

COPLAND IN PURSUIT OF NEOCLASSICISM:
A SPECULATIVE DISCOURSE ON HIS “LEFTIST” POLITICS,
HIS INTERPRETATION OF MAHLER, AND THEIR
CONFRONTATION AT THE THIRD SYMPHONY

A Thesis
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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MAY 2016

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COPLAND IN PURSUIT OF NEOCLASSICISM:
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Dr. Judith Mabary, Dr. Michael Budds, and Dr. William Bondeson. I am also grateful for the enthusiasm and persistence of my family and friends.

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Chapter I

COPLAND, MAHLER, AND NEOCLASSICISM

Indeed, philosophical treatment of art is concerned with the idea, and not with notions of style, however much the idea may touch on the latter.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*¹

A significant connection between Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) and Aaron Copland (1900-1990) has long been acknowledged by contributors to the musicological discourse and, more importantly, by Copland himself. No systematic investigation of this relationship has yet been published. On its own, such an undertaking would offer little insight into the music of the latter, but in the context of a larger conversation about Copland's neoclassical aesthetic, its necessity becomes apparent. In addressing Copland's historical writings—in which Mahler's music is one of the more frequently treated topics—the possibility of providing a manifold for a historico-political discussion of Copland's neoclassicism emerges. A full account of this aspect of Copland's career should necessarily include theses on his methodology regarding historical writing and, ultimately, assertions about whether this methodology was similarly applied in his approach to musical composition. Once a material argument concerning Copland's apperception of Mahler has been formed, I will evaluate Mahler's relevance to Copland's neoclassical aesthetic philosophy, the ultimate embodiment of which can be found in the Third Symphony.

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 8.

The most immediate goals of this project are to identify and collect the primary and secondary documents linking the two composers, to impose a hierarchy of their importance, and to assess the implications of their content. Accordingly, I will address the scope and nature of Copland's published views on Mahler, the periods of Copland's life that yielded the greatest concentration of commentary on Mahler, the treatment of this relationship by scholars, and the ways Copland's consciousness of history conditioned his view of Mahler's work.

Copland's writings on Mahler appear in a variety of contexts. In several of his letters and interviews, as well as in his autobiography, Copland discussed his initial discovery of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1909) while studying in Paris with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) in the early 1920s. This finding led to a rather fruitful period of intellectual growth, constitutive of a profound concentration on Mahler. In 1925, precipitated both by his increasing appreciation of the composer's work and by a number of particularly negative reviews of a performance of Mahler's Second Symphony by the New York Philharmonic, Copland submitted a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* in which he offered his own critical perspective on Mahler's music.² In the letter he highlighted aspects of the composer's work that he felt had been overlooked, marginalized, or misunderstood by critics.

Once he had established his own reputation, Copland published a number of essays, many of which reference the famous composer and conductor. In his book *Our New Music* (1941)—and its second edition, *The New Music, 1900-1960* (1968)—for example, he speculated about the implications of what he believed to be Mahler's contribution to

² Aaron Copland, "Defends the Music of Mahler," *The New York Times* (5 April 1925), X: 6. A more complete discussion of this letter appears in Chapter II.

music history, comparing him to other late Romantic composers, namely Richard Strauss (1864-1949), Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), and Jean Sibelius (1865-1957).³

Throughout the next few decades Copland maintained a compelling loyalty to Mahler's music, defending and attempting to contextualize the composer historically in essays, books, lectures, and interviews. One particularly intriguing product of Copland's maturity is found in an article he co-authored with Jack Diether for the March-April 1957 issue of *Hi-Fi Music at Home*—a magazine devoted to record aficionados—titled “Guide to Record Collecting: Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library.”⁴ For this article Copland produced a discography of what he believed to be the greatest recordings of Mahler's most important works, each entry devoted to discussion of the piece itself as well as to a list of selected recordings. He submitted a similar list in the appendix of *Our New Music*.⁵

Responses to Copland's oral and published commentaries can be found in various formats: historical surveys, biographical studies, analytical reports, book reviews, program notes, and more. Naturally, some must be understood as controversial; for example, a number of critics responded with skepticism to Copland's discussion of Mahler in *Our New Music*. In his 1941 review of the book *New York Times* music critic Olin Downes (1886-1955) contended, “he [Copland] does not seem to mind Mahler's inflated

³ Aaron Copland, “The Late Romantics: Mahler, Strauss, Scriabin, Fauré, Sibelius,” *The New Music, 1900-1960* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 32.

⁴ Aaron Copland and Jack Diether, “Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library,” *Hi-Fi Music at Home* IV/1 (March-April 1957), 26, 66-70.

⁵ Aaron Copland, “Appendix: A Selected List of Phonograph Recordings,” *Our New Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941), 277.

rhetoric, his exhibitionism, and the turgid orchestration of his symphonies. These very characteristics are in fact turned into virtues.”⁶ Such comments remind one of a skepticism of Mahler maintained by some American commentators in the first half of the twentieth century, notably Henry Krehbiel (1854-1923), the prominent and influential music critic of the *New-York Tribune*; these criticisms seem to lend themselves well to the necessity of Copland’s writings on the composer. Outlining the history of Mahler’s reputation in America is beyond the scope of this project, but Copland’s contribution to Mahler’s reception in the United States, and criticisms thereof, is highly relevant.⁷

Unlike some of Mahler’s critics who engaged categories such as audience reception as a barometer of the quality of his music, Copland formulated arguments that seemed largely related to the musical phenomena itself. There was, in fact, a fundamental difference between Copland’s conception of Mahler and that of the anti-Mahlerians, although the way that Copland articulated this difference was affected by his partiality toward the growing neoclassical tendency in music. As Vera Micznik rightly warned in her excellent article “Music and Aesthetics: The Programmatic Issue,” “The historical and critical assessment of Mahler’s works cannot be understood outside the prevailing late nineteenth-century paradigmatic dichotomy of ‘programme’ versus ‘absolute’ music.”⁸ Furthermore, while Copland certainly highlighted many of the avant-garde qualities of Mahler’s music in his writing, he ultimately cast the Viennese

⁶ Olin Downes, “A Composer States His Position,” *The New York Times* (19 October 1941), X: 7.

⁷ See Matthew Mugmon, “Beyond the Composer-Conductor Dichotomy: Bernstein’s Copland-Inspired Mahler Advocacy,” *Music and Letters* XCIV/4 (November 2013), 606-27. This author offers an excellent analysis of this aspect of the composers’ relationship.

⁸ Vera Micznik, “Music and Aesthetics: The Programmatic Issue,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mahler*, ed. Jeremy Barham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38.

composer as the tonal anchor that pulled music through the “violent upheaval” of modernism.⁹

As enticing as an isolated discussion of Copland’s writings on Mahler may be, such an undertaking must be accompanied by a critical examination of his very approach to historical writing. It appears from Copland’s discourse that, while he attempted to deal with Mahler’s music immanently, in which case his discussions stemmed from an analysis of the internal phenomena of Mahler’s music itself, he also situated the composer in a view of history that saw tonal-modernism prevail over atonality and that understood the contributions of the serialists Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern as ultimately subordinated to the neoclassical direction of composers such as Stravinsky, Milhaud, and Hindemith. Such a teleological determination radically alters one’s ability to comprehend fully the function of an individual work within this time frame. It was as if Copland’s view of the musical events of modernism was designed to suit his own compositional interests rather than a materialist view of the works and events that history comprised. This does not mean that Copland’s position was wrong, for such a thing cannot be; rather, his ideology was itself produced dialectically by society, which is to say that Copland’s own subjective view of history was determined objectively by reality. It was not out of some sort of opportunistic intent that Copland appropriated Mahler in such a way; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Copland’s categorization of Mahler was based entirely on his rational assessment of history. He discussed Mahler’s music in conjunction with what he perceived to be the events and composers involved with contributing directly to the compositional decisions that Mahler made, attempting to situate him in a particular and lucid narrative of the major musical events of the late

⁹ Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, 9.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, as Walter Benjamin wrote, “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”¹⁰ Copland’s understanding of what the diaspora of avant-garde styles and forms created under and after modernism meant—and what those changes were pointing towards—was mediated by his increasing interest in the neoclassical style. In *The New Music* Copland explained, “Thus, as far as orchestral practice is concerned, Mahler bridges the gap between the composers of the early 18th century and the Neoclassicists of our own time.”¹¹ It is from this conception of Copland’s Mahler, a Mahler unknowingly pointing towards neoclassicism, that I will conduct my investigation. Further exegesis on this topic will be offered in Chapter III.

Of course, Copland's views on Mahler fluctuated vastly during his lifetime. Fortunately, his thoughts on the composer were well documented at most points in his career. It was not until his compositional and literary output diminished, likely as a result of his desire to conduct more often, that his thoughts on Mahler became scarcer; for the majority of his life, however, Copland returned to the composer as a reference point in various contexts. Nevertheless, as the highest concentration of writings on Mahler occurred in the first half of his career, this project will privilege that period.

The documentary portion of this thesis will be largely oriented towards the discourse concerning Copland and Mahler—much of which was written by Copland himself—and my analysis of its ramifications. It is not my desire to discount or minimize any efforts by other composers and critics who also recognized Mahler’s importance

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.

¹¹ Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, 34.

before he achieved widespread American popularity; American reception history of Mahler certainly reflects the participation of a number of individuals. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain how Copland's relationship with Mahler might have been cultivated had it not been for the efforts of countless musicians and intellectuals, Bruno Walter, Leonard Bernstein, Willem Mengelberg, and Nadia Boulanger among them. What I aim to do here is to examine Copland's relationship to Mahler, regarding, in particular, the former's Third Symphony by questioning how Copland's historical consciousness, political ideology, and musical interests contributed to his overall understanding of Mahler's body of work and what it meant, or, in Copland's view, what it pointed towards.

Literature Survey

Aaron Copland bears the distinction of being one of the most studied American composers of the past century. Consequently, there is no shortage of biographical and analytical scholarship concerning his life and music. Works selected for this project have typically fallen into three categories: literature about Copland by other scholars, documents written by Copland himself, and philosophical studies by social and literary theorists. The composer's own writings are, of course, of paramount importance, the most integral here being *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (1984) and *Copland since 1943* (1989), both with the assistance of Vivian Perlis, which provide a detailed autobiographical portrayal of the composer that spans nearly the entirety of his life.¹² In these two books numerous references both to Mahler and the Third Symphony can be

¹² Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984). Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

found, as well as Copland's own observations about the musicians and events he believed were influential to his own career. His book *Our New Music* (1941)—and the subsequent, updated version *The New Music* (1968)—contain some of Copland's most exposed writing on music history and Mahler; they have been critical sources for this project. Volumes containing selected writings by Copland have also been useful in charting his references to Mahler chronologically, especially *Aaron Copland: A Reader* (2004)¹³ and *The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland* (2006).¹⁴ Articles and essays by Copland have proven to be extremely valuable as well, notably his 1925 letter to *The New York Times* and his essay "The Twentieth Century: Reorientation and Experiment" in *Music and Western Man* (1958).¹⁵ Finally, Copland's own program notes to the premiere of the Third Symphony are central to a study of the work.¹⁶

As far as historical portraits are concerned, there are numerous excellent models that have aided in this study. Howard Pollack's *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (1999) is the reigning, and most thorough, biographical study on the composer.¹⁷ While Arthur Berger's *Aaron Copland* (1953) is a short work, it contains a great deal of fascinating musical and psychological observations about Copland and his

¹³ Aaron Copland, "The Mahler Question," *Aaron Copland: A Reader*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2004), 286-87.

¹⁴ Aaron Copland, *The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland*, ed. Elizabeth B. Crist and Wayne Shirley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Aaron Copland, "The Twentieth Century: Reorientation and Experiment," *Music and Western Man*, ed. Peter Garvie (Sussex: Littlehampton Book Services, 1958), 281-86.

