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Forming Form through Force: Bruckner, Mahler, and the Structural Function of Highpoints

Among the reasons that led some scholars to deny the historical connection between Bruckner and Mahler in the aftermath of the Second World War there was the understandable reaction to the Nazi regime's cultural politics, which imposed a remarkable distance between the two composers: while Mahler's "degenerate" music was banished, Bruckner's music flourished because it was turned to political use.[1] There is an echo of these events in the beginning of Theodor Adorno's influential 1960 monograph, where the names of Mahler and Hitler occur together and, one page later, we find the claim that Mahler's "incommensurable presence … defies … the bald historical derivation from Bruckner."[2] The distance between Mahler and Bruckner created by the Nazi regime is thus basically maintained in Adorno's contrary evaluation. On the other hand, he was too intent on depicting Mahler as the composer who paved the way for the "new music" to accept the idea of a contiguity with the late-romantic Bruckner.[3]

Historical distance enables us to understand the dynamics of this reception and revise these evaluations. Among the few scholars who have returned to the connection between Mahler and Bruckner after Adorno, the work of Peter Revers stands out. He discusses some "aspects of a phenomenology of Bruckner's and Mahler's composition" in order to "test their comparability" and "question the possibility of a reception of Bruckner in Mahler's oeuvre."[4] In the close examination that follows, he focuses on three research directions, highlighting analogies and differences in the "construction of time," the tendency to "clarification" of structures in subsequent versions of the same work, and the "construction of highpoints."

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[1] See Gilliam, "The Annexation of Anton Bruckner"; Solvik, "The International Bruckner Society and the N.S.D.A.P."; Brotbeck, "Verdrängung und Abwehr," 364.

[2] Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, 3–4.

[3] An opposition between Mahler and Bruckner had been already created by music critics in Mahler's time. See Wandel, *Die Rezeption der Symphonien Gustav Mahlers*; Celestini, "Der Trivialitätsvorwurf an Gustav Mahler".

[4] Revers, "Gustav Mahler und Anton Bruckner," 265.

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In the present essay I take up this third direction, developing a different perspective: on one hand I move the focus from the "construction" to the "function" of highpoints in the formal organization of a symphonic movement, and on the other I adopt a criterion of historical contiguity, offering a comparison between two symphonic movements that from the point of view of the compositional process can be considered contemporary: the first movements of Bruckner's Ninth and Mahler's First Symphony.[5] The fact that any direct influence between these works must be excluded serves the purposes of my examination: I do not intend to support the thesis of a "filiation," but rather to compare the compositional strategies of the late Bruckner and the young Mahler in order to draw connections in the light of the music historical milieu they shared: the post-Beethovenian Austrian symphonic tradition.[6] This toward the end of the nineteenth century took the course Adorno referred to in the concept of "nominalism,"[7] intending by it a process of increasing individualization of the musical artworks, which gradually broke away from genres and formal conventions.

To do this I rely on a theoretical-methodological framework deriving from an interaction of perspectives. I pose the problem by referring to the debate concerning the role of "climax" in music during the last sixty years, and complete it by taking up the "energetic" theory of musical form proposed by Ernst Kurth in his 1925 Bruckner monograph. From his discursive examination of the first movement of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, I derive a model of analysis that I then apply to the first movement of Mahler's First, resorting to diagrams that are in fact alien to Kurth's sensibility. In this application I refer to Adorno's idea of a "material theory of musical form"[8] as a key to understanding Mahler's music. Actually, Kurth and Adorno give a similar answer to the hermeneutic question which emerges when traditional forms, intended as abstract typologies, are reduced to an inert state: when, that is, they are present and recognizable but no longer able to justify the concrete formal organization of a composition by supplying its "meaning."[9] Such theoretical imbrication

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[5] See Cohrs, "Vorwort," VII; Wilkens, "Vorwort," V.

[6] Bekker, *Die Sinfonie von Beethoven bis Mahler*, 20.

[7] Adorno, *Mahler*, 62.

[8] Ibid., 44.

[9] I use this term to refer to the idea of a logical and coherent organization of the musical work. Adorno always used the term "*Sinn*" so as to avoid the idea of "reference," which is unequivocally expressed in "*Bedeutung*." For an in-depth discussion of this problem see Borio, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung in der Musik."

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encourages a revision of the verdict on the connection between Bruckner and Mahler: Kurth's positive evaluation of late Romanticism offers a corrective to Adorno's opposite view, opening the path to less unilateral positions. Moreover, Kurth's approach has the advantage of defining the level of formal organization to which analysis has to be oriented in order to highlight analogies between the compositional strategies of the two symphonic movements. The recognition of such analogies will enable us to circumscribe the differences ascribable to the more "nominalist" character of Mahler's compositions, limiting the thesis of incommensurability so as to support the idea of gradual historical evolution.

Climax in music: theoretical perspectives

Though confined to a small group of scholars, the theoretical debate on the role of "climax" in music conducted over the last sixty years provides interesting points for discussion. One point on which scholars agree is that climax meets the requirement of integration, yet their arguments concern different structural levels. While William Newman intends such integration in terms of general aesthetics by claiming that "the concept of a single climax within a single curve of force is possible only in a completely integrated art form,"[10] Leonard Meyer deals with basic syntactic unities, investigating the possible functions of climax in musical themes with a periodic structure.[11] And while Kofi Agawu chooses relatively short compositions involving the intonation of a poetic text,[12] Richard Kaplan investigates "the sense of climax" as a possible strategy "for achieving structural integration" by observing "coherent musical processes or relationships in the large dimension of the piece as a whole."[13]

A second point is the connection between the discussion of climax and the stylistic distinction between classical and romantic music. Newman claims that classical art only can be taken into consideration in order to achieve a "valid generalization," given that "the location of climax in a romantic style may very well depend on subjective reaction to emotional expressions."[14] Nevertheless, when he underlines the "romantic" variability in the

[10] Newman, "The Climax of Music," 284.
[11] See Meyer, "Exploiting Limits."
[12] See Agawu, "Structural 'Highpoints' in Schumann's *Dichterliebe*."
[13] Kaplan, "Temporal Fusion and Climax in the Symphonies of Mahler," 215.
[14] Newman, "The Climax of Music," 285–86.

