Questioning The Limits Of The Deductive Approach Attempted By The Samale-Phillips-Cohrs-Mazzuca (Spcm) Scholars' Group And Exploring Possibilities To Overcome Them

Sébastien Letocart

"Rules do not make a work of art" – Claude Debussy

Each realization of the Finale of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony inevitably falls short of what Bruckner himself could have achieved, especially a Bruckner in full possession of his intellectual powers. As a composer who has completed a version of the Finale[1], my intention was to strike a balance between strict adherence to the manuscript sources and reasonable speculative composition, avoiding the implementation of unnecessary extraneous material. Achieving perfection in this is an impossible task but the goal is to attain the highest level of inspiration, considering the inherently transcendent nature of the music. This inspiration had to stem from a deep understanding of the composer's compositional techniques, which served as a guiding force for every aspect of the work. I subjected myself to rigorous self-criticism when faced with the gaps in the exposition, development, and recapitulation sections and maximum combinatory imagination regarding the coda.

John Alan Phillips, a member of the SPCM, published an article last year in The Bruckner Journal[2] discussing the final completion of Finale that he had been collaborating on with the group for many years. Phillips apparently had divergences of opinion with fellow member Cohrs in 2006 and began pursuing his own path in 2012. The objective of his paper is the following:

> "[…] to put on the record (yet again) what exactly the surviving MSS of the Finale represent, how a credible reconstruction and completion of the movement can be achieved, and, indeed, why we should do so."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

Between 2021 and 2022, Phillips uploaded a number of YouTube videos presenting his own revised completion. Specifically, within the context of the London Philharmonic's rendition of the 9th symphony in four movements, conducted by Robin Ticciati and performed towards the conclusion of 2022, my reference pertains to the latest accessible video found on Phillips' YouTube channel.[3]

This completion of the Ninth Symphony, initially conceived in 1982/83, has undergone a substantial number of revisions. Its premiere began with a recording in 1985, helmed by Eliahu Inbal and performed by the RSO Frankfurt. Subsequent revisions ensued in 1992, 1996, 2006, 2008, 2012, and most recently, from 2021 to 2022. These revisions have surpassed the extent to which Bruckner himself would have dared to alter his own symphonies. The scholars involved in these revisions have displayed an increasing zeal compared to the original model of such a task, with their primary focus directed towards modifying the structural elements of the central fugue's missing section, the transitional phase leading to the coda, and the gradual truncation of the coda itself throughout these successive revisions.

> "So the current revision represents, for better or worse, my final views on the work. That is not to say the changes made here are in any way subjective; they have only been undertaken because they can be fairly claimed to represent advances in stylistic credibility, accuracy and authenticity."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

I conducted a thorough examination of Phillips' paper, scrutinizing the musicological arguments he put forth. My intention was to discover new insights pertaining to the unresolved Finale. Unfortunately, I found no such revelations.

Let us now embark on a comprehensive analysis, delving into the intricate components of the score, the stylistic attributes, and the numerous statements made by Phillips.

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[1] "Bruckner 9th symphony – completion of the Finale", Sébastien Letocart. https://tinyurl.com/LetocartB9Finale

[2] "The 'SPCM' Finale of Bruckner's Ninth Redux: Revision 2021-2022", John A Phillips. The Bruckner Journal, Vol. 26 no 3. https://tinyurl.com/TBJ26iiiPhillipsB9Finale

[3] "Bruckner: Ninth Symphony, Finale. SPCM Performing Version, revision 2021-22", John A Phillips. https://tinyurl.com/YTPhillipsB9Finale

About the notion of "forensic musicology"

> "Since the Finale originally existed as a highly organized, integral movement, any approach to its reconstruction or completion should be foremost via what could be termed "forensic musicology" – by using every possible scholarly resource to reconstruct it as accurately and faithfully as possible, rather than by what musicologist Peter Gülke once referred to as "*drauflosbrucknern*", treating the fragments as an opportunity for historical composition á la Bruckner. A more ethical attitude [*emphasis SL*] to a composer's legacy and to a work of this stature is needed."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

Can "forensic musicology" be deemed a dependable aesthetic tool for completing such a magnificent masterpiece? The numerous revisions undertaken by the involved parties did not derive from the unearthing of lost materials attributed to the composer, but rather from conjectures and hypotheses. The primary objective of musicology, like archeology, revolves around establishing factual evidence from accessible sources as a starting point. When composing in the style of another composer, an entirely distinct process must be adhered to, one that diligently draws upon not only the interpretable sources provided by musicology but also extends beyond its realm.

About Bruckner being a disciple of Simon Sechter following fundamental bass theory rules

> "Bruckner did not merely pass on the Viennese fundamental bass theory of his teacher Simon Sechter: he actively expanded it, adding, for example, ninths (five-note chords) to the triads and sevenths Sechter regarded as the *Stammakkorde* or essential chords of music. Bruckner's late works, especially the Ninth, his most dissonant, boldly explore the expressive possibilities of not only ninths, but elevenths and thirteenths. Bruckner even mentioned to his theory students in his final lectures at the University of Vienna the chords he was using in his Ninth. Its towering dissonances are not wilful conglomerations of notes but the expressive exploitation of the theoretical possibilities of Viennese fundamental bass theory, translating theoretical speculation into compositional resource. While unquestionably indebted to Wagner, Bruckner's advanced harmonic thinking, even in the Ninth, remains analyzable by Sechter's fundamental bass steps. Even the metrical periods underlying phrase structures (an important aspect of Sechter's thinking) formed an indissoluble part of Bruckner's theoretical contemplation of musical process; it is from this that the majestic, measured flow of his music derives."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

Simon Sechter, an esteemed theorist and pedagogue, holds a prominent position in the realm of music history. Noteworthy for his extensive collection of fugues and a three-volume treatise entitled "*Die Grundsätze der musikalischen Komposition*" (The Principles of Musical Composition), Sechter drew inspiration from Jean-Philippe Rameau's theory on fundamental bass, particularly the interplay between diatonicism and chromaticism. During Bruckner's studies with Sechter from 1855 to 1861, adherence to strict rules of "canonical composition" superseded any inclination towards imaginative, personal, or original creativity.

Subsequently, Sechter appointed Bruckner as his successor in Vienna, where Bruckner, in turn, imposed similar requirements on his own students: a prohibition on creative liberties. This approach was predicated on the students' developmental stage at the time. However, Bruckner humorously cautioned his pupils that if they were to persist in writing according to those same rules after a two-year interval, they would be promptly dismissed. An alternative rendition of this anecdote involves Bruckner jocularly admonishing his students, stating, "When you bring a work of yours to my class, you have to follow the rules. But if you bring one of your works following these same rules (implying those of Sechter!) when you visit me at home, I will kick your backside!" The English composer and great symphonist Robert Simpson once wrote the following: "Sechter unknowingly brought about Bruckner's originality by insisting that it be suppressed until it could no longer be contained."[4]

According to Phillips and Cohrs, there exists a notion that Bruckner may have assumed the role of a disciple under the tutelage of Simon Sechter, even in relation to his final and most daring composition. While it is undeniable that Bruckner held reverence for his professor, employing this association as a pretext to justify the foundations of a completion appears to be unfounded. Moreover, if such a claim were indeed valid, one

[4] *The Essence of Bruckner* by Robert Simpson, Robert Wilfred Levick Simpson Gollancz, 1967.

must inquire into the precise "techniques" that are identifiable within Bruckner's symphonies. What exactly did Bruckner "expand" in relation to these techniques? The thesis presented by Phillips in "*Bruckner's Ninth revisited: Towards the re-evaluation of a four-movement symphony*"[5] seems to lack the provision of a single satisfactory and convincing technical example supporting the assertions made in this regard.

> "While unquestionably indebted to Wagner, Bruckner's advanced harmonic thinking, even in the Ninth, remains analyzable by Sechter's fundamental bass steps."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

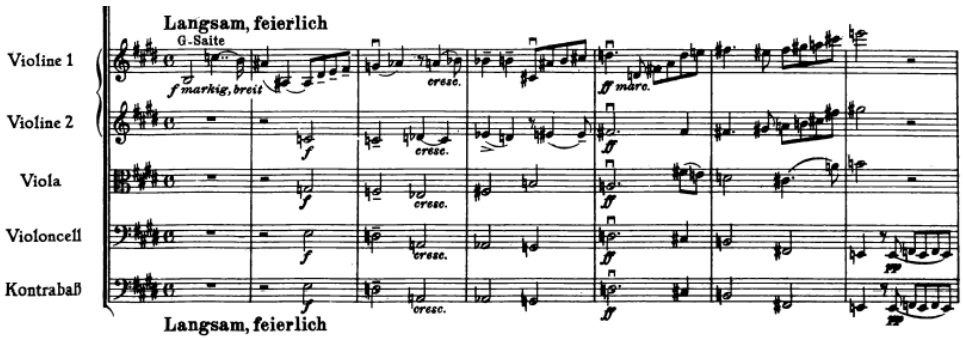
Sechter did not invent something particular or unique. On the contrary, it was basic and common practice at that time. It was more about learning usual mechanisms of tonal music through repetitive exercises than developing artistic originality. Analyzing tonal compositions has been a longstanding practice since the advent of basso continuo and the embodiment of baroque principles, wherein the verticality of the bass assumes prominence. However, the intricacy of Bruckner's musical language lies in his utilization of ancient church modes or allusions thereof, intermingled with diverse dissonances and chromaticism. It is through this interplay of elements that certain ambiguities, particularly evident in the Ninth Symphony, find their explanation within Bruckner's oeuvre.