¹⁶ These notes were generously made available to me in a digitized form by Bridget P. Carr, archivist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

¹⁷ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999).

music, especially the Third Symphony.¹⁸ Musicologist Elizabeth B. Crist has been remarkably prolific as far as writings on Copland are concerned, and her dissertation *Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946): Context, Composition, and Consequence* (2000) is the most essential treatise on the work, a monograph that will be discussed in Chapter III.¹⁹ In addition, Crist's book *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War* (2005) provides a compelling narrative of the composer's political activities and opinions in the years prior to the composition of his Third Symphony.²⁰ Crist's numerous publications on the Third Symphony, *Symphonic Ode*, and Copland's life in general are tremendous additions to the body of knowledge on the composer.²¹ Matthew Mugmon has also contributed excellent research on the connection between Mahler and Copland, most recently in the form of his earlier-cited article on Bernstein's and Copland's roles in the American reception of Mahler, "Beyond the Composer-Conductor Dichotomy: Bernstein's Copland-Inspired Mahler Advocacy."²²

In addressing the socio-political dimensions of this project, I will be drawing on works by social and critical theorists Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Leon Trotsky. Adorno's books *Philosophy of New Music* and *Mahler: A Physiognomy*, as well as collections of his essays, *Essays on Music* and *Quasi una Fantasia*, have been no less

¹⁸ Arthur Berger, *Aaron Copland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

¹⁹ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946): Context, Composition, and Consequence* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2000).

²⁰ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²¹ See Elizabeth B. Crist, "The Compositional History of Aaron Copland's Symphonic Ode," *American Music* XVIII/3 (Autumn 2000), 257-77.

²² Matthew Mugmon, "Beyond the Composer-Conductor Dichotomy: Bernstein's Copland-Inspired Mahler Advocacy," *Music and Letters* XCIV/4, 606-27.

than foundational in my own efforts to understand these musical works and composers.²³ G. W. F. Hegel's and Walter Benjamin's writings on the philosophy of history and historical materialism, respectively, have been helpful in achieving a more objective understanding of Copland's approach to historical writing. In the introduction to *Philosophy of History* Hegel diagnosed the numerous approaches to historical thinking and writing, ranging from first-person documentation of events to the philosophical-critical contemplation of them by subsequent thinkers, ultimately making the claim that different modes of historical consciousness impact one's ability to understand the unfolding of freedom over time in different ways.²⁴ Benjamin's writings on materialism, especially "Theses on the Philosophy of History," provide a necessary twentieth-century Marxist complement to Copland's ostensibly Left-leaning historical and musical writings.²⁵ Finally, chapters from Leon Trotsky's book *Literature and Revolution*, such as "Proletarian Culture and Proletarian Art" and "Revolutionary and Socialist Art" are quite interesting to consult when considering Copland's political and aesthetic interests in the 1930s.²⁶ In aligning a critique of Copland's musicological writing—and his music itself—with a discussion of the Left and an underlying critique of capitalism, it becomes possible to make hypotheses regarding his ideology surrounding his relationship to Mahler and also to American

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1960), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 437-69; and Theodor W. Adorno, "Music and Language," *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* (London: Verso, 1998), 1-8.

²⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988).

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, 253-64.

²⁶ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005).

music. The works of these writers often appear here in direct counterpoint to, and sometimes in harmony with, writings by musicologists—including Aaron Copland himself, whose scholarly observations are one of the pillars of this study—in order to illuminate the historical relationship between Copland and Mahler and its effect on the Third Symphony.

Methodology

In the subsequent chapters of this project I will focus on different aspects of both Copland's writings on Mahler and Copland's Third Symphony itself. The second chapter will be devoted to my account of Copland's own evaluation of Mahler's style and works, as well as the biographical circumstances that led him to hold such views. The two best classifications of this material are tied to chronology and content; conveniently, viewing the content of these comments in a linear order will also show an evolution in the quality and clarity of Copland's opinions. My presentation of these documents will be sequenced accordingly. As the most abundant threads of Copland's observations concern Mahler's use of counterpoint and orchestration, commentaries addressing these musical aspects will occur with the greatest frequency. After presenting Copland's theses on Mahler's counterpoint and orchestration, I will address his estimations regarding Mahler's impact on his own compositions. In addition, I will assay Copland's negative criticisms of Mahler, which could be said to provide a foundation for his argument that he was not conscious of any relevance of Mahler to the composition of his Third Symphony.

In the third chapter I will begin by presenting a chronological survey of Copland's major orchestral achievements, political activities, and aesthetic views leading up to the composition of the Third Symphony, with commentary from both myself and others, in

order to determine which orchestral and aesthetic precedents appeared in Copland's writings and music before the Third Symphony and whether material reminiscent of Mahler exists there. Considering the political and aesthetic dimensions of Copland's personality and career is imperative when attempting to provide a thorough portrait of the composer. In the context of an investigation that necessarily incorporates these categories, I intend to provide my own aesthetic examination of the Third Symphony.

It is well known that many of Copland's colleagues urged him to create a symphony thoroughly conceived as such, even prior to his receiving an official commission for such a work from Serge Koussevitzky, the principal conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. A much more infrequently discussed problem, however, is the question of whether a symphony was the most appropriate genre for American composition in the 1940s, still a period of avant-garde experimentalism in art. Taking for granted that Copland sought to declare his greatness in a genre then dominated by other American composers such as Roy Harris (1898-1979), William Schuman (1910-1992), and Howard Hanson (1896-1981), I aim to question whether the composition of a neoclassical work in 1946 was an adequate expression of Copland's political and aesthetic beliefs. In answering this question, I will account for Copland's communist leanings, the form this political alignment took during the 1930s—a decade that serves as the locus for the disintegration of revolutionary Marxism—and how this orientation was reified in his Third Symphony.²⁷ Theodor Adorno most elegantly comprehended such a tumultuous musical-political relationship in more general terms of style: "The quest for

²⁷ Copland identified with some of the tenets of communism, but he was not known to have been a member of the Communist Party. I will provide a more thorough account of his communism in Chapter III.

an age past not only fails to indicate the way home, but forfeits all consistency. . . . The universal style, after World War II, is the eclecticism of the shattered.”²⁸ And if Copland’s symphony was, indeed, the regressive product of such a violent transformation in art, I believe that in its shards can be seen a refracted portrait of Gustav Mahler.

After situating the Third Symphony historically within Copland’s career, I will offer a comparison of two symphonies: Mahler’s First and Copland’s Third. In this comparison I aim to determine the similarities between the Mahler symphony, which I feel exhibits many of the composer’s most characteristic compositional techniques, and the Copland symphony, which I believe best represents the height of his mature symphonic neoclassical style. By citing specific similarities and differences between these major works, I will show that Copland’s intense study and appreciation of Mahler during his formative years produced certain anxieties that were addressed by the composer, both consciously and unconsciously, through the composition of his Third Symphony. This is not to suggest that the possibility of Mahler’s influence is limited solely to this piece; a number of Copland’s orchestral works and songs can be found to contain stylistic traits similar to those in works by Mahler. Such a comprehensive investigation is, regrettably, impossible here.

In the fourth chapter I will present my conclusion in the form of a cohesive final argument in which I will incorporate elements from all three prior chapters. It is my goal to provide a portrait of the Third Symphony that accounts for Copland’s understanding of Mahler’s body of work, whether conscious or unconscious. It is my contention that the historical circumstances that led Copland to compose his Third Symphony were mediated by a confluence of his affinity for Mahler’s works, as evidenced by his writings, and his

²⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 10.

political activities, affiliations, and opinions in the 1930s and 1940s. I hope to show that the Third Symphony was Copland's attempt to mobilize his political goals by seeking an intersection of avant-garde styles and more accessible, traditional forms. Ultimately, I will posit that Copland failed to engage Mahler's formal innovations critically, ultimately pouring an ahistorical reading of Mahler's forms into a regressive neoclassical framework.

CHAPTER II

COPLAND ON MAHLER

When one assesses the relationship between Copland and Mahler, navigating the problematic category of influence while still attempting to objectivize their connection is an undertaking that must be treated carefully. In a 1973 interview for *Tempo* Peter Dickinson, with a similar task in mind, asked Copland about the influence of American folk music and cowboy songs on his works. The composer responded, “You sort of grow up with them as a kid in the States. I can't remember when I first heard a cowboy tune: it's just around.”¹ Copland's answer brings to light one aspect of the complexity of attempting to provide a portrait of the composer as a young man. Fortunately for this study, he left within the discourse a significant trail of insightful comments regarding his views on Mahler's style, compositions, and general impact. In accumulating and organizing many of the documents containing these commentaries, which range from interviews and essays to lectures and a two-volume autobiography, larger trends in theme begin to surface. Not only did Copland publish a multitude of reactions to specific works by Mahler, but he also discussed elements of his predecessor's methodology and the degree to which it affected his own practice. Due to the ambitious nature of a project that aims to document such a varied assortment of literary and musical references, classifying the results has the potential to be a complex issue; therefore, in pursuit of logical organization, the findings will be presented largely chronologically.

The most abundant types of references to Mahler by Copland are those of a stylistic and compositional nature; Copland frequently lauded, as well as criticized, his

¹ Aaron Copland and Peter Dickinson, “Composer in Interview: Aaron Copland,” *Tempo* LVII/224 (April 2003), 11.

predecessor for his creativity with regard to counterpoint, orchestration, and form. In the breadth of his discourse, he exhibited knowledge of nearly all of Mahler's major works, but the piece that made the greatest impression on him was the 1908 orchestral song cycle *Das Lied von der Erde* [The Song of the Earth]. He afforded it a similarly large role in his model of music history: "The Song of the Earth is in many respects the swan song of the entire Romantic movement."²

It is, perhaps, impossible to ascertain exactly when Copland became aware of Mahler; it seems probable, however, that his first exposure to the composer occurred when he was living in New York City as a child. It is possible, although not likely considering his age and circumstances, that Copland might have heard about Mahler when the latter traveled to the United States in 1908 to conduct the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic, as his tenure with the two organizations was highly publicized and discussed in local newspapers and, undoubtedly, in the musical community. By noting the chronology of references to Mahler in Copland's autobiography, one can deduce that he also may have read about Mahler in issues of *The Dial*, an American publication that ran from 1840 to 1929, which Copland described as "the literary avant-garde monthly of that period."³ In that journal, which was rejuvenated in 1920 by Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson, Jr. as a modernist literary magazine, Copland might have read articles by such critics as Paul Rosenfeld, who worked for the publication during that time. Copland later recalled that Rosenfeld "wrote

² Aaron Copland, *The New Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 32.

³ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984), 32.

perceptively about controversial figures such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Ornstein, Mahler, and Sibelius.”⁴

The first concrete evidence of Copland's exposure to Mahler's music is found in the context of his lessons with composition instructor Nadia Boulanger during the three years he spent studying in Paris (1921-1924). It was during these lessons that Copland discovered Boulanger's score for *Das Lied von der Erde* and examined it diligently, refining his critical eye. He reminisced in his autobiography, “I discovered Mahler through Mademoiselle. How she got into him I don't know, but she had the score for *Das Lied von der Erde* in 1922, and we pored over it together—especially the orchestration.”⁵ In addition, Copland remembered suffering through Boulanger's intense tutelage, which included “having to read torturously through Mahler orchestra scores at the piano with Mademoiselle insisting I go on to the end without stopping, no matter how slowly; this was a routine requirement of her score-reading classes.”⁶ These events alone imply that Boulanger's teaching style relied heavily on orchestration, an aspect of Mahler's music that Copland came to admire. Throughout his writings he referenced several other composers whom Boulanger emphasized in her studio, namely Claudio Monteverdi, Carlo Gesualdo, J. S. Bach, Gabriel Fauré, and Igor Stravinsky.