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location of climax, he implicitly claims its more prominent structural importance—for example when he identifies in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* examples "of the long postponed climax."[15]

On this point Meyer offers a more articulated examination. He derives from compositions of the classical age an "archetypal structure":[16] the abstract scheme of a period with "syntactic climax" intended as the "turning point" of a process of "reversal … shaped by the primary parameters of melody, rhythm, and harmony." To this Meyer opposes a "statistical climax" or "apotheosis" obtained through "a gradual increase in the intensity of the more physical attributes of sound" to a "tensional 'highpoint,' followed by a usually rapid decline in activity … to quiet and closure."[17] On this basis Meyer distinguishes between the classical and romantic style by highlighting "the increasingly important role played by secondary parameters in the shaping of musical process and the articulation of musical form," matched by "an increase in the importance of statistical climax … relative to syntactic climax in the shaping of musical structure."[18] In his analytical examination he compares the main theme of a late work by Beethoven which conforms to the "archetypal structure"—the fourth movement of the String Quartet Opus 131 (1826)—with the main melody (*idée fixe*) in the first movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), where the archetype is "obscured"[19] by the insertion of a musical process Meyer names "Sisyphean sequence,"[20] that is, an ascending sequence of a descending motivic model, which through intensification leads to a "statistical climax." Unlike what happens in Beethoven's theme, in Berlioz's melody there is no coincidence between statistical and syntactic climax. Rather, the first precedes the second, undermining its structural predominance: here the subsequent syntactic climax can only confirm (or repeat) the "highpoint" in order to lead the melodic and harmonic course of the archetype toward the end and achieve closure. On this basis Meyer concludes that the two works, chronologically close, manifest a radical change in style: "in Beethoven's theme, syntactic climax dominates apotheosis; in Berlioz's melody, statistical apotheosis dominates

[15] Ibid., 292.
[16] Meyer, "Exploiting Limits," 184.
[17] Ibid., 189.
[18] Ibid., 194.
[19] Ibid., 191.
[20] Ibid., 188, 195.

syntactic climax."[21]

Agawu also connects nineteenth-century music intrinsically to the "structural" importance of "highpoints," pointing out that this term avoids confusion with the original meaning of "climax," which in Greek "denotes an arrangement of figures in ascending order of intensity,"[22] as Newman had previously noticed.[23] The choice of Schumann's song-cycle *Dichterliebe* (1840) depends on the premise that he is "the quintessential Romantic composer."[24] In his examination Agawu tries to surpass the limitations of the prevalent theoretic and analytical models by investigating the role of an undefined number of musical parameters involved in the shaping of highpoints and adopting the methodological criterion of "flexibility": the syntax, form, melody, harmony, dynamics, texture, expressive cues and even syntactic and narrative processes of Heine's poems are variously involved in the analysis, and in the closing remarks Agawu proposes that for nineteenth-century music the rigid hierarchical distinction of "structural and ornamental factors" should be abandoned.[25]

When investigating the Adagio of Mahler's Tenth Symphony (1910), Agawu seems to return to a more traditional conception, insofar as he claims that the famous chord in the "climax" of the movement "performs both rhetorical and structural functions, rhetorical because it uses such so-called 'secondary parameters' as timbre, dynamics, and register in a big way, and structural because it presents the ultimate conflict between the primary key system … and a subsidiary one."[26] For the overlapping of "structural and rhetorical functions" to be considered significant, the two attributes must be clearly distinguished in theoretical terms, and here they are distinguished precisely by relying on the usual hierarchy of musical parameters, which Agawu has recently reasserted.[27]

In his systematic study dedicated to the role of secondary parameters in processes of "closure," Robert Hopkins starts from a persuasive definition of the concept of "parameter" based on the criterion of independence.[28] On this basis he specifies and reinforces the

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[21] Ibid. 199.
[22] Agawu, "Structural 'Highpoints' in Schumann's *Dichterliebe*," 160.
[23] Newman, "The Climax of Music," 283.
[24] Agawu, "Structural 'Highpoints' in Schumann's *Dichterliebe*," 160.
[25] Ibid., 176.
[26] Agawu, "Tonal Strategy in the First Movement of Mahler's Tenth Symphony," 231.
[27] See Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 61–73.
[28] See Hopkins, *Closure and Mahler's Music*, 29–30.

distinction between primary and secondary parameters. From the former he excludes "rhythm," which depends on other parameters,[29] while the latter are reduced to four independent parameters: "registral pitch," "dynamics," "duration," and "timbre."[30] In the analytical section of his book, Hopkins offers a systematic examination of the different forms of closure in Mahler's oeuvre, highlighting the role of secondary parameters—taken individually and in their interaction—in four basic strategies: "dissolution," "collapse," "fragmentation," and "subsidence."[31] The introduction of a terminology suitable for the description of the modalities of interaction of the secondary parameters must be stressed: secondary parameters, actually, can be more or less "synchronized" and/or "congruent."[32] In his investigation of "closure" Hopkins takes into consideration strategies of "abatement," yet his terminology can be easily applied also to strategies of "intensification."[33]

The role that climax plays in Mahler's symphonies has been investigated by Kaplan, who referred to the concept of "fusion" in two different perspectives. In terms of the chord of the climax in the Adagio of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, Kaplan identifies a process of fusion by explaining its harmonic structure as the overlapping of dominant chords of two distinct tonalities at the basis of the movement.[34] While when it comes to the peculiar narrative function of "climactic sections" in Mahler's works he focuses on relations of "reminiscence" and "foreshadowing" which prove to be established among quite remote places in the score. In this case he observes that the proximity of the climax tends to produce forms of coalescence of the two temporal directions, defined as "temporal fusion."[35]

The whole debate tends to concentrate either on the first half of the nineteenth century or on the works Mahler composed in the twentieth century, thus focusing on the extremes of a historical development. This shortcoming is partly remedied by Wolfgang Krebs, who proposes the idea of an interaction between musical syntax and the construction of highpoints in Wagner and Bruckner. Krebs identifies a new kind of syntactic typology he names

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[29] Ibid., 29.
[30] Ibid., 31.
[31] Ibid., 64–155.
[32] Ibid., 7.
[33] Ibid., 5.
[34] Kaplan, "The Interaction of Diatonic Collections in the Adagio of Mahler's Tenth Symphony."
[35] Kaplan, "Temporal Fusion and Climax in the Symphonies of Mahler."

