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Mahler within Mahler Allusion as Quotation, Self-Reference, and Metareference

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The music of Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) is ideal as a focus for discussion of the role of self-quotation within musical works. Although self-quotation is not in a technical sense the same thing as a narrow usage of self-reference, these two terms converge in the case of Mahler, through his creation of a semiotic ‘idiolect’ or vocabulary of musical signs which define his works as a single system. This contribution traces a progress from self-quotation, through a more semiotically potent kind of self-reference, to a situation in Mahler’s last completed symphony in which one can speak of metareference within the musical text.

Mahler quotes constantly and copiously from other composers and his own works throughout his oeuvre. The most thoroughgoing examination of this habit to date is a 1997 article by Henry Louis de La Grange, whose observations are summarised and discussed here. The concern of this contribution is to focus on Mahler’s self-quotations, and to investigate whether these are a special case, in semiotic terms, and whether their use develops over time.

The most straightforward case, in terms of sign functioning, is provided by Mahler’s First Symphony and its quotation of his own song, “Gieng heut’ Morgens über’s Feld”. This is a use of quotation to incorporate the suppressed text of the poem within the semiotic economy of the symphonic narrative.

A more tangential and allusive technique is seen in the Fifth Symphony, where the relationship to pre-existing songs and their texts is more distant, and their function within the symphony is indirect and subtle, whilst remaining undeniable.

Finally, the present contribution discusses the closing bars of the Ninth Symphony, hearing in them a Proustian representation of the operation of memory through Mahler’s use of fragmented units, which are self-referential within the Mahlerian idiolect. This way of composing attains a modernist, metareferential form of signification.

Introduction: quotation, self-reference and metareference

On discovering that the 2007 conference, the proceedings of which form the present volume, was to be themed around the idea of ‘self-reference’, it was immediately clear to me that I could not avoid offering this essay as a contribution. In engaging with the debate opened up

by Werner Wolf's essays on 'metareference' (see Wolf 2007 and in this vol.), I am returning to the two intellectual fields of my book of 1995: the music of the Austrian symphonist Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), and what I termed in the title of that book 'musical semiotics'. What I want to do in the present article is to pursue some examples of self-quotation within Mahler's works, and to try to suggest some ways of analysing the semiotics of these particular musical elements; but in doing this, I regard myself as in dialogue with Wolf's more theoretical and taxonomic concerns.

First of all, some terms need to be defined. Wolf is particularly concerned to define 'self-reference' as essentially synonymous with what many British or American semioticians would term 'introversive semiosis', where signifieds are located within the same text as their signifiers¹. As Wolf comments, "each repetition or variation of a theme within a fugue or a sonata can be regarded as an instance of self-reference" (Wolf 2007: 302). This indicates one of the most distinctive features of music as a semiotic system since, as Wolf also comments, signs are often assumed to function by pointing to referents outside the text, in 'extroversive semiosis'². Whether musical signification is limited only to introversive semiosis – in other words, whether reference outside of the 'text' is even possible in the case of music – is an issue which has been much debated, but is not a question which need concern us here. Mahler's musical procedure presents a different question, which is how the recurrence of music between works functions within the semiotic economy of those works. In other words, his practice foregrounds the question of musical quotation and its relationship with musical meaning.

Self-reference arguably goes beyond quotation. In order to function as part of a sign, a repetition of a musical unit (for instance, the return of the opening gesture of a sonata movement at the recapitulation) has to function as the *referent* or *signified* of the first occurrence, rather than simply as a recurrence or quotation of it. The second occurrence must be interpreted as signifying a function ('recapitulation', perhaps) something that requires the interpreter to create an 'interpretant' (to use a term from Charles Sanders Peirce). In what follows, I shall be

¹ For example, "introversive semiosis" is the title of the third chapter of Kofi Agawu's influential study *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (1991).

