

Chapter Seven

Mahler as Social Critic: The Finale of the Seventh Symphony

No other movement of a Mahler symphony has engendered the kind of controversy and hand-wringing among critics and scholars as the finale of the Seventh. It could be said in this regard that the finale is the Achilles heel of the symphony, preventing the symphony in the eyes of some from achieving a greatness it might otherwise have attained. For, it also might be said, if Mahler had succeeded in composing a finale that could be heard as bringing the prior four movements together in a clearer symphonic focus, the symphony as a whole might be more favorably considered. This is old news to anyone familiar with the Seventh and its history.

But should we automatically assume that Mahler was trying to compose a finale that would provide the kind of predictable close that a movement entitled *Rondo-Finale* suggests? Or, does this finale provide a suitable—if highly unconventional—close for the four movements that precede it?

The answer depends largely on how one reads the many expressive concerns of the other four movements. I have been arguing that, with the Seventh Symphony, Mahler engages the many crosscurrents of his social, psychological, political, and cultural world in ways that differ from his other work, but that he still succeeds in staying close to what we have come to know as Mahler's "style." The Seventh Symphony, on the whole, takes Mahlerian paradox, irony, discontinuity, and generic subversion several steps further than any other Mahler symphony. This is particularly so with the finale. When seen in this light and closely read, the finale emerges as an appropriate closing movement for the Seventh.

Reactions to the finale have been mixed over the course of its history, though later generations of scholars have almost unanimously condemned it in one way or the other.¹ In the early reception of the Seventh we find several enthusiastic assessments, most notably from reviews of some of the first performances and several roughly contemporaneous analytical essays. A common and easily understandable theme running through these various interpretations is the emphasis on the positive, joyous, and heroic characteristics of the movement.

Perhaps the most spirited account comes from William Ritter. Writing after the Prague premiere in the *Courier Musical*, Paris (15 October 1908), Ritter relates the following:

And now for daylight and the final miracle. With a calm nerve, and making no attempt at concealment, Mahler takes hold of the *Meistersinger* overture, makes it his own, does not quote it directly — oh! no — but recreates it from a new perspective, outdoing the original, extracts its framework, the continual *da capo* of its colossal Rondo, and from within this glorious, dazzling structure launches unrestrainedly the wild and passionate dances of his own devising, a radiant theme, now in Carinthian, now in pure Slovak mode. It is an endless jubilation that spreads itself under the booming arches of fanfares in *Meistersinger* style, continually reshaped in every detail, always bewitching, causing the heart to swell to the point we have all reached, the point at which we are faint with happiness, rediscovering the small child deep within us, unable to imagine any paradise better than this. And monstrous fugal passages, sculptured blocks where all the themes display their high spirits at the same time, intermingle and cut across each other, collapse here and there in a dying blaze of fireworks, and tear themselves apart over the living garland of the dances that now join up again from all sides, one link following another, the stamping, leaping *Ländler* here, the Slovak clarinets there. And when, after so many jolts and fresh starts, so many sudden changes of tempo, it comes to a halt with that typical Mahlerian abruptness which has enriched the art of composing unusual and astonishing endings with a variety of special effects — imperious, brittle, crashing down from on high — after it was all over, there was, amid a frantic applause, and among those of us who for eight days had been habitués, almost inhabitants, of this audacious symphony, a kind of despair. When and where would we hear such music again?²

¹ A few notable exceptions are mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation.

Ritter's impressions are valuable not only for the way they convey the sheer excitement over the world premiere of a leading composer's work, but also for the descriptions of several of the finale's properties, such as the *Meistersinger* allusion, the many abrupt invocations of ethnic and popular sounding tunes, the weighty counterpoint, and the crude juxtapositions (all Mahlerian trademarks, but emboldened and laid bare in a manner unusual even for Mahler). Ritter treats these with a child-like enthusiasm, whereas, as will be seen, critics of a later generation have heard these salient features as deficiencies, as indications that somehow Mahler went too far, or worse yet, did not even know where he was going. Ritter seems at home with Mahler's expression, a point I will return to after exploring other critiques of the movement.

Felix Adler's interpretation is similar to Ritter's. Writing immediately after the premiere, he comments that after the first four movements

[a] thrilling contrast to what has been heard up to this point is provided by the towering *Rondo-Finale* with which the work closes. Here all is joyous, happy, life-affirming. The sun has risen, and day has broken. "The world is your oyster!" — in Mahler's own words — is the mood of this movement; it carries the message that life is a delight. A merriment truly worthy of a *Meistersinger*, an enormous Bacchanalian zest blows through this movement, and in his high spirits the composer risks the most difficult compositional problems. He plays catch with his motives, one of which is an unadulterated Kärnten country dance of the most spirited frivolity.³

Richard Specht, one of the most consistent champions of Mahler's work, wrote about the Seventh Symphony on at least three different occasions. He maintained a high regard for the work, particularly the finale, in all three writings, and his impressions echo

² Quoted in Donald Mitchell, "Reception" in *Gustav Mahler: Facsimile Edition of the Seventh Symphony*, eds. Donald Mitchell and Edward Reilly (Amsterdam: Rosbeek Publishers, 1995), 40.

³ *Bohemia, Morgen-Ausgabe*, No. 260, Prague (20 September 1908), p. 1; as quoted in Mitchell, "Reception," 43-44.

the interpretations of Ritter and Adler. The first is from a review for the *Neue Freie Presse*, published one day after the premiere.

The final movement (is) a masterly rondo–finale of frenetic gaiety and freedom... After a single hearing its details can hardly be grasped, but there is a verve which sweeps along irresistibly, and an utterly effortless, sovereign victory over the most restrictive formal contrapuntal problems.⁴

The following year Specht published a brief analysis of the Seventh for *Der Merker* in which he describes the music as rejoicing, cheerful and ebullient. He notes the finale's "radiant, unparalleled humor," as well as the dizzying intertwining of the various motives, all of which serves to create a work that ultimately expresses a "joyous courage to live."⁵ In his book on Mahler, published first in 1913 and reprinted in 1920, Specht considers the finale, after some brief comments on the middle three movements, with the following:

But all that [the cumulative effect of the middle three movements] opens itself up completely, spreads its wings when the timpani lets loose with a turbulent joviality, and a happy, blissful, careless, joyfulness is declared by each tone of the noisy C major; country fair, Meistersinger gaiety, even though it is less Nuremberg than good Austrian Meistersingers, who suddenly rebel against the established rules, with which they are so familiar, however, that they still begin according to the rule when they sing in joyful abandon, "sell my cloak, I'm headed toward heaven." What is the world coming to?⁶

Early reception of the finale was not uniformly positive, however. Reviews of the Netherlands premiere (The Hague on 2 October 1909, and Amsterdam the following day), a year after the world premiere in Prague, range from ambivalence to the kind of unbridled

⁴ Quoted in Mitchell, "Reception," 48.

⁵ Richard Specht, "Mahlers Siebenten Symphonie" *Der Merker* v. 2 (1909): 7–8.

⁶ "Aber all das öffnet sich ganz ins Weite, spannt die Flügel aus, wenn die Pauke in turbulenter Lustigkeit loslegt und eine frohe, sonnenselig leichtsinnige Freudigkeit aus jedem Ton dieses brausenden C–Dur spricht; Kirmesjubiläum, Meistersingerfrohsinn, — wenn es auch weniger Nürnberger, als gut österreichische Meistersinger sind, die plötzlich rabiat gegen die Tabulatur losgehen und sie doch so gut im Leibe haben, daß sie es sogar nach der Regel anfangen, wenn sie ein sorgloses, 'Verkauft's mei G'wand, ich fahr' in'

enthusiasm as expressed by Specht, et. al. For instance, L. Van Gigch Jr., writing for *De Telegraaf*, Amsterdam, praised the work as a whole, but found problems with the finale. “The final movement has met with the most severe criticism. Not everything in it is clear to me, either, and I, too, do not always find the melodic ideas attractive, but there are nevertheless also very lovely sections in it.”⁷ From this brief comment, we see that the finale was singled out for criticism even by those most disposed to the Seventh as well as Mahler’s work in general. Herman Rutters’ review for the *Nieuwe Courant* of Amsterdam, which appeared a day before Gigch’s notice, is fascinating for its ambivalence. Rutters praises Mahler as a great artist, and then criticizes him for his “aversion to the principle of form,” and hearing the Seventh confirms an “assertion that Mahler’s newest work leaves the listener with a sense of impressionism which obeys the urge towards pure expression of feeling so consistently that it disregards and despises form.” Still, Rutters maintains that “Mahler is a great artist, and certainly only a master could write a movement such as the second *Nachtmusik* and the finale. If only everything reached the heights as these movements!”⁸

Writing the same day, however, W. N. F. Sibmacher Zijnen wrote in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* that “...it is quite clear that, while the *Nachtmusiken* have the most instant appeal, the tremendous first movement, the Allegro, and also, above all, the last movement, the *Rondo-Finale*, filled with *Meistersinger*-like gaiety and impressive in its reckless treatment of its main theme, increase our respect for Mahler’s art immensely.”⁹

himmel’ singen.’ Was kost’ die Welt?” Richard Specht, *Gustav Mahler* (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1913, rprnt. 1922), 251.

⁷ Mitchell, “Reception,” 52.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

A few days later in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, an Amsterdam correspondent (Mitchell believes that it was probably H. L. Berckenhoff) who had had several opportunities to hear the work offered the following: "...this work is indeed not difficult to follow, while the development of its themes has already become clear enough that we are able to predict that it will emerge ever more distinctly with each repetition." The writer comments on Mahler's folk-like tunes, but takes him to task for not knowing how to "elevate folk melodies (as did Beethoven, Schubert, and Haydn and Brahms), nor how to impress upon them to the same extent the stamp of his own personality." Moreover, he singles out how Mahler "... draws his melodies from his surroundings, and it is striking how strongly they sometimes resemble the tunes from Viennese Operetta which stick in our minds." Regarding the finale in particular, he notes that "nobody could fail to be stirred by the joyous brilliance of *Die Meistersinger* sparkling out at them from the last movement."¹⁰

The following excerpts from three reviews, one negative and two positive, of the Vienna premiere (3 November 1909) demonstrate further the intensity of the first impressions of this still imposing work and its problematic finale. Robert Hirschfeld, a critic particularly hostile to Mahler, not surprisingly found little to admire in the Seventh. Though he begrudgingly wrote of some redeeming qualities he found in the first four movements, particularly the two *Nachtmusiken*, the best he could say of the finale was that it was "wretchedly scatter-brained" and a "frightful mockery of the overture to the *Meistersinger*, which infuriates even admirers of Mahler's symphonies."¹¹

The comprehensibility of Mahler's handling of form is treated deftly by a clear admirer of Mahler's, Dr. Elsa Bienenfeld, a critic for the *Neues Wiener Journal*. The following remarks, published just five days after Hirschfeld's review, seem to address

¹⁰ Ibid., 58–59. The reference to *Die Meistersinger* in this regard is particularly interesting because Mahler programmed the *Meistersinger* overture for the Netherlands premiere.

