SOLO VIOLIN IN GUSTAV MAHLER'S SYMPHONIC WORKS AS A MUSICAL SIGN

Qiyao Yang

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APPROVED:

Philip Lewis, Major Professor
Clay Couturiaux, Committee Member
Nikola Ruzevic, Committee Member
Benjamin Brand, Director of Graduate Studies
    in the College of Music
John Richmond, Dean of the College of Music
Victor Prybutok, Dean of the Toulouse
    Graduate School

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Noted for both vocal and symphonic output, Gustav Mahler's musical sophistication constantly puzzled scholars in the past decades. In his symphonic works, the mixed forms and styles in combination with the vocal influence make it abstruse for listeners to detect the meaning of the use of traditional instruments. The solo violin, which has an extensive history of appearing in symphonic compositions since the Baroque era, is an instance of a traditional instrument given an unusual function. For instance, Mahler's violin solos do not tend to showcase the virtuosity of the instrument as they normally do in orchestral music. In order to closely examine the role of the solo violin, I rely on aspects relating to introversive semiosis such as harmonies, rhythms, textures, phrase structures, and forms; then my focus shifts to extroversive semiosis, specifically to topics and contextual factors. By considering the violin as a musical sign, listeners can comprehend the instrument's structure, syntax, and ultimately the complex logic of Mahler's musical discourse.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A leading composer and conductor of his generation, Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) was famous for writing songs, song-cycles, and symphonies throughout his life. He created a significant connection between each of the categories and was regarded by the critics as a "song-symphonist."[1] For instance, Mahler tended to include materials from a song or songs as the construction for a symphony, especially in the Wunderhorn years. Even so, Mahler was an individualist who strived to "heighten the expressive burden…of individual moments of sound."[2] His concept of symphonic music is vast, presenting a vision of lyrical and symphonic synthesis of human aspirations.[3]

As a symphonist with a heterogeneous style, Mahler often catches the audience's attention through his deployment of unusual instruments. For example, the use of the post horn in his Third Symphony; cowbells and hammer in his Sixth Symphony; and cornet, cowbells, tenor horn, mandolin, and guitar in his Seventh Symphony. In addition to using instruments that were not standard at the time, he never ceased to explore the capacity of traditional instruments. His use of solo violin illustrates this point.

In this dissertation, I will examine the symbolic meaning of the violin solos (solos given to the concertmaster, within a duet, or in a solo group) in Mahler's symphonic works in No. 1 through No. 9 (not all movements of No. 10 are orchestrated by the composer) along with *Das Lied von der Erde*, which involves an orchestra and two singers. What is the role of the solo violin? Is it to create a novel sonority or simply to repeat a theme or a counter theme? Is it to

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[1] Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson, eds., *The Mahler Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

[2] Philip Barford, *Mahler Symphonies and Songs* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), 8.

[3] Ibid.

continue a line, make a response, expand a motive, or provide an accompaniment? From a broader viewpoint, does it have its own perspective or does it imitate the human voice? I will address these questions by studying Mahler's unconventional use of the solos.

Mahler often gives the concertmaster an unusual type of sonority through a shifted register, altered articulations, contrasts to muted strings, and scordaturas. The violin solos are usually in fragments, which prepare for the completion and conclusion of a melody or a counter melody. The composer prefers brief motivic repetitions and developments that do not typically emphasize the virtuosity of the instrument. He also has a personal approach to texture such as enabling the solo to split from or merge with the rest of the violin section or employing an odd chamber music setting for a group of solo instruments. The solo violin at times is treated as if it were a voice, recalling the characteristics of Mahler's earlier vocal music. It has a role in continuations, interruptions, conclusions, and transitions that affects the structure of a theme or a movement. Overall, the solos are easily identified musical signs that can assist in understanding potential meanings of a symphonic work; interpretations of these signs require both extrinsic and intrinsic evaluations of the music in regard to small and large structural functions as well as the composer's narrative perspective. Through research of the implication of the solo violin, I will provide a detailed scholarly analysis of the solo excerpts in their musical context in addition to grouping their purpose into specific categories.

1.1   Semiotics

In using the word "sign," I invoke the theory known as semiotics. This can be traced back to the ideas of two semioticians, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) is concerned with the study of language as a symbolic

system.[4] Peirce, on the other hand, preferred the term "semiotic" and attempted a general theory of signs in which language does not play an important role.[5] Saussure defines a sign as the union of the signifier and the signified. The signifier can be "interpreted as the material form…something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted."[6] The signified refers to mental concepts, concepts that are "mental constructs, not external objects."[7] Different from Saussure, Peirce adheres to the terms "representamen" (sign) and "object," and he adds "interpretant," an element missing in Saussure's model.[8]

> The sign (representamen) is an item observed as having a capacity to represent. Its "object" is the idea conveyed by the sign, which may or may not be an idea of a concrete thing. The "interpretant" (in its simplest form) is that by virtue of which the sign and object are linked. An interpretant may be a conventional code, arbitrarily formed, to give a kind of meaning consistent with that observed by Saussure.[9]

Umberto Eco elaborated upon the concepts of Saussure and Peirce and created a useful method in his *Theory of Semiotics* (1977). In recent years, Kofi Agawu in *Music as Discourse* proposed the idea that music and language are closely affiliated and that elements such as topic, form, and narrative are crucial in music analysis. Using as well Heinrich Schenker's approach that applied semiotic concepts to music, Agawu in *Music as Discourse* included a chapter on Mahler's Symphony No. 9 to demonstrate that "something of the spirit of the music surely influences analysis of [the] directly musical qualities."[10] Concerning Mahler's Sixth Symphony,

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[4] Robert Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony: A Study in Musical Semiotics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

[5] Ibid.

[6] David Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 15.

[7] Ibid., 63.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Naomi Cumming, "Semiotics," *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed September 3, 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/49388.

[10] Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 253.

