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Re-interpreting the Farewell Story of Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*: Dialectical Synthesis in the Modern Age

Daniel Sheridan

Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* has for so long been interpreted as being about the approach of death, specifically Mahler's "farewell to the world and to life,"[1] that the interpretation has practically become axiomatic. Alban Berg's oft-quoted letter to his wife about the first movement reads "it is the expression of an unheard–of love for this earth, the longing to live in peace upon her, Nature, still to enjoy her utterly, even to her deepest depths–before Death comes. For it comes irresistibly. This entire movement is based upon a presentiment of death."[2] Dr. Moriz Scheyer, a reporter who attended the posthumous premiere in 1912, considered the symphony a "resigned farewell of an unsteady person who finally went to his rest."[3] Willem Mengelberg went so far as to create a program for the symphony after studying the score and sketches; he referred to

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1 Vera Micznik, "The Farewell Story of Mahler's Ninth Symphony," *19th Century Music* XX/2 (Fall 1996): 144.

2 Stephen E. Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," in *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 467.

3 Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), 272.

the symphony as a "farewell from all whom he loved...from the world...and from his art, his life, his music."[4] In the years since the work's debut, it seems as if there is not a single piece of writing that does not mention the death-haunted nature of the work.

Nonetheless, there are flaws in these interpretations: for example, those who would interpret the symphony as a farewell often forget that before his death Mahler had completed a draft score of a Tenth Symphony. Also, Mahler's state of mind was not consistently sombre throughout 1909, when much of the symphony was composed. In a letter to Bruno Walter at the beginning of the year Mahler wrote:

> There is so much to write about myself that I cannot even make an attempt to begin. My life is now so infinitely full of experiences...I can hardly talk about it. How should I attempt to describe such a tremendous change! I see everything in a new light–feel so much alive and find the 'habit of existence' sweeter than ever.[5]

During that summer, when primary composition took place, Mahler was quoted as saying "I get such pleasure from the world! How beautiful the world is!"[6] These are not the words of a man anticipating death and resigning himself to his fate. Yet the so-called "farewell story" persists. One of the reasons is the knowledge that Mahler made annotations to the draft score such as "O days of

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4 Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 273.
5 Micznik, "The Farewell Story," 155.
6 Micznik, "The Farewell Story," 155.

youth! Vanished! O Love! Scattered!" and "O beauty! Love! Farewell! Farewell! World! Farewell!" Mahler did not die until 1911, but the above passages seem to support Stephen Hefling's assertion that Mahler was "not obsessed by death in 1909", but he was "nevertheless aware of its relentless approach."[7]

In the following pages, I intend to re-interpret this "farewell story;" instead of reading this story as a program, I will situate the story within 20th Century culture, a culture where factories and assembly lines are numerous and music seems to be more of a commodity than ever before (although it is doubtful there was ever a time when music was not a commodity). In a society where sales of CD's are closely monitored, where standards of the classical repertoire are often used to sell hamburgers, where music is used as "background noise" in supermarkets to create a pleasant shopping atmosphere, where does this symphony fit? How does modern culture receive and interpret the work? The symphony creates binary oppositions out of such musical qualities as major/minor, diatonic/chromatic. In addition, the symphony sets descriptors of the music's character, such as simple/complex, sublime/vulgar, in opposition to each other. I will read these oppositions as dialectical and the symphony as an attempt at synthesis of these opposing ideas. The "farewell story" may refer not to Mahler himself, but to the notion of "art for art's sake." The symphony makes a final attempt at dialectical synthesis, to create a work of art that appeals to proletariat and bourgeoisie alike, before the attempt is revealed as

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[7] Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 468.

impossible. The notion of tonal music as an autonomous work with intrinsic value is laid to rest, with the role of commodity being accepted. To aid my interpretation, I will draw mainly on the writings of Theodor Adorno and his ideas about the commodity character of music and autonomy. My reading of the score will be fairly brief and will not involve a bar-by-bar analysis as I feel that applying meaning to every minute detail runs the risk of essentialism (although I am probably leaving myself open to criticisms of ignoring too many pertinent details). I wish to make it clear that this is by no means a definitive reading of the work, as there are numerous possible interpretations that are equally viable. Nor is my intention to provide some sort of rebuke to popular music, arguing that such music's only value is to the free market, to be consumed with minimal thought, or to suggest that acceptance of music's commodity character is inherently negative. My intention is to theorize how a work of European "art" music, traditionally held up as an objective standard for Western music, remains viable in the modern, industrial age.

Artistic Expression, Commodity Culture, and Dialectical Synthesis

In the 21st Century, the capability of disseminating music is at an all-time high; compact-discs, radio, DVD, and the internet allow almost instantaneous access to virtually every imaginable type of music. Factories mass produce CD's and DVD's, radio stations perpetually play the most popular songs and large arenas and stadiums are routinely filled to capacity for concerts. Clearly, music is a very

lucrative business, but how does this affect the production of music itself? According to Walter Benjamin:

> Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be perceived in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room.[8]

The "beholder" has easier access to a facsimile of the work, but how does the reproduction affect the original work? Benjamin writes that "one might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art."[9] The work's aura is its sign of authenticity, its uniqueness; in essence, "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."[10] Reproduction divides the work between the original source, with its aura of uniqueness and authenticity, and the copy, which

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[8] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 222-223.
[9] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 223.
[10] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reprocuction," 233.

serves the express purpose of being a use object for the consumer. In terms of music, one would think of recordings: the composition is performed and recorded. However, one does not purchase a copy of the original composition, but a reproduction of the recording. Benjamin's thinking posits the original work as not devalued by reproduction; it is only the reproduction that assumes the role of commodity. I feel that there is a flaw in his reasoning: if, for example, The Rolling Stones write songs with the express purpose of recording them and releasing them on mass-produced CD's, are the original compositions commodities as well? Similarly, if a classical musician composes an opera so that it may be staged in a theatre, with admission charged, does the opera still have an "aura"? Is the work of art itself a commodity when it is created for the purpose of exhibition?

