as mouthpieces for his agenda. In a practical sense, this means that no Adornian position shall lie beyond criticism. His views will have to share the stage with other, competing perspectives, including a close consideration of the symphonies' programmatic and psycho-biographical dimensions. And, as we have already seen, I shall be inclined to set some of them—even fundamental ones—aside as unhelpful, misguided, or just plain wrong.

This may not please everyone, I recognize. Experience suggests that some readers will judge this project not for whether it uses Adorno for musically or critically enlightening ends, but rather for its fidelity to the Adornian orthodoxy. I find this ironic: are we really to accept without protest Adorno's many willful misreadings of Mahler's aesthetics while denying ourselves comparable license when dealing with Adorno himself? If so, then the ascension of "Adorno's Mahler" over his historical namesake is all but accomplished. But that is not my aim. I cannot stress enough that my purpose here is not to provide some belated analytical validation of Adorno's Mahler, to consummate Adorno's project by providing the detailed readings he himself withheld. (To imagine such a thing possible would be to misread Adorno entirely.) Nor, in bringing the composer's own programs and paratexts on board, is my aim to stage some Utopian reconciliation, some seamless merger of the two (Adornian and historical) Mahlers into an ideal or authentic persona.

42. Williamson (1980, 355) makes this very point about Sponheuer 1978.

Rather, it may be helpful to understand this book as a kind of tribute to Adorno, one whose analyses aim to be Adornian in spirit if not method. It seeks to make use of those ideas of his that are hearty enough to survive in less rarefied analytical climates and that do not entail a blunt dismissal of Mahler's own aesthetic commitments. By now, I hope it would be clear that such insights are abundant, including (1) the notion that each of the composer's details is of consequence in the larger trajectory; (2) the concept of a contingent, processive form that sweeps along the remnants of earlier schematic paradigms like debris; (3) the mutually determinative and often antagonistic relationship of the part and the whole; and (4) the variant-form as narrative conduit. Though my analyses vary in their indebtedness to Adorno (his influence is more explicit in Part III than in Part II), these themes are fundamental to them all. In the end, they form but a portion of yet another eponymous construct: *my* Mahler, emerging from my own confluence of interests and bearing the stamp of a distinctly twenty-first-century critical agenda. The analyses he inhabits are my attempt to capture the experience of listening to these works from a variety of engaging perspectives—that of Adorno, of course, but also those of Hepokoski and Darcy and indeed of Mahler himself—and of exploring the many fascinating intersections and tensions between them.

CHAPTER Three

Dimensions of Mahlerian Narrativity

The fact that in various individual passages I often . . . see a real event as if it were taking its course dramatically before my eyes can easily be gathered from the nature of the music. However, . . . I gladly leave the interpretation of details to each listener's imagination.

—Mahler to Max Marschalk on his
Second Symphony (1895)¹

I. Introduction: Mahler the Storyteller?

For casual listeners, the “narrative” aspect of Mahler’s music is both essential and self-evident. His are symphonies that tell stories, enact dramas, or chart the intricate contours of human experience. Grounded in the illustrative mannerisms of stage music (or, to modern ears, of classic film scores) and gilt with evocative paratexts of every sort, they seem at all times to reach beyond their own sonic substrate to a realm of ideas, images, and “expressive gesture[s]” (Franklin 1991, 39), all shaped purposively through time. Audiences recognized this from the start: Mahler was inviting them to hear storytelling on several scales at once, from the epic, Dostoevskian sweep of the symphonic whole to the microarticulated musical present, with all its unexpected ruptures, blockages, swerves, and non sequiturs. Comparisons to narrative literature were perhaps inevitable.² By 1930, Erwin Stein had already seized on a metaphor that would resonate throughout the decades to come: each of Mahler’s symphonies, he wrote, was like “an exciting novel,” one that “again and again took a new and unexpected and surprising turn” (1995, 115).

Naturally, the symphonies’ mercurial grandiloquence did not please everyone; novelistic or not, many found them only tedious and overwrought. But even detractors would likely have grasped the sense of Stein’s comparison.³ And few, one suspects, would have imagined a time in which such analogies could be set

1. Letter of 17 December; see Martner, ed. 1979, 172.

2. Leon Botstein suggests that they were part of a master plan in which Mahler deliberately adapted the plot devices of popular nineteenth-century novels (“elements of surprise, engagement, . . . and astonishment”) to reach the widest possible audience (2002, 34–35, cf. 14–15).

3. Cf. Hermann Kippner’s disparaging critique of the Fifth Symphony, which he likened to a “musical novel” (at the time, an indirect reference to literature via Charpentier’s *Louise*) with a “hypernervous” character (de La Grange 1999, 30).

forth only with caution, if at all. But that, of course, is the climate in which the present study sets out. As readers of this volume surely know, musical “narrative” has been a contentious topic for over two decades, and its stigma endures, even in Mahler circles. To ascribe narrative meaning to this music—however natural or intuitive the impulse—is to court criticism along several familiar lines, many of them rooted in one obvious and seemingly inescapable point: Mahler’s symphonies don’t *really* “tell stories” at all.

Quite the opposite, in fact: they put us in the role of storytellers ourselves. As Leon Botstein notes, for all their connotative richness and volcanic expressivity, the symphonies are “devoid of stable meaning” (2002, 14) and must be rationalized anew by each listener. Botstein believes that this semantic open-endedness—which requires the auditor to “actively impose meaning” and to “use memory, observation and recognition” to “complete the work” (35)—helped to cement Mahler’s popularity, in the composer’s century as well as our own. And this may be true, to a point.⁴ But for many of his contemporaries, any such semantic collaboration was unwelcome. Even a steadfast Mahlerian like Max Kalbeck resented being forced to “manufacture a logical or narrative connection” between the various “quirks, spasms, [and] fanfares” that interrupted his colleague’s symphonies (McColl 1996, 182). Indeed, a striking number of early critics refused to believe that these “narrative connections” did not already exist, somewhere outside of (and prior to) the symphonies themselves. Works that so flagrantly defied the aesthetics of purely musical form, they reasoned, *must* have been organized around a secret program or “poetic idea” of some sort. Mahler’s refusal to disclose that inspiration—his disingenuous attempt to pass off the programmatic as “absolute”—only ensured that audiences would be left scratching their heads.

Nowadays, we are better adjusted to these kinds of indeterminacies. Most analysts are comfortable with the idea that narrative coherence is as much the listener’s contrivance as an author-intended “given” of the work itself. Indeed, our disciplinary unease has shifted from the responsibility of meaning-creation to the potential promiscuity of the same. Mahler may “invite us to hear” storytelling, as I put it earlier, but there are few inbuilt checks on the kinds of stories we might take away; often, interpreters barely outnumber interpretations. And the problem is hardly confined to Mahler. As Carolyn Abbate noted, in a salvo that helped launch the narrative debates of the 1990s, any music, in any genre, could notionally—even reflexively—be heard as “narrative.” Alarms were raised, a virtual epidemic declared: we would do well, she implored, to “shun” any “method” that combined so broad a reach with such an “impoverishment” of hermeneutic means (1991, 28).

What followed is history. Detractors hammered away at narrative analysis as both trivial—it was old-fashioned populist writing dressed up as scholarship (24),

4. Though Botstein’s lay audiences are rather savvier than can be justified, I think. It is hard for me to believe that the average concertgoer (in any century!) would find that Mahler “trigger[ed]” a “self-critical awareness” so powerful that it called into question “the validity of one’s subjective procedure in constructing truth” (2002, 41).

a “naggingly unsatisfactory” rehash of old formulas (Burnham 1995, 163)—and superficial, in that it applied an arbitrary and comforting veneer of causality without penetrating the music in any meaningful way. It distorted experience by reducing music, in all its ineffable depth, to an “unfolding drama” (163) or “wordless literature,” or by replacing it altogether with a paraphrastic set of verbal “readings” (Taruskin 2009, 347). The most infamous and influential attack—levied first by Jean-Jacques Nattiez but embraced by Abbate, Lawrence Kramer, and others—held that it failed even to be “narrative” at all. All the while, defenders scrambled to pin down those aspects of narrative analysis that might be rehabilitated or redeemed while launching counterattacks of varying effectiveness.

Lately, though, temperatures have cooled somewhat. And with Byron Almén’s *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (2008), the debate seems to have moved into a new phase: having weathered its existential crisis, narrative analysis is now in a period of more nuanced reflection.⁵ Thus, my purpose in this chapter is not to mount another broad defense of “musical narrative” as a basic principle; nor is it to prove that Mahler’s music “is” narrative in some absolute or inherent way, as others have tried (e.g., Micznik 2001). Rather, my aim is simply to make my methodology as transparent as possible, to lay bare the interpretive poetics that drive the study and which allow me to hear Mahler’s music telling the kinds of “stories” I do. If I cannot offer the reader interpretive finality—hermeneutics has no such authority—then accountability will have to do.

I begin by reviewing aspects of the 1990s music-and-narrative discussions and then outlining Almén’s theory, which I adopt here as foundational. Sections III and IV then construct a hierarchical matrix of “narrative domains” that are active in my analysis of any given movement. Section IV adds the last, highest-ranking domain, that of “transsymphonic” narrative; it is there that I consider the complex relationship between multimovement plots—the sort that have long been Mahlerians’ main concern—and those unfolding within individual movements.

II. Musical Narrative: Controversies and Concerns

At the start of “Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis,” Bryon Almén shares his intention to “revive the debate” about this vital topic (2003, 2). At the time, his meaning was perfectly clear: after a decade or so of intense interest, scholarship on musical narrative had fallen off, leaving more than a few loose ends. But in some respects, the term “debate” misleads, since there was actually very little back-and-forth between opposing camps. Indeed, beyond a point one could barely speak of “camps” at all. After a

5. The more relaxed attitude of this “new phase” is embodied brilliantly in Klein 2013, which opens with a fanciful scenario in which the “Muse of storytelling” renders those “tiresome arguments about music’s failures of diegesis, representation, temporality, agency, and causality . . . moot with the wave of a wand” (3).

pair of brilliant opening volleys, Nattiez (1990) and Abbate (1991) more or less withdrew from the discussion. But their critique was pointed enough to inspire a kind of siege mentality in parts of the music-analytic establishment. Abbate's views, in particular, cast a long and fearsome shadow, ensuring that few would dare use the term "narrative" without lengthy apologetics or nervous prostrations. Even a decade later—and despite their having been thoughtfully countered at several points—one sensed that the absent instigators were still calling the terms of the discussion, and not always for the best. Since a full account of these debates is impossible here, I shall focus on what I see as its watershed moments: the initial Abbate/Nattiez critique and Almén's response two decades later, which included the first fully developed "theory" of musical narrative.

In many respects, Nattiez's "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?" (1990) laid the foundation for all the controversies to follow. Its central premise is the idea that "musical narrative" is essentially a contradiction in terms: music does not, and can never, "narrate," and "any description of its formal structures in terms of narrativity," he wrote in a widely cited passage, "is nothing but superfluous metaphor" (257). If we feel—as was surely intended—some shock at Nattiez's pointed use of the word "superfluous," it is because the inclination to regard music as telling stories is so deeply ingrained that it feels to be anything *but*. The comment is all the more barbed because we know it to be true: the stories that music tells are of our own making—"enabled and constrained" by the musical trace and its paratexts (Cook 2001, 179), but always detachable from it, always standing at a metaphoric remove from "the music" itself, which cannot speak on its own.

But Nattiez's aim was not to take away our stories, though—only to initiate a more disciplined discussion of the topic. His point was that narrative can only be supported by a linguistic armature, and language as such will always lie outside music's borders. Nattiez is hardly insensitive to the psychological need behind this "narrative impulse" (1990, 243). If we are tempted to describe music in such terms, he writes, "it is because music shares with literary narrative the fact that, within it, objects succeed one another: this linearity is thus an incitement to a narrative thread which *narrativises* music. Since it possesses a certain capacity for imitative evocation, it is possible for it to imitate the semblance of narration without ever knowing the content of the discourse" (257; emphasis original). He also knows perfectly well that the impulse to "narrativize" in this sense—to make sense of event-successions and to orient parts within coherent teleological wholes—has often been taken for a fundamental, trans-cultural mechanism of human thought.⁶

But music's potential to be rationalized in terms of a plot is not, he concludes, sufficient to warrant its classification as *narrative*, per se. This, ultimately, is the most enduring aspect of Nattiez's critique: the notion that to qualify as narrative, music would have to be able to withstand close, highly particularized

6. Many have pleaded the special status of narrative in the way we understand our life and environs. See, e.g., Barthes 1977, Ricoeur 1984, and White 1981.

comparisons with literary narrative or narration. Absent certain key elements—a clear distinction between “story” and “discourse” (a la Chatman 1978), for instance, or the ability to establish causal relationships—the term “narrative” can be applied to music only “improperly” (Nattiez 1990, 255).

Abbate’s *Unsung Voices* (1991) built upon Nattiez’s critique, with several key amendments. She, too, insisted that musical “narrative” be predicated directly on its literary antecedent, though with a stronger emphasis on *narration*, per se, as a locutionary act. Music, in her view, is essentially mimetic, trapped in its own real-time enactment and unable to articulate a “past tense”—let alone the diegetic, discursive distance from its own events necessary for us to hear “the human, epistemological, or moral complexities of a narrating voice” (1991, 52–55). But unlike Nattiez, she does not rule out the possibility that such “narrating voices” might occasionally speak in music—only that they are exceptional rather than normative, marked by the “bizarre and disruptive” intrusion of a “special sonorous presence” (29, xiii). Lawrence Kramer’s (1990, 1995) position was similar in many respects. Like Nattiez, he privileged a specifically literary concept of narrative—one that gave a central place to the rift between “story” and “metastory”—and ruled that music could not generally sustain such a distinction. But, like Abbate, he allowed that narrative might exist as a subversive condition, rare but not unthinkable: when they occurred, “narrative effects” in instrumental music would have to be self-deconstructing moments in a form that is primarily lyrical.

If Abbate seems at first to be more flexible than Nattiez—she does, after all, permit the occasional diegetic moment and thus musical “narrative” worthy of the name—her sweeping dismissal of traditional plot-based analysis makes hers the more hard-line position by far. Nattiez had merely advised terminological caution; Abbate set out to stigmatize an entire interpretive practice. Still, it is helpful to view her critique within the larger cultural polemics of its day. In a climate buzzing with challenges to the assumptions and values of traditional theory and analysis, one suspects that “narrative” was sometimes less of a concern for Abbate (or Kramer) than the upset of the status quo with watchwords like “dislocation” and “subversion”—which strike at cozy institutional pieties equating value with “unity”—and disquieting images like that of the monological “composing persona” beset by phantom voices in his own work.⁷

At any rate, the tone of the discussions that followed was generally more measured. There were, as mentioned, earnest attempts to temper Abbate’s more radical pronouncements (e.g., Maus 1991, Treitler 1997) and many creative applications of concepts from literary narratology, including Gregory Karl’s (1997) adoption of Propp’s “roles” and “functions” for formal analysis, Vera Micznik’s (2001) retooling of the “story/discourse” distinction for narrativizing thematic transformation, and Michael L. Klein’s (2004) recuperation of past-/present-tense signification schemes. Still, in these studies and others, theoretical discussions

7. Abbate’s later work (esp. 2004) would continue to shake the foundations of music-analytic institutions with a lively combination of cutting insight and soaring hyperbole.

were generally adjuncts to single-piece analyses; none offered anything like a comprehensive or widely applicable theory.

Almén's project aimed to provide exactly that. By the time his study arrived, of course, the music-and-narrative discussions had largely fallen off. Though "narrative" still carried its red flag—using the term all but obliged one to engage the now-stalled debate—it had long been business as usual for analysts interested in hearing music in terms of plots of various sorts. This is why his monograph (2008) was anything but mistimed: what Almén offers is not a new method, but a more elegantly theorized way of understanding what analysts were *already* doing and were likely to do well into the foreseeable future. His project wrests musical narrative from the mire of the 1990s debates and restores the concept to working, fully democratized order. In more practical terms, it has freed projects like mine to invoke music's narrative qualities without hand-wringing or acrobatic justifications. In what follows, I summarize its most important points; naturally, interested readers should consult the original texts for more detail.

Above all else, Almén argues that musical narrative must be freed from its dependency on literary instantiations of the same. Though he was hardly the first to note that "such correlations create as many problems as solutions" (2008, 11), no one yet had attempted to develop such a robust counterparadigm.⁸ For this, he develops what he calls a "sibling" model of musical narrative, one that distinguishes between "narrative *proper*"—the "set of foundational principles common to all narrative media"—and medium-specific (e.g., literary, musical, dramatic) realizations (12). This he sets in contrast to the more prevalent "descendant" model, which "presents musical narrative as a derivative phenomenon: it is effective only to the degree that the musical work is able to mimic or approximate the effects of literary narrative." Under such a regime, he writes, "we are bound to view music as insufficiently and ineffectively narrative: it apparently lacks semantic specificity, a recognizable narrator, and coherent characters. Music's native signifiatory processes are thereby deemphasized, while those arising from the mixture of media are given disproportionate priority" (12).

These notional shortcomings will be familiar to anyone acquainted with Nattiez's critique. Indeed, of the five major objections to musical narrative that Almén roundly debunks (28–37), four were popularized by Nattiez.⁹ The influence of this "descendant" model, Almén suggests, rests on a basic "confusion" about what narrative *is*, abetted by the unlucky etymological kinship of "narrative" and "narrator" (which led many to suppose that the latter was a necessary "precondition" for the former [234n10]). Clearing this hurdle allows us to regard musical narrative as something more than "mere analogy" (37); it frees us to engage music on music's own terms—sparing us the misstep of "overinterpreting

8. Almén cites Maus (1991), Micznik (2001), and Klein (2004), among others, as musicologists dissatisfied with the arbitrary limits set on musical narrative by the descendant model (Chapter 2).

9. These are the "verbal cue argument," the "causality argument," the "narrator argument," and the "referentiality argument." The fifth objection is the so-called "drama argument," which would establish an alternate "descendant" model that traded diegetic literary narrative for mimetic stage drama.

musical works to render them more like literary events” (12–13)—while still being mindful of the commonalities between narrative media.

The essence of Almén’s “sibling” model—and thus of narrative at large—is meaningful change over time. Four “irreducible factors” are at play, he suggests, in any narrative: temporality, hierarchy, conflict, and the “observer’s perspective” (40). I shall touch briefly on each.¹⁰ Temporality is straightforward enough: narratives unfold in time, and their meaning is wrapped up in that directed linearity. They will generally raise the possibility of multiple outcomes, only some of which will be realized. These “outcomes,” in turn, are functions of *hierarchy* and *conflict*. In any narrative design, he explains, “the relative value of a cultural unit or units—their place in a hierarchical system—is subjected to some change, leading to a crisis that is then confronted” (50).¹¹ This is a broad definition, to be sure—and one that broadens further when we recognize that “conflict” and “confrontation” don’t necessarily entail anthropomorphic violence or hostility. (Though at times, of course, they may.) Rather, they merely indicate that *something is at stake* and must be negotiated—namely, the status of some element or elements within a culturally sanctioned system, usually at the instigation of some disturbance or “transgression.”

What those stakes and their attendant “conflict” are ultimately taken to *mean* depends on the fourth element: the “observer’s perspective.” Following James Jakób Liszka (1989), Almén believes that the ultimate nature of any narrative “crisis” and “confrontation” will depend on the observer’s rhetorical or ethical alignment vis-à-vis the elements at play and the system in which they stand to be revalued. Speaking very broadly, his or her sympathies may lie with the initial hierarchical arrangement—the prevailing order of things—or with the transgression that stands to upset it. To track these alignments, Almén adopts Liszka’s four narrative *mythoi*—comedy, romance, irony, and tragedy—which serve as superordinate narrative “archetypes.”¹²

Liszka’s archetypes, which account for “plot organization at the most fundamental level” (65), arise at the intersection of two binary oppositions: victory/defeat and order/transgression. When an order-imposing hierarchy is seen to be victorious over a transgression, we have the Romantic archetype (order + victory; think *Jaws*). If, however, our sympathies align with the transgression rather than the ruling order, that same arrangement is construed along lines of defeat, resulting in Tragedy (transgression + defeat; think *Oedipus Rex*, or *Jaws*

10. Almén’s four “irreducible” factors have analogs in other broadly inclusive definitions of narrative. David Herman, e.g., argues that narratives will typically involve (1) “a structured time-course,” (2) a “world” into which (3) “disruption or disequilibrium” enter, and (4) some qualitative dimension accounting for the “subjective awareness” of the participants (2007, 8–9). These four factors closely match Almén’s own.

11. This view reflects the idea, espoused by Propp (1984), Joseph Campbell (1949), Northrop Frye (1957), and others, that “it is the *relations between elements* and not the elements themselves that are the foundation of narrative” (Almén 2008, 36; emphasis original). For Almén, this neutralizes Nattiez’s contention that to be narrative, music must be able to denote an explicit set of (extramusical) referential objects (Nattiez 1990, 249 and 257).

12. Liszka’s *mythoi* are adaptations of Frye’s, as presented in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).

from the shark's point of view). Irony and Comedy are similarly paired, the difference being that the reigning order is overturned, not preserved: if a transgression is seen as victorious over order, Comedy arises (transgression + victory; think *Rocky II*); whereas an emphasis on the defeat of a reigning order by a transgression—often one that dwells on the flaws of the order itself—results in Irony (order + defeat; think *Dr. Strangelove*, or maybe Wagner's *Ring*, as long as you're not rooting for the Valhalla cartel). These four basic categories can then inflect one another, yielding a range of "phases"—comic romance, tragic irony, and so on (165ff.).¹³

I shall have more to say about the usefulness and limitations of Almén's archetypes shortly. First, however, I want to touch on a few of his broad points about narrative analysis in general, along with their implications for what follows. As Almén is quick to stress, narrative is not, in itself, an analytical "method." Rather, it is a kind of broad orientation or meta-method, one capable of drawing together "multiple structures of meaning" (27) gathered from a range of parameters and often with a variety of analytical lenses.¹⁴ This "depth and breadth of semantic coordination" (39) is both necessary and desirable: it is neither adequate nor feasible, Almén warns, for a single musical parameter—common-practice tonality, for instance—to "universally determine a narrative trajectory" (161). The purpose of a narrative analysis, in turn, is to "coordinate" these various input streams into a coherent "interpretive whole" (13), one that brings sense to the articulation and unfolding of its central oppositions.

This chapter's second half aims to clarify the various "input streams" that inform my analyses, along with their hierarchical relationships. As might be expected, there is much to untangle. Any musical work of sufficient length and complexity will feature narrative activity—conflicts, oppositions, transformations, and so on—on multiple levels of "magnification" (Almén's term), as revealed by a combination of top-down and bottom-up perspectives. But, as Almén notes, most such readings will also feature a "primary narrative level," the musical domain in which the central oppositions play out and (crucially) the one in relation to which all other domains gain their narrative significance. As might be imagined, it is the traditional sonata plot, as described in Chapter 1, that provides this primary level in each of my analyses. The "order-imposing hierarchy" in such a hearing is the idealized sonata structure itself, with its compulsory resolution to tonic; all other narrative domains are coordinated with this central storyline.

It is worth pausing here to offer a few thoughts about the interaction of Almén's theory with the narrativistic views of sonata form outlined in previous

13. Almén's "phases" are also borrowed from Frye, who allowed blendings between adjacent *mythoi* in his cyclical framework. Accordingly, each *mythos* can be inflected by only two of its siblings, yielding a total of eight phases. (Romance and irony, being counterpoles in Frye's system, cannot inflect one another; neither can tragedy and comedy.)

14. Almén does, however, suggest that any narrative approach might be viewed in terms of three methodological "levels"—the "agential," "actantial," and "narrative"—all borrowed from Liszka 1999 (2008, 55–56).

chapters. Almén is in broad accord with Sonata Theory that the traditional sonata form might, even in its most conventional realization, constitute a narrative vehicle (2008, 77). As it happens, it is also possible to align Almén's four *mythoi* with the four basic tonal/expressive schemata of late eighteenth-century sonata practice as Hepokoski and Darcy envision them:

Major-Mode Sonatas:

1. Major-mode sonatas can be heard generically to realize the romantic *mythos*: the prevailing order is the tonic-major tonality, and the transgression is the displacement of that tonic by the subordinate key. In the recapitulation, the original order is restored.

Minor-Mode Sonatas:

2. In Hepokoski and Darcy's conception, the defining "transgression" of minor-mode sonatas would appear to be *mode* rather than key, per se. For these authors, every minor-mode sonata carries an additional expressive "burden," a kind of anthropomorphic desire to be freed from the "troubled condition" of the minor into the parallel major (2006, 306). In most such sonatas, that modal contrast would first be glimpsed in the exposition's move to the relative major. When the recapitulation or coda of a minor-mode sonata successfully achieves this emancipation, the comedic *mythos* might be heard to arise—one in which the transgressive major tonality upsets the existing minor-mode regime.
3. By contrast, if the recapitulation of a minor-key sonata cannot realize this breakthrough to the major (i.e., if it closes in the tonic minor), then tragedy obtains—the implication being that the transgressive move to the major first proposed in the exposition has been quashed or blocked by the minor-mode order.
4. When a minor-mode sonata modulates to v rather than III, an "all-minor" exposition results. For Hepokoski and Darcy, this much rarer option—which often lacks even the hint of the emancipatory major—carries "chillingly dark, fatalistic, punishing, or pessimistic" overtones (315). The expressive meaning of such movements hinges, they hint, on a presence of absence; its bleakness comes not just from its use of minor but from the listener's knowledge that a more standard option has been passed over. This suggests an ironic narrative—one in which the transgressive minor-dominant modulation casts doubts on the very capacity of the genre to offer even a *possibility* of modal liberation.

Though this fourfold mapping has its appeal, other interpretations are also possible. We could, for instance, take No. 2 as romance rather than comedy if we imagine the minor mode *itself* as the transgression, one that indicated the corrosion or degradation of some primordial or idealized major tonic. Or we might hear no. 4 merely as "tragedy" rather than as tragic irony, if we focused on the

suppression of a relative-major secondary key more as a failure of the exposition itself rather than a staged metacritique of the genre. So while it is important to acknowledge the range of generic narrative/expressive possibilities offered by traditional sonata form, we must also recognize that the narrative *mythos* of any individual realization will ultimately be a function of the interpreter's emphasis or angle.

Indeed, though Almén does not raise this possibility, it seems possible that many movements could, *even within a single interpretation*, implicate several *mythoi* simultaneously, albeit on different axes of conflict. For example: a major-mode sonata with a “continuous”-type exposition and recapitulation (see Chapter 1) could be heard as romance in terms of its tonal outlines, as described earlier. But we could also hear it—at the same time, I submit—as ironic or comedic, if the transgression were taken to be formal in nature—that is, the bypassing of the “expected” medial caesura and secondary theme. And our analysis might well construe both angles equally.

I mention this because for all that I admire Almén's eloquent defense of musical narrative, I have often found it difficult to reconcile my own analyses to any single archetype. It seems to me unequivocal that Chapter 7 presents the Finale of the Sixth as a tragic narrative. But with the other chapters, I am less sure. Part of the trouble stems from the fact that Almén offers little guidance when it comes to narratives involving substantial deformations of generic schemata. At one point, he appears to suggest that any such hearing would fall within the ironic sphere:

Irony frequently invokes a divided mode of listening. In part, we are listening *within* the frame of expectation: we anticipate what will happen based on our familiarity with causal, stylistic, generic, formal, semantic, and narrative conventions. . . . In another sense, however, we listen from *without*, expecting to be surprised and disappointed, and this adds a layer of complexity to how we listen. These two modes of listening are not resolved, but are held in constant balance. . . . [S]uch a trajectory can gently expose the limitations of a hierarchy, sharply indict it, show it to be ineffectual or meaningless, or completely demolish it. (2008, 169; emphasis original)

In this regard, all of Adorno's Mahler readings would be patently ironic, as would my own, and possibly any reading focused on significant or far-reaching deformational structures. But can that really be the whole story? Consider Hepokoski's well-known analysis of Beethoven's “Egmont” Overture, op. 84. On the level of sonata-form process, his analysis reads as irony, precisely as Almén describes it here: it tracks the insufficiency of Beethoven's recapitulation to meet the generic demands implied by the form and the potential “indictment” (Almén's term) of the genre that such a deformation might entail (2001–2, 134). On the level of mode and expression, however, it reads as romance: after so much turmoil, the tonic-major coda liberates the overture from the transgressive minor mode—mirroring, as Hepokoski notes, the Flemish emancipation from aberrant

Spanish tyranny following Egmont's execution.¹⁵ For me, it would sell Hepokoski's analysis short to reduce it to one archetype or the other. The piece is all the richer if we hold both semantic dimensions in our hearing, sacrificing neither its dialogue with the tragic-to-triumphant topos nor its knowing subversion of sonata-form practice.¹⁶

Similar ambiguities arise in my own analyses. In Chapter 4, I show Symphony no. 6/I to resemble the "Egmont" overture in many respects: it, too, is a minor-mode sonata with a wrong-key (i.e., "failed") recapitulation and a coda that eventually restores the tonic *major* mode. And it presents a similar interpretive dilemma between romance and (here tragic) irony. The analyses of 3/I and 4/I incline even more strongly toward irony, in that each tracks Mahler's idiosyncratic and far-reaching deformation of the archetypal sonata-form layout. In the one, I depict an F-major sonata cleaved apart by numerous competing story strands; in the other, I show how Mahler's progressive foreshadowings of a symphonic finale distort and nearly overrun the G-major sonata from which they emerge. In both cases, the primary conflict is not between tonic and secondary key, but rather between the sonata, as a kind of ritualized action or cultural institution, and forces that would marginalize it or render it dispensable. But other archetypes come to mind as well. Symphony no. 4/I, for example, might strike us as romance, with the sunny G-major tonic triumphant over both the sonata-form secondary key and/or the increasingly menacing incursions by the minor-mode "sleighbell" music. And 3/I might take on a comic aspect if we hear—as Adorno did—its many "novelistic" strands fully liberating themselves from the Procrustean confines of sonata form.

My aim in pointing out these taxonomic difficulties is not to invalidate the idea of narrative archetypes altogether. Inquiries along those lines are always instructive. But I do wish to challenge the idea that all narrative analyses might be distilled to one and only one archetype. The question is surely one of method. If one sets out to analyze a work with a unitary classification in mind, an archetype will no doubt present itself.¹⁷ But retrofitting an archetype to a preexisting reading is quite a different matter, and one from which I will largely abstain as we move ahead. Indeed, Almén's theory on the whole will recede into the background from here, as we pass from the deeper mechanics of musical narrative to the specifics of my own approach in Sections III and IV.

15. Absent this programmatic cue, we might well take the movement to be a comedy that upsets the prevailing minor-mode order. Indeed, it might also be comedic on the level of sonata-form process, since one could imagine that the tonic-restoring coda might represent the ascendance of a new order, one that transcended the archaic (and here, failed) sonata genre.
16. Hepokoski's observation that the work's "rhetorical . . . and tonal structures do not coincide" (2001–2, 134) might well imply that the work's rhetorical and tonal *narratives* are out of sync as well, as suggested by this dilemma of archetypes.
17. Though see Klein 2013, which suggests that Almén's system of *mythoi*, with its core emphasis on narratives of victory and defeat, may be better suited to Romantic repertoire than that of the twentieth century, which often sought out "new terms for storytelling" (19).

Before then, though, I want to touch briefly on one criticism that Almén does not address, at least not directly: that is Abbate's charge of "promiscuity," the insinuation that narrative analysis might be applied willy-nilly to any music under the sun. Almén does provide a helpful list of attributes that might make certain repertoires (e.g., Mahler's) more responsive to a narrative approach than others.¹⁸ But these are mostly foreseeable and would probably have come as no surprise to Abbate, whose deeper concern seems to be that narrative analyses are, in the end, simply rather boring. Raising the specter of an "industrial machine for interpretation," she hints that such readings are so formulaic, so creatively "impoverish[ed]," that they all but write themselves (1991, 28). Even one more such story, she seems to suggest, would be one too many.

It is hard to imagine a more cynical view of so mainstream an analytical pursuit. One might think that the sheer hyperbole of Abbate's argument—her principled refusal to distinguish between good and bad analyses, her caricature of music analysts as anesthetized drones, incapable of self-restraint or -reflection—would have undercut her credibility on this point. But a number of influential scholars have echoed these sentiments over the years. And they were recently joined by one of the leading figures of contemporary Mahler research. At the start of his insightful and often brilliant study, *Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies* (2009), Julian Johnson expressly distances himself from narrative approaches, offering his own as a more substantial alternative:

Commentaries on Mahler's symphonic narratives have proliferated, many of which might seem congruent with our experiences of the music. But in the end, the sheer diversity of such readings is self-defeating because it underlines the ease with which the music disdains them and the extent to which it is impervious to such more-or-less plausible interpretations. My concern here is not to provide another set of readings—another guide to Mahler's symphonies—but to get under the surface of the various plots we might ascribe to this music: to explore the musical *how* and, by doing so, to get closer to the musical *what*. In Mahler's music, the *what* lies entirely in the *how*, because in Mahler the problem with speaking as such is precisely the content of the music. (2009, 4; emphasis original)

There is much to unpack here. Clearly, the charge that narrative analysis fails to grasp the true "content" of Mahler's music is more self-promotion than serious criticism; Johnson knows as well as anyone that it is not his place to pinpoint or delimit "the" content of this extraordinarily rich music. (The symphonies "disdain" his readings as effortlessly as they do Adorno's or Bekker's or my own.) I'll also admit to finding odd the claim that narrative analyses of Mahler are so "diverse" as to effectively cancel one another out. My own impression is quite the opposite, in fact: apart from a handful of admirable outliers, narrative views

18. They are (1) a syntactical capacity for conflict; (2) the coherence of conflicted groupings over time; (3) "teleological directedness" (i.e., some change between beginning and end); and (4) cultural preconditions that invite listeners to attend to these features.

of Mahler's music are, if anything, wearingly predictable. In many respects, the discourse of the Mahler industry has become an echo chamber of truisms, clichés, and hagiographic pabulum. And while the worst offenders are populist genres—the innumerable biographies, listener's guides, and concert programs—scholarship has not always been immune to this interpretive stagnation. Though our understanding of Mahler's life and intellectual milieu has grown substantially in recent decades, our sense of the works *as narratives*, as stories, seems in fact to have changed very little.

I may misread Johnson, but I detect a similar weariness in critique; his apprehension about yet “another guide to Mahler's symphonies” suggests not self-defeating plenitude but numbing overfamiliarity. In either case, he clearly shares Abbate's impatience with the commonplace, her commitment to moving beyond ossified hermeneutic routines. But his critique, being both more targeted and more moderate, is also more defensible: Johnson is right to insist that we ask new questions of Mahler's music, and his book charts one especially fruitful path. But his *tout court* dismissal of narrative analysis will not do—especially if it rests on a specious equation of “more” and “less plausible” readings, as if there weren't a world of difference between them. Little good, I think, can come from such leveling cynicism. What we need, rather, are fresh approaches to narrative analysis in this music: those organized around new questions and which promise new hearings and new insights; those that let us engage the old narrative tropes—many of them adaptations of Mahler's own—without merely rehearsing or embroidering them; and finally, those that aspire to new and more rigorous terms for “plausibility.”

This last point is key. For a century, narrative discussions of Mahler's music have drawn their authority mainly from the composer's own paratexts and/or biographical circumstances. These are obviously crucial considerations, always to be kept in mind. But my readings also appeal to other grounds for “plausibility” as well, in two broad domains: *analytical detail* and *intertextual consistency*. On the first point, one must tread carefully; Nicholas Cook is surely right to warn that analytical quality does not correlate in any simple way to “the percentage of notes in the score that [the reading] can account for” (1994, 229). But if the purpose of narrative analysis is to draw discrete events into comprehensive teleological wholes, then it seems to me self-evident that, *mutatis mutandis*, an analysis that deals with a greater number of features should be more persuasive than one founded on scater data (to say nothing of one that passes over whole passages or even large sections of a movement).

Broader methodological issues are at play here as well. I have already shared my view that analytical depth and detail are especially urgent matters in Mahler studies. Although discussions of transsymphonic narrative are legion, they tend to deal only with broad-brush topics like programmatic design, cyclical unity, and long-range topical/expressive arc. Finely wrought, analytically driven narrative accounts of complete movements—those that go beyond mere tabulation to ask *why* events happen as they do, with an interest in developing new and illuminating connections between them—are still quite rare. To a point, this is only natural; even after taking ownership of all the notes (a complex task, but a vital

one), there is the question of what *kind* of sense one makes of them. This, for me, is where the intertextual dimension has proved invaluable. Each of my analyses presumes that where form and meaning are concerned, the best (or “more plausible”) interpretation is always the one that is more consistent with, or at least more fruitfully in dialogue with, the narrative grammar of Mahler’s other works. Naturally, this involves some circularity, since individual instances must always be reconciled with a totality comprising other, similarly interpreted instances. But I see it as vastly preferable to a purely ad hoc hermeneutics or, worse, a nihilistic relativism that sees such interpretation as a wholly subjective affair, impervious to evidence-based reasoning. By striving to understand these movements as elements of a wide-ranging, internally consistent corpus, I hope to arrive at a more firmly grounded sense of Mahler’s sonata-form dramaturgy and, with it, a sharper image of his evolving craft and sense of musical emplotment. Indeed, I believe these holistic insights may be among the book’s signal contributions.

So, to the charges of Abbate and her fellow skeptics, I can say only this: one must pick one’s battles. There will always be a contingent eager to trivialize narrative analysis; this book is plainly not for them. For those on the fence, however—or for those already sympathetic—my hope is that the analyses in Chapters 4 through 7 will push back against such reductive stereotypes. That is to say, even beyond the window they provide onto Mahler’s formal thinking, I like to imagine that my readings might, through rigor and imagination, stand as a yet another reminder that narrative analyses can be not only “plausible” but also rewarding and worthwhile.

III. Subordinate Narrative Effects

As Chapter 1 explained, the paradigmatic sonata plot provides each of my analyses with its “primary narrative level”—that is, the overarching teleological framework in which more localized events find their meaning. In this section, I look briefly at the three most important processes that give rise to these subsidiary narrative effects. The attributes discussed—transformed repetition, gesture, and affective state change—all provide ad hoc, bottom-up complements to the sonata plot’s top-down regulating function.

Transformed Repetition

Whenever a discrete musical unit changes over time, we have the opportunity to hear meaningful narrative activity. Mahler knew this well, and stressed the importance of thematic transformation, above all else, for establishing a work’s teleological through-line.¹⁹ For Adorno, transformed repetition was the sine qua

19. See, e.g., his letter to Max Marschalk of 12 April 1896 (Martner, ed. 1979, 182). Naturally, thematic transformation was an essential (and much-discussed) element of nineteenth-century symphonic and stage music.

non of Mahler's art, its ubiquitous "formal law" (2002b, 613). The composer's "variants," as he called them (see Chapter 2), served two related functions. They allowed *structure* to arise, spontaneously and from the bottom up, by establishing "autonomous connections" between distant points on the score (1992, 83). But they also, through their constant and purposeful change, acted as conduits for the music's "novelistic" logic, the temporally purposive qualities that we might call its narrativity.²⁰

Though the variant concept is well known, it is normally associated with the small-scale thematic gestalts that were Adorno's main focus. At points, however, Adorno makes clear that the variant process operates on many scales at once and applies equally to vast tectonic fields, the giant varied "stroph[es]" of Mahler's symphonic designs (1992, 77). On this point, we find a significant overlap with what Hepokoski and Darcy call *rotational form*.

The premise of rotational form is simple: a work establishes at its outset a "referential thematic pattern," an "ordered succession" of motives or themes that is then recycled or reworked as the piece progresses—the implication being that "once we have arrived at the end of the thematic pattern, the next step will bring us back to its opening, or to a variant thereof, in order to initiate another (often modified) move through the configuration" (2006, 611). And like Adorno's variants, rotational processes occur at various levels of structure; large rotations often contain their own internal cyclings or *subrotations*.

Hepokoski and Darcy are quick to stress the "flexibility" of the principle as it applies to actual compositions. "Successive rotations," they explain, "are often subjected to telling variation:

Portions of them may dwell longer on individual modules of the original musical arrangement; they may omit some of the ordered modules along the way; or they may be shortened, truncated, telescoped, expanded, developed, decorated, or altered with ad hoc internal substitutions or episodic interpolations. (611)

This flexibility, in turn, gives the principle an especially long reach. The authors hear rotational processes at work not only in simple cyclical forms (e.g., rondo or varied strophic), but also more complex genres such as the sonata, where the exposition provides the referential layout for both the recapitulation (which we might expect) and the development (which we might not).²¹

20. When discussing Mahler's variants, Adorno uses the term "narrative" only in the more restricted, Abbatean sense. He invites us to hear a kind of diegetic mediation between the "diction" of Mahler's music—its "general flow"—and the thematic particulars manifested therein. It is, he suggests, as if the symphonies "depicted" their themes in a way that recalls "the reflection of a narrated incident by the narrative"; this is how the music "recites itself, . . . narrates without narrative" (1992, 76). Micznik 2001 puts forth a similar idea.

21. Here we find the most crucial difference between the rotational principle and the Mahlerian "variant." For Adorno, Mahler's large-scale variants inherently undermined or obscured a movement's sonata-form architecture, whereas Hepokoski and Darcy see the form itself as *inherently* rotational. On the problems of Adorno's position, see Chapter 2, Section V.

Naturally, this entails a changed view of developments themselves. Rather than supposing them to be thematically arbitrary or ad hoc, Hepokoski and Darcy hold that the first-level Classical default was to develop modules from the preceding exposition *in their original order*, suggesting a kind of varied or deeply abstracted retraversal of what came before. Indeed, this practice was pervasive enough in their view that deviations—in Mozart's time and after—should raise the question of deliberate “overriding” on the composer's part and, in turn, spur modern analysts to take up the hermeneutic gauntlet (206–7).

From this last point, it should be clear that “rotational form” is often better understood as an interpretive strategy or regulating idea than a work-immanent structural feature, since many of its most striking applications involve the assertion of parallelisms between spans of music that are actually quite different at the acoustic surface. And it is in this—the capacity to assert meaningful deviation where we might otherwise see only neutral difference—that we find the theory's greatest strengths and limitations alike. On the one hand, by elevating transformed repetition to a broad formal principle, rotation theory can bring a sweeping increase in hermeneutic traction, since changes from one rotation to the next will tend to implicate some kind of purposeful narrative development. On the other hand, there looms the risk of misapplication and thus of skewed hearings, with sonata form being an especially sensitive case. Hepokoski and Darcy urge us to hear rotational designs “implicated in every sonata, even when [they are] apparently absent or deeply obscured” (2006, 613). But the pitfalls here are obvious: if every sonata must be “about” rotation in some sense—if every deviation from the referential layout requires an assertion of meaningful suppression or substitution—then we are ironically obliged to hear the movements least outwardly suggestive of a rotational layout as the ones most preoccupied with it.²²

This is a serious concern, and one we shall keep in mind at all points ahead. Still, the relevance of rotational concepts to the Mahler canon strikes me as beyond debate; no study of his formal thinking could do without them. In songs and symphonies alike, he routinely treats presentational order as the constant around which other variables change—often dramatically.²³ For a brief example, let us turn to “Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n” (1901), the first of his five *Kindertotenlieder*. Our interest will be the remarkable transformation by which Strophe 1 (m. 1) becomes Strophe 3 (m. 41)—a reworking so thorough that the familiar concept of strophic “variation” falls decidedly short.

The left side of Figure 3.1 divides Mahler's model strophe into five segments. The right side tracks the modifications they undergo in the third rotation. More

22. To be fair, Hepokoski and Darcy ultimately back down from an overly Procrustean stance, conceding that the question “remains open” whether “the rotational norm for developments is sufficiently powerful to suggest its tacit presence . . . even in cases when it is replaced by something else” (2006, 613).

23. Those who write about the “varied strophic” impulse behind Mahler's instrumental forms have no doubt recognized this; see, e.g., Tibbe 1971, Danuser 1975, Oltmanns 1988, and Micznik 2001. To date, Darcy 2001a and Marvin 2009 are the only expressly “rotational” analyses of Mahler in print—though Darcy has given several conference papers on the topic as well (2003, 2005).

Figure 3.1 “Nun will die sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n,” transformation of model strophe into rotation 3

| STROPHES 1, 2 | | | STROPHE 3 | | |
|---------------|--------|--|--------------|-----|--|
| | Bars | Function | | Bar | Function |
| ① | 1, 22 | Introduction <i>Instrumental</i> | — becomes —> | 41 | Introduction <i>Instrumental</i> |
| ② | 5, 25 | Line 1, 3 <i>Vocal</i> | — becomes —> | 44 | Introduction, cont’d. <i>Instrumental (counterpoint inverted, melody doubled in 3rds; tonic presence attenuated through omission of bass voice)</i> |
| ③ | 9, 29 | Link <i>Instrumental</i> | — becomes —> | 48 | Line 5 [Introduction, cont’d.] <i>Vocal (melody reset in loose mirror-image counterpoint); Harmony hovers on supertonic seventh</i> |
| ④ | 11, 32 | Line 2, 4 <i>Vocal</i> | — becomes —> | 52 | Line 6 [start of new, contrasting section] <i>Vocal (melody altered; harmonic progression intensified; texture thickened; violin descant transforms Abgesang 2 [m. 37])</i> |
| ⑤ | 16, 37 | <i>Abgesang</i> <i>Instrumental</i> | — becomes —> | 59 | Interlude [song’s expressive climax] <i>Instrumental (vastly intensified, contrapuntally enriched; 8th-note figuration spills over into succeeding strophe)</i> |

striking even than the components’ individual variations (and they are often profound!) are the overall changes of formal function and rhetorical weight. By displacing the vocal entry to a transitory linking passage (m. 48) and by withholding a strong tonic bass presence until segment 4 (m. 52), Mahler turns the latter—formerly a mid-rotation event—into a major sectional onset. When that music reaches its desolate phrygian-mode cadence in m. 59, Mahler then recasts the once-elegiac *Nachspiel* as a nightmarish contrapuntal interlude, providing the song’s expressive climax.

Justifiably, analysts have tended to focus on the *difference* of this strophe—especially segments 4 and 5—from what surrounds: Mitchell calls it the song’s “development section” (1986, 105–6), and Roman hears it as the B section of a large *Reprisesbarform* (1970, 323). But we should not overlook that this apparently new contrasting section does more than “use . . . the same material” as the preceding strophes (de La Grange 1995, 833): it transforms them in toto. By hearing this music as a full-fledged Adornian variant or Hepokoskian rotation, we shed new light on its role as the song’s climax/culmination, since now each of its segments has its own backstory and its own narrative/teleological arc. And from this, of course, new hermeneutic opportunities follow.²⁴

One sees dramatic rotational transformations of this sort throughout Mahler’s works; at the largest scale, he often makes cyclical returns as audible as possible with ear-grabbing formal markers.²⁵ And, as Hepokoski and Darcy predict, virtually all of his sonata forms show rotational elements to some degree.

24. Monahan 2013b offers a detailed interpretation of the song based on this strophic transformation.

25. One thinks, e.g., of the sleighbell intrusions in 4/I, the disintegrating “inferno” outbursts in 5/II, or the C_♯ bell drones in “Der Abschied.”

For caution's sake, however, my analyses do not assume in advance that rotational processes are operative at all times, or that a strongly implicative metric of deviation offers the best interpretive framework for a given movement. My aim, rather, has been to determine the concept's relevance for each movement from the ground up. Along these lines, I have found it helpful to distinguish between (non-implicative) rotational *patterning* and (strongly implicative) rotational *processes* as Hepokoski and Darcy define them. That is, I shall sometimes address Mahler's use of the same loose modular ordering from section to section without viewing differences from the referential layout as the music's leading source of meaning. This distinction will allow us, in turn, to give due emphasis to those movements that *do* call to mind truly cyclical processes, where the music's forward spiral seems to bear strong connotations of rebeginning, renewal, or even blind reduplication, as in 3/I (see Chapter 6). In certain movements not treated at length here, like 5/II and 7/I, it would also be useful to distinguish between "strong" and "weak" rotations, to capture varying degrees of fidelity to the referential array. In still other cases, we might well see the principle suspended or neutralized entirely for some duration—as in the development of 6/I, which concludes with an unusual "backward" cycling through the normative rotational order (see Chapter 4).

Gesture

The next two narrative domains tend to involve spontaneous changes to the musical stream at large, rather than transformations of bounded, discrete entities like themes or formal units. The first is *gesture*, which involves energetic configurations that invite comparison with real-world actions and, crucially, the kinds of expressive/psychodynamic processes they might implicate. Robert Hatten has theorized at length about musical gestures, both in terms of their prototypical characteristics and their relation to gestures at large as staples of human communication. On the first point, he notes that gestures are emergent features of musical discourse, "synthetic gestalts" that coordinate a range of primary and secondary parameters (2004, 94); they possess "articulate shape," are "amenable to type-token relationships," and offer "hierarchical potential," meaning that smaller gestures can be grouped into larger ones (124). And in most cases, they will be underwritten by some metaphorical equation of musical environments with physical spaces—spaces whose governing forcefields are modeled after those we experience in the real world.²⁶

26. Like a number of neo-energeticist writers—most notably Steve Larson—Hatten sees "tonality" as a defining structural force in such virtual environments, particularly in its capacity to generate a sense of "gravity." For me, such a conception of gravity is far too narrow. Without denying that tonal centers can often provide an energetically "stable platform" (Larson 2012, 83), I hear a more generalized sense of environmental "gravity" underwriting virtually all musical gestures, tonal or not. Such a force lends distinct and opposing energetic qualities to falling contours (which "submit" to its downward pull) and rising ones (which must "resist" it through counterforce).

The *meaning* of musical gestures, in turn, has much to do with their perceived correspondence to physical—that is, bodily and/or facial—movements, which are linked to emotion and affect in our deepest, pre-linguistic cognitive wiring (Hatten 2004, 102–4). Just as we read our compatriots’ interior states based on their bodily motions, so too can we read affective, volitional, or rhetorical qualities in music’s many gestures.²⁷ Indeed, I suspect that our culture-wide tendency to interpret instrumental music *agentially*—that is, as comprising the virtual actions or mental life of one or more musical actors or “personae,” including that of composer—may stem from this habit of inferring psychological states from music’s gestural dimension.

Though Hatten’s focus is the late Classical style, his views transfer readily to post-Wagnerian repertoire, where gestures take on a heightened relevance. Mahler’s music, of course, is famously gesture-driven; his oversized mannerisms and relentless vicissitudes—the “quirks,” “spasms,” and “fanfares” that Kalbeck lamented—lend the symphonies expressive immediacy and, as Micznik notes crucially, much of their narrative character as well (2001, 226). This is crucial. Like Botstein and others, Micznik hears Mahler’s unexpected and/or hyperbolic gestures spurring the listener to provide his or her own supplemental narrative logic, one that builds upon their rich extramusical—if not necessarily programmatic or pictorial—connotations (246).

But she also suggests, with a distinctly Adornian spin, that this alternative logic will necessarily “shatter,” “subordinate,” and ultimately “replac[e]” the “conventional musical logic” of the Western symphonic tradition, which can neither predict nor assimilate them (226). Using 9/I as a case study, she argues that Mahler’s avoidance of “predictable” or purely “syntactic” routines—whether gestural, thematic, or tonal—makes his music “more narrative” than that of his Classical forebears (246). In this, her theory builds extensively on Newcomb’s suggestion (1992, 118) that music’s narrativity might vary inversely with its reliance on traditional practice.²⁸

One can certainly appreciate why analysts of Mahler’s Ninth might arrive at such a view. As Chapter 1 showed, its opening movement all but renounces tonal plot as a source of narrative interest. But I am wary of any model that rests on a tidy zero-sum relation between “narrative” and “traditional”

27. Note that I refer here mainly to individual, “strategic” gestures and not those that are merely stylistic or conventional within some preexisting genre or topic—though these may of course be connotative in other respects. Also note that this sort of empathic interpretation may be as much a *physical* act as a cognitive one; see Cox 2011.

28. Newcomb credits this view to Adorno. Many of Micznik’s central premises have Adornian roots as well—e.g., the analogical linking of thematic transformations to discursive (i.e., narrative) manipulations of an originary “story” (cf. Adorno 1992, 76); the narrative advantages of Mahler’s gestalt-preserving thematic technique over the Classical practice of motivic dissolution and reassembly (Micznik 2001, 207; cf. Adorno 1992, 86–88); and the idea that Mahler’s narrative logic arises as a response to the impotence of traditional tonal plots (cf. Adorno 1992, 43 and 48). But with these ideas, Micznik also inherits aspects of Adorno’s polemically binaristic view of Beethovenian and Mahlerian practice—one that is too quick, in my opinion, to valorize the latter through reductive caricature of the former (see Chapter 2).

procedures—especially if it treats too deterministically the complex and variable relationship between narrative implications at various hierarchical levels.

Consider the issue of gesture: to hear a particular event *as a gesture* is one interpretive task; situating it within a broader narrative context is quite another. And while the former, as Micznik notes, is likely to rely more on immediate context cues and ad hoc extramusical (e.g., kinetic, mimetic, affective) associations, the latter can appeal to any number of synthesizing strategies. So while it is possible to narrativize complete movements as Micznik does—from the bottom up, around the implications of localized gestures, topical shifts, and thematic transformations—this is by no means the only or best option. Individual gestures can also be heard to articulate higher-level, top-down plot structures as well—including, as in my analyses, the traditional tonal drama of sonata form.

Affective State Changes

The last narrative effects to consider here are shifts between broad, expressively connotative musical fields—the rhetorical uplift when a funeral march gives way to a pastoral episode, for instance, or the gloom that ensues when major-mode music slips irreversibly into minor. Though these “fields” may be connected by localized gestures—collapsing, eliding, or escalating into one other, for instance—I refer here to the broader affective trajectory created by the successions themselves.

The importance of affective state changes to the narrative character of Romantic music is well known, and a number of writers have privileged them above all others (e.g., Micznik 2001, Klein 2004). In Mahler, they are especially vital as the medium in which *topics* normally take on narrative meaning. Note that “topic” refers here to a broader stock of generic types than we find in the classical style. Beyond the standard battery of marches, pastorals, folk tunes, and archaic styles—all with their own inbuilt sociocultural baggage—there are the countless imports from Romantic dramatic/illustrative music, many of them Wagnerian fingerprints with specific expressive connotations of their own.²⁹

The importance of these borrowed musics in Mahler’s style is so well known as barely to require comment. If I have disregarded them until now, it is because topics are, in themselves, “expressively static” (Almén 2008, 75); they acquire a narrative value only relationally, when we rationalize why one gives way to another. Sometimes, significant topical successions occur noncontiguously, as when a single theme is filtered through different generic types. (Think of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” hymn reappearing as a Turkish march.) In those cases, topics take on narrative qualities in conjunction with transformed repetition. More often, though, topics give rise to narrative effects when they follow one another directly, like when the stolid funeral march in 1/III gives way a lilting

29. Indeed, it seems sometimes that everything in Mahler is a kind of “topic.” As Franklin writes, “perhaps nothing in Mahler . . . is simply ‘music.’ Everything speaks, [everything] signifies” (1991, 39).

Klezmer lament (m. 39),³⁰ or when the *Totentanz* in 4/II quickens into a dreamy, vaguely tipsy *Ländler* (m. 69). For Hans-Peter Jülg, it is just these sorts of juxtapositions that define the idiosyncratic “*Verlaufskurve*” of Mahler’s music (1986, 55–56).

In closing, I should like to revisit the idea, touched on earlier, that these various kinds of narrative activity might be heard as hierarchically nested “domains” or “levels.” In suggesting such a model, my purpose is not to rank Mahler’s narrative effects by salience or relevance; they are all equally important. Rather, I want to compare the organizing influence that they bear on analysis by looking at their relative *scale* and *immediacy*—the idea being that lower-ranking domains will include more localized effects, in contrast to the broader spans implicated by higher-ranking ones. I also hope to shed light on their reciprocal roles. For while lower-level events like gestures can be organized and given meaning by higher-ranking narrative structures, it is only *through* these localized effects that we can come to perceive the more abstract, higher-ranking ones in the first place.

Thus at one extreme of the hierarchy we have the sonata plot, which outranks all others (1) because it encompasses the broadest span of music and (2) because all other narrative registers can be heard to serve it. At the other end we find gestures, which provide the finest grain of narrative detail to processes in other domains. In between fall affective state changes—which lie toward the center of the hierarchy, since they tend to encompass broader, continuous stretches of music—and transformed repetitions, which vary in scale, spanning nearly the entire continuum. Thematic transformations are typically lower-level events, involving networks of individual and mostly noncontiguous moments (though they may at times be closely coordinated with some affective-successional shift)³¹ while formal/rotational transformations may be so expansive as to encompass entire sections of a movement (e.g., a sonata-form exposition or development).

Together, these domains account for most of the narrative effects I address in any individual sonata movement. But there is an obvious catch: none of Mahler’s sonata-form movements can really be understood as free-standing, “individual” entities. Most are also embedded, programmatically and musically, within broader transsymphonic dramas. Naturally, this creates a welter of concerns. In the next and final section, I grapple with questions that strike me as central to any narrative view of this music: How can a movement be *both* an integral, self-contained plot and also a station within some larger narrative process? Are there inherent differences between transsymphonic and single-movement narratives, in terms either of their structure or their grounding in the score? How, or to what extent, do these narrative domains blend or interpenetrate? (Can we really consider one wholly independently of the other?) And should Mahler’s

30. See Draughon and Knapp on this music’s combination of “Jewish, Bohemian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian musical styles” (2001, par. 11ff.).

31. One such instance is when the “*Meeresstille*” theme in 2/I passes from major into minor just as its pastoral topos gives way to a return of the opening funeral march (mm. 145ff.).

views on the matter—to the extent we can retrieve them—shape our own in any way?

IV. Transsymphonic Narrative

It has long been a matter of course to understand Mahler's symphonies mainly as transsymphonic dramas. Donald Mitchell speaks for generations of listeners when he describes each of Mahler's finales as the "denouement" of a "narrative" reaching back to the work's opening bars (1999b, 208).³² Such a conception has broad roots, of course, in the post-Beethovenian ideal of the teleologically integrated symphony. More decisive, though, are the cues we get from Mahler himself that his symphonic ideal was a through-composed one. Though it is most obvious with the explicitly programmatic works, we know that Mahler cared deeply about the shape, balance, and pacing of all of his symphonies as integral wholes: he routinely fretted about the order of their movements and, in one telling incident, even tried to control the clock-time that was to elapse *between* them, as if such gaps could be annexed into the piece itself (Kennedy 1991, 122–23). Indeed, the storied view of these works is so deeply entrenched that when Mahler politely declined to provide programs, twentieth-century critics enshrined their own, like the Ninth Symphony's farewell story or tragic battle against fate in the Sixth.³³

At times, though, this transsymphonic bias runs deep enough to cause concerns. As this study took shape, I received feedback from a number of critics who thought that its central aim—to analyze Mahler's individual movements as discrete "narratives"—was problematic or even illegitimate. An anonymous early reviewer put it especially bluntly: "A narrative analysis [in Mahler] should really look at entire symphonies. Imagine analyzing a novel by looking only at the first or last chapter." That such comments came from several directions at once is alarming; if they are signs of a broader sensibility, it is surely worth addressing them directly.

The most striking aspect of this critique is its defiance of long-standing disciplinary habits. Nineteenth-century critics routinely treated the constituents of multimovement symphonies as relatively independent entities, certainly worthy of analysis on their own terms. And this tendency has only strengthened with time; it is far more common nowadays for analysts to read individual symphonic movements as discrete entities (narrative or otherwise) than as waypoints in a larger totality. To my knowledge, no contemporary critic has expressly rejected such practices.

So why the resistance with Mahler in particular? Disciplinary precedent is hardly sufficient. Though analysts have overwhelmingly followed Mahler in

32. This view goes back to the symphonies' earliest performances; see Painter 1996, 228ff.

33. Interestingly, de La Grange (1999, 851–53) suggests that the generally lukewarm reception of the Seventh Symphony rests on its *resistance* to interpretation as a single transsymphonic narrative.

privileging transsymphonic narrative, I see no reason why his much-vaunted sense of musical drama should be less evident *within* his sonata forms than in the symphonies that house them—especially given the likelihood that the form itself had strong cultural sanction as a kind of self-contained narrative archetype, as Hepokoski and Darcy (2006) and Almén (2008) suggest.³⁴ Is a deeper exceptionalism is at play, then? Are we really to believe that Mahler's symphonic integration was so singularly effective that it reduced his individual movements to mere narrative segments—units that might *be* beginnings, middles, or endings without having real beginnings, middles, and ends of their own?

Of course not. Mahler's own views were very much of their time and, as such, repel any simplistically through-composed view of his works. Consider the case of the Third Symphony: shortly before the 1896 premier, Mahler arranged for several of its movements to be performed independently (Franklin 1991, 24–25), suggesting that they had, in his mind, enough conceptual autonomy not to strike audiences as open-ended or unintelligible excisions from an otherwise unspecified whole.³⁵ His comments on the work's genesis give much the same impression. After its completion, he explained to Natalie Bauer-Lechner that although he had hoped to engineer “profound interrelationships” between its six movements, the plan had come to naught: “each movement stands alone,” he explained, “as a self-contained and independent whole” (1980, 59).³⁶

All this suggests to me that Mahler was quite at ease with the idea that narrative in multimovement works might be a dual-level phenomenon: constituent parts could be “self-contained” and “independent” and yet still contribute to the vital narrative arc of the whole.³⁷ Indeed, to shoehorn his works into a single-level model—one that sanctions *only* the transsymphonic story—is far too reductive, since it asks us to pass over a host of complexities that, if anything, deserve closer consideration. As Hepokoski and Darcy write, our impulse to hear multimovement works as coherent wholes rather may be innate and “self-evident,” but the methodological issues it raises are “daunting” (2006, 318). This is no less true of Mahler than of Haydn and Mozart, despite the increased cachet of cyclical integration after Beethoven. So rather than waving away the tensions between the two “levels” of narrative in multimovement designs, my purpose here is to probe them more deeply, with an eye toward better understanding Mahler's art.