² "Extroversive semiosis" is the title of the fourth chapter of Agawu 1991.

discussing quotation within Mahler's works, but one of the questions I wish to ask is whether his practice of quotation should be regarded as self-reference. The most obvious terminological problem with this is that quotation, by its nature, involves reference *between* rather than *within* works. However, herein lies one of the most interesting features of Mahler's compositional procedure. One of the semiotic effects of his practice of self-quotation, in my view at least, is the positing of his own works – all of them – as a *single system*. Quotation between his works builds up a vocabulary unique to those works and distinctive of them: a Mahlerian 'idiolect'. Seen in this light, self-quotation does indeed become a clear instance of self-reference.

This is to run ahead of myself slightly, though. The interplay between quotation and reference will be discussed below. The remaining question in terms of terminology is whether self-quotation, and indeed self-reference, ever assumes the status of 'metareference'. In other words, the question is in this case whether Mahler's quotations of his own works have the effect of commentary on the practice of quotation, on the mechanisms of referentiality itself, or on other aspects of the musical medium. My answer to this question is not going to be a simple 'yes' or 'no'. But it is indeed my conclusion that Mahler's music does, at least occasionally, and at least to some extent, attain the status of 'music about music'. If this is so, it poses interesting questions in turn about the relationship between music and literature, which account for my own fascination with Mahler's works within the nineteenth-century history of word-music relations. Whilst musical narrativity, which is often perceived by commentators on Mahler's symphonies, does not necessarily imply metareferentiality, if this music is 'telling a story' *about itself*, then how does it create this effect? Answering this question is my task in the remainder of this article.

Mahler and the inevitability of quotation

Mahler's music is inseparable from the idea of quotation, something that has been noted and discussed since his own day. That Mahler quotes copiously from previous music is beyond doubt. The significance of this habit, however – why he does what he does – is much more open to analysis and discussion. In a recent authoritative survey of contemporary Mahler research, John Williamson comments:

The question of categorizing seeming quotations from other composers is central to discussion of Mahler. Because the charge of banality was countered amongst the composer's earlier admirers with concepts such as irony and parody, analysts have tended to point to supposed allusions with a degree of pride, though in many ways they demonstrate the continuing belief in Mahler's lack of thematic originality. (2007: 267)

This practice, Williamson points out, may not be in itself as distinctive of Mahler as it has sometimes appeared: "the greater prevalence of the phenomenon [quotation in symphonies] in Bruckner, Mahler and Strauss in comparison with the generation of Mendelssohn and Berlioz is striking" (ibid.). Self-quotation, however, is a slightly different matter. It has been taken both as a measure of the depth and complexity of the subjectivity to which Mahler's music gives access, and as a stick to beat him with. Viewed positively, the many invitations to hear references between works, and therefore to interpret moments or entire works according to their relationship with a pre-existent work within Mahler's oeuvre, are an attestation of interpretive richness; viewed negatively, the frequent resort to material which has been heard (or, more often, half-heard) elsewhere indicates a lack of originality, or an unacceptable degree of self-indulgence.

The most extended discussion of this topic to date is a 1997 article by the great Mahler biographer, Henry-Louis de La Grange, entitled "Music about Music in Mahler: Reminiscences, Allusions, or Quotations?". De La Grange knows Mahler's music more intimately, and has listened to it more intently, than I ever shall; and he provides as an appendix to the article a modest list of some sixty-one examples of passages where he hears Mahler's works quoting other musical works. He describes these examples as "reminiscences", and their identification as "an ongoing game" (1997: 129). They range, too, from direct, unmistakable quotation to quite distant, questionable association. There are several things which strike me in de La Grange's lengthy and careful discussion. One is that he tends to include Mahler's adoption of 'folk-like' style, which can be described as musical allusion to popular forms – such as military march, peasant dance, popular or folk song, and so forth – along with references to individual, identifiable musical works. He wants to discuss the heterogeneity of Mahler's style, and emphasise its difference in this from earlier symphonic music; direct musical quotation, as he remarks, has a much longer history and is not, in itself, revolutionary. But in taking this perspective, de La Grange does not wish or need to ask questions about the specific

semiotic economy of direct (or indeed indirect) quotation of identifiable music. Another curious feature of this article is its typology of the moments it inventories. De La Grange says:

