

“Inescapable” Coherence and the Failure of the Novel-Symphony in the Finale of Mahler’s Sixth

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Few symphonic works of the late Romantic era are preceded by a reputation as extravagant as that of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony.¹ Beginning with Mahler’s own epithet (“Tragic”) and exacerbated by Alma Mahler’s mawkish portrayal of the work as “prophetic” of its composer’s downfall, the A-Minor Symphony has been enshrouded in a morbid mystique that every commentator seems obliged to address in some way.² The received lore links two related tropes.

The first is that the Symphony is a consummate essay in negativity or cynicism. Much of the weight for this interpretation falls on the enormous finale, which draws together materials from the preceding movements and enacts a violent struggle ending in failure.³ The second

¹A short score of the entire movement, annotated to serve as a companion piece for this article, may be downloaded at <http://caliber.ucpress.net/toc/ncm/31/1>. My sincere thanks go to James Hepokoski for his comments on an earlier version of this article.

²As is well known, Alma Mahler claimed that her husband intended the Symphony to depict various aspects of his domestic life: herself (in the second theme of the opening Allegro), their children (in the trios of the scherzo), and himself in the finale (Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, rev. and ed. Donald Mitchell, trans. Basil Creighton [New York: Viking Press, 1969]; orig. publ. as *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen und Briefe* [Amsterdam: Allert de Lang, 1940], p. 70).

³Richard Specht likens the finale’s tumult to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and in its end the “silence of annihilation” (Richard Specht, *Gustav Mahler* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1925], p. 245). Bruno Walter finds the Sixth “bleakly pessimistic: it reeks of the bitter cup of human life. . . .The work ends in hopelessness and the night of the soul” (Bruno Walter, *Gustav Mahler*, trans. from the German supervised by Lotte Walter Lindt [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957], p. 137). More recently, Warren Darcy has suggested that the work turns “resolutely nihilistic” by “posit[ing] utopia as an illusion, a self-deluding conceit, the pursuit of which is ultimately futile” (Warren Darcy, “Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis, and Fantasy-Projection in the Slow Movement of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony,” this journal 25 [2001], 49–74, at 50). For an overview of reception trends, see Henri-Louis de la Grange, *Mahler, Volume III: Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904–1907)* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 819–20; 838–41).

is that the work discloses some uniquely personal message, either as veiled autobiography or as a grim allegory on the human condition.⁴ The second tradition has at least a limited basis in historical fact, in that Mahler envisioned the work's harshness as a reflection of the cruelty he had suffered at the hands of others.⁵ Yet the autobiographical program of Alma's memoirs stands squarely at odds with Mahler's professed attitudes toward symphonic programs at that time.⁶ And inasmuch as Mahler was inclined to compose autobiographically or philosophically, it is difficult to defend the Sixth as a *more* sincere statement than his other mature works. In all likelihood, the Sixth has enjoyed special privileges because the work's musical character resonates most keenly with the Mahler that postwar audiences have constructed in their own image: cynical, knowing, internally conflicted, and immune to the untenable promises of fast-fading Romantic ideologies.

⁴Prophetic elements notwithstanding, some scholars have found the autobiographic basis of the work at least partially credible (see Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker [Portland: Amadeus, 1993], orig. publ. as *Gustav Mahler III: Die Symphonien* [Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1985], p. 161; and de la Grange, *Gustav Mahler, Volume III*, p. 841). More often, critics distill from the work a depiction of "man's struggle with fate . . . in its full, tragic grandeur" (Erwin Ratz, "Musical Form in Gustav Mahler: An Analysis of the Finale of the Sixth Symphony," trans. Paul Hamburger, *Music Review* 29 [1968], 34–48; orig. publ. "Zum formproblem bei Gustav Mahler: Eine Analyse des Finales der VI. Symphonie," *Die Musikforschung* 9 [1956], 156–71). Compare with Jonathan Carr: "It is not just Mahler going down under those hammer blows but mankind itself" (Jonathan Carr, *Mahler: A Biography* [New York: Overlook Press, 1998], p. 136).

⁵Alfred Roller, *Die Bildnisse der Gustav Mahler* (Leipzig: E. P. Tal, 1922), p. 24.

⁶Alma Mahler's recollections of her husband proved tremendously influential, despite having been met with skepticism from the outset. In 1969 Henri-Louis de la Grange declared the need for a "new image" of Mahler, founded on a dismissal of Alma's "most serious distortions" (Henri-Louis de la Grange, "Mahler: A New Image," *Saturday Review*, 29 March 1969, p. 48). But even if, as Donald Mitchell maintains, Alma's recollections are "exceptionally well founded and accurate" (Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, p. xxxv), Mahler would certainly have been repulsed by the way in which liner notes and program guides have ossified his off-hand comments into a "virtual" program—the kind painfully evident, for example, in a recent concert review that glibly likened the demise of the finale's "hero" to "a 'Star Wars' character being slowly vaporized" (Anthony Tommasini, "The Ways that Maazel Knows His Mahler" *New York Times*, 24 June 2005).

But what of that "musical character" itself, the first tradition named above? Can we legitimate the notion that this untexted work conveys a singularly tragic or negative message? From one viewpoint the question is so obvious as to be trivial. After all, the lay concertgoer does not need score analysis to tell that the finale is bad news. From timbral, tonal, and topical viewpoints the work's outcome is as obviously and intuitively negative as the Second's or Eighth's is positive. For much of its thirty-odd minutes, the finale alternates between caricaturized elation and turmoil, with the most bombastic moments occurring precisely where the former gives way to the latter. (And just in case we *weren't* paying attention, several of these shifts are punctuated by the visually arresting drop of a gigantic hammer.) Even the sonic surface of the piece seems to grimace, with Mahler's marvelously noxious orchestration inspiring one early critic to comment on his peculiar "cult of ugliness."⁷

And yet no matter how vital they are, sensuous, transient attributes such as timbre and gesture fail to penetrate the deeper recesses of the work and are incapable of sustaining coherent musical arguments across entire movements on their own. Ideally, a more trenchant exploration of the finale's negativity would move beyond its tumultuous surface to a close reading of its expansive formal, tonal, and thematic processes. Yet in the vast bibliography on the Sixth and its finale, there are few sustained attempts to forge a link between the movement's structure and expression. Technical discussions have tended to be interpretively neutral, with authors like Bekker, Ratz, and Redlich marveling at the finale's Byzantine construction and taut motivic relations mainly through a formalist lens.⁸ The tradition stemming from

⁷Albert Kauders, after the immensely unpopular Vienna premier of the Sixth (cited in de la Grange, *Mahler, Volume III*, p. 541).

⁸See for instance Paul Bekker, *Gustav Mahlers Sinfonien* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1969), pp. 225–33; Ratz, "Musical Form in Gustav Mahler"; Hans Redlich, "Mahler's Enigmatic Sixth," in *Festschrift Otto Erich Deutsch zum 80. Geburtstag am 5 September 1963*, ed. Walter Gerstenberg, Jan LaRue, and Wolfgang Rehm (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963), pp. 250–56. Though these early studies differ in scope and emphasis, they all tend to treat form and motive as essentially separate from tonal design. Later analysts include

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 teleological whole. For Adorno, as for the more mainstream critics, the finale's semantic profile still seems to arise in large part from the large-scale juxtaposition of sharply differentiated musical topics, barely moving us beyond our original (and inadequate) formulation of negativity as a function of unchecked hyperbole and a minor-mode finish.⁹

In this study, I propose a reading of the finale that construes its negative outcome as the culmination a coherent narrative plot—one that assimilates a maximum of compositional details across a wide array of coordinated musical domains. Embarking from a single suggestive comment in Adorno's *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, I will aim to link the finale's negative expression to a breakdown of what that author famously called the symphonies' "novelistic" character. Adorno saw Mahler's music as a heterogeneous tissue of individualized impulses, amassed in defiance of the synthetic meaning that ossified formal schemes could no longer assure. The long, convoluted arc of the Mahlerian novel-symphony disdains any path predetermined by the Classical "ontology of forms." Rather, each unfolds according to the unique dictates of its thematic constituents, which are energized by the tense forcefield of their collective nonintegration and ultimately brought to pronounce a higher truth. For Adorno, this was Mahler's grand trump, the breakaway gesture that turned obsolete symphonic means against themselves in scathing critique. Mahler's triumph, Adorno maintained, was the liberation of music from an aesthetic

of integration that had governed the Beethovenian tradition and from the formal and thematic protocols that underwrote music's image as a closed system "without contradictions," an irresistibly logical and self-confirming dynamic structure.¹⁰

In the finale of the Sixth, however, the integrative totality returns with a vengeance. In this movement, Adorno remarks, Mahler "dares to undertake a work of the Beethovenian type"—meaning one in which the parts exist only to serve the whole—and, moreover, that this relationship might be seen 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."¹¹ The comment is striking for two reasons. First, it offers Adorno's only direct acknowledgment of a lapse in Mahler's novelistic construction. Second, it implies that this lapse might be elemental to the finale's singularly dark demeanor. In context it seems little more than an offhanded rhetorical flourish; it receives no follow-up and is difficult to square with Adorno's broader line of thought.¹² Yet the doubly anthropomorphic conceit that Adorno tosses off here—that of the monolithic work pitted against its own constituent elements—is uniquely potent as the backbone of an emplotted view of the finale. I will show that it is possible to see 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 triumphed. 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 totality. In the end, we find it is no coincidence that Mahler's most procedurally

Del Mar, Floros, and de la Grange (Norman Del Mar, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony: A Study* [London: Eulenberg Books, 1980], pp. 51–64; Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, pp. 180–86; de la Grange, *Mahler: Volume III*, pp. 829–41).

⁹The view of the finale as a study in extreme contrasts goes back at least as far as Bekker's 1921 monograph (Bekker, *Gustav Mahlers Sinfonien*, p. 238) and finds its most celebrated expression in Ratz's portrayal of the work as alternating between "positive" and "negative" event-spaces (Ratz, "Musical Form in Gustav Mahler," p. 43).

¹⁰Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); orig. publ. as *Mahler: Ein musikalische Physiognomik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 62 "ontology of forms"; p. 14 "without contradictions." See also chap. 4, "Novel."

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹²See this article's final section.

traditional symphony is also the bleakest in expression.

The first section of this article explores how Adorno's novel-symphonic principle might be absorbed into a more contemporary hermeneutics of form, and the second section lays the foundations for a narrative reading by addressing the movement's sonata processes at the largest level of structure and how the exposition's premature collapse precipitates larger problems in the unfolding sonata drama. The third section takes a closer look at the exposition, with particular interest in how the work poses its abiding dramatic problems through various semantic oppositions; the fourth explores the procedural and material grounds for what numerous critics have termed the finale's "inescapable" coherence, by linking certain obsessive and asphyxiating aspects of the work's thematic processes to its sonata story, which dramatizes the violent ascendance of strict formal and tonal imperatives above all dissenting elements. With the hermeneutic foundations in place, the next two sections retrace the remainder of the work, from development to coda, finding the drama of this "inescapable" coherence to play out across both tonal and thematic domains and corroborated at a remarkable level of detail. In closing, I return to 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.

ADORNO, THE NOVEL-SYMPHONY, AND SONATA-FORM HERMENEUTICS

When Mahler warned of the many "riddles" his Sixth Symphony would pose to posterity, he surely had the structure of its enormous finale in mind.¹³ The movement is so brazen in scale and complexity that analysts have often seen it as a 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 proclaim-

¹³"My sixth will propound riddles that may be solved only by a generation that has absorbed and digested my first five symphonies" (undated letter to Richard Specht, 1904, in Gustav Mahler, *Gustav Mahler Briefe: 1879–1911*, ed. Herta Blaukopf, rev. edn. [Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1996], p. 318).

ing a symbolic mastery of its form.¹⁴ Because this study advances a hierarchic approach to musical plot—one that considers individual details in relation to the large-scale musical argument wherever possible—form will be a central concern here as well. The initial task will be to develop a hermeneutics of plot that not only strikes a middle path between myopia and reductivism—allowing us to attend to the work's countless idiosyncrasies without losing sight of its dialogue with past models—but also absorbs as much as possible of Adorno's thought without forfeiting the clarity and navigability of modern analytic writing.¹⁵ But before beginning to customize the novel-symphonic conceit for analytic purposes, I will pause for a closer look at what it actually entails.

As one might expect from Adorno, the novel-symphony is not so much a well-formed theory as an aggregate of ideas about Mahlerian form, melody, and process, gathered around the unifying themes of temporality, expectancy, and freedom. Its central conceit is the liberation of the work's materials from the "ritual execution" of a tautological, self-confirming whole: renouncing the hope that preexistent forms can still guarantee meaning, Mahler's music unfolds according to the "individual impulses" of its heterogeneous materials, which the novel-symphony brings into seemingly fortuitous collusion and collision.¹⁶ Adorno refers to this in-

¹⁴Critical testimony often reveals a flush of expeditionary enthusiasm: Bekker marvels at the power of the form to bind the most extreme contrasts into a convincing whole. Ratz heralds the finale's "somnambulistic sureness" of conception, de la Grange its "irresistible logic of architecture." Adorno speaks in superlatives: the finale is nothing less than the "center of Mahler's entire oeuvre," the work which the composer's "epic expansion attains tightest control over itself" (Bekker, *Mahlers Sinfonien*, p. 225; Ratz, "Musical Form," p. 41; de la Grange, *Mahler, Vol. III*, p. 838; Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 97).

¹⁵On this point a certain amount of distortion is necessary and even desirable. It is the nature of Adorno's expression, brimming over with electric antitheses, that to validate any one of his ideas concretely is all but to necessitate the negation of another—the price we pay for a terrestrial Adorno is the damage we do to his ideas when bringing them down to earth. Yet we can be faithful, I think, to the spirit of what Adorno hoped to celebrate in his image of Mahler without fetishizing his most intractable theses or placing naïve stock in the patently irreducible.