34. Leonard B. Meyer (1989, 203) notes that the tendency to hear sonata-form movements as self-contained narratives goes back at least to Carl Czerny (1791–1857).

35. Movements from the Second Symphony (nos. 1–3) were also performed independently in these years.

36. This is not entirely true, of course. Later, Bauer-Lechner has Mahler himself acknowledging the handful of cyclical links between the outer movements—which he did not expect audiences to notice! (1980, 59).

37. Sadly, Mahler left no explicit testimony that he understood his individual movements as discrete *narratives*, per se. But there are hints that he heard his music tracing a dynamic, dramatic, or processive curve. See, e.g., this chapter's epigraph, or the 1893 letter in which he describes the necessity for contemporary music to objectify not only basic emotive states but also the “transition[s]” and “conflicts” between them (Martner, ed. 1979, 148).

To begin, we should think about the differences between those narrative levels themselves, especially as manifested in analytical practice today. Individual movements, like the symphonies that contain them, are what Nicholas Cook calls “authorized wholes” (2001, 188)—that is, culturally sanctioned totalities. But the nature of that “wholeness” can vary dramatically. Latter-day narrative analyses of single movements typically have far-reaching traction in the musical score. They tend to be highly attentive to musical particulars, either by treating musical entities as full-blooded narrative agents or by closely tethering a more abstract psychological or symbolic narrative to a work’s thematic/motivic/tonal processes.³⁸

Transsymphonic narratives generally have far less “traction” of this sort. Owing to the movements’ lack of shared materials and themes—and also to the crisp partitioning of their underlying formal schemata—there is simply no intramusical foothold for the kind of integrated, materially grounded musical teleologies we can easily read into single movements.³⁹ To be sure, many nineteenth-century composers crafted striking moments of foreshadowing or reminiscence in which materials *do* pass between movements—none, perhaps, more consistently than Mahler himself. But these are still the exception, and by a long margin. As a rule, the continuity and logic of transsymphonic narratives will tend to rest on an armature of more holistic or generalized parameters like topic, mode, key, and/or genre. And it is no coincidence, I think, that the most memorable of them also rely on some kind of illustrative, literary, or psychodramatic program to establish continuity and to knit their components together intelligibly. This includes most of Mahler’s symphonies, where the unifying stories are sometimes the composer’s own (e.g., the Third Symphony’s ontological ascension) and sometimes later critical additions (like Newcomb’s [1992] take on a Ninth as a musical *Bildungsroman*).⁴⁰ But while such narratives are often keyed to certain hot-button moments within individual movements (e.g., the Sixth Symphony’s hammerblows or the Fifth Symphony’s *Durchbruch*), they are

38. Though the line between these is not always clear; see Monahan 2013a.

39. This lack of pervasive material connectedness also works against any comparison of individual symphonic movements to quasi-autonomous “chapters” in a traditional novel. True, such chapters may well have their own narrative beginnings, middles, and endings, as symphonic movements do. But their collective coherence *qua* novel typically resides in (1) their mutually shared characters and particularities of socio/geographic milieu, and (2) an overarching, determinate story that expressly embeds the smaller narrative within the larger one. As already noted, most multimovement symphonies lack anything like consistent thematic/motivic “characters.” And without paratextual aid, they are not generally capable of signifying such an “embedding” of stories. Consider Mahler’s Ninth: if we wished to hear its successive movements as “chapters” in a four-movement “novel,” the work itself offers few clues as to *how* those individual stories might be understood to relate. Their coherence would mainly be the contrivance of the listener alone (cf. Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 340–41); this is why Newcomb (1992) looks to literary “plot paradigms” for its narrative coherence.

40. For other recent narrative analyses of complete Mahler symphonies, see Almén (2006) on the First, Mitchell on the Fourth and Fifth (1999b, 1999a), and Samuels on the Sixth (1995, 150ff.). Almén also offers an elaborate *intersymphonic* narrative that spans the entirety of Mahler’s *Wunderhorn* tetralogy (2006).

not usually built to account systematically for most or even many of their internal details.⁴¹

Of course, these differences between narrative levels are not inherent or absolute. They only turn up under analytical regimes that, like mine, prefer to stake narrative continuity on concrete intramusical relationships. (In other words, it is always an option to read individual movements as loosely impressionistic poetic or psychological dramas, of the sort normally assigned to complete symphonies.) But the constructive differences they point to are real: the part/whole relationships of individual movements and multimovement cycles are, at bottom, fundamentally disanalogous. This is nowhere more evident than in Mahler's license with movement order. That he even had the *option* to shuffle the constituents of a work that was notionally complete (as with the Sixth) or to make a finale of what was originally an inner movement (in the Third) reveals much about the comparably loose-knit nature of transsymphonic narrative. Individual movements—especially those in dialogue with well-defined formal schemata—offer no such freedom. (Can we really imagine Mahler reordering a sonata's principal themes after the movement was completed? Or making a coda of its development?) All this is to say that a series of contrasting movements, no matter how carefully arrayed, will tend to fall shy of being a *musical* plot in the most rigorous sense, since the material discontinuity between them strongly inhibits the continuous working-out of any clearly delimited musical problem or process.

Before turning to the question of how transsymphonic and single-movement narratives interact in Mahler's music, we might step back first to marvel that we should have to negotiate this dual-level model at all. For one has to ask: why would a composer so singularly committed to transsymphonic storytelling have embraced the archaic convention of stringing together rhetorically closed, materially individuated movements? Other, more integrated models had certainly been available for generations, ranging from the hybridized multi-/single-movement structures pioneered by Schubert and Liszt—what Steven Vande Moortele (2009) calls “two-dimensional sonata forms”—to *sui generis* experiments at radical integration, like Schumann's Fourth Symphony. That Mahler passed over these options might be a testament to his cultural conservatism—what was good enough for Beethoven should be good enough for his heirs—or an outgrowth of his principled eclecticism, his much-touted belief that the symphony should be as internally diverse as the world itself.

Whatever the reason, we can hardly regret Mahler's choice to work in so peculiar a system, since its very rigidity appears to have spurred some of his most characteristic and startling originalities. For while earlier composers had

41. This is not to say that it would be *impossible* to assign a specific mimetic/illustrative/pictorial significance to every moment in a work under the aegis of some transsymphonic program. My point is that few of the transsymphonic narratives passed down to us by Newcomb and others provide no obvious basis for correlating individual score events to the overarching poetic framework.

experimented with cyclical and/or motivic unification, no one before Mahler, I think, had so successfully explored and exploited the *tension* between the two kinds of authorized wholes at play in the multimovement symphony. When Mahler deploys materials across movements, the result is rarely some bland or trivial “unification.” Rather, the effect is often to *intensify* our sense of the ontological rift between movements, to fashion the symphonic universe multidimensionally, as a series of insulated spaces subject to the occasional rupture, rather than as a simple linear continuum with temporal breaks between movements. This tension is vital to his idiom: by keeping the material connections between movements relatively infrequent, and through emphatic foregrounding—often with connotations of disruption or spatio-temporal plasticity (flashbacks, premonitions, “breakthroughs,” and so on)—Mahler allows these points of interconnection to retain a vital aura of uncanniness. They are load-bearing semantic moments that no hearing can afford to ignore, as he himself repeatedly stressed.⁴² They also suggestively reinforce his music’s transcendence claims, in that they posit an “out there” beyond the boundaries of immanent musical reality and its laws, a behind-the-curtain realm in which the heterogeneous movements interpenetrate and communicate. Thus, in addition to the surface-level “coherence” arising from motivic unity or thematic cross-reference, per se, the symphonies also assert a more rarefied and powerfully symbolic coherence—one disclosed only through paranormal revelations, and which lies (paradoxically) in the works’ refusal to dispel the tensions between their own putative wholeness and the autonomy of their constituent parts.

In practical terms, the effect of these striking “revelations” and “uncanny” cross references is to impel—often quite strongly—the very kind of transsymphonic interpretation that the symphonies cannot, from a material standpoint, fully sustain. Wherever they appear, that is, they urge us to imagine the movement at hand as part of some deeply embedded temporal/conceptual through line. In this respect, we may find it helpful to imagine an intermediary layer of narrative design, a latticework of isolated material connections that serves to link the independent movements to each other, on the one hand, and also to the transsymphonic plot (however conceived) on the other, by way of what I call “narrative threads.”

These narrative threads turn up in a variety of media. Sometimes, they take the form of abstract key relationships. Many of the symphonies offer strategic early glimpses of their closing tonics; celebrated instances include the ecstatic foreshadowings of E major in the Fourth Symphony and D major in the Fifth. In other cases, we might hear an apparently teleological link between a work’s framing tonics, as with the minor-to-major semitone “upshifts” of Symphonies nos. 5 (C# minor to D) and 7 (B minor to C). Most often, though, these allusions involve

42. Mahler explained to Max Marschalk of his Second Symphony that “Even the most experienced and competent listener must first trace the interconnections between the various parts of the work; only then will the significance of the whole work reveal itself to him” (letter of 29 December 1895; Martner, ed. 1979, 173).

more concrete material/thematic connections. I find it helpful to distinguish between three broad types:

Motivic, Subthematic, or Deep-Structural Connections:

This includes material links that do not count as “quotations” per se. Typically, this occurs at the motivic level; the First and Sixth Symphonies are especially tightly knit in this regard. Occasionally, entire formal/tonal designs might be recycled as well, as in the outer movements of the Sixth.⁴³

Foreshadowings and Flashbacks:

Here, materials appear in two different movements but are weighted asymmetrically, such that they appear more indigenous to one than the other. This gives the less-indigenous appearance a temporal “pointing” function: if the material is more native to the earlier movement, the later occurrence will point backward, suggesting a “recollection” or “flashback”; if it is native to the later movement, it points forward as an “anticipation” or “foreshadowing.”⁴⁴

Integrated Thematic Recurrences:

In these cases, a single, clearly delimited theme appears as a contextually unmarked element in *two different movements*, as in the first two and last two movements of the Fifth, the last two of the Ninth, and (more obliquely) the outer movements of the Fourth.

Only the last of these—a remarkable situation, rarely used even by Mahler—offers the chance to read the same kind of narrative *across* movements as we can within them. In these cases, a recursive-transformational network breaches the pauses between movements, allowing us to hear the progressive transformation of a single “character” as a transsymphonic event. Interpreting such instances demands a special consideration of both sibling movements, since the recurring theme may have a substantial prehistory (as in 5/II, whose S-theme was a central player in the preceding movement) or be fated for some significant function later in the work (as in 4/I, whose teleologically generated “paradise” theme becomes a leading motive of the programmatically inflected song-finale).

Of the remaining two categories, the first—though certainly relevant to interpretation—offers relatively little traction for reading narrative continuity between movements, at least on its own. This means that most of Mahler’s

43. See Chapter 7.

44. Occasionally, it is hard to tell which is the “native” appearance of a recurring passage—as when both occurrences are firmly embedded in their musical context, neither of them disruptive to the contextual syntax or rhetorical equilibrium. (Think here of the undulating quarter-note “Nacht” chords at the opening of both in 3/I and 3/IV.) But very often, one appearance will have connotations of intrusion or rupture, as when 2/III foreshadows 2/V or when 5/II flashes back to 5/I.

narrative threads rely on the “foreshadowings and flashbacks” of category two. Our next step, then, is to look in more detail at the organization and referential structure of these threads, since they reveal a great deal about Mahler’s trans-symphonic thinking.

We start with two key observations: (1) each of Mahler’s first seven symphonies features a high concentration of cross-references between their outer movements, most of them rhetorically spotlighted;⁴⁵ and (2) nearly all *inner*-movement narrative threads point to one or the other of the outer movements. This means that the vast preponderance of Mahler’s narrative threads are directed toward the symphonic beginnings and endpoints.⁴⁶ This is no coincidence, I suspect. Narrative theorists often remind us of the special reciprocal affinity shared by beginnings and endings: openings are not merely openings because they *come first*, but also because they are suffused with a sense of the impending conclusion, however distant. As Sartre writes in *Nausea*, even at the beginning of a story, the end is already “there, invisible and present . . . transforming everything” with a special urgency (2007, 40). By contrast, the central section of the narrative, what Barthes calls its “dilatory space,” serves as a zone of “retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation,” where problems posed at the outset are worked through (Brooks 1984, 92–94). The resulting schema is linear in one sense (in that plot flows forward from beginning to end) but symmetrically tripartite in another, with the flanking sections connected directly by higher-level conduits, to the exclusion of the middle.⁴⁷ A story’s endpoints thus bear a disproportional significance through the “structuring power” that their shared forcefield exerts on the narrative as a whole (94).

Consciously or not, Mahler seems to have embraced such a view, since his symphonies’ beginnings and endings are both reciprocally linked and, in many respects, conceptually distinct from the narrative center. Though their various prolepses (and, in works like the Second and Sixth, a shared sense of gravity), his opening movements often seem to point as much or more to their respective finales than to the movements that follow them directly.⁴⁸ And vice versa, of

45. The Eighth, while technically lacking “inner” movements, does actually reprise material from the first movement toward the end of its final section. Thus, only the Ninth really departs from this practice—though many motivic and material connections link the outer slow movements.

46. Only rarely do finales include a recollection of an inner movement, like when 2/V quotes the preceding song-movement “Urlicht” (mm. 662ff.). It is equally rare that an opening movement foreshadows a middle one, as when the bucolic E♭-major pastoral in 6/1 (mm. 225ff.) anticipates the symphony’s slow movement; see Chapter 4. (Though the opening of the Fifth famously prefigures passages from the sonata form that follows, the latter is arguably not a true “inner movement,” but rather the other half of the first [of three] “Abteilungen.”)

47. This schema maps readily onto the traditional sonata plot, especially as construed by Hepokoski and Darcy, who regard the exposition and recapitulation as reciprocal structures of “promise” and of “accomplishment,” respectively (2006, 11), and for whom the development is a kind of dilatory space, one that neither “promises” nor “accomplishes” any generic task.

48. The Third Symphony is interesting in this light, as the only recorded case of indecision about an outer movement. During composition, Mahler discarded the original finale (the song “Das himmlische Leben”) and decided to end the work with the formerly penultimate Adagio.

course: his finales usually evoke the symphonic opening more so than the intervening events. Mitchell calls these twin pillars—which, in his view, propose and then resolve a work’s defining drama or conflict—the symphonic “frame.” He sets these apart from Mahler’s inner movements, which typically “bypass the rigor of the [outer movements’] narrative argument, providing relaxation, consolation, and contrast” (2007, 385).

I agree. It is often most productive, I think, to understand Mahler’s middle movements as tableaux, subplots, or self-enclosed way-stations that are ancillary to the narrative impelled by the outer movements. These stations occur en route to the finale in a literal sense, but not within a rigorous, directed narrative initiated by the first movement and closed by the last.⁴⁹ Such a conception recognizes that from a material standpoint, Mahler’s narrative current does not flow steadily, evenly, or even directly between the movements. Rather, multiple overlapping currents jump from one conductive region to another, leaving intermediate points unperturbed. Indeed, to gauge just how loosely knit Mahler’s “narrative middles” really are, consider that his inner movements could, in most cases, be arbitrarily reordered without changing the overall referential structure of the narrative threads. That is to say, because these inner movements allude almost exclusively to the outer ones (rather than to one other), a random shuffling—however ill-advised!—would never turn a musical foreshadowing into a reminiscence or vice versa. This might help to explain why Mahler’s indecision over movement order was nearly always limited to the symphonic interior.⁵⁰ It also makes clear the asymmetrical narrative weighting of his outer movements, since they alone anchor these vital networks of temporally directed cross-references.

Since each of my analytical chapters deals with an outer movement (three openings and one finale), they are all poised to engage aspects of transsymphonic design. To close, I should like to clarify what this might mean in purely pragmatic terms. To begin, I think it is important to distinguish between two different “perspectives” on transsymphonic narrative, what I call “outside” and “inside” views. The outside view is the more traditional one: with an aerial gaze, it regards each of a work’s movements as a portion of some coherent, synoptically glimpsable transsymphonic story—even if one that is more loosely knit, as Mitchell suggests, toward the center than at the edges. My analyses will tend, by contrast, to privilege an “inside” perspective, one that considers transsymphonic narrative only to the extent that it is implicated *within* any single movement’s musical processes. The sightlines change in that case, along with analytical priorities. For now we shall be “aware” only of those movements that can be glimpsed along the

49. Mahler’s program for the Second Symphony comes closest to corroborating this tableau concept: the outer movements served as reciprocal conceptual poles—signifying “death” and “rebirth”—while the inner movements were simply “episodes” from the fallen hero’s life (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 43).

50. See Mitchell on movement-order dilemmas vis-à-vis the Second (1995, 184–87) and Fourth Symphonies (1999a, 215n42); see also Franklin on the Third (1991, 47–49) and Floros on the Tenth (1993, 310). Most notorious of all were Mahler’s vacillations regarding the Sixth; for the continuing debate, see Kaplan, ed. 2004 and de La Grange 2008, 1578–87.

narrative threads. In other words, regions of the symphony to which there are no material links—no pointing flashbacks or premonitions—will be “invisible.” So where an “outside” view obliges one to determine each movement’s role within some larger symphonic plot, the task of the analyst working from the “inside” is to account for how narrative threads leading elsewhere in the symphony might be heard to create, respond to, or complicate the narrative issues *within* the plot of the movement being analyzed. If those threads leave certain (usually inner) movements untouched, the latter will tend to have little bearing on the analysis at hand.

Consider, for instance, 5/II. As Chapter 1 explained, that catastrophic sonata is rent again and again by quotations of the first-movement funeral march where its S-theme had first gestated. But the narrative current also leaps ahead at one point to the symphonic finale, whose triumphant chorale-climax appears as a “celestial apparition” just before the movement unravels (Adorno 1992, 12). So while its narrative threads point insistently to the symphony’s outer movements, none at all lead to the Scherzo (5/III) or Adagietto (5/IV). This means that the view from “inside” the *Hauptsatz* would mainly consider just two of the symphony’s other movements (nos. I and V), whose allusions take on qualities of past and future “tenses” within the sonata drama at hand. As interpreters, this leaves us with something of a balancing act. For our task is then to model the movement *both* as a closed, self-contained plot and as a partly “open” narrative—one whose internal events might be either (1) a response to happenings in earlier movements, or (2) the start of a new narrative thread, to be concluded in a later one.

In different ways, each of my analyses grapples with a “balancing act” of this sort; each depicts a self-contained sonata story that must also be reconciled with events in the transsymphonic past or future. Chapter 5 shows 4/I to be riven by a conflict of narrative interests, one in which the unfolding sonata story is nearly derailed by the “preparation and gradual clarification” (Bekker 1969, 147) of the finale’s “Das himmlische Leben” theme. Chapter 6, in turn, must negotiate the various and often conflicted tonal narratives implicated in 3/I, where D major is treated both as a hurdle to be cleared (as the secondary key of its F-major sonata) and a conclusive tonal goal in itself (as the governing tonic of its introductory spaces and, more important, as the anticipated telos of the symphony as a whole). And in Chapters 4 and 7, I present the outer movements of the Sixth as “ontological duals”—mirror-image sonata forms whose meanings are so profoundly intertwined that we cannot, in effect, know one without fully comprehending both. In this respect, my readings aim to give full voice to the richness of Mahler’s narrative imagination, one that was roused to some of its greatest feats by the multidimensional nature of symphonic storytelling.

PART II

Mahler's "Classical" Sonatas

CHAPTER FOUR

“A Demonic Haydn”

Mahler’s Confrontation with Tradition in the First Movement of the Sixth

It can only have been as an act of careful planning that this symphony, . . . which introduces orchestral features of such novelty and originality, should be so much more conventional in its purely formal aspect.

—Norman Del Mar, *Mahler’s Sixth Symphony: A Study* (1980)¹

I. Perspectives on the Sixth: Tragedy, Autobiography, and Classicism

For a work of such extraordinary expressive directness, Mahler’s Sixth Symphony in A minor (1904) comes to us with a curiously disjunct set of reception traditions. With a touch of hyperbole, we might even say that posterity has bequeathed us not one but *three* images of the Sixth, each of them slightly out of joint with the others. First and most obviously, there is the “Tragic” Sixth, Mahler’s singular and terrifying essay in musical cynicism. This is the work whose implacable negativity moved the composer’s earliest supporters to new heights of rhetorical extravagance: Bruno Walter declared the symphony “bleakly pessimistic,” fated to end only in “hopelessness” and “the night of the soul” (1957, 137). Richard Specht likened it to a vision of the apocalypse and heard in its final bars the “silence of annihilation,” the wailing voices of hope and longing “mercilessly strangled” (1913, 282).² Julius Korngold, awed by the music’s “satanic character,” heralded its composer as nothing less than a kind of “demonic Haydn” (de La Grange 1999, 425). En masse, these sorts of reverential effusions—still a staple of commentary today—have enveloped the Sixth in a morbid mystique that has shaped nearly every aspect of its reception.

Alongside this, though—and no less familiar to collectors of liner-note lore—is the “autobiographical” Sixth, Mahler’s mid-career return to the programmatic self-depiction of his youthful works. Though most of his music had long been

1. Del Mar 1980, 34.

2. “Den weinenden und hoffenden Sehnsuchtsstimmen zum Trotz, die erbarmungslos erstickt werden, bis alles zu Eis zu erstarren scheint und das Schweigen der Vernichtung erschütternd herabsinkt.”

heard as deeply personal or confessional—the composer was barely deceased a year when Specht declared his corpus “a great autobiography” (1913, 170)—this Sixth was unknown to Mahler’s inner circle. Rather, it came into being only posthumously, when Alma’s memoirs (1940) announced a supposedly authentic domestic subtext. Mahler, she claims, had intended the work to depict her (in the first movement’s secondary theme), their children (in the scherzo’s trios), and most importantly, himself, as the “hero” brought to ruin by the finale’s infamous hammerblows (1969, 70).³ Naturally, the reliability of Alma’s memoirs are a concern on this point—especially since (1) no firsthand evidence links this ostensible “domestic” program to the composer himself and (2) Mahler had recently and publicly forsworn illustrative composition of any sort.⁴ But Alma’s autobiographical Sixth resonated powerfully with audiences and critics alike—enough that it quickly became a canonical paratext, a kind of “virtual program” to stand in for the one Mahler withheld. Only a generation after Alma’s revelation, Constantin Floros could confidently set the Sixth alongside *Ein Heldenleben* and Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* as one of “the great symphonic works that have been autobiographically conceived” (1993, 162).

There is also a third image of the work, one with less popular allure but still well known to scholars: that is the Sixth as Mahler’s muscular, post-industrial reimagining of the Viennese classical symphony. Critics have often noted that the work’s steely modernist surface conceals a surprisingly conservative, even anachronistic form. In contrast to Mahler’s usual practice, the Sixth (1) observes a traditional four-movement layout (Allegro—[Scherzo—Andante]—Finale)⁵; (2) includes no sung texts or programs; (3) ends in the same key in which it began; and (4) opens with a didactically clear sonata form, replete with exposition repeats. Though none of these features is unique to the Sixth, they combine to give the impression of a composer focused intently on the history of his craft. As Deryck Cooke writes, “the classical side” of Mahler’s personality “is concentrated into [the Sixth Symphony] far more potently than into any of his others” (1988, 86).

Since the mid-twentieth century, these perspectives have thrived in close quarters; most analyses touch on all three to some degree. Yet they remain in a curious state of mutual isolation, with few serious inquiries into their possible synergies or frictions. To a point, one can sympathize. Apart from one obvious

3. The image of the Sixth as the plight of some unspecified “hero” dates to the work’s first reviews (see de La Grange 1999, 414–17) and reappears occasionally into the present (see, e.g., Ratz 1968, 47 and Carr 1988, 134–36).

4. It is also relevant that the two pages in Alma’s memoirs that discuss the Sixth were written some time after the rest of the manuscript. De La Grange cautions that they may even have been written much later, “when her memory was often at fault” (2008, 1586).

5. Mahler’s original ordering was Scherzo then Andante, but he reversed this for the 1906 premiere and had all print materials (scores, reductions, thematic guides) changed accordingly. Today, both orderings are performed, though debate continues over which is preferable. In view of Mahler’s broader corpus, both may be considered “conservative,” though Mahler’s revised version (significantly or not) brings the symphony more closely in line with the standard eighteenth-century format.

overlap—the composer of the “autobiographic” Sixth elides with the implied hero of the “tragic” one—it is hard to square Alma’s domestic image of the work with the music’s overwhelmingly dark demeanor. Nor is it obvious, beyond the occasional hint that Mahler’s formalism is itself severe or imposing, how the work’s archaic design might relate to its negative tone.⁶ Least evident and least considered of all are the links between the work’s formal conservatism and its aspects of self-depiction, “domestic” or otherwise.

Still, some questions are too important to be deferred indefinitely. Difficulties aside, we may feel that it is worthwhile to ask: Why *would* Mahler insert portraits of his loved ones into so bitterly cynical a work? (And must we accept that the summers of its composition were as uniformly “serene and happy” as Alma claimed [1969, 70]?) Is it mere chance that Mahler’s most procedurally traditional symphony is also his only foray into tragedy? Or was there something about the inner workings of the Beethovenian sonata itself that struck Mahler as well suited for his cynical vision? And finally, given Mahler’s lifelong insistence that his music was shaped, however ineffably, by personal experience, is it merely a coincidence that this strikingly reactionary aesthetic turn—this retreat, as it were, into the security of time-tested routines—follows a series of tumultuous and often frustrating changes in his personal life?

My purpose here and in Chapter 7 (which analyzes the Finale) is to sketch out answers to these very questions and thus to shed new light on the Sixth by exploring how these well-known connotative dimensions—tragedy, autobiography, and classicism—intersect and interact. This occurs in two stages. My first task is to flesh out the last and by far the least developed of the three: *classicism*. I argue that the symphony’s dialogue with historical precedent only begins with its conservative modular layout. More significant, I think, are the *procedural* echoes of Beethovenian practice, the musical processes that call to mind (or perhaps might be heard to “reenact”) those of Mahler’s Viennese forebears. This includes a variety of thematic and motivic techniques but also, and more important, the narrative strategies governing both of the symphony’s outer movements. Nowhere does Mahler dramatize the basic teleology of the classical sonata with such urgency: the Allegro and the Finale can each, in very different ways, be heard as a story centrally and fundamentally “about” the resolution of the secondary group in the tonic key. In this sense, the Sixth is especially crucial for my project, in that it lets us hear Mahler’s dialogue with the past as the music’s leading source of meaning, nearly a “program” in itself.

Ultimately, though, this amplification of the work’s classicism is only a step toward the broader aim of drawing its various interpretive tropes into a tighter weave. This too occurs in stages. The bulk of this chapter and of Chapter 7 is concerned with the integration of the classical and the tragic. I argue that Mahler’s archaisms can always be heard serving an expressive function within the symphony’s overarching drama. Initially, I present the framing narratives of that

6. Cooke hears Mahler shaping the symphony’s disasters with an “iron classical control” (1988, 86); see also the quotes from de La Grange and Samuels that begin Section III of this chapter.

story—the Allegro's tenuously resolved conflict and the Finale's nihilistic self-destruction—as purely intramusical dramas, focused on anthropomorphized themes and their tonal/cadential ambitions. But I conclude each chapter by turning to the question of autobiography, asking how these narratives might be heard to echo aspects of Mahler's personal life during their composition. Along the way, I challenge much of the received wisdom about Mahler's marriage in 1903–4 while offering a fundamentally new perspective on the nature and origin of the symphony's tragic outlook—one that is more attentive to the musical facts and more firmly rooted in the realities of Mahler's fraught domestic life.

But we should not get ahead of ourselves. This "new perspective" on the symphony's tragedy will have to wait until the end of Chapter 7, when my readings of the outer movements are both fully in place. Our task in this chapter is to grapple with Mahler's opening Allegro, the movement whose crisp organization has, more than anything else, established the symphony's "classical" credentials. Before going into specifics, though, we will first need to place the Allegro in context, establishing its role within the Sixth at large and, most important, its special relationship with the work's tragic finale.

II. Transsymphonic Narrative: The Allegro and the Finale

In Chapter 3, I noted that Mahler's works rarely allow us to devise elaborate, materially grounded musical narratives spanning entire symphonies. Despite the obvious care put into their expressive sequencing, his multimovement structures should not, in other words, be understood as "through-composed" in any way that compares to the rigorous organization we find within individual movements. Broadly speaking, the Sixth is no exception, as Mahler's last-minute reordering of the Andante and Scherzo makes especially clear.

And yet the transsymphonic design of the Sixth is still distinctive in at least two respects. First, its economy with key regions has allowed many listeners to construct a loose intramusical narrative bridging all four movements and centered on the hegemony of the tonic A minor. Its details are familiar from countless analyses: the Allegro begins as a sinister A-minor march but concludes with an ecstatic breakthrough into the parallel major; the Scherzo then reinstates the tonic minor and (ominously) remains there, while the pastoral, E \flat -major Andante offers the only sustained escape from the tonic-key march sphere;⁷ by way of a climax, the Finale builds toward several dramatic (and unsuccessful) attempts to reinstate the Allegro's closing A major—its shattering conclusion a grim testament to the "inescapable" pull of the minor tonic.⁸

7. Mahler's inner movements retain these narrative functions in either ordering, despite producing different affective trajectories.

8. The notion that the tragedy of the Sixth stems from an inability to "escape" some metaphoric constraint (a prefigured fate, the bonds of the tonic minor, etc.) has been prevalent for almost a century: see Bekker 1969, 211; Adorno 1998b, 91; Andraschke 1992, 232; Jülg 1986, 57, 63, 65,

Though superficial in many respects—it considers scarcely more than the movements’ topoi and tonal endpoints—this narrative is still remarkable in that it hears the Sixth telling a single *musical* story from start to finish, with no programmatic armature to speak of. None of Mahler’s other works have so consistently invited this kind of interpretation. The reason (beyond the fact that there often *is* a program to contend with) may lie in the difficulty of viewing Mahler’s key plans in a narrative fashion. Naturally, any multimovement symphony can be said trivially to have a “tonal narrative” insofar as it unfolds *some* series of keys. But most key successions are not semantically meaningful in themselves, making them poor candidates for “narrative” in the more restrictive sense. Take the Seventh Symphony: en route from B minor to C major, Mahler passes through E minor (the opening movement’s actual tonic), then C minor, D minor, and F major. One would be hard pressed, I think, to speak of a single, continuous tonal “process” based on these keys alone. Apart from the second movement’s suggestive minor-mode reference to the closing tonic, the inner movements have no obvious function in relation to the narrative established by the tonal endpoints.⁹ The same could be said for many—even most—of Mahler’s inner movements.

The Sixth, however, is more tightly woven. Mahler’s close adherence to A minor/major effectively narrows the symphony’s tonal focus to a single, tense question of modal outcome—will the work end in major or minor?—with three of the four movements playing an explicit role. And the one movement *not* in the tonic—the E \flat -major Andante—uses a key chosen for its unique remoteness from A minor, both modally and tonally (i.e., as measured on the circle of fifths), to mark the maximal otherness of its pastoral dreamscape.¹⁰ This makes the Sixth unique among Mahler’s symphonies in that all of its inner movements stand in privileged, semantically significant tonal relations to its starting and ending keys.¹¹

The Sixth is also distinguished by the depth and complexity of its outer movements’ relationship. As in the earlier symphonies, the Allegro and Finale serve a vital narrative function as the endpoints of a purposeful expressive continuum—what Mitchell called the symphonic “frame” (2007, 385). And here, as always,

and 78; Redlich 1968, XXI; and Sponheuer 1978, 289 and 293. In Chapter 7, the Adorno-inspired idea of “inescapable” coherence—a kind of corrupt organicism—is a leading theme in my reading of the Finale.

9. That is to say, the Scherzo’s D minor (for example) carries no specific narrative/expressive meaning *by virtue* of being either the mixed mediant of B, the subtonic of E, or the supertonic of C. Indeed, we could transpose that movement up or down by semitone without, I think, upsetting the symphony’s harmonic teleology on any fundamental level. Curiously, two analysts—Christopher Orlo Lewis (1984) and Christopher Hailey (1992)—have tried to account for the tonal “coherence” of entire Mahler symphonies based almost *solely* on their key plans, with only fleeting (and often dizzyingly contrived) reference to the music’s topical/thematic substance. Neither, in my opinion, is persuasive.
10. Such tritone-polar relationships are vital to the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies; see Section V of this chapter.
11. One could make a case for the First Symphony as well (D–A–d–Fm→D), though the use of the closely related dominant key for the *Ländler* movement seems to me more conventional than “semantically significant.”

that framing function is reinforced by significant musical connections—including, of course, the tonal links just discussed. But now we are faced with more than just a few shared themes or a handful of spotlight quotations. Rather, Mahler casts the Finale as a thoroughgoing recomposition of the opening Allegro: it, too, is a large symphonic sonata, and its themes expressly rework those of its predecessor, such that the earlier movement is invoked as a constant point of reference. So on one level, there is—even for Mahler—an especially strong sense of continuity between the framing movements, with the Finale seeming to wrap up a story set in motion in the symphony's opening bars.

But since these parallelisms of motive and genre also set into relief how *different* the movements are in nearly every other respect, some critics have focused less on narrative continuity than on a kind of grand ontological/existential conflict. For Adorno, the Finale calls forth the taut and triumphant Allegro only to “negate” it, by presenting its sinister mirror-image—an elliptical, interminable sonata gone haywire and fated for a devastating implosion (1992, 138). In that case, the Finale's tragic amplitude arises not simply from its having the last word, modally speaking. Rather, its special menace is that it erases or “writes over” the Allegro and its tonic-major ending altogether.¹²

This intricate intertext poses special challenges for the critic. Obviously, where narrative continuity is concerned, grasping the Finale in all its depth requires us to know the Allegro inside and out. But in some respects the opposite is also true, since many events in the Allegro only attain their full significance when illuminated by parallelisms in the later movement. To imagine the Allegro and Finale as ontological duals or “mirror images,” that is, the texts must “cross” in both directions; each movement must be heard in light of the other. This is a tall order, to be sure, and it requires that my hearing of the Allegro remain essentially incomplete until Chapter 7, when the Finale is laid bare as well. But there is much to do in the meantime. Like all of Mahler's symphonic openings, the Allegro can be understood both as an autonomous, “closed” sonata plot and as an element in a broader, forward-driving narrative. Our main task in what follows is to flesh out the first of these views. In the next section, I focus mainly on the Allegro as a “classical” sonata, highlighting the architectural and processive features that most strongly suggest a dialogue with the Beethovenian tradition. I then zoom in for a closer and more extended look at its narrative details, with special interest in how the basic sonata plot laid out in Section III is amplified and ramified by the work's thematic processes and, in particular, by the opposition and apparent reconciliation of its two main sonata subjects.

III. Mahler's Allegro as a “Classical” Sonata

The first of Mahler's sonatas to pay self-conscious tribute to his classical forebears was the opening of the Fourth Symphony (1900). There, the composer's Viennese

12. I borrow the concept of “writing over” from Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 613.

inheritance is evident mainly at the work's stylistic surface, an ironized pastiche of Mozartean gestures and textures. The opening of the Sixth announces its classical pretensions in an entirely different fashion. Gone are the stylistic artifacts from a simpler age; the phantasmagoric sleighbells of the Fourth find their demonic obverse in the Allegro's slashing bass-voice ostinato, the gauzy incantation of a carefree past replaced by a "trampling" march very much of the industrial present (Adorno 1992, 34). Gone too is the flushed buoyancy of the Fourth Symphony's archaic escapades, and in its place a "desperate and petrified formalism" (de La Grange 1999, 820) signifying not a return to the past, but the manifestation of the past within the present, a routine as seemingly arbitrary as the movement's infamous repeat signs. From the very outset, Mahler forces us to contemplate a neoclassicism devoid of irony, a work whose sonata scheme, outlined with "schoolmasterly insistence" (Samuels 1995, 144), seems disconcertingly out of step with its thoroughly modern style.

As already hinted, critics have been reluctant to overinterpret this hyper-conservative sonata form. More inclined to hear Mahler as the harbinger of the Second Viennese School than a latecomer to the First, they have tended to downplay these classical traits as mere "scaffolding" [*Gerüst*] (Jülg 1986, 54), something present "mainly superficially" [*vorwiegend äußerlich*] (Bekker 1969, 219). De La Grange goes further, insisting hyperbolically that the work "is anything but classical" and "belongs fully to the twentieth century" (1999, 812). Adorno seems at first to be more flexible, suggesting that Mahler may have needed the traditional form to "discipline himself" after his earlier symphonies' eccentricities (1992, 96). But in the end he falls back on the standard biases, insisting that the Allegro is ultimately sonata-like only "as if in defiance" and that its regularities are in fact meant to accentuate Mahler's "hostility to the schematic" (1998b, 108–9). But this familiar reassurance, which Adorno varies only slightly—the Allegro may sound like a sonata, but "really" isn't—rings as hollow as ever, since it begs the question of why Mahler would go to the trouble of building so traditional a structure in the first place.

Perhaps the clearest and most telling signs of uneasiness with the symphony's classicism have arisen around its first-movement repeat marks. Despite seeming negligible or even expendable—conductors routinely ignored them for half a century (Samuels 1995, 143–44)—it is worth pausing to consider their past and future significance, as they are, to my thinking, crucial for framing the Sixth as a whole.

Troubled by their perceived anachronism and arbitrariness, critics have often scrambled to rehabilitate Mahler's repeats as evidence of heightened artistry and sensitivity. But their rationalizations—always ad hoc and curiously heedless of the movement's staged classicism—rarely convince. One reads, for instance, that the repeats reflect Mahler's concern for the listener, who would be better prepared to follow subsequent events if the exposition were heard twice (Andraschke 1992, 232).¹³ This seems reasonable until we ask why the composer's *clearest* exposition would be the only one he thought deserved a second hearing. Others have suggested

13. "Durch das nochmalige Hören wird dem Rezipienten die dichte und komplexe Themenstruktur des Satzbeginns bewußtergemacht; das ist entscheidend für das Mitverfolgen der weiteren Entwicklung." Mitchell (2007, 186) makes a similar point.

that the repeats were added to improve the movement's "proportions," both internally and with respect to the enormous Finale it stands to counterbalance.¹⁴ But these notionally improved proportions are not to be found in any of Mahler's other works. Internally, the repeats actually make the exposition of the Sixth far *longer* in relation to the whole than is typical for Mahler.¹⁵ As for transsymphonic proportions, not only do the repeats only negligibly reduce the outer movements' size gap; Mahler's other works raise doubts as to why such outer-movement "balance" should be a criterion at all.¹⁶

Rationalizations of this second sort are also plagued by a deeper irony: inspired by an eminently Mahlerian aversion to repetition (thus the need to defend the repeats), they nevertheless imply that Mahler himself was somehow unable to fine-tune his symphonic proportions without repeating huge blocks of material verbatim. We see this especially clearly in Donald Mitchell's discussions of the repeat-mark problem (1997, 184–87; 1999b, 286). In order to legitimate each of Mahler's decisions, Mitchell must change the terms of his critique on a case-by-case basis: the published repeat signs, he insists, reflect Mahler's sensitivity to issues of balance and "proportion" (1997, 185–86), while those he inserted but then removed reveal his commitment to "narrative continuity"—which for Mitchell simply means *not* repeating the exposition (187). This reasoning imputes a rather muddled perspective to Mahler himself, who either thought repeat signs only *sometimes* obstructed "narrative continuity" or was sometimes unable to fine-tune his symphonic "proportions" without forfeiting the same.

Mitchell is right to insist that Mahler's repeat signs are significant and demand explanation. But we need to justify them with criteria that can be applied consistently across Mahler's entire corpus, allowing us to explain (1) why he included repeats in two cases, withdrew them in two others, and most often never considered them at all; and (2) why a composer so vocal about the sins of musical redundancy ("each repetition is already a lie!") would selectively impose these large-scale, mechanical recyclings.¹⁷

This is possible if we view the repeats primarily as symbolic rather than sonic signifiers—that is, as markers whose function and meaning lie less in their imminent acoustic/experiential effects (e.g., lengthening the movement, replaying the exposition) and more in their archaic connotations themselves, their announcement of the symphony's abiding engagement with the past. This would explain their inclusion in works whose links to the grand tradition Mahler wished to

14. See Andraschke 1992, 232; Bekker 1969, 213; and Del Mar 1980, 36.

15. Discounting 3/I and 6/IV, whose proportions are complicated by massive recurring introductory sections, Mahler's average pre-developmental space is roughly 24 percent of the whole. With their repeats, the expositions of the First and Sixth are 47 percent and 40 percent of the whole.

16. Mahler did not, for instance, add repeats to the exposition of the Second Symphony, whose opening movement is dwarfed by its finale. Nor did he fret over the peculiar shape of the Fourth, whose finale is only half the duration of the opening sonata and a mere 16 percent of the whole.

17. The quote here is from Mahler's well-known 1900 diatribe about Schubert: "He repeats himself so much that you could cut out half the piece without doing it any harm. For each repetition is already a lie. A work of art must evolve perpetually, like life" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 147).

make explicit, like the Sixth (which was likely a classical vehicle from the outset) or the First (which received its “symphonic” repeat signs belatedly, as a mark of dissociation from its program-music parentage).¹⁸ It also helps us to understand their eventual removal from the Fifth and Ninth, which were conservative in some respects—both are instrumental and nonprogrammatic—but not, in the end, neoclassical in outlook. That Mahler seems never to have considered repeat marks in the Third, Fourth, or Seventh Symphonies—or in the Finale of the Sixth, for that matter—almost surely has to do with his decision to compose out *apparent* exposition repeats in those movements.¹⁹

Heard this way, the repeat signs are anything but a superfluous vestige, let alone a threat to Mahler’s modernist credentials. Rather, they are an open door, an invitation—oblique but insistent—to ask the questions that I feel lead us into the heart of the Sixth Symphony: What it might mean for so drastically modernist a work to tether itself so closely and so seemingly arbitrarily to the rituals of old-Viennese practice? Assuming that the apologists are correct—that the work’s conservative form is not merely a lapse of artistry or imagination—is there a way to embrace, rather than whitewash, its archaisms? Can we understand the Sixth to pursue classicism on other, perhaps subtler, levels than that of its modular layout?

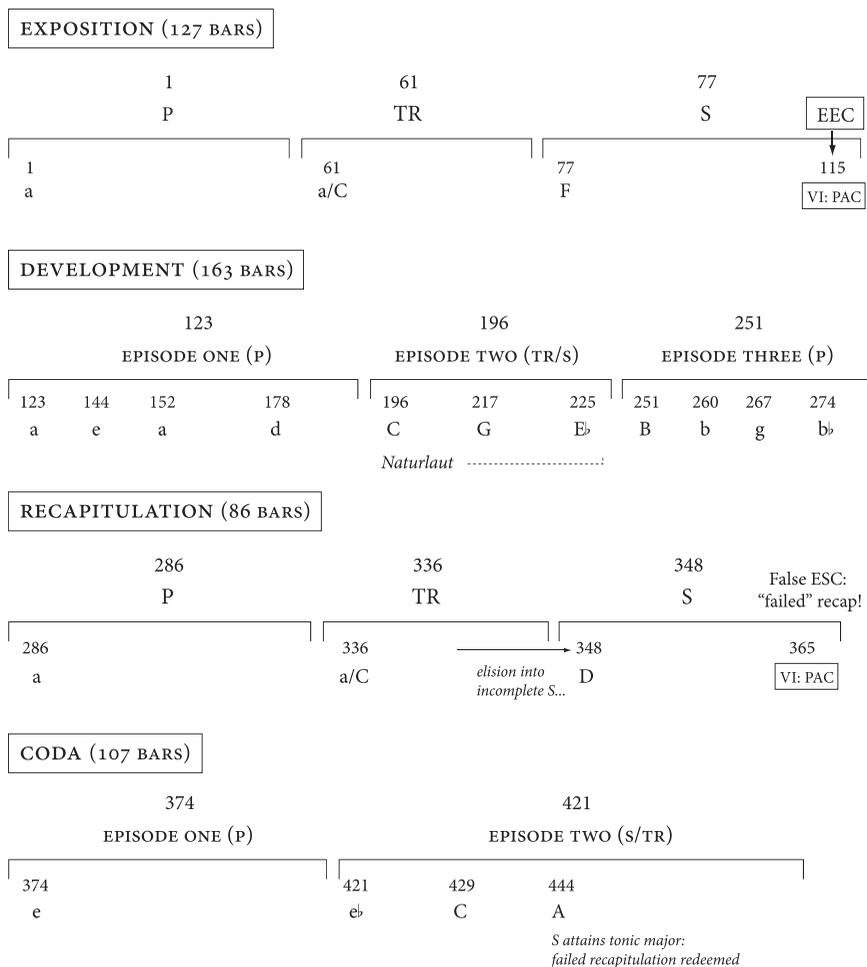
In what follows, I offer several new perspectives on the Allegro’s classicism, beginning with what I see as the most important: the manifestation of classicism in terms of musical *plot*. With the right orientation, we can hear the Allegro as a sonata that for all its patently Mahlerian devices, and notwithstanding its Mahlerian scale, dramatizes a century-old structural crisis and its resolution: the tonal failure of S in the recapitulation and the compensatory attainment of tonic in the coda. Our task now is to come to grips with that “crisis” and “resolution” and, more specifically, how the work’s triumphant coda concludes a formal process that encompasses much of what precedes. This reading, which focuses primarily on a handful of crucial junctures, will give us a dramatic armature to be fleshed out in later sections.

Figure 4.1 sketches the Allegro in its broadest outlines; Figure 4.2 provides a more detailed view of the exposition. Here we see that music’s famed schematic clarity: primary, transitional, and secondary thematic zones follow in close succession, sharply differentiated in character and separated by emphatic pauses. (The second of these corresponds vestigially to the medial caesura.) Remarkably, Mahler achieves this schematic clarity without a single authentic-cadential divider. For over a hundred bars, section breaks are marked either by stark textual/motivic shifts, often with intimations of rupture (as within the manic *Fortspinnung* of the P- and S-themes—for example, mm. 47–56 or 89–90), or by anemic half cadences (as in the stolidly periodic TR, mm. 68, 76). It is only at the

18. Mitchell himself acknowledges this, issues of “proportion” notwithstanding (1997, 185).

19. In 4/I the false exposition repeats occur within the exposition (and are thus repeated in the recapitulation). In 3/I and 7/I the developments begin as large-scale exposition variants, initially sounding like large-scale repeats.

Figure 4.1 Symphony no. 6/I, simplified overview

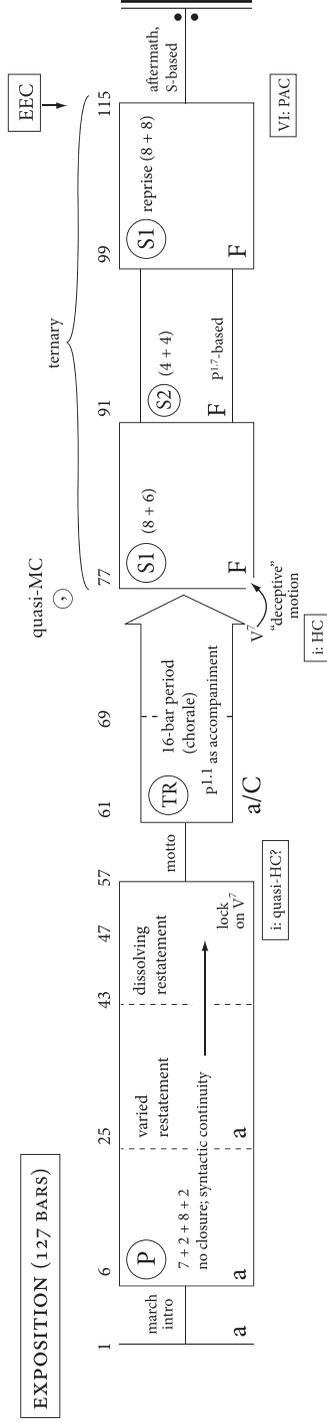


end of S that the music finally bears down a massive, rhetorically spotlighted PAC in the submediant (m. 115),²⁰ discharging vast stores of accumulated tension and offering an especially vivid late-Romantic realization of Hepokoski and Darcy's EEC principle: there can be little doubt that this moment is the grand telos of the entire exposition.

It is also a unique moment in the composer's mature music. From the Second Symphony onward, Mahler routinely undermines or complicates his prospective EECs in some way, often creating structural/dramatic issues that draw out the

20. The submediant is Mahler's first-level default for sonata-form secondary keys, whether diatonic (1/IV, 6/I, 7/I) or modally mixed (3/I, 5/II, 9/I). Well-known precedents include the openings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Schubert's Eighth.

Figure 4.2 Symphony no. 6/I, exposition



exposition and/or ramify throughout the movement. (Even the coyly neoclassical Fourth Symphony runs into EEC troubles and retreats sheepishly back to the tonic.) Here, he returns to the kind of effortless and unyielding EECs last used fifteen years earlier, in the outer movements of the First Symphony.²¹ There is no blockage or struggle or loss of momentum, and the newly secured tonic suffers no degradation or displacement.

Given the rarity of such gestures in later Mahler—to say nothing of the anachronistic repeat signs that immediately follow—we might well hear this untroubled arrival carrying “archaic” connotations of its own, inviting us to recall a simpler time, when the S-themes of crisply structured expositions fulfilled their cadential aims without a hitch. And yet that very “effortlessness” will take on a new, more sinister aspect as the Sixth unfolds: as we see the cadential ambitions of its S-themes thwarted with increasing violence, the radiant confidence of this major-mode arrival will come to seem disastrously premature. For now, though, the listener remains innocent of the symphony’s tragic mechanics, its compulsion to offer glimpses of what cannot, in the end, be achieved. Indeed, by repeating its exposition wholesale, the Sixth may lull us even further into taking its crisp layout and frictionless closure for granted.

But then the development arrives, and with it a suspension of the exposition’s rigid formalism. With an almost audible shifting of gears, Mahler sets his themes loose to unfold in a more discursive, improvisatory fashion. This kind of stark processive contrast is unusual for his mature symphonies, where developments usually begin as large-scale exposition variants. Instead, the Allegro takes up a procedure seen most clearly in the neoclassical Fourth: rather than suggesting a cyclical return to past material, its development opens up a radically new space, one in which the exposition themes are more likely to be dissolved into autonomized motives or transformed beyond recognition than preserved as integral “gestalts.” In other words, the development takes up the very same “Beethovenian” motivic procedures that Adorno saw Mahler superseding with his much-vaunted variants.

Without the architectonic grid to restrain them, Mahler’s P- and S-themes come into an extended and graphic conflict; Section V examines that music in more detail. For now, what matters is that the recapitulation (m. 286) begins with a striking reimposition of that grid: the P-theme, from its first bars, tracks the exposition nearly exactly, seeming very much the “structure of accomplishment” promised by the exposition. But then things go awry: TR itself plays back in dizzying rhythmic diminution (mm. 336–47), and when Mahler applies the brakes we find ourselves in the midst of a tonally disoriented S, one that soon settles in the *subdominant* and drives forward to a grandly incongruous, wrong-key “ESC” in D major (m. 365). The music has lost none of its self-assurance, but the exposition’s promise of a smoothly executed sonata form has proved false. The recapitulation has failed.

21. The EEC of Symphony no. 1/IV is not entirely “unyielding”; a minor-mode shadow passes over the newly confirmed D_b-major tonic in mm. 224–25. But the major mode is quickly reinstated, with no further disturbances until the segue to the developmental rotation begins (m. 238).

Critics have had little to say about this wrong-key cadence and its implications for what lies ahead. In one sense this is hardly surprising, since there are no outward signs of “failure” at all; listeners lacking absolute pitch will hear only a faithful replay of the exposition. Still, the sonata’s lack of resolution cannot be so easily brushed aside. From his first five symphonies, we know that Mahler viewed tonal closure as a dramatic/expressive category as much as a structural one, with wrong-key or defective S-reprises always leading to a negative, minor-mode outcome—or an abandonment of the tonic altogether.²² Here, he offers us something new, closer to the paradigm of Beethoven’s “Egmont”: a glib, wrong-key “ESC” in a major key.²³ But by now, his earlier works have taught us to hear this moment for what it is: an ominous glitch in the sonata narrative, one that raises the specter of a ruinous outcome.

The fallout of the failed recapitulation is swift and harsh. Without pause, the coda plunges into the movement’s most sinister, turbulent music: a black, E-minor variant of the P-theme march (m. 374), leading into a dense thicket of slithering portamenti and ghostly premonitions of the Finale.²⁴ The severity of the ongoing structural crisis is evident in the sheer scale and complexity of the coda itself—significantly, Mahler’s first and only in the grandly discursive Beethovenian mold.²⁵ Sprawling to rival the exposition in scale and tracing an arc that ranges the Allegro’s full expressive bandwidth, this coda lives up to the traditional view of such spaces as both a kind of “second development” (Floros 1993, 170) and a place for unfinished business to be settled. For now, our concern is the fruit of that effort: the brilliant apotheosis of S1 in the tonic major (m. 444).

Discussion of this passage has focused mainly on its nearly hysterical pitch of triumphalism; it is the only such moment in the symphony at large and, as Floros writes, the “high point by which one can later realize the extent of [its] fall” (1993, 171). But its exultant character can also be heard to reflect a deeper function within the Allegro’s sonata drama. That is to say, the movement’s “success” lies not just in its modal outcome (i.e., major rather than minor) but also in its capacity to spring back decisively from a potentially unrecoverable formal crisis. With no guarantee that such a victory was in store, S returns in exultant tones to fulfill, even if belatedly, its “formal purpose” (Hepokoski 2002, 136), suggesting a redemption of the derailed sonata and—so it would seem—the Allegro as a whole.

This dramatic conclusion makes the Allegro Mahler’s second minor-mode sonata to end in major after a troubled S-theme reprise. But unlike its predecessor, the finale of the First Symphony, that deliverance now comes from within the thematic machinery of the sonata itself. There is no transcendent *Durchbruch*, no

22. See Chapter 1.

23. See Hepokoski 2001–2, 130. Like “Egmont,” the recapitulation of 6/I features a brief, S-based closing zone.

24. See note 53 of this chapter.

25. All of Mahler’s other codas are of the tonic-confirmational sort, the dramatic peroration being carried out in the recapitulation itself. (5/II is a special case; its coda first “confirms” the *wrong* tonic—the subdominant—before reinstating the right one. Still, the rhetoric is strictly that of aftermath and reflection, not of further development.)

eleventh-hour tonal non sequitur.²⁶ Here the sonata process proposes its own image of success and then dramatizes its protracted attainment, even if outside of "sonata space" as strictly defined. And critically, both the image and its attainment pivot on venerable devices of sonata emplotment (the entrusting of tonic closure to S, the failed recapitulation, the compensatory tonic-apotheosis coda), suggesting once again that the movement as a whole—the entire journey from A minor to A major—stands in dialogue with late-classical practice, not just the die-cast exposition.

Still, several vital questions remain open. First and most obviously: *Why did the recapitulation fail?* Why would so confident and decisive an S-theme seem unable to find its tonic-key bearings at the appointed time? Second, how might the events of the development—which we have so far overlooked—play into that narrative of failure and redemption? As it turns out, these questions are related. In Sections V and VI below, I show the misfired S-theme to be part of a dramatic trajectory extending not just forward but backward as well, into the heart of the development. Before that, however, we must acquaint ourselves more closely with the drama's main players, the Allegro's two principal sonata subjects.

IV. Rhetorical and Processive Oppositions in the Allegro's Exposition

As we close in on Mahler's exposition for a more nuanced reading, the most pressing question would seem at first to be: what is there to "interpret"? The exposition wears its most salient characteristics on its sleeve—namely, its hyperbolic rhetorical contrasts and the clear-cut expressive trajectory of its three theme groups, passing from P-theme agony to S-theme ecstasy through by an impassive and "expressionless" TR (de La Grange 1999, 821). Beyond this, the disarming *lack* of ambiguity in the Allegro's layout would appear to leave the analyst, as Samuels puts it, "practically no room for discussion" (1995, 144). Mahler's textbook layout neutralizes any narrative that might stem from the "deflection" of formal paradigms (Newcomb 1992, 119), while his curtly expository rhetoric flies in the face of the novel-symphonic ideal, which rejects such rigid functional delegations in favor of a form that is kept in "continuous development" (Adorno 1992, 88).

More apt here is Adorno's alternate image of the Mahlerian exposition as a "presentation . . . of the dramatis personae, whose musical story is then told" (1992, 95). As we shall see, the Allegro's narrative substance emerges mainly from the opposition established here between P and S, a conflict between the implacable, forward-spinning, minor-mode march topos and its diametrical opposite: a major-mode *non-march* topic. In this second, closer look at the exposition, I clarify the themes' rhetorical and processive contrasts as sharply as possible.

26. See Chapter 1, Section IV.

But I also show that the function of the exposition is not merely expository—that even *within* the presentation of the Allegro’s musical characters, a subtle drama plays out, laying the foundation for what is to come.

The Allegro’s primary theme (P) has been the subject of several detailed analyses. Peter Andraschke offers a concise physiognomy of the march itself: forward-driving, gladiatorial, huge in ambitus, full of wide leaps, and (despite its constant development) prone to a blunt, “short-winded” [*kurzatmig*] delivery (1992, 214). But for Andraschke, like most analysts, the theme’s defining characteristic is its ruthless economy. From its opening bars, Mahler’s arch-classical symphony observes the strictest of organicist imperatives, spinning a seemingly inexhaustible stream of ideas from a Spartan stock of basic motives; I label these in Figure 4.3.²⁷ And as many critics hasten to point out, this economy is far-reaching. Without much effort, the secondary theme can be heard emerging from the same basic ideas. But an overemphasis on the music’s motivic level can distract from other vital dimensions of Mahler’s technique: P and S may share the same genetic material, but they are starkly polarized in terms of *how* those materials are marshaled into larger thematic complexes. This is an important point, and one critics have tended to underplay.

The P-theme is, above all, a tour de force of Mahlerian developing variation. Its much-vaunted organicism operates on many levels at once, with motives and even entire phrases deftly recycled as seemingly new material. This formal impulse drives the music forward through three large paragraphs: a principal statement (mm. 6–22) and a pair of variants (mm. 23–42 and 43–56). These variants, moreover, are generated by a range of procedures far more diverse than anything Adorno describes in the *Physiognomy*. Before moving ahead, we will want to get a sense of the P-theme’s technical sophistication—not simply to admire Mahler’s ingenuity (though that is part of it!), but also to provide a frame of reference for the analysis of S, which is simple, even simplistic, by comparison.

Figure 4.4 shows the derivational chain that produces the P-complex in its entirety. Each statement comprises two phrases, labeled here in ellipses. (Linking passages, derived from the introduction’s ostinato, are used initially [mm. 13–14 and 23–24] but then discarded.) Phrase 1a unfolds a seven-bar non-hierarchical string of one- and two-bar ideas, while Phrase 1b shows a clear sentential structure, its constituent segments labeled with subsidiary brackets. The dotted vertical arrows show that Mahler recycles all of these elements, transformed, in statement two: Phrase 2a compresses 1a, while 2b reinstates the sentential structure of 1b but extends it, repeating the continuation with alterations. Statement

27. See Andraschke 1992, 209–20 or Jürg 1986, 46–51 for detailed analyses. Here and elsewhere, I use Hepokoski and Darcy’s (2006, 71–72) thematic/modular labeling system, but with two broad modifications. Zone abbreviations (P, TR, S, or C) followed by a single full-sized integer (e.g., “S1,” “S2”) denote integral, self-contained themes appearing therein—*whether or not* they are divided from others in the zone by a PAC proper. Abbreviations followed by superscripted, decimal-divided integers refer to component motives of the same—thus “S2” might subdivide into motives “S^{2.1},” “S^{2.2},” and so on. When a zone contains only one principal theme, the free-standing letter (e.g., “P”) stands for the theme, and its motives begin with a superscripted “1.” (Thus “P” divides into “P^{1.1},” “P^{1.2},” and so on.)

Figure 4.3 Primary theme (P) motives

From Statement 1 (mm. 6–22):

Figure 4.3 displays six primary theme (P) motives from Statement 1 (mm. 6–22). Motives P1.1 and P1.2 are shown on a single staff. P1.1 starts at measure 6, and P1.2 starts at measure 8. Motives P1.3 and P1.4 are on a second staff, with P1.3 starting at measure 10 and P1.4 at measure 11. P1.5 and P1.6 are on a third staff, with P1.5 starting at measure 15 and P1.6 at measure 20. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks such as accents and slurs. P1.4 ends with the word "etc." indicating it is not the final motive in the sequence.

