
Structure of the First Movement of Mahler's Seventh Symphony

A Reading of Readings

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It [The Seventh] was to remain there for three years, for he no doubt feared that his most 'advanced' and 'modern' work would strike its first audiences as even more disconcerting and difficult to accept than his earlier works.¹

Not only the composer himself thinks that the symphony is a modern work, the Seventh Symphony by Mahler is often related to Viennese avant-garde like Arnold Schoenberg and his pupils; the symphony, composed between 1904 to 1905, anticipated Schoenberg's later chamber-styled orchestral and fourths-formulated melody in *Kammersymphonie* written in 1906;² it became Anton von Webern's favourite Mahler symphony by the "innovative orchestral colouring";³ Alban Berg specially paid a visit to Prague for the première.⁴ Although they addressed very little on the musical material or structure on the symphony,

¹ Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904-1907)*. v. 3. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 240.

² Kurt Blaukopf, *Gustav Mahler*, trans by Inge Goodwin (New York: Limelight, 1991), 188; La Grange quoted a study of Dominique Jameux, believes that, however, the symphony would not have influenced the *Kammersymphonie* because the première of the symphony came later than the completion of Schoenberg's work and Schoenberg had probably not studied the score of the Seventh Symphony before. See La Grange, 848.

³ Wolf Rosenberg, "Mahler und die Avantgarde: Kompositionstechnische Vorbild oder geistige Sympathie?", in Otto Kolleritsch, ed., *Gustav Mahler: Sinfonie und Wirklichkeit* (Graz: Universal Edition for the Institut für Wertungsforschung, 1977), 81-92. Quoted in Peter Revers, Revers, Peter. "The Seventh Symphony". In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 376.

⁴ Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*. trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker (Portland: Amadeus, 1993), 190.

except Schoenberg "sensed so many 'subtleties of form',"⁵ the modern taste of the work remained the most frequently quoted in essays and discussions of the symphony. Among all discussions of the symphony, the use of consecutive perfect fourths in melody and harmony, exaggerating use of dissonance and the radical changes in tonality and mode often invited study and research of many kinds.

The advancement of the symphony attacks at all sides and their summation results as what Mahler thinks the most advanced work. However, it is more phenomenal that the absurdities come not only in this symphony but also in Mahler's *œuvre*. For the purpose of this paper in limited scope, the Seventh Symphony will be used as an amplification of one element among all musical parameters that is certainly anomalous. Adorno, in where he begins to discuss about the novelty of Mahler's music in his influential book devoted fully to him, thinks that Mahler's concept of a symphonic movement "begins from the bottom,"

... with the facts of experience, transmitting them in the unity of their succession and finally striking from the whole the spark that leaps beyond the facts, instead of composing from above, from an ontology of forms. To this extent, Mahler works decisively toward the abolition of tradition.⁶

The main point comes later, however, that Mahler "does not construct new forms" and "everywhere the overall structure is unmistakably preserved, but everywhere punctuated with artifices."⁷ In a general sense without a particular movement in mind Adorno is ad-

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 190.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 62.

⁷ *ibid.*, 62 and 87.

dressing to, he suggests that Mahler retouched the structure⁸ of music, resulting not to create new types of form by abandoning existing archetypes of those traditional and ontological form in the back of the mind. Rather the musical structure in Mahler's symphonies provokes archetypes, by means of provoking the impression on history of form; it sometimes mocks the narrative feature of an architectonic form to produce a subtle, polemical new musical architecture. The structure thus produced, in a level, would particularly cohere with traditional coding entity of form which remained intact in our minds when we listened.⁹ However, fitting the real music or the resulting musical structure *per se* would be reversing what Mahler thinks from bottom the movement is perceived and would probably overlook and underestimate the dramatic effect that brought by dynamo of musical form as an organism that brought from bottom to above. Fitting the real music into theoretical model of form would sometimes become, as I would comment, a painful task, as the result would not always be conforming the ontological form.

Among the symphonies I would choose the first movement of the Seventh Symphony to amplify such point by reviewing two existing readings of form of the movement.

⁸ In this paper, *structure* is made different from *form* in the sense that structure particularly refer to the architecture and organizations of themes in the movement, while *form* designates to the codified entities of musical structure that was established before the music is composed.