Theodor Adorno, one of Benjamin's colleagues in the Frankfurt School,[11] thought along similar lines as my questions above, although his writings were of a rather dystopian character. His Marxist position was that the commoditization of music was the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy of bourgeois culture; the bourgeois elite produces work that is easily consumable by the masses which results in greater profit and social standing.[12] To use a cliché,

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[11] An introduction to the Frankfurt School may be found in Richard Leppert's introduction to *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 5-6, 18-32.

[12] Adorno puts forth this notion (in more elaborate language) in the section "Standardization" of "On Popular Music" (1941), in *Essays on Music*, 441-444.

"we give the people what they want and the people want what we give them." According to Adorno, "music no longer serves direct needs nor benefits from direct application, but rather adjusts to the pressures of the exchange of abstract units."[13] One is reminded of the "boy-band" craze of recent years. Following the success of the Backstreet Boys were a seeming deluge of similar groups like N-Sync and 98°. Similarly, in the late '60's, the success of heavy-rock groups, particularly Led Zeppelin, resulted in such groups as Bad Company and Black Sabbath being signed to record labels and enjoying great success. In these instances, the record labels observed what types of music were selling and provided more examples of such music.[14] The record labels likely did not see this music for its potential value to listeners, but for its market value.[15] Even the music-buying public seems to acknowledge the commodity character of music: we purchase magazines like *Billboard* and *Entertainment Weekly* that contain weekly charts of the top selling recordings. We watch programs on music television stations that count down the most popular videos. In short, we seem to place a great deal of importance on the success of musicians.

The examples above would seem to single out popular music as a commodity. Indeed, much of

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13 Theodor Adorno, "On the Social Situation in Music" (1932), in *Essays on Music*, 391.

14 This is, of course, an assumption, but that such similar groups closely followed the success of the original group leads me to this assumption.

15 I cannot subscribe to Adorno's view that groups like N-Sync and Bad Company would not serve any direct needs. Artists do not enjoy the level of success of these groups without being of great value to their audience.

Adorno's criticism of commodity culture focused on popular music (which would have been Jazz in his time). Adorno believed that standardized musical form (of which he saw numerous examples of in Jazz) was one of the causes of music's reification as a consumer product. "Popular modern music is obliged to attempt to fulfill two different requirements. The popular work must, on the one hand, be familiar to its audience and, on the other hand, have the appearance of distinctiveness."[16] In other words, popular songs may sound distinctive in that they have an original melody, but other aspects like form and harmony are regimented. Yet the various characteristics of commodity that were applied to popular music have equally viable applications to the art music repertoire. Royal patronage was a significant factor in the production of music in the 18th Century. For example, Haydn spent a great deal of his career in the employ of Prince Esterházy, producing works to entertain his court; music was not regarded as a mode of individual expression, but as entertainment. Franz Liszt, a composer and pianist firmly embedded in the "art for art's sake" aesthetic of the 19th Century, showcased his bravura performances at recitals in front of adoring throngs.[17] Liszt's spectacular performances of technically difficult music would have been the draw for the audience, paying for an opulent show.

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16 Pauline Johnson, *Marxist Aesthetics*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 90.

17 See Richard Leppert, "Cultural Contradiction, Idolatry, and the Piano Virtuoso," in *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 252-281.

Liszt's virtuosity commodified the music he performed.

In modern times, works in the repertoire have received numerous recordings, with periodicals like *Gramophone* rating the quality of new recordings. Books like *The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs* contain reviews of recordings of years past, with the authors determining "essential" albums. As Adorno writes, "a great share of supposedly 'serious' music adjusts itself to the demands of the market in the same manner as the composers of light music."[18] Although Adorno puts the word "serious" in quotation marks, indicating his belief that truly serious music does not "adjust to the demands of the market," I would argue that for modern audiences of art music, the works are just as standardized as any pop song.

Traditionally, concerts consist almost exclusively of tonal music from the 17th to the 19th Century. Modern works tend to be in the neo-Romantic idiom, with performances of Modernist works being comparatively rare (in traditional concert halls). To cite an example from personal experience, about two years ago, I attended a concert of a violist (whose name, regrettably, I do not remember) who played such standards as a Bach Cello Suite and Schubert's "Arpeggione" Sonata. Also performed was an atonal piece from the latter half of the 20th Century. The violist felt the need to say a few words about this piece before she performed it, as if she needed to justify its inclusion on the program. Indeed, the review in the newspaper the following week basically asked why she bothered including

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[18] Adorno, "Social Situation", 395.

music that no one would understand when plenty of music by composers like Schubert was available. In other words, tonality is what the audience pays for and tonality is what the audience expects to get.