In my view, the main categories to be distinguished are (1) reminiscences, which are in principle unintentional, and (2) allusions or quotations, which are intentional. (Ibid.: 127)

In making intentionality the criterion for distinguishing between examples of intertextual reference, de La Grange appears to be adopting the unprovable as a principle. However, he is quite in line with earlier Mahlerians in doing this. He summarizes the typologies of Monika Tibbe and Marius Flothuis thus:

Zitat (quotation), *Gedächtniszitat* (quotation from memory), *Selbstzitat* (self-quotation), *Paraphrase*, *Anspielung* (allusion), *Anlehnung* (taking something as a model), *Entlehnung* (borrowing), *Anklang* (echo or reminiscence), *Ähnlichkeit* (similarity), and *Huldigung* (homage). (Ibid.)

The looseness of criteria for compiling this list means that, whilst all these authors identify and delineate an immense quantity of material, they do not wish to ask how these moments of external reference participate in the semiotic richness of the music. The third aspect of de La Grange's article which strikes me is his apparent coyness in discussing Mahler's self-quotation, either as an example of quotation or allusion generally, or as a topic in its own right. He writes:

But although these borrowings constitute an important feature of Mahler's compositional practice, they fall outside the framework of this paper, which focuses upon the various procedures Mahler employed for "music about music". (Ibid.: 142)

It is not clear to me why self-quotation cannot constitute 'music about music'. In making this statement, de La Grange is accepting self-quotation as "an important feature", but in terms of assessing its functioning, he seems not to want to enter into discussion concerning the nature of its workings. This is an avoidance which suggests that the topic of the present paper is worth pursuing, at the least.

Unsurprisingly, given the comments just quoted, de La Grange concludes that "in my opinion, they [musical allusions] really do not matter that much" (ibid.: 144). Despite the title of his article, it is contestable whether de La Grange is actually trying to identify or describe 'music about music'. The phrase suggests the sort of 'meta-reference' that Wolf is trying to pursue, but de La Grange is not interested in distinguishing between situations according to their possible signification. For instance: (1) where the presence of earlier

music within the text is part of a contextualisation of the composition in question, situating it within a discourse, general ('Western art music') or specific ('nineteenth-century Austrian symphonies'); (2) where a direct reference to another work is part of a specific semiotic economy (tying in one work to Mahler's oeuvre as a single system – an instance of the 'Mahlerian idiolect' at work); and (3) those where there is a critical 'metareferential' interpretation to the quotation.

This trio of possibilities is only one of several semiotic spectra which could be suggested. My thumbnail descriptions of them here perhaps suggest C. S. Peirce's distinction of 'Firstness', 'Secondness' and 'Thirdness' in semiotic function (possibility, fact, and argument as three sign-types). I am taking this sideways glance at the complexity of the semiotic theory involved in analysing the functioning of musical signs from Naomi Cumming's book *The Sonic Self* (2000). I would affirm, along with Cumming, that a single musical moment may be functioning in more than one way at a time, semiotically speaking; the question is how this multivalency of the text presents possible interpretations to the listener.

Direct quotation

It is time to consider some specific musical examples. I want to begin at the beginning, with the opening of Mahler's First Symphony of 1888. Theodor Adorno likens the sound of this opening to the whistling made by old-fashioned steam engines (cf. 1992: 4). But it is also already a musical reference, since it recalls the opening of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – the pedal A naturals, the slow descent using the interval of a fourth, the key (D major in Mahler and D minor in Beethoven). However, this allusiveness, whilst convincing to my ear, is vague enough to have escaped de La Grange's inventory. If the similarity is accepted as a genuinely significant resemblance, then it is no more than a potential sign, a feature which gives a possibility of interpretation: an instance of Peirce's Firstness. Its interpretation is of course debatable. Perhaps the twenty-eight-year-old composer wished to affirm, even if subconsciously, the noble musical tradition, and the titanic figure of Beethoven within it, that his first contribution to the genre wished to join. Perhaps he arrogantly wished to be heard as Beethoven's successor, his own first symphony taking over from – or

even outclassing – Beethoven’s last. The multiplicity of the possible interpretations reflects the looseness of the connection.