⁹ The reception and recent critiques of form is a huge area of research. For the purpose of this paper, I would not further develop or argue on the reception of form and its history. The reception of form noted in my essay is summarized from Robert Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony: A Study in Musical Semiotics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64-7, where he has given a detailed account on introducing the form analysis on finale of Mahler's Sixth Symphony.

Among existing readings of the structure of this movement, two accessible structural plans in by two eminent Mahler scholars, Constantin Floros and Henry-Louis de La Grange are chosen for discussion. La Grange's analysis is based primarily on a previous study published earlier by German scholar Hans Swarowsky.¹⁰ Although both scholars have not declared the movement a "sonata form," it is Swarowsky, whose reading La Grange based on, thinks that the movement is a sonata-movement (*Sonatensatz*).¹¹ Floros' reading shows flavor to a sonata-form movement by labeling the sections *exposition*, *development* and *recapitulation*.

Table 1 – Structural plan of the first movement of Mahler's Seventh Symphony

Measure Rehearsal Number	Key	Floros ¹²	La Grange ¹³	Tempo marking
1	b	Exposition Slow Introduction	Introduction Theme I, followed by a restatement of its opening bars	Langsam. (Adagio)
19	3/3	March theme	Transition Theme I'	Etwas weniger langsam, aber immer sehr gemessen.
27	3/11	Again <i>arioso</i>	Theme I' (prefiguring A)	Nicht schleppen
50	6/1	Main section	Exposition Theme A	Allegro con fuoco
80	10/5	B	Theme A'	
99	12/4	e	Transition (A, A')	
118	C	Secondary section	Theme B	a tempo (sempre l'istesso)
134	16/6	Final section	Concluding Theme (C: see I')	a tempo Allegro.
145	18/4	e – b – e	Development 1st section (modified reprise of the exposition)	Tempo I. h = q

¹⁰ According to La Grange, "The synoptic table [as summarized in Table 1] follows that of Hans Swarowsky, but with certain modifications." La Grange adopts Swarowsky overall formal plan except in coda, where Swarowsky suggests the coda should be starting from measure 523. In this paper, however, our focus will be on La Grange's reading of the symphony. See Hans Swarowsky, *Wahrung der Gestalt: Schriften über Werk und Wiedergabe, Stil und Interpretation in der Musik*, 142.

¹¹ Swarkowsky, 138.

¹² Floros, 192-4.

¹³ La Grange, vol. 3, 855-6.

Measure Number	Key	Floros ¹²	La Grange ¹³	Tempo marking
174	21/7	D – b	Development First section	A' + I
186	22/7			A' + I, inversion of A
196	24/1	B	Second section: based on secondary theme in B minor/B major	B and A''
212	26/1		Third section: based on exposition motifs	A, A', I'
228	28/5		Fourth section	2nd section (combinations)
245	30/4		Fifth section: based on exposition motifs; mm. 247-251 fanfares and signals of the trumpets	I, I', A' B, fanfares
256/258	31/8 or 32/2	E _b	Sixth section: religious vision: The march theme changed to a solemn chorale; reminiscences of <i>Urlicht</i>	I', A, A', B, fanfares
266	33/5	g	Seventh section: Episode with solo violin in G major/G minor	
298	37/1	E _b	Eighth section: religious vision with trumpet fanfares, chorale lines, and reminiscences of <i>Urlicht</i>	I, A', I', fanfares
317	39/5	B	Ninth section: Might be considered the center of the movement in B major	I, I', A, A', B
328	41/1			I', A', B
338	42/4	b	Recapitulation beginning with funeral march rhythms and trombone solos	3rd section (reprise of introduction as transition)
354	44/3			1st section (I, A, B)
373	46/5	e	Main section	2nd part (B+I', I', A, A + A)
427	53/5	B		Recapitulation Theme A
465	57/10	G	Secondary section	Theme A'
487	60/10	G	Closing section	Theme B
495	61/7	e		Theme C
523	65/5	e	Coda	Theme C
				Frisch.
				Coda
				Nicht eilen!
				Tempo I. (Allegro)

As noticed in Table 1, the structural view of forms relies heavily on the recurrence of musical themes, important music building block in Mahler's symphony as identities.¹⁴ Al-

¹⁴ Adorno forms a unique view on Mahler's theme as the "general outlines of [his] themes always remain intact" and called the themes *gestalten*. With the small detailed frequently blurred and modified, the whole theme's shape is still preserved and thus "the nature of Mahler's themes qualifies them to work better on the level of themes than of motives." See Adorno, 87.

though Floros and La Grange identify all the important themes, they fail to compromise the crucial points of a "sonata form," namely the point where exposition, development and recapitulation start.