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"energetic" or "dynamic period with highpoint effect," shortened as "culmination period,"[36] in an attempt of giving a syntactic guise to processes involving relaxation of syntax. For the rest, his examination is wholly based on Kurth's treatises, to which I will refer directly, in order to set them in the light of the discussion on climax.

Kurth adopts the framework of Vitalism, relying on one hand on the philosophical tradition (Schopenhauer) and, on the other, on the *Lebensphilosophien* emerging and consolidating, in polemic with Positivism, around the turn of the century (Dilthey, Bergson). Within this framework he proposes a metaphysical perspective, based on the idea of a "force [*Kraft*]" (noumenic principle) that assumes a spatial-temporal (phenomenic) form through an act of "coercion [*Bezwingung*]."[37] The philosophical concept of form has in Kurth a dynamic structure, defined through the tension between the "force" and its "consolidation [*Festigung*] in the phenomenic world."[38] Similarly, the concept of musical form results from the "interaction between the force and its coercion in outlines [*Umrissen*]."[39] Relying on this definition Kurth introduces a stylistic distinction between "classical" and "romantic" formal principles, depending on the different relation established between "outlines" and "force." To Kurth, the composers that conform to the classical style deliberately highlight the "outlines" of their works, that is, syntactic articulation, symmetries, regularity of accents, melodic lines and formal partitions; while those conforming to the "romantic" principle shape and structure their works predominantly through "forces," that is, energetic configurations which relaxes syntax in favor of processes based on tensions, polar attractions, intensifications, accumulations, involutions, and so on.

The principle Kurth names "romantic" does not refer to the composers that we today consider equally representative of the musical Romanticism, but only to a specific evolutionary line. This starts from Berlioz, evolves in Liszt, finds its full realization in Wagner's *Tristan* and is transferred by Bruckner to symphonic music. The other evolutionary line—though involving romantic composers such as Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Brahms—is to Kurth still anchored in the principles of classicism, derived from the classical style of Beethoven. Kurth develops his theory in order to underline such difference and at the

[36] Krebs, "Zum Verhältnis von musikalischer Syntax und Höhepunktsgestaltung," 33.
[37] Kurth, *Bruckner*, 239.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 234.

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same time contrast the *Formenlehre* that still dominated didactics and academic treatises of his period, founded by Adolf Bernhard Marx in the mid-nineteenth century and relying on classical models. This theory of form is to Kurth unsuitable to confront the stylistic changes that emerged in the romantic authors of the first line.[40] In order to overcome such limitations Kurth defines the morphology of Wagner and Bruckner using the concept of "wave of force [*Kraftwelle*],"[41] through which he underlines the incomparably greater value and importance assumed by "forces" relative to the "outlines" and particularly by the cumulative principle building to "highpoints [*Höhepunkte*]."

By combining Kurth's perspective with Meyer's reflection it becomes plausible to hypothesize that during the nineteenth century there was a progressive extension of the role of the musical processes based on secondary parameters: while in Berlioz these served to "obscure" the archetype, in Wagner and Bruckner they broke free from traditional syntactic structures and became all-pervasive. The processes Kurth talks about under the term "intensifying waves [*Steigerungswellen*]" are based on ascending modulating sequences of prevalently descending motives (like Meyer's "Sisyphean sequence"). He explains such processes as energetic configurations in tension toward "highpoints" defined in statistical terms. What Kurth names *Steigerung* is thus none other than a process of intensification based on the "congruent" and "highly synchronized" increase of Hopkins's secondary parameters, though Kurth would prefer using "melodic curve" in the place of "registral pitch" and "density [*Dichte*]"—which highlights the quantitative aspects of instrumentation—in the place of "timbre." And it is the convergence of all the secondary parameters that Kurth refers to when he claims the primacy of the "symphonic course [*Verlauf der Symphonik*]" over melody.[42]

Relying on the previous discussion I can now formulate with enough clarity the thesis that in the late nineteenth-century Austrian symphonic tradition the highpoints gain a peculiar structural relief not by virtue of the correspondence with syntactic, harmonic or formal turning points, but exclusively as configurations of force, that is in the "statistical" value emerging from the congruent and synchronized increase of all the independent secondary parameters, whose convergence undermines the structural predominance of the primary ones.

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[40] Ibid., 235–36.
[41] Ibid., 249.
[42] Ibid., 273–274.

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Energetic deployment and formal organization in late Bruckner

The first movement of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony offers a heuristic model of Kurth's treatise; he considers it as the last result of evolution within Bruckner's symphonic oeuvre, where he sees an increasingly wider role of the energetic deployment in the concrete formal organization. This is the reason why we can find analytical cues both in the paragraph dedicated to this movement[43] and in the systematic sections of Kurth's monograph.[44]

The strategy of presentation of the main thematic configuration is revealing: unlike the other initial movements of Bruckner's symphonies, the exposition of the theme does not coincide with the beginning of the piece. Kurth considers the first 96 bars[45] as a coherent process whose integration relies not on a well-established syntactic structure but on the fluctuation of secondary parameters, resulting in a symphonic "wave" articulated in energetic phases.