Robert Samuels asserted that identifying musical signs and their signifying structures can help ascertain the meaning that arises from those structures.[11]

Typically, a semiotic approach has been used to analyze a movement or an entire symphony, not on an instrument itself; authors such as Agawu and Janet M. Levy have used a semiotic approach to discuss Classical music in an audience-oriented aspect. No study of the type I am proposing appears to have been undertaken. Looking at Mahler's violin solos, one must first consider the conventional functions of the instrument in the Classical and Romantic symphonic repertoires.

1.2   Literature Review

The symphony as a genre flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century. Not only did it become a common genre for orchestras maintained by court rulers, it also promoted the increase in size of the ensemble by placing substantial demands on string players, particularly on the first violin section. The well-known Mannheim under Johann Stamitz was noted for executing a gradual crescendo from a whispering *ppp* to a shouting *fff*.[12] These accomplishments required a strong leader: a virtuoso violinist usually held the post of a Kapellmeister, at a time when a concertmaster stood in the position of a conductor. Also, many eighteenth century Kapellmeisters were composers as well as skilled violinists. Their repertory raised the quality of violin playing, and the advancement in technique spread to other musicians.

Composers at the time were thus able to write demanding violin parts in orchestral music and employ violin solos in an ensemble outside a concerto setting. One of the most influential

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[11] Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, 5.

[12] Walter Kolneder, *The Amadeus Book of the Violin: Construction, History, and Music,* trans. and ed. Reinhard G. Pauly (Michigan: Amadeus Press, 1998), 339.

violin solos in the Classical era (within an orchestra) was Ludwig van Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* (1819-1822). A solo violin had appeared in many earlier masses, from the Salzburg *Festival Mass* (1682), previously attributed to Orazio Benevoli, to Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and a number of "solemn" or "long" masses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[13] In the Benedictus of the *Missa solemnis*, the substantial violin solo begins on a soaring G6 and then gradually descends to the G string, symbolizing the Son of God coming down to mankind. The section spans 124 measures in which the violin floats above the solo vocal quartet, occasionally rising to the fourth octave above middle C.[14]

The Benedictus solo does not resemble a solo in a Classical concerto. In fact, the solo singers navigate and perform as the *concertante*, turning the spotlight away from the single violin.[15] Moreover, Classical concertos tend to have more than one theme. The Benedictus, on the other hand, recycles its material in a symphonic style: Beethoven allows a single theme to undergo a variety of transformations. According to William Drabkin, the role of the solo violin is to add an additional dimension to the orchestral accompaniment as a secondary obbligato part or to provide an extension to the range of solo singers.[16] Even so, the solo's high range and florid style contribute to the overall design of the movement—it serves to embody the spirituality of the composer.

If Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* exceeded the standard use of orchestral solo violin through its length and range at the time, Mahler's contemporary Richard Strauss managed to fully embrace the virtuosity of the instrument. The proliferation of nineteenth century violin

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[13] Kolneder, *The Amadeus Book of the Violin*, 385.

[14] Ibid.

[15] William Drabkin, *Beethoven: Missa Solemnis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 78.

[16] Ibid.

music relates to other developments in that period: an increasing number of public concerts, a rising popularity of family music making, and the growth of music schools open to the public.[17] The extensive repertory divides into several categories: works for violin and orchestra, including double and triple concertos; works for one or several violins and piano; works for unaccompanied violin; and duets for two violins, violin and viola, or violin and cello. The considerable concerto and chamber repertoires may have hindered the growth of the virtuosic solo violin in the symphonic genre of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, composers such as Richard Strauss and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov granted the instrument a major portion of solos in orchestral repertoires such as those in *Scheherazade* (1888), *Don Quixote* (1897), and *Ein Heldenleben* (1898).

Strauss's violin solos particularly challenged performers because they are extensive and technically demanding. His works between 1886 and 1915 included ten tone poems, employing "an outstanding virtuosity in thematic invention, rhythmic elaboration…and dramatic characterization through musical means."[18] Tone poems such as *Don Juan, Ein Heldenleben, Also Sprach Zarathustra,* and *Till Eulenspiegel* are programmatic and are usually poetic or narrative in nature. Composers in the late Romantic period eagerly incorporated literature into their own art; subsequently, program music became the medium for these composers to realize their ideal.[19]

Ein Heldenleben, Strauss's longest tone poem, has a violin solo in the middle section, portraying the composer's wife. Possibly due to her unpredictable character, the instructions for

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[17] Kolneder, *The Amadeus Book of the Violin*, 422.

[18] Lawrence Gilman, *Stories of Symphonic Music: A Guide to the Meaning of Important Symphonies, Overtures, and Tone-poems from Beethoven to the Present Day* (New York: Garden City, 1937), 11.

[19] Wonsoon Chung, "The Role of Solo Violin in the Orchestral Compositions of Richard Strauss." (D.M.A. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1997), 8.

this solo are detailed, as demonstrated in the quick and dynamic alternation of pacing (see

Example 1.1). The passage leaves a demanding task for performers due to both challenging

techniques and a critical stylistic execution.

Example 1.1. Strauss, *Ein Heldenleben*, Rehearsal 22-24

In contrast to Strauss's writing, Mahler's solo violin did not attempt to go beyond the

instrument's capacity. It is not showy for the instrument's own sake and is brief in accordance

with this observation by Hector Berlioz when he stated, "the effect of a solo violin is so peculiar

and conspicuous that it should never be employed without a compelling poetic motive."[20] If

Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* included the solo violin as a symbol that allowed him to capture the

Holy Spirit in the context, Mahler preferred an orchestral narrative voice and effects that are able

to create a vivid impression of a figure. For example, in an early sketchbook for his Symphony

No. 4, Mahler left a verbal reference to Freund Hein (death), a legendary skeleton fiddler who

leads the way to the "beyond."[21] The music does not simply symbolize the grotesque death in a

conventional sense but rather suggests a caricature of a humorous character.