The movement begins with a slow, *langsam* melody for tenor horn (Theme 1 in this analysis)¹⁵ over an added-sixth chord on winds and strings. Both scholars agreed to call it a "slow introduction." This theme immediately strikes us first by its added-sixth chord which is a favourite in late Mahler style,¹⁶ and then its slow march rhythm.¹⁷ However it is interesting to see that Floros suggests the introduction should be part of the sonata exposition, while La Grange repels it out from exposition and makes it part of the introduction section. Another point worth mentioning is the use of tenor horn. The tenor horn nearly associates fully with the slow introduction.¹⁸ Mahler never used this characteristically nostalgic instrument in other symphonies.

Example 1 – Theme 1



¹⁵ For the sake of clear presentation and to avoid a biased view, I erect a label of themes of my own. To avoid confusion of my labels with La Grange's and Floros, a conversion table between my nomenclature and theirs are given in Table 2, p. 15.

¹⁶ Mahler has a favorite on the added-sixth chord particularly in *Das Lied von der Erde*.

¹⁷ Mahler wrote to Alma Mahler that the inspiration of introduction to the first movement came to him at a sudden, not in theme but rather rhythm and style. Quoted in La Grange, vol. 3, 239.

¹⁸ Tenor horn plays in m.1 ff, m.32 ff, m.193 ff and m.334 ff.

According to the plan of La Grange and Floros, the introduction has some 50 measures. Among all introductory passages of Mahler symphonies,¹⁹ only the length of the First Symphony is comparable to the Seventh: the First has 58 measures of introduction and the Seventh has 49. Although the number of measures cannot simply relate to the importance of the introduction, the introduction is, however, materially crucial with the coming theme, Theme 2.

Example 2 – Theme 2

(50)

Although Theme 2 has a distinct melody on top and the identity of this theme never diminishes in the entire movement, the first appearance of this theme sounds somehow ambiguous because, firstly, Theme 2 clearly inherits the dotted rhythm of Theme 1. The dotted rhythm, which gave Mahler its first inspiration in composition, is brought up from the beginning, accelerated in the middle reached the quick tempo and remained clear here in Theme 2. Mahler somehow intentionally let the dotted rhythm to inherit through

¹⁹ For a quick list of introductory passages present in Mahler's symphonies, see John Williamson, "The Structural Premises of Mahler's Introductions: Prolegomena to an Analysis of the First Movement of the Seventh Symphony". *Music Analysis* 5/1 (1986): 29.

here.²⁰ Secondly, the bridging passage leading to Theme 2 is another piece of puzzle – it is a passage made up of horizontal and vertical fourths which are usually used as a denial of tonality but rather establishing the identity of the major events, stating the major theme of the movement. The Theme 2 has, as a result, not a strong cadence before fully establishes the theme.

Example 3 – Transition to Theme 2

Another moment that the symphony cannot get out from the influence of the introduction material is often frequently overlooked. In measure 192 to 196, there is a short moment of B minor gesture which closely resembles measure 17-8 in the introduction. What makes the comparison on this trace element more meaningful is the way that this gesture

²⁰ Revers suggests that Mahler "permeates the musical material of the entire exposition" by the initial rhythm. See Revers, 392.

is suggested. In the introduction, the two-measure element is the first closure to the melodic period that start from the beginning of the movement. It is the first tonal goal of the music that clearly establish the key.

Although what precedes this "closing unit" is different here in measure 192, from the introduction this reiteration of the unit, with striking similarity in all aspect of musical parameters (especially the insertion of tenor horn which has been tacit the whole quick section since measure 36), unavoidably invites resemblance of the cadential property that the unit has brought onto this melody the same way it did some minutes earlier to monumentally close the introduction melody. The closing impression drawn from this cell may provide an alternative start of development which point Floros and La Grange cannot agree on.