Working with the famous pedagogue had a profound effect on the style and opinions of the young composer. In her studio lessons and master classes Boulanger offered her students a well-rounded music education by covering a wide range of composers and styles and engaged her pupils in an array of intellectual activities. It was

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

in her weekly studio meetings that Copland learned to appreciate fine literature, *e.g.*, the works of Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, André Gide, and Ezra Pound; during these events he also had the opportunity to meet Igor Stravinsky, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Maurice Ravel, and Camille Saint-Saëns, who were among the many figures invited to attend. Howard Pollack described the nature of these engagements in his biography of the composer:

On Wednesday afternoons, “Mademoiselle” extended a family tradition by holding an informal class at her home. She or her students would play through an unfamiliar score, debating its merits and faults. . . . In addition, they might sing early choral music or discuss a new novel. For refreshments, Boulanger served tea and cakes. The atmosphere was far from luxuriant; the apartment's temperature was often frigid, the cakes typically stale. But this did not prevent musical and literary luminaries from attending.⁷

From the accounts of Boulanger’s salon by Pollack and Copland, it is clear that the young composer began to learn not only about Mahler but about a plethora of sophisticated topics.

Toward the end of his tenure in Paris, a time enhanced by traveling through other regions of Europe, Copland began consciously acknowledging Mahler as a personal interest and a great influence, perhaps, in part, because his travels allowed him to begin to explore Germanic language and culture. At this point in his correspondence, Copland started to reference German and Austrian composers more frequently. In a 25 July 1923 letter to Boulanger from Vienna, he reported that he had “found excellent surroundings in which to work” and that he spent most of his time “on composition and learning German

⁷ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 47-48.

. . . specializing in Bruckner, Reger, and Mahler,”⁸ evidence of a developing interest in Mahler outside of his lessons with Boulanger.

Copland returned to the United States in 1924 with a fresh and idealistic perspective on Mahler. After the European composer's death in 1911 the climate for reception of his work in the United States was lukewarm at best, the result of a number of factors. First, during his reign as conductor of the New York Philharmonic, Mahler received more than a few poor reviews from local critics, who wrote negatively of his supposed tyrannical behavior, his disdain for American customs, and his programming decisions. One of Mahler's greatest critical opponents was journalist Henry E. Krehbiel (1854-1923). As editor of the *New-York Tribune* (known after 1924 as the *New York Herald Tribune*), Krehbiel exerted significant power in the musical community and wrote frequently of characteristics he perceived as sub-par in Mahler's work at the Philharmonic. He seemed determined to convince New Yorkers that Mahler was merely a passing trend in music, claiming in the obituary of the composer that “He was looked upon as a great artist, and possibly he was one, but he failed to convince the people of New York of the fact, and therefore his American career was not a success.”⁹ It must have been partially as a result of this sort of press that Copland felt so strongly about revitalizing Mahler's image in the American musical community.

In April 1925 the conductor Willem Mengelberg led a performance of Mahler's Second Symphony with the New York Philharmonic. The aura surrounding the concert

⁸ Aaron Copland's letter (25 July 1923) to Nadia Boulanger, *The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland*, ed. Elizabeth B. Crist and Wayne Shirley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 40.

⁹ Henry Krehbiel, “Death of Mr. Mahler,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (21 May 1911), V: 2.

significantly affected the young Copland, causing him to issue a strong public response; he soon submitted an essay to *The New York Times* titled “Defends the Music of Mahler.”

Copland wrote to Boulanger of the experience:

Mengelberg gave the Second Symphony with chorus of Mahler. How very modern the orchestration is! Thirty years ahead of its time. How I wish I could hear all the others, especially the “Seventh.” The music critics treat Mahler badly in New York. I shall write an article “In defense of Mahler.” Once more I have to thank you for discovering Mahler for me!¹⁰

In his letter to *The New York Times* Copland began by citing problems with New York critics, claiming that they had not been moved to assess Mahler's music in the same way as most Europeans. Nevertheless, as a fair adjudicator, he acknowledged that many of the American critics' reviews of Mahler's music contained partial truths, but he also presupposed that many of those same reviewers had overlooked the most essential and idiosyncratic qualities of Mahler's style. Yet to these critics Copland conceded, “Mahler has at times written music which is bombastic, long-winded, banal.”¹¹ In a personal journal entry from 1929 he expanded this statement.

Those who most violently object to Mahler imagine they do so because he is trite, bombastic, and long-winded. Why are they so sensitive to Mahler's faults? Is it because they are close to him and feel ashamed of his weakness, as if he were a spiritual half-brother? . . . I am willing to overlook his shortcomings for the sake of those real qualities which are also his: an apocalyptic grandeur, with its concomitant, a child-like naïveté greater than that of any other composer before him; an amazing contra-

¹⁰ Aaron Copland, *The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland*, 47.

¹¹ Aaron Copland, “Defends the Music of Mahler,” *The New York Times* (5 April 1925), X: 6.

puntal mastery; an original orchestration thirty years in advance of his time.¹²

An examination of *The New York Times* letter of 1925 also shows Copland arguing for Mahler's relevance by situating the European composer as a modern and crucial force in new music.¹³ This particular angle was Copland's niche. As he would conclude on several future occasions, he presented Mahler's cornerstone achievements here as those having to do with orchestration and counterpoint.

From the standpoint of orchestration, Mahler is head and shoulders above Strauss, whose orchestral methods have already dated so perceptibly. Mahler orchestrates on big, simple lines, in which each note is of importance. He manages his enormous number of instruments with extraordinary economy, there are no useless doublings, instrument is pitted against instrument, group against group.¹⁴

Copland also cited examples of Mahler's contrapuntal writing (the Eighth Symphony) and listed what he considered to be Mahler's most important achievements: “the first movement of the Seventh Symphony, the scherzo of the Ninth, the last movement of the Fourth, and the entire *Das Lied von der Erde* have in them the stuff of living music.”¹⁵

As was demonstrated in the letter to *The New York Times*, Copland envisioned himself something of a musicologist and tried throughout his career to advance his own vision of Western music history. Many of his essays, particularly those in *Our New Music* (1941), deal with Mahler from a historical perspective while still focusing on the

¹² Aaron Copland, “The Mahler Question,” *Aaron Copland: A Reader*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2004), 286-87.

¹³ Aaron Copland, “Defends the Music of Mahler,” X: 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

foundations of his compositional palette. He found the period of music directly preceding his own to be of particular interest and value, which is not surprising considering the impact of his discovery of avant-garde music, which had been facilitated by both his reading of literary/musical journals and an awareness of the composers and styles he studied with Boulanger.

When dealing with these types of historical documents, ones that attempt to temporalize aesthetic achievements, it is necessary to distinguish among a few different, and often contradictory, categories of historical thinking, for it could be argued that the historical narrative to which one subscribes is, in fact, a personal theory of the present. Along these lines, an attempt to understand Copland's approach to musicological writing can simultaneously illuminate both his ideology related to society as it was and also his determination of the events that contributed to such a society coming into existence.

In his introduction to *Philosophy of History*, G. W. F. Hegel differentiated three modes of historical thought: original, reflective, and philosophical. Original history, Hegel claimed, is an author's narration of events that he or she has experienced first-hand in an attempt to give an account of important activities and events of his or her own time. "The culture of the author and the events in his work, the spirit of the author and the actions he tells of, are one and the same," Hegel declared. "He describes more or less what he has seen, or at least lived through. . . . in order to bring that picture to posterity with as much clarity as it had in his own direct observation or in the accounts of other direct witnesses."¹⁶ In the case of Copland, this mode of thought accounts for his correspondence, reviews of concerts, and lectures.

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 4.

Reflective history, however, concerns accounts that are not historically contingent; in other words, the author is not required to have been an actor in the events that he or she describes. It is in this arena that much of Copland's body of musicological work must be situated. Regarding reflective history, Hegel articulated, "Here the main thing is the elaboration of the historical material, which the historian approaches with *his* spirit—this being different from the spirit contained in the content. . . . and the spirit that speaks through the author is different from the spirit of the times for which he speaks."¹⁷ In this way the author often and unknowingly reconstructs history in order to fit contemporary categories of social understanding. Copland exemplifies in *The New Music* this kind of historical thought.¹⁸

The third type of historical practice is philosophical history. This is the thoughtful consideration of history: the attempt to discover a rational process, the intent to bring to light the material of history itself, the effort to map the unfolding of freedom over time. This category of historical practice is a material conception of history—or historical materialism. This is the approach most associated with the German Idealist thinkers (Kant and Hegel), Karl Marx, and the Frankfurt School philosophers, notably Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin.

The distinction between reflective history—known occasionally in twentieth-century philosophy as historicity—and historical materialism is well rendered in Siegfried Kracauer's provocative examination of the invention of the technology of photography and its social and metaphysical consequences. In contemplating a proposed

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ The implications of this dimension of Copland's historical procedure will be illuminated further in the next chapter.

project that would result in a collection of works on Goethe in order to provide a complete portrait of the author, Kracauer recognized the potential for an ahistorical understanding of Goethe by conjuring him in such a way.

The principle of Goethe philology is that of historicist thinking, which emerged about the same time as modern photographic technology. On the whole, advocates of such historicist thinking believe they can explain any phenomenon purely in terms of its genesis. That is, they believe in any case that they can grasp historical reality by reconstructing the course of events in their temporal succession without any gaps. Photography presents a spatial continuum; historicism seeks to provide the temporal continuum. According to historicism, the complete mirroring of an intratemporal sequence simultaneously contains the meaning of all that occurred from within that time. . . . Historicism is concerned with the photography of time. The equivalent of its temporal photography would be a giant film depicting the temporally interconnected events from every vantage point.¹⁹

In seeking to provide a chronological narrative of late Romantic and “new” music—surely a product of reflective history (as put forth in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*)—Copland linked Mahler to neoclassicism, a style not yet in fruition at the time of the latter’s death, nor one that truly acknowledged the most radical aspects of his work.

The neoclassical style emerged in the 1920s and 1930s as an alternative for composers who wished to pursue a more traditional musical and formal vernacular than that envisioned in the expressionist and serial works of composers like Schoenberg and Webern. Although Schoenberg’s serialism could be said to have been the most objective musical display of social suffering, offering formal functions (albeit with neoclassical foundations) that allowed for a less encumbered expression of the subject than with tonality, many composers saw it as esoteric and unforgiving for uneducated listeners. For

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” *The Mass Ornament*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 49-50.

these composers neoclassicism was an attempt to circumvent this crisis in music by reverting to older forms. As this crisis was a function of a much larger social issue—the disintegration of bourgeois society under capitalism and the failure of revolutionary politics—so did Copland seek to make it the locus of his political ideology in the 1930s and 1940s, a political position that Crist diagnosed in her dissertation as “progressive liberalism.”²⁰ It is here that Copland took stylistic and formal cues not only from Mahler, who he believed “bridge[d] the gap between the composers of the early 18th century and the Neoclassicists of [his] own time,” but also from Stravinsky and France’s Les Six; the ideological content in his neoclassical works, however, was much more indebted to music from the Soviet Union, an aesthetic that will be discussed in Chapter III.²¹ Adorno pursued a discussion of the neoclassical tendency best in his essay “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” where he asserted, “Neo-Classicism became an accepted style because it enabled individuals sated by their individuality to colonize the libidinous space of a past age not yet fully individuated.”²² Therefore, neoclassicism becomes an attempt to depict balance in a society that is in decay, where no such balance actually exists. Conversely, the rational kernel of truth in Stravinsky’s neoclassicism, his “anti-psychological” approach to the music, is that his forms were as equally revealing of society as Schoenberg’s in that they not only questioned whether the subject was free, but whether it existed at all.

²⁰ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Aaron Copland’s Third Symphony (1946): Context, Composition, and Consequence* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2000), 88.

²¹ Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, 34.

²² Theodor W. Adorno, “Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,” *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* (London: Verso, 1998), 155.

Copland published *Our New Music* in 1941 and followed it with a “revised and enlarged edition” in 1968. The second edition featured minor changes, the most notable and obvious being the title, *The New Music, 1900-1960*. A brief justification of the altered title can be found in the book’s preface where Copland explained:

The change of title from “*Our*” *New Music* to “*The*” *New Music* is not meant to imply a subtle disengagement of the author from the musical scene of more recent years. The new title was chosen to indicate that this is not merely a reprint of the original edition. . . . My purpose, as explained in the Preface of the first edition, was to highlight the main lines of development from the late 19th-century to mid-20th-century music, discussing only those composers and tendencies that played a key role in that development.²³

On a deeper level, Copland’s semantic shift indicates a change in tone; in altering the title Copland likely viewed various assertions in the book to have moved from opinion to canon. Using the word “the” implies a dogmatism that “our” does not as emphatically suggest.

