

The Breaking of the Voice

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Part I of this article explores instances in Mahler's symphonies where the composer allows the continuity of the musical voice to break and to fall temporarily into silence. It analyses these in terms of seven different categories or compositional strategies – violent strikes, abysmal silence, draining away/falling apart, drowning out, hyperintensity, fragmentation, and strained voices. Part II considers the wider context for this breaking of the voice in literary and philosophical self-critiques of language contemporary with Mahler's work, specifically Austro–German forms of Sprachkritik as in the work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Fritz Mauthner, but also extending the parallel in less obvious directions to include Samuel Beckett. Taken together, the two parts of the article thus provide both evidence and historical context for a radical suggestion about Mahler's music, that at the heart of the symphonic is a constant threat of the aphonic – a complete loss of voice. While such moments are rare in Mahler, they might be read as extreme manifestations of the self-consciousness of language to which all his music is subject.

'What is new is his tone. He charges tonality with an expression that it is no longer constituted to bear. Overstretched, its voice cracks ... The forced tone itself becomes expressive.' (T.W. Adorno)¹

Introduction

Fifty years on, and almost a hundred years after Mahler's death, Adorno's idea continues to shape the critical understanding of Mahler's music. The affirmative tone, the monumental scale, the expressive intensity and emotional directness, are all called into question. 'Mahler was a poor yea-sayer', Adorno asserted: 'His voice cracks, like Nietzsche's, when he proclaims values, speaks from mere conviction.'² This reading has of course been key to the critical rehabilitation, in the later twentieth century, of Mahler as a central figure of Viennese modernism, far more closely linked to Schoenberg and his pupils than might be immediately apparent from the surface of his music. The link, it seemed, was to be found not on the rich surface of Mahler's music, but precisely in the cracks that surface conceals, in those moments where the music breaks off, fragments, and threatens to fall apart. 'His fractures are the script of truth', Adorno concludes in the closing lines of his Mahler book, with a formulation that has become emblematic of his assessment of the composer.³

¹ Theodor W Adorno, *Mahler. A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992): 20.

² *Ibid.*, 137.

³ *Ibid.*, 166. Peter Franklin cites this line in the title of an article in which he assesses the importance of Adorno's reading of Mahler. See "'...his fractures are the script of truth.'" – Adorno's Mahler', in *Mahler Studies*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 271–94.

In this spirit, I suggested some years ago that the fractures in the language itself might be more telling than the stories that appear to be told in spite of them.⁴ Rather than reading Mahler's symphonies in terms of the narratives they seem to project (and invite us to follow), I suggested that we might consider how these works problematize the very conditions of a narrating and narrated subject, and that the ruptures of musical form and language challenge the model of subjectivity implied by narrativity. Such a reading can be located in specific technical details; in the case of the late works, it is found in the manner in which the music erodes the conditions of closure towards which, at the same time, it nevertheless appears to move. That is a technical category (of tonal form, voice leading, harmonic rhythm) but also a semantic one, as the meaning conferred by a closed whole is repeatedly called into question; a model of subjectivity is thus proposed but left contingent, unfinished, or in a state of dissolution. Mahler's Ninth Symphony, I suggested then, is marked by 'its desire to achieve subjective identity through closure within a musical context that renders this unachievable.'⁵

More recently, I have explored at length how the plural voices of Mahler's music reflect a high degree of linguistic self-consciousness.⁶ Viewed from this perspective, his music can be heard to expose its own artificiality and conventionality while, at the same time, apparently affirming its expressive gestures as authentic and non-ironic. This is a tension that defines Mahler's music, traces of which are woven into his whole output, and one that is never resolved for all the air of finality that Mahler achieves with his endings. His ironic impulse, heard as a questioning of the adequacy or authenticity of the musical voice, manifests itself in many ways, but most obviously in the idea of plurality itself – that the music speaks with many voices. A mere list of these might suggest no more than a colourful vocabulary or a diverse troupe of symphonic characters, but that would be to miss how the over-arching authorial voice of these works is subverted and called into question. Historically, the symphony is predicated on the idea of achieving a grand unity out of the ordering of its heterogeneous parts; in Mahler, this aspiration persists but alongside an increasing sense of its own impossibility.

In this article, I want to pursue a rather different line. I want to consider the fragmenting of Mahler's musical voices not in terms of stylistic or genre play, nor in terms of structural rupture, but in terms of sound.⁷ I want to take Adorno's metaphor of the cracking or breaking of the voice and apply it literally to Mahler's use of the orchestra, to suggest that, prior to questions of musical discourse, the musical voice itself, as sonic material, already signals its own breaking. Of course, this might seem like a counter-intuitive idea in relation to a repertoire that is generally heard today as a high point of romantic expression and lyrical intensity. The idea of a voice that cracks – as when, overcome with emotion, the voice breaks in mid utterance – might seem an odd one to apply to

⁴ Julian Johnson, 'The Status of the Subject in Mahler's Ninth Symphony', *19th-Century Music* 18 (1994–5): 108–20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶ Julian Johnson, *Mahler's Voices. Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ Sound is explored as a central category by John S. Sheinbaum in 'Adorno's Mahler and the Timbral Outsider', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131 (2006): 38–82, and also in Thomas Schäfer, *Modellfall Mahler: Kompositorische Rezeption in zeitgenössischer Musik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999): 211ff.

Mahler. The unprecedented popularity of his music today clearly has much to do with the cultivation of a certain tone – the polished richness of sound and the precision of the modern symphony orchestra – deployed in the telling of grand musical autobiographies on a cinematic scale.⁸ As unanimous applause erupts to meet the resonant ending of a Mahler symphony, still hanging in the air of the big public space of a modern concert hall, surely nobody hears a *broken voice*?

But that, nevertheless, is my suggestion – that, at the heart of the promise of the *symphonic* (many voices sounding together), Mahler's music unleashes the spectre of the *aphonic* (the complete loss of voice); at the height of its powerful affirmation of voice and meaning, Mahler's music sounds a pre-echo of its own muteness. This is found, before any considerations of form, structure, genre, or irony, in the substance of orchestral sonority itself. Amid all the eloquence, the passionate declamation and masterful control of dramatic pacing in Mahler's music, I want to focus on those moments when the voice cracks, like that of an actor whose sudden constriction of the throat and slight stumble in delivery, in an otherwise faultless performance, betrays the onset of a fatal illness. In Part I of what follows, I therefore offer an overview of the 'strategies' by which Mahler's music stages the breaking or even silencing of the voice. This is necessarily closely tied to the musical text, but from the perspective of performance and audition. In Part II, I explore a possible context for this aspect of Mahler's music in terms of the literary and philosophical critique of language (*Sprachkritik*) that emerged, primarily within Viennese culture, towards the end of Mahler's life.