¹¹ Ibid., 60.

both Hirschfeld's and L. Van Gigch's complaints about Mahler's form. After a lengthy discussion mostly on the attributes to be found in Mahler's work in general, and some specific remarks concerning the Seventh, Bienenfeld, in reference to the first and then last movements of the Seventh, observed that

Unlike Brahms and Beethoven, he does not manage to hammer content into form. Mahler's form can hardly cope with its content because it tends so much to overreach itself on a huge scale, as if a sublime word were spoken too loudly, with too wild a gesture.

I sense this misunderstanding in the last movement too, a rondo whose C major is broken through repeatedly by couplets in A flat, A, G flat, and D major. A bold, very powerful life-affirming energy informs the orgiastic victory song. Only someone with the strength to overcome their deepest pain and sorrow could conjure up the world in such lively and joyful high spirits. Mahler is also more successful in taming form in this movement. But it is as if he could not go far enough in the depiction of joy; in adding climax to climax he simply loses himself in the breadth of it all. His lively, imaginative spirit modifies the themes subtly and variously. That he sometimes renders them coarse and unstylish in the process is the strongest reproach one could make of the movement.¹²

Bienenfeld broaches a central issue concerning Mahler and form: the dichotomy between a composer's use of inherited forms and the creative impulse. What Bienenfeld observes as the inability of Mahler's form to adequately "cope with its content," Adorno saw as a "rupture between self and forms." I will address this aspect of the finale as part of the central thesis of this chapter. For now, it is important to note that a friendly critic of Mahler's perceived Mahler's struggle to contain his expressive intentions within recognizable parameters as central to understanding Mahler's work, and moreover, that in spite of this issue concerning Mahler's work, she felt that he was "more successful in taming form" in the finale than in the first movement.

Also contrasting strongly with Hirschfeld's review is the following excerpt from a pamphlet by Julius Korngold, which appeared in the *Neue Freie Presse*. Korngold offers

¹² Ibid., 63-64.

several perceptive, though at times contradictory observations. For instance, on the one hand he states that Mahler “does not at all concern himself with portraying the objective world, but only himself and his emotional being.” On the other hand Korngold observes that, unlike those of some of Mahler’s contemporaries,

Mahler’s melodies still offer something to grasp hold of. He reaches out all too readily for folk-like sounding sequences of notes of a less than noble stamp, which he then troubles little to dress up, but which he rather, very often with a deliberately realistic intent, crams directly into the symphony in their everyday dress or working overalls.¹³

The above implies that at times Mahler indeed portrayed “the objective world,” by “cramming” folk-like tunes “into the symphony in their everyday dress or working overalls.” As Mitchell says regarding Korngold’s review, it is a “fascinating exercise, one might think, of sitting on the fence. For one reader at least, an entirely bogus impartiality is what characterizes this seeming attempt to remain above the battle.”¹⁴ But, more germane to an understanding of the finale are Korngold’s observations concerning Mahler’s “deliberately realistic intent.” This is a point I will pursue further—that the finale of Seventh is one of Mahler’s most blatantly socially-grounded symphonic movements, and the exclusive search for existential and psychological meanings has deflected attention from what might be one of the clearest examples of Mahler as a social critic. Regarding the finale, Korngold writes:

This is one ecstasy of joy, with Mastersingers and summer festivals, beribboned parties and cheerful holiday voices, comparable to the final rondo of the Fifth Symphony which characterized the ascension into heaven. There is a lot of solid counterpoint and attention to detail in this movement. Like a festive call for jubilation, the main theme returns again and again, each time unleashing new gusts of energy and thereby substantiating the movement’s rondo character. But taken as whole, the

¹³ Ibid., 65.

¹⁴ Ibid., 65.

finale is full of a sound and fury which, as so often, runs the risk of signifying nothing.¹⁵

I share Mitchell's frustration with Korngold's comments, but I would characterize the problem differently. It seems to me not so much an issue of sitting on the fence and staying above the fray as a problem of confusion and therefore ambivalence. Korngold hears ecstasy, joy and a "festive call for jubilation," but fears that ultimately the finale "runs the risk of signifying nothing." He perceives a powerful, realistic expression in the movement, attempts to understand it, cannot, and concludes that it therefore possibly means nothing.

Korngold's interpretation has to be seen in context. An important aspect of the above reviews is the highly personal nature of the interpretations. That is, like many of their contemporaries, these critics chose to view art as an expression of the internal life of the artist, rather than as a portrait of the external world. Thus Ritter, for example, heard the "colossal Rondo," with its "glorious, dazzling structure" which "launches unrestrainedly the wild and passionate dances of his own devising, a radiant theme, now in Carinthian, now in pure Slovak mode," and the "many jolts and fresh starts, so many sudden changes of tempo" as expressions of the child within us and the jubilation of life. The other critics perhaps were less flamboyant, but nevertheless couched their interpretations in the most personal terms. This is not surprising considering that openly realistic representations of social and political life among artists, poets and novelists were rare, and it stands to reason that a composer's work would likewise be considered as an expression and exploration primarily of inner states. Edward Timms points out that, considering the diversity and richness of artistic talent in Vienna at the turn of the century, there was a "paucity of realistic representations of social life and of the city itself. Led by Gustav Klimt, the

¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

painters of Vienna developed an exotic idiom for the exploration of inner states, colored by sensuous eroticism (Klimt) or extreme nervousness (Kokoschka and Schiele). The poets and novelists were equally cavalier in their disregard for social realism.”¹⁶ The conscious division between the personal and political, or as Schorske puts it, the “separation of politics from art” is in itself, as indeed Schorske himself points out, political.¹⁷ The one, of course, easily coexists with the other: that is, personal artistic expressions can also be read politically.

This, I believe, is one of the most difficult aspects of the finale of the Seventh. And it may have been at the root of Korngold’s ambivalence. Korngold found it difficult to reconcile his reading of the finale in personal terms with what ultimately for him was a movement that, because of its intense “sound and fury,” might just mean nothing at all. We have become accustomed, for good reason, to hear Mahler almost exclusively as an artist of inner subjectivity. However, the Seventh as a whole, and the finale in particular, presents some difficult challenges for such a reading. Indeed, at least one other contemporaneous critic suggested that the Seventh was not particularly personal, that it “is mainly impression, a musical reflection of exterior sensations, and bears witness to very little of the creator’s inner life.”¹⁸

As noted above, Specht relies heavily on personal and emotional descriptive prose in his brief thematic analysis in *Der Merker*. Paul Bekker, in his much more detailed formal analysis does the same, but offers his comments in a more philosophical light. His reading

¹⁶ Edward Timms, “Images of the City: Vienna, Prague, and the Intellectual Avant-Garde,” in *Decadence and Innovation: Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Robert B. Pynsent (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 6.

¹⁷ See Schorske, “Gustav Klimt: Painting and the crisis of the Liberal Ego,” in *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 208–278.

¹⁸ Richard Batka commenting on the Seventh for the *Prager Tagblatt*, 20 September 1908, p. 16. See Mitchell, “Reception,” 49.

rests primarily on the notion that the Seventh is a work that proceeds from darkness to light.¹⁹ Bekker begins his analysis of the finale with the following:

Night is over, day arrives. With timpani, fanfares, and the band playing in brilliant C major. No more half-dreaming, no struggling out of twilight and foreboding into the worship of the dawning light as in the first movement. Unquestioned victory and joyous dedication to light.²⁰

As La Grange points out, Bekker's is an essentially existential interpretation of the Seventh. This is particularly so in the finale, in which Bekker hears "Mahler's hymn of joy" after a consummate heroic struggle. La Grange notes that an unequivocal sentiment such as "unquestioned victory and joyous dedication to light" is contrary to what we know of Mahlerian ambiguity.²¹ La Grange is right in my estimation, and he anticipates some latter-day readings that focus on discontinuities and ambiguities as the nexus for interpreting the movement.

One such reading is that of Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich who dwells considerably on how the movement is constructed of both numerous contrasts and closely related themes, the trivial, the parodistic, and the violent and coarse (*brutal-ungeschlachten*) transformations of the positive into the grotesque, and concludes that Mahler "could hardly be more radical" than he was with the Seventh, particularly so with the finale.²² Central to Jungheinrich's reading is his assessment of Mahler's choice of C major for the finale. He criticizes Adorno for his excessive criticism of Mahler's choice of key by citing a number

¹⁹ Bekker, 238.

²⁰ "Nacht is vorbei, Tag kommt herauf. Mit Pauken, Fanfaren, und klingendem Spiel in leuchtendem C-dur. Kein Dämmern mehr, kein Sichdurchringen aus Zwielflicht und Ahnungen zur Anbetung des aufgehenden Lichtes, wie im ersten Satz. Sieghaftes, zweifelfreies Bewußtsein, beglückende Hingabe an die Helle." Bekker, 260.

²¹ Henri-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d'une Vie*, v. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1979-84), 1207.

²² Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich, "Nach der Katastrophe: Anmerkungen zu einer aktuellen Rezeption der Siebten Symphonie," in *Mahler: Eine Herausforderung* ed. Peter Ruzicka (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1977), 198.

of famous works that end in C major, works that Adorno presumably did not view as inferior because of their C major finales. He then comments that the choice of C major reflects a “compositional attitude that is being criticized at the same time.” And, the symbolic strength of the key (C major) becomes the “stigma of the deep questionability of the symphonic concept.”²³

There are several critics, however, who hear the discontinuities of the movement as serving the same kind of positive, if not stereotypically heroic, expression heard by so many of Mahler’s generation. Jean Matter describes the harsh juxtapositions of the movement as part of the movement’s humor: “Here Mahler, using all the resources of alternate montage, unites effects connected to polyphony and polyrhythms with effects of discontinuity and collage.”²⁴

From the above overview we see that many early critics and analysts heard the tumult and violent juxtapositions of the finale as evidence of victory, jubilation, etc.... whereas a less sanguine view prevails among later generations.²⁵ The overriding issue, then, is how to interpret the most obvious trait of the finale, its many discontinuities. John Williamson offers the most comprehensive presentation of what he terms the “hermeneutical enigma” of the finale of the Seventh, which “ultimately hinges on whether Mahler intended to create a reflection of unbroken positivity.”²⁶ Writing in 1982, Williamson notes that

Few students of Mahler have resisted the temptation to agonize over “something irreducibly problematic about this symphony,” and for

²³ Ibid., 197.

²⁴ Jean Matter, *Connaissance de Mahler* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1974), 240

²⁵ As noted above, the view among early critics of the finale as jubilant and heroic was not universal.

²⁶ John Williamson, “Deceptive Cadences in the Last Movement of Mahler’s Seventh Symphony,” *Soundings* 9 (1982): 89.

every attempt to seek a positive in discontinuity, there have been two or more others to subscribe to Deryck Cooke's dismissal of the finale as "*Kapellmeister*" music.²⁷

As Williamson notes, Bernd Sponheuer, who is unfavorably disposed towards the finale of the Seventh (and of the Fifth as well), sees three major interpretive stances.²⁸ They are the "orthodox interpretation," the "critical interpretation," and the "metacritical interpretation." Sponheuer summarizes them as follows:

The orthodox interpretation views the movement without reservation as inspired, and interprets it as witness of an almost metaphysical affirmation of life, and, at the same, as an affirmative answer to the negative ending of the previous Sixth Symphony.

The critical interpretation maintains that [the finale of the Seventh] constitutes a relapse behind the advanced position of the Sixth Symphony, represented by lack of compositional technique, as well as by the deceptively joyous tone.