¹⁶Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 49 "ritual execution"; p. 128 "individual impulses." See also pp. 61–62.

version of the part-to-whole relationship as composing from the “bottom up,” rather than from the “top down”—a strategy that allows a commingling of antitheses and degrees of graphic juxtaposition that are elemental to the literary novel but unthinkable in the top-down construction of the Viennese Classical symphony, whose “seamless identity” shuns anything it cannot assimilate without contradiction.¹⁷ As it suits him, Adorno extends this novelistic analogy to the themes themselves, which he fashions as the novel’s “characters.” Like subjects in prose novels, Mahler’s themes possess a core identity that is transformed outwardly by context, duration, and experience. Their role in the overall conceit is critical, as their degree of variance from appearance to appearance manifests not only the passing of novelistic time, but the “concrete logic” itself of Mahler’s style.¹⁸

I will return to these themes below. What is striking at this point is how many of Adorno’s ideas already point beyond the modular-taxonomic views of his contemporaries, toward more modern dynamic conceptions of “form” as an unfolding transaction between composer and listener, one that draws semantic capital from the fulfillment and deflection of expectations, and as such is closely intertwined with music’s expressive functions.¹⁹ 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 that 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.”²⁰ This entails a radical shift of emphasis, from form as an objective attribute to form as a process. Because novelistic construction presumes a form that unfolds in a state of almost constant generative tension, it cannot be reckoned against *any* static, ontologically binding schema. At the same time, though, “Mahler’s innovations . . . are not comprehensible without reference to the norm from which he deviated.” This means—and the idea is crucial as we move ahead—that these same conventional schemes cannot be disposed of entirely, because they supply critical points of reference and are thus indirectly constitutive of the work’s meaning.²¹

In focusing attention on the *gap* between Mahler’s immanent structures and the balanced, symmetrical archetypes that they so urgently distort, the novel-symphonic idea anticipates certain modern understandings of musical “narrativity” as well. As Maus has shown, many

¹⁷Theodor W. Adorno, “Mahler, Centenary Address, Vienna, 1960,” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), p. 87 “bottom up” (see also Adorno, *Mahler*, pp. 49–50, 62, 128); Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 13 “seamless identity.”

¹⁸Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 72: “In general 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.” See also p. 88: “The relations between [the thematic characters’] deviations, the degree of proximity between them, their proportions and syntactic connections, make up the concrete logic . . . of Mahler’s epic manner of composing.”

¹⁹This tradition made important early strides in the works of Anthony Newcomb, who advocated a more fluid approach to formal analysis, recognizing formal paradigms as signifiers that triggered expectations whose fulfillment was nonobligatory. Once invoked, formal paradigms might be deflected, truncated, or merged with others, allowing the analyst to account for structures otherwise unclassifiable with ontological binding schemes. See especially Anthony Newcomb, “The Birth of Music Out of the Spirit of Drama: An Essay in Wagnerian Formal Analysis,”

this journal 5 (1981), 38–66, and “Once More ‘Between Absolute and Program Music’: Schumann’s Second Symphony,” this journal 7 (1984), 233–50.

²⁰Adorno, “Centenary Address,” p. 87.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 81. Adorno seems to contradict this when he insists elsewhere that Mahler’s formal “asymmetries” and “irregularities” are *not* in fact “surprising surrogates for the expected”—a position especially confusing in apparent denial of the propensity for surprise that the novel-symphonic principle celebrates (Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 67). But such comments should be read as a jab at Richard Strauss, whom Adorno routinely derided for his dependence on superficial surprise-effects (see Richard Wattenbarger, “A ‘Very German Process’: The Contexts of Adorno’s Strauss Critique,” this journal 25 [2001], 313–36). Adorno could have been clearer by stating that Mahler’s irregularities are (unlike Strauss’s) never *arbitrary*, but in fact necessitated by the “objective laws” of form—the very same laws that by various turns require the debris of “transformed, disguised, and invisible objective forms” like the sonata to protrude into the immanent novelistic flow (Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 67). In the late essay “On the Problem of Musical Analysis,” Adorno makes his case more emphatically: the specific task of analysis is to negotiate “the complex relationship of *deviation* to *schema*” (emphasis in original) (in Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Max Paddison [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002], p. 165).

critics regard musical narrative as a kind of alternative or supplementary musical logic, intended to compensate for the degradation of supposedly self-evident traditional plans.²² With its bias against the dramatic validity of eighteenth-century schemata, this position has roots in Adorno's idea of novel construction as a "second and superior logic."²³ In the case of Mahler's sonata forms, the novelistic impulse is realized through the intrusion of individual freedom within a field of events that is "de-temporized" by its own ponderous symmetries. These "improvisatory" impulses strain against the tendency of ponderous and predictable architectonic schemes for "imposing order." In so doing, they reinvigorate music's temporal presence, its capacity to arise vitally, "of its own enactment" rather than from rote pattern completion.²⁴

But Adorno's own breakthrough is not his observation that Mahler's music ran roughshod over received forms, unfolded with the apparent nonlinearity of complex prose, or employed incessant thematic transformation—all this had been noticed before.²⁵ Rather, it is his conviction that the music conjoins these attributes in

a system that brings broad formal gestures and isolated musical details into demonstrable, causal interrelation. The significance of the novel-symphony lies less in its observation that Mahler's music follows a "novelistic curve" in its gestural-mimetic language ("rising to great situations, collapsing into itself"²⁶) than in the presumption that the 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 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."²⁷ In his promise that a discernible (if often "subterranean") logic binds the most distant chapters of the musical novel, Adorno takes us enticingly close to the threshold of genuine musical *emplotment*—the idea that the work's material configurations themselves might be understood to realize a coherent story, however complex its inner workings.²⁸ But then he backs away. Defining this novelistic "logic" according to any strict measure would surely in Adorno's eyes have led to a reduction of Mahler's music to just the kind of programmatic analyses that he abhorred. Enticing as it sounds, the logic that we inherit from Adorno is merely a placeholder for a set of metaphysical relationships that can only be degraded by concrete exegesis.²⁹

²²Fred Everett Maus, "Music as Narrative," *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991), 18–19.

²³Adorno, *Mahler*, pp. 69, 75. Adorno's comment that "it is not that music wants to narrate, but that the composer wants to make music in the way that others narrate" is perhaps the most ubiquitous sound bite in the vast bibliography on music and narrative—in part at least because of its apparent generality (*ibid.*, p. 62). Yet Adorno's view of Mahler's "narrative" qualities is rather subtler than this comment suggests out of context; see for instance discussions on pp. 24–25 and 75, where he uses the term to denote narrative in the strict sense—that is, as a kind of diegetic distancing-effect.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 35 "de-temporize"; p. 78 "improvisatory" (see also pp. 37, 87, 91); p. 97 "imposing order"; p. 93 "of its own enactment."

²⁵Talia Pecker Berio shows that Erwin Stein used the "novel" metaphor as early as 1930, in an article that she surmises Adorno may have read ("Mahler's Jewish Parable," in *Mahler and His World*, ed. Karen Painter [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002], pp. 87–110, at 99). Many authors had noted Mahler's proclivity for complex thematic transformations—including the composer himself (Mahler, *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, ed. Knud Martner [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979], p. 182). And as Hermann Danuser points out, Friedrich Schlegel was already drawing analogies between the development of musical themes and literary characters in that late eighteenth century (Hermann Danuser, *Musikalische Prosa* [Regensburg: G. Bosse, 1975], p. 110).

²⁶Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 69.

²⁷Adorno, "Centenary Address," p. 95; Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 52.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 35, "subterranean."

²⁹Despite its central position in his critical armory (to say nothing of the implied rigor of the term itself), Adorno's notion of "musical logic" is especially specious from the point of view of applied analysis—no less suspect than the "objective laws" of musical form it is intimately tied up with. Though it is musical "logic" that ostensibly distinguishes Mahler from predecessors and contemporaries alike, it is all but impossible to pin that logic to a set of definite criteria or techniques. (The most we can glean is that Mahler's "logic" is superior to that of the Classical period in its ability to mediate breaches the latter would not allow [Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 14].) In large part Adorno uses these concepts polemically, to reinforce preexisting biases. For an illuminating discussion, see Wattenbarger, "Adorno's Strauss Critique," pp. 323–29.

For those intent on pursuing Adorno's promise to more concrete analytic ends, accounting for the constructive logic of Mahlerian emplotment has been a formidable task. Some have mapped plot archetypes from the literary sphere onto Mahler's instrumental symphonies; others have rationalized the successive stages of his works with ad hoc narrative/dramatic schemes grounded in gestures, topoi, key networks, and other artifacts unique to the score.³⁰ Both paradigms have yielded enlightening analytic results and made good on our abiding cultural intuitions that Mahler's music is fundamentally plot-driven. But they have tended nevertheless to lean toward the Adornian assumption that traditional forms, being dynamically inert, are beyond the purview of dramatic emplotment—that "narrative" begins where conventional forms end. Both approaches are compromised by their reluctance to tell Mahler's stories in relation to a *musical* plot paradigm, one that transcends the individual work.

A decade ago, Gregory Karl argued that the formulation of viable models of musical plot would be among the foremost challenges facing modern analysts.³¹ The urgency was hardly overstated. If we abide by Peter Brooks's insistence that plots are not merely "organizing structures" but also "intentional structures, goal-oriented and forward moving," then much twentieth-century formal analysis falls short of the mark.³² In the case of the finale, questions

of paradigmatic plot would surely focus on the sonata most critics see vestigially in the work. Yet to the extent that they regard the sonata plan as relevant (which is not always the case), analysts have tended toward a modular/spatial conception of form, one less concerned with modeling form as an "intentional structure" than with reducing the work to some rational and unequivocal taxonomic plan. This has led some commentators to downplay the finale's complexities or dismiss them as overstated. Others have rationalized its idiosyncrasies using custom-built taxonomic categories or legitimated them as modular rearrangements of the traditional scheme, necessitated by such quasi-spatial criteria as balance, symmetry, and proportion.³³ Adorno was justifiably critical of such normalizing approaches. Not only do they insist on folding its irregularities into a harmonious, aestheticized whole, but they also fatally underplay the temporal, teleological basis of Mahler's discourse. (These are the pitfalls that the principle of novelistic construction intends to overcome.) Yet owing to its perceived dramatic redundancies, the sonata genre itself—for Adorno like many of his contemporaries—fails to be either "goal-oriented" or "forward moving." Even in Adorno's intensely temporized conception, Mahler's forms unfold novelistically only at the *expense* of some hypothetical underlying sonata—they are not narrative complications *within* a sonata plot that unfolds before us. In his readings, the sonata is relevant mainly as historical debris, as a "husk" whose brokenness and superfluity testify to the impossibility of composing sonatas with impunity.³⁴

³⁰Newcomb uses the Romantic *Bildungsroman* as an interpretive heuristic for Mahler's Ninth (Newcomb, "Narrative Archetypes in Mahler's Ninth Symphony," in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], pp. 120–36; see also Robert Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony: A Study in Musical Semiotics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], pp. 149–51). Recent plot-oriented analyses eschewing real-world story paradigms include Vera Micznik, "Music and Narrative Revisited: Degrees of Narrativity in Beethoven and Mahler," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 126/2 (2001), 193–249; Darcy, "Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis, and Fantasy-Projection"; James Buhler, "'Breakthrough' as Critique of Form: The Finale of Mahler's First Symphony," this journal 20 (1996), 125–43; and Steven Allen Gordon, *Mahler's Seventh Symphony, Modernism, and the Crisis of Austrian Liberalism* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998).

³¹Gregory Karl, "Structuralism and Musical Plot," *Music Theory Spectrum* 19 (1997), 15.

³²Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 12.

³³Del Mar and Floros find the movement to be in "normal" sonata form (Del Mar, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, pp. 51–52; Floros, *Mahler: The Symphonies*, p. 180); Williamson declares it "the most traditionally oriented of the sonata structures in the central symphonies" (Williamson, *The Development of Mahler's Symphonic Technique, with Special Reference to the Compositions of the Period 1899–1905* [Ph.D. diss., Oxford, 1975], pp. 108–09). Erwin Ratz and Hans Redlich are more eager to embrace the finale as deformational. Ratz acknowledges Mahler's many licenses, but justifies them as *evidence* of the composer's sensitivity to spatial-formalist criteria. Redlich accommodates the work's ad hoc formal categories like "ante-" and "post-recapitulations" (Ratz, "Musical Form in Gustav Mahler," pp. 35, 46; Redlich, "Mahler's Enigmatic Sixth," pp. 255–56).

³⁴See Adorno, *Mahler*, pp. 77–78, 95.

Here we can customize Adorno's apparatus most beneficially by adopting a view of sonata form that better accommodates Brooks's conception of plot: James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy's *Sonata Theory*, which reconstitutes the *Formenlehre* sonata scheme into a genuine plot paradigm.³⁵ Hepokoski and Darcy construe the eighteenth-century sonata as an inherently teleological form, bent on achieving an array of generic goals, through a constellation of conventionalized (if highly variable) processes; it is not simply a synchronic plan or mold into which musical content is poured. What is more, these generic goals and genre-defining features often appear to transcend the incremental changes that the genre underwent from decade to decade, as the normative and optional procedures available to composers in a given historical moment gradually evolved.³⁶ We might say informally that *Sonata Theory* posits a set of *plot functions* for the genre, whose consummation, omission, or evasion constitute the work's main dramatic outlines, as well as generic functional *roles*, correlated to specific anthropomorphized theme-types.³⁷ In toto, these plot functions provide a narrative map of the genre flexible enough to accommodate repertoire several generations removed from the originary sonatas of the mid- and late eighteenth century.³⁸

³⁵Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 251–54.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 15; see also p. vii. Hepokoski and Darcy's chap. 2, "Sonata Form as a Whole: Foundational Considerations," summarizes the basic teleological outlines of the sonata as they conceive it.

³⁷Plot functions are generic types of acts within a genre, defined with regard to their significance for the entirety of the unfolding story; they may or may not occur in a given tale, but their relative order remains fixed. Roles are conventionalized characters-types, variable in their outward appearance, that are common to most or all instances of a certain genre of story. Both were introduced in Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Bloomington: Research Center, Indiana University, 1958). For a very different treatment of plot functions in a music-analytic environment, see Karl's analysis of the "Appassionata" Sonata (Karl, "Structuralism and Musical Plot," pp. 20–31).

³⁸Though unlike Propp's, the "plot functions" of *Sonata Theory* do not form a universal, neutral background structure. As the genre develops and compositional priorities change, certain functions take on different hues and intensities of meaning. There is, in other words, no Platonic "Sonata" underwriting a century's worth of repertoire.

Like the narrative models of Newcomb and others, Hepokoski and Darcy's notion of "dialogic form" regards deformations, distortions, and deflections of historical norms as grounds for strong interpretation.³⁹ But by eliminating the crisp opposition between narrative and traditional forms, it facilitates a more integrated view of emplotment, one that capitalizes on the genre's built-in teleologies and incorporates them into the semantic field generated by the work's intrinsic narrative threads.