However, this is not the case five minutes later, once the very lengthy introduction finally produces the symphonic first subject. This is another allusion, and indeed this time a self-quotation. The source in question is a song composed by Mahler to a text of his own, in 1883–1885, “Gieng heut’ Morgens über’s Feld”. There isn’t any room for doubt here: the symphony quotes the song; Mahler is quoting himself. However, care has to be exercised even in stating this obvious fact as obvious. There are differences between the song and the symphonic melody, and all the differences are significant. Mahler does not simply set the melody as a ‘song without words’. He allows it to emerge gradually and, initially, quietly, out of the introduction’s pedal A naturals (so cruel in their demands on the orchestral players who have to sustain them, especially the double-bass players); he repeats small phrases, fragments the melody through its instrumentation, re-combines its elements. These are all techniques typical of his procedure in developing and recapitulating themes in his early symphonies. They also provide a distance, a kind of semiotic space, in which an interpretation of the symphony as different from the song can be created. In this case, however, I for one would not wish to argue for a metareferential aspect to the music. I remain guided by the text of the song in this: “Gieng heut’ Morgens über’s Feld” (‘This morning I went out across the field’) seems to me pretty much consonant with the emergence of the symphonic protagonist from the inchoate *Naturlaut* of the opening. The optimism of Mahler’s poem is sustained right up to the final couplet, where the poet’s unhappiness in love undercuts the beauty of the natural world in a Heine-like ‘reversal’; but the symphony is to replicate this poetic structure, by undercutting the optimism of the first subject, only much later in the musical argument. The melody itself, for simple and for not-so-simple reasons, invokes a musical representation not distant from another Beethoven symphony, the ‘Pastoral’ Sixth. One of the results of this is that it really does not matter to the interpretation of the passage whether the melody is invented by Mahler or an ‘authentic’ folk tune, whether one knows the text set to it, or whether the song precedes the symphony. All these questions are interesting, and the answers readily ascertainable; but they do not affect my interpretation of the music. Just for once, as far as Mahler’s music goes, I prefer to hear it without irony, as an arresting and intriguing combination of naivety (as a sign

of youth and innocence) and sophistication (as a reinterpretation of the symphony as a genre).

Before moving on, however, I want to note a couple of features here. The facts that this direct quotation is a self-quotation, and that it is of a song, remain generally true throughout Mahler's work. His references to other composers are oblique and contestable; direct quotation is of his own works. This is part of what I called earlier the 'Mahlerian idiolect' – the construction of a musical vocabulary unique to Mahler, a literal 'sound world'. I shall return to this technique later. But the other thing I want to observe now is that the link between song and symphony reflects the narrative nature of the symphonic argument. The parallelism of the first subject's musical journey and the text of the poem is not accidental, but neither is the one generated by the other. Both are made possible by the interpretation of the music according to a narrative scheme. Mahler himself was quite happy to talk or write about 'the hero of the symphony', and indeed he applied the title *Titan* to this symphony, allying it with the novel by Jean Paul. There is no discernible connection between the poem and Jean Paul or his novel; but the possibility of interpreting the symphony as a narrative enables the quotation to acquire semiotic significance. The symphonic setting both invokes and suppresses the text of the song. It becomes an element in the musical narrative.