The metacritical interpretation, finally, understands the forced cheerfulness of the music as self-consciously artificial and considers the finale as a critical montage built of a knowingly false musical expression.²⁹

Both Williamson, and Sponheuer before him, ascribe specific critics to one or the other of the above views. I would like both to summarize and elaborate on their assessments. Early critics such as Ritter, Adler, Specht, Berckenhoff, Bienenfeld, and much more recently Michael Kennedy subscribe to the "orthodox" view.³⁰ It is an essentially romantic view that glosses over the discontinuities, pitfalls, and wrong turns of

²⁷ Ibid., 88. The quotations are from Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 89 and 91.

²⁸ Bernd Sponheuer, *Logik des Zerfalls: Untersuchungen zum Finalproblem in den Symphonien Gustav Mahlers* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1978). The chapter that deals specifically with the finale of the Seventh, is, considering Sponheuer's assessment, fittingly titled "Das 'Heitere Schlussrondo.' Die Misslungene Restauration Eines Finaltopos (Die Siebte Symphonie)," 353–401.

²⁹ Ibid., 362,

the movement and chooses to hear only its triumphant C major. It regards the cyclical return of the primary theme from the first movement as further evidence of romantic triumph. The orthodox view concludes that the Seventh's finale, as Bekker put it, is Mahler's "hymn to joy."³¹

The "critical" view is represented best by Adorno's thoroughly unforgiving critique of the movement. Adorno for the most part loathed Mahler's affirmative finales, and in the following he takes particular aim at the finale of the Seventh, a movement in which he found practically no redeeming value. It is one of the most potent and negative passages in all of Adorno's writings on Mahler, and its impact is most felt when read in full:

Only an apologist nervous to the point of obduracy could dispute that there are weak pieces by Mahler. Just as his forms never remain within the confines of the given, but everywhere make their own possibility and musical form itself their theme, each of them enters the zone of potential miscarriage. Aesthetic quality itself is not immune to his fractures. The work through which, probably, most have come to love Mahler, the Second Symphony, is likely to fade first, through loquacity in the first movement and the Scherzo, through some crudity in the "Resurrection" Finale. The latter would have needed the thoroughgoing polyphony which the first movement of the Eighth takes upon itself; the long instrumental section garrulously divulges too much of the vocal section and seems loosely articulated, even the cries causing scarcely a shiver; only the *pp* entry of the choir and its theme retain suggestive power. The Adagietto of the Fifth, despite its important conception as an individual piece within the whole, borders on genre prettiness through its ingratiating sound; the Finale, fresh in many details and with novel formal ideas like that of the musical quick-motion picture, is undoubtedly too lightweight in relation to the first three movements. *If opinions may differ over this, the Finale of the Seventh embarrasses even those who concede everything to Mahler.* In a letter Schoenberg chose examples of Mahler's power of invention from precisely this movement. But even they are peculiarly arrested in their growth. Even

³⁰ Graham Whettam could be added to this list. His assessment of the finale in his brief "BBC Music Review" is unreservedly positive in the "orthodox" sense. See Graham Whettam, "Mahler's Seventh Symphony," *The Listener* 74 (1965): 1088.

³¹ Concerning the Seventh, and the finale in particular, Kennedy states that "...a great interpretation of this symphony will crown it with this Rondo, its gaiety so open-hearted, its sudden retreat to the simplicity of the *Wunderhorn* so touchingly effective, and its final peroration not entirely free from doubt despite the overt triumph (rather like the coda of Elgar's First Symphony). Once again the symphony has embraced everything." See Michael Kennedy, *Mahler*, 147. I agree that "once again the symphony has embraced everything," but, as I will show, for entirely different reasons.

on the most strenuous immersion in the work, one will scarcely be able to deny an impotent disproportion between the splendid exterior and the meager content of the whole. Technically the fault lies with the steadfast use of diatonicism, the monotony of which was scarcely to be prevented, in view of such ample dimensions.³² The movement is theatrical: only the stage sky over the too-adjacent fairground meadow is as blue as this. The positivity of the *per aspera ad astra* movement in the Fifth, which surpasses even this finale, can manifest itself only as a tableau, a scene of motley bustle; perhaps the Finale of Schubert's Great C Major Symphony, the last abundant work of symphonic positivity to be written, already tends secretly toward operatic performance. The limpid soaring of the solo violin in the first measure of the fourth movement of Mahler's Seventh, solace that follows like a rhyme the mourning of the tenebrous Scherzo, commands more belief than all the pomp of the Finale. Mahler in one place gently mocks it with the epithet *etwas prachtvoll* (rather ceremoniously), yet without the humor breaking through. The claim that the goal has been reached, the fear of aberrations *après fortune faite*, are answered depressingly by endless repetitions, particularly of the minuet-like theme. The tone of strained gaiety no more actualizes joy than the word *gaudeamus*; the thematic fulfillments announced too eagerly by the gestures of fulfilling do not materialize. Mahler was a poor yea-sayer (ein schlechter Jasager).³³

There is obviously much that can be said about these comments, and a good deal of my thesis concerning the finale will be based on a dialogue with Adorno. Others who side with Adorno's view of the finale of the Seventh include Cooke, Hans Redlich, Sponheuer, and, to a certain extent, Mitchell. For better or worse it has been the "critical" view that has informed most of the recent reception of the symphony as a whole and the finale in particular.

³² As mentioned above, Jungheinrich takes Adorno to task for this complaint.

³³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 136–7 (emphasis mine). Schoenberg's letter referred to by Adorno is cited in all biographies of Mahler as evidence of the turning point in Schoenberg's attitude towards Mahler's work. In it he refers to the Seventh in glowing terms. For a full text see *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (London: Faber, 1964), 293–295; this is partially reprinted in Mitchell, "Reception," 70–71. See also Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler*, 325–326. For an overview of the artistic relationship between Schoenberg and Mahler, which also refers to this letter, see Stephen Hefling, in "Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg," *Mahler's Unknown Letters*, ed. Herta Blaukopf, trans. Richard Stokes (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 167–176.

Cooke's comments, mentioned briefly above and in the introduction to this dissertation, come down particularly hard on the finale:

The "festive" C major finale opens with battering timpani, and wind and horn fanfares. The main group comprises a major version of the first movement's march theme, on trumpet; a majestic progression of brass chords *too* reminiscent of *The Mastersingers*; and a lively, jogging tune on wind and strings which follows *too relentlessly* the pattern of one-note-up-one-and-two-down. The subsidiary groups consist of 'popular' material of little distinction, the second being of remarkable banality (*unintentional* for once). On its second appearance, the jogging tune takes on an insistently chattering form which is the most tiresome element of all. At the end, the first movement's march theme returns in its original form, but in the major, to provide a grandiose but unconvincing conclusion. Mahler had written for once the thing he most detested—*Kapellmeistermusik*.³⁴

Redlich's comments, though much briefer, are equally dismissive.³⁵ Sponheuer takes up Adorno's critique of "hackneyed happy endings of earlier symphonies,"³⁶ both by Mahler and earlier symphonists, as the starting point for his interpretation of the formal process of the Seventh's finale. The "central task of [Sponheuer's] analysis is an examination of the extent to which the finale of the Seventh was disastrously influenced, in letter and spirit by...the anachronistic re-establishment of the truly meaningless convention—the happy closing rondo...derived from what was the absolutely necessary marriage at the end of a comic opera."³⁷

Mitchell is as unequivocal as Adorno and Cooke in his condemnation of the finale in his contribution to the *New Grove* article:

³⁴ Cooke, *Gustav Mahler*, 91.

³⁵ Hans Redlich, *Bruckner and Mahler* (London: J. M. Dent, 1955), 204–205.

³⁶ Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, 138.

³⁷ Sponheuer, *Logik des Zerfalls*. Sponheuer looks at the movement as a tableau, and uses metaphors of the dramatic stage to explain the movement.

[A]bove all, the finale requires an act of faith to be heard as the logical conclusion to what has preceded it...this movement fails to convince one that it belongs to the symphony which it ostensibly completes. The sudden discontinuity, an arbitrarily slapped-on C major, is disconcerting; and the final display of cyclic conjuring tricks (see no. 281 ff) is no help.³⁸

However, Mitchell softened his position considerably a few years later in a revised article from *The New Grove Turn of the Century Masters*. There he states that

As for the rondo–finale, its shock–tactics can now be seen to be part of the programmatic intent and heard, in all its C major radiance, as a logical outcome of the symphony’s opening B minor, in the same way that C# minor in the Fifth inexorably results in a concluding D major.³⁹

Clearly, Mitchell eventually found some justification for the C major finale. This is evident also in his contribution, cited on a number of occasions in this dissertation, to the facsimile edition of the fair copy of the Seventh published in 1995.⁴⁰

The interpretations summarized above of Jungheinrich, Matter, and, to an extent, La Grange can be counted among the “metacritics.” Peter Ruzicka, James Zychowicz, and more recently Martin Scherzinger round out the list.⁴¹ All three share positions similar to the others, with Scherzinger’s a bit more far-reaching. Scherzinger analyzes the finale

³⁸ Donald Mitchell, “Gustav Mahler,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 521.

³⁹ Paul Banks and Donald Mitchell, “Gustav Mahler,” in *The New Grove Turn of the Century Masters* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 145.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Mitchell’s more favorable assessment of the Seventh’s finale, found in his article for the facsimile edition, echoes his first published comments on the Seventh, found in his program notes for a BBC broadcast of the Symphony in 1963. See “Mahler’s Enigmatic Seventh Symphony,” *The Listener* 69 (1963): 649.

⁴¹ Peter Ruzicka, “Befragung des Materials: Gustav Mahler aus der Sicht aktueller Kompositionsästhetik,” in *Mahler: eine Herausforderung. Ein Symposium*, 101–120; James Zychowicz, “Ein schlechter Jasager: Considerations on the Finale of the Seventh Symphony,” *The Seventh Symphony of Gustav Mahler: A Symposium*, ed. James L. Zychowicz (Madison: A–R Editions, Inc., 1990), 98–106; Martin Scherzinger, “The Finale of Mahler’s Seventh Symphony: A Deconstructive Reading,” *Music Analysis* 14:1 (1995): 69–88. Added to this list might be Constantin Floros, but his ambivalence is unnerving, and it is difficult to

...in terms that draw explicitly on Derrida's deconstructive method...[T]he analysis configures this movement as articulating the workings of Derrida's *supplément*. In doing so, it attempts to show how any 'internally coherent' moment contains within itself a 'space' which inevitably contains its opposite ('incoherence')—a space which reveals the inadequacy of that moment while at the same time, paradoxically, making its very coherence possible. In the Rondo–Finale, the strategic presence (and absence) of certain functional progressions, aspects of meter, elements of the larger form and so on, frequently serves to fill this "space."⁴²

Scherzinger then concludes, through analyses somewhat couched in deconstructive terms, that Mahler succeeds in the finale by turning its compositional process on itself. In other words, he makes it music about music.

As the title of this chapter implies, my position is that with the finale of the Seventh Mahler makes his most overt attempt at social criticism. I base this thesis on three elements: Adorno's view of Mahler's work in general and this movement in particular, Franco Moretti's thesis of the Modern Epic, and the historical context of the Seventh.⁴³

Parts of Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation dealt with Adorno's position on Mahler and musical form, and it is clear to any who encounter Adorno's work that he viewed Mahler's music as the quintessential example of music as social discourse. However, Adorno, as with all of us, had his prejudices. Among them was the notion that it is not possible, indeed it is dishonest, for an artist to stipulate through his or her art that social injustice, as Adorno understood it, could be overcome as long as a given work was in some way in the service of what it seeks to overcome. This may be an

know just where he stands. See Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, trans. Vernon Wicker (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993), 206–211.