To 21st Century ears, the structures of the works performed are also standardized; when we hear a Bach vocal aria, do we not expect a *Da Capo* repeat of the A section? When we hear the first movement of a Mozart piano concerto, do we not expect to hear two expositions, one with the orchestra and one with the soloist? When we hear a Mahler symphony, do we not expect to hear elaborate contrapuntal writing in a high Romantic idiom? Do we not expect a dominant chord to resolve to the tonic? The audience for Western art music may be smaller than the audience for popular music, but there is an audience and that audience's tastes are catered to.

Art music as a commodity or art music as the creation of the autonomous individual: these are two seemingly antonymous viewpoints. Is there any possibility of dialectical synthesis? Can this synthesis take place within the music? According to Adorno, the supposed autonomy of music is the basis for the attempt to achieve synthesis of individual and society. As Rose Subotnik writes:

> Great art since the maturity of the bourgeois era...has been crafted by artists directly concerned not with society...but with the immanent problems of art. Nevertheless, Adorno simultaneously maintains that the more rigorous the exclusiveness with which the artists devote themselves to such immanent problems, the more certain is the resulting art to embody, within its own

> structure, an artistic counterpoint to the structure of external human affairs...[19]

Subotnik elaborates with:

> The fundamental elements of artistic form (by which in musical terms Adorno appears to mean both the physical aspects of sound configurations and the principals of organization that govern them) are ultimately derived not from the artist's own imagination but, unconsciously, from the formal categories and models of the historical world outside of the art work.[20]

The music's social relevance is conveyed through the dialectical relationship between the subject (individual) and form (society). Adorno argued that Beethoven's second-period style articulated the possibility of dialectical synthesis through the treatment of the subject. "Development is the process through which the musical subject demonstrates its self-generated powers as it 'goes out,' in dialectical terms, from itself into the generalizing world of Other or object."[21] The expanded development is a signifier of individuality until "the emphatic reassertion of self" that begins the recapitulation.[22] However, by Beethoven's third period, Adorno believes that reconcilability of

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19 Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition", in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 19.

20 Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagonosis of Beethoven..." 19.

21 Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagonosis of Beethoven..." 20.

22 Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagonosis of Beethoven..." 21.

autonomy and heteronomy has been revealed to be impossible. Thus, music can no longer present the illusion of synthesis; the subject must acknowledge its lack of self-determination and disappear into the form. In other words, "to avoid violating its own autonomy, the musical subject had to give up its own place in music by yielding to–or, in effect, taking on–the formal characteristics of objective reality."[23] The subject's inability to reconcile its autonomy with the heteronomy of society was demonstrated through the increased contrapuntal activity of Beethoven's late music.[24] The homophony of the second period style, which emphasized the subject's individuality, gave way to polyphony and placed the subject within a collective of voices. The subject lost its unique identity as it was but one voice among many. If we assume that all tonal music is created for the purpose of exhibition, we can infer that the possibility of autonomous music is illusory and thus the music allows itself to be subsumed within objective reality, in this case commodity culture.

The Archaic *Ninth Symphony*

Returning to Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*, I posit that as a work originally composed at the outset of the 20th Century, shortly before the First World War and the industrial expansion that resulted, it may be interpreted by a modern audience as a farewell to tonal music as an autonomous art. Two years after Mahler completed this symphony, Schoenberg composed the atonal work *Pierrot Lunaire*, notable for

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[23] Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagonosis of Beethoven..." 26.
[24] Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagonosis of Beethoven..." 27.

its use of *Sprechstimme*. More experiments in atonality followed leading to the development of the serial method in 1923 and even more experimental ideas in the following years. If these ideas were the new art music, then tonality would appear to be an archaic form. Composing in the tonal system would practically be a regression. I would argue that in Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*, synthesis between tonality's status as art and as commodity is attempted. The attempts consistently fail and tonality is laid to rest at the symphony's end.

First Movement: *Andante Commodo*

The form of the *Andante Commodo* "has been variously described as a sonata form, as a sonata combined with rondo, and as a sonata combined with rondo, variation *and* strophic song!"[25] "The unusual interplay of materials in the movement tends to confute traditional formal categorization"[26] as Stephen Hefling writes. The differing interpretations are the result of the constant presence of the key of D: the first theme is set in D major while the second is in D minor. Additionally, throughout the movement's "development," the key of D returns constantly, making it difficult to determine where the "recapitulation" begins. The numerous articulations of the tonic give the movement its rondo character. The unusual structure seems to be an amalgamation of tonal forms as if the symphony were acting as a