Submerged quotation

It is time to move on, both in terms of Mahler's output, and in terms of the semiotic complexity of self-quotation. My next example is taken from what is possibly Mahler's most famous single movement; certainly it is the one of his works to feature most regularly on the UK radio station Classic FM. This is the Adagietto, the fourth movement out of five, from the Fifth Symphony. Within the structure of the symphony, this movement serves as an extended introduction to the Finale, with which it makes up the third large block of the work, after the opening pair of movements and the immense central scherzo. It is also the nearest thing to a slow movement in the whole of the Fifth Symphony. If one accepts, as I contend, that a symphony for Mahler constitutes a coherent, complex, narrative structure, then the function of the slow movement is often to invoke a more intimate, personal, often erotic counter-narrative to the more public world of the argu-

mentative sonata-allegro opening movement and the social associations of the dance-derived scherzo. Here, the Adagietto is scored virtually for a chamber ensemble: just strings and harp. In form it is indeed a ‘song without words’ – a lyrical, sustained melody for the first violins is accompanied by the rest of the chamber forces. The melody is well-known, and it resembles those of the songs Mahler composed immediately beforehand and contemporaneously with the symphony. These are settings of poetry by Rückert, which Mahler first composed with piano accompaniment and then later orchestrated, also for chamber-sized forces. *Example 1* shows the opening of the Adagietto’s melody.



Example 1: Mahler, Fifth Symphony, Adagietto, first theme, mm. 3–6.

There are two songs which have been most often cited as references for this melody. First of all, *Example 2* shows the third of the *Kindertotenlieder* (‘Songs on the Death of Children’), ‘Nun seh’ ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen’.

The image shows the opening of the song 'Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen' from Mahler's Kindertotenlieder. It consists of two staves: Voice and Piano. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo/mood is 'Ruhig, nicht schleppend.' The voice part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The piano part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The piano part includes dynamic markings: *p*, *sf*, *p*, *pp*, and *pp*. The piece continues, as indicated by 'etc.'.

Example 2: Mahler, “Nun seh’ ich wohl”, opening.

The opening gestures are very similar to the opening melodic phrase of the Adagietto. It is worth noting, however, that the actual melodic line of the song varies the motivic vocabulary in ways that prevent the Adagietto from being heard as a re-presentation of the word-setting melody – the Adagietto really is ‘without words’.

The other song which approaches the Adagietto, this time in its vocal line, is ‘Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen’, often taken as a manifesto of Mahler’s attitude to art.



Example 3: Mahler, “*Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*”, mm. 49–53.

The extract of the melody in *Example 3* (from near the end of the song) does resemble, motivically speaking, parts of the Adagietto’s opening melody. In more general terms, the Adagietto re-creates and shares in the sound-world of the Rückert settings, and indeed these songs (ten in total, composed between 1900 and 1904) have a motivic reservoir of gestures which are shared between them – another version of self-quotation, and a more specific, restricted form of ‘Mahlerian idiolect’.

Before hastening to conclude that Mahler is in the Fifth Symphony simply operating in much the same way as in the First, it is worth pausing. It is too simple, here, to read a straightforward reference from the songs into the symphony. Apart from anything else, these songs are very different from each other. One is mourning the death of a child who in retrospect seems always to have had too much of the heavenly in their eyes to have been detained long on earth; the other is declaring that the poet can live detached from all earthly cares. And the pitfalls of a simple referential reading are further complicated by two other factors. Firstly, the ‘narrative curve’ of the symphony does not easily accommodate either poem as a possible subtext – quite unlike “*Gieng heut’ Morgens*”. Secondly, there is strong evidence that Mahler had a specific aesthetic charge in mind in composing the Adagietto; one that does indeed ‘fit’ within the symphony, and one which was of entirely personal significance, and so remained unknown for many years, before its discovery and publication by the Mahler scholar and conductor Gilbert Kaplan. The manuscript of the Adagietto exists in two copies, both dating from 1901. The earlier is in Mahler’s hand, and the later (prepared very shortly afterwards) is in Alma’s hand, and is probably that used by the publisher for engraving. The significance of the existence of two copies is suggested by an anecdote preserved in an annotation to the conducting score of the symphony that belonged to Wilhelm Mengelberg, conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw orchestra, Mahler’s close friend, and champion of his music. On the first page of the Adagietto, Mengelberg’s handwritten comment describes it as a ‘love song’ sent by Gustav to Alma (to whom he had just become secretly engaged, only a matter of

weeks after their first meeting), and claims that both partners independently testified to this³.