⁴² Scherzinger, "The Finale of Mahler's Seventh Symphony: A Deconstructive Reading," 70.

⁴³ Franco Moretti, *The Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1996).

oversimplification, but it is a thread that runs throughout Adorno's work on Mahler, particularly when he discussed Mahler's affirmative finales. As Max Paddison points out,

Adorno's sociologically oriented writings on music arise from a consideration of the problem of the composer's relation to musical material and of the performer's dual relation to the musical work (as score) and to the audience, in the social context of the commodification of music and the effects of what he came to call the "culture industry."⁴⁴

Adorno loathed Mahler's affirmative finales because he felt they reaffirmed the status quo, and thus fulfilled the expectations of those most apt to relate to music as a consumable commodity.⁴⁵ It comes as no surprise, then, that the finale of the Sixth is Adorno's favorite Mahler finale, and his analysis of the movement is extensive considering the overall length of the book. Moreover, Adorno's wholly sympathetic language describing the Sixth's finale shows the great extent to which he resonated with its tragic message.⁴⁶ His view of the movement is summarized in a chapter titled "Decay and Affirmation" (*Zerfall und Affirmation*), where he declares that "the finale of the Sixth has its pre-eminence in Mahler's oeuvre because, more monumentally composed than all the rest, it *shatters the spell of affirmative illusion*."⁴⁷

However, after his diatribe on the Seventh's finale quoted at length above, Adorno comments more generally on Mahler's finales, and observes that Mahler's "...vainly jubilant movements unmask jubilation, his subjective incapacity for the happy end denounces itself."⁴⁸ Elsewhere Adorno states that "...there is no stronger affirmative

⁴⁴ Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 26.

⁴⁵ One must consider also Adorno's innate pessimism. As Paddison points out, Adorno "communicates a sense of dark irony and pessimism in all his work." *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 96–100.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 135 (Emphasis mine).

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, 137.

argument in Mahler's favor than his impatience with the affirmative nature of the masterpiece. And it was the very idea of affirmation that he found suspect."⁴⁹ Apparently Adorno for the most part was pleased with the way Mahler so often undermined, or at least questioned, his attempts at affirmation.

I would like to elaborate on this a little further, and turn Adorno on himself. In the overview of the early reception of the finale of the Seventh, I drew a connection with Bienenfeld's observation that Mahler had difficulty creating form that could adequately "cope with its content" and Adorno's concept of the "rupture between self and forms." This is summarized by Paddison in the following:

Adorno saw the "crisis of modernism" as a breakdown of established meanings—a recognition of the inadequacy of received concepts and systems of thought to contain the contradictions of perceived reality. This process of disintegration, as slippage between concept and referent, was one he also discerned within the apparently self-contained material of music. There it manifested what he called, after Lukács, a "rupture between self and forms": the expressive needs of the composer as expressive Subject were no longer served by the handed-down genres and formal types representing the objectivity of the social totality.⁵⁰

There are two major points here. One is Adorno's suspicion of art as affirmation, and the other is his observations concerning the "crisis of modernism" as expressed through the "rupture between self and forms." Regarding the former, it is clear that Adorno felt that Mahler had betrayed himself, or perhaps more accurately, betrayed Adorno. I feel that Adorno unwittingly fell victim to the "orthodox" school, and thus heard the finale as Mahlerian triumphalism. Unlike the orthodox critics, however, this reading ran against the grain of Adorno's overriding critique of Mahler, and that is why he declared the finale a

⁴⁹ Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 91.

colossal failure. But the latter point, the “rupture between self and forms” lies at the heart of the formal process attempted by Mahler in this finale, and as such Mahler succeeds in what Adorno wants so much from him—to undermine the affirmative. For Adorno, the finale of the Seventh tries too hard for closure and completeness, a trait that Adorno found antithetical to the mission of modern art, and dishonest in light of history and society.⁵¹ Also, Adorno saw the idea of *catastrophe* and *discontinuous, sudden change* as positive features of the late works of Beethoven, and of the music of Mahler. Sudden change and discontinuity lie at the heart of the Finale, and in this regard it seems odd that Adorno would be so unforgiving of Mahler regarding the finale of the Seventh. Finally, what constitutes the “authenticity” of Mahler’s music for Adorno is Mahler’s “acceptance of the fragmentary character of musical material and his displacement of it in relation to the handed-down formal schemata....”⁵² This is precisely what Mahler does to great effect in the finale of the Seventh, and the close reading that follows shows, among other things, how this movement can be understood as being consistent with Adorno’s Mahlerian ideal.

Adorno’s concern, and mine, is how form is pressed into the service of social discourse. Moretti’s theory of the “Modern Epic,” and a brief overview of the context of the Seventh’s finale, will help further lay the groundwork for my reading of the Seventh as social commentary. I would like to focus on Moretti’s ideas as they pertain not only to Mahler, whom Moretti considers a composer of Modern Epics, but more specifically to the finale of the Seventh. In this reading I demonstrate that the finale can be viewed on its own and as a fitting close to the issues raised in the previous four movements. In other words, both the symphony as a whole, and the finale on its own can be considered modern epics.

⁵⁰ Paddison, *Adorno’s Musical Aesthetics*, 16. See Chapter Two of this dissertation for further discussion of Adorno’s notion of the “rupture between self and forms.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 259.

Moretti defines modern epics as “world texts,” works that reach beyond narrowly defined national borders to represent and encompass the “non-homogeneous social and symbolic forms” found, upon closer examination, in the countries of makers of modern epics.⁵³ Moretti’s examples of culturally diverse countries where modern epics were produced are Wagner’s divided Germany, Joyce’s Ireland, Melville’s America, and areas of Latin America.⁵⁴ I would add the ethnically diverse society of Mahler’s Vienna. Issues concerning nationality and cultural identity were always seething, and were at the root of much political and social confusion, and at times considerable upheaval. Both as a citizen and composer, Mahler was a prime example of this polyglot, multicultural Vienna, one who never attained his own unchallenged national identity.

Moretti articulates several formal properties of the modern epic, or world text, that can be applied directly to the finale’s formal process. Two of Moretti’s concepts have their most direct application on the finale: the modern epic’s “encyclopedic ambition” and its internal “non-contemporaneity.” The modern epic strives to encompass and express as much as possible, indeed an entire world, hence its encyclopedic ambition. But, as Moretti says, it must do so with “inherited form.”⁵⁵ Here Moretti echoes Adorno regarding the “rupture between self and forms,” but with a twist. For Moretti, Adorno’s modernist rupture is the modern epic’s “double bind of the inherited form: it is possible neither to do without it, nor really to believe in it.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 50.

⁵⁴ Examples of modern epics examined by Moretti include Goethe’s *Faust*, Wagner’s *Ring*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. All were produced where “historically non-homogeneous social and symbolic forms, often originating in quite disparate places, coexist in a confined space.” See *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The problem with inherited form lies in a strong interpretative as well as philosophical distinction Moretti draws between the unitary vision of a novel and the multifarious ambition of an epic. The writer or composer of a modern epic, if one accepts Moretti's thesis, has reached back into antiquity for a form, that "...functioned as a veritable encyclopedia of a society's own culture: a storehouse of its essence and basic knowledge."⁵⁷ But, the modern epic goes considerably beyond its own borders, and this results in "epic universalism."⁵⁸ This is a problem for the modern epic, because universalism implies a kind of homogeneity that the modern epic seeks to undermine. The result is an oxymoron—the modern epic: a form that relies on the breadth and vision of an antiquated model, but responds to the multifarious needs of modernity.⁵⁹

In the finale Mahler shows the Seventh to be a modern epic, because of its "encyclopedic ambition." In it Mahler sought what Moretti observes about the "world text," or "modern epic"

...to represent the social totality — while at the same time *addressing* it. To be innovative and popular, complex and simple, esoteric and direct: to heal the great fracture between avant-garde exploration and mass culture.⁶⁰

This, I think sums up the finale, and as such the finale sums up the Seventh Symphony.

The modern epic's "non-contemporaneity" will be a focus of the following reading. Moretti defines non-contemporaneity in part as the "creation of the new from the past...as in *bricolage*: old materials, new treatment." In support of this definition Moretti quotes August Strindberg from his preface to his play *Miss Julie* (1888):

⁵⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁹ In this regard, modernity for Moretti begins with Goethe's *Faust* because it is the first clear text that grapples with the crisis of modernity. One could also say the same of late Beethoven.

As modern characters living in an age of transition [...] my people are more vacillating and disintegrating than their predecessors, a mixture of the old and the new [...] conglomerates of past and present cultural phases.⁶¹

This description of Strindberg's characters sheds interesting light on the cultural and societal context that influenced his writing, and that of his contemporary, Mahler. Indeed, traits such as these can be used to describe the themes and processes of the finale.

This speaks directly to the many startling discontinuities of the finale. The vacillating, disintegrating, fragmented aspects of Mahler's time, particularly as Mahler experienced them in Vienna, are central topics of the finale of the Seventh. Moretti's discussion of fragments as key to the formal design of modern epics is particularly germane:

Fragments (are) symptoms of the contemporary disorder...But if fragments are symptoms, then they are still fully motivated: they are indeed the 'expressive form' of modern indecision. The polyphony created by them may present local difficulties, just like the stream of consciousness: but the form *as such* would have a clear *raison d' être*. It would be *motivated*: This is how human beings feel and speak in the modern world.⁶²

Fragments, discontinuities, collapse, unsurpassable contradictions: these and similar characteristics have been used to describe Vienna at the turn of the century.⁶³ The following passage, from Robert Musil's (1880–1942) *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man Without Qualities*), written towards the beginning of the twentieth century, though not published until 1952, encapsulates the radical juxtapositions of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna so

⁶⁰ Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 107.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 42 (Moretti's ellipses).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 186–187 (Moretti's emphasis).

many have chronicled. Speaking of the Viennese in general, and Vienna's intellectual elite in particular, Musil observed that

[t]hey were as different from each other as could be, and could not have been more contradictory in their aims. There were those who loved the overman and those who loved the underman; there were health cults and sun cults and the cults of consumptive maidens; there was enthusiasm for the hero worshipers and for the believers in the Common Man; people were devout and skeptical, naturalistic and mannered, robust and morbid; they dreamed of old tree-lined avenues in palace parks, autumnal gardens, glassy ponds, gems, hashish, disease, and demonism, but also of prairies, immense horizons, forges and rolling mills, naked wrestlers, slave uprisings, early man, and the smashing of society. These were certainly opposing and widely varying battle cries, but uttered in the same breath. An analysis of that epoch might produce some such nonsense as a square circle trying to consist of wooden iron, but in reality it all blended into shimmering sense. This illusion, embodied in the magical date of the turn of the century, was so powerful that it made some people hurl themselves with zeal at the new, still-unused century, while others chose one last quick fling in the old one, as one runs riot in a house one absolutely has to move out of, without anyone feeling much of a difference between these two attitudes.⁶⁴