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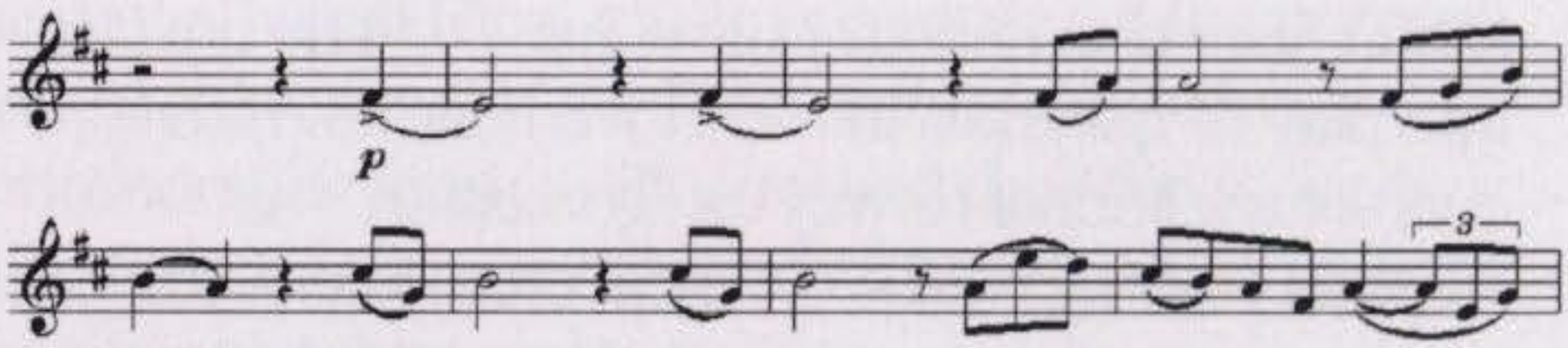
[25] Christopher Orlo Lewis, *Tonal Coherence in Mahler's Ninth Symphony*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 13.
[26] Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 470.

summation of tonality in order to bid it farewell.[27] Also, by not adhering to traditional formal principles, the symphony makes its first attempt at autonomy. The two themes, in parallel keys, form a dialectic whose "opposition articulates a permanent state of affairs that has to be constantly reapproached." This opposition is "presented without mediation or the possibility of synthesis."[28] Indeed, throughout the movement, neither theme is presented in the other mode.

The D major theme begins on the anacrusis to measure 7 in the second violins.

Figure 1: First movement mm. 6-13 (second violin)



The theme is completely diatonic and "for a symphonic work of 1909 it is also a fairly old-

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[27] I do not say that Mahler is doing this as it ascribes agency over this reading to Mahler. It is not possible that Mahler intended the work to be interpreted this way. For one thing, as I have mentioned, he made significant progress on a Tenth Symphony before his death. Also, he could not have foreseen the development of the serial method as the next phase in art music. Nor am I aware of Mahler ever considering his music a commodity.

[28] Julian Johnson, "The Status of the Subject in Mahler's Ninth Symphony," *19th Century Music* XVIII/2 (Fall 1994): 109.

fashioned theme, not far removed from nineteenth-century 'popular' music in its simple shape and phrasing."[29] The theme's simplicity is such that anyone witnessing a performance could sing along. The instrumental texture is thin enough that the theme is not submerged. This is music for the mass audience.

At measure 27, the mode shifts to D minor, with the second theme entering in the first violin at measure 29 (see Figure 2). This theme is characterized by chromaticism and rhythmic irregularity with agogic accents occurring on metrically weak beats. The counterpoint accompanying the theme is more complex with more instruments present. This theme is not as accessible to the audience as the previous was; singing this melody would require more skill, more musical training. The two themes oppose simplicity against complexity, mass culture against elite culture, self against society. As the movement unfolds, the orchestra expands with the counterpoint becoming more complex, at times seeming completely heterogeneous (for example, measures 178-198). At these moments, thematic material cannot be clearly discerned. As the D major theme re-appears in the development, it becomes more rhythmically and contrapuntally active. For example, at measure 144 the theme is expressed in eighth notes and passed between the second and first violins. The D major subject recognizes that there cannot be a synthesis with its D minor opposite and thus retreats into

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[29]Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 472-473.