The "preliminary development [*Vorentwicklung*]"[46] (bars 1–26) begins with a string tremolo—which to Kurth is in general the "stirring of force more than of sound"[47]—joined by woodwinds in the lower register (bar 3) accompanying for a while the entrance of the horns (bar 5). These offer simple motivic configurations insisting on the basic intervals of the D minor triad (third and fifth). To Kurth such intervals are "striving" for the octave, establishing a tension that is not resolved at this point; a "turn [*Wendung*]" follows (bars 19–26), characterized by harmonic modulation and deployed as a little wave within the bigger wave, with its own culmination.[48] From the harmonic point of view the little wave begins in E<flat> major with seventh (*d*<flat>) in the bass, reaches the culmination on the C<flat> major triad and arrives at A<flat>7 (with retardation of the fourth on the third grade) before dispersing.

The lengthy "intensification [*Steigerung*]" (bars 27–62) that follows, is based on the principle of a modulatory sequence and articulated in three phases (bars 27–38, 39–50, 51–

[43] Ibid., 661–707.
[44] Ibid., 320–22, 445–46, 450–51, 558–61.
[45] I refer to the critical edition: Bruckner, *IX. Symphonie D-Moll*.
[46] Kurth, *Bruckner*, 279.
[47] Ibid., 281.
[48] Ibid., 682–83.

62), the last of which is characterized by a remarkable ascent of the melodic curve and synchronized increase of dynamics, orchestral density and motivic acceleration, all building to the "highpoint" (bars 63–75). This is the main event (D minor) of the wave, the result of the tension triggered in the first bars, which Kurth sees as corresponding not to the "exposition" of the main theme but rather to its "outburst [*Ausbruch*]."[49] Completing Kurth's analysis, we can investigate the detailed construction of the theme in order to underline energetic as well as syntactic aspects of its articulation. Therein, a periodic structure is quite recognizable: the first part (bars 63–70) is an antecedent [A] based on melodic descent: chromatic from tonic to dominant, diatonic from dominant to "Neapolitan" grade (*e*<flat>), harmonized as C<flat> (the tonality of the culmination in the "turn"). After a pause, the second part (bars 71–75) represents a consequent [B] starting from E minor (as resolution of C<flat> major, enharmonically equivalent of B), ascending at first gradually and then in rapid scales to *b*<flat>, on the seventh chord on the second grade of D minor with *g* in the bass. The highest note (*b*<flat>) (bar 74) is the melodic highpoint which leads to the final cadence [C]—a simple descending fifth of the dominant on the major tonic (bars 74–75).

The last phase of the wave (bars 77–96) is to Kurth the energetic consequence of the highpoint, that is, a reverberation of the outburst causing "after-tremor [*Nacherschütterung*]," and corresponds only superficially to a transition to the second theme.[50] I would make this point more precise by saying that the passage has not the "character" (the traditional features) of a transition while conserving its "function." Kurth interprets the *pizzicato* which dominates this passage both as a symbol of the rebounding of the energy in descending figurations to the complete dissipation, and as the expression of a "state of tension";[51] the last bars prepares, in fact, a new event through the dominant of A major.

In this first articulated formal process emerge two striking configurations of force: the first is perceived as primary or "structural," for the highpoint corresponds to the tonic key, to a defined syntactic structure (basically periodic) and to the formal function of exposition of the main theme; while the second is perceived as secondary and "episodic," for the motivic configuration of the "turn" represents something preliminary, playing an undefined formal function, offering a loose syntactic construction, avoiding fundamental tonalities (even if the

[49] Ibid., 685.
[50] Ibid., 450.
[51] Ibid., 282.

culminating chord is then included in the main theme) and following a modulatory and fluctuant course. Yet, the primary configuration does not merely "underline" or "reinforce" the theme, rather it identifies it as the outburst of a force that previously was only latent; I would define this as an energetic "translation" of a structural function.

The exposition continues with two thematic waves, each with a less prominent highpoint. These follow a more linear course, corresponding to a second theme in A major, the character of which is that of a typical *Gesangsthema* (bars 97–152), and a third theme (*Unisono*) initially exposed in D minor (bars 167–226) after a short preparation (bars 153–66). The subsequent development is to Kurth a single great evolutionary process, though initially divided up into short sections.[52] The first two (bars 227–52, 252–76) combine the preliminary horn motives (bars 5–11) respectively with the retardation at the end of the "turn" (bars 24–25) and inverted fragments of the second theme, concluding in short intensifications (bars 245–52, 256–76) based on the "turn" (bars 19–25). The third (bars 277–301) develops motivic materials from the "after-tremor," combined with materials of the second theme. The accompaniment motive of the subsequent section (bars 303–20) also relies on the inversion of the first part of the *Gesangsthema* (bars 97–98, violins), developing a gradual intensification based on the principle of the ascending modulating sequence; this motive accompanies the restatement (in fact identical) of the last phase of the lengthy intensification of the first symphonic wave (bars 321–32), building to the first highpoint of the development.[53]

This could be the beginning of the "recapitulation" of the main theme in D minor. Yet the antecedent [A] is restated only to be elaborated through melodic sequences (bars 333–54) that touch tonal regions recalling that of the "turn" (E<flat> minor, G<flat> minor, E<flat> major). A "march"[54] in A<flat> minor follows (bars 355–66), returning to elaborate the initial horn motives, treated with motives from the antecedent of the main theme, that subsequently become predominant (from bar 367). With the emergence of a new motive in the violins (bars 367–80), in obsessive repetitions and sudden changes of tonality, the march episode leads to a sudden "densification [*Verdichtung*]," [55] on harmonies of B major to F minor, building to a second highpoint (bars 387–91). This ends in a forceful collapse, with repeated rebounds of

[52] Ibid., 689.
[53] Ibid., 693.
[54] Ibid., 697.
[55] Ibid., 700.