The musical discourse of the finale of the Seventh is concerned primarily with radical juxtaposition as a means of expression. All the discontinuities and paradoxes raised in the first movement are brought into bold relief in the last movement, but with little of the harmonic obfuscation that was so prevalent in the first movement. Though discontinuity and paradox are compositional mainstays for Mahler, they are brought to an unparalleled extreme in the finale of the Seventh. Mahler's use of rondo form facilitates his expressive goals because a rondo simultaneously suggests unity (the refrain, or A section as a unifying device) and contrast (the other sections inherent in a rondo form). Both unity and contrast, however, are brought to absurd extremes, both in and of themselves, and particularly in the way the unifying and contrasting properties of the movement work together and against one

⁶³ See Chapters One and Three of this dissertation for a more involved discussion of Vienna's "unsurpassable" contradictions.

another, thereby exaggerating what is unified and what is designed for contrast. As Moretti says of the collage technique he sees in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the finale of the Seventh "is the allegory of a heterogeneous—but not forcibly unified—reality."⁶⁵

The inherited or handed-down form of the finale is obvious enough. Swarowsky argues for a broad overview that consists of four major sections.⁶⁶ The first three are comprised of a refrain, couplet and variation, and the last consists only of a variation and refrain. As the movement progresses, however, Moretti's double-bind becomes increasingly evident. An increased complexity of events and gestures, designed at least in part to obscure boundaries, shows Mahler's inability to actually believe in the form he has chosen, but for his purposes he cannot possibly do without it. On one level, the sectionalization is clear, but once we encounter the variation sub-sections of each major section, we find a level of complexity and discontinuity not expected of a traditional Rondo-Finale. The form of the movement, in the broadest sense, is as follows:

Section 1: mm. 1–119

Refrain: 1–52
Couplet: 53–78
Variation: 79–119

Section 2: mm. 120–267

Refrain: 120–152
Couplet: 153–188
Variation: 189–267

⁶⁴ Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, v. 1, ed. Burton Pike, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Knopf, 1995), 53.

⁶⁵ Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 229.

⁶⁶ Hans Swarowsky, "Mahler: VII. Symphonie," *Wahrung der Gestalt* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1979), 156–8.

Section 3: mm. 268–445

Refrain: 268–306
Couplet: 307–359
Variation: 360–445

Section 4: mm. 446–590

Variation: 446–538
Refrain: 539–590

The opening is much more complex than might be apparent at first. Most of the gestures and topics of the finale are broached in the first several phrases. Mahler's encyclopedic ambition is made plain in the first seventy-eight measures (the first refrain and couplet). But the intimation of an encyclopedic ambition and the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" are evident in the first six measures, and then extend throughout the first refrain.⁶⁷

The first six measures appear to be no more than introductory pomp. This opening gesture, composed of four motives, provides important material for the movement, as well as establishing the rest of its tone.⁶⁸ The opening gesture is made up of two motives, the dactylic fanfare and the falling third, which is transposed to a falling fourth in m. 4 (Ex. 1a). The third motive is the dotted-rhythm motive (Ex. 1b). The fourth is the sixteenth notes that accompany the dotted-rhythm gesture (Ex. 1c).

⁶⁷ Moretti defines "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" as how the modern epic "forces meanings from different epochs to cohabit within the same sign" (Moretti's emphasis). Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 88.

⁶⁸ Swarowsky and La Grange argue for three motives in the opening six measures. See Swarowsky, "Mahler: VII. Symphonie," 156, and La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d'une Vie*. v. 2 1202.

Example 1a Opening gesture, mm. 1–4

Example 1b dotted-rhythm motive, mm. 5–6

Example 1c sixteenth-note motive, mm. 5–6

The image displays three musical examples from Mahler's Symphony No. 2, first movement. Example 1a shows the opening gesture in the Timpani part, starting at measure 1. It features a series of eighth notes with a dynamic of *f*, followed by a dotted rhythm with *sfp* dynamics, and then a sixteenth-note motive with *f* and *mf* dynamics. Example 1b shows the dotted-rhythm motive in the Violins, Violas, Celli, Bass, and Bassoon parts, starting at measure 5. Example 1c shows the sixteenth-note motive in the woodwinds in octaves, also starting at measure 5. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *sfp*, *mf*, and *ff*, and performance instructions like "mit Bravour".

Mahler immediately piles the motives on top of one another, which produces an opening gesture that is perhaps more raucous than heroic, and more pompous than portentous. From the outset, the music seems to go in several directions at once, indicating that the blazing light of day may only be tangential to the movement's overall expression. Important to this ambivalence is the transition from an implied E minor, which opens the movement, to C major, the actual key of the movement. Interestingly, this juxtaposition takes advantage of the common chord G major to infuse a sense of conflict, not just juxtaposition. It is particularly noticeable in m. 4 where a G major chord in the winds conflicts with the E minor pull of rest of the orchestra (Ex. 2).⁶⁹ Here Mahler first suggests that the ancient form of the rondo will be wrought with much contemporary ambivalence.

⁶⁹ Sponheuer analyzes this as C major in his chart. See Sponheuer, *Logik des Zerfalls*, 376.

Example 2 mm. 4–5

Example 2

Flutes, Oboes,
Clarinets

ff

This double-bind of inherited form, or the rupture between self and forms suggested by this brief ambivalence, grows by leaps and bounds as the music progresses. The next three sentences suggest three different attitudes towards the rondo and its ostensible jubilation. Is it, as the first sentence suggests (mm. 7–14), a movement that narratively transforms the first theme from the first movement from something funereal to something heroic? Or is it, as the second sentence suggests (mm. 14–22), a rondo that relies on a famous operatic gesture for its suggestion of pomposity, yet dignity and jubilation? Or lastly, is it a finale that takes the notion of affirmation over the edge to the realm of satire, with its oft-cited reference to Lehár's *Merry Widow* in the third sentence (mm. 23–26)?

It is all three. Regarding the first sentence, there is a small bit of tantalizing evidence that Mahler may have entertained a cyclic connection between the first and last movements in the early gestation of the symphony.⁷⁰ If this is so, it is not unreasonable to conclude, as does Graham Whettam, that the tune in mm 7–14 is intentionally related to the first movement.⁷¹ This would be consistent with some nineteenth-century symphonic strategies of transformation and overcoming and could argue for a view of the Seventh and its finale as being narratively unified.

⁷⁰ See Stephen E. Hefling, “‘Ihm in die Lieder zu Blicken:’ Mahler’s Seventh Symphony Sketchbook,” in *Mahler Studies*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 200, 211–212.

⁷¹ Whettam, “Mahler’s Seventh Symphony,” 1088.

The second sentence, with its *Meistersinger* reference might be heard to evoke a sense of celebration. But it is much more. As La Grange points out,

In the finale of the Seventh, the various elements seem impossible to synthesize into a whole, unless one invokes the Joycean notion of “stream of consciousness.” Sudden breaks, constant mood changes, irony travestied as jubilation, or vice versa, create from the beginning a feeling of uneasiness further heightened by the... quotation from *Die Meistersinger* that, heard so early in the movement, immediately catches the ear. Yet the allusion is doubly ambiguous, because Wagner’s own procedures marked the beginning of a new ambiguity between “scholarly” and “comic.”⁷²

Beyond La Grange’s reading of either Mahler’s or Wagner’s ambiguity, or as Matter put it, the “conquering of the seriousness of tradition,” lies another reference.⁷³ There are few musical gestures that are considered more quintessentially German, or that invoke the sense of Germanic ostentatiousness more than the opening to *Die Meistersinger*. For all the talk of ambiguity, the overture to *Die Meistersinger* was associated, as was of course Wagner’s entire output, with German nationalism.⁷⁴ Indeed, when Mahler was in his early twenties, he was a member of at least two proto-nationalist groups, the Saga Society (*Sagengesellschaft*) and the Pernerstorfer circle, whose members included prominent German nationalists such as Siegfried Lipiner, Richard von Kralik, and Engelbert Pernerstorfer. Mahler, on at least one occasion, played the *Meistersinger* overture as a gesture of nationalist solidarity with the Saga Society.⁷⁵ Its allusion here, especially considering the allusion of the following sentence, is politically charged. As McGrath notes:

⁷² Henri-Louis De La Grange, “Music about Music in Mahler: Reminiscences, Allusions, or Quotations?,” in *Mahler Studies*, 148. La Grange’s reference to “Joycean stream of consciousness” will be taken up later.

⁷³ Matter, *Connaissance de Mahler*, 240.

⁷⁴ William J. McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 100–102.

For the earlier gatherings of the Pernerstorfer circle, Mahler had provided *O du Deutschland, ich muss marschieren*, while the new Sagengesellschaft demanded *Meistersinger*—the respective choices could hardly be more apt.⁷⁶

Following on the heels of the *Meistersinger* allusion in the third sentence (mm. 23–26) is a gesture that has engendered all manner of commentary among recent scholars. It started with Hans Redlich with the following from his generally negative critique of the Seventh’s finale:

The rondo–finale repeats the processes of its forerunner in Symphony V with tremendous gusto, but with less inward conviction. Its unbuttoned contrast group (cue 23), with its Slavonic lilt and primitive bass pedal, comes perilously near to Lehár’s *Merry Widow* waltz—the kind of light Viennese music for which Mahler entertained a furtive admiration.⁷⁷

There has been some confusion regarding this reference. There is no cue 23 in the original or either of the two critical editions of the Seventh. In his analysis and overview of the Seventh in his 1979 biography of Mahler, La Grange misunderstands Redlich and assumes he is referring to the passage that begins in m. 23.⁷⁸ But this is inconsistent with Redlich’s description of the passage he refers to both in his book and in his preface to his edition of the Seventh.⁷⁹ In both instances Redlich refers to a “Slavonic lilt.” Also, in his book quoted above, he refers to a primitive bass pedal. There is no doubt that when he referred to cue 23 in his book, he meant cue 230 (m. 56) and not m. 23 as assumed by La

⁷⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁶ Ibid.,

⁷⁷ Redlich, *Bruckner and Mahler*, 204.

⁷⁸ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d’une Vie*, v. 2, 1205.

⁷⁹ Hans Redlich, Foreword, *Mahler Symphony No. 7* (London: Edition Eulenberg, 1965), viii.

Grange.⁸⁰ Indeed, the musical example given in the Eulenberg edition is directly from cue 230.

This is important because the musical connection La Grange and others make (Ex. 3) is much more tenuous than the one Redlich draws (Ex. 4).

Example 3 comparison of the finale, mm. 23–24 with Franz Lehár, “Lippen schwiegen” from Act 2 of *Die Lustige Witwe*

Example 3
23
Winds + Strings

Franz Lehár, "Lippen schwiegen" from Act 2 of *Die Lustige Witwe*

Valse

Example 4 comparison of the finale, mm. 53–58 with “Lippen schwiegen” from Act 2 of *Die Lustige Witwe*

Example 4

f *p* *p* *pp* *sf*

Oboe Clarinets a3 Celli

Franz Lehár, "Lippen schwiegen" from Act 2 of *Die Lustige Witwe*

Valse

⁸⁰ The same connection is made by Sponheuer *Logik des Zerfalls*, 368 and Ruzicka, “Befragung des Materials,” 111.

But both can be heard as references to the *Merry Widow*. As La Grange much more recently points out, the passage beginning at m. 31 (based on the passage that begins in m. 23) is similar to the finale from the *Merry Widow* (Ex. 5).