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[20] Hector Berlioz and Richard Strauss, *Treatise on Instrumentation*, trans. Theodore Front (New York: Dover, 1991), 58.

[21] Neville Cardus, *Gustav Mahler: His Mind and His Music Volume I*, ed. Rudolf Schwarz (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965), 129.

Due to the recurrent fragmented writing of the solo—this is in contrast to an extensive, predominant, and flashy part—researchers in the past did not conduct a structured or comprehensive examination on the role of the solo violin in Mahler's symphonic oeuvre. His solo passages usually lie scattered among multiple movements within an entire symphony. They have escaped scholarly attention due to the absence of virtuosity and unconventional functions.

1.3   Methodology

I plan to approach my topic with terms taken from semiotics, the most basic of which is the sign, also the concept with the least stable meaning.[22] Peirce defined a sign as "something…stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity."[23] For Saussure, a linguistic sign is a double entity that is made of the combination of the signifier and the signified: "The signified is the concept embodied in a particular signifier."[24]

When applied to a musical sign, the signifier and the signified relate to introversive and extroversive semiosis respectively.[25] Introversive semiosis deals with an analysis of harmonies, rhythms, textures, phrase structures, and forms—the "internal, intramusical reference, both backward and forward, retrospective and prospective, while extroversive semiosis denotes external, extramusical, [and] referential connection" such as topics, which are essentially musical signs, and other contextual factors.[26] I will begin my analysis with the introversive perspective and then proceed to the extroversive.

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[22] Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 16.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 132.

[26] Ibid.

As a starting point, I consider the growth of the violin solo from a linear point of view. According to Agawu, a musical work is conceived as a sequence of events.

> A musical work typically belongs to a repertoire that is constrained historically and stylistically and that subtends its own performing conventions. An event may be a gesture, an idea, a motive, a progression, or, more neutrally, a building block, phrase, segment, or unit, including the "intonational units"…Events are generally assumed to unfold in orderly fashion.[27]

To understand the numerous segments of Mahler's violin solo is to understand how they are established by a series of events that relate to each other. The growth, in this case, also refers to form and analysis. I will peruse the solo material and determine whether it is a melody or a counter melody. An example of a melody is not uncommon among Mahler's symphonies. In Symphony No. 3, a violin solo that resembles a folk song appears in mm. 140-147 of the beginning movement and is later restated and altered (see Example 1.2). A counter melody can be found in the same symphony where the solo falls under the clarinet in a somewhat embellished form (see Example 1.3). In pairing up the clarinet with a single violin, Mahler blurs the clarinet's melody; however, this vagueness allows both instruments to speak in equal voices, which together present an embellished flowing line. The overall structural functions of the solo are interruptions, transitions, continuations, and conclusions. I will also observe the segments of motivic repetitions and developments to determine their structural support to the content.

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[27] Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 7.

Example 1.2. Mahler, Symphony No. 3, Mvt. 1, mm. 140-147

Example 1.3. Mahler, Symphony No. 3, Mvt. 3, mm. 366-369

Additionally, I will examine the texture of the solo content within an orchestral setting. Levy mentioned in an article that there are three types of texture that function as a conventionalized sign in the Classical and Romantic periods. All three fall into the "homophony" category:[28]

1. Homophonic with conventional accompaniment patterns such as an Alberti bass

2. A solo line by itself, not the type as in solo versus tutti

3. Unison passages, including the octave doubling arrangement

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[28] Janet M. Levy, "Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 488.

The majority of Mahler's solos utilize the first and third types, rarely the second. Therefore, I will observe the solos' behaviors in the first and third types to examine their syntactic use. In general, the solos appear in three manners: they split from the rest of the section violin, merge with them, or become a member in a chamber music setting.

Agawu proposed that the "music-as-language" metaphor matters to music analysts; language and music are as alike as they are different.[29] Jean Molino further argues that, "the phenomenon of music, like that of language…cannot be defined or described correctly unless [listeners] take account of its threefold mode of existence—as an arbitrarily isolated object, as something produced and as something perceived…It is on these three dimensions that the specificity of the symbolic largely rests."[30] For instance, the high G6 in *Missa solemnis* is an object produced by a single violin. Its gradual descending line may not symbolize the Son of God coming down to mankind if the listeners are unaware of the Benedictus setting. Thus, a probe into a related context is necessary to uncover the symbolic meaning of Mahler's solo violin.

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[29] Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 18.

[30] Ibid., 20.

CHAPTER 2

INTROVERSIVE PERSPECTIVES

In this chapter, I describe the syntactic usage of Mahler's solo violin. The structural role appears in continuations, interruptions, conclusions, transitions, or two individual functions combined. Motivic growths contribute to both small and large structures. Two common homophonic textures set the inner phrase construction, emphasize a mood, or challenge listeners with the subtlety created by multiple sound layers.

2.1   Continuation

Typical of Mahler, the solo violin as a continuation of a musical line permeates through his symphonic repertoires. One instance demonstrates this point in the opening movement of the Sixth Symphony (see Example 2.1). Singing the melody for five bars aside from the horn, the first violin section enters as a co-leading voice in m. 225, which is then completed by the concertmaster in the succeeding four bars. The sound layer of the first five measures becomes thinner as the violin plus the horn solos carry on the tune, although neither of the solo instruments brings the phrase to a completion—the fully-diminished chord in m. 233 remains unresolved. The solo violin not only prolongs the existing *tutti* melody in this place but also takes over the theme with the horn, leaving the phrase open to proceed to the next melodic wave in the bass clarinet.