Given Mahler's late historical moment, the question naturally arises as to the aptness of any interpretive model, however pliable, that situates him in a tradition with roots planted firmly in the eighteenth century. But the composer's middle-period symphonies—and the Sixth in particular among them—present a special case. After his Third Symphony Mahler turned self-consciously to more traditional symphonic idioms (and to a late-century concept of "sonata form" above all) as expressive vehicles. His own comments suggest that departures from historical precedent in these works take on a new semantic weight.⁴⁰ The stylized naïveté of the Fourth notwithstanding, it is the Sixth that proves to be Mahler's most profound engagement with the structural rhetoric of the Classical style. As David Matthews points out, it is the only Mahler symphony to feature the traditional four movements in their traditional order, within an ostensibly Classical key scheme.⁴¹ Moreover, the opening Allegro exhibits by far Mahler's strictest, clearest sonata form—one that dramatizes the plot points recognized by *Sonata Theory* as the most fundamental.⁴² This is critical, because the finale,

³⁹For more on "dialogic form," see Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, pp. 9–11.

⁴⁰Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, trans. Dika Newlin, ed. and annotated Peter Franklin (London: Faber Music, 1980), p. 131.

⁴¹David Matthews, "The Sixth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 336.

⁴²The first movement of the Sixth offers a textbook example of what Hepokoski and Darcy call a "failed recapitulation" (the inability of the secondary theme to achieve "essential structural closure" in the tonic key) and an equally conventional compensatory strategy—the deferral of secondary-theme tonic confirmation until the (spectacularly effusive) coda. Despite its advanced idiom, the movement—unlike the more elliptical No. 4/I—consummates

though far from conventional in any regard, expressly reworks the thematic substance of the opening Allegro, inviting us to view the latter as a constant point of reference. We can hear the finale simultaneously invoking its predecessor (in terms of key, materials, and genre) and negating it (by the finale staging a sonata as fraught as the Allegro's was effortless).⁴³ Mahler not only points us toward some abstract referential paradigm—he has built that paradigm right into the Symphony.

To best model the finale's protracted sonata story, my analysis will adopt some of Adorno's more flexible conceits, with particular focus on two: (1) the construal of themes as anthropomorphic "characters," and (2) the notion that these characters, under normal circumstances, will comport themselves in a way that impacts the large-scale form (an exertion of their "novelistic" freedom) and realizes some long-range musical teleology.⁴⁴ But I will dispense with

its Classical pretensions by playing out a structural crisis and resolution well within the rhetorical vernacular of composers writing a hundred years prior (see Hepokoski, "Back and Forth from *Egmont*: Beethoven, Mozart, and the Nonresolving Recapitulation," this journal 25 [2001–02], esp. 149; see also this article, p. 63 for more on the obligatory structural goals of the sonata's secondary theme).⁴³This view may originate with Adorno's comment that the finale "raises up" [*steigert*] and then "negates" [*negiert*] the opening Allegro (Mahler, p. 138). In his lengthy analysis, Bernd Sponheuer corroborates the view of the two movements as "negative images" by documenting the extensive material, constructive, and topical links connecting them (*Logik des Zerfalls: Untersuchungen zum Finalproblem in den Symphonien Gustav Mahlers* [Tutzing: Schneider, 1978], pp. 321–50). Yet for all its painstaking detail Sponheuer's analysis disappoints, as it shows all too clearly how Adorno's critical apparatus, adopted in toto, exposes its own weaknesses when overloaded with the analytic particulars Adorno originally withheld. Sponheuer's aim is to document the finale's "processive curve" (*Verlaufskurve*). But as his (otherwise astute) observations pile up, the chimerical concepts of "musical logic" and "logical progression"—no better defined here than they are in Adorno—are asked to bear an unmanageable amount of explanatory weight, and ultimately show themselves to be little more than tautological validations of the work in question. Beyond the rough sonata outline, Sponheuer lacks an organizing principle to bind the myriad details into a convincing narrative whole, and to help his *Verlaufskurve* transcend measure-by-measure description.⁴⁴As a means of fleshing out the implications of a "novelistic" musical idiom, my analysis "reads" the finale as a story unfolding within a self-contained musical world, one whose plot comprises the deeds performed by musical agents ("characters") capable of sentience and volition. More conventional, perhaps, would be the ascription of

Adorno's ineffable governing "logic" and search instead for a coherent plot, grounded in the Sonata Theory plot paradigm, and centered on these characters, their motivations (reconstructed through both contextual clues and genre norms), and their role in the execution of the sonata. Ultimately, I will show the finale's turmoil arising from a proprietary conflict between different character groups, each of which is invested in one of several proposed outcomes.

EXPOSITIONAL FAILURE, ROTATIONAL HAVOC, AND THE ERRANT S-THEMES

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 denouement. I begin by looking at the strand with the most decisive effect on the finale's large-scale formal unfolding: the increasingly desperate plight of the sonata's secondary themes to secure major-mode closure—particularly following the collapse of the exposition at m. 228. The task in this section is to trace this particular thread across the entire movement, providing a large-scale overview of the whole work, and a semantic scaffolding that will allow the addition of critically important details in the essay's subsequent sections.

To make the finale's daunting proportions more manageable, fig. 1 offers a much simplified overview of its thematic and tonal organization.⁴⁵ (Where applicable, I use the standard Sonata Theory abbreviations for thematic zones within a normative sonata exposition: P [primary theme]; TR [transitional theme]; S [secondary theme].) The piece divides into four "blocks" corresponding to the four sections of

global agency to a fictional Mahler, one said to "stage" all of the dramatic events I read into the score. But such locutions grow unnecessarily cumbersome in profusion and tend to imply intentionality where none can be proved. Though an imaginary, intending composer is implicit throughout this article, I will prefer to tell the finale's musical story without such mediation, and with the hope that readers will indulge the "agency" of Mahler's musical characters just as they would the illusory agency of human characters in fiction.

⁴⁵For a detailed comparison of six earlier analyses of the finale's form, see Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, pp. 64–82.

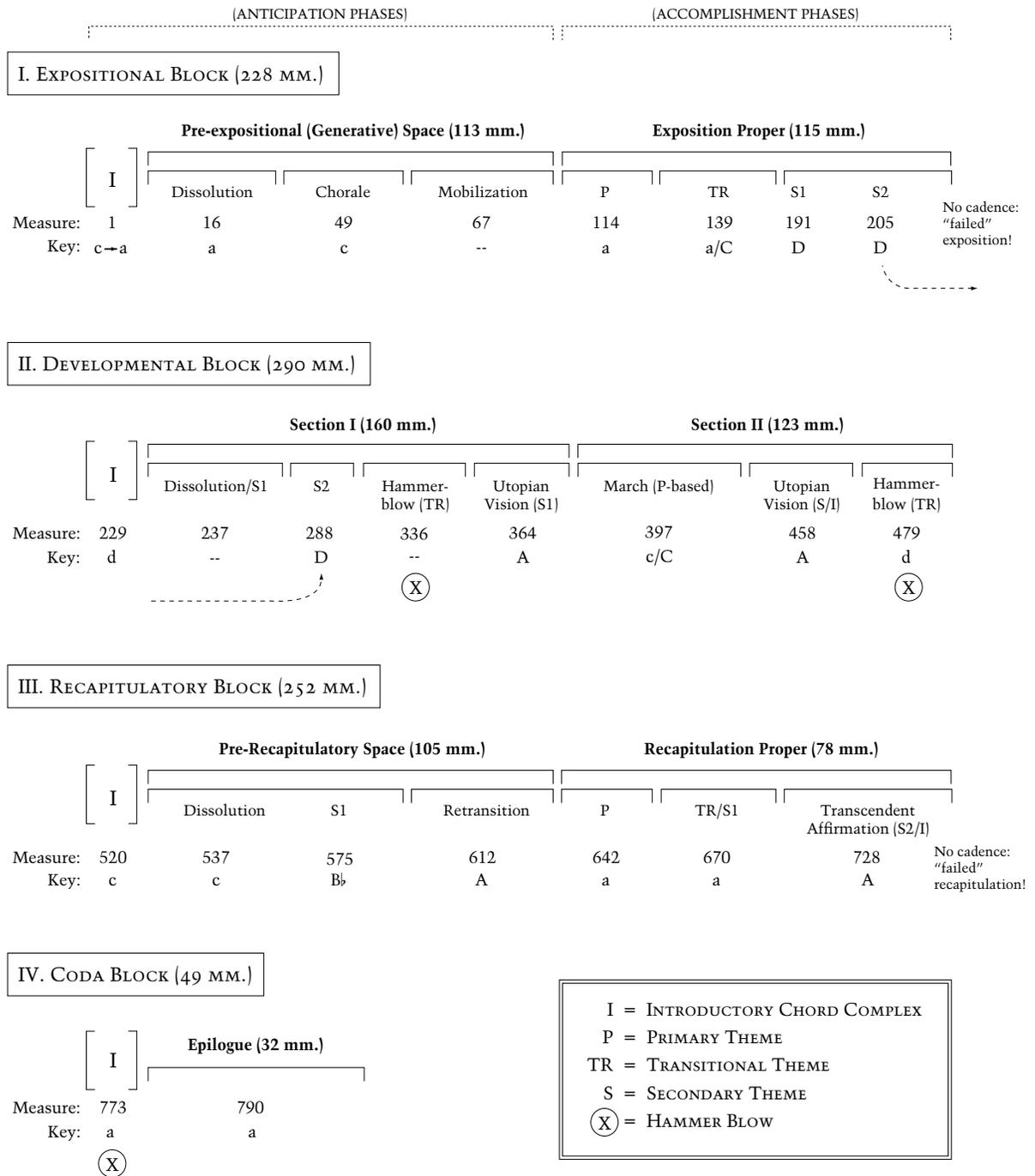


Figure 1: Modular-thematic overview of the finale.

the traditional sonata, each beginning with the “introductory complex” (labeled “I”), a brief but highly characteristic formal marker. In each case, the introductory complex gives way to what I call “dissolution fields,” spaces characterized by ethereal *pianissimo* textures, fragmented motivic utterances, unstable tonality, and an overall lack of symphonic impetus.⁴⁶ In the expositional block, this field is the starting point for an extended generative process (mm. 16–113), where the themes of the exposition—whose onset is delayed by over a hundred measures—emerge from the ether and gradually accumulate the momentum sufficient to launch the sonata.

The exposition proper (m. 114) unfolds with a functional clarity reminiscent of the Symphony's first movement: primary, transitional, and secondary thematic zones are all sharply delineated. It is only in the last of these that significant complications arise. As fig. 1 indicates, S-space in fact contains two distinct themes: a buoyant but restrained S1, and a surging, ecstatic S2.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ S1, spirited but too lightweight to contrast the oppressive march preceding it, peters into aimless sequences and

is hastily nudged aside by its more assertive successor. But S2—after much confident promise—is cadentially derailed (and with it, the exposition) at m. 228. This tonal and rhetorical collapse results in a particularly graphic instance of what Hepokoski and Darcy term expositional “failure”—the inability of the S-themes to secure a strong cadence (in this case, *any* cadence) in the new key. This collapse is of vital importance to the musical narrative of the entire movement. To understand its implications, we must delve into Sonata Theory's central teleology: the generic imperative of S to achieve tonic closure in the recapitulation.

Sonata Theory regards the eighteenth-century exposition as having both determinative and referential functions. It is determinative in that it proposes how the recapitulation is likely to be effected. This hinges largely on the trajectory of S. In the exposition, the generic goal of S is to secure cadential confirmation in the secondary key, the moment of *essential expositional closure* (EEC). Hepokoski and Darcy argue persuasively that the correlative *tonic cadence* in S-space—the ESC, or *essential structural closure*—is in turn the *single* generic goal of the recapitulation and thus the movement at large.⁴⁹ This means that the teleological mission of an entire sonata is allotted solely to S, making it “the most generically critical” material in the exposition.⁵⁰ For this reason the failure of an exposition to secure an EEC—the failure to produce a satisfactory perfect authentic cadence (PAC) in the new key—suggests a structural-rhetorical defect or crisis that may have ramifications across the entire movement. In many cases this involves a parallel recapitulatory failure, often with tonic-cadential closure deferred as late as the coda.

The exposition serves a “referential” function in that it provides a normative order of modules, a basic layout against which later deviations might be assessed, in conjunction with what Sonata Theory identifies as *rotational* principles. As Darcy states in his own discussion of the Sixth, rotational form is “a

⁴⁶I borrow the notion of the “dissolution field” (*Auflösungsfeld*) from Adorno, who uses it to describe certain collapsing passages in the finale's development (Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 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—and thus a fertile staging ground for the generative process. For this reason I prefer Robert Samuels's translation of the term (“dissolution”) over Jephcott's more graphic “disintegration field” (Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, p. 78).

⁴⁷The designation of the second theme as S2 deviates from Sonata Theory standards. Without a clear cadential division, we should call this “S1.2” instead (Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 71). Nevertheless, I opt for the exponent that suggests maximum differentiation, as the two themes serve different functions in the form, and it would be misleading to use nomenclature that suggested S2 was in some way “part of” S1. However, I concur with Hepokoski and Darcy that this second S-theme cannot be a proper “closing group” (as Ratz and Sponheuer contend) since S1 remains unclosed.

⁴⁸D major has a brief but critical back story in the Sixth Symphony as the tonality of the first movement's failed recapitulation (see n. 42 above).

⁴⁹Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, pp. 19–20; see also chap. 7: “The Secondary (S) Theme and Essential Expositional Closure (ESC).”