Part I: Strategies of Breaking

'Like an axe-blow': silencing through violence

There are places in Mahler's symphonies where the musical voice appears to be simply felled, cut down at a point of maximum intensity. The first hammer blow in the Finale of the Sixth Symphony is one such astonishing moment. The original performance direction was for 'a short, powerful, but muffled-sounding blow, not metallic in character'. Mahler later revised this instruction to include the phrase 'like an axe blow' (*wie ein Axthieb*). The startling strangeness of this moment on no account should be diminished by the habit of commentators to suggest, ad infinitum, that the three hammer blows in the Sixth Symphony somehow anticipate events in Mahler's life three years later in the summer of 1907. Musically, these are unprepared acts of violence, without explanation or context, whose intrusion into the concert hall remains palpably shocking. The theatrical spectacle, of one of the percussionists striking a large object with great force, is important for this reason: this is less a sound *of* the music, than an extra-musical act *upon* the music.

The hammer blow constitutes more than simply a structural or narrative reversal; it makes a proposition that threatens to undermine the symphony altogether – that the expression of progress, articulated through harmonic, melodic and instrumental materials, might be silenced by a gesture of violence that is, quite pointedly in Mahler's instructions, not a musical tone at all, but a kind of noise. This is also the function of the famous 'motto' theme of the Sixth Symphony. Its

⁸ Leon Botstein discusses these divergent readings in 'Whose Gustav Mahler? Reception, Interpretation, and History', in *Mahler and his World*, ed. Karen Painter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): 1–53.

shift from a major to minor tonic triad, fortissimo to piano, signals a closing down, a switch from light to dark, open to closed; its accompanying drum rhythm is a brutal beating, effecting silence through physical violence. It threatens this early on in the first movement at its first appearance [at Fig. 7] before being answered by the intensely lyrical second subject; but at the end of the Finale, it has the last word and the symphony ends in uniquely funereal mode.

The hammer blows and motto theme of the Sixth are not isolated examples but simply the most famous of a host of similar moments where musical discourse is temporarily silenced by various forms of hitting or striking, moments that blur the distinction between musical material and acts of physical violence. A gesture of comparable force was planned for the Tenth Symphony, where a sequence of powerful bass drum blows link the end of the fourth movement to the start of the fifth. This is a gesture of such ferocity that it exceeds the musical context; the repeated blows seem to mark a total nihilism in which the expressive voice is utterly silenced. Every attempt to build a melodic voice is cut off by a return of the drum stroke – first the solo horn, then the incomparably beautiful melody introduced by a solo flute, shot down like a bird just as it begins to take flight.

Elsewhere, Mahler achieves a similar effect without the use of percussion. In the Scherzo of the Seventh Symphony, the energy of the waltz is brought to an abrupt halt by a pizzicato low in the cellos and basses (marked *fffff*), with the additional direction to the players that they should pluck the strings so hard they hit the wood (a Bartók pizzicato before Bartók) [Fig. 161.4, and earlier, Fig. 148]. The context of this ‘hit’ is important. In the preceding section the melodic voice in the violins has already been painfully bent out of shape – what should be simple melodic intervals (thirds, fourths and fifths) are stretched to compound intervals (tenths, elevenths and twelfths) in a way that suggests a distortion of the natural range of the voice (an effect underlined by glissandi). The wind instruments take up the same material mechanically, until the rapid staccato scales in the strings suggest a kind of malfunction and breakdown. The disjointed wind arpeggios [Fig. 161] are marked ‘shrieking’ (*kreischend*), at which point, the music is simply cut dead by the stroke of the bass pizzicato.

The Finale of the First Symphony opens with a scream, and continues with a series of violent percussive strikes and bodily tremors. The sense of being physically struck is underlined by Mahler’s markings; the triplet figure in the wind is marked ‘sehr gestossen’, meaning, literally, ‘struck hard’ or ‘well struck’. But the resonances of the verb ‘stossen’ include the sense of to kick, punch, cuff or jab. The phrase ‘jemand das Messer in die Brust stossen’ means ‘to plunge a knife into someone’s breast’ which, given Mahler’s barely concealed programme for this symphony, might be exactly what he had in mind.

Gestures of striking are not the only kinds of physical violence to which Mahler incites his orchestra. His music includes a group of gestures that have to do with the idea of tearing or ripping up. In the Scherzo of the Fourth Symphony [Fig. 6.3], short pizzicato notes high up in the register of the solo violin are marked ‘very short and snatched’ (*sehr kurz und gerissen*). The same marking (*gerissen*) appears in the Fifth Symphony for a gesture played by all the violins and violas in unison, where the direction implies something more like ‘torn up’.⁹ In the Scherzo of the

⁹ In the first edition, Mahler gave the following performance direction at Fig. 32: ‘This passage must be played by the strings with the greatest power, so that the individual strings, as a result of the violent vibration, almost come into contact with the fingerboard. The Viennese call this “schöppern”. A similar effect applies to the horns.’