From Statement 2 (mm. 25–41):

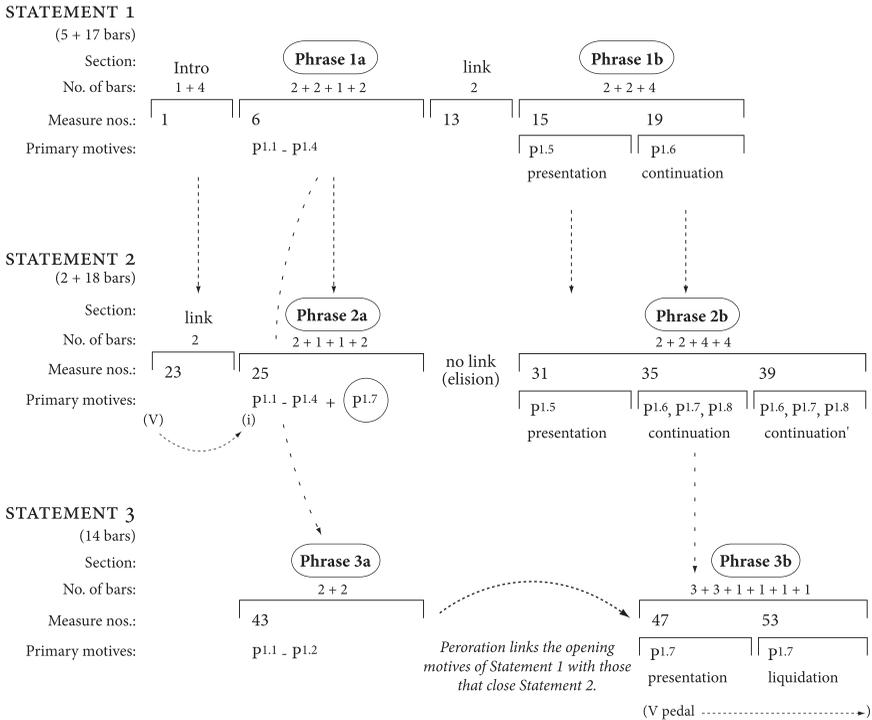
Figure 4.3 also displays three primary theme (P) motives from Statement 2 (mm. 25–41). Motive P1.1VAR is on a single staff starting at measure 25. Motive P1.7 is on a bass staff starting at measure 35. Motive P1.8 is on a single staff starting at measure 35. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks such as accents and slurs.

three carries a closing/liquidation function, intensified by its synoptic compression of all that comes before. The dashed arrows show that it begins with the material that opened statement one, but closes with a quasi-sentential structure that highlights P¹⁻⁷, a native element of statement two, and which unravels over a dominant pedal (mm. 47–56), leaving the entire complex unclosed.

Figure 4.5 shows the derivation of statement two in more detail, to highlight Mahler's different transformational techniques. Adorno, we recall, heard Mahler's variants relating by virtue of a common "gestalt"—one that was that was held constant through continuously changing intervallic and motivic content (1992, 88; see Chapter 2). But this is actually only one of three distinct procedures in play here. Indeed, Figure 4.5a, which shows the transformation of phrase 1a into phrase 2a, shows Mahler doing precisely the *opposite* of what Adorno describes: here, the intervallic framework of the first phrase is held constant, but projected onto a wholly different metric/rhythmic gestalt. I have adjusted spacing here to align the fixed-pitch modules.²⁸ The vertical arrows show that virtually every melodic element in Phrase 1a is replicated in its successor, through the

28. Because Phrase 2a compresses 1a from seven bars to six, there are several truncations in which temporally distinct events in the earlier phrase are telescoped to simultaneities in the later one. I have indicated these with gaps in the lower system; the dashed arcs underneath point to instances of the same barline (mm. 25/26, 29/30), redundancies resulting from "untelescoping."

Figure 4.4 Primary theme (P) phrase organization



tumbling sixteenth-notes of P^{1.4}; arrows with tightly packed dashes (mainly toward the beginning) indicate fixed-pitch returns, while those with widely spaced dashes show correspondences that are gestural but not pitch-specific.

Figure 4.5b shows a change of procedure for the subsequent b-phrases. Now we see something closer to what Adorno describes. Compare, for instance, the respective two-bar basic ideas of Phrases 1b and 2b (mm. 15–16; 31–32). As Adorno predicts, the main gestalt is preserved despite significant difference of pitch/interval content. This same relationship appears more dramatically between the continuation of Phrase 2b (mm. 35–38) and its repetition (mm. 39–42), shown in the lowest system of Fig. 4.5b). Both statements set out over tenor-voice presentations of P^{1.7}, but in the top voice only the rhythm remains constant; the gestural outlines change almost completely.

Still a third variant technique is used to generate the continuation of 2b (mm. 35–38, just discussed) from the continuation of 1b (mm. 19–22). Here Mahler replicates the principal line of mm. 19–21, but displaces it by one bar within the four-bar schema; I show this with skewed dotted arrows. Phrase 2b begins with a single bar of new material (m. 35; P^{1.8}), but then links up with what was previously the first bar of Phrase 1b (m. 36 [= m. 19]). The result is a redistribution of the hypermetric stresses among the modules of 1b and an

Figure 4.5 Comparison of first and second P-theme statements

STATEMENT 1

Phrase 1a: 7 bars

Link: 2 bars

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Stretto: melody in bass

STATEMENT 2

Phrase 2a: 6 bars

25 26 27 28 29 30 31

Phrase 2b...

Origin of $p:7$

continued...

- Spacing has been adjusted to realign ordered fixed-pitch modules (shown with vertical dotted lines).
- Blanks in the lower system indicate truncations in which a single segment corresponds to two distinct events in the upper system. The dotted arcs below the system connect instances of the same barline (note the repetition of mm. numbers 26 and 30).
- Textures have been simplified in places for clarity.

Figure 4.5 Continued

STATEMENT 1 (contd.)

Phrase 1b: 8-bar sentence

Basic idea

Continuation

15

19

Phrase 1a: 8-bar sentence

Basic idea

Continuation

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omission of the phrase's final unit (m. 22), the P^{1.2} motive that allowed 1b to rhyme with 1a (compare m. 12).

Statement Three, not shown here, liquidates the entire complex. Shortly after an attempted reboot of P^{1.1} (m. 43), the theme ruptures violently, the sudden surge to its melodic apex (mm. 46–47) countered by a precipitous descent in which P^{1.7} rides several waves of tremulous wind figures into the orchestra's murkiest depths (mm. 55–56). Once P has vanished, a funereal drum-figure sounds twice, accompanied on the second pass by a major triad sinking to minor. This is the celebrated "motto" of the Sixth Symphony, a musical insignia appearing throughout the Allegro, Scherzo, and (especially) Finale. Since the earliest analyses, critics have invested the motto with special prophetic connotations: not only does its collapse to minor prefigure the symphony's tragic modal narrative; its sheer immutability, its imperviousness to context, symbolizes that which cannot be changed, what Bekker calls the "inalterable verdict of fate" [*unabänderlicher Schicksalsspruch*] (1969, 209). On its last sounding—some 1,892 bars from now—the motto will appear with the minor triad alone, and it is with this gesture that the symphony shudders at last to a close, the major utterly expunged. But in the interim, the figure will flash periodically into the symphonic consciousness with the non-sequitur abruptness of a premonition, always an ominous lurch from present into future tense.

Locally, the motto's modal rupture creates a negative forcefield from which the rest of the exposition will struggle to escape. Resistance begins immediately, when the transitional theme—an affectively blank, "secularized" chorale (Williamson 1975, 115)—converts its A-minor tonic back to major (see Figure 4.6, mm. 61–62). But the motto's pull proves hard to resist: chordal thirds fall, one after another (mm. 62, 63, 64), and the whole texture betrays an ominous suffusion with the motto's iconic descending semitone.²⁹ This inability to shake off the motto is only first of several ways this TR seems to point backwards rather than forwards. Critics have been quick to point out that this bloodless chorale is decidedly unsuitable for any "transitional" function. And in fact it doesn't end up "transitioning" anywhere; it ends where it began, in the tonic A minor.³⁰ The notion of an ineffective, nontransitional TR is further reinforced when, as Jülj notes, the chorale cannot even drive back the P-theme's infectious march elements, which shadow the chorale here as a pizzicato accompaniment (1986, 61; see the bracketed P^{1.1} in Figure 4.6).

It is only with the abrupt entrance of S (m. 77) that we seem at last to reach escape velocity. This surging, ecstatic *Gesangsthema* is undoubtedly the most controversial music in the Mahler canon. For several generations, critics routinely lamented its saccharine, overly sentimental qualities; even Mahler's allies

29. Only *eight* of the thirty-two notes in the soprano voice are not involved in some semitonal descent. Cf. Bekker's insightful description of TR as "a cryptic spinning-forward of the fatalistic major-minor imperative" ["Es ist wie heimliches Weiterspinnen des fatalistischen Dur-Moll-Gebotes"] (1969, 215).

30. Cf. Adorno 1998b, 108; Floros 1993, 167; and de La Grange, 1999, 821.

Figure 4.6 Transitional theme (TR) (Black wedges indicate falling chordal thirds; white wedges indicate local major-to-minor mixture.)

Stets das gleiche Tempo
Winds

61 *pp* pizz.

66 i: HC

71 poco rit i: HC

found it reminiscent of third-tier Romantics like Theodor Kirchner (1823–1902).³¹ Other advocates sought to bypass the question of quality altogether. Conceding that the theme’s defects were “incontestable” [*unbestreitbar*], Paul Bekker nevertheless argued that to judge it out of context was to miss the point, since Mahler’s overall conception [*Idee des Vortrages*]³²—which never falters—imbues it with a higher meaning not present in isolation (1969, 215).³² A generation later, Adorno took this argument one step further, transmuting the theme’s failures—its “overexertion” and “stigmata of contrivance”—into virtues, pillars of a critique that declared the “fruitlessness” of composing harmoniously integrated sonata forms in Mahler’s late historical moment (1992, 128–29). Such convolutions are less common nowadays, though. After Alma revealed the theme’s intimate origins—this was, so the story goes, Mahler’s tribute to *her*—listeners grew altogether more sympathetic. And by the end of the twentieth century, the theme’s

31. Both Specht and Redlich invoke Kirchner. See Monahan 2011a, 122–39, for a detailed discussion of the theme’s reception history.

32. “Die klang sinnliche, klang sichtbare Erscheinung ist ihm Nebensache. Als wichtig gilt nur die Klangbedeutung. Sie ergibt sich aus dem Vortrag, durch ihn können klanglich gleichlautende Phrasen grundverschiedene Deutung erhalten. . . . Im allgemeinen mochte beides, Idee des Vortrages und thematische Individualität zusammentreffen. . . . Zuweilen war die thematische Kraft an sich minder stark. Dann folgte Mahler der Idee des Vortrages allein.”

Figure 4.7 Secondary theme (S) motives S^{1.1} and S^{1.2}

transformation into an exhilarating expression of nuptial ardor was nearly complete, its former ignominy all but forgotten.

Deciding what one hears in this music (enraptured élan? bathetic bluster?) is naturally a key question for framing the Allegro as a whole. To begin, it is worth noting—despite Floros's insistence to the contrary (1993, 168)—that there are indeed objective, technical bases for hearing the Alma music as overwrought and/or overextended. First, there is the theme's uncharacteristically dense scoring, an outgrowth of its oversized Straussian demeanor. Such sustained sonic opulence not only sets this music apart from any of Mahler's prior S-themes; it also runs counter to the composer's much-vaunted textural/contrapuntal austerity. Adorno observes that Mahler, in contrast to his rivals Strauss and Reger, "does not write hybrid filling voices, nor inexact arabesques buzzing in [the] accompaniment. He is allergic to pseudo-counterpoint. . . . Rather than feigning polyphony for the sake of richness of sound, he accepts occasional meagerness of composition" (1992, 113). For the most part, Adorno is right. But the normally ascetic Mahler indulges in virtually all of these "vices" here, engorging the texture with voices that, as Andraschke points out, mainly provide heterophonic support to the *Hauptlinie's* successive spasms and undulations (1992, 223).³³

More troubling still, these massive orchestral means are put to relatively meager musical ends. For all its brilliance and vitality, S1 is likely to strike us as curiously "undercomposed." By comparison to P, in particular, there is a striking lack of variety and internal development: of its thirty total measures, a full twenty arise from contour-adjusted repetitions of just two basic motives, S^{1.1} and S^{1.2} (Figure 4.7).³⁴ On these grounds, it is easy to hear the theme as precariously overextended, capable of achieving its ample dimensions only by stretching its scant melodic/motivic resources to the limits of good taste. And when the music does finally move to escape its repetitive circling, clearly intending to climax, it merely lapses into material recycled from the P-group. Figure 4.8 shows that the "breakaway" gesture itself (m. 88)

33. "Während im Hauptsatz die Nebenstimmen die Komplexität des Satzes ausmachen, kontrapunktische Bedeutung haben und wesentlich sind, dienen sie hier im Seitensatz nur der Ausschmückung des Themas und vervollständigen dessen emphatischen Ausdruck." See especially the sixteenth-note runs in the violas and winds at m. 77ff.

34. As Andraschke writes, "though always newly embroidered," the theme "essentially stays the same" (1992, 223). ["Obgleich immer neu ausgeschmückt, zeigt das Thema im Prinzip stets dasselbe."] For Jülg, this repetitive character has negative connotations: symbolizing "the eternally unchanging," the theme is locked in a fruitless orbit that "brings no enduring liberation" (1986, 63). ["Sie symbolisieren mit all ihrer Pracht ein Immer-Gleiches, ein Kreisen um immer dasselbe, welches keine bleibende Befreiung bringt."]

Figure 4.8 Comparison of S1's "breakaway" gesture to P-theme excerpts

The figure displays a musical score with three main sections, each showing a melodic line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The first section, labeled "Primary theme (P)" and starting at measure 35, features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *ff*. The second section, labeled "Secondary theme (S1)" and starting at measure 88, shows a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *ff* that transitions to *p* and then *mf*. The third section, labeled "Primary theme (P)" and starting at measure 10, shows a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *sf*. Vertical dashed arrows connect the melodic lines across the sections, highlighting specific intervals and rhythmic patterns. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and rhythmic patterns that support the melodic themes.

Figure 4.9 Derivation of S2 from elements of the third subrotation of P

Primary theme (P)

Secondary theme (S2)

Figure 4.10 Derivation of S-theme incipit (S^{1.1}) from P^{1.2}

Primary theme (P)

Secondary theme (S1)

reprises material from the second strophe of P (m. 35), while the *Absturz* that follows replays material that ended the first strophe (m. 10).

The recycling of P-based modules continues with the entrance of S2 at m. 91; Figure 4.9 highlights its prominent reuse of P^{1.7} (mm. 93–94). However, this little march is significant mainly for its odd incongruity. Until now, the *Allegro* has followed the outlines of what Hepokoski has termed the “Dutchman”-style exposition, after Wagner’s 1841 overture. Structures of this sort divide into two broad, affectively contrasting, and explicitly gendered blocks: the first presents a minor-mode P-theme that is “an aggressive, forte image of the tormented male in extreme crisis,” while the second offers its “redemptive” feminine counterpole, a “self-assured, lyrical” S in the non-tonic major (1994, 498).³⁵ Of course, Mahler has already begun to tinker with the form’s generic implications, in that his S1-theme, while still recognizably “feminine,” is breathless and agitated rather than tender or reassuring. But with this B section, the whole structure threatens to go off the rails. On the one hand, S2 transgresses the Dutchman-paradigm’s crisp gender partitions by introducing elements already marked as “masculine”

35. Hepokoski identifies similarly gendered expositions in 1/IV, 2/I, and 5/II and a host of marquee Romantic works by Weber, Tchaikovsky, Liszt, Strauss, and others.

into the ostensibly feminine portrait-space. On the other, its bizarre orchestration—growling low brass combine with high winds, pizzicato violins, and glockenspiel to yield a sound that is both ponderous and cloying—undermines any straightforward gender characterization while tainting the nuptial portrait with an air of jaunty absurdity.

Naturally, there are many ways to interpret these notional defects. One is to take them as mostly or entirely deliberate, making the whole S-complex a kind of garish, even misogynistic caricature. But that would be going too far, I think. Johnson is surely right to resist hearing this music as “insincere” or “deliberately ironic” (2009, 120). That being said, Mahler was hardly infallible, and it may well be that the compositional thinness of S1 stems, as Bekker suggests, from a lapse of melodic ingenuity (1969, 215), an inability to imagine how such an impetuous and assertive “feminine” theme might develop naturally or organically. Mahler may have also miscalculated the effect that S2 would have in the midst of the portrait theme—though his later treatment of that music as a kind of contaminant raises the possibility that the incongruity might be deliberate (see Section VI).

There are, however, two aspects of the S-music that do strike me as both intentional and strategic. One is its unbridled, over-the-top character, its many excesses of affect and instrumentation. Like Adorno, I believe that the drama of the Allegro (like that of the Finale) pivots on the idea that S should provide a contrast to P so “extreme” (1992, 128) as to make any enduring reconciliation unthinkable. The other aspect is the unexpected flip-side of this rhetorical opposition: the two themes’ underlying similarity. Analysts have long noted the derivation of S from P, beginning with the rhythm of its headmotive (see Figure 4.10) and ending with the allusions and quotations discussed earlier.³⁶ But we should remember that this strategy—building a movement-spanning opposition around two themes that are in some sense, subcutaneously, *the same*—is actually quite unusual for Mahler. (It appears in the outer movements of the Sixth and nowhere else.) Tellingly, it is more typical of certain minor-mode works by Beethoven—most notably, the tragic opening of the “Appassionata.”³⁷

Adorno was fascinated by what he termed the dialectical “identity in non-identity” of the Appassionata’s contrasting P and S (1998a, 21). But he was also quick to stress the fundamental asymmetry of their power relations. As in the openings of Beethoven’s Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, the Appassionata’s lyrical second subject, an avatar for individual subjectivity, is forced to “defend

36. Cf. Andraschke 1992, 222; Jülg 1986, 52; Matthews 1999, 368; and de La Grange 1999, 823.

37. The “Appassionata” may have provided a model for the Sixth in several respects. Even apart from the work’s overall shape—a tragedy bookended by two sonata forms, the second even more hyperbolically dark than the first—there are several striking parallels, including the sharing of rhythms between P and S and the recapitulation of P over a dominant pedal (in Mahler, see mm. 292ff.). More important is Mahler’s revival of the idea, originating in Beethoven’s opening movement, that authentic-cadential arrivals might be reserved for tragic climaxes—especially those with negative implications for the lyrical S-theme. Arguably, the only PAC in op. 57/i is the one that cinches the fate of S (m. 240), thrusting it into the tonic minor. However, that moment echoes the pseudo-cadences at mm. 51 and 190, which are the only such moments in the expositional and recapitulatory S-zones and, critically, also moments of decisive modal collapse. See Chapter 7 for more on Mahler’s use of cadences as tragic junctures.

itself" from P, which "descends" aggressively on the latter with the "force of the [totalizing] whole" behind it (18). Significantly, this is precisely the kind of hostile totalization Adorno heard Mahler resurrecting in the "Beethovenian" Finale of the Sixth (1992, 97; cf. 125). I believe we can hear these same asymmetrical power-dynamics governing the Allegro as well. It is here, in my view, that past analysts have erred in dealing with Mahler's motivic parsimony. By casting P and S merely as blandly complementary organic siblings—Bekker heard the two themes "complet[ing] each other" (1969, 216),³⁸ while Andraschke compared them to "differently shaped boughs from the same tree" [*verschieden geformte Äste eines Baumes*] (1992, 224)—they have missed the deeper and profound *irony* of this relationship. For me, the entire exposition hinges on the dissonance between the putative autonomy of S—which promises liberation from the oppressive march topos—and the fact that this contrasting *Gesangsthema* is so dependent on P for its materials, so incapable of substantiating itself, that it routinely lapses into paraphrase of the latter. Their pairing, like that of the Finale's subjects, thrums with the dialectical tensions of ontological unity and dramatic antagonism. But listening ahead, there is no question that in the unfriendly climate of the Sixth, it is the P-themes that have all the leverage. Even in the short space of the exposition, we have seen P (along with its associated motto) encroach upon every subsequent musical space that would attempt to distinguish or autonomize itself—first TR, then S1, and finally S2. In the development, these antagonisms will take on a far more urgent form.

V. The Development: A Shift from Formalism to Nominalism

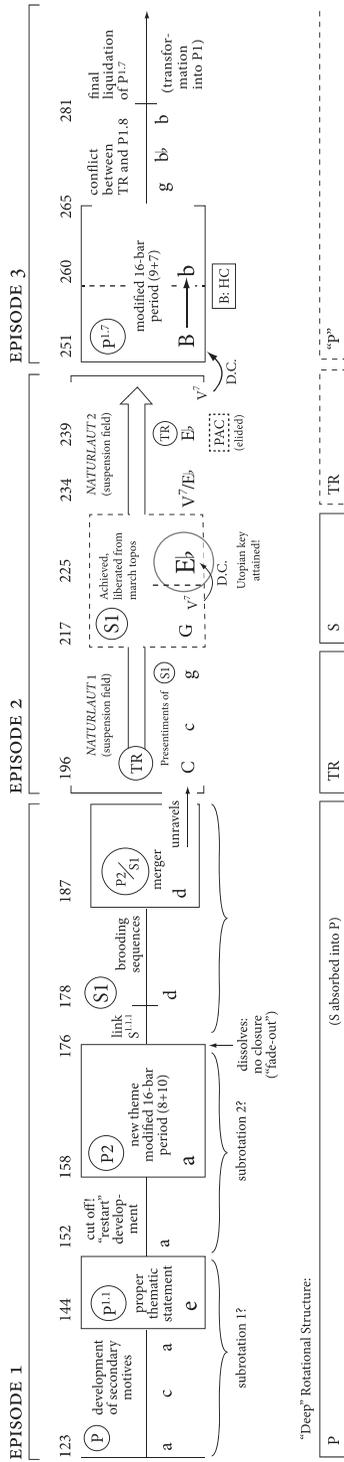
As noted earlier, a striking change of formal principle takes effect as soon as we cross the repeat signs' threshold. In an instant, the exposition's frank, presentational objectivity and long, crisp paragraphs give way to a searching, improvisatory music that seems very much to arise "of its own enactment" (Adorno 1992, 93), following twisted paths toward goals no longer foreseeable in advance. The "presentation of the dramatis personae" now complete, the music takes on a vigorously narrative character, unfolding a drama in which P and S take their oppositions to new, hyperbolic extremes.

Figure 4.11 divides the development into three broad episodes. The first of these, based on the P-theme and dominated by the motto rhythm, moves swiftly to undercut the exposition's rhetorical uplift. The march topos is promptly reinstated, and its first harmonic decree is to repeal the S-theme's F-major EEC: simply by placing its chordal third in the bass, Mahler transforms his submediant back into a tensely consonant A-minor pseudo-tonic (mm. 124–25) like those at the

38. "Erstes und zweites Thema tragen in sich keine tiefen Gegensätzlichkeiten. Sie sind verschiedenartig individualisierte, im Wollen und Wesen aber übereinstimmende Kundgebungen des gleichen, zur Aktivität drängenden Grudwillens. . . . Beide ergänzen einander."

Figure 4.11 Symphony no. 6/I, development

DEVELOPMENT (163 BARS)



symphony's opening. At first, though, P can only constitute itself as a negative presence, a nightmarish miasma of dissociated secondary motives. It is only after much brooding that a sudden agitation (mm. 139–43) stokes the music to an intensity sufficient to launch a properly thematic outburst of P^{1.1} in E minor (m. 144). But just as quickly, this assertive breakthrough is aborted and the opening ostinato is reset (compare mm. 152ff. to 125ff.).

As in the exposition, P unfolds a three-part form that spins forward without closing. (Braces in Figure 4.11 indicate its three subsections.) But without the impetus to elide one section into the next, the music falls into a pattern of jarring discontinuity, with each segment replicating the pattern just seen: a brooding, inert march will be seized by a more assured impulse, only to die away or be discarded. The second subsection (m. 152) unveils a new theme, the impassioned P2, to drive the music forward—now firmly rooted in the tonic minor and flogged by an ominously motto-based accompaniment.³⁹ But its phrase-structural stability and propulsive momentum prove short-lived; once again, the music loses focus and trails off (mm. 170–77). The turning point comes in subsection three (m. 178), when the faltering P-group augments its ranks with a new conscript, S1, which is divested of its former regalia and recast as a lumbering march in the low winds and strings, beneath a brittle accompaniment of macabre trills and lashing motto-strikes. The imperious primary group, it seems, has begun to reclaim its own organic offshoots.

At m. 185 the trumpet resists, inching S1 into a more dignified tessitura. But P marshals its forces (P2 especially, m. 187), and, after a brief tussle, S is ultimately driven down to its nadir and silenced (m. 192–93). Emboldened, the march group revives the “agitation” motive that prepared the last presentation of P^{1.1} (compare mm. 191–95 to 136–40). And it is in response to this—the promise of another full-throated outbreak of the martial headmotive—that the music suddenly tears open from within. Time stops, a C added-sixth chord still hanging in mid-air (m. 196), and without so much as a cross-fade, we find ourselves in the midst of a Mahlerian nature landscape, replete with cowbells, shimmering *Klangfläche*, and distant fanfares.⁴⁰

Critics have universally heard this, the development's second episode (m. 196), as an expression of extreme physical or psychological Otherness, often emphasizing the music's dreamlike qualities and diametrical remove from the “Alltagswelt” (Flothuis 1992, 248) of the march.⁴¹ Mahler himself imagined that the *Herdenglocken*, in particular, would evoke “the loneliness of a being far away from the world,” the sensation of standing “on the highest peak, in the face of eternity” (Floros 1993, 165). And it is no coincidence that the character that flourishes in this escapist idyll, this “vision of another, better world” [*Vision von einer anderen, einer besseren Welt*] (Jürg 1986, 72), is the lately beleaguered S1. Initially, mere snatches of the theme float past—vaguely, like a thing sought but only half-remembered. More

39. Launching a new theme to maneuver around early-development blockages is another technique first employed in 4/I (see Chapter 5).

40. On *Klangfläche*, see Dahlhaus 1989, 307. See also Peattie 2002, Ch. 3.

41. See Bekker 1969, 217; Floros 1993, 169; Jürg 1986, 72; and Andraschke 1992, 229.

prominent in this first phase is the TR-chorale, intoned in the far distance by muted horns and punctuated by echoes of the major-minor motto (mm. 203, 208). Remarkably, despite the apparent formal “aberration” [*Abweichung*] of the *Naturlaut* (Jülg 1986, 42), Mahler’s rotational patterning endures: as before, TR will serve to prepare the entrance of S. But now the chorale is less a passive portal or “Zwischenspiel” (Andraschke 1992, 221) than an active summons, beckoning the wandering consciousness to the clarifying solace of the Alpine heights.

A sudden textural shift (m. 217) lets us know we have arrived: the pastoral signals die off, the tonal stratification relaxes, and the various strands lock together in true counterpoint, bringing the musical proceedings from the far distance into the foreground. At last, S1 begins to bloom, first in G major and then, more substantially, in E \flat major.⁴² This is a key with unique symbolic significance in the Sixth Symphony at large: as both the modal inverse of A minor and the key that is furthest on the circle of fifths, it marks a point of unique remoteness from the tonic and, by association, its relentless march tops.

Mahler’s inspiration on this point may well have come from *Tristan*, which uses such relations to mark several major dramatic juxtapositions: the lovers’ Act II duet and Tristan’s attempted suicide (A \flat major / D minor); Tristan’s despair in Kareol and Isolde’s transfiguration (F minor / B major); and, most significantly, the Prelude’s disastrous E \flat -minor climax and the A-major arrival that is hinted—but never realized—shortly before.⁴³ We also find evidence of its symbolic significance in Mahler’s own comments⁴⁴ and in the tonal plots of several of his earlier symphonies.⁴⁵ But his use of this device is never more transparent than in the Sixth, where it is underscored by a large-scale formal parallel: E \flat is, of course, the key of the Andante movement, which serves the same escapist-pastoral function within the symphony as a whole that the present episode serves within the Allegro. This is not a parallel Mahler intends us

42. Presumably, Mahler chose G here because it is the only key that leads us to the E \flat telos by way of the same “deceptive” V \rightarrow VI motion that prepared the expositional S.

43. See Wagner’s shift to a three-sharp signature at m. 43, leading to the installation of a prolonged V/A major (m. 63). For a discussion on tritone relations in Wagner’s mature works, see Chafe 2008, 89–91.

44. In 1899, Mahler offered a hypothetical modally-inversed tritone scheme (D major to A \flat minor) to Natalie Bauer-Lechner as a token of the “outlandish” and “unusual” (1980, 131). Flothuis cites these comments to make a similar point (1992, 240 and 248–49).

45. One early instance of a modal/tritonal polarity is in the finale of the First Symphony, when the tranquil D \flat -major EEC is dislodged by the development’s opening G minor. The tonal plot of the Fifth Symphony’s *Hauptsatz* (mvt. II) is woven through with significant tritone relationships, many of them modally mismatched. Most obviously, the catastrophic failed recapitulation concludes in E \flat minor, signifying a devastating negation of the tonic A minor. But there are subtler instantiations too. The exposition unfolds three keys in succession: A minor, F minor, and A \flat major. And strikingly, the movement’s four later major-mode enclaves are in E \flat major (m. 161), B major (m. 266), A \flat major (m. 288), and D major (m. 464)—the tritonal poles of the three exposition keys, *in order*, albeit with one replication. These relationships are also undergirded by the thematic correspondences: the E \flat -major episode reworks material from the A-minor P-theme; the B-major episode is a remote variant of the F-minor S-theme (actually they are *both* variants on the 5/I funeral march); and the D-major *Durchbruch* evolves from a retrograde of the rustic A \flat -major theme from m. 288.

to miss: the Allegro's arrival on E \flat major (m. 225) foreshadows (motivically and gesturally) a number of major tonal arrivals in the Andante, including its climactic tonic confirmation (m. 173).⁴⁶

The rhetorical transformation of S1 in this E \flat -major enclave is striking. Here, at last, the theme finds its true voice, singing not just the stock declamations that the exposition repeated ad nauseam, but a long, supple line, delicate in its expression and nuanced in its modulation, enfolded in a finely spun contrapuntal texture. This is S1 in its most idealized, rhetorically purified expression; all that was "defective" about this music in the exposition, all that was contrived or decadent, is corrected here. For a fleeting Utopian moment, the feminine impulse is at last shorn of its derivative march elements and permitted to dream its own unfolding in the rapt pastoral style of Mahler's early secondary themes.

But like all such reassuring enclaves in the Sixth, this one shows itself to be unsustainable: at the very moment we move to cadence in E \flat , the vision begins to slip away. Just as the music locks onto the cadential dominant (m. 234), the orchestral focus softens, the nature sounds return, and the thread of the melody is lost. Indeed, as the elongated boxes below Figure 4.11 show, we effectively start to slip "backward" through the rotational scheme. The TR chorale sounds again in the distance, transformed once more: it now begins in E \flat major (its only major-mode onset prior to the coda) and is prepared not by a motto-progression but by an elided perfect-cadential motion from the last trailing remnants of S (mm. 237–39). The confrontation with "eternity," as Mahler put it, may have been ephemeral. But the enduring persistence of E \flat major suggests that there may yet be some critical insight to be carried down from the Alpine heights.

Encouraged, the music then prepares a second, more emphatic cadential attempt (mm. 245–50). But at the moment the tonic would emerge from the gently blooming cadential dominant, the flattened submediant (B major) leaps out in a springloaded *fortissimo*, dislodging E \flat and setting the third and final episode (m. 251) into motion. This is a decisive moment, as it shows that when emancipated and purified to its most idealized form, S also becomes even more palpably symbolic of what cannot be attained. Despite its expositional success, any drive for closure not preordained by the sonata will not be tolerated. With each cadential attempt the music moves further along its retrograde path away from the Utopian heights, ultimately back into the grip of P.⁴⁷

As Figure 4.11 shows, episode three begins with a sixteen-bar period, firmly rooted in B major/minor and based on P^{1,7}, a character we have not heard prominently since the exposition. The second phase begins when the TR-chorale intrudes (m. 265), destabilizing the music's tonality and phrase groupings. This

46. Cf. Flothuis 1992, 249, Hailey 1992, 264, and Samuels 1995, 154. However, none of these authors notes that the Andante's tonal plot reverses this scheme, with A minor twice (!) serving as the portal to its most tragic episodes (mm. 60–64 and mm. 138–45).

47. Perversely, the march materials return with the same V→VI motion that had so far been the trademark of S. The episode's succession of deceptive resolutions divides the octave by enharmonic major thirds (G→E \flat →B). Major-third cycles will play an increasingly prominent role in the Seventh and Ninth Symphonies. (See Lewis 1984 on the latter.)

Figure 4.12 Comparison of “autonomized” P^{1.7} in development, episode 3 (b) to P^{1.7} liquidation in exposition (a) and S2 (c)

The figure consists of three musical staves labeled 4.12a, 4.12b, and 4.12c, illustrating the evolution of the P^{1.7} motif. Staff 4.12a (bass clef, starting at mm. 50) shows the initial liquidation of P^{1.7} in the exposition, with three boxed measures. Staff 4.12b (treble clef, starting at mm. 250) shows the 'autonomized' P^{1.7} in the development, featuring a 'short-short-long' phrase design and a dynamic marking of *sf*. Staff 4.12c (treble clef, starting at mm. 90) shows the P^{1.7} motif in S2. Arrows indicate the relationship between the motifs: from 4.12a to 4.12b, and from 4.12c to 4.12b.

gives way to a field of open conflict between motives from P and TR (which reappears in mm. 271 and 274) and eventually to the liquidation of P^{1.7} that elides into the recapitulation.

This episode is hard to fold into the narrative I’ve offered so far, mainly because it is unclear whether this autonomized P^{1.7} should represent “P” in a larger sense. On the one hand, it negates the Utopian key of E \flat major, comes into conflict with TR, and expressly prepares the return of both P (in its original form) and the tonic minor. On the other hand, all of the defining tokens of P are absent: the repeated-note ostinato, the trills and motto rhythms, and of course the primary headmotives P^{1.1} and P^{1.2}. That P^{1.7} is also the only exposition motive to have passed virtually unchanged between P and S confuses matters further, since its new short–short–long phrase design (Figure 4.12b) recalls S2 as much as the primary group (compare to Figures 4.12a and c).⁴⁸

But that fluidity might also offer a hermeneutic opening, since we can easily hear the episode’s explosive entry as the march music violently “reclaiming” the P^{1.7} melody from the S-group that it so aggressively shouts down. If there is any substance to the idea of tritone-polar oppositions, this would be another significant instance, since the episode’s recurring B-minor tonality can be heard as a pointed negation of F major, S2’s original key. That P^{1.7} might be a kind of contested “property” could also help us explain its presence (uniquely among the P-modules) alongside S1 and TR in the coda’s triumphal procession—making that merely the last in a series of (re)appropriations.⁴⁹ As the third episode reaches

48. This “short–short–long” configuration was actually first heard, albeit less prominently, at the start of the development’s episode one (horns, mm. 136–38).

49. The idea that P^{1.7} would be “borrowed” or passed from one theme group to another resonates with the fact that the tune is itself borrowed from Liszt’s Piano Concerto No. 1 in E \flat (de La Grange 1997, 158).

its climax (m. 279ff.), though, the bond between $P^{1.7}$ and the P-group is reestablished and made increasingly palpable, as Mahler transforms the liquidated remnants of the one ($P^{1.7}$) into the precipitous headmotive of the other ($P^{1.1}$), leading seamlessly into the sonata's recapitulation (m. 286).

VI. Failure and Deliverance: The Recapitulation and Coda

In Section V, we saw that one of development's chief functions was to further sharpen the contrast of the Allegro's two main theme groups. Most obviously, this involved amplifying their expressive polarity, with P gravitating toward the nightmarish and S toward the transcendent. But that contrast also extended to their general comportment. In that nominalist, improvisatory climate (and in the first two episodes, especially), P showed itself to be surprisingly anemic, unable fully to congeal or stabilize, while S used its freedom to reconstitute itself and then mount a successful, if also fleeting, Utopian escape.

The implication here—that P is a less viable musical entity when unsupported by the movement's formalist scaffolding—points to a key theme in my reading of the Finale. In Chapter 7, I depict the closing movement as an extended conflict of nominalist and formalist impulses, a struggle between improvisatory freedom and the prescriptive rigidity of an "inescapable" A-minor sonata form. Within that conflict, the leading functionaries of the authoritarian sonata are the primary theme and its associated motto. The Allegro's moment of reprise offers an early glimpse of this dark triumvirate alliance. As noted, the recapitulation of P tracks the exposition almost exactly. But there is one striking recomposition: the theme actually enters in an outlandishly brilliant A *major* (m. 286), only to crash into minor four bars later.⁵⁰ With this fearsome gesture, Mahler projects the motto's fatalistic progression across the very music that announces the reascension of P and (thanks to the near-literal reprise) the resumption of the movement's formalist impulse as well.

But the grip of this rigid formalism does not, in fact, extend beyond P itself. When TR arrives, it unfolds at twice its original speed, sounding less like a chorale than a manic, overwound music box. S has changed, too, in ways that bear the stamp of events just heard in the development. First, there is the notable loss of vigor: seized by a new circumspection, S1 enters only timidly, pausing to glance back fondly on the framing keys of the development's pastoral fantasy (C major, m. 348; E \flat major, m. 350). It then settles into a lush D major, where it will gradually build confidence and turn its focus to the present. This, as we know, is the tonality of the wrong-key ESC, which arrives in m. 365 to spur the last leg of the drama. But this anomaly, too, has roots in the development, since we can easily hear S1's self-assured D major as a reprisal for its *D-minor* debasement in episode

50. To underscore the intensity of this modal collapse, Mahler actually installs a four-sharp key signature in m. 286 only to cancel it out in m. 290!

one. That is to say, we might hear the failed reprise not as a random mishap but rather as part of a broader emancipatory strategy.

Such a hearing seems even more plausible in light of the third modification: the exclusion of S2. At barely a third of its original length—much of it devoted to slow reenergization—the recapitulated S has just enough time for a single complete statement of its headmotive (in stretto, mm. 356–58) and a replay of the cadence-preparing “breakaway” and “*Absturz*” (359ff.). But the subsequent omission of the jaunty, P-based S2 suggests that S1 has internalized the development’s main lesson: true liberation means freedom from the primary theme and its martial influence. Indeed, this notional “reprise” is so perfunctory that it feels but a placeholder, as if the theme recognized that a mere exposition-replay could never yield the kind of emancipation it required. Half-heartedly discharging its formalist duties, S1 bides its time to regroup and restrategize.

Figure 4.13 offers an overview of the coda, showing above all its striking correspondence to the development: many of that section’s signature events recur here, and nearly always in their original order.⁵¹ (The diagram’s dotted lines show near-literal recyclings; dashed arrows indicate mere derivatives or extrapolations.) The most significant difference, seen by comparing the brackets above and below the figure, is that the coda compresses its predecessor’s irregular P–S–P episodic layout into a more normative bipartite structure, with broad P- and S-complexes in succession. Significantly, though, Mahler does not simply discard the development’s counterrotational episode three. Rather, he folds its main thematic constituents—P^{1.7} and TR—into S-space in subsidiary roles, allowing him to maintain a broad parity with the development while ensuring that S has the last word.⁵²

The coda’s opening P-complex—the Allegro’s darkest, most toxic music—seems also to reinstate the development’s erratic pacing, with disjunct eight-bar episodes (mm. 374–81 and 382–89) following one after the other. (It is in the second of these—Adorno’s “irruption of the horrible” [1992, 125]—that the lumbering P takes up the D major of the false ESC, only to fling it angrily aside.) But the march soon finds its stride, first stabilizing E minor (m. 390) and then gradually introducing a welter of P-motives, P^{2.2} and P^{1.1VAR} most prominently. This is a crucial moment. For despite their vastly different contours, both motives are based the rhythm of the major/minor motto. By quickly saturating the texture with this figure, Mahler pointedly foreshadows the Finale, where this same motto rhythm will spread malignantly through the symphonic tissue, nearly always inducing collapse or derailment.⁵³

51. The upshot, naturally, is that the Allegro reveals itself to be a large *birotational* structure: [recapitulation→coda] + [exposition→development].

52. This jubilant tonic-major superimposition of S and TR (which appears at m. 453) suggestively anticipates the most tragic moment in the Finale: the simultaneous recapitulation of (its own) TR and S *in the tonic minor*; see Chapter 7.

53. Compare especially the iterations P^{1.1var} in the orchestra’s low voices (m. 388ff.) and trumpet (mm. 402–5), for instance, to similar figures in the Finale’s retransition (m. 497) and coda (m. 790).

But for all its momentum, P still drives forward only blindly, to no apparent goal. As in the development, S1 is eventually called forth in the deepest registers (m. 415; cf. m. 180). But now the tables are turned: S1 appears firmly in *A major*, dislodging P by semitone into *E \flat minor* (m. 417), where it disintegrates into the same spastic figure that triggered the development's rupture into the *Naturlaut* (compare mm. 419ff. and 194–95). But rather than dropping the thread as before, Mahler sustains the galloping tension, whipping the music into a frenetic whirlwind. And it is here that S2 is fated to make its final appearance (m. 421). The implications are stark. S2 has been passed over during every post-expositional appearance of S, just as it will be excluded from the theme's A-major transformation in the coda. This alone would mark it as problematic, as a kind of outsider unfit for redemption. But Mahler goes further here. Not only is this last setting one of the most strident and macabre moments in his mature works (the passage would not be out of place in the darkest Shostakovich), but he also makes a point to set the music in *E \flat minor*, the unmistakable “dystopian” opposite of the “Utopian” *E \flat major* attained by S1.⁵⁴

Why Mahler would pause here—literally on the threshold of the movement's thundering A-major climax—to make such cruel sport of S2 is perplexing. But the impression is that of a blockage being removed, as though the exile of S2 were somehow necessary for the apotheosis to move forward. For as soon as the theme has run its course, the music moves swiftly to prepare the final entrance of S1. At m. 429 it opens into a clearing that revives, in less vaporous form, elements of the development's *Naturlaut*: tremulous upper-voice pedal-chords, anacrusic fanfares, and the C-major tonality that has so far always been a direct or indirect harbinger of S (compare Figures 4.14a and c).⁵⁵ But at the same time, we also hear echoes of the development's retransition (see Figures 4.14b and c): the violins revive its descending third-plus-sixth cell (itself a derivative of P^{1.7}), while the bass voice mimics its arduous bootstrap modulation (see the brackets under both examples). This convergence of recollections lends the passage an unusual depth. The echoes of the *Naturlaut* reawaken the promise of a musical space in which S can be emancipated, while the retransitional figures evoke the movement's previous A-major arrival, the short-lived opening of P in the recapitulation (m. 286; see earlier discussion). This suggests that the triumphal A-major *Siegeslied* will serve a twofold purpose. Most obviously, it will offer a final and (seemingly) sturdier Utopian image of S. But it will also reclaim the tonic major lost at the opening of the recapitulation—an emphatic rebuke to P, whose terrifying motto-projection of mm. 286–90 would seem here to be retroactively repealed.

However, like the “Alma” theme on which it is based, this A-major apotheosis has divided commentators. Some have taken its affirmational claims strictly at face value. Norman del Mar, for instance, hears the final bars proclaiming an

54. Naturally, *E \flat minor* stands in the same relation to *A major* as *E \flat major* did to *A minor*—i.e., the modally mismatched tritone pole.

55. It is a “harbinger” of S as the principal opening key of the *Naturlaut* (albeit with mixolydian inflections) and as the secondary key to which TR gravitates in both the exposition and recapitulation. In the earlier TR, the C major implications are contained within A minor; in the later one, C major elides directly into the recapitulated S.

Figure 4.14 Conflation of Naturlaut and retransition in portal to A-major apotheosis

4.14a. Development, episode 2

4.14b. Retransition

4.14c. Threshold of A-major apotheosis

all-embracing “triumph of love over adversity” (1980, 40). Such a view is hardly unjustified. Even beyond its general air of frenzied exultation, the ending would seem to resolve to long-standing structural/dramatic issues: (1) the “defective” sonata, which is here repaired and redeemed, and (2) the ongoing clash of gender paradigms, which would seem to be neutralized by the hybridization of the formerly supple S1 into a kind of stiff-backed martial anthem, replete with *fortissimo* brass and hyperactive timpanic flourishes (mm. 444, 458, 475).

And yet there are many reasons to find the music’s manic triumphalism suspect or even unsettling. With the broader symphonic arc in mind, it is easy to see why the coda’s assurances would ring hollow: the A major that seems conclusively victorious here turns out to be contingent and revocable. By the time the Scherzo is mobilized, the minor tonic will be fully reinstated, and the Finale will revive A major only to run it into the ground, along with the secondary themes intent on securing it. (That those later, doomed S-themes are close cousins of the Allegro’s S1 lends the present coda an especially pointed irony.)

There are also subtler, intrinsic reasons to listen against the grain of the coda’s elation. Alex Ross, for instance, notes a certain “strain” in its conflation of gender markers, a sense of incongruity between the theme’s lyrical origins and its new hefty, broad-shouldered vigor. (It is “as if love,” he writes, “were an army on the march” [2007, 22].) Indeed, the theme is so denatured, so thoroughly androgynized, that we might hear its victory march as more coercive than conciliatory, with the once-feminine S1 reduced to a kind of puppet, an avatar of its masculine opposite. We might also find that the sheer pitch of the coda’s frenzy challenges its believability, its ad nauseam victory declamations protesting rather too much that the preceding turmoil had been overcome. For Adorno, it is precisely this sense of manic exertion that would allow the coda to speak its disconcerting “truth,” which is that of “the unattainable.” These moments of overtaxation were vital to the composer’s style, he believed, in that they offered an image of deliverance in place of the real thing. In them, the music embodies “fruitlessness itself,” proclaiming the falsehood not merely of the fleeting A-major tonic but of redemption in all its forms (1992, 128–29).

Still, some analysts go too far, I think, in teasing out the poorness of Mahler’s yea-saying here, the telltale “crack” in his affirmative voice (Adorno 1992, 137). Samuels finds the voice-leading of the passage to be subtly unhinged, owing to clusters of appoggiaturas so dense that they never seem to resolve. The effect, he argues, is a “non-progressing simultaneity” of E and F# that generates a “symptom of unease” and ultimately prevents the music from achieving true closure (1995, 152). I prefer to hear these hypostatized chordal sixths as a brightening effect, an early instance of the “super-major” Adorno found in the opening of the Seventh Symphony, one “resplendent with added notes” (1992, 100–101) and which points the way to the hypostatized sixth-chords that conclude *Das Lied von der Erde*—themselves anything but emblems of “unease.”⁵⁶

56. Though Adorno cites no specific passages, he does offer a Brucknerian precedent: m. 17 of the Ninth Symphony’s Adagio. The chord in question, drawn out over eight slow bars, is ii⁷ superimposed over a dominant pedal. (But it does not resolve functionally to V as such chords tend to, as in the opening of Schumann’s C-major Fantasy, op. 17.) Though there is no equivalent chord in

Sponheuer, meanwhile, hears a prophetic shadow fall over the music in mm. 473–74, the coda's *Höhepunkt*, when the major subdominant falls to minor (1978, 331; see Figure 4.15e).⁵⁷ For me, this hearing oversimplifies a watershed moment in the overall narrative, and one that warrants a thorough unpacking. It is true that by this time in the piece, this spotlight progression can hardly avoid calling the motto to mind. We cannot, in other words, take its appearance here as fortuitous. But it is crucial to read the gesture in its specific context, where for the first and only time, it does not effect a shift of local mode. Hoisted to the subdominant, it serves as a functional progression that only *intensifies* the tonic-major confirmation. Its rhetorical hallmarks, disruption and modal collapse, are wholly neutralized. Furthermore, this “domesticated” motto undergirds two suggestive Wagnerian clichés, both of which reinforce, rather than negate, the Allegro's claims to a happy ending. The modally mixed plagal progression, which swells and then recedes as $\hat{6}$ yields to $\flat\hat{6}$ over a stationary bass, is an unmistakable fingerprint of redemptive peroration, one that prepares the final major tonic chords of both *Tristan* and the *Ring* (see Figures 4.15a and b).⁵⁸ And the “Tristan” appoggiatura here—the load-bearing augmented fourth that resolves long-accumulated tensions in a single step—had been used by Strauss at a structurally analogous moment in *Tod und Verklärung* a decade earlier (see Figures 4.15c and d), adding another redemptive layer to the intertext.⁵⁹

The tension between intrinsic and extrinsic hearings is never so vibrant as at this moment. On the one hand, this climax invites us to imagine that the motto has been wholly undone. Conscripted to such heavily mannered peroration rhetoric, the motto here is semiotically “defused,” demoted from a specific signifier to a generic one. Effectively it no longer *is* the motto, since without its prophetic speech—its ability to invoke the “inescapable” ending looming ahead—it can no longer urge the music toward its undoing. But on the other hand we know, looking forward, that the motto has not lost its potency, making it all the more ironic that the installation of A major is functionally *dependent* on this progression; the final tonic confirmation emerges, quite literally, from the confident declaration that the motto no longer poses a threat. As Chapter 7 shows, any such assumption would be gravely mistaken.

VII. The Allegro as Musical Autobiography

Earlier, I noted that this chapter's main concerns would be twofold: to sharpen our sense of the Allegro's classicism and to show the “integration” of those

7/I, Adorno might be referring to colorful progressions like that in m. 14, where Eadd6 proceeds through a G major triad to Bmaj7.

57. “Unmittelbar vor den Schlußstakten des Epilogs . . . ertönt noch einmal, gleichsam warnend, das Motiv des Dur-Moll-Wechsels . . . in Posaunen und Trompeten.”

58. This idiom prepares the final tonic of 7/I as well (mm. 541–42).

59. The idiom, which typically appears after a deceptively resolving dominant, also concludes the “transformation” music in Act I of *Parsifal* (m. 1140), marking the arrival into the grail temple. Mahler himself had used it as the portal to the tonic-confirming passage in 2/IV (m. 60).

Figure 4.15 Converging Wagnerian/Straussian idioms in the Allegro's Höhepunkt

4.15a. *Tristan und Isolde*, Act III, mm. 1695–99

6 → b6

4.15b. *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, mm. 1596–98

6 → b6

4.15c. *Tristan und Isolde*, Act I, mm. 15–16

6 → b6

5
4
3 (w/augmented 4th)

4.15d. *Tod und Verklärung*, mm. 482–83

6 → b6

9 8
6 5
3 4
INVERTED version of idiom in 4.15c

4.15e. Mahler, *Symphony no. 6/I*, mm. 472–76

6 → b6

5
4
3 (w/augmented 4th)

archaisms with the symphony's narrative design. On the first point, I drew out at least six classicist—or in several cases specifically Beethovenian—departures from Mahler's usual practice: (1) the underlying motivic parity of the contrasting P and S; (2) the ease of the S-theme's expositional closure; (3) the use of exposition repeats; (4) the shift—pace Adorno!—to an episodic, theme-dissecting development; (5) the presence of an extended, discursive coda; and, above all, (6) the sonata plot itself, with its dramatic focus on the belated tonal resolution of S. Along the way, I showed how most of these elements can be heard to function dramatically, as part of the Allegro's conflict-and-reconciliation narrative and/or as ironic foreshadowings of the finale, where many of these same compositional issues and devices will be revived with darker purposes.

But I also promised to consider how the symphony's "autobiographical" dimensions might fit into this picture as well. On this point, it is worth stressing from the outset: my aim here is not to lay bare some kind of definitive or obligatory "secret program" for the Sixth. There is no getting around the fact that evidence for a domestic subtext is scant and at best only partly reliable. Mahler, as we know, gave few hints, public or private, of an autobiographic program.⁶⁰ And two of the three portraits Alma cites in her memoirs—those of the composer himself and of his daughters—are plainly fabricated or embellished.⁶¹ That leaves us with only the portrait of Alma herself, the authority of which we must take on faith if this exercise is to have any traction at all. (We will be in good company, at least; even skeptics have tended to find Alma credible on this point.)

All this is to say that the reading that follows is ultimately hermeneutic, not documentary. Rather than "proving" the existence of a domestic subtext, I want to ask what kinds of new hearings might follow if we accept Alma's portraiture account but also insist that it be reconciled with (1) a fuller examination of the work's musical particulars and (2) a more thoroughgoing consideration of Mahler's personal life, many details of which are new to discussions of the Sixth. As we shall see, the most pressing questions along these lines—why, for example, Mahler would pay tribute to his nuptial bliss in the most cynical symphonic work ever conceived—have yet to receive the consideration they deserve.⁶²

First, some background. Though critics generally accept that the Allegro's S1 was meant to "capture" Alma, they also tend to limit the portrait's relevance, in terms of both breadth and depth. In practice, the so-called "Alma theme" is usually framed as an ephemeral programmatic tableau, something separate from the work's central tragic narrative and lacking greater ramifications for the symphony's overall meaning. And those local meanings that *are* ascribed tend to be sentimental and affectively narrow. Most often, they reflect the rose-colored view

60. I know only of his comment to Alfred Roller that the work's harshness reflected various "agonies" [*Grausamkeiten*] and "cruelties" [*Schmerzen*] he'd personally endured (1922, 24).

61. Mahler had only one daughter, a newborn, in 1903. So the scherzo's shifting meters cannot have been inspired by his children's "arhythmic, . . . tottering" play (1969, 70). And it goes without saying that Alma's image of Mahler prophetically depicting his own "downfall" in the Finale is a lurid contrivance, nothing more.

62. The arguments to follow are a much-condensed version of those developed in Monahan 2011a.

of Mahler's marriage propagated in Alma's memoirs, which recall the summers of the symphony's composition (1903–4) as "beautiful, serene and happy," the composer himself calm, self-possessed, "a tree in full leaf and flower" (1969, 70). Widespread acceptance of this account—which invites us to hear the theme as a simple tribute to newfound bliss—has left many critics puzzled by an apparent "paradox": why, they ask, would Mahler have composed this disastrously cynical work during a time of such overwhelming personal and professional triumph? For Donald Mitchell, this discrepancy is powerful enough to repel any biographical explanation of the Sixth. Alma's account of the work's genesis "exemplifies the curious, often mystifying *non*-synchronization of art and life." "The paradox," he insists, "could not be *more* clearly exposed" (2007, 383–84; emphasis original).

But is Alma's report accurate? As it happens, her private journals suggest otherwise. The diaries of 1902–4 paint the picture of a marriage in crisis—of a young wife beleaguered by unglamorous responsibilities, exasperated by her husband's aloofness, and deeply resentful of her social isolation and lack of a creative outlet. Only four months after their wedding, she was convinced that this subjugation would prove her undoing:

I don't know what to do. There's such a struggle going on in me! And a miserable longing for someone who thinks OF ME, who helps me to FIND MYSELF! I've sunk to the level of a housekeeper! . . . Someone has seized me roughly by the arm and dragged me far away—from myself. . . . I have never cried so much.⁶³

Not that this should surprise. As many have noted, their union was far from auspicious. Mahler was an imperious, workaholic killjoy and self-absorbed misogynist ("You . . . have only one profession from now on," he wrote in 1901: "to make me happy!" [de la Grange 1995, 451–52; emphasis original]), while she was a vain, independent-minded hedonist, nearly twenty years his junior and well accustomed to being the center of attention. Their courtship was impetuous and deeply pathological, the one driven by a mortality-defying procreative urge (Feder 2004, 74), the other by an erotic attachment to powerful men that began soon after her fawning father's early death. (Previous mentor/love-interests included Gustav Klimt and Alexander von Zemlinsky.) Mahler's ecstatic forecast for their future happiness—only a month into their affair!—reveals how grossly he overestimated what this querulous twenty-two-year-old could bring to his life:

What you are to me, Alma, what you could perhaps be or become—the dearest and most sublime object of my life, the loyal and courageous companion who understands and advances me, my stronghold invulnerable to enemies from both within and without, my peace, my heaven, in which I can constantly immerse myself, find myself again, and rebuild myself—is so unutterably exalted and beautiful, so much and so great, in a word, my wife.⁶⁴

63. Diary entries of 10, 12 July 1902 (de la Grange 1995, 536–37; emphasis original).

64. Letter of 19 December 1901; cited in de La Grange 1995, 449.

In the end, of course, the couple's many "incompatibilities and animosities" were "never fully reconciled" and "continued to smoulder beneath the surface" throughout their marriage (de la Grange and Weiss, eds. 2004, 393). During these early years, Alma's diaries alternate between rage, hopelessness, and mock-ecstatic yearnings to martyr herself for Gustav's happiness. As might be imagined, the latter had little lasting effect. By the time the outer movements of the Sixth were taking shape (1904), long-mounting tensions placed no small strain on the household. Mahler was seized with doubts about Alma's love; she, in turn, confided to her diary that she felt none.⁶⁵ As biographer Oliver Hilmes writes, by the end of that summer, the spouses' "estrangement" had reached its nadir (2004, 84).⁶⁶

It is no wonder, then, that Alma would dissemble. Indeed, the most memorable image in her account—the Sixth as an act of musical "prophecy"—at last reveals itself as the brilliant misdirection that it is. For by casting the symphony as a tragic vision of the future, she defuses the pressing question of what it was *in the present* that might have inspired so negative a work. But it is plain to see that the symphony's tragic content almost surely had firmer roots in Mahler's personal life than is normally assumed. Mitchell's paradoxical "non-synchronization of art and life" dissolves at once when we acknowledge that the composer's domestic situation was, if not quite "tragic," at least an ongoing source of tension, distraction, and disenchantment. That is to say, whether or not these were (as is so often claimed) the "happiest" years of his life, they were years that Mahler almost surely *expected to have been happier*. Even if marriage brought certain pleasures and conveniences, he would still have been painfully aware of the disjunction between prenuptial fantasy and conjugal reality. Any expectation that his union with Alma would be "unutterably exalted and beautiful," or that his spouse would selflessly provide only "peace," "heaven," and an "invulnerable . . . stronghold," would likely have been met with progressive disillusionment. These, I believe, are the psychological realities we must bring to bear on any "autobiographical" reading of the A-minor symphony.

So why has this not been the case? Though they remain unpublished, Alma's 1901–5 diaries have long been available to scholars, and many of the most revealing excerpts have been in print for decades.⁶⁷ One does not have to dig very deeply, in other words, to see that the marriage was in trouble. To an extent, we can trace this neglect to the allure of the "paradox" meme, which added another dimension to the work's already considerable occult appeal. But there may be a deeper and more serious concern: that to draw far-reaching psychobiographical parallels between the Sixth and its author would reduce the work to a piece of "mere" program music, the kind of transcriptive realism that Mahler had grown to abhor.

65. The 1904 diary reads: "He said he could feel that I didn't love him—and at this moment he is certainly right" (Alma Mahler 1958, 31). This was not the first such incident; see 13 July 1902: "And now he has doubts about my love! . . . How frequently I've doubted it myself" (de La Grange 1995, 537).

66. "Die Entfremdung zwischen den Eheleuten hatte einen Tiefpunkt erreicht."

67. See especially de La Grange 1995 and Hilmes 2004. Alma's 1899–1902 diaries have been in print since the 1990s; those of 1902–5 exist only in transcription, in the Alma Mahler-Werfel collection at the University of Pennsylvania. (Ominously, Alma destroyed all diary entries between mid-1905 and Mahler's 1911 death.)

But interpretation along these lines needn't lead to anything so vulgar or overdetermined, as Peter Franklin suggests. Franklin describes the Allegro as a study in "relentless antitheses" (2007, 17)—by which he surely means P and S—and submits that the "irreconcilability" of those oppositions "certainly echoed those underlying [Mahler's] marriage" (1997b, 142). This is hardly an invitation to hear the work as a reenactment of petty domestic spats. Rather, his view is that the Sixth served Mahler as a kind of "symbolic stage" or "testing-ground" for working through the psychodynamics of his imperiled relationship—the purpose being, Franklin believes, to "outmaneuver the *future* rather than [to] record the past" (142; emphasis added). In other words, we might hear the Allegro abstractly reinscribing the conflict-dynamics of Mahler's marriage, negotiating its apparently irreconcilable impulses and straining to imagine a path toward reconciliation.

As it happens, I have already laid the groundwork for such a reading, by modeling the Allegro as a clash of gender paradigms—one rooted in the oppositions generically implied by the "Dutchman"-style exposition and culminating in the coda's *sui generis* militarized lyricism. Later in this chapter, I will retrace that narrative with an ear for Franklin's "echoes" of Mahler's personal life. But first, I want to look briefly at the original, expositional appearance of the S-group, which offers several biographically suggestive parallels of its own. These include, perhaps most obviously, the theme's bracing "surprise" entrance (m. 77), which Stephen Hefling justly compares to Alma's own sudden and near-total seizure of her future husband's psyche (2007, 120).⁶⁸

There is also the theme's oddly compromised design. Earlier, I suggested that Mahler may have been unable to intuit how S1 might be developed organically, from its own inner need, leaving him (after much foundering repetition) to complete the theme with music grafted from P. To hear S this way—as a notionally independent idea being molded, perhaps unconsciously, to resemble its opposite—should call to mind Mahler's own awesomely clueless (and predictably ineffective) attempts to console his wife by urging her to be *more like him*—that is, to renounce her own impulsive nature and cultivate an iron-willed self-mastery to match his own.⁶⁹ Speaking more broadly, we might also find that the theme's signature shortcoming, its troubling gap between earnest sentiment and flawed execution, mirrors the disconnect that plagued Mahler's early courtship and set the stage for later crises: the chasm between his rapt, high-minded affections, on the one hand, and their flighty, adolescent object on the other.