⁵⁰Hepokoski, “Beyond the Sonata Principle,” p. 134.

cyclical, repetitive process that begins by unfolding a series of differentiated motives or themes as a referential statement or ‘first rotation’; subsequent rotations recycle and rework all or most of the referential statement, normally retaining the sequential ordering of the selected musical ideas.”⁵¹ Rotational processes may operate independently or in conjunction with other formal paradigms. In the sonata genre, the exposition serves as the “referential arrangement” of a rotation comprising P, TR, S, and possibly C (“closing,” or post-EEC ideas). As a rule, Mahler’s music is strongly rotational in design, treating order of presentation as a constant around which other variables may vary (often drastically). Here, the division of the finale by recurrent formal markers surely invites us to look for large-scale rotational process at work.⁵² But that task proves more difficult than we might expect. Figure 1 shows that it is difficult to square “referential arrangement” of the exposition proper (P-TR-S1-S2) with the succeeding blocks. A quick comparison shows that no large block expressly cycles through the content of any other. And though the recapitulation proper (m. 642) reinstates the modular layout of the exposition, this ordering is conspicuously absent from the intervening sections: the developmental block’s section I (m. 237) lacks any definitive presentation of P, and the TR-equivalent hammer blow theme falls *between* two secondary theme zones; in section II, P (m. 397) proceeds directly to a variant of S (m. 458), and only then moves on to TR (m. 479); and before retransitioning, the recapitulatory block dwells entirely on S1. My contention, however, is that this rotational irregularity is exactly the crisis situation precipitated by the untimely derailing of the S-themes in the expo-

sition. From a narrative perspective, we can trace many of the finale’s formal irregularities to the erratic behavior of the thwarted S-themes, which exhibit an increasing desperation to stabilize the major mode originally denied them, often using formal and tonal means unsanctioned by the sonata at large.

If the designation of the S-themes’ behavior as erratic is not simply arbitrary, however, we should be able to identify the normative understructure they have upset. To blame them for the rotational havoc, we must unearth a deeply embedded, conceptual rotational scheme, however fractured at the musical surface. We can do this most convincingly by focusing on the one constructive element (beyond the introductory complex) common to all three blocks: the delayed onset of the main concentration of P-materials. The appearance of the primary theme (P) only halfway into each would-be rotation marks a striking departure from Hepokoski and Darcy’s normative role of P as the rhetorical “initiator” of rotations. The authors of *Sonata Theory* show that the main sections of the Classical sonata (exposition, development, recapitulation, coda) tend overwhelmingly to begin with elements of P. This turns out to be the norm as much with Mahler as it is with Haydn or Mozart.⁵³ Given a century’s worth of association between P-materials and musical beginnings, then, we can reasonably presume that the initiatory function of P might be residually preserved even when those materials appear in the midst of some larger span.

In the case of 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

⁵¹Darcy, “Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis, and Fantasy-Projection,” p. 52. For a detailed account of the methodological underpinnings of rotational form, see Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, “Appendix 2: Terminology: ‘Rotation’ and ‘Deformation’.”

⁵²Mahler’s music abounds with rhetorical markers like this, which define large strophic or rotational patterns while remaining insulated from the main musical argument. The most obvious precedent for the finale is the opening movement of the Third Symphony, discussed below. Other examples (among many) include the sleigh bells of Symphony No. 4/I, the *Schreckenfanfaren* of No. 2/V, and the disintegrating “inferno” outbursts of No. 5/II.

⁵³Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, chap. 5: “The Primary Theme (P)”; esp. p. 65. With the exception of the Second Symphony’s opening movement, all of Mahler’s other sonata developments and recapitulations begin either directly with P-materials or by a rotational return to introductory space followed by P (as in the recapitulation of No. 7/I, the development of No. 1/IV, and both post-expositional rotations of No. 3/I).

disarray followed by a concentration of forces around the P-theme—reurs 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 comprises two broad chapters—an *anticipation phase* (beginning with the introductory [I-] 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 fig. 1.) In this respect the form revisits that of the Third Symphony's first movement, each of whose massive rotations dwell in a distended introductory space before the main sonata materials parade onto the scene. In the finale of the Sixth, however, this constructive principle is harder to detect because its anticipation phases (unlike those in the Third) are not rotationally congruent. Other than beginning with a dissolution field, they apparently have little in common.⁵⁴ Our task then is to look beyond their rhetorical and material differences to see their narrative/dramatic congruence as zones of instability, disorder, and postponement. And in each of the post-expositional blocks we will find that the 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 an orderly or tautly constructed sonata.

The first indication that expositional "failure"—the curtailing of S-space prior to cadential closure—has set the secondary themes on a problematic path comes with their apparent 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 subdues a subdominant inflection in the original, making the second S2 even more

strongly vectored toward D major. (Figure 1 displays 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 rhetorical 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.⁵⁵

It is against this waywardness that the first of the famous hammer blows (marked "X" on fig. 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 (as nearly all critics have) mainly for its violently theatrical shift of mode and local affect is to miss its larger significance. Mahlerian emplotment demands equal attention to the circumstances surrounding a musical element's first *and* final appearances. 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 is but the first instance of an essential plot device: the tendency of the finale's emphatic cadential efforts to produce a corrupted representation of the intended tonic and in so doing to permanently negate or expel one or more musical elements associated with the S-themes.

⁵⁴The distinctions between sonata and non-sonata space are not so sharply drawn in the finale as in the first movement of the Third, whose rotations we can productively view as beginning outside sonata space, and entering (or reentering) only with the onset of the main march materials.

⁵⁵Paul Bekker apparently saw enough ambiguity in the reprise of S2 to conclude that the exposition was still underway at this point, only terminating with the hammer-blow (Bekker, *Gustav Mahlers Symphonien*, pp. 230–31).

The protracted drive for closure that has preoccupied the work for nearly 150 measures reaches what Adorno might call its “negative fulfillment” in the tonal and thematic chaos immediately following the hammer blow (mm. 338–63).⁵⁶ But it is not long before elements of S return unexpectedly, in a new guise and with a revised 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. Since the modal outcome of the Symphony hangs in the 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.⁵⁷ Yet through its very placement *here*, rather than in the recapitulation, we know it to be premature, and in that respect untrustworthy. Just as S2 had forcibly rewound symphonic time, here S1 attempts to fast-forward to a hypothetical Utopian future, beyond the troubled expanses of a sonata still underway. This idealized expression of the

tonic major will return twice in the finale—always broader and more urgent, and (critically) always reworking materials from S-space. But here the Utopian vision proves scarcely more stable than the surrounding music and quickly dissipates.

Now stretched too thin and growing increasingly frantic in the search for stability, the second anticipation phase simply snaps in m. 385, unleashing pandemonium. And as had been the case in the expositional block, ultimately the P-theme materials 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 well-behaved and earnest 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 in a perversely corrupted cadence on 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.⁵⁸

The third anticipation phase, that beginning with the recapitulatory block, warrants special attention, since it has been a source of analytical confusion for nearly a century. At first glance, it seems hard to defend this music as a zone of “instability, disarray, or postponement” like its predecessors. It appears grounded, directed, and utterly confident. After some initial meandering, the now-problematic 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. Encountering the first coherent, tonally stable

⁵⁶Like the “breakthrough,” “fulfillment” (*Erfüllung*) is a formal category Adorno used to distinguish Mahler’s loose-knit forms from rigidly economic Classical precedent. The fulfillment-field delivers from *within* the form the kind of rhetorical excess that the *Durchbruch* introduces from without, denoting certain watershed moments where the musical stream eddies temporarily, to broaden and unleash affirmational energy accumulated in the course of its dense and incessant narrative ramification (Adorno, *Mahler*, pp. 42–43). Adorno devised its opposite, the “negative fulfillment,” as a means of refashioning Mahler’s collapsing passages not merely as the unraveling of the what is present, a failing of the symphonic voice, but as having a genuine negative immanence, a force of negation that allows them to extend through the form “as something in their own right,” an enactment of “what the musical process fears” (*ibid.*, p. 45). Arguably, the “negative fulfillment” is a more perfect inverse of the *Durchbruch*; in the latter an affirmative presence enters from without, while in the former a negating presence, like a black hole, erupts from within.

⁵⁷This outcome “hinges on” the fate of S if only for the simple fact that 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. (For more on the generic modal dramas entailed in minor-key sonatas, see Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, chap. 14: “Sonata Form in Minor Keys.”)

⁵⁸Mahler corrupts the cadence by dovetailing it with the onset of the recapitulatory block. At the moment the cadential bass finally (after nearly 450 measures!) attains a resounding low D \sharp , the upper voices sound the movement’s brittle opening sonority (C, E \flat , F \sharp , A \flat). See p. 86.

appearance of S1 since the exposition, many commentators have been led to view mm. 575–611 as the first leg of a “reversed recapitulation.”⁵⁹ But this is surely a misreading for several reasons. In the first place, the very concept of the “reversed recapitulation” is founded on a misunderstanding of earlier Classical practices.⁶⁰ And if the principle has no purchase in regard to Classical models, it seems wholly out of place in Mahler’s most overt dialogue with that tradition—especially since his more formally adventurous symphonies set no precedent for reordering a sonata’s basic components. Second, there is (unusually for Mahler) no discernible motivation for why any such putative “recapitulation” would be not only in the wrong key, but in a key with no back story in the Symphony—that alone is reason to be suspicious of S1’s immodest extroversion here. But finally, and most importantly, there is no need to resort to this “reversed” interpretation, since immediately following the recapitulation of the primary theme (m. 642), there is still another statement of S1 to come, *in the tonic minor* (m. 670), making the “reversal” claim all the more inaccurate. This later appearance of S1 may have escaped attention because it occurs within TR-space, literally superimposed onto the latter. At that point the TR-theme itself is displaced to the bass voices and S1 appears, in its entirety, in the trumpet.⁶¹ This kind of thematic conflation is, unmistakably, a radical deformation. But it is surely the preferred reading, both because it comes closer to fulfilling the secondary theme’s generic tonal and rotational requirements—it bends these imperatives for narrative effect but does not break them—and because Mahler had used exactly this

deformational strategy in his previous Symphony.⁶²

In sum, the stronger interpretation reads the premature B \flat -major apotheosis of S1 (m. 575) *against* the outward grain of the music—as a site of slippage, of procedural strain, rather than the unproblematic fulfillment of some formal requirement. From a narrative perspective the point is that *this S1 does not belong here*. Like its more capricious outbursts earlier in the work, this appearance is further evidence of its intransigent resistance to any well-ordered formal scheme. By preserving the image of S1 as a subversive (“wrongly placed”) element even this late in the drama, we also lay a more satisfying hermeneutic foundation for its extraordinary final appearance: its simultaneous return with TR (m. 670). As if in retaliation to its demonstrative defiance in m. 575, the sonata does not merely recapitulate S1, it *subjugates* it. Stripped of its original texture and accompaniment, the finale denies S1 even the full honors of a dedicated minor-mode reprise. It is pressed summarily into the tonic minor as if by force, side by side with the similarly vanquished TR.

After a brief liquidation (m. 708) the TR/S1 complex unravels (m. 720), and the recapitulation now enters its most expectant moment: a final version of the A-major Utopian vision begins to bloom (m. 728), mounting gradually to unprecedented heights of breathless excitement. Mahler’s hope here is surely that we will take this S-based music for a final, redemptive breakthrough—its lofty triumphalism is not out of proportion to a goal sought since the first measures of the Symphony. And unlike the earlier Utopian visions, this one appears in a plausible location within the unfolding sonata, as the rotational correlate of S2 (see fig. 1).⁶³

⁵⁹Ratz, Adorno, Sponheuer, Floros, de la Grange, and Del Mar use this explicit terminology. Redlich is more sensitive on the point. His custom categories of ante- and post-recapitulation capture the erratic and formally unpredictable aspects of S1, but he still believes in the actual recapitulation only to treat P and TR. For a recent take on this traditional reading, see Timothy L. Jackson, “The Finale of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony and Tragic Reversed Sonata Form,” in *Bruckner Studies*, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Paul Hackshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 199–201.

⁶⁰See Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, pp. 353–55, 368–69, and esp. 382–86.

⁶¹This passage appears as ex. 11.

⁶²The recapitulation of Symphony No.5/II also conflates two rotationally adjacent thematic zones. Several measures into the reprise of the second subject (m. 356), the highly recognizable P2 theme—originating in mm. 35*ff.* and previously omitted from the recapitulation—appears in counterpoint with the ongoing S-theme. These two instances are but extreme examples of Mahler’s middle-period tendency to superimpose themes late in an unfolding sonata process.

⁶³On pp. 84–86 I explain how this Utopian vision is a “reembodiment” of the defeated S2 theme, hybridized with elements of the introductory complex.

But when this last ecstatic drive to tonic-major fulfillment is shattered by the corrupted cadence of the coda block (m. 773), it becomes clear that the major-mode ending will remain unattainable.⁶⁴ The last introductory complex resounds, announcing the final and total defeat of the S-themes' resistance and leading into a grim, enervated epilogue that unfolds under the long shadow of tonic-minor hegemony.

EXPOSITIONAL BLOCK/
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

With the help of Sonata Theory's plot and character archetypes, our first pass through the finale modeled its peculiar form in terms of the actions of, and reactions to, a single pair of themes, S1 and S2. In so doing, it appealed to the novel-symphony's foundational conceit: that themes, as anthropomorphized dramatic "characters" (and driven by idiosyncratic "impulses"), could impact the unfolding of the musical whole, as a function of an Adornian "bottom-up" construction.⁶⁵ That these themes ultimately wage a losing battle also offers an early validation of the master-trope that this study aims to realize: the image of the finale turning against its own rebellious elements, of "the totality that sanctions for its own glory the destruction of the individual."⁶⁶

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 crucial passages. In this section I begin a second pass through the work with a closer look at the expositional block, which introduces the drama's characters and poses the problems whose working-out provides the narrative substance for the remaining two acts. The main concern here will be how the exposition, particularly in its long genera-

tion phase, articulates the semantically charged *oppositions*—tonal, thematic, processive, even metaphysical—that will be vital to the interpretation of the whole.

As indicated above, it was only in the aftermath of the exposition's failure (the critical first-act plot point) that the S-themes' form-subverting drama really gets underway. The finale's other main plot strand commences the moment the curtain rises. Example 1 shows the opening introductory complex in its entirety. The gesture divides into two eight-measure units: the first spins out the anxious I-theme over an augmented-sixth chord at least notionally (judging by the key signature) in C minor; the second shifts abruptly to A major-minor and continues the upper-voice melody over the so-called motto of the Sixth Symphony—a major block-chord sinking to minor (mm. 9–11), accompanied by a pounding, funereal drum figure. The antithetical status of the two tonal planes could hardly be more emphatic. Framed by timbral and dynamic discontinuities, honoring no logic of harmonic/contrapuntal succession, and harnessing the brash outburst of the motto, A doesn't simply follow C—it expels it, annihilates it. This charged antipathy resounds through the entire drama: not only do these two keys repeatedly assert themselves at one another's expense, but they reenact with tragic regularity the plot function encapsulated here—that of A minor violently usurping a musical process set into motion by C.