Sixth Symphony Mahler gives the direction 'as if whipped' (*wie gepeitscht*) for a violent gesture in the string section [Fig. 65.6], fitting, perhaps, in a symphony whose orchestra includes both the Holzklapper (the slapstick, or orchestral whip) and the Rute (or switch, literally a bundle of sticks tied together).¹⁰

Abysmal silence

The violent hit is an extreme case of silencing the musical voice. It is presented as a kind of catastrophe, which negates the idea of voice on which the music is predicated, and with it the suggestion of a subjective presence projected by the music. Some of Mahler's music begins from abysmal silence, as an amorphous state from which a voice will gradually emerge (as in the first movement of the Third Symphony), but the effect of opening up such emptiness in the middle of a movement is quite different. In the Finale of the Sixth Symphony, successive moments of violent collapse, for which the 'hammer blows' become a dramatic and condensed symbol, repeatedly negate the musical voice and challenge it to reconstitute itself; this, in a nutshell, is the dramatic form of the Sixth's Finale which makes thematic this cycle of collapse and rebuilding. In this way, the music becomes a discourse *about* the voice, rather than simply a drama narrated *by* the voice. The cumulative effect of moments of breakthrough and catastrophic collapse is one of 'eternal recurrence' (in a Nietzschean sense), with the same set of events locked into a cycle of repetition. In the end, it is absence that prevails. More than any other moment in Mahler, the ending of the Sixth Symphony embodies what Thomas Mann was later to ascribe to the fictional composer, Adrian Leverkühn. Mann's character famously revokes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; Mahler might be heard to revoke the idea of the symphony as a whole, and with it the ultimately affirmative voice represented by the symphonic genre.¹¹

Other movements appear to begin *after* some earlier catastrophic event. The Ninth Symphony presents, in the opening bars of its first movement, a process of *re-constitution*. The isolated fragments (a simple rhythm on a monotone in the cello, a bell-like tolling low in the harp, a fragment of fanfare on a muted horn, a slight rustling in the violas), only gradually coalesces into the beginnings of a melody proper. The effect is utterly different to a standard introduction before the entry of a principal theme; instead, the melody here appears as the reconstituting of what might earlier have been whole but is now reassembled from its broken fragments. In other words, this symphony begins *after the catastrophe*. This is made clearer as the movement progresses, because the successive returns of the D major melody (at bars 148, 269, 347) are literally reconstituted after catastrophic moments of collapse. In the strange, shadowy (*Schattenhaft*) no-man's land out of which these returns emerge, Mahler marks the orchestra as 'gradually acquiring tone' (for example, bar 60ff.), as if slowly returning to life. These cyclic returns of the principal melody even haunt the close of the Finale. This movement is in D \flat major, but the transition to the final *Adagissimo* (bar 159) settles out onto a dominant seventh chord of D major in bars 155–6. This tiny glimmer of the key of the initial Andante seems to offer the faintest hope of an impossible return, as if

¹⁰ For contemporary cartoons drawing attention to Mahler's noisiness and expansion of the percussion section, see *Die Musquete*, 19 January 1907 and *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, no. 88, 31 March 1907.

¹¹ Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949).

the song of the first movement might yet reappear for another time. The catastrophe of the Finale, it turns out, is the one from which the first movement attempts to recollect itself.

The Ninth, and the first movement of the Tenth Symphony, often expose what Samuel Beckett, describing Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, heard as 'a vertiginous path of sounds connecting unfathomable abysses of silence.'¹² The lie to such a reading might be thought to be given by Mahler's Eighth, a uniquely voice-led symphonic work. But consider the hiatus between Parts I and II. Mahler's texts for the two halves of his symphony are drawn from two quite different worlds. Part I, with its setting of a ninth-century Latin hymn, theatrically revokes the temporal distance of a thousand years in order to summon into the present the affirmation of a lost community. The revivification of an ancient world was one of Mahler's greatest coups (both technically and in terms of reception), but the beginning of Part II, with its modern and vernacular voice (Goethe) serves only to highlight the gap between the two. The affirmative fullness of the setting of 'Veni creator spiritus' is followed immediately by the abysmal emptiness of the desert and a yearning for voice and presence. The opening of Part II thus provides a microcosm of modernity and its long journey to recover, as a present reality, a plenitude projected onto the past. The Eighth declines to stage the moment of catastrophe; it takes place somewhere in the vast, unheard ellipsis between Part I and Part II. It is perhaps here, rather than after the first movement of the Second Symphony, that Mahler should have insisted on a long pause in performance.

Draining away/ falling apart

The violent and catastrophic blow, followed by abysmal silence, constitutes a dramatic staging of the silencing of the voice. Elsewhere, Mahler allows the musical energy simply to drain away or to fall apart. The first is experienced as a kind of dissolving or evaporating away of the musical voice, the second arises from a progressive isolation and fragmentation of elements. Both are often found as means of ending middle movements of the symphonies. The tendency to dissolve away is often associated with Mahler's 'fairytale' mode where the ending seems to revoke earlier presence as ephemeral and illusory; the close of the second movement of the Second Symphony is a good example. Such endings can also take on a more mechanical aspect, however, and several Mahlerian endings have the character of a small machine falling apart. The ending of the Scherzo of the Seventh Symphony [from Fig. 167] creates this effect, as does the end of the second movement of the Ninth [from Fig. 27.5]. In both cases, Mahler's progressive fragmentation of elements reduces the musical texture to its bare component parts and accentuates the mechanical aspect of the dance materials from which the music is formed (note the wheezing of the contra-bassoon and piccolo at the end of the second movement of the Ninth).

In the Scherzo of the Sixth Symphony, a mechanical and percussive element is marked by the prominence of the xylophone, but even the contrasting lyrical material [Fig. 56, *altväterisch*], sounds like an old mechanical toy imitating the sound of simple rustic music. It is not hard to hear some pre-echoes of the

¹² Letter from Beckett to Axel Kaun in 1937. See Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner and the Limits of Language', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 95 (1980): 183–200, esp. 189.

grotesquerie of the mechanical that Stravinsky was to foreground a few years later in *Petruschka* [see Fig. 64]. The fourth movement of the Seventh Symphony dissolves, with the same dreamlike tone that prevails throughout, like a music box winding down. This movement, which begins with a gesture of authentic lyricism (in the solo violin), ends by revealing itself as no more than the lyrical tinkling of a music box, as the exposed sonorities of the harp, guitar and mandolin make clear at the end. There is a kind of transparency to these moments, as if, after the masterly play of musical illusion, Mahler reveals the mechanical means by which it has been achieved.

