A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF EXPRESSIVE CONTENT IN MAHLER'S NINTH SYMPHONY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis defends the legitimacy of expressive interpretations of music[1] by proposing how critics might reconcile a work's expressive, or extramusical inferences[2], with its autonomous or purely musical substance. It focuses on the music of Gustav Mahler, whose resurgence in popularity in the 1960s owed a great deal to his music's richness in extramusical associations. As one critic observed: "The magnitude and intensity of reactions to Mahler suggests that more is involved than purely musical or aesthetic appreciation."[3]

Amidst this century's skepticism towards matters of expression in music, there has been a tendency to regard a work's extramusical inferences as entirely arbitrary. Rather than examining the musical elements which may have given rise to these inferences, critics have often dismissed them as musically inconsequential. This thesis counters that many of the non–musical inferences that are drawn from Mahler's music actually underscore purely musical properties; hence, expressive interpretations may be regarded as a complementary, not competing method of musical understanding.

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[1] which may be defined as critical discussions of works which draw comparisons between music and various non–musical phenomena such as ideas, emotions, objects and events.

[2] Both *expressive* inferences and *extramusical* inferences may be defined as non–musical information which is achieved through expressive interpretations.

[3] Eva Hoffman, "Mahler for Moderns", *Commentary* 59 (June 1975), 52.

Mahler's Ninth Symphony has been chosen as the focus for this study because it has encouraged some of the most philosophically imaginative interpretations since its posthumous debut in 1912. Three analytically–based interpretations of this work are critically examined based on how convincingly each of them reconciles the work's extramusical inferences with its objective, or purely musical properties. In preparation for this examination, this thesis explores the basic elements common to most theories of musical expression. It adopts a semiotic view of musical expression which argues that there is a musical basis for many extramusical inferences; hence, there is a legitimate place for expressive interpretations in music criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary concern of this thesis is to determine the legitimacy of expressive interpretations of Mahler's Ninth Symphony. The Ninth will serve as a case study for the exploration of a larger question in music criticism: how do absolute works of music relate expressively to extramusical phenomena, and how might this relationship be meaningfully illustrated by the critic? Recently, it has been implied that the expressive interpretations commonly attributed to Mahler's music are arbitrary, and hence incidental additions to the music, with no formal basis whatsoever. Marc. A. Weiner, in a 1987 article entitled "Mahler and America: A Paradigm of Cultural Reception", writes:

> The form that Mahler's popularity has taken proves how little it concerns his music. When examining Mahler's reception in America we may discern *in nuce* an extra-aesthetic response...through which an audience ignores the object of its scrutiny while attending to the ideological image it has invented. [1]

Weiner did not intend his study to be a personal attack against Mahler's music, but rather, a demonstration of what he considers to be "paradigmatic of a widespread response to aesthetic works in the modern world." "When we listen to music," he writes, "we disregard its aesthetic

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[1] Marc. A. Weiner, "Mahler in America: A Paradigm of Cultural Reception," *Modern Austrian Literature* 20: 3/4 (1987): 166.

content in acting out our social consciousness in the process of reception."[2]

This thesis is designed as a challenge to Weiner's view but one that candidly acknowledges the truth of many of his assertions. Although it cannot be denied that extramusical concerns have influenced Mahler's popularity over the years, the music itself has not necessarily been overlooked in the process. Ideologically manufactured or not, the image of Mahler to which listeners respond most is that which is expressed *musically.* Weiner's insistence in attributing Mahler's popularity to solely extramusical factors causes him to overlook the aesthetic impact of the music itself. He claims, for example, that Mahler's popularity increased because listeners "failed to respond to the complexity of his art."[3] Such an argument appears to suggest that when listeners respond to extramusical concerns the music's "true aesthetic content" is necessarily overlooked in the process. In other words, *extramusical* and *purely musical* understanding appear to be mutually exclusive.

This thesis counters that many of the expressive inferences drawn from Mahler's works actually underscore purely musical properties which may be of ultimate concern to the critic. Hence, the expressive content of a work is not only a legitimate subject for discussion, but a particularly valuable one as well; in addition to their formal relationship

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[2]Ibid. 155.

[3]Ibid., 166. Weiner claims that "Mahler's success is not due to a modern audience's response to a sound medium bringing out the subtle spatial complexities of his art, but to the medium providing phantasmagoric aural impressions that actually detract attention from the structure of Mahler's music."

with objective, musical properties, expressive inferences may actually highlight these features for further *musical* examination.

Mahler's Ninth Symphony has been chosen as the focus of this examination for two reasons. First, it is one of Mahler's most abstract works, containing no direct programmatic or textual clues that might influence a listener's interpretation. And second, it has engaged the philosophical imagination of listeners perhaps more than any other symphony. Jack Diether describes the work as "one of the most heartrending utterances in all music," and he adds that "the more knowingly one sets it in relation to the composer's life and other music, the more eloquent it becomes."[4]

Virtually all expressive interpretations of the Ninth hinge on the understanding that Mahler composed it in the knowledge that his days were numbered. Edward Seckerson suggests that "death permeates every fibre of the apocalyptic first movement of the Ninth,"[5] recalling Alban Berg's early description of the music as "permeated by the premonition of death."[6] Other interpretations over the years have relied more blatantly on autobiographical references:

> The first movement of the Ninth...is not of this world any more. This movement is a wonderful symphonic *Kindertotenlied* for [Mahler] himself. A man who is dying says farewell to the beautiful life that has passed him by—when he knows it is too late.[7]

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[4]Jack Diether, "The Expressive Content of Mahler's Ninth Symphony: An Interpretation, *Chord and Discord* 2:10 (1963): 69.

[5]Edward Seckerson, *Mahler: His Life and Times* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1982), 124.

[6]Cited in Michael Kennedy, *Mahler* 2nd ed. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1990), 169.

[7]Theodore Reik, *The Haunting Melody* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982, [rpt, of 1953]), 353.

These kinds of interpretations rely on the assumption that the so-called "meaning" of Mahler's Ninth symphony is inextricably tied to nonmusical (i.e. biographical or psychological) events surrounding the work's composition. Often, they conflate the music's *meaning* with the extramusical *intentions* of the artist, thereby claiming a degree of authority over other expressive interpretations. This thesis will challenge the notion that an artist's personal motivations for composing a piece constitute the work's ultimate meaning or content. By adopting an undeniably formalistic premise, it will be argued that the ultimate meaning of music is, by nature, abstract, or purely musical. Referential, or *extra*musical content, on the other hand, may relate to the music, but only *metaphorically,* not absolutely. Therefore, a measure of a given expressive interpretation's legitimacy or value is not determined by its authoritative appeal to extramusical sources of information, but rather, by its demonstrated relationship with the autonomous structure of the music itself.

Chapter One begins by determining whether or not Mahler's music might accurately be described as autobiographical. It examines Mahler's own statements about composition and then presents a condensed sketch of his life, with an emphasis on determining the extent to which this information is mirrored expressively in his music. Since all extramusical interpretations demand that listeners bring some kind of conceptual information to the music, such a review points to the source of many of the most common assumptions made about Mahler's compositions.

As well, Chapter One attempts to account for the resurgence of interest in the expressive content of Mahler's music which occurred in the 1960s. Without a doubt, Mahler's popularity at this time had a lot to do with the allure of his presumed, extramusical message. By mid-decade, Mahler was hailed as the "first musical existentialist."[8] One writer stated that his symphonies "reach[...] beyond music toward a struggle with existential and religious problems."[9] As Michael Kennedy reflected in 1974, Mahler's music had a peculiar relevance to the concerns and attitudes of modern–day listeners:

> Audiences throughout the world hear in Mahler's music a modern voice which speaks to them in terms they can understand. They recognize that it is a troubled voice, the voice of a man beset by doubts and fears which have nagged at mankind's consciousness but which the dwellers in the second half of the century sometimes seem conceitedly to imagine are exclusively theirs.[10]

While there was indeed a certain degree of generational "conceit" in the attention that 1960 audiences paid to Mahler's music, this should not lead one to assume, as Weiner does, that such enthusiasm reflects exclusively *extramusical* interests. Even when expressive inferences are the focus of attention, it can often be demonstrated that such meanings originate in the work's purely *musical* properties. Quite conceivably, listeners in the 1960s did not place their ideological preoccupations *onto* Mahler's music, but rather, discovered *in* the music something that resonated with their contemporary concerns and attitudes. After all, if Mahler's music failed to give expressive

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[8]Jack Diether, "Mahler's Place in Musical History," *Chord and Discord* 2:10, (1963):167.

[9]Gross, 485.

[10]Kennedy, 1.

support to the types of inferences made in the 1960s, it is doubtful that it could have generated and sustained the level of enthusiasm that it did. To assume otherwise would be to under–estimate the level of sophistication in a listener's aesthetic evaluation of music.

To defend the legitimacy of expressive interpretations as a whole, it must be demonstrated that abstract and referential meaning in music not only exist simultaneously, but actually interrelate. Chapter Two examines how music is linked to emotional and philosophical content. It proposes that expressive meanings are not actually *communicated* by an artwork, but rather, *discovered* by individual listeners based on their interpretive interaction with the music. Such meanings then, are not absolute, but neither are they arbitrary. The chapter concludes by defining the goal of expressive interpretations for today's music criticism, and suggesting the criteria by which existing interpretations might be critically evaluated.

Chapter Three is an application of the aesthetic theory presented in the preceding chapter. While there have been several attempts to infer philosophical meanings from the Ninth, this examination focuses its attention on three interpretations which have attempted to illustrate these ideas through musical analysis. One is by Jack Diether, another by David Holbrook, and the last by David B. Greene.[11] Each is evaluated according to how convincingly its expressive inferences are related to the symphony's specifically musical properties.

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[11]Jack Diether, "The Expressive Content in Mahler's Ninth Symphony: An Interpretation." *Chord and Discord* 2:10 (1963). David Holbrook, *Mahler and the Courage to Be* (London: Vision Press, 1975). David B. Greene, *Mahler: Consciousness and Temporality* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1984).

These particular analyses have been chosen because they all share the contention that the Ninth, in some way, expresses Mahler's existential acceptance of death.[12] Since Mahler's status as the "first musical existentialist" earned him much attention in the 1960s, it would be interesting to determine how successfully such interpretations bear close musical scrutiny.

Absolute musical works such as Mahler's Ninth pose special problems and concerns for critics eager to engage in forms of musical hermeneutics. As an earlier Mahler enthusiast once wrote:

> [Mahler's] music is not program music in the accepted sense; neither is it "absolute" music. Many listeners are either caught off guard by this paradox or, while aware that with Mahler you must read between the lines, are still unwilling to make the effort preferring to fall back upon those symphonists who give them no such problem.[13]

As the above statement suggests, Mahler's music is challenging for contemporary critics because it seems to encourage interpretive efforts that exceed mere discussions of formal structure. In a time which is only recovering from an atmosphere totally suspicious of the expressive component of music, there is an obvious hesitancy on the part of many analysts to shed their positivistic garb. Consequently, as Christopher O. Lewis points out, there has been a "relative dearth" of

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[12]John Macquarrie describes the existential attitude as primarily "concerned with the individual whose quest for authentic selfhood focuses on the meaning of his [or her] personal being." *Existentialism* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), 17.) To the existentialist, finding meaning in life necessitates a direct confrontation with many of the most disconcerting elements of human existence: guilt, alienation, responsibility, and most importantly, one's own finitude. Death in particular, is understood as that which ultimately defines life, for only by coming to terms with death's inevitability, can one attain an awareness of what it really means to be alive.

[13]Warren Storey Smith, "Some Mahlerian Misconceptions," *Chord and Discord* 2:4 (1946): 64.

formal analyses of Mahler's compositions; the bulk of the critical attention paid to them over the years has concentrated upon "either motivic detective work or consideration of the programmatic meaning of the symphonies."[14]

Lewis' own analysis of the Ninth, which first appeared as in Doctoral Dissertation in 1983, was an attempt to address this imbalance, and the attention he paid to Mahler's music is undoubtedly a valued contribution to the existing literature. Nevertheless, this thesis intends to demonstrate that these kinds of purely analytical examinations need not be cast as the complete opposite of those discussions which delve into matters of extramusical interest. In response to the critical examination conducted in Chapter Three, the concluding chapter proposes how critics might embrace the expressive connotations of music in such a way that the *purely* musical is not compromised, but rather, enriched and clarified in the process.

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[14]Christopher Orlo Lewis, *Tonal Coherence in Mahler's Ninth Symphony* (Ann Arbor Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1984), 1.

CHAPTER 1

MAHLER'S MUSIC IN ITS EXTRAMUSICAL CONTEXT

According to Michael Kennedy, Mahler's music "lends itself easily to extramusical analysis;" in fact, he describes it as "among the most autobiographical music ever written."[1] This claim is endorsed by Norman Lebrecht, who claims that no composer "wrote more of himself into his music" than Gustav Mahler. While a number of composers before him dealt with extramusical themes,

> Mahler was the first composer to seek personal spiritual solutions in music...From his earliest symphony, [Mahler] delved into private experiences and traumas—domestic brutality, bereavement, alienation—searching within himself for remedies to the human condition.[2]

In attempts to respond critically to such far–reaching claims about Mahler's music, this chapter will explore his compositions in their extramusical context. It will be demonstrated that there is, in fact, an expressive parallel that can be perceived between Mahler's life and music; and in many respects, it was this quality in particular that attracted the majority of listeners in the 1960s. While earlier audiences reacted negatively to the presumed emotional and philosophical themes of Mahler's compositions, listeners in the 1960s greeted them with renewed

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[1] Michael Kennedy, *Mahler*, 103.

[2] Norman Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1987), ix.

interest and enthusiasm. This new acclaim, however, should be viewed neither as a *mis*understanding nor a *better* understanding of Mahler's music; it was simply a *new* understanding that allowed his compositions to provide unique, musical support to the concerns and attitudes of a new generation of listeners.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL BASIS OF MAHLER'S MUSIC

When the term "autobiographical" is applied to Mahler's music it recognizes emotional, philosophical, and narrative content, for according to Mahler himself, he used composition to express his feelings, ideas and experiences. To his good friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner, Mahler confessed:

> My symphonies contain the inner aspect of my entire life; I have written into them everything that I have experienced and endured. To understand [my] works properly would be to see my life transparently revealed in them.[3]

By this Mahler was not prescribing a "proper" way to understand his music. He was merely suggesting that *if* such an understanding were possible it would reveal highly personal information. All too often, remarks of this kind have been interpreted as *explicit commands* for listeners to search for a direct analogy between Mahler's life and music.[4] But when his statements about composition are

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[3]Natalie Bauer–Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, trans. Dika Newlin, ed. Peter Franklin (London: Faber & Faber Music Ltd., 1980 [Rpt. of 1923]), 30.

[4]Kennedy writes: "To pretend that it [Mahler's music] exists only in terms of musical procedures is to miss an element which Mahler explicitly commanded us to take into account...it is wrong to separate the music from the composer as though it was an isolated activity." 103. Kennedy's insistence that expressive content is a vital component of Mahler's music is not disputed, only his suggestion that Mahler left

examined collectively, his instructions are anything but explicit. Mahler did not exclusively support either the doctrine of absolute music or that of programme music, thus accounting for his apparent inconsistency in presenting programmes with his symphonies. In a letter to the German critic Max Marschalk, Mahler attempted to explain why he had initially given his First Symphony a title and programme, and why he subsequently chose to withdraw them:

> My friends persuaded me to provide some sort of programme notes to make the D Major Symphony easier to understand. So I worked out the title and...explanatory notes retrospectively. My reason for omitting them this time was not only because I think they are quite inadequate—in fact, not even accurate or relevant—but that I have experienced the way the audiences have been set on the wrong track by them. Believe me, even Beethoven's symphonies have their inner programmes, and closer acquaintance with such a work brings understanding of the development of feeling appropriate to the ideas. It will eventually be the same with my works.[5]

It is possible that Mahler's attitude towards programmes in the 1890s affected his appraisal of his intentions a decade earlier. In its original 1889 version, the First appeared as a tone poem in two parts, with each movement bearing an imaginatively descriptive title.[6] Hence, it is doubtful that Mahler conceived the programme entirely "retrospectively". In fact, he showed surprisingly little qualms about

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"explicit" or unquestionable instructions as to how he wished his music to be understood.

[5]From a letter to the critic Max Marschalk dated March 20, 1896, *Gustav Mahler, Selected Letters*, ed., Knud Martner, trans. by Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Keiser and Bill Hopkins (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1979), 177.

[6]Part One consisted of what we presently know as movements One and Two, separated by the discarded "Blumine" movement, while Part Two consisted of the final two movements. Mahler eventually withdrew the programme, but its title, "The Titan", is still mentioned in programme notes accompanying live performances and recordings of the work today.

issuing programmes until about1894, when he politely refused a critic's offer to write programme notes for his First Symphony. He feared that even a musicological description would "confuse a concert audience...by... forcing them to *read* instead of *listen[...]*"[7]

Mahler ended up submitting and retracting programmes until about 1900, at which time he appeared to abandon the idea altogether. Despite his frequently changing attitude however, Mahler's ultimate intentions appeared to remain the same: he wanted his music to be understood and appreciated by listeners. In frustration, Mahler complained to Natalie Bauer–Lechner that: "People have not yet accepted my [musical] language. They have no notion of what I am saying or what I mean."[8] It is quite likely that just as Mahler decided to introduce programmes to promote the understanding of his symphonies, he later withdrew them because they ended up having the opposite effect. As Deryck Cooke explains, Mahler "wanted...to leave the interpretation [of his music] to the 'individual insight of the listener'; finding little insight, he tried to explain in words; finding words taken literally instead of symbolically, he withdrew them."[9]

More than anything else, Mahler appeared to want listeners to approach his works primarily as expressions of emotion. When asked about the meaning of his Second Symphony, he replied:

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[7]From a letter written on May 15, 1894 to Otto Lessmann. Ibid .,151.

[8]Cited in Vera Micznik, *Meaning in Gustav Mahler's Music: A Historical and Analytical Study Focussing on the Ninth Symphony* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1989), 97. This quotation originally appeared in the unedited version of Bauer-Lechner.

[9]Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to His Music* (London: Faber & Faber Music Ltd., 1980), 12.

> I believe I have formulated [the meaning of the Second Symphony] clearly in terms of music...I should regard my work as a complete failure if I felt it necessary to give...even the slightest indication of the emotional trend of the work...In conceiving the work I was never concerned with a detailed description of an *event*, but at most with a *feeling*.[10]

For Mahler, composition was a means of expressing "obscure" or "undefinable feelings": "as long as I can express an experience in words I should never try to put it into music."[11] He explained further: "Although I have given [my symphonies] titles now and then, it is just because I wanted to indicate where emotion should be transformed into imagination."[12] Mahler admitted that, at times, a particular piece of music might exemplify an actual life experience; but more often than not, the experience was not the actual *cause* of the work's composition:

> In various individual passages I often retrospectively see a real event:...[for] the parallelism between life and music may go deeper than one is at present capable of realizing.—However, I am far from requiring everyone to follow me in this. I gladly leave the interpretation of details to each listener's imagination.[13]

All along, Mahler emphasized that he intended his compositions to be appreciated foremost as *music*, and not for what they might signify in extramusical terms. In a letter to Bruno Walter, Mahler declared that extramusical content is, in itself, not to be avoided; but "a *composer* must express himself in [the music] and not a writer, a

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[10]Martner ed., *Mahler's Letters* , 172. From another letter to Marschalk dated 17 December, 1895. (All italics used for emphasis appear in Martner's edition of the letters.)

[11]Ibid., 179.

[12]Cited in Dika Newlin, *Bruckner–Mahler–Schoenberg* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978, [revised ed. of 1947]), 140.

[13]Martner ed., *Mahler's Letters* , 172. This particular citation proves that Mahler never claimed that even *he* had the authoritative interpretation of his music. He seemed to recognize that there are potentially several equally justifiable interpretations of any art work.

philosopher, or a painter."[14] Accordingly, he would have denied that the extramusical meanings or motivations behind his symphonies must be understood in order for them to be valued as music. As he once explained: "[a] real life experience [is] the *reason* for [a] work, and not its content"[15] ; although a composition's meaning may have been motivated by an idea or feeling, once expressed in music, its value becomes self-evident, and its relation to its source of inspiration becomes musically inconsequential.

Nonetheless, Mahler would have undoubtedly scoffed at the idea of separating so-called "purely musical" and "extramusical" content– as if the two were somehow unrelated. For him, music and expressive content were inextricably intertwined:

> Creativity and experience are so intimately linked for me that, if my existence were simply to run on as peacefully as a meadow brook, I don't think that I would ever again be able to write anything worthwhile.[16]

It is difficult to determine the extent to which knowledge *about* Mahler shapes a listener's understanding of his music. Donald Mitchell insists that

> Certain biographical data may actively assist musical understanding, and since understanding is a necessary stage on the way to evaluation, one can claim that such information is, at the very least, a proper study for musical research.[17]

As well, Jack Diether argues that an awareness of Mahler's life might make his music not only more understandable, but more

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[14]Cited in J. McGrath, "The Metamusical Cosmos of Gustav Mahler," *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 126.

[15]Martner ed., *Mahler's Letters* , 179.

[16]Bauer-Lechner, 30.

[17]Donald Mitchell, "Mahler and Freud," *Chord and Discord* 2:8 (1958): 64.

"emotionally compelling". He claims that what is at first *implicit* in the music, becomes *explicit* when set in relation to Mahler's personal experiences.[18] In other words, if put into the proper context, Mahler's music goes from merely *suggesting* extramusical information, to seemingly *expressing* it, thereby accounting for the music's peculiar eloquence to listeners.

It is questionable whether Mahler would have endorsed the translation of his obscure, undefinable feelings in music into explicit accounts of extramusical content. According to his own statements, Mahler appeared to regard composition as a type of *substitute* for verbal expression, so it is unlikely that he would have endorsed explicit, extramusical interpretations when he considered his own attempts to do so to be fundamentally inaccurate and misleading. Nevertheless, the fact that Mahler considered issuing programmatic descriptions at all seems to suggest that he was eager to make his music accessible to a larger audience. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that Mahler would have supported any effort to have his compositions appreciated for *musical* reasons; although he would have objected to interpretations which distract one's attention from the music, he would have no doubt supported interpretations which actually highlight or enhance a work's purely musical content.

The following is a brief summary of Mahler's life that demonstrates how certain features of his life and personality can be linked expressively to his music. Even if such a profile of Mahler's life

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[18]Jack Diether, "The Expressive Content of Mahler's Ninth," 69.

fails to illuminate the music in any direct way, it will no doubt shed a clarifying light on the source of some of the more notorious interpretations made over the years.

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Mahler was born on 7 July, 1860, in a small Bohemian village called Kališt. He was second oldest of fourteen children, seven of whom died in infancy or childhood. According to his wife, Mahler never spoke "an affectionate word about his father "who apparently "gave way to his temper whenever the mood took him...but [Mahler's] love for his mother had the intensity of a fixation."[19]

Based on a series of anecdotes of Mahler's childhood, Deryck Cooke provides a composite sketch of how Mahler might have appeared as a young boy:

> We see a moody, introspective boy, with [a] short spare figure and worried eyes, roaming the countryside and wondering how a world so fresh and beautiful can contain so much cruelty. We see him daydreaming, listening to the fascinating sounds that echo noises of nature, country song and dance, bugle-calls and tattoos from a nearby barracks. All these were later to be woven into his songs and symphonies.[20]

Cooke points to several characteristics that remained a vital part of Mahler's personality as an adult, and it is not surprising that the composer's moodiness is Cooke's first observation. If there was one characteristic that typified Mahler's personality at practically any age it

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[19]Alma Mahler–Werfel, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, 4th ed. with additional notes and commentaries, ed. Donald Mitchell and Knud Martner (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1990 1st. English ed. 1946), 8.

[20]Cooke, 7.

was his capacity for wild mood swings. Natalie Bauer-Lechner recalls an incident from her diary:

> Coming to fetch me at a friend's [Mahler] rushed into the house like a whirlwind. He talked brilliantly, in the most exuberant mood, and swept everyone off their feet with his high spirits and sparkling merriment. But after a short time—who knows what had come into his head!—he suddenly fell silent as the grave, sat there lost in his own thoughts, and uttered not another word until we left.[21]

Mahler's "whirlwind succession of mood-changes," as Bauer-Lechner describes them, put "his relationships with those nearest to him at the mercy of [his] unpredictability."[22] It is not difficult to hear the same emotional volatility in his compositions. One of the most pronounced characteristics of a Mahler symphony is the juxtaposition of contradictory moods. As Guido Adler observes: in each of Mahler's symphonies "an almost bewildering multitude of countenances alternate with, and push against, one another..."[23] A musical example that comes to mind is the rapid shift from the major mode to the minor, which is considered a veritable trade–mark of Mahler's musical style. As Diether explains, this expressive device was reported by those who knew him "to mirror so uncannily the sudden clouding over of his features after he had made a cheerful remark."[24]

An encounter with Sigmund Freud late in his life made Mahler aware of a possible psychoanalytic explanation for these mood swings—at least in so far as they are expressed in his music. Apparently, when

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[21]Bauer-Lechner, 81.