Example 2.1. Mahler, Symphony No. 6, Mvt. 1, mm. 224-234

2.2   Interruption

An example of interruption is manifested in the false recapitulation of the opening movement of the Ninth Symphony. This "recapitulation" is missing the second theme, which is replaced by a stormy and climactic section amid the development. Listeners can catch the opening two-note fragment—horns in m. 267 share the same motive with Violin II in m. 7 (see Example 2.2)—which foreshadows the first theme's arrival on two solo violins, one after another (Example 2.3). Even though the fragment is rhythmically altered, it unmistakably recalls the opening theme (see Example 2.4). The occurrence of the solos alludes to a traditional sonata form but is indeed a disguise of delaying the real recapitulation. It is thus important to trace the location of the solo violin passages to realize their unconventional contribution to Mahler's larger structural design.

Example 2.2. Mahler, Symphony No. 9, Mvt. 1, mm. 266-267; mm. 6-7

Example 2.3. Mahler, Symphony No. 9, Mvt. 1, mm. 269-270

Example 2.4. Mahler, Symphony No. 9, Mvt. 1, mm. 18-19

2.3   Conclusion

Consider the solo in the finale's recapitulation of the Second Symphony: it is a melody that generates from the opening offstage horns (see Example 2.5). The rhythm is slightly altered with a shortened melodic segment (mm. 556-562, see Example 2.6). Noticeably, the transformed motive occurs four times in the order of the appearance of horns, trombones, clarinets, two pairs of double flutes and solo violins. With chorus and solo singers, the final movement of this symphony expands on eight stanzas. The four-bar violin solo ends the intermezzo in between the second and third stanzas. Nevertheless, this motive does not resemble a closing of the section. With no gap in between, the solo embraces the beginning of the next stanza with a held G-flat chord, literally a conclusion that does not conclude (m. 560).

Example 2.5. Mahler, Symphony No. 2, Mvt. 5, mm. 32-35

Example 2.6. Mahler, Symphony No. 2, Mvt. 5, mm. 547-562

2.4   Transition

The solo violin's transitional function is not always conspicuous to the audience. In the

Scherzo movement of Symphony No. 7, the middle Trio section announces the first theme in

eight bars (see Example 2.7). The next two and half bars (mm. 185-187) introduce solo flutes

and a violin in a descending pattern, which ultimately transitions the first theme of the Trio into

the second. Similarly, a solo fragment later takes place during the interval of the second and third

themes. In this compact form scheme, Mahler's 82-measure Trio mainly relies on succinct

transitions that successfully connect one melody to another. With the marking *Più mosso*

(subito), the solo is given a significant role in rapidly transferring one short theme to another.

Example 2.7. Mahler, Symphony No. 7, Mvt. 3, mm. 179-192

2.5   Combined Functions

Not only does the solo violin serve as a continuation, an interruption, a conclusion, and a transition individually, it also has dual functions. The opening movement of his Second Symphony exemplifies a combination of interruption and transition: the solo interrupts and continues the flute melody in mm. 208-222 (see Example 2.8). This melody is first heard as a contrasting theme in E major over a dominant pedal in the exposition (see Example 2.9). Mahler labeled the theme *Gesang* (melody) as a way to differentiate it from the opening harsh sound of the C-minor funeral march.[31] When the flute returns (m. 208) it appears in F over a C pedal and is interrupted by a solo violin (m. 216)—a different sonority that continues the line. Not only does the melodic voice shift to a different instrument, it also perplexes the audience harmonically with the F-sharp in the violin solo (mm. 216-217), making listeners wonder whether the tune has

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[31] Mitchell and Nicholson, *The Mahler Companion*, 100.

modulated. On the last beat of m. 218, F-natural is reiterated and picked up by the flute in the

process of transitioning into B major.

Example 2.8. Mahler, Symphony No. 2, Mvt. 1, mm. 208-222

Example 2.9. Mahler, Symphony No. 2, Mvt. 1, mm. 48-62

2.6 Motivic Repetitions and Developments

Regardless of the time period in which a symphony was composed, motives were

frequently deployed in phrase developments. A straightforward instance from Mahler's earlier

output, Symphony No. 3, displays a 4-bar phrase of the solo violin (see Example 2.10). The

motive includes a triplet followed by two quarter notes, and it is further embodied with grace

notes and rhythmic alternations. The chief melodic contour consists of B, A-sharp, G-sharp, and

F-sharp in descending steps. The accompaniment instruments such as the oboe and clarinet in E-

flat share the similar triplet figure that fills in as filigrees above the solo. The motivic repetition

propels the line forward to a cadence on F-sharp in m. 116 as a direction guide.

Example 2.10. Mahler, Symphony No. 3, Mvt. 2, mm. 113-116

As discussed earlier, the opening movement of Mahler's late Symphony No. 9 presents

the solo violin with crucial structural roles. The false recapitulation brought out by the solo leads

the audience to believe the arrival of the authentic one (see Example 2.3). In the coda, Mahler's

concluding violin solo employs fragments from the beginning introductory two-note motive (see

Example 2.2, mm. 6-7) as well as the first major theme (see Example 2.4). In Example 2.11, the

closing solo is reminiscent of the inception of the movement's journey: the ending's serenity

dwells on small motives of the rising and falling major sixths (mm. 445-446) in addition to a

descending major second (mm. 437-440). Mahler's fondness for motivic unity contributes to the

thematic transformation, allowing listeners to better understand the "rhapsodically free structure"

of the movement.[32]

Example 2.11. Mahler, Symphony No. 9, Mvt. 1, mm. 434-448

2.7   Texture

As mentioned earlier, Levy's three unambiguous types of texture—homophonic with

accompaniment, solo by itself, and unison—can "instruct [listeners] quite specifically about how

to comprehend both simultaneous and subsequent musical events."[33] In Mahler's symphonic

output, he rarely wrote solo violin passages that do not interact with the rest of the orchestra;

thus, the "solo by itself" category will not be discussed in this chapter. Although the relation

between textures' meaning and their syntactic use can be elusive, the structural idea often leads

to revealing insights of the solo.

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[32] Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, ed. Reinhard G. Pauly, trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993), 277.

[33] Levy, "Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music," 488.