Example 4 – Closing material from Introduction and parallel in m. 192

The problem in sectional division does not end here but, unfortunately, they cannot agree on the point of recapitulation as well, which is sometimes regarded as "the crux of

sonata form."²¹ Floros points the recapitulation to the moment when the B minor introduction solemnly reinstates in measure 338. The return of the introduction material, or actually the return of Theme 1, is not an accidental one. Mahler seriously articulates this point by preceding it a section of stability in front of this section, starting from measure 317 in B major. Here in this section, all themes are brought to major, including Theme 1 which would be never heard in major mode in the entire symphony except the triumphant end of the finale.²² The bridge leading to the reinstatement of Theme 1 is phenomenal; it includes a typically Mahlerian build-up of intensity and dynamics starting from measure 328, pushes the music into a never-reached climax at measure 335 and resolves into the next section with a strong V-I cadence which is infrequent before this point.

However La Grange painfully gives up this point as a point of recapitulation but labels measure 373 as a true recapitulation. Mapping this moment as recapitulation is not just to cohere with the mapping of exposition and the main theme that he proposed. Rather from the music, Mahler clearly articulates this point as a new start in a similar fashion as the return of introduction at measure 338 with a heavier intensification in terms of instruments and texture and a cadence in plagal character (bIV – I). The use of the staccato triplet figures in woodwind and strings resembles the some materials heard earlier as closing materials.²³ More significantly is that not until this point, Theme 2 has not received its

²¹ Adorno, 94.

²² Theme 1 will reappear in the final movement at measure 455 (fig. 279/6) in D minor and C# minor and it appears in the end in C major in measure 581 (fig. 296).

²³ These triplet figures are first found in measure 69, interrupting Theme 2. It intrudes the Theme 2 in the same fashion in measure 163, and further reappears in measure 391.

first statement prepared by a strong cadence and a clearly articulated period before the theme begins.

Down from the thematic level, the material of the slow introduction went down to motivic level. Comparing the consecutive fourth bridging passage leading to the Theme 2 (found full excerpt in Example 3), it shows a trend of developing of the dotted rhythm motive cell, circled in Example 5, from the introduction down to measure 45. This motive in measure 2, initially declared by tenor horn, is repeated for some times and later transformed into the motive that consists of consecutive perfect fourths in measure 45. What makes this transformation smoother is that both the motivic cells preserve the basic rhythmic pattern and the musical gesture underneath the motive is very similar.

Example 5

The image displays a musical score for Example 5, illustrating the development of a motive. It is divided into three main sections:

- First Theme Tenorhorn:** Shows the initial statement of the motive in measure 2, circled. The notation includes a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, with a dynamic marking of *f*.
- Trumpet in F and Violin:** Shows the same circled motive in measure 45, also circled. The trumpet part is in the same key and time signature. The violin part provides a rhythmic accompaniment of chords, marked with *f* and *dim.* (diminuendo).
- Transposed of m. 45:** A separate line of music showing the transposed version of the circled motive from measure 45, demonstrating its similarity to the original motive in measure 2.

The consecutive fourth motive is found in the rest of the movement generally in the same shape. The dotted rhythm of the motive is generally preserved, although as music develops, the accompaniment underneath and tempo drastically changed. In Example 6, the circled fourth motive is actually reached after some similar gesture preceding it in the bass.

Example 6

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system features a Viola (Vla.) part in the upper staff and a Violin 1 (Vln. 1) part in the lower staff. The Viola part begins with a circled measure number '76' and a dynamic marking of *ff*. It consists of a series of chords, with a *dim.* marking in the second measure and a *pp* marking in the third. The Vln. 1 part enters in the fourth measure with a *ff* dynamic. The second system shows a Piano (P) part in the upper staff and a Harp (Hm.) part in the lower staff. The Piano part has three measures, each marked with *fp*. The Harp part has three measures, with the first measure marked *sf* and the second and third marked *dim.*

This struggle of transformation from introduction to the final consecutive fourth shape finds its way out in measure 173. The motive of introduction is made side-by-side with a fourth motive in one single phrase. The example quoted here seems to suggest that Mahler the consecutive fourth motive is actually transformed from the introduction, by varying one note the introduction motive to result as the consecutive fourth motive. This linkage of motives is to show that the introduction material influences the music in a motivic way that the introduction motive is found transformed as a motive that flourish within the whole movement and the transformed motive, a motive based on consecutive fourth, is an important motive that gives the modern taste to the music.