In the chapter of *The New Music* titled “The Late Romantics: Mahler, Strauss, Scriabin, Fauré, Sibelius,” Copland began by making a general statement on what the cited composers represented. Concerning Mahler’s music, he offered the following assessment: “aesthetically it added little, since it attached itself to a tradition that had already fulfilled its promise, but the technical means employed—the harmonies, the contrapuntal textures, the orchestral timbres, the melodic lines—contained elements that were capable of being disengaged and used for new ends.”²⁴ This breakdown of the fundamental components of Mahler’s music is concurrent with Copland’s consistent

²³ Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

preoccupation with the composer's counterpoint and orchestration. While he does attempt to polemicize parts of Mahler's procedures, his other comments in the essay lead one to believe that he had a higher regard for the music than he was willing to admit. According to Copland's interpretation, "All his music reinvokes the past glories of that golden age, but with an added note of regret for a wonderful epoch that is gone without hope of recall."²⁵

Copland frequently revisited compositional topics such as counterpoint, instrumentation, and orchestration in the monograph, bringing forth deeper observations about Mahler's orchestral writing. In one such statement, he gave attention to counterpoint and instrumentation specifically: "Two facets of [Mahler's] musicianship were years in advance of their time. One is the curiously contrapuntal fabric of the musical texture; the other, more obvious, his strikingly original instrumentation."²⁶ Perhaps the most provocative comment in that chapter is Copland's dissection of Mahler's use of polyphony and space in the orchestra:

Mahler's was the first orchestra to play "without pedal," to borrow a phrase from piano technique. The use of the orchestra as a many-voiced body in this particular way was typical of the age of Bach and Handel. Thus, as far as orchestral practice is concerned, Mahler bridges the gap between the composers of the early 18th century and the Neoclassicists of our own time.²⁷

"Without pedal" likely refers to the musical transparency gained from Mahler's approach to polyphony and texture, his affordance of autonomy to each individual line and motif,

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the perfect balance between the part and the whole. This comparison to original Baroque convention and the more recent neoclassical style is not surprising coming from Copland, himself a formidable scholar of the two styles and a frequent composer in the latter; however, this teleological vernacular (“Mahler bridges the gap. . .”) points to the seeds of Copland’s own appropriation of Mahler’s work as a stepping stone to his brand of neoclassicism.

Another major difference between *Our New Music* and the later revision is the omission of the appendix. In *Our New Music* Copland featured an extensive “Selected List of Phonograph Recordings” in which he recommended performances of works by the composers discussed in the book.²⁸ The most revealing quality of the appendix is its justification: “The recordings listed are chosen for their significance in the composer's output rather than for their excellence as recordings.”²⁹ Presuming Copland is following his stated rationale, he meant to highlight what he believed to be the most imperative works by Mahler; ostensibly, however, any recordings by Mahler mentioned in the appendix were likely of those works that Copland found personally attractive.

Consequently, Copland's roster of phonograph recordings of works by Mahler is quite informative: in listing a mere six selections, he demonstrated a serious knowledge of both the composer's output and some of the primary conductors of his works at the time the appendix was written. The list comprises the following pieces: *Das Lied von der Erde*, “Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen” and “Ich atmet einen Linden duft” from the *Rückert-Lieder*, Symphony No. 2, the “Adagietto” from Symphony No. 5, and

²⁸ Aaron Copland, “Appendix: A Selected List of Phonograph Recordings,” *Our New Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941), 277.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Symphony No. 9. Its most interesting aspect is that Copland's veneration of these pieces predates their acceptance into the canon of symphonic and chamber literature, and, therefore, is completely divorced from any modern sense of hierarchy among Mahler's works. Coincidentally, these six pieces are, to this day, among the most highly regarded of Mahler's music.

One must acknowledge this thoughtful list as a testament not only to Copland's thorough knowledge of Mahler's music but also to his deep admiration of the composer in general. Furthermore, four of the six recordings recommended by Copland were conducted by Bruno Walter, a former colleague of Mahler who later became one of the most outspoken advocates of his work. Walter was responsible for programming Mahler's works in the United States after New York critics had largely rejected the composer during, and following, his residency with the New York Philharmonic. Copland's embrace of the conductor is only further evidence that he was knowledgeable about Mahler and supportive of his circle.

Copland's selection of works is especially intriguing when juxtaposed with the choices that he made for the March-April 1957 issue of *Hi-Fi Music at Home* in his contribution to an article by Jack Diether titled "Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library."³⁰ Copland's second exercise, in which he named twenty-five recordings of five different works, exhibits some overlap with the music from his previous list in *Our New Music*, as it contains *Das Lied von der Erde* and Symphony No. 9. The addition of *Kindertotenlieder*, Symphony No. 1, and Symphony No. 4 to complete the selections is not explained specifically in the article; however, Diether's discussion of the history of

³⁰ Aaron Copland and Jack Diether, "Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library," *Hi-Fi Music at Home* IV/1 (March-April 1957), 26, 66-70.

recordings of Mahler's works may shed light on their inclusion. As Diether observed, Mahler's entire catalogue had been recorded on American labels by 1953.³¹ This development would have given Copland plenty of time to round out his knowledge of Mahler's works via recordings by the time he was working on the article, as live performances of the composer's music were still somewhat rare.³²

Throughout the article Diether offered compelling explanations of Copland's selections. He submitted that *Das Lied von der Erde* was the composer's favorite piece by Mahler, a supposition confirmed by information supplied by Copland himself in other documents. Diether discussed the major compositional elements of each piece and then compared the qualities of each recording. Interestingly, he echoed observations made by Copland regarding the elements of Mahler's compositional style. One prime example concerned counterpoint in the Ninth Symphony: "In this [third] movement, titled *Rondo Burleske*, Mahler's contrapuntal skill, a skill surpassed by no modern composer, reaches a climax and one might also say a crisis. But in the closing *Adagio* he quietly turns his back and sings his inmost thoughts for everyone and no one."³³ This comment emphasizes two foundations of Mahler's compositions: contrapuntal mastery and great emotional depth.

The Copland/Diether list of recordings is significantly longer and more detailed than the one in *Our New Music*. As Copland demonstrated with the previous discography, his choices were associated with musicians who were frequently cited in

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

³² The "Mahler boom" did not begin until 1960, when Leonard Bernstein held a Mahler festival with the New York Philharmonic, during which all of Mahler's symphonies were performed.

³³ Aaron Copland and Jack Diether, "Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library," *Hi-Fi Music at Home*, 68.

conjunction with estimations of the greatest Mahler interpreters. The *Hi-Fi* article names illustrious performers: Kathleen Ferrier, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Bruno Walter, Jascha Horenstein, Paul Kletzki, Rafael Kubelík, and Dimitri Mitropoulos, among others.

Another substantial article in which Copland offered a discussion of Mahler is titled “The Twentieth Century: Reorientation and Experiment” from the essay collection *Music and Western Man*, in which he considered the composer in the context of Wagner and post-Wagnerianism.³⁴ Connections between Mahler and Wagner have been discussed for nearly a century, as they are understandably abundant both in the realm of Mahler’s compositions and the opera productions he conducted. Copland’s claim that Mahler came after the Romantic period, which was “a tradition that had already fulfilled its promise,”³⁵ is interesting in that it ostensibly places Mahler's music in a more or less reasonable historical context but, being a largely non-dialectical assessment, fails to highlight the aesthetic and philosophic qualities of his music that simultaneously drew from aspects of the Romantic era and set his music apart from it.³⁶

Copland's assessment of Mahler's compositional techniques in “Reorientation and Experiment” is redolent of the author's previously published remarks on the topic: he cited the composer's two major contributions as “his conception of texture as contrapuntally received,” and “a new kind of orchestration.”³⁷ The structure of Copland's argu-

³⁴ Aaron Copland, “The Twentieth Century: Reorientation and Experiment,” *Music and Western Man*, ed. Peter Garvie (Sussex: Littlehampton Book Services, 1958), 281-86.

³⁵ Aaron Copland, *Our New Music*, 29.

³⁶ Copland's thoughts on such topics in Mahler's music will be elaborated on in subsequent sections of this and the following chapter.

³⁷ Aaron Copland, “The Twentieth Century: Reorientation and Experiment,” *Music and Western Man*, 282.

ment in this particular article is, nevertheless, quite innovative, as he set his lesson on Mahler against a laterally running discussion of Richard Strauss. His opinion of Strauss in this essay is also decidedly positive, even venerable:

Nevertheless, it was apparent before long that Strauss belonged to the future, at least in part, for his harmonies were more daring, his textures more brilliant and more complex, and in general he indicated to the composers who followed him a rhythmic and musico-dramatic adventuresomeness that surpassed anything they had previously known.³⁸

This excerpt is especially interesting in that, as he did with Mahler, Copland viewed Strauss temporally, his music important, in part, because it “belonged to the future.”

Despite this affirmation, Strauss did not quite extend, in Copland’s estimation, into the realm of the avant-garde; rather, he held the pragmatic view that Strauss was simply a brilliant composer but, perhaps, not the visionary that he believed Wagner or Mahler to be. Copland’s reverence eventually fractured when he began to focus on what he thought were the limitations of Strauss’s impact, as seen in this excerpt from a 1935 essay:

in Germany around the 1900s when Strauss and Mahler were in full flush of their artistic careers. . . one would seem to have been justified in predicting a brilliant succession of new and talented young men. But, strangely enough, in the German case, a hiatus of twenty to thirty years occurred between Mahler and Strauss on one hand and Hindemith on the other.³⁹

This is one instance in which Copland’s historicist thinking prohibited him from viewing Strauss’s music dialectically; rather, he had a difficult time situating Strauss in a temporal

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 281-82.

³⁹ Aaron Copland, “A Note on Young Composers (1935),” *Aaron Copland, A Reader*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2004), 125.

portrait of the “progress of music,” so he seemingly gave up on him. If, according to Copland’s view of music history, Strauss’s music lay in opposition to the oncoming neoclassical tendency, then it could not accurately be classified and was, therefore, inferior to that of Mahler.

This type of thinking is one of the most dangerous byproducts of historicism, for it fails to recognize that the true value of a work of art lies not in how it inspires future artists, nor in how it behaves over time, but within the internal phenomena of the work itself: how it behaves in its own moment. One reason that Copland found Mahler so significant, however, was his belief that Mahler’s music pointed towards future neoclassical works. He did not seem to believe the same of Strauss. In fact, in the final years of his career Copland exhibited a complete break from Strauss, turning down tickets to attend a 1970 Covent Garden production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, confessing that “of all the composers whom he had disliked in his younger days, Richard Strauss was the worst.”⁴⁰

The purpose of this extended look at Copland's changing views on Strauss is twofold. First, it reveals the volatility of Copland's academic rhetoric; obviously, given the fact that he did not feel that “Strauss was the worst” when he was younger, this must have been a false recollection on his part, a projection of his then-current beliefs into the past (or, of course, he simply changed his mind). Second, the juxtaposition of Mahler and Strauss, who are inexorably linked in history, further highlights Copland's lifelong

⁴⁰ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 63.

devotion to Mahler in conjunction with his eventual dismissal of other composers, notably Strauss, whom he at one point had placed in a relative light to Mahler.⁴¹

The previously mentioned “Reorientation and Experiment” essay from 1958 is especially provocative when viewed with the knowledge that Copland’s eventual conclusion would be that the promise of Mahler and Strauss was in some ways unfulfilled; his diagnosis of Mahler’s effect on twentieth-century music was certainly entangled with his evaluation of particular aspects of Mahler’s style. For example, when supplementing his claim that Mahler’s counterpoint was unique and vital, he explained, “The clarity of independent melodic lines is a very typical feature of later twentieth-century music, and Mahler was perhaps the first composer to realize that the new sound world would reflect primarily contrapuntal rather than harmonic interests.”⁴² This “new sound world” is clearly something to which Copland himself also sought to contribute, as his mature style is generally considered to be synonymous with the “American sound”—one of the many nationalistic, tangential styles that emerged in the early to mid-twentieth century. One aspect of Mahler’s counterpoint that would have reflected the new sound world was not only his learned counterpoint of individual melodic lines against each other, but his counterpoint of *ideas* against each other. Copland continued his analysis as follows:

We find in Mahler a dry, clear orchestration demonstrating a striking economy of means. Even though he wrote for enormous numbers of performers there are always sections where single instruments play thinly

⁴¹ Ironically, Mahler and Strauss were good friends throughout their careers. I am not sure whether Copland knew this. A detailed account of the two composers’ correspondence can be found in Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss, *Gustav Mahler/Richard Strauss: Correspondence 1888-1911*, ed. Herta Blaukopf, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Munich: R. Piper, 1980).