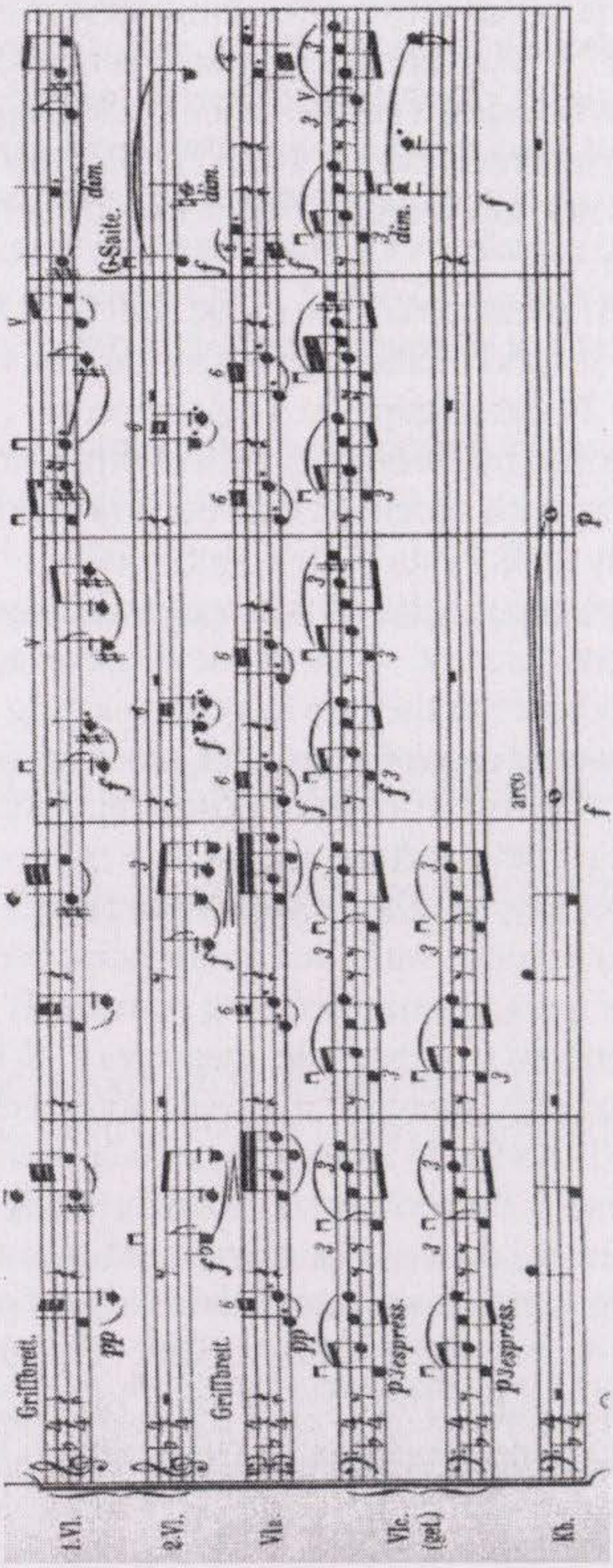


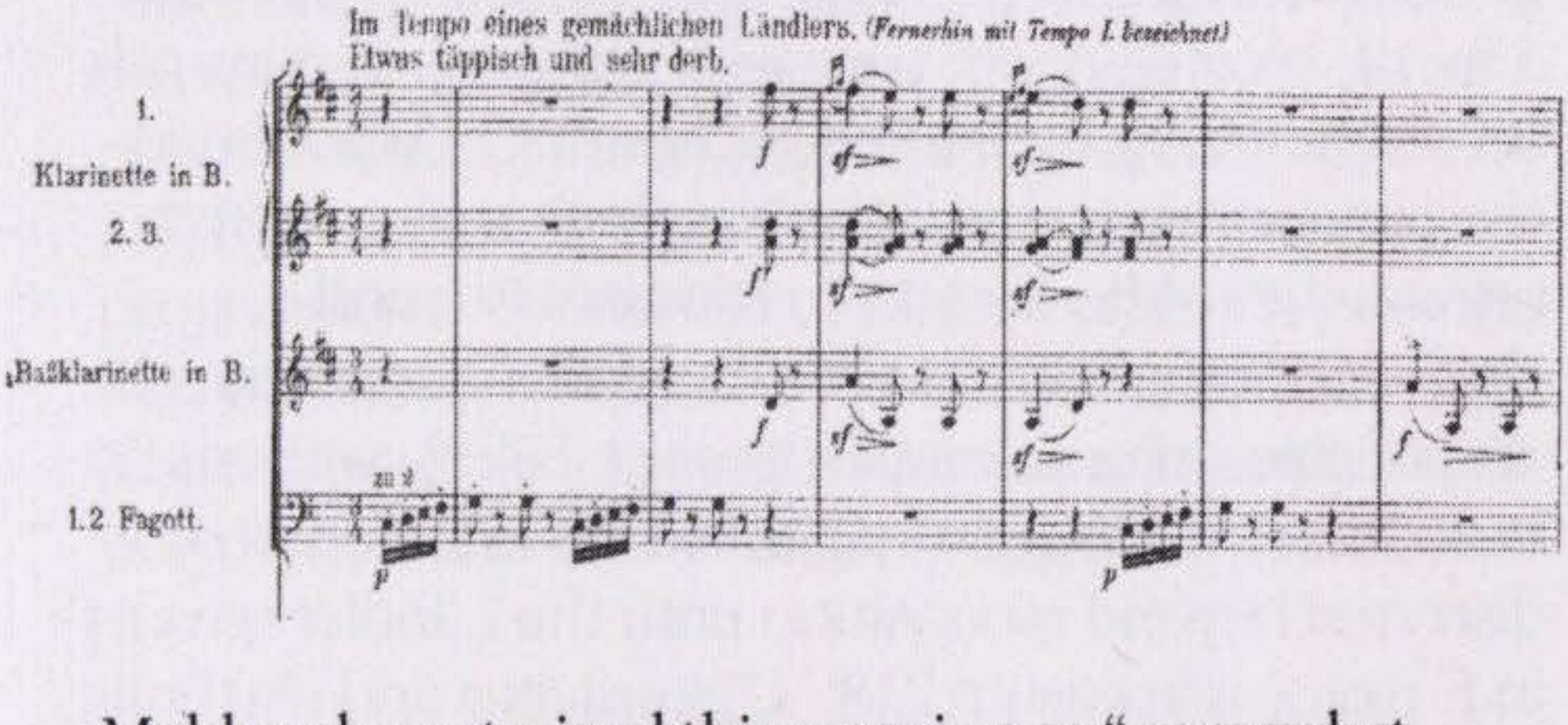
Figure 2: First movement mm. 27-31

objective reality and joins society's multiplicity of voices in counterpoint. What was once individual has become part of a mass culture. As the movement ends, a solo violin enters for a final time in D major while the accompanying texture fades to nothingness. D major loses all sense of individuality as the movement closes with only a D in the flute and a D harmonic in the cello. While this occurs, an E in the oboe is held over for one beat, creating a 9-8 suspension that is not resolved; with three more movements, there are still more chances to attempt synthesis.