[22]Ibid., 54.

[23]Guido Adler, *Gustav Mahler and Guido Adler: Records of a Friendship*, Edward, R. Reilly, ed., (Cambridge: 1982), 69.

[24]Diether, 76.

Mahler was quite young he was witness to an "especially painful scene" between his parents. (We are left to assume that Mahler's father had been beating his mother at the time.) According to Freud's own recollection:

> [The incident] became quite unbearable to [Mahler], who rushed away from the house. At that moment, however, a hurdy-gurdy in the street was grinding out the popular Viennese air *[Ach] du lieber Augustin.* In Mahler's opinion the conjunction of high tragedy and light amusement was from then on inextricably fixed in his mind, and the one mood inevitably brought the other with it.[25]

Mahler's moodiness might have been symptomatic of a dual nature which pervaded practically every area of his life, most noticeably his music. His first composition, which he wrote at age six, was entitled "Polka Introduced by a Funeral March".[26] How prophetic this title was of the expressive duality that would eventually typify his art! For Mahler was as much at home writing a gentle *Ländler* or a whimsical *scherzo* as he was composing a brooding funeral march or a terrifying *rondo burlesque*.

In many ways, Mahler's personal life encouraged his dual nature because it demanded that he adapt from one extreme to another. He never enjoyed the luxury of being able to devote his career entirely to composition, something which he apparently regretted deeply.[27] During his entire adult life, Mahler spent three seasons out of every year as a conductor at some of the most prestigious musical posts in the world.

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[25]Cited in Kennedy, 4. (Originally appearing in Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, Vol. II (1955), 89.

[26]Lebrecht, 7. This letter originally appeared in the unedited version of Bauer-Lechner's *Recollections*.... (1923).

[27]Bruno Walter recalls: "Mahler...said with one of his particular expressions of hidden sorrow: 'Do you not know that I am really a composer?'" Lebrecht, 81.

From 1897 to 1907 he was the musical director at the Vienna State Opera, and from 1908 to his death in 1911, he held similar posts at both the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic in New York City. Only in his summers could Mahler completely devote himself to his art. During this time, he locked himself away in his "composing hut" in the Austrian country-side, interrupting himself only to take a swim, a bicycle ride, or a brisk, up–hill hike.

With the end of every summer, Mahler needed to make a transition from the simple, rustic life he enjoyed in the country to the fast-paced, cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city. Ernst Decsey reports Mahler confessing great optimism during the summers when he composed: "I get such pleasure from the world! How beautiful [it] is!"[28] While in Vienna however, Bruno Walter describes Mahler assessing life quite differently:

> What grim darkness underlies life!...To what purpose is all this toil and suffering? How can cruelty and evil be the work of a loving God? Will death at last reveal the meaning of life?[29]

Anna von Mildenburg, who was at one time rumoured to be engaged to Mahler, describes both his optimism and pessimism as characteristically introspective and intense:

> [His typical] serenity always gave way to reflection and serious, pensive contemplation, [and] an awareness of God's wisdom, will and wonder. He always felt the miracle and mystery...with a touchingly childlike astonishment. He could not understand Man's indifference to those wondrous acts of nature. How joyful...happy, [and]...grateful he could

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[28]Lebrecht, 252. (Toblach, 1909 when Mahler was at work on his Ninth.)

[29]Cited in Cooke, 9. (The exact circumstances of this quotation are not known, but it is considered typical of Mahler's deep, and at times, despairing concern for humanity.)

> be when he infected someone else with his enthusiasm, an enthusiasm for nature...art...[and] all that was beautiful and genuine. But too often he wrestled in vain, squandering his best efforts.[30]

By all accounts, Mahler was an intellectual. As Adler described, his philosophical interests revealed him as "neither a complete pessimist nor total optimist":

> He read Schopenhauer and Nietzsche with partiality...and buried himself in Dostoevsky's works. From youth he was familiar with the classics of world literature; in later years Goethe was closest to him; in his youth he was especially fond of E. T. A. Hoffmann...and also Hölderlin and Jean Paul, whose *Titan* gave the First Symphony its poetic accompaniment and at first even its title.[31]

The influence of Dostoevsky cannot be overestimated. Mahler spoke passionately about his favourite author, and even suggested to Schoenberg that he have his students read Dostoevsky's novels because he claimed they were "more important than counterpoint!"[32] The author's philosophy permeated virtually every area of Mahler's life, making him acutely aware of his moral responsibility to other human beings. He grew frustrated with the ambivalence and lack of concern he perceived in European society, because for Mahler, the "whole world concerned [him]."[33] As Alma reflected in her memoirs: "He [Mahler] set to music Dostoevsky's question to life: 'How can I be happy when somewhere another creature suffers?'"[34] With knowledge such as this

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[30]Lebrecht, 91.

[31]Adler, 37. Both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are early considered proponents of what is loosely defined as existentialism.

[32]Lebrecht, 220. (Quoted from *The Life and Work of Alban Berg*, trans. Cornelius Cardew (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 31-32.

[33]Ibid., 252.

[34]Ibid., 317. Originally appearing in the Introduction to Mahler's letters, *Gustav Mahler Brief, 1879-1911*, ed. Alma Maria Mahler (Werfel) (Berlin and Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1924), xiii-xiv.

about the composer, it is no wonder that enthusiasts of Mahler's music heard in his compositions the struggle to acquire existential solutions to the spiritual problems of life.

Mahler's characteristic self–absorption and reflection needed to be finely balanced with the more assertive qualities required by his responsibilities at the theatre. As a conductor, Mahler earned himself a formidable reputation. As Wilhelm Kienzel recalls:

> The orchestral players feared him because in artistic matters he made no concessions whatever and, in his unwearying diligence at rehearsals, was as reckless with his musicians as he was with himself. He would not suffer sloppiness, nor let the slightest fault pass.[35]

Away from the theatre, Mahler was a loyal friend and supporter of the more progressive artists of his day, including Arnold Schoenberg. Mahler publicly endorsed the younger composer's music, even though he was warned that doing so might jeopardize his own position with the Viennese public.[36] He admitted privately, however: "I don't understand his music, but he's young and perhaps he's right. I am old, and I dare say my ear is not sensitive enough."[37] Mahler's acceptance of Schoenberg's progressive tendencies revealed an open–mindedness and courage that was rare amongst people in his position.

Mahler's heart, nonetheless, was with more traditional music. He kept Bach's *Well–Tempered Clavier*, and Beethoven's Thirty-Two Piano

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[35]Ibid., 60. Kienzl was a contemporary of Mahler's who composed operas.

[36]Henry Raynor, *Mahler* (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1975), 32. Guido Adler reportedly urged Alma to discourage her husband from "endangering his precarious position in Vienna by supporting so scandalous a work [as Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony*]". (The year was 1907 when an anti-Mahler campaign had begun to pose a real threat to Mahler's position in Vienna.)

[37]Ibid., 32.

Sonatas at his keyboard whenever he composed; he spent his own money to have Bruckner's symphonies published; and interestingly, the last thing he was reported to have said before he died was "Mozart". His own music has been described as both traditional and progressive, the two tendencies appearing either simultaneously or in juxtaposition with each other within a single work. For example, the second movement of Mahler's Ninth features a folk-inspired *Ländler*, but its treatment is decidedly novel. Vera Micznik points to the "modernistic-multidimensional quality of the movement [which] depends on the interaction of various processive layers," and describes this movement as "one of the most modernist movements Mahler ever wrote."[38]

It was Mahler's marriage to Alma Schindler in March of 1902 that brought him into contact with the progressive artists of his day.[39] Alma, who was nearly twenty years younger than Mahler, was a spirited and highly educated woman, and herself a proficient Lieder composer who studied with Zemlinksy.[40]

Within their first year of marriage, Alma gave birth to Maria Anna, affectionately known as "Putzi." Their second daughter, Anna Justine, was born less than two years later. By all accounts, the first

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[38]Micznik, 307, and 252. She writes: Mahler's music is intrinsically related to the past, but at the same time it violates the tradition from which it comes, by appropriating ideas from the present. This dialectic pervades his works, but it is more powerful than ever in the second movement of the Ninth Symphony. For the most important ideas of this movement can be defined only in terms of their relation to pastness and presentness." 252–53.

[39]including Alexander von Zemlinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Anton Webern, and Secession artists Gustav Klimt, Carl Moll, and Alfred Roller.

[40]According to Alma's memoirs, before marrying Mahler, she had to agree to give up composition and dedicate herself entirely to his creative efforts. After a crisis in their marriage years later, she subsequently resumed composing with Mahler's encouragement. (This will be discussed in more detail below.)

five years of their marriage were happy ones. Summers were spent in Maiernigg on the Wörthersee, just outside of Klagenfurt, Austria, where Mahler composed his Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, as well as several Lieder based on poems by Friederich Rückert. Alma admitted being uneasy with the idea of Mahler finishing his *Kindertotenlieder*[41], because she felt that the father of two healthy young girls was merely "tempting Providence" by dealing with such a grim topic.[42]

Tragically, just three years later (in the summer of 1907) their eldest daughter died of scarlet fever complicated by diphtheria. Suddenly Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* acquired the hauntingly prophetic reputation it holds today. It has since been assumed that this work reveals Mahler's obsession with death, an interpretation which stemmed in part from ignorance of Mahler's real motivations for setting Rückert's poems to music.[43] Mahler was not morbidly anticipating the death of his daughter. He was merely sympathizing with the pain of a parent who had lost a child, a pain that is so clearly and eloquently portrayed in Rückert's poems. It has often even been suggested that Mahler was identifying with his own parents' grief after having lost seven children to childhood illnesses. On a more personal level, his favourite brother Ernst died when Mahler was fourteen, and Mahler was reported to have

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[41]Literally, "Songs on the Death of Children." Mahler had begun the song cycle in 1901, setting to music three of Rückert's poems about the death of his (Rückert's) own children. He resumed composition in the summer of 1904, and the five songs of the cycle received their debut in 1905.

[42]Mahler–Werfel, 70.

[43]Max Graf wrote of Mahler in 1947: "To what extent Mahler was imbued with morbid thought is proved by his "Kindertotenlieder", which he composed even before his own child died..." *From Beethoven to Shostakovich...*, 135.

grieved his death intensely. Perhaps his decision to set Rückert's poems to music reveals less of an obsession than a desire to work through unresolved feelings about death.

In addition to the *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler's Sixth Symphony has also been considered prophetic in nature. Mahler described the last movement as depicting "three blows of fate, the last of which fells [the hero] as a tree is felled." Alma claimed in her memoirs that in the Sixth, "[Mahler] anticipated his own life in his music. On him too fell three blows of fate, and the last felled him."[44]

The death of his eldest daughter was one of these "blows". Another occurred around the same time: Mahler was diagnosed by the attending physician as having a serious heart condition. Alma fatefully recalled that "this verdict marked the beginning of the end of Mahler."[45] Once a robust lover of physical activity, and a man accustomed to the strain and pressure of a conducting career, Mahler's entire lifestyle was turned upside-down. To make matters worse, he was about to embark on a new career with the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York City, and this would undoubtedly demand tremendous dedication and energy as he adjusted to life in America.

Mahler's relocation to the United States was prompted by an earlier crisis that year—the first of the three "fateful blows" that was

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[44]Mahler–Werfel, 70.

[45]Ibid., 122. Henri Louis de la Grange has produced new evidence that Mahler's diagnosis was really no more than a heart murmur. As Vera Micznik writes, "It is La Grange's suspicion that Alma exaggerated her husband's physical and psychological decline in order to justify in the eyes of the world her on-going affair with Walter Gropius." "Is Mahler's Music Autobiographical?" *Revue Mahler Review* 1: (2nd Semester 1987), 51. Even if La Grange's speculation is true, there is ample evidence that Mahler himself interpreted the diagnosis as life–threatening and behaved accordingly.

believed to have contributed to his premature death. As a result of a scathing press campaign, Mahler was forced to resign from his conducting post in Vienna. The movement against him was motivated largely by anti-Semitism. Although baptized in 1897, Mahler never denied his Jewish heritage. His decision to convert to Catholicism resulted "from an instinct of self-preservation," as he put it; he later confessed that it cost him "a great deal."[46] Mahler described profound feelings of alienation while in Vienna: "I'm thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans and as a Jew throughout all the world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcomed."[47]

His religious beliefs are hard to pin down. Mahler's father was a self-professed "free thinker", but his mother was "unquestionably devout". As Norman Lebrecht describes:

> The hypersensitive Gustav was raised therefore amid a domestic dichotomy of religious observance and sensual amorality, simple faith and sordid hypocrisy. Small wonder that he acquired a scepticism for established religion while retaining his mother's unwavering belief in an all-powerful deity.[48]

He was drawn to aspects of Christian mysticism. Alma reports that "he could not pass by a church without going in; he loved the smell of incense and Gregorian chants."[49] His interest in Chinese poetry and philosophy was given creative expression in *Das Lied von der Erde* ,which

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[46]Lebrecht, xxi. Mahler wanted to clear his pathway to the Vienna State Opera, and Jews were not allowed to hold court appointments at the time. Apparently, consenting to baptism fulfilled the State requirement, thus enabling him to accept the appointment.

[47]Cited in Kennedy, 2.

[48]Lebrecht, xix.

[49]Mahler–Werfel, 101.

he composed in 1908. Overall, Mahler's religious beliefs can be described as eclectic, like every other part of his life. As Richard Sprecht recalls:

> That Mahler was devout and religious to the core is certain, but related to each religion merely as legend and belonged to no community, not even to the Buddhists or pantheists. When I once asked him about it and wanted to know his religious confession, he looked at me seriously and said: "I am a musician. All else is contained in that."[50]

Despite acquiring one of the most prestigious and influential musical positions in the world, Mahler experienced frequent feelings of alienation and despair which are aptly expressed in one of his lieder based on Rückert's poem "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen"; Mahler once confessed to Bauer–Lechner that this poem expressed his "very self".[51] It is untrue, however, that Mahler renounced life, and sought death towards the end of his life. An example of this all too familiar assumption can be found in a 1947 text by Max Graf: "One can safely say that the thought of death that crystalized into such a variety of symphonic shapes in Mahler was the greatest reality in his emotional life."[52] Graf's tragic depiction of Mahler as obsessed with death not only misrepresents his personality, but his music as well.

As explained earlier, Mahler's moods varied considerably from one moment to the next, sometimes changing so rapidly that they dazzled those around him. Alma reports, however, that towards the end of his life, Mahler actually became *less* moody and depressed. As she put it, "It was only in the last years of his life, when excess of suffering had

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[50]Lebrecht, 185.
[51]Bauer-Lechner, 174. The English translation is "I am lost to the World."
[52]Graf, 136.

taught him the meaning of joy, that his natural gaiety broke through the clouds."[53]

In the summer of 1909, while composing his Ninth Symphony, Mahler conveyed a profound peace and joy in a letter to Bruno Walter:

> I see everything in such a new light...I am thirstier for life than ever before and find the "habit of existence" sweeter than ever...How absurd it is to let oneself be submerged in the brutal whirlpool of life...Strange! When I hear music—even while I am conducting—I hear quite specific answers to all my questions—and am completely clear and certain. Or rather, I feel distinctly that they are not questions at all.[54]

Mahler's letter sounds as if he had acquired a lasting peace—not through an *absence* of pain, but almost *in spite of* pain. Mahler still referred to life as a "brutal whirlpool", but somehow he was no longer "submerged" in it. It will be demonstrated further on that it was this kind of clarification of Mahler's image that contributed to a new reception in his music in the 1960s. Modern audiences identified in his music the same bitter irony as that present in the existential attitude, that only through suffering and pain can human beings truly understand what it means to be alive and free.

Much has been made about Mahler's apparent reluctance to write a "Ninth" symphony because of a superstitious fear that, like so many composers before him,[55] he might not live to exceed nine symphonies. Alma recalls in her memoirs that Mahler felt he had out-smarted fate by refusing to give the designation of "ninth" to *Das Lied von der Erde*. According to him, this was his *real* Ninth Symphony. By

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[53]Mahler, 120.
[54]Martner ed., 329.
[55]Such as Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner, Spohr, and Dvořák..

the time his next work was completed, Mahler felt he had removed himself from the threat, because as he put it, this symphony was "actually his Tenth", and not the fated "Ninth".[56]

It is quite doubtful that Mahler was as superstitious as this tale makes him appear. If he had not been diagnosed with a fatal disease, it is unlikely that he would have given the composition of a Ninth Symphony a second thought. But the fact that he knew his days were numbered undoubtedly made him more sensitive to the topic of death. This is no reason to suggest, however, that he was neurotically obsessed with the subject. As Theodore Reik points out, "the recognition of his heart disease gave Mahler's fear a reality basis which provided the resonance to his superstitious fear."[57]

It was probably Arnold Schoenberg who exaggerated the significance of the superstition by bringing it to the world's attention in a famous essay he wrote after Mahler's death:

> It seems that the Ninth is the limit. He who wants to go beyond it has to leave. [It's as if] those who had written a Ninth Symphony were too close to the Beyond.[58]

Schoenberg's theory is utter nonsense. He ignores the fact that many composers have exceeded nine symphonies, and capitalizes on a romanticized view of creative artists that, frankly, alienates us from them as human beings and distorts our perceptions of their art-works. As Burnett James concludes, the whole superstition that surrounds

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[56]Mahler, 115.
[57]Theodore Reik, *The Haunting Melody*, 352.
[58]Cited in ibid., 351.

Mahler's Ninth Symphony "is one of the sentimental legends that is best forgotten: it has done enough mischief already."[59]

Another feature of Mahler's biography which has done similar mischief is Mahler's consultation with Sigmund Freud. The visit took place in the summer of 1910. Donald Mitchell describes the circumstances around their meeting:

> Mahler became seriously alarmed about his relationship with his wife. He was advised to consult Freud...was given an appointment [and] cancelled it...no less that three times. Finally the meeting took place in Leyden, Holland, towards the end of August. The two men met in a hotel, and then...spent four hours strolling around the town and conducting a sort of analysis".[60]

As Mitchell's account suggests, Mahler's meeting with Freud was hardly a formal psychoanalytic session. Theodore Reik remarks on the "unorthodox way of having a single psychoanalytic session which lasts a whole afternoon," but he concludes that "extraordinary situations and circumstances (as well as extraordinary personalities) demand extraordinary measures."[61]

In some respects, their encounter was rather like a mutually stimulating meeting of minds. Freud admitted that from his discussion with Mahler, he "had plenty of opportunity to admire [his] capability for psychological understanding;" and he described Mahler as "a man of genius."[62] In addition to the "hurdy-gurdy" story recounted earlier,

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[59]Burnett James, *The Music of Gustav Mahler* (London: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), 148.

[60]Mitchell, 65.

[61]Reik, 344. (It should be pointed out that Reik was himself a psychoanalyst in Vienna just a generation after Freud.)

[62]Ibid., 343. This is a quotation from a letter Freud himself sent to Reik recounting his session with Mahler.

Freud diagnosed a "Holy Mary complex" (mother fixation) and suggested that Mahler subconsciously willed Alma to be like his mother.[63] This inevitably affected their relationship, resulting in what we are led to believe was sexual impotence on Mahler's part.[64]

Apparently, Freud seemed to have a positive impact on Mahler, for he left Holland in good spirits and returned to Alma with a new awareness of, and sensitivity to, her emotional and sexual needs. He encouraged her to pursue composition again, and initiated the publication of many existing songs. "God, how blind and selfish I was...!" Mahler was reported to have said while examining her Lieder.[65]

Despite Freud's success, however, the significance of Mahler's meeting with him has often been greatly distorted in the literature. One of the most glaring inaccuracies came from Theodore Reik's pen. He points to four lines of poetry that Mahler wrote himself, and inserted into his last song of *Das Lied von der Erde*. He claims that these are "another echo" of his conversation with Freud[66] How could Freud have possibly influenced the production of a work which was complete in 1908 when he did not meet Mahler until 1910? In actual fact, Freud had no influence whatsoever on Mahler's creative output because Mahler did not compose a single note of music after his visit with him. The Tenth Symphony, which he had begun that summer, remained as a detailed

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[63]Alma recalls: "[Mahler's] first impulse was to change my name to Marie [his mother's name]...And...wanted my face to be more "stricken"—his very word." 175.

[64]Corroboration for this theory can be found in Freud's letter to Theodore Reik, dated 1935. According to him, Mahler had "withdrawn his libido from [Alma]", causing her to pursue sexual interests outside their marriage. (Cited in Reik, p. 343.)

[65]Mahler–Werfel, 176.

[66]Reik, 342.

sketch after his death, still containing the scrawled messages of the emotional turmoil that initiated his visit with Freud in the first place.[67]

Mahler's marital crisis, which has thus far only been implied, took place earlier in the summer when he discovered a love–letter from Walter Gropius, designed for Alma, but addressed to "Herr Direktor Mahler."[68] Alma had met the famous young architect at a sanatorium where she was recovering from a type of nervous exhaustion.[69] Upon being confronted with the letter, Alma confessed her dissatisfaction in the marriage. Mahler insisted that Gropius come to the house so that Alma could make a choice between the two of them face to face. Alma apparently chose to stay with Mahler, but it is highly suspected that she continued her affair with Gropius behind Mahler's back.

After this eventful summer Mahler spent the autumn arranging two performances of his Eighth Symphony in Munich. Early in 1911, while conducting in New York City, Mahler was stricken with a severe streptococcal blood infection. After a failed attempt to receive treatment in Paris, Mahler returned to Vienna and died on the 18th of May that year.

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[67]Scrawled across the sketches were several exclamations including: "Oh God, Oh God! Why has thou forsaken me?" "Thy will be done!" "Farewell my lyre!" "To live for you, to die for you Almschi!..." Once thought to refer to Mahler's concern for his ailing health, these exclamations are today, widely believed to reflect his despair upon learning about Alma's affair with Gropius.

[68]See Mahler–Werfel, 172. Apparently, Gropius insisted that his addressing the letter to Mahler was simply a mistake; but Mahler himself believed that Gropius was requesting him to allow Alma to leave their marriage and become Gropius' wife. Incidentally, Alma did eventually marry Gropius in 1915. The marriage ended in 1918, at which time she beared the short–lived child of Franz Werfel whom she did not marry until 1929.

[69]Exact condition unknown. Alma's memoirs are vague, and she deliberately distorts the extent of her involvement with Gropius.

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MAHLER'S MUSIC: AN OVERVIEW

Mahler's personality, which was dominated by a pervading duality, found a unique, if not idiosyncratic, expression in his music. It should come as no surprise then, that succeeding generations of music enthusiasts considered his compositions to be somewhat of a critical dilemma.

Contemporary responses to his works were heavily influenced by the absolute-versus-programme music debate which raged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As previously explained, Mahler's music resisted being rigidly categorized, falling somewhere between the respective poles of "absolute music" and "programme music". As a result, his compositions were unwittingly used to bolster critical positions on both sides of the argument. For example, one Viennese music critic, Arthur Seidl, hailed Mahler as a proponent of programme music. He published a letter that Mahler had written to him comparing his own music to that of his friend and colleague Richard Strauss: "My music," Mahler wrote, "*generates* a program as a final elucidation, whereas with Richard Strauss the program is a set task."[70] The context in which Seidl used Mahler's statement obviously distorted the composer's views, for Mahler later complained to Bauer-Lechner that the comparison he had made between himself and Strauss had won for him unwanted attention: "They've taken me at my word and now consider me an ardent advocate

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[70]Cited in Martner ed., *Mahler's Letters*, 212.

of Strauss and that program music which I've had to fight fiercely and openly."[71]

The extent to which Mahler's music has been considered explicitly autobiographical over the years has owed a great deal to critics like Seidl who claimed that it expressed more than just *general* emotions, but *specific* feelings, ideas and life experiences.[72] However, other critics, such a Max Graf, refrained from issuing specific autobiographical statements. As Micznik observes, Graf, "makes no attempt to connect a particular life experience with a particular musical event, but rather, uses...vague, general, indefinite symbols...those of the anonymous hero's struggles and passions."[73] A similar approach was taken by Mahler's first important biographer, Ludwig Schiedermair.[74] Schiedermair engaged in regular correspondence with Mahler, and made it his mandate to defend Mahler's music against the charge that it was programmatically inspired. His interpretations were more analytical, making them some of the earliest attempts to reconcile the music's objective musical properties with its extramusical content. They failed,

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[71]Cited in Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler* (English). vol. i. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), 596. The letter was published some time around 1900 and shows how fervently Mahler opposed the use of programmes after two decades of indecision on the topic.