A different kind of draining of energy is heard at some very surprising moments: in the closing sections of the otherwise monumental and affirmative Finales of the Second, Third and Eighth Symphonies. In all three cases, the movements end with sustained passages of powerful *tutti* writing, so the brief step back might simply be explained away as a necessary moment of contrast before the return of maximum intensity for the final bars. Nevertheless, it makes for a curious effect, particularly in the case of the two choral Finales, because here it is achieved by silencing the voices of the choir before the end of the movement. Given the importance of the choir to both symphonies (reserved in the Second until very late in the work) it is curious that Mahler opts not to use them in the final bars. Instead, he follows the final choral flourish by allowing the energy of the sonority to be drawn away and fall back (both by reduced orchestration and by lower dynamic markings) before the final orchestral conclusion (with the prominent use of bells in the Second Symphony and organ in the Eighth).¹³

These passages would perhaps be unremarkable except for a Mahlerian tendency towards withdrawing at the moment of arrival, or – to put it another way – of allowing a voice to break through, only to reveal it as distant and not yet achieved. The best-known example of this is perhaps the first appearance, in the second movement of the Fifth Symphony, of the D major chorale theme that will return triumphantly in the Finale. The moment of arrival [Fig. 27] is powerful enough, but rather than being rounded off and closing in a similar vein, Mahler allows its energy to drain away in the horns [after Fig. 29], before the episode is interrupted by a return of the ferocious minor-key music of this Scherzo ('with greatest vehemence').¹⁴ In the Andante of the Sixth Symphony, a breakthrough into E major [Fig. 94] projects a powerful sense of arrival, but its energy simply dissipates, without warning, after eleven bars. A five-bar link of curiously broken and vagrant figures in the strings leads back, without any logical connection, to a resumption of the opening music in Eb major.

Drowning out

In marked distinction to voices that simply drain away are those that are drowned out by the overwhelming force of the rest of the orchestra. In the Finale of the First Symphony [Fig. 56], Mahler gives the instruction: 'The horns should drown out everybody, even the trumpets!' (*Die Hörner Alles, auch die Trompeten übertönen!*). If this were not enough, Mahler directs the horn players to stand up, overdetermining the musical material (a chorale) through the addition of

¹³ See Figs. 49.7 to 50.3 in the Finale of the Second Symphony, and Figs. 218–19 at the close of the Eighth Symphony.

¹⁴ Something very similar occurs in the Finale of the Sixth Symphony, Figs. 131–3.

performative spectacle. It is the kind of exaggeration that recalls Richard Specht's personal reminiscence of Mahler: 'He didn't walk, he stamped; he didn't speak, he shouted, screamed, implored, preached...'.¹⁵

Alban Berg's often-quoted remark about death announcing itself 'with the greatest force' in the first movement of the Ninth Symphony refers to a precise moment (at bar 314) where a rhythmic motif is sounded out in unison by the trombones and tuba (*mit höchster Gewalt*). The brutal energy of this motto rhythm constitutes an act of physical violence amid the syntactical sophistication of the movement. It quite literally overwhelms the rest of the orchestra, as much by the force of its dissonant tone as by sheer volume. Elsewhere, Mahler is not averse to deploying the force of the orchestra in the manner of a scream, simply overwhelming any possibility of discourse by syntactical means. The opening of the Finale of the First Symphony has already been referred to in this way; the ending of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony [Fig. 18] might be another example. Marked 'lamenting' (*klagend*), it is a moment of catastrophe that simply closes down the possibility of expression and acts as the prelude to the gradual falling apart and draining of energy (*verlöschend*) with which the movement closes. Nowhere is this threat to articulate musical speech more pronounced than in the Tenth Symphony. The highly dissonant nine-note chord, stacked up towards the end of the first movement [Fig. 28], is just such a scream – a gesture of exasperation at the impossibility of resolution through discourse; its return in the Finale underlines, with gruesome force, that the attempt to speak is constantly haunted by the threat of vocal collapse.

Mahler's March forms often take on a terrifying force, one aspect of which is a treatment of the orchestra designed to overwhelm. This is much in evidence in the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies. Where a March functions as an unremitting, implacable force of collective power, inimical to an individual or lyrical voice, its effect has much to do with scale – with the duration of its persistent rhythm, tone and texture. To increase its power, as Shostakovich was to discover after Mahler, the composer's principal tool is orchestration, which can be 'turned up' to a kind of maximum level where any other element is overwhelmed. In the first movement of the Seventh Symphony, the March material returns with terrifying force at Fig. 61.7, now with a prominent side drum. The horns' repeated falling fifths (with their bells up) recalls the monumentality of Bruckner and its tendency to what Steven Beller called the 'aesthetic celebration of authority'.¹⁶

Contemporary criticism often complained of how noisy Mahler's music was, and cartoons drew attention to Mahler's extended percussion section. Even in his choice of instruments, Mahler seemed to be opening up the hallowed aesthetic space of the symphony to the noise of the street and the farmyard. There is an interesting paradox here. Mahler himself seems to have been highly sensitive to noise; the accounts of his summer composing retreats given by Natalie Bauer-Lechner and his sister Justine suggest that he was forever having to be protected from the noise of tourists, or the local brass band, and even the birds.¹⁷

¹⁵ Richard Specht, *Gustav Mahler* (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1913): 28.

¹⁶ Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews 1867–1938. A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 107.

¹⁷ Mahler was apparently so disturbed by noisy birds around his composing hut at Steinbach that he had them shot. See also his letter to Alma of 14 June 1909, from Toblach, in *Gustav Mahler: Letters to his Wife*, ed., Henry-Louis de La Grange and Günther Weiss, with Knud Martner. Rev and trans., Antony Beaumont (London: Faber, 2004): 319.

The longing for silence and isolation was endemic among nineteenth-century artists fleeing the bustle of the modern city, as Marc Weiner suggests, such that noise was stigmatized 'as the emblem of the masses', while silence 'emerged as the *sine qua non* of the revered and isolated intellectual.'¹⁸ Such a longing is inscribed into Mahler's music, from the Rückert song 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' to the retreat of 'Der Abschied'. And yet, the same composer frequently unleashes an armoury of noise-making machines on the orchestra, largely unprecedented before the music of Edgard Varèse. The first movement of the Third Symphony foregrounds what, for the Viennese, would have been the noise of the modern urban street; Mahler marked his draft score [at Fig. 44], 'Der Gesindel' – the rabble. By the end of the movement, it simply drowns everything else out.