Example 5 comparison of the finale, mm. 31–36 with Lehár, *Die Lustige Witwe*, Act 3 Finale

Example 5

Violin 1
 31
 D-Saite
 immer *ff* und sehr markig

Violin 2
 immer *ff*

Viola
 immer *ff*

Celli
 immer *ff*
 a 2
 unis.
 a 2
 unis.
ff

Bass
ff

Lehár, *Die Lustige Witwe*, Act 3 Finale
f
p
p

There is one caveat, however: the *Merry Widow* did not receive its premiere until the end of 1905, after Mahler had completed the Seventh. It cannot be a reference unless Mahler had had an opportunity to see the score or heard portions of the operetta in some context. No such thing is documented. Nevertheless, it is possible Mahler was aware of it, and moreover, the operetta-like quality of both passages is unmistakable. It was noticed by at least one contemporary of Mahler who, in one sentence, confirms two points I have been

making: that national references can be heard, and that the two tunes just discussed have an operetta-like quality. H. L. Berckenhoff, reflecting on Mahler's music in general and the Seventh in particular notes:

Mahler shows a natural freshness in his choice of thematic materials. It has a very definite national character. He draws his melodies from his surroundings, and it is striking how strongly they sometimes resemble the tunes from Viennese Operetta which stick in our minds.⁸¹

Most importantly, Mahler juxtaposes a thoroughly Germanic reference with an equally thoroughly Viennese reference. Mahler thus observes that both, not one or the other, are integral to Viennese society. Mahler introduces into his heterogeneous mix one of the political issues that rankled the Austrian liberal bourgeoisie—the connection of the Austrian with the German. Though Karl Lueger and the Social Democrats had been in power for almost eight years when Mahler composed the finale, and for almost twelve years when the Seventh received its Vienna premiere, strains of the liberalism that marked the Austrian parliament for much of the late nineteenth century persisted. The crux of the matter occurs when the *Merry Widow* reference comes on the heels of the *Meistersinger* reference. Mahler thus tries to forge a bright, jubilant, potentially heroic statement out of the two competing political and cultural factions of his time—the German and the Austrian.

Other aspects of Austrian/Viennese life are referred to. The opening makes one think of the ridiculous pomp of the emperor, as well as the forced revelry that pervaded the troubled Viennese society. Imagine what the Prague audience might have thought of it, considering the problems in the Austrian parliament concerning the Czechs. In short, it is a noisy, boisterous opening that questions its own cocksuredness.

⁸¹ Quoted in Mitchell, "Reception," 59.

In the following passage, mm. 27–37, Mahler takes material from the introduction and from the m. 23 tune, and melds them into material that will figure prominently into the music to come. For instance, the dotted rhythm from m. 5 is elaborated on and made into a gesture of singular importance (Ex. 6).

Example 6 m. 27 and m. 5

Example 6

Violins

Violins, Violas,

Celli, Bass, Bassoon

Measure 27 *ff* merges into the declamatory two half-note figure in m. 31 *ff* which, rhetorically at least, is related to the first measure of the movement's primary theme (Ex. 7).

Example 7 mm. 31–35 and m. 7

Example 7

Horn in F

Violin I

Strings in octaves

Horn 1 + 3 in F

Horn 2 + 4 in F

Trumpet in B-flat

Such regeneration of motivic material, as will be seen, is fundamental to the encyclopedic ambition of the finale.

The closing gesture, mm. 38–52, combines several introductory gestures with variations on material from the principal theme (m. 7 ff). The ebullience that results from the counterpoint, and a solidly grounded C major tonality, suggest complete certainty. Instead of even teasing the listener with a hint of E minor, the tonic C is uncontested in every way, with the possible exception of the clearly non-harmonic D[#]s in 47–48.⁸²

The opening strives for a sense of inclusiveness. The ad hoc construction, with its myriad motivic and melodic gestures indicates that this movement will be as musically comprehensive as possible. However, it is the trope that emerges from the moment the A^b chord is superimposed on C major in m. 51, that really opens the hermeneutic flood gates.

As uncompromising as C major is once the opening gets underway, A^b is equally so in the following couplet (mm. 53–78). This is one of the most controversial moments in all of Mahler's music. The juxtaposition comments strongly, indeed parodistically, on the nineteenth-century convention of introducing flatted-sixth key areas. The unceremonious interpolation of the new key pulls the rug out from under the ostensible confidence of the opening. In one fell swoop, Mahler negates what now seems like hot air. Furthermore, he does it with a crude, yet simple gesture followed by a tune of clearly lilting ethnic qualities. As I said above, special attention must be paid to the trope that emerges from this intersection. The overblown attempt to project power and profundity is shattered by a puny tune in a key associated more often than not with "...a loss of confidence in the individual's

⁸² An interesting manipulation of the texture occurs in m. 39, where the strings are instructed to play *col legno (mit d. Bog. geschlagen)*. This is a strange effect in light of the prevailing fanfare atmosphere. I performed this symphony recently, and the string section almost to the person was incredulous that that is what Mahler really wanted. It felt very much like the wind was taken out of our sails.

ability to determine his or her own fate....”⁸³ It is as if the overbearing countenance of the opening, a countenance that may be false, is somehow made valid by the onset of something as jarring but ultimately dull as the A^b tune. In other words, the loss of confidence implied by the flatted–sixth area is so radical that, in retrospect, it props up the otherwise potentially false promise of the opening. It is only through such a jarring juxtaposition that we can have any faith at all in the opening. This would be consistent with the kind of self–delusion of many Viennese, indeed many Austrians, c. 1900. Though many looked to the pomp and ceremony of the Hapsburg empire for security and cultural sustenance, few actually believed in its efficacy.

The first large–scale variation occurs in mm 79–119. The section begins with a refrain that recalls, through variation, the *Meistersinger* reference. Most importantly is how the C–major tonal center is grabbed back just as suddenly as it was lost in m. 51. In mm. 87–99, the first variation, Mahler combines four elements: the motives from mm. 5–6 (Ex. 8a), 27–30 (Ex. 8b), 31–34 (Ex. 8c), and the melodic outline of the m. 23 tune (Ex. 8d). He takes something enormous, such as the gesture from m. 23, and transforms it. Though the tune in m. 87 is traced easily to m. 23, it is nevertheless treated as an independent theme in its own right. And though they share the same key and ebullience, the gesture at m. 87 is, for all intent and purpose, brand new. Indeed, its counter melody and the 3/2 meter assure its individuality.

⁸³ Susan McClary, “Pitches, Expression, Ideology: An Exercise in Mediation,” *Enclitic*, 7/1 (Spring 1983): 76–86. See especially p. 82. As McClary points out, however, flatted–sixth areas do not always indicate a loss of confidence, but sometimes signify an act of will.

Example 8a comparison of mm. 87–88 with mm. 5–6

Example 8a

Violin 1
Violin 2
Woodwinds in octaves

87 *nicht eilen*
kurz gestrichen

5 *ff*

Example 8b comparison of mm. 89–93 with mm. 27–30

Example 8b

Violin 1
Violins

89 *sempre f*
pp subito

27 *ff*

Example 8c comparison of mm. 92–95 with mm. 31–36

Example 8c

Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Cello
Bass

90 *Nicht eilen*
p

31 *immer ff* und sehr markig
immer ff
immer ff
immer ff
ff

D-Saite
a 2
unis.
a 2
unis.
ff

Example 8d comparison of mm. 87, 93, 95, and 98 with m. 23

Example 8d

87

93

95

98

23

Variations like these demonstrate the striking individuality of the many musical topics, in spite of the control of a seemingly ever-present motivic unity. On the one hand the refrain and its components struggle fiercely for control. The discontinuities are too powerful, however, and we are struck by the movement's disjointedness. But, the permeations and permutations of the ritornello imply an attempt to tighten the architecture and impose control. No matter how far afield the music goes, it will always return to the status quo—C major and the ritornello. The violence of the juxtapositions, however, argues against the status quo, revealing the contradictions that are at the root of modern society. It is difficult to sustain a heroic stance in the face of such doubt and arbitrary upheaval.

The struggle between focused heroic jubilation and discontinuity that runs throughout this finale is expressed through its musical process. On one hand there is an overt attempt at unity as seen in the opening measures, their relationship with one another, and their motivic impact on the ensuing passages. Also, the ensuing passages share much in common and further enforce the notion of unity. Furthermore, in spite of the disturbing

discontinuities, a trajectory of various musical events can be inferred, which implies that some of the music evolves organically, and also suggests unity. For instance the gesture at m. 186 grows to m. 249 and then ultimately to the passage at m. 368. Also important is the tune at m. 105, which is a mere six measures long.⁸⁴ It is elaborated on considerably in mm. 220–248 as part of the second large variation section. Aspects of it appear in the developmental refrain, mm. 268–306, it is further re-contextualized in mm. 402–438, and it is blown into unforeseen proportions in m. 506 ff before it makes a final appearance in m. 517 ff. It is important to keep in mind that this tune is based on the opening theme in m. 7, and its accompaniment is a continuation of m. 87, which in turn is based on m. 23. And yet, in spite of its organic roots and growth, the m. 105 tune is almost always disruptive. This is one of the central topics of the movement. All attempts made towards homogeneity give sway to heterogeneity. Rather than organicism, it is inclusiveness, however disruptive, that ultimately holds things together. This is the mission of the modern epic.

Every passage in the movement holds both the organic and disruptive within it. In the last passage of this section, mm. 106–119, attempts at unity are made in the following way: m. 106 is based on m. 27, in m. 109 there is an interpolation of the opening timpani motive from m. 1, music from m. 131 ff is incorporated throughout this passage, and m. 116 is based on mm. 5–6. This process argues for *bricolage*—the melding and pasting together of musical elements, rather than organic unity. In this instance, there are pieces of motives that have potential narrative significance, but none of them is allowed to dominate. And, perhaps, that is the point.

⁸⁴ Scherzinger and Floros refer to this tune as the second secondary theme. Scherzinger, “The Finale of Mahler’s Seventh Symphony: A Deconstructive Reading,” 75; Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 207. Both La Grange and Swarowsky hear the tune, though clearly new, as part of the refrain. La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d’une Vie*, v. 2, 1202; Swarowsky, “Mahler: VII. Symphonie,” 156. Regarding the latter, keep in mind that Swarowsky and La Grange hear the variation sections as functioning as refrains.

Furthermore, there is an extraordinary re-contextualization of many of the opening gestures. Whatever narrative potential a gesture had is brought into question, and is subsumed into a contrapuntal and temporal fabric that is very much at odds with its original “heroic” character. Finally, all is disrupted in m. 116, which leads directly into the next refrain.

What is remarkable about this version of the refrain (mm. 120–152) is the way a slower tempo, softer dynamics, and thinner orchestration undercut the strength of the opening, thereby questioning its purpose. This is akin to how the A^b episode (m. 53 ff) undermined the blazing C major opening. This passage is even more striking because it uses the jubilant material against itself.