[72]Recall Theodore Reik's description of the Ninth as Mahler's "farewell to the beautiful life that has passed him by when he knows its too late." (Introduction, 3)

[73]Micznik, p. 54. Micznik refers to Graf's essay *Wagner-Probleme und Andere Studien* (Vienna: Viener Verlag, 1900). As pointed out earlier however, Graf's criticism of Mahler, still promoted an unfairly tragic view of the composer as unnecessarily fixated on the topic of death.

[74]His *Gustav Mahler, Eine biographisch-kritische Würdigung* was published in Leipzig in 1901. He also published several articles in *Die Musik*.

however, to meet Mahler's complete approval, for he once described them as "insipid and totally lacking intelligence."[75]

Another dichotomy into which Mahler's music falls is that of progressive–versus–traditional music. As explained earlier, Mahler's music has been described as having both modern and reactionary tendencies. Among his most ardent supporters were composers from the *New Viennese School* (Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern), causing his music to be drawn into discussions about the disintegration of tonality, and other progressive musical tendencies. To some, Mahler's music is considered to have anticipated the serial techniques of Schoenberg; to others, he was rooted in the nineteenth century, and remained a romantic all of his life. Both statements are true—to an extent.

Because of the characteristic duality inherent in Mahler's personality and compositional output, attempts early in the century to polemicize his music actually served to obscure it. As a result, many of Mahler's supporters unwittingly undermined their own efforts to win his music popularity. An example is Richard Sprecht, who twice published monographs about Mahler (1905 and 1913).[76] In the 1913 edition in particular, Sprecht depicts Mahler as a type of creative martyr. As Micznik points out, Sprecht's interpretations of Mahler's music make every attempt to "reinforce the idea of 'tragedy'...[he] distorts the composer's words by applying to musical analysis statements made in a

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[75]Cited in Micznik, 61 notes. Mahler apparently did not like Schiedelmair's expressive interpretation of the First Symphony.

[76]*Gustav Mahler* in *Moderne Essays*, Dr. Hans Landberg editor, Heft 52 (Berlin: Gose und Tetzlaff, 1905), and *Gustav Mahler* (Berlin and Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, 1913). The 1913 account is a drastically revised version of the 1905 edition that had won Mahler's approval.

different context...[As a result, his] new biographical–programmatic interpretation of the symphony reflects neither Mahler's beliefs, nor the content of the music."[77]

A similar attitude was adopted by Arnold Schoenberg who insisted on depicting Mahler as a martyr/saint. Just after Mahler died in 1911, Schoenberg lashed out against his critics, practically accusing them of being responsible for his death:

> Gustav Mahler was a saint. Anyone who knew him even slightly must have had that feeling. Perhaps only a few understood it...They have martyred him. They carried things so far that this great man doubted his own work...Rarely has anyone been so badly treated by the world; nobody, perhaps, worse...[78]

Alma Mahler herself painted an unfairly bleak picture of Mahler's personality. She portrayed him in her memoirs as highly superstitious, neurotic, prematurely old and feeble, perhaps, as Norman Lebrecht suggests, to "excuse her marital infidelities."[79] Her third husband, Franz Werfel, obviously influenced by his wife, described Mahler's *music* as veiled in perpetual gloom:

> Mahler's music is tragic music. Truly Man does lie in direst need. He yearns to fill the short span of life between waking and sleeping with superficial enjoyment...The titanic effort to which man is condemned is portrayed in many movements of Mahler's symphonies.[80]

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[77]Micznik, 71–72.

[78]Lebrecht, 315. Reprinted from "Gustav Mahler", *Der Merker*, vol 3/5 (Mahler–Heft, March 1912). Lebrecht suggests that Schoenberg's unqualified praise of Mahler "was founded on guilt feelings for having shown him insufficient respect" while he was alive. (Lebrecht, xv, notes.)

[79]Ibid., xiii. Lebrecht insists that Alma "deliberately misleads too often for her book [*Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters* (1924)], compulsively readable though it remains, to be used as the principle basis for considering Mahler's character."

[80]Franz Werfel, "Gustav Mahler," *Chord and Discord* 2:4 (1946), 49.

This persistence to view Mahler and his music as uniformly tragic in its conception can still be found in more recent scholarship. Even as late as 1975, one critic suggested that Mahler's "narrow concentration on disappointment, depression, and despair contrast sharply and unfavourably with the vast emotional range of a Bach, a Mozart, and Beethoven."[81] Clearly, this critic's familiarity with Mahler's compositions is minimal, for they are often joyous and affirmative in nature, and rarely do Mahler's symphonies actually end tragically.[82]

In his examination of Mahler's reception, Marc Weiner correctly recognizes that much of the literature about Mahler

> emphasizes his existence as tragic, his aesthetic goals as ephemeral, and his psychological constitution as agonized. The strength, dynamism and confidence in his make-up complement the interpretation of him as morose and depressed, yet this side of Mahler's personality is seldom mentioned today.[83]

It is questionable, however, that this misrepresentation of Mahler's character actually *contributed* to his eventual popularity. To the extent that Mahler was viewed as neurotic or hypersensitive, his music was judged, by some critics, as practically incoherent. For instance, in the 1920s, the American critic Paul Rosenfeld described Mahler as a "sentimentalist, searching out emotion for its own sake, and luxuriating

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[81]Samuel Lipman, "The Mahler Everyone Loves," *Commentary* 64 (Nov. 1974), 58.

[82]As Henry Raynor summarizes: "The First, Second, Fifth, and Seventh [symphonies] end in triumph; the Fourth ends in childlike delight, the Third in rapturous serenity, the Eighth in Religious ecstasy. Only the Sixth ends in appalled hopelessness for the *Das Lied von der Erde* and the Ninth Symphony achieve heart-breaking reconciliation with death; the end of *Das Lied* is a passionate recognition not of pain and lost but of continuing beauty of the world and human life..." Raynor,11.

[83]Marc. A. Weiner, "Mahler and America..., 161.

in it."[84] Rosenfeld simply could not follow Mahler's anomalous pairing of seemingly unrelated ideas and emotions; his characteristic style of rapidly alternating different moods and musical idioms was interpreted by Rosenfeld as either a sign of emotional instability, or the inability to follow through with a musical thought:

> Mahler is helpless on nearly every page. With all his prodigious orchestral technique he cannot touch [us]. There is always the beginning of something in his scores. His vast and Bruckner–like themes heave on with terrific stride, then break down suddenly...A song begins; a few notes are sweet; then suddenly there is a banal, stale note, from which one turns as from a sour breath...[85]

Actually, Rosenfeld's description of Mahler's music is, superficially, quite accurate. Mahler's music does alternate vast, Bruckner–like themes with elegiac melodies and banal, salon–type music. Rosenfeld's intolerance of these groupings signifies his unwillingness to consider a possible unity behind what is seemingly contradictory. As Raynor observes:

> [Mahler's] aim was to write symphonies in which...mutually exclusive states of being and modes of expression should achieve their proper place of relationship to each other; those who find his music intolerable cannot understand, or cannot accept, the idea of a musical world embracing all these diversities.[86]

Early accounts of the Ninth Symphony persisted in inferring information about Mahler's so-called death–wish or morbid obsession, probably because this was a topic which so regularly commanded the

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[84]Paul Rosenfeld, "The Tragedy of Gustav Mahler, *Musical Chronicle (1917-1923)* (New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1972), Rosenfeld, 247. (This article originally appeared in March, 1922.)

[85]Ibid., 241.

[86]Raynor, 8.

focus in the Mahler literature at the time. What makes these interpretations so dissatisfying is that they misrepresent not only Mahler's personality but his music as well. By fixating on one side of his characteristically dual–sided music, such interpretations ultimately obscure the music's expressive significance. This is not to say, however, that all interpreters failed to notice both sides of the music. Alban Berg mentioned the "death premonition" which returns "again and again", interrupted by "elements of terrestrial dreaming;"[87] another mid-century interpretation reported "far flung outcries of rage" alternating with "a wondrous calm;"[88] and yet another described Mahler's "desire for beauty, happiness and peace which cannot be achieved because of the disharmonies of life."[89] The real failure of these early interpretations to modern ears is not the result of what they do or do not uncover in the way of expressive content, but rather, *how* the expressive content is interpreted further as an expression of Mahler's feelings, ideas and beliefs. Until mid–century, the expressive duality of Mahler's music was often observed, but its aesthetic significance was interpreted quite differently.

In all likelihood, Mahler's eventual popularity involved a reconsideration of both his personality and his music. Many early critics were, in fact, so eager to prove Mahler's emotional decadence and instability that they concluded his symphonies contained nothing but

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[87]Cited in Cooke, 114.

[88]Louis Biancolli, (Review of the Bruno Walter's 1938 recording of Mahler's Ninth Symphony), *Chord and Discord* 2:4 (1946): 100.

[89]Hans Tischler, "The Symphonic Problems in Mahler's Works," *Chord and Discord* 2:3 (1941): 18.

dense, thickly orchestrated passages at blaring volumes and intensities. Obviously none of these critics bothered to examine any of Mahler's scores. If they had, they would have discovered Mahler's almost insatiable desire for clarity in his musical textures. While there are moments of ferocious intensity, these are characteristically juxtaposed with elegant and judiciously streamlined passages of veritable chamber music. These critics' mental convictions appeared to make them deaf to over half of Mahler's music.

In many respects, Weiner's claim, that in the 1960s listeners ignored Mahler's true aesthetic content or failed to understand its complexity, better describes the reception that earlier decades gave Mahler's music. While it is possible that his compositions failed to meet some of the post-Romantic aesthetic criteria, many critics simply did not give them a fair chance. A lot of misconceptions about Mahler's music were eradicated solely through more listeners encountering the music first–hand and reaching their own conclusions.

Early in the century, Mahler's music had a hard time winning support in the United Kingdom and North America because of Mahler's own neglect to promote his compositions in these countries. Mahler visited England only once, in 1892, before his status as a conductor or composer was sufficient enough for him to secure the contacts needed in order to have his works regularly performed. With respect to America, however, Mahler's professional ties in New York might have presented themselves as quite an advantage in promoting his music; but it is well known that Mahler never used his position of authority or influence to

advance his compositional career. In fact, he was so sensitive to the possibility of a conflict of interest, that he probably erred in favour of his music's neglect.

In Britain, ambivalence or even hostility towards his music was more noticeable and lasted longer than in other areas of the world. As Jack Diether explains:

> At the time Mahler was producing his major works, Britain was under the spell of Brahms and Strauss and had no time for yet another new German composer. Then Mahler died and the first world war came, which ruled out any possibility of putting his music on the British map. Finally after the war there was a violent reaction against the "monumental" in music and only works of this kind by established composers of the past were tolerated. Thus circumstances from the beginning were against Mahler's music from being given a fair trial here.[90]

In addition to aesthetic reasons for early twentieth century audiences avoiding "monumental" works, there were practical reasons as well. During and after the First World War, many orchestras simply did not have the financial and human resources to perform Mahler's compositions. This made it near impossible for his supporters to encourage orchestras, who were not already familiar with Mahler's works, to give them a try. But in countries like the Netherlands, it was a different story. Willem Mengelberg, conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebow Orchestra, and himself a personal friend of Mahler's, staged a nine day festival of his works in 1920. The Amsterdam "peace conference", as it came to be known, made this city the first to have performed all of Mahler's nine completed symphonies. As Kurt Blaukopf

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[90]Jack Diether, "Mahler's Music in War Time Britain," *Chord and Discord* 2:4 (1946): 71.

explains, the festival "seemed to give an uplift to the international cultivation of Mahler's music."[91] In the following autumn, the German conductor Oskar Fried conducted all of Mahler's symphonies except for his Eighth. One critic offered his account of Mahler's apparent popularity in at the time:

> There can be no more doubt that Mahler is the composer of our age. Our troubles, our misery, all the intolerable elements of an unpalatable reality, have tremulously increased our metaphysical need, making us want to leave the horrors of everyday life for the solitudes of the great god Pan.[92]

Interestingly enough, the above statement is forty years ahead of its time in its conception of Mahler's importance as a composer. For reasons that remain unclear to this day, Mahler's music was unable to secure the permanent support of European audiences. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm displayed in the above review proves that Mahler's ability to speak to the philosophical concerns of audiences was not unique to the 1960s. Perhaps it simply required audiences that were willing to listen.

In many respects, Mengelberg, Fried and other conductors such as Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer, and Artur Bodansky, were more helpful to Mahler's cause than any other group of his supporters. While they initially failed to achieve for Mahler's music widespread success, their efforts kept it, at the very least, from falling out of the repertoire altogether.

With the rise of National Socialism in the 1930s, performances of Mahler's music in Europe were threatened. In 1936, Bruno Walter

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[91]Kurt Blaukopf, *Gustav Mahler*, trans. Inge Goodwin, (London: Furtura Publications Ltd., 1974), 241.

[92]Cited in ibid., 242.

recorded his historic performance of *Das Lied von der Erde*, the same year his book about Mahler was published.[93] Two years later, in December of 1938, Walter recorded the Ninth just one month before the *Anschluss*. Walter eventually fled to the United States to escape the impending horrors of the Third Reich, along with several other famous supporters of Mahler's music, including Alma Mahler (Gropius-Werfel), Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, Thomas Mann, and Theodore Adorno.

Marc Weiner claims that Mahler's persona as a martyred Jew attracted many listeners at the time who attributed to his music an ideological position morally opposed to the that of National Socialism.[94] But even if Mahler's name was drawn into ideological debates, this does not automatically mean that listeners failed to appreciate his compositions for *musical* reasons as well. By the 1930s, the United States became the world–wide center for Mahler research and promotion. In January 1931, for example, the Bruckner–Mahler Society of America was created with the aim of encouraging academic research into the lives and music of these composers.[95] Throughout the world, Mahler was gradually emerging as a serious composer for the first time. After World War Two, even the English critics were taking notice of Mahler's music—and interestingly enough, not for its extramusical content alone. In 1946, Ernest Newman dedicated four weekly feature articles in the *Sunday Times* to a discussion of Mahler's merits as a composer; Neville

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[93]Bruno Walter, *Gustav Mahler*, trans. James Galston, with a biographical essay by Ernst Krenek (New York: The Greystone Press, 1941 [Rpt New York: Vienna House, 1973]). Walter's is a nostalgic and overly subjective interpretive account of Mahler's music which makes no attempt to support any of his statements with musical analysis.

[94]Weiner, 157.

[95]It was this organization that published the periodical *Chord and Discord*.

Cardus and Donald Mitchell each published important musical and biographical studies, while Donald Tovey and Wilfred Mellers submitted "musicological" examinations of the symphonies. Although actual fame was still a few years away, it seemed that the more Mahler's music was worked into orchestral programmes, the more curiosity it provoked.

Slowly, the aesthetic bias against Mahler's music was lifted. Increasing numbers of influential musical figures expressed their admiration of his symphonies and songs, and many notable composers such as Boulez[96], Stockhausen, Shostakovich and Britten[97] confessed Mahler's influence on their own composition.

It wasn't until 1960, however, that Mahler's music received its fateful break into concert halls around the world. It was the one hundredth anniversary of Mahler's birth, and enthusiasts of his music had mustered enough clout over the years to initiate festivals that would expose his music to unprecedented numbers of people. In Vienna, an exhibition entitled "Gustav Mahler and his time" was held in the Secession Building, drawing attention to Mahler's involvement with the progressive artistic trends of his day. But it was in the United States that Mahler's music sparked the greatest interest. Leonard Bernstein, who had inherited the zeal of the pro-Mahler campaign, initiated and arranged a festival which featured all of Mahler's symphonies (except his unfinished Tenth) and his major song–cycles. Thirty-two concerts were performed in total from January to April, commencing with a television

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[96]Boulez writes that Mahler "is indispensable to anyone reflecting today on the future of music." Cited in Lebrecht, p. x, originally appearing in Pierre Boulez, *Orientations*, London (Faber and Faber), 1986.

[97]Kennedy, p.1. Shostakovich, incidentally, declared in a 1967 interview that Mahler was in fact his favourite composer. Blaukopf, 245.

documentary aired on the WCBS network. In it, Bernstein spoke about Mahler's music, highlighting certain biographical information and suggesting the composer's possible motivations for writing particular works.

The festival was an enormous success, as one reviewer testified:

> To judge by the rapt behavior and capacity size of the crowds, the Mahlerites are definitely on the increase; indeed, there would seem, as of these commemorative weeks, to be little line of demarcation between them and the Philharmonic patrons in general.[98]

Mahler had become not only accepted by the musically elite, but downright popular, especially with younger audiences. By 1967, Bernstein had recorded Mahler's entire symphonic opus (excluding the unfinished Tenth). That same year, he published his land-mark paper entitled "Mahler: His Time Has Come,"[99] in which he described Mahler's music as prophetic of a number of the horrors that beset the twentieth century, such as two World Wars, the Holocaust, the armament race, McCarthyism, Vietnam, and the cold war.[100] Bernstein's charisma and sincere enthusiasm for Mahler's music managed to convince contemporary audiences that Mahler was a composer with a message ideally suited to their day and age. By the end of the sixties and into the seventies, one contemporary writer observed bumper stickers that read

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[98]"Mitropolous Conducts Mahler's Ninth" *Chord and Discord* 2:9 (1960): 123. [Reprinted from *New York World Telegram* 23 January, 1960.

[99]Leonard Bernstein, "Mahler: His Time Has Come," *High Fidelity* September (1967).

[100]Ibid., 52.

"Mahler Grooves" and a record album portraying Mahler in "counter-culture getup, complete with love beads."[101]

The hype around Mahler at the time exploited his characteristically dual-sided personality on both extremes. To some, he was a veritable saint who prophesied this century's worst social horrors and granted absolution in his music; to others, Mahler represented the decadence and narcissistic self–adulation of the "Me Generation". His persona was dubiously worked into Visconti's film version of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, in which "Gustav von Aschenbach, accompanied by the lush string and harp music of the "Adagietto" from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, succumbs to decadence and homoerotic passion..."[102] Fortunately, as Norman Lebrecht points out, "[Mahler's] creations penetrated the underlying culture more permanently than any of the decade's crop of individualist cults."[103] It had the peculiar ability to speak to listeners on a personal level, something that Mahler enthusiasts had observed much earlier in the century:

> One feels that Mahler has opened up his soul completely in his music...Mahler takes us completely into his confidence, he speaks directly into our hearts and pours forth his inner most thoughts, but without indulging in the hysterical emotional instability of a Tchaikowsky. There is something extremely human about Mahler's music.[104]

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[101]Harvey Gross, "Gustav Mahler: Fad or Fullness of Time?", 484. The album Gross refers to is entitled *Mahler's Head* which is more or less a sampler–album of Mahler's best known symphonic movements. The liner notes compare the impact of Mahler's music as akin to "reading Hesse...taking LSD or any other number of secular and religious attempts at defining [one's] place in the universe." Dave Marsh, (Orphic Egg QES-6901, 1972).

[102]Ibid., 484.

[103]Lebrecht, ix.

[104]William Parks Grant, "Mahler's Art: A New Survey," *Chord and Discord* 1:5 (1945): 17.

Unlike preceding audiences, listeners in the 1960s did not have the same difficulty with Mahler's incessant desire to build symphonic "worlds" that "embrace everything"[105] Those with an interest in eastern mysticism, and altered states of consciousness might have found Mahler's veritable hodge-podge of ideas strangely appealing. But even to more sober listeners, Mahler's symphonies depict the at times bitter conflicts which beset an individual in society. As one writer suggested, Mahler's music "foreshadows our own instabilities and fragmentations...in Mahler we have an artist in whom we can recognize ourselves from a nostalgic distance."[106]

CONCLUSIONS

This examination has pointed to three principal factors that influenced the critical reception of Mahler's music in the past eighty years. First, Mahler's compositions, like many other Romantic works, fell victim to a change in the aesthetic criteria of what constitutes good music; a change in taste. Around the time of his death, a new era of musical composition arrived, one that naturally reacted negatively to the styles and idioms of the age that preceded it. As a result, the monumental quality of Mahler's symphonies had little appeal to many listeners in the early part of the century; but as the years progressed, his

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[105]In a conversation with Jean Sibelius, Mahler insisted that the expressive scope of the symphony should be all–encompassing; as he put it "the symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything." Cited in Lebrecht, p. 218. Originally appearing in Karl Ekman's *Jean Sibelius; The Life and Personality of an Artist*, trans. Edward Birse, Helsingfors (Holger Schildts Förlag), 1935, 190–91.

[106]Eva Hoffman, "Mahler for Moderns," *Commentary* 59 (June 1975), 59.

music encountered new audiences whose tastes were not as biased against the ardent Romanticism of Mahler's day.

Second, early literature on Mahler presented an unbalanced account of him as depressed, neurotic, and emotionally unstable. As a result, many of the aesthetic attributes devalued by modern audiences, (thick orchestration, vividly depicted moods etc.) were excessively associated with his music. As critics fixated on Mahler as an unstable Romantic, they overlooked an entire side of his music: the sparsely textured, refined, and elegant side that has since been appreciated by present day audiences. It appears as though sustained, long–term popularity for Mahler was achieved, for the most part, through a balanced appreciation of both tendencies; and this has probably taken place in the last decade or so.

And third, there were practical, as well as aesthetic reasons why Mahler's music was shunned early in the century, and its absence from concert programmes merely served to fuel audiences' misunderstanding of it. As his compositions were slowly introduced into the symphonic repertoire, due to the unceasing efforts of a few supporters, many erroneous beliefs about his music were challenged and overcome.

By mid-century, the literature on Mahler was redressed, and as a result, a more balanced profile of the composer reached. Increasing numbers of listeners encountered Mahler's music first–hand, and instead of sharing the previous generation's disdain for Mahler's intense, and at times apocalyptic, musical vision, many found themselves peculiarly

sympathetic to his message. Obviously, a certain amount of their enthusiasm was influenced by fashion, but all fashions, even the most superficial, inevitably reflect an underlying phenomenon in society. As Raynor writes, "the music we neglect is that which is irrelevant to our concerns, and whatever other virtues it may possess, without that relevance we care nothing for it."[107]

Since the 1960s, Mahler's music has engendered the sympathetic response of an entirely new generation of listener. As Klaus Tennstedt recently reflected: "Young people are searching for values that have been destroyed. Long after his death, Mahler fights on against a terrible world. He gives people back their sense of feeling, and fear, and outrage."[108] In a similar tone, Claudio Abbado suggested that "young people can find all the great matters of life and death in Mahler."[109] It seems that despite many predictions to the contrary, Mahler's music shows no sign of returning to obscurity or critical disrepute. A decline in Mahler T-shirts and bumper stickers over the years cannot be considered an indication of his drop in popularity, for the number of serious, scholarly examinations of his music has risen proportionally. Even today, Mahler's music may be valued for its extramusical content, but in the end, it is still *music* that is encouraging such inferences. Weiner's insistence on separating one from the other is futile, for one might ask: are any composer's works valued for strictly musical reasons?

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[107] Raynor, 13.

[108] Lebrecht, x. From an interview with Lebrecht published in *Sunday Times* colour Magazine, 15 September 1985.

[109] Ibid., x. Originally appearing in *Barbican* magazine, December 1986.

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The following chapter will directly tackle the above question by exploring how it is that music becomes associated with extramusical events. Further, it will advance a theory which helps to define music's ontological identity with respect to these nonmusical references, while clarifying how such references might be appreciated for their *musical* significance.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING MUSIC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH EXTRAMUSICAL PHENOMENA

As demonstrated in Chapter One, much of the enthusiasm that Mahler's music has generated over the years has had to do with the richness of its extramusical associations. Harvey Gross writes that "even in [Mahler's] purely instrumental works we are plunged into a world of vividly depicted states of feeling. It's not surprising, then, that many listeners recognize in Mahler's music the outlines of his autobiography, the chapters of a great confession."[1]

Implicit in Gross' observation is the claim that the inferred, autobiographical content of Mahler's music first originates in a listener's recognition of the music's emotional character. As is often the case, Gross appears to take the affective component of music for granted. Despite over a century of debate concerning music's expressive role, such an unquestioned acceptance of its relationship with feelings and emotions is comparatively widespread. While one may be skeptical about music's ability to communicate actual *ideas*, few, if any, sincerely deny that music is at least associated with human emotions.[2]

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[1]Harvey Gross, "Gustav Mahler: Fad or Fullness of Time?", 485.