Second Movement: *Ländler*

The *Ländler* movement begins with the bassoon and violas doubling a staccato 16th note scale before the clarinets enter with the Ländler tune.

Figure 2: Second movement mm. 1-6



Mahler characterized this opening as "somewhat clumsy and very coarse."[30] According to Hefling, "it owes much of its clumsiness to a relentless tonic-dominant and diatonic emphasis on C Major…this

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[30] Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 480.

music proceeds by repetition and seemingly random phrase groupings...driven chiefly by the droning triple time of the peasant dance."[31] The affect of the opening is comical; the following measures are almost completely diatonic and homophonic with a nearly constant 8th note motion. The extreme simplicity makes the music seem amateurish, as if it were music made by the proletariat. Entering at measure 91 is a waltz in E Major. The peasant Ländler is opposed by the aristocratic waltz. The shift to the mediant key is completely unexpected as the previous measures consisted almost entirely of tonic and dominant in C. This is the first sign that something is seriously amiss in this section. The music remains diatonic and homophonic for a brief period, as if a synthesis of high and low dance forms were being attempted. However, tonal stability becomes tenuous until the first waltz moves into a second one in E-Flat Major at measure 149. Here, "the music becomes truly grotesque: trombones, tuba, and contrabass introduce a banal, bloated dance tune with continuous oom-pah accompaniment by the full orchestra."[32] Whereas in the previous movement the simple D major subject retreated into the decadent chromaticism and rhythmic complexity of the rest of the movement, the aristocratic waltz acknowledges the failed synthesis by becoming increasingly vulgarized. The dance is distorted beyond recognition until the Ländler returns in F major at measure 218. Diatonicism and rhythmic simplicity return until the process begins again at measure 261 with the return of the first waltz in D

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31 Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 480.
32 Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 481.

major. Adorno writes: "through its irreconcilable and obtrusive negativity, the movement, despite the traditional dance forms, is miraculously ahead of its time."[33] The music is "merely a collage picture made from deformed clichés: it pillories reified, petrified forms."[34] Mengleberg's program described the movement as a "Dance of the Dead"[35]; given the grotesque distortions of dance forms, it is an understandable label. With its unstable harmony and use of semi-tone key relationships, one could say that it is tonality that is engaged in the dance.

Third Movement: *Rondo-Burleske*

The *Rondo-Burleske* is "Mahler's compositional tour de force of negativity...it is the most syntactically untraditional, contrapuntally complex, and riotously sardonic movement in all Mahler's oeuvre."[36] The movement almost completely emancipates dissonance from the opening measures (see Figure 3). The piece is not unequivocally in A minor until the downbeat of the seventh complete measure. On beat two of the previous measure is an augmented-sixth in the key of D. The resolution to A thwarts standard tonal progressions. From there, Mahler builds a movement that constantly threatens to break down into chaos. The tempo is very fast with numerous examples of polyrhythm and woodwinds playing in or near their

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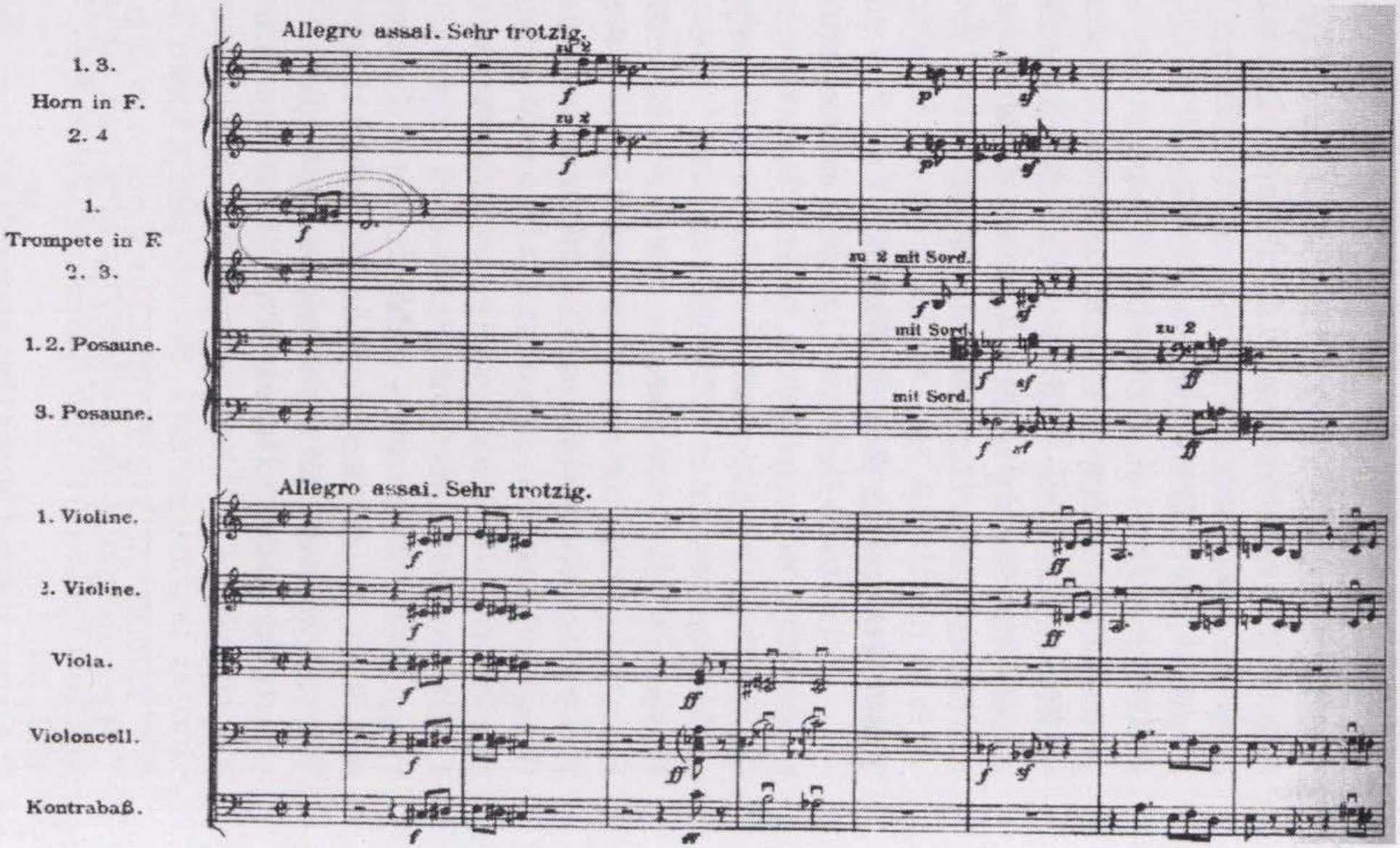
[33]Theodor Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*; trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 161.