While paused here, I should also like to suggest a new way of hearing S2, the odd little march that seems utterly removed from the surrounding nuptial portrait (m. 91). Faced with this quirky, undersized replica of the primary theme, one whose frivolous orchestration seems at first either malicious or miscalculated, could we not imagine ourselves being offered a glimpse of the newest addition to

68. Mahler had met Alma several times before their famed encounter at Bertha Zukerkandl's home in November 1901, but she made little impression. The November encounter was different, Feder submits, because Mahler had recently suffered a near-fatal hemorrhage and was now seeking the "immortality" conferred with fatherhood (2004, 74).

69. See, e.g., the letter of 2 April 1903 (de La Grange 1995, 600).

the composer's domestic lineup, the progeny that Mahler sought to ensure his "immortality" (Feder 2004, 74)? Could this awkward creature, which bursts forth into the world (literally from "within" Alma!), perhaps be the musical embodiment of the child that had so recently enlivened Mahler's life, thus bringing the exposition-as-family-portrait trope to an unexpectedly literal completion? Some readers will find this hearing far-fetched, I am sure. For others, it may nudge the Sixth too close to the pictorial literalism of that other, better-known *Sinfonia Domestica*, which Mahler (in what cannot be a coincidence) would conduct shortly after finishing his own.⁷⁰ For me, though, it offers perhaps the most sympathetic perspective on a bewildering and rarely discussed passage. But it is also not without problems, as we will see.

As already hinted, I hear the post-expositional narrative hinging on the Alma music's various transformations, which are unusually numerous and often quite dramatic. The portrait music will appear in no fewer than five distinct guises; in toto, they invite us to hear the movement as a kind of ongoing existential crisis or search for some stable, sustainable embodiment. What hangs in the balance, it seems, is nothing less than the ability of this feminine theme to *be* a "feminine" theme. For with each new appearance, the theme's admixture of gender markers—already somewhat off-kilter in the exposition—changes in some telling way.

The development begins by thrusting the Alma theme into a state of abject subjugation: it is grafted into the sound-world of the masculine march, shorn of its feminine traits, and literally displaced into a "supporting" role, as a bass-voice counterpoint (m. 178). This elephantine disfigurement is the very image of the persecuted Alma we know from her diaries, the once "splendid bird" forced into the role of a "heavy, grey" flightless one.⁷¹ Mid-development, the pendulum swings to the other extreme, calling forth a truly liberated image of the Alma music, one free from marchlike impurities (m. 225). And yet, we might still wonder exactly *whose* fantasy we are hearing. Could it be "Alma," indulging in a wholly reimagined self, unburdened of her mercurial nature and freed from the shackles of the workaday march world?⁷² Or is it Mahler's own symphonic persona, longing for a more docile, pliable, and conventionally "feminine" companion—his very own Senta, Agathe, or Gretchen? What matters, of course, is that the fantasy proves unsustainable, leading ultimately to the reascendence of P and the onset of the recapitulation, where the Alma music will mimic (but not provide) the structural resolution that is its generic task (m. 365).

70. The world premiere of Strauss's *Sinfonia Domestica* occurred in New York City on 31 March 1904; Mahler conducted the first Viennese performance on 23 November of that year, shortly after finishing the Sixth. We do not know when Mahler first acquired the score. But it seems likely that Strauss's work would have been on his mind—and perhaps also on his piano—during the months before this important premiere.

71. "I feel as though my wings have been clipped. Gustav, why did you bind to you this splendid bird so happy in flight, when a heavy grey one would have suited you better?" (diary entry of 13 December 1902; cited in Carr 1998, 143).

72. Alma often found her own impetuous, inconstant nature to be burdensome or even disturbing. See, e.g., the diary entries of 13 July 1902 ("One moment I'm dying of love for him—and the next

Significantly, that crucial juncture in the sonata narrative is also a load-bearing moment for any reading centered around art/life parallels. For the tensions that emerge in the recapitulation between rhetorical success and structural failure—the self-contradictions of a music that dramatizes triumph while masking defeat—resonate powerfully with Alma’s own continuing struggle between public submission and private dissent. Outwardly dutiful, Alma’s music seems nevertheless to be inwardly resistant to its role as a mere functionary in the sonata’s master plan. As already suggested, its feigned resolution here could be a kind of passive-aggressive retaliation for its treatment in the early development. This recalcitrance also brings about another striking deformation of the “Dutchman” paradigm. Hepokoski writes that the feminine theme’s attainment of the tonic should generically signify “a resolution of the hero’s plight” (1994, 498). If this is true, then this sabotage of the sonata process would seem deliberately to preempt any such happy ending. Ominously, the hero’s redeemer becomes an impediment to redemption.

Alternately, we could trace this tonal mishap to the negligence of a theme still distracted by fantasy. The music leading up to the reprise proper (mm. 348–58) is so lavishly self-absorbed, so lost in reflection on past tonal escapades, that we might well hear a hint of narcissism, a self-regard so engrossing that it leads to dereliction. Such a reading is especially unsettling if we take S2 to be an avatar of the Mahlers’ offspring. For Alma, whose vanity was legendary and whose limited capacity for selflessness was already exhausted by her husband’s needs, motherhood did not come instinctively. Pregnancy, in particular, was a trial.⁷³ In this light, we might hear the missing S2 less as a victim of strategic excision than as a casualty of neglect—as though the Alma theme’s sumptuously protracted entrance were but an indulgent diversion from the labor of bringing the “progeny theme” once again into the world, along with the sacrifices of identity that this entailed. In this sense, the theme’s sentimental reverie becomes an act of stalling, of waiting for the time allotted to S2 to pass conveniently by.

Whether or not one embraces these more extravagant hearings, there can be little doubt that, in the broadest sense, the sonata’s failed denouement stands as an uncanny metaphor for the Mahlers’ domestic situation as a whole in 1904. To the casual observer, the marriage and the sonata alike would seem entirely, even demonstratively, successful. But for those with insight into their inner dynamics, each is threatened by structural imbalances and unsustainable tensions.

In the symphony, at least, these tensions quickly come to a head. For if the sonata proper offered a snapshot of the marriage in its present crisis, the coda seems to shift into future tense, imagining a range of possible outcomes. At first,

I feel nothing—nothing! . . . If only I could find my inner balance! I’m torturing myself and him” [cited in de La Grange 1995, 537]) or 20 January 1903 (“Outwardly I rage, weep, rave—and the interior is an unbreakable peace . . . frightening!” [“Äußerlich tobe ich, weine, rase—und im Innern ist eine unbrechbare Ruhe, erschreckend!”] [cited in Hilmes 2004, 79]).

73. “All my married life was one long dread of pregnancy—every month I trembled,” she wrote to her lover Gropius in July 1910 (de La Grange 2008, 875; emphasis original); cf. Hilmes 2004, 79 and 84. Alma’s narcissism and insensitivity would cause no small strain in her relationship with her surviving daughter Anna; see Keegan 1991, 232–34, 273, and 304–9.

the forecast is grim, with the brooding, raving march seeming to militate against any positive outcome. But when the Alma theme buoys up incongruously in A major (m. 415), the way to an ostensibly affirmative ending becomes clear. But to cross that ecstatic threshold we must first negotiate the E \flat minor "exile" of S2 (m. 421).

The implications of this music for my domestic reading are potentially quite dark: by making the A-major resolution so plainly dependent on the progeny theme's negation, Mahler all but concedes the damage done to their marriage—or at least to his idealized image of Alma—by Putzi's birth. On some level, that is, this passage declares that their breathless reunion is incompatible with the infant's continued presence in the work. But we can hardly, I think, take this episode as a callous longing to be childless again—not from so fond a father. Rather, the dizzying "negation" of S2 might signify a reversal of time's arrow, making the blissful denouement (m. 444) less a projection of future reconciliation than an imaginary retreat into their rhapsodic early courtship. Or it could be a flight into pure fancy, making the deformed S2 a kind of valediction to those real-world constraints that would inhibit the ardent A-major reverie to come.

What matters, of course, is that neither hearing dispels the Allegro's lingering tensions. The coda's delirious marriage of lyricism and bombast might seem to signal a home-front armistice, but the martialized representation of Alma is no less suspect as staged reminiscence than it is as hopeful prediction. Past or future, the authentic feminine voice is lost here under the din of the march subject's coercive ventriloquizing. And, of course, the A-major tonality remains as highly qualified as ever, tainted as it is by the minor-mode calamity ahead. At the close of Chapter 7, I show that that "calamity" might also be heard through the prism of Mahler's domestic dysfunction. Only there, the optimism proclaimed so confidently in the Allegro's coda is pointedly absent. Instead, we shall see the opposition of the martial and the lyrical rebooted and taken to new and ever more violent extremes. We shall hear see the hope of redemption revived again and again, only to be quashed without pity. We shall find, in short, a far more cynical vision of where the composer's marital instability might lead, in a movement that demonstrates repeatedly—indeed, obsessively—that catastrophe will strike precisely when fulfillment seems at last to be within our grasp.

CHAPTER Five

“A Play within a Play”

Games of Closure and Contingency in the First Movement of the Fourth

Everything is composed within quotation marks. . . . [T]he music says: Once upon the time there was a sonata.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1960)¹

I. Introduction: Journeys into the Past, Visions of the Future

It is one of the great ironies of early modernism that Mahler would commemorate the onset of a new century with a decisive retreat into the past. In July 1899, while hiking in the mountains near Aussee, he announced to Natalie Bauer-Lechner a fundamental change in his creative ethos: “In earlier years, I used to like to do unusual things in my compositions. . . . [Now] I’m quite happy if I can somehow only pour my content into the usual formal mould, and I avoid all innovations unless they’re absolutely necessary” (1980, 131). The ostentatiously progressive forms and strategies of his early works, he suggested, were but the “flashy” dress of an artistic adolescent. This about-face—in keeping with what Alma later called his curious “fondness for the old” [*Antikisieren*] (Floros 1993, 115)—was by no means permanent. Only two summers later Mahler would again indulge his experimentalist streak with the aggressively forward-thinking Fifth Symphony. But the comments clearly had resonance for him at the moment. That same week, he had begun work on his Fourth, which indeed marks a striking departure from its older siblings in its attitudes toward tradition and innovation.² Casting off the epic construction and “Faustian tone” of the early symphonies, the Fourth deploys a compact four-movement structure and balmy, Haydnesque vernacular that decidedly call to mind the symphony of yesteryear—a burst of “Apollonian” clarity on the heels of the murky, Dionysian Third (Hefling 1997, 397).

1. Adorno 1992, 96.

2. Bauer-Lechner dates this conversation to 22 July; work on the Fourth began in mid-July (de La Grange 1995, 754).

Of course, this return to an ostensibly simpler idiom hardly simplifies life for the listener or analyst. As many critics have pointed out, the work's modest construction and mannered ingenuousness conceal a dazzlingly refined artistry. The Fourth finds Mahler not so much "avoiding" innovation as trading one kind of innovation for another. Its signifiers of archaic practice are but elements in a creative strategy more broadly sophisticated, but also more elusive, than anything he had attempted to date. The work's coy humor confounded and incensed early listeners, whose expectations of another "Resurrection" Symphony were roundly deflated.³ And though the nostalgic Fourth eventually found favor with dissonance-beleaguered postwar audiences, critics today are still working to untangle its ambiguities and to make sense of the ways in which its artifice, anachronism, and staged naiveté crystallize into a distinctly modernist conception. No other symphony of Mahler's remains quite so puzzling, and none is haunted by such contradictory interpretations, ranging from transcendent bliss to "deeply impregnated sorrow" (Adorno 1998b, 90).

To set the stage, Section II addresses several key framing questions about the Fourth Symphony as a whole: In what ways has the work been heard to manifest "classicism," and how are we to understand it—parodic or earnest, past tense or present, naïve or critical? And how does that classicism, and the movements that embody it, serve Mahler's program? Section III looks more closely at the complex interrelationship linking the transsymphonic narrative and the sonata story unfolded in the opening movement. There, I advance the chapter's central interpretive theme: the image of a "contingent" sonata, one whose notionally self-contained plot is routinely subordinated to musical processes that are ultimately directed beyond the sonata to the symphony's finale, the *Wunderhorn* song "Das himmlische Leben." Section IV then pauses to look at the work's interpretive traditions, with specific interest in the ways it has been heard to undermine its own ostensibly affirmative message. Finally, Sections V through VII look closely at the exposition, development, and recapitulation, fleshing out the story of the "contingent sonata" while also exploring the many narrative and organizational parallels between this, Mahler's first overtly classicist sonata, and its direct successor, 6/I.

II. Classical Signifiers, Programmatic Intentions

In contrast to the Sixth Symphony, which would pursue its Beethovenian agenda subcutaneously, in deep-structural processes opaque to casual listening, the Fourth wears its classicism on its sleeve. Like the Sixth, the work deploys a "traditional" formal layout (Allegro—Scherzo—Andante—Finale) whose first movement shows a relatively clear sonata design. Only the diminutive song-finale overrides the generic requirements of the eighteenth-century archetype. But the

3. Mahler predicted that critics would use his Second "as a stick to beat the Fourth to death with" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 184).

work is also strongly “classical” in its surface rhetoric, often inclining to a pastiche of archaic idioms, mannerisms, and textures.⁴ Though the relation of these two modes of classical signification might seem self-evident, this was not always the case. Early listeners tended to focus on one or the other of these attributes, which ended up separated by lines of contemporary debate and were prevented from cohering into a single, holistic invocation of (or “dialogue with”) the past.

After the work’s first performances in Munich and Berlin (1901), Mahler’s critics harped on what they heard as a sentimental, “reminiscence”-laden dialect. One charitable writer was simply perplexed by its “sweet and simple style, [its] conscious leaning toward the old and the very old” (de La Grange 1995, 411). Others, feeling mocked, derided its materials as “totally unoriginal” (401) and heard in its caprice only “musical jokes of doubtful taste” (399).⁵ But these same critics, outraged by the defiantly anticlimactic song-finale, failed to hear the deliberately conventional aspects of its design. We find repeated charges of “formlessness,” like that from the critic from *Die Musik*, who perceived only “a shapeless stylistic monstrosity that collapses under a surfeit of witty details” (402).

It was in this critical vein that “ironist” became a mark of scorn, a badge of decadence that indicated a hypermodernist temperament at best and at worst a sign of racial inferiority. In turn, Mahler’s advocates were compelled to stress the non-ironic nature of his music—its austerity and connection to the grand tradition—and thus to downplay the work’s stylistic peculiarities. In his 1901 review of the Fourth, Arthur Seidl revered Mahler as a “God seeker” with a “sacred approach” to his art and made a point to castigate those critics “who consider him with an ironic eye and find only affectation in his music” (de La Grange 1995, 402). Amid the many calls for Mahler to disclose the program that would *have* to underlie so strange a work, Bruno Walter stressed instead its traditional structure: “Is it really necessary . . . to have a program in order to understand a movement with a first and second theme, a development and a restatement? Or a Scherzo with a Trio? Or an Andante with variations?”⁶

Significantly, Walter claims to speak here with the composer’s own authority. Like his advocates, Mahler makes free reference to the work’s formal conservatism; he spoke, for instance, of the first movement’s “almost pedantic adherence to the rules” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 153). But beyond a stray comment to Alma that the work was like “an old painting on a golden background” [*ein altes Bild auf Goldgrund*] (Mahler 1963, 27), we find little direct acknowledgment that the work’s dialect was inflected with old-Viennese simplicity—let alone that it might be heard as “inauthentic” [*uneigentlich*] (Sponheuer 1978, 184ff.) or

4. It was this gathering of guileless diatonic ditties—“nonexistent children’s songs”—that inspired Adorno’s image of Mahler abducting his music “from the realm of the dead” (1992, 56–57).

5. The first quote is a paraphrase from Karl Potgeisser’s review in the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* after the Munich premier on 25 November 1901; the second is the anonymous critic of the *Allgemeine-Zeitung* after the same concert.

6. 1901 letter from to Schiedermaier; cited in de La Grange 1995, 524. Still, Walter was disingenuous to beg *the* critical question, when he added that “the clamor for a program would seem to be justified solely by a desire to ascertain the relationship of the vocal fourth movement to the preceding ones” (524).

speaking in a musical "past tense" (Samuels 1994, 154). This brings us to a crucial point: as Mahler conceived it, the voice of the Fourth was simply not "historical" in any direct or immediate sense. For its author, at least, the work was by no means a self-justifying or disinterested homage to the antique style, or "neoclassical" in the sense Mitchell proposes, where "*the history of the form itself* becomes the subject of the composer's discourse" (1999b, 201; emphasis original). Rather, its tokens of eighteenth-century practice were conceived programmatically, to connote innocence and simplicity.⁷ They are musical emblems of the childlike purity and enlightened clarity that are the work's leading themes and the conditions to which it aspires.

All the same, the complexity of a work like the Fourth arises from its multiple registers of signification, and the fact that Mahler conceived the work's classical mannerisms functionally—as a means rather than an end in themselves—hardly makes it less striking that this late-Romantic work reaches boldly into a pre-Beethovenian past for many of its materials and processes. He may have intended us to focus only on a stratum of emergent, associative meaning (the "innocent" classical style as the infancy of the medium, one preceding music's maturation into a soundboard for "grown-up" psychic turbulence), but that layer is itself grounded in the material stratum, a musical trace indelibly marked by a fully- or partly-conscious dialogue with the past. The richest analysis will be the one that takes both strata of meaning into account, downplaying neither Mahler's programmatic intentions nor the work's spirited invocation of its musical ancestry. Luckily, these turn out to be reciprocal goals.

We begin with the question of these "programmatic intentions." In keeping with Mahler's much-discussed change of heart about such matters around 1900, the Fourth Symphony has no authorized or "official" program.⁸ At the same time, Floros is right to point out that the work hardly passes for "absolute" music (1993, 113). It may lack the paratextual richness of the early symphonies, but its embedded verbiage is singularly provocative, both in terms of its placement and its content: the song "Das himmlische Leben," a stylized and often macabre view of heaven through the eyes of a child, which Mahler composed almost a decade earlier (1892) and used as the symphony's finale.⁹ And to his friends, Mahler let on that the Fourth pursued a very specific poetic agenda, one that emerged directly from the song text: the entirety of the work, not just the finale, was preoccupied with images and notions of life after death. Mahler's own comments are

7. Mahler speaks, for instance, of 4/I opening "as if it couldn't count to three" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 154).

8. The Mahlerian party line was that the composer "most vehemently abhors all programs" (1901 letter from Walter to Schiederemair; cited in de La Grange 1995, 524). In truth, Mahler was reluctant to share the poetic images and themes that inspired him, for fear of being taken too literally. Of the Fourth, he told Bauer-Lechner "I could give [its movements] the most beautiful names—but I'm not going to betray them to the idiot listeners [*Trotteln*] and pundits [*Richtenden*] who would promptly misunderstand and misinterpret me as foolishly as ever!" (1980, 153). See also de La Grange 1995, 521–27.

9. Mahler had originally slated this *Wunderhorn* song as the finale of the *Third* Symphony instead. See Franklin 1991, chapter 3.

helpful here: he told Bauer-Lechner that the symphony embodied the “serenity of a higher world, one unfamiliar to us, which has something awe-inspiring and frightening about it”; the effect was to be as opulent and disarming as the “undifferentiated blue of the sky, which is harder to capture than any changing and contrasting shades” (1980, 178, 152). Though the Scherzo is “mystical, confused, and uncanny” (152), the Andante, inspired by images of peaceful sleepers etched on sarcophagi (Walter 1957, 134), restores the transcendent calm. And critically, it is in the last movement that “the child—who, though in a chrysalis-state, nevertheless already belongs to this higher world—*explains what it all means*” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 178; emphasis added).¹⁰

In these comments, Mahler pinpoints the most daring aspect of his conception: the delayed revelation of the work’s poetic armature. It is no wonder that audiences were confounded. Nowhere is the composer’s own ambivalence about the status or function of programs imprinted so thoroughly into the symphonic substrate and passed on, unprocessed, to his public. As Adorno writes, the work has paradoxically “swallowed” its own program (1992, 58), forcing the listener to grapple with daunting levels of mannerism and “characterization” that appear merely to be self-referential—at least until the climax, where with an act of “retrospective enlightenment” (Mitchell 1999b, 194) access is ostensibly granted to “what it all means.”

Of course, early audiences, disoriented by the first three movements’ barely tenable claims of being “absolute,” were too spent by the end to realize that the Fourth, as the critic Max Graf snidely put it, had to be read “from back to front like a Hebrew Bible” (Mitchell 1999b, 200). But later commentators, armed with a knowledge of Mahler’s intentions and the luxury of multiple hearings, have proved more adept at playing his game, exploring a variety of ways that the finale can be understood to clarify, culminate, or “explain” what precedes. By charting what Mahler himself called the “extremely significant” [*überaus wichtig*] thematic links that prepare the finale, and by making the song’s poetic themes relevant to the interpretation of the work’s instrumental movements, they have been able to bind the Fourth into a greater conceptual, teleological whole.¹¹ In so doing, they have helped to draw out the symphony’s defining temporal paradox, its tense opposition of reminiscence and expectancy: even as its archaisms draw us nostalgically into the past, its musical genesis directs our attention ever *forward*, to the blissful revelations that await.

They have also found angles from which the work’s classicism and its idiosyncratic program can be heard to interact productively, with Mahler’s self-consciously traditional gestures reinforcing or even facilitating the finale’s clarifying/culminating functions. Mark Evan Bonds offers one such reading in a fascinating essay that hears the Fourth as Mahler’s decisive “confrontation” with Beethoven’s Ninth. Bonds argues that by way of its four-movement structure and vocal finale (as well as numerous key details within individual movements), the work invokes Beethoven’s magnum

10. See Floros 1993, 112–15 for a more detailed account of Mahler’s poetic inspiration.

11. Letter to Georg Göhler, 8 February 1911; cited in Martner, ed. 1979, 372. The notion that the

opus while subjecting it to a Bloomian "misreading" that "radically subverts the nineteenth century's idea of the symphony as a monumental, heroic gesture" (1996, 175–77).¹² This subversive maneuver pivots on the generic unsuitability of "Das himmlische Leben" for a culminating role in the post-Beethovenian symphony. But not only this—equally important is the fact that the rest of the work hews so closely to the to the eighteenth-century model, generating the very Beethovenian resonances that throw the finale into such sharp relief.¹³ In this sense, Mahler's own comments about tradition, quoted earlier, prove especially apt: the more faithfully the work traces the eighteenth-century schema, the more conspicuous its deformations become—and the more urgently we must account for their "necessity." And in this case the single most outlandish gesture, from the point of view of traditional practice, is indeed the semantic key that Mahler intended intended to unlock the whole.

The reading I propose here takes up the same conceit as Bonds—Mahler using traditional or generic schema to foreground key programmatic elements—but pursues it within a single movement, the sonata form that opens the work. Despite its pronounced aspirations to a distinctly "classical" clarity (and notwithstanding Mahler's comments on its "pedantic" form), this opening sonata features a number of striking and perplexing deformations. I argue that these singular features are best explained in terms of extrinsic, rather than intrinsic processes: where the sonata leads us to the brink of inexplicability, the "necessity" of explanation requires a switch to a wider lens, one encompassing the symphony totality.

III. Transsymphonic Narrative and the Sonata as Generative Matrix

Like the Allegro of the Sixth, this "classical" sonata bears an especially strong intertextual bond with its finale. But the relationship here is nothing so abstract as one finds between the mirror-image variants that bookend the later work. Instead, Mahler interleaves materials from the song-finale directly into the sonata

song-finale is the key to understanding the whole factors into most detailed readings, including Bekker 1969, Stephan 1966, Sponheuer 1978, de La Grange 1995, Bonds 1996, Knapp 1999, and Mitchell 1999b.

12. The reference was not lost on Mahler's contemporaries, and their hearings were less than charitable (Bonds 1996, 177). Mahler was lampooning not only the sacred Mother of All Finales but also a moment of world-historical significance in Wagner's widely embraced Beethoven mythology: the introduction of the voice, the *word*, to the symphony, redeeming the latter from its insularity and raising it to a higher state, as the germ of the artwork of the future. The Fourth Symphony mimics this ontological leap, but depicts its higher spirituality with a cheeky naiveté that struck Mahler's audiences as a kind of "sacrilegious buffoonery" (William Ritter on the Munich premier; cited in de La Grange 1995, 398).
13. It is helpful to imagine the diminished effect that the song might have had as the finale of the *Third* instead. While still a striking conclusion, it would be comparatively unmarked in context: one of *three* vocal movements, within a form so irregular that just about anything would seem possible by the end.

movement, spurring a number of detours and anomalies in the unfolding sonata plot. As we shall see, the connotations are strongly teleological: I argue that beyond its existence as an independent sonata, 4/I also serves as a generative matrix, one whose higher purpose is to produce the finale's opening theme, what Bekker calls the work's *Uridee* (1969, 148).

For Bekker, the "formal and logical meaning" of the symphony's first three movements is, above all else, the "preparation and gradual clarification" of this "himmlische Leben" theme: "through all of the different spheres it passes, [this *Uridee*] drives, consciously or unconsciously, to the final terminus" (1969, 147–48).¹⁴ And he is quick to stress that the theme's progressive emergence is important not just for the interpretation of the whole, but also for the comprehension of the individual movements themselves. He urges a sharp ontological distinction between the materials of the sonata, scherzo, and variations, on the one hand, and this omnipresent "thematic *Ursymbol*" on the other (149). The former, he insists, are "not, in fact, as consequential as they might seem"; they merely provide the staging ground from which the latter can ultimately emerge. In this reading, the sonata's themes are but masked characters acting out a "play within a play," a self-contained form ancillary to the main transsymphonic story but also necessary to its ultimate revelation (149).¹⁵ In effect, this hearing invites us to distinguish between two concurrent levels of plot: the superficial one presented by the sonata (the "play within a play") and the "real" one centered on the emergence of the "himmlische Leben" theme, which is left unclosed at the movement's conclusion.

Rudolph Stephan revives Bekker's dualism but envisions a more fluid interaction between levels. In his hearing, the "himmlische Leben" theme is not merely generated within the opening sonata form; it also impinges on it, eventually establishing itself as a kind of surrogate *Hauptgedanke* (1966, 16–17).¹⁶ This perceptive reading provides a springboard for my own, which asks how the drive to, or preparation of, the song-finale causes warps or anomalies within a sonata that

14. "Die formlogische Bedeutung dieser . . . Vordersätze ist Vorbereitung und allmähliche Klarlegung der musikalischen Uridee des Finale. . . . Aus dem Suchen nach diesem befreienden Grundsymbol erformt sich der organische Aufbau des Werkes. Von jeder der verschiedenen Sphären aus, die es durchläuft, steuert es immer bewußt oder unbewußt auf den einen Schlußpunkt hin."
15. "Es handelt sich hier um eine Sinfonie mit einem Thema, das als solches erst im Finale klar erkennbar, in den vorangehenden Sätzen nur angedeutet, nicht ausgesprochen wird. Diese Erkenntnis ist wichtig nicht nur für die Erfassung des Gesamtverlaufes der Sinfonie, sondern auch für das Verständnis der Einzelsätze. Das Urmotiv ist allen gemeinsam, es ist auch das ideelle Ziel, dem sie alle zusteuern. Da es aber in den Vordersätzen nur episodisch zum Durchbruch kommt, während andere Themen darin erheblich breiteren Spielraum einnehmen, so sind diese Sätze gleichsam über Themen geschrieben, die in Wahrheit gar nicht so wichtig sind, wie sie der äußeren Verwendung nach scheinen. Die thematische Struktur ist nur Mittel, den Boden aufzulockern, das erstrebte thematische Ursymbol herauf zu beschwören. Die übrigen Themen werden dadurch in ihrer Eigenbedeutung wesentlich herabgesetzt. Sie sind nur Masken, die eine Komödie aufführen, ein Schauspiel im Schauspiel, um die eine, gesuchte Wahrheit ans Licht zu ziehen" (emphasis added).
16. Sponheuer also adopts Bekker's view, arguing (with his usual Adornian spin) that the thematic substrate and ritually enacted archaic forms of movements I–III are not just secondary but "inauthentic" (1978, 206). However, he ultimately extends that inauthenticity to the finale as well, in a thoroughly negative reading that strongly echoes Adorno's own.

otherwise aspires (so it seems) to normalcy. Central to this reading is the fact that the "himmlische Leben" theme does not—as many analyses suggest—descend unprepared into the midst of a development already under way. Mahler may frame it as "new" material, but he derives it methodically from a constellation of exposition themes—particularly S, of which it is a distant variant, and (critically) for which it surrogates in the development. Thus the internal and external plot strands are even more tightly interwoven than the authors cited suggest, since the *Uridee* not only insinuates itself into the sonata process, but also paradoxically emerges *from* it as well. In other words, the autonomy that Bekker and Stephan grant that theme from the outset must, in fact, be attained as the movement unfolds.

My reading also explores subtler (and previously unexamined) ways that the sonata movement participates in the transsymphonic drive to the finale. Of special interest are the curious games of closure that unfold at the end of the sonata's outer sections. In the home stretch of a conspicuously traditional two-part exposition—at the very moment of the anticipated EEC, no less—Mahler deflects the music through a series of digressions, leading ultimately to emphatic closure in the *tonic* key (m. 91). The recapitulation repeats this gambit in its entirety. Though it now arrives at the correct key (tonic, as before!), serious issues remain: not only does the moment of structural closure (m. 323) fall outside any zone recognized by the traditional sonata plot; the very function of that closure is called into question, since the exposition's tonic ending neutralizes the very "tonal tension" that is supposed to motivate the drama to its close. In other words, the basic reciprocity of the exposition and recapitulation—structures of "promise" and "accomplishment," respectively (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 18–19)—is fundamentally upset.

In terms of the sonata and its business, these closure-related deformations are even more consequential than those caused by the emergent "himmlische Leben" theme. They are also less straightforwardly explained in terms of the transsymphonic plot. Nevertheless, my reading sets out from one critical fact: the bucolic tonic-confirmation fields that close *both* exposition (m. 91) and recapitulation (m. 323) distinctly foreshadow the textures and motives of song-finale—as well (in both cases) as its opening tonality. I take these sites of extreme ambiguity—each one effecting problematic long-range closure while conjuring an untroubled image of the heavenly transsymphonic telos—as evidence of the tension between Bekker's two plot-levels: the self-contained, "closed" sonata versus the open-ended drive of the *Uridee* to its final destination. In the analysis ahead, they will help to flesh out Bekker's image of the movement as ephemeral and contingent (a mere "play within a play"), since they show Mahler routinely subordinating the sonata's closure-mechanisms to rapt visions of the work's "true" destination, a yet-unknown Utopian country beyond the borders of the sonata itself.

Ultimately, our aim will be to hear the many anticipations of the finale not as isolated "premonitions," but as deeply entangled with the sonata process itself—related to its themes and bound up with its goals. In so doing, we will find Mahler's own ambivalence about symphonic programs filtering recursively through the musical hierarchy, to the innermost mechanics of the sonata. Just as none of his symphonies would so tensely embody the perceived duality of programmatic and "absolute" conceptions, no single opening movement shows such deep ambivalence about

its own autonomy—seeming on the one hand to revive a traditional, self-contained sonata plot, while on the other hand precariously staking its very comprehensibility on an external semantic key.

IV. Interlude: Interpreting the Transcendent Telos

Before moving on, I should like to weigh in on an issue that has been much debated in recent years, and one that is surely relevant to any interpretation: the question of how the Fourth as a whole ought to be understood, in terms of tone and meaning. The buoyancy of its outward mood is beyond debate. Opening with brisk humor and closing with a gentle lullaby, its enchanted arc is only intermittently perturbed by “dark . . . shadows” and “bogeymen” (Cooke 1988, 68). And for a number of generations, critics sympathetic to Mahler took this prevailing optimism at face value. Writers like Bekker (1969), Specht (1913), and Walter (1957) understood the Fourth much as the composer himself seemed to: as essentially affirmational, a rapt (if idiosyncratic) admixture of naïve mysticism and nostalgia.¹⁷

Increasingly, though, critics have been inclined to rethink the work’s cherubic image, tilting the reception tradition to darker themes. This trend seems to have begun with Adorno, whose readings in the 1960s are still startling in their dissent from the broad consensus. None of Mahler’s symphonies, he declared, is “more deeply impregnated with sorrow” (1998b, 90). “Entirely broken,” it offers “no transcendence . . . but that of yearning,” and its “joy” ultimately remains “unattainable” (1992, 52 and 57). This reading goes against the grain of Mahler’s humor in quite a different fashion from those of early detractors, who merely heard it as supercilious. Without ever calling the composer’s earnestness into question, Adorno positively obsesses over the work’s inner divergence from its outward appearances. Much about his reading is stimulated by the work’s archaic form and “banal” language: it is “inauthentic,” composed “within quotation marks” (58, 56, 96); its sleighbells are really “fool’s bells,” declaring that “none of what [we] hear is now true” (56–57).

But his critique is moved on a deeper level by a basic resistance to the idea of a happy ending, a need to redeem the whole from fairy-tale triviality (and tacitly from Mahler’s own naïve metaphysics). The “inauthenticity” of the style is instrumental to this end. Where Adorno would rail famously at the affirmative endings of the Seventh and Eighth (1992, 137–42), the Fourth earns no such abuses, because its archaic dialect fends off any perceived collusion with the post-Wagnerian establishment and its consecration rituals.¹⁸ The Fourth is able to speak so eloquently of loss because its very dialect is itself already “lost,” archaic and overworn. And while

17. More recently, Floros 1993, Hefling 1997b, and Mitchell 1999b offer similarly sympathetic (if more nuanced) readings.

18. For Adorno, the Eighth, like the finale of the Seventh, capitulated to a broader confusion of art and religion evident from Wagner through Pfitzner and Schoenberg, one that “mistakes the consecrated wafer for the Spirit itself.” He shuttles between images of a Mahler *tempted* by the establishment’s false promises of “the absolute” and one who was *coerced* into turning away from

this "disintegrating language" "phantasmagoric[ally]" conjures the work's "transcendent landscape," it also "negate[s]" it from within (56–57). For Adorno, the work is not dramatically tragic like the Sixth. It traces no temporal curve from elation into despair. It is ontologically tragic. It breaks, invisibly and inaudibly, under the very impossibility of its own existence. From the first bars to the last, Adorno's Fourth is the presence of absence made audible.

Adorno's indifference to composer intentions is rarely so blunt; Mahler would scarcely have recognized this "broken" Fourth as his own. But we should recognize that Adorno's most decisive break with tradition hinges not on what happens within the Fourth, but rather on what lies beyond it. The central themes of his analysis actually have a long pedigree and are not so dissonant with the status quo as we might imagine. The trope of "unreality" that pervades his discussion—that nothing we hear is "true" or "authentic"—adds a historical-material spin to much older views of the Fourth as a "fairy tale," filled with "dream" images.¹⁹ And Adorno's death-fixation—which in no way downplays the work's outward bliss—merely gives fuller voice to what is already a latent, and unavoidably morbid, part of the work's eschatology.

The difference, rather, is broadly metaphysical. Adorno's dissent is that the Fourth is *only* a dream, a wish for what might be, but cannot. Mahler may have wanted to "assure himself and us through a lofty and cheerful dream of the joys of eternal life, that we are safe" (Walter 1957, 135). But in a world where such assurances ring hollow, the Fourth takes on a pall that makes it "as sad as the late works." Rather than dying away into eternal bliss, its quizzically passive final bars simply *die*, leaving the song's promise that "all shall awake to joy" forever unfulfilled (Adorno 1992, 57). None of Adorno's readings hinge more completely on a surreptitious exchange of Mahler's metaphysics for his own or more emphatically realize his (utterly un-Mahlerian!) dictum that in this music "the absolute is conceived, felt and longed for, and yet it does not exist. . . . All could be well, but in fact all is lost" (1998b, 109). And yet Adorno's trap is a clever one. Rather than allowing us to choose between two Fourths—a positive or a negative one—he rigs the game so that the more affirmatively one hears the sounding work, the deeper its ostensible message of loss.

One choice we can make, however, is to opt out of Adorno's game altogether, sidelining all such metaphysical questions as peripheral to the work's immanent narrative. Limiting our attention to the story told by the sounding musical trace hardly confines us to a naïve hearing. As a number of recent studies have shown, a closer inspection of the work's many musical and musical/textual tensions point to a Fourth that is at best internally conflicted, and one that works subtly to undermine the very affirmation that is its ostensible goal. In an immensely valuable recent reading, Raymond Knapp

his own "radical secularization" of metaphysics, a victim of musical fascism who "takes refuge in the power and glory" of that which he "dreads." In the latter analysis, Adorno ominously declares the "official posture" of the Eighth one of "fear deformed into affirmation" (1992, 139).

19. Walter expresses this most clearly: in the Fourth, "inward piety dreams a dream of Heaven. The whole atmosphere, indeed, is dreamlike and unreal; . . . [it is] a fairy tale; the power and pathos of its predecessors are translated into airy improbability" (1957, 133).

explores the “bleak underside” to Mahler’s depiction of “childhood innocence and vulnerability” (1999, 234). Drawing on Mahler’s original 1892 pairing of the song-finale with “Das irdische Leben”—the agonized lament of a starving child—Knapp lends more credibility to the “ironic” hearing, first glimpsed in Adorno’s work, in which “the child dies of starvation while dreaming of plenty” (239).²⁰

With a similar eye for telling detail, Bonds examines the tensions between adult and childlike perspectives in the work, both textual—as with the poem’s juxtaposition of naïve and violent images (1996, 181)—and musical, with specific focus on the jarring disruptions and outbursts that are never ultimately reconciled with the main pastoral sphere (182). Though both writers owe a debt to Adorno, neither puts forth so flatly negative an assessment of the work as a whole. Instead of hearing an absolute ontological self-negation, each struggles, as Knapp writes, to “leave open, as much as possible, the ambiguities that Mahler himself left open” (1999, 235). For Bonds the “very essence of the work lies in its ambiguity.” He stresses that while past analysts like Bekker have clearly suppressed the work’s disturbing features,

it would be equally mistaken to exaggerate the score’s darker elements. To regard the Fourth as a negation of paradise, a mere dystopia, would be to miss the richness of the work’s ambiguity. The seeming contradictions of the text and the deeper contradictions between text and music leave a strange but moving sense of doubt. Mahler created an ending in which believers . . . can continue to hear the sleighbells as a memory of childhood’s innocence. It is this ambivalence of faith—and closure—that is by far the most radical element within the Fourth Symphony. (1996, 199)

I agree. The work is more compelling if we allow it a multitude of conflicting voices, rather than reducing it—as Adorno does, without quite intending to—to a potpourri of “children’s songs” made morbid by their own paradoxical non-existence (1992, 55). For this reason, ambiguity—both of expression and formal process—will be a leading theme in my own reading as well. And as I have already hinted in Section II, “ambivalence of . . . closure” is at the heart of the matter—if not exactly in the manner Bonds has in mind.

V. Exposition: The Contingent Sonata and Problematics of Closure

For those grown accustomed to Mahler’s Fourth Symphony and its peculiar sound-world, it can be instructive to imagine how the work might sound to a first-time listener who encountered it while surfing the airwaves, tuning in late by only by a few seconds—let’s say around bar four. If our hypothetical listener were knowledgeable of the Viennese classical style, the work would probably

20. Adorno notes that as the text “wakes into joy,” the music drifts off to sleep, raising the specter of death: “no one knows whether it does not fall asleep forever” (1992, 57). See also Bonds 1996, 181.

come across as mildly perplexing—clearly not of the eighteenth century, owing to any number of quirks in the harmony and scoring,²¹ and yet knowingly reminiscent in many regards: a warmly nostalgic string theme, unfolding tidy symmetrical phrases and laced with echoes of Schubert; a brisk transitional idea whose rustic fanfares build to an emphatic half-cadential stop; a broad, singing, lyrical theme in the dominant, followed by a contrasting closing group. *Mutatis mutandis*, a faithful and seemingly earnest reenactment of the two-part sonata exposition central to the late eighteenth-century vernacular. At least so far.

But those who know the Fourth also recognize that for our latecoming listener, the work thus far has been misrepresented, and fundamentally so. For concentrated in those three missing bars is Mahler's most striking symphonic introduction: an unlikely vapor of jingling bells and murmuring winds that crystallizes from nothing and then dissipates. We will hear the bells again at several key points, but this first appearance is decisive, since it is critical in establishing the tone of what follows. Mahler himself likened it to a "jester's cap" worn by the work as a whole (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 182), a fantastic metaphor echoed in images like Cooke's "celestial sleigh ride" (1988, 67). In a similarly symbolic vein, Bonds (1996, 175) and Mitchell (1999b, 207) hear the bells announcing the "child-like innocence" that is thematized throughout the Fourth.

More suggestive, though, are readings that focus on the effect of the passage in its specific context—especially its artifice and discontinuity with the subsequent sonata exposition, which strolls in glibly as though nothing had come before. Sponheuer hears the bell-music's phantasmagoric non sequitur establishing the work's "objective brokenness" [*objektive Gebrochenheit*] right from the outset. They are the acoustic image of the "quotation marks" Adorno places around the Fourth in its entirety, declaring its "inauthenticity" (1978, 183–84; Adorno 1992, 96).²² With typically Adornian long-distance hearing, his analysis looks ahead to the finale, where the bell-music reveals its true function: that of *rupture*, of agitated incursion into the pastoral sphere. That rupture-character is subdued here, but latent nonetheless. Knapp's hearing is similar: the Fourth paradoxically "begins with an intrusion." But just as important—and here Knapp makes a critical point—the quick succession of scene changes results in a dizzying reversal where the "intrusion" itself becomes a "background," a second space or "wintry outside," beyond the balmy sonata soon to envelop us (1999, 235).²³

Knapp's metaphor of nested spaces—of a starkly juxtaposed "out there" and "in here"—is appealing in that it proposes from the very outset the presence of a palpable, superordinate Other, something that transcends and relativizes the

21. See Johnson (2009, 107–10) on the "gentle incongruities" that distinguish this music from its classical models.

22. We might as easily hear them pronouncing his famous *Es war einmal*: "Once upon a time there was a sonata" (1992, 96).

23. Whether this "outside" is specifically "wintry" is debatable. While the sleighbells suggest such imagery, the wind instruments surreally juxtapose Mahlerian *birdcalls*. (Compare the flute figures in mm. 2–3 to the "cuckoo" calls from "Ablösung im Sommer" [mm. 1–9] and to the similar figures in 3/III.)

sonata while also looking ahead to the finale. (In this sense it merges easily with the “contingent” sonata-image derived from Bekker in Section III.) More than this, though: because the spaces are nested and not merely contiguous, the metaphor implies that this Other, this larger sphere, is present throughout *all* of what follows, even during the long stretches where it recedes from our attention. (For better or worse, the outside is still “out there,” even when we come indoors.) And this, ultimately, is why the latecoming listener misses the bigger picture: Mahler presents the bell-music as the marked half of an asymmetrical binary, one whose opposing element is the entirety of the exposition that follows. The meaning of that sonata is ontologically bound up in this binary. It is not presented in a straightforward sense; it is literally not given as “absolute.” At every moment, the fading memory of the bells reminds us that the sonata is what it is by virtue of *not* being that cryptic, briefly glimpsed Other.

While keeping all this in mind, let us now step into the sonata itself, beginning with a closer look at the exposition. The topmost brackets in Figure 5.1 show that the exposition proper divides into two parts. The first of these, “Exposition 1,” imitates an eighteenth-century two-part exposition: a P/TR zone proceeds through a clear medial caesura (MC) to a dominant-key S-space and closing group (C1). (The diagram indicates the EEC-complications mentioned earlier; I return to these shortly.) “Exposition 2,” which follows, begins as a written-out exposition repeat, restating the opening bell-music and much of the P-complex with only superficial adjustments.²⁴ But in m. 91 the reprise short-circuits, and the music deflects to completely new material: the bucolic “C2,” discussed in Section III, which closes the exposition in the tonic and offers a first, veiled glimpse of “Das himmlische Leben.”

Figure 5.2 offers a closer look at the exposition’s internal structure. The second tier of brackets show that the P-space of Exposition 1 comprises two basic ideas, P1 and P2, arranged in two brief subrotations. I show these themes in Figure 5.3, along with the introductory bell-music, which I have labeled as “P0.”²⁵ Careful readers might sense a tension here, since this nomenclature would seem to undermine the distinctions I have just outlined between bell-world and sonata, since both are notionally grouped as “P.” But the purpose of this label will become clearer in the development, where Mahler reconfigures the P-materials, merging P2 and P0 into a single complex and revealing a more fluid relationship than is suggested by the starkly juxtapositional opening bars.

For now, though, the fantastic P0 remains safely cordoned off, allowing the exposition to unfold a musical world that Mahler hoped would sound “childishly simple and quite unselfconscious” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 162). As mentioned, the harmony and phrase rhetoric here incline to nostalgic simplicity.

24. Stephan (1966, 12), Knapp (1999, 240), Williamson (1983, 28), and others have rationalized this repeat as evidence of a “sonata rondo” structure. On the problems of such a reading, see Monahan 2011b, 50n88.

25. Hepokoski and Darcy suggest this nomenclature for “opening flourishes” or “initializing gestures” that delay the onset of the “real” P-theme by several bars (2006, 86).

Figure 5.1 Symphony no. 4/1, simplified overview

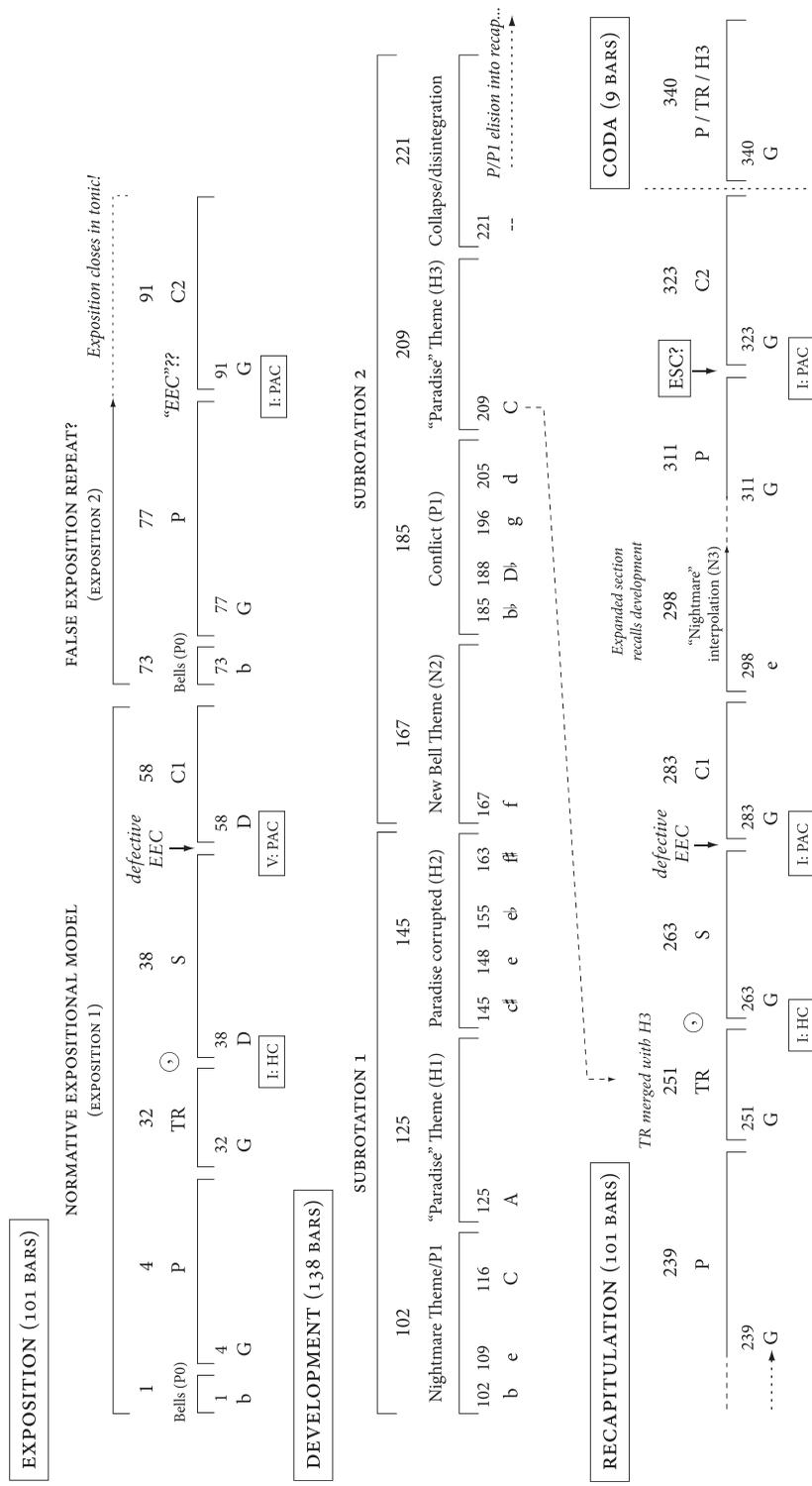
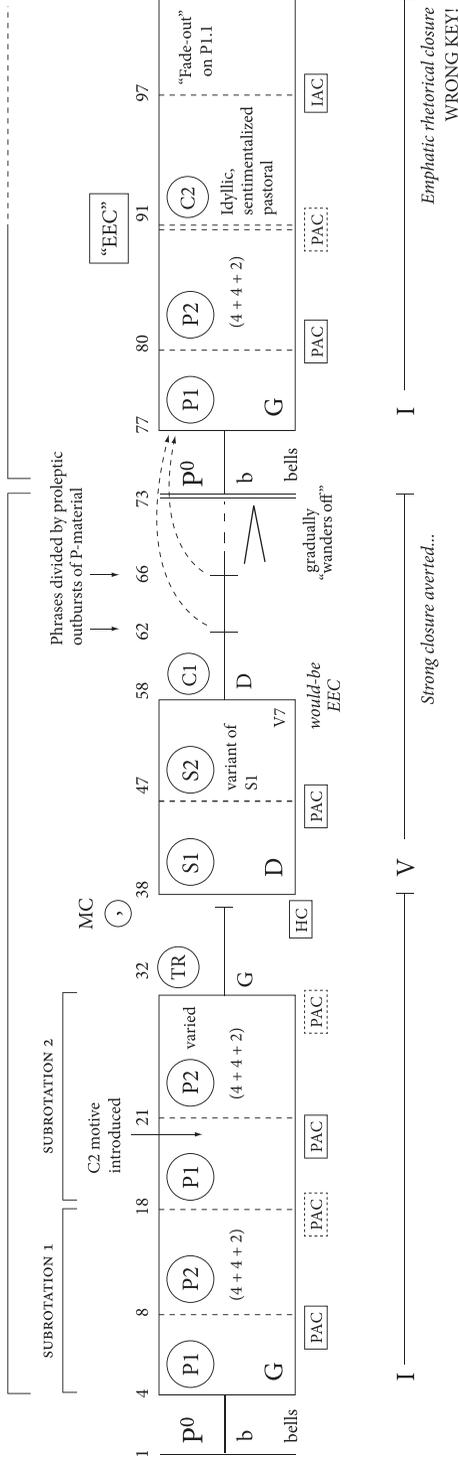


Figure 5.2 Symphony no. 4/I, exposition

EXPOSITION (101 BARS)

Corresponds to Standard Two-Part Exposition
(EXPOSITION 1)

Exposition Restart (Written-Out Repeat?)
(EXPOSITION 2)



Adorno points out that the "Mozartean" P1 theme (Mahler's "most inauthentic," he exults!) is actually derived from Schubert's Piano Sonata in E \flat , D. 568 (1992, 56–57). And its tidily symmetrical disposition sets a precedent for P2, which unfolds a chain of balanced two-bar units. Cadences come often and effortlessly (mm. 8, 18, 21, 32), depleting tension and lending the music an ambling composure very much the opposite of the manic *Fortspinnung* that opened the Sixth.²⁶

A sudden spike in energy marks the onset of the transitional theme (TR), which, after a brief romp, leads to a grand half-cadential MC in m. 37.²⁷ Curiously, a number of Adorno's readers have aimed to tease out dislocated or intrusive aspects of this passage (Samuels 1995, 141; Knapp 1999, 243–44). But Mahler offers little incentive to listen against the grain here. Indeed, the very point of this sonata-form transition—the first of Mahler's career, we might note—is that it reenacts an utterly conventional, century-old formal gesture with brisk, unforced exuberance. (If anything is remarkable here, it is Mahler's confidence that material so formulaic would be adequate to his creative vision.)²⁸

The ensuing secondary theme (S) has also been subject to against-the-grain hearings. In this case it is Adorno himself, who saddles S with the task of undermining the unfolding sonata. But his assessment—such a songlike binary contrasts too sharply with P and is indeed "too self-sufficient for a sonata as such" (1992, 96–97)—hardly convinces. The insularity of S may betray certain late-Romantic sonata sensibilities, but its contrast with P falls short even of the Mahlerian norm and does little to offset the impression that Mahler is deferring cheerfully to convention.²⁹ This glibness clearly puts Adorno on edge, and he reacts with customary contrariness, assuring us that any outward semblance of arbitrary formalism is undermined from within, by Mahler's insurgent strikes against the ever logical, ever remainderless dominating force of the classical sonata.

In truth, the sonata's first real rupture only occurs at the *end* of S, at the moment of the ardently prepared PAC that would consummate the new key and close the exposition (m. 58). There, Mahler grants us the expected tonic, but all

26. Figure 5.2 distinguishes between terminal and elided PACs with solid and dashed boxes, respectively.

27. This melody reworks mm. 1–2 and 10–11 of the *Wunderhorn* song "Starke Einbildungskraft." It is hard to see how the song's cheeky exchange between young lovers might inform the program of the Fourth—though the song title itself may be a wry commentary on the derivative nature of the surrounding music.

28. The scalar figure leading into the MC (mm. 36–37) quotes the parallel moment of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C, op. 2/3/i (mm. 26–27), which itself tropes imitative half-cadential MC arrivals in works like Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 23 in A, K. 488 (mm. 97–98) and Piano Sonata in B \flat , K. 281 (mm. 16–17). And a nearly identical figure ends the retransition of Haydn's Piano Trio no. 28 in D, XV:16 (mvt. I, half cadence at mm. 125–26). On these grounds, it is especially hard to credit Samuels's insistence that Mahler's MC expressly *defies* classical convention (1995, 141; cf. Johnson 2009, 110).

29. This theme, too, has a classical parentage, in Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E \flat , op. 27/1/i (Floros 1993, 119).

Figure 5.3 Bell music and primary theme (P) motives

Bell Music (P0)

The musical notation for Bell Music (P0) consists of two staves. The first staff contains two motives: p0.1, which is a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dotted quarter note, and p0.2, which is a sequence of eighth notes. The second staff contains two motives: p0.3, which is a sequence of eighth notes, and p0.4, which is a sequence of eighth notes with a dotted quarter note.

P-Complex

The musical notation for the P-Complex consists of three staves. The first staff, labeled P1, shows a sequence of notes with a circled '4' above the first measure and a '[PAC]' marking at the end. The second staff, labeled P2, shows a sequence of notes with circled '8' above the first measure and circled '3' below the last two measures. The third staff, labeled P2VAR, shows a sequence of notes with circled '22' above the first measure and circled '3' below the last two measures.

else goes awry: the texture implodes, the dynamics fall off, and the yearning string timbres give way to a choir of concertante winds pecking out staccato counterpoints. As Knapp points out, for a closing group C1 is “curiously ambivalent about closure” (1999, 244). Its three variants rarely exceed a *piano* dynamic, and at the end of the last, it simply wanders off (mm. 70–72), in the manner of the Third Symphony’s retransitional snare drum. It also proves ominously unstable. Twice, *forte* outbursts of P-theme material burst in (mm. 62, 66; see the dotted arcs in Figure 5.2), knocking the legs from under the tottering C1 and announcing with some impatience that the primary theme is on its way—perhaps to set matters right after this graphic (if tongue-in-cheek) expositional “failure.”

Exposition 2 alters P only slightly. The most significant change occurs in P2 (m. 80). For this third sounding, Mahler superimposes the original version with its later variant (cf. mm. 8–17, 21–31)—a procedure systematic enough to belie Erwin Stein’s famous image of Mahler “shuffl[ing]” motives here “like a pack of cards” (1953, 7). That the G-major tonic dominates the proceedings is not itself remarkable, since a composed-out exposition repeat would presumably entail a tonic reset followed by a second pass at the secondary key. But at culmination of P2—the very moment where

Exposition 1 began its modulation to the dominant, no less—Exposition 2 offers a massive, terminal, tonic-key PAC (m. 91). And it is there that the music stays, dwelling in a sumptuous pastoral space and dreaming of the finale to come.³⁰

As the exposition fades away, it is clear that the music's rhetorical and processive signals have fallen glaringly out of sync. From the viewpoint of plot norms, this wrong-key "EEC"—which effectively composes over TR and S—suggests a sonata gone utterly off the rails. And yet it offers itself to the listener, as Adorno writes, "like a village before which he is seized by the feeling that *this might be what he seeks*" (1992, 44; emphasis added). This is no casual metaphor, since as Bekker argues, "what we seek" (what we *really* seek) is of course the transcendent finale, which is "foretold" in this music (Knapp 1999, 247) by the many striking anticipations of "Das himmlische Leben's" opening: the G-major tonic pedal and portamento-textures, the idyllic *morendo*, the arpeggiated anacrusis, and especially the pentatonic "arpeggio-plus-upper-neighbor" cell $\hat{3}-\hat{1}-\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ that is both the song's opening melody and the germinal motive of C2 itself (m. 91).³¹

What should we make of this conflicted music? A cynical listener might take this lush G major as a Janus-faced attempt to mask sonata failure—something like what we encountered in the recapitulation of 6/I (see Chapter 4). A more sympathetic hearing, and one more attuned to Mahler's proleptic agenda, might draw from Bekker the idea that the routine business of the sonata is subordinated here to another, broader rhetorical objective. That is to say, we could hear the failure as strategic, reminding us of the sonata's contingency and announcing that the higher goal—and thus "true" closure—is not endemic to this terrestrial genre at all. Thus the sonata proper hangs in an uncannily suspended state while Mahler offers an early glimpse of the transcendent telos.

Other idiosyncrasies make this "failure" especially compelling. In most cases, expositional failure would involve the absence of a decisive cadence in a well-defined secondary key, as in 5/II, 6/IV, and 7/I. But it is rarely the case that Mahler fails to escape the tonic at all. Here, both defects are present: the inability to close in the newly attained secondary key (in Exposition 1) and a compulsion to close in the only key truly "unavailable" for the articulation of the EEC: the tonic (in Exposition 2). The result is an involuted narrative in which Exposition 1 (the "exposition within the exposition," to trope Bekker) establishes what is meant to be a long-range tonal tension, only to have it undermined in stages—first with the skittish and ineffective C1, and then with the vigorous negation of C2.

Moreover, the reinstalled tonic of C2 upsets the sonata's fundamental dramatic trajectory—the drive of the secondary theme to achieve tonic closure—by threatening with its unwanting, Elysian G major to close the entire process down

30. Schematically, the complete exposition broadly resembles that of 2/I. Compare Figs. 1.3 and 5.2; both have the broad design $P \rightarrow S \mid P \rightarrow C$.

31. This motive first appears as an accretive counterpoint to the cadences that close the second and third statements of P1 (mm. 20, 79). Prophetically, then, the motive is bound up from its very first soundings with G-major closure.

prematurely. (That several authors have called this music a “coda” accords with the perplexing cues that we have somehow left the sonata’s affairs behind us.)³² But the movement does go on, and in so doing it reproduces within the sonata the same games of closure and contingency that relate the sonata to the whole. That is to say, the exposition—like the entire movement—feigns a closure, a self-containment it does not in truth possess. Both are shown ultimately to be contingent, merely stages within longer processes. And strikingly, both levels of G-major closure are overturned by vertiginous, fiddle-haunted nightmares—the movement as a whole by the Scherzo that follows, and the exposition by its macabre development.

VI. Development: Phantasmagoric Collage, Thematic Genesis

Critics rarely fail to mention the striking discontinuity between Mahler’s exposition and what Mitchell calls the “virtually self-contained” development that follows (1999b, 213). One often reads of a shift in the music’s “state of consciousness.” Knapp, for instance, offers the elegant image of C2 as “a lullaby leading to an uneasy sleep besieged by nightmare” (1999, 248).³³ And as Adorno observes, the juxtaposition is not only one of character but also of process. As if in response to the exposition’s formalist strictness, Mahler embarks here on the first development of his career that treats its materials “in an explicating way.” It is only in leaving the bucolic C2 behind, he writes, that “the movement truly begins as a story” (1992, 96).

Here we find one of the defining parallels between the present movement and the “classicist” Allegro of the Sixth: a development that casts off the exposition’s formalist attitude in favor of a discursive, episodic, and intensely “novelistic” unfolding. (This, again, contrasts with developments begin as clearly drawn exposition-variants, as in 3/I, 5/II, or 7/I.) Mahler emphasizes these procedural shifts with similarly stark textural and affective juxtapositions. In each, a strongly rooted major-mode cadential field (in 6/I, the F-major post-EEC aftermath; here, the G-major C2) is uprooted by a nightmarish vortex of dissociated P-theme materials. Furthermore, both developments begin with minor-mode representations of the major tonic that the symphony ultimately strives to attain, as if to mark the onset of some long-range primordial or existential conflict. The Sixth Symphony’s Allegro begins its development in the tonic A minor (which will be challenged unsuccessfully by its parallel, A major), while the present development sets out in E minor, the modal inverse of the luminous E major that closes

32. See de La Grange 1973, 815 and Zychowicz 2000, 13.

33. Bekker asks of the development “was it all only a dream, a fantastic hallucination?” [“War vielleicht das ganze Spukwesen, der Aufschwung, die Paradiesesvision—war dies alles nur Traum, fantastische Halluzination?”] (1969, 154).