[2]Even Stravinsky, famous for his adamant denial of music's ability to express "anything", clarified that "whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature...if music appears to express something, this is only an illusion, and not a reality." (Cited in Deryck Cooke's *Language of Music*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 11. Stravinsky is not denying music's association with emotions; he is merely stating that such an association is, at times, misleading.

Where there is disagreement, however, is in defining music's ontological relationship with respect to emotions and other extra-musical phenomena. Even Eduard Hanslick, who is famous for his protest against the floridly emotional music criticism of his day, did not deny music's relationship with emotions *per se*; but he insisted that it is not music's *purpose* to express emotions, nor would music's association with them constitute its aesthetic *content*. While acknowledging music's ability to depict the inner "dynamics" of feelings, Hanslick argued that the expressive predicates used to describe music should be employed only "figuratively" or metaphorically. And, he added, emotions are but one of several extramusical sources from which metaphorical labels can be drawn.[3]

Hanslick's aesthetic position, which has often been erroneously interpreted as a denial of music's expressive nature, is in fact, an attempt to preserve its autonomy as an art form. He never objected to expressive metaphors being used in criticism but he cautioned critics against issuing statements such as "this music portrays arrogance."[4] Hanslick reasoned that when music is viewed as representing external phenomena it becomes the *means* for non-musical expression, rather than an expressive *end* in itself. His views are not unlike the earliest proponents of absolute music who argued that the non-imitative, or

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[3]Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, 8th edition, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), [Original English translation published 1891]), 32.

[4]Ibid., 32.

abstract character of instrumental music made it the highest art form.[5] Unlike painting and poetry, music's true role was not to represent external reality, but rather, to present the inner "dynamics" of the human spirit.[6]

Hanslick's concern for the expressive autonomy of music has been adopted by a number of theorists in this century, many of whom are most noted for their contributions to expression theory. For example, Susanne Langer's view of music as an "unconsummated symbol" reveals her reluctance to assign fixed labels to the expressive properties of music.[7] Peter Kivy, on the other hand, elects to limit the specificity of the labels he employs,[8] while others, such as Anthony Newcomb and Monroe Beardsley, adopt the "exemplification" theory of Nelson Goodman in their efforts to acknowledge the vast, expressive potential of music while resisting the temptation to reduce its aesthetic significance to that of representation.

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[5]In his review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (1810), E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote that "only instrumental music, which scorns all assistance from and combination with other art, can express with purity music's peculiar nature." Cited in Vera G. Micznik, *Meaning in Gustav Mahler's Music...*, 16.

[6]Schopenhauer's influence on the doctrine of absolute music is obvious. In his metaphysics, Schopenhauer elevated music above all other art forms because unlike painting or poetry, music was a direct copy of the "Will" (the dynamic essence behind life itself). "For this reason the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than is that of other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence." Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* Vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969, 257. [originally published in German in 1819]

[7]See Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* 3rd edition, (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979) particularly chapter VIII "On Significance in Music," 204-45.

[8]See his *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the musical Emotions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), containing the complete text of *The Corded Shell: Reflections of Musical Expression* (1980).

In attempts to propose a working theory of how Mahler's music might expressively support the types of existential inferences discussed earlier, this chapter draws upon the insights of several theorists from this century. Edward T. Cone notes that when it comes to expressive content in music "there is wide divergence of opinion; even those who vigorously defend the concept often disagree as to its nature, its range, and its limits."[9] With this in mind, this examination emphasizes those elements which are common to virtually all theories of musical expression, recognizing that in doing so, there is the risk of indirectly misrepresenting an author's ultimate intentions.[10] No doubt Hanslick himself would have found it peculiar, if not downright objectionable, for his protest *against* expressive interpretations to be used to ratify a methodology for them.

The ideological position favoured by this examination is one that is common to both semiotic theory and a branch of hermeneutic philosophy influenced by the phenomenology of Hans–Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. Stated in explicit terms, it views meaning—in this case *musical* meaning—as the creative by–product of a listener's interpretative interaction with the objective, acoustical properties of a musical work. Consequently, while it may be true that a musical *work* can exist independently of a listener, musical *meaning* certainly

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[9]Edward T. Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics," *Nineteenth Century Music* 5 (Spring 1982): 234.

[10]But according to the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans–Georg Gadamer, the author's intentions have no ultimate authority over the interpretive consequences that are reached.

cannot;[11] it presupposes a listener who is capable of decoding a vast array of acoustical stimuli and registering it in his or her mind as *music*. For this reason, the term "autonomous", when applied to musical meaning, becomes misleading, for it will be argued that there is no understanding of music that is unmediated by the individual perceiver. As Rene Cox states:

> Musical works are not distinct from [a listener's] conceptions but arise only out of a special sort of relationship between sounds (or remembered or imagined sounds) and a perceiver.[12]

In response to the question which concluded Chapter One, whether or not listeners can appreciate music for purely musical reasons depends largely upon how the term "purely musical" is defined. By adopting Wilson Coker's distinction between *congeneric* and *extrageneric* meaning in music, it becomes apparent that there is a continuum of so-called purity against which meaning in music can be measured. Congeneric meaning, which refers to content derived solely through relationships found within the musical work itself, is undoubtedly "purer" than extrageneric meaning which implies a relationship between music and exterior phenomena.[13] At no time, however, can an interpretation's purity be considered absolute, because even the most abstract musical understanding demands a certain degree of mediation by the listener in the process of perception. Nor is the purity of a given

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[11]This distinction has been offered as a way of recognizing the ontological identity of a musical work in the form of a musical score prior to its being performed or attended to aurally.

[12]Rene Cox, "A Defense of Musical Idealism," *British Journal Of Aesthetics* 26:2 (1986):135.

[13]Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics*, (New York: Free Press, 1972), 61.

interpretation a measure of its quality. Those who would argue that congeneric meaning is naturally superior to extrageneric meaning have, at times, erroneously viewed the two as mutually exclusive. This belief, which is implicit in Marc Weiner's examination of the reception of Mahler's music, is one that this thesis as a whole proposes to challenge.

HOW MUSIC RELATES TO EXTRAMUSICAL PHENOMENA

All theories of musical expression must inevitably account for how music suggests or represents various nonmusical phenomena. Vera Micznik writes that

> Insofar as music communicates meanings that can be understood, it can be considered at least partially a system of signification. Signification depends on signs, and signs depend on conventionalized relationships between a signifier and signified.[14]

This process of "signification", to which Micznik refers, amounts to a form of musical semiotics. It offers a paradigm by which the topic of musical meaning can be tackled with greater rigour and precision; and yet, with all its benefits, the semiotic approach has been adopted here with some reservation. Strict semiotic theories that treat music as a type of language, run the risk of reducing music to an expressive means, and not an end in itself. As Ann Clark argues, they "undermine the real significance of music as an alternative to

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[14]Micznik, p. 185. Micznik is employing Ferdinand de Saussure's terminology. Saussure represents the Parisian branch of semiotics which retains his term "semiologie" as opposed to "semiotics." It can thus be distinguished from the "semiotics" of Eastern Europe, Italy, and the United States which has been influenced more by the theories of Charles Peirce.

language."[15] If music's expressive autonomy is to be at all respected, the concept of *denotation* in musical expression must be replaced with the more flexible form of *connotation*. These terms deserve some clarification.

According to Robert Scholes, denoted meaning is "proper or literal" in nature. In many ways, denotation is synonymous with naming, where meaning is designated in a fixed or permanent way. Connotation, on the other hand, refers to "meanings that are attached loosely to a [sign]." They depend, to a certain degree, on the context in which they are perceived.[16] When a musical sign *denotes* it is said to depict a given expressive property; but when it *connotes*, it merely stands for the property in a certain context. Connotation, therefore, is associated with a more open, and flexible designative function, and characterizes the way in which music is best understood as a signifying or representative art form.[17]

In order to examine the basic elements of how music relates expressively to extramusical phenomena, it is fruitful to adopt the tri-partite division of signs proposed by Charles Peirce.[18] Although Pierce himself did not devise these categories specifically for music, they

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[15]Ann Clark, "Is Music a Language?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41:2 (1982): 203.

[16]Robert Scholes, *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982): 143.

[17]Further clarification as to the ontological difficulties posed by the use of the term "denotation" will be discussed in conjunction with Nelson Goodman's exemplification theory.

[18]Actually, Peirce had a nine-fold categorization of signs of which the following designation is only one division. For a more in-depth discussion about Peirce's "trichotomies", see Raymond Monelle's "Music and the Peircean Trichotomies", *International Review and Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 22:1 (1991): 99–108.

have since been applied to music with considerable success.[19] According to Pierce, all signifying gestures, or "signs" as they are called in semiotic terms, can function in three ways: as an *index*, *icon*, or *symbol*. A sign functions as an *index* when there is "a phenomenal or existential connection between the sign and what it signifies."[20] In this case, the meanings attached to the sign appear spontaneous and natural, but are based solely on *association*, not on any identifiable morphological *resemblance*.

When a structural similarly does exist between a sign a particular expressive attribute, the sign is said to function as an *icon*. Peirce considered the status of both indices and icons as non-arbitrary in nature; to the listener, indexical and iconic representation appear spontaneously, and naturally expressive.

When a sign functions as a *symbol* however, its meaning assumes the status of a fixed or designated label. But because of music's abstract nature, its signs rarely, if ever, function as symbols in the Peircean sense of the term. If and when symbolic functioning does occur in music, Peirce's arbitrary/non–arbitrary dichotomy proves somewhat misleading. The term is instead assigned a slightly different meaning that encompasses both indices and icons whose meanings have attained the status of an established, expressive convention.

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[19]See both Monelle, "Peircean Trichotomies..." and W. Jay Dowling and Dane L. Harwood, *Music Cognition*, (Orlando: Academic Press Inc., 1986), specifically Chapter 8, "Emotion and Meaning", 202–24.

[20]Scholes, p. 144.

Indexical Vs. Iconic Sign Functioning in Musical Expression

Indices in music are based on the principle of association; hence, their expressive effect appears natural and spontaneous but is really the result of a listener's conditioned response to a given musical property. Examples that come to mind include the feeling of "religiosity" imparted through the use of pipe organs, plagal cadences, and plainchant. If a listener had never experienced these musical sounds in a sanctimonious atmosphere, their seemingly innate "religious" quality would go unrecognized.

Another instance of indexical sign functioning involves the act of musical borrowing—where a composer incorporates a fragment of another existing work into his or her composition. A good example is Puccini's insertion of the first phrase of "The Star Spangled Banner" in *Madamma Butterfly* to suggest the American protagonist's heroic or patriotic character.[21] Puccini obviously relied on the fact that his audience was familiar with America's National Anthem. Had they not been, this particular expressive device would have been ineffective.

Like indexical representation, iconic representation has an immediate, and spontaneous character; but unlike indices, which are expressive through conditioned association, icons share a structural similarity with the properties they are said to represent. According to Rudolf Arnheim, expressive interpretation based on this theory "relies on the concept of isomorphism which was introduced by gestalt psychology, to describe similarity of structure in materially disparate media."

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[21] Dowling and Harwood, 204.

Arnheim notes that the resulting "structural kinship [between music and an expressive property] is so compelling perceptually that it is directly and spontaneously experienced."[22]

One might ask how music can share the expressive structure of an emotion. Susanne Langer explains that "there are certain aspects of so-called "inner-life"—physical or mental—which have patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfillment, excitation, sudden change etc."[23] When a piece of music features a specific combination of these patterns, the music appears to "sound the way an emotion feels." This phrase, which was coined by the psychologist and aesthetician Carroll Pratt[24], has in fact become a slogan for a branch of expression theory which focuses on music's iconic resemblance with feelings and emotions. This theory will be referred to herein as the "Iconic Resemblance Theory".

A theorist who attempted one of the most rigorous ratifications of the Iconic Resemblance Theory is Donald N. Ferguson. In his 1960 book *Music as Metaphor*[25], Ferguson identifies the musical elements capable of creating a similarity between music and emotions, and he distinguishes them as "tone stress" and "ideal motion". "Tone stress" refers to the subjective side of emotional experience—how emotions *feel* inside the human body, whereas "ideal motion" refers to the appearance

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[22]Rudolf Arnheim, "Perceptual Dynamics in Musical Expression," *The Musical Quarterly* 70:3 (1984): 304. Incidentally, this theory is often referred to as the "Isomorphic" theory.

[23]Langer, 228.

[24]Carroll, C. Pratt, "Structural vs. Expressive Form in Music," *The Journal of Psychology* 5 (1938): 154.

[25]Donald N. Ferguson, *Music as Metaphor: The Elements of Expression*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960).

of an emotion—the type of body movement and activity that people *manifest* when experiencing a particular emotional state.

Essentially, Ferguson's theory views specific combinations of musical properties as having the ability to act as a kind of metaphor for various expressive predicates. For example, it is easy to recognize a metaphoric relationship between a rising melodic line and a feeling of aspiration and challenge. This can be accounted for by the perceived effort in all physical ascents of one kind or another. The degree of struggle associated might be heightened by the number of obstacles that the rising melody encounters. For example, if its ascent is direct, the music might sound purposeful; whereas if the melody retreats from its ascent, and lingers momentarily before continuing on, it might sound hesitant, or distracted.

A similar metaphoric relationship can be recognized between the music's tempo and emotional activity. Because heightened energy and excitement manifests itself in human beings by faster breathing, rapid speech, and quicker body movements, it is not surprising that faster music is often interpreted as being passionate or arousing, whereas slower music is naturally associated with more relaxed feelings.

Musical examples such as these demonstrate the rather obvious iconic relationship which can exist between music and certain emotional properties. But there are several expressive features of music that might be considered to resist the iconic label. A good example involves mode. There has been much debate over whether the expressive effect of mode is intrinsic or learned. Theories which rely exclusively on

the iconic view of representation often have a difficult time accounting for, say, the intrinsically "sad" or "sombre" quality of the minor mode. Many choose to adopt the kind of distinction proposed by David Osmond Smith who identifies a second type of iconic representation (in addition to the "formal" version previously discussed). He calls it *unconscious iconicism*: "the communication of moods or emotional states by means of unconscious psychological nexus."[26] According to this theory, the sound of the minor mode is iconic with the feeling of a particular emotional quality such as sadness.

Because Smith's explanation is ultimately dissatisfying in its attempt to explain how modes exhibit different emotional characteristics, many theorists maintain that such expressive tendencies are rooted in learned musical conventions. As Peter Kivy argues, it is through repreated association that we have come to recognize the inherently expressive character of the minor mode. He clarifies, however, that "emotive descriptions founded on [such]...'conventions' are as 'objective' [and]...as defensible as any statements can be whose truth relies upon the truth of a psychological generalization."[27] In many ways, Kivy's use of the term "convention" is a lot like Peirce's "index": even when certain expressive features are judged to be merely the result of a

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[26]Monelle, 102.

[27]See Kivy's fourth chapter of *Sound Sentiment* "Contour and Convention" p. 135. Kivy argues that the minor mode may have, at one time, sounded inherently "dissonant" or "restless" to listeners, but he argues that today, its expressive use is tied only to convention. (82.) Kivy's distinction between "contour" (natural) and "convention" is controversial, and arguably convoluted, for if the use of the minor mode today fulfills the same expressive need as it did years ago, who is to argue that it is not being perceived as intrinsically expressive?

repeated association, their expressive nature is nevertheless perceived as objective and real.

It is in cases such as these that the term *symbol* is often employed. After all, what is naturally or intrinsically expressive (iconic), and what has acquired expressive qualities through custom and tradition (indexical) might be a distinction that is, in reality, an academic one. As Cone astutely observes:

> It might be argued that the expressive associations of the Funeral March from Chopin's Sonata in B-flat minor depend on mere convention—on the fact that we recognize the combination of common meter, slow tempo, ponderous beat, and somber color, as adding up to a conventional symbol that reads: Funeral March. But...one can reply that the convention is not an arbitrary one. It arose in response to the demand of a specific kind of occasion for which music served a functional purpose, and hence the same convention can be used artistically to evoke a similar occasion in the imagination.[28]

The Musical Symbol

When it comes down to practice, no matter how stylized some musical conventions appear, composers would not use them if they did not satisfy the expressive need at hand. Consider the popular "sigh" motive, used in Western tonal music to depict weeping, or other manifestations of despair or resignation. Typically, this motive involves a half-step descent, with the lower note customarily resolving a dissonance which is created between the higher note and the accompanying harmony. The expressive metaphor is one of identifiable

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[28]Edward, T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 174.

pain (dissonance) which eventually subsides as the dissonance is resolved.

While the "sigh" motive does share the same expressive form as stylized acts of weeping, its depiction as a descending minor second is sufficiently stylized that it might be regarded as a type of "symbol". Used in this way, the term "symbol" refers to a sign with a somewhat designated function. But unlike the discursive symbols of language, a musical symbol is never literal, nor is its ontological relationship, with respect to the properties it represents, entirely arbitrary in nature.[29] Musical symbols are rarely expressively removed from the properties they represent.[30] Hence, a broader definition of the term "symbol" than Peirce's is required if it is to be applied meaningfully to music.

Dowling and Harwood define musical symbols as signs whose "meanings arise from their place in the syntax of a piece and, more broadly speaking, of a style." They go on to explain that

> This is true of some iconic signs as well. The play of tension and release over time that mirrors the ebb and flow of emotional excitement depends on syntactic relations for its expression, and so such icons also function as symbols. Wagner's leitmotifs, too, which were initially introduced as indices of characters and plot themes, when heard again in the symphonic texture, provide a unifying principle in the syntactic structure of the opera and thus function symbolically.[31]

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[29]In a purely linguistic context, Peirce's "symbol" has a precise or literal meaning; "[it] signifies by virtue of an arbitrary, conventional habit of usage." Scholes, 148.

[30]It should be clarified that this discussion is referring only to *expressive* symbols in music. It does not ignore the existence of many purely arbitrary symbols that do exist in music, such as a particular letter names to depict a musical pitch, or any number of stylized representations of "notes" and "rests" that appear in our system of musical notation.

[31]Dowling and Harwood, 213.

Musical symbols then, are not automatically more arbitrary[32] than icons and indices. After all, both icons and indices can be said to function as symbols in certain circumstances, and when they do, they do not suddenly lose their capacity for spontaneous, emotional expression. The only real prerequisite for a symbol is its necessarily involvement with other signs in a *purposeful* system of signification. But as Vera Micznik points out, such a cause–and–effect relationship between music and various nonmusical phenomena is not as common as one might think: "For although music easily appropriates the stronger semantic meanings of ideas or language when associated with them, it will not preserve those *unless* the relationship becomes conventionalized through intensive usage."[33] An example might be the stylized funeral march described above; but as Kivy points out, appropriately responding to even the most common expressive symbols of music presupposes a certain level of musical competence and stylistic familiarity on the listener's part:

> We cannot hear the expressiveness of...[a particular work] unless we can...hear it as music; unless, that is, we are educated musical perceivers who have been initiated into the musical culture of which [this music] is a part. And that involves, among other things, having internalized a parcel of musical convention.[34]

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[32]Thus far the term "arbitrary" has been used to describe the nature of something "based on or determined by preference or convenience rather than by necessity or the intrinsic nature of something...i.e., random or by chance." Another definition of the term which might cause some confusion is: "depending on individual discretion and not fixed by law." (Definitions taken from the *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1985).) Musical symbols are not arbitrary according to the first definition, but they are arbitrary according the second. To avoid obvious confusion, this discussion will adopt the first of the two definitions and employ another term when the meaning of the second definition is desired.

[33]Micznik, 448.

[34]Kivy, 84.

Interestingly, Mahler himself conceived of musical expression as rooted in convention. "All communication," he insisted, "depends upon a convention. The latter justifies this or that motive or musical symbol, or (as one might otherwise put it) supplies the expressive vehicle for this or that thought or particular mood."[35] For Mahler, music conventions were the rationale behind a composer's choice of expressive gestures. In this respect, they serve a function similar to the syntax of a language.

As a result of this kind of thinking, there has been a great tendency over the years to regard music as a kind of expressive "language". One of the most influential proponents of the "language" theory of music is Deryck Cooke, who published a rather controversial book, aptly named, *Language of Music* (1959).[36] Cooke's ambition was to provide a veritable dictionary of musical gestures that composers have used over the years to convey their personal feelings in music:

> The listener thus makes direct contact with the mind of a great artist, "interpreting" his [or her] expression of emotion in the same way that he [or she] will "interpret" an emotional letter from a friend: in both cases, mind meets mind.[37]

While Cooke's study is a fascinating compilation of conveniently labeled musical gestures[38], he makes no attempt to explain *how* this type of communication is achieved. Few of Cooke's

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[35]Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, 235.

[36]Deryck Cooke, *Language of Music*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[37]Ibid., 19-20.

[38]This term is refers loosely to any particular feature in music that is isolated and examined for its expressive properties. It has been employed by some writers to be synonymous with "sign" and at times, "symbol", but for the purposes of this discussion, "gesture" in intended to be used in a general, as opposed to its semiotic, context.

observations are what one would call controversial. In fact, his study does seem to point out the apparently rhetorical quality of musical expression. What is controversial, however, is his conception of music as a language, capable of direct communication. Cooke regards the meaning of music as synonymous with the composer's intentions; hence a given interpretation can be measured for its legitimacy or appropriateness by the extent to which it is faithful to these intentions.[39]

COMMUNICATION–BASED VERSUS SEMIOTIC–BASED THEORIES

The primary weakness of any theory of musical expression based on the communication model has to do with the way it absolutizes the meaning of a musical work, and trivializes the process of interpretation. According to this view, music is the *means* by which a composer's intentions are conveyed; the individual interpreter is merely a passive receiver of this information. An alternative to this view was alluded to in the introduction to this chapter and may be called the semiotic view. It views meaning in music as the result of a listener's interaction with the objective properties of a musical work. Hence according to this view, the expressive meaning of a work is not obtained by decoding a pre-established message; rather, it is *discovered*, and to a certain extent, *created* in the process of interpretation. While the communication-based theory (or information theory) involves a *dyadic*

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[39]Cooke's view of musical meaning might be considered representative of an "intentionalist" or "absolutist" branch of hermeneutics philosophy espoused by E. D. Hirsch. See his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.)

relationship between sender and receiver, this alternative approach is characteristically *triadic* in nature. Expressive meaning, therefore, is acquired as a result of an interpreter attending to various expressive properties in the art work.

By adopting semiotic theory's tri–partite view of interpretation, the expressive content of a musical work is obtained through a listener's interpretive interaction with a work's various expressive symbols. As mentioned earlier, unlike language, whose symbols are often arbitrary and expressively inert, music maintains a more direct relationship with the expressive properties it is said to represent. Langer notes that "the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language"; and therefore, she concludes, "music can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach."[40]

Although Ferguson distinguishes between the *experience* of, and *appearance* of emotions, it can be argued that most of the time, music relates to both phenomena. For example, when people are afraid, they experience a sudden rush of energy or tension in their bodies. Their typical action might be to jump, or quickly bring their hands up to their face in order to cover their eyes. If a composer wanted to express the emotion of fear musically, he or she might compose something such as a sudden, loud and dissonant chord which gives way to a series of harsh suspensions over a trembling bass line. One can argue that the loud chord expresses the rush of fear that people experience when afraid. But

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[40]Ibid., 235.

it also could be argued that the music depicts people jumping in response to an alarming stimulus. The dissonance could be said to reflect the pain and tension experienced by frightened individuals; but it might also depict their agonizing facial expressions or body movements. Finally, the trembling bass line could be thought to express both the inner "tremor" of the experience of fear, as well as the appearance of someone shaking.

It may be argued then, that music is every bit as much an "expression" of emotional activity as our physiological responses. Both are merely expressions of the "dynamics" of emotion. Even Hanslick would agree with this claim. He writes:

> [Music] can produce the motion of a physical process according to the prevailing momentum: fast, slow, strong, weak, rising, falling. Motion is just one attribute, however, one moment of feeling, not feeling itself...It can depict not love but only such motion as can occur in connection with love or any other affect.[41]

By appropriating Hanslick's distinction, one can argue that to express the dynamics of emotion is not to express that emotion directly. Rather, it is to *imply* or *suggest* the emotion through a type of metaphor. Such a view of expression emphasizes the necessity of interpretation. Even Ferguson, whose account of musical expression considers music to be fundamentally representative in nature, admits that a metaphor established between music and emotion "must be *interpreted* before it can become an idea—a fact of expression."[42]

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[41]Hanslick, 11.
[42]Ferguson, 87.