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the F minor chord, to the exhaustion of all the residual energy (bars 391–97). What follows (strings only) is an episode based on augmentation of the descending triplets from the main theme, over a lengthy dominant pedal (bars 400–20). This serves two functions: one of energetic compensation for the previous highpoint, the other of concluding the development and preparation of the recapitulation of the *Gesangsthema* in D major.

The whole passage from the first highpoint of the development to the recapitulation of the second theme is to Kurth "a twofold formal event [*formales Doppelereignis*]": the "restatement" of the main theme is completely "woven into the development,"[56] while the traditional character of the reprise as formal fulfillment has been transferred to the second theme (bar 421). However its restatement is shortened (bar 458), or rather broken off by a sharp caesura, and is followed by a shorter recapitulation of the third theme (bar 459). Instead of reaching a relative culmination as in the third wave of the exposition (bar 210) and moving to closure, the theme becomes a modulating ascending sequence that through powerful densification leads to a third highpoint (bars 493–503)—harmonically a polytonal passage combining B<flat> minor and E<flat> minor chords. A "chorale"[57] follows (bars 505–16) modulating toward the dominant but also producing energetic compensation after the highpoint.

On the tonic pedal begins, once again, an extremely lengthy intensification (from bar 518), at first based on motives from the antecedent [A] of the main theme. After a while, the restatement of the consequent [B] of the main theme enters in the horns (bars 531–41), repeated several times (bars 542–47) in exact correspondence with the chord of the culmination of the main theme, to build a powerful cadence [C] to D minor (bars 548–50) as the fourth highpoint. Here we find a process that Kurth elsewhere names "over-intensification [*Übersteigerung*],"[58] continuing the culmination and expanding it to a fifth and more powerful highpoint (bar 551). At this point the head of the "turn" enters in the trumpets at its proper pitch level (bars 553–55), yet over the tonic pedal, and is heard repeatedly (bars 557–62) until it resolves on D as an open fifth (bar 563). After a descending fifth in the trumpets (bars 563–65), the rebounding of the bi-chord in the horns concludes the movement.

In order to interpret the location of these highpoints I draw on a criterion that can be

[56] Ibid., 695.
[57] Ibid., 703.
[58] Ibid., 410.

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connected to the concept of "formal tension [*Formspannung*],"[59] though this does not receive a univocal definition in Kurth's treatise. I refer to the idea of "formal events in tension toward the … final result."[60] As in the single symphonic wave the highpoint is the main event to which what precedes is oriented in terms of tension, so in the whole organization of a symphonic movement the succession of highpoints establishes a field of forces relying on a web of tensions; these on one hand orient the formal organization, and on the other help to understand the "meaning" of the symphonic process as a whole. The highpoints are thus in tension with one another. Completing Kurth's indications, it could be said that in the first symphonic wave the tension between the initial horn motives and the highpoint establishes a "primary" line of force (see Figure 1).

From this highpoint radiates a formal tension to other two highpoints: the first and the fourth (counting from the beginning of the development). Though Kurth here does not take into consideration the thematic-motivic relations, I notice that the first highpoint of the development corresponds to a recapitulation of the antecedent of the main theme [A]. This means on one hand that its structural value is crippled, and on the other hand that it has to be completed in order to achieve integration. The fourth highpoint is preceded by intensification, where the consequent of the main theme [B] is restated, while broadening the cadence from the end of the theme [C]. The first and fourth highpoints are also involved in the first line of formal tension, establishing a process of motivic-thematic completion.

Actually, Kurth focuses his attention on another line of tension ("secondary"). This is established starting from the "turn" and is all the more important on one hand because it makes it possible to "explain" the particular shaping of the development and all the events following the reprise of second and third themes, and on the other because its possible "structural" meaning is exclusively established by forces and tensions. Kurth touches on this point when he describes the second highpoint of the development. He does not rely on primary parameters but notices a tension that he names "preparation of the end."[61] Subsequently he describes the recapitulation of the second and third themes as "interruption," identifying the third highpoint (as continuation of the third theme) as the decisive

[59] Ibid., 246.
[60] Ibid., 696.
[61] Ibid.

"resumption"[62] of such tension toward the end of the movement. Concerning this "end," Kurth is aware of the fact that the final motivic configuration in the "over-intensification" following the final cadence in the fourth highpoint restates the initial motive of the "turn," but he does not clarify the relation between this last climactic passage and the highpoints (second and third) enclosing the reprise. By failing to make such a relationship explicit, his analysis is on this point compromised. A closer motivic analysis shows that both the highpoints offer a combination of fragments from the themes (the first and the third respectively) with a motive consisting of an octave leap, divided into two intervals of fifth and fourth: in the second highpoint it is the motive in the violins (from bar 381); in the third it is the most prominent motive (bars 493–500, violins and woodwinds), though apparently a derivation from the third theme. In this sense, both highpoints "prepare" the end of the movement, even if only the powerful collapse at the end of the second highpoint (bars 391–95) offers a rather catastrophic prefiguration of the very end of the piece (bars 563–67, trumpets).

My interpretation of this double formal tension—helping to achieve integration on the energetic level—touches the hermeneutic aspects of the question: the energetic course "explains" what from the point of view of sonata form theory would be rather difficult to understand, that is the broad and articulated development including the partial restatement of the main theme, but also the peculiar construction of the coda.[63] Moreover, I underline a rather unusual function of highpoints in late Bruckner. These can no more be considered "episodic" or "rhetoric." By means of secondary parameters, Bruckner seems to transform structural moments into configurations of force (primary line of tension), while non-structural elements gain a new structural meaning thanks to their forceful significance (secondary line of tension). Consequently the two lines of formal tension come to be assimilated on the strictly energetic level, with repercussions on the organization of the movement. The configuration of the coda, where the fourth highpoint (the cadence) is surpassed through over-intensification while the "turn" is restated, announces, as it were, a "trans-valuation of values": the secondary tension overwhelms the primary one through its constitution of force. At the same time, the conclusion of the movement offers an interactive overlapping of the two tensions (with relative motivic contents), revealing the structural meaning of both. Thus,

[62] Ibid., 702.