Hyperintensity

Paradoxically, the voice is often broken in Mahler through self-destructive exaggeration. Adorno's comment, at the head of this article, suggests that the breaking of the voice has to do with forcing the tone, over-burdening or over-stretching the voice. This can be demonstrated in quite specific ways, as an exaggeration of the lyrical voice which at first heightens its intensity, but then falls over into its opposite. The orchestral doubling of melodic lines is often over-determined in Mahler. In the first movements of the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies lines are often multiply doubled which, coupled with the angular quality of the line itself, can produce an uncomfortably *unlyrical* tone.¹⁹ Another form of stretching is the expressive exaggeration of intervals within melodic lines. This is well illustrated by the vocal line given to the Pater profundis (bass solo) in the second movement of the Eighth Symphony [from Fig. 39]. The painful distortion of interval in the vocal part and the dislocated shapes of the accompanying instrumental lines signal a kind of breaking, entirely commensurate with Goethe's text at this point. Both the Pater profundis and Pater ecstaticus sing of their passionate desire to attain the divine through an overcoming of self, to surpass their mortality in order to cross the threshold of heaven. In this context, therefore, the breaking of the voice is the prelude to a redemptive transformation, signalled musically as the chromatic agonies of the post-Wagnerian voice are followed by the diatonic simplicity and metrical regularity of the chorus of angels [Fig. 56].

Mahler often intensifies the lyrical voice through counterpoint. The choric expansion of a single melodic line into a rich polyphonic texture produces the immediately recognisable sound world of the Mahlerian adagio, as in the Finales of the Third and Ninth Symphonies, and the first movement of the Tenth. Though the richness of these passages might seem opposed to any idea of the breaking of the voice, these movements are nevertheless key sites in the struggle for voice. The paradox is explained by the tendency of a state, when sufficiently exaggerated, to flip over into its opposite. This is evident in music in terms of both chromaticism and counterpoint: the dissonant note, an agent of harmonic

¹⁸ Marc Weiner, *Undertones of Insurrection: Music, Politics and the Social Sphere in the Modern German Narrative* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993): 75–6. Cited in K.M. Knittel, 'Wagner, Deafness, and the Reception of Beethoven's Late Style', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 51 (1998): 49–82, esp. 79.

¹⁹ For example, four bars before Fig. 18 in the first movement of the Sixth Symphony, where the same line is doubled by 4 flutes, 2 oboes and 4 clarinets.

motion, produces harmonic stasis if sufficiently multiplied, and the sense of linear motion achieved by simple counterpoint results in an opposite effect if the texture is thickened beyond a certain point. Mahler's music is often highly chromatic and highly polyphonic at moments of greatest lyrical intensity, producing an expressive paradox: the voice of lyrical and expressive authenticity begins, through its own intensity, to pull apart, to break up in a process of self-destruction. This is already evident at certain moments in the Finale of the Third Symphony, Mahler's first extended lyrical Adagio movement [for example at Figs. 20 and 24].

It is perhaps in the outer movements of the Ninth Symphony, however, that this tendency of lyrical counterpoint to undermine itself becomes most apparent. There is a kind of inner turbulence to the musical textures, which Mahler creates by using plural rhythmic values in counterpoint with each other – notably a running triplet figure against duplet lines, often highly chromatic at the same time. Passages in the first movement (for example, bars 211 or 285) can often evoke the busy contrapuntal textures of Schoenberg, found in works like the First Chamber Symphony (1906). In the Finale, the hyperintensity of the lyrical voice is both enhanced by the dense counterpoint and simultaneously eroded by it, like the effect of the chromatic harmonic progressions and neighbour note inflections, which heighten the expressive tension but threaten to erode tonal coherence at the same time. It is at the approaches to cadence points, almost universally incomplete, that this tendency to pull apart is most apparent. The sense of a truncated, incomplete voice leading dominates the entire movement, producing a series of gaps or hiatuses in the otherwise linear movement of the music (bars 11, 28, 88, 132). The effect of eroding linear purpose is further heightened by a chromatic twisting of the lines (for example, in bars 72, 143); as the music fails to close, the knotted energy of the approach simply drains away without result.

Fragmentation

The proliferation of contrapuntal lines, initially an expansion of a voice, thus turns into a kind of fragmentation. Elsewhere, Mahler achieves this through orchestration, in a kaleidoscopic division of a musical line into brief moments of different orchestral colours. This expressionistic dissociation, transmuting the focused logic of line into a dissipated field of colour, is one of the most 'modernistic' aspects of Mahler's music; yet it is often overlooked, because the lines themselves derive from a relatively conventional harmonic language. It becomes pronounced from the Fourth Symphony onwards, particularly, though not exclusively, in scherzo movements. The Scherzo of the Fourth compounds its orchestral fragmentation with material that is also at odds with itself metrically, making for disorientation utterly at odds with the mellifluous Andante that follows it. The solo violin, retuned to be harsher in tone and directed to be played like a folk fiddle, fragments from the main section like a sharp splinter. The rapid changes in colour across the orchestra dissolve any sense of a stable or enduring voice. In the Scherzo of the Fifth Symphony, the solo horn takes on the role of a kind of 'caller' at a dance, attempting to control the constantly divergent parts. In the face of this spiralling apart of the orchestra, the arresting of motion by the echoing horns [Fig. 10] represents a kind of retreat – an inward listening to one's own voice, a mirroring of one's own acoustic identity (hence the '*innig*' tone of the cellos at this point). But these are isolated moments: after the horns' first

moment of arrest, the Scherzo is restored as a ghostly pizzicato [Fig. 11]; after the second occurrence, the inward calm of private acoustic space is violently juxtaposed with the full force of an orchestral *tutti* [Fig. 28].

That such fragmentation has to do with the breaking of the voice is underlined by an unlikely instance in the first movement of the Eighth Symphony. In marked contrast to the affirmative strength of the larger part of this movement, Mahler's choral setting of 'infirmi nostri corporis' produces a rare section of fragmented music [Fig. 19]. This brokenness of 'weak bodies' is then taken up by the orchestra alone [Fig. 23], creating a structural break in the flow of the music thus far (an interlude sustained until the 'lumen accende' at Fig. 33). Its haunting quality, so at odds with the solidity of the music that surrounds it, will return in Part II of the Symphony where, in the midst of the heavenly, the 'infirmi' music returns as the angels reflect on the twofold nature of man [Fig. 76.5]. To be mortal, it seems, is to have a broken voice (and note, that brokenness is akin here to a kind of modernity); to be divine is to have a whole voice (signalled by Mahler's ascription to the angels of the diatonic simplicity of folk music). Here, as elsewhere, Mahler's broken voice stands in for the loss of a prior fullness.