Where, then, does this leave my consideration of quotation and self-quotation? I do not want to claim that publication of Mengelberg's anecdote transforms our interpretation of the Adagietto or of the Fifth Symphony. No more did I wish to claim that it was essential to know the words of the song whose melody is set in the First Symphony. But neither do I want to discard it as irrelevant, nor to deny that there is significance in the relationship with the Rückert settings. As I said, the character of this movement, as an instrumental, 'wordless' version of a song-setting, is fully consonant with its positioning in the symphony, where it literally mediates between the social imagery of the scherzo and the brisk, culminatory optimism of the Rondo-Finale. In other words, it sounds as if it ought to have words, and we can have a fairly shrewd guess at what the import of those words ought to be; and, fortuitously and gratifyingly, we have some evidence of just such a reading from personal, biographical sources. The importance of the 'narrative drive' to the symphony is confirmed by yet another instance of self-quotation when the theme of the Adagietto turns up in the Rondo-Finale, now transformed in character, but again, not to my ear with irony (see *Example 4*).



Example 4: Mahler, Fifth Symphony, Rondo, allusion to theme of Adagietto (mm. 190–197).

As for the connection with the other songs, the moral seems to be not to look for the meaning of the words set in the songs within the instrumental work that refers to them. At this level, the reference is musical and not literary – that is the whole point. The musical connections are almost undeniable, and, of course, there are oblique connections between the words too – in all three cases (one of which has no actual words), there is a strong idea of transcendence: the child belongs to a transcendent realm; the poet wishes to escape into the 'heaven of my love and my song', and the Adagietto itself gestures equally towards

³ The relevant page from Mengelberg's copy of the score, as well as both autographs, are reproduced in Kaplan, ed. 1992.

the transcendent power of love. But in all these cases, the words appear as the outcome of the musical work of signification, rather than as the key to that work. The music is aesthetically prior to the text.

Self-quotation as obsession

My final examples trace a further complexification of musical sign creation through self-quotation, by looking at Mahler's last completed symphony, the Ninth. In this work, self-reference becomes something close to an obsessive compulsion. Mahler is, in many respects, doing in this work what he does in every work: that is, re-thinking and re-casting the institution of symphonic composition itself, which is both the enabling ground of his art and something akin to a patriarchal adversary for him.

A brief example will serve to reinforce this last point. The third movement of the Ninth Symphony, entitled "Rondo. Bursleske." by Mahler, is a movement of aggressive savagery, the violence of which is set against the conflicting expectations created by its title(s) and its positioning (Mahler reverses the order of movements, putting the 'rondo' third and concluding with an adagio). Its main material, though, has clear precedents. *Example 5* gives the opening of the Scherzo of the Fifth Symphony, which I mentioned above.

4 horns in F corno obbligato

sf *p* — *ff* etc.

Example 5: Mahler, Fifth Symphony, Scherzo, opening.

And *Example 6* gives the opening of the same symphony's second movement, marked "Mit größter Vehemenz".

4 trumpets in F *rit. a tempo*

ff *ff* *veloce* etc.

cellos, basses,
bassoon, contrabassoon

ff *rit. a tempo* *rit. a tempo*

Example 6: Mahler, Fifth Symphony, second movement, opening.

And now, *Example 7* gives the opening of the Ninth Symphony's "Rondo. Burleske."

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, "Rondo. Burleske." It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for trumpet in F and 4 horns in F, and a bass clef staff for strings. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The trumpet and horns part begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The strings part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. Both parts are marked with a forte dynamic (f). Brackets below the score indicate that the first two notes of the trumpet and horns part are quoted from the Scherzo of the Fifth Symphony, and the first four notes of the strings part are quoted from the second movement of the Fifth Symphony. The score ends with "etc." on the right.