2.7.1   Solo with Accompaniment

According to Levy, a homophonic accompaniment to a solo can set the music's inner structure. A melodic statement in the fourth movement of Symphony No. 7 demonstrates the separation of the solo from the rest of the first violin. When entering with the concertmaster, the first violin contradicts the solo's dynamics with a *sforzando* followed by a *fortepiano* (see Example 2.12, m. 51). In result, the *tutti* players break through the *forte* sound mass of other instruments on the downbeat of the same measure, making a grand entrance for the solo violin and then immediately dropping the dynamic in order for the solo's crescendo to penetrate. The solo's entrance in m. 51 interrupts the climax of the previous phrase, as if it were introductory again, similar to the movement's opening where the same solo material occurs at an octave lower. On the other hand, the concertmaster leads into a new section at the downbeat of m. 54. Later on, the first violin section drops out in m. 76 (see Example 2.13), leaving one violin to repeat a motive from m. 56. At the same spot, the first oboe's motive (borrowed from m. 51 in celli and basses) and the Alberti bass accompaniment in the mandolin form two additional layers on top of the violin. In this example, the motivic violin solo is a continuation that repeats a former segment, an introduction that unexpectedly interrupts the previous event, and a phrase conclusion that leads into the next section. The four-bar mandolin accompaniment (mm. 76-79) is a segment that marks the four-bar phrase in conjunction with an oboe motive (previously occurred in bassoons, celli, and basses, mm. 72-75). The mandolin accompaniment not only creates a sense of stability once it establishes itself but also relinquishes the need for a completion of the phrase due to its harmonic twist in m.79.

Example 2.12. Mahler, Symphony No. 7, Mvt. 4, mm. 42-57

Example 2.13. Mahler, Symphony No. 7, Mvt. 4, mm. 71-80

2.7.2 Unison

One of the most pervasive qualities of unison is its "authoritative control," in which the unanimity of two or more voices is organized to express a special effect.[34] In the third movement of Symphony No. 1, the first oboe begins and continues the melody for two bars (see Example 2.14); the concertmaster joins the oboe in a descending chromatic line for another two bars. The unison of the two emphasizes the chromatic motion and thus causes a harmonic instability. The texture here is not merely noted; it is also characterized and possibly described as sorrowful or bitter based on the harmonic progression and the chromatic contour in the last two bars.

Example 2.14. Mahler, Symphony No. 1, Mvt. 3, mm. 94-100; *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen,* Rehearsal 28

The power of unison is also manifested in Mahler's treatment of sonorous subtlety. The composer was inclined to challenge one's ear by doubling certain materials with the same instrument, as it appears in Example 2.15. One violin leads the melody together with the first violin section at pickup to m. 48 but then drops out for two bars. This event repeats in the next four measures (mm. 52-55) and makes listeners wonder the purpose of such brief unisons. Mahler even indicates the distinction between the dynamics of both parties to maximize the drama of one extra fiddler's sound atop the *tutti* group. Furthermore, since the solo violin is

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[34] Levy, "Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music," 507.

tuned a whole-step higher than normal, it varies slightly in its timbre and projection. In this case,

Mahler combines sonorities alike with disparate dynamics, adding a similar layer of perceptible

subtlety.

Example 2.15. Mahler, Symphony No. 4, Mvt. 2, mm. 47-55

CHAPTER 3

EXTROVERSIVE PERSPECTIVES

Aside from introversive semiosis, this chapter deals with topics and contextual

background that associate with the solo violin. It will be divided into three categories—vocal

influence, the voice of literature, and the voice of retrospect—most of Mahler's symphonic

works will be discussed regarding narrative, biographical, cultural, and aesthetic aspects in

which the structural function and the expression of the solo are illustrated. After all, the

extroversive semiosis denotes the "referential link with the exterior world."[35]

3.1   Topics

One of the most important factors of Romantic music is topic or topos (in plural form).

Leonard Ratner explained topics in his *Music: The Listener's Art* as the following:

> From its contact with worship, poetry, drama, entertainment, dance, ceremony, the
> military, the hunt, and the life of the lower classes, music in the early 18th century
> developed a thesaurus of characteristic figures, which formed a rich legacy for classic
> composers. Some of these figures were associated with various feelings and affections;
> others had a picturesque flavor. They are designated here as topics—subjects for musical
> discourse.[36]

The Classical topics such as the minuet, the march, and the horn calls survived the

Romantic era, although they were facing a greater heterogeneity of compositional ideals in the

nineteenth century; these topics are recognized as constructions, not naturally occurring

objects.[37] Specifically, the use of several topics in a work can provide not only clues to the

content being discussed but also insights into the strategy or styles of the music. Janice

Dickensheets in an article argues that new meanings can generate from contextual inflection of

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[35] Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 23.

[36] Leonard G. Ratner, *Music: The Listener's Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 314.

[37] Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 42.

old topics.[38] Table 3.1 displays the regular topics Mahler employed in his symphonic works, mostly conventional.

Table 3.1. Mahler's Topics[39]

Nature theme	Fanfare	Horn call	Bird call	Chorale	Pastorale
March (including funeral march)	Arioso	Aria	Minuet	Recitative	Scherzo
Bell motif	Totentanz	Lament	Landler	Folk song	

Consider the slow movement of Symphony No. 1 as a topic example. All violin solos from this symphony take place in the third movement, but they occur in different topics upon which Mahler draws. In November 1900, the composer made remarks about the unique setting of the movement stating, "The funeral march of 'Brother Martin' [Frère Jacques] one has to imagine as being played in a dull manner by a band of very bad musicians…The roughness, gaiety, and banality of this world then appears in the sounds of some interfering Bohemian musicians."[40] Taking a close look at the solo's appearances, one can find the topic associated with each of them. The movement's middle section quotes Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* in which the solo imitates the recitative (see Example 2.14). The later occurrences (see Example 3.1, solo violins in mm. 120-121) present a counter theme that first appears in the beginning funeral march (oboe 1 in mm. 21-23, same example) and a segment from the Bohemian tune (violin in mm. 133-134, compared to Example 3.2). Mahler incorporates heterogeneous elements into the basic march theme, making conventional topics an unconventional sign, which generates a sharp irony for the audience to digest. Metaphorically,

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[38] Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 45.