The first large-scale projection of this plot function begins immediately, playing out across the entirety of pre-expositional space. Figure 2 shows the expositional block in more detail: the upper brackets divide the generative anticipation phase from the exposition proper, while the lower set traces the rhetorical character of its internal sections. Binding the finale's tonal endpoints like supercompressed 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

⁶⁴Elided with the final introductory complex, this would be A-major arrival is the structural analog to the cadence that closed the developmental block (see n. 58 above). At the moment the bass secures its low A \sharp , the upper voices sound a dominant-seventh chord on F. Thus each of the final two I-complexes closes a tonal thread opened by S-materials: first, the one centered on D, then the one focused on A major.

⁶⁵See the first section, on Adorno.

⁶⁶Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 97; see this article's introduction above.

Example 1: Introductory complex (C minor), with “motto” (A minor).

the finale’s sonata proper. A glance at the arrayed tonal centers in fig. 2, however, reveals that the tonic A minor plays very little part in the generative process. Despite its imperious display 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 the galvanizing force capable of moving the finale forward. Until the last moment, all signs point toward a C-minor sonata. But at the instant of the exposition-launch (m. 114), A minor bursts in, hijacking the accumulated energy and 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. From the broadest vantage, then, the story of the anticipation phase is one of the competition between two prospective tonics, and of the

repeated ascendance of A minor over its rival. But this tonal drama plays itself out in concrete musical figures, and the picture remains incomplete until one accounts for the narrative’s thematic dimension. This requires going into further detail.

Though our first sense of pre-expositional space is likely to be one of bewildering chaos, with sufficient altitude we can perceive a constructive logic that belies any impression of randomly dispersed motives and keys. Figure 3 has pre-expositional space organized into two large subrotational cycles, each commencing with a self-contained formal marker (enclosed in brackets) and proceeding to a series of rhetorically differentiated episodes treating P- and S1-modules in succession. The “formal marker” of the first subrotation is of course the I-complex. The music that follows traces a rhetorical arc that elevates gradually toward coherence

Pre-expositional (generative) space

Exposition proper

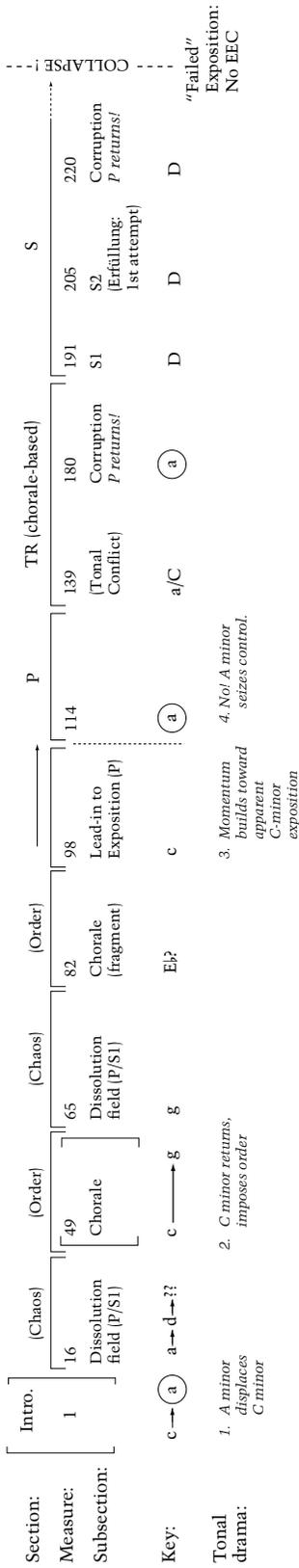


Figure 2: Structure of the expositional block.

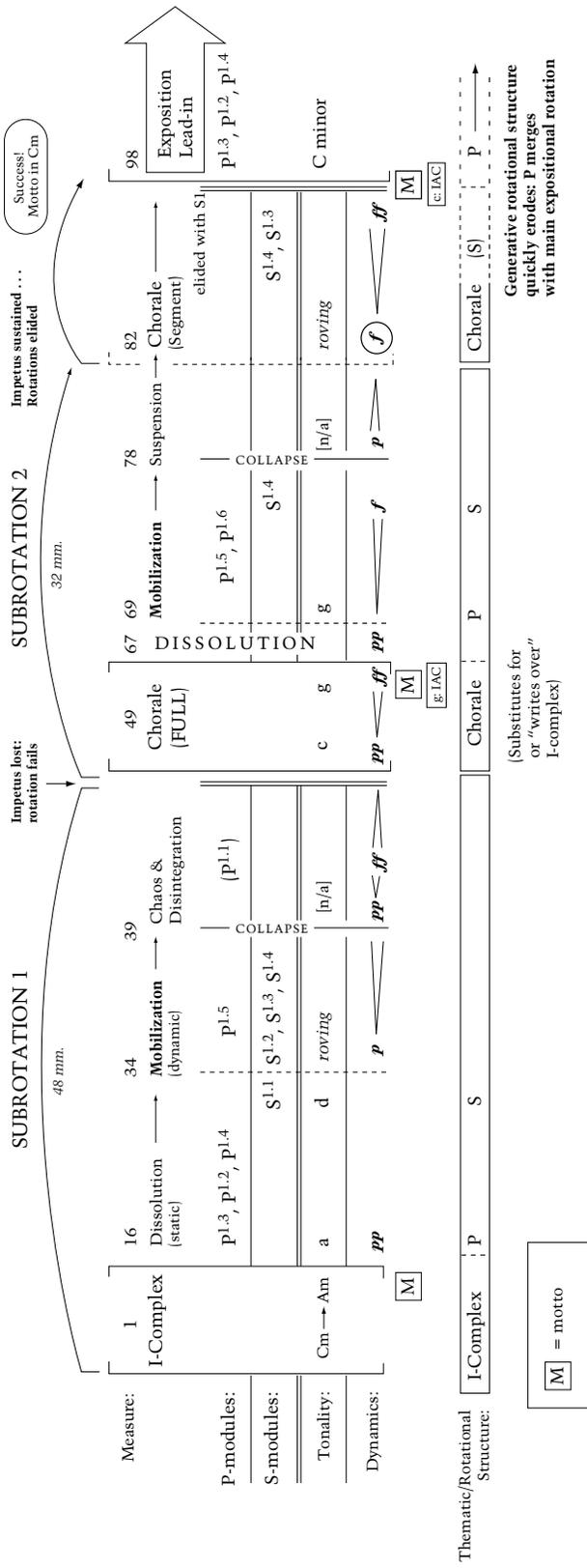


Figure 3: The structure of pre-expositional space.

a. The exposition's P-theme (mm. 114–21).

b. The exposition's S1-theme (mm. 191–201).

Example 2

and then collapses into chaos at m. 39. For reference, ex. 2 shows P and S1 as they appear in the exposition, and ex. 3 illustrates how their motives, not yet coalesced into themes, are dispersed through this first dissolution field. The progress toward coherence is particularly evident in Mahler's treatment of the two themes. Example 3 shows that while the motives of S1 appear in the proper order (mm. 31–39)—many of them underscored by the energetic (if aimless) functional harmonies of the first mobilization—the P-motives mainly serve as gestural and textural elements, indicating if anything the *absence* of a discernible theme. It is no coincidence that the first motives encountered in this newly born universe are in fact the elementary particles of the Sixth Symphony itself: the octave leap and the $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ minor-third cell (mm. 16–17). These cells are generative units for much of the Symphony's main

themes (excluding those of the Andante).⁶⁷ Their presence here, in the ether beyond the veil of symphonic edifice, suggests a primordial state, prior to the formulation of more complex melodic structures—even prior to the Symphony's articulation into discrete movements. Yet this primordial A minor does not turn out to be the promising starting-point one might expect. After several chaotic outbursts the first subrotation sinks, enervated, back into dissolution (mm. 47–48).

Advocating an essentially Freudian grammar of emplotment, Peter Brooks argues that just as human subjects repeat actions as a means of mastering the past—of overcoming it to reclaim the future—*transformed repetitions* in texts, retracing ground already traversed, represent a

⁶⁷Sponheuer, *Logik des Zerfalls*, pp. 300–03.

16

(Tuba)

p

P1.3

(Vc.)

pp

P1.2

(Cl.)

ff

(Hn.)

f — *p*

22

(Cl.)

ff

(Hn.)

f — *p*

(Bsn.)

(Vla.)

f — *sf* > *p*

(Vc.)

cresc.

(Cb.)

pp

3

3

P1.4

(Ww.)

f

ffp

f

(Tuba)

p

28

(Hn.)

p

3

(Vn. I, II)

pp

S1.3

(Hn.)

S1.1

S1.2

(Vla., Cl., Harp)

pp

pp

(Celesta) P1.5

MOBILIZATION →

COLLAPSE

34

S1.3 (cont.)

(Bsn.)

p

pizz.

p

S1.4

(Hn.)

(Vla., Vc.)

mf > *p*

mf > *p*

pp

(Harp)

(Celesta)

f

Example 3: First dissolution field, mm. 16–40.

"search" for an ideal narrative ending.⁶⁸ One could scarcely find a more apt frame for subrotation two: in this transformed repetition C minor returns as the chorale in m. 49 to reclaim the symphonic generation, but is only able to move forward to its ideal ending—a C-minor exposition-launch—once it has symbolically mastered the trauma of the I-complex.⁶⁹ This occurs in two stages: the suppression of the I-complex and the coopting of the intruding A-minor motto.

Initially, it is far from evident that subrotation 2 is anything like a transformation of what precedes. As fig. 3 indicates, the primary correspondence elements (thematic and rhetorical) only begin with the dissolution field in m. 67. The opening wind chorale (mm. 49–64) seems the farthest thing imaginable from the I-complex, its apparent subrotational correlate. But retrospectively this contrast is surely the point: with its symmetrical phrasing, harmonic clarity, and uniform orchestration the chorale is the antithesis of all the music that has preceded. It is not a new stage in the generative process, but something already formed, above and outside that process altogether—more suggestive of a rebeginning, a new start of the sort necessary to find the "ideal ending."⁷⁰ 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"—that is, as parallel beginnings.⁷¹ We might imagine then that the success of the second subrotation hinges on the C-minor chorale negating or "writing over" the I-complex that set the first rotation on its ill-fated A-minor course.⁷² This success is evident first of all in that this section does not, like its predecessor, degenerate into chaos and lose impetus. After only a brief suspension of forward motion (mm. 78–82) the music elides into an even more dynamic reprise of the chorale theme, which triggers the final push to stabilize C minor and begin the exposition lead-in. Yet it is equally critical that the I-complex is not *entirely* suppressed in subrotation 2. In fig. 3 the chorale retains the major-minor motto (M)—the "primary trauma" itself—to master it through reenactment. Pressing it into functional-harmonic service, as the culmination of a grand authentic cadence on the dominant G minor (m. 65), the chorale decisively curtails the motto's intrusive force. The second chorale segment goes further, using the motto in a similar fashion to confirm C minor itself (m. 98), the key it originally aimed to displace. It is only then, the tables fully turned and the trauma mastered, that the generative phase can draw to a close and the C-minor sonata (or so we would believe) can prepare to embark.

But we know already that the C-minor sonata is not to be, that A minor displaces its

⁶⁸Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, chap. 4 ("Freud's Masterplot: A Model for Narrative"), esp. pp. 98–101. (See also Newcomb, "Narrative Archetypes," pp. 132–34.)

⁶⁹Obviously, any ending the chorale precipitates is only "ideal" in terms of the immediate tonal narrative. Affectively it is unremittingly dark.

⁷⁰Strictly speaking, the chorale is a voice from beyond the Sixth Symphony entirely. The theme stated in mm. 49–52 originates in the fifth movement of Mahler's Third ("Armer Kinder Betterlied"), where it underscores Peter's guilt-ridden lament, "And should I not weep, you gracious God?" (I have broken the Ten Commandments, and go and weep most bitterly.) The implications of this ominous musical epigraph are far-reaching, beginning with the need to consider why the finale—if it allegedly documents fate gorging itself on the valiant Mahlerian Everyman—begins with so explicit a reference to a personage emblematic not of martyrdom but of fallibility, regret, and contrition. Can we justify linking the three hammer blows of the first edition to Peter's three denials (or the three nails hammered (!) into the cross, for that matter)? We know that Mahler planned as many as five blows in the original draft, so the symbolic import of there being three (or *not three*, if we believe that superstition moved him to remove the last) could not have been part of the original conception (de La Grange, *Mahler: Vol. III*, pp. 813–14). But this is not to say a symbolic element did not enter the picture later on—especially considering that it is *this chorale* that be-

comes the hammer-blow theme. Could *this* be among the "riddles" Mahler posed here? Agonizing lapses of faith seemed to have been part of Mahler's spiritual makeup, and a deeply troubling one at that (Bruno Walter, "Mahlers Weg: Ein Erinnerungsblatt," *Der Merker* 3 [1912], 166–71; cited in de La Grange, *Mahler: Volume III*, p. 461; see also Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: Visionär und Despot* [Zurich: Arche, 1998], pp. 201–02). Might this be enough to justify the search for an alternative biographical master trope, one grounded not in victimhood but in *guilt*, relating to the transgression of lapsed faith and a perceived betrayal of God?

⁷¹Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 101.

⁷²I borrow this concept from Hepokoski and Darcy, who sometimes advocate understanding (apparently) non-rotational elements as "writing over" or "blanking out" an element of the referential arrangement (Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 613).

rival to assume control of the exposition's primary theme (m. 114). Now storming ahead with unchecked expositional vigor, the P-theme will exert dominion over the remainder of the exposition. Returning now to fig. 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. A and C (both primarily in the *major* mode) now fight under the open air, for mere measures of territory. By m. 157 the music lurches between provisional tonics every few measures, until the entire texture implodes in m. 176.⁷³ There is little doubt as to the victor. When the music stabilizes, it is not only firmly planted in A major (purging even the *tone* C!), it has brazenly reinstated motives from P (P^{1.5}). It has been a "transition" to nowhere; the primary theme, in the tonic key, has 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 the P^{1.5} motive (mm. 224ff.).