[34] Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*; 161-162.

[35] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 273.

[36]Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 483.

Figure 3: Third movement mm. 1-8



highest register. Both tonality and the orchestra are taxed to their absolute limits. With the dissolution of tonality fast approaching, tonality protests its fate with its most dissonant music possible. The music attempts to deny its commodity character by attempting to baffle the audience. Subotnik writes that "for art to have any chance of resisting neutralization, in Adorno's terms, it must alienate society by making itself difficult for society."[37] At measure 346, the movement finally settles down with string tremolos before the flutes enter with a turn motive that becomes an integral part of the next movement which is often interpreted as "Mahler's soul sings its farewell!"[38] Tonality's eventual passing is mourned, but tonality is not ready to be buried yet: numerous times, the turn motive is interrupted by shrill woodwinds before the orchestra returns with its barrage. The movement ends with the entire orchestra striking an A minor chord at a loud dynamic, closing the movement with anger and bitterness.

Fourth Movement: *Adagio*

The *Adagio* that closes the symphony opens dramatically with an octave leap followed by the turn figure introduced in the previous movement.

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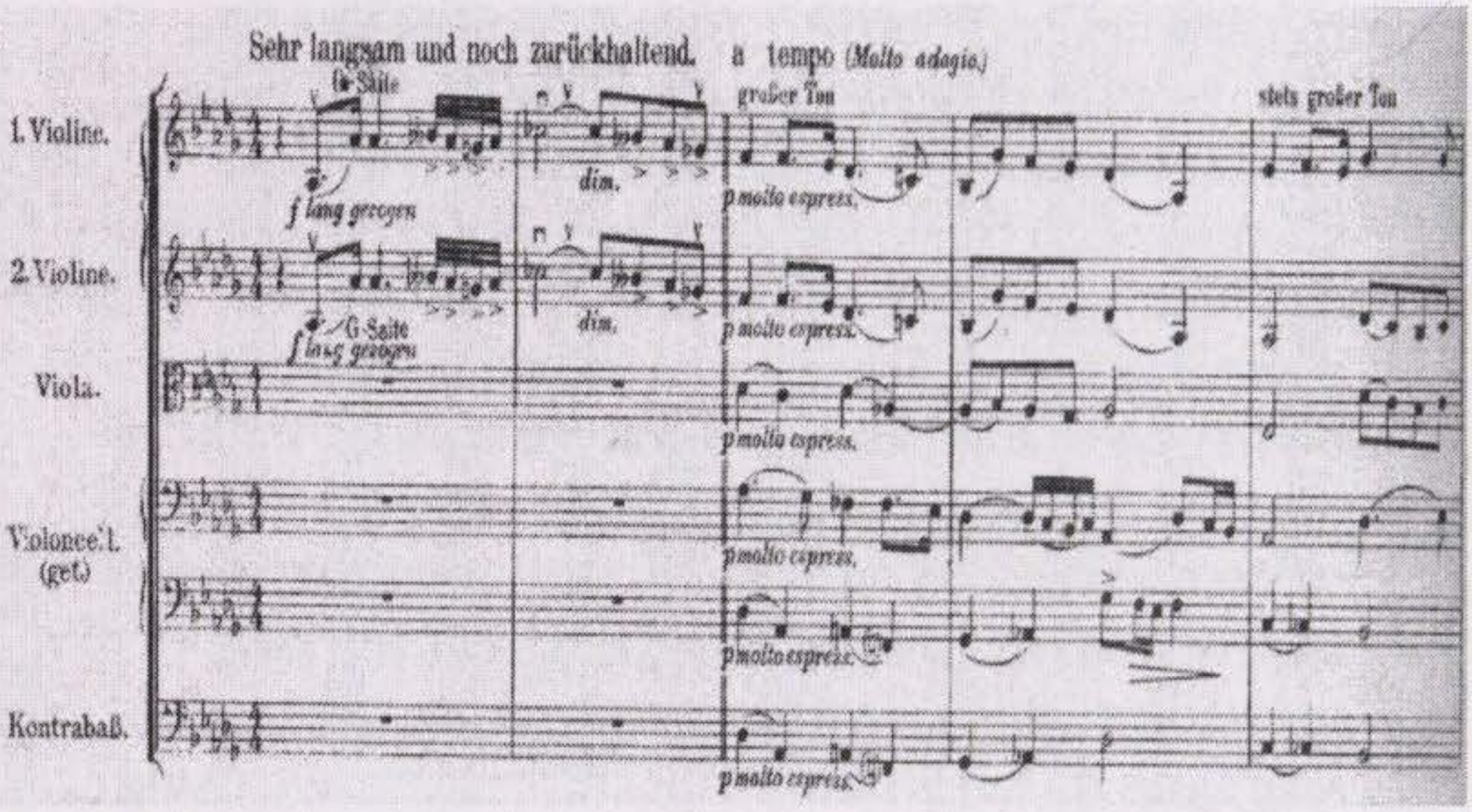
[37] Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven..." 32.
[38] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 274.