[39] Ibid., 47.

[40] Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 40.

the big topical umbrella, the funeral march, covers small topics such as the imitative recitative

and the parody folk song. The violin solo in this movement helps the audience "hear it as a

repository of historically situated conventional styles that make possible a number of

dialogues."[41]

Example 3.1. Mahler, Symphony No. 1, Mvt. 3, mm. 120-134; mm. 21-23

Example 3.2. Mahler, Symphony No. 1, Mvt. 3, m. 47

3.2   Contextual Revelations

3.2.1   Vocal Influence

A number of Mahler's symphonic music reflect an intimate relationship between the

human voice and an instrumental one. Symphony No. 8 and *Das Lied von der Erde*, two of his

late symphonic works, prove this point. In Part I of the Eighth Symphony, the orchestra's

function is to amplify the voices essentially. Because of this trait, Mahler was able to create a

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[41] Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 50.

combination of both vocal and instrumental tones and gestures. The orchestral parts lend

themselves easily to "vocalization," as the solo violin demonstrates in Example 3.3. In Part I, the

two choirs repeat the line "Infirma nostri corporis" ("Strengthening with lasting vigor") from

Veni, creator spiritus, the chosen Latin hymn by Hrabanus Maurus. Interestingly, Part II also

utilizes the same violin material (see Example 3.4), setting it in German to Choir II, the More

Perfect Angels from the final scene of Goethe's *Faust* (see Table 3.2). Although it has been

controversial whether the two texts, different in languages and content, result in a *concordia*

discors or a unity, the solo violin line suits both with the same material. If Mahler strived to

affirm and deepen "the Christian experience of faith and the Goethean image of the Feminine as

a redemptive aspect of God," he abandoned the option of writing absolute music and "returned to

the concept of sound as bearer of the idea."[42]

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[42] Barford, *Mahler Symphonies and Songs*, 45.

Example 3.3. Mahler, Symphony No. 8, Part 1, mm. 141-152

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Example 3.4. Mahler, Symphony No. 8, Part 2, mm. 552-563

Table 3.2. Texts from "Veni, creator spiritus" and the Final Scene from Goethe's *Faust*, II

Symphony No. 8 Part I, Choir I+II		Symphony No. 8 Part II, Choir II divided	
"Veni, creator spiritus"		Final Scene from Goethe's *Faust*, Part II	
Latin	English translation	German	English translation
Infirma nostri corporis	Strengthening with lasting vigor	Und wär er von Asbest, Er ist nicht reinlich. Wenn starke Geisteskraft Die Elemente An sich herangerafft,	And even if it were of asbestos, It is not completely pure. When strong spiritual power Has greedily clutched The elemental forces,

As another instance to be discussed, *Das Lied von der Erde* can be both a symphony and an orchestral song cycle, despite the fact that neither a song cycle nor a symphonic approach was on the composer's mind when he started writing each of the songs to the text.[43] In the first song of *Das Lied*, the solo violin maintains a close relationship with the vocal line. It not only indicates text painting, but also reminds listeners of an instrumental thematic cell from earlier. In Example 3.5, the violin's A-flats fall on "Zeit" (m. 161) and "mehr" (m. 165), which are agogic accents in accordance with the tenor line. Repetitions on certain pitches of the voice suggest the narrator's intensified feeling, "A full cup of wine at the right time is worth more than all the kingdoms of this earth." The concertmaster's three-note motive Eb-Ab-Eb (mm. 160-162) recalls that of the opening horns (see Example 3.6) on E-A-E. Apparently, Mahler illustrates a synthesis between the vocal and symphonic genres, with the singer expresses a feeling while the solo violin emphasizes the implication of it.

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[43] Egon Gartenberg, *Mahler: The Man and His Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1978), 336.

Example 3.5. Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde,* the first song, mm. 158-169

Example 3.6. Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde,* the first song, mm. 1-3

Mahler's music is a kind of telling, usually presented in a plurality of musical voices. Among these the vocal and symphonic voices permeate each other in many ways. Some of Mahler symphonies have no direct relationship to vocal influence; others do. They draw on the composer's earlier vocal output but transform themselves into orchestral songs that become exclusive instrumental movements. Both types indicate that vocality is omnipresent in Mahler's symphonies, whether a vocalist participates or not.

In the third movement of the First Symphony a single violin doubles the first oboe; together they quote a tune from the fourth song of Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (*Songs of a Wayfarer*, 1884-85, see Example 2.14). Although in a different key, the melody in the symphony remains close to that of the song cycle. Mahler wrote the *Gesellen* lyrics himself. The translation of the quoted text states, "To me no one bade farewell. Farewell!" The music set to this verse expresses the wayfarer's sorrow after losing the love of his life. The narrative begins on the wedding day of his beloved and concludes with the narrator's desperation in his loneliness. Significantly, Mahler's unhappy affair with soprano Johanna Richter in 1884-85 had an influence on the composer who incorporated his personal life experience into the narrative of the song. Subsequently, the mood of depression was taken into the First Symphony from the song cycle. According to Carl Schorske, the "world" of a symphonic movement and "I" in

Mahler's vocal setting are in a kind of problematical relationship.[44] Mahler successfully managed the conflict between the two, "mind and outer reality," creating a way for others to comprehend his personal voice and outside reality.[45] The solo violin and the oboe represent the distress in the aftermath of the composer's unrequited love that his personal voice blends into the complex symphonic narrative.