The initial aim in surveying the expositional block was to become acquainted with the work's "characters" and to chart the dramatic problems whose working-out occupies the remainder of the finale. As it happens, these are reciprocal goals, since the work's "problems" pivot on rhetorical oppositions involving multiple characters and their contextual tonal, processive, and syntactic attributes. The more thoroughly we examine how these oppositions play out over time, the sharper a sense we get of the work's materials *as dramatic characters*, integral entities distinct from one another in terms of their goals, their anthropomorphic "personalities," and even their planes of origin. (Compare, for instance, the profile so far of the P-theme—initially diffuse, inert, and freeloading, then caustic and territorial once vested with authority—as opposed to that of the chorale—stoic, industrious, indomitable, protean in its aim to secure C tonicity.) All of this is to realize Adorno's concept of novelistic coher-

ence at the finest level of detail, while aiming for a cross-parametric integration atypical of Mahlerian thematic analyses.⁷⁴ In the next section, momentarily pausing in our second, more detailed pass through the finale, I probe the issue of character "personality" further, exploring the *kinds* of transformations the finale's themes undergo and squaring them with Adorno's dictates for novelistic construction on the one hand—particularly the preservation of identity amid incessant change—and the demands of an implacable sonata form on the other.

VARIANT TECHNIQUE,
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 perceive a claustrophobic sameness to the finale's melodic resources, the sense that many rhythms and figures—particularly the dotted rhythms associated with the motto—are repeated too incessantly to be a function of mere "coherence." 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."⁷⁵

⁷⁴To bring the novel-symphonic idea to bear in close analysis, one must begin with a leap of faith that (as Adorno implies) the thematic process is coordinated with the formal and tonal plots—that the piece is governed by a single logic rather than multiple parallel logics operating in different domains (motivic, formal, etc.). The lack of such a coordinated view is evident in both Sponheuer's and Ratz's thematic analyses of the finale, which are more concerned with documenting the proliferation of key motivic cells—more grist for the organicist mill—than modeling the thematic process as semantic in any respect.

⁷⁵Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 103.

⁷³See the C-major arrivals in mm. 157, 167, and 172.

This may indeed be the case, since on closer inspection the monotony is only endemic to the exposition's P and S1 themes and their derivatives. The chorale, its offshoots, and the soaring S2 seem comparatively unfettered. (Adorno is surely right when he insists that Mahler, when he was of a mind to, could produce "as many original melodic ideas as he wished."⁷⁶)

The broad duality that follows from this, between themes that manifest this motivic affliction and those that do not, proves vital to the finale's master-narrative through its relation to the power politics of the sonata process itself. In its dramatized conflict between integration and freedom—the face-off of the Classical and novelistic paradigms—the finale's sonata is the global mechanism of integration, the arbiter of tonic-minor assimilation. Strikingly, the themes that appear to collude with the sonata and its A-minor agenda share two critical properties: (1) they are the *least* "novelistic" ones in their comportment (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*].⁷⁷ Adorno's image of "inescapable" coherence offers a provocative lens for examining the finale's thematic/motivic processes, one that allows us to bring the various interpretive strands explored so far (the wracked sonata plot, the conflict of tonal au-

thority, and the trope of a failed novel-symphony) into an ever-tighter weave.⁷⁸

Adorno insisted that the narrative coherence of the novel-symphony was legible mainly in the transformation of its thematic characters, whose "core" identities remain inalterable despite constant superficial change.⁷⁹ The stability of these core identities is guaranteed by what he terms Mahler's "variant" procedure. Mahler's materials, he argues, resist the Classical inclination toward gradual breakdown into smaller units. Instead of dissolving its subjects into motivic debris, only to reassemble them in a moment of ritual self-confirmation, the novel-symphony preserves the outlines of its themes as indivisible "gestalts" with shifting intervallic content and expressive exteriors.⁸⁰ To see the variant principle in action one need look no further than the finale's chorale theme. As ex. 4 shows, the chorale engenders a network of variants, which together delineate the intricate transformation of a single "character" through time.

Adorno suggests that the variant procedure, like the novel-symphonic condition it facilitates, is more or less omnipresent in Mahler's *œuvre*. Taken at face value, the implications are stark: were the thematic process to erode or dissolve 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 the case turns out to be as overstated as most of Adorno's analytic generalizations. Many of Mahler's themes comport themselves this way, while others do not. In most contexts, it is ill

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁷Adorno, "Centenary Address," p. 91. This metaphor of inescapability proved influential among later writers. As is often the case, Sponheuer's comments are an elaborate paraphrase of Adorno's own: "In stark contrast to the classical conception of immanence as a harmonious coherence of the well-rounded whole, here the immanent coherence projects the experience of being trapped [*Ausweglosigkeit*], of not being able to escape [*Nicht-Entrinnen-Könnens*]" (Sponheuer, *Logik des Zerfalls*, p. 289). By contrast, Redlich uses the metaphor without expressive overtones, declaring "the inescapability [*Unentrinnbarkeit*] of the thematic coherence" in the finale simply to be "one of Mahler's highest compositional accomplishments" (Redlich, foreword to *Symphony VI A Minor by Gustav Mahler (first version/Originalfassung)*, Edited with a Foreword by Hans Ferdinand Redlich [London: Ernst Eulenburg, 1968], p. XXI).

⁷⁸Adorno himself compares the "tormenting insistence" of the finale's melodic character to the "implacable" quality of "strict sonata form," with no sense of how systematically they might be linked (Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 103).

⁷⁹"The firm, identical core, which nevertheless exists, is difficult to pin down, as if it shunned mensural notation." On these grounds, the variant technique cuts across traditional notions of thematic hierarchy. Where the "variation" presumes a stable reference-point and a clear distinction between originals and derivatives, Mahler's variants are *all variants equally of one another*; all are the same distance from this unstated Platonic center (*ibid.*, p. 88).

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 87.

"Hammer-blow" theme (mm. 336ff./479ff.)

Introduction (mm. 82–85)

Phrases 1 & 2

CHORALE

Phrases 3 & 4

TR incipit (mm. 141–44)

TR-segment (mm. 149–56; also 678ff.)

The diagram shows the relationship between these musical elements. A large upward-pointing arrow connects the Introduction (mm. 82–85) to the "Hammer-blow" theme (mm. 336ff./479ff.). A large downward-pointing arrow connects the Phrases 3 & 4 of the Chorale to the TR-segment (mm. 149–56; also 678ff.). A large upward-pointing arrow connects the Phrases 1 & 2 of the Chorale to the TR incipit (mm. 141–44). The Phrases 1 & 2 and Phrases 3 & 4 are enclosed in boxes, with the word "CHORALE" centered between them.

Example 4: Chorale melody (mm. 49–64) and later variants.

advised to use the variant technique as a litmus test for novelistic integrity.⁸¹ But in the finale such a reification proves remarkably apt, as 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,

⁸¹It is important to recall that inasmuch as Adorno's variant principle seems to offer a technical basis for the novelistic condition, the novel-symphonic idea remains for him a loose aggregate of characteristics, not especially bound to systemic coherence. There are occasions, for instance, where he remarks on the music's novelistic quality based solely on its propensity for rhetorical *non sequiturs*, with no mention of thematic process (ibid., p. 98).

which 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."⁸² Quite a few of Mahler's themes resist this characterization, but none contradicts it as thoroughly as P. Unfolding with none of the inner necessity or subtle continuity 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 Mah-

⁸²Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 87.

lerian clichés—hastily assembled into a larger configuration, simply to fulfill an *a priori* symphonic necessity.⁸³ (Those who have charged the Sixth with contrivance, artificiality, and ugliness could make a strong case with this music alone.) Later events confirm our suspicion that P is strikingly nonintegral, that the affiliation of these motives was 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 development, when P^{1.1}, P^{1.2}, and P^{1.3} fall in to form the march).⁸⁴ “Bottom-up” construction dictates that Mahler’s characters show individual volition, the impulse to resist the architectonic grid that would restrain them. P not only lacks such autonomy—by recurring unchanged, merely to delineate the sonata pattern, it becomes the grid itself. As a theme its function is entirely structural. It fails to be a character at all.⁸⁵

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 the finale of the First Symphony onward, Mahler’s minor-mode sonata expositions pivot on the juxtaposition of two maximally contrasting affec-

tive worlds. Predictably, P and S1 manifest what Adorno calls a “graphic dualism” of topic, timbre, and tessitura.⁸⁶ But underlying this duality is a striking degree of motivic sameness. Example 5 outlines the two themes’ constructive similarities—unmistakably, S1 reinterprets the defining structural features of P, in their original order.⁸⁷ Until now, we have seen S1 diametrically 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 typically invest the motto (ex. 6) with an uncanny prescience: not only does its collapse to minor prefigure the Symphony’s fated outcome, but its sheer immutability also symbolizes that which cannot be altered, the “unchangeable verdict of fate.”⁸⁸ Thus the motto, too, is antinovelistic—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 the *non sequitur* abruptness of a premonition, a lurch from

⁸³Williamson echoes this prognosis at least in the sense that he characterizes the theme as essentially “a temporary conglomerate of motifs” (Williamson, “The Development of Mahler’s Symphonic Technique,” p. 134).

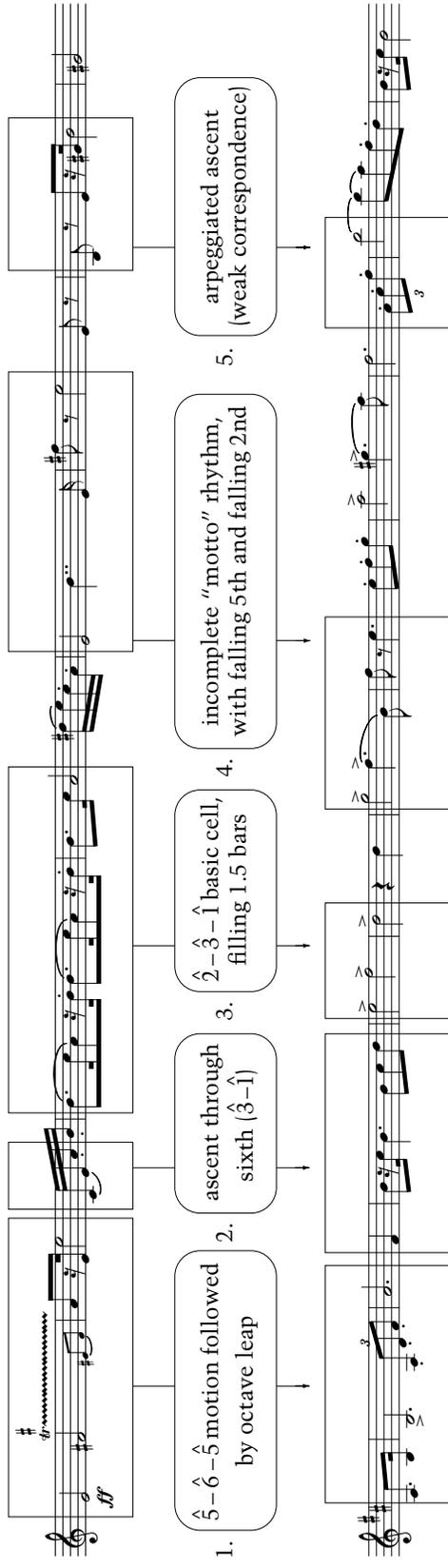
⁸⁴This is a singular event. Among all of Mahler’s symphonic sonatas no other P1-theme fails to appear in the development in a recognizable variant of its original gestalt, and none is recapitulated without significant alteration or truncation.

⁸⁵This reading of P as mechanistic or insentient echoes the sentiments of early critics like Hermann Starcke of the *Dresdener Nachrichten*, who found that in the finale “the motifs are not living beings, or building blocks that could function as the basis of a symphony. They are simply artificial figures in burlesque costumes who follow each other in a grotesque manner” (my emphasis; cited in de la Grange, *Mahler, Volume III*, p. 664). Similarly, Arthur Schnitzler was said to be haunted by the finale’s “dehumanized and soulless” elements (Specht, *Gustav Mahler*, p. 25; cited in Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, p. 163).

⁸⁶Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 98.

⁸⁷Adorno also remarks on the many thematic cross-connections between these themes, some of which Sponheuer documents (ibid., p. 97; Sponheuer, *Logik des Zerfalls*, pp. 304–05). Neither author, however, emphasizes the rigidly ordered nature of the connections—the feature that distinguishes the finale’s P/S relation from that of the opening Allegro, whose themes merely share key ingredients. For a historical view on the P-based S-theme, see Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Form*, pp. 135–36, 147.

⁸⁸Richard Specht, *Gustav Mahler*, p. 292; cited in Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, p. 164.



Example 5: Ordered thematic connections linking P and S1.



Example 6: The “motto” of the Sixth Symphony.

G1-Motives (all invertible)



G2-Motives (some forms)



Example 7: The two families of generic motives (G-motives).

present into future tense.⁸⁹ (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 at reading Mahlerian prose, the more clearly we see the motto as something entirely different: a musical cryptogram, 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, though it does respond to the figure’s obduracy and markings of otherness. And yet I wish to go further, by suggesting that the motto is not merely emblematic of the finale’s downfall, but is in a manner of speaking responsible for it.

Earlier, I proposed that the finale’s antinovellistic elements were also vital to the effect of “inescapable” coherence, a concept that I will at last explore in some detail. As Adorno intimates, this inescapability has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. It is a consequence (in general) of thematic rigor pervasive

to the saturation point and (in particular) a reliance on certain figures in excess of what is tasteful or aesthetically justifiable. But most importantly—and here I part company with Adorno—“inescapable” coherence is also a dramatic/narrative condition involving the deployment of certain motivic forms in a recurrent plot function vital to the finale’s self-negating rhetorical character.

Example 7 shows a group of common motivic forms clearly bearing the finale’s DNA but that appear to be derived from no one theme in particular. For this reason I will refer to them as the “generic motives” (or G-motives). All the G-motives share incomplete manifestations of the motto rhythm (♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩ or ♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩; compare to ex. 6), but they fall into two broad groups based on ambitus and kinetic profile. The more common G1 motives are self-contained units, characterized by narrow range, stepwise motion, and a general inertia; the dramatic G2 motives traverse giant leaps and unfold in extended chains.