"Das himmlische Leben" and the Fourth as a whole.³⁴ The purpose of the present development will be to overcome this E minor and its associated bell-world, in order to forge the leading motive of the song-finale from fragments of the exposition themes.

Despite its relative brevity (138 bars), this development poses unusual challenges to the would-be interpreter, as it brims over with an effusive, novelistic surfeit of seemingly new materials and themes. Figure 5.4 draws out the basic aspects of its underlying organization. The chart divides into two horizontal strata, each of which constitutes a single subrotation within a larger double-subrotational structure. The vertically divided box along the bottom charts the four plot points that define each rotation: (1) "Nightmare" topos; (2) P1 struggles to enter; (3) "Paradise" theme; and (4) Corruption/Disintegration. Notice that the basic modular design of the exposition is manifested here only at the deepest, most abstract level. The first rotational event corresponds loosely to P0, the second to P1, and the third to both TR and S. Neither C1 or C2 is represented, and the fourth rotational event ("Corruption/Disintegration") is an elisional space where elements of P filter in, preparing the next (sub)rotation.

The second point to note is that these four recycled "events" differ considerably in length from the first subrotation to the second and even cut across the rhetorical divisions of the musical stream into discrete "episodes." Brackets along the top of each subrotation divide the development into six such episodes, plus an aftermath/retransition.³⁵ While some of the mappings are straightforwardly one-to-one—Episode 2 onto Episode 6, for instance—others are not. Notice that where Episode 1 includes both of the first two rotation-defining events ("Nightmare Topos" and "P1 Struggles to Enter"), Mahler divides these between two episodes (nos. 4 and 5) in subrotation 2.

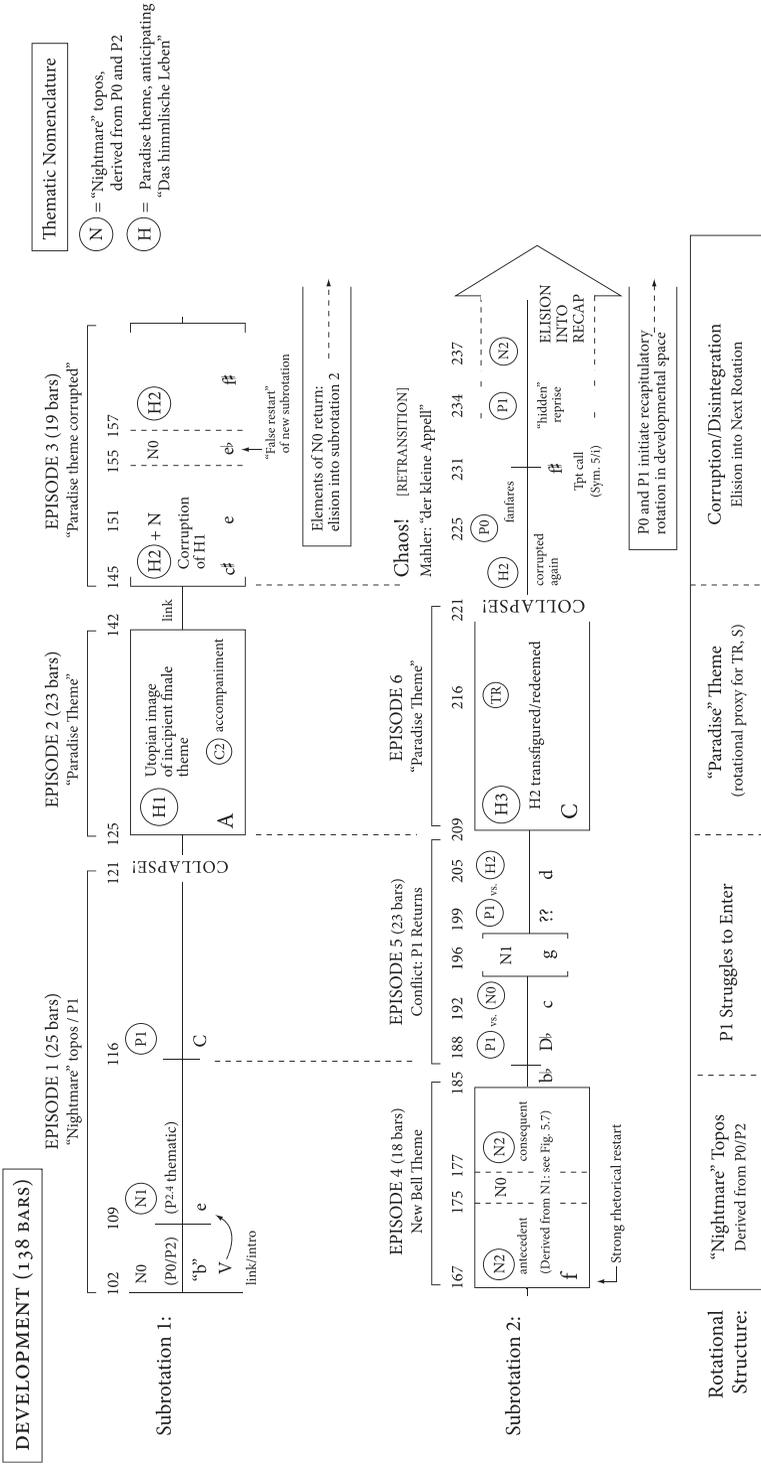
Figure 5.4 also features new thematic nomenclatures. In addition to P and TR, we see "N" and "H," each of them appearing in multiple versions (N1, N2, and so on). Here, "N" stands for "nightmare topos," a fusion of P0 and P2 that we will examine shortly, while "H" denotes the so-called paradise theme—the opening melody of the finale, which Mahler generates here in stages.³⁶ (The "H" stands for "himmlische Leben," P [for "paradise"] being unavailable.) The focal point of each subrotation is a major-mode presentation of this H-theme. These occur in

34. Most foreshadowings of the finale here will gravitate to G major, the key that *begins* the song. Mahler will strategically delay the appearance of its terminal E major until the end of the third movement. Some critics (e.g., Mitchell 1999b, 212) have heard the Fourth possessing a so-called double tonic of G and E. But I fail to see how the metaphor of an ontologically unitary "double" tonic is preferable to the simpler, traditional view that the starting and ending keys are simply *different* and thus differently freighted in their programmatic significance. On the general theoretical problems of Robert Bailey's "double tonic complex," see BaileyShea 2007, 193ff.

35. These episodes correspond Floros's (1993), except that the latter subdivides my Episode Three at m. 155 (the moment I call a "false restart").

36. "Paradise theme" is Floros's term (1993, 118). The present development draws much from that of 1/IV, in that P-based developmental episodes alternate with generative anticipations of the symphony's transcendent climax (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 5.4 Symphony no. 4/I, development



Episodes 2 and 6, and stand out as the only securely optimistic, tonally stable moments in a development that otherwise tends toward the macabre and dissociative. Thus each subrotation traces the same affective gestalt, from darkness into light and back again.

We begin with the starkly negative Episode 1. Here, the B-minor bell-music returns and, as before, gives way to a presentation of more properly thematic material. But this time, the bells do not yield to P. Instead, the bell-world *absorbs* elements of P in order to unfold its own diabolical *ersatz* primary theme. (Whatever partition had kept the bells "outside" and the sonata "inside" has clearly been annulled.) As the annotated short score shows, the opening bell-field is woven through with fragments of P2 (mm. 103, 106–8), which are suffused with a new, spectral character. This is our first glimpse of the "nightmare topos" (N) that will dominate the development. Materially, N derives equally from P0 and P2. But P2, at least as we once knew it, is not a genuine thematic presence here: it is merely dismantled and used for parts, enabling the once static bell-music to unfold dynamically.

That dynamic unfolding begins with the bell-music's first functional-harmonic accomplishment. Twice before (mm. 4, 77), the frozen B-minor vamp thawed innocuously into G major. Here, it resolves emphatically to E minor (m. 110), realizing a "dominant" potential only latent in its first two appearances.³⁷ This E minor provides the springboard for a new thematic impulse, fused from fragments of P2: N1, whose initiatory function mirrors that of P1 in the exposition. But Mahler makes it plain to hear that N1 does not merely substitute for P1, but actively suppresses it—that in Hepokoski and Darcy's terms, N1 truly "composes over" its rotational correlate. First, there are the parodic echoes of P1 itself: the glibly symmetrical phrase-groupings, the "naïve" pizzicato accompaniment outlining tonic and dominant. More important is the conflict Mahler stages only moments later, in m. 116. There, P1 moves effortfully to reenter but is quickly repelled: its lithe string melody is beset by wind-choir iterations of N1 (m. 117), and after a few flailing moments the entire texture collapses (m. 121), concluding the episode. This momentary conflict is decisive, as it recasts the previously unperturbed P1 as an agent whose very existence is at stake. Unable to effect the background/foreground reversal Knapp hears in mm. 3–4 (1999, 235)—powerless to normalize itself and the sunlit world of the exposition—P1 remains an "intruder." (The road back from this marginalization will span the rest of the movement, since it is only in the coda that P1 fully reestablishes itself as an unchallenged presence.)

In this surreal world, discontinuity quickly becomes the norm. And as Episode 1 collapses, both N and P1 are swept aside to make way for a new, luminous idea (m. 125): the celebrated A-major "Paradise theme" (H1), a merry tune sounded by four unison flutes (Adorno's famous "dream ocarina" [1992, 53]) over a murmuring bed of C2-based string figures. Here Mahler offers a more concrete vision of the musical hereafter. Figures 5.5e and 5.5f

37. Cf. Sponheuer 1978, 209 and Mitchell 1999b, 212.

Figure 5.5 Genesis of H1 (“paradise theme”)

5.5a PENTATONIC MASTER CELL
 Musical notation showing a pentatonic scale: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Labeled M9.

5.5b (C2) First appearance, in P1 cadential gesture
 Musical notation showing a cadential gesture: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Labeled 20.

5.5c (TR) 5.5c
 Musical notation showing the first appearance of the H1 theme: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Labeled 32.

5.5d (S1) 5.5d
 Musical notation showing the development of the H1 theme: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Labeled 38.

5.5e (H1) 5.5e
 Musical notation showing the development of the H1 theme: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Labeled 127.

5.5f “Das himmlische Leben” (Movement IV) 5.5f
 Musical notation showing the H1 theme in the context of the piece: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Labeled 3.

DEVELOPMENT, EPISODE 2

compare H1 and the actual "himmlische Leben" theme, showing strong material correspondences: the analytic beams show an identical scale-degree framework, and the black wedges highlight the repeated-note motive common to both.

Adorno cites H1 as a decisive early instance of Mahler's novelistic approach, on the grounds that the introduction of seemingly new material mid-development offends the principle of symphonic economy (1992, 71). But this apparent newness only makes the theme's hidden material derivation more compelling. And as Figure 5.5 shows, that derivation is long and complex, involving successive permutations of a basic pentatonic "master cell" derived from "Das himmlische Leben" (compare Figures 5.5a and 5.5f). First, we see from Figures 5.5c and 5.5e that the scale-degree skeleton of H1—which outlines the master cell in its entirety—is strongly foreshadowed in the head-motive of TR. In turn, Figure 5.5b traces this skeleton to the germinal cell of C2, first improvised as an accompaniment to P1 in bar 20.³⁸ The black wedges in Figures 5.5d and 5.5e show another important derivational branch: the characteristic repeated notes of H1 originate in the opening module of S1 (which itself outlines an incomplete master cell). Thus while the Paradise theme undoubtedly points forward in the overall narrative, it distinctly echoes much that has come before—S1 most clearly, but also TR. Accordingly, Figure 5.4 proposes that H1, like the later H3, serves as a rotational proxy for S and (to a lesser extent) TR.

Before moving on, we might pause to ask why the H-themes should be heard as "proxies" for S. First, such a hearing helps to correct what would otherwise be a striking deviation from Mahler's standard practice: the apparent omission of the S from the development.³⁹ (TR, by contrast, is not omitted; it will appear in Episode 6.) Second, it allows for a more satisfying integration of the local and transsymphonic plots. Investing too literally in the conceit of a "self-contained" development—one with no prehistory and whose sole purpose is to generate the finale theme—prevents us from hearing the ways in which the development carries the sonata's rotational processes forward at a deeper level. By understanding the Paradise themes to be materially derived from S (and as occurring in rotational zones ostensibly allocated to S-material), we can hear the Paradise narrative emerging from the sonata (rather than arising *ex nihilo* in its midst), giving the latter a more purposive role in the execution of the symphonic whole.

Finally, by imagining the Paradise theme as a Utopian transformation of S that also freely intermingles elements of TR, we tease out another plot device common to this movement and its classical successor, the Allegro of the Sixth. Previously, I noted that each of these movements pits a tightly

38. It can be traced even earlier than that. Mitchell shows that this same skeleton underlies the "Herald" theme of Mahler's *Third* Symphony—the palimpsest of a time when "Das himmlische Leben" was still intended as that work's finale (1995, 313).

39. All of Mahler's two-part expositions lead to developments that present S at least once. The only borderline case is I/IV; see Chapter 1, Figure 1.4.

Figure 5.6 Symphonies nos. 4/I and 6/I, simplified rhetorical/thematic layout of development sections

| CENTRAL RHETORICAL/DRAMATIC OPPOSITION | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Sym no. 4/I (subrotation 1) | m. 102 [bell-world] | m. 125 ["paradise"] | m. 145 |
| Sym no. 4/I (subrotation 2) | m. 167 [bell-world] | m. 209 ["paradise"] | m. 221 |
| Sym no. 6/I | m. 123 [march-world] | m. 196 ["fantasyscape"] | m. 251 |
| | P0 / P Elements of P destabilized, dissociated, brought into "world" of introduction [P0] "NIGHTMARE" | TR / S Elements of TR and S intermingled and/or fused "UTOPIA" | Combinatorial Space: Elements of P and S, with P eliding into next rotation → "CHAOS / CONFLICT" |

constructed exposition against an intensely "novelistic" or "improvisational" development. In so doing, each development reduces its multisectional exposition to a single rhetorical dualism. In 6/I, the exposition delineates three distinct thematic zones (P/TR/S) but organizes its development around the more basic opposition of the march world of P (mm. 123–95) and the Alpine fantasyscape that includes both TR and S (mm. 196–250).⁴⁰ Mahler then ends the developmental rotation with a zone that intermingles elements of P, TR, and S2, and which elides directly into the next (in this case recapitulatory) rotation (mm. 251–85).

The bottom layer of Figure 5.6 offers a simplified view of that development as three rhetorical/thematic zones: a P-zone; a TR/S-zone; and a "combinatorial space" that elides into the P that begins the next rotation, but which is not predominated by any single thematic character. (The main "rhetorical/dramatic" opposition falls between the *first* two juxtaposed zones.) The diagram's top two layers analyze the present development, showing that each subrotation conforms broadly to this schema: the essential duality is that of bell-world versus paradise, with the "combinatorial spaces" corresponding to the "corruption/disintegration" phases of Figure 5.4.

The first of these combinatorial zones arrives when Episode 3 (m. 142) hurls us back into the bell-world, where the paradise theme will now be disfigured and dismembered. Here we encounter H2 (m. 148), a twisted bass-register variant of H1, accompanied by Episode 1's "nightmare" figures. Figure 5.4 shows the episode dividing into three parts. The outer sections (mm. 145–54, 157–66) present

40. See Chapter 4, Figures 4.2 and 4.11.

H2 at various pitch levels and with increasing fragmentation. (The theme's three-note "severed head" is held grotesquely aloft at mm. 150, 153, 154, *et passim*.) The middle section (mm. 155–56) is only retrospectively "interior": it begins as an apparent restart of the N0 topic from Episode 1, only to dissolve back into the "corrupted paradise" music.

The bell topos returns securely only at the onset of the second subrotation (m. 167), where a new theme, N2, launches Episode 4. Once again, we see Mahler's thematic techniques to be richer and more diverse than Adorno predicts. For while the various "Paradise" themes arise as gestalt-based "variant" transformations, the bell-based themes (N1, N2, N3) are made from concatenations of previously nonadjacent motives. (At last, Stein's "shufflings"!)

Here, Mahler assembles N2 from assorted components of N1, as shown in Figure 5.7. He also incorporates debris from the liquidated H2, with the end of the antecedent phrase (mm. 174–75) recycling several fragments heard in mm. 165–66.

Figure 5.4 shows that the large self-contained period of Episode 4 corresponds rotationally to the *first half* of Episode 1. That episode's second half, the ill-fated reappearance of P1, is now recast as a longer and more protracted struggle, forming the whole of Episode 5. Once more, the incorruptible P1 tries to stabilize a major tonality (m. 188) but is harried by fragments of the nightmare topos (mm. 190, 192ff.) and eventually shouted down by an oversized tutti restatement of N1

Figure 5.7 Derivation of new bell theme (N2) from N1

From N1 (Episode One)

The figure illustrates the derivation of a new bell theme (N2) from an earlier theme (N1). It consists of three main musical excerpts:

- Top Staff:** [Clar/Bells] starting at measure 103, marked *p*. A box highlights a specific rhythmic and melodic motif.
- Middle Staff:** [Horn] starting at measure 110, marked *f*. A box highlights a triplet motif. Dotted lines connect this motif to the new theme N2.
- Bottom Staff:** [Flutes] starting at measure 167, marked *p*. A circled "N2" and a boxed "13" indicate the onset of the new theme. This staff shows the new theme N2, which is a concatenation of motifs from the previous excerpts. Below it, other instruments like [Clar], [Harp/Oboe], and [Horn] are shown playing accompaniment.

(m. 196).⁴¹ By m. 200, the music reaches a stalemate. Fragments of H2 reappear—the “severed head” now awkwardly reattached to the body (mm. 201–2)—while P1 repeats its reentry strategy, meeting sustained resistance from N0/N1.⁴² This time, however, the floor drops away: Mahler withdraws P1’s characteristic eighth-note accompaniment—the earlier music’s metric/harmonic glue—giving this second pass a more pointillistic and vertiginous character.

But from this miasma of ghostly fragments there congeals a sudden elevating impulse, and the music delivers us without warning into the uplands of C major (m. 209) and the threshold of Episode 6—a “noisily cheerful” field (Adorno 1992, 54) that Mitchell hears as the “apotheosis” of the movement’s “calculated naivety” (1999b, 211). Motives from the nightmare world, illumined and transfigured, meld into a glittering tutti texture that underscores the final terrestrial incarnation of the Paradise theme, H3, sung resplendently here by the F trumpet (m. 212) and set in counterpoint against TR.⁴³

At this climactic moment, the origins of the Paradise theme in S1 are at last resoundingly audible. Figure 5.8 shows the derivation of H3 from H2, H1, and ultimately S1—all four themes being related by their three-note headmotive. Look first at H2 (5.8d). Though in context it tends to sound like a corruption of the immediately preceding H1, H2 is more directly formed from the rhythmic gestalt of S1 (5.8a) and the melodic contour of P^{2.6} in its dissonant “nightmare” configuration (5.8b). As Figure 5.8e shows, H3 brings all of these strands together. For the apotheosis, Mahler projects the scale-degree skeleton of H1 onto the S1-derived rhythmic gestalt of H2, producing a form that is the closest yet to the “himmlische Leben” theme (5.8f). The result also offers a compelling twist on Hepokoski’s dictum that “even in the development, thematic references [to S] should be heard as recalling what their past function was and what their future role is ‘destined’ to be” (2002, 134). At this lofty elevation, where the sightlines are clearest both ahead and behind, we can distantly perceive the theme’s “past function” as an exponent of the sonata drama, but also its “future role” as the crowning theme of the multimovement structure.⁴⁴

And yet this single figure embodies these past and future functions only tensely, since the “future role” to which the S-materials would normally point would be *within* the sonata—specifically the projected ESC—and not beyond it entirely. Mahler’s transmutation of S is so thoroughgoing that it raises the question—at least in a musical world where such teleological transformations seem to be “irreversible” (de La Grange 1995, 763)—of how S might plausibly rejoin any rhetorically functional recapitulation. Utopian transformations of S-materials are of course a

41. De la Grange points out similarities between this music and the main theme of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto no. 4, mvt. I (1997, 150); Mahler himself seemed to have noticed this resemblance after the fact (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 153). One wonders whether the present movement’s abrupt juxtaposition of B and G as prospective opening tonics (mm. 1–4) was borrowed from the same concerto.

42. Mm. 200–206 roughly track mm. 188–93.

43. The TR-headmotive appears in mm. 212–13 and 216–17 but is orchestrated almost inaudibly.

44. That the whole passage occurs over a dominant pedal reinforces the sense that the music speaks in the “future tense,” anticipating some secure arrival to come.

the bell-motive's open fifths now soured into tritones (m. 225). But as Knapp observes, a new presence enters as well: a funereal trumpet call, conjuring the specter of death.⁴⁵ Gradually and with effort, the fanfare unfolds a black presentiment of the Fifth Symphony's funeral march: from a single note (m. 225), it expands to a third (m. 228), finally realizing complete triads in mm. 231–32. It is the last of these—a shard of muted F# minor—that proves to be the “intolerable” image, the one that prompts the musical consciousness to jolt itself awake.

And yet the shift of consciousness is not itself instantaneous. Mahler leads us graphically through the twilight space of partial wakefulness, with a transition that he himself found especially “artful” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 183): the much-celebrated “hidden” recapitulation onset. As countless writers have pointed out, P1 begins, protracted and only partly audible, while the bell topos is still unraveling (mm. 234–38). When, after a general pause, the recapitulation proper begins (m. 239), all that remains of P1 is its final two bars, which reinstall the tonic with a non-sequitur PAC comically out of proportion to the preceding turmoil. With this gesture, the musical subject, after so many nocturnal adventures, dusts itself off hastily, straightens its garb, and rejoins the plebeian world of G major.

Before rejoining that G major ourselves, we might look back to say a few words about the development's tonal narrative. In 6/I (Chapter 4), we saw a tonal plot tightly woven into the broader interpretation. Its development presented only a few keys, each of them bearing a specific semantic or narrative function. Here Mahler repels any such hermeneutic tidiness. Turning back to Figure 5.4, we see that the present development passes through no fewer than twelve tonalities: three major (C, D \flat , A) and nine minor (c, d, e \flat , e, f, f \sharp , g, b \flat , b),⁴⁶ most of them appearing only once, thus omitting the kind of strategic repetitions and recursions that make Mahler's tonal plots “readable” in the first place. Of these twelve, only four are strongly weighted: E and F minor (in Episodes 1 and 4), and A and C major (in Episodes 2 and 6). We already know that E minor is marked as the modal inverse of the symphony's concluding tonic. But the others offer little in the way of interpretive traction.

For an analytic approach whose ideal is the integration of tonal, formal, and thematic processes, the inability to make narrative sense of Mahler's key choices might feel like something of a failure. But the point here may not be the specific semantic function of individual keys, as it will be later in the Sixth. That this relatively brief development articulates more distinct tonal centers than all of 3/I—a musical span six times longer, and one celebrated for its “fearful” and “chaotic” heterogeneity (Adorno 1992, 78)⁴⁷—suggests that Mahler's aim here

45. Mahler's own comments are, admittedly, hard to square with Knapp's interpretation or my own. The trumpet call, which he playfully called “Der kleine Appell” (after the “grosse Appell” of the Second Symphony), was like a captain calling his confused and disordered troops back into formation and “orderly ranks” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 154).

46. Only G \sharp /A \flat is absent as a tonic pitch class.

47. Only two of Mahler's other sonatas present so seemingly chaotic an assemblage of key regions: 5/II and 8/I.

may be less one of plenitude than of calculated excess. As part of the development's pervasive "surreality" or "otherworldliness," he puts to use the sheer effect created by a dizzying profusion of tonal states. Tonalties appear as a series of unrepeatably phantasmagoric digressions, to contrast the exposition's back-and-forth travel within a well-worn tonic/dominant thoroughfare. Adorno would hear such unruly abundance as additional proof that a radically novelistic impulse has superseded the movement's opening formalism. And as we saw in 6/I, the recapitulation moves to reinstate that formalist bearing, though not without aftershocks from the development—proving again that "what happens must always take specific account of what happened before" (Adorno 1992, 52).

VII. Recapitulation/Coda: Terrestrial Ambivalence, Cosmic Affirmation

As Knapp would have it, the recapitulation proper begins with a bout of formal/thematic "disorientation" suggesting a consciousness just roused from sleep (1999, 249). At the moment that P sets its fairly strict reprise into motion, the paradise theme H3 enters as a spirited stretto addition to P2 (m. 240), suggesting that elements of dream and reality are not yet "firmly separated" (249). But while Knapp is right not to overlook (as many have) the incongruity of H3 here, I hear something more purposeful than a mere slippage or flashback.

As we reached the development's transcendent climax, I asked how so wayward a narrative—one that transformed the exposition's materials beyond recognition—could be reconciled with the sonata from which it emerged. Mahler's solution is to strike a precarious balance between recapitulatory strictness (of the sort seemingly forecast by the formalist Exposition 1) and a spinning-forward of two of the development's central narrative issues: the ascendance of H3 and the suppression of P1. Previously separate, these threads converge here when, as Stephan writes, the paradise theme steps into the role of a surrogate *Hauptgedanke* (1966, 16–17).⁴⁸ (As later in 4/III, the narrative focal point elevates the paradise theme above all others.) With this leap from dream-world to "reality," H3 embeds itself into the sonata, carrying its teleological genesis one ontological rank closer to transcendence—but not without an exacting a price. It can do so only because P1, suppressed now for a third time, remains unable to regain the initiatory function that it lost in the development. Once more, transsymphonic concerns preempt the normal business of the sonata. Where in the exposition we saw a contingency of process (with closure-mechanisms subordinated by tonic-major finale premonitions), here we see a contingency of *identity*. Subtly, the conventional symphonic "protagonist" is erased from the record, and in its place the newly minted paradise theme is installed.

48. "Die Reprise (T.239–339) gibt zu erkennen, was die Durchführung bewirkt hat: die Erhebung des Themas [X] bzw. [XI] zum Hauptgedanken des ganzen Satzes." Stephan's "X" and "XI" are my H2 and H3.

Mahler grants the ascendant paradise theme the first word in TR-space as well. Anachronistically and in offense of “all formal rules” (Adorno 1992, 54), the latter opens with a full-scale tonic-major reprise of Episode 6, the developmental “apotheosis” that introduced H3 just forty bars earlier (m. 251; Figure 5.1 shows this with a dotted arrow). Though the modular correspondence is exact, Mahler’s reorchestration brings the previously liminal TR-descant to the fore (m. 257; compare m. 216), so that before our ears an apparent flashback to the development changes into a clangorously oversized restatement of TR, unfolding now to its full length and bearing down on a triple-forte medial caesura (m. 262), the threshold of what Williamson suggestively calls the S-theme’s “triumphant homecoming” (1975, 77).⁴⁹

This is a hopeful moment for a sonata process that seems deprioritized, even unrecoverable. Having sacrificed S for the generation of the paradise theme—having yielded up its materiality for the sake of the transsymphonic whole—Mahler now rewards it with a complete and literal restatement in the tonic and the chance to fulfill its preordained function of ESC attainment.⁵⁰ The ubiquitous H3 makes no incursion, because in a sense it is “already here” in its incipient form.⁵¹ Impervious to recomposition and bent on discharging its generic task, S shows a new and palpable confidence. Previously subdued, it now sings its congenial tune in a sonorous, unfettered *fortissimo*, one whose sheer vitality entices us with the prospect of sonata successfully executed—the attainment of a terrestrial telos to parallel the heavenly one glimpsed earlier.

But Mahler’s macabre sense of humor ultimately prevails. Having now set a seemingly exact recapitulation on track, he takes that “exactitude” at face value, leading S off the same cliff as in the exposition and setting the listener up to fall for the same trick a second time. Once again, at the moment of expected ESC, the texture collapses, leaving the diminutive C1 to hold the floor (m. 283). Despite adding a poignant new countermelody (one that suggestively echoes P1 in mm. 290–91), Mahler aims for parity with the exposition, restaging the same “wandering off” *morendo* and bringing the bells in for a second subrotation, equivalent to Exposition 2 (mm. 295–98).

This recapitulatory fidelity leads to further troubles when the prevailing transposition by fifth extends to this interstitial bell-music. Now the bell-transition leads ominously into E minor (m. 298; compare B minor, m. 73), a key of no small symbolic and narrative import: it is both the dystopian antithesis of the symphony’s concluding E major and the tonality from which the nightmare topos

49. Uneasy about what he hears as a cut-and-paste repetition, Adorno grants Mahler a twofold exoneration: first, on the grounds that “a fanfare *cannot* be further developed, only repeated”; and second, under the premise that the sheer “irregularity” of the repetition evinces a nominalist bearing (1992, 54; emphasis added). Why he overlooks the striking differences of orchestration is unclear.

50. This is Mahler’s only literal, tonally normative S-theme recapitulation—a fact uniformly passed over in an analytical literature inclined to extol variation and ignore repetition.

51. Curiously, the opening of S (m. 263) now “rhymes” with those of the recomposed P2 (mm. 240–41) and TR (m. 253), since all three begin with the repeated quarter-note motive characteristic to that variant family.

originally crystallized (m. 109). It is also, unlike the ever-transient B minor, a key with staying power. In a striking replay of the development's opening, E minor quickly entrenches itself to unfold a full thematic presentation of N-materials—now the variant N3, shown in Figure 5.9. Momentarily, we might imagine that the recapitulation has broken off and given way to a developmentally congruent coda rotation of the sort Mahler used later in 6/I (see Figure 4.13). But the music's swift return to G major and the reprise of P2 (m. 311) show that the recapitulation is still in fact under way.⁵² The E-minor "nightmare" is merely a detour, one that exists solely to compose over P1, which would be slated to make its final appearance here (compare m. 77).⁵³

With the music of the development comes a creeping return of its generally surreal atmosphere. The suppression of P1 may be ominous, but the glibness with which the nightmare-music slips back into the cheerful P2 is bizarre, even unsettling. The sonata motors along, apparently indifferent to a growing list of structural/expressive problems—the unclosed S, the exiled P1—and it is at this point that the work's delicately sustained ambiguity threatens to collapse into total impenetrability. But it is not long before Mahler brings both of these threads to their respective resolutions.

Ultimately, S will go unconsummated; closure will come, but not in any way preordained by the sonata plot. Figure 5.1 shows that the final P2, like its expositional counterpart, passes through a tonic PAC onto the idyllic fields of C2 (m. 323; compare m. 91). As in the exposition, this terminal cadence provides long-range rhetorical closure that is problematic from the standpoint of the sonata itself. On the one hand, this PAC notionally compensates for the one withheld in S-space. (Because P1 was suppressed, it is actually the first and only cadence after the collapse of S.) On the other hand, though, it does so without correlating clearly to any of the sonata's generic thematic zones. It mimics an ESC, and yet its paradisiacal vision suggests, as I wrote earlier, that "true closure . . . is not endemic to this terrestrial genre at all."

I also asked if this would not be a deeply ambiguous moment from the perspective of the sonata plot, since by ending in the tonic, the exposition seems to neutralize the tonal tension that would make this otherwise emphatic closure truly conclusive or "essential" in the structural-dramatic sense. Perhaps, to paraphrase Adorno, the ambiguity at this point is still "deeply impregnated." But this hardly feels like an aporetic moment. The musical consciousness, already directed with rapt attention to the finale, hints that from a wider vantage such worldly concerns (like a sonata tidily executed and lacking loose ends) are but passing distractions.

52. Hefling (1997b, 401) and Knapp (1999, 250) read everything after m. 298 as coda. My reading, like those of Stephan (1966, 18), Floros (1993, 118) and Adorno (1992, 96), places the coda at m. 339.

53. Here we glimpse a teleological precision typical of Mahler's narrative designs: the same agent that divested P1 of its initiatory function at the development's opening is also the one that returns here to ensure that it is never regained.

Figure 5.9 Recapitulation: “nightmare” interpolation (N3)

(N2) *End of antecedent*

[Ob] 173

[Vla]

p2.6

(N2) *End of consequent*

[Basses/Contrabassen]

185

p2.7 (segment)

p0.3

[Vc] 226

From “kleine Appel” disintegration field

(N3)

298

[Flute]

[Vln]

pp

sempre pp

[Flutes/Sleighbells]

[pizz]

[Vln]

[Vc] ppp

[pizz]

f

[pizz]

f

In culminating the narrative of P1, Mahler reinforces this central trope—the sonata that is contingent, ephemeral within the Fourth Symphony's musical cosmology—in an especially illustrative way. As before, C2 (m. 323) unfolds a single, poignantly protracted harmonic motion from tonic to dominant and back. But now Mahler effects a broad temporal and tessitural expansion, lingering on the dominant for four full bars to accommodate the violins' rapt ascent from D₅ to D₇ (mm. 326–29). As the luminous dissonance of m. 330 resolves—at the very crowning moment of the movement's bliss—the second violins gently usher in none other than the headmotive of the long-beleaguered P1, with echoes resounding in the oboe and horn (mm. 331, 333).

If C2 is indeed a window for glimpsing the hereafter, Mahler allows us to see that P1, though beset and defeated in the sonata's earthly sphere, has found its eternal repose. Thus, by guiding P1 into safe harbor, he encodes the movement with a message that is deeply relevant to the work's eschatological program and which inscribes its metaphysical assurances into the musical narrative. The sonata has been plagued by procedural defects—it has "failed" according to the (by now ill-fitted) generic criteria—and its principal character has been unseated and suppressed. And yet as the curtain falls, all seems to be well. The sonata ends by pronouncing the very assurances to which Adorno's ears had grown incurably deaf.

And yet the curtain does not stay down for long. Mahler forbears, allowing P1 to take center stage one last time. The contrast of closing strategies with the final movement is striking. The latter ends in unsettling self-contradiction: a promise of joyful "awakening" wafts over music that relaxes into lullaby and falls asleep. The present movement permits no such ambiguity. In place of a narcoleptic *morendo* there is a hearty evocation of cyclical rebirth and renewal. As the last strains of C2 die away—as the vision of the heavenly life dissipates—Mahler grants P1 a final terrestrial romp (m. 340), at last unchecked by the bells. Timid at first (pulling aside the curtain, its three-note anacrusis asks "is it safe?"), the theme quickly gains momentum, launching a coda whose manic *stringendo* telescopes a full thematic rotation into nine whirlwind bars.⁵⁴ Once P1 locks onto the subdominant in m. 341, the music rapidly cycles through elements of P2 (m. 342), TR (m. 346), and S1/H3 (m. 346, beat 3), driving to a giddy *fortissimo* conclusion. Years after completing the Fourth, Mahler would come to believe in reincarnation, a process of purification taking many lives to complete.⁵⁵ With the aural image of a transfigured P1 still lingering, it is easy to hear the theme being "reborn" here in the coda—suffused with youthful vigor and unburdened of the trials endured in its past existence.

54. Adorno explains this appearance of P1 as a compensation for its omission in the development (1992, 96), but fails to mention that P1 had also just appeared in C2-space.

55. "We all return," he declared to Richard Specht. "Life only has meaning through this certainty" (1925, 73; cited in Franklin 1991, 107n48; see also de La Grange 1999, 930–31). Chapter 6 argues that these themes of death and rebirth are latent already in Mahler's eclectic pantheism of the 1890s and manifested in 3/I.

How different this optimistic hearing is from Adorno's, in which the music bleakly "cancel[s] itself out," its happy ending both a historically archaic "caricaturing convention" and a defense mechanism against the self-recognition of falsehood—that, looking back, nothing thus said was "true" (1992, 57). For Adorno, so frivolous an ending must be a blithe denial of all that came before; at best, the music's giddiness merely serves to distract a guilty conscience. And yet it is worth noting that Adorno *could* have granted the music its affirmative amplitude here without relinquishing his pessimistic hearing of the finale. In that case the Fourth Symphony would become a triumph-to-tragedy narrative in the manner of the Sixth—a story of "fool's bells" that are initially overcome, but which return in the end to undo the symphony's reassuring mythology.

I, however, am content to allow the coda to end on a flippant, lighthearted, or (as it were) *childish* note. Several times in this chapter, I pointed to parallels between the present movement and the symphonic totality: the exposition mirroring the sonata movement as a whole, the development prefiguring the scherzo, and the recapitulation anticipating aspects of the slow movement. These were only casual comparisons, but in the spirit of completion (and not without a mischievous note of my own) I am compelled to hear the coda, in its frivolity and even regression, encapsulating the defining aspect of the Fourth Symphony's finale. In a word, this glib final paragraph allows us to hear the opening movement aspiring to—and ultimately achieving—a state of innocence, just like the symphonic whole. Thus, we find again that in the strange world of the Fourth Symphony (a work that was even composed "in reverse"!) moving forward amounts to moving backward. If there is a conceptual core to the work, one that binds program and process, compositional means and eschatological ends, it is this—that conceptual journeys forward can only be made by way of paradoxical retrogrades. For just as the Fourth crystallizes its strikingly modernist vision from archaic fragments, so Mahler's vision of life after death makes ascension to the next, higher state tantamount to regression into a past one.

PART III

Mahler's "Epic" Sonatas

CHAPTER SIX

“The Objectification of Chaos”

Epic Form and Narrative Multiplicity in Part One of the Third

The eternally new and changing content determines its own form.

—Gustav Mahler on his Third Symphony (1895)¹

I. The Novel-Symphony Marches In

Works of art sometimes surprise even their creators. Wearied of endless laboring on his *Ring*, Wagner famously set out to write something “simple,” performable, and commercially viable—and turned out *Tristan und Isolde* instead.² In the summer of 1895, Mahler found himself in a similar situation, at the helm of a piece that was turning out rather differently than planned. Returning to his newly built composing cottage at Steinbach am Attersee, the composer had hoped, after the “seriousness” and “weightiness” of his first two symphonies, merely to “relax” with his Third (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 63). But like Wagner before him, Mahler let his guard down only to find the core elements of his style asserting themselves all the more intensely. Even as one who had repeatedly stressed the impenetrability of the creative process, the composer was taken aback by the fruits of his labor. By the following summer, he would declare: “Real horror seizes me when I see where it is leading, the path the music must follow, and that it fell upon me to be the bearer of this gigantic work. . . . I am driven to it against my will. . . . It sweeps me along irresistibly . . . there’s no escaping it!” (61, 63).

The movement that so unsettled Mahler was the work’s “incomprehensibly vast” (63) and scandalously heterogeneous “Part One,” his longest symphonic opening at nearly nine-hundred bars. Even as he put it to paper, Mahler feared the worst. The work, if it could be performed at all, was fated for condemnation and misunderstanding; he himself would be dismissed as a “crackpot” (64). As it happened,

1. Bauer-Lechner 1980, 40.

2. In an 1854 letter to Liszt, Wagner envisioned *Tristan* as “simple” but “full-blooded” (Millington 1992, 300). Thirty months later, the music still uncomposed, he was still aiming for a “practicable” and, ultimately, lucrative work (1857 letter to Liszt; cited in Wapnewski 1992, 71).

reactions to the Third Symphony were mixed; though a "resounding success" with audiences at its 1902 premier and after, the work met with "hostility and personal denunciation" from most critics (Franklin 1991, 27–28).³ Apprehension about the opening movement continued well into the century, with an advocate as staunch as Deryck Cooke writing it off as a "total failure" (1960, 15).⁴

For Adorno, however, Part One of the Third was a watershed. It inspired, perhaps single-handedly, nearly all of the core themes discussed in Chapter 2: the "novelistic" repudiation of preformed wholes, the variant technique, the transfiguration of banal materials, and the entire emancipatory project that reenvisions music as a "procession of the liberated" (1998b, 97), freed from the tautologies of top-down construction. The only familiar Adornian leitmotiv with no place here is that of Mahler's dialectical engagement with the past. This is no coincidence: Adorno's mythology grants this movement a spontaneity and freedom unparalleled in Mahler's oeuvre and indeed all of Western music.⁵ This, Adorno believed, was the unprecedented and epiphanous realization of true bottom-up construction, an "unfettered" improvisation of "primeval" proportions, one that recognized "no structure beyond the configuration of the characteristic" (1992, 77–78 and 49).

For Adorno, such "complicity with chaos" made the Third an unrepeatable experiment (77). To move forward, Mahler would have to "confront" the historical forms he'd so brazenly cast off. But here, at least, his thematic impulses face no resistance from the pre-formed schemata of tradition. For much of the work, scrappy battalions of rough-hewn characters trample one another in a surge so anarchic that "form itself," Adorno writes, becomes "something both fearful and monstrous" (78).

In some respects, Adorno used the Third as a lens for viewing Mahler's entire corpus. When he writes about "novelistic" construction—especially in the middle-period works—we can be sure that this movement, the very wellspring of his "epic ideal" (101), lurks in the background. So of this chapter's main objectives, our first and most important is to explore how this movement bears out Adorno's related visions of novelistic form and variant-based narrative coherence in its broadest process and finest details alike. That said, I am also interested in the status of this symphonic opening movement *as a sonata*—a concern that puts me at odds with Adorno, for whom the work's sonata scheme was but an inconsequential "husk" (77). Finally, my reading entails a thoroughgoing reappraisal of how Mahler's unruly bundle of paratexts and poetic images might be brought to bear on a process-based analytic reading.

3. See also de La Grange for a discussion of the premier (1995, 527–32) and for an extended report on the first Viennese performance (1999, 68–76).

4. Cooke later scaled this back to "original" and "flabbergasting" (1988, 64).

5. The only rival to this status was the opening of the Ninth, which Adorno lauded as the "absolute novel-symphony" (1992, 157). We might understand these two movements as the crucial pillars of his Mahler mythos, the Third Symphony's "exultantly barbarous" (77–78) demolition of the old music complementing the Ninth's more sophisticated "initiat[ion]" of the New Music (157). Significantly, the other great triumvir of Adorno's Mahler-image, 6/IV, did *not* embody this kind of "unfettered" construction. Rather, it represented an exercise of "inexorable" integration in the "Beethovenian" tradition (79, 97); see Chapter 7.

As Adorno points out, Mahler compensates for the suppression of so many familiar sonata-form signifiers (contrasting subjects, thematic development, retransitional rhetoric, and so on) by shifting the music's logic to a variant form operative on many levels at once. Together, these registers of transformed repetition serve a double purpose: while providing a rich substrate for narrative effects and constructions of "novelistic" temporality, they also allow the music to "take on form and inaugurate . . . autonomous connections within itself" without overtly indexing ready-made schemata (Adorno 1992, 83).

To be sure, this increased reliance on variant-based logic marks only a difference in degree from the other movements that I examine here. But we can also speak of a significant difference in kind. Like a number of Mahler's sonata movements, the opening of the Third features recurring slow-introductory zones best understood as falling outside "sonata space." In the present movement, as later in 6/IV, these interstices grow so enormous that they rival the sonata itself in terms of size and complexity. The effect is that the sonata, disposed in discontinuous chunks, is reduced to a string of episodes embedded in a more broadly conceived formal design. But where the Sixth Symphony's distended introductory zones serve to expand and ramify the central sonata plot, those of the Third unfold a narrative only tangentially related to that of the sonata, one that is organized around different processes and bent on different goals. Though it is possible to consider the movement from the "top down," as a single, radically engorged sonata plot (and at points I shall), it is by no means obligatory. I am equally interested in a "bottom-up" hearing, one that consummates Adorno's image of novelistic construction by hearing the sonata as only one plot strand among many. Indeed, a central concern here will be to explore the tensions between these two ("top-down"/"bottom-up") conceptions—not to prefer one over the other, but rather to shed light on their "aporetic," disharmonious coexistence (Adorno 1992, 49).

I approach the movement in stages. Section II reviews the symphony's well-known programmatic elements, while Sections III and IV both deal with questions of large-scale form. It is in the second of these that I confront the work as a sonata, proposing my own reading only after a careful look at past analytic traditions. Sections V and VI then trace the narratives woven through the sonata and introductory spaces, respectively—the first of these being a "narrative of integration," the second a "narrative of emergence." Finally, Section VII proposes an interpretive framework that neutralizes some of the often-cited tensions between Mahler's linear "evolutionary" narrative and the music's manifestly cyclical organization.

II. Mahler's "Programmatic" Conception

It should hardly surprise that the Third Symphony is often discussed in terms of superlatives. It is, after all, the longest and most internally varied work of a

composer whose very calling cards were extreme length and heterogeneity. It is also Mahler's most comprehensively programmatic. In contrast to the first two symphonies, whose programs were formulated mainly as afterthoughts, a flexible "programmatic" theme of cosmological diversity informed even the earliest stages of Mahler's planning and evolved with the work as it came into being. Since the symphony's deeper philosophical foundations and protracted genesis are treated extensively in several full-length studies (see Solvik 1992 and Franklin 1991), a brief summary here should suffice.

From the outset, Mahler's vision was a suite of movements "as infinite in variety as the world itself," with each reflecting a distinct "order . . . of being."⁶ As composition progressed, this cosmological program came into increasingly sharper focus. In the earliest stages, Mahler's vision was an epic seven-movement structure culminating in the *Wunderhorn* song "Das himmlische Leben," written three years prior. By the time the work's torso was drafted, he had settled on six movements, titled to reflect an ascent through the ontological hierarchy, from stony, barren nature, through flora, fauna, man, angels, and ultimately the "liberating resolution" of transcendent love (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 64)⁷:

PART ONE:

Introduction ("Pan Awakens")

I. Summer Marches In (Bacchic Procession)

PART TWO:

II. What the flowers in the meadow tell me (Menuett)

III. What the animals in the forest tell me (Rondeau)

IV. What man tells me (Alto solo)

V. What the angels tell me (Women's chorus with alto solo)

VI. What love tells me (Adagio)⁸

By the end of his 1895 holiday, Mahler had finished the eclectic, multisectional "Part Two." What remained—and what would occupy him for most of the following summer—was the immense "Part One," an introduction called "Pan Awakens" followed by the main section, "Summer Marches In."⁹ Unlike the character pieces that followed, this opening movement did not reflect a single "order of being." Rather, it encapsulated the ontological ascent of Part Two within itself. Mahler imagined it

6. Bauer-Lechner 1980, 64; letter to Friedrich Löhr, 27 August 1895 (cited in Mitchell 1995, 189).

7. "Das himmlische Leben" ultimately found a home in the Fourth Symphony (1900); see Chapter 5.

8. Titles taken from the program notes to the Berlin performance of the second movement (by itself) on 30 November 1896. At this point the work was still tentatively titled "A Summer Morning's Dream" (Franklin 1991, 24) and not yet divided into two "Parts" [*Abteilungen*].

9. "Summer Marches In" had been Mahler's original name for the entire movement, as per his summer 1895 title lists. It was only during composition, in 1896, that he came to find the opening section warranted a different name, which he found on 28 June (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 60).

depicting the ascendance of teeming summer life—everything that “grows and flowers, creeps and flies, thinks and yearns”—in its triumph over the “soulless, petrified matter” of its introduction.¹⁰

Supplementing these colorful movement titles are a generous helping of quirky score inscriptions (“The battle begins!”, “Pan sleeps!”, and so forth) and a wealth of personal correspondences laying bare Mahler’s creative agenda. (His conversations with Natalie Bauer-Lechner, already cited, are extensive and revealing.) Nevertheless, it is critical to recognize that these assorted paratexts stand only in a loose relationship to the music and to one another; they are not tokens of an analytically reconstructable “program” in the strict sense. Their value lies in the insights they offer into Mahler’s compositional process, in that they document (with unusual richness and detail) the philosophical/poetic themes that preoccupied him during the work’s composition and which helped him to make sense of it afterward. As Franklin writes, Mahler’s “cryptic titles and descriptions were intended to aid the imaginatively reliant listener in the creation of his own explanatory program” (1991, 19). They offer a point of hermeneutic departure and a set of regulating ideas, but not a through-composed story that maps directly onto the musical trace.

That Mahler himself was inconsistent about certain aspects of these “programmatic” supplements hardly detracts from their relevance. Like the equally flexible supplements to the Second, their connection to the score is mainly impressionistic; they make no objective claims about the music and can therefore be neither corroborated nor invalidated by it. Adorno was predictably dismissive of their trivializing potential, incorporating elements of them only sparingly and abstractly, as when he declares that “the literary idea of the great god Pan has invaded the sense of form” (1992, 78). I am more inclined to bring them on board to the fullest extent possible. My analysis is frequently in dialogue with Mahler’s central poetic themes—particularly the emergence of life and the ascension of higher forms over lower ones—which prove invaluable aids when attempting to untangle the music’s thematic/formal processes.¹¹

III. Conceptualizing the Form (I): A Generative Overview

For all its imagination and metaphoric breadth, Adorno’s image of this movement’s form rests upon a “generative” conception of structure quite conventional for its time. By imagining the piece to unfold spontaneously, according to the dictates of

10. Letter to Friedrich Löhr, 27 August 1895 (Martner, ed. 1979, 164–65); Bauer-Lechner 1980, 59.

11. Thus my aim runs counter to that of Vera Micznik, who rejects Mahler’s paratexts as too problematic to serve as reliable narrative cues. We should instead, she argues, look to the topical successions in the music itself. But she repeatedly overstates the misalignment of these domains—insisting, for instance, that Mahler’s program fails to account for the presence of a funeral march in mm. 27–57 (2005, 313). But what could be a *more* appropriate vehicle for depicting “lifeless, rigid nature” (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 59) than a generic musical emblem of death, frozen in a single key?

its eclectic materials and without deference to prefabricated forms, Adorno places himself in a mainstream tradition going back to the generation of the composer and his contemporaries. For Richard Specht, the movement was original enough in its conception to "refuse comparison" with "any other symphonic creation," even despite its echoes of traditional form (1913, 248).¹² During its composition, Mahler himself saw the Third breaking with tradition entirely: its "eternally new and changing content," he insisted, "determines its own form," to the point where calling the work a symphony at all would be "inaccurate" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 40).¹³

That said, most analysts are ultimately compelled, like Specht, to derive the work from some deeply embedded sonata scheme. Viewed as a group, these sonata-form readings are strikingly inconsistent, showing little consensus on even the most fundamental questions of sectional division and thematic identity. Before delving into these controversies, however, it will be helpful to draft a sonata-neutral map of the movement's broad design and material content. So, ironically, I begin with my own "generative" assessment, starting from what Adorno called the raw "facts of experience" (1992, 62). Where applicable, I use the programmatic inscriptions of Mahler's score, which offer convenient handles for nearly all of the prominent theme groups and also help to spotlight key stations in Mahler's evolutionary allegory.

Figure 6.1 provides a simplified overview of the work's basic materials and their distribution: at the top, 6.1a presents symbols representing the movement's four basic material zones; below, 6.1b shows the arrangement of these materials within the work's broad tri-rotational structure. The movement breaks down into nested sets of rhetorical oppositions. At the broadest level, it is organized around the contrast between the caesura-riven musical prose of the introduction ("Pan Awakens") and the surging *perpetuum mobile* of "Summer Marches In." But as Figure 6.1a shows, Mahler organizes each of these sound worlds around its own pair of contrasting materials: "Pan Awakens" opposes rhetorical/programmatic representations of "death" and "life" (shown with gray and white circles); and "Summer Marches In" opposes "low" and "high" march topics (indicated with gray and white squares).

To acquaint ourselves with these basic materials, let us first examine how Mahler uses them to build a broad musical/programmatic story spanning all of Rotation One. In Figure 6.1b, the topmost brackets divide the rotation into the two basic "sound worlds" just discussed. These, however, are preceded by a self-contained exordium that Mahler called the *Weckruf* (shown here with a bold "W")—a

12. "So leicht [der erste Satz] wieder auf die Grundformel der Mahlerschen symphonischen Anfangssätze zu bringen ist—Einleitung, erster Teil, doppelte Durchführung, . . . Reprise und breiter Epilog—so sehr verwehrt das Wesen, der wilde Humor, die ganze turbulente, von hohen und burlesken Gestalten erfüllte Traumwelt dieses Kolossalmarsches jeden Vergleich mit irgendwelcher anderen Schöpfung der Symphonik."

13. And yet a year later, after completing Part One, he marveled: "without my having planned it, this movement . . . has the same scaffolding, the same basic ground plan that you'll find in the works of Mozart" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 66). This *ex post facto* recognition of architectural parity with the classics finds striking parallels in Adorno's hearing, in which the movement arises spontaneously, without reference to a "preconceived totality" (1992, 62), but then attains "architectonic" qualities only "retrospectively" (80).

riveting eight-horn declamation of the movement's leading theme (mm. 1–11) that quickly fades into a gloomy stillness (mm. 11–22) punctuated by what Mahler called “mystical presentiments” of the symphony's fourth movement (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 64).

Figure 6.1. Symphony no. 3/I, simplified overview

6.1a. Distribution: Rotational/Subrotational Design

INTRODUCTION: “PAN AWAKENS!”

“Captive life struggling for release from lifeless, rigid Nature”



= Funeral March/Arioso (“Death”)
“Soulless, petrified matter...Inarticulate sounds”



= Pan/Herald Complex (“Life”)
“Life gradually breaks through”

MOVEMENT PROPER: “SUMMER MARCHES IN”

“The most sublime cheerfulness prevails, an eternally radiant day”

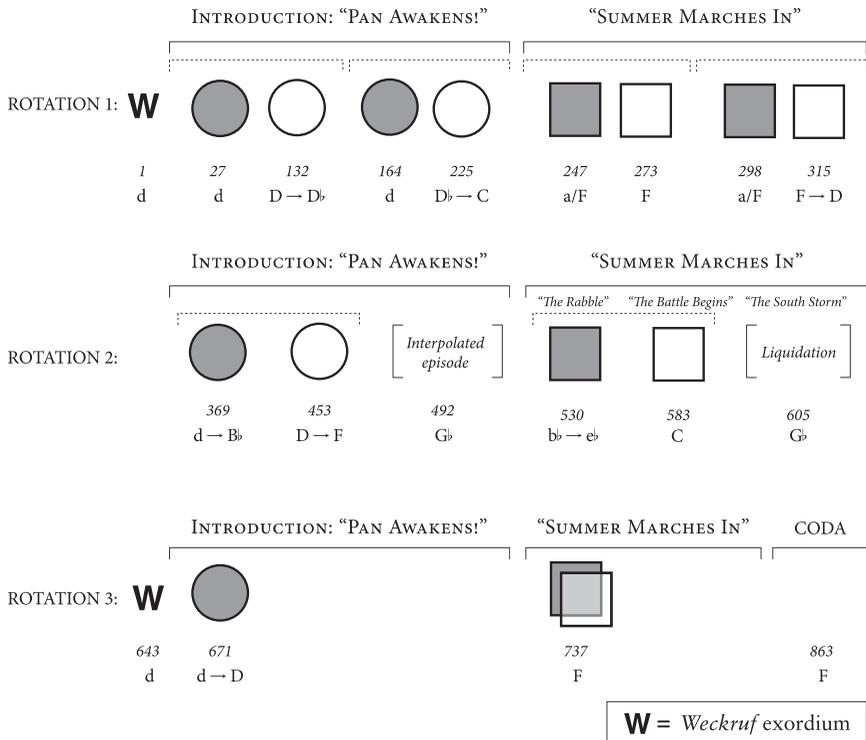


= Herald Marches (“Low”)



= Pan/Weckruf Marches (“High”)

6.1b. The Four Basic Material Zones (all quotations are Mahler's, from Bauer-Lechner 1980)



The *Weckruf* deposits us at the base of the ontological hierarchy, in the "primeval landscape" of the introduction proper (Franklin 1991, 84); Figures 6.1a and 6.1b indicate these regions with gray circles. Here we encounter the stuff of the world in its basest state, only "soulless, petrified matter" and "inarticulate sounds" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 59). The zero point itself is a leaden funeral march (m. 23), one that in its inertia "almost ceases," Mahler said, "to be music at all" (59). But it is not long before this barren landscape is cleaved by more dynamic impulses—blistering "ariosos" for unison horns (m. 58) and later solo trumpet (m. 83).

And yet in the rifts between the ariosos' craggy faces we glimpse the primordial stirrings of life, in two musical characters that will flourish when summer arrives: a lyrical theme that Mahler labeled "Pan Sleeps!" (m. 132) and a fanfare he called "The Herald!" (m. 148).¹⁴ These critical points, Mahler's vision of "captive life struggling for release" (59), appear as white circles in Figure 6.1b.

The introduction cycles through these contrasting materials twice, creating two internal subrotations beginning at mm. 27 and 164 (indicated by dashed brackets in Figure 6.1b). The next section, the entrance of summer, is built similarly, in that two contrasting ideas are again disposed in two parallel subrotations (mm. 247, 298). Figure 6.1a shows that the contrasting elements are both marches this time: a "lower" stratum of dynamically recessive, tonally ambiguous themes (the "Herald Marches," named after the latter's omnipresent grace-note figure); and a "higher" stratum of extroverted, tonally focused marches, based on transformations of the *Weckruf* and "Pan" themes.

It is important to note that "high" and "low" are strictly relative terms here. Ultimately, almost all of the movement's music is conspicuously "low," from the crassly hyperbolic funeral marches to the spectacularly plebeian *Bacchuszug*. "Nowhere," Adorno writes, "does Mahler less rigorously censor the banal" (1992, 79); nowhere does he so lewdly thumb his nose at the pious post-Wagnerian orthodoxy. The raucous "summer" marches—especially those following the break into a full-throated *fortissimo* at m. 315—are touchstones for Adorno's image of Mahler as culture-critic whose music "promises victory to the losers" (2002b, 617). This egalitarian pastiche gives pride of place to the very uncultured musics whose exclusion was a point of self-definition for the hallowed post-Beethovenian symphony. Equally critical here is Mahler's simultaneous withdrawal of *himself* as the autobiographic/authoritarian "composing subject" of the earlier symphonies.¹⁵ Absent any central organizing voice, the movement is left to speak an intensely ironized jumble of dialects and vernaculars. More renegade even than its failure to be "great music" at the acoustic surface is the work's refusal to implicate a "great composer" pulling the strings.¹⁶

14. These and other score inscriptions are compiled by Floros (1993, 94).

15. In contrast to the first two symphonies, which "reveal" his own life "transparently" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 30), Mahler insisted that the Third had "nothing to do with the struggles of an individual" (letter to Ludwig Schiedermair, cited in Franklin 1991, 27).

16. This reading harmonizes nicely with Julian Johnson's image of the Third as a developmental arc that begins with eclectic, even chaotic heteroglossia and culminates, six movements later, in the

And yet this assault on the “proud values of culture” (Adorno 1992, 56) is anything but gratuitous. By grounding the work in these ungainly, coarse musics, Mahler allows the symphony to undertake a *stylistic* evolution that parallels the ontological one of the program. That is to say, he deploys this banality as a counterpole to the closing Adagio’s rapt hymnody, making the road to transcendence also one of stylistic de-ironization and purification. Of course, for the time being the music remains confined in the terrestrial sphere, meaning that the long dramatic arc cultivated in Mahler’s earlier symphonies finds no transcendent outlet. As a whole, Rotation One merely trades one kind of banality for another, culminating in a delirious lowbrow spectacle capped by a massive PAC at m. 362.

As Figure 6.1b indicates, Rotations Two and Three each trace this same basic trajectory: twice more, the inert “Pan Awakens” music gives way to the more vital “summer” marches. But while this broad, rotation-defining contrast is preserved, the *subrotational* layout of Rotation One gradually dissolves. In Rotation Two, Mahler presents each of the four material groups only once, yielding two single subrotations.¹⁷ (Each subrotation gives way to an interpolated G \flat -major episode: mm. 492, 605.) In the last rotation the subrotational design breaks down entirely: the ariosos (m. 671) proceed directly into the “summer” music, bypassing the Pan/Herald complex, while the summer music itself interleaves the “high” and “low” marches into a single continuous procession (hence the imbricated squares at m. 737).

IV. Conceptualizing the Form (II): The Movement as a Sonata

Though it simplifies a great deal, Figure 6.1 offers a reasonably accurate sense of how the movement is built. But how this overcrammed tripartite structure amounts to a *sonata* has been subject to much debate. We can trace much of the disagreement over the movement’s form to a single crucial question: *is the recurring introductory section—the “Pan Awakens” music—part of the sonata or not?* On this point, we can see two broad interpretive traditions and two complementary analytic paradigms, shown in Figure 6.2a. The first, what I call an “embedded sonata” reading (Type A), distinguishes the introductory sections from the sonata sections proper. The second, the “coextensive sonata” reading (Type B), hears the movement unfolding a large, through-composed sonata *without* autonomous introductions, typically with the funeral march and arioso sections composing a large P-group, and the remaining materials (Pan, The Herald, the *Weckruf* marches, and so on) combining to form S. Thus, both types are

hard-won attainment of a “unified and ‘authentic’ voice” (2009, 107; see also 249 and 253–54). For more on the desubjectification of Mahler’s music in general, see Monelle 2000.

17. Figure 6.1b also shows the quasi-programmatic titles Mahler added to the individual sections of the second half of Rotation Two.

organized around the same rhetorical opposition, that of the minor-mode arioso music and the various major-mode marches. The difference is how they interpret it. The first views the opposition as one of sonata versus non-sonata materials, the second as P versus S; the one passes in and out of "sonata space," while the other remains inside throughout.