Similarly, it can be argued that many physiological sensations must be interpreted as well before they are recognized and labeled as specific emotions. After all, what distinguishes the thrill of falling in love from the feeling of fear? The phenomenology of both experiences is often demonstrated by a similar rush of tension or energy in our bodies. People respond appropriately because they *interpret* the sensation through analyzing the facts of their environment. In other words, they put the experience *into context*. The same thing is true with respect to appropriately labeling *musically* depicted emotions. Something has to be brought to the music by the listener in order for the "dynamics" of music to be interpreted as emotions (or anything else for that matter).

This is where we leave formalists such as Hanslick behind. Hanslick insists that because music does not supply the conceptual information needed in order for listeners to interpret musical properties as specific emotions, then emotions cannot be considered a legitimate form of musical content:

> The representation of a specific feeling or emotional state is not at all among the characteristic powers of music...Only on the basis of a number of ideas and judgments...can our state of mind congeal into this or that specific feeling...if we take [concepts] away, all that remains is an unspecific stirring, perhaps the awareness of a general state of distress.[43]

While he recognizes music's structural affinity with emotions, Hanslick remains faithful to the ideal of the music's expressive autonomy. He writes that just because music is "intimately related to

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[43]Hanslick, 9.

our feelings in no way supports the view that the aesthetical significance of music resides in this relationship."[44]

A similar reluctance to embrace music as a representative art form is expressed by Susanne Langer. While she refers to music as a type of "symbol" of emotive life, she makes an important clarification: music is an "unconsummated symbol"—one that could not be assigned a fixed meaning. She goes on to explain that for music:

> Articulation [of emotions] is its life, but not assertion; expressiveness, not expression. The actual function of meaning, which calls for permanent contents, is not fulfilled; for the *assignment* of one rather than another possible meaning to each form is never explicitly made.[45]

The reason Langer refuses to attach emotive labels to music reflects both a concern for its expressive *autonomy*, as well as its *flexibility*. She recognizes that expressive labels, when applied to music, are conditional on the context in which they are perceived. The same musical gesture, she argues, might be capable of expressing two seemingly dissimilar emotions equally well: "*For what music can actually reflect is only the morphology of feeling*; and it is quite plausible that some sad and some happy conditions may have a very similar morphology."[46] This has already been demonstrated by the "morphological" similarities between the experiences of falling in love and fear.

Peter Kivy offers what he considers to be another solution to the problem of preserving music's expressive autonomy. Sharing Hanslick's refusal to provide music with the conceptual content required

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[44]Ibid., 3.
[45]Langer, 240.
[46]Ibid., 238. (The italics are Langer's own.)

for *specific* emotions to be depicted in music, Kivy limits his descriptions to only the broadest, and most general terms. Anything more specific, he insists, would necessitate the addition of highly personal or idiosyncratic information. "Gross expressive properties" on the other hand, are considered by Kivy to be a part of music's very own language because they can be apprehended almost instinctively by any listener familiar with the musical style of the composition at hand. Kivy places great importance on the degree of "intersubjective agreement" which exists amongst expressive interpretations of music. If an interpreter's description is dependent on the addition of highly personal information, then it will not be as applicable to a wider population of listeners; hence, it will be less acceptable.

Kivy's ambition is to provide music criticism with a stable, normative principle by which acceptable interpretations can be measured. But as Anthony Newcomb argues:

> This view misconceives the essential nature of musical meaning, which is created by music itself and exists in its own terms. Language may attempt to give an example of this meaning by bringing the structural patterns of music into relation with other aspects of our experience; this is the enterprise of expressive interpretation. But to do this is not to identify preexistent verbal meaning, which music only realizes. The verbal conceptualization is secondary. Hence to search for close intersubjective agreement in such verbal descriptions is fundamentally mistaken. One can only expect agreement that a description is in some sense appropriate.[47]

Newcomb argues persuasively that music's expressive autonomy is not preserved through limiting the choice of expressive adjectives used

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[47]Anthony Newcomb, "Sound and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (June 1984): 629-630.

in interpretation. Even the broadest of adjectives cannot be applied to music with complete objectivity, for their relationship to the music is still only metaphorical in nature, and therefore, depends on interpretation. Recent studies in the field of music cognition confirm this conclusion:

> Appearance value[48] is not caused by music...[it] is created by the listener in which an affect, based upon the listener's own life experiences, finds grounds with particular musical patterns. And because it is the individual who finds the connections, I doubt that a useful explanation of how *that* is done can be found.[49]

While Harold Fiske's studies were unable to define the specific mechanisms involved in the recognition of musical expression, he nevertheless concluded:

> An emotional response to music is genuine and real-life, but its source is synthetic. The source is an association; the result is an appearance of an emotion-laden event...Appearance value is not part of the music itself, it is not embodied in the patterns or their anticipation, or in the sound object. Nor is it entirely appropriate to claim that appearance value is caused by music. Appearance value is created by the listener [by] an affect, based upon the listener's own life experiences, find[ing] ground with particular musical patterns.[50]

GOODMAN'S EXEMPLIFICATION THEORY

So Hanslick might have been correct when he insisted that music can only depict the "inner dynamics" of an emotion, but he was mistaken when he concluded that music criticism *necessarily*

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[48]This is Harold Fiske's term which refers to properties in music that are recognized by the listener as possessing an innate expressive character.

[49]Harold E. Fiske, *Music and Mind: Philosophical Essays on the Cognition and Meaning of Music*, (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 129.

[50]Ibid., 129.

"degenerates into subjectivity" when it pays attention to these properties.[51] A theoretical model that delivers music from a purely representational role, while recognizing its vast potential for extrageneric expression, has been put forward by the aesthetician Nelson Goodman. His *Languages of Art*[52] has been described as one of the "seminal works of mid-twentieth–century aesthetics."[53] While Goodman himself did not apply his theory to musical expression in great detail, countless others did, including, most notably, Monroe Beardsley[54], Vernon A. Howard[55], and Anthony Newcomb.

The title of Goodman's book should not cause readers to surmise that he treats art as a language in the regular sense of the term. In fact, the theory he proposes has been intended to replace the idea of *denotation* in expression with *exemplification*. Newcomb explains that

> the distinction between denotation and exemplification lies in the direction of reference. A linguistic label...refers to the thing...it denotes...The reference flows from label to thing denoted...In exemplification, on the other hand, reference flows both ways.[56]

In musical terms, Goodman's theory contends that an expressive label refers to a property that is expressed by a musical symbol. For example, the term "sad" refers to a specific expressive

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[51]Hanslick, p.1.

[52]Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to the Theory of Symbols*, (Indianapolis, New York, and Kansas City: Hackett Publishing, 1968).

[53]Newcomb, 620.

[54]See his essay "Understanding Music" in *Criticizing Music: Five Philosophical Perspectives* ed., Kingsley Price & J. Hopkins, (London: University Press, 1981), 55-73; and "Semiotic Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 9:3 (1975), 5-26.

[55]See his "One Musical Expression," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 11:3 (1971): 271-73.

[56]Newcomb, 622.

property—an inner dynamic—that characterizes the feeling of sadness. The symbol literally *possesses* this property, independent of whether or not its has been appropriately labeled, or was the expressive intention of the composer. Both the label and the music, however, only *exemplify* the property. In other words, the symbol stands between an interpretation and the music itself, *expressing* a property that is shared between the label and the music itself.

Musical Gesture	**Dynamic Property**	**Expressive Label**
Congeneric content	**Expressive or dynamic content**	**Extrageneric content**
Defined analytically in purely musical terms	Defined both analytically and metaphorically using both musical and extramusical terms	Defined in entirely extramusical terms
Exemplifies an Expressive Property	Possesses an Expressive Property	Exemplifies an Expressive Property

To use the example above: A musical symbol *possesses* the "dynamic" of sadness; therefore it can *express* sadness. But the label ("S.A.D") and the music as a whole (an acoustical phenomenon) neither *possess* nor *express* the property; they *exemplify* it.[57]

Goodman's theory can be seen to preserve music's expressive autonomy by effectively providing an alternative to the idea of *denotation* in music. As explained earlier, denotation reduces music's status to a mere vehicle for meaning. By adopting the exemplification theory, music might appear to embrace a more connotative role, thereby relating to extramusical properties contingently, and not necessarily. Goodman

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[57]Goodman writes: "What is expressed is possessed...I will reserve the term "expression" to distinguish the central case where the property belongs to the symbol itself—regardless of cause or effect or intent or subject–matter." p. 85.

notes that "[the] establishment of [a] referential relationship is a matter of singling out certain properties for attention, [and] selecting associations with certain other objects."[58] As a result, a lot of emphasis is placed on the individual interpreter whose choices ultimately determine the meaning that is attributed to the art work.

It might be concluded then, that while a musical *work* (as a score or acoustical phenomenon) can be considered objective and self-subsistent, its interpreted *meaning* essentially cannot. As Rene Cox states: "An individual interpretation is distinct from a work in that it is but a small part of the fluctuating complex of conceptions that ordinarily constitutes a work."[59] Therefore, meaning in music—specifically *expressive or interpreted* meaning—is dependent on the *context* in which the work is perceived. Varying interpretations are the result of different contexts. Even from one individual, minor, but telling, variations in the meaning of a particular work may be observed, because as Cone notes, "we...continually [,] though subconsciously, bring new personal experiences to bear on [the music], finding in them new exemplifications of an ever-widening range of expressive possibilities."[60] This might explain why certain music maintains the interest and excitement of audiences throughout centuries of changing musical climates. It might also explain why other permanently falls from the performance repertoire.

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[58]Ibid., 88.
[59]Cox, 140.
[60]Cone, *Composer's Voice*, 170-71.

IN DEFENSE OF EXPRESSIVE INTERPRETATIONS:

Does the above tri-partite view of musical understanding abandon expressive interpretation to complete relativity? Quite simply: No. Although there may be no absolute standards against which the truth or legitimacy of interpretations can be measured, they can be evaluated based on how convincingly extramusical inferences are related to purely musical properties. If an expressive interpretation is thought of as a type of *conceptual metaphor* for the emotional contour of the music, the legitimacy of a particular interpretation can be more or less determined by the aptness of the metaphor used. In other words, it is based on how convincingly the interpreter links extramusical inferences with both the music's general expressive properties and its objective, purely musical properties. "The important matter" according to Anthony Newcomb,

> is not so much the expressive patterns suggested by the words chosen, but the *demonstration* [my emphasis] of how the processes of music itself might be heard to have suggested the patterns suggested by the [interpretation].[61]

What remains to be discussed then, is how such a demonstration of expressive content is achieved. A popular method in the past has been to isolate various gestures of music and infer expressive content from there. But such an approach has recently been criticized for failing to consider the large-scale process of music. Cone, for example, argues that meaning in music is not found in its surface level gestures which are merely "decoded" by the interpreter, but rather,

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[61]Newcomb, 633.

in the music's "comprehensive design" which includes all of its expressive gestures in relation with one another "in a significant temporal structure."[62] Similarly, Roger Scruton argues that

> if any [one] feature is responsible [for musical expression], then so are they all. Expression is a character of the whole appearance—the whole *Gestalt*—and to understand it is not to decode it in accordance with some rule of reference, but rather to situate it in the world of human interest and communication.[63]

Cone demonstrated his own version of musical hermeneutics with an examination of Schubert's *Moment Musical* in A flat, op. 94. His guiding premise was that if expressive content is capable of being verbalized at all, "it must depend on close structural analysis."[64] The end result is a remarkably convincing expressive interpretation that reconciled a highly complex extrageneric inference with the music's "precise and specific" congeneric content.[65] And, as a result of his efforts, a renewed interest in the field of expressive interpretation was sparked.

The issue of musical hermeneutics is unlikely to appeal to everyone. One of the most prevalent charges leveled against such an endeavour is that it serves to distract listeners away from what is really important: the music itself. While this has undoubtedly been true in certain instances, the analytical rigour of Cone's interpretation should dispel the belief this is necessarily the case all the time. Newcomb

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[62]Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note...", 235

[63]Roger Scruton, "Analytical Philosophy and The Meaning of Music," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46: (special issue 1987): 173.

[64]Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note...", 235.

[65]Ibid., 239.

insists that the only real danger that exists when it comes to expressive interpretations of music

> is that the medium of the interpretation [verbal] may swamp the music, especially in a culture much more adept verbally than musically. The critic can combat this by returning constantly to the impetus for the particular metaphor in the musical processes themselves, by recalling the two-way process of reference inherent in artistic expression, and by insisting that the verbal metaphor is only a secondary example from the range of expressive potential in the primary musical meaning.[66]

From the above statement Newcomb effectively provides music criticism with a set of criteria against which expressive interpretations may be evaluated. First, he emphasizes the importance of regularly returning to the music itself for guidance: Does the interpreter illustrate his or her findings analytically? Or does he or she merely provide musical examples as a decoration to an otherwise literary discussion? And second, does the interpreter realize that his or her conclusions capture but a fraction of the work's expressive potential? As Newcomb argues, the ultimate meaning of any musical work is essentially untranslatable, so no interpretation should be heralded as absolute. A particularly strong interpretation, then, might be seen as having the ability to convincingly defend its choice to emphasize certain expressive properties while acknowledging the existence of alternative interpretations.

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The following chapter will undertake a critical examination of three expressive analyses of Mahler's Ninth Symphony based on the

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[66]Newcomb, 637.

aesthetic principles discussed herein. It should be clarified, however, that this examination in no way purports to be a thorough summary of the expressive conclusions reached by each interpreter; nor will every analytical detail of each demonstration be dealt with exhaustively. The aim is simply to shed a clarifying light on which expressive inferences are actually supported by the music, thereby distinguishing between what does and does not constitute a legitimate form of music criticism.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL EXAMINATION

No symphony of Gustav Mahler's has been the focus of as much philosophical consideration as his Ninth. While all of his compositions seemingly contend with weighty, existential issues, none has encouraged from listeners as much autobiographical speculation as the Ninth. Deryck Cooke writes that the work

> plunges into a darkness which represents the spiritual nadir of [Mahler's] last [compositional] period....[It] marks Mahler's furthermost descent into the hell of despair that suddenly confronted him after the mighty spiritual affirmation of No. 8, when he was told by his doctor that he had not long to live, and found his hard-won religious faith too insecure to exorcise the spectre of his swiftly approaching premature extinction.[1]

Cooke's reaction is typical of a widespread persistence to regard the Ninth as Mahler's dreary "farewell to life", due largely to the superstition which surrounds that work as a whole. As many have since argued, however, the once common view of Mahler as philosophically resigned and haunted by morbid thoughts late in life is not entirely supported by the literature. In fact, as cited earlier, Mahler described himself as "thirstier for life than ever before" during the time that he was composing his Ninth Symphony.[2] As a result of updated information

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[1]Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler:* 114.

[2]Knud Martner ed., *The Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, p. 329. (More of this letter to Bruno Walter is cited on page 27 in Chapter One.)

about Mahler, the Ninth has taken on a revised extramusical profile. Since the 1960s, it has been stripped of many of its bleak and tragic connotations and has assumed a more courageous, affirmative definition. David Holbrook, for example, introduces his analysis of the work as a direct challenge to earlier interpretations that described the Ninth as "world weary" or "valedictory":

> They [earlier interpreters] see Mahler as one who "withdrew" into the inner life, as if he sought merely to solve his own private problems and was prepared to let the world go hang. They supposed he spoke nostalgically of the past. To me his music seemed triumphantly positive, and offered in its effect on one's sensibility a profound sense of meaningful existence without God.[3]

Similarly, Jack Diether, who was the first to refer to Mahler as a "musical existentialist", insists that Mahler's late works reflect his shift away from the orthodox, religious sentiments of his Second and Eighth Symphonies, to more agnostic or pantheistic feelings. Diether concludes that this change in ideology marks "the final paradox of Mahler's life: that faced with actual death, he no longer strove for reconciliation with eternity, but with *this* world."[4]

Both Diether and Holbrook, because of their own philosophical leanings towards atheism, view Mahler's eventual disenchantment with religion as fundamentally positive and courageous. Holbrook even goes so far as to suggest that the reason earlier listeners interpreted the Ninth as marked by tragedy and despair was because of their "resistance" to Mahler's agnosticism later in life:

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[3]David Holbrook *Mahler and the Courage to Be*, 32.
[4]Jack Diether, "The Expressive Content in Mahler's Ninth Symphony..., 107.

> Bruno Walter...was a devout Catholic....To him... Mahler's music was searching for God even though Mahler had lost his faith....To him, obviously, world weariness would be a commendable attribute: yet, I think, to attribute it to Mahler is to put a wrong interpretation on his music.....Mahler's attachment to the joy and beauty of the earth is intense....It is stoical. It recognizes no Heaven or transcendental realm to which death is our 'door'. Even though Mahler's quest is intensely religious and philosophical, it does not in the end reject this world: this is all we have.[5]

Even if such an appraisal of Mahler's beliefs could be unanimously established as fact, this would not automatically mean that this assessment of the Ninth's meaning is more accurate than competing interpretations. As suggested in the Introduction, if expressive interpretations are to be valued for *musical* reasons, their legitimacy cannot be determined by extramusical facts alone. There must be a demonstrated congruency between an interpretation's expressive inferences and the work's purely musical structure before an interpretation is deemed to have any musical value.

INTRODUCING THE ANALYSES

Jack Diether's interpretation of the Ninth appeared in *Chord and Discord* in 1963. Although his thirty-eight page examination might be considered lengthy for a journal article, it comes across as remarkably compact when compared with David Holbrook's enormous discussion of the work twelve years later. Holbrook devotes an entire book to Mahler's Ninth, essentially providing little more than a philosophical re-interpretation of Diether's initial analysis. David B. Greene's work, on

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[5]Holbrook, 46–47.

the other hand, provides fresh philosophical as well as musical insight. While the Ninth occupies only one chapter of his 1984 book *Mahler: Consciousness and Temporality*, Greene demonstrates his expressive conclusions with an analytical rigour that gives his interpretation a degree of musical legitimacy exceeding earlier interpretations.[6]

Diether introduces his analysis with an important qualifying statement which recognizes that no interpretation can lay claim to capturing the work's ultimate expressive meaning:

> Inherently this is my own subjective interpretation, not necessarily better than other different ones...It is simply an intuitive extrapolation based on 25 years' study of Mahler's music and letters....I certainly intend to continue probing deeper into the *Ninth*, and since the work is virtually inexhaustible, no doubt I shall come to consider some of what I say here to be naive, tentative or clumsy...[7]

In addition, Diether concedes that the expressive conclusions he reaches are, by nature, quite vague:

> I must emphasize...that for the very reason that music is such an exact purveyor of the language of emotions, our verbalization of its expressive (not literary) content must be of necessity less so.[8]

It appears that Diether regards the ultimate meaning of music as, for the most part, hidden from the listener, and only partially translatable from music into ideas. Holbrook, on the other hand, begins by making reference to Diether's comments about "explicit statements [being] no more than rough generalizations"; but he provides a telling indication of his own beliefs by claiming that "we...understand the music

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[6]Additional information as to the professional backgrounds of each analyst can be found in the appendex "Notes on the Analysts", p. 131.

[7]Diether, 72.

[8]Ibid., 72.

better if we are trying to understand...what it is 'about' "[9] Such a statement betrays his determination to "prove" his expressive conclusions by appealing to Mahler's personal reasons for composing the work. Essentially, Holbrook believes that the Ninth has a specific, extramusical meaning, and it is his task to uncover it.

Both Diether's and Holbrook's analyses begin by extracting conventionalized emotional gestures from the music as well as any textual allusions to other works. These details are then set against known facts about Mahler's life in order to establish various expressive *connotations*. Holbrook, in particular, makes regular reference to Deryck Cooke's theory of music as a "language", obviously adopting Cooke's premise that music is the expressive *means* for a composer's fully-intended emotional or conceptual message.[10]

Greene's approach is strikingly different. "Musical analysis," he writes, "does not have a vocabulary for ultimate matters," so he borrows concepts from outside of music—from the field of phenomenology—to assist him in relating philosophically-based concepts to Mahler's music. He clarifies, however, that he does not employ phenomenological terms to "interpret" Mahler as an individual, but rather, to gain expressive insight into his music:

> What I am doing is not like translating a message from one language into another; I want to let his musically projected images become sharper by comparing and contrasting them to the conceptually projected image. What I am doing is

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[9]Holbrook, 119.

[10]See Chapter Two. Cooke's theory was challenged for its reliance on the "communication" model of musical expression, which reduces music to a vehicle for non-musical expression, and equates a composer's extramusical motivations for composing a piece with the its ultimate meaning.

> comparable to literary critics comparing two poems on the same theme by different writers.[11]

The terms Greene employs (evident from the title of his book) are *consciousness* and *temporality*. "The concept of temporal process," Greene explains, "will be used to gather up a number of assumptions about continuity, coherence, fulfillment and closure that are implicit in the music."[12] Adopting Goodman's "Exemplification Theory", Greene refers to music's metaphorical relationship with other non–musical phenomena. Music, he states, "metaphorically exemplifies things like progression, striving, fulfilling tendencies, arriving at a climax, and closure. These things in turn work together to exemplify a temporal process."[13]

Greene believes that many of the so-called philosophical inferences that are drawn from Mahler's compositions are tied to the temporal processes depicted by the music. He writes: "Because a concept of consciousness is so tightly linked to a concept of temporality, becoming clear about the temporal processes Mahler is exemplifying may help us to know how to assimilate his allusions to matters of the soul."[14] Even on a purely musical level however, Greene argues that it is the unique temporal organization of Mahler's compositions that ultimately makes his music sound so remarkable, and at times, peculiar to many listeners:

> The more closely one pays attention to Mahler's music and the details of its twists and turns, the more one realizes that

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[11]Greene, x.
[12]Ibid., 15.
[13]Ibid., 16.
[14]Ibid., 15.

> its processes cannot be said to exemplify the temporal process in which we usually think we live...Mahler's music itself disputes our usual concepts of consciousness and temporality in the sense that it embarks on processes that are analogous to those of cause and effect or of decision-making and then rejects these familiar processes for the sake of more disturbing ones.[15]

Greene observes that when listeners negatively criticize Mahler's music, they tend to conclude that he was simply an inept composer, or was, perhaps, eccentric or emotionally unstable. But those who champion him as a composer "hear a profound continuity in the flow of his music, but maintain that it is achieved in extraordinary ways."[16] Greene's analyses are devoted to exploring the unique temporal designs of Mahler's compositions, which he contends create "a kind of coherence that our usual assumptions find startling, mystifying and perhaps even unacceptable;"[17] Therein, Greene concludes, lies the ultimate significance of Mahler's compositions both extramusically, as well as purely musically.

CRITICAL EXAMINATION

First Movement

Jack Diether begins by identifying a "gesture of farewell", which he claims is derived from the music which accompanies the words "*ewig, ewig*" (ever/eternity) in *Der Abschied* of Mahler's earlier work, *Das Lied von der Erde*:

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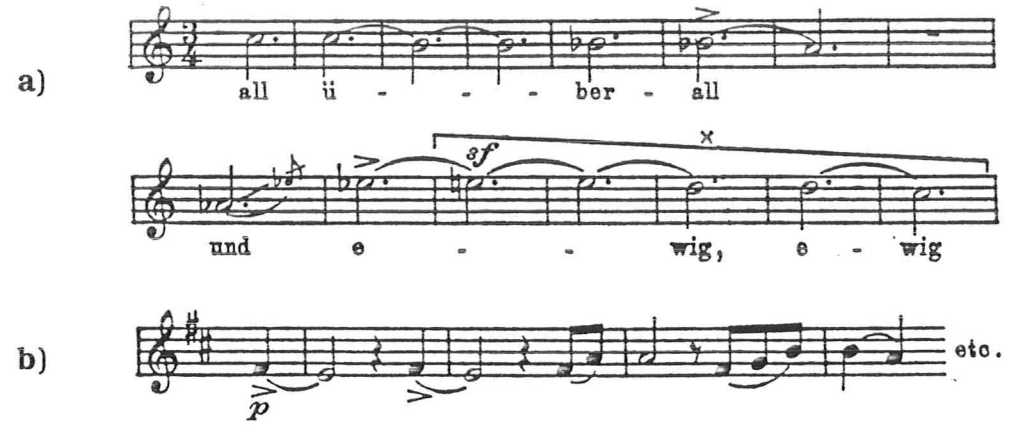
[15]Ibid., 3.
[16]Ibid., 2.
[17]Ibid., 14.