Strained voices

If I want to produce a soft, sustained sound, I don't give it to an instrument which produces it easily, but rather one which can get it only with effort under pressure – often only by forcing itself and exceeding its natural range. I often make the basses and bassoon squeak on the highest notes, while my flute huffs and puffs down below.²⁰

We need not be over-concerned about the accuracy of Natalie Bauer-Lechner's reporting here, because Mahler's music gives plenty of evidence of such an approach to orchestral sound. The Scherzo of the Seventh, with its foregrounding of what Adorno called 'dispossessed voices' – a solo viola, a contra-bassoon, a tuba, a solo double bass – provides a very good example. The allotting of the heroic solo in the first movement of the Seventh to a tenor horn (where a trombone or a French horn would have made a more obvious choice), is another. But this category can be summed up by one simple example – the solo double bass at the start of the third movement of the First Symphony. No wonder the first audiences were bewildered: this is the symphonic equivalent of having an old tramp wander out on to the stage of the Imperial Opera and sing in a strained, untrained voice. The discomfort produced by this solo is intense: the voice is broken yet sings anyway. Its mournful, weakened tone signals loss even before we recognise the funereal distancing of childhood (via the minor-mode nursery song). Many years later, Mahler was to use the word 'Erschütterung' (in shock) to mark the vocal part in the first song of the *Kindertotenlieder*; it could well stand above the double-bass solo in the First Symphony. But the song allows the singer moments of expressive breaking out, of lyrical protest of line and tone; the double bass is confined to the mechanical repetition of the nursery rhyme and the forced, stifled tone of the upper register. It is one of a number of moments where Mahler's worn musical characters seem to anticipate the down-at-heel literary ones of Samuel Beckett.

²⁰ Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, ed. Peter Franklin, trans. Dika Newlin (London: Faber, 1980): 160.

Part II: Sprachkritik

Beckett might seem an unlikely point of reference for Mahler. Born nearly half century and a world away, what could an Irish writer associated with the literary avant garde have to do with a composer of late-romantic Austro-German symphonies? An answer might be found by placing Beckett's great novel *The Unamable* (1953) alongside Mahler's Ninth Symphony (1909). Beckett's famous 'I can't go on; I'll go on', an internal dialogue that dominates the closing pages of his book, makes a resonant literary counterpart to the closing pages of Mahler's Adagio Finale; both have to do with the persistence of speech beyond the breaking of the voice. Mahler's music also 'carries on' while acknowledging the impossibility of doing so; it speaks while questioning the very language in which it speaks and allowing its voice to break.

I was delighted to discover recently a connecting link between my intuition about Beckett and the self-critique of language at the heart of the intellectual culture of Mahler's world.²¹ Apparently, James Joyce, nearly blind in 1932, used to ask the young Beckett to read him passages from Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu eine Kritik der Sprache*. One of the things that must have impressed them, Linda Ben-Zvi suggests, was Mauthner's 'passionate, rambling vituperations, contradictions and logorrhoea.' Both Joyce and Beckett, it seems, found resonant for their own work a critique of language that 'illustrates the possibility of using language to indict itself.'²² There is a longstanding tradition among Mahler detractors to draw attention to his proclivity to musical 'rambling', or even 'meandering'. This should not be denied, because it constitutes a key aspect of his symphonic discourse. The Wunderhorn-based Scherzo movements of the Second and Third Symphonies illustrate the point wonderfully: 'going on' is key to the humour of 'Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt', as is underlined in the orchestral expansion with its circling *moto perpetuo* figures. Luciano Berio was perhaps the first to propose the kinship between Beckett and Mahler, when he used this movement as the underlay to the third movement of his *Sinfonia* (1968), whose rich overlay of quotations includes lines from Beckett's *The Unamable*.

Ben-Zvi suggests that Mauthner's central project – to reveal the inadequacy of language through language-use – was an important precursor of Beckett's drama and fiction. 'By reducing knowledge to speaking, [Mauthner] suggested that the writer could merely allow characters to speak and their words would become signs, not of knowledge, but rather of the failure of knowledge. Instead of being about anything, words would indicate the very impossibility of moving beyond language.'²³ To my ears, this comes close to the gentle humour of Mahler's Wunderhorn songs and the more incisive irony of the Scherzo movements he developed from them: going on, like an over-loquacious character in a novel by Beckett, is a powerful means by which Mahler uses (musical) language to indict itself.²⁴

The three volumes of Mauthner's *Beiträge* appeared in 1901–02, but were written over the preceding decade or so, which makes this project contemporary with the Wunderhorn Lieder and Mahler's first four symphonies. I am not proposing any direct influence here: there is no evidence that Mahler knew either

²¹ Ben-Zvi, 'Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner and the Limits of Language'.

²² *Ibid.*, 183.

²³ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁴ A good example is the Wunderhorn song, 'Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?!'.

Mauthner or his work, nor was Mauthner involved directly in Viennese intellectual life (he grew up in Prague and lived in Berlin from 1895). There are, nevertheless, some fascinating parallels. Both men were born into Jewish families living in German-speaking cities in Bohemia (Mauthner was born in Hořice in 1849, but his family moved to Prague when he was five). His own account of having to speak several different languages (and thus fulfil several different identities), sound uncannily like Mahler's:

I cannot understand how a Jew born in a Slavonic land of the Austrian Empire could not be drawn to the study of language. In those days... he learned to understand three languages at once: German as the language of civil servants, of culture [Bildung], poetry, and polite society; Czech as the language of peasants and servant girls, and as the historical language of the glorious kingdom of Bohemia; a little Hebrew as the sacred language of the Old Testament and as the basis of *Mauscheldeutsch* that he heard not only from the Jewish hawkers, but occasionally also from quite well-dressed Jewish businessmen of his society, or even from relatives.²⁵

Mauthner's early writings included literary parodies of some of the key figures of his day, later published in 1897 as *Nach berühmten Mustern*.²⁶ Though these were quite separate from his later philosophical works on language, his critical attitude towards language use, demonstrated in his facility at parody, anticipates the 'readings' of Karl Kraus as a means of critiquing the language of journalism. It also overlaps with the charge of *Kapellmeistermusik* that was often levelled at Mahler by hostile critics.