⁴² Aaron Copland, “The Twentieth Century: Reorientation and Experiment,” *Music and Western Man*, 282.

spaced sonorities. The way in which he uses solo instruments to bring out these original sounding intervals can be heard even more clearly in *Das Lied von der Erde*, one of his last works.⁴³

First, Copland called attention to Mahler's "original sounding intervals"—a recurring musical phenomenon for which both composers are known. Surely anyone who has heard Copland's music is aware that he tended to favor open fourths and fifths. In addition, many of Copland's works rely on "dry, clear orchestration," "[using] solo instruments," and "thinly spaced sonorities." One of the greatest examples of the congregation of these ideas is in his *Quiet City* (1941), where the composer relied heavily on exiguous, open orchestration and instrumental solos to show the sparseness of a material lifestyle and the "inner distress of the main character."⁴⁴ Written originally as incidental music to a play of the same name by Irwin Shaw, the shelf life of Copland's music has long exceeded the play's own brief popularity. Copland's reflections on the piece include the following remark: "The work has been called 'atmospheric' and 'reflective,' and [the play's protagonist] David Mellnikoff has long since been forgotten!"⁴⁵

Like many of Copland's works, Mahler's music often contained extramusical content. Much of Mahler's aesthetic platform relied on both his preoccupation with his existential situation and his obsession with cultural and literary references. It is not apparent from his music that Copland was as intensely plagued with the same search for meaning that afflicted Mahler, his biography certainly evidences interests in modernist literature and contemporary political issues, which were, to be sure, bound up with the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 282-83.

⁴⁴ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, 287.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

idea of consciousness. For these reasons as well, one can understand why Copland's appreciation of Mahler was not relegated to counterpoint and orchestration alone and also why Mahler's emotionally dense, psychologically substantial paradigm was more appealing to Copland than Strauss's more altiloquent compositional style.

In his landmark biography of the composer, *Mahler: A Physiognomy* (1960), Theodor Adorno accused Mahler of being a “cultural fetishist.”⁴⁶ In this observation Adorno articulated a dominant aspect of Mahler's music: many of his compositions rely heavily on cultural and extramusical references, from text by Friedrich Nietzsche to musical quotations of Beethoven and Wagner. By stressing these references, Mahler separated them from the whole of which they were once a part. The effects of this separation occur on a number of levels. According to Marx, commodity exchange obfuscates the original characteristics of the product and also the way that the consumer relates to the laborer who created it, *i.e.*, the product of labor is simultaneously alienated from the laborer, and, containing objectified labor, permanently altered socially in terms of the relationship among the laborer, the product, and the consumer. Under capitalism this form of commodity fetishism conditions all social relations.

What this means for Mahler is that in his use of extramusical references, the relationship between the producer of the original references and the music itself is obscured. Even Mahler's self-borrowing, which occurs frequently throughout his symphonies and song cycles, can be understood as a self-fetishization, extracting themes and motifs from the context in which they were conceived. What fetishization means when dealing with Copland, however, is that Mahler's body of work is transformed

⁴⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1960), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 20.

through Copland's misappropriation of it as pointing towards neoclassicism, the irony being that his assessment of it as such made his misunderstanding true.

In order to obtain a reasonable comprehension of Mahler's works, nonetheless, one must, at the very least, be familiar with the elemental extramusical themes on which the programmatic and subtextual implications are contingent. By examining the literary and cultural events on which a number of Mahler's symphonies are based, one may eventually come to terms with Mahler's approach to program and structure. To return to Vera Micznik's theory of Mahler's dialectical relationship with the culture of his own time, "The historical and critical assessment of Mahler's works cannot be understood outside the prevailing late nineteenth-century paradigmatic dichotomy of 'programme' versus 'absolute' music."⁴⁷

It was when Copland focused on Mahler's aesthetics that he offered some of his most interesting commentary. A highly trained theorist himself, Copland knew the techniques necessary in order to understand and compartmentalize Mahler's complex style properly. Perhaps Adorno described this desirable quality in analyzing Mahler best in his 1930 essay "Mahler Today," when he declared: "His work wants to be understood in layers."⁴⁸ Like Adorno, Copland was also in touch with the philosophical depths and cultural undercurrents in Mahler's music. In *Our New Music* he touched on the idea of a submerged, more human, and cultural layer to Mahler's oeuvre.

⁴⁷ Vera Micznik, "Music and Aesthetics: The Programmatic Issue," *The Cambridge Companion to Mahler*, ed. Jeremy Barham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38.

⁴⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, "Mahler Today," *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 607.

All his music reinvokes the past glories of that golden age, but with an added note of regret for a wonderful epoch that was gone without hope of recall. It is impossible to understand the music of Mahler without keeping in mind that he was by nature a profoundly childlike artist, yet heir to all the problematical complexities of the modern world.⁴⁹

Many of his symphonies directly reference literary and musical figures ranging from Friedrich Nietzsche (Symphony No. 4) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Symphony No. 8) to Richard Wagner, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Hector Berlioz (Symphony No. 2). Having studied Romantic music and literature, Copland would have been aware of these references.

Like Mahler, Copland was by no means a composer of absolute music exclusively; his works were often subordinated to extramusical sources, notably texts, programs, dances, and plays. And as with his predecessor, Copland also invested considerable time in exploring the connection between his life and art. Although his compositions may ultimately have expressed a less desperate and existential drive than those of Mahler, he, nevertheless, used his music to work out internal issues. In *Music and Imagination* from 1952, for instance, Copland confided: “I must create in order to know myself”—a philosophy that he seemingly held in common with Mahler and, undoubtedly, many others.⁵⁰

Also marginally relevant here is Copland's assessment of Mahler's Judaism. Based on the materials I have assessed for this project, Copland's attraction to Mahler's religious principles must remain of a speculative nature; nevertheless, here are two composers of varying spirituality who shared a similar religious background. When

⁴⁹ Aaron Copland, *Our New Music*, 30-31.

⁵⁰ Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 41.

describing Darius Milhaud's Judaism in *Our New Music*, Copland reflected: “That he is not so racial a composer as Bloch or Mahler seems natural if we remember that his ancestors settled in Provence.”⁵¹ Copland’s depiction of Mahler as a “racial” composer—referring, in this context, to the latter's Jewish background—is quite relevant in that it signifies that he considered Mahler's Judaism to be an active element in his musical style. How or whether this religious grounding is applicable to Copland's own career, again, remains unclear. Although Copland spoke of his Jewish upbringing unenthusiastically—“Religious observance in the Copland family was mostly a matter of conventional participation rather than a deep commitment to other-world experience”⁵²—Judaism and spirituality in music was always a subject that interested the composer in his own life and career.⁵³ Howard Pollack painted the composer's “Jewishness” as mercurial at best, acknowledging that “he showed relatively little involvement in any aspect of his Jewish heritage” but also adding that “Over the course of his career, he nevertheless wrote a handful of works with explicit ties to Judaism.”⁵⁴ Two of Copland’s earlier religious works were the *Four Motets* for mixed voices (1921), which took their text from the Old Testament, and *Vitebsk: Study on a Jewish Theme* for violin, cello, and piano (1929), in which the composer sought to depict the harsh conditions of village life for European Jews.

⁵¹ Aaron Copland, *Our New Music*, 83.

⁵² Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, 19.

⁵³ For more on Copland’s attitude towards these topics, see “What is Jewish Music?” *New York Herald Tribune* XXVI/7 (2 October 1949), 14.

⁵⁴ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 27.

One of Copland's first major orchestral works, *Symphonic Ode* (1929), a single-movement piece that generally lasts about twenty minutes, has drawn some comparison to Mahler. A cursory examination of the work may yield, to some, these Mahleresque qualities: a rather large brass section, frequent shifts of mood and dynamics, and a moderate use of dissonance within a largely tonal atmosphere.⁵⁵ In the first volume of his autobiography Copland described the piece as a summation of many of the musical influences from the first leg of his career. On this occasion he cited Mahler and Judaism specifically as imprints on his style.

The Ode resembles me at the time, full of ideas and ideals, introspective and serious, but still showing touches of youthful jazz days, reflections of a Jewish heritage, remnants of Paris (Boulanger's *la grande ligne*), influences of Mahler (the orchestration) and Stravinsky (motor rhythms).⁵⁶

Copland later reflected on the piece's existential qualities, relating the style to that of Mahler. It would appear that the *Symphonic Ode* represented in some ways one of Copland's earliest musical attempts to “[affirm] the tragic reality which is at the core of existence,” an action that can also be interpreted as a Mahlerian endeavor. Later, in the same passages, Copland conceded that “You will find a certain relation between the Ode and an occasional movement in the grandiose style by Gustav Mahler.”⁵⁷ Such comments exhibit a relative willingness to admit Mahler's influence, at least in the case of the *Symphonic Ode*.

⁵⁵ A highly detailed and essential account of the genesis of the work can be found in Elizabeth B. Crist, “The Compositional History of Aaron Copland's *Symphonic Ode*,” *American Music* XVIII/3 (Autumn 2000), 257-77.

⁵⁶ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, 165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

Copland was not quite as disposed to acknowledge Mahler's impact later in his career. In the case of the Third Symphony (1946)—one of Copland's most conventional neoclassical works—it is possible to locate passages that seem reminiscent of Mahler. Copland acknowledged such comparisons, but he did not concur. In the second volume of his autobiography he contemplated this connection:

It is an ambitious score, often compared to Mahler and to Shostakovich and sometimes Prokofiev. . . . as a longtime admirer of Mahler, some of my music may show his influence in a general way, but I was not aware of being directly influenced by other composers when writing the work.⁵⁸

The spirit of this comment is echoed later in the same volume, when he discussed *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1950).

Although Copland attempted to distance himself from comparisons to Mahler in these later works, he nevertheless acknowledged the possibility of some interesting overlap among the three artists: Dickinson, Mahler, and himself.

Ives, Mahler, and Fauré have been mentioned as influences on the Dickinson Songs, particularly the romantic fifth song, "Heart, We Will Forget Him," which has been likened to Mahler. Miss Dickinson's poems are preoccupied with death, as is so much of Mahler's work. But as important to my work as these three composers have been, I see no direct influence. Perhaps I am too close to the picture; it is certainly possible that they were part of my working apparatus.⁵⁹

The rhetoric behind these recently discussed comments in *Copland: Since 1943* must be considered briefly in this light. Ironically, the two mentions of Mahler in this volume in relation to the Third Symphony and the *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* correspond

⁵⁸ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

with Mahler's two preferred genres of composition: the symphony and the song cycle. Copland has therefore taken two pieces that are among his finest achievements in those areas and has cited them in conjunction with Mahler, while also taking care to distance himself from the composer. Or, at the least, he has produced a fog surrounding whatever influence Mahler may have exerted on the two works. Nonetheless, Copland did not deny Mahler's influence outright; therefore, he must have felt the connection to be valid on some level or he likely would not have addressed it in such a manner.