> "the metrical numbers with which Bruckner underlaid every single bar of his sketches and scores reveal their placement within these metrical grids. In a standard eight-bar period, first and fifth bars carry most, third and seventh less, and even-numbered bars least weight."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

There are plenty of instances contradicting this assertion. Let's take a look at two examples:

- The first phrase of the adagio (third movement) exhibits notable characteristics worth examining. Notably, the presence of chromaticism in the third bar imparts a heightened sense of tension to the phrase. The fifth bar introduces the trumpet theme in D major, while the seventh bar serves as the climax of the phrase. It is at this juncture that the phrase attains the "correct" tonality of E major. It is pertinent for Phillips to provide further clarification on the precise meaning of "carrying most" in contrast to "carrying less." While the second part of the seventh bar and the eighth bar manifest as transitional rumination within the lower strings, it is imperative to recognize that the third and seventh bars possess a distinct potency as important as the others. This distinction stems from the phrase's cohesive nature, wherein every note and harmony contribute to a resolute sense of directionality, devoid of any inherent weaknesses. Thus, the phrase emerges as a robust and cohesive arc, wherein each element holds significant meaning and firmly propels the overall arc of the musical expression.

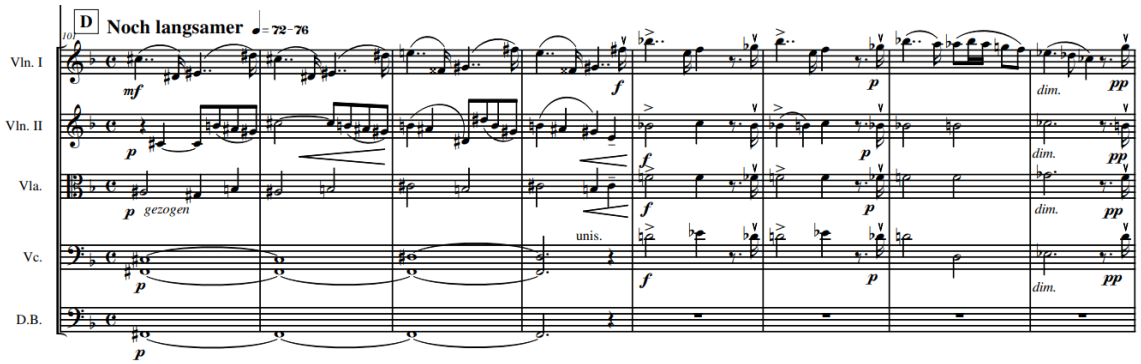
Ex. 1: Adagio – Langsam, feierlich; first phrase



[5] Adelaide Research & Scholarship: Bruckner's Ninth Revisited: Towards The Re-Evaluation Of A Four-Movement Symphony, by John Alan Phillips – https://tinyurl.com/PhillipsB9Revisited

- Within the Finale, we encounter the first phrase of the "*interlude section"* situated amidst the "*Gesangsperiode*", extending across a span of eight bars. The third bar serves as the introduction to heightened tension and the subsequent development of the phrase, while the fifth bar assumes the role of a pivotal breaking point. However, it is unequivocally the seventh bar that epitomizes the resolution and culmination of the entire phrase, where a sense of fulfillment becomes distinctly perceptible.

Ex. 2: Finale – 8 first bars of the interlude section in the B lyrical group

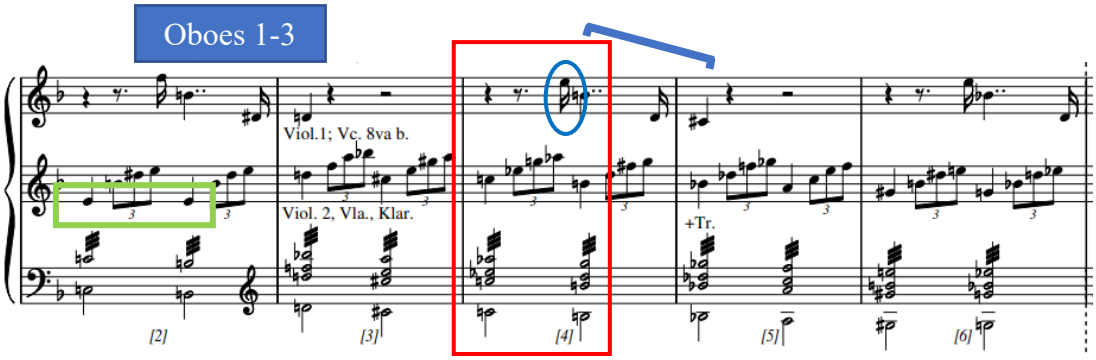


The task of finding numerous additional examples to support the aforementioned argument would likely not pose a significant challenge. Ultimately, the crux of the matter pertains to a more fundamental question: Did Bruckner experience musical influence from Sechter, or is it rather a matter of utilizing a structural methodology for the conception and elaboration of his musical ideas?

It is worth noting that Sechter is widely regarded as one of the least captivating composers in existence. This could possibly account for the humorous anecdotes relayed by Bruckner to his pupils regarding their early studies of composition under Sechter's tutelage. Is Simon Sechter to be considered a composer of the same magnitude as Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt, or Wagner? To the best of my knowledge, the answer appears to be a resounding no. Asserting that Sechter must be regarded as a primary source of inspiration for completing Bruckner's ultimate Finale seems preposterous.

About harmonic mistake

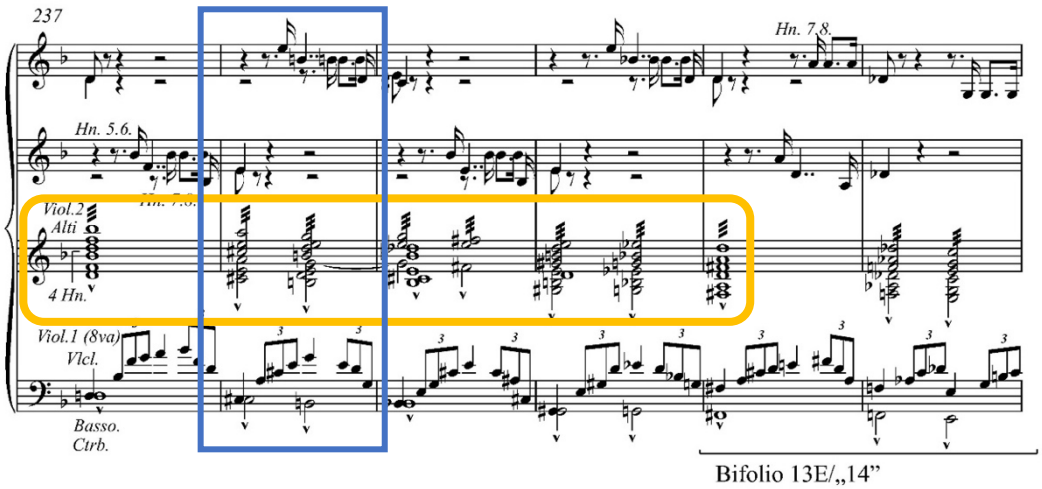
Ex. 3: Harmonic mistake in the transitional catabasis (entrance to the development section), reconstruction of bifolios "13a"E and "13b"E



Within the musical excerpt, specifically in the indicated blue bar *[4]*, an observation emerges: the three oboes prominently perform an unequivocal E natural, a passage directly originating from Bruckner's own hand. Contrasting with this, the SPCM completion, which has remained unaltered for over three decades, adopts the chord of A♭ major (in the 6th position, denoted by the encompassing red highlight) on a reconstructed and speculative bass line. The dissonance created by the simultaneous presence of E♭ and E♮ lacks a discernible rationale. Furthermore, the sustained pedal point on E♮ in the preceding *stasis* (designated as bar *[2]* and highlighted in green) is disrupted at the bar marked *[3]*. The note "E" cannot be attributed to a lingering reverberation of this pedal point. This consequential harmonic error in the SPCM completion is also

perpetuated in the "Documentation of the Fragments," an authoritative publication edited by the esteemed "*Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag Wien*".[6]

Ex. 4: appropriate harmonies enriched with figurative dissonances in my own completion

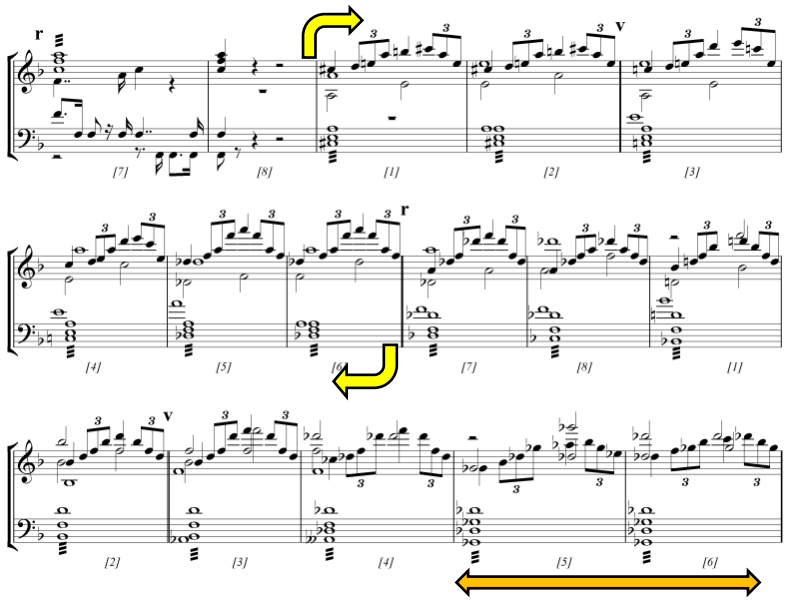


Within the given musical context, a descending harmonic progression becomes evident, aligning with the implications of the oboe parts (highlighted in blue). Instead of the unrelated A♭ Major, these harmonies showcase A major. This progression is enhanced by the inclusion of asymmetrical prepared dissonances present in the tremolo of the upper strings and the horn parts. The orange outline accentuates the harmonic path.