Example 7

Musical score for Example 7, measures 173-177. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. Measure 173 starts with a treble clef and a circled '173'. The bass clef part begins with a double bar line. Dynamics include *ff*, *sf*, *p*, and *sf*. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes with some rests.

The polemics of the structure of the movement is revealed by inability to compromise on the point of sectional divisions present in a form. The significance of the introduction material plays a decisive role on such polemic. The drama of the music lies in the narrative level that, when the slow introduction is first heard, it leads to the quick section, which is normally the main section, without clearly declaring that the allegro has arrived. The music continues to develop and does not want to stop; even themes show developing character.²⁴ The reprise of introduction material, in a solemn and well-prepared tone, in measure 338 can undoubtedly fit into recapitulation if we accept that the introduction material as the first theme (*Hauptsatz*). However, the drama of music is that when the music is paving way for the Theme 2, the music intensifies, and the final resolution will lead into the true reprise of Theme 2. Here at this point, in retrospect, that the identity of

²⁴ For example in measure 118 where La Grange marked Theme B, which is another important theme in the movement, soon gets interrupted by furious episode in measure 134 without a proper ending. Josef Foerster recorded that "Mahler assured me that almost never did a purely melodic line occur to him, but rather nearly always a theme, already embellished, developed, and in many ways linked to secondary thematic permutations." Josef Bohuslav Foerster, *Der Pilger: Erinnerungen eines Musikers*, trans. Pavel Eisner (Prague: Artia, 1955), 356. Quoted in Stephen E. Hefling, "'Thm in die Lieder zu blicken': Mahler's Seventh Symphony Sketchbook" In *Mahler Studies*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214.

Theme 1 is now falling ambiguous in its role in the sonata form – is it *Hauptsatz* or *Einleitung*?

From the dictionary definition of sonata form, it is known that, starting from Beethoven, the introduction material starts to get its importance to by integrations to main section.²⁵ Surprisingly the introduction material here in this Mahler symphony finds its way back to the then-extensive passage of the slow introduction to first movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, with both symphonies contain the very same notion of "repeated rhythmic modules" and the module is a kernel for both symphony to develop.²⁶ Mahler pushes the role of introduction to its height that heavily influences the remaining "main section" of the movement. The existing sonata form will certainly fall short to an analysis of the movement with such a significant introduction and, as seen from Floros and La Grange's structural reading, the themes cannot get ramified in role and the structure of the symphony cannot be simply reconciled if we only take sonata form as the only reading.

La Grange knows the polemics of the structure of symphony and he, follows Swarowsky, proposes a section schema that with some sections have double roles and two possible tripartite views can be drawn on the equivocal movement.²⁷ Other alternative view of the structure of the movement in formulative theory is still pending. As pointed out by Robert Samuels on a conclusion of the structural analysis of finale of Sixth Symphony, that "faces with the limit points of the application of existing formal categories to the musical text, the analyst is faced with a choice", an either-or choice to accept traditional

²⁵ James Webster, "Sonata Form". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., vol. 23, 694

²⁶ Revers, 392.

²⁷ Swarowsky, 140; La Grange, vol. 3, 857.

form view or invent his own.²⁸ Recent studies in semiotics, narrative archetype and music, and Adornian categorization on a symphony's *Durchbruch*, *Suspension* and *Durchführung* may suggest way out to the situation. For Mahler, who is often called master of irony, may now smile upon us and advises that a symphony,

... must have something cosmic and inexhaustible like the world and life itself in order to be worthy of the name. Its structure should be such that nothing inorganic, no chance patching or mending, disrupts it. The gaiety of the first movements is that of strange higher world that tends to bewilder and terrify us. In the last movement, a child explains the meaning of it all, for he still belongs to this world of chrysalides, which is nevertheless at a higher level than ours.²⁹

Table 2 – Conversion of nomenclature of themes appeared in this paper

My label	Floros' label	La Grange's label	Measure number in music	Given in this paper
Theme 1	Slow introduction	Theme I	1	Example 1 (p. 6)
Theme 2	Main section	Theme A	50	Example 2 (p. 7)

²⁸ Samuels, 89.

²⁹ Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897-1904)*. v. 2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 392.

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