Despite Copland's significant esteem for Mahler in his writings, it is imperative to recognize that he also chronicled complaints against the composer. As early as his 1925 letter to *The New York Times*, Copland registered issues with elements of Mahler's style. Perhaps he was, in a way, attempting to rationalize the complaints of the critics, as he was notorious for being polite. Towards the beginning of the essay, Copland qualified his argument with the following disclaimer: "If I write in defense of Mahler it is not merely for the pleasure of contradicting the critics. As a matter of fact, I also realize that Mahler has at times written music which is bombastic, long-winded, banal."⁶⁰ Copland registered numerous shortcomings in Mahler's works in this essay, specifically, "that Mahler has on occasion been grandiloquent is undeniable" and that "Mahler has possibly never written a perfect masterpiece."⁶¹ These assessments neutralize many of his positive observations, as they frequently appear in conjunction and often cancel each other out. And yet the comments of praise in *The New York Times* essay far outweigh the negative conclusions.

⁶⁰ Aaron Copland, "Defends the Music of Mahler," X: 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

“Banal” was a word that Copland frequently used to describe Mahler. In a 1927 letter to composer and friend Roger Sessions, Copland complained, “How naïve and sympathetic the banality in Mahler is, compared to the empty, heartless banality of Strauss.”⁶² This passage can be interpreted as a beautiful and backhanded compliment akin to Adorno’s portrait of Mahler’s banality, for it was precisely such banalities that allowed Mahler to critique the classical forms he invoked. As I have shown in this chapter, Copland moved further away from Strauss as he became a more sophisticated musician; this letter was registered quite early in his career, however, when other writings indicate he still respected Strauss as a composer. Copland’s comparison of Mahler’s banality with that of Strauss indicates that he understood the term dialectically, unlike some of Mahler’s critics who likely employed the term simply derogatorily.

Copland did offer more concrete, negative assessments of Mahler’s style. In *Our New Music* he addressed the composer’s flaws in great detail. Ironically, the “Late Romantics” chapter contains some of Copland’s greatest praise of Mahler but also some of his harshest criticism. First, he offered a survey of basic flaws.

Mahler’s faults as a composer have been dwelt upon ad nauseam. Admittedly, he is long-winded, trite, bombastic; he lacks taste, and sometimes he plagiarizes unblushingly, filching his material from Schubert, Mozart, Bruckner, or another of a half dozen of his favorites. It is music that is full of human frailties no doubt. But when all is said, there remains something extraordinarily touching about the man’s work, something that makes one willing to put up with the weaknesses.⁶³

⁶² Aaron Copland, letter (18 August 1927) to Roger and Barbara Sessions, quoted in *The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland*, 57.

⁶³ Aaron Copland, *Our New Music*, 31.

Even in this lengthy reproach Copland seemed willing to overlook some of Mahler's perceived shortcomings because he believed them to contribute ultimately to a greater aesthetic and existential cause. Many of the critiques in this passage are, to this day, borrowed by some as arguments against Mahler. Earlier in the same essay Copland had written of Mahler's naïveté, this time comparing the composer to Berlioz. What follows is one of his most infamous comments on Mahler, in which he compared both Mahler and Berlioz to Beethoven:

It is a mistake to compare the music of either of these men with that of Beethoven. One is always being told that Mahler was no Beethoven. Quite so. The difference between Beethoven and Mahler is the difference between watching a great man walk down the street and watching a great actor play the part of a great man walking down the street. The two experiences can be equally impressive, though in different ways.⁶⁴

In this quotation one sees the totality of Copland's conflict, the drive to both revere and disparage the composer. Regardless of what Copland wrote in *Our New Music*, however, the weight of his endorsements of Mahler far outweighs that of his reservations. To determine the extent of any connection between the actual music of the two composers, an analytical comparison must be made in order to highlight the distinct similarities between their styles and compositional techniques. I will offer such an analysis in Chapter III in conjunction with an extended examination of Copland's Third Symphony.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER III

COPLAND'S NEOCLASSICISM

Intentions are central to music, but only intermittently. . . . To be musical means to energize incipient intentions: to harness, not indulge them. This is how music becomes structure.

— Theodor W. Adorno¹

Any attempt to discuss Copland as a symphonist seems, at first, to beg mighty questions. Did not his genius lie in altogether different areas? Was he a symphonist at all?

— Calum MacDonald²

Introduction

Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946) is, to this day, recognized as one of the composer's masterworks, and yet certain questions concerning its genesis and meaning still remain. The primary function of this chapter is to address Copland's orchestral projects, political activities, and aesthetic views leading up to the composition of the Third Symphony in order to locate the contradictions that ultimately engendered his neoclassical turn. This narrative will be aligned with the documentary study of his discourse on Mahler presented in the previous chapter in order to examine whether Mahler's influence on Copland can be measured in a practical way. The resulting exegesis will provide the foundation for a new dialectical discussion of the Third Symphony.

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Music and Language," *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* (London: Verso, 1998), 3.

² Calum MacDonald, "Statements and Connotations: Copland the Symphonist," *Tempo* [New Series] CCXIII (July 2000), 26.

For the purpose of analysis and comparison, it was necessary to select a work from Copland's oeuvre that exhibits the most Mahlerian qualities. It was also imperative to choose a large-scale major work that represents Copland's neoclassical style, as pursuing an immanent critique of such a work is the most radical way to comprehend his technique in relation to Mahler. I am not concerned here with total claims regarding Copland's career or style but, rather, only those insofar as they illuminate his relationship with Mahler—itsself tempered by Copland's approach to historical thinking—and that can be argued to be represented in some form in the Third Symphony or in his aesthetic philosophies surrounding it. I am not searching for direct content overlap between the two; I merely seek to compare the work of these composers, separated by high modernism, their greatest symphonies separated by the atrocities of the Second World War, in order to understand better the meaning of Copland's neoclassical aesthetic. Or, to put it another way, I aim to question whether, or to what effect, Copland's approach to his Third Symphony was conditioned by his understanding of Mahler's body of work and what it pointed towards.

In determining an object of Copland's neoclassicism in order to search for Mahler, it was necessary to choose a work that falls within one of the primary genres for which Mahler composed, *i.e.*, symphonies and song cycles. According to these criteria, the Third Symphony provides the most appropriate composition for such an analysis. One may question whether the most relevant commentaries by Copland on Mahler occurred in chronological proximity to the creation of the Third Symphony; yet, as exhibited in the previous chapters, Copland maintained a discourse on Mahler that dates from as early as 1925 (with reminiscences beginning in 1922) and extends at least to the

publication of the second volume of his autobiography in 1989. As the breadth of Copland's commentary on Mahler spans nearly three quarters of a century, it is a topic clearly relevant to most of his career and, consequently, to the composition of the Third Symphony.

One of the difficulties, however, in discussing Copland's work in terms of influence is that no single style pervades the totality of his career as a composer. Unlike Beethoven, Mahler, and Schoenberg, whose music can generally be discussed as a product of the idealism and determination with which they sought to engage critically their own moment, Copland is a somewhat different case. Depending on the piece being studied and the period of the composer's career being examined, conflicting stylistic and aesthetic categories can easily be attributed to specific works and periods. Lawrence Starr observed this conundrum when he noted, "Attempts to categorize Copland's output in terms of style have been made, but such attempts usually run into difficulty at every turn."³

Copland's list of works is, perhaps, among the most varied of that of any twentieth-century American composer; it contains film scores, songs (including proletariat work songs), symphonies, ballets, atonal studies, neoclassical pieces, operas, chamber works, and others. While such a diverse output is certainly portentous of the dissolution of musical consistency under post-modernism and, subsequently, the twenty-first century, one could simultaneously hypothesize that Copland's work is the necessary consequence of the exponentially increasing role of technology in the composition and dissemination of music after the Industrial Revolution. The role of technology, notably

³ Lawrence Starr, "Copland's Style," *Perspectives of New Music* IXX ½ (Autumn 1980-Summer 1981), 70.

the radio, in Copland's career will therefore be treated as one of the central issues in the series of events leading up to the composition of his only symphony fully conceived as such.

In order to quantify the relationship between Copland's and Mahler's compositional methodologies, especially in whatever capacity they exhibit similarities, it will be necessary not to focus exclusively on musical theoretical procedure but to examine compositional and philosophical substance simultaneously, the confluence of which will facilitate a hermeneutical reading of material in the Third Symphony. In the opening pages of his monograph on Mahler, Adorno envisioned such an approach, as he wrote that explicitly thematic analysis often "misses the music's substance in its preoccupation with procedure."⁴ What Adorno meant here is that truth content in Mahler can only be unveiled through immanent critique—by examining how the internal musical phenomena comports socio-historically. In this chapter I will amplify my analysis by unpacking some of Adorno's claims about Mahler and about modernism and will place them in the context of Copland's career and his Third Symphony. Ideally, I would endeavor to include a comprehensive discussion of these works alongside larger questions of freedom, namely those relating to texts by Hegel on spirit [*Geist*] and to readings of Marx; considering the limits imposed on this particular project, however, such a discussion would arrogate focus away from the Third Symphony.⁵ What an investigation such as this requires is a triangulated focus on Copland's work,

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1960), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

⁵ For a social and political profile of Copland during this period, I recommend beginning with Elizabeth B. Crist's *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War* (New York: Oxford, 2005).

incorporating both musical and material theory. On one hand, there are Copland's remarks on Mahler; on the other, there are analytical and stylistic observations from third parties. The writers whose critical discussions of Copland and Mahler have influenced my views most in terms of clarifying the link between the two composers have been Elizabeth Bergman Crist, Arthur Berger, and Theodor W. Adorno; therefore, a reading of the philosophies of these musicologists and thinkers, oriented toward the possibility of a connection between Mahler and Copland, will constitute a significant portion of this chapter. In addition, the political conditions that affected Copland before and during the composition of his Third Symphony are thoroughly relevant here. Finding the intersection of these commentaries and viewing them in conjunction with an examination of music by each composer will help reveal what, if any, degrees of Mahler exist—concretely or abstractly—in Copland's Third Symphony.

Towards the Third Symphony: Examining Copland's Orchestral Projects

Commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, Copland began working on the Third Symphony in an official capacity in 1944.⁶ After its 18 October 1946 premiere, conducted by Serge Koussevitzky himself, some claimed that the work, which was the culmination of Copland's long and complex relationship with the symphonic genre, was one of the composer's greatest achievements. This success came after he had largely avoided the symphonic genre for most of his career; until the Third Symphony, he had produced very few real symphonic works, namely *Symphony for Organ* and

⁶ A thorough and insightful documentary study of the genesis, composition, and reception of the work can be found in Elizabeth B. Crist, *Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946): Context, Composition, and Consequence* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2000).

Orchestra (1924), *Dance Symphony* (1929), *Symphonic Ode* (1930), and *Short Symphony* (1934). The *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*, a student work that received a New York premiere the year following its completion under the baton of Walter Damrosch, featured Copland's former teacher Nadia Boulanger as the soloist. In 1928 Copland arranged the piece for performance without an organ soloist, at which point it took on the formal association of being a symphony.

The *Dance Symphony* was an arrangement from Copland's ballet *Grog* (1922-1925). Thus, while a symphony in structure and title, the piece was not fundamentally conceived with the same approach and attitude that the composer later afforded the Third Symphony. In fact, the *Dance Symphony* was only created in order for Copland to have a submission to the 1929 RCA Victor Competition; the *Symphonic Ode*, which he had intended to submit for consideration, was not ready in time. Concerning the writing process surrounding the *Dance Symphony*, Copland explained:

I was not able to finish the orchestral score before leaving for Europe. It would have been a shame not to submit anything to the competition, so I searched my scores for a substitute. . . . By working nights and days for weeks, I extracted three dances from the ballet score, gave it the title *Dance Symphony*, and delivered the score to the competition officials just in time for their end-of-May deadline.⁷

This information is relevant even divorced from the circumstances of the deadline, as it shows Copland experimenting, although by necessity more than invention, with self-borrowing—a compositional technique that would prove crucial in his writing of the fourth movement of the Third Symphony—and a method that Mahler used often.