For example, the crescendo that extends from m. 126 through m. 127, is attenuated by the strange juxtaposition between the two half notes of m. 127 and the delicate short eighth notes in m. 128. Compared with m. 15, the *Meistersinger* has been cut down to size. Such a passage goes beyond mere variation. Indeed, all the varied restatements of the original refrain are striking for how they interrupt the musical flow, and for how they undermine the power of the original presentation. The approach to the traditional rondo form is rendered modern when we consider how the musical gestures are manipulated. For example, the prominent chords in mm. 16 and 18 are inverted in practically every way in mm. 129 and 131. The *Meistersinger* reference is almost concealed.⁸⁵

Particularly odd is Mahler’s instruction in m. 136, *kräftig gestoßen*, with powerful strokes. The dynamic marking, however, is *piano*. Mahler wants the musicians to pull the bow across the string forcefully, but softly. It is a self-contradictory gesture, very much in keeping with the nature of this variation, indeed with the nature of the movement.

⁸⁵ The harmonic contrasts in mm. 130–132 (E–A^b–B^b–C–E) also weaken the *Meistersinger* reference.

The couplet that follows in mm. 153–188 has several distinguishing features. It is, of course much more than a “couplet.” Most of its material, in fact, is based on music from the refrain, specifically mm. 27 and 31. Only the beginning of this section is clearly reminiscent of the first couplet (m. 53), but it is set in A minor, far removed from the original A^b. The music in this section and its process seem out of place, even for a piece such as this. It is surprisingly pedestrian. The banal English horn melody at m. 157, followed by the plodding, almost comical rendition of refrain material first played by the celli in m. 158, and then the metrically displaced answer by the bassoons in m. 161, present a rather ordinary version of what had been very electrifying motives.

We can sense this deflation beginning in m. 147 where the promise of a dramatic cadence is almost immediately diffused. Though the trumpet fanfares in mm. 147–8 return in m. 577 (Ex. 9) and lead to the highpoint of the movement, they are not allowed to progress to that point. They are uttered in mm. 147–8 and quickly forgotten.

Example 9 comparison of trumpet fanfare in mm. 147–148 with m. 577

Example 9

The musical score for Example 9 consists of two main sections. The first section, labeled '147', contains three staves for Trumpet 1 in B-flat, Trumpet 2 in B-flat, and Trumpet 3 in B-flat. Each staff begins with a rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a quarter note (C5), all marked with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The second section, labeled '577', contains two staves for Trumpet in F and Trumpet in B-flat. Both staves begin with a rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a quarter note (C5), also marked with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic.

We get the impression that nothing of importance happens until the next refrain. Only the intrusions in mm. 166, 182, and 186 breathe life into this otherwise dull passage. As if to reinforce the incidental character of the entire passage, a diminuendo leads into the next refrain (m. 188). Considering the events just described, beginning with the trumpet fanfares in m. 147–8 and the nature of the ensuing passage, La Grange is correct to suggest that the finale might be seen in light of the “Joycean notion of ‘stream of consciousness.’”⁸⁶

Moretti sees “stream of consciousness” as a central technique of the modern epic. It is the one technique that truly deals with “the advent of the metropolis (in which) the modern individual is subjected to extremely intense, and perhaps excessive, stimulation.” Moretti maintains that “the stream of consciousness is able to pick up those stimuli, and organize them in a singularly effective way.”⁸⁷

The remainder of the movement, with its increasingly intense discontinuities, bricolage, and sheer noise further suggests that that this movement is Mahler’s attempt at social commentary. Because, in it he tries to express the “extremely intense, and perhaps excessive, stimulation” of his time. Stream of consciousness, encyclopedic ambition, and the contemporaneity of the non–contemporaneous are all used to great effect in the balance of this extraordinary movement.

The next large section, Refrain: Variation II (mm. 189–268) begins a half–step above the movement’s tonic, which immediately heightens the return of the *Meistersinger* part of the refrain. It would seem that most of mm. 189–267 is simply a reference to and elaboration of 79–119:

⁸⁶ La Grange, “Music about Music in Mahler,” 148.

⁸⁷ Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 168.

189–196 (refers to 79–86) D^b — D

197–209 (refers to 87–99) C major

210–219 C major

220–230 (refers to 100 ff) A major

231–240 (refers to 106) A major

241–248: (refers to 106) D^b major

These passages are more than elaboration of previous material. For instance, the passage beginning in m. 220, though it refers to m. 100 ff, is unencumbered by any of the refrain material, thus allowing for the folk-like character to emerge more fully. The nationalist concerns of the refrain are absent. In m. 231 ff the folk tune is infused with gestures from operetta, e.g. the portamento slides in all the strings in mm. 233–6 (Ex. 10).

Example 10 mm. 233–235

Example 10

The image shows a musical score for strings, labeled 'Example 10', covering measures 233 to 235. The score is written for five staves: two treble clefs (Violins I and II) and three bass clefs (Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/8. The music features a melodic line with portamento slides, indicated by a 'v' above the notes and a horizontal line connecting them. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando), *pp* (pianissimo), and *p* (piano). The score is divided into three measures, with the first two measures showing the initial melodic phrase and the third measure showing a variation with a different dynamic.

However, the sudden interpolation of refrain material in m. 239–240 (Ex. 11) quickly expunges any complacency that the lilting, humorous melodies may have suggested.

Example 11 mm. 239–240

Example 11

239

ff

Strings in octaves

Holzschlägel

ff

Timpani

This jolt, however, lasts for only a brief moment, and the folk-tune returns. But it is in D^b major and accompanied by a variation of refrain material. Passages such as mm. 241–245 are noteworthy for their inclusiveness. The bombast of the opening and its variation are transformed into a delicate accompaniment. The competing nationalist identities are in a sense dancing to the same tune, if somewhat awkwardly.

Yet another interruption occurs in m. 246. The remainder of this section mm. 246–268 becomes increasingly hectic, almost chaotic. First, the two half-note motive heard in various guises since the beginning of the movement is finally let loose beginning in m. 249. Also in this section is another example of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, as Mahler refers to Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) (Ex. 12).⁸⁸

⁸⁸ The reference is even more apparent in m. 368 ff.

Example 12 Mozart, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Overture, mm. 9–14

Example 12

The musical score for Example 12, measures 9–14, is presented in a standard orchestral format. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes the woodwinds and percussion: Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets in B-flat (marked *f*); Bass Clarinet in B-flat (marked *mf*); Bassoon (marked *f*); Horns in F, Trumpets in B-flat (marked *mf*); Timpani (marked *mf*); Triangle (marked *mf*); and Cymbal (marked *mf*). The second system includes the strings: Violin 1 (marked *f*), Violin 2 (marked *f*), Viola (marked *f*), and Cello + Bass (marked *f*). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are several trills and triplets indicated in the woodwind and string parts.

Measures 260–267 should dispel any doubt that the finale of the Seventh is a commentary on modern life. This passage is more loaded than its brevity might imply; it produces a sense of controlled chaos. There are two powerful gestures working in tandem: the unison string line, and the unison wind and brass motive. The last of the brass descending motives is a tritone, an extremely important interval in the first movement.

Moreover, it occurs over a half-diminished chord—the opening sonority of the symphony. Mahler sets this dizzying amalgam of references and gestures amidst a kaleidoscopic succession of tonal references to emphasize further the sense of inclusiveness as well as a loss of control.

In Section 3, mm. 268–445, Mahler not only develops the ideas of the previous events, he increasingly ups the ante. The result, rather than jubilation or heroism, is an overexcited, overwrought state of mind. The passage brings to mind the title of Chapter 3 of Moretti’s *The Modern Epic*: “An incredible musical pandemonium”⁸⁹—a phrase drawn from one of the most frequently cited passages in the Mahler bibliography.

The following Sunday, we went on the same walk with Mahler. At the fête on the Kreuzberg, an even worse witches Sabbath was in progress. Not only were innumerable barrel-organs blaring out from the merry-go-rounds, swings, shooting galleries and puppet shows, but a military band and a men’s choral society had established themselves there as well. All these groups, in the same forest clearing, were creating an incredible musical pandemonium without paying the slightest attention to each other. Mahler exclaimed: ‘You hear? That’s polyphony, and that’s where I get it from!’⁹⁰

Moretti invokes this passage as a musical example of “the polyphonic form of the modern West,” the epic, which for Moretti “specializes in the heterogeneous space of the world-system, and must learn to provide a stage for its many different voices.”⁹¹ Furthermore, “in the expanding universe of modernity, many things are as yet unclear; and

⁸⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁰ Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, trans. Dika Newlin, ed. Peter Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 155. Originally published as *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler* (Leipzig: E. P. Tal, 1923), 147.

⁹¹ Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 56–7.

Example 13c trombones, mm. 291–292

Example 13c
291
Trombones



Example 13d horns, mm. 291–295

Example 13d
291
Horns in F



Example 13e trumpets, mm. 295–296

Example 13e
295
2 Trumpets in F



Example 13f violins, mm. 295–296

Example 13f
295
Violin 1
Violin 2



Example 13g violins, mm. 299–300

Example 13g
299
Violin 1



The passage extending from m. 268 through m. 285 dwells on several ideas: the opening timpani motive (mm. 270, 276, 279–280, 283–4), a new tune based on the m. 15 tune (horns in mm. 271–2), the eighth-note variation of the m. 23 tune (strings throughout), and the tune that begins the closing section (m. 38 ff) of the opening refrain (horns and trumpets 276–7). Most striking is that Mahler has taken the meter of the m. 87 variation (3/2) and applied it to this version of the refrain.

On the one hand we have “returned” to the beginning. But, the order of things is completely mixed up, including the keys. In the beginning, E is implied and followed by C, where here C is the initial tonality at the beginning of this passage, followed by an obvious excursion to E beginning in m. 276. This, in turn, is followed by A^b in m. 282. Mahler is suggesting that the hierarchy of these key relationships matters little. The passage is a hodge-podge, and that is the point.

Before leaving this section, it is worth noting the cadential character of the passage in mm. 286–290. The plagal cadence that extends from mm. 286–288 sounds ceremonious and suggests a parody on the overture to *Die Meistersinger*, where, in m. 60, the counterpoint becomes particularly thick and ostentatious. Moreover, the use of the triangle and cymbals, the changes in meter, etc. throughout this refrain resemble those used by Wagner towards the end of the last act of *Die Meistersinger*.

The following Couplet, mm. 307–359, continues with development. Aside from some very brief harmonic inflections, the guiding tonality of the section is clearly G^b major. This section not only elaborates considerably on the couplet idea, it is self-parodying. The passage beginning in m. 335 incorporates flutter tongue in the flutes and the ricochet bowing in the strings to emphasize the point. This passage is also another example of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous. For, as La Grange points out, it bears a

striking similarity to a passage from the fourth movement of Schumann's Second Symphony (Ex. 14).⁹⁴

Example 14 comparison of the finale, mm. 335–339 with Robert Schumann, Symphony no. 2, mvmt 4, mm. 12–22

Example 14

Schumann, Symphony no. 2, mvmt 4, mm. 12-22

The parody actually begins in m. 332, where Mahler indicates *Etwas eilend* (somewhat hurrying). It seems that the promise of comfort in “the folk” is sneered at in this passage by the flippant character of the music. The folk seem as preposterous in their stance as does officialdom as expressed in the opening. This frenetic posture is evident in the harmonic writing (Ex. 15).

Example 15 harmonic analysis of mm. 320–323

Example 15

(E) B^b E^b B⁷ E⁺⁷ A^b D^b A

⁹⁴ La Grange, “Music about Music in Mahler,” 153.