Example 1: A comparison of a) the *ewig* theme from *Das Lied von der Erde* (Diether's Ex. 3, p. 72) and b) the first movement's opening theme, (his Ex. 11, p. 75)



Diether cites a "strong resemblance" between the *ewig* gesture and the "*Lebewohl*" figure in Beethoven's "*Les Adieux* " Piano Sonata, Op. 81a. "The really striking thing about this figure," Diether writes, "is that, in addition to being a cadence figure, it is repeatedly used to *begin* the vocal phrases of *Der Abschied*, including the recitatives. This endows the vocal music with that feeling of finality, even in its highest passion."[18] Consequently, Diether describes the overall mood of the first 28 bars as a mixture of "gentle nostalgia" (depicted by the falling cadences of the *ewig* gesture), and "resignation" (depicted by the "funereal tread" which opens the piece and expressively underpins it in several sections).

To employ the semiotic terminology discussed in Chapter Two, these particular expressive signs can be accounted for both iconically

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[18]Diether, 73. To avoid any confusion between Diether's and Greene's use of the terms "*ewig*" and "*Lebewohl*", Diether explores its basic similarity to Beethoven's *Lebewohl* motif but does not differentiate between them. Greene, on the other hand, regards the *ewig* motif, although derived from the *Lebewolh* motif, as fundamentally different from it, as will be demonstrated.

and indexically. The *ewig* gesture for example, shares certain morphological characteristics with feelings of finality and nostalgia, but curiously enough, Diether seems to emphasize its indexical status as a result of its textual ties to *Das Lied von der Erde*. Similarly, his reference to a "funeral tread" can be understood both iconically as well as indexically. And to the extent that Diether assumes their expressive effect to be intentional on Mahler's part, these signs may also be describes as symbols.

According to Diether, the feeling of nostalgia inherent in the opening theme is then brought into violent opposition with "music of restless, passionate longing in D-minor":[19]

Example 2: First movement, entry of the D–minor section, appearing bar 29. (Diether's Ex. 15, p. 76)

Diether notes that the *ewig* melody continually reappears after an angry and restless theme in D-minor, "as though reluctant to let go [of the gentle nostalgia] after all." He goes on to explain that when the key signature changes from D-major to D-minor (beginning bar 27), the second horn assumes the *ewig* figure, only this time in the minor with some variation. As well, the horn is accompanied by "heavy brass [which] sounds the D-minor triad as a dark foundation to the rising chromatic theme." The effect is an ironic juxtaposition of two moods, reminiscent of "Mahler's ubiquitous falling tonic triad (*Sixth Symphony*,

[19]Ibid., 75.

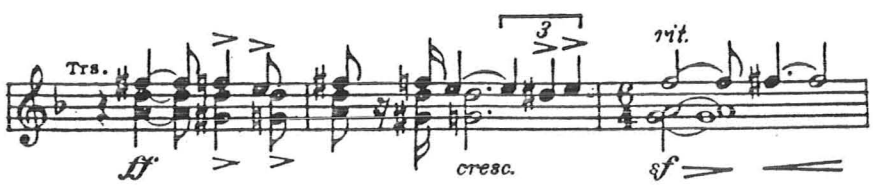
etc.) which was said by his friends to mirror so uncannily the sudden clouding over of his features after he made a cheerful remark." He concludes that

> Here the minor triad corresponds in essence to its function in the *Sixth*, while the whole D-major paragraph tells us explicitly to what it is counterpoised here—not life, but the calm acceptance of its ending.[20]

From the above statement, it is apparent how much Diether insists on interpreting the work in the context of Mahler's life circumstances. The "passionate protest" is immediately assumed to represent Mahler's defiance of death, while the peaceful "*ewig*" theme represents his resigned acceptance of his fate. Diether attempts to demonstrate how the themes are derived from the expressive attributes of the music itself, (i.e.. iconically) but his explanations make several assumptions about why we hear the expressive effects that we do:

> By placing the semitone *between* those third and second degrees of the scale, chromaticizing the "*ewig ewig*" complex, and implanting a desperate new rhythmic impetus to it, Mahler transforms in the most direct and graphic manner his evocation of a gentle resignation into a fierce cry of anguish.[21]

Example 3: The chromatic significance of the D–minor theme (Diether's Ex. 18, p. 77)



While Diether's expressive conclusions are probably acceptable to most people's ears, he fails to give a satisfying explanation of *why* the

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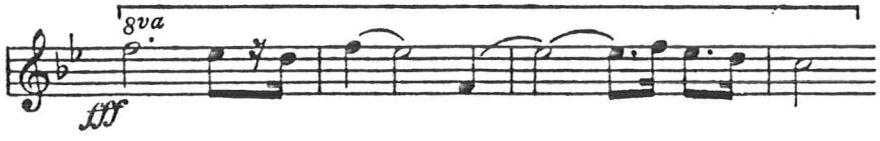
[20]Ibid., 76.
[21]Ibid., 77.

D-minor section, for example, elicits the expressive effect that it does. Like so many interpreters before him, he assumes that music naturally, and spontaneously represents certain emotions through established musical conventions. In other words, he assigns these musical gestures a symbolic status that is unwarranted. His argument would have been more effective if he were to have emphasized how the music is expressively iconic to the emotional attributes he cites.

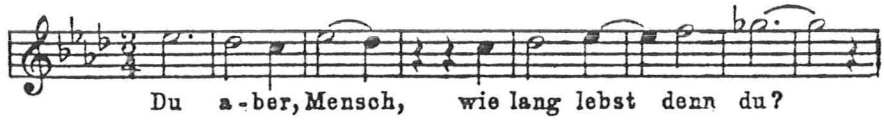
Further indication of Diether's reliance on indexical as opposed to iconic explanations is his repeated references to musical quotations from Mahler's earlier compositions, (especially those with accompanying texts like *Das Lied von der Erde*.) A striking example involves Mahler's "*Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde,*" where he makes reference to music which accompanies the lines "*Du aber Mensch, wie lang lebst denn du?*":[22]

Example 4: A comparison between *Das Trinklied* and bars 92-95 of the first movement. (Diether's Ex. 20 and 21, p. 77)



Compare this latter with the outline of the passage "*Du aber, Mensch*" ("But thou, Man, how long livest thou") from *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde:*

Ex. 21



[22]Ibid., 77.

The significance of this quotation, according to Diether, can be found in the explicitly defined meaning of the Lied from which it is derived:

> In...the mood of passionate protest, death is terrible and to be feared, not sadly embraced. It is the interrupter, the grim destroyer of unfulfilled ambitions, the crouching ape of *Das Trinklied* whose 'howls pierce the sweet scent of life'..."[23]

A great deal of extramusical information has been extrapolated based solely on Diether's marginally convincing reference to another work. In defense of his interpretation, Diether insists that Mahler always employed "the word as bearer of the idea"; only in his late music,

> the message is implied rather than stated, and so the more direct *emotional* meaning which music can impart is totally freed from the original verbal inspiration, while at the same time the latter is explicitly acknowledged.[24]

Implicit in Diether's entire discussion of the music is the rather obvious assumption that Mahler's use of musical quotations was intentional, either consciously or subconsciously. As Diether puts it: "Mahler's 'stream of consciousness' appears too total and enveloping, too pregnant with connotation, to be merely fortuitous."[25] This statement betrays an important bias underpinning Diether's reasoning: since Mahler's expressive references are viewed as intentional, it naturally follows that there is an "ideal" or "correct" interpretation of the music which is synonymous with the composer's personal motivations for writing the piece. It is, therefore, obvious that Diether's primary reason

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[23]Ibid., 76.
[24]Diether, 69.
[25]Ibid., 70.

for exploring the "meaning" of Mahler's music is to gain insight into the composer himself, not his music *per se.*

A similar emphasis is apparent in Holbrook's analysis. Holbrook openly admits that he views the Ninth Symphony as a conscious expression of Mahler's philosophical struggles late in life. He writes: "Mahler clearly *knew* he was writing what we would call "existentialist" music."[26] According to Holbrook, the Ninth represents Mahler's "true engagement" with his existential fears—a "battle that needs to be fought [by all of us], in the quest for our humanness."[27] Moreover, Holbrook insists: "Had Mahler not been able to accomplish this inward quest, he could never have finished his [Ninth] symphony, and there might have been consequent risks for his personality."[28]:

Clearly, Holbrook regards the compositional process as performing a therapeutic function for Mahler. His analysis, which he describes as an "attempt to apply certain insights from recent psychoanalytical theory and existentialism to the criticism of a work of music", relies almost entirely on the analytical insights provided by Diether. Comparing Holbrook's observations with Diether's up to this point, Holbrook identifies the rhythmic pattern, which accompanies the *ewig* theme, as representing a heartbeat. And he goes on to explain that the "first orchestral song," which is based on Diether's *ewig* theme,

> has the hesitant and expanding shape of a primal exploring awareness. It is a breathing—and it is also an echo and a tender groping—a musical expression of "togetherness" seeking "a presence in the being of the other"....Surely this

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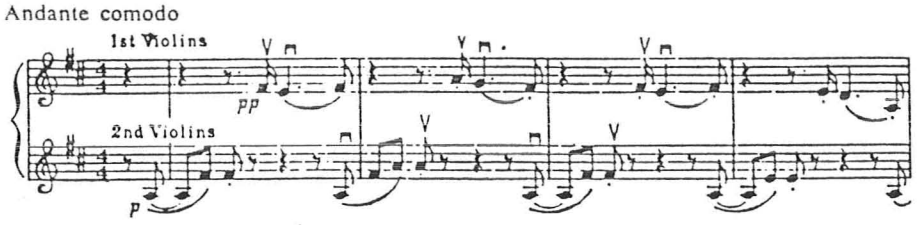
[26]Holbrook, 14.
[27]Ibid., 32.
[28]Ibid., 57.

> figure in the melody of the orchestral song may be seen as the musical equivalent of something like the inarticulate communication between mother and infant.[29]

Example 5: Segment of the "orchestral song" appearing bars 142–45 of the first movement, (Holbrook's Ex. 10, p. 124)



Holbrook explains that this music "re-enacts the discovery of space by the child...it belongs to the primary experience of *being* in the mother's arms, cradled, rocking, crooned to..."[30] He concludes that

> under the threat of death Mahler seeks to be reborn in the sense of becoming invulnerable, existentially. To do this he must "recreate the object" and re-experience "confirmation" —to make himself whole, to a whole Alma; to make peace with himself and the whole earth. So he returns to the first experience of at–one–ness, from which the core of being derives. He mothers himself. From there he begins at once to explore the discovery of the self, of the me and the not me, so that the suspension in a recaptured sense of eternity quickly gives way to movement, expansion, exploration and discovery. From the sense of unitary being (at-one-ness, *ewig*) of subjective identification with the feminine element he moves towards the discovery of the object...the mother, the woman partner. From this inevitably rise the problems of hate and existence anxiety, since he is treading the path towards painful ruth and concern.[31]

With continual reference to Diether's analysis, Holbrook explains that the "combination of finality and eternity [which Diether

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[29]Ibid.,123.

[30]Ibid., 125.

[31]Ibid., 123. Much of Holbrook's terminology at this point reflects his interest in the "object relations" of Melanie Klein, as well as the existential ideas of Martin Buber.

observes in the *ewig* theme] conveys the feeling [that] 'in my end is my beginning'—or put another way, 'confronted by my death, I concentrate on the problem of finding a meaning in my existence.'"[32] When the D-minor section enters, Holbrook observes that the major-second interval (F-sharp to E-natural of the D-major *ewig* theme) is replaced with a minor-second interval (F-natural to E-natural). He borrows Cooke's language theory of music to account for the resulting expressive effect, and in doing so, manages to interpret a considerable amount of psychoanalytic information about Mahler's condition:

> As Cooke says...a falling cadence stands for falling, despairing, and sighing. It expresses the *normal* (manic depressive) sorrow against which we set joy....But in discussing descending chromatic scales, Cooke says the slow gradual painful sinking, through the chromatic scales '*expresses the feeling of life ebbing away altogether*'. This brings us to the schizoid problem...The chromatic element threatens to dissolve that tonality which has been established in the opening pages and has a feeling of security, love, and a groping towards freedom. There has been some conflict [between the] major and minor but that corresponded to the normal manic-depressive" relationship with life. The chromatic threat now points beyond this to the schizoid problem of a deeper tonal breakdown.[33]

It becomes strikingly apparent from the above quotation just how much Holbrook's interpretation relies on insights from earlier work; Holbrook himself merely elaborates upon the extramusical side of the metaphor, missing no opportunity to draw extensive information (of considerable psychoanalytical detail) from the most basic gestures of music. A good example is his reference to Mahler's famous Hurdy-gurdy incident which emerged from the composer's discussion with Sigmund

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[32]Ibid., 151.
[33]Ibid., 157.

Freud (see Chapter One). Holbrook suggests that the emotional resonance of this experience is expressed in the Ninth by the conflict which is created between the "love theme" in D-major, and the "hate theme" in D-minor:

> How is it such a disturbing theme of hate can emerge out of passion and love? We can illuminate [its] origins...if we imagine the vulgar tune *[Ach] Du Lieber Augustin*! played on a barrel organ, out of tune, with a monkey on the top. To be confronted with [this] left him for ever in fear of being overwhelmed by ugliness and coarseness. Is this not the source of the hate theme of the *Ninth*?[34]

Holbrook places an enormous amount of significance on this love–hate conflict. In fact, he appears to view the entire symphony as somewhat of a creative testimony to the "massive regression" that he claimed Mahler needed to undergo as he struggled with his various psychological issues late in life:

> Mahler finds the object and makes reparation in the Ninth Symphony. What is involved is a magnificent

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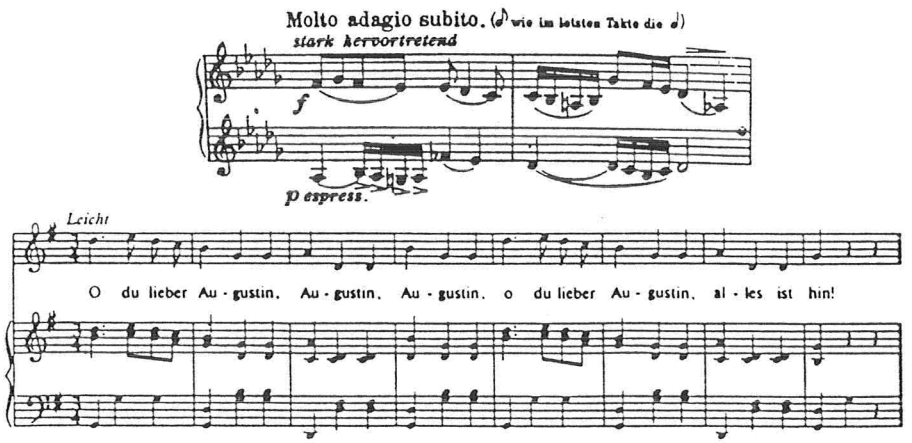
[34]Ibid., 158. Holbrook goes so far as to suggest that the tune "Ach Du Lieber Augustine" is quoted in the chromatic turn of the final movement *Adagio*:

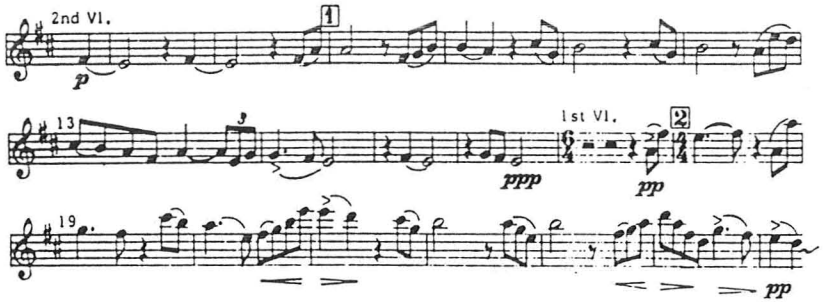
Example 6: A comparison between the chromatic turn from the Finale and "*Ach du lieber Augustin*" (Holbrook's Ex. 38 (part) and 39 respectively, 158.



> completion of the "depressive position" as a stage in the developing sense of being in a real work. Mahler is able to find true concern for the consequences of one's hate in the world, through re-enacting [the] "encounter"."[35]

Turning to the third analysis, Greene begins by identifying what he refers to as the *Lebewohl* motif, which "consists of two descending whole steps: F-sharp to E and E to D."[36]

Example 7: *Lebewohl* motif spun–out over twenty bars: (Greene's Fig. 94, p. 265)



While he acknowledges that the *Lebewohl* motif is expressively derived from Beethoven "*Les Adieux*" Sonata, Op. 81a, Greene insists that the feeling of finality that it imparts "is not merely conventional[37]; the motif is also an apt metaphor for departure." He explains:

> To hear [the internal] dynamics [of this motif], listeners must obviously be aware of the harmonic context; they must

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[35]Ibid., 84-85.

[36]Greene, 264. It will be interesting to compare Greene's comments on the *Lebewohl* motif with his discussion of a similar motif in the Finale.

[37]Ibid., 264. Greene's implication that the *Lebewohl* motive had assumed conventionalized status by Mahler's day has been hotly disputed by Vera Micznik who writes: "Had the *Lebewohl* motive become such a convention, the early biographers [of Mahler] would have certainly noticed the connection, but they did not even mention Beethoven." 448. While I agree with Micznk's general conclusion, I think she overlooks that fact that Greene invests much more of his attention to a discusssion of the motive's *iconic*, as opposed to *indexical* or *symbolic* characteristics. Unlike the other analysts, Greene does not take its presumed indexical ties to Beethoven's work completely for granted, choosing rather, to emphasize how the motive exemplifies expressive properties that are isomorphic with the experience of bidding farewell.

> know that the first note, the F-sharp, is not the final note in a scale, but is a tone that has downward mobility to the final note D. On hearing the F-sharp, we expect a lower note, in much the same way the we expect a noun to come when we hear the word "toward" and the context tells us we are hearing English. The downward push from F-sharp to D is not, however, nearly so strong as the downward push from F-natural to D would be. In fact, the motif begins almost balanced between the pull of the D and a resistance to movement of any kind.[38]

Greene demonstrates that the *Lebewohl* motif can be considered metaphorically similar to the feelings of bidding farewell to a loved–one because the "experience of feeling tied to someone, resisting movement away from this person, and at the same time feeling that the tie is about to be broken", is analogous to the internal dynamics which are experienced when one listens to this section of music. He explains that when one is bidding farewell, "the impending end does not weaken the strength of the bond, and the strength of the bond does not weaken the sense of imminent, final departure." He clarifies that musically,

> A descent from F-*natural* to E to D would be a less apt metaphor for "farewell" because its downward push is stronger, and the sense of finality dominates over what is left behind. The difference between the two descents is a subtle one, somewhat like the difference between resignation and despair.[39]

The feeling of nostalgia so commonly attributed to this movement is described by Greene as a "balance between the sense of a coming final end and the sense of being profoundly involved in what is about to end."[40] These feelings are expressed in the music through the

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[38]Ibid., 264.
[39]Ibid., 264.
[40]Ibid., 267.

use of the *ewig* motif which is comprised of a whole tone descent from F—sharp—E:

Example 8: The *ewig* motif. (extract from Greene's Fig. 94, p. 265)

Although the *ewig* motif is derived from the *Lebewohl* motif, it performs a much different expressive function. Typically, it is suspended over a C major chord, and is harmonically perceived as "neither at rest nor moving toward rest...it neither has nor seeks closure", and therefore, it gives the association of "what it is like to be eternally conscious."[41] Over the course of the entire movement the *Lebewohl* motif is transformed into the *ewig* motif: subtle changes occur which make the *Lebewohl* motif's final descent from E to D no longer sound necessary; the motif F-sharp to E appears to stand sufficiently on its own.

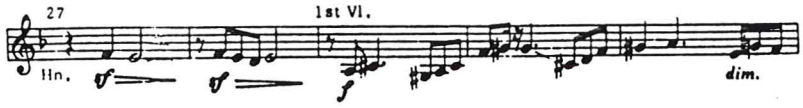
Greene's entire explanation of the process by which this transformation occurs is difficult to summarize, as he gives considerable attention to the subtlest harmonic and melodic details. Essentially, he explains that Mahler gradually blurs the division between the background (harmony and accompaniment) and the foreground (main melodic material), a process which he refers to as the "emptying of musical space". By the end of the movement, almost everything is foreground; there is no depth to the music. The background material, which supplied the harmonic context which originally caused listeners to expect some kind of resolution or closure when confronted with the *ewig*

[41]Ibid., 265-66.

motif, is entirely eliminated. Hence, the descent from F-sharp to E ends up sounding complete on its own: *it just is.*

Conversely, the D–minor theme, which emerges earlier in direct opposition to the resigned *ewig* theme, is "despairing, anguished, angry, protesting and striving" in character. Its main distinguishing feature is its F-natural to E descent, which leans much more heavily into the final D than the more benign *ewig* theme:

Example 9: The chromatic significance of D–minor theme: (Greene's Ex. 99, p. 272)



> ...[The F–natural—E descent] lacks the resistance to movement that almost balances the pull of the D in the F-sharp—E interval. As a result, the F—E motif seems to suggest despair instead of the resignation of the "Lebewohl." The new motif gives rise to an anguished figure that begins low and struggles upward....As if someone were saying, "No, I will *not* go gently in to that good night," the striving becomes increasingly agitated. In the first D minor section, the striving reaches a goal, and this arrival is a glorious triumph, the most thrilling and satisfying moment in the movement....[42]

This point in the symphony is of critical importance for Greene. At bar 47, with 407 bars left in the movement, he insists that "never again does the music seem so glorious. Never again does the song of peaceful resignation enter as a climax or as the goal of striving."[43] Instead of making a thundering climax time after time, each of the violent D–minor episodes in the development section crumble and

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[42]Ibid., 272.

[43]Ibid., 272. I disagree with Greene here. The ten bars which precede bar 359 (rehearsal number 16) create what is arguably one of the most poignant and "glorious" moments in the entire symphony, at least in terms of arriving at climax.

dissolve shortly before any sense of a goal is allowed to take shape. A good example of this takes place around bars 303–14. As the turbulence of these bars subsides, there is no sense of having actually arrived at a goal; instead, the menacing, syncopated rhythm from the introduction appears to step in rather arbitrarily:

> It is played triple *forte* by the horns and trombones. Like a primeval blare, it has no melody, no harmony, and none of the sense of direction that melody and harmony imply. It is as lacking in energy as it is in direction; its first tone is long, then it pulsates in irregular, unpredictable lengths. It so insists on its unpredictableness that the very principle of regularity on which a sense of the future depends seems to be contradiction. At the moment when a goal is most expected and most needed if goals are to make sense at all, time is frozen; the climax is the impossibility of conceiving a goal![44]

Greene argues each return of the D–minor section is marked by increasingly diminished momentum. As he puts it, "the energy simply spends itself, so that when the song of resigned peace reenters we have less and less of a sense of arrival. More and more it simply happens."[45] Hence, as the music is slowly emptied of musical space (i.e. no background) it is simultaneously emptied of a musical future; that is, it increasingly demonstrates less and less a sense of heading towards a goal:

> At the end, the future has become emptied in the sense that the present is utterly independent of the future....Just as sucking the background into the foreground creates a musical space that is a void, so sucking the very possibility of coming events into the present creates a musical future that is a void. At the end of the movement, it is no wonder that the descending whole step from F-sharp to E sounds

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[44]Ibid., 274. This section marks the end of the third episode of the development section and the beginning of the retransition into the movement's recapitulation.

[45]Ibid., 272-73.

> neither complete nor incomplete. It exemplifies metaphorically a temporal process in which one experiences no contrast between what is and what is coming.[46]

In attempts to tie his musical observations to a conceptual metaphor based on Mahler's life, Green writes:

> [Mahler] was a dying man. Perhaps the new way of being conscious into which the first movement leads us is his vision of what consciousness might be like after the body has died....As the movement runs its course, it transforms the consciousness of final separation into the kind of consciousness which knows no finality and in which one's sense of self is radically altered because one no longer closes the present self with the remembered or the possible self."[47]

Obviously, Greene's analysis is influenced by existential or Zen–like thinking. While he does not openly admit it in so many words, he appears to be speculating on what may have been Mahler's philosphical attitude during the time he was composing the Ninth Symphony. Nevertheless, because Greene's intention was, for the most part, to focus on the music itself, he resists elaborating excessively on the extramusical side of the metaphor in the manner of the other interpreters.