The *Symphonic Ode*, a single-movement work, represented in some ways a

⁷ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984), 163.

stylistic shift for Copland. He later reminisced: “I had been striving for something grand and dramatic in this work. Composed over a two-year span that was transitional for me, the *Ode* is a transitional work—a summing up as well as a looking ahead.”⁸ The *Ode* represents two advances: a step into deeper orchestral waters and a hint at seeds of Mahlerian influence in Copland’s symphonic works. Regarding its orchestration, Copland revealed that “The *Ode* in its original version was to be scored for a Mahler-like oversized orchestra with eight horns, five trumpets, three trombones, and two tubas.”⁹ As he himself confessed, this expansive ensemble is similar to that required in a Mahler symphony; the latter’s First Symphony, for example, requires seven horns, four trumpets, three trombones, and one tuba.

The similarities in instrumentation should not be overlooked. Even when peering directly into the late Romantic fog, where most composers were writing for increasingly large orchestras, the *Ode* points with clarity to Mahler. Large brass sections were certainly common in late nineteenth-century German Romantic opera, especially in those of Wagner and Strauss, and both Mahler and Bruckner appropriated such operatic instrumentations in their symphonies. Obviously the impact of Wagner’s and Strauss’s instrumentations on opera was internationally monumental, but this impact was most prevalent—at least immediately—in German and Austrian music. As noted in the previous chapter, during his travels in Europe in the early 1920s, Copland wrote to Boulanger of his desire to become a specialist in the Austrian symphonic tradition of Mahler and Bruckner; evidently, this desire began to advance toward fulfillment with the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

Symphonic Ode.

The *Short Symphony*—so titled because of its length—was an opportunity for Copland to develop his symphonic style further.¹⁰ The work, comprising three movements, which are to be played without a break, features some of Copland’s most complex writing to date. Difficult rhythms, pointillistic—almost Webern-esque—entrances, rich orchestration, and prominent dissonances can all be found in the score. The *Short Symphony* is reminiscent of Stravinsky, a major influence on Copland early in his career and who, like Copland, engaged extensively with neoclassicism. Performances of the *Short Symphony* received mixed reviews from American critics when it debuted in the United States; a *New York Times* critique of the symphony’s New York premiere (9 January 1944, Leopold Stokowski and the NBC Symphony Orchestra at Radio City Music Hall) contained the following comment: “There is little to be said about the work, since it is all so manufactured and uncommunicative that it never gets anywhere in particular and leaves the impression of futile fragmentariness in general.”¹¹

How do these compositions aid in contextualizing the Third Symphony? The orchestral works preceding it, which were written under varying impetuses and which exhibited a somewhat modern, albeit occasionally ambivalent, attitude towards structure and form, show Copland trying to reconcile through experimentation his own compositional style with that of his predecessors. Evidence of this attempt resides, at least in part, in Copland’s writings, in which he always seemed to keep one eye trained on the past. In his early career he was exposed to, and tried to emulate, music from numerous historical moments. As I have attempted to show in the second chapter of this

¹⁰ The *Short Symphony* generally takes about 15-16 minutes to perform.

¹¹ N.S., “Copland Symphony Has Premiere Here,” *The New York Times* (10 January 1944), 15.

project, Copland was also influenced considerably by the German Romantics' approaches to style, form, harmony, and counterpoint. Crist highlighted this relationship, writing, "Despite his general distrust of the Austro-Germanic musical tradition, Copland was particularly beholden to the ideal of the symphony as practiced by Beethoven and Mahler; works by those outside this line of development were often found to be somehow insufficient."¹²

The notion of a "line of development" is an apt way to explain, in part, what Copland believed his task to be. It is this sort of historicist thinking that guided him in the composition of his Third Symphony. In his backwards gaze, acutely focused on the "line of development" yet also distracted by social problems of the present, Copland, perhaps, was unable to grasp fully the emerging contradiction between avant-garde and kitsch as well as the aesthetic judgments that accompany such a distinction.

Political Activities and a Developing Style

While Mahler's compositional attention was almost entirely oriented toward the musical language itself, many scholars have noted a particular duality in Copland's early- and middle-period works, one that ultimately relates to the composer's assorted aesthetic and social ideals. Arthur Berger attributed to this duality the fact that "Copland's works, to be sure, seem to fall into at least two classes: one emphasizing the colloquial and the other leaning towards what may be described as a more generally musical substance."¹³

¹² Elizabeth B. Crist, "Aaron Copland's Third Symphony from Sketch to Score," *The Journal of Musicology* XVIII/3 (Summer 2001), 377-78.

¹³ Arthur Berger, "Aspects of Copland's Music," *Tempo* X (March 1945), 2.

It would seem that Berger was addressing a deeper aesthetic concern in music during the moment of capitalism: the artist's conflict between the avant-garde and the necessity to create a product that submits to its commodity element and aspires to appeal to a more general audience in order to facilitate a greater monetary gain. Crist discussed a similar idea in her article "Aaron Copland and the Popular Front," in which she contended that his commitment to stylistic and topical accessibility was "influenced by the descriptions of Soviet proletarian music in the pages of *Modern Music*."¹⁴ In this periodical Copland would have read detailed biographical and historical articles about contemporary composers, reviews of domestic and international concerts, analyses of specific modern pieces, and even essays on film music. During the magazine's considerable run, which lasted from 1924 to 1946, Copland would likely have followed its content fairly closely. The Soviet music he read about from this period—one when socialist realism predominated—was inspiring to him and certainly did influence him, especially when he began composing for the radio.

Socialist realism, which arose in the early 1930s as an attempt by the Soviet regime to reinforce the aims of the State by controlling the art produced within it, relied on a specific set of aesthetic goals in order to manipulate a particular response from the viewer or listener, namely to instill a unified sense of identity and nationalism. The general dictates of socialist realism maintain that art should be realistic, that it should depict scenes from the everyday lives of the proletariat worker, and that it should be created in a non-esoteric mode of representation in order to be accessible to a broad audience. In short, these rules essentially claim that art should comport antithetically to

¹⁴ Elizabeth B. Crist, "Aaron Copland and the Popular Front," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* LVI/2 (Summer 2003), 442.

the freedom that the subject would enjoy in a truly socialist state (which Stalinism was not), that artists adhere to a form that claims freedom without actually acting it out. Of course, as one may ascertain from this brief description of socialist realism, it represents a system that presents an aesthetic that is extremely problematic.

It would be a mistake to think that Copland—being a communist-leaning “progressive liberal”—intended simply to depict America’s greatness straight-on in his symphony. Were that to be the case, the object of such an endeavor would have to be either irony or naiveté—Copland would be depicting a free and triumphant America, an image inconsistent with the social problems that inspired his sympathy for anti-capitalist thought in the first place. In his essay “The Author as Producer,” Walter Benjamin addressed such an issue in photography: “Needless to say, photography is unable to convey anything about a power station or a cable factory other than, ‘What a beautiful world!’... What we require of the photographer is the ability to give his picture a caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary use value.”¹⁵ Given Copland’s devotion to his task, it can be assumed that his Symphony is not simply a sterile ironic gesture. It reflects society with some degree of sincerity. Perhaps the Third Symphony is a wish, a utopian fantasy, a depiction not of the unity that was not, but of what Copland desired it to be. Greater knowledge of his political positions and musical activities is necessary in order to explore this notion further.

As Copland became increasingly interested in politics in the early 1930s, he began to turn his attention toward developing a style in which he could reconcile his social and musical interests. In order to mobilize his politics—which have been

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 775.

described as “communist with a lowercase c referencing the movement rather than the Party”¹⁶—Copland began to create a kind of art that would, in theory, represent the marriage of serious and popular music by packaging his modernist tendencies in widely accessible forms and styles. Therefore, while the Third Symphony may not be an overtly political work in program, the way it behaves formally is certainly so in that it ultimately fails to be critical of capitalism in the way that Copland was in his personal political leanings. What is critical of empirical reality, however, is that which does not adhere to the categories for the possibility of experiencing art, categories given to us by capital or, more specifically, by the culture industry.¹⁷

In his 1941 essay “On Popular Music” Adorno clearly defined the distinction between serious and popular music, a philosophical dichotomy to which both Crist and Berger have alluded.

A clear judgment concerning the relation of serious to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization. The whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization. . . . Serious music, for comparative purposes, may thus be characterized: Every detail derives its musical sense from the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn, consists of the life relationship of the details and never of a mere enforcement of a musical scheme.¹⁸

¹⁶ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War*, 19.

¹⁷ In this context, the word “category” refers to Kant’s categories of understanding and judgment (quantity, quality, relation, and modality, with various sub-categories for both the Table of Judgments and the Table of Categories). Kant discussed how the concept the subject has of an object—a person’s concept of “music,” for example—provides the manifold of intuition with which one perceives and self-represents that object. It is in this sense that an avant-garde piece of music can cause a breakdown in the logic of thought forms. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 437-39.

While Adorno's theory of popular music was written mostly with jazz and popular songs in mind, one can find embedded within it a significant aspect of his aesthetic theory: that an artwork's freedom becomes trivialized when it concedes itself to pre-determined forms in order to increase its accessibility. For Adorno, some modernist and pre-modernist art—such as a Mahler symphony—produces freedom by simultaneously utilizing predetermined forms and breaking away from them, at which point they achieve a degree of abstraction through which they can be critical of empirical reality. Essentially, what Copland attempted to do, after his “political awakening” in the 1930s, was to seek an intersection of socialist realism—which sought to document the plight of the proletariat and explicate the ideals of the Communist Party—and European modernism. Such an intersection, in theory, would have Copland appropriating modernist compositional tendencies with the intention of orienting them, possibly through social images or themes, toward the American public. The implications of this fundamentally flawed antinomy will be discussed later in this chapter.

Leon Trotsky, in his famous 1938 aesthetic treatise “Art and Politics in Our Epoch,” discussed socialist realism's transmogrification by Western society. While there is nothing in the essay to indicate that he was familiar with Copland's work, the date of its publication certainly situates his ideas within the timeframe in which Copland was developing the aesthetic that would govern his Third Symphony.

The art of the Stalinist period will remain as the frankest expression of the profound decline of the proletarian revolution. This state of things is not confined, however, within the frontiers of the USSR. Under the guise of a belated recognition of the October revolution, the “left” wing of the western intelligentsia has fallen on its knees before the Soviet burea-

ocracy. As a rule, those artists with some character and talent have kept aloof.¹⁹

From Trotsky's comment, which presents a decidedly critical stance toward the appropriation of socialist realism in the West, it is clear that Copland was not the only representative of the "western intelligentsia" exploring Soviet art.

Where Berger diagnosed Copland's bifurcation of accessibility as "generally musical" and "colloquial," Crist, in her dissertation, finds the terms "concert" and "functional" to be more applicable.²⁰ Adorno submitted "serious" and "popular." Regardless of the vernacular, these are the issues that Copland attempted to reconcile in the Third Symphony.

These two musical imperatives, which have existed as long as the symphonic form itself (albeit in different contexts), were further exacerbated when confronted with the development of recording technology and the dissemination of music on a massive scale. Copland was well aware of the opportunities in this new direction of the "music industry," as he composed numerous pieces specifically for the radio, *e.g.*, *Prairie Journal* (1936). It was also during this period that he was developing his particular brand of American nationalism, which itself flourished under the new technological circumstances and the volatile domestic situation that enveloped the country during and between the two world wars. Regarding the radio and his *Prairie Journal*, Copland made the following declaration:

Radio was an exciting new medium—the very idea of reaching so many

¹⁹ Leon Trotsky, "Art and Politics in Our Epoch," *Partisan Review* XI/2 (March-April 1950), 65-66.

²⁰ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946)*, 135, 138.

people with a single performance! I believed that radio was an important new field for the American composer to explore, and I welcomed the chance to compose music that would lend itself to the unique opportunities of radio performance. Radio Serenade (as my piece was first called) is in one movement of about twelve minutes' duration in a style designed to bridge the gap between modern composition and the need for a wider public. It was written expressly for a large audience of inexperienced listeners, rather than for the more limited number of sophisticated devotees of the concert hall.²¹

The aesthetic that Copland described here can also be interpreted as essentially a more focused and direct application of his desire to locate the intersection of socialist realism and European modernism. The Third Symphony eventually represented his vision of accessibility fully realized: a piece that effectively combined popular and art music ideas, maintaining a wide appeal while retaining the composer's "artistic integrity," which is itself, of course, merely an imagined concept, symptomatic under capitalism.