Example 7: Mahler, Ninth Symphony, "Rondo. Burleske.", opening.

This is certainly self-quoting, and this time there is no text, unless it is so far latent in the material as to be irrelevant. But the compulsion to quote, to create music which sounds richly allusive, as if every phrase is a quotation of some sort, is here confirmed and extended by the fact that the elements which are most readily identifiable as quotations are self-quotations. Here, self-quotation is coming much closer to Wolf's 'metareferentiality'. Once again, it seems to me that the semiotic potential of this self-quotation rests upon a kind of narrative, but now a narrative about musical narrativity itself, or, to use the term, a meta-narrative: Mahler's music is here making (or so it seems to me) some sort of statement about the possibility of making sense through symphonic discourse; and it does this through invoking Mahler's own symphonies as the past. It is not simply that Mahler's earlier works are invoked, and the passage of time thereby marked – that is certainly happening, but the effect here is of a different order. In the sound-world of the Ninth Symphony, the earlier works *are* the past; they emblemise it. The music does more than accept its place within the phenomenological world; it posits itself *as* the world. Mahler's often-quoted remark to Sibelius, that the symphony should be 'like the world' is reflected in this practice.

If music does have the potential for (at least implicit) metareference (to use Wolf's term), for the discursive, propositional meaning that Peirce called 'Thirdness', then it has it in virtue of exploiting the temporality of its nature, which enables it to represent temporal processes – the pastness of the past, the operation of memory. In this

semiotic space, self-reference through quotation is a powerful operation, and the locus of metareference.

There is no space here to give any detailed analysis of the complex semiosis at work in this “Rondo. Burleske.”. Instead, I want to consider the very end of the symphony, the point at which, to my mind, the musical narrative created and developed through the earlier movements takes on a metanarrative character.

The last movement of the Ninth Symphony is, as I remarked above, a slow movement. Its entire substance is allusive, and as it progresses, allusion within the Mahlerian idiolect becomes more noticeable, more obsessive. Its final page is, I would argue, the most striking and the most ‘modernist’ of Mahler’s repeated attempts to find an appropriate ending for a symphony – a means by which the music, and with it the musical argument, is concluded, rather than just happening to stop as if arbitrarily or through a mindless adherence to rule. The final page of the work presents fragmentary melodic scraps, all of which have some sort of self-quoting, idiolectical and potentially metareferential nature. One of the principle points of reference is the *Rückert-Lieder* or *Kindertotenlieder* style, from which many of the short (four- or five-note) motivic fragments stem. Semiotically, the Mahlerian idiolect itself disintegrates before our ears. The harmony itself becomes atomised, partial, allusive, as *Example 8* exemplifies.

Langsam und *ppp* zum Schluss

ersterbend zögernd

Vln I

Other strings

Example 8: Mahler, Ninth Symphony, fourth movement, mm. 155–163.

It is possible to hear, in the violin melody of *Example 8*, a latent or partial quotation of the melody that sets the final words of the fourth of the *Kindertotenlieder*, “Oft denk’ ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen”. The text of the fragment quoted is “im Sonnenschein! Der Tag ist schon auf jenen Höh’n!” (‘in the sunshine! The day is fine on yonder height!’). The similarity is shown by *Example 9*, which also demon-

strates how etiolated the rhythm of the symphonic allusion is by comparison.



Example 9: Mahler, *Kindertotenlieder* No. 4, "Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen", mm. 63–69.