In the Second Symphony, Mahler proves that his music, as a narrative voice, "is not merely an instrumental imitation of singing, but rather is marked by multiple disjunctions with the music surrounding it."[46] Looking at Example 2.9 from the first movement, one can find this melody, first appeared immediately after the opening fanfare, as not only a musical contrast to the opening theme but also a "registral shift to musical discourse that signals a singer and a song."[47] The flutes later lead the song-like theme (m. 208, see Example 2.8), which ascertains the song quality; however, the originality of this theme is varied by the voice of the concertmaster who shifts the narration unexpectedly with the flute —the harmonies are altered toward the end of the phrase, as it modulates and prepares for the introduction of another theme.

Mahler in 1893 claimed that his first two symphonies (although the Second was not completed at the time) had an "inner aspect" of his whole life; in contrast, the Third was written in a cheerful and humorous style that celebrated the happy life, following the Second, which had "inaugurated [the happy life] after dispelling apocalyptic horrors with its concluding choral

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[44] Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 180.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Julian Johnson, *Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 217.

[47] Ibid., 218.

hymn to the individual spirit."[48] The fourth movement of the Third symphony has a setting of the

Midnight Song from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathust*ra:

Table 3.3. Text from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*

Text	English Translation
O Mensch! Gib Acht! Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht? Ich schlief, ich schlief! Aus tiefem Traum bin ich erwacht! Die Welt ist tief, und tiefer als der Tag gedacht.	O man! Take heed! What does the deep midnight say? I slept, I slept! I have awoken from a deep dream! The world is deep, and deeper than the day conceives.
[O Mensch! O Mensch!] Tief, tief ist ihr Weh! Lust tiefer noch als Herzeleid! Weh spricht: Vergeh! Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit! will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!	[O man! O man!] Deep, deep is its woe! Joy, deeper still than heart ache! Woe says: be lost! But all joy wills eternity! wills deep, deep eternity!

It is obtained from the "metaphysical proposition of an aesthetic and prophetic voice

called forth from nature": in 1896 the symphony's program for the first three movements was

"Summer marches in," "What the flowers in the meadow tell me," and "What the animals in the

forest tell me" respectively.[49] According to Peter Franklin, the hope of eternal joy and the

fatalism of "woe" in the text are shown as "elemental modes of human experience."[50] The fourth

movement is marked *misterioso*, the entry of the alto voice, *mit geheimnisvollen austruck* (with

mysterious expression). The alto is summoned by the emptiness of the musical background—the

movement is static until after reaching the midpoint of the poem ("O Mensch! O Mensch!").

Taken as a whole, the *misterioso* movement presents minimal material compared to the previous

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[48] Peter Franklin, *Mahler: Symphony No. 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41.

[49] Johnson, *Mahler's Voices*, 48.

[50] Franklin, *Mahler*, 66.

movements. It only progresses gradually, mostly undisturbed in motion. The violin solo in the

second half contributes to a slightly expansive statement in response to the fragmented alto line

and intertwines with the voice intimately as the instrument enters after "Tief ist ihr Weh" (m.

101, see Example 3.7). In a way, the single violin not only expands the lyrical expression of the

"woe" but also intensifies the emotional state of the alto voice. "Tief ist ihr Weh" is led by a

fragmented four-note motive (mm. 100-101), which is elaborated in an improvisatory style by

the concertmaster successively. The same motive repeats at a half step higher on B-flat in mm.

105-106. The embellished eighth notes in the violin represent a second voice, an instrumental

one that speaks for the unspoken dialogue of the alto. The same concept takes place in "Weh

spricht: Vergeh" (mm. 115-118); the similar motivic repetition echoes that of the previous "Tief

ist ihr Weh"—both highlight the "woe," which is astonishing to Zarathustra, the narrator, how

powerful and deep suffering can be. As mentioned before, joy and woe are "elemental modes of

human experience," and only one of them embraces eternity. Joy prevails over woe in the text;

the unison of the violin and the alto in mm. 110-112 confirms the point and reflects the happy

life depicted by Mahler.

Example 3.7. Mahler, Symphony No. 3, Mvt. 4, mm. 100-119

3.2.2   The Voice of Literature

Unlike the first three symphonies, the Fourth, as Mahler proclaimed, was to be understood as absolute music. Nevertheless, it is the opposite of what is commonly considered to be absolute music due to its foundation on philosophical program that Mahler did not reveal in

public but shared with his friends in conversations: life after death.[51] For example, the Scherzo is described as *in gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast* (in easy motion, without haste) on the score. Its theme

> is the gruesome dance of Death, led by a figure of popular demonology. Freund Hein [death]. It is the mistuned fiddle of the skeletal figure of death which is heard at the opening of the movement…It is a grisly, sudden feeling which comes over us, just as one is often panic-stricken in broad daylight in a sunlit forest. The Scherzo is mysterious, confused, and supernatural that your hair will stand on end when you hear it. But in the Adagio to follow, where all this passes off, you will immediately see that it was not meant so seriously.[52]

With a relatively modest size orchestra, the solo violin, tuned a whole-step higher, is able to project a crude sound. Mahler's intention was to achieve "a shrill and frightening effect" with the scordatura, according to his friend Alphons Diepenbrock.[53] The subject of a sinister street player was not unpopular in nineteenth-century music and arts. In fact, Mahler was inspired by Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*, which also features scordatura for the violin.[54] The solo provides a grotesque and eerie impression, although the expression mark *lustig* (merrily) appears three times throughout the movement. The reason for this mark, which is contradictory to the figure's characteristic, is that Mahler attempts to demonstrate two faces of death, a dreadful one plus a friendly and merciful one.[55] Death in this context can be described as frightening, deceiving, but also alluring. Toward the end of the movement, the composer includes a second solo violin that forms a duet with the first (see Example 3.8). This pair of solos implies the dual

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[51] Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 113.

[52] Gartenberg, *Mahler*, 294.

[53] Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 122.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 125.

nature of Death: it personifies joyous dancing moving on top of the tritone dissonance (m. 301).

Death's appearance therefore is pleasant in a macabre scene.