The generic motives’ dramatic/rhetorical function is clearly wrapped up in the business of liquidation and disintegration. With striking consistency—on eight occasions—they aggregate densely as some musical region reaches

⁸⁹Compare Hans-Peter Jülg, who calls the motto an “intrusion from without” [*Einbruch von draußen*] (Jülg, *Gustav Mahlers Sechste Symphonie* [Munich: Musikverlag E. Katzbichler, 1986], p. 124).

the end of its life span, shortly before it collapses or derails.⁹⁰ 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 ex. 7 shows, the motives themselves lack melodic presence: the G1 motives confine the lyrical impulse to cramped stepwise confines, while the G2 motives 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 an outright erasure of the prevailing theme's distinguishing elements. Moreover, 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,” but 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: the motto is harmonic and rhythmic but *not melodic* in any real way. That the generic motives, under the banner of its hallmark rhythm, spearhead a global tendency toward negative lyricism suggests that the motto's influence may be felt even in its absence. Where the novel-symphony revels in multiplicity and luxuriates in ample time spans, the finale's prevailing antinovelistic 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 free-

⁹⁰These occur in the exposition TR-zone (mm. 157–59 and then 172*ff.*) and S2 theme (m. 220); the development S2 (m. 328) and march (m. 441); the recapitulation TR-zone (m. 700); and all three Utopian visions (mm. 372, 469, 754).

dom and thus of their respective identities.⁹¹ And both agencies in their own way rely on veiled replication as a realization of corrupt organicism—just as P mutates into the doomed S1, the motto extends its influence by spawning its own ad hoc, malignant clones.⁹²

Example 8 shows the collapse of the exposition's TR-zone and provides an opportunity to see the generic motives' erasure-function in action—as well as their affiliation with the A-minor tonal axis. As we recall, TR-space serves as a theater for the ongoing conflict between A and C tonalities. Ultimately, it is the generic motives' corrosive effect that tips the battle in favor of the former. The G-motives had first appeared in m. 157 (prior to the passage printed here) in response to a decisive PAC secured by C major. In the space of three measures, the motives not only wrest the tonal course back to A but interpolate the motto rhythm—until now absent—as a permanent fixture in the texture. When the music dares to seize again on C major in m. 172, G1b brings forth a more emphatic representation of the motto rhythm, and almost instantly the music unravels. Earlier, its restabilization around P^{1.5} seemed an assertion of primary theme dominance. Now P^{1.5} is only the most salient marker in a fabric woven entirely of generic motives and, as such, reiterations of the inescapable motto rhythm.⁹³ This pattern will appear frequently in our final pass through the development and recapitulation.

⁹¹That the generic motives embody the motto rhythm is not in itself remarkable. It is plain enough to see that similar rhythms are endemic to nearly all the finale's thematic regions in one way or another. What matters is that they manifest *little else* than the motto rhythm, that the rhythm takes on a heightened presence as distinguishing melodic features are bled away.

⁹²Listeners who have found the finale exceedingly difficult to know, 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.

⁹³Later in the exposition, the collapse of S2 traces the same plot contours in a more compressed space: first, the G2 motives rush into the texture (mm. 220–23) then P^{1.5} reappears, accompanied by G1a (mm. 224–28) until the onset of the developmental block.

After G2 intrusion (not shown),
TR continues against G2 segments

At final turn to C major,
G1 intrudes, precipitating collapse

168 (Trpt.)
ff (Hn.)
G2
f (Strings)
G2
f (Bsn., Tuba)
ff (Vn., Ww.)
mf
G1b
p (Hn.)
f (Vc., Cb., Bsn.)
ff

174
G1b
ff
ff
sf
mf
sf
ff
ff
ff
ff
ff
ff

Disruption, breakdown.....

Example 8: Collapse of Expository TR-Space, mm. 168–85.

DEVELOPMENT: COMPETING VISIONS
OF THE FINALE'S FUTURE

The second and third sections above documented two broadly defined and largely independent forces of resistance against the sonata's A-minor hegemony: the redemption-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 intricate. The two resistance impulses now face off regarding the ideal outcome of the sonata,

besieged all the while by the generic motives' corrupting forces.

Figure 4 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.⁹⁴ We know the main plot outlines of the first episode already: the I-complex severs the exposition's S2 theme, and after a brief dissolution field the latter re-

⁹⁴Adorno, Floros, and Sponheuer observe these divisions (Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, pp. 72–75).

TR eliminated; texture dominated by motto-based P1.5 and G-motives

Example 8 (continued)

turns in force, only to find its second attempt at transcendence smashed by the hammer blow that begins episode two. To this I 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 measures (mm. 237–87), fragments of S1 struggle to relaunch that theme (mm. 244–45, 248–49, 251–55, and so on) but prove unable to maneuver around inert, obstructing P-modules. Only by virtue of this sustained impasse is S2 able to take the reins uncontested. Second, although the hammer blow and its related theme 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 it needs to cadence in D (m. 302). From that point forward S2 can shake off the motto rhythm only by losing its grip on the dominant harmony (mm. 315ff.). By the final cadential thrust, G1a announces sourly that the dominant has been corrupted with the minor mode (mm. 328–31), predicting the hammer-blow deceptive cadence only moments away.

As ex. 4 indicated, the ensuing hammer-blow music (m. 336) is an emphatically demonic variant of the chorale tune. 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 disruptive shortcuts to transcendence are unwelcome. If a well-

Section I: Anticipation Phase (pre-developmental space)

Section II: "Development Achieved"

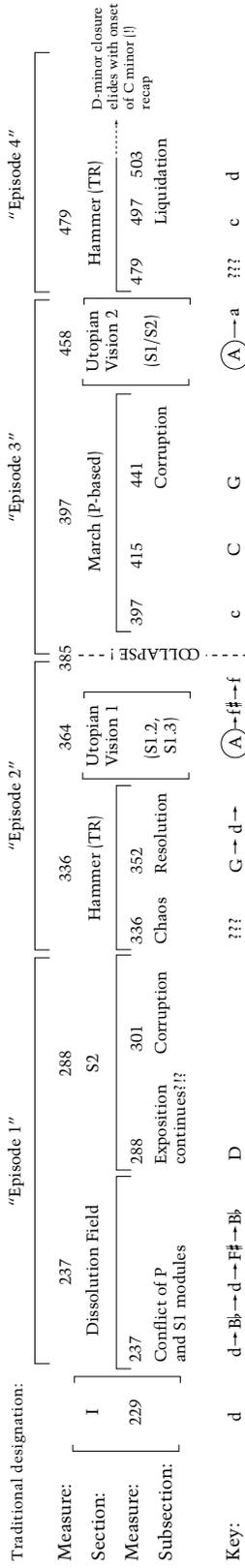


Figure 4: Structure of the developmental block.

oiled symphonic development is to be set into motion, 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 fig. 4 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. At the instant the generic motives appear, the grip on the tonic is lost (m. 372; see also m. 469), and catastrophe soon follows.

Figure 4 shows that this catastrophe takes the form of a seismic 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 measures C minor regains control over the P-theme materials stolen from it at the exposition-launch, in time to undertake a more earnest rendition of symphonic development (see p. 66 above). 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."⁹⁵ 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. The 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-measure 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 vector—gradually moving from C minor to C major—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 in 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. There is also a change here in thematic emphasis. Elements of S1 are still present in ex. 9, but they are embedded in an imitative texture unlike anything examined so far. Earlier, I suggested that after its encounter with the hammer, S2 never reappears. This is 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 measures, to the start of the development.

Of the finale's four introductory complexes, only the second—the one that opens the developmental block—departs from the model set forth in mm. 1–16. Comparing ex. 10a with ex. 1, we see it effecting five major changes: (1) it omits the motto; (2) it truncates the I-theme itself to allow for imitative entries; (3) it inverts the turn figure of the melodic incipit; (4) it quickly suppresses the dynamic level; and (5) it softens the main sonority from an augmented-sixth to a minor-seventh chord. Drastically subdued and lacking its siblings' acerbic, declamatory shriek, this second I-complex loses

⁹⁵Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 99.

Example 9: Tonic major “Utopian vision,” mm. 458–65.

a. Incipit of S2-theme, mm. 205–08.

b. I-complex initiating the developmental block, mm. 229–34.

Example 10: Comparison of S2 and the second I-complex.

much of its efficacy as a form-dividing entity. This might give us pause, since the S2 themes will soon suggest that the exposition is still underway, that the form has not in fact been divided successfully at all (see p. 65). All the more strikingly, a comparison of exs. 10a and 10b reveals that the “subdued” I-complex comes

to resemble S2 in several ways: the inverted I^{1.1} motive (labeled x) becomes intervallically identical to the S2 incipit, and the imitative texture derives from the latter, as does the pedal-point D₄. The implications are clear: at the moment of their collision S2, though silenced, imprints itself on the I-complex as a means of

facilitating its own return shortly thereafter.

Turning back to ex. 9, we are now faced with a contradiction. We can now recognize that the second Utopian vision, in a purely material sense, is an unmistakable variant of that second, “subdued” introductory complex (ex. 10a). 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 these impulses. Such affirmative aims are more characteristic of the embedded S1 theme, and indeed of the defeated S2, whose residues—particularly the upward-striving octaves—find a new, urgent form here. In grasping this disparity, we come to see that the relation between thematic materials and the character-impulses they bear is more fluid than we might have assumed. Although this Utopian vision assumes the outward form of the transformed I-complex, it embodies—more importantly—the major-vectored 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 S2 bifurcates that complex into two autonomous and antagonistic thematic characters: the original, sinister version and the affirmational antivariant shown here, a kind of reincarnation or reembodyment of S2 that I call the *emancipation motive*. (This theme will play a vital role in the upcoming recapitulation, discussed in the next section.) In short, the second Utopian vision advances a more concrete agenda than the first: it insists that if the tonic major is to become a reality, the I-complex—which harbors the major-minor motto—must be transfigured.

Though the second Utopian vision preserves the tonic major longer than had its predecessor, it too succumbs to the creeping generic motives (m. 469), which deflect it toward D minor for a reprise of the fate that met the original S2: the hammer blow (m. 479). It is here, in the final thrust to close the development, that the hammer-blow theme—without forfeiting its symbolic dominion over the S-themes—finally reveals its affiliation with the tonal agenda of its progenitor, the chorale. In m. 497 the hammer theme locks onto the dominant of C minor, feinting retransition. But after only seven measures it hoists itself up to the dominant of

D minor and begins to retransition in earnest, under the aegis of the S-theme’s still-unconsummated drive toward closure in D. This apparent indecision belies a single compound agenda. Bizarrely, the chorale complex installs and confirms its own tonic (C) by steering D minor headlong into a corrupted cadence—one that negates the latter permanently. At the moment of expected resolution (m. 520), the would-be tonic D is mocked from above by a recurrence of the movement’s shrill opening sonority (Ab, C, Eb, F#), announcing the return of the original I-complex, the ascension of C minor, and onset of the final rotation. There, one by one, all the remaining traces of resistance will gradually be eliminated—beginning with that C minor itself.

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 underway, 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 5 shows that at the start of recapitulatory block C minor, in a startling inversion of sonata tonal imperatives, appropriates all 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. In appropriating the tonic minor’s music, C also takes on the former’s entropic inertia and eventually slackens. This permits 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♭, A♭, E) until, without warning, it snaps to alertness midstream on the apparently random tonal level of B♭ major.⁹⁶ And it is here,

⁹⁶S1 seems to be engaged in a game of identities here: its “surprise” reanimation is successful in no small part because the theme “disguises” itself by switching headmotives (S1.1 is henceforth replaced by S1.5). The choice of tonality might also represent a disguise of sorts: it is surely relevant that the only role B♭ has played so far

Pre-recapitulatory space

Recapitulation

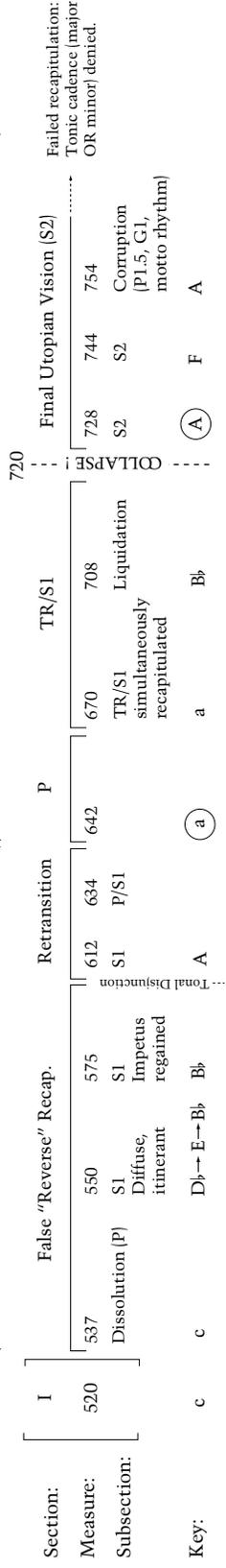


Figure 5: Structure of the recapitulatory block.

after a fairly lengthy development, that the theme closes in on a bona fide apotheosis (m. 600)—a boisterous brass chorale.⁹⁷ 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.

Novelistic time, Adorno repeatedly urges, 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.”⁹⁸ Above, I maintained 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 antitemporal recapitulation. Although the measures 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. But gradually we find 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.⁹⁹ Emboldened by this establishment of architectonic order, the tonic axis takes swift punitive action against the novelistic insurgents. The simultaneous return of TR and S1 (ex. 11) is where the two main impulses of

is as the sonority effecting the very \flat VI deceptive cadence (at the hammer blows) that permanently negated the S-theme's D major in the development. Might we see S1 here as the sheep who puts on wolf's clothing in an attempt to slip past his aggressors unnoticed?

⁹⁷The game of identities continues: just as the chorale complex imitated the tonic axis shortly before, now S1 imitates the chorale. Furthermore, the cadential lock S1 uses here is stolen directly from the S2 playbook (see nearly identical gestures in mm. 217 and 301).

⁹⁸Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 107.

⁹⁹The exact correspondence measures begin in m. 653.

resistance succumb in a single blow to their long-averted fates. As noted above, Mahler makes their symbolic loss of novelistic autonomy all the more graphic by literally depriving them of their independence, denying them even the dignity of an autonomous reprise. Instead, they are paraded *en masse* like prisoners of war, their fate sealed by the terrifying motto-cadence in 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 submotivic *Urformen* (discussed on p. 71), 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 unsustainable 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, which brings S2 to its final apotheosis.¹⁰⁰ On the heels of 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 the cadence attained here proves to be corrupt. Its sour deceptive resolution (m. 773) merely serves as a portal to the desolate coda block, where all hope must be abandoned.