Within each broad type, one encounters a number of subtypes. I show five of these in Figure 6.2b, with the main sectional divisions tabulated in the leftmost column. (Solid horizontal lines show the breaks between rotations, while dashed lines show each rotation's main internal subdivision.) At the far left we find Type A1, the "strong" expression of the embedded-sonata viewpoint—meaning those analyses that distinguish explicitly between the introductory spaces and the sonata zones. I have included Type A2—the "weak" version of the same—to account for the many readings that recognize a delayed-onset exposition but which equivocate (or fail to comment) about the sonata status of the subsequent introductions. The variation between the coextensive-sonata subtypes (B1, B2, B3) are more dramatic; types B2 and B3, for instance, show a nearly *four-hundred* bar difference in where they place the development. These discrepancies are partly a consequence of assigning the arioso music proper sonata-thematic status (as "P"). Because the ariosos appear four times in total—once more than the number of main sonata sections—the analyst must choose either to have some kind of "double exposition" (Types B1 and B2) or a "double development" (Type B3). Figure 6.3 shows these subtypes as realized in earlier analyses.

Remarkably, scholars have had little to say about these striking disparities. In perusing the literature, one is hard pressed even to find an acknowledgment that there *are* two interpretive traditions, let alone reflection on how one might choose between them.¹⁸ For me, this sort of casual indifference hints at a broader distrust of formal interpretation in general, a suspicion that the kinds of distinctions I make here are merely terminological and perhaps unworthy of debate. Naturally, I disagree: if one accepts that form can be a leading source of musical meaning, a more circumspect approach is in order, since these different formal perspectives lead to virtually incompatible images of the movement.

The most crucial differences between these paradigms are those of sonata plot. As Figure 6.4 shows, an embedded-sonata reading yields a more or less normative tonal trajectory. After a long off-tonic introduction (m. 23), the exposition begins in F major (m. 247) and modulates to the secondary key D major for the EEC (m. 362). (With no distinction between P and S, we have a so-called "continuous" exposition.)¹⁹ In turn, the recapitulation effects a conventional tonal resolution, transposing the EEC-attaining music to the tonic (m. 846). By contrast, the coextensive-sonata readings tend to effect a large background/foreground reversal of key functions: with the

18. Specht (1916, 3) and Danuser (1975, 91ff.) are both sensitive to the movement's special formal/interpretive challenges. Among recent analyses, only William M. Marvin's (2009) adequately confronts this division between paradigms, though he comes to different conclusions from my own.

19. Though Darcy (2001b) is the first to apply this term, the principle is implicated in most embedded-sonata analyses, since they uniformly avoid P/S demarcations.

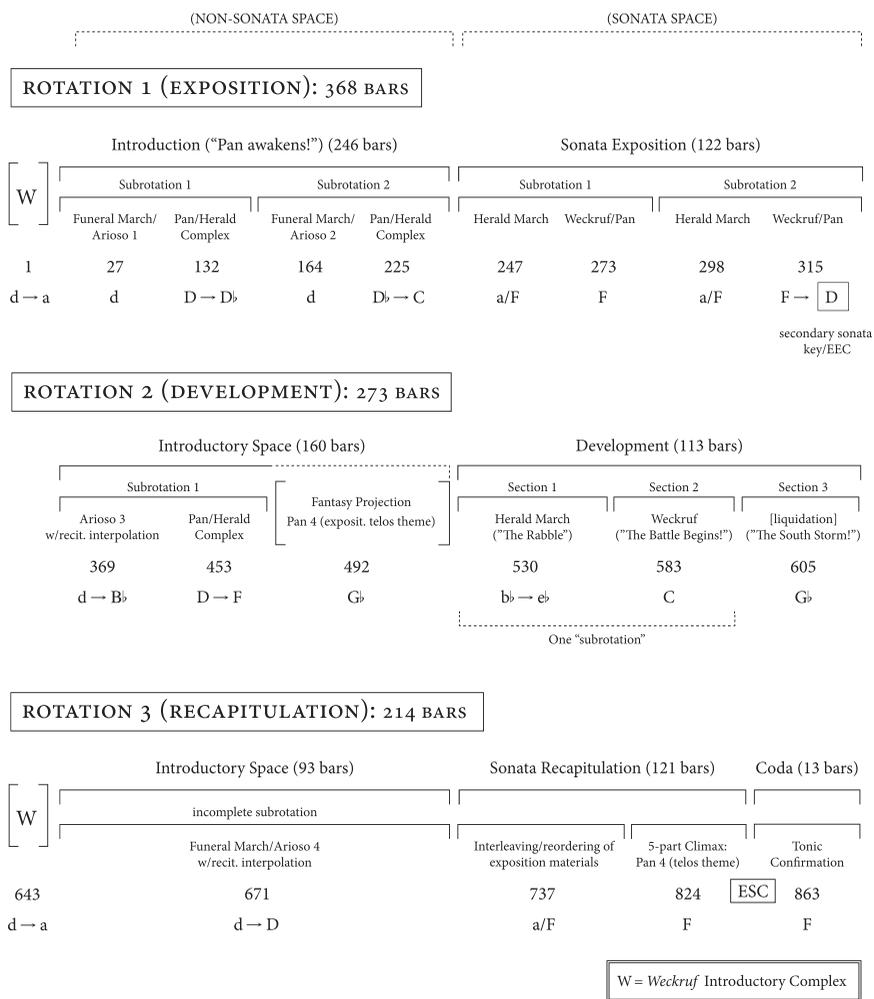
Figure 6.3 (Continued)

| Bars | TYPE 2a See also Solvik (1992) | | TYPE 2b See also Stephan (1920) | TYPE 2c |
|---------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Marvin (2009) | Kaplan (2005) | de La Grange (1973) | Micznik (2005) |
| 1–26 | EXPOSITION (I) Weckruf (S!) | EXPOSITION (I) Weckruf | EXPOSITION (I) Weckruf | EXPOSITION A |
| 27–131 | P | Group 1 | A (recitative) | B |
| 132–147 | S | Group 2 | B | C |
| 148–163 | | | | |
| 164–224 | EXPOSITION (II) P | EXPOSITION (II) Group 1 | A | B |
| 225–236 | S | Group 2 | B | C |
| 237–246 | | | | |
| 247–272 | ↓ | | ↓ | ↓ |
| 273–297 | | | | |
| 298–314 | | 351ff. “Closing” | | |
| 315–368 | | 362ff. “Transition” | | |
| 369–452 | DEVELOPMENT P | DEVELOPMENT | EXPOSITION (II) A (recitative) | B |
| 453–462 | S | | [transition] | C |
| 463–491 | | | | ↓ |
| 492–529 | [Fantasy Projection] | | B | |
| 530–582 | | | DEVELOPMENT | |
| 583–604 | S | | B-group | ↓ |
| 605–642 | ↓ | | | |
| 643–670 | RECAPITULATION Weckruf | RECAPITULATION | RECAPITULATION Weckruf | RECAPITULATION A |
| 671–736 | P | Group 1 | A (recitative) | B |
| 737–799 | S | Group 2 | B | C |
| 800–862 | | | | |
| 863–875 | Coda | | Coda | Coda |

power, providing an image of the movement that is truer to Mahler’s intentions, more persuasively aligned with his broad sonata grammar, and richer with inter-textual connections.

The first reason to prefer the embedded sonata model is that it is supported by Mahler’s own paratexts. Not only does the 1896 manuscript plainly call mm. 1–246 an “Einleitung,” but it also refers to the Third as a “Symphony in *F major*” (Franklin 1991, 78; emphasis added). Though the title page would eventually bear the D-minor tonic of its introduction, it seems unlikely that Mahler would ever

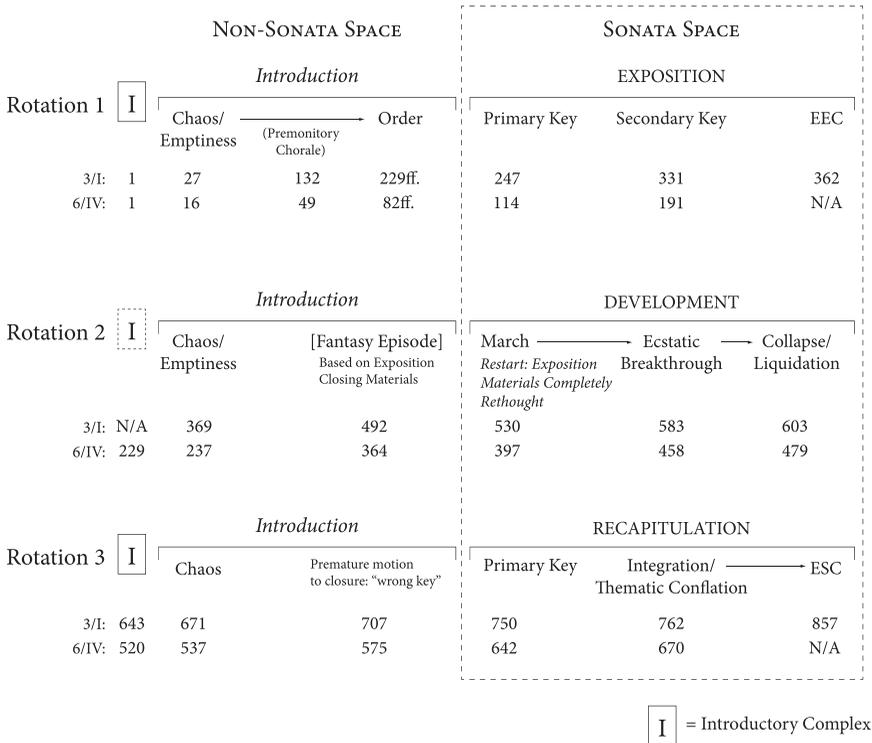
Figure 6.4 Symphony no. 3/I, interpreted as "embedded sonata"



have chosen to name the *entire symphony* after the key of its first movement's secondary theme. Second, the embedded-sonata model aligns more closely with Mahler's wider sonata-form praxis. Recurring, off-tonic introductory spaces are a staple of his style, appearing in 1/I, 4/I, 6/IV, and 7/I. By contrast, the coextensive model's wholly off-tonic recapitulation/coda is entirely anomalous, from both structural and expressive standpoints. There is no other instance of a Mahlerian sonata-form coda that ends off-tonic.²¹ And as Chapter 1 explained, it

21. Mahler often recapitulates S outside of the home key (see 2/I, 5/II, 6/I, and 7/I) but always reinstates tonic for the closing zone and coda. And while it is true that 1/IV begins and ends in different keys, it is not the *sonata itself* that ends off tonic. See Chapter 1.

Figure 6.5 Basic schema, “epic” plot type



would be unlike Mahler to enact so glaring a recapitulatory failure without some affective perturbation on the musical surface; at this point in his career, the movement’s ending is just too unabashedly affirmative to follow an unqualified, unre-mediated structural malfunction.

The embedded-sonata model also draws out a number of intertextual links between the Third and symphonies written both before and after. For instance, it helps to clarify that the Seventh Symphony’s tremolando-backed brass ariosos are not just texturally but also *functionally* derived from the present movement, since both appear recurring, off-tonic introductory zones.²² Deeper and more substantial are the connections with 1/I, discussed in Chapter 1, Section VI. Most profound of all are features that 3/I shares with its “epic” sibling, 6/IV. Figure 6.5 shows the basic outlines of the epic plot type, with bar numbers included to correlate critical points of similarity. (Readers may wish to return to this figure at various points in Chapter 7.) The plot type’s defining features are easy to see at a glance: a broad embedded-sonata format, with recurring rotation-initiating “introductory complexes” (here indicated by an enclosed “I”).²³

22. See 7/I, mm. 1ff. and 338ff. A near-quotation of 3/I occurs at m. 346.

23. Adorno (1992, 79) and Specht (1916, 3) both hint at the close kinship of these movements.

Finally, we must weigh how the two interpretive paradigms model the sonata's theme types. As Figure 6.3 shows, coextensive-sonata readings (Type B) tend to hear the D-minor funeral marches and ariosos as P and the rest of the materials (the Pan chorale, the "Herald," the various up-tempo marches) as an eclectic, multisectional S. By contrast, the embedded sonata makes no such distinction; its sonata spaces feature no separately delineated or contrasting S-theme. And again, the latter reading brings us into closer accord with the Mahler's general practice, since nothing in the movement actually sounds or behaves like one of his S-themes.

Consider first the issue of affect and character. Neither of Mahler's paradigmatic S-theme types—the yearning, lyrical S of the *Wunderhorn* symphonies or the surging, intoxicated S of 6/I and 7/I—is present here. There is also the matter of presentation. Before the Eighth, Mahler's expositional S-themes tend to confine themselves to a single orchestral texture and feature a dominant and recognizable incipit for the purposes of later transformations. The promiscuously inclusive "S" of the coextensive-sonata readings, which includes no fewer than a half-dozen themes and textures (see Figure 6.2b), diverges sharply from this otherwise ubiquitous paradigm. Most important of all, no theme or group of themes does what S is supposed to *do*—that is, to introduce the new key and secure (or try to secure) the EEC. All of the exposition's materials appear in the tonic F major before the secondary key D major even appears (m. 331). Such a desynchronization of thematic and tonal scripts is unheard of in the composer's two-part expositions; prior to 9/I and 10/I (which subvert Mahlerian precedent as a matter of course), S always coincides with the introduction of the secondary key.

This lack of an S-theme has far-reaching consequences. First and most obviously, it undermines the stark thematic dualism so central to Mahler's sonata style; the effect is that the sonata itself, as a dramatic schema, seems to pull back from the threshold of perception.²⁴ What Adorno calls the "disempowerment" of this particular sonata form—its loss of an a priori claim to the music's structure and subsequent relegation to the fringes of our awareness—surely stems from the elimination of this familiar rhetorical marker (1992, 95). In turn, this liberation from the "top-down" demands of the traditional schema helps to establish the sense of spontaneity and even fortuity that Adorno's reading celebrates.

Second, the omission of S bolsters Mahler's effort to desubjectify the Third, to steer it away from the autobiographic leanings of its predecessors. There are many ways in which a typical Mahlerian S-theme can be heard to carry subjective or agential qualities. Sonata Theory offers one, asking us to imagine S as the sonata drama's focal protagonist, directed toward certain key goals. That this paradigm fits so well with Mahler's music may stem from a more general location of the objective/subjective binary along thematic lines. As Chapter 1 argues, Mahler's

24. The lack of an S-theme is matched in some respects by the absence of an archetypal (up-tempo, tonally focused, and rhetorically assertive) Mahlerian P-theme as well.

P-zones can often be heard as situational, presenting a “world” in which the drama unfolds or, socially speaking, a kind of “collective” or “preindividual” presence. By contrast, his S-themes can suggest a musically embodied persona reacting to that world or negotiating with the demands of the social collective. Absent such an S-protagonist, the Third offers no individual voice to set the heterogeneous collective into relief.²⁵

V. A Narrative of Integration: The Sonata Itself

So far, we have pinned down some of the movement’s most characteristic features and established its basic narrative topography. Now it is time to look in greater detail at the stories that the movement actually tells. In this section and the next, I read each of these main event-spaces (i.e., the introductions and the sonata proper) unfolding its own distinct and largely autonomous narrative, organized around its own teleological processes and boasting its own principal themes and governing tonalities.

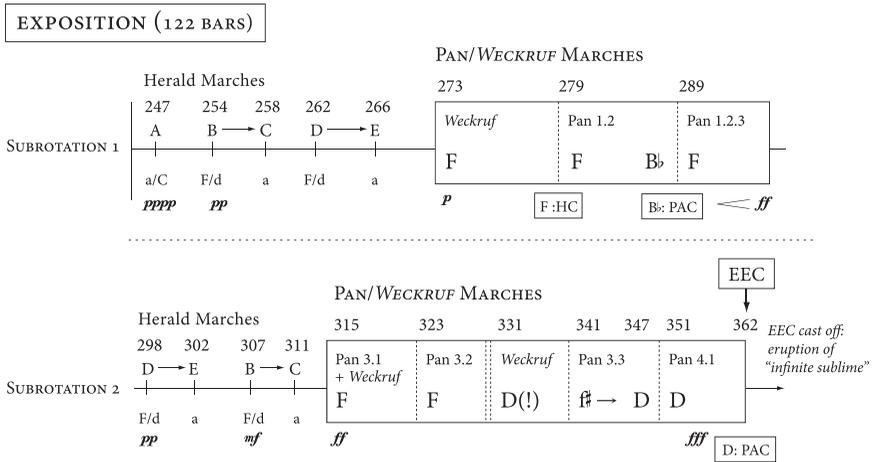
As mentioned earlier, critics have often heard the many rough-hewn marches that gather in the movement’s sonata-spaces embodying a collective, communal, or even “socialist” spirit. As Franklin writes, Mahler “dispenses with the manners of ‘good’ bourgeois music and . . . throws the doors of the concert-hall open to village bands and those rough ‘children of Nature,’ whose purpose . . . is to rout the repressive Philistines” (1991, 83). The *Weckruf*, in particular, has spurred such socialist hearings, given its often-cited resemblance to various political songs and student anthems.²⁶ But the movement’s egalitarian impulse goes far beyond the mere inclusion of various lowbrow musics. Rather, we shall see in its sonata spaces a narrative that actually *dramatizes* the dissolution of social spheres. Over vast symphonic expanses, and driven by what Specht called a “highly productive combinatorial force” [*produktivster kombinatorischer Kraft*] (1905, 38; cited in Micznik 2005, 299), the movement gradually entwines its “high” and “low” march-strands into a single, cooperative musical impulse.

This integration narrative is best grasped in two distinct stages. As the exposition unfolds, Mahler will first fuse the two “high” marches into a single,

25. See Johnson 2009 (225ff.) on the “collective” or “processional” qualities of marches, along with their potential for generic opposition to lyrical, individuated subjectivity; see also Adorno 1998b, 99 and Danuser 1975, 110. (“Preindividual” [*vorindividuell*] is Danuser’s term.) In this regard, 3/I stands opposed to 1/I—which, being completely song- rather than march-based, indulges subjectivity at the expense of objectivity rather than vice versa. As Knapp writes, the song-protagonist’s adolescent awareness is so acutely self-directed that in his “oblivious cheerfulness” he perceives the natural world merely as an “extension” of himself (2003, 169).

26. The most often cited are “Ich hab mich ergeben mit Herz und Hand” (Adorno 1992, 78) and “Wir hatten gebaut ein staatliches Haus” (Franklin 1991, 81). The *Weckruf*’s resemblance to the finale of Brahms’s First Symphony is also plain to hear. See Micznik 2005, 311–12 and Johnson 2009, 247–48 for insightful discussions.

Figure 6.6 Symphony no. 3/I, exposition proper



banner-carrying "telos theme." Then, across the development and recapitulation, he will show the opposition, conflict, and ultimate desegregation of these "high" and "low" spheres.

Let us start by looking at the high and low marches themselves. Figure 6.6 shows the exposition in detail. Boxed areas within each subrotation indicate the "high" themes; what precedes are the Herald marches, labeled with letters A through E. As hinted earlier, the high/low duality is rooted deeply in the marches' basic tonal, timbral, and dynamic characteristics. Tonally, the Herald marches tend to be nebulous and unstable. They fall into two broad tonal types: Marches A (m. 247), C (m. 258), and E (m. 266) crystallize A minor in varying shades of stability, with March A being notably weaker than its successors.²⁷ By contrast, Marches B (m. 254) and D (m. 262) conjure the phantom of F major but quickly dissipate into a vague D minor. Thus, in their paradigmatic ordering, the marches project a diatonic field whose tonal center drifts repeated by falling thirds (a→F→d). By contrast, the more sharply etched *Weckruf* and Pan Marches (m. 273) effect an instantaneous tonal and timbral clarification, installing F as an unambiguous tonic and dispelling the murky counterpoint in favor of a clear melody/accompaniment texture (replete with marching tonic/dominant bass). Their ascension offers a vivid realization of Mahler's explanatory master-trope, that of "higher form[s] overcoming the lower" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 76).

The high marches also mark a shift from static to dynamic musical processes. Despite keeping the low marches in a state of constant superficial

27. Adorno's non-reconciliation of part and whole is realized here on a molecular level, with C major and A minor—realized by the winds and strings, respectively—appearing as an unforced, non-integrative simultaneity.

alteration, Mahler conveys nevertheless that they are rhetorically frozen, never adjusting their tonal orientations or rhythmic gestalts. Lacking the thematic presence to undergo meaningful variant-transformation, the Herald marches are not “characters” in the normal Adornian sense. Rather, they create a surging background force—an entropic, self-shuffling torrent of march-modules—that serves to foreground the exposition’s higher, more developed themes. On nature’s path “from stiff materiality to the greatest articulation,”²⁸ they are only an intermediate stage.

Not surprisingly, most of the expositional work falls to the high marches. This “work” consists of two tasks—one generic, one specific. Generically, the exposition must establish and close in the secondary key, D major. Normally, this would fall to a dedicated secondary theme. But here it is the *Weckruf* that steps forward to announce this new stage in the evolving tonal plot (m. 331). This is no coincidence: by now we have come to know the *Weckruf* as an evolutionary instigator, the agent whose every appearance moves the music to a more advanced state.²⁹

The more “specific” task of the high marches is to furnish the music’s logic and continuity through their ongoing and purposeful evolution. When Adorno describes Mahler’s variants as “gestalts with mobile motivic content,” as “nuclei” that do not merely change at each “retelling” but also “intermingle,” he might well have had these protean themes in mind (1992, 88). Throughout the movement, Mahler transforms and retransforms them unceasingly; in the first rotation these mutations enact the exposition’s central thematic process: the fusion of Pan and the *Weckruf* into a composite entity, the “telos theme” Pan 4 (m. 459).

Figure 6.7 traces the process in detail, showing many (though not all!) of Pan’s successive incarnations. Figures 6.7a, b, and c show the theme’s first three appearances, all within introductory space. Its most enduring characteristic—one that long outlives the dissolution of the original tune—appears in the *second* two variants (6.7b and c): the linear/structural descent from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{3}$, in two related forms. (Both forms emphasize the fourth-span from $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{3}$. The difference lies in the bridging element between $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{6}$ —which is either $\hat{5}$ [6.7b], creating parallel fourth-spans, or a linear passing $\hat{7}$ [6.7c].) The last of these, Pan 1.2 (6.7c), is the model for the exposition’s first statement (m. 279).³⁰

Figures 6.7d, e, and f show later expositional variants, tracing the theme’s rhythmic expansion (6.7d) and subsequent combination with the *Weckruf* (6.7e), whose rhythmic features it absorbs, producing a new gestalt. For the culminating

28. Undated letter to Ludwig Schiedermair, cited in Franklin 1991, 27.

29. As Figure 6.6 shows, it single-handedly introduces and stabilizes both principal sonata keys; later turns in the narrative also coincide with the *Weckruf*’s appearance. And these are all but local reflections of the theme’s first and most important function, that of bringing the work’s musical cosmos into existence from nothing.

30. When referring to “Pan” melodies, I use full-sized (i.e., rather than superscripted) decimal-divided numbers. Melodies that share a single pre-decimal integer (e.g., “Pan 1.1,” “Pan 1.2,” etc.) are closely related variants; those with different primary integers (e.g., “Pan 1.1,” “Pan 3.1,” etc.) are more pervasive transformations.

Figure 6.7 Progressive formation of "telos theme" Pan 4

6.7a Pan 1.1* 136 Basic "Pan" shape first proposed

6.7b Pan 2.1 140 Rhythmic gestalt-based variant introduces structural descent from 1 to 3, organized as two linear fourth-spans

6.7c Pan 1.2 229 Original Pan shape absorbs structural 1 → 3 descent, reorganized to emphasize 1 → 7 → 6 span

6.7d Pan 1.2.3 289 (778) Pan 1.2 reorganized rhythmically into 1 + 1 + 2 bar format

6.7e Pan 3.1* 315 Denatured Pan 1.2.3-variant combined with Weckruf, absorbs the latter's rhythmic gestalt

Major-mode Weckruf

6.7f Pan 3.2* 323 Variant of Pan 3.1, contour and rhythm adjusted

6.7g Pan 4.1 351 Final variant combines exact rhythmic gestalt of Pan 3.2 with the linear frameworks of both Pan 2.1 and Pan 1.2

from Pan 2.1

from Pan 1.2

statement (Pan 4; Figure 6.7g), Mahler reunites this new hybrid gestalt with the scale-degree framework of the earlier versions, producing a variant that echoes various stages of its own history simultaneously—its outer form being a product of recent events and its inner one a remnant of its nascent, pre-expositional existence.³¹ Pan 4—the “telos theme” mentioned earlier—offers up a massive D-major EEC in m. 362, one whose near-immediate negation I consider in Section VII.

The development presents the exposition’s contrasts in a distinctly different light. Once an innocuous background element, the “low” marches are reconstituted here as an unruly mob, their relation to the “high” elements now one of conflict and requiring resolution. Returning to Figure 6.4, we see that development-space proper consists of one broad subrotation, comprising two colorfully named episodes: “The Rabble” [*Das Gesindel*] (m. 539) and “The Battle Begins!” [*Der Schlacht Beginnt!*] (m. 583). Before the melee erupts, though, Mahler makes a point to set the newly formed telos theme in a safe location, out of harm’s way. (Pan will have little to do in the upcoming conflict; the more muscular *Weckruf* will alone serve as the “high” marches’ theme-at-arms.) In a twilight region between introductory- and sonata-spaces (m. 492), Pan 4 reappears, shorn of its march elements, as a shimmering, incorporeal “fantasy projection” (Darcy 2001b) or dream-recollection of the exposition (Danuser 1975, 103). But the fantasy is short-lived. In what Danuser calls the movement’s “negative climax” [*negativer Höhepunkt*] (100), the once triumphal telos theme becomes diffuse and increasingly limp, and from various sectors of the orchestra the rabble begins to gather (mm. 522–28), quickly aggregating to a lumbering B \flat -minor tutti in m. 530.

Thus begins the “Rabble” episode proper, as an orderly (if ungainly) unison presentation of Herald March A. But as Adorno writes, the veneer of civility quickly fades, as this would-be fugue subject grows overlong and eventually “attaches itself in a most un-fuguelike manner to a single note” (m. 538), “duping” those who would expect a “well-bred” contrapuntal answer (1992, 79). What follows is a far more potent, even “savage” outburst of this “anti-civilizational impulse” (51). Lashing the music forward, the once naturalistic “Herald” turn-figure now mingles with a coarse, “stomping” octave-bass and bawdy outbursts of the “fugue” subject, which becomes the Rabble’s rallying cry (mm. 544, 547). All the same, the rabble’s newly invigorated “low” marches betray many of their former liabilities. As in the exposition, they are tonally unstable and melodically amorphous, with snippets of discernibly “thematic” material only occasionally audible above the fray (e.g., mm. 548, 550–51). Phrase lengths, too, are erratic, the masses audibly tripping over themselves in the forward surge (mm. 544–48).³²

31. And as Danuser astutely points out, this culminating moment also marks a textural return to the unison, echoing even earlier events—the initial *Weckruf* and subsequent *arioso* passages (1975, 96).

32. To intensify their primordial savagery, Mahler laces the Rabble marches with echoes of the introductory *Ariosos*—materials that are otherwise foreign to sonata space. See, e.g., mm. 541, 554.

It is only when the *Weckruf* reenters in m. 583—under the inscription “The Battle Begins!”—that the phrase groups and tonality stabilize. Curiously, Mahler’s “battle” is more of an armistice, since it marks the end of hostilities rather than their onset. If there is a conflict to speak of, it is actually in the buildup to this decisive moment. Around m. 561, the rabble march begins to recycle its own materials wholesale, suggesting a state of arrested development (compare mm. 561–64 and 548–51). At m. 565 a new figure appears: the “battle fanfare,” the *Weckruf*’s trusty “forerunner” [*Wegberierterin*] (Danuser 1975, 99).³³ Though initially inconspicuous, the fanfare spurs the Rabble to action, the latter promptly gathering its forces in a massive stretto (m. 568). In m. 574, this buildup is broken off by a proto-cinematic “jump cut”: the dynamics drop off sharply, and the battle fanfare is heard again, now in counterpoint with the *Weckruf* itself, at last visible on the horizon. As soon as the theme has unfolded (m. 578), Mahler pans back to the Rabble, which resets the tonality to B \flat minor, recoils in a tense chromatic *crescendo*-buildup, and springs forward to meet the *Weckruf* in an almost palpably physical collision in the musical foreground (m. 583).

Thus the “battle” itself marks the creation of a new contrapuntal complex, one that joins the “high” *Weckruf* and “low” Herald March A in a robust, conciliatory C major (m. 583). After a brief reprise of some “Rabble” elements (mm. 588–94), the episode climaxes with a second, massive iteration of this complex (m. 595), one that eventually hoists the tonality up a half-step to D \flat , where an eruption of the “The Herald” (m. 603) dislodges the march and sends the music careening into a truly drenching liquidation that Mahler labeled “The South Storm” (m. 605).

The battle’s riotous combination of “high” and “low” spheres directly anticipates the recapitulation, where this integration narrative culminates in a cheerful, spirited reconciliation. The music reenters sonata space for the last time in m. 737, setting out in the same burly unison that instigated the Rabble episode (but one that draws its material from the “South Storm” fanfares instead; compare mm. 741–46 to 609–16).³⁴ After some initial meandering, the music settles back into the exposition’s liminal A minor (m. 747). And like the exposition, the recapitulation falls into two broad parts (mm. 750–803 and 803–57). But this time these internal sections are not subrotational variants. Indeed, the entire point of Mahler’s extensive recomposition is to dissolve the segregating subrotational divisions between the “high” and “low” march types altogether. At last, the rowdy perpetrators from the “rabble” are allowed to march side-by-side with the more noble Pan and *Weckruf* themes, whose reordered sections they link together in short snippets.

33. The battle fanfare appeared twice before (mm. 295–96, 468), each time with increasing prominence. Danuser cites this theme in reference to the tendency Adorno mentions for Mahler’s themes to “take over the center in the same way as previously unnoticed minor characters in novels” (Adorno 1992, 71).

34. Note that the sonata restarts with precisely those fanfares that ended the liquidation, as if returning to the place where the sonata last “left off.” And yet the widely altered texture and expressive context suggest (à la Adorno’s “variant” theory) a considerable lapse of intervening time.

The top section of Figure 6.8 reproduces Figure 6.6. The lower level shows the recapitulation in its entirety, again indicating the Pan and *Weckruf* marches in boxes. Dotted and dashed arrows show Mahler's redistribution of march modules. The "high" marches are reprised literally, but out of order and with Herald marches inserted in between.³⁵ As in the exposition, the "low" marches undergo superficial changes that nevertheless implicate a broader rhetorical fixity.³⁶

The second section, a five-part climax that culminates in a tonic presentation of the "telos theme" (m. 846), takes the integrative process to a higher level still. There, Mahler telescopes various critical episodes from the sonata's history into a single tonic-major procession to the finish. The portal to the climax proper is a brief but significant episode based—as we might now predict—on the *Weckruf*. Here the figure at last transcends its own rough-edged diatonicism, as Mahler heats it from within, smoothing its angular fanfare-contours into yearning lines that wind through a tissue of chromaticism unlike anything that surrounds (m. 808). As Danuser writes, it is as if the entire march train—heretofore a conspicuously "preindividual," depersonalizing force—were suddenly "shot through with subjective expression" [*mit subjektivem Ausdruck durchsetzt*] (1975, 110 and 107).

But rather than melt the figure down entirely, Mahler uses this passage to leverage us back into a seemingly transfigured F major (m. 816), where the *Weckruf* regains its declamatory sharpness and launches a transformed reprise of the development's contrapuntal "battle" complex (compare m. 583). Recollections of the "fantasy projection" follow (compare m. 828 to m. 488ff.), along with transformed returns of the telos theme (mm. 824, 832). And the entire complex leads into a thundering return of the latter in its original form (m. 846), which drives to an ESC in m. 857, bringing tonal and rhetorical closure to the sonata.³⁷

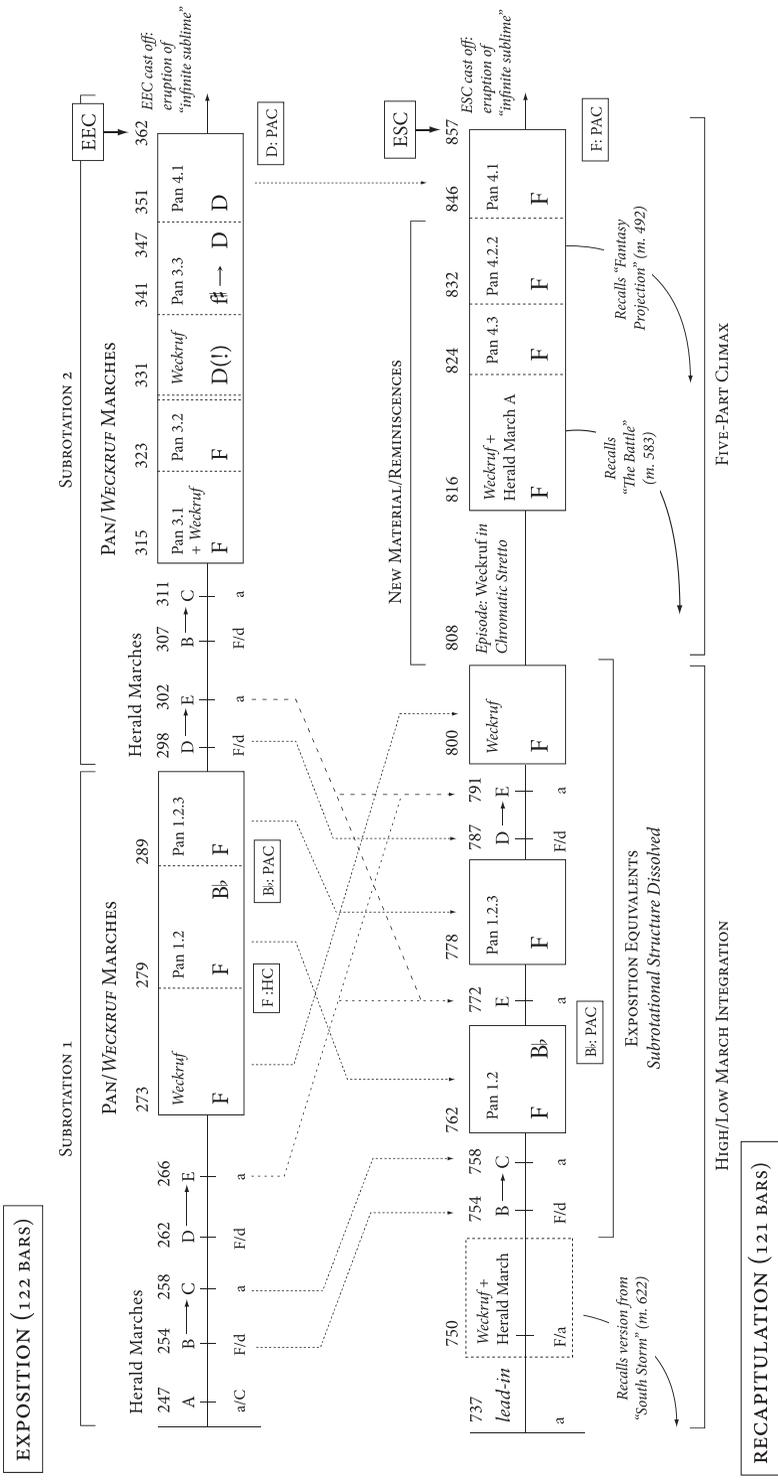
Deferring to conventional notions of monotonicity—or simply by force of habit—we might assume that this triumphal F-major climax brought closure to the entire movement as a single, unified continuum. And in certain obvious respects it does. But Mahler's novelistic totality spurs us to move beyond such leveling top-down views to subtler perspectives, those that more capably accommodate the movement's diverse internal narratives. Before conferring too great a global authority on this F tonic, we would do well to consider the narrative that plays out within the introductions, which seem to possess their own tonic key and their own mechanisms of long-range closure.

35. Mahler adds one additional presentation of the *Weckruf* in m. 750, a version that preserves the reconfigured scale-degree structure of the last version heard, that of the "South Storm" episode (m. 622).

36. As Figure 6.8 shows, they do not map one-to-one onto their exposition presentations. The presentations of Herald March E at mm. 772 and 791, e.g., each recall aspects of appearances in mm. 266 and 302.

37. The intricate teleologies unfolding here and elsewhere in 3/I challenge Johnson's view of Mahlerian marches as generically non-narrative or even "antinarrative" forms. This may be true in some cases, but Mahler's marches are far too varied in tone, content, and process to reduce to a single symbolic/allegorical genre—let alone one that declares them in advance, and without evidence, to be devoid of "any real dialogue or development" (2009, 225).

Figure 6.8 Symphony no. 3/I, comparison of exposition and recapitulation



VI. Narratives of Evolution and Emergence: Introductory Space

Typically, Mahler's introductory zones serve as generative fields, spaces in which he stages the emergence or assembly of the upcoming sonata's most important themes. In the present movement this is much less the case. Sonata materials do appear nascently in the introductory zones' Pan/Herald enclaves (mm. 136, 229, and 459, all within the white circles in Figure 6.1b). But the introductions' more extensively developed materials, the brass ariosos, have no stake in the sonata to come. And strikingly, their thematic autonomy from the sonata is matched by a striking tonal and architectural independence.

The ariosos' "tonal independence" is suggested most obviously by their overwhelming confinement to D minor.³⁸ In the crudest sense, the function of the funeral marches and ariosos is to lay out swaths of D minor ponderous enough to both anchor and motivate a minor-to-major modal narrative spanning six movements and nearly two hours. But even within these barren D-minor spaces—which in toto represent the bottom rung of the ontological ladder—Mahler subtly articulates change and growth.

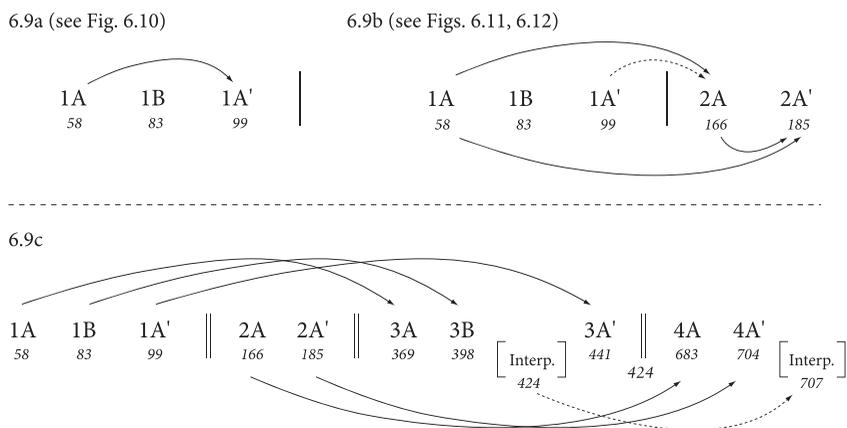
Like the sonata that follows, introductory space is built in ontological layers. The funeral marches themselves are emblematic of absolute stasis; they are marches that "march nowhere" [*an Ort und Stelle tritt*] (Danuser 1975, 93), their strident minor/major trumpet arpeggios frozen at a single pitch level.³⁹ Like the later Herald marches, they provide a lower background layer, an "empty" space into which a more developed impulse will soon break. In this case, the higher forms are the ariosos, which, though primitivistic, are also propulsive, capable of variation and even purposeful transformation. Ultimately, the introduction's narrative is their story, one whose D-minor to D-major curve mirrors that of the symphonic whole.

To best grasp this story, let us begin by examining the themes themselves—their distribution, character, and transformational tendencies. As Figure 6.4 shows, there are four funeral march/arioso episodes: two in Rotation One (mm. 27, 164) and one each in Rotations Two and Three (m. 369, m. 671). The ariosos themselves unfold in long, proselike paragraphs governed by a variation process that is rigorous but also manifestly crude. Though occasionally transformed in the standard Adornian gestalt-based sense, they more often give the impression of stony melodic fragments heaving, colliding, breaking apart, and recombining in a kind of monolithic musical tectonics.

38. This in contrast to the three Pan/Herald enclaves, which routinely demonstrate tonal affiliations with the F-major sonata. As Figure 6.4 shows, the first two (mm. 132, 225) effect a series of semitonal downshifts to convert the local D tonic into the dominant of F ($D \rightarrow D\flat // D\flat \rightarrow C$). The third complex (m. 453) points backward to the recently closed exposition, leading from the local D tonic back *into* F major for a fleeting appearance of the *Weckruf* (m. 478).

39. These fixed-pitch trumpet calls anticipate those of 5/I (pickups to mm. 1, 61, 233, 317, and 397).

Figure 6.9 Derivation chains of arioso themes



Arioso 1 unfolds a small ternary form (see Figure 6.9a) whose final section (m. 99) reworks the opening in this “tectonic” fashion. Figure 6.10 shows the transformation in detail, with solid lines and brackets showing rhythmically stable segments and dotted lines indicating those that are rhythmically compressed or expanded. Figure 6.9b depicts Arioso 2 as a large parallel binary design [AA']. There, the many forward-reaching arrows show a more complex and cumulative derivation pattern: Arioso 2A draws material from Ariosos 1A and 1A', while 2A' is a hybrid variant of 1A and 2A. Figure 6.11 shows the derivation of 2A in detail, once again with rhythmic compressions and expansions.⁴⁰ Last, Figure 6.12 traces the convoluted formation of 2A' from virtually all that precedes: its first half (mm. 185–98) echoes aspects of 1A and 2A more or less simultaneously, while the second half (m.199ff.) appends a new closing fanfare to the ending of 2A. In this fanfare (m. 203–9), the major-mode tonic glimpsed obliquely in earlier sections (mm. 67, 173, 196) abruptly becomes a vivid—if still fleeting—acoustic reality. This early gravitation to D major is critical, but for the time being the ariosos are repeatedly “paralyze[d]” by the minor tonic whose “pull” they cannot resist, leaving the music to lapse continually into a “state of decay” (Revers 2007, 101–2).

Fettered thus to D minor, Ariosos 1 and 2 offer little in the way of a tonal “narrative.” For that we must look at Ariosos 3 and 4, which present a limited but crucial escape from these tonic-minor confines. Before examining their narrative in detail, though, we should note an important aspect of their construction. As Figure 6.9c indicates, Ariosos 3 and 4 are large-scale transformed repetitions of

40. Arioso 1B does not partake in these extended transformation-chains. These passages anticipate 3/IV, Zarathustra's D-minor “Midnight Song.” Indeed, 3/I is rife with what Mahler called “presentiments” of the latter (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 64). These range from specific quotations (like these, or the “midnight chords” at 11ff.) to the overall tonal scheme, which borrows the song's juxtaposition of D major/minor and F major.

Figure 6.10 Derivation of Arioso 1A' from 1A

The figure displays two musical staves, both in treble clef and 3/4 time. The top staff, labeled 'Arioso 1A', begins at measure 58 and ends at measure 90. The bottom staff, labeled 'Arioso 1A'', begins at measure 90 and ends at measure 120. Both staves conclude with the instruction 'to d: PAC'.

Key annotations include:

- Staff 1 (Arioso 1A):** Measures 58-60 contain a triplet of eighth notes. A bracket labeled 'x' spans measures 60-62. A bracket labeled 'y' spans measures 62-70. A bracket labeled '3' is placed under a triplet of eighth notes in measure 70.
- Staff 2 (Arioso 1A'):** Measures 90-92 contain a triplet of eighth notes. A bracket labeled 'x' spans measures 92-100. A bracket labeled 'y' spans measures 100-110. A bracket labeled '3' is placed under a triplet of eighth notes in measure 110. A bracket labeled 'y (1/2)' spans measures 110-115. A bracket labeled 'x'' spans measures 115-120.

Dotted arrows indicate the derivation of Arioso 1A' from Arioso 1A:

- Arrows from the first triplet in Arioso 1A point to the first triplet in Arioso 1A'.
- Arrows from the 'x' bracket in Arioso 1A point to the 'x' bracket in Arioso 1A'.
- Arrows from the 'y' bracket in Arioso 1A point to the 'y' bracket in Arioso 1A'.
- Arrows from the triplet in Arioso 1A point to the triplet in Arioso 1A'.
- Arrows from the triplet in Arioso 1A point to the 'y (1/2)' bracket in Arioso 1A'.
- Arrows from the 'x' bracket in Arioso 1A point to the 'x'' bracket in Arioso 1A'.

(* octave-leap omitted)

Figure 6.11 Derivation of Arioso 2A from 1A and 1A'

The figure displays a musical score illustrating the derivation of Arioso 2A from Arioso 1A and Arioso 1A'. The score is organized into four main sections:

- Arioso 1A'** (measures 90-99): Shows a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 90 and a triplet of quarter notes in measure 91. A bracket groups measures 90-99.
- Arioso 1A** (measures 63-64): Shows a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 63 and a triplet of quarter notes in measure 64. A bracket groups measures 63-64.
- Arioso 2A (Introduction Subrotation 2)** (measures 166-175): Shows a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 166 and a triplet of quarter notes in measure 167. A bracket groups measures 166-175. A box labeled "D: HC" is located below this section.
- Arioso 1A** (measures 58-59): Shows a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 58 and a triplet of quarter notes in measure 59. A bracket groups measures 58-59.

Arrows indicate the derivation of Arioso 2A from Arioso 1A and Arioso 1A'. Dashed arrows show the mapping of notes from Arioso 1A and Arioso 1A' to Arioso 2A. A box labeled "D: HC" is located below the Arioso 2A section.

Figure 6.12 Derivation of Arioso 2A' from 2A and 1A

The figure illustrates the derivation of Arioso 2A' from Arioso 2A and Arioso 1A. The score is presented in two systems.

System 1:

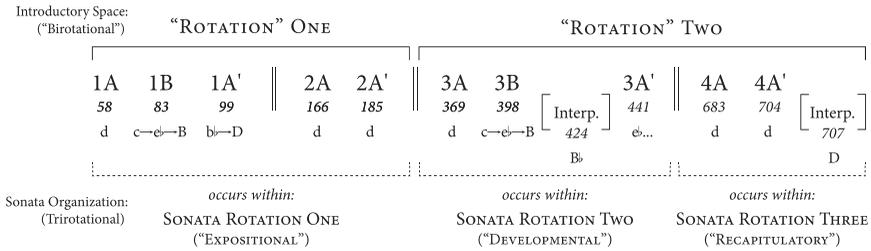
- Arioso 1A:** Measures 58-65. Features a melodic line with triplets and accents.
- Arioso 2A:** Measures 166-175. Features a bass line with triplets and accents.
- Arioso 2A' (Introduction Subrotation 2):** Measures 184-199. This section is derived from Arioso 1A and Arioso 2A. Arrows indicate the source of the melodic and bass lines.
- Measure 166:** Labeled with a circled 'i' and '(V7)'.

System 2:

- Arioso 2A:** Measures 175-199. Continuation of the bass line from System 1.
- Arioso 2A' (cont'd.):** Measures 199-206. Continuation of the melodic line from System 1.

Performance markings include **D:HC** and **D:PAC** in boxes.

Figure 6.13 Conflict between trirotational sonata structure and birotational introductory space organization



Ariosos 1 and 2, respectively. (The two bracketed passages labeled "interp." are new material, dealt with shortly.) This means that "arioso space," considered on its own, is built in *two* broad rotations, with the block [Arioso 3→Arioso 4] being a massive recycling of [Arioso 1→Arioso 2].

I use the term "rotation" here informally, since the ariosos do not occur end-to-end. Still, this is an important repetition pattern, and all the more noteworthy in that it cuts across the movement's broad tri-rotational structure. Figure 6.13 illustrates: the top brackets show Mahler's two "rotations" through the arioso materials, while those below indicate where these passages fall within the larger, tri-rotational whole. Critical here is the ariosos' disengagement from the implied functions of the (notionally) superordinate sonata sections: Arioso 3 appears in what many regard as the work's "development" but its rhetorical function is not developmental, any more than Arioso 4 is overtly "recapitulatory."

That the main rhetorical categories of sonata form (i.e., exposition, development, and recapitulation) fail to impinge upon the ariosos—and thus huge swaths of the work's surface—is yet another way that the movement's sonata is undermined or "disempowered." It also amplifies Adorno's theory of "novelistic" construction in an unforeseen and satisfying way. As we recall, Adorno believed that Mahler's "epic" temporality was inscribed most saliently in his long-range transformed repetitions. If this is true, then the movement's possession of two broad, interlocking repetition patterns (that of the ariosos and that of the tri-rotational whole) is especially suggestive, since it allows us to hear the work not only telling multiple "stories" but also establishing two different, and yet interwoven, temporal frameworks—essentially, realizing two different *kinds* of time, like a novel whose constituent stories unfold at different speeds or in different eras.

And yet the most crucial story within the introductory spaces itself cuts across this double-"rotational" structure. At two points, Mahler abruptly reroutes an unfolding Arioso into what I call "recitative interpolations"—reflective, subdued passages that retain the ariosos' scoring while softening their jagged lines into a supplicating lyrical voice. Returning to Figures 6.9c and 6.13, we find these passages enclosed in brackets within Ariosos 3 (m. 424) and 4 (m. 707). It is through this intensely marked music that the introductory spaces come to manifest a more significant long-range tonal tension.

The first interpolation (m. 424) appears in the aftermath of a B-major fanfare-rupture within *Arioso* 3B. For a dozen bars it holds down B \flat as tonic—first minor (mm. 425–26), then major—but then slips back into *arioso* rhetoric for its final three bars.⁴¹ The recitative then returns, extended and elaborated, at the end of *Arioso* 4 (m. 707), where it is transposed to the local tonic—now D *major*—and, unlike its predecessor, drives to a decisive PAC in m. 735.

This PAC is the final event in all of introductory space, and a uniquely fitting *telos* for several reasons. Most obviously, it allows the introductory narrative to predict, in its entirety, the symphony's D-minor to -major trajectory. But further emphasis comes from the sonata-like tonal/structural resolution it brings to the recitative interpolations, by consummating their transposition from a tonally open, "unstable" B \flat major in Rotation 3 to a cadentially-anchored tonic D in Rotation 4.

Finally, in their refined prosody and modal emancipation, the recitatives clearly represent a "higher" form than the elementally brutal *ariosos* they supplant, further reinscribing Mahler's ontological master trope. As Johnson writes, the trombone's progression from "stark, monosyllabic utterances" toward "genuine lyricism" is an "evolution" that mirrors those of the movement itself and of the transsymphonic whole (2009, 52). It is worth pausing to examine the more specific programmatic implications that follow from this. We know already how Mahler resisted the idea that this movement—or the symphony at large—might express the feelings or "struggles" of some programmatic subject. It had only to do with "Nature's path of development, from stiff materiality to the greatest articulation."⁴² For this, Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony seems to have been his model. Not long after completing the Third, Mahler explained to Bauer-Lechner that through most of the "Pastoral" it is "nature alone" that speaks. But he also stipulated that Beethoven's own voice breaks through in several places, where the composer's "inner emotion overflows in passionate tenderness." Mahler heard the rest of the Sixth driving intently toward these "personal passages," while also serving as a "lower stratum" necessary for their breakthrough (1980, 136).⁴³

These comments offer a revealing framework for the recitative interpolations. With striking consistency, critics write of an emergent subjectivity here, of the music arriving at a kind of "self-awareness" or acquiring a true "expressive voice."⁴⁴ We might, of course, take this subjectivity as that of the composer, making this the rare moment in which Mahler's *own* "inner emotion" pours forth in "passionate tenderness." In the universe of the work's program, though, this influx of a higher consciousness would seem to be the anticipated emergence of an individual living impulse from the barrenness that surrounds, of "captive

41. Compare mm. 437–39 to mm. 95–98 (the end of *Arioso* 1B).

42. Letter to Ludwig Schiedermair, cited in Franklin 1991, 27.

43. Here I find Bonds's translation of Bauer-Lechner's "Untergrund" ("lower stratum"; 1996, 192) more suggestive than Dika Newlin's ("foundation").

44. The term "expressive voice" is Johnson's (2009, 52; cf. 183); see also Danuser 1975, 98; Franklin 1991, 87; and Adorno 1992, 78. We note a parallel here with the sonata itself, whose denouement is prepared by a similar "acquisition" of subjectivity (Danuser 1975, 107; see Section V), reinforcing Greene's conviction that the movement as a whole "offers an image of consciousness emerging" (1984, 164).

life struggling for release" from "lifeless, rigid Nature" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 59). To use Mahler's own term, the recitative stands out like a delicate bud emerging from the monolithic "lower stratum" of the craggy, fissured ariosos.

To intensify this aura of naïve expectancy, Mahler lulls the passage gently into its cadence with a quotation from "Urlicht," the hymnlike *Wunderhorn* song that directly preceded the Second Symphony's cataclysmic finale. The song expresses a child's ardent conviction that all living things, having come from god, must return to god. The cadential melody that Mahler quotes here falls on the heels of the sentiment's most direct and naïve expression: "Je lieber möcht' ich im Himmel sein" ("I would rather be in heaven"). Imbued with the voice of the child form "Urlicht," the trembling bud—and perhaps Mahler himself, compelled at last to soliloquize through the fourth wall—sings confidently of its place within the cosmological whole, looking out beyond the worldly sonata at hand to the transfiguring power of divine love that is revealed in the symphony's finale, where the D major only glimpsed here will become transcendent reality.

With this music, Mahler depicts the emergence of life in a manner fundamentally different from what we have encountered elsewhere. In contrast to the impersonal surge unleashed when Pan rouses his troops, this life is tender and intimate; it possesses an inwardness and stark simplicity that set it in contrast with virtually everything else in the movement. More important, this life grows organically *from* the ariosos' motivic substrate, rather than merely interrupting them.⁴⁵ Where the Pan/Herald complexes (mm. 132, 225, 453) marked proleptic breaks within the introductions, always pointing ahead to the imminent sonata, the recitatives reflect audibly on their own primeval past.

But as Adorno writes, "the gaze that lingers" will discover a deeper logic behind Mahler's veneer of fortuity (1992, 90). And here we find that the composer has tuned these various depictions of "emergent life" to resonate in an especially suggestive way. Figure 6.14a shows the movement's very first stirring of life, the initial Pan/Herald complex of Rotation One. To contrast the ariosos' glacially moving functional harmony, Mahler embodies this musical quickening—the rousing of the sleeping Pan—with the striking triadic progression B \flat →D. Once again, echoes of the "Pastoral" emerge: this stark juxtaposition recalls an especially magical moment in Beethoven's opening movement, where the same progression, at pitch, is the only harmonic change in a span of almost fifty bars.⁴⁶ And as Figure 6.14b shows, the large-scale harmonic path of the recitative interpolations projects this progression over a three-hundred bar span: an unstable B \flat , moving to a stable D. Indeed, Mahler reinforces this crucial progression by diverting the last recitative to B \flat major

45. Compare the recitatives' rising and falling third-cell (D–E–F–E–D; mm. 708–10) to the basic motive of Arioso 1A (mm. 58–59) and especially 1A' (mm. 99–100). (Mahler will eventually transform this third-cell into the turn figure of the "Urlicht" quotation.) Also note the recitatives' preservation of the ariosos' prominent "sighing" appoggiatura.

46. See Beethoven's m. 173, where twelve bars of unchanging B \flat give way to twenty-four of D. It is surely these kinds of passages Adorno has in mind when he traces Mahler's "quasi-narrative, expansive undercurrent" through Bruckner's and Schubert's "epic" forms, and ultimately to certain unnamed passages in the "Pastoral" Symphony, where we find, in the music's ample slackness, "a joyous life . . . reposing in itself" (1992, 65).

Figure 6.14 Recursive use of $B\flat \rightarrow D$ to symbolize the emergence of life

6.14a.
First stirrings of life (rotation 1)

6.14b.
Resolution of Emergence-Narrative (rotations 2, 3)

The figure consists of two parts, 6.14a and 6.14b. Part 6.14a shows a musical score for the Pan/Herald Complex, starting at measure 132. The score is in treble clef and features a series of chords that transition from B-flat major to D major. A box highlights the initial transition, labeled $B\flat \rightarrow D$. Part 6.14b is a diagram enclosed in an oval, showing two boxes representing 'Recitative Interpolation 1' (mm. 424-40) and 'Recitative Interpolation 2' (mm. 707-36). An arrow points from the first box to the second, indicating a tonal progression from B-flat Major (Tonally Unresolved) to D Major (PAC (m. 735) in local tonic).

(mm. 719–28) just before its D-major PAC, allowing us to hear the former “resolving” to the latter on yet another scale, closer to the musical foreground.

In these differently scaled but programmatically aligned manifestations of the $B\flat \rightarrow D$ progression, we find yet another “novelistic” dimension not considered by Adorno: the possibility that the music might double back to represent the same event from different “perspectives.” In other words, we might wonder if Mahler invites us to understand Figures 6.14a and 6.14b as instances of a single temporal moment, heard from radically different distances—as though the recitative interpolations in their entirety were some fractal of the Pan chorale, some inner fiber of that fleeting progression audible only on a drastic “zooming in.”

To use an appropriately organic metaphor, the Pan chorale’s initiating progression ($B\flat \rightarrow D$) contains the harmonic DNA of two critical narrative strands: that of the recitative interpolations, as just discussed, but also that of the exposition as a whole—which begins nascently with that very chorale and builds to a thundering (if short-lived) climax on D major over two hundred bars later. All the same, we should not gloss over the fact that these different manifestations of D major relate only tensely. The recitatives produce a D that resolves a tonal tension and stands as an apparent terminus; the exposition’s D major, though a local telos in its own right, is ultimately a tension needing resolution. (To simplify somewhat, Mahler frames one as a “solution,” the other as a “problem.”) Our instinct here to square the circle, to comprehend these two D majors as the “same” key, only lures us deeper into the aporia.

And yet the difficulty, even impossibility, of entwining these narrative strands into a single coherent image hardly defuses the urgency of the task. The power of the work’s ambiguity stems from its assurance that we, as listeners acculturated to the canons of coherence and closure, will struggle—even in vain—to fit the movement and its signifiers to some internally consistent, through-composed paradigm. (It is precisely this difficulty, Adorno would argue, that makes the proposition of “bottom-up” construction so revolutionary.) In the next section, I pursue this idea further, teasing out some of the challenges that the movement poses to any top-down narrative understanding and proposing an interpretive framework that removes some—though not all—of these obstacles.

VII. Eternal Recurrence, the Infinite Sublime, and the Movement as a Whole

Before attempting to "narrativize" the movement in its entirety, we might pause to take stock of the various story-strands we have read into the work so far. Figure 6.15a presents the movement's event-spaces as a six-part grid: each of the three rows represents a single rotation comprising an introductory zone and a sonata zone—Ix and Sx, respectively, where *x* equals the rotation number. Section III examined the "horizontal" narrative shown in Figure 6.15b, Mahler's own programmatic story of a great cosmic *Beseelung*. (There and in subsequent grids I have grayed out narratively "inactive" areas.) By contrast, Sections V and VI mapped out the "vertical" narratives shown in Figures 6.15c and 6.15d, by reading one or the other of the movement's two event spaces as an autonomous story.⁴⁷ What remains to be considered is the narrative suggested in Figure 6.15e—one that proceeds through the movement from start to finish.

The first challenge facing any such reading is the often-cited dissonance between Mahler's essentially linear programmatic conception and the cyclical nature of the musical argument. With their vivid imagery of summer triumphing over "lifeless, rigid nature" and higher forms ascending over lower ones, Mahler's titles and paratexts offer an invaluable framework for Rotation One. But as many have noted, these programmatic supplements fit rather poorly with the movement as a whole, since they neglect to mention that the "lifeless, rigid" music *keeps coming back*. That Mahler himself labeled everything after the exposition-onset (m. 247) "Summer Marches In" seems glaringly out of step with the musical facts.

On the one hand, such a tension may have been inevitable. Because transformed repetition is *the* fundamental element in Mahler's grammar of plot, there is bound to be slippage when his works are gauged against any "linear" extramusical narrative. On the other hand, Mahler's "seasonal" theme seems to offer one obvious solution: to hear the movement progressing through three annual cycles, three winters turning over into summer. But such an explanation falls flat on several accounts. First, it overlooks the fact that Mahler only intermittently fashioned the "Pan awakens" music as specifically "wintry" in nature. He favored this metaphor in 1895 (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 41), but in 1896—as the work was being composed—described the introduction as "an atmosphere of brooding, summer midday heat" (59). The *Einleitung* music invariably represented death (or at least the "suspension" of life [59]), but we distort Mahler's own conception to map the emergence of life onto a fixed seasonal schedule.

More important, the "seasonal" explanation fails to account for the notoriously artificial connections that wrench us out of sonata space. The sonata-zones of Rotations One and Three each end with a tumultuous rupture, while that of

47. Needless to say, these simple diagrams reduce out certain key points—like the fact, mentioned earlier, that the sonata *narrative* (if not the sonata proper) begins in introductory space, at the entrance of Pan (m. 132).

Figure 6.15 Map of narrative strands traceable through Symphony No. 3/I

6.15a.
Supersimplified “Map” of Event-Spaces

| | | |
|-------------|----|----|
| Rotation 1: | I1 | S1 |
| Rotation 2: | I2 | S2 |
| Rotation 3: | I3 | S3 |

I = Introductory Space
S = Sonata Space

6.15b.
Cosmic *Beseelung* Narrative
(Discussed in Section III; derives from Mahler’s titles)

| | | |
|-------------|----|------|
| Rotation 1: | I1 | → S1 |
| Rotation 2: | I2 | S2 |
| Rotation 3: | I3 | S3 |

6.15c.
Sonata (“Integration”) Narrative
(Discussed in Section V)

| | | |
|-------------|----|----|
| Rotation 1: | I1 | S1 |
| Rotation 2: | I2 | S2 |
| Rotation 3: | I3 | S3 |

6.15d.
Introductory-Space (“Emergence of Life”) Narrative
(Discussed in Section VI)

| | | |
|-------------|----|----|
| Rotation 1: | I1 | S1 |
| Rotation 2: | I2 | S2 |
| Rotation 3: | I3 | S3 |

6.15e.
Schema for an Integrated, Through-Composed Narrative

| | | |
|-------------|----|------|
| Rotation 1: | I1 | → S1 |
| Rotation 2: | I2 | → S2 |
| Rotation 3: | I3 | → S3 |

Rotation Two simply marches off in an illustrative *diminuendo*.⁴⁸ The point, of course, is that there is nothing suggestively “autumnal” about the passages linking “summer” with “winter.” Rather than succumbing to intrinsic decay or subsidence, summer is dislodged by mechanical interventions that simply reset the evolutionary clock back to zero. What we require, then, is an interpretive framework that preserves Mahler’s *Beseelung*-narrative within each rotation but also honors the striking disjunction *between* them—in other words, one that teases a cyclical element from the programmatic conception that fits more convincingly with the music’s own highly idiosyncratic cyclicity.