Although Mahler's career began before radio and vinyl records were important tools in the dissemination of reproduced music, he was, nevertheless, able to create works that were well-received. Ranging from Biblical references and folk song quotations to texts from philosophical works and allusions to other composers, notably Wagner and Beethoven—not to mention borrowing from his own works—Mahler was able to incorporate a significant number of musical and extramusical references in his symphonies, molding them into challenging collages of ideas and sounds that listeners and theorists alike have sought to decipher for over a century.

The difference between what Mahler does with references and what Copland does with folk quotation and radio programming is that, while Mahler embraced extramusical content largely to illuminate and convey his perception of, and experience in, the world in

²¹ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, 254.

which he lived, Copland seemed to do so more for the sake of reception, which is consistent with his comments on accessibility. In other words, there is a marked difference between the way these composers approached their tasks, for only Mahler seemed to appropriate this type of content in his work for its value in itself, rather than for a desired effect on the audience. To invoke Adorno's epigraph to this chapter, intent, when over-indulged, becomes counterproductive to a work's freedom.

Adorno recognized the potential consequences of composition in the age of radio all too well after being contracted to work with various American radio projects in the late 1930s, and he wrote extensively on the medium in response. In his famous 1945 essay "A Social Critique of Radio Music" he discussed the various stages of the commodification of music from the late eighteenth century until the advent of radio and the invention of the phonograph.²² He observed, "What seems significant, however, in the present situation, and what is currently deeply connected with the trend to standardization and mass production, is that *today the commodity character of music tends to radically alter it.*"²³ Adorno therefore diagnosed a salient complication in the radio and post-radio moments, epochs that encompass much of Copland's oeuvre.

Because the style that Copland employed in his Third Symphony was being developed and was responsive to the period in which radio became a prevalent cause for composition (and method of consumption), exposing the complex problems related to radio music must be included in a discussion of the work. With the social and cultural

²² Readers interested in Adorno's comments on radio and the phonograph should consult the volumes in which he critiques these mediums at great length. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*; and Theodor W. Adorno, *Current of Music*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, "A Social Critique of Radio Music," *The Kenyon Review* VII/2 (Spring 1945), 211. All italics in this quotation are Adorno's.

circumstances of this period of Copland's career briefly outlined, it is now possible to form a more inclusive lens through which to examine his music. Of course, a discussion of the forms Copland was using is only meaningful when complemented by an examination of the content with which he filled them.

Folk Music, Modernism, and the Unconscious

The Third Symphony contains a number of conspicuous diversions from Copland's earlier orchestral style. First, it features no direct folk quotations of any kind, which is especially surprising considering the composer's prior relationship with this tradition. Copland's decision to forego direct folk quotation signifies a move from the literal—Copland used such quotation in *Lincoln Portrait* (1942), for example—into the abstract, which is certainly a quality that coordinates with the modernist aesthetic that interested the composer. Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly why Copland avoided direct borrowing of folk tunes in the Third Symphony, two possible reasons lay in his knowledge of the treatment of the folk tradition in Soviet music and also by one of his contemporaries, Béla Bartók (1881-1945), who engaged by way of absorption, rather than quotation, of folk elements in his own music.

From Copland's writings it is evident that he found Bartók's approach to folk music compelling. He discussed the Hungarian composer's handling of this tradition in his 1953 review—titled "The Essence Remained"—of Halsey Stevens's *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*.

Having wedded folk song to modern harmony, the composer then successfully incorporated native musical materials into extended musical forms.

And in the final metamorphosis, as Mr. Stevens phrases it, Bartók employs neither folk melodies nor imitations of folk melodies, but absorbs their essence in such a way that it pervades his music.²⁴

Thus, Copland observed Bartók's late period technique involving folk music as an approach that circumvented quoting melodies literally in favor of "absorbing their essence." It is not apparent from the review that he intended to incorporate Bartók's approach to folk music into his own compositional practice; however, his style preceding and during the composition of the Third Symphony was similar, at least with regard to a general attitude towards the American folk tradition.

Copland remarked on his avoidance of specific quotation in the Third Symphony in his autobiography, mentioning it in conjunction with a brief discussion of self-borrowing (*Fanfare for the Common Man*) and a possible connection with Mahler. For *Copland: Since 1943*, he offered this explanation:

One aspect of the Third Symphony ought to be pointed out: It contains no folk or popular material. Any reference to either folk material or jazz in this work was purely unconscious. However, I do borrow from myself by using *Fanfare for the Common Man* in an expanded and reshaped form in the final movement. I used this opportunity to carry the *Fanfare* material further and to satisfy my desire to give the Third Symphony an affirmative tone. After all, it was a wartime piece—or more accurately, an end-of-war piece—intended to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time. It is an ambitious score, often compared to Mahler and to Shostakovich and sometimes Prokofiev, particularly the second movement. As a longtime admirer of Mahler, some of my music may show his influence in a general way, but I was not aware of being directly influenced by other composers when writing the work.²⁵

In this quotation Copland again acknowledged the possibility, if not the reality, of

²⁴ Aaron Copland, "The Essence Remained," *The New York Times* (3 May 1953), XII: 7.

²⁵ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 68.

Mahler's influence.²⁶ This dichotomy is very much in line with the American's habit of making textual references to his predecessor in letters, articles, and books and then subsequently dismissing any connection between them. A psychoanalyst might claim that Copland's mere summoning of the Mahler reference in his writing suggests an unconscious debt to the latter composer, and Copland himself admitted as much. Berger, too, explained Copland's non-use of folk material in the Third Symphony with Freudian logic.

But precisely because the composer did not force himself to say any one thing in the Third Symphony, he seems to be saying very many, though these would be extremely difficult to pin down. For the ways of the unconscious are such that we often express feelings without being aware of them, and these often represent a deeper level of our being when conscious layers are not active to simplify and (as in programme music or music otherwise connected with a specific subject) narrow down to the sphere of reference.²⁷

Berger therefore addressed a fundamental aspect of modernist art: the growing predilection toward freedom of expression and form in music by way of complete topographical independence, giving precedence to the musical and formal language itself—a concept that appears similarly in psychoanalysis as “free association.” This characteristic of modernism was true not only of the music of composers such as Mahler, Schoenberg, Webern, and Ives, but in some of the most important literary works of the period: James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), and the novels and short stories of Franz Kafka, most of which were available to Copland when he was studying in Paris.

²⁶ “Again” refers to a similar discussion of this phenomenon in the previous chapter.

²⁷ Arthur V. Berger, “The Third Symphony of Aaron Copland,” *Tempo* [New Series] IX (Autumn 1948), 20-27.

What makes these musicians and writers avant-garde, however, is not exclusively how their attitudes are expressed in content, but how they are expressed in form. Or, to cite Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" again, such a dichotomy "concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time. It is concerned, in other words, directly with the literary technique of works."²⁸

To be sure, diluting American folk music to its core formal and tonal qualities and expressing those qualities in an original and somewhat emancipated way was a facet of Copland's neoclassical work; in fact, one could argue that this was one of the more modern aspects of his Third Symphony, one that places him in the realm of his modernist contemporaries. In the case of Charles Ives (1874-1954), for example, originality came, in part, in the form of reconstituting familiar American popular tunes in alternate modernist contexts (encompassing both tonal and atonal settings). Copland exerted a much more significant impact over time and with even less pre-existing material with which to work. This is due, in part, to the ultimately tonal vernacular of the Third Symphony, which makes the themes and melodies easy to remember, effortlessly lending themselves to the appeal of the work.

In his program notes for the premiere of the Third Symphony, Copland addressed the issues of meaning, intention, and the unconscious as he found them relevant to this work:

Inevitably the writing of a symphony brings with it the question of what it is meant to express. I suppose if I forced myself I could invent an ideological basis for my symphony. But if I did, I'd be bluffing—or at any rate, adding something ex post facto, something that might or might not be true, but which played no role at the moment of creation. Harold Clurman put my meaning well when he wrote recently that music is a "reflection of

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 770.

and response to specific worlds of men: it is play, it is speech, it is unconscious result and conscious statement all at the same time.” Anything more specific than that in relation to so-called absolute music is suspect. In other words—to use a well-worn phrase—I prefer to let the music ‘speak for itself.’²⁹

Because Copland did not specify a particular program, nor did the Symphony contain any specific extramusical references outside of the instance of self-borrowing in the fourth movement, it begins to appear as a work of absolute music, simply meant, as Copland instructed, to “reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time.”³⁰

While the Symphony appears as a work of absolute music, it was most certainly informed by Copland’s “progressive liberalism,” his modernist and neoclassical tendencies, and also his socio-aesthetic views, namely his apparent desire to find an intersection between socialist realism and European modernism that would allow the proletariat to appreciate his music. In the next section I will ascertain which of the Third Symphony’s qualities distinguish it from Mahler’s work and which point towards an appropriation or misappropriation of his formal language. I will also highlight some of the modern techniques that I believe Copland was using and how those aspects of the work operated in the overall form.

Copland contra Mahler

A cursory comparison of the forms in Mahler’s First Symphony and Copland’s Third Symphony reveals on the surface a few unsurprising similarities. First, both

²⁹ Aaron Copland, program notes for Third Symphony, Boston Symphony Orchestra (18-19 October 1946), 138.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

composers adopted the four-movement symphonic form.³¹ Second, both pieces appear in sight and sound to contain elements of extramusical content, even though it is acknowledged that Mahler's is well known and Copland's made manifest exclusively in essence and self-borrowing. As to the second observation, and keeping in mind Adorno's sentiment that part of Mahler's greatness can be attributed to "the art-work's claim to embody something merely added in thought, without being realized,"³² it can be noted that Copland relied on a similar intuition, certainly given precedence in his earlier work: reductively, that major and minor triads, open fourths and fifths, and clear-cut counterpoint can represent the promise of the American West, the unknown frontier, the various manifestations of freedom that Americans can enjoy. This accounts for the "absorption of essence" element of his music, which can be traced to a few concrete precedents, namely, Copland's interest in Soviet and other nationalist music, as well as in some of the work of Bartók. Part of the modern quality of these styles/composers lay in their ability to invoke associations through the listener's intuitions and to engage with extramusical concepts in an abstract way.

Nevertheless, should one endeavor to construct a formal narrative based on the content of the finale of Copland's Third Symphony—retroactively engaging its hypothetical socialist realism dimension—and simultaneously attempt to align that narrative with common themes in his work, he or she would not necessarily find a coherent social commentary or even a particularly forward-thinking or self-critical compositional aesthetic; rather, the way the finale develops has the narrative implication

³¹ Although Mahler's First Symphony originally had five movements, the published version had only four; the composer removed the "Blumine" movement after the initial performances of the work. The official reason for this is not known.

³² Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Physiognomy*, 5.

of maintaining the status quo, the world's course. This is one place where significant discrepancies between the formal approaches of Mahler and Copland begin to emerge.

A dialectical view of Mahler's forms, especially in the First Symphony, gives way to what Adorno called the "breakthrough," which he elaborated on early in his book on the composer:

The idea of breakthrough, which dictates the entire structure of the [first] movement, transcends the traditional form while fleetingly sketching its outline. But Mahler's primary experience, inimical to art, needs art in order to manifest itself, and indeed must heighten art from its own inner necessity.³³

This concept is most engendered in Mahler's early works, where he willingly engages the sonata form, only to let his music spiral further and further away from the formal "rules" dictated therein. In the first movement of his First Symphony, for example, the recapitulation is markedly different in character from the exposition. A deviation of this nature is not facilitated as much by an overwhelming desire to subvert sonata form as by the fact that the trajectories of his large forms were determined by a balance between the individual events that occur over the course of the work and a critical attitude towards the sonata form itself. