

Rhythmic Transformation
in the Adagio
of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony


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WHAT FOLLOWS is an attempt to apply to symphonic rhythmic structure the same kind of large scale analysis that has frequently been applied to nineteenth-century harmonic structure. Music both is and is not a natural language, to different degrees and at different times; and it is assumed here that in addition to the natural and intuitive use of rhythmic factors in shaping climaxes and points of repose, there is also a part rhythm plays in defining the meaning of a piece of music, that which is represented in the music and which speaks to human experience.

The method of analysis used here is based, to an extent, on that outlined by Wallace Berry in his Structural Functions in Music. The concepts of progression and recession (as tension-building and tension-releasing) have been retained, as well as his symbols for indicating accentuation and some of his methods of taking into account complementary and compensatory independent parametrical changes, and their effect on rhythm.

The Adagio of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony has been chosen for two reasons. One is Bruckner's uniqueness among symphonic composers in that his rhythmic^{interest} tends to be on a large level, and we can deal directly with that level without getting bogged down in Schumannesque syncopations or Brahmsian hemiolas. I think that the major problem that

our Chopin-bred musicians often have in approaching Bruckner is exactly this tendency of his to have little rhythmic interest on a level smaller than the measure. Just as the rhythmic focus must contract in moving from Schumann to classical Indian music, it must expand to comprehend Bruckner. Secondly, this Adagio has been chosen as having a uniquely outwardly complex rhythmic profile within Bruckner's output. Four and eight-measure phrases are extremely common in Bruckner's music, and the unusual $3\frac{1}{2}$ measure phrase which opens each major section of this movement creates a significant departure from nineteenth-century norms.

THE ADAGIO of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony has two historical connections with his musical heritage. Many commentators have pointed out the similarity in structure and rhythmic character between this movement and the Adagio of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Considering how much Bruckner owed stylistically to this symphony, conscious patterning seems probable. The most obvious similarities consist of the form: ABABA+Coda, the A's being in 4/4 meter and the B's in 3/4, and the use of regular four-bar phrases and the rhythm  in the B sections.

The second connection is with Wagner. The inspiration for the first theme, Bruckner claimed, came to him after a visit to the Master in which he realized Wagner would soon die. The first draft of the Adagio was completed on Jan. 23, 1883. Wagner died on Feb. 13, after which Bruckner revised the coda, increasing its length. The Adagio shares a phrase in common with the "Te Deum", which Bruckner

worked on concurrently. This phrase is a setting of the part of the "Te Deum" which is concerned with death: "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." The first draft of the "Te Deum" was written between 1881 and 1884, and no material accessible to this writer indicates in which work the phrase was first used. Nevertheless, the connection increases the probable depth of the association in Bruckner's mind between the Adagio music and the idea of death.

This connection with the death of Wagner may seem irrelevant to the task of rhythmic analysis. I would like to suggest, though, that the existential crises and realizations of a man's life and deep, structural analysis of his music can cast mutual light on each other, especially when the man is as sensitive a soul as Bruckner.

It has been noted that the form of the Adagio is ABABA with a coda. Most of the combined A material is derived from the two phrases contained in the first $7\frac{1}{2}$ measures. (See page 4.) The first phrase has the definite character of an antecedent and consequent. The antecedent is two measures in length, implying a similar length in the consequent. The second phrase, however, begins a half note "too early", cutting off the consequent by half a measure. If the first two quarter notes of the second phrase (m. 4) are considered an upbeat, then the rhythmic groupings continue regularly enough, but several factors render this interpretation difficult. The first such factor is the sudden "mf" on the third beat of m. 4, along with the entrance of both violin sections at this point. The interpretation of this third beat as an initiative is verified in retrospect by the occurrence of some sort of accentuation on each third beat in mm. 6, 7, 8, and 9. The third beat

first phrase usually applied to whole phrases rather than semi-phrases

Handwritten musical score system 1. The system consists of two staves. The left staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The right staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in 4/4 time. The left staff contains a series of eighth notes, with a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The right staff contains a series of eighth notes, with a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The tempo marking 'Adagio' is written at the bottom left. The dynamics 'cresc.' and 'dim.' are written above the staves.

Handwritten musical score system 2. The system consists of two staves. The left staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The right staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in 4/4 time. The left staff contains a series of eighth notes, with a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The right staff contains a series of eighth notes, with a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The dynamics 'cresc.' and 'dim.' are written above the staves.

Handwritten musical score system 3. The system consists of two staves. The left staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The right staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in 4/4 time. The left staff contains a series of eighth notes, with a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The right staff contains a series of eighth notes, with a circled '3' indicating a triplet. The dynamics 'cresc.' and 'dim.' are written above the staves.

of m. 6 is the high point of the melody. That of m. 7 combines the lowest point of the phrase, a change of key (f^\sharp to A), and the greatest change in amount of pitch space so far. The third beat of m. 8 is marked by an upward leap of a seventh, and that of m. 9 by a rest, a leaping pickup note, and the most distant change of key yet encountered in the movement. Contrastingly, the first beat of m. 7 receives accentuation from the entrance of horns and lower strings, but the effect is greatly vitiated by a sudden dynamic marking of "p".

The conflict between the clearly accented third beats in the second phrase and the meter and the implied two and four-measure phrase structure of the first phrase creates a rhythmic dissonance and an ambiguity concerning the second phrase; specifically, whether the third beat of m. 4 is the initiative and structural downbeat of the phrase, or whether the first two chords are to be heard as an upbeat to m. 5. As a creator of rhythmic dissonance, the phrase has a progressive, tension-producing character. For the first two measures, the second phrase is also harmonically progressive, moving chromatically from consonant triads in E major through an unresolved V^7/c^\sharp and ending on an unresolved V^7/f^\sharp .

The dissonant and intensifying form of the second phrase is thrown into sharper relief by comparison with the use of the same phrase in the "Te Deum". (See p. 6, lower example.) Here the phrase is very square, beginning on the first beat of the measure, and its accentual pattern in the large scale rhythmic structure is entirely unambiguous. The function of the phrase is very different here, as it occurs at the end of the piece, where the rhythmic dissonance would

Handwritten musical score for a piano piece. The score is written on two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of notes with various dynamics and articulations. The second staff continues the melody with similar notation. Dynamics include 'p' (piano), 'mf' (mezzo-forte), 'cresc.' (crescendo), and 'dim.' (diminuendo). There are also markings like '3' for a triplet and 'etc.' at the end of the piece.

TE DEUM

Handwritten musical score for a Te Deum. The score is written on two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of notes with various dynamics and articulations. The second staff continues the melody with similar notation. Dynamics include 'p' (piano), 'mf' (mezzo-forte), 'cresc.' (crescendo), and 'dim.' (diminuendo). There are also markings like '3' for a triplet and 'etc.' at the end of the piece.

be less appropriate.

Bruckner could have easily used the 'non confundar' phrase in the symphony in the same guise as in the "Te Deum", by inserting a half note pause after the first phrase. (See p. 6, upper example.) Such pauses are very common in Bruckner's early style; the Fifth Symphony, in particular, is replete with examples. That this rhythmically consonant version is still stylistically Brucknerian underlines the urgency that Bruckner wanted to express with this muted setting of 'non confundar in aeternum'.

I submit that the basic compositional problem of this Adagio (which, of course, has its own subsidiary relation to the problem of the entire symphony) is the transformation of the 'non confundar' motive from a progressive event into a recessive one, or in other words the large-scale resolution of the rhythmic dissonance. This is accomplished through both rhythmic and harmonic means, and in three stages corresponding to the three A sections.

THE POINTS AT WHICH the compositional problem is dealt with more or less significantly are indicated by a comparison of the rhythmic factors which shape the climaxes and areas of repose in the movement. The chart on pp. 8 and 8a gives an overview of the rhythmic shape of the A sections. Rhythmic activity on three levels has been outlined: the general attack tempo of the smallest values; the chord-to-chord harmonic rhythm; and the rate at which new pitches are tonicized, along with the distance between the tonal systems involved.

Some explanation is necessary of the measurement of tonal distance

Bruckner: Symphony No. 7, Adagio

A₁:

Harmonic Rhythm
Tonal Rhythm
Tonal Distance
Motives Used
Predominant Attack
Tempo

Measure	5	10	15	20
Harmonic Rhythm	c#	c#	c#	c#
Tonal Rhythm	E	F#	(A)	F#
Tonal Distance	1	2	4	4
Motives Used	1	2	4	1
Predominant Attack	1	2	4	1
Tempo	1	2	4	1

A₂:

Harmonic Rhythm
Tonal Rhythm
Tonal Distance
Motives Used
Predominant Attack
Tempo

Measure	77	80	85	90	95	100
Harmonic Rhythm	c#	c#	c#	c#	c#	c#
Tonal Rhythm	E	F#	(A)	F#	b	D
Tonal Distance	1	2	2	3	1	2
Motives Used	1	2	1	2	2	4
Predominant Attack	1	2	1	2	2	5
Tempo	1	2	1	2	2	3

A₃:

Harmonic Rhythm
Tonal Rhythm
Tonal Distance
Motives Used
Predominant Attack
Tempo

Measure	157	160	165	170	175	180
Harmonic Rhythm	c#	c#	c#	c#	c#	c#
Tonal Rhythm	E	F#	A	dF	A	F#
Tonal Distance	1	2	1	32	1	4
Motives Used	1	2	1	32	1	4
Predominant Attack	1	2	1	32	1	4
Tempo	1	2	1	32	1	4

25 \updownarrow 30 \updownarrow 35

(F#) V/B^b V/F# /

↓ ↓

105 110 115 120 125 130

C e C c V/F V/F# V/G E^b F A^b E F F# G

5 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

1. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2.

(Inversion)

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

185

D^b c#

5 2

2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2. 2.

↑

Coda

used here. Of the criteria for tonal distance suggested by Berry, I have used only one: intersection with regard to key signature, keeping in mind the raised leading tone in minor tonalities. The structure of Bruckner's music frequently, as in the present Adagio, involves the juxtaposition of tonalities without the use of pivot chords or nested layers of tonal systems, except in a very large sense. Through the great majority of this movement, it can be easily specified of each chord to which tonal system ^{it belongs} it belongs. The ten key changes which occur between mm. 9 and 18 illustrate this point well. For this reason such criteria of tonal distance as accessibility of the dominant, intersection of chords, etc., can be ignored, to a point; the complex phenomena for which they account rarely come into play. There are exceptions, such as the first few measures of each A section; and at times the interchangeability of major and minor mode creates complications. However, the incidence of such exceptions is always associated with modulations to very close tonalities, and the part of the graph which indicates tonal distance tends to be more accurate towards the higher part of the range, at values 4 and 5.

As indicated by the chart, the rate of tonal change in the first A section accelerates to m. 18 and then slows down considerably for the remainder of the section. The general harmonic rhythm, however, remains fairly constant until m. 23, where the tonal rhythm is at its slowest. The harmony and tonality are both very static at m. 27ff., where the attack tempo finally starts to reach its peak. In short, each aspect of the overall rhythm progresses to a climactic point and then recedes, but they do so independently, and the feeling of climax at m. 27 is

due to orchestration and high pitch range, and is vitiated by other factors.

The second A section is in two parts, the second one beginning at m. 101 with the inversion of the opening theme. The first part develops the opening phrase, and the second part the 'non confundar' phrase. In the first part, tonal rhythm accelerates to m. 91, and then slows down, while harmonic rhythm decelerates from m. 80 and attack tempo generally increases. A climax is marked out at m. 101 by the greatest attack tempo so far, a modulation from F[#] to C, a long period of tonal stability (discounting the major-minor change), and a much accelerated harmonic rhythm after m. 103. From m. 109, for the first time, all four factors progress towards a climax at m. 127. The complementarity of all parameters at this point creates the first climax of the piece with a sense of arrival, followed by recessive tendencies in every parameter.

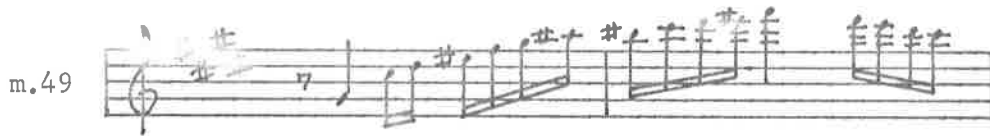
The third A section begins with the fastest attack tempo of the movement, which remains constant. All other parameters are progressive to m. 172, where begins the preparation for the climax of the movement. This climax is more convincing than that of the second A section due to orchestration and the increased tonal rhythm leading up to it, as well as the greater attack tempo. Note that the tonal distance in this section helps define the beginnings of phrases. The true climax finally occurs at m. 177 with the cymbal crash and the resolution of the German sixth; from this point all parameters are recessive.

To condense the parametrical comparisons on the chart into a few words, the first A section (let us call it A₁) has no convincing climax,

A₂ has a quasi climax at m. 101 and a real one at m. 127, and A₃ has the best-prepared climax in the section between mm. 172 and 180. The shape suggested by this parametrical analysis can serve as a guide in following the treatment and final resolution of the 'non confundar' theme.

The B sections and coda have not figured in the analysis so far, and little will be said of them, for the reason that they do not figure in the development of the 'non confundar' theme. Nevertheless, a few things should be pointed out. With regard to the compositional problem of the movement, the B sections serve the purpose of a contrasting section separating the climaxes from the beginnings of the next stages of development. Each B section consists of regular four measure phrases. B₁ is ten such phrases and changes key very little; B₂ is in six phrases and modulates somewhat more often. Taken as a whole, then, they are rhythmically progressive, leading up to the final A section. The formal equilibrium of the B sections forms a much needed contrast to the irregularity and urgency of the A sections. This equilibrium is aided by an internal device: there is a feeling of 3/2 meter imposed by the melody in many of the two measure groupings. This is usually accomplished by an accent of range or note duration on the second beat of each second measure:





This device deemphasizes the downbeat of the second measure of each group, and broadens the sense of time flow.

The coda is basically a long prolongation of the subdominant, an important key in the movement. Rhythmically, it has a character predictable in an adagio coda. Attack tempo and harmonic rhythm both decelerate to a virtual standstill. The 'non confundar' motive is not used as such after m. 188.

WE ARE NOW READY to turn to the gradual clarification and resolution of the rhythmic ambiguity of the 'non confundar' phrase. In A₁ the phrase is accentually ambiguous, and remains displaced by a half note, ending on the second beat of m. 9. Bruckner deals with this displacement by adding a one measure episodic phrase, the repetition of which is interrupted in the middle with a new phrase beginning on the first beat of m. 11. (See p. 4.) That is to say, he doesn't deal with the 'non confundar' phrase at all, but leaves it in its rhythmic dissonance and ambiguity, using filler material to restore the expectations of metrical regularity. The remainder of this A section is completely unambiguous rhythmically, at least on a one- or two-measure level.

The second A section begins similarly to the first. This time, however, the beginning of a new phrase is dove-tailed with the

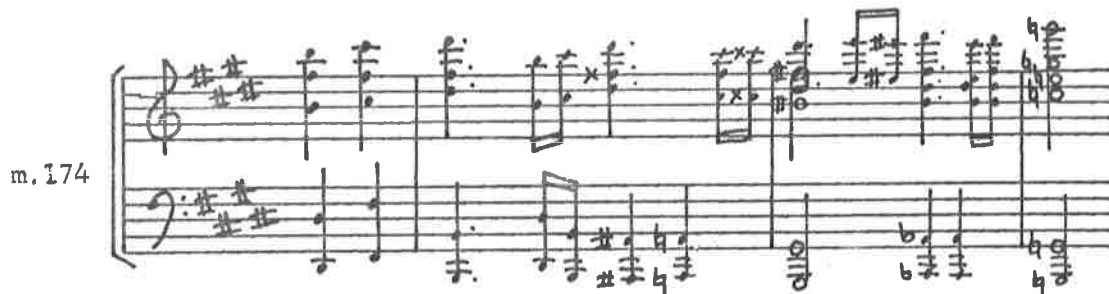
extension of the 'non confundar' phrase to restore the primacy of the downbeat. In other words, at m. 84, what had been a full one-measure extension of the basic four-measure phrase in A_1 is shortened to a half note extension. Obviously, the second phrase has not been affected here.

After the development of the first phrase, the opening theme returns in inversion at m. 101. The 'non confundar' phrase begins in the middle of m. 104, and here the two upbeat quarter notes are hidden in a diminuendo and not treated as part of the succeeding phrase. The flute announces a new initiative at the downbeat of m. 105. The ambiguity of the phrase has been merely sidestepped. Then, at m. 113, a V^7 of G major is held for three half notes instead of the expected two, and the 'non confundar' motive begins on the third beat of m. 114. The phrase immediately recurs five more times, each time starting on the third beat of the measure, and each phrase is set off by instrumentation and dynamics. Here there is no ambiguity - the initiative of each phrase is on the third beat of a measure, where the greatest parametrical changes occur; and there are virtually no aural clues that the beginning of the phrase is not the beginning of the measure. This rhythmic dissonance must be resolved, and the solution here is very simple. At the climax, m. 127, an orchestral tutti occurs on the downbeat, and on that of m. 128 as well. This device restores the correct feeling of the downbeat, but needless to say, the phrase itself is not affected in its rhythmic construction. This tutti deals with the rhythmic problem, but in a very superficial manner.

The 'non confundar' phrase occurred only once in A_1 , occupied half of A_2 , and will now be the sole concern of A_3 . This increasing preoccupation is another large scale progressive factor. After the usual statement of the opening and 'non confundar' phrases, the latter is immediately developed through increasing tonal rhythm and distances, and always starting on the third beat. Finally, at m. 172, the B major statement of the motive occurs in a harmonically recessive, non-modulating version:



The phrase has been resolved harmonically, but the rhythmic dissonance is still present. The theme is now repeated in its original harmonic form, moving to a V^7 of c^\sharp . At this point, an extra half measure is added which simultaneously serves a harmonic and rhythmic function: it allows the melody to move into position to resolve as a German sixth to C major, at the same time throwing the resolution of the chord onto the first beat of m. 177:



This is the climax marked by the famous cymbal crash; it could conceivably

be considered the climax of the entire symphony, since this Adagio dwarfs the two movements which follow it. The continuation of the 'non confundar' phrase is now perfectly consonant in both harmony and rhythm:



This was impossible until both harmony and rhythm had been transformed and their true meaning revealed.

The 'non confundar' motive, though resolved, is not finished. At m. 182 it reënters sneakily in D^b major, starting on the second half of the third beat. Finally, at m. 184, it enters on the third beat in c[#] minor, and in its old form; and from here it dissolves into the funereal strains of the coda written in memory of Wagner.

NOW THAT THE ANALYSIS has been carried this far, it might be of interest to review the structure of the Adagio in light of its supposed connection with Wagner's death. The present day, average, American music-lover, with a prejudice against musical hermeneutics, is probably inclined to see in this connection no more than a broad expression of a vague emotion. The Adagio is a lament, written in a funereal style because Bruckner was very sad, and slow, minor-key music is appropriate to sadness.

In talking about a man's reaction to death, however, we are talking about dealing with a sense of loss. In everyday human experience, the loss of something cherished is an obstacle which frustrates our desires and energies. A great enough loss can keep us from functioning, and is therefore a problem which must be resolved. Often our first attempts to deal with a loss are superficial and indicate an inability to see the loss and our relation to it exactly as they are. For this correct vision, this realization, to occur, the event of the loss must be transformed by a deeper understanding or a change of viewpoint, so that the loss can cease to be an obstacle and instead spur us to further action, liberating our energies into constructive channels. The source of tension must become an opportunity for release.

This process of transformation is mirrored perfectly in the Adagio. In the first stage, the dissonant and disquieting doubt: *non confundar in aeternum* - is ignored and not referred to (directly) again, although its appearance necessitates eventual resolution. After a period of rest, the motive reappears and is dealt with in several superficial ways; the last of these has an appearance of finality, although the experience itself has not been restructured. After another period of rest, all concerns are set aside except for the disturbing motive, and it is at last transformed from its core into a recessive, tension-releasing experience.

Weight is lent to the hermeneutic by the reappearance of the 'non confundar' motive after the climax in its original form. In fact, Bruckner would have been guilty of falsifying human experience

had the motive not reappeared in its dissonant form. For the human truth is that these existential moments of vision are not final. We invariably fall back into our everyday inauthenticity, although with the difference that the moment of vision can provide a foundation of faith underlying our inauthentic state of mind.

However one wants to construe the relation of Wagner's death to all this, and even if one wants to leave it out entirely, what is clearly represented is a transformation from tension into release, of which the overcoming of a sense of loss is one of the most common examples in human life. It is the isomorphism between the musical process and the existential one which provides the possibility of the Seventh Symphony's relevance to any human listener. And since artists are quite often people who deal with life more effectively through their medium than in the real world, perhaps this Adagio was involved in a very real way with Bruckner's acceptance of death.

an elegant summation!

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