48. On the idea of 3/I as a “spatially moving source of music,” see Adorno 1992, 79ff.; Johnson (2009, 225) develops the idea further.

One option is to understand the movement's rotations as complete, discontinuous life-cycles, each ending in negation or death and followed by a "rebirth." Such a hearing accords well with Mahler's own cyclical view of life itself. Specht reports that by the middle of the next decade, Mahler had become deeply committed to the idea of reincarnation: "We all return," he said. "Life only has meaning through this certainty. . . . For this reason I have to live ethically in order to spare my returning soul some part of its journey" (Franklin 1991, 107n48). For Franklin, such beliefs can be traced to the influence of Nietzsche, whose doctrine of "eternal recurrence" Mahler would surely have known (1991, 17). Nietzsche was clearly on Mahler's mind at the time: he set a portion of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in the fourth movement and even toyed with calling the symphony as a whole "Die fröhliche Wissenschaft" ("The Gay Science").⁴⁹

But Mahler's reincarnationism seems to me quite the opposite of Nietzsche's, which envisioned the individual returning "not to a new life or a better life or a similar life," but rather "eternally to this identical and self-same life, in the greatest things and the smallest" (1961, 237–38). By contrast, Mahler's *ewiger Wiederkunft* is teleological in precisely the way that Zarathustra's is not: Mahler hopes to live ethically not *because* he will tread again through this "identical and self-same life," but so he will not have to. His next cycle through life will be affected by his actions in this one, as successive stations within a purposeful process of "purification" [*Läuterung*] (Specht 1913, 39).⁵⁰ All the same, if Mahler had at some point adopted Nietzsche's view of "eternal recurrence," it is hardly inconceivable that by 1896 he would already have begun to customize the idea to accommodate his own insatiable transcendentalist leanings. (Needless to say, the musical realities of the Third more readily accommodate a Mahlerian—that is, teleological—view of eternal return than a Nietzschean one.) So might we understand the successive rotations as "reincarnations" of a single abstract life-impulse, progressing on the macroscopic level toward some higher goal?

At the very least, such a framework offers a satisfying way to deal with the unsettling conclusions of the first and final rotations. In each, the music builds for several inexorable minutes toward climactic arrivals on the "telos theme" (Pan 4), which provides the last push toward cadential closure. But on grasping their respective cadences, each erupts in an explosive gesture that instantly disperses the march and sends the music spinning into another key. The first of these cataclysmically overturned cadences occurs in m. 362: the march reaches its long sought D-major EEC only to cast that harmony off in exchange for the mixed submediant—a tenuously hovering B \flat triad that decays repeatedly into a fully diminished seventh (mm. 365). The last of these dissonant harmonies

49. Beyond this, the extent of Nietzsche's influence on the Third has been debated; see Micznik 2005, 305. Several years later, Mahler would famously repudiate Nietzsche's "deceitful and viciously shameful immorality" (19 December 1901 letter to Alma Mahler; cited in de La Grange 1995, 450).

50. Thus Mahler's cosmology precisely mirrors his musical sensibilities: both are cyclical, teleological, and averse to unnecessary repetition.

intensifies suddenly and discharges onto E \flat (m. 368), the Neapolitan portal leading back into D minor and the onset of Rotation Two (m. 369).

What does one make of so “deliberately self-defeating” a gesture (Franklin 1991, 88)? What would compel Mahler to toss aside a musical goal four hundred effortful bars in the making? Many have heard this moment as a turn for the worst: Greene calls the moment “devastating” (1984, 157); Micznik finds it “catastrophic” (2005, 323). Pointing to a vivid suggestion of the “Götterdämmerung” leitmotiv from Wagner’s *Ring*, Darcy finds the moment “manifestly negative” (2001b, 30).

At first blush it is hard to disagree; one does not conjure the specter of world annihilation lightly. But while there can be no denying that this rupture clearly undermines all that the music has so far accomplished, leaving us to question “whether any goals have been achieved” at all (Revers 2007, 102), I am not convinced that Mahler obliges us here to so a negative reading. My reasoning begins with the *Ring* quotation itself. To be sure, the prophecy Mahler evokes here carries dark portents in its original dramatic context. At the climax of *Das Rheingold*, Erda appears to announce that “Alles was ist, endet. Ein düst’rer Tag dämmert den Göttern” (“All that is shall come to an end. A dark day dawns for the gods”).⁵¹ But when the world does end, it comes not as tragedy, but as deliverance and renewal. When we hear this motive for the last time, moments before the tetralogy closes, it gives way to the so-called redemption theme and finds the world of the *Ring* returned much to the state we found it in four operas earlier, with the coveted ring once again in the Rhine daughters’ possession. The end brings us back to the beginning. To be sure, this world-renewal depends upon the fall of the gods and their order. But the tragedy, the “dark day,” is theirs alone. Thus the “Götterdämmerung” music is multilayered in its signification: it entails a dimension of subjective foreboding but also an objective one, of orders overturned and balances restored.

If we take Mahler’s word that the opening of the Third does not, as a rule, embody the “struggles of an individual”—if there *is* no musical subject, only Nature in all its terrifying grandeur—then the *Ring* quotation might strike us in a new light. That is, the layer of subjective negation or “catastrophe” would be overshadowed by the theme of tumultuous world renewal, of broader cyclical patterns of change and return—which of course gives the motive central relevance in the reading I suggest, that of Nature represented as a series of abstract “life cycles.” In other words, we can understand the rupture at m. 362 as a colossal negation without it necessarily entailing a “tragic” or “manifestly negative” turn in some continuum of subjective experiences. Instead, it can be heard as a radical perspective shift: a sudden panning-back to reveal the awe-inspiring breadth of Mahler’s cosmological lens, one that trades the close-quarters frenzy of the Bacchic procession for a dizzying glimpse of the infinite sublime itself. As Adorno writes, “without any sense of catastrophe,” it is simply “as if a new aspect had suddenly been revealed” (1992, 79).

It is here that we can sense most fully what Mahler meant when he spoke of the movement juxtaposing the “Earth Spirit” with revelations of “the Universe

51. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, Scene Four (mm. 3499–504).

itself, into whose infinite depths you sink, through whose eternal spaces you soar, so that earth and human destiny shrink behind you into an indiscernibly tiny point and then disappear" (Bauer-Lechner 1980, 62). To model the sublime—what he called the "eternally ungraspable," a "great and terrible Unknown" (62)—Mahler resorts to a gesture that is itself "ungraspable" from any formal/logical standpoint, one in which the sonata itself seems suddenly to "shrink into an indiscernibly tiny point then disappear," its terrestrial accomplishments shaken off like so much corporeal ballast.

And yet, if we are inclined to hear a note of subjective terror in this music, it is surely this—"earth and human destiny" diminishing into the negligible. For a brief moment, at the point farthest from human understanding, Mahler allows the music to pass into a "human" perspective, if only to bear witness to the unfathomable. For one weightless moment we inhabit the transmigrating soul itself, passing through the metaphysical connecting tissue between successive life spans. But that subjective moment is short-lived and quickly lost in the epic expanses that surround. Ultimately, "human sorrow and distress," as Mahler said of this movement, have "no place here" (62).

The first sublime eruption thrusts us back into the primordial chaos of introductory space, declaring that we are not yet ready for the liberating D major of the symphony's finale. Tellingly, the rupture itself—the cadential harmony and its immediate negation in m. 362—is an exact reversal of the "emergence of life" motive discussed in Section VI above (see Figure 6.15). The strenuously attained D major explodes back into B \flat , and the whole cycle must start over again. But the second such negation, coming just after essential structural closure (ESC) in F (m. 857), is itself quickly negated by Mahler's shortest and most flippant coda (m. 863). As before, the cadential harmony is swept aside by a striking common-tone transformation (m. 857); now F major gives way to D \flat major. What follows is all exact transposition, until the culminating Neapolitan (m. 863; compare m. 368) is seized by a manic frenzy that sends the music hurtling through Mahler's eccentric *ersatz* dominant—a rapidly inflated major supertonic (m. 866)—headlong into eight bars of clangorous tonic confirmation.

More than anything prior, it is the coda's hysterical exuberance that casts doubt on the sublime eruptions' tragic or "negative" connotations. So much of Mahler's discourse arises from the laborious working out of musical/dramatic crises. Why would this one "crisis" would no follow-through at all? Were this second rupture truly a "catastrophe," it would lack teeth by the composer's usual standards; in its wake, the last-minute triumph would sound suspiciously unearned.

That said, it would perhaps be too easy to suppose that the music's successive negations (the sonata-cleaving rupture, the rupture-annulling coda) merely cancel one another out, or that the movement's giddy conclusion necessarily redeems the undermined sonata. I prefer to hear the sonata remaining at least partly unresolved, its tenuous closure a mark of the same "contingency" that we encountered (albeit more subtly) in the Fourth Symphony. With playful firmness, the music insists that the sonata cannot, as it once might have, glory in the kind of absolute closure that would draw into itself all that came before. All the same, such loose ends are quickly lost in the exhilarating rush to the finish line. Indeed,

the ending is so abrupt and arbitrary that we might be inclined to hear one final subjective intrusion: the composer himself, intervening with a mischievous gesture that sends the curtain crashing down while implying that the whole cycle, if left to its own momentum, would just go on forever.

VIII. Epilogue: Aporia, Fragments, Memory

As mentioned at the chapter's opening, a defining characteristic of the novel-symphony was that the parts and the whole could never be made to "harmonize"—their relationship was necessarily "aporetic" (Adorno 1992, 49). It follows that to hear the novel-symphony as a truly integral whole—to view it from the "top-down" (as I have at points, out of necessity)—would be to misrepresent it. Rather, we as listeners must let ourselves be borne along by the musical stream as it unfolds, apprehensive of what lies ahead but also continually reevaluating what has come before. A true "bottom-up" assessment is one that relinquishes any fixed point of reference and yet makes no demands that the work thus viewed congeal into a unified, remainderless whole.

We can hear a similar "top-down/bottom-up" tension in the present analysis as well. The musical facts suggest an interweaving of story strands that are at best only partly relatable. Beginning from the bottom up, we find a harmonious coexistence of multiple tonics, multiple long-range goals, with only the occasional node of overlap. By contrast, a top-down view, from what Adorno called the "ontology of forms" (1992, 62), forces us to flatten these multiplicities into an awkward, paradox-riven unity—one that demands, for instance, that we posit the key of D *either* as a primary or secondary region—for it cannot, tradition tells us, be both. Indeed, the status of D within the movement is irremediably fraught. That introductory space would be in D minor is hardly remarkable; Mahler's off-tonic introductions routinely factor into the transsymphonic tonal narrative.⁵² What baffles is Mahler's use of D as a secondary sonata key—a choice that seems designed to confuse, since it sets the aims of the sonata against that of the transsymphonic totality. (Why, one wonders, would Mahler build his sonata so that its central tonal agenda would be the seemingly regressive move *away* from the long-range goal, D major, back to F?)

52. In 1/I and 3/I, the recurring introductions anticipate the tonality of the work's conclusion. The B-minor sleighbells of 4/I eventually disclose their "dominant" relationship to E minor, the modal inverse of the work's concluding tonic (see Chapter 5). The B-minor introductions of 7/I have a similar "dominant" relationship to the movement's E-minor tonic; they also stand in a "leading tone" relationship to the work's concluding C major, replicating the $c^{\sharp} \rightarrow D$ arc of the Fifth Symphony (whose opening movement, as many have argued, is itself a kind of off-tonic "slow introduction" to the *Hauptsatz*). In the A-minor Finale of the Sixth, the C-minor introductions aim to achieve tonic status, presumably to initiate a broader move to C *major*, allowing the symphony as a whole to realize the liberating minor-to-relative-major narrative of the Second (see Chapter 7).

And yet despite all this, the music's effervescent superabundance resists any reading that would reduce it to a malformed specimen of what it is not, or a set of unresolved structural "problems." As Adorno writes, in the face of the movement's "genius," our "objections reel helplessly" (1992, 78). In the end, we may be inclined to afford the Third a singular status—to exempt it, as Adorno did, from the "mythical unfreedom" of the classical tradition (94) and its ideology of the "harmoniously self-sufficient work" (12).

To be sure, the movement bespeaks a dialogue with the past—no less than Mahler's other sonatas. But the dialogue here lacks the anxious self-consciousness of the middle-period works, where tradition weighs more heavily on every bar. To use an Adornian turn of phrase, this particular dialogue is more an exuberant negation; Mahler evokes the outlines of a sonata knowingly, but mainly to bring his own emancipatory project into the foreground. Our charge is not to ignore the sonata, to dismiss it as vestigial or irrelevant, but rather to pursue it—even if, or perhaps because, we do so gropingly and in vain. The more thoroughly we rake the movement's peculiar landscape, the clearer it becomes that little remains but fragments—fragments whose complementary shape activates the memory of a historical genre, but whose meaning, as Adorno would say, resides mainly in the fissures. On the one hand they speak of loss, of cultural monuments vandalized and of the absolute made contingent; they are the debris of a sonata form hijacked and consumed by Mahler's madcap cosmological allegory. But on the other hand, and perhaps more important, they utter a promise—a promise of what music and culture might have to gain if the monolithic, totalizing sonata were finally conscripted to march alongside its lesser compatriots, as only one story among many.

CHAPTER **S**even

“Tragedy Refuses a Nominalist Form”

“Inescapable” Coherence and the Failure of the Novel-Symphony in the Finale of the Sixth

The totality . . . sanctions for its own glory the destruction of the individual, who has no choice but to be destroyed, rules unchallenged.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1960)¹

I. Tragedy, Negative Recomposition, and the Destruction of the “Epic Ideal”

Nothing in Mahler’s earlier works—indeed, nothing in the Western canon at large—could have prepared fin-de-siècle audiences for the Finale of the Sixth Symphony. Never before had instrumental music been asked to bear a calamity of this scale or intensity. Perhaps only Strauss’s *Salome*, premiered the year before (1905), had ever used the post-Wagnerian orchestra for such diabolically noxious ends. Even the earlier movements of the Sixth itself—demonic enough in their own right—pale in comparison to the half-hour sonic assault that closes the symphony, one that “bewildered” early audiences (de La Grange 1999, 412) and sent critics scrambling to decry this hyperbolically dark and “hypertrophically” scored monstrosity.² Reviews were almost uniformly negative. The Finale was “a lamentable failure . . . pretentious, overblown, and noisily insignificant,” a “cacophon[ous]” and unnavigable “polyphonic labyrinth.” Even the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which freely praised the opening movements, had to concede that much in this last one was simply “abstruse” and “incomprehensible.”³

Few, however, were confused about Mahler’s broader expressive aims. Indeed, one of the ironies of the Sixth Symphony’s tortured early reception was

1. Adorno 1992, 97.

2. Leopold Schmidt (*Signale für die Musikalische Welt*) lamented its “hypertrophy of instrumentation” (de La Grange 1999, 416).

3. All quotes are from de La Grange 1999 on the symphony’s May 1906 premier. In order, they are Rudolf Louis of the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* (415); Otto Lessmann of the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* (413); and the anonymous critic of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (415). See also de La Grange’s account of the abysmal Viennese premier eighteen months later (1999, 534–44); once again, even Mahler’s advocates wavered on the Finale’s effectiveness.

that listeners generally had no trouble at all grasping its overall tragic message, even without a program. Remarkably, Mahler himself had anticipated as much. On the eve of its 1906 premier, he suggested that the Sixth might have "more chance of being understood by the general public" than his earlier works, owing to its "altogether moving" character—by which he meant one that relied more on pathos than on "humor," which often eluded listeners on a first hearing (hence the disaster of the Fourth Symphony's early reception).⁴

What Mahler did not seem to anticipate (at least in this eleventh-hour burst of optimism) was that the Finale's expressive immediacy could hardly offset its length and complexity—even for listeners who embraced its pessimism and peculiar "cult of ugliness."⁵ The movement's disastrous arc is plain enough to hear: after eight hundred bars of swinging between caricaturized elation and turmoil, it collapses violently and limps to an agonized A-minor conclusion. (Contemporary accounts of an "indescribably grieving, longing struggle" and the "thrashing of a tortured soul finally torn to pieces" show that even dubious critics got the basic gist.)⁶ But to hear the Finale in this way—superficially, as a chain of escalations that implode repeatedly into chaos—is to miss much that is special about this remarkable movement. It is also likely to leave one wondering (and not always charitably) why Mahler felt the need to go on at such extraordinary lengths to make his point.

Twentieth-century analysts probed much deeper, of course. By laying bare the Finale's thematic design and sonata-form endoskeleton, they brought order to its vast time spans and left vital roadmaps for future listeners. But their studies also share certain limitations. For the most part, major commentators on the Sixth—Bekker (1969), Ratz (1968), Floros (1993), et al.—tend to treat formal/thematic architecture as something entirely separate from expressive character or narrative design. As such, they give few clues as to how the movement's structure might relate to its overall tragic argument. They tell us what occurs, and when, but rarely offer a convincing *why*.

My aim in what follows is to close that gap. I want to show that we can hear the Finale's tragedy playing out not only in the mayhem of its musical surface, but also in the depths of its tightly coordinated formal, tonal, and thematic processes. As Chapter 4 noted, the narrative I develop here hinges on an opposition of the formalist and nominalist impulses, pitting a rigidly prescriptive A-minor sonata against its own wayward, fulfillment-seeking S-themes. I excavate the specific Adornian roots of that hearing at the end of this introduction, and its details follow in Sections II through VI.

4. Undated letter ca. 1906, cited in de La Grange 1999, 409. The symphony's publisher, C. F. Kahnt, agreed, hoping that the "simple character of its content" would make fewer demands on listeners (414).

5. The term is from Albert Kauders's (generally positive) review of the Viennese premier (de La Grange 1999, 541).

6. Leopold Schmidt (*Signale für die Musikalische Welt*) and Eduard Reuss (*Neue Musikalische Presse*), cited in de La Grange 1999, 416–17.

First, however, we must set the stage by acknowledging the Finale's place at the center of a broad intertext, one that brings unexpected depth to the movement's nihilistic outlook. Taking a cue from Adorno, I would like to suggest that the Finale's much-vaunted tragedy only *begins* with monumental self-destruction. Ultimately, it entails the wholesale negation of two preceding sonata-form movements as well: 6/I and 3/I. The overworn image of Mahler as the Finale's "protagonist" takes on a new, urgent meaning here: in an act of spectacular creative immolation, the composer methodically lays waste to his own history, in a kind of scorched-earth intertextuality that for Adorno signaled nothing less than "the end of the symphonic sonata" and indeed "the end of the order that bore the sonata" (2002a, 609).

Intimations of these intertexts appear throughout Adorno's writings and provide the essential framework for the reading that follows. But as usual, it is only with some effort that his fragments can be pieced together into a coherent image; we must first sift through several layers of apparent contradiction. As Chapter 4 noted, Adorno was perhaps the first to point out the Finale's diametric relation to the symphony's opening Allegro. While constantly invoking the latter (through its tonal agenda, thematic *Urstoff*, and self-conscious orientation toward sonata form), it also "negates" it (1992, 138)—most obviously by revoking its major mode conclusion, but also by laying bare the artifice and arbitrariness of its seemingly naturalistic, effortless classical form.⁷ In the Finale, Adorno writes, Mahler "finally melts the crust of form" which had "hardened" in the opening movement (2002a, 609). The latter's "petrified" formalism (de La Grange 1999, 821) is dissolved cataclysmically, as if "whole geographic regions were glowing volcanically and their settlements were pitching into each other in a river of fire" (Adorno 2002a, 609).

The epic tendency that the Finale uses to loosen and dissolve the taut A-minor Allegro is "inherited" from 3/I, Mahler's first attempt at "a kind of musical novel in several volumes." But unlike the Third, which "thumbs its nose at the thought of order," 6/IV responds "with inexorable construction" (1992, 79). The term "inexorable" [*unerbittlich*] resonates powerfully, since Adorno uses it elsewhere to pin down the very essence of the classical style as he understood it, the implacable core that is *antithetical* to the epic impulse: where the classical symphony "takes hold of its idea with an inexorable rigor derived from the model of discursive logic," the novel-symphony aims decisively to "escape" that logic (1992, 72). Set side by side, these two intertextual hearings point to a seeming impossibility: that the Finale could simultaneously instate *and* undermine the formalist impulse, that it might activate and yet also counteract the "discursive logic" of the novel-symphony. Invoking 6/I and 3/I at the same time, it negates the one through its reinstatement of the epic tendency and the other through its "inexorable" formalism. In effect, it is a negative recomposition of both movements at once, one in which Mahler's "epic expansion" paradoxically "attains tightest control over itself" (Adorno 1992, 97).

7. See Sponheuer 1978, 321ff.; see also Samuels 1995, 144.

But how might this abstruse mesh of dialectical tensions factor into a close narrative reading? And what has any of this to do with the work's negative or cynical demeanor? For Adorno, the Finale's tragic dimension is wrapped up specifically in its negation of the Third Symphony's emancipatory nominalism. "Tragedy," he writes, "cannot be reconciled with the epic ideal" and ultimately "refuses a nominalist form" (1992, 101 and 97). In this it stands in stark contrast to the Third, the work in which "music for the first time becomes aware of its *radical divergence from tragedy*" (127; emphasis added). To unpack this last comment fully, we need to appreciate the close ties that Adorno saw between tragedy and musical classicism itself. For Adorno, theatrical drama (and tragedy especially) were emblematic of top-down construction, the arbitrary imposition of "contrived" situations onto living (and ostensibly autonomous) subjects. In this, tragedy—a form whose events "seemed to emanate from above, from the author and his idea, and was never motivated from below, from out of the characters themselves"—finds an unlikely parallel with the micromanaged contrivances of Viennese classicism as Adorno sometimes understood it (1976, 123).⁸

All the same, Adorno is careful to keep the Finale at a safe distance from any notion of dramatic tragedy, per se, and for good reasons: ever reluctant to correlate music too concretely to human action, he would have been especially wary about seeming to encourage the very reception trope he intended to dispel, one that heard the Finale dramatizing the exploits of some "tragic hero." For the most part, Adorno would have us believe that the work is "tragic" not because it reinscribes the dramatic content of tragic stage narratives, but because of its implacable dominion over its materials, its forcible negation of the epic impulse—the latter being a function of tragedy's top-down sibling, musical classicism, manifested here on a larger-than-life scale.

However, there is one especially charged moment in the *Physiognomy* where Adorno seems to inject this dominant classicism with the stuff of true dramatic narrative. With disarming casualness, he remarks that in the Finale, Mahler "dares to undertake a work of the Beethovenian type"—meaning, unmistakably, one in which the parts exist only to serve the whole, in the top-down fashion of the Enlightenment "dramatic" symphony—and then models this affected classicism as coercive, transgressive, and even sadistic: "the totality that sanctions for its own glory the destruction of the individual, who has no choice but to be destroyed, rules unchallenged" (1992, 97). Unusual for Adorno is the suggestion here that tragedy is something that happens within—even *to*—the Finale, as the product of conflicted musical agencies.

In context, the comment seems little more than an offhanded rhetorical flourish; it receives no follow-up and is difficult to square with his broader line of thought.⁹ But if our aim is to model the Finale as a coherent, teleological plot, the doubly anthropomorphic conceit that Adorno tosses off here—that of the

8. Cf. Adorno's use of "dramatic symphony" as a shorthand for the Enlightenment paradigm (1992, 43, 72, and 127).

9. See Section VII.

monolithic work pitted against its own constituent elements—offers a singularly effective point of entry. In this chapter I will show the work staging a spectacular confrontation between the novelistic freedom of its individual subjects and precisely the type of implacable integration over which Mahler's earlier works had ostensibly triumphed. It is a true "tragic narrative" in Almén's sense, with "order"—here, the A-minor sonata itself—triumphing brutally over all "transgression." Negativity in this reading is not the destruction of some programmatic hero but an exercise of power run rampant, a hyperbolized classicism in which coherence becomes a damaging condition, one that liquidates individual impulses according to the whims of a voracious collective. In such a view, it is no coincidence that Mahler's most procedurally traditional symphony is also the bleakest in expression. Indeed, the work stands as a graphic testament to the coercion Adorno hears latent in "all classicism": that of "conflicts" and "antitheses" that are "thrust upon" a work's living details "as if by decree" (1976, 123). In it, the integrated totality abrogated in the Third and then reawakened in the opening movement is potentiated to avenge itself on the "epic ideal" in general and on the Allegro's A-major affirmation in particular.

This chapter's structure resembles that of Chapter 4, with narrative detail accumulating gradually across several complete journeys through the movement. Section II lays crucial foundations by addressing its sonata processes at the largest level of structure. Section III then rewinds to look at the exposition in more detail, with particular interest in how the work poses its abiding dramatic problems. Section IV explores the procedural and material grounds for what critics have termed the Finale's "inescapable" coherence, by linking the obsessive and asphyxiating aspects of its thematic work to its tragic sonata story. With these hermeneutic foundations in place, Sections V and VI then retrace the remainder of the work, finding the drama of this "inescapable" coherence to play out in remarkable tonal and thematic detail. In the concluding sections, I first revisit Adorno's comments and explore how his estimation of Mahler the man may have led him to two irreconcilable views of his favorite Mahler movement; I then return to the question, first raised in Chapter 4, of how a close reading might prompt us to rethink or revise the traditional image of the Sixth as a kind of domestic portrait.

II. Expositional Failure, Rotational Havoc, and the Errant S-Themes

When Mahler warned of the many "riddles" [*Rätsel*] that his Sixth Symphony would pose to posterity, he surely had the structure of its enormous Finale in mind.¹⁰ The movement is so brazen in scale and complexity that analysts have

10. In 1904, he wrote to Specht: "My sixth will pose riddles that only a generation that has absorbed and digested my first five symphonies may hope to solve" (Martner, ed. 1979, 277; translation modified). Obviously, these comments stand at odds with his later hopes that the work would be immediately accessible.

often seen it as singular challenge, a musical Everest whose peak would reveal some unique vantage on the horizons of Mahler's genius. Conquering the Finale has been tantamount to proclaiming a symbolic mastery of its form. Critical testimony often betrays a flush of expeditionary enthusiasm: Bekker marvels at the power of the form to bind the most extreme contrasts into a convincing whole (1969, 225).¹¹ Ratz heralds the Finale's "somnambulistic sureness" of conception (1968, 41), de la Grange its "irresistible logic of architecture" (1999, 838). Adorno speaks in superlatives: the Finale is nothing less than the "center of Mahler's entire oeuvre," the work (as quoted earlier) in which the composer's "epic expansion attains tightest control over itself" (1992, 97).

And yet, as already hinted, technical discussions have tended to be interpretively neutral; most of the authors just named marvel at the Finale's byzantine construction and taut motivic relations mainly through a formalist lens.¹² The tradition stemming from Adorno raised the bar for interpretive sophistication, but his image of the Finale as a grueling, self-negating critique of the *Formenlehre* sonata makes scarcely more headway in binding the work's myriad particulars into a compelling whole. For Adorno, as for more mainstream critics, the Finale's distinctive character still seems to reside mainly in its explosive juxtapositions of sharply differentiated musical topics. In such hearings, the movement's "negativity" is in large part a feature and function of the tumultuous musical surface.¹³

It hardly surprises that mid-twentieth-century analytic paradigms, with their normalizing tendencies and wholesale disregard of tonal plot, prevented critics from gaining any traction in the Finale's deeper musical processes. Often, the movement's schematic similarity to traditional models is breezily overstated. Floros simply describes the movement as being in "normal" sonata form (1993, 180), and Del Mar submits, mystifyingly, that it only "appears . . . more complicated and unconventional than it really is" (1980, 51–52). Ratz and Redlich are more willing to embrace the Finale as deformational but are no less bound by midcentury schematic conceptions of form. Ratz acknowledges Mahler's many licenses, but justifies them as *evidence* of the composer's sensitivity to spatial/formalist criteria (1956, 35 and 46), while Redlich normalizes the work's irregularities with ad hoc formal categories like "ante-" and "post-recapitulations" (1963, 255–56).

The need for a dynamic organizing principle is nowhere more evident than in Bernd Sponheuer's lengthy analysis (1978), which adopts Adorno's critical apparatus in toto and aims meticulously to document the movement's "processive curve." Sponheuer's attention to detail is refreshing, but as otherwise astute observations pile up, Adorno's chimerical concepts of "musical logic" and "logical

11. "Was diesem Finale seine Ausnahmstellung gibt, ist die Kraft der formalen Bändigung, die Geschlossenheit, mit der verschiedenartigste Stimmung und Konflikte als Totalität erfaßt sind."

12. See also Redlich 1963; del Mar 1980; and Floros 1993. Samuels offers a helpful comparison of six earlier analyses (1995, 64–82).

13. The view of 6/IV as a study in contrasts goes back as far as Bekker (1969, 225ff.) and is most famously expressed in Ratz's portrayal of the work alternating between "positive" and "negative" states (1968, 43).

progression” are asked to bear an unmanageable amount of explanatory weight. Ultimately, they show themselves to be little more than tautological placeholders, prone to collapse when overloaded with the analytic particulars that Adorno originally withheld.¹⁴ Beyond the rough sonata outline, Sponheuer lacks a means to bind the myriad details into a convincing teleological whole, to help his *Verlaufskurve* to transcend bar-by-bar description.

What these analysts overlook is that for all its ostentatious complexity, the Finale is almost obsessively preoccupied with the tonal/cadential drama of the Enlightenment sonata. Nowhere in Mahler is the secondary theme’s generic drive for closure more intensely wrought than here. Granted, it is not the only long-range impulse driving the form; one reason that the Finale’s sonata plot is so difficult to untangle is that it interweaves a number of narrative strands that remain largely independent until its climax. But the plight of the secondary themes to secure major-mode closure—particularly following the exposition’s collapse at mm. 228–29—is the most decisive in terms of the movement’s large-scale unfolding and offers an especially productive access point. Thus, as in Chapter 4, our first task is to trace the story of S across the entire movement, raising a narrative scaffolding that will allow us to add critical details later on.

Figure 7.1 offers a much simplified overview of its thematic and tonal organization. The piece divides into four “blocks” corresponding to the four sections of the traditional sonata,¹⁵ each beginning with the “introductory complex” (labeled “I”), a brief but highly characteristic formal marker (mm. 1–16). In each case, the introductory complex gives way to what I call “dissolution fields,” spaces characterized by ethereal *pianissimo* textures, fragmented motivic play, tonal instability, and an overall lack of symphonic impetus.¹⁶ In the expository block, this field is the starting point for an extended generative process (mm. 16–113) in which the movement’s main themes emerge from the ether and gradually gain the momentum necessary to launch the sonata.

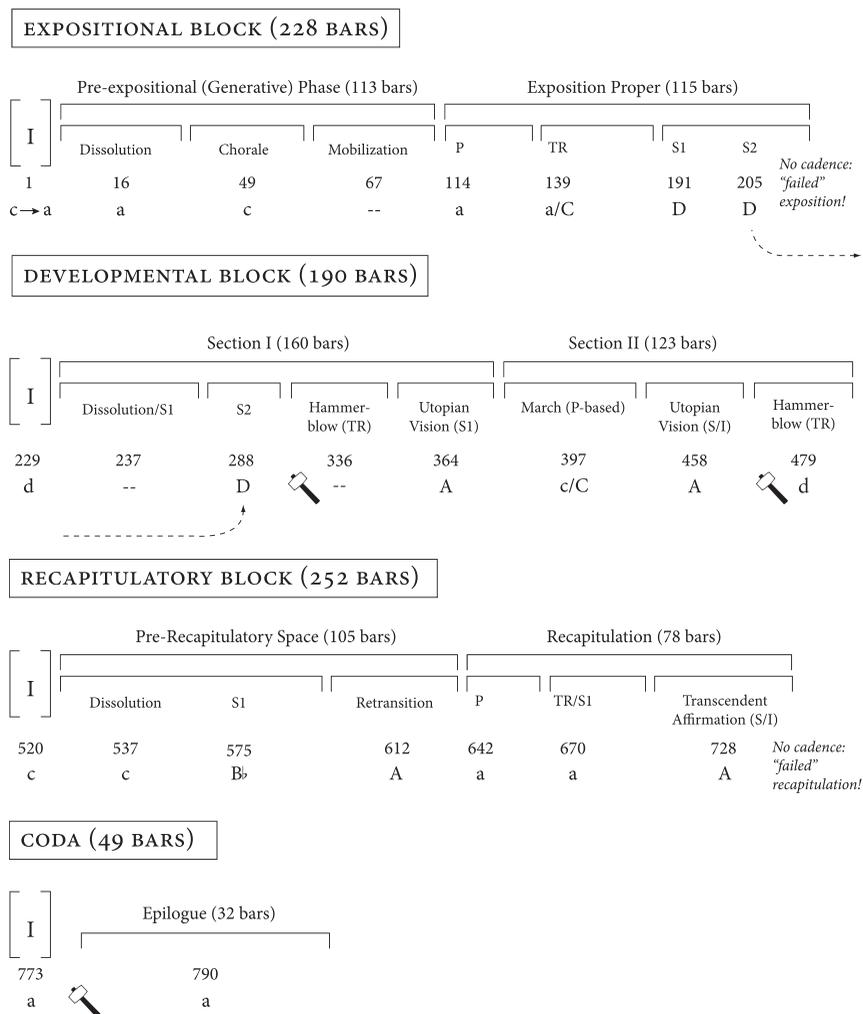
The exposition proper (m. 114) unfolds with a functional clarity reminiscent of 6/I: P-, TR-, and S-zones are delineated sharply and unambiguously. It is only in the last of these that significant complications arise. As Figure 7.1 shows, S-space in fact contains two distinct themes: a buoyant but restrained S1 and an over-the-top S2 that expressly channels the ecstatic *Schwung* of the Allegro’s “Alma” theme. Despite differences in character, the two themes share a common purpose—to secure the secondary key of D major—as well as a common fate: both are cut short before being able to do so. S1, spirited but too lightweight to contrast the oppressive P-theme march, peters into aimless sequences and is hastily nudged aside by its more assertive successor. But after much confident promise,

14. See Chapter 2, Section III.

15. My preference for the term “block” here over “rotation” is explained later.

16. I borrow “dissolution field” (*Auflösungsfeld*) from Adorno, who uses it to describe certain collapsing passages in the Finale’s development (1992, 99). Here, I reserve it for the inert and inchoate expanses following each I-complex, where the music expresses less an active disintegration than a state of absolute fragmentation and stasis. I thus prefer Samuels’s translation (“dissolution”) over Jephcott’s more graphic “disintegration” (Samuels 1995, 78).

Figure 7.1 Symphony no. 6/IV, simplified overview



S2 is also derailed before cadencing (mm. 228–29), leading to an especially graphic instance of expositional failure.

Before tracing the story of S any further, we should first zoom out to take stock of the movement's overall design, since its large-scale organization is far from self-evident, and my reading differs significantly from all that precede. One challenge here is the tangle of conflicting signals regarding the movement's rotational build. By dividing the Finale with clear, recurring formal markers (the "I-complexes"), Mahler seems to invite us to listen for large-scale rotational process of the sort heard in earlier works. But no such scheme materializes. From Figure 7.1, we can see that the expositional layout (P–TR–S1–S2)

is difficult to square with the succeeding sections; no large block, in fact, expressly cycles through the content of any other. However, my contention is that this rotational disarray is *exactly* the crisis situation precipitated by the exposition's untimely S-theme derailment. In other words, the Finale's formal irregularities can be traced to the erratic behavior of the thwarted S-themes, which become increasingly desperate to stabilize the major mode originally denied them, often using formal and tonal means unsanctioned by the sonata at large.

Still, to blame the S-themes for the rotational havoc—to justify their behavior as “erratic”—we need to find traces of a deeply embedded rotational scheme, however fractured at the musical surface. We can do this most convincingly by focusing on the one constructive element (apart from the I-complex) common to all three blocks: the delayed onset of the main concentration of P-theme materials. The appearance of P only halfway into each block marks a striking departure from its normal role as the rhetorical “initiator” of rotations. As Hepokoski and Darcy show, the main sections of the classical sonata (exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda) tend overwhelmingly to begin with elements of P; this is as much the norm for Mahler as it was for Haydn or Mozart.¹⁷ Given the strong generic association of P-materials with musical beginnings, we might well assume that their initiatory function would be preserved—if only residually—even when P appears in the midst of some larger span.

In the Finale's expositional block, there is little doubt that the musical proceedings begin in earnest only after the generative introduction, with the onset of P (and thus the exposition proper) in m. 114. But the Finale's overall design snaps into much sharper focus when we realize that this basic structural rhythm—an extended period of anticipation and disarray followed by a concentration of forces around the P-theme—recurs in both post-expositional blocks as well. If there is a single key to unlocking the Finale's formal argument, it is this: at the highest level of structure, each of the three main blocks joins two broad chapters—an *anticipation phase* (beginning with the introductory complex) and an *accomplishment phase*, where the P-theme elements at last discharge their traditional initiatory function. (These phases are indicated at the top of Figure 7.1.) It is in this respect that the form revisits the “epic” plot type of 3/I (see Figure 6.5).

In the opening of the Third, this large-scale design was easy to perceive, thanks to strong rotational congruence between sections. In the Finale, it is harder to detect because the anticipation phases are not obviously related. Indeed, apart from beginning with a dissolution field, they actually have very little in common. But looking beyond their rhetorical and material differences, one finds a striking narrative/dramatic congruence as zones of instability, disorder, and postponement. And in each of the post-expositional blocks, we will find that the

17. Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 65. Apart from 2/I, Mahler's other developments and recapitulations all begin either with P-materials or by a return to introductory space followed by P (as in 7/I [the recapitulation], 1/IV [the development], and both post-expositional rotations of 3/I).

determining agents of postponement and disorder are consistently the S-themes, always preoccupied with their own immediate and unattainable fulfillment, and always at the expense of a taut or orderly sonata.

Our first indication that expositional failure has set the S-themes on a problematic path comes with their refusal to acknowledge that the exposition is even over. Shortly after the developmental block begins (m. 229), a full-voiced S2 breaks in without warning (m. 288) and begins to replay almost exactly as it had in the exposition, preserving both key and phrase structure. (Indeed, the transposition of the original melody by a fourth dampens a subdominant inflection in the original, making the second S2 even more strongly rooted in D major.) Figure 7.1 shows this reentry with the dotted line connecting the first two blocks. This kind of near-redundancy is striking enough for its rarity in Mahler's idiom; it is all the more jarring here in baldly undermining the many cues that a new, developmental rotation had begun. Thus the instability of the second anticipation phase is not simply tonal or thematic (and it is both of these at times), but temporal and even ontological. The reintrusion of S2 (as something of a "second try") does not simply call into question our position in the unfolding form—it induces a temporal short-circuit whereby the listener seems to be present to expositional and developmental space *simultaneously*.¹⁸

It is against this waywardness that the first of the famous hammer blows (marked with mallet icons on Figure 7.1) takes punitive action. On reappearing, S2 resumes its original tonal agenda with increased fervor, extending to nearly twice its original length and building to feverish intensity by the time it locks onto the dominant of its D-major target in m. 328. But the final drive to closure—seemingly so secure at this point—is smashed by the hammer's colossal minor-mode deceptive cadence (m. 336), which reasserts the symphonic present tense and declares the exposition closed once and for all.

To celebrate this moment mainly for its violent theatrics, as most writers have, is thus to miss its larger significance. Here as elsewhere, Mahler requires us to pay equal attention to the circumstances of a musical element's first *and* last appearances. And looking ahead, we see that after falling under the hammer, neither the once-hopeful S2 nor its key of D major appears again in the Finale. This sinister plot device is central to all that follows: again and again, cadential efforts will produce a corruption of the intended tonic and, in so doing, permanently negate or expel one or more elements associated with S1 or S2.

The protracted drive for closure that has preoccupied the work for nearly 150 bars reaches what Adorno might call its "negative fulfillment" in the tonal and thematic chaos immediately following the hammer blow (mm. 338–63). But it is not long before elements of S return, in a new guise and with a new strategy. Gradually recollecting itself, the Finale eventually settles on a passage of high-Wagnerian transcendence in the tonic A *major* (m. 364), featuring transfigured motives from S1. Because the modal outcome of the symphony hangs in the

18. Bekker apparently saw enough ambiguity in the reprise of S2 to conclude that the exposition *was* still under way here, only to terminate with the hammer-blow (1969, 230–31).

balance—and because that outcome hinges on the fate of the troubled S-themes—this idyllic enclave ought to strike us as especially provocative, as it offers a vision (if only fleeting) of the best of all possible resolutions, a blissful A major emancipation from the oppressive tonic minor.¹⁹ It is at once an idealized future and an echo of the past, enabled by the S-themes' ancestral memory of the Allegro's A-major coda. Yet through its very placement *here*, rather than in the recapitulation, we know this tonic major to be premature and, in that respect, untrustworthy. Just as S2 had forcibly rewound symphonic time, here we find S1 attempting to fast-forward to a hypothetical Utopian future, beyond the troubled expanses of a sonata still under way. Similarly idealized expression of the tonic major will return twice before the movement's end—always broader and more urgent, and (critically) always reworking materials from S-space. But here, the Utopian vision proves no more stable than the surrounding music and quickly dissipates.

Stretched too thin and growing increasingly frantic in the search for stability, the second anticipation phase breaks off in m. 385, unleashing pandemonium. And as in the expositional block, it is ultimately the P-materials that impose order and marshal symphonic impetus (m. 397). On the heels of the previous section's instability and volatility, the P-based march—committed over its long arc to the diligent working-out of a few select motives—seems a particularly earnest and well-behaved symphonic development. After so much stalling, the sonata seems back on track. But as this lengthy episode begins to unravel, the tenacious S-materials burst into the discourse with a second, varied sounding of the A-major Utopian vision (m. 458), precipitating another caustic response from the hammer (m. 479) and triggering the final, troubled leg of the development. Culminating at a perversely corrupted cadence in D minor (m. 520), the development concludes by bringing the narrative thread that opened it—the never-successful search for D-major fulfillment—to a harrowing and unequivocal close in its modal opposite.²⁰

The third anticipation phase, at the start of the recapitulatory block (m. 520), is problematic in several respects. To begin, it is by far the least outwardly suggestive of “instability, disarray, or postponement”; indeed, it appears grounded, directed, and utterly confident. After some initial meandering, S1 steps forth to seize on a stable B \flat tonality (m. 575), where it makes its own final bid for transcendence, without the support of the defeated S2. Still, S1 has proved so problematic by this point, it is worth asking if we should listen against the grain of its outward elation—especially given the seemingly random tonal level of this staged apotheosis.

Doing so puts us at odds with past critics, who have almost universally sought to normalize this integral, tonally stable S1 as the first leg of a “reversed” recapitulation.²¹ But this hardly seems to me the most convincing or attentive

19. This outcome “hinges on” the fate of S if only because a modally reconfigured P-theme is all but unthinkable. Thus the question looms throughout as to whether the recapitulated S will be able both to retain its major tonality and secure it with an EEC. See Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, ch. 14.

20. Mahler corrupts the cadence by dovetailing it with the onset of the recapitulatory block. At the moment the cadential bass finally (after nearly 450 bars!) attains a resounding low D, the upper voices sound the movement's toxic opening sonority (C, E \flat , F \sharp , A \flat). See Section V.

21. See, e.g., Sponheuer 1978, 317; Del Mar 1980, 60; Adorno 1992, 93; Jackson 1997, 199–201; de La Grange 1999, 837; Hefling 2007, 123; Mitchell 2007, 391; and Painter 2007, 135.

hearing. For if we look ahead to the reprise proper (m. 642), we find that P gives way to a full presentation of S1 *in the tonic minor* (m. 670). It may be that this later appearance has so consistently escaped attention because it occurs within TR-space, superimposed onto the latter. (As S1 sounds in the trumpet, TR itself is displaced to the bass register.)²² But it is unmistakably there. And unlike the putative "reversal," which occurs nowhere else in his oeuvre, this kind of late-stage thematic conflation is a standard Mahlerian device,²³ one that allows S1 to fulfill its generic tonal and rotational requirements while also partaking in a remarkable and unnervingly graphic deformation. As if in retribution for S1's final subversive outburst—the confident but wrongly placed "recapitulation" attempt of m. 575—the Finale takes its ultimate revenge, denying the theme even the full honors of a dedicated reprise. Stripped of its original texture and accompaniment (m. 670), the once-sprightly S1 is pressed summarily into the tonic minor as if by force, side by side with the similarly vanquished TR.

After a brief liquidation, the TR/S1 complex unravels (m. 720), and the recapitulation now enters its most expectant moment, as a final version of the A-major Utopian vision begins to bloom (m. 728). Surely Mahler meant us to take this S-based music for a final, redemptive breakthrough; its lofty triumphalism is well suited to a goal sought since the symphony's opening bars. And uniquely, this Utopian enclave appears at a plausible location in the unfolding sonata, as the rotational correlate of S2 (see Figure 7.1). But when this last ecstatic drive to the tonic major is shattered by the final I-complex (m. 773), the S-themes' fate is sealed.²⁴ All that remains is an enervated epilogue, dragged out under the long shadow of tonic-minor hegemony.

III. Expository Block: Dramatis Personae

Our first pass through the Finale tracked the actions of, and reactions to, a single pair of themes—S1 and S2—whose "novelistic" independence decisively shaped the unfolding form, in keeping with Adorno's vision of "bottom-up"

22. Only Ratz (1968, 46) and Floros (1993, 183) make reference to S1 in m. 670—though they note only the presence of "motives" from S when in fact the entire theme is present (albeit with the adjusted headmotive first heard at m. 575). Redlich (1963, 256) devises the custom term "ante-recapitulation" for the B \flat -major music—he does not invoke "reversal"—but he too overlooks the A-minor recapitulation of S1.
23. The recapitulation of 5/II also conflates two adjacent thematic zones: shortly after S begins its reprise (m. 356), the highly recognizable P2 theme—originating in m. 35 and till then omitted from the recapitulation—appears prominently in counterpoint (m. 362). Chapters 5 and 6 show a number of thematic syntheses and superimpositions in the recapitulations of 4/I and 3/I. Also relevant here is the extraordinary B-major enclave just *before* the recapitulation of 7/I (m. 318ff.), where Mahler intermingles all of the exposition's themes in a fantasy-projection that is swiftly undercut when the real reprise begins.
24. As the bass secures its low A, the upper voices sound a sour F dominant seventh. Thus the final two I-complexes each close a tonal thread opened earlier by S-materials: the first one centered on D major, the second on A major.

construction. That their plight ended so wretchedly also gave an early glimpse of this chapter's master trope, that of the Finale turning against its own rebellious elements, as the "totality" that "sanction[s] for its own glory the destruction of the individual" (Adorno 1992, 97). But so far I have said little about the agents reacting to S1 and S2 and have offered only a skeletal account of a few select passages. In this section, we set out on a second, more detailed pass through the work—beginning with the expositional block, which introduces the drama's characters and long-range narrative issues. Our main concern here will be how the exposition, particularly in its long generation phase, articulates the charged tonal, thematic, and processive oppositions that will ultimately dictate the course of the work.

As already noted, it was only in the aftermath of the exposition's failure—that critical first-act plot point—that the S-themes' form-subverting drama really gets under way. The Finale's other main story strand begins as soon as the curtain rises. Mahler's introductory complex (mm. 1–16) divides into two 8-bar units: the first spins out the anxious I-theme over a German diminished-third chord in C minor; the second shifts abruptly to A major/minor, continuing the upper-voice melody over a violent sounding of the symphony's motto (mm. 9–11).²⁵ The antithesis of the two tonal planes could hardly be more emphatic. Framed by timbral and dynamic discontinuities, honoring no logic of contrapuntal succession, and harnessing the brash outburst of the motto, A doesn't simply follow C—it expels it, annihilates it. This charged antithesis resounds through the entire drama. Not only do these two keys repeatedly assert themselves at the other's expense, they also reenact with tragic regularity the plot function encapsulated here: that of A minor violently usurping a process set into motion by C.

The first large-scale projection of this conflict plays out across the whole of pre-expositional space. Figure 7.2 shows the expositional block in more detail; the upper brackets divide the generative introduction from the exposition proper, while the lower set traces the rhetorical character of its internal sections. Binding the Finale's tonal endpoints (C minor and A minor) like super-compressed matter, the tense singularity of the I-complex unleashes such dispersive force that only moments later we find ourselves floating in an infant universe, a vacuum clouded only with elementary particles. It is the purpose of the long introduction to fuse these particles into durable musical matter, to collect and focus the energies of the I-complex into a state sufficient to launch the Finale's exposition.

A glance at the arrayed tonal centers in Figure 7.2, however, shows that the tonic A minor actually plays little part in the generative process. Despite its show of dominance in m. 9, it proves too unstable to launch the sonata on its own. By the time of the lead-in to the exposition (m. 98), it is the ousted key of C that has proven capable of moving the Finale forward; until the last instant, all signs point toward a C-minor sonata. But at the moment of the exposition-launch (m. 114), A minor bursts in,

25. See Chapter 4, Section III, for my initial discussion of the Sixth Symphony's "motto."

Figure 7.2 Symphony no. 6/IV, expository block

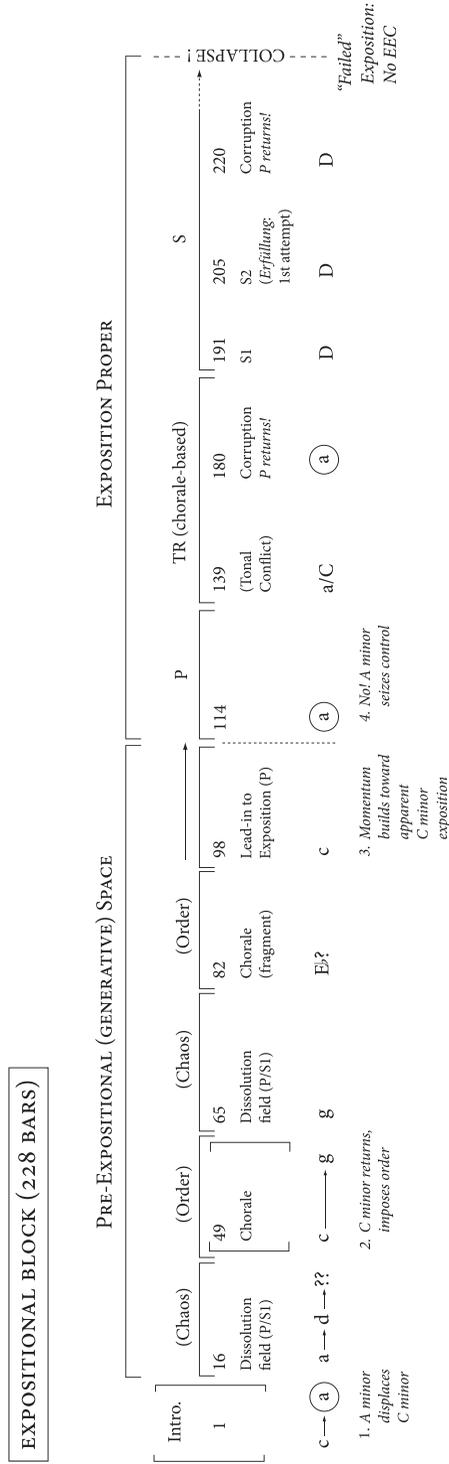


Figure 7.3 P and S1 motives

7.3a. The exposition's P-theme (mm. 114–21)

7.3b. The exposition's S1-theme (mm. 191–201)

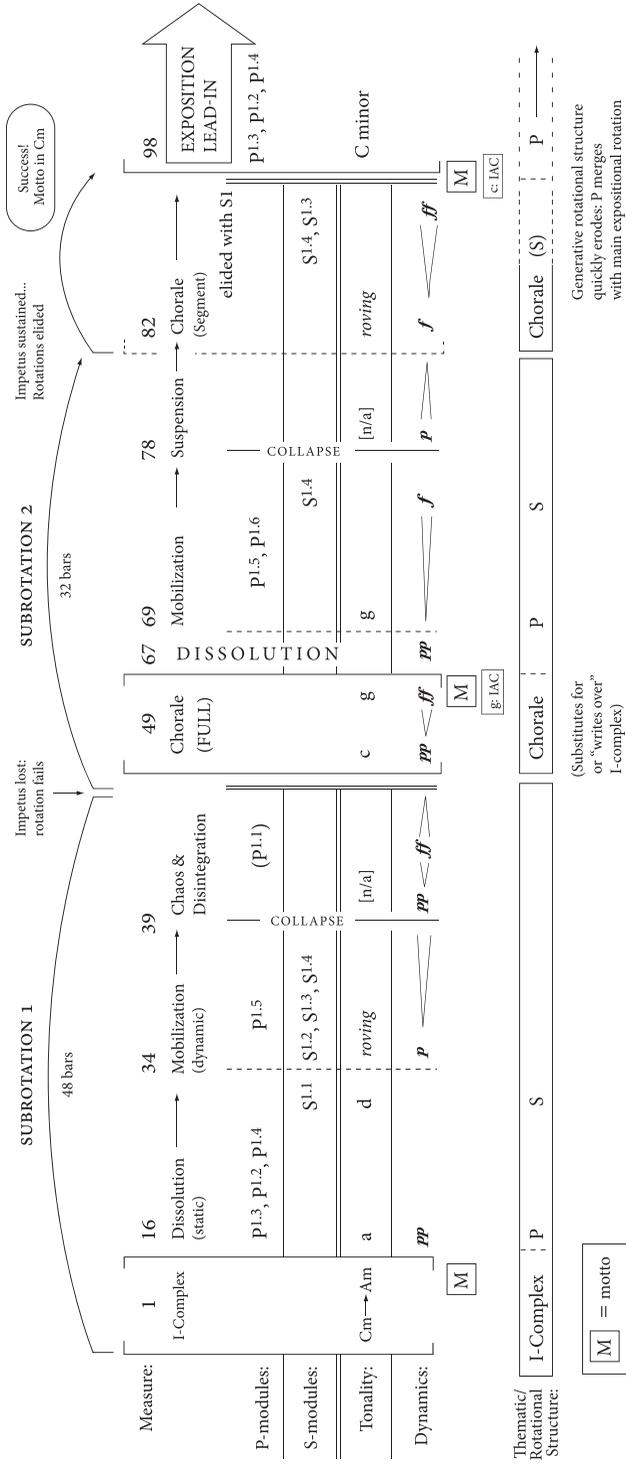
stealing the accumulated momentum and reenacting the proprietary tonal conflict of the movement's opening: for a second time, it appears out of nowhere to claim what seems rightfully to belong to C.²⁶ From the broadest vantage, then, the story of the anticipation phase is one of the competition between two prospective tonics, with A minor ascending repeatedly over its rival. Let us now look more closely at how that drama plays out.

Our first impression of pre-expositional space is likely to be one of complete chaos. But with sufficient altitude, its underlying logic becomes clear. For reference, Figure 7.3 labels the component motives of P and S1; Figure 7.4 then tracks their dispersal throughout pre-expositional space. The latter reveals two large subrotational cycles, each of which commences with a self-contained formal marker (enclosed in brackets) and then proceeds to a series of contrasting episodes treating P- and S1-modules in succession.

There are two things to notice here. The first is that the dynamic opposition of P and S—no less crucial here than in the opening *Allegro*—is already taking shape. For now, this polarization lies mainly in their stark differences of thematic integrity and harmonic character. Scattered almost at random, the initial

26. Remarkably, the *Finale*'s "epic" twin, 3/I, also displaces C with A minor at the moment the exposition begins (see mm. 239–47).

Figure 7.4 Symphony no. 6/IV, pre-expositional space



P-motives (mm. 16–28) serve mainly as gestural and textual elements, indicating if anything the *absence* of a discernible theme. (The first of these are the elementary particles of the Sixth Symphony as a whole, the octave-leap and the $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ minor-third cell.) By contrast, S1 appears more or less fully formed, its motives arrayed in the proper order (mm. 31–39) and underscored by energetic (if aimless) functional harmonies. Where P mainly filled space in a static field, S presides over a decisive—if also short-lived—“mobilization” of forces (see Figure 7.4).²⁷

A similar, if broader, polarity of coherence and initiative underlies the two subrotations themselves. Where the first devolves into chaos and then trails off (mm. 39–48), the second sustains its momentum and drives to a powerful climax. This difference has much to do with their initializing events. As Figure 7.4 shows, Subrotation 1 begins with the I-complex (in brackets) and establishes A minor as its governing tonic. But as we have already seen, it is a key that is unable to stabilize itself. The resumption of momentum then falls to Subrotation 2, where the maligned key of C minor will return in a new form to retake control of the generative process.

Freud famously argued that we repeat traumatic actions as a means of mastering the past—of overcoming them, in other words, to reclaim the future. Peter Brooks extends this idea to the realm of literary plot, suggesting that *transformed repetitions* in texts, retracings of ground already traversed, might represent the “search” for an ideal narrative ending (1984, 98–101).²⁸ Such a view resonates suggestively with Subrotation 2, where C minor can only attain its desired ending—an exposition launch in its own key—when it has symbolically mastered the trauma of the I-complex. To this end, it must suppress the complex itself and then pacify the intruding major-minor motto.

This first task is successful enough that we might not suspect Subrotation 2 to be a “transformation” of what precedes at all. (This only becomes clear at the dissolution field of m. 67.) With its symmetrical phrasing, harmonic clarity, and uniform timbres, the solemn wind chorale at m. 49 seems the furthest thing possible from the I-complex, its notional correlate in Subrotation 1. But this contrast is surely the point. The chorale appears not as a new stage in the generative process, but as something already formed, intervening from above and/or outside that process altogether; its function is that of an alternate beginning, one that graphically “writes over” the I-complex, in hopes of setting the music on a more stable course.²⁹ Its success is evident almost immediately. Unlike its predecessor, Subrotation 2 does not degenerate into chaos; after only a brief flagging of forward motion (mm. 78–82), the music elides into a dynamic reprise of the chorale theme, which in turn triggers the final push to stabilize C minor and prepare the exposition.

27. This opposition also has a significant prehistory: recall that in the development of 6/I, an inchaote assemblage of P-modules gave way, after many fits and starts, to a longer, more coherent presentation of S. See Chapter 4.

28. Cf. Newcomb 1992, 132–34.

29. As Brooks might say, the subrotational structure “binds” these otherwise antipodal events, forcing us to consider them “in terms of similarity or substitution rather than mere contiguity”—in this case, as parallel beginnings (1984, 101).

It is at the climax of this process that the chorale complex finally masters the major-minor motto—the “primary trauma” itself—through reenactment. As Figure 7.4 shows, both chorale strands (mm. 49 and 88) culminate in soundings of the motto. But by pressing the figure into functional-harmonic service, as the tonic constituents in a pair of authentic cadences, they strongly curtail its threat as an intrusive force. The first of these mottos confirms G major/minor (m. 65). But the second is used to install C minor itself (m. 96)—precisely the key that the motto originally served to displace. Only then, with the tables turned and the trauma symbolically mastered, can the generative phase draw to a close and the C-minor sonata prepare to launch.

But as we know, that C-minor sonata is not to be; A minor will soon displace its rival to assume control of the exposition's primary theme (m. 114). Now storming ahead with unchecked vigor, the P-theme exerts its dominion over the remainder of the exposition. Returning now to Figure 7.2, we see that the transitional theme (m. 139), a vaulting derivative of the chorale melody, opens in A minor but swiftly resumes the tonal struggle of the introduction.³⁰ A and C (both primarily in the major mode) now fight in the open air, often for mere bars of territory. By m. 157 the music lurches between provisional tonics every few measures, until the texture simply implodes (m. 176).³¹ When the music restabilizes, there is little doubt as to the victor: motives from P (especially P^{1.5}) are brashly reinstated, firmly planted in A major (thus purging even the tone C₄!). Like its ancestor in 6/I, this TR has been a “transition” to nowhere. The primary theme, in the tonic key, has had the last word. Even into S-space, we continue to feel the gravity of the newly empowered P-theme. Seconds before S2 collapses (m. 228), the closing events of TR-space replay in full: the music destabilizes (m. 217), and after a chaotic digression recollects around an energized outburst of P^{1.5} (mm. 224ff.).

In Chapter 4, I portrayed the opening Allegro as an extended conflict between P and S. By now, it should be clear that I hear the Finale in similar terms—though now the clash involves a larger cast, with even more outsized personalities. There is, of course, P—inert and freeloading at first, then caustic and territorial once empowered—and its opposite, S—ardent, protean, and dogged in its pursuit of major-mode fulfillment. But now there is also the C-minor chorale, aligned with neither: stoic, industrious, and indomitable in its attempts to reclaim tonic authority. In the next section, I pause our analysis to probe this issue of character “personality” further. Our focus now will be the *kinds* of transformations these theme-characters undergo as the movement unfolds, squaring them with Adorno's dictates for novelistic construction on the one hand and the demands of an implacable, depersonalizing sonata form on the other.