Returning to the other analyses for comparison, Diether passes rather swiftly over the development section, remarking that it is "impossible to verbalize all [of its] conceptual implications," and insisting that "the musical experience itself must take over where the power of verbal characterization begins to fail."[48] Nevertheless, Diether draws attention to the three episodes which comprise the development

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[46]Ibid., 274-75.
[47]Ibid., 275.
[48]Diether, 79.

section. He remarks that the first two episodes gather increasing energy and momentum, but eventually "crumble" into "futile gropings to 'attain' or 'remember' the song of peace." Only in the third and final episode (bars 303-314) is the music's pent-up energy allowed to express itself in its fullest passion. Diether takes special notice of the fact that it was the *third* episode in which the music "sunders everything" with a "catastrophic climax", recalling "the three blows of fate in the finale of [the Sixth Symphony]".[49] Diether does not bother to illuminate the reader as to what he feels is the particular significance of his reference to the Sixth. Presumably, he is referring to the fact that the third blow of fate, as the legend goes, was the one which eventually "felled" Mahler "as a tree is felled"; but he leaves this to the reader to surmise.

Holbrook views the same three episodes in the development section as being primarily concerned with reconciling the "love" and "hate" themes of the exposition. He claims that hate is eventually "redeemed" through love, but the struggle is a difficult one.[50] The violent climax, which occurs after the third episode (bars 303-314), expresses profound feelings of *existential* despair; but out of this grief the music suggests that one can emerge capable of loving and living with meaning:

> Temporality, death, and the possibility that all is meaningless are courageously encountered...But this is not *nihilism*: it is *existential* despair—and the effort to *learn*...it is a mistake to regard this as an end, a collapse, a throwing up of the sponge, as pessimism or negation, for it is a beginning—a beginning to learn *how to be*, when all the

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[49]Ibid., 79.
[50]Holbrook 173.

> existing forms of being have proved unsatisfactory, while the world is menaced with a longing for non–being.[51]

Holbrook believes that the "hate" theme takes on a special significance just before this climax occurs, suggesting that it has undergone part of its transformation:

> [The hate theme] is now part of the pain of joy in living... beneath it always lies the menace of nonexistence [for] the greatest joy of life is *in* its temporality. The threat of the end of our time continually threatens us with meaningless—out of fear arises our hungry hate: but the same voracious hate-hunger is itself man's most glorious if painful gift, to suffer the quest for meaning. [Pages] 45-6-7 [roughly bars 296-309] are about the painfulness of consciousness, which is both consciousness of joy...and of death, which suddenly appears *fff mit höchster Gewalt*...[52]

Holbrook interprets the origins of the love–hate conflict as rooted in Mahler's own conflicting feelings towards his parents: since Mahler apparently hated his father and adored his mother, Holbrook proposes that he needed to integrate the good and bad elements of both sexes into his psyche in order to emerge as a fully functioning adult:

> Mahler is...moving towards recognizing the truth that the problems he is dealing with are integral with the identification with, and internalization of, the father and the mother. The male hate he fears will destroy his world is part of the father whom he has taken into himself, along with the good and feminine (and loving) elements of the father: the four voices (love and hate in mother and father must be studied together. Mother love is the orchestral song: the possibility of eternity in the 'I–thou'....The mother as exciting object does not satisfy, but is experienced as rejecting, leading to the threat of disintegration, and this in turn is associated with the father's hate. The solution is to try to find and love the regressed libidinal ego, or infant self, which suffers these fears—and, at the same time, to

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[51]Ibid., 178.

[52]Ibid., 175. (*Mit höchster Gewalt* occurs specifically at bar 308).

> understand male and female in the parents and in oneself, not least the origins of hate.[53]

This lengthy quotation illustrates just how psychoanalytically dependent Holbrook's analysis of the music is. In actual fact, Holbrook never really gets around to analyzing the *music* because he is too busy analyzing *Mahler.* He uses the Ninth simply as a lens through which he can examine his subject in entirely nonmusical terms.[54]

Holbrook concludes that the "hate" theme is eventually "transformed into pure gold—into love and security, in D major,"[55] but he does not demonstrate his conclusions analytically, except to refer arbitrarily to various quotations here and there. It is obvious at this point that Holbrook's "analysis" is nothing more than a philosophical elaboration of Diether's broader inferences. In *musical* terms, Holbrook's interpretation is stretched far beyond credibility, for as discussed in Chapter Two, even the most general expressive conclusions are only metaphorical in nature. Holbrook's analysis is like a metaphor based on a metaphor, and is hence, of more literary than musical value.

According to Holbrook, the movement ends with feelings of "peace" and "eternity". Since by his own admission, Holbrook is "more of a literary person than a musical person"[56], he turns to a long reference from Diether's analysis to lend musical support to his interpretation:

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[53]Holbrook, 171.

[54]For a rather trenchant attack against pychoanalytical interpretations of composers, see Dika Newlin's "The 'Mahler's Brother Syndrome': Necropsychiatry and the Artist: *Music Quarterly* 66:2 (1980): 287-95. Newlin defines "Necropsychiatry" as "the raping of the minds and spirits of great men and women of the past in the name of 'science'." (297) After citing some analytical mistakes in Holbrook's work, Newlin lets him off rather easily, claiming his "total evaluation of Mahler is worthy of consideration, as is his perception of the Ninth." (299)

[55]Holbrook, 180.

[56]Ibid., 12.

> On the last page, the lyric theme slowly evaporates in D major, in a broken dialogue for solo violin and winds, in which the oboe keeps repeating its "ewig...ewig"...till the final *morendo*. And this time the falling cadence is completed only by a very tenuous high D in the piccolo...[57]

Interestingly, Diether's analysis appears to place more emphasis on the oboe repeatedly chanting the *ewig* theme than anything else. For Diether, the *ewig* gesture literally means "eternity". It functions as a *symbol*, which according to the definition established in Chapter Two, implies a purposeful desire to achieve an expressive effect. As a result, further explanation as to *how* the music is imbued with this sentiment would seem unnecessary to Diether.

Unsurprisingly, both Diether and Holbrook make reference to the scrawled messages that Mahler wrote on the pages of his manuscript in order to support their interpretations. For instance, earlier in the movement, at bar 148, Mahler wrote: "*O Jugendzeit! Entschwundene! O Liebe! Verwehte*."[58] These exclamations, it should be noted, do coincide with one of the most poignant moments in the entire first movement, and are arguably, quite fitting descriptions of the affect presented musically at the time. Undoubtedly, Mahler was aware of the emotional character of what he was writing, but it remains debatable whether or not the Ninth should be considered the literal expression of what he was feeling at the time he composed it. After all, Mahler himself insisted that a "real life experience is the *reason* for [a] work, [but] not its

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[57]Diether, 81.

[58]Cited in James L. Zychowicz, "The Adagio of Mahler's Ninth Symphony: A Preliminary Report on the *Partiturentwurf*." *Revue Mahler Review* no. 1 (2nd Semester 1987):8. Originally appearing in Henri Louis de la Grange, *Gustav Mahler* vol. 3, (Paris: Fayard, 1984): 356. (This translates in English to "Oh youth! Vanished...Oh, love! Flown away!)

content."[59] If an interpreter's intentions are to analyze the *composer*, then such speculation is warranted and perhaps necessary; but if it is the *music* one is purporting to analyze, then appealing to the composer's intentions has very little authority.

Of the three analyses, Greene's best avoids conflating the music's meaning with its expressive content, significance or purpose. Despite the fact that he considers the Ninth to *exemplify* Mahler's sense of being near the end of his life, Greene does not insist upon establishing close parallels with biographical information; nor does he place a lot of emphasis on textual allusions to earlier music. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he does not see it as his task to explain *why* Mahler may have written the work. He appears to view music's expressive *significance* and its *purpose* as somewhat unrelated, and views both as separate from the work's ultimate *meaning*.[60]

Second and Third Movements

While Diether and Holbrook examine the two inner movements in detail, Greene confines his discussion, for the most part, to movements One and Four. This examination will do likewise, passing over the *Ländler* and *Rondo Burlesque* in an attempt to heighten the comparison between the three analyses. To summarize the inner movements briefly, however, the *Ländler* seems to make a subtle mockery of life, while all along expressing a rather bitter-sweet "farewell" to its

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[59]*Gustav Mahler, Selected Letters*, ed. Knud Martner, trans. by Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Keiser and Bill Hopkins (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1979), 79.

[60]This distinction will be explored in more depth in the concluding chapter.

many joys and pleasures. Viennese Waltzes are interspersed with banal sounding *Ländler* tunes, appropriately marked "*Etwas täppisch und sehr derb*,"[61] as if Mahler wanted to pit cosmopolitan sophistication against country näiveté.

The *Rondo Burlesque*, in comparison, is an utterly savage movement, which one writer described as "a ferocious outburst of fiendish laughter at the futility of everything."[62] But just before the movement ends, there is a brief glimpse of the *finale's* peaceful serenity, as if to suggest that the bitter irony of the two inner movements will somehow be resolved in the music that follows.

Fourth Movement

The fourth movement *Adagio*, according to Diether, "grows organically out of the other movements, and yet affords an utter catharsis of all that has preceded it." He adds that the very key in which it is written is in itself "a unique kind of resolution."[63] Diether takes special note of the fact that the concluding *Adagio*, written in D-*flat* major, ends the symphony a minor second below the key in which it had begun (D-major). Comparing the tonal arrangement of the Ninth with that of the Fifth symphony, Diether concludes:

> If a semitone rise, beginning in the minor mode and ending in the major [Mahler's Fifth Symphony] may be said to signify optimism or triumph, then a semitone fall, both beginning and ending in the major mode, may equally well signify retirement and peaceful resignation.[64]

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[61]"somewhat clumsy and very coarse."
[62]Cooke, 117.
[63]Diether, 94.
[64]Ibid., 95.

Consistent with his analysis of the first movement, Diether makes no real effort to explain *how* the work's tonal scheme might lead a listener to this conclusion. Neither does Holbrook, who arbitrarily deduces the movement's tonality to mean that Mahler "is dying, and accepts his mortality."[65]

Greene's analysis, on the other hand, devotes considerable effort to discussing any extramusical deductions based on Mahler's progressive tonal scheme; and unsurprisingly, his explanation is a great deal more analytical than either Diether's or Holbrook's. Basically, Greene hears the fourth movement as expressing the underlying tonality of C-sharp, the enharmonic equivalent of D-flat.[66] He argues that the keys of the preceding movements (D—C—a) have so far, "related to and confirm[ed] the tonality of D and thus [prepared for] a Finale in D." The implied C-sharp tonality does not contradict this expectation until the very end of the movement when the listener is left anticipating a final resolution up to D. (C-sharp, after all, is the leading tone of in the D-major scale.) When this implied resolution is denied, Greene contends that the symphony ends "suspended in mid air [and] the work as a whole sounds incomplete. But this incompleteness, he adds, "is

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[65]Holbrook, 212.

[66]It should be added here that 43 bars of the *Finale* are, in fact, written in the key of C-sharp minor, in effect the parallel minor of the opening key. Greene argues that those who hear the piece as falling a minor second in the last movement "ignore the tonalities of the middle movements", viewing them as irrelevant. C-sharp, as opposed to D-flat, will be experienced as the functional tonal centre by "listeners who let themselves be guided by their ears and not by what they see in the score or the printed program." (p. 296.)

combined with a completeness" when examined amidst several other details of the music overall.[67]

As in his examination of the first movement, Diether places considerable extramusical significance on the Ninth's expressive ties to *Das Lied von der Erde:*

> The whole *Adagio*", Diether writes, "translates into pure music the poetic ambiguity of *Der Abschied*, with its lingering sensuousness and the overwhelming passion of its outburst apostrophizing "*Schoenheit,*" "*ewignen Liebens,*" and the "*Lebens-trunk'ne Welt*". It is music imbued not only with the utmost sadness of leave-taking but with a deep love of life and a feeling for life in every fibre.[68]

The quotations to which Diether refers are presumably the exclamations which Mahler scrawled over the final pages of his manuscript, but Diether does not elucidate as to his source. Recently, in 1987, the original manuscript of the *Finale* of the Ninth (the *Partiturentwurf*) was discovered, and written over the last couple pages of the score were the following phrases:

O Schönheit! Liebe! <Oh, beauty! Love!>
Lebt wol! Lebt wol! <Farewell! Farewell!>[69]

Together with the exclamations found in the first movement, it would appear that Diether and Holbrook have persuasive evidence that the message of "farewell" was intentional on Mahler's part. But as argued earlier, when determining the musical legitimacy of an interpretation, the intentions of the artist are not the issue. What is of

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[67]Greene, 296-97.
[68]*Diether*, 97.
[69]Zychowicz, 79-80, citing La Grange, 356.

concern is how a given interpretation *demonstrates* its expressive ties to the music's autonomous, or purely musical structure. Establishing Mahler's intentions is not synonymous with demonstrating how his music achieves a particular expressive effect. Mahler may have had a detailed extramusical agenda for his Ninth which is entirely indecipherable to listeners. Such intentions, then, may constitute the Ninth's extramusical *purpose*, but not its *content* or *significance*, which is, by nature, listener–dependent.

To further illustrate this point, Diether hears a similarity between the movement's main theme and the hymn *Abide with Me.* He claims that through reference to such "common" or "banal" tunes, Mahler expressed his subconscious feelings—a process that Diether describes as "Mahler's musical surrealism."[70] Holbrook takes the idea one step further by citing two additional musical references that he claims were suggested to him by Diether in private communication: they are the American folk songs *"Silver Threads Among the Gold"*, and *"Poor Old Joe."* According to Holbrook, Mahler "redeems" these melodies in his Ninth, just as the "banal aspects of one's own being—perhaps the most dangerous threats to transcendent meaning—must, in some way, be absorbed into one's entire being."[71] It isn't entirely clear which of the two analysts should be directly accredited with the following example. (Diether, at least, did not have the courage to *publish* this absurdity.)

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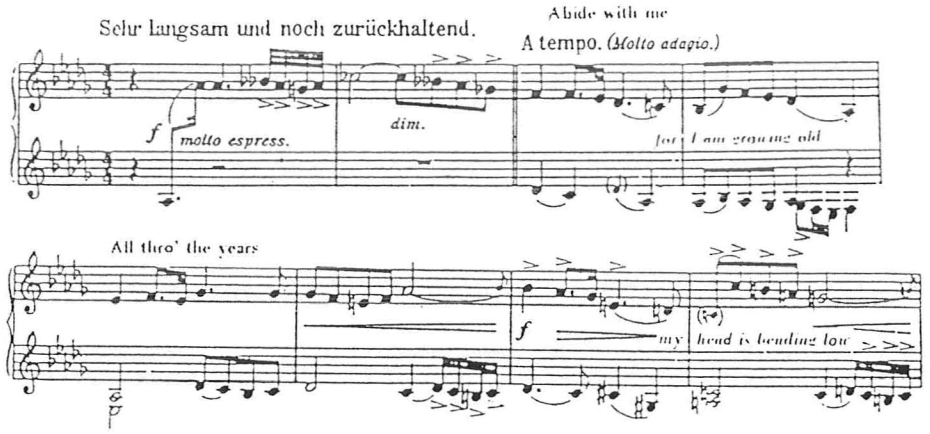
[70]Diether 100.
[71]Holbrook, 214.

Example 10: (Holbrook's Ex. 112, p. 215)



These kinds of expressive conclusions are simply arbitrary associations, and hence, are of little *musical* value in determining a work's expressive significance.[72] Because both Diether and Holbrook equate *meaning* with *intentionality*, they remain forever attached to decoding surface level gestures, rather than exploring the music's *comprehensive design*, which Cone argues, is ultimately responsible for the work's expressive significance.[73] Of the three analyses, Greene's offers, by far, the best demonstration of how Mahler's music actually supports its various extramusical associations by pointing to the expressive properties it shares with various extramusical phenomena. For this reason, the better part of the remaining examination will be devoted to Greene's work.

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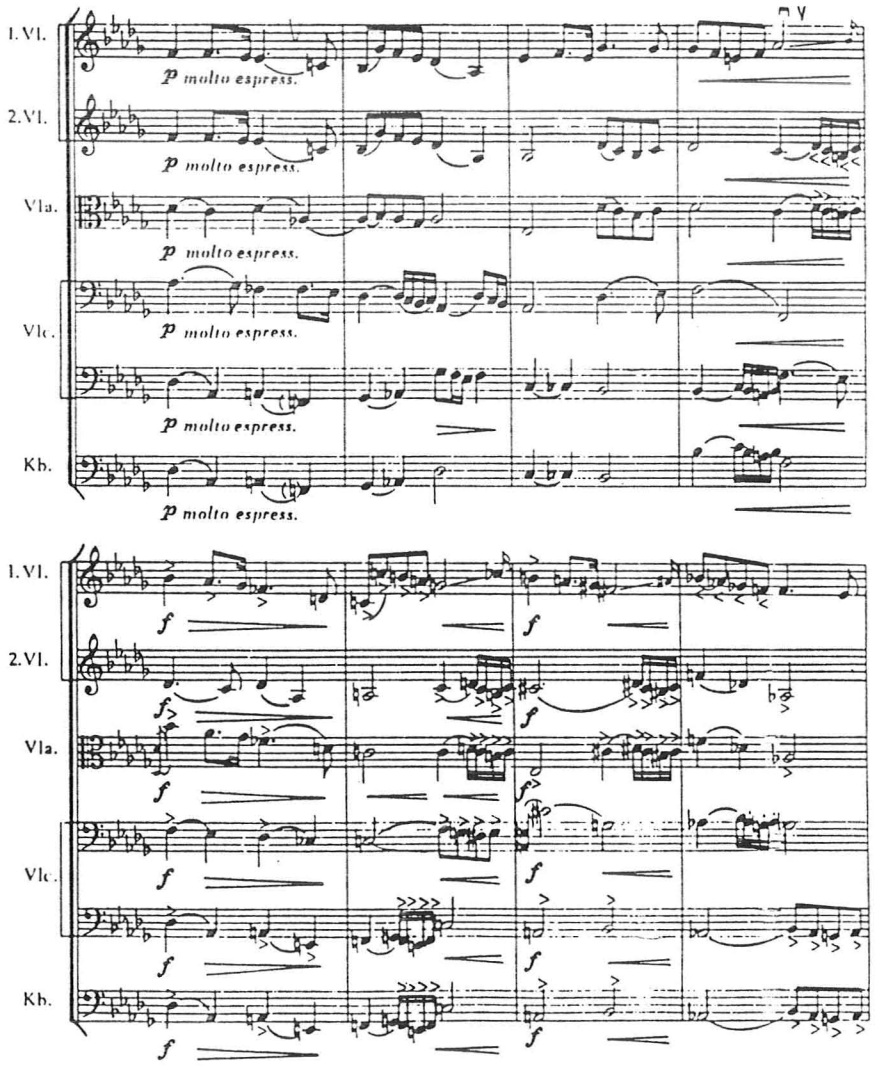
[72]Ibid., 215. Unlike Puccini's reference to the "Star Spangled Banner" in Madamma Butterfly, (see Chapter Two) these quotations are not immediately recognizable by the average listener, and therefore, cannot be considered examples of expressive indices. Moreover, it is questionable whether Mahler was even familiar with these pieces in the first place.

[73]Edward T. Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics," *Nineteenth Century Music* 5 (Spring 1982): 235. Referred to previously in Chapter Two.

Example 11: Fourth movement, bars 3-10 (Greene's Fig. 101, p. 277)



Greene begins by drawing attention to the *Lebewohl* hymn, which he states has similar connotations to the *Lebewohl* motif in the first movement. He observes that D-flat is immediately established as a melodic and harmonic goal, and unlike in the first movement, this goal is repeatedly attained. The expressive effect, however, still manages to suggest feelings of "farewell" or "final leave-taking" as Greene explains:

> By moving to D-flat at the beginning and the end of each period and by keeping in force the goal of D-flat throughout

> the period, the musical line connotes a final leave-taking...Along the way to the end, chromatic harmonies appear to enrich the downward descent. Although they suggest that the stream of life flowing to its inevitable end if full of eddies that make it interesting and worthwhile, they never weaken the tonicity of D-flat nor hide its arrival as the passage's goal nor suggest that its arrival can be put off indefinitely.[74]

According to Greene, the temporal process exemplified by the *Lebewohl* hymn is "one in which its subject is at peace with itself, with the certainty of its coming nonbeing and with its finite experiences." In more philosophical terms he adds: "Life that ends is not worthless merely because it ends, and trying to realize valuable, though finite, goals does not need either to ignore or to defy the coming nothingness.[75]

Basically, Greene is describing what he would call *normal consciousness*: an awareness of finitude balanced by a sense of meaning in the present. The music continues to generate and satisfy various expectations in the listener, but these expectations are not created merely to stall the coming of the end of the piece: essentially, they define the music, and make it what it is. Similarly, the various struggles an individual endures in his or her lifetime are not merely obstacles on the route to death: *they are life itself.*[76]

In the second statement of the *Lebewohl* hymn (bars 49-87), Greene observes that the temporal process undergoes an important transformation. Gradually, the music moves towards a new goal of A-flat, and by the end of the third *Lebewohl* hymn section (bars 126–85), A-flat "decisively displaces D-flat as the tone toward which the melody

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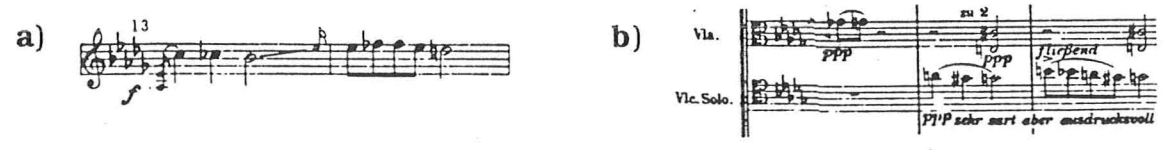
[74]Greene 276.
[75]Ibid., 281
[76]Ibid., 278.

moves and on which it comes to rest at the end."[77] Greene's description of the process by which A-flat displaces D–flat as the movement's melodic goal, is quite involved, and can only be unfairly summarized. Essentially, it has to do with the expressive merging of the movement's gentle *Lebewohl* hymn, and what he terms the "tragic fanfare."[78]

According to Greene, the tragic fanfare appears intermittently with the *Lebewohl* hymn: "Entering so violently, it seems to shriek a protest against the resigned peace...that is projected by the "Lebewohl" hymn".[79] He notes that the fanfare

> Consists of two statements of [a] descending motif, the immediate repetition making the fanfare more conspicuous and intensifying its connotations of thrusting forward futilely. But in the fourth movement the repetition occurs not on the same pitches (as in the first movement) , but an augmented fourth higher[80], and the second chromatic descent is preceded by an accented lower neighbour tone. The upward leap and the auxiliary note for the repetition make the tragic fanfare a shriek of agony and anger—the diametric opposite of the peaceful resignation of the "Lebewohl" hymn....The upward leap and lower auxiliary are so central to the Finale's tragic fanfare that their absence from the fanfare's appearance in bars 155–56 is striking and seems to underscore the significance of playing it "*pianissimo*, expressively."[81]

Example 12: a) The fourth movement's "tragic fanfare", (Greene's fig. 104, p. 285.) and b) its transformed version appearing bars 155-56 in the score.



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[77]Ibid., 278.

[78]Greene credits Deryck Cooke with this term.

[79]Ibid., 281.

[80]Greene's analysis falls into error here. The interval at which the repetition occurs is a *diminished* fourth not an *augmented* fourth.

[81]Ibid., 283.