[63] For a different but in my opinion problematic formal division of this development see Steinbeck, *Anton Bruckner: Neunte Symphonie*, 80–82.

highpoints as statistical configurations based on the articulation of secondary parameters become structural markers of a formal organization that is not prevalently based on abstract typologies relying on sonata form theory, but rather on the concrete energetic deployment: the movement is in fact characterized by continuous alternation of intensification processes building to highpoints and zones of compensation. Compared to this, the traditional formal "characters" move into the background: though present and still recognizable (mostly as formal "functions"), they are no longer able to convey the "meaning" of the formal organization; on the contrary, they hinder it.

Material theory of form and energetic organization in Mahler

While Kurth resolves the question of formal organization in Bruckner from an energetic point of view, Adorno proposes a "material theory of form" with recourse to "the deduction of formal categories from their meaning [*Sinn*]" as a key to understand Mahler's music. What Adorno claims for Mahler could equally apply to Bruckner: "the usual abstract formal categories are overlaid with material ones; sometimes the former become specifically the bearer of meaning; sometimes material formal principles are constituted beside or below the abstract ones, which, while continuing to provide the framework and to support the unity, no longer themselves supply a connection in terms of musical meaning."[64]

The material categories proposed by Adorno—including "suspension," "fulfillment," "breakthrough," and "collapse"—are not far from Kurth's vocabulary, and it is perhaps no coincidence that in his discussion of the first movement of Mahler's First Symphony Adorno focuses his attention on the relation between the fanfares in the introduction (bars 9–15, 22–26, 36–38, 44–47) and their extraordinary explosion in the development (bar 352).[65] To Adorno it is reductive to think of this passage as the reaching of a "climax"; rather, "the music has expanded with a physical jolt," and there is a "rupture … intervening from outside." It is a "breakthrough" that "affects the entire form." Subsequently, the "recapitulation … shrinks to a hasty epilogue," while "the memory of the main idea drives the music swiftly to its end." In

[64] Adorno, *Mahler*, 44–45.

[65] I refer to the critical edition: Mahler, *Symphonie Nr. 1 in vier Sätzen für großes Orchester*.

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this sense, the outburst "dictates the entire structure of the movement."[66]

The analogies with some of the previous remarks on Bruckner's movement are evident. Yet, by interpreting Mahler's movement in Kurth's energetic perspective, the connection to Bruckner becomes more striking. The introduction corresponds to a phase of "preliminary development" (bars 1–62) where some motivic figures prepare the theme (the fourths) while others quite "out of context" assume the narrative function of "foreshadowing."[67] I refer particularly to the third fanfare (bars 36–39) on the D major triad, while the first (bars 9–12) develops the same semitone harmonic relation (B<flat> on *a* pedal) as the "turn" (E<flat> after *d*) and the conclusive event (E<flat> on *d* pedal) in Bruckner's movement.

Considering the theme that follows (bars 63–162), it is not so much a quotation, but rather a symphonic re-formulation of the second song of *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* "Ging heut' morgen über's Felds." Its character of "montage," involving rearrangement of the components through permutation of the original order and combination with elements from the introduction, is the prominent aspect at the narrative level.[68] At the energetic level the main point is rather the comprehensive course with which it conforms, established through the deployment of secondary parameters. In addition to dynamics, instrumental density and melodic curve, tempo too cooperates in structuring the whole thematic complex in the form of a wave. Mahler indicates "*Tempo-Steigerung*" in the score (from bar 110), but the passage builds a *Steigerung* even in the sense used by Kurth, involving gradual intensification and densification with a highpoint almost at the end of the exposition (bar 151) corresponding to a motivic derivation [x] that is not present in the original song. In the symphonic re-formulation the highpoint is a "syntactic climax" (employed as reversal to closure) that coincides not only with the "statistical climax" but also with a "tempo-culmination" (bars 151–59). It is particularly these aspects that in Mahler mark the aesthetic and structural distance between the symphonic idea and the strophic conception of the Lied.

Given that Mahler prescribes repetition of the whole theme (a traditional character of exposition), what follows (from bar 163) can only be seen as development. Tempo, timbre, density, dynamics, durations denote a "material" continuity with the introduction. Mahler

[66] Adorno, *Mahler*, 5–6.
[67] Kaplan, "Temporal Fusion and Climax," 216.
[68] Borio, "Le parole cancellate e le tracce," 23.

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lingers on this development, where proper elaboration is confined to the motive [X] in the flutes in combination with the fourth intervals of the introduction (from bar 165). What emerges is rather the gradual entrance of the "new theme."[69] Actually, we have to do with new "motives" in a germinal state (bars 167–202, cellos), with insertions where fragments from the introduction concentrate and overlap one another (bars 189–98). The return of the initial tempo of the theme (bar 207, *Sehr gemächlich*) suggests an aspect of "recapitulation," but the movement still maintains the character of a development, into which hints of a recapitulation are "woven" more radically when compared to Bruckner. The "new motives" evolve in two directions: from the last elaboration in the cellos (bars 201–2) derives a "new fanfare" which includes the descending fourth (bars 209–16, horns), while the major "variant" of the motive (bars 220–24) develops a counterpoint within the texture of the Lied theme, which appears in a new permutation, giving place, at times, to the "variant," that undergoes further development (from bar 257). With the return to the minor (from bars 304–6), the "new theme" proper combines with more vigorous melodic figurations (bars 310–16) anticipating the main theme of the Finale. Through haunting motives based on an octave leap (from bar 317) the movement becomes a preparation for a climactic restatement, yet not of the main theme, but of the third fanfare from the introduction: this appears the first time in D<flat> major (bars 323–25), followed by a more accurate prefiguration of the main theme of the Finale, here developed as a further variant of the "new theme." A sudden *pianissimo* represents what Mahler himself indicates in the score as "*Beginn der Steigerung*" (bar 338). Melodic values are here virtually unaltered and the deployment of this intensification relies on secondary parameters through dynamic *crescendo* and instrumental densification, while the timbral quality of massed horns accompanies the last phase of the *Steigerung* with repeated triplet notes (bars 348–51). The resulting highpoint is the apotheosis (Adorno's "breakthrough") corresponding to the restatement of the fanfare from the introduction starting in D major (with *a* in the bass) and continuing, *accelerando*, to the dominant chord (bars 352–57) which resolves on the restatement of the "new" fanfare [NF] from the development (bars 358–63).

This double highpoint is followed by elaborations based on the "new theme" (bars 364–69) and fragments of the Lied theme, until a short intensification corresponding to an

[69] Adorno, *Mahler*, 13.

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ascending modulating sequence (bars 378–83, woodwinds) establishes a high level of dynamics (from bar 383) that will be maintained until the end of the movement. Therein the main theme in D major appears in the trumpets and then in the woodwinds and strings. Even the last wave is characterized by "*Tempo-Steigerung*," but starting from a faster tempo than in the exposition. Now the modular components of the theme that preceded its culmination in the exposition are restated in the same order, but tempo and secondary parameters do not permit the syntactic reversal to achieve closure (bars 431–36), involving it in a further intensification (from bar 436), until the theme undergoes its peculiar "liquidation" (in Schoenberg's terms)[70] through reduction to the fourth interval. In the timpani this becomes a peremptory gesture of quieting (bars 436–40). Twice the movement attempts to escape, only to be silenced by the timpani strokes in two striking general pauses (bars 443–47), until it succeeds, reaching the last cadence with the fourth interval (now ascending) in the bass (bars 449–50).

It is not difficult to identify the role of energetic organization in Mahler's symphonic movement, based on the location of highpoints along tension lines establishing a field of forces. By mapping such tensions, the connection with the strategies adopted in Bruckner's movement can be further defined. Here too, the preliminary development is the point of departure for two different tensions (see Figure 2).

The first ("primary") is triggered by the initial fourth motives and prepares the theme, which develops a symphonic wave reaching the highpoint near the end of the process. The second ("secondary") emerges in the series of fanfares, appearing as rather episodic and is to some extent "doubled" by the new fanfare in the development. Such secondary tensions have their goal in the climax of the development, combining the apotheosis of both fanfares into an uncommon "cadence of highpoints."

The tension of the main theme interacts, then, with the entrance of the "new theme" in the development. Before the highpoint, the "restatement" of the Lied theme is confined to some modular arrangements of its components, with insertions where the new theme is in relief. After the highpoint the "new theme" is still combined with the Lied theme; this becomes predominant only when the tension toward its true culmination is reactivated. Retrospectively, this culmination at the end of the exposition can be characterized as a

[70] Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, 58.

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"preparation of the end." Yet, the impetus triggered by the "breakthrough" combines with the tension of the theme to its highpoint, adding up its force. This is the reason why now the theme cannot achieve closure: the increased force involves the motives of the "closure" in a rush, with a tempo acceleration that only the forceful gesture in the timpani can contrast.

Once the analogies have been identified, it is possible to clarify to what an extent Mahler's composition emerges, right from the outset, as more radically nominalist than Bruckner's less traditional sonata movement. The fact that motivic and embryonic thematic materials proliferate in the "preliminary development" as well as in the development proper (though derived from a rather homogeneous musical material) gives the decisive impetus to the dissolution or at least to the weakening of primary thematic centers. Moreover, the shaping of tempo, through its true articulation, does away with regularity, still predominant in Bruckner—with the exceptions of *ritenuto* before highpoints are reached (Ninth Symphony, first movement, bars 61–62), and gradual *accelerando* in lengthy episodes of intensification (bars 325–32). More in general, secondary parameters come radically to the fore, emphasizing the secondary and episodic thematic centers over the primary ones through deployment of configurations of force. Adorno too connected the category of "breakthrough" first of all to the fact that the fanfare explodes "quite out of scale with the orchestra's previous sound or even the preceding crescendo."[71] Actually, the instrumentation represents the most significant innovation of Mahler's symphonies, giving to the main highpoint the effect of a shock with the outburst of statistical values (density and dynamics) being enforced by the quality of timbre—a parameter that in Mahler assumes an uncommon constructive role. Yet the structural meaning of the highpoint in terms of formal tension can be fully explained only by evaluating the comprehensive energetic organization of which it is the statistical turning point.

Referring to the second (although he mistakenly speaks of the "first") movement of Mahler's Fifth Symphony (1902), Meyer claimed that it is difficult to identify a "single decisive syntactic climax" in the "succession of more or less equal, and local, syntactic turning points," while "the main statistical climax" can be easily recognized, because Mahler indicated "*Höhepunkt*" in the score.[72] I would ask whether the presence of such an indication

[71] Adorno, *Mahler*, 4–5.

[72] Meyer, "Exploiting Limits," 199.

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does not rather suggest the opposite conclusion. I mean that Mahler's First and Fifth Symphony are different steps in an evolution. While the late Bruckner takes the direction of nominalism by means of energetic strategies, Mahler initially conforms to the same principle only to develop it further and expand the sphere of its influence. The First Symphony, with the prominent climax in the first movement, represents an early phase. Subsequently Mahler will surpass the predictability of the energetic course that is so peculiar to Bruckner, moving toward an increasingly greater compositional freedom. Yet the deployment of the energetic organization will remain a decisive element until the Adagio of the Tenth Symphony. A greater attention to these aspects would be crucial to historicize Mahler's symphonic oeuvre.