Figure 4: Fourth movement mm. 1-5



The opening two measures are tonally ambiguous; the octave leap initially suggests A-flat major while the next measure implies G-flat. It is not until the third measure that the key of D-flat Major is firmly established. The use of this key in the finale is rich in hermeneutic implication: while Mahler had been known to conclude his symphonies in a key one semi-tone higher than where he began (this technique is called progressive tonality), Mahler ends this symphony a semi-tone *lower* than his original key. This is another example of progressive tonality, but perhaps it could also be considered *regressive* tonality: whereas a semi-tone higher may imply moving forward, a semi-tone lower implies moving back. The possible key symbolism where "D major, key of life, fulfillment, drops to D-flat major, key of solemnity,"[39] could be a determining factor in terms of key choice.

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[39] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 276.

Certainly D-flat, with no open strings will contain a dark, brooding sound.

As in the first movement, the finale's thematic material is set in parallel keys: the A theme (the movement is a five part rondo form) is set in D-flat major (the subject) while the B theme is set in C-sharp minor (the object). The movement opposes the two areas through orchestration: the A sections consist of contrapuntal string textures with the turn motive being utilized. The B sections make use of the winds and solo violin, built primarily on an ascending scale in the bass and low winds. Although neither section is of light character, the B material is more bleak; the orchestration is sparser, the harmony more diatonic. The B section suggests resignation while the A section, with its chromaticism and greater rhythmic activity, suggests struggle. Eventually, the D-flat "subject" resigns to its fate; having failed to reassert its identity in the face of the C-sharp minor object, the subject is restated from measures 156 to the end in increasing rhythmic augmentation, while the orchestral texture gradually fades. The score at 159 carries the marking *ersterbend* (dying), while an annotation in the draft score reads "Farewell world!"[40] Tonality, subjectivity and "art for art's sake" have been laid to rest while the modern audience fights back tears and gives the conductor a standing ovation.

Conclusion: Art Music's Relevance and the Social Situation of Music

I have not undertaken this study to devalue Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* as a mere "use" object nor

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[40]Hefling, "The *Ninth Symphony*," 489.

do I wish to imply that commoditization of music is inherently bad. Rather, I see the commodity character of music as a simple reality. My goal has been to provide a reading that shows how art music remains relevant in the modern age, where popular music is most widely disseminated, while art music is often dismissed as an archaic, esoteric form. I have attempted to show that a piece of orchestral music from the early 20th Century may be interpreted as a metaphor for the social situation of all musics. My hope is a culture where all "musical activity, production and consumption...unconditionally recognizes its commodity character."[41] Dialectical synthesis between individual and society may not be possible, but if the Farewell Story of Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* helps break down distinctions between "high" and "low" culture, then perhaps it is a farewell that need not be mourned.

Abstract

Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* has most commonly been interpreted as a "farewell story"; specifically Mahler's farewell to the world and resignation to death. How would this story remain viable to a modern audience, long after Mahler's death? How would a modern audience receive this work? Modern society has increasingly commodified music, particularly the tonal repertoire, exploiting the profitability of music. This challenges the 19th Century aesthetic of music as an autonomous art. In Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*, there are numerous binary oppositions such as simple/ complex and sublime/ vulgar. I read these oppositions as a dialectic between tonal music

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[41]Adorno, "Social Situation," 395.

as autonomous "art for art's sake" and as a commodity for public consumption. This dialectic is presented in each movement of the symphony, with an attempt at synthesis between autonomous ("high") music and commodified ("low") music. Each attempt fails, with one side of the dialectic overtaking the other. The symphony ends in sombre fashion; dialectical synthesis has shown to be impossible and tonal music acknowledges its lack of autonomy. Thus, the "farewell story" of Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* may be read by modern culture as a farewell to the notion of tonal music as an autonomous art. Tonality, be it art or popular music, has accepted its commodity character. This problematizes traditional distinctions between "high" and "low" culture. Therefore, Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* articulates a farewell that need not be mourned.