The first appearance of the tragic fanfare is preceded by a two-bar interlude played by solo bassoon. This rather haunting melody anticipates the movement's two subsequent sections in C–sharp-minor. When the fanfare enters at bar 13, Greene describes it as "an unwarranted outburst...Nothing that happens in 3-12 justifies it"[82] After only five bars, the fanfare concedes to a reprise of the *Lebewohl* hymn (second period bars 17-27) In the bars that follow, the music gathers passion and momentum but the expected climax at bar 28 is denied. Instead, the first section in C–sharp-minor enters rather arbitrarily. Greene claims that aside of the fact that the minor section maintains (enharmonically) the D-flat tonal centre, there is nothing at all to tie it musically to either the *Lebewohl* hymn, or the tragic fanfare:

> The texture of one is rich and sonorous, its sounds tightly packed together; the texture of the other is thin and stringy, its three voices spread far apart. The one is hot-blooded and passionate..the other is aimless and passionless; having no future, it exemplifies precisely the temporality of the futureless void that prevails at the end of the hymn. Although one of the melodic lines in the C-sharp minor section is a rising one, it does not seem to rise to anything in particular; it hovers around G-sharp, and sounds more nearly complete on that pitch than on any other, but none of the G-sharps convey the sense of finality that characterizes the arrivals on D-flat in the "Lebewohl" section. As the hymn is an image of moving surely and certainly to a foreseen end, yet passionately affirming the process in spite of the absolute certainty of its finiteness, so the C-sharp minor passage is an image of having ended—an image of the peace of numb goallessness and blank futurelessness.[83]

The first section in C–sharp–minor dissolves sweetly into the noble sounds of the second *Lebewohl* hymn (bars 49–72). At bar 60, the

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[82]Ibid., 283.
[83]Ibid., 288.

tragic fanfare returns, this time emerging naturally from the *Lebewohl* music itself; and just as naturally, it is re–absorbed into the *Lebewohl's* dignified, but striving momentum (bar 64). But again, the music is refused a climax; at bar 73, the music withdraws and meanders tentatively towards the second section in C–sharp-minor beginning at bar-88.

The eerie numbness of this section antagonizes from the tragic fanfare its fiercest protest. Greene describes its entry as "one of the oddest, most disconcerting moments in all of Mahler's music: "Instead of subsiding [as on previous occasions], the fanfare in bars 107–8 is the basis for building to an excruciatingly intense statement—the movement's peak—of the tragic fanfare in bars 118-19."[84] Here, the music collapses into a reprise of the third *Lebewohl* hymn, commencing at bar 126 (see Example 13).

From this point on, both the hymn and the fanfare appear to have undergone significant transformations. As Greene Explains: "The culminating hymn absorbs the half-steps of the fanfare into its fabric,"[85] while the fanfare in turn "is played softly, delicately, expressively" like the *Lebewohl* hymn.[86]

> In short, by absorbing the tragic fanfare into the "Lebewohl", the final section takes the incompleteness and forward-thrusting aspect out of the one and the aspect of utter finality, which the life-affirming passion...out of the other. The contrast between the "Lebewohl" motif and the tragic fanfare—a violent contrast earlier in the movement—has disappeared. For the transfigured forms of both motifs

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[84]Ibid., 289.
[85]Ibid., 290.
[86]Ibid., 291.

> project...[a] blend of completeness and incompleteness and the temporal process implied by this blend. [87]

This balance between completeness and incompleteness is possible because, as Greene states, "the nature of completion [itself] is transformed....The hymn's most important feature—the completeness of its sure-footed descent from F to D-flat—has been set aside in favor of a different kind of completeness."[88] Greene goes on to explain that "at bar 173 the piece sounds genuinely finished: the A-flat is a genuine goal, and not a temporary substitute for one..." He concludes:

> By establishing A-flat as a goal that is not a tonic while maintaining the force of D-flat as the melody's unrealized goal, Mahler changes not only the particular note on which completion occurs but also the nature of completion itself.[89]

Greene attempts to tie these analytical observations to the Farewell metaphor which he claims relates expressively to the temporal process exemplified by the music:

> All through the Finale, the tragic fanfare has protested against the finality of death and has bitterly rejected the "Lebewohl" hymn's acceptance of death and its peace in the face of final separation. The culminating "Lebewohl" [also]...refuses to accept the finality of death. No other consciousness or temporality would adequately respond to the fanfare's intensity [at bars 107-25]. The concluding, culminating "Lebewohl" absorbs the tragic fanfare and its protest against and rejection of the earlier "Lebewohl's" kind of peace: D-flat—the close of the "Lebewohl" motif—no longer closes the melodic line (though it is present as the bass and root of the final harmony).[90]

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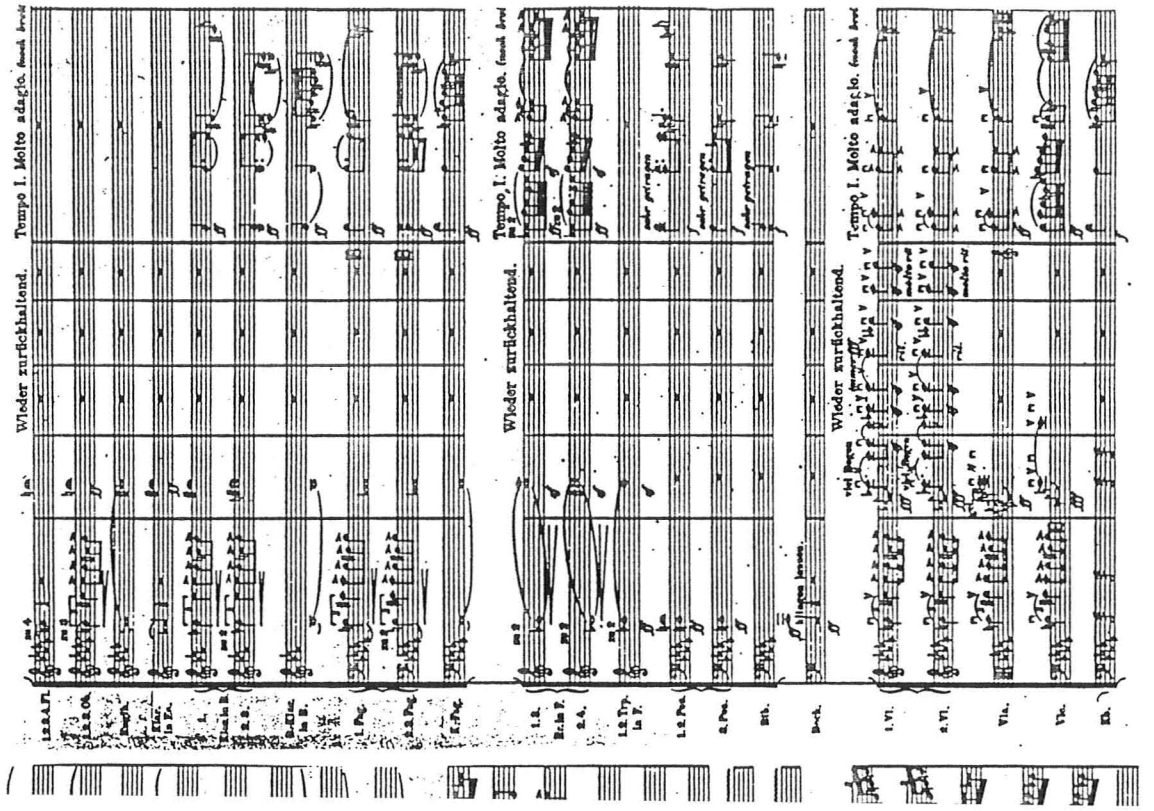
[87]Ibid., 291.
[88]Ibid., 290.
[89]Ibid., 278-79.
[90]Ibid., 291-92.

Example 13: Fourth movement, bars 117–26.



According to Greene, the A-flat functions much like a *finalis*[91], as it sounds both complete and incomplete. It exemplifies a future that is both open and closed, or a Greene puts it "eternally unactualized."

> [The] implied but never-to-be stated future (D-flat) is one that connotes a completely satisfying closure....In such temporality, a person is more than what death ends: a person somehow also embodies this fulfillment even though it is foreshadowed and never enacted. The anticipation of fulfillment touches the close with joy as much as the non-actualization of fulfillment touches it with sorrow. Because one is aware that the A-flat, while open to the future, will certainly not be superseded, there is no sense of striving beyond the A-flat; both the joy and the sorrow are touched with serenity and peace.[92]

When the temporality exemplified by this movement is compared to that of the first movement, Greene observes some significant differences. According to his analysis, the first movement ends sounding neither complete nor incomplete: the *ewig* motif neither has nor seeks harmonic or melodic closure; hence its temporality exemplifies "the consciousness of a peace which is beyond joy and tragedy and to which death cannot matter. It is a consciousness that may be described as transcendental indifference." The fourth movement, in comparison, makes no attempt to transcend completeness and incompleteness, or joy and tragedy; instead,

> it suggests a temporality that embraces both....The joy of living and the tragedy of not living out all of one's goals are maintained in the face of one another; the final temporality, in embracing both completeness and incompleteness, sustains peace with and in spite of both joy and tragedy.[93]

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[91]Greene explains that "A–flat as a non–tonic *finalis* is somewhat analogous to the kind of finality experienced at the end of some antiphons of Gregorian chant." 279.

[92]Ibid., 292.

[93]Ibid., 293.

CONCLUSION

THE MUSICAL LEGITIMACY OF EXPRESSIVE INTERPRETATIONS

It is obvious that the "farewell" metaphor, which has dominated so many interpretations of Mahler's Ninth over the years, figures prominently in each of the three analyses discussed herein. Greene argues that even if Mahler himself did not consciously understand his symphony in this way, the metaphor

> accurately calls attention to the symphony's treatment of finality and to the centrality of this theme throughout its four movements. For in one way or another, a sense of being near the end or an attempt to dismiss or accept or transmute this feeling makes itself continuously present."[1]

Given Mahler's superstitious concerns about writing a Ninth Symphony, and the fact that he did not live to finish the Tenth, it is no wonder so many listeners feel that Mahler's treatment of finality in the Ninth has special extramusical significance. Greene writes that the end of the Finale "presents the possibility of a new kind of peace, a peace that combines remembrance with a sense of finality and both of them with a premonition of beauty. It is a peace of a consciousness that makes it possible to sustain "not yet" in the face of "no longer."[2] Like Diether and Holbrook, Greene's final appraisal of the work comes across sounding very "existential" in nature; it suggests an attitude that neither seeks nor resists death, but rather, accepts it as that which defines life and

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[1] David B. Greene, *Mahler: Consciousness and Temporality*, 263.
[2] *Ibid.*, 299.

ultimately gives it its meaning.

It remains to be discussed whether it is appropriate for music criticism to attend to these kinds of non–musical inferences. After all, almost everyone agrees that music has the ability to support various extramusical phenomena, but many question whether its expressive capacity warrants a place in serious discussions of music. Susanne Langer, for example, argues that "to tie any tonal structure to a specific and speakable meaning would limit musical imagination, and probably substitute a preoccupation with feelings for a whole–hearted attention to music."[3]

Langer, and others skeptical of expressive interpretations, are basically opposed to two things: one, they view the process as not only *non*–musical, but *anti*–musical, because, in their opinion, it serves as a distraction to, or substitute for, serious (i.e. analytical) examinations; and two, they charge that such interpretations compromise the ultimate meaning of music, and at the same time, limit the interpretative imaginations of individual listeners.

The remaining pages of this thesis will present evaluative conclusions about the legitimacy of expressive interpretations based on the critical examination conducted in Chapter Three. It will be argued that first of all, expressive interpretations need not be carried out at the expense of musical understanding. In fact, they may even serve to enhance one's understanding of music. While it is true that an expressive interpretation captures only a portion of a work's overall

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[3]Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 238.

meaning, the same can be said about purely analytical discussions as well. Perhaps, as Anthony Newcomb suggests, formal analysis and expressive interpretation may be in fact, "two complementary ways of understanding the same phenomena." The main difference between them, he insists, "is that the first goes beyond the second in pointing out, through metaphor, relationships between structures of the artwork and those of other aspects of experience"[4]

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Despite the many similarities of the three analyses, Greene's examination can be distinguished from both Diether's and Holbrook's in two fundamental ways. First, Greene demonstrates that the Ninth's existential inferences are not related to the music arbitrarily, but are in fact, embedded in the work's overall, temporal design. He reasons that the very properties that make music a dynamic art form—its sense of striving toward goals, reaching these goals, and achieving a state of completion and closure—are properties that other non–musical phenomena share. And by examining the work's melodic and harmonic implications, Greene manages to show that the music actually *sounds* the way bidding "farewell" *feels*.[5] In comparison, Diether and Holbrook go about justifying their interpretations in entirely non–musical terms, such as appealing to evidence that Mahler simply *intended* his symphony to be understood in this way.[6]

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[4]Anthony Newcomb, "Sound and Feeling," 636.

[5]In other words, Greene demonstrates the music's *unconscious iconicism* with the experience of bidding farewell. (See Chapter Two)

[6]Both Diether and Holbrook treat the work's expressive properties rather *symbolically*. In other words, they assume intentionality on Mahler's part. Therefore, to

Second, Greene at no time argues that the Ninth actually *means* or *communicates* these feelings. He simply states that if the music is examined in the context of this metaphor, certain musical features will appear to resonate with such existentially related themes. Conversely, both Diether and Holbrook assume that the meaning of the Ninth is inevitably tied to Mahler's personal motivations for composing the work; hence they equate music's meaning with the creative intentions of the composer.

In spite of these distinctions, Greene's analysis has incited its share of protest from the musical community. Vera Micznik, who has given the topic of meaning in Mahler's Ninth Symphony considerable attention in the recent past[7], contends that Greene's analysis is unduly influenced by ideas of farewell. She notes that although Greene viewed "Mahler's awareness or lack of awareness of his imminent death [as] not necessarily relevant...ideas of death and farewell still constitute the underlying premises for his analysis."[8] She therefore casts Greene into much the same boat as Diether and Holbrook, who she believes relied "almost exclusively on...what they thought were Mahler's feelings."[9]

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them, further analysis of how the music generates these expressive conclusions seems somewhat unnecessary.

[7]Her Doctoral dissertation entitled *Meaning of Gustav Mahler's Music: A Historical and Analytical Study Focusing on the Ninth Symphony* (1989) is an in-depth analysis of the music which attempts to propose an anaytical methodology that reconciles many of the expressive nuances of the Ninth with its purely musical structure. Because of the scope of her analysis ((464 pages of which over 300 are strictly analytical) it could not be effectively compared with the others. As well, her analysis does not share the other's view that the work in some way exhibits existential-like tendencies.

[8]Micznik, 440.

[9]Ibid., 439.

There is an important fact that Micznik appears to overlook in her evaluation of Greene's work. Greene did not set out to define the *ultimate meaning* of the Ninth, but rather, its *expressive content*. While the former might be viewed as transcending extramusical concerns, the latter is undoubtedly dependent upon them. The expressive content of music can be understood as the dynamic properties it shares with other non–musical phenomena; by exploring this relationship in greater detail, Greene hoped to "deepen and refine our response to [Mahler's] music"[10]

In her own examination of the work, Micznik ends up rejecting all extramusical inferences whose relationship with the music is anything less than *symbolic* or *conventional*; in other words, she dismisses inferences that are simply metaphorical in nature. Her prime objection to farewell–based interpretations of the Ninth stems from the fact that Mahler's personal reasons for writing *Lebewohl* across the score cannot be "unequivocally validated."[11] This refusal to recognize music's contingent relationship with extramusical phenomena indvertedly absolutizes the meaning of music. If Micznik is willing to *dismiss* interpretations on extramusical grounds, it is conceivable that she might, in turn, *validate* them for similar reasons; and if this were the case, she would be aligning herself precariously with those who equate a work's meaning with the creative intentions of the artist.

More than likely it was Micznik's intention to shelter Mahler's music from all sorts of unwarranted and arbitrary associations; but in doing so, she comes close to denying his music one of its most esteemed

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[10]Greene, x.
[11]Micznik., 445.

attributes: its ability to relate to human experience. As explained in Chapter Two, music's relationship with a given extramusical import need not be deemed absolute to be acceptable.

Part of Micznik's problem has to do with her use of the term "meaning" when discussing the expressive inferences of music. While sharing her contention that the actual *meaning* of music must be understood primarily in its own terms, this thesis preserves the critic's right to issue metaphorical statements when discussing music's *expressive content*. Basically, the expressive content of music is its dynamic character, which can be described using terms that are both extramusical and purely musical.[12] When discussing the significance of a particular tonal implication for example, a critic can adopt either an analytical or metaphorical approach; but it is important to note that the same dynamic property is being attended to either way. Purely analytical descriptions, however, can be analogous to relating how one is feeling in entirely physiological terms. For this reason, critics often speak about music figuratively, using expressive labels and metaphors. These bring what is essentially an acoustical phenomenon into context with human experience by pointing out the expressive properties that music shares with other non–musical phenomena.

The only problem that exists when expressive labels and metaphors are applied to music is that frequently, the extramusical and purely musical are insufficiently reconciled. Recalling Goodman's Exemplification theory as presented in Chapter Two, the expressive

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[12]such as tension, expectation, interruption, preparation, resolution etc.

capacity of music is effectively understood as *tri–partite*. Both a musical work and its various extramusical interpretations can *exemplify* expressive properties, but they do not actually *possess* these properties. Only the music's expressive content (before it has been metaphorically defined or labeled) actually possesses expressive properties. Therefore, the expressive content of a work it can be seen as mediating the music's ultimate meaning and its interpreted or extramusical meaning. For this reason, an analysis of a work's dynamic properties is crucial to an expressive interpretation, for without it, an extramusical inference sounds rather arbitrary.

Therefore, no matter how expressively appropriate a given metaphor may appear to be, it cannot be treated as a substitute for an analysis of the work's dynamic properties. After all, saying "I feel as though my dog just died" is not the same as describing the experience of "sadness" or "grief", just as assigning music fixed labels such as "happy" or "sad" does not explain *how* music manifests these qualities. While such arbitrary labels may be acceptable in language, they must be avoided when it comes to music because they consign music to a communicative role which sacrifices its ontological identity as an art form. The distinction between exemplification and expression provided by Goodman's theory helps avoid this problem because it challenges music's denotative role while preserving its capacity to relate metaphorically to various non–musical phenomena.

The following chart is reminiscent of one presented in Chapter Two; the only difference is that instead of comparing extrageneric content

with congeneric content, this chart compares extrageneric (or in this case extramusical) content with music's ultimate meaning. The latter, incidentally, is not synonymous with music's congeneric content, for even purely musical interpretations represent only a fraction of a work's overall meaning. As Anthony Newcomb explains:

> In doing formal analysis of a complex work, we do not notice all its properties, point out all its relationships, organize it into all its possible structures. We select which properties strike us as important and bring them into convincing relationships with each other.[13]

THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF MUSIC	**ITS EXPRESSIVE CONTENT**	**ITS INTERPRETED OR EXTRAMUSICAL CONTENT**
Exemplifies expressive properties	*Possesses* expressive properties	*Exemplifies* expressive properties
Encompasses all expressive and acoustical properties	A portion of a work's many dynamic properties isolated by the critic for examination	A given extramusical label or metaphors chosen by the critic
An ideal: Cannot be explicitly defined either musically or extramusically	defined in dynamic (*i.e.* musical and extramusical) terms using both	The music's interpreted significance defined in extramusical terms
	formal analysis (Congeneric content) and expressive interpretation (Extrageneric content)	
Objective & Absolute	Both objective and subjective	Subjective & Relative

Of the three analyses examined, only Greene's focuses on the work's expressive content as defined above. According to him, Mahler's Ninth exemplifies a temporal process which in turn exemplifies a type of consciousness that is strikingly similar to the existential attitude towards death. According to Micznik however, this final step brings Greene perilously close to speculating about what may have been Mahler's

[13]Newcomb, 636.

intentions for writing the work; but Greene does not cross this line. In fact, he dismisses any suggestions that the work represents Mahler's final "farewell" to life. As he puts it, "Mahler wrote enough of his Tenth Symphony, and its [temporal] coherence is new enough to make us hesitant about attributing any sort of finality to the Ninth."[14]

Admittedly, each stage of metaphorical comparison distances Greene from the music, but he still manages to preserve his interpretation's expressive ties to the work's purely musical content. However speculative and philosophical his inferences may be, they are never expressively alienated from the music itself. Diether's and Holbrook's interpretations, on the other hand, move swiftly past the music to the extramusical side of the metaphor. It is as if they are intent on interpreting Mahler *in spite* of his music.

As mentioned earlier, one of the more prevalent charges against expressive interpretations is that they do a disservice to music because they compromise its abstract and ineffable meaning by translating it into words. But as Newcomb argues:

> Hundreds of mystics have written about the ineffable mystic experience, and have treasured and learned from the writings of other mystics about that experience, without claiming that their words offered a direct equivalent of the mystic experience or refusing to write about the experience because words rendered its significance imperfectly. Should we musicians be holier than they?

It can be concluded then, that expressive interpretations of music allow music to come into context with a listener's intimate life

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[14]Greene, 300.

experiences, and this can contribute to both the music's extramusical as well as purely musical significance. As Nelson Goodman observes:

> ...[T]o describe a work or passage as muscular, electric, spatial, curvilinear, brittle, or floating may be to describe metaphorically some recondite and highly important structural features....New likenesses and differences, new relationships and patterns, are thus revealed, and are described by the metaphorical application of these alien terms...Only at the risk of overlooking important structural features of a work can a formalist ignore what the music expresses.[15]

The only stipulation when conducting an expressive interpretation should be that the exercise deepen and enhance one's appreciation of the music itself. If this involves a comparison being drawn between the music and some other non–musical phenomenon, so be it. Even Hanslick accepted music's association with extramusical phenomena, provided its purely musical content was not neglected by the composer (or the critic for that matter):

> Music certainly will never be able to express a definite object, or to represent its essential characteristics in a manner recognizable without [a] title [or accompanying programme]; but it may take the basic mood...[and] with a title...present an allusion, if not a graphic representation. The main prerequisite is that music be based on its own laws and remain specifically musical, thus making, even without programme, a clear, independent impression.[16]

By isolating and examining the expressive dynamics of a musical work, critics can draw attention to purely musical properties which have either been overlooked by analysts in the past, or which have been described insufficiently by musically illiterate proponents of the

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[15]Newcomb, 636.

[16]Eduard Hanslick, "Liszt's Symphonic Poems" (1857), *Hanslick's Music Criticisms* , edited by Henry Pleasants (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950.

trade. Fortunately, with respect to Mahler's music, scholarly, analytical examinations are on the rise, and remarkably, many analysts, such as Micznik, have spared room in their investigations to account for the expressive nuances of Mahler's music as well. While this thesis disagrees with how Micznik defines meaning in music,[17] it thoroughly endorses the analyical rigour with which she approaches the music. Combined with an aesthetic approach that is more tolerant of metaphorically based interpretations, Micznik's study might constitute the ideal approach to Mahler's music.

To conclude, thesis thesis has illustrated that many of the expressive inferences drawn from Mahler's music have profoundly influenced its reception over the years. Rather than ignoring his music's expressive quality, it would make sense for music critics to learn how to deal better with it. The kind of expressive interpretation proposed herein affords the critic a means by which the seemingly elusive and magical quality of music can be understood in musical terms. And while a given interpretation may never capture a work's ultimate meaning, it need not be dismissed as entirely subjective or relative. In short, the goal of expressive interpretation is not to demonstrate objective, aesthetic truth; it is to bring the extramusical and the purely musical into greater proximity with one another.

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[17]My definition of meaning is ultimately more formalistic than Micznik's in that it recognizes as "meaning" only abstract or purely musical understanding. Micznik's definition, on the other hand, includes various "significative" levels of musical understanding (morphological, syntactic and semantic). Nevertheless, I allow for metaphorical associations to be made between the music's *expressive* or *dynamic* content and various non–musical phenomena, whereas Micznik rules these associations out because they cannot be "unequivocally validated."

APPENDIX

NOTES ON THE ANALYSTS

Jack Diether is a Canadian writer, radio producer and music enthusiast. He has annotated more that 20 programme notes for a variety of Mahler recordings, and has contributed several critical reviews of his music to *The American Record Guide*. His interest in Mahler has been recognized by the Bruckner–Mahler Society, who in the 1960s, awarded him the Mahler Medal of Honour. While Diether holds no formal degree in music, he has instructed musical appreciation classes at a Beverly Hills music school, and has held the position of contributing editor to *Musical America*.

David Holbrook is a British writer and scholar who has been a part–time associate at King's College and the Director of English Studies at Downing College in Cambridge England. *Mahler and the Courage to Be* is just one of several books written by Holbrook entitled "Studies in the Psychology of Culture." Despite his lack of musicological credentials, Holbrook's study of the Ninth attracted considerable response from Mahler enthusiasts and scholars in the 1970s, owing to a deficiency in the number of in–depth studies of his music at the time.

David B. Greene graduated from Harvard University with a degree in music history and theory, and then pursued post graduate studies at Princeton's Theological Seminary. He continued his studies in music theory, theology and Phenomenology at Yale where he earned his Ph.D. Greene approached Mahler's music after having conducted similar analyses of Beethoven's symphonies. When *Mahler: Consciousness and Temporality* was published, Greene held the position of Professor of Philosophy and Religion and Chairman of the Humanities Faculty at Wabash College, Indiana.

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