Another colossus of Mahlerian scholarship, Constantin Floros, interprets the similarity between the earlier song and the symphony's ending unproblematically as Mahler's affirmation of faith in life beyond death (see 1993). Hearing this movement as valedictory is, admittedly, a traditional interpretation; but it is not self-evident, as is demonstrated by Anthony Newcomb's contrary narrative interpretation of the symphony as a version of a 'Bildungsroman' plot in which the end contains the potential for further adventure, as if beyond the bounds of the current story: "[the symphony's] formative energy, always ready to be stirred again into life, passes out of hearing" (1992: 136). Whilst I would not want to accept wholeheartedly Newcomb's choice of the 'Bildungsroman' as a narrative archetype (although Newcomb deliberately chooses Dickens' *Great Expectations* as a point of comparison, hardly the most typical 'Bildungsroman' one could name, as he discusses), the signification of Mahler's closing page is extremely complex. This complexity is intimately bound up with the practice of self-reference; every musical motive has a weight, a history, which has been created not just within this work, but within Mahler's whole corpus and, in the infinitely malleable world of musical resemblances, extending beyond his works to others both identifiable and lost. At this point, Mahler's music becomes literary. The effect, I would suggest, is not dissimilar to that created by Marcel Proust in the final pages of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the volume that closes *A la recherche du temps perdu*. As the immense novel draws towards its close, Proust's narrator experiences a sequence of 'involuntary memories', through which he realises the significance imbued in every experience, every moment of the present through the weight of the past. At the close of the novel, he realises that it is through writing that he is able to reclaim this past, and the final pages turn back to the opening of the first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*, as the narrator is able to begin writing the novel he wishes he had just read. It is

through the narration of how the narrator has become able to begin to narrate that the novel becomes metareferential; and something similar is true of the ending of Mahler's Ninth Symphony. The sparse, fragmented motives are like involuntary memories; they bring back, unbidden, the experience of the past. This is what furnishes Newcomb with the sense that the music's "formative energy, always ready to be stirred again into life, passes out of hearing" (1992: 136). It is also the reason why unproblematic readings such as Floros' are unsatisfying for many Mahlerians. But rather than following a process analogous to the narrative curve of a 'Bildungsroman', I hear the music striving towards a metareferential state in which its potential for narrative reading becomes its own topic.

Conclusion

This study has traced a history in Mahler's use of self-quotation, in which his practice has been seen to vary, and in fact to follow a path of increasing subtlety and complexity in the deployment of this particular technique. The impulse to narrativise this history should be embraced with caution; regarding it as a story of increasing maturity, leaving the naivety of the First Symphony far behind in the sophistication of the Ninth, would be doing the composer something of a disservice. It would be truer to the development of Mahler's aesthetics to see here a progress from the Romanticism of the First Symphony, through a more post-romantic or neo-romantic ideology in the Fifth, to something in the Ninth Symphony closer to the modernism that was about to emerge in the works of Schoenberg and Berg. The relationship between metareference as a strategy and modernism as an aesthetic is an interesting one. For Mahler as for Proust, its importance arises from the realisation that storytelling is not a transparent process. Proust's narration of self-discovery is also a story of how that narration can be achieved; Mahler's symphonic narrative becomes an interrogation of how meaning can be constructed in the passage of music through time. The case of Mahler demonstrates how the overall concern of this volume with self-reference as a phenomenon of musical signification is connected with the relationship between music and literature. Self-reference, in the strict sense of signs which unite signifiers and signifieds (representamens and objects, to use Peirce's terms) within a single semiotic system, is a key to the operation of

narrativity in absolute music. It is through this narrative potential that, in Mahler's late style, a metareferential mode can be constructed. Mahlerian self-reference, then, is bound up with word-music relations beyond the plain fact of his habit of quoting melodies previously set to words.

One of the most important recent works in the field of word and music studies is Peter Dayan's book, *Music Writing Literature* (2006). And in Mahler's earlier practice, one can indeed speak of his music as writing a form of literature. This is a literature which narrates in specifically musical terms, in which the poetry of the songs which furnish the material for self-quotation is a component of the narrative, but do not determine or decode it. But as Mahler develops towards a metareferential, modernist style, increasingly the phenomenon in question is a sort of literature writing music: the story being told is less the kind of story which is best told in musical terms, and more a story about musical storytelling itself.

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