Yet the coda's negativity far exceeds the

¹⁰⁰To earmark this passage as the rotational equivalent to S2 is, admittedly, to reduce away a delicately crafted ambiguity. Owing to the emancipation motives' dual parentage—their strong affiliations with both S2 and the I-complex (see pp. 85–86)—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 fig. 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.

Example 11: Simultaneous tonic-minor recapitulation or TR and S1, mm. 670–87.

simple fact that this last Utopian vision fails to retain the tonic major. Rather, it lies in the impression that the entire event is staged—a ruse of the sinister *Gleichschaltung*, intended only to taunt us with what is beyond our attainment. As a rule, the two expressive spheres discussed in this essay's opening—the sensuous and the structural—have worked in parallel throughout the finale, corroborating and clarifying one another. Here we find something altogether different: the music's outward topical disposition is unchecked elation, but the materials themselves betray a different meaning, all pointing toward 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 deception. First, at m. 744 and again 760 the music, without flagging, slips into F major while retaining A♭ as a common-tone bass—direct foreshadowings of the deceptive-cadence procedure in m. 773. (The “redemptive” overtones become explicit here, with an unmistakable reference to the final moments of Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*.¹⁰¹) The second clue emerges at the first return to A major: a blaring

¹⁰¹Compare Mahler's mm. 760–72 to the last nine measures of Wagner's tetralogy, where the leitmotivic “Götterdämmerung” chord (a “frozen” $\frac{3}{2}$ -sonority overlaid with stepwise descents) hovers briefly and melts away, leading into the last statement of the work's “redemption” motive in the tonic major.

678

TR transferred to top voices

(Ob., Vla.) *ff*

(Vn. I, II) *ff*

S1 expunged before cadence (tutti)

ff *p* *f* *ff*

S1 continued in lower voices

683

(Hn.) *fff* *p*

(Trb.)

(Perc.)

Motto cadence

Example 11 (*continued*)

statement of motive G1b in the horns (m. 754), riding the crest of a kind of perverse fulfillment. Until now, the Utopian A-major space has been the only zone impervious to the corrosive G-motives. Not only does their intrusion here signal the collapse of the affirmational vision, but their entrance in full thematic regalia also seems a mockery of all the themes they have denuded or dissolved. 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 aberrant internal forces.¹⁰² Here its ecstatic countenance betrays the nihilistic glee of marching the Utopian vision—the last remaining impulse of resistance—to its *Untergang*.

With the opposition routed, the finale is free to revise its own history. At the commence-

¹⁰²It appears at the collapse of TR-space and S2-space in the exposition, as well as moments before the ascension of A minor in the recapitulatory accomplishment phase.

a. Epilogue, mm. 790–95.

b. Liquidation of second “hammer” episode, mm. 497–502.

c. Instances of the “emancipation motive.”

S2 (mm. 205ff. [see ex. 10a], 288ff.) “Utopia” theme (mm. 458ff., 728ff. [see ex. 9])

Example 12: The epilogue theme and its origins in the chorale complex and the “emancipation motive.”

ment of the coda block (m. 773) the I-complex, reinforced by the final hammer blow (m. 783), appears at last as an unperturbed expression of A minor, as though its C-minor contaminants had never existed. Yet in its wake, a final, faint impulse still stirs in the tuba and trombones (mm. 790ff.). Adorno offhandedly compares this grim imitative passage (ex. 12a) to the opening chorale, noting their apparently unique exemption from the movement’s rhetorical hyperbole.¹⁰³ But the connection goes deeper than this. The trombones here revisit figures that twice arose in the wakes of the hammer blows (mm. 352ff. and 504ff.). They are remote descendants of chorale itself, whose turn figure

they vaguely preserve. The octave-leap motive and the turn figure (labeled y and z in ex. 12) have a long mutual history. Every chorale-complex has brought them into some kind of contrapuntal interaction (see mm. 168–71, ex. 8, for instance, or mm. 497ff., shown in ex. 12b). But it is only with the epilogue theme that Mahler concatenates them into a single figure. In so doing, he replicates a familiar gestalt: the “emancipation motive” common to the most ecstatically affirmational characters, S2 and the Utopian Vision theme (ex. 12c).

Thus the epilogue becomes a moment of great weight, as a pair of distinct narrative threads converge upon a single abject telos. The main figure here is like a dark glass that reveals the shadowy forms of two defeated resistance-impulses, the chorale-complex and S2,

¹⁰³Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 126.

united in a common variant. Rarely do we find so vivid a realization of Adorno's claim that Mahler's variants "remember things past and half-forgotten from a great distance," at once proclaiming and protesting the irrecoverability of the past.¹⁰⁴ The figure evokes the memory of its progenitors' resilience and vitality, a panoply of images from their diverse histories. At the same time, it is 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 forward only by the impetus of its own momentum, 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 becomes present.

ADORNO, MAHLER'S OPTIMISM, AND
THE "ABSURD POSSIBILITY" OF HOPE

For a century, analytic commonplaces about the Sixth Symphony's classicism remained neatly insulated from its ostensibly tragic or pessimistic outlook.¹⁰⁵ Adorno's dichotomized "Classical" and "novelistic" archetypes encouraged us to bridge that divide by casting the work as a clash of symphonic paradigms, one that transforms "classicism" from a set of outward forms into an agency that seeks to inflict its own internal hierarchies on the music. The sonata becomes the totality Adorno sees glorying in the destruction of its own subjects—an image that may seem uncannily prescient in

hindsight. But we cannot assume that the analysis here has only sought to realize what was already latent in Adorno's thought. In fact, it is worth reflecting on just how far we have diverged from Adorno himself.

It goes without saying that adapting the image of the "destructive totality" into a highly determinate narrative has brought us into methodological territory Adorno would never have envisioned, much less sanctioned. But more importantly, the image is itself strikingly inconsistent with Adorno's broader thinking on the finale. It arises as a fluke, a metaphoric spark leaping from the collision of two unrelated and incompatible viewpoints. Specifically, the "destructive totality" is an extravagant projection of the part-to-whole conceit that underwrites novelistic construction. Where Adorno typically anthropomorphizes the novel-symphony's unfettered impulses, here—believing the finale to embody certain Classical ("Beethovenian") traits—he colorfully inverts the trope, displacing control of the form back onto the whole, which is momentarily suffused with agency. But reading more widely we see that the classicism that Adorno more routinely attributes to the finale is entirely architectonic, incapable of anthropomorphization.¹⁰⁶ That *the sonata itself* might act as an agent, responsive to the musical proceedings—that it might end up a *de facto* character in the kind of hyper-novel-symphony I have actually portrayed—would scarcely have occurred to him. Indeed, for Adorno the finale's Classical elements are necessary complements to its novelistic excesses, not antagonistic elements at all.¹⁰⁷ The finale's "inplacable totality" turns out to be a

¹⁰⁶The finale's "sonata skeleton" is "indispensable to the last movement of the Sixth in binding together its dimensions: the intensification of expansive power in it needs to be complemented by a capacity for imposing order" (Adorno, *Mahler*, pp. 96–97; see also p. 92, where Adorno actually lauds the work for restoring the balance, 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 (see p. 59 above).

¹⁰⁷The closest Adorno comes to acknowledging a tension between paradigms is an oblique remark that the work's architectonic and novelistic elements are balanced so that "the symphonic idea is simultaneously suspended and realized" (Adorno, "Centenary Address," p. 91).

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰⁵For one exception, see Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to His Music*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 85–86.

prop necessary for metaphorical symmetry, and the clash of paradigms seemingly implied in his comment a passing phantom.

Yet the tensions run deeper than this, as the image of the “destructive totality” is shot through with a sadism disarmingly out of step with his overall Mahler project. Given Adorno’s notorious pessimism (as well as his impatience with Mahler’s affirmational streak), it is all too easy to suppose that he affords the finale a singular status based on the sheer amplitude of its bleakness. But for Adorno the marks of torment in Mahler’s language are ultimately signs of a higher form of optimism, one more hard-won and enduring than the gaudy triumphalism peddled by overripe Romanticism. Adorno’s Mahler is cynical, to be sure—too cynical for some. But he is no abject 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.” In Adorno’s loftier rhetoric, we come to recognize the novel-symphony as the concrete form of this emancipatory vision, a site of resistance to the repressive forces in the tradition and the world at large. Mahler’s works “do not express a discipline which triumphantly subdues all particulars and individuals; instead, they assemble them in a procession of the liberated.”¹⁰⁸

In this spirit, Adorno is typically inclined to downplay the finale’s pessimistic or sadistic attributes. While obliged to honor that the work’s uniqueness is inextricably bound to its negative elements, he typically focuses on elements that are *symbolically* negative, in keeping with his view of the finale as consummate ideology critique.¹⁰⁹ It is against this backdrop that the image of a totality “sanctioning for its

own glory the destruction of the individual” leaps out as particularly unsettling, since it shows Adorno deliberately resorting to the same metaphoric framework as the comment above, to precisely the opposite end. Astonishingly, without warning or follow-up, Adorno casually implies that Mahler’s greatest movement is also the sole outlier in the composer’s critical-emancipatory project. This is not Adorno’s usual stylized self-contradiction. The incongruity is so complete that one could take it as evidence that Adorno was grappling with two incompatible views of the finale—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.

One possible complication was that Adorno’s apparently strong identification with Mahler the man may have placed constraints on his ability to assess the finale. Peter Franklin suggests that Adorno the cultural critic saw a kindred spirit in Mahler, a connection demonstrably 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.¹¹⁰ 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, and not vice versa. The compositions do not illustrate ideas, but become the 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. The fallout, however, is that his reading of the finale must be congruent with the ethical alignment he hopes to find in the composer. There is no

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 93, 97.

¹⁰⁹As 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 allusion”), its unique affective hyperbole (the music’s “abandonment to unbridled affect is its own death”), or, as we read in the section on Variant Technique, its thematic coherence (Adorno, *Mahler*, p. 135, 126; see also p. 69 for more on the affective argument). I find none of these theses especially convincing on their own, and difficult to reconcile with one another.

¹¹⁰Peter Franklin, “. . . his fractures are the script of truth’: Adorno’s Mahler,” in *Mahler Studies*, ed. Stephen Hefling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 272. Naturally, exile and genocide were powerful shaping forces on Adorno’s musical and social philosophy, and his identification with Mahler as an assimilated Jew surfaces regularly in his physiognomy of the composer, whose music he retrofits with regular premonitions of fascism (see Adorno, *Mahler*, pp. 21, 34, 150).

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 would dabble in musical dramatizations of quasi-totalitarian sadism.

So we have to ask: is it good form to posit a Mahler even more cynical than Adorno was willing to admit—one so jaded that he would busy himself with the spectacle of a self-negating symphony merely for the sake of seeing it perish? We can of course never know what Mahler really meant in writing the Sixth. The best we can hope for is to rise up to the interpretive challenges that he has posed for us. And we must be vigilant not to confuse Adorno’s ideologies for Mahler’s own, or for that matter Adorno’s Mahler with the historical Mahler. But if we choose (*pace* Adorno) to regard its meaning as allegorical rather than immanent, there is no reason why the present reading cannot be consonant with his view of Mahler as cultural critic. Rather than view the Sixth as an exercise in wanton pessimism, we can just as easily 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.

Even leaving certain questions unanswered, though, some readers are likely to find my interpretation imprudently overdetermined; others may find its metaphors too florid or indulgent. But to do justice to Mahler’s idiosyncratic art, one’s analytic aims must themselves be Mahlerian in scope, embracing all contradictions: committed to sweeping immensity and yet enamored of details; learned yet suspicious of formalisms that present themselves as inherently meaningful; willing to take expressive risks that might be perceived as garish or mannered. Mahler did not assemble his compositions as cerebral riddles to be solved by cool analytic objectivity. They repel disinterested evaluation at every turn; they demand involvement. If my take on the Sixth has been extravagant, it is only because I see other analytic temperaments as prone to founder on Mahler’s bizarreries. Yet I would never lay claim to a definitive reading. Mahler’s music will always resist any singular or immutable “meaning.”

Even Adorno found his own brilliant formulations to be “impoverished, abstract and false” when “confronted with the actuality” of Mahler’s work.¹¹¹ If some readers find that the musical data culled here lead more comfortably to other interpretations, 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 his music. With Mahler, there is always so much more to say. 

¹¹¹Adorno, “Centenary Address,” p. 109.

Abstract.

Critics have long viewed Mahler’s Sixth Symphony in A Minor (1904) as the composer’s consummate essay in musical tragedy or negativity, one with deeply personal implications. Its enormous finale draws together materials from all the preceding movements and enacts a terrible conflict ending in failure. Yet few studies have looked beneath the work’s bombastic rhetorical-expressive surface to explore how its negativity might be reflected in its tonal, formal, and thematic processes. This study sets out to link that negative expressivity to a breakdown of what Adorno called the “novelistic” character of Mahler’s symphonies. For Adorno, Mahler pioneered a new, emancipatory symphonic idiom, one that liberated its musical materials from the dictates of preconceived formal totalities. Unlike the Classical symphony, where the parts exist for the sake of a symmetrical, tightly knit whole, the “novel-symphony” follows no predetermined path. Instead, it unfolds according to the dictates of its constituent elements, realizing its unique form from the “bottom up” rather than the “top down.”

Yet (as Adorno suggests) in the finale of the Sixth this integrating totality returns with a vengeance. We can read the movement as a clash between Adorno’s novelistic and Classical paradigms, a showdown between the impulsive freedom of certain recalcitrant thematic elements on the one hand, and the increasingly punitive demands of rigid minor-mode sonata on the other. This drama—one that caricaturizes “classicism” itself as a repressive or stifling force—plays out on both formal and thematic levels. Several writers have noted the claustrophobic effect created by Mahler’s incessant recycling of certain key motives, an “inescapable” co-

herence in which the organicist imperatives of the grand tradition themselves become corrupt and, ultimately, corrosive. As these generic, subthematic particles proliferate, the movement's "novelistic" themes—those seeking to subvert the strict sonata—are systematically denuded of the differentiating features and dissolved beyond recognition. In the end,

the movement's infamously brutal minor-mode conclusion reveals itself to be the culmination of a musical plot spanning the entire movement, one that gathers its many details into an inexorably tragic narrative whole.

Keywords: Mahler's Sixth Symphony, Adorno, novel-symphony, sonata theory, musical plot.

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MONAHAN
The Finale of
Mahler's Sixth

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