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Fig. 1. Diagram of formal tensions in Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, first movement

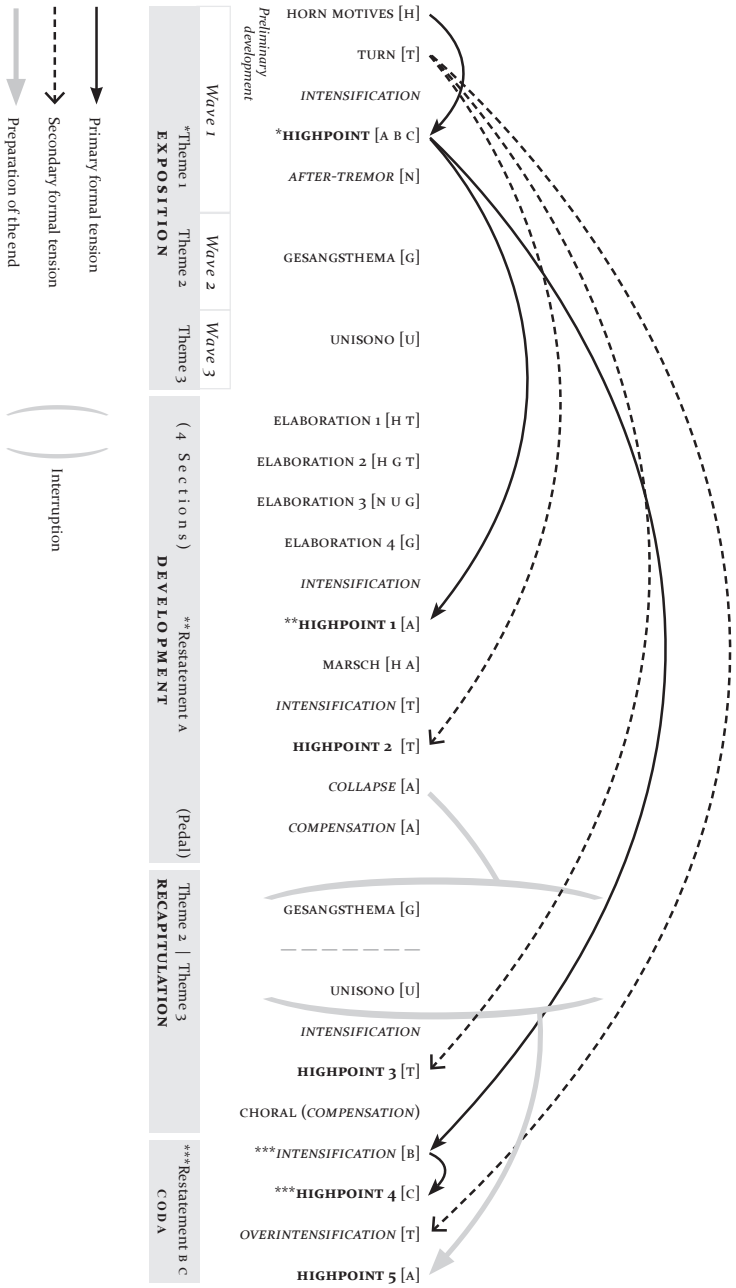

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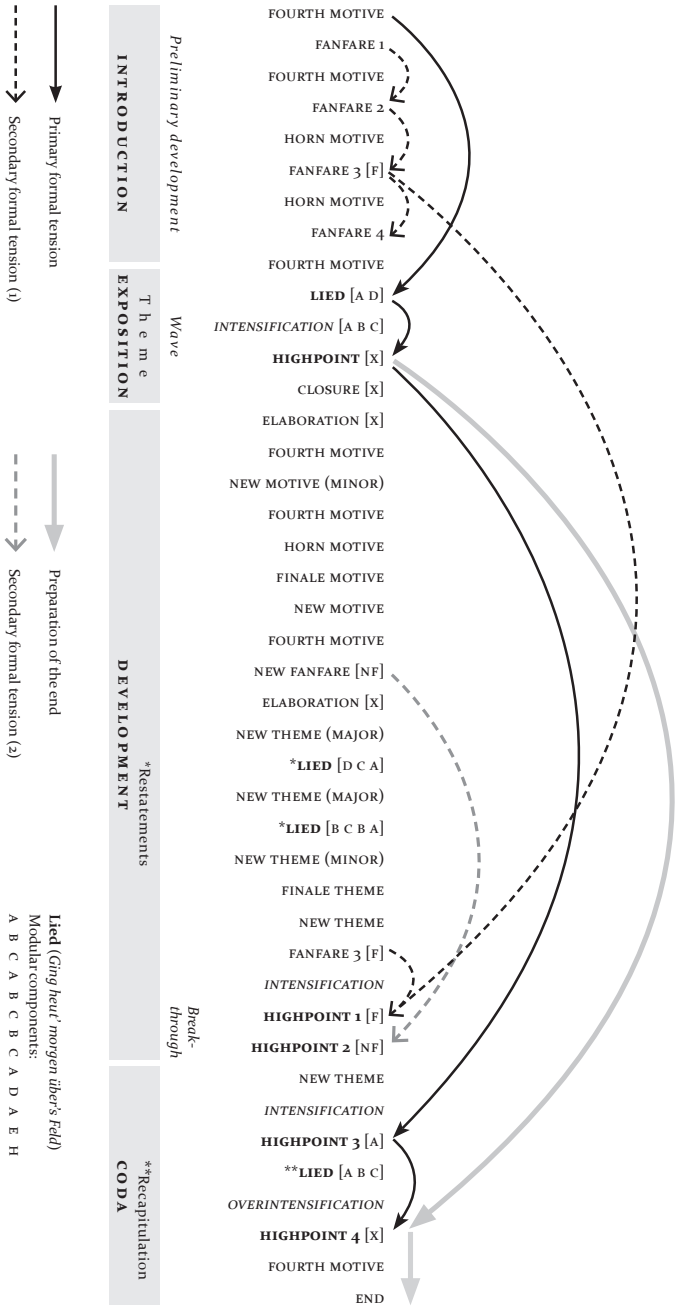
Fig. 2. Diagram of formal tensions in Mahler's First Symphony, first movement



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