30. The Finale's chorale-derived TR should naturally call to mind the TR-chorale of 6/I—not just topically, but also in its striking concentration of falling melodic semitones (mm. 149, 163, etc.), a trait inherited from its source chorale (mm. 49, 50, 57, etc.; cf. Figure 4.6).

31. See the C-major arrivals in mm. 157, 167, and 172.

IV. Malignant Replication and “Inescapable” Coherence

As Mahler matured, he became increasingly adept at spinning out elaborate, often sharply diversified structures from a small stock of basic motives. Like the Seventh and Eighth after it, the Sixth Symphony wears its motivic economy on its sleeve. Yet even Mahler’s admirers are likely to notice a claustrophobic sameness to the Finale’s melodic resources, the sense that many of its characteristic figures—particularly the dotted rhythms associated with the motto—are repeated too often, too incessantly to be a function of mere “coherence.” Indeed, with Mahler’s other works in mind, it is hard to shake the impression that many of its melodies are undistinguished, unmemorable—even downright weak. Detractors had long noticed this, but Adorno was the first to take this as an *intended* effect: he writes of a unity that becomes a kind of affliction, of an asphyxiating rigidity that is found “in too many themes in the whole Sixth Symphony for it to be attributed to a wearying of melodic invention” (1992, 103). This may indeed be the case, since this monotony is actually only a feature of the exposition’s P- and S1-themes and their derivatives. The chorale, its offshoots, and the soaring S2 seem comparatively unfettered.

This broad dualism—between themes that manifest this motivic affliction and themes that do not—will be crucial as we move ahead, particularly in its relation to the power politics of the sonata process itself. As hinted earlier, the Finale’s contest between classical integration and novelistic freedom lets us hear the A-minor sonata itself as a kind of meta-agent, the force that steers the global push toward tonic-minor assimilation. (To use Adorno’s conceit, it is the “totality” bent on the “destruction of the individual.”) Strikingly, the materials that seem to be in alliance with the sonata and its rigid formalist agenda share two key properties: (1) they are the least “novelistic” ones in their compartment (by Adorno’s definition); and (2) they are the very themes whose motives metastasize throughout the symphonic tissue, creating the impression of an organicism run amok, a coherence grown so monolithic that it “allows for no escape” [*keinen Ausweg duldet*] (Adorno 1998b, 91).³² This image of “inescapable” coherence gives us a useful lens for examining the Finale’s thematic/motivic processes, and one that allows us to bring the various interpretive strands explored so far (the wracked sonata plot, the conflict of tonal authority, and the trope of a failed novel-symphony) into an ever-tighter weave.³³

As Chapter 2 explained, Adorno believed that the narrative coherence of the novel-symphony would be legible mainly in the transformation of its thematic characters, whose “core” identities remain fixed despite constant superficial change. He also suggests that the variant procedure, like the novel-symphonic condition it facilitates, is more or less omnipresent in Mahler’s oeuvre. Taken at face value, the implications are stark: were the thematic process to dissolve

32. The metaphor proved influential; see, e.g., Sponheuer 1978, 289 and Redlich 1968, XXI. See also Chapter 4, n. 8.

33. Adorno himself compares the “tormenting insistence” of the finale’s melodic character to the “implacable” quality of “strict sonata form,” with no apparent sense of how fundamentally they might be linked (1992, 103).

those core identities beyond recognition—or were a theme simply to remain identical at each sounding—we would presumably encounter a breakdown of teleological coherence, a degradation of novelistic temporality, and a regression into architectonics. But as we have seen in previous chapters, the case turns out to be rather overstated. Many of Mahler's themes comport themselves this way—like the chorale, whose variant network I show here in Figure 7.5—while many others do not. To say the least, we would err to suppose that the variant technique offered a global litmus test for novelistic integrity. But the idea has at least some purchase in the Finale, thanks to a single striking fact: again and again, its most the properly “novelistic” characters readily submit to variant-based transformation, while the affiliates of the A-minor counterinsurgency clearly resist it.

There are two thematic characters to whom the variant procedure conspicuously does *not* apply. The first is the exposition's P-theme, which brashly defies Adorno's axiom of “bottom-up” construction. Convinced that the core identities of Mahler's characters were to be defined at the level of the gestalt, Adorno warns that it is fruitless to view them in terms of component parts. Under the constant flux of the variant procedure, their constituent motives are “blurred to the point of irrelevance” (1992, 87). Many of Mahler's themes resist this characterization, but none contradicts it as thoroughly as this P. Unfolding with none of the inner necessity of Mahler's carefully crafted developing variations, P seems to be little more than a ragtag group of undistinguished motives and fanfares—several of them venerable Mahlerian clichés—hastily assembled into a larger configuration, simply to fulfill an a priori symphonic necessity.³⁴ (Those who have charged the Sixth with artificiality and ugliness could make a strong case with this music alone.)

Later events confirm that the association of these motives is an arbitrary and provisional “top-down” imposition: remarkably, the P-theme proper *never recurs*—even in a remote variant—until its exact, formally obligatory recapitulation in the third block. There is no gestalt, no hidden “core” identity. Outside these formally sanctioned appearances, its motives simply scatter—some destined for semi-autonomization (like P^{1.5}), others to regroup in entirely different configurations (as in the main development, when P^{1.1}, P^{1.2}, and P^{1.3} fall in to form the C-minor march).³⁵ “Bottom-up” construction dictates that Mahler's characters show individual volition, the impulse to resist the architectonic grid that would restrain them. It is not merely that P lacks such autonomy; by recurring unchanged, merely to delineate the sonata pattern, *it becomes the grid itself*. As a theme, its function is entirely top-down; it fails to be a “character” at all.³⁶

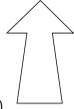
34. Cf. Williamson's description of P as “a temporary conglomerate of motifs” (1975, 134).

35. None of Mahler's other P1-themes is completely omitted from the development, and none is recapitulated without significant alteration or truncation.

36. This reading of P as mechanistic or insentient echoes the sentiments of early critics like Hermann Starcke of the *Dresdener Nachrichten*, who found that in 6/IV “the motifs are not living beings, or building blocks that could form the basis of a symphony. They are simply artificial figures in burlesque costumes who follow each other in a grotesque manner” (de La Grange 1999, 664).

Figure 7.5 Chorale melody (mm. 49–64) and later variants

“Hammer-blow” theme (mm. 336ff./479ff.)



Introduction (mm. 82–85)



Transitional theme incipit (mm. 141–44)



Chorale (mm. 49–64)



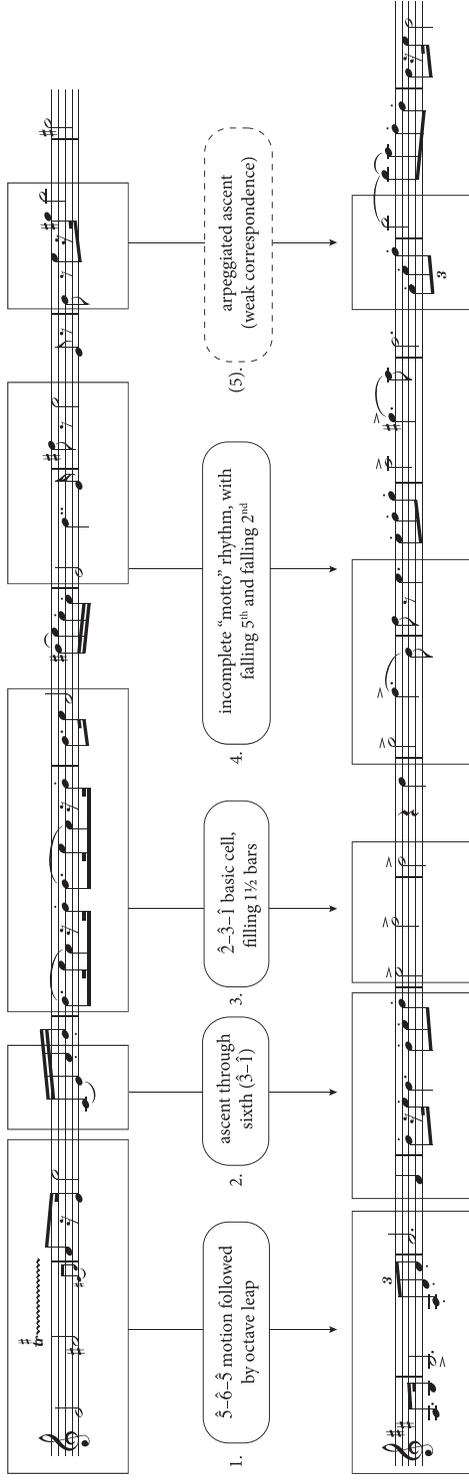
Transitional theme segment (mm. 149–56, cf. 678ff.)



This image of P as an “anti-character”—animate but insentient, the vacant functionary of a higher will—has surprising consequences for its dramatic foil, the S1 theme. From 1/IV onward, Mahler’s minor-mode expositions pivot on the juxtaposition of two maximally contrasting affective worlds. Predictably, then, P and S1 manifest what Adorno calls a “graphic dualism” of topic, timbre, and tessitura (1992, 98). But underlying this duality we find a striking degree of motivic sameness, one that far outstrips even that of the Allegro’s own P and S (see Chapter 4). As Figure 7.6 shows, S1 reinterprets the defining structural features of P, in their original order. Until now, we have seen S1 opposed to P on every front: subverting the architectonic order and rotational normalcy it would impose, constantly pulling the tonal course toward an idealized major-mode resolution. That S1 would turn out, just below the surface, to be a mere mutation of its nemesis P comes as no small irony—particularly given its ultimate inability to escape the assimilating force of the A-minor sonata. Like many of the Finale’s failures, the subjugation of S1 is all the more tragic for our sense that the game had been rigged, that its autonomy had been illusory and thus its failure unavoidable—even foreseeable in advance.

Of course, here we encounter a trope that has echoed through a hundred years of reception: that the Finale’s A-minor conclusion is, despite all manifest resistance, predestined, inevitable, *inescapable*. Such readings often focus on the

Figure 7.6 Ordered thematic connections linking P and S1



immutability of the major-minor motto, Mahler's symbol of that which cannot be altered. For the motto, too, is anti-novelistic—in its fixity, in its imperviousness to the effects of surrounding events, to time itself. Insular, detached, and intruding as if from beyond, the motto flashes into the symphonic consciousness with what Chapter 4 described as “the non-sequitur abruptness of a premonition,” a “lurch from present into future tense.” (One senses in this regard that all the mottos point ahead to the final one, and—unlike properly novelistic themes—never to each other.) The more adept we become at reading Mahlerian prose, the more clearly we see the motto as a kind of musical cipher, one that is decoded only on the novel's final page, when the major third is extirpated and the minor triad resounds alone.

The motto's “clairvoyance” may be among the more extravagant themes in Mahlerian lore. But I believe we can take it one notch further: in what follows, I argue that the motto is not merely emblematic of the Finale's downfall, but is, in a manner of speaking, *responsible* for it, by directly abetting the impression of a coherence that “allows for no escape” (Adorno 1998b, 91).

Figure 7.7 shows a group of common motivic forms that clearly bear the Finale's DNA but which derive from no one theme in particular. For this reason, I call them “generic motives” (or “G-motives”). Though they fall into two broad groups based on ambitus and kinetic character—G1s are self-contained step-wise units, while G2s hurtle through giant leaps joined in extended chains—all feature incomplete versions of the motto rhythm (♩ ♩. ♩| ♩ ♩ or ♩ ♩. ♩| ♩).

Rhetorically and dramatically, the G-motives are clearly wrapped up in the business of liquidation and disintegration. With striking consistency—on eight occasions!—they aggregate densely as some musical region reaches the end of its life span, shortly before it collapses or derails.³⁷ But they are more than mere signposts of impending catastrophe. By virtue of their melodic character and distributional tendencies, the G-motives play an active role in the disintegration process. As Figure 7.7 shows, the motives themselves lack melodic presence: the G1 family confines the lyrical impulse to cramped step-wise motions, while the G2s diffuse it in disjunct paroxysms. Because they tend to swarm in *at the expense* of properly thematic motives, edging them from the texture, the effect is not merely an overall erosion of lyrical integrity but a relentless erasure of the prevailing theme's distinguishing elements.

That this same mode of liquidation strikes so consistently and indiscriminately—that such a wide array of thematic zones is overrun by these faceless subthematic particles—suggests that the “totality” does not merely “sanction . . . the destruction of the individual,” as Adorno writes. Rather, it seeks to eradicate the idea of the individual altogether, in favor of a denuded, generic similarity. It is here that the G-motives' strong genealogical connection to the motto becomes especially provocative. For the motto is harmonic and rhythmic but *not melodic*

37. These occur in the expositional TR (mm. 157–59 and then 172ff.) and S2 (m. 220); the developmental S2 (m. 328) and march (m. 441); the recapitulatory TR (m. 700); and all three Utopian visions (mm. 372, 469, 754).

Figure 7.7 The two families of generic motives (G-motives)

7.7a. G1-Motives (all invertible)



7.7b. G2-Motives (some forms)



in any real way. So when we hear the generic motives mounting a global campaign toward negative lyricism under the banner of the motto's hallmark rhythm, we may well detect the far-reaching influence of the latter.

Thus, where the novel-symphony revels in multiplicity and luxuriates in ample time spans, the Finale's anti-novelistic agencies ruthlessly negate diversity and temporality alike, driving everywhere toward the elemental singularity of the final, static A-minor triad. The motto and the sonata work at this from different ends: the sonata imposes tonal conformity on its materials, while the motto (often "behind the scenes") exerts its persistent gravitational pull toward a state of melodic inertia, one that divests individual thematic impulses of their lyrical freedom and thus of their respective identities. And both agencies rely in their own way on veiled replication as a species of corrupt organicism: just as P mutates into the doomed S1, so the motto extends its influence by spawning its own ad hoc, malignant clones.³⁸

The collapse of the exposition's TR-zone gives us an opportunity to see the G-motives' erasure-function in action, as well as their affiliation with the A-minor tonal axis. As we recall, TR served as a theater for the ongoing conflict between A and C. Ultimately, it is the generic motives' corrosive effect that tips the battle in favor of the former. The G-motives first appear in m. 157, in response to a decisive installation of C major: in the space of three bars, the motives not only wrest the tonal course back to A, but also interpolate the motto rhythm—absent until now—as a permanent fixture in the texture. When the music dares to seize again on C major (m. 172), G1b brings forth a more emphatic representation of the motto rhythm, and almost instantly the music unravels. In Section III, I took the music's rapid restabilization around P^{1.5} (m. 180) to be an assertion of P-theme dominance. Now we see that P^{1.5} is only the most salient marker in a fabric woven

38. Listeners who have found 6/IV difficult to retain in the mind's ear have likely been affected by the proliferation of these melodically and semiotically underdetermined forms. Relentlessly familiar, yet eluding any attempt to fix their origins or their meaning, the generic motives confound Mahlerian listening by turning memory against itself. Even as they tantalize us with referentiality, they erase the objects under recall.

entirely of generic motives and, as such, reiterations of the “inescapable” motto rhythm. This is a pattern that we shall see more and more often as we make our final pass through the development and recapitulation.³⁹

V. Development: Competing Visions of the Finale’s Future

Earlier, I suggested that we might hear two broad and largely independent forces of resistance against the sonata’s A-minor hegemony: the emancipation-driven S-themes and the chorale family (including TR) bent on reclaiming tonic authority. But if there is a lesson to be learned from the developmental block, it is that sharing a common foe does not amount to having common aims. In this section, the geometry of conflict becomes more complex, as the two resistance impulses face off over the ideal outcome of the sonata, besieged all the while by the generic motives’ corrupting forces.

Figure 7.8 provides a closer overview of the development, with the topmost brackets once again dividing the anticipation and accomplishment phases and the next set down indicating the break-points between the four “episodes” recognized by earlier analysts (Samuels 1995, 72–75). We know the significance of the first episode already: the I-complex severs the exposition’s S2 theme (m. 229), and after a brief dissolution field the latter returns in force (m. 288), only to find its second attempt at fulfillment smashed by the hammer blow that begins episode two (m. 336). To this we need add only a few details.

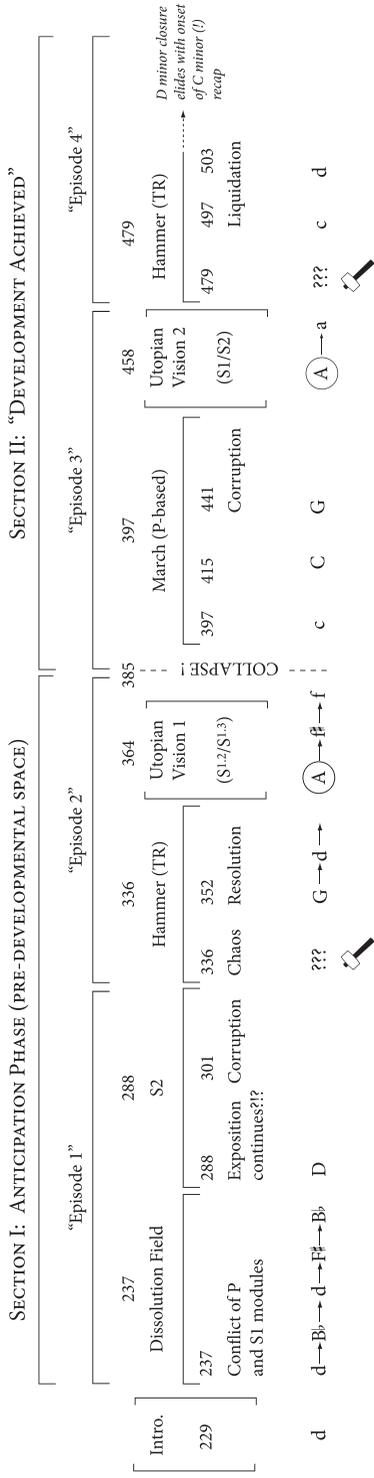
First, just as in the exposition, S2 bursts into the discourse only after S1 has shown itself to be inadequate or ineffectual. For over fifty bars (mm. 237–87), fragments of S1 struggle to relaunch (mm. 244–45, 248–49, 251–55, *et passim*) but are blocked by inert, obstructing P-modules. It is only by virtue of this sustained impasse that S2 is able to take the reins uncontested. Second, although it is the hammer blow and its related theme that ultimately supplant S2 here (m. 336), the generic motives play a critical role in its undoing, maneuvering S2 into position to receive the blow itself: G1 appears at the precise moment that S2 locks onto the dominant that it needs to cadence in D (m. 302), and from that point forward S2 can shake off the motto rhythm only by losing its grip on the dominant harmony (e.g., mm. 315ff.). By the final cadential thrust, G1a announces sourly that the dominant has been corrupted by the minor mode (mm. 328–31), predicting the hammer-blow deceptive cadence now only moments away.

As Figure 7.5 indicated, the ensuing hammer-blow theme (m. 336) is a demonic variant of the chorale tune. Thus when the hammer strikes, the two main resistance impulses come into their first open conflict. For the chorale, whose aim is to control an orderly and efficient sonata, the S-themes’ formally

39. The exposition’s S2 collapse also unfolds similarly: G2 motives flood the texture (mm. 220–23), then P^{1.5} reappears, accompanied by G1a (mm. 224–28) until the onset of the developmental block.

Figure 7.8 Symphony no. 6/IV, developmental block

DEVELOPMENT BLOCK (190 BARS)



disruptive shortcuts to transcendence are unwelcome. If a well-oiled symphonic development is to be set into motion, the itinerant S must be cleared from the decks. This is why the hammer-blow theme casts off the chorale's native C-major/minor garb: to take arms against S2 it must transplant itself into the latter's tonal narrative as the negation of the D-major impulse.

Before the development proper can begin, however, S1 variants return with the first of the three tonic major enclaves, labeled in Figure 7.8 as "Utopian visions." I have already proposed that these S-based passages present an image—however untenable—of the best of all possible outcomes. We are now ready to understand how the idealized state projected by the Utopian visions is not merely a product of generic major/minor dualities but a direct outgrowth of the prevailing narrative: for as long as each Utopian vision holds down the tonic major, it resists infiltration by the motto rhythm. In other words, Utopia—represented concretely by the tonic major—is *a world in which the motto rhythm, in all its forms, has been neutralized*. For at the instant that the generic motives appear, the grip on the tonic is lost (m. 372; see also m. 469), and catastrophe soon follows.

This "catastrophe" is the rupture (m. 385) that brings the developmental block's anticipation phase to its chaotic end. With the extended march that follows (m. 397), the tonal narrative reaches a major turning point. For the first time in nearly three hundred bars, C minor regains control over the P-materials stolen from it at the exposition-launch, in time to undertake a more earnest rendition of symphonic development (see Section II). Adorno points out that in its intricate motivic work the march operates "in the spirit of the sonata" but that it represents the primary theme as "something evolving, not firmly congealed" (1992, 99). But even this posits too concrete an identity to the exposition's P-theme, by suggesting that it somehow endures beyond the formally obligatory statements in the sonata's flanking sections. Like the "Rabble" episode that subdivided 3/I, the present march does not so much rework a preexisting theme as completely reimagine how a set of motives might be assembled into an integral structure. And as in the introduction, C minor proves more adept than its rival A minor at energizing the P-motives into articulate formations: the melodies spun out in the march boast the long-range integrity so clearly lacking in the pastiche of four-bar fanfares that was the P-theme proper. Furthermore, in its conspicuous omission of P^{1.5}, the march proposes how a P-theme might sound *without the motto rhythm*. (Indeed, its modal trajectory—gradually moving from C minor to C major—conspicuously inverts that of the motto.) In this regard the march is every bit the idealized image of a "Finale that might have been" as the Utopian visions surrounding it. But like those visions, the march can only hold the generic motives at bay for so long. G1c sneaks subtly into the accompaniment in m. 419, then reappears as an interrupting agent nine bars later (m. 428), paving the way for a massive outbreak of G2-motives (m. 441) that dissolves the march entirely.

Where the first Utopian vision offered an idyllic, reposeful image of the tonic major, the second (m. 458), rushing in to fill the vacuum of the disintegrating march, calls forth A major in more rapt and ecstatic tones. We also find here a change in thematic emphasis. As Figure 7.9 shows, elements of S1 are still present,

Figure 7.9 Tonic major "Utopian vision," mm. 458–65

but they are embedded in an imitative texture unlike anything that we have examined so far. Earlier, I suggested that after its encounter with the hammer, S2 never reappears. This was only partly true. In fact, the apparent annihilation of S2 sets in motion the most remarkable of the Finale's thematic processes, one vital to the would-be ascendance of the tonic major. To grasp it fully, we have to back up several hundred bars, to the start of the development.

Of the Finale's four I-complexes (mm. 1, 229, 520, 773), only the second—the one that opens the developmental block—departs from the model set forth in mm. 1–16. Comparing Figure 7.10b to the movement's opening, we see five major changes: the second I-complex (1) omits the motto, (2) truncates the I-theme itself to allow for imitative entries, (3) inverts the turn figure of the melodic incipit, (4) quickly suppresses the dynamic level, and (5) softens the main sonority from an augmented-sixth to a minor-seventh chord. Drastically subdued and lacking its siblings' acerbic shriek, this second I-complex is notably less effective as a form-dividing entity. This might give us pause, since the S2 themes will soon act as though the exposition is still under way—in other words, they will suggest that the form has not, in fact, been divided successfully at all (see Section II). All the more strikingly, a comparison of Figures 7.10a and 7.10b shows that through many of these changes, the "subdued" I-complex (7.10b) actually comes to *resemble* S2 (7.10a): the inverted $I^{1,1}$ motive (labeled "x") replicates the S2 incipit, and the imitative texture derives from the latter, as does the pedal point $D\sharp$. The implications are clear: at the moment of their collision (mm. 228–29) S2, though silenced, imprints itself on the I-complex as a means of undermining the latter and thus facilitating its own return shortly thereafter.

Turning back to Figure 7.9, though, we are now faced with a contradiction. It is easy to see that the second Utopian vision is, in a purely material sense, a variant of that second, "subdued" introductory complex (Figure 7.10b). But its narrative function—to secure a stable tonic major—stands at odds with the universal tendency of the I-complexes (whose very insignia is the modally corrosive motto) to undercut such impulses. Such affirmative aims are more characteristic of the

Figure 7.10 Comparison of S2 and the second I-complex

7.10a. Incipit of S2-theme, mm. 205–08

7.10b. I-complex initiating the developmental block, mm. 230–34 (texture simplified)

embedded S1 theme and indeed of the defeated S2, whose residues—particularly the upward-striving octaves—find a new, urgent form here.

This disparity suggests that the relation between thematic materials and the character-impulses they bear is more fluid than we might have supposed. For though this second Utopian vision assumes the outward form of the transformed I-complex, it embodies—more importantly—the major-vector impulse of the S2 theme that had effected that transformation, resulting in a new entity altogether. In other words, the passing suffusion of the I-complex with elements of S2 bifurcates that complex into two autonomous and antagonistic thematic characters: the original, sinister version (which we will hear again at the start of the recapitulation and coda) and the affirmational anti-variant shown in Figure 7.9, a kind of reincarnation or reembodyment of S2 built around what I call the “emancipation motive.” In this, the second Utopian vision advances a more concrete agenda than the first, insisting that if the tonic major

is to become a reality, the I-complex—which harbors the major-minor motto—must itself be transfigured.

Though the second A-major enclave endures longer than its predecessor, it too succumbs to the creeping generic motives (m. 469), which deflect it toward D minor and imminent hammer-blow retribution (m. 479). It is here, in the development's final thrust, that the hammer-blow theme at last reveals its affiliation with the tonal agenda of its progenitor, the C-minor chorale: in m. 497, the hammer-theme locks onto the dominant of C, preparing the installation of that key as recapitulatory tonic in m. 520. En route, though, it takes special pains to finalize its dominion over the D-major insurgency it has already twice struck down: after only seven bars, the retransition hoists itself up by step to the dominant of *D minor* (m. 504), reviving the S-themes' (still-unconsummated!) drive to D major only to steer itself into a corrupted cadence that annihilates that key once and for all. At the moment of resolution, the bass-voice D collides with the movement's shrill opening sonority (A \flat , C, E \flat , F \sharp), which announces the return of the original I-complex, the local ascension of C minor, and onset of the final rotation. There, one by one, all remaining traces of resistance will gradually be eliminated—beginning, ironically, with C minor itself.

VI. Recapitulation and Coda

With the massive cadential buildup that closes the development, the chorale complex is at last able to complete a large-scale formal gesture unimpeded. That the gesture is one of such brute hostility, worthy of the tonic axis itself, is fitting. For as the recapitulation gets under way, C minor will abandon any image of a Finale that "might have been" and make its last bid for authority simply by imitating its A-minor rival. Figure 7.11 shows that at the start of the recapitulatory block—and in a startling inversion of sonata-form tonal imperatives—C minor appropriates all of the music that had formerly belonged to the A-minor tonic. At last, the usurped becomes the usurper. But this proves to be a fatal gambit: by appropriating the music of the tonic minor, C also takes on the latter's inertia and eventually slackens. This allows S1 to creep in with its own last-ditch strategy for fulfillment. With a disarming lack of urgency, a fragmented S1 meanders sleepily through various keys (D \flat , A \flat , E) until, without warning, it snaps to alertness mid-stream, on the apparently random tonal level of B \flat major. And it is here, after a fairly lengthy development, that the theme closes in on a bona fide apotheosis (m. 600)—a boisterous brass chorale.

But predictably, as soon as the cadence is in sight, the *real* tonic key abruptly unsettles everything by seizing control and launching a non-sequitur retransition (m. 612), one that prefigures the coming assimilation by sweeping up all of the movement's thematic characters in a manic A-major whirlwind. And in case there were any confusion, the retransition's pounding motto rhythms (especially mm. 622–25) remind us that this is not the transcendent A major of the Utopian

episodes: this is the genuine tonic key, inflected with major-mode giddiness as it bears down on the tonal-thematic denouement.

As we now know well, Adorno's novelistic time is Heraclitian to the core: there can be no turning back the clock, since to repeat music verbatim is to imply that "nothing had happened in the interim" (1992, 72). I have already suggested that the P-theme's diffuse and artificial makeup was antithetical to novelistic subjectivity; now, its near-exact reprise (m. 642, the onset of the recapitulation proper) represents the undoing of novelistic time itself. And yet to intensify its effects, Mahler "temporalizes" this anti-temporal recapitulation. Although the bars of the second P-zone map exactly to the first, there is initially significant reorchestration, as well as motivic residues of S1 that spill over from the retransition. What we find, then, is that P actually progresses toward an increasingly exact reprise as it unfolds; it does not just embody repetition mindlessly: it *achieves* it, even flaunts it. Emboldened by this establishment of architectonic order, the tonic axis takes swift punitive action against the novelistic insurgents: in m. 670, TR and S1 return simultaneously to succumb, in a single blow, to their long-averted fates. As noted, Mahler makes their symbolic loss of autonomy all the more graphic by literally depriving them of their independence, denying them even the dignity of a proper reprise. Instead, they are paraded en masse like prisoners of war, their fate sealed by the terrifying motto-cadence of m. 686.

With tonal singularity now secured, the Finale rapidly drives toward thematic singularity as well. Surging toward collapse, the liquidation that closes the TR/S1-zone (m. 712) grinds its materials down to the symphony's sub-motivic *Urformen*, the octave-leap and the $\hat{2}-\hat{3}-\hat{1}$ minor-third cell. With nothing left now to dissolve but itself, the Finale erupts into chaos (m. 720), loses steam, and promptly disintegrates. When the music restabilizes (m. 728), every trace of the tumultuous recapitulation has vanished. All that remains are the soaring emancipation motives of the third A-major Utopian vision, where S2 rises for its final apotheosis.⁴⁰ After the self-negating tumult that preceded, this luminous affirmational space would have us believe that the sonata has cast off the burden of the minor mode once and for all. But as we know, the cadence attained here proves to be corrupt, its sour deceptive resolution (m. 773) merely a portal to the desolate coda block, where all hope must be abandoned.

40. To earmark this passage as rotationally equivalent to S2 is admittedly to reduce away a delicately crafted ambiguity. Owing to the emancipation motives' dual parentage—their strong affiliations both with S2 and the I-complex (see Section V)—one could argue that there is actually no way to tell where we are at this point in the unfolding sonata drama. Is this, as I suggest above, the ecstatic fulfillment of the secondary theme, a redemptive transformation of the exposition's S2? Or could it be the "transfigured" I-complex hinted at in the development, setting a new coda rotation into motion (a reading reinforced by the many rhetorical signals [liquidation, collapse] that we shook off the recapitulation entirely in m. 727)? We could certainly hear it as either, and until the *real* coda block begins, it is effectively both. (So long as it is a true Utopia, it cannot be reduced to any definitive coordinates on the map of "reality" that is Figure 7.1.) What matters is that by telescoping the recapitulation of S2 and a would-be "apotheosis-coda" into a single passage, Mahler stakes all our hopes on a single decisive—and failed—thrust toward A-major closure.

Yet the coda's negativity exceeds the simple fact that this last Utopian vision fails to retain the tonic major. Rather, it lies in the impression that the entire event has been staged, intended only to taunt us with what is beyond our attainment. For on closer inspection, we find that beneath the unchecked elation of the final A-major buildup, there are clear hints of the impending collapse. If music can be sarcastic—if it can say something affirmative while meaning something acerbic—then Mahler has offered us a breathtaking specimen.

There are three clues to the ongoing ruse. First, at m. 744 and again at m. 760, the music, without flagging, slips into F major while retaining A as a common-tone bass—direct foreshadowings of the deceptive-cadence climax in m. 773. (The “redemptive” overtones become explicit here, with an unmistakable reference to the final moments of Wagner's *Ring*.)⁴¹ The second clue emerges at the first return to A major: a blaring statement of motive G1b in the horns (m. 754), riding a crest of perverse fulfillment. Until now, the Utopian A-major space has been the only zone impervious to the corrosive G-motives. Their intrusion here signals the collapse of the affirmational vision, their entrance in full thematic regalia an outright mockery of all of the “real” themes they have denuded or undone. And underneath, the timpani hammers out the motto rhythm, savoring this major mode triumphalism only for its potential to collapse grandly into minor. The final clue is the boisterous declamation of motive P^{1.5} (m. 764), which leads the music to its ecstatic peak. By now, P^{1.5} has become emblematic of the sonata's triumph over aberrant internal forces.⁴² Here, its ecstatic declamation betrays the nihilistic glee of marching the Utopian vision—the last remaining impulse of resistance—to its downfall.

With the opposition routed, the Finale is free to revise its own history. As the coda block begins, the I-complex appears at last as an undiluted expression of A minor, as though its C-minor contaminants had never existed.⁴³ Yet in its wake, faint impulse still stirs in the tuba and trombones (m. 790ff.). Adorno offhandedly compares this grim imitative passage (Figure 7.12a) to the opening chorale, noting their exemption from the movement's otherwise ubiquitous hyperbole (1992, 126). But the connection goes far deeper than this. The trombones here echo figures that twice arose in the wake of the hammer blows (mm. 352ff. and 504ff.); looking more closely, we see that they are remote descendants of the chorale itself, whose turn figure they vestigially preserve.⁴⁴ What is more, the chorale-complexes have often brought this turn figure (labeled “z” in

41. Compare Mahler's mm. 760–72 to the last nine bars of Wagner's tetralogy, where the leitmotivic “Götterdämmerung” chord (a “frozen” first-inversion triad overlaid with stepwise descents) hovers briefly and melts away, leading into the last statement of the work's “redemption” motive in the tonic major.

42. It appears at the collapses of the expositional TR and S2 and also moments before the ascension of A minor in the recapitulatory accomplishment phase.

43. Note that neither the recapitulation nor the coda block ever produces a terminal cadence in A minor. As prefigured throughout the introduction, A minor is a key that gains ascendance through brute force, not cadential niceties.

44. Compare m. 51 and especially m. 60 (Figure 7.5) to motive “z” in Figure 7.12a.

Figure 7.12 The epilogue theme and its origins in the chorale complex and the "emancipation motive"

7.12a. Epilogue, mm. 790–95

7.12b. Liquidation of second "hammer" episode, mm. 497–502 (texture simplified)

7.12c. Instances of the "emancipation" motive

S2 (mm. 205ff. [see Fig. 7.10a], 288ff.)

"Utopia" theme (mm. 458ff., 728ff. [see Fig. 7.9])

Figure 7.12a) into contrapuntal interaction with the preceding octave-leap motive ("y"): see, for instance, mm. 497ff. (shown in Figure 7.12b) or TR, mm. 168–71. But it is only in the epilogue theme that Mahler joins them into a single melodic figure. And in so doing, he replicates a familiar gestalt: the "emancipation motive" shared by the work's most ecstatically affirmational characters, S2 and the Utopian Vision theme (Figure 7.12c).

The epilogue thus becomes a moment of great weight, as a pair of distinct narrative threads converge upon a single abject telos. The main figure here is a shadowy remnant of *two* defeated resistance-impulses—the chorale-complex and S2—which are now united in a common variant. Rarely do we find so

vivid an instance of Mahler's variants "remember[ing] things past and half-forgotten from a great distance," at once proclaiming and protesting the irrecoverability of the past (Adorno 1992, 94). While evoking its progenitors' past vitality and resilience, the figure also serves as an emblem of their mutual defeat; by pressing them into a single materiality, the Finale declares their lost autonomy to be irretrievable.

The emancipatory impulse now advances only by a refusal to die—it crawls, enervated, toward no goal in particular. Gradually, the last traces of this figure fade, leaving only the ghostly forms of the symphony's primordial octave-leap and minor-third cell, bringing the imposition of thematic singularity—a dissolution back to elemental particles—at last to absolute completion. All that remains is the collapse into temporal singularity, which occurs with the sounding of the final motto. With a corporeal shudder, the Finale negates not only tonal and thematic diversity but also the very temporal continuum in which they might occur. This time only, the triadic third is frozen in minor. The major has been expunged, the long-predicted future at last become present. The "end of the symphonic sonata" is at last achieved.

VII. Adorno, Mahler's Optimism, and the "Absurd Possibility" of Hope

As Chapter 4 noted, the Sixth Symphony's classicism has rarely been linked in any substantial way to its tragic or pessimistic outlook. In the case of the Finale, Adorno helped us to bridge that divide with an invitation to hear the symphonic totality glorying in the destruction of its own subjects. In its pursuit, we reimagined "classicism" as something more than just a set of inherited forms, the familiar schemata of Beethovenian practice: it became an ideology of domination that sought to inflict itself on the music, through the intermediate agency of the A-minor sonata. In other words, classicism itself became the force driving the tragedy.

And yet despite its Adornian roots, this analysis has in many ways led us directly away from Adorno himself. On the most basic level, of course, he would never have sanctioned the transformation of the "destructive totality" conceit into a detailed anthropomorphic narrative like the one outlined here. But just as crucially, we need to recognize that that image itself—the "destructive totality"—is strikingly inconsistent with Adorno's broader thinking on the Finale. It arises as a fluke, the byproduct of a familiar metaphor stood briefly on its head. As Chapter 2 explained, the novel-symphony decisively reverses the part/whole relation of the classical archetype, imbuing its thematic constituents with an agency that allows them to create form from the "bottom up." Seeing the Finale to embody certain classical (or "Beethovenian") traits, Adorno playfully inverts that trope, granting the symphonic whole top-down, agential dominion over its parts.

Reading more widely, though, we see that the classicism that Adorno typically attributes to the Finale is entirely architectonic and thus incapable of anthropomorphization.⁴⁵ What is more, these classical elements are most often depicted as the necessary *complements* to its novelistic excesses—and thus not as antagonistic elements at all.⁴⁶ Consider as well that this image of the “destructive totality” is shot through with a sadism disarmingly out of step with his Mahler project as a whole.

Given Adorno's abiding pessimism (to say nothing of his notorious impatience with Mahler's affirmational streak), it is easy to imagine that he affords the Finale such singular status based solely on the amplitude of its bleakness. But the marks of torment in Mahler's language are ultimately, for Adorno, signs of a higher form of optimism, one more hard-won and enduring than the gaudy triumphalism peddled by override Romanticism. Adorno's Mahler is cynical, to be sure—too cynical for some. But he is no pessimist. His critical temperament is always and only one of cautious, forward-looking idealism. Mahler's world is “full of hope, although not for us. He passionately wagers everything on the absurd possibility that it will one day be fulfilled” (1998b, 93). The novel-symphony is the concrete form of this emancipatory vision, a site of resistance to the repressive forces in the tradition and in the world at large—a fact made clear in his bold declaration that Mahler's works “do not express a discipline that triumphantly subdues all particulars and individuals; instead, they assemble them into a procession of the liberated” (97).

In this spirit, we typically find Adorno inclined to downplay the Finale's pessimistic or sadistic attributes. While obliged to honor its negativity, he typically focuses on elements that are *symbolically* negative, in keeping with his view of the Finale as consummate ideology critique. As it suits him, Adorno traces the Finale's negativity to its scale (“more monumentally composed than all the rest, it shatters the spell of affirmative illusion”), its unique affective hyperbole (the music's “abandonment to unbridled affect is its own death”), or, as Section IV explained, its thematic coherence (1992, 135 and 126; see also 69). None of these positions is especially convincing on its own, and as a group they are difficult to assemble into a coherent image. Even when Adorno recognizes tragedy as an outgrowth of the work's intense formalism, he soft-pedals around the issue of agency, lapsing into passive voice (“tragedy cannot be reconciled with the epic ideal” [1992, 101]), or positing tragedy as something passively present in the music, rather than something *enacted* by it (“tragedy refuses a nominalist form” [97]).

45. The Finale's “sonata skeleton” is “indispensable in binding together its dimensions” and balances out its “intensification of expansive power” with “a capacity for imposing order” (Adorno 1992, 96–97; see also 92, where Adorno lauds 6/IV for restoring the reciprocity of formal schemata and the “singular composing impulse”). This static view of the sonata is of course consonant with Adorno's view of the genre in general.

46. The closest Adorno comes to acknowledging a tension between paradigms is an oblique remark that the work's architectonic and novelistic elements are balanced in such a way that “the symphonic idea is simultaneously realized and suspended” (Adorno, 1998b, 91).

Under such sanitized explanations, the work's sadistic dimension all but disappears. And it is against this backdrop that the image of a totality "sanctioning for its own glory the destruction of the individual" leaps out as so unsettling. Here Adorno returns to the same metaphoric framework as the earlier "procession of the liberated" comment, but to precisely the opposite end. Astonishingly, without warning or follow-up, he casually implies that Mahler's greatest movement, the "center of his oeuvre" no less, is also the sole outlier in the composer's critical-emancipatory project—that here, at least, his music *does indeed* "express a discipline that triumphantly subdues all particulars and individuals." This does not strike me as Adorno's usual stylized self-contradiction. The incongruity is so complete that we could take it as evidence that Adorno was grappling with two incompatible views of the Finale—in other words, that he was able at least to sympathize with a truly pessimistic reading but could not allow himself to embrace it as the work's leading implication.

This tension surely lies in Adorno's strong identification with Mahler the man and, in turn, the constraints that may have placed on his ability to assess the Finale. As we saw in Chapter 2, Adorno the cultural critic saw a kindred spirit in Mahler, a connection strengthened by their mutual Jewish roots. At times, one suspects Adorno of embodying in Mahler the kind of stoic optimism that he, writing in the post-Auschwitz world, could not permit himself. The problem is that in Adorno's metaphysics, the ethical consciousness of the artwork transcends and even supplants that of its creator. When speaking of Mahler's values, Adorno is usually projecting the works' perceived ideological claims back onto their composer, not vice versa. The compositions do not illustrate ideas, but manifest ideas themselves, which are bequeathed to Mahler by proxy. This conceit allows Mahler to pass judgment on tradition only by virtue of the righteous judgment that Adorno sees the Finale passing on itself (1992, 125). The fallout, though, is that his reading of the Finale must be congruent with the ethical alignment he hopes to find in the composer. There is no room in this scheme for a Mahler so nihilistic as to march his "procession of the liberated" straight to the gallows—let alone one who, on the threshold of a spectacularly violent modernity, would dabble in musical dramatizations of quasi-totalitarian sadism.

But to document the devastation enacted within the Sixth is not to implicate the composer himself with such "sadism," with setting this self-negating symphony into motion merely to watch it perish. If we choose to regard the work's meaning as allegorical rather than immanent, there is no reason the present reading cannot be consonant with Adorno's view of Mahler as cultural critic. Rather than hear the symphony as an exercise in wanton pessimism, we might read it as a parable or a cautionary tale on the dangers of any number of traits Mahler was known to abhor in music and his fellow men alike: brute arbitrariness, unreflective pedantry, sophism, or heedless deference to tradition. In this case the didactically classicist Sixth becomes a manifesto against didacticism itself—a work that advocates progressive art by enacting the dangerous and regressive fallout of cultural conservatism.

And of course we need not limit ourselves, as Adorno might have, to extrabiographical meanings at all. Indeed, we saw in Chapter 4 that if one digs deeper than the familiar liner-note bromides, the hyperpersonal angle on the Sixth can be richer and more illuminating than might be expected. There, I suggested that we might hear the symphony's opening Allegro as a theater of nuptial discord, a tense confrontation between suggestively—even caricaturistically—gendered sonata subjects. Now, we will ask how Finale might play into such an interpretation, with far-reaching consequences for our understanding of the Sixth as a whole.

VIII. A "Domestic" Tragedy? Rethinking the Finale's Autobiographical Subtext

So far, my reading has largely passed over the Finale's most celebrated reception trope, its depiction of a "tragic hero" in a losing battle with fate. One reason is that a programmatic conceit of this sort would seem to be at odds with my Adornian framework, which locates the work's negativity in its intrinsic critique of sonata form rather than in any kind extrinsic signification. Another is that the "tragic hero" trope has been almost entirely absorbed into the mythology set forth in Alma's memoirs. To consider this angle, one has been all but obliged to rely on the lurid image of Mahler "predicting" his own downfall. The first of these factors is hardly insurmountable: the Finale's intramusical drama readily accepts a wide range of metaphorical or allegorical overlays; the work can be "about" sonata form itself in one sense while also carrying meanings in other registers or symbolic domains as well. The second is more serious. If the Finale did carry some hyperpersonal or autobiographical meaning for Mahler—if we are inclined to regard its tragedy as *his* tragedy—we will need to set aside Alma's sensationalist account of nihilistic prophecy for an angle that is more clearly grounded in the musical and biographical facts.

I laid out the most significant "biographical facts" in Chapter 4, at least from the perspective of a "domestic" reading: the Mahlers' impetuous and ill-considered rush to marriage; Gustav's insensitivity and aloofness; his wife's simmering discontent, alienation, and jealousy. On the musical side, we shall of course be interested in the many material connections that link the symphony's outer movements. We have already noted their shared motivic DNA and mutual reliance on sonata form. More compelling, though, are the links that suggest an overarching narrative continuity—like the fact that the Finale's failed exposition reinstates the exact tonal and topical design of the Allegro's failed *recapitulation*, as if picking up a lost thread: both begin with imperious A-minor marches; both move on to chorale-derived TRs that pit A minor against C major; both conclude with impetuous D-major S-themes. More important still: the Finale's S-themes each plainly derive from the first movement's "Alma" melody: as Figure 7.13 shows, the Finale's S1 (Figure 7.13a) borrows its gestural and rhythmic template, while its S2 (Figure 7.13c) preserves the intervals but changes the durations.

Figure 7.13 Relation of Finale's S-themes to Allegro's "Alma" theme

7.13a. Finale S1 theme
transposed to F

7.13b. "Alma" theme (mvt. I)
original key

7.13c. Finale S2 theme
transposed to F

These thematic similarities have moved a number of critics to ask whether Mahler's spousal rendering might *also* be revived in the Finale, suggesting that the Alma portrait might be less of a "theme," per se, than a kind of protean, trans-symphonic impulse—one with characteristic gestural/affective features but a flexible motivic/intervallic makeup.⁴⁷ This thesis deserves more than casual attention. For by extending the Allegro's gender conflict into this more gruelingly cynical sphere, we are poised to discover that the symphony's "domestic" and "tragic" subtexts—long treated as separate and unrelated strands—might be poised to interact in new and startling ways.

To provide the backdrop for such a reading, we should turn first to Robert Samuels's provocative take on the symphony's overall narrative design. Taking a cue from Anthony's Newcomb's interpretation of the Ninth Symphony as a musical *Bildungsroman*, Samuels has argued that the entire Sixth can be emplotted along the lines of a nineteenth-century "feminine tragedy" such as *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary*—that is to say, as a story depicting a "protagonist struggling with forces that crush his or her individuality, promising and then denying freedom" (1995, 150; cf. Newcomb 1992). Figure 7.14 shows his mapping of this narrative archetype onto the work's four movements.

Samuels, we should note, does not go so far as to reify a *specific* protagonist for the Sixth, male or female. Though he does venture that the archetype "virtually necessitates a female"—a bold move, given the universal gendering of the work's tragic hero as male (155). And he only hints, half apologetically, that Mahler's use of this plot paradigm may have autobiographical resonances, noting merely that the theme most suggestive of a "desire for sensuous gratification and Romantic individuality"—the one we would most readily identify as its protagonist—is none other than the music in which Mahler supposedly depicts his wife (157). But his reading convinces nonetheless, in part for a reason he himself overlooks: the fact that it is *precisely* the Alma-derived secondary themes that are forced to bear the burden of the Finale's many musical disasters.

47. See Diether 1975; Floros 1993, 184; Hoeckner 1999, 127; and Hurwitz 2004, 113.

Figure 7.14 Samuels's "feminine tragedy" plot archetype mapped onto the Sixth Symphony (adapted from Samuels 1995, 120)

| | |
|----------|--|
| Allegro: | Adolescence and first realization of social forces (Emma Bovary's and Anna Karinen's marriages) |
| Scherzo: | Engagement with society, constraining personal choice (Emma's encounter with the viscount, Anna's rise in society) |
| Andante: | The promise of freedom and attempted escape through personal fulfillment (Emma's affairs, Anna's affair with Vronsky) |
| Finale: | <i>Peripeteia</i> and ultimate extinction (betrayal for Emma, Anna's illness and abandonment by Vronsky, suicide for both) |

As we have seen, each of the Finale's negative climaxes finds either S1 or S2 derailed in an attempt to reclaim the kind of major-mode fulfillment secured at the end of the Allegro. That these two subjects are direct outgrowths of the "Alma" theme suggests that we are quite justified in hearing the Sixth organized around the plight of an ill-starred "protagonist" who, after an early glimpse of emancipation, finds her freedom "denied" and her individuality "crushed." In other words, Samuels's reading brings us to the threshold of a radically reimagined Sixth—one whose tragedy is, in a sense, *Alma* Mahler's, rather than her husband's. At first, such a prospect seems far-fetched; one can scarcely imagine an artist as neurotically self-obsessed as Mahler devoting an entire symphony to the portrayal of someone else. But if we take the Sixth to be less "about" Alma in some simplistically illustrative sense and more about the psychodynamics of an envisioned tragedy involving *both* spouses, an irresolvable clash of character and gender roles, the scenario becomes far more plausible.

To develop this reading further, we would do well to consider the most infamous of the "disasters" that befall the Finale's feminine S-themes, the development's hammer-blow climaxes (mm. 336 and 479)—for there is still much to unpack from these crucial moments. We know already that the hammer-blow theme derives from the introduction's C-minor wind chorale (see Figure 7.5). But the chorale itself has a significant prehistory, and one that has escaped critical notice for over a century: it originates in 3/V (1895), Mahler's setting of "Armer Kinder Betterlied" for contralto and treble choirs.

Like many of its fellow *Wunderhorn* texts, "Armer Kinder Betterlied" draws its distinctive tone from a seemingly glib intermingling of the naïve and the grotesque, the ingenuous and the knowing. Couched between buoyant tableaux celebrating divine forgiveness and "heavenly joy without end," we find a dark meditation on a guilt so powerful that it would defy absolution. At the start of song's B-section, Christ admonishes Saint Peter at the heavenly dinner table: "What are you doing? Whenever I look at you, I find you weeping!" ("Was stehst du denn hier? Wenn ich dich anseh', so weinst du mir!") The chorale melody in Figure 7.15a appears before, and then during, Peter's response: "And

Figure 7.15 Symphonies nos. 3/V and 6/IV, comparison of chorales

7.15a. Symphony no. 3/V, “Armer Kinder Betterlied,” mm. 35–38 (melody repeats to the text “and shall I not weep, you gracious God?”)



7.15b. Symphony no. 6/IV, mm. 49–52



should I not weep, you gracious God? I have violated the ten commandments; I go and weep most bitterly.⁴⁸ (“Und sollt’ ich nicht weinen, du gütiger Gott? Ich hab’ übertreten die zehn Gebot! Ich gehe und weine ja bitterlich!”) To take this quotation seriously is to impel a potentially revelatory question: why would Mahler take such pains to craft a hidden musical epigraph that frames the Finale not in terms of heroic defiance (as is almost always assumed), but in terms of guilt, shame, and contrition?

Naturally, this penitential subtext could be religious in nature, as suggested by the source song. Mahler endured many painful lapses of faith during these years—enough that Bruno Walter came to hear the Sixth evoking a “world without God” [*entgötterten Welt*] (1912, 170).⁴⁹ But what if, following the path Alma has opened for us, we supposed this guilt to be more terrestrial, even domestic, in nature? Could we take this solemn chorale to be a veiled admission of culpability, Mahler’s acknowledgment that the marital unrest discussed in Chapter 4 was as much his own fault as anyone’s? Could we imagine that the terrible “fate” paid tribute here is not some abstract future misfortune but the inalterable arrangements *of the present*—the fact that Mahler felt he had no choice but to put his art, his sublime

48. For reference, Figure 7.15b reproduces the Finale’s chorale theme.

49. It seems unlikely that Mahler, the eclectic pantheist, would have entertained much spiritual guilt over the nominal rejection of his birth religion for Catholicism. But bouts of more generalized doubt seem to have been a part of his spiritual makeup. Walter testifies that his friend became disenfranchised from God in these years, having “lost Him in the world, which seemed to [Mahler] increasingly cryptic and grim” [“In der Welt hatte er ihn verloren, sie schien ihm immer rätselvoller und düsterer”] (Walter 1912, 170). Ferdinand Pfohl and Oskar Fried also recount Mahler’s agonized lapses of faith; see Floros 1998, 201–2.

calling, before the contentment of his wife? Before dismissing this out of hand, we should recall the striking fact that this same "penitential chorale" lashes out in a *fortississimo* shriek at precisely those moments in which the Alma-derived S-themes are most spectacularly cut down. With eruptive violence, the chorale's sidelong confession of guilt becomes a terrifying annunciation.

Of course, the domestic and religious interpretations of the chorale-quotation are hardly incompatible. Indeed, they can blend in mesmerizing ways. By calling forth the personage of Saint Peter, Mahler puts us in a position to hear provocative resonances between the first edition's three hammer blows, Peter's three denials of Christ, and even the three nails "hammered" into the cross.⁵⁰ These associations, in turn, suggest that the Finale might be involved with a different sort of nuptial "passion"—one that placed Alma in the role of sacrificial lamb, betrayed by those closest to her and called to endure a "suffering" (as claimed in her diary) that ultimately stood to bring "joy" into the world. After all, sacrifice had become their matrimonial watchword. Before the wedding, Mahler had even asked her point-blank: "Could you stand by me and take all these burdens upon yourself—even to the point of humiliation—*could you happily bear this cross with me?*"⁵¹ Now, three years later, it may finally have dawned on Mahler that Alma's cross was borne not with him, but simply *for* him.

And yet we can go further still. Consider the following, which no scholar I know has ever discussed and the Freudian implications of which are as astonishing as they are far-reaching: during the composition of the Sixth, amidst marital unease and, from what we can tell, intermittent sexual dysfunction on the composer's part, Alma Mahler was receiving regular obstetric/gynecological care from a Doctor Albert *Hammerschlag*.⁵² Now of course this connection might be entirely fortuitous. But it is hardly unthinkable that an artist hampered by intimate "performance" issues might develop negative subconscious associations with the name of the man whose duty it was to attend to his wife's reproductive organs—especially given his possessive attitude and the threat posed by their difference in age.⁵³ Here we enter much darker territory, with overtones of sexual jealousy lending the hammer-blow outbursts a sinister air only amplified by their manifest, even disturbing, violence.

50. Mahler's original plan to have *five* hammer blows—the three present in the first edition, plus two in the first and third I-complexes (mm. 9, 530)—suggests that they did not initially carry this kind of symbolic significance. That the first published configuration *did* have symbolic import has long been an article of faith among Mahlerians, along with the conviction that the composer removed the third—the "death blow," by Alma's account—for fear of tempting fate. In terms of the argument presented here, it is telling that the two blows preserved in Mahler's final version are precisely the ones coincident with the transformed "penitential chorale."

51. Letter of 12 December 1901 (de La Grange and Weiss, eds. 2004, 61; emphasis added).

52. Hammerschlag (1863–1935) was a well-known Viennese physician, brother of Mahler's friend Paul Hammerschlag (1860–1933) and close friend of Sigmund Freud (!). Mahler's relatives had seen Hammerschlag for a variety of ills since at least 1899 (McClatchie, ed. 2006, 331). Alma herself saw Hammerschlag in 1903, but was also seeing another gynecologist, a Dr. Fleischmann, in the summer of 1904 (de La Grange and Weiss, eds. 2004, 117 and 170).

53. Since Mahler's sexual proclivities are known to us mainly through Alma's report, one must tread with caution. See Monahan 2011a, 164n111.

Whether or not we think that this “Dr. Hammerschlag” revelation deserves credence, the broader picture that emerges here is that of a Sixth Symphony whose despairing arc almost surely had more to do with the composer’s home life in 1903–4 than has been previously assumed. In Chapter 4, I argued that the opening movement might be heard as a kind of “testing ground” (Franklin 1997b, 142) for the conflict-dynamics of Mahler’s imperiled relationship—less a piece of transcriptive realism than a symbolic working-out of seemingly irreconcilable attitudes and affects. Much the same can be said here. But where the earlier movement imagines a provisional (if tenuous) accord, the present one deigns to explore the most dire of outcomes. Whether Mahler himself was fully or even partly aware of the symphony’s cathartic function in this regard, we can never know. But in one respect it scarcely matters. As the composer himself always maintained, works of art contain mysteries that escape even their creators—including those of an autobiographical sort: “The parallelism between life and music,” he once mused, “may go deeper and further than [the artist] is at present capable of realizing.”⁵⁴

I close with this vignette on the Finale’s “domestic” subtext partly because it is a fascinating and underexplored aspect of the movement, but also because it helps to drive home an important point about the relationship between hermeneutics and narrative analysis in general. I have suggested that my largely intramusical analysis of the Finale (i.e., that laid out in Sections I–V) could support a range of more broadly allegorical or metaphorical interpretations. This is not to suggest that this “intramusical” analysis isn’t itself entirely “interpretive.” Nor is it a plea for privileged or objective access to some chimerical “music itself.” Rather, it is to invite a basic heuristic distinction between readings that are firmly rooted in musical processes—those that mean to account for music’s narrative/dramatic logic on its own terms, so to speak—and those that regard those narratives or processes as symbolic representations of real or imaginary social, historical, or biographical relationships or events. Indeed, these two categories need not even be distinct “readings”; they can just as easily be separate layers of, or stages within, a single interpretive act. All the same, I believe it is helpful to distinguish between the analytical groundwork that underwrites a narrative analysis—the initial parsing/segmenting of the score into discrete, hierarchically related units and the subsequent tracking of their opposition and transformation over time—and the translation of those relationships into a fully realized narrative interpretation *per se*.

Such a distinction matters because the abstract conflict-dynamics mapped out at the earlier stage can then be filtered through any number of “rhetorical modes” (Almén 2008, 141) at the later one, yielding a wide array of structurally isomorphic narratives. For example, my analyses of the Sixth Symphony here and in Chapter 4 present, on one interpretive level, a closely tracked network of thematic and rhetorical oppositions. On another, they offer more

54. Letter to Marschalk, 17 December 1895; cited in Martner, ed. 1979, 172.

elaborate signification schemes based on the same: I have chosen to read the Sixth at various turns as either the ascension of unfreedom over freedom (a la Adorno) or as the dominion of the masculine over the feminine (after Samuels). But one could just as easily use the narrative armature developed here as the basis for any number of alternate hearings—the Sixth as the triumph of death over life (with Mitchell), of the collective over the individual voice (with Johnson), of aggression over compassion (with Hanheide), of fate over defiance (with Alma), or of alienation over social acceptance (with de La Grange), and so on.⁵⁵ I see my reading(s) as consonant with all these interpretations, not in competition with them; a Sixth broad enough to contain the artist's "whole . . . feeling, thinking, breathing, and suffering . . . being" surely has room for them all.⁵⁶ None is definitive, but none fails to illuminate.

In the bigger picture, this distinction also helps to clarify what painstakingly close readings like those in this book might mean for analysts who come after me—particularly with regard to matters of overinterpretation and scholarly discretion. Outsized readings like mine require so much hermeneutic bandwidth that they open themselves to charges of excess and even imprudence, of drowning out a range of alternate hearings. But charges along these lines would be misplaced, I think. However intricately wrought, my readings make no claim to being definitive; as Spitzer writes, "Hermeneutics errs when it assumes that there is a meaning reachable at the end of a long relay of interpretations" (2006, 6). Even Adorno found his own brilliant formulations to be "impoverished, abstract and false" when "confronted with the actuality" of Mahler's work (1998b, 109). My hope here, as I expressed at the outset, is not to settle the matter of Mahler's meaning once and for all, but rather to open the door on a new round of conversations. To do this, I have found it helpful to pursue new standards for engaging the myriad details of Mahler's scores. I believe that to thrive, Mahler analysis needs to move past the several dozen passages that have monopolized discussion for a century (the Sixth Symphony's hammer blows, the Fourth Symphony's elided recapitulation, the Third Symphony's *Weckruf* or posthorn solos, any of the various self-quotations, and so on) to attend to the thousands of bars of music—all of them containing significant musical events—that have never been discussed or noted only cursorily, without being situated in a meaningful context or reconciled to any larger process. This is a grand vision, to be sure. And in practice, as these "meaningful contexts" and "larger processes" proliferate, the result may well be the kind of byzantine exegeses I offer here.

55. Although this reading is only implicit in de La Grange's biography (1999, 409–12 and esp. 2008, 1582–83), the portrait he paints of Mahler's nearly debilitating anxieties about the work's reception—his fear that its "radical new style" (de La Grange's term; 2008, 1582) would ensure the symphony's public failure—is suggestive enough that one can easily project these tensions back onto the work itself. That is to say, in terms of public reception, we can understand the work as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, one whose acerbic tone and fatalistic outlook were prompted by the anticipation of the very failure they caused.

56. Undated letter, summer 1904, cited in de La Grange 1995, 527.

But the analyses are neither exhaustive nor proprietary; indeed, I would hope that they would be seen as quite the opposite. As much as anything, I envision this book as an invitation to fellow Mahlerians to *make use* of the analytical observables that I've brought to light here—the many indispensable “particulars” that Adorno implores us to engage—and ultimately to undertake similar hermeneutic expeditions themselves. If some readers find that the musical data culled here lead more comfortably to other interpretations—if they see fit to map different narratives onto the “armatures” I have built here, or if they find those armatures themselves in need of amendment—this is only a good thing. We are only now, after a century, beginning to read Mahler in the detail that his art warrants, and I would be pleased if this study served as the starting point for any extended dialogue that brings us into a closer engagement with this music, which remains as thrilling and fascinating as ever.

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