There were also more direct points of contact with literary modernism in Vienna. After Hugo von Hofmannsthal published his *Chandos-Brief* in a Berlin newspaper, in October 1902, he received a letter from Fritz Mauthner, eager to draw parallels with his own work.²⁷ What Mauthner had explored at great length in the *Beiträge*, Hofmannsthal had given succinct expression to in his fictional letter, setting out an author's terror at the crumbling of language. Hofmannsthal, no less than Mauthner or the later Beckett, was writing out his own crisis of language: 'what am I doing with words, when I have renounced them!', exclaims Lord Chandos at one point, underlining the artist's inevitable cycle of renunciation and 'carrying on'.²⁸ And in place of language use, what does Chandos find? When he steps out of language, gives up on the agony of wrestling with it, he finds consolation in a kind of epiphanic unity with the world around him. His description might recall those 'paradisial' interludes in Mahler's music that step out of the main symphonic discourse: 'I feel an enchanting, quite

²⁵ Cited from Mauthner's autobiography, *Prager Jugendjahre*, pp. 21–33, in Elizabeth Bredeck, *Metaphors of Knowledge: Language and Thought in Mauthner's Critique* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992): 17.

²⁶ This includes a parody of Wagner, in a piece titled, 'Der unbewusste Ahasverus oder Das Ding an sich als Wille und Vortstellung. Bühnen-Weh-Festpiel in drei Handlungen'. See Almut Vierhufe, *Parodie und Sprachkritik: Untersuchungen zu Fritz Mauthners "Nach berühmten Mustern"* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999): 93ff.

²⁷ See Martin Stern, ed., 'Der Briefwechsel Hofmannsthal–Fritz Mauthner', *Hofmannsthal-Blätter* 19–20 (1978), cited in Michael Morton 'Silence Audible: Mauthner, Hofmannsthal, Wittgenstein, and the Vindication of Language', in *Fictions of Culture: Essays in Honor of Walter H. Sokel*, ed. Steven Taubeneck (New York: Peter Lang, 1991): 215–43.

²⁸ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, trans. Michael Hoffman (London: Syrens, 1995): 14.

limitless counterpoint within me and around me, and among the substances playing against one another, there is none into which I could not flow.²⁹

There is, to repeat, no question of influence here; as Michael Morton says, what Mauthner represented was 'a particularly extreme...expression of a direction of thought already being reflected in one way or another in much of the philosophy and literature of the period.'³⁰ Mauthner himself failed to see any connection between his own work and that of contemporary literature (reflecting a distaste for modern poetry shared by Mahler). But his friend, Gustav Landauer, in his *Skepsis und Mystik* of 1903, underlined 'deeper connections between [Mauthner's] critique of language and the poets Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Richard Dehmel, and Alfred Mombert.'³¹ For music historians this is a striking list, since it includes those poets who were vital to the move towards atonality in the first decade of the twentieth century in the work of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg and Strauss. What Landauer identified in both Mauthner's *Sprachkritik* and the work of modern poets, was a defining concern with the 'unsayable' or, put more accurately, a use of language that was dedicated to revealing its limitations as a strategy for implying a content beyond them.

As Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin make clear, the field of *Sprachkritik* was very wide. It was a project which embraced such diverse figures as Mauthner, Kraus, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Kafka, Musil and Broch – not all of them working in Vienna – and, of course, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Much has been made of the polarised readings of the latter's great *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, published in 1922 but formulated during the years of World War I. Widely taken up afterwards by Anglo-American philosophy, as a demonstration of how the majority of traditional philosophical questions (including the whole of metaphysics) lay outside a rigidly logical use of language and were thus deemed 'nonsense', the same work has also been read as an attempt to separate out those aspects of knowledge and experience that language can deal with adequately from those that it cannot, but with the implication that all the most important questions pertained to the latter. Janik and Toulmin cite a telling letter from Wittgenstein to Ludwig Ficker, suggesting that the *Tractatus* might have been prefaced by the lines: 'My work consists in two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one.'³²

While 'Wittgenstein's Vienna' was also Mahler's Vienna, the two men might seem to have little in common.³³ The terse style of Wittgenstein's philosophy could hardly be further in tone and method from Mahler's music, and Wittgenstein, in later life, was brusquely dismissive of Mahler's music.³⁴ It may well be that his

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.16.

³⁰ Morton, 'Silence Audible', 221.

³¹ Cited in Morton, 224.

³² Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973): 192.

³³ Janik's and Toulmin's claim, that Mahler was a *regular* visitor to the Palais Wittgenstein between 1897 and 1907, has since been refuted, but Mahler was certainly a guest there on occasion. On the musical nature of the Wittgenstein family, see Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 170–75.

³⁴ In a note from 1948, Wittgenstein referred to Mahler's symphonies as 'worthless'. See *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989): 67e. Instead, he praised the music of Josef Labor, composer and organist, friend of the Wittgenstein family and the first composition teacher of the young Alma Schindler (62e).

antipathy derived from hearing in Mahler's music the very 'babble' of contemporary language-use that he sought to address in his own philosophical work. More obvious parallels might be found between Wittgenstein and Schoenberg: both pursued a path to purify the use of language by means of a ruthless logic, excising anything that was inessential, and believing that they had found a solution to the problems of their respective disciplines.³⁵ Schoenberg was later to reflect back on the consequences of this uncompromising ethical stance in his essay 'How one becomes lonely', a position that recalls Ernest Gellner's description of the *Tractatus* as 'a poem to solitude.'³⁶ Gellner refers repeatedly to what he calls 'Wittgenstein's autism' in the insulated, inert and isolated world of language of the *Tractatus*, a metaphor that might extend to the twelve-tone music of Schoenberg, with its obsessive ordering of objects into the lines and columns of the row table.³⁷

For all their differences, Schoenberg inherited the same historical problems of Austro-German musical language with which Mahler had wrestled. Wittgenstein's insistence that the unwritten 'other' part of the *Tractatus* was the most important one, calls to mind Schoenberg's vast unfinished oratorio *Die Jakobsleiter*, itself indebted to Mahler's Eighth Symphony. Part 1, which was completed, is in one sense a series of propositions (made by its different characters) about adequate ways of being in the world, and thus a kind of critique. This 'ladder' of different positions is both metaphysical and at the same time linguistic, in that the gradual process of ascent is achieved in part by a changing language.³⁸ The assumption of the departed soul in the concluding bars of Part I is realized musically by devices that pre-empt Schoenberg's formal adoption of the twelve-tone method in 1923. Part II of the oratorio was never written, despite Schoenberg's attempt to return to it on several occasions in later life. The text, written years earlier, makes it clear why this depiction of a heavenly state was ultimately 'uncomposable'.

For Mauthner, the endpoint of the odyssey of language critique was a state of 'learned ignorance'³⁹ akin to a process of Socratic irony, in which the assumptions of language are gradually taken apart in order to arrive at a state of innocence: 'The lowest form of knowledge is in language; the higher in laughter; the last one is in the critique of language, in the heavenly stillness and gaiety of resignation and renunciation.'⁴⁰ Such a condition might come close to the condition that Mahler's music often seeks, marked outwardly by deliberate simplicity, humour, gentle

³⁵ Wittgenstein claimed he had found a 'final solution' to the problems of philosophy with the *Tractatus*; at around the same time, Schoenberg claimed that his Method would define German music for the next hundred years.

³⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 46.

³⁷ Janik and Toulmin suggest a close parallel between Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* and Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*. See *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 107.

³⁸ Wittgenstein employs the metaphor of a ladder at the end of the *Tractatus* (6.54): 'My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)' See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981): 189. Mauthner had made use of the same metaphor earlier in his *Beiträge*.

³⁹ Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 126.

⁴⁰ Mauthner, *Beiträge III*, 634, cited in Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 177.

irony and naïveté. Mauthner's statement, in the closing pages of his vast *Beiträge*, that 'the most profound language is only the stammering of a child',⁴¹ was exactly contemporary with Mahler's use of the child-like voice of 'Das himmlische Leben' as the closing movement of the Fourth Symphony.

It is perhaps significant that the *Kindertotenlieder* were begun in the same year, 1901, that Mahler gave the premieres of his Fourth Symphony and his early cantata, *Das klagende Lied*. All three works are concerned with the voices of children, but under the shadow of death. In the Scherzo of the Fourth, death intrudes as 'Freud Hain', and Mahler suggested that the slow movement shows 'where death has led us', before the Finale presents the transfigured voice of a child in heaven.⁴² *Das klagende Lied* has, at its centre, the idea of a child's voice silenced by death, only to be restored momentarily through the mysterious bone flute. In the *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler brings together two extremes – childhood as the symbol of idyllic plenitude, and death as its irrevocable loss. In the gap between them, his music explores, with particular intensity, a catastrophic breaking of the voice. In fact, the *Kindertotenlieder* present two categories of speechlessness. There is the silence of the children themselves, robbed of speech by death, but also the stuttering of the bereaved. After Stéphane Mallarmé's young son Anatole died at the age of eight, in 1879, the poet tried and failed to write out his grief in a completed poem. The 210 loose sheets he left behind were published posthumously as *Pour un tombeau d'Anatole*. What is striking about these fragmentary notes is not just the words, but the huge silences between them, the brokenness of the poet's voice in failing to find form for the father's grief.⁴³ By contrast, Friedrich Rückert, after the death of two of his children in December 1833 and January 1834, could not stop writing. His collection of *Kindertodtenlieder*, written over the following six months, runs to some 425 separate poems (again, published posthumously).⁴⁴

Like the Ninth and Tenth Symphonies, or 'Der Abschied', Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* begin after the catastrophe, with the voice having already been silenced. Like those late works, these songs are concerned with trying to recover a lost voice, to speak in spite of the brokenness of the voice. In the face of death itself, this music nevertheless attempts to construct a fragile line between the despair of voicelessness and the recollection, through sound, of a lost presence. Mahler's music might be heard to bear out a comment of Giorgio Agamben: 'People are born without speech. They were once and are ever in-fants (from

⁴¹ Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1902): 650.

⁴² Mahler's title for the third movement is given in Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897–1904)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 766. For an extended discussion of childhood and death in Mahler see Raymond Knapp, 'Suffering Children: Perspectives on Innocence and Vulnerability in Mahler's Fourth Symphony', *19th-Century Music* 22 (1998–9): 233–67.

⁴³ See Patrick McGuinness, Introduction to *Stéphane Mallarmé: For Anatole's Tomb* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003): vii–x.

⁴⁴ Massimo Cacciari suggests that Rückert's literary art was already self-reflective: 'His language game is contemporary with Schopenhauer's pessimism about classical and romantic conceptions of art. That is, by now art can be nothing but cultural reworking, virtuoso philology, a linguistic game – despairing, finally, of any ethical or existential content ancillary to Nirvana. It is this *essential* despair that Mahler finds in Rückert's poetry.' See *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point*, trans. Roger Friedman (Stanford: California University Press, 1996): 52.

Latin, 'without speech').⁴⁵ The speechlessness of infants becomes a category of Mahler's music, the opposite pole to the breaking of the voice in ironic self-critique, but one that comes out to meet it. And just as the breaking of the voice is heard as sound, before any consideration of syntax, style or structure, so too is the plenitude of a pre-linguistic voice of childhood.

This is made thematic in the Fourth Symphony, and returns as central to the Eighth. The soprano part, in the Finale of the Fourth, is marked by the composer 'to be sung with childlike and serene expression; absolutely without parody!'. This is the tone through which Mahler presents something unrepresentable: 'kein Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden', the soprano sings, and yet in a song that we *do* hear on earth. Mahler may draw on the all-too-familiar materials of Austrian folk music, but distanced and illuminated here, as also in Part II of the Eighth Symphony, where such a tone serves as the voice of angels. The vision of the Virgin Mary [Fig. 106] they precede, is represented by a wordless song, a simple violin melody heard over a harp accompaniment. Like the ending of the Fourth, (also in E major), this music functions like a lullaby, a pre-vocal sonority, in Agamben's sense of the voicelessness of infants. Of course, its immediacy borders dangerously on the sentimental;⁴⁶ but that is Mahler's gamble – in juxtaposing the breaking of the voice with a fragile revocation of its loss, couched as a memory of childhood, he deploys a musical language loaded with an 'expression that it is no longer constituted to bear.'⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cited by Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 97.

⁴⁶ 'The feeling persists that Mahler's ascent towards the inexpressible belongs as much with Puccini and Massenet as with Goethe.' John Williamson, 'The Eighth Symphony', in *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 417.

⁴⁷ Theodor Adorno, see note 1.