Example 3.8. Mahler, Symphony No. 4, Mvt. 2, mm. 298-302

* Solo 1's notation is a whole step below the actual pitches

3.2.3 The Voice of Retrospect

After the Wunderhorn symphonies, Mahler's Fifth (1902), Sixth (1904), and Seventh

(1905) symphonies are works from his middle period and purely instrumental. They do not

consist of words, singers, or choirs; however, Mahler's choice of not selecting pre-existing songs

leads him to composing works in the character of songs without words. Without much program

influence he discovered the inspirational strength to express himself in instrumental setting only.

The instrumental narrative allows him to focus more on the retouching of the orchestration,

thematic transformations, and counterpoint. In this narrative, the solo violin injects a voice of

retrospect, an orchestrally expanded one.

Consider the solo quartet setting in the Scherzo of Mahler's Fifth (see Example 3.9). The

solo strings are oddly enough the only group that continues the second trio with *pizzicato*. The

concertmaster delineates a new version of a theme, which is first stated in the legato horns in

mm. 241-246 (see Example 3.10); later on, the viola adds a motive in m. 314, similar to the one

in the trumpet (mm. 245-246). Mahler explained a reason why the nineteenth century symphony

orchestra needed a large group of instruments in his letter to the young Gisela Tolnay-Witt in

1893 stating, "in order to be heard by the multitudes in huge concert-halls and opera-houses, we

have to make a big noise."[56] Here in the middle movement of the Fifth, the composer steps back

to a small quartet setting that delicately employs the color of *pizzicato* strings. He looks back to

the early Classical chamber ensemble by giving his symphonic space to the "cliché" string soli.[57]

Example 3.9. Mahler, Symphony No. 5, Mvt. 3, mm. 308-317

Example 3.10. Mahler, Symphony No. 5, Mvt. 3, mm. 241-247

[56] Franklin, *Mahler*, 15.

[57] Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, 116.

In the Scherzo movement of the Sixth Symphony, Mahler marks the trio as *altväterisch* (old-fashioned), which is a contrast to the beginning march rhythm. In Example 3.11, one can find the "unrhythmic games of children" mentioned by Alma Mahler at the end of the movement; this theme happens at the start of the trio as well.[58] The solo violin reminds listeners of the innocence of youth, the playing of little children. As a result, Alma states that "Ominously the childish voices became more and more tragic, and at the end died out in a whimper."[59] The temporary child's voice can only stay in retrospect. It is consequently overcome by the tragic tone from the beginning of the Scherzo.

Example 3.11. Mahler, Symphony No. 6, Mvt. 2, mm. 411-415

The Seventh Symphony spreads out a romantic voice in the second *Nachtmusik*, which is essentially a serenade. According to Levy, a solo in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries usually leads to or suggests a beginning, "a beginning in the sense of [a] point of departure or initiator of action on some level of musical structure."[60] The opening violin solo of *Nachtmusik II* demonstrates this point (see Example 3.12). It is presented as a Romantic song without words, a refrain that keeps coming back in slightly varied forms (see Example 2.12, mm. 51-54). As a starting point, this solo projects a song-like theme that refers to the Romantic past but is soon shifted to something else at the guitar entrance (m. 4)—an introduction to the reality of the ongoing sound of modernism. The movement's aim with this particular opening is to revive the

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[58] Gartenberg, *Mahler*, 308.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Levy, "Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music," 497.

past; nonetheless, the recreation of the vanished romantic ideal fails to survive the impending

future.

Example 3.12. Mahler, Symphony No. 7, Mvt. 4, mm. 1-5

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The majority of Mahler's violin solos are in segments or short phrases that do not exhibit a clear contextual implication without a probe into a specific work. In spite of their ambiguity as an isolated object—a possible sign, or a concept that has unstable meaning—the violin solos' explanation on internal structures has to be absorbed into the outlook of the external reference in order for the audience to apprehend their significance. As a violinist, I have been wondering how the intramusical and extramusical analysis would affect a performer's rendition or assist that person to extract musical ideas from that analysis. The key is to incorporate the analysis into the context, the composer's subjective style and aesthetic approach. In other words, one has to turn a "sign" into a "contextual sign."[61]

Thus, the symbolic meaning of the solo violin lies in the extrinsic reference among Mahler's symphonic works. The instrument is a narrator regardless of the programmatic or vocal influence. Its functional relations—the syntax—are conspicuous in the part's continuations, interruptions, conclusions, transitions, and any of the two roles combined; furthermore, the texture, mainly a solo with homophonic accompaniment or unison, establishes the inner organization of a movement and alludes to connotations of the themes as well. Despite the examination in textures, phrase structures, and forms, both topics and contextual factors specify the external knowledge of the music and take it one step further toward discovering the semantic value of the pieces. As Émile Benveniste asserts, "Semiotics (the sign) must be recognized; semantics (discourse) must be understood."[62] The plurality of musical voices—human voice,

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[61] Levy, "Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music," 483.

[62] Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 14.

literary voice, and orchestral voice—is present in the peculiar solo violin. This solo instrument appears as, for instance, the song quotation that blends into Mahler's symphonic realm of Symphony No. 1; an additional voice that speaks for the unspoken dialogue in No. 3; a literary figure with dual nature portrayed in No. 4; a retrospective instrumental voice that indicates the concept of songs without words in No. 5, 6, and 7; and last but not least, a synthesis of both songs and orchestra in No. 8 as well as *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Needless to say, Mahler is a composer who values structure and expression. Listeners can detect the uniqueness of the solo by searching for the extrinsic and intrinsic meanings signified in a structural development and a voice of narration. As Henry-Louis de La Grange points out, "what matters in Mahler's music is less the nature of the material than its treatment."[63] As a matter of fact, the solo content loses its significance if not taken into consideration with a structured yet expressive path.

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[63] Stephen E. Hefling, ed., *Mahler Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145.

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