About the unjustified transposition of the musical material from bifolio "12 C" to reconstruct the [14/"15"]

To address the initial gap in the development, the scholars at SPCM decided to employ material from bifolio "12 C" and transpose six bars of it (as illustrated in the example below). This choice was based on the fact that bifolio "12 C" provided the sole available material that could offer insights into the potential design of this passage leading to bifolio [15D/"16"]. However, the rationale behind transposing it a semitone higher to facilitate a smoother harmonic progression to G♭ major lacks substantiation and is baseless.

Ex. 5: Harmonic progression of the SPCM completion heading to G♭ major

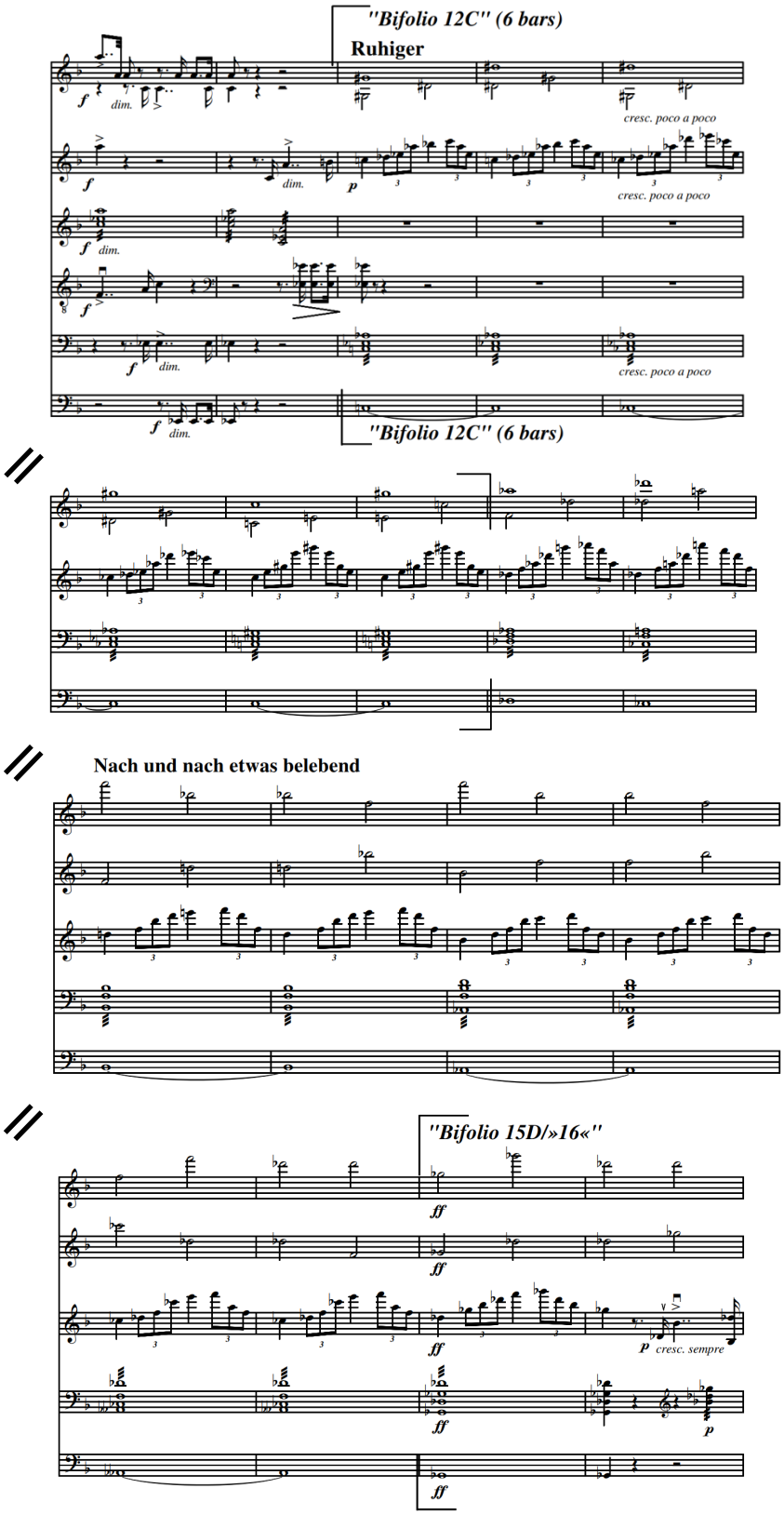


[6] Reminder: indeed some parts of it come from the SPCM 1996 completion giving continuity to the actual gaps in the music. This is the material used by Nikolaus Harnoncourt for his recording of the Ninth Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic.

Additionally, it should be noted that the harmonic sequence resolves to G♭ major prematurely by two bars, thus emphasizing the inherent drawback of repetitive passages devoid of substantive content (as denoted by the orange arrow above).

Presented below is the suggested resolution in my revised completion, which has undergone significant changes since the sole existing recording of it in Hungary from October 2008.

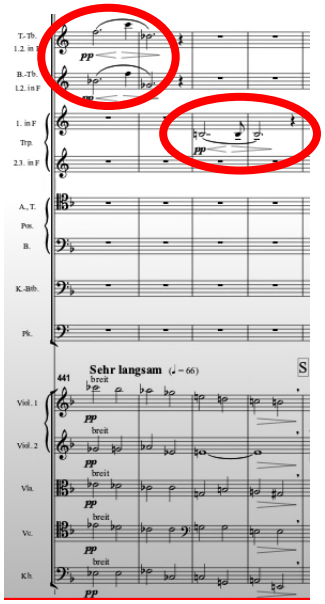
Ex. 6: Reconstruction of bifolio [14/"15"] without transposing the 6 first bars of the sequence, starts from "*Ruhiger*"



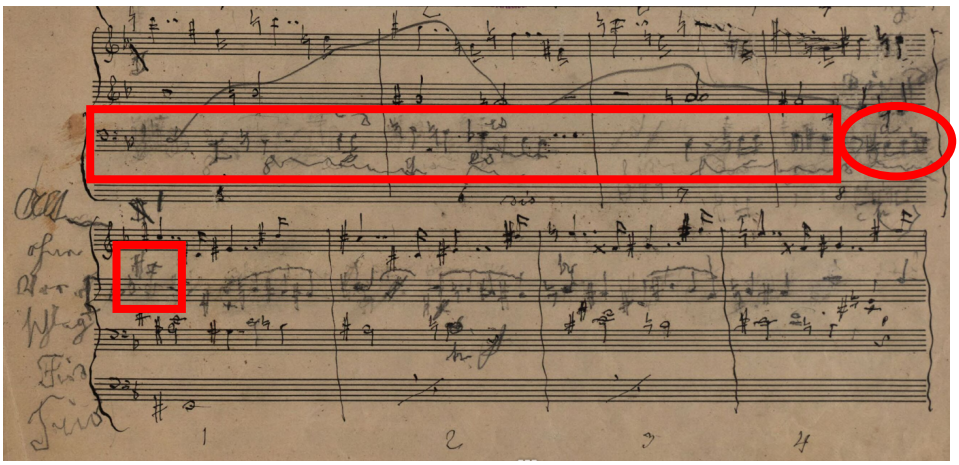
About the use of extraneous material

The reappearance of the Choral theme within the confines of the "*Gesangsperiode*" (recapitulation) is originally scored exclusively for strings[7]. This juncture represents a temporal suspension[8], where the inherent beauty of the harmonies becomes self-sufficient. The inclusion of tuba and trumpet parts raises questions about the intended purpose of this passage and its impact on the original artistic intention. The given explanation that the episode from bar 156 in the adagio has been used as a model for continuity reason seems unfitting as the context here is very different.

Ex. 7: Extraneous brass intervention on the strings Choral – Samale/Cohrs 2012, measure 443 ; Phillips' 2022, measure 441

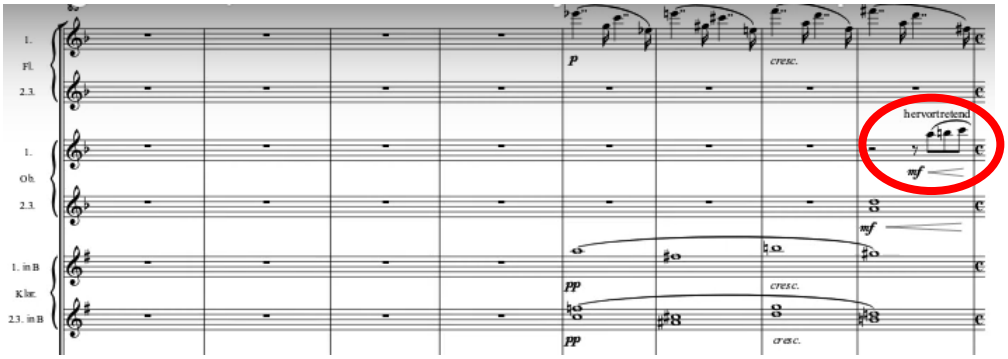


Exposition, at the end of the 4-bar transition preceding the "interlude section" of the B group, the SPCM introduces a solo oboe part, expressly indicated by the author as "*hervortretend*" (standing out). The origin of it seems to be found in one sketch[9], the 5th stave of it being obviously scratched and discarded by Bruckner, the melodic and harmonic content of it being completely different from page 2 of the 5B bifolio[10]. This short melodic fragment is written with a pencil at the end of a full 4 bars contrapuntal phrase but not used in the "Documentation of the Fragments" (why?) and the high c♯ on the first beat of the 6th stave obviously corresponds the conclusion of the phrase and harmonic progression that we can find in the recapitulation, not in the exposition.



[7] See bifolio 26F/"27" in facsimile page 305.
[8] We can find similar episodes exclusively written for strings with a very similar choral melody line in the first movements of the original versions of the 3rd (1873 – measures 474-494) and 4th (1874 – measures 324-330) symphonies.
[9] See facsimile page 33, 5th and 6th staves.
[10] See facsimile page 164.

Ex. 8: Addition of an extraneous oboe part not visible on bifolio 5B – Samale/Cohrs 2012, measure 94 ; Phillips' 2022, measure 92



There are numerous other instances of this kind in the completion. I am not going to point at every one of them.

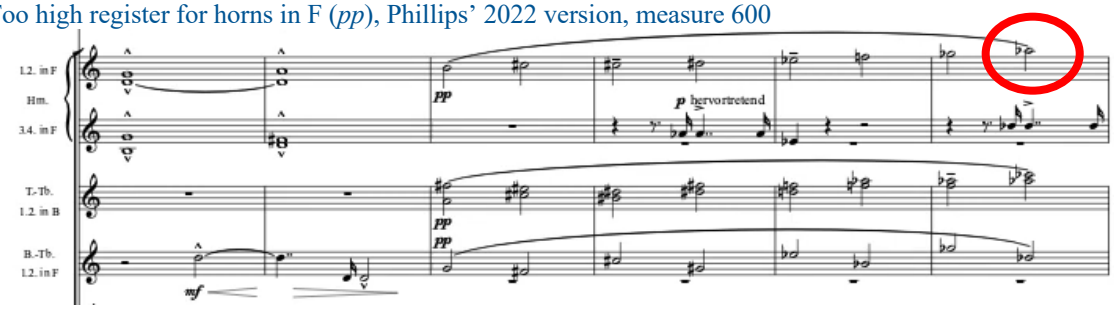
About the contradictory decreasing orchestration of the SPCM completion at the central climatic moment of the movement[11]

If there is a discernible recurring characteristic in Bruckner's architectural approach, it is his tendency to employ a full complement of orchestral resources when building towards a climactic moment. However, a divergence can be observed in the SPCM completion, wherein there is a reduction in the orchestral forces at the peak of the central section. This reduction occurs immediately after a protracted *crescendo* that incorporates the toccata string motive from the Finale of the 6th symphony and the *Te Deum - Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis*. In contrast, my completion maintains the involvement of all woodwinds and brass instruments, establishing an imitative "echo game" centered around the triplet motive introduced by the horns[12].

About the frequent misuse of instrument registers (tessitura)

In the coda of the Finale, during the ascending choral section, a specific melodic line calls for the first two horn players to execute a high-pitched D-flat note with a nuanced double piano dynamic. This choice appears to deviate from established stylistic conventions and lacks a compelling justification, particularly when considering that an F trumpet could readily execute the part. Alternatively, an alto trombone would offer greater technical suitability and tonal cohesion with the quartet of tubas. In the first movement, specifically at the pinnacle of the development spanning measures 371 to 375, the first and second horns are assigned a demanding high register passage (D♭) and then D♮) to be played at a *fortissimo* dynamic (*ff*)[13].

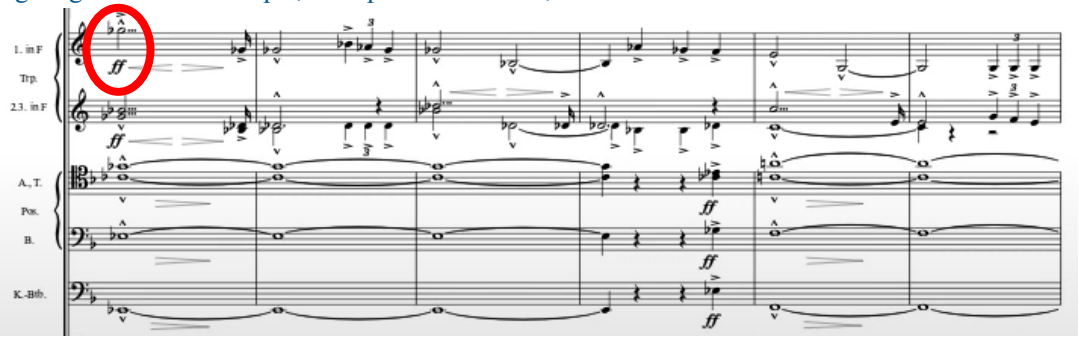
Ex. 9: Too high register for horns in F (*pp*), Phillips' 2022 version, measure 600



Still in the coda, the note C♭ is played by the first trumpet in F, which is in a higher register than conventually expected :

[11] See measures 383-394 in Phillips' 2022 version.
[12] See Bruckner's bifolios manuscript, facsimile 22D/"23" and 23D/"24" pages 294 – 297.
[13] The note D♮ also appears in the Scherzo of the 5th symphony (bar 336). This high pitch register is very rarely used by Bruckner and in very specific configuration, nuance *forte* to *fortissimo*. We also know the problem Bruckner had with the soft solo part at the end of the slow movement of his 2nd symphony (high pitched c♮).

Ex. 10: Too high register for a F trumpet, Phillips' 2022 version, measure 613



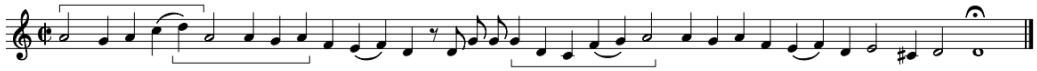
The highest note Bruckner usually dares to reach with a trumpet in F is the natural A or B♭ as can be seen in the climactic moment of the march in the third C group during the Eighth symphony's exposition of the Finale.

Although these observations may appear trivial to some, it is crucial for readers and enthusiasts of Bruckner's music to grasp the underlying significance. A composer's "style" is molded by a distinct set of parameters, encompassing the specific framework governing the utilization of instruments within a symphonic orchestra as established by the composer.

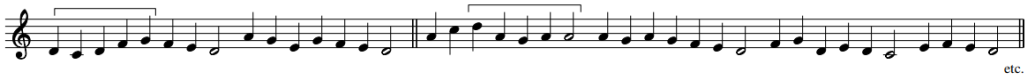
About the misquotation from liturgical sources; "*Christ ist erstanden*"

An issue can be found in the purported quotation from the medieval German hymn "*Christ ist erstanden*" from 1160. Phillips asserts the presence of allusions to this ancient melody in the recapitulation section, where, in fact, no such references can be promptly identified. Instead, only selective melodic fragments appear to have been extracted, lacking a clear, explicit, and recognizable quotation from any of the hymns he references. Below is a comparison between the authentic hymns and the fragmentary hymnic idea present in Bruckner's autograph. Although there are partial resemblances in terms of fragments, it is important to note that these do not amount to any form of direct "quotation" from the ancient songs:

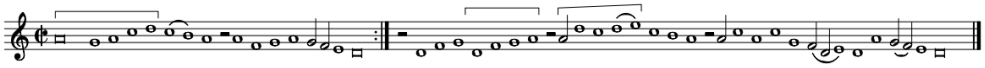
"Christ ist erstanden" (1160):



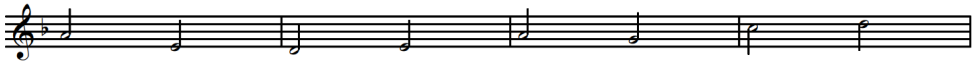
"Victimae paschali laudes":



"Christ lag in Todesbanden":



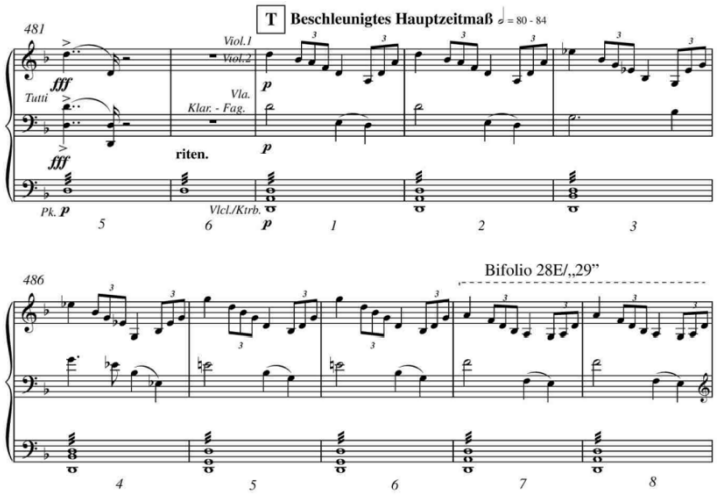
Bruckner's actual theme:



The inclusion of Bruckner's late cantata *"Helgoland"* style into the Finale of the 9th symphony by the group of experts can be understood given the shared context of both works being composed in the very later stages of Bruckner's life. However, the second statement of the non-quotation of "*Christ ist erstanden*" (performed *tutti* in D minor) appears to evoke resemblances more closely associated with Howard Shore's film score for "*The Lord of the Rings,*" specifically the piece titled "*City of Minas Tirith, the People of Gondor,*" rather than reflecting Bruckner's distinctive style.

In my own interpretation of this passage, I have chosen a different approach by reinforcing the *catabasis tutti* figure and concluding it abruptly with a pedal point in D (timpani *pp*). This effect maintains a discreet, efficient, and simple nature, aligning with the principle of minimal intervention. The connection with bifolio 28E/"29" became evident through the reconstruction of the violins' *ostinato* and the harmonic progression of the alti and clarinets.

Ex. 11: End of the song period and transition to the return of the choral (recapitulation)



About the available sources and the "reconstruction" of the fugue and the coda

The missing section of the fugue:

In the portion missing from the latter part of the fugue, approximately 13 measures followed by 3 measures of orchestral tutti in C♯ minor (the absent Bifolio 19D/"20"), it is plausible that Bruckner had intended to employ a *stretto* treatment of the theme. However, I must clarify that this is a logical speculation and intuitive inference on my part as a composer, rather than a factual assertion. Indeed, this section represents an opportune moment to enhance the counterpoint and intensify the rhetorical tension before the gradual *crescendo* leading to the central climax. Typically, the resolution or conclusion of a fugal process involves the implementation of *stretto*.

The underlying challenge – a similar issue encountered in the coda – lies in the actual available material found within the remaining sketches. This is precisely the juncture in the score where the term "reconstruction" must be employed with utmost caution and precision. Cohrs and Phillips have seemingly diverged in their approaches since the years 2006-2012 concerning the specific portions of the sketches to be incorporated. In 2006, Cohrs presented a compelling reassessment of the sketches ÖNB 3194/13 and 14, while Phillips opted to revert to an earlier solution devised in the 1992/1996 completion, based on non-existent material, and unfortunately, the recent revision has further compounded the matter.

> "This in all essentials was the solution first proposed for the passage by Samale and Mazzuca, maintained in the 1992 and 1996 scores and documented in my doctoral dissertation. The continuity of the last seven bars of the bifolio are apparent from a sketch (FE 23) which dovetails convincingly into the ensuing bifolio; given the extant sections of the fugue which precede and follow it, every evidence suggests the passage was likewise conceived as a threefold sequence (6+6+4 bars)[14]. As the first three bars of this sequence survive at the end of bifolio 18D/"19", the effective "composition" of only three bars was required. [*emphasis SL*] The use of a series of earlier exploratory sketches replaced this threefold sequence in the 2012 score, but it is a vague and amorphous improvisation compared with the highly structured and contrapuntally driven "*Spiegelbild*" sequences (= simultaneous *rectus* and *inversus* versions of a fugal subject)"
>
> – John Alan Phillips

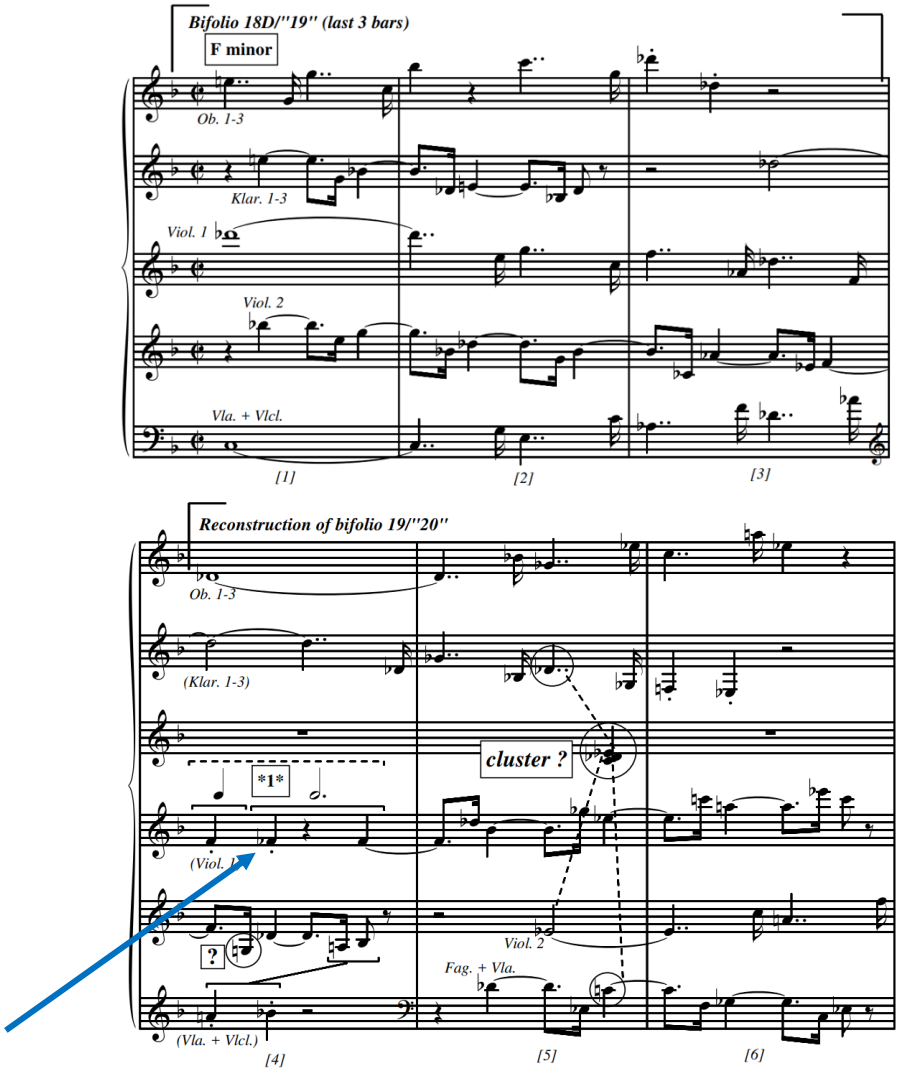
Contrary to what Phillips claims, the harmonic trajectory he opted for seems quite prosaic: the repetition of three quasi-identical sequences, the second sequence in A minor being simply the replication (copy/paste) of the three last bars from bifolio 18D/"19" (f minor) + 3 reconstructed bars, the third sequence being also the same but shortened (4 bars) leading to the *tutti* in C♯ minor. Each sequence starts with minor 7th and 9th dominant chords so that we have the following structure:

3 bars (from bifolio 18D/"19") +3 / 3+3 / 4 [+3 bars – C♯ minor *tutti*]

[14] Actually no evidence has been presented.

Since it is a repetition of the final three bars of bifolio 18D/"19", every subsequent sequence that relies on minor 7th and 9th dominant chords in Phillips' contrapuntal figuration exposes the simplistic *arpeggio* patterns stemming from these chords (diminished chord). This configuration is quite trite, repetitive and clichéd. Moreover, several other elements of the counterpoint clearly show elementary mistakes. In fact, the transitional tissue of the first three "reconstructed" bars are already fraught with objective compositional problems, as we can observe in the following:

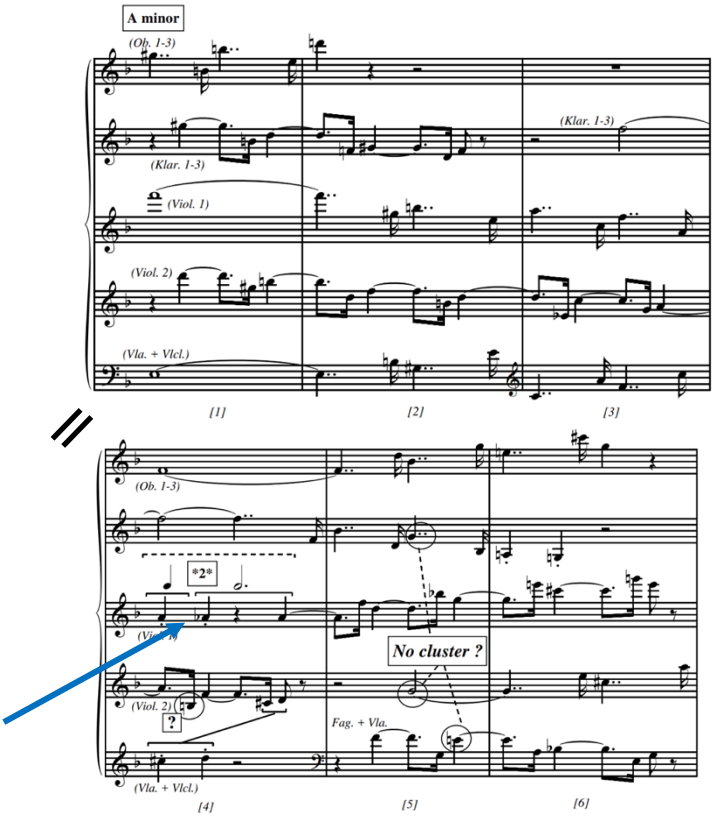
Ex. 12: Reduction of JA Phillips' reconstruction of the fugue



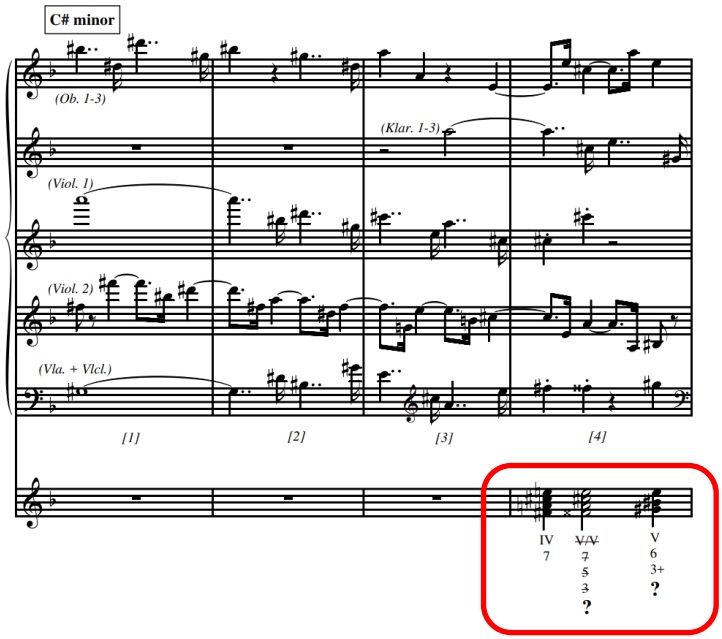
Let's take the very first bar of the reconstructed bifolio 19/"20" as an example. The harmonic rhythm is asymmetrical, with a quarter note followed by a half-dotted note (see Ex. 12 [*1*]), which lacks any stylistic justification since the harmonic rhythm is otherwise regular and consists of half notes. Although syncopations caused by the imitations could potentially explain this displacement, in the present context this seems unlikely. Furthermore, the diminished chord on the second quarter beat (B♭/D♭/F♭, without G♮) lacks direction and fails to provide any proper harmonic or melodic resolution. The note F♭ is heading to E♭ (second violins part), but the chord in the first half of the next bar (marked *[5]*) is a G♭ 7th dominant in +6-4-3 position, once again without any proper resolution. It seems that we are supposed to be in the "harmonic galaxy" of B♭ minor moving to G♭ major and then to a F major 7th and 9th dominant chord, but the reason for emphasizing the note F♭ remains unclear.

The transitional diminished chord (E♭, G♭, A♮, C♮+ F♮) has actually no connection to the following A minor sequence. The harmonies implied here make absolutely no sense. Furthermore, the different parts of the counterpoint are riddled with basic mistakes, such as the already mentioned inclusion of G♮ on the first quarter beat. There is here an obvious lack of counterpoint and harmonic rigor, including the proper direction and resolution of dissonances and the sonic hierarchy between these dissonances. In the next bar, there is a fundamental error in counterpoint: a dissonance resolution and the dissonance occurring at the same time

(indicated as a “cluster?” here in the reduction). Note C resolves the dissonant D♭ while another D♭ in a lower register (oboes 1-3) is simultaneously sounding with E♭. This results in a contrapuntally confused and tonally ambiguous passage. To compound this issue, Phillips then repeats the same pattern twice (A minor and C♯ minor), with little variation or development.



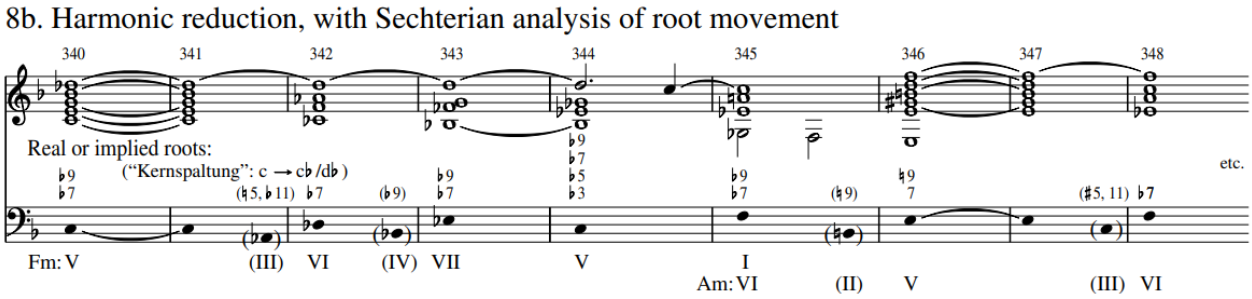
The asymmetrical harmonic structure and the entire counterpoint in this sequence are simply a copy/paste of the preceding one, as shown in the above figure *2*, except for the absence of the “cluster” in the following bar. This suggests that there may be an error in the score in the first sequence that the author did not notice or hear. [15]



[15] Like Gerd Schaller, Phillips realized an organ transcription of the SPCM completion also available on his YouTube channel which makes the numerous counterpoint weaknesses even more perceptible in this arrangement. The first “cluster” C – D♭– E♭ is there at the second half of bar 330 but more surprisingly the “second cluster” E – F – G is also there on second half of bar 336. Just listen from here: https://youtu.be/rweOGg56gf8?t=665 It would seem that a new revision of both versions is still necessary.

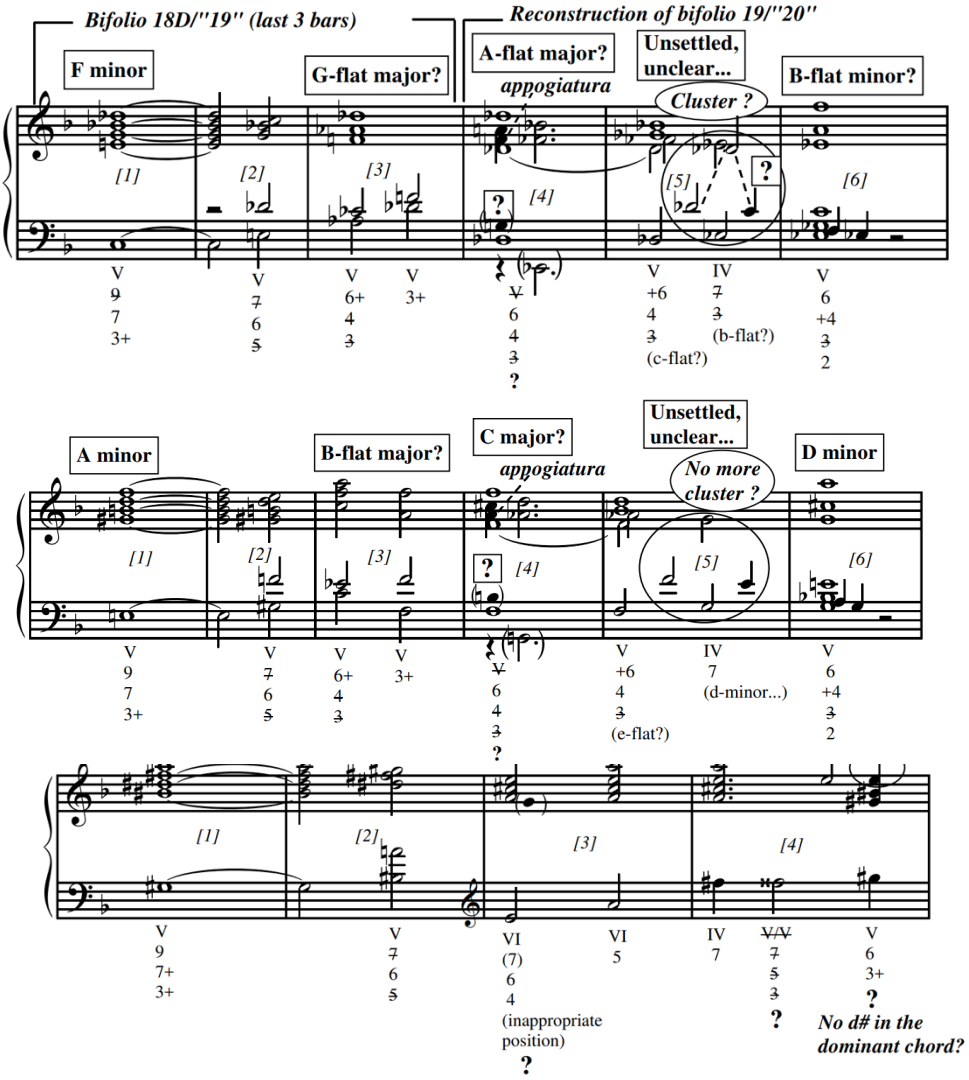
Below is the harmonic reduction of the similar solution proposed in the 1996 version of the completion. It accumulates numerous inaccuracies:

Ex. 13: Harmonic reduction of the fugue with Sechterian analysis according to JA Phillips



The "Sechterian analysis" presented in Phillips' thesis demonstrates his very approximate understanding of harmony and counterpoint. There is no stylistic justification to use such a high density of successive unresolved 9th, 7th, and diminished 5th chords in a fugue with a leaping subject and having intersecting melodic lines, unless one is composing in the style of Bartók, Schönberg, or Ravel's "La Valse". The lack of stylistic coherence and continuity in comparison to the rest of Bruckner's fugue is absolutely evident. As shown in Phillips' reduction and the scrupulous analysis I provide, the excessive use of directionless dissonances makes the music tonally incomprehensible.

Ex. 14: Hereafter a more precise reduction analysis of these 13 bars showing some of its flaws…

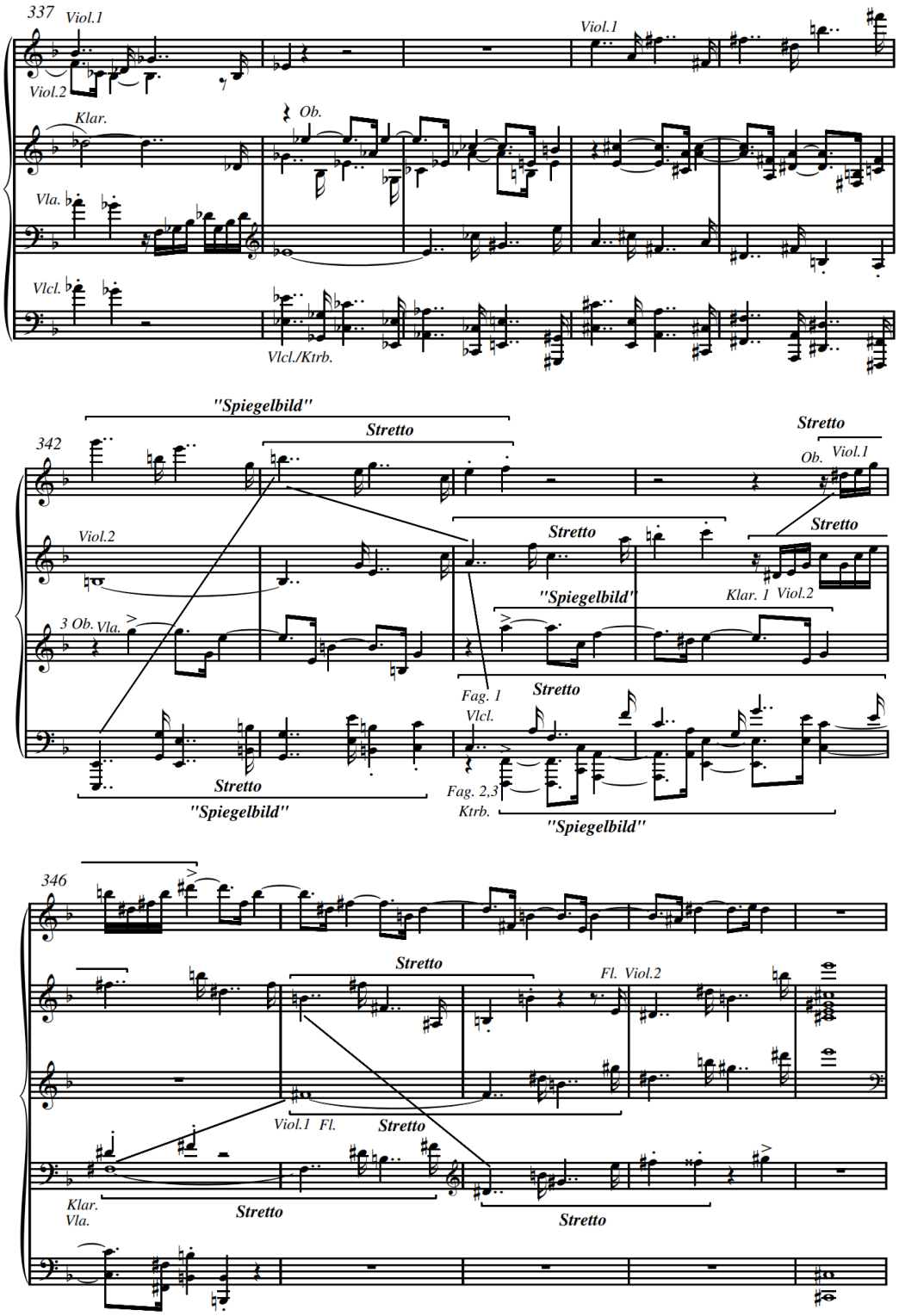


However, if we analyze the available sketches, it is most likely that the structure of this section was the following:

3 bars (from bifolio 18D/"19") +1 / 4 / 4 / 4 [+3 bars – C♯ minor *tutti*]

The sixteenth note figure heard in the celli and double basses at the beginning of the fugue is not used again by Phillips, even though it could have been used to enrich and increase the density of the counterpoint, as demonstrated in my completion where it is integrated as a double *stretto*.

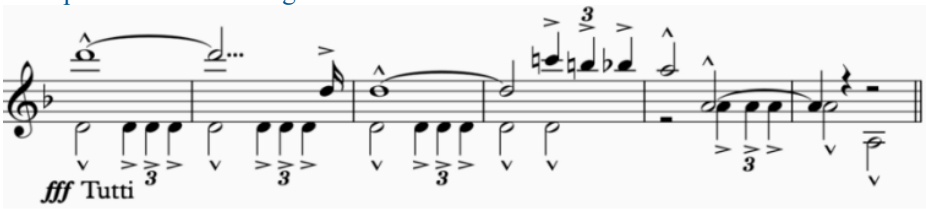
Ex. 15: Here is the solution in my completion using profusely the "*Spiegelbild*" rectus-inversus device as well as stretti:



The missing transition to the coda:

In the Samale-Cohrs version of 2012, the idea of reintroducing the main theme from the first movement at the end of the recapitulation is shared with Phillips' conception:

Ex. 16: SPCM completion: reintroducing the main theme from the first movement at the end of the recapitulation



As we can observe, the only idea presented here is the literal quotation of the main theme from the first movement (in canon) superimposed on the continued triplet ostinato (pedal point on D) derived from the end of bifolio 31E/"32". However, the musical outcome is simplistic and lacking in tension, whereas the music inherently requires a build-up of tension before the coda, rather than the opposite effect of a deflating balloon. This reflects the same kind of fundamental compositional weakness as the unfulfilled climatic moment of the central section, which was mentioned earlier in this article.

The coda:

> "The version of the coda presented here for the first time embodies everything we actually know from Bruckner's sketches and verbal statements. It omits 12 bars of what was effectively "faux Bruckner" (the "combination of themes" episode in the older SPCM versions), but restores 12 bars of Bruckner's own continuity from his sketches for the coda from May 1896."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

Sketches dated from May 1896 make reference to a "bifolio (Bogen) n°36", suggesting that the coda was likely laid out, and that Bruckner may have even been working on its orchestration. However, this is the most perplexing mystery at the heart of this Finale: if the symphony's conclusion was so advanced, why do we not find more substantial traces of it in the sketches or any remaining bifolios, even those that were only partially orchestrated? The most obvious and likely explanation is the presence of "souvenir hunters" who visited Bruckner's Belvedere apartment in the days following his death. The casual security measures taken by Anton Meißner (Bruckner's secretary and confidant) and other individuals responsible for the premises may have contributed to the loss of valuable materials.

The fact remains that there is very little material available to accurately "reconstruct" the ending of this movement or even to have a basic idea of its actual structure. Aside from the clearly defined harmonic progression in sketch ÖNB 3194/3^{r} which is explicitly derived from the very beginning of the movement, and a few other extensions found in the long crescendo leading to the first presentation of the Choral and two similar harmonic progressions in the first section of the development, the rest of the available material consists of barely legible handwritten sketches consisting mainly of a few notes and chords surrounded by empty, numbered/scratched staves.

The meaning of these sketches, and even their order or their chronology is sometimes difficult to interpret, and explanations given by Phillips or Cohrs have left me always extremely skeptical compared to the available evidence. Another completer, William Carragan, a reliable musicologist[16] and contributor to the official Bruckner Edition (*cf.* 2nd symphony; 1872 and 1877 versions), has a different understanding of the material. The simple truth is that no one knows precisely how to interpret these sketches.

In his paper, Phillips provides a "cleaned" version of the sketches available for the coda[17]. However, for those who have taken the time to carefully read and analyze these sketches, particularly those that were most likely intended for the coda, it's clear that these available materials are barely sufficient and extremely sparse.

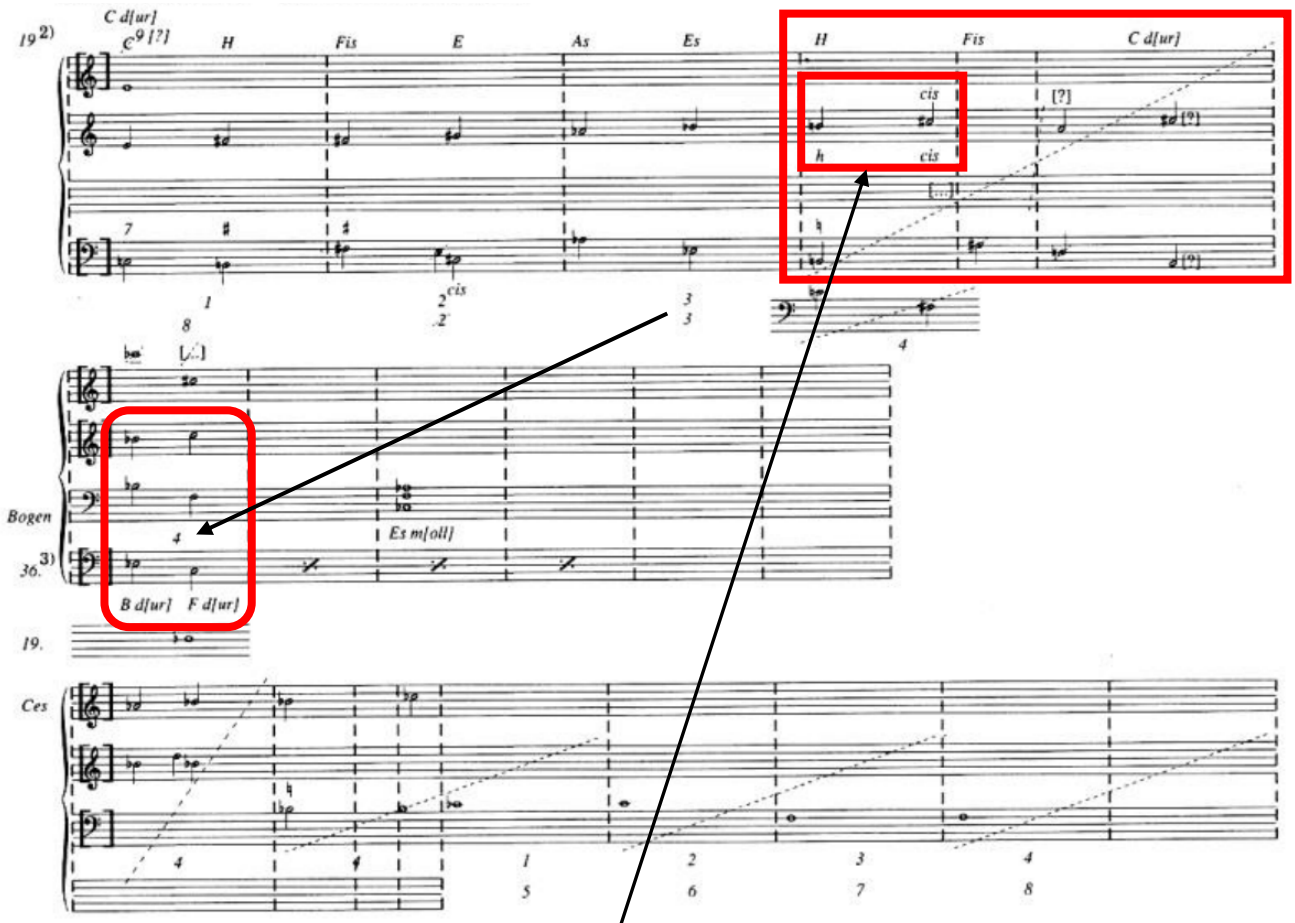
---

[16] William Carragan's Red Book is a "must buy" for any passionate Brucknerian.

[17] As I have previously mentioned, there have been no significant developments since the release of the Facsimile in 1996, the 'Documentation of the Fragments' published by the official *'Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag Wien'* in 1999, or even in Cohrs' thesis "Bruckner's 9th Revisited: Towards a Re-Evaluation of a Four-Movement Symphony" from 2006/2012.

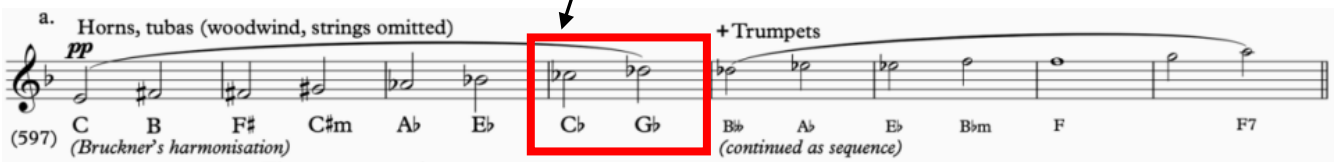
It is impossible to gain even a rudimentary understanding of what Bruckner might have had in mind for the conclusion of his Ninth Symphony. Finally, what are exactly these 12 bars of Bruckner's own continuity justifying this new ultimate revision of the completion and deserving such publicity from the author?

Ex. 17: sketch ÖNB 6085/45r



As we can see, the first 4 newly revealed "authentic bars" do not actually exist[18] being labelled as "*continued as sequence*" by Phillips:

Ex. 18: Continuation of the ascending Choral according to JA Phillips

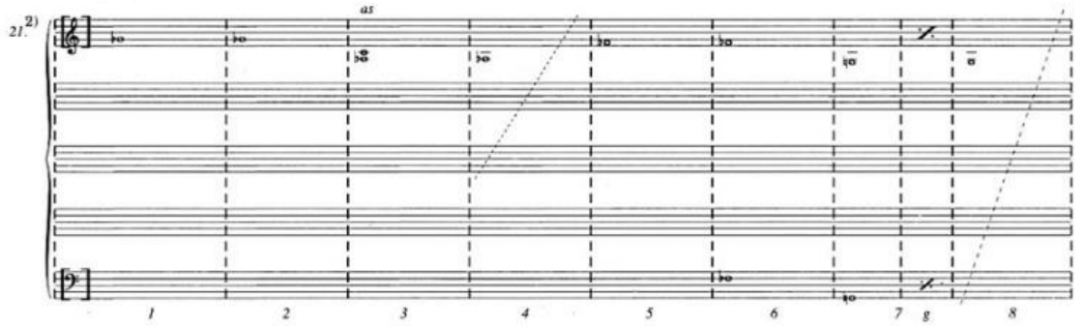


This section consists of an ascending four-part choral, of which Bruckner's sketch only displays the bass and melody lines. This part represents the explicit inversion of the *catabasis* Choral, which follows the first presentation of the main theme in the exposition and leads to the "*Gesangsperiode*".

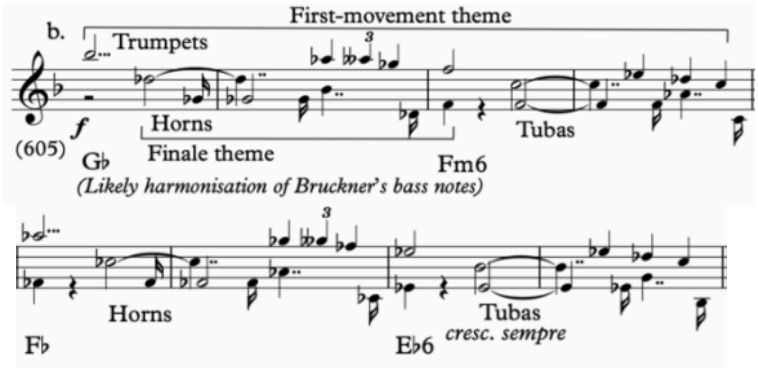
Moreover, the original sketch of the ascending Choral clearly shows the soprano notes B♭ / C♮ marked as being the fourth bar of the sequence with the harmonies also indicated by the composer *B d[ur] / F d[ur]* (B♭ major / F major) – see the rounder red corners here above. However, Phillips decided to change it into C♭ / D♭ [actually marked H – Cis / B♮ – C♯ in the sketch] based on the scratched/discarded preceding staves system…

[18] ÖNB 6085/45r; see Facsimile page 45.

Ex. 19: sketch ÖNB 6085/47r [19]



Ex. 20: 2021-2022 completion of J.A. Phillips based on the sketch ÖNB 6085/47r



As we can see, Phillips has taken this almost blank and scratched sketch and created something purely from his own imagination. He has deduced harmonies and chords based on the "*Likely harmonization of Bruckner's bass notes*". However, this could just as easily have been interpreted as *E♭ minor* [bars 1-2] (or *C♭ major* in 6th position?) / *A♭ major* [bars 3-4] (marked "*as*" by Bruckner) / F♭ major / E♭ major in 6th position.

Moreover, the recurring presupposition that a bifolio has a determined length of 16 bars (8 bars recto/verso per page) is based on assumption. While it is true that pages were systematically prepared with 4 bars per page, some bifolios could sometimes contain more than 4 bars per side. Who knows if Bruckner added more bars in the process of working on the coda or starting the orchestration, as he did in previous phases and sections of the movement? There are obviously many uncertainties involved in attempting to reconstruct the coda, to which Phillips draws no attention. In fact, reconstructing the coda involves a high degree of speculation and uncertainty.

Furthermore, it is difficult to determine how much of the available sketches were still relevant during the composition process. Many bars from them are scratched. We can assume that there was much more material than what is currently available. While it is reasonable to use all available material, we must acknowledge that there is almost nothing that is substantially convincing or clear. Therefore, the claims made by Phillips are based on guessing and speculation.

At the end of the last available sketch, Phillips has invented a reappearance of the "*Schreckensfanfare*" heard for the first time before the central fugue then leading immediately to the so called *"Alleluia salvation theme"* paraphrasing the ending of "*Helgoland*". The very ending of the completion reminds the listener more the end of "Das Rheingold" (triplets of repeated notes) by Richard Wagner than actually anything else. While the reference to the conclusion of "*Helgoland*" can be more or less understood, the harmonic path to the *"Alleluia (Hallelujah) theme"* in D major is awkwardly unprepared, with the dominant of the dominant featuring a diminished 5th chord (G♯, B♭, D, E) that is clearly a breaking point, a sudden stop (*parrhesia abruptio*, *memento mori*) that is obviously not a conclusive cadential move leading directly to the tonic of D major!

[19] See Facsimile page 46.

About the discarding of the hypothetic pile-up or "*coagmentatio*" of the four main themes of the symphony

> "Optimistically designated its "*Letztgültig Revidierte Neu-Ausgabe*" (*Definitively Revised New Edition*), the 2012 publication of the SPCM score was intended to set an endpoint to its by then almost 30-year evolution." / […] / "At letter X (bar 589) in the older SPCM versions began the contrapuntal combination of the four themes of the symphony. However, no surviving sketch or statement by Bruckner suggested the Finale was to include anything like an "overlay of the themes of each movement as in the Eighth Symphony"; that idea derived solely from questionable and in fact self-contradictory statements by Bruckner biographer Max Auer. […] Quite apart from the strident, un-Brucknerian counterpoint, wrenching the Adagio theme onto the tonic falsified its harmonic function, while the timpani quotation of the Scherzo rhythm was tokenistic, and somehow a little too clever. (!?) [*punctuation SL*] Had Bruckner intended such a thing, there would surely have been some indication, somewhere, in the hundreds of pages of MSS for the four movements, that he intended to do so. There is none. Samale expressed his own doubts about the validity of the "combination of themes" to me in 1991; unfortunately, I dismissed his concerns."
>
> – John Alan Phillips

There is absolutely no evidence in the sketches to suggest that Bruckner intended such a thing, especially in such an awkward and Shostakovichian/Star Wars-esque manner. One of the flaws of the "concept" is that the theme of the adagio is played twice as slowly as the tempo of the actual adagio, making it very difficult to perceive the theme amidst the turmoil. For more than twenty years, their superposition or pile-up of the four main themes of the symphony in D minor – "*coagmentatio*" – has always been presented as being rigorously part of a scientific and serious reconstruction of the coda.

The notion of superimposing the four main themes, as in the finale of the 8th symphony, is based on second-hand testimony from Max Auer. This reliance on second-hand accounts is a recurring issue in regard to this unfinished finale. In fact, upon examining the available material, there is indeed no direct evidence to support this idea. So it should be made clear to those who have heard the 2012 Berlin Philharmonic Rattle EMI recording that John Alan Phillips himself clearly came away from this "solution".

About the "Hallelujah" theme concluding the finale

Richard Heller, Bruckner's physician, also provided second-hand testimony about the finale. However, Heller himself was not a professional musician and admitted that he likely did not grasp everything the composer communicated to him or performed on his Bösendorfer piano while visiting him. One of the main issues with the physician's account is the reference, attributed to Bruckner, of a "*Hallelujah* theme from the second movement" that was supposedly intended to conclude the symphony as a song of praise. This is a highly speculative issue about the order of the inner movements discussed by Gunnar Cohrs in his paper "*An Introduction to the New Critical Edition (1996-2004/rev.2006-2012) by Nicola Samale & Benjamin-Gunnar Cohrs*." Cohrs explains that Bruckner was likely unsure about the order of the inner movements, and therefore, Heller supposedly referred to a "*Hallelujah*" theme identified as the D major *arpeggio* rising motive from the adagio (bar 5). However, this assertion is also based on no strong evidence.

Conclusion

I do not believe any "scientific reconstruction method" nor "forensic musicology" process to complete unfinished works by composers such as Bruckner, Schubert, Mahler, nor any other composer should be sufficient if the aim is to be as close as possible to what the author could have done. It is a conscious limitation in the artistic goal one sets to achieve, particularly when we have a clear understanding of what was left unfinished, or at the very least, what remains available today.

The missing parts of the development and recapitulation require guesswork and deduction to "reconstruct" their likely content from the available music in the surrounding bifolio. Phillips' claim that the missing parts "can be restored with a high degree of certainty from the corresponding *particello* sketches" appears highly questionable, as these sketches are often thin and diffused. Instead, we must accept the absence of substantial handwritten material for the coda and not rely too heavily on imprecise verbal statements from second-hand accounts. The most important purpose is the credible artistic result of a completion.