Added to all this is a new tune at m. 332. It is a variation which never returns, and seems designed to highlight the sarcasm of this section. Note also the comical temporal displacement of the cadential V/I figure in the second violins and horns in mm. 333–334 (Ex. 16).

Example 16 mm. 333–334

Example 16

Flute 1 + 2

Flute 3 + 4, Oboes

Horn 1 in F

Violin 1

Violin 2

The eight-bar reprise of the ritornello in mm. 360–367 begins another series of variations. This rendition has a significantly heavier orchestration than its first appearance. Most conductors (the recordings by Simon Rattle and Leonard Bernstein’s last recording of the Seventh, for example) impose a slower, more ponderous tempo on these eight measures.⁹⁵ However, Mahler wrote very clearly that the speed of the passage should be *Tempo I subito*.⁹⁶ This is significant, because the composer has confused the interpreter.

⁹⁵ Mahler, Gustav, *Symphonie No. 7*, City of Birmingham Symphony, Simon Rattle (EMI Classics, CDC 7 543442). *Symphonie No. 7*, New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein (Deutsche Grammophon, D 274296).

The music implies one thing, and the composer's written instruction (*Tempo I*) demands another. The passage seems to offer an anchor, but if it is taken at the speed of the beginning, the anchor is considerably weakened.

Controlled chaos prevails over the section that extends from mm. 368–410. Mahler flirts even more with stream of consciousness, and this section can be described the way Moretti describes Joyce's *Ulysses*.

...the most disturbing feature of Joyce's novel...is an incomprehensible, unstoppable *productivity*...it multiplies discourses, subdivides them, estranges the various viewpoints, until we are given a world *full of culture* — and totally *devoid of wisdom*. It is the new polyphony: the polyphony of the metropolis.⁹⁷

Certainly the onset of the tune at m. 411 and its successive varied restatements through m. 429 speaks to the kind of multiple discourse Moretti describes. This tune, it will be recalled, is the second of two secondary melodies introduced towards the beginning of the movement. It was first heard in m. 105 in the key of C. The first secondary tune, the lilting one in A^b, has not been heard since m. 307 (about half way through the movement) and will not be heard again for the remainder of the movement, save for a motivic reference in the passage that extends from mm. 517–538 (e.g. in m. 520). The dialogue has shifted to only the opening material and the second secondary theme. The viewpoint, so to speak, of the first secondary theme has been estranged in favor of something that was, so it seemed, a mere afterthought.

This passage is constructed of three components: mm. 411–414, mm. 415–421, and mm. 422–429. Several factors make this passage more than a mere repetition. One is the approach to the passage. Another is the pianissimo solo trumpet (played *auf kleinem*

⁹⁶ The indication *Tempo I subito* is in the *Stichvorlage* and both critical editions of the score, although it is not in the fair copy.

⁹⁷ Moretti, *The Modern Epic*, 211.

Piston, like a small cornet) which plays the primary theme at m. 415. This gesture has not appeared before. In the third component (m. 422) Mahler indicates that the tempo should be slower, and that the tune be played *beinahe Menuett*, almost like a minuet. However, the triple meter in this phrase lasts for only two measures, and it soon slips into duple meter when the first theme appears again. It peeks through, very much as an independent agent. And, indeed, it follows its own phrase structure. Furthermore, it is supported by a brief reference to m. 23 in the violas for two measures (mm. 426–7).

The music relaxes even more in mm. 430–438 where the instruction *beinahe Menuett* seems more appropriate than it was in the previous passage. This iteration of the second secondary theme relates directly to the rendition heard beginning in m. 232. But this time (mm. 430–433), the Viennese operetta idea is taken to the limit. In sum, there is something strangely vacuous about this music. It refers to Viennese culture, but the most it can do is parody it.

As if to say that no gesture is safe from complete decontextualization, the wild passage from m. 249 and m. 368 is tamed almost beyond recognition in m. 434. It is simultaneously playful and one of the most serious passages in the movement. For all their wildness, the passages at mm. 249 and 368 meet the challenge of modernity face to face. At m. 434, the passage sounds repressed, almost lobotomized because of the very soft dynamic, and relatively thin orchestration. However, when the stopped horns enter at m. 439, the strength of the movement begins to return.

From here on out, the push and pull of the gestures becomes increasingly more strident. The sudden tonal shift from C major to D^b/C[#] major in m. 443, and the jump to D major in m. 446 is as jarring as anything in this movement and demonstrates forcibly that a solution to the problems set out in this movement will come, if at all, at a very high price.

The passage extending from mm. 439–454 is analogous to mm. 136–148. As I have discussed, many of the gestures in this movement have a trajectory that runs across

the many disjunctions. The motive begun in the violins in m. 136, and then taken up canonically in the horns and trumpets in mm. 140–142, is recalled in mm. 439–445. The latter passage is then taken up, varied, and becomes prominent as a motive in its own right beginning in m. 455. Also, of all the references to the m. 23 gesture, it is not until m. 439 that it returns with the correct rhythmic values and in the right key. But, it is *pianissimo*. The reference in m. 210, played by the second and third oboes is in A minor, and the context is dissimilar enough to make the connection to m. 23 difficult. The trombones have it in m. 291 ff, but it is in A major. The next literal reference is not until m. 554. Of all the references to the m. 23 motive, only two are literal. In sum, though the m. 23 gesture has a trajectory, the context and placement of each iteration suggests that the notions of disjunction and unity will have to co-exist.

A *fantasia* on many of the various topics, including the cyclic return of the first movement's principal theme, begins in m. 446. The key scheme, as with so much of the movement, is ad hoc:

446: D major
455: D minor
462: C# minor
476: C minor
486: B major
492: B^b major
(with a pull to
B major in 500)
506: D^b major
517: C major
533: A^b major
539: C major

The cyclic return in m. 455 of the first movement primary theme is a distinctively nineteenth-century gesture. It is tempting to think that with this gesture Mahler was trying to dig himself out of the modernist hole he spent 444 measures creating. The gesture seems so out of place in the present context, that it alone could have engendered the negative response of the past generation of Mahler scholars. Recall, for example, Mitchell's complaint of a "final display of cyclic conjuring tricks" in the finale.⁹⁸

This cyclic gesture stands out for its incongruity, yet ironically it is consistent with the character of the movement. But the inclusion of the first-movement theme seems to add insult to injury because it sounds as if Mahler is trying to make things right. It is a kind of apologetic gesture, as if to say that all the chaos, paradox, incongruity and sheer noise of much of the previous 444 measures were a mistake at worst, or an experiment at best. The problem with this view, however, is that the sheer amount of music and the obvious effort Mahler invested in the movement argues against the movement as being a mere experiment.

After the initial cyclic return of the first movement's primary theme, the music for a brief time goes completely outside the movement. The two tunes that are juxtaposed in mm. 462–475 are new. The focus has shifted, reinforcing the overall sense of incongruity. For a brief time there is no anchor, except for the familiarity of the first movement, and the accompanying theme is somewhat related to finale material. The shift of key from D minor to C[#] minor in m. 462 adds to the sense of incongruity. Moreover, the passage beginning in m. 471 is quite dissonant, particularly on the downbeat of m. 475 when the trombones enter with the m. 23 motive, and accentuate the dissonant relationship between C[#] minor and C minor. In sum, in spite of the ostensibly unifying cyclic gesture, the finale at this juncture has gone very far afield.

⁹⁸ See note 38.

The two opposing principles that have guided the finale, incongruity and unity (via motivic derivation, variation and repetition) are brought to a fever pitch from m. 476 through to the end of the movement. As Strindberg says of his technique in *A Dream Play* (1901):

Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality the imagination spins, weaving new patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities and improvisations. The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble.⁹⁹

So Mahler does in the balance of the finale. Moreover, as Peter Nicholls points out, Strindberg's description contrasts strongly with the theme of repetition in *A Dream Play*.¹⁰⁰ The same can be said of Mahler's technique.

In spite of the controlling key of C minor in the mm. 476–485, the intense dissonance in this passage threatens collapse. The first-movement theme has to struggle to be heard against the motive played by three oboes, E^b clarinet, three additional clarinets, two horns, violas and cellos. Yet, in a half-hearted nod towards cohesion, Mahler throws in the motive from m. 23, just to keep us grounded (mm. 477–479). It is hardly audible for all the noise that surrounds it—noise, incidentally, that is generated by a motive not heard until m. 455.

Not surprisingly, a startling juxtaposition comes suddenly in mm. 486–491. This passage refers to the one at m. 434, and it has serious implications, considering the context of the passage at m. 434. That passage, which decontextualized previous material, is now itself decontextualized.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Peter Nichols, *Modernisms* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 155.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

The ad hoc key scheme continues with a shift from B major in the above passage to B^b major/minor in mm. 492–506.¹⁰¹ This passage begins a push towards conclusion, but the tonality prevents it from becoming a conclusive gesture. Most notable are the dissonances in m. 500. These dissonances are some of the most egregious in the entire movement. The F/F[#] dissonance in m. 500 is particularly violent, and it is followed by a complex of dissonances from 502–505.

The “weaving (of) new patterns,” the “mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities and improvisations...” gives way to repetition of a kind in mm. 506–516, where most of the prior fifty measures is summarized. It is not, however, mere repetition, and the combination of the first–movement theme with the m. 105 couplet theme results in a particularly violent juxtaposition.

The following passage, mm. 517–538, seems like one too many repetitions. But it is absolutely necessary to the movement’s rhetoric. It is as if Mahler saved the clearest passage for this moment, directly after impending chaos and collapse. And that is the key to this movement: the alternation between clarity and chaos, collapse and structural integrity. Mahler does not stop there, however. The gesture from mm. 267 and 400 is decontextualized and pasted onto this passage as a segue for the final ritornello.

The final refrain, beginning in m. 539 ff, is recapitulatory. Indeed, mm. 556–590 very closely resemble the closing section of the opening. With the glaring shift to E major in m. 573, Mahler attempts to resolve the long range tonal dissonance, first articulated in the first movement, between E and C. Paradoxically, it is used as the last incongruity before the final drive to the tonic and the end of the movement. The first–movement theme serves as the final highpoint of the movement, and the movement ends as the first presentation of the ritornello did, with the glaring exception of the penultimate chord. This

¹⁰¹ This includes a brief shift to B/E beginning in m. 500.

chord can be viewed as a conflation of the C/A^b juxtaposition earlier in the movement, or as a conflation of the C/E dissonance articulated in the first movement, and referred to briefly at the end of the last movement.

The last bars of this movement are glorious and unconvincing at the same time. It is difficult to deny the catharsis delivered by Mahler in these final measures. But, there is a disingenuous side to this catharsis which makes it somehow unsatisfying. Expectations were never allowed to fully take root in our consciousness due to the incongruities of the movement. Though a trajectory can be adduced, it must be ferreted out through an ungainly thicket of violent formal juxtapositions. When the final ritornello does come, it sounds like “a gigantic persiflage of the pompous, turn-of-the-century style”, and thus a fitting close to a movement described by Karl Schumann as “a bizarre summary of orchestral effects not unlike the manner of the American Charles Ives.”¹⁰² Only the sheer weight of the orchestration gives the final gestures support. The catharsis has been tacked on, pro forma, and considering the nature of the movement, and the symphony as a whole, it is a fitting gesture.

¹⁰² Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 207. Both quotations are from Karl Schumann, *Das kleine Gustav Mahler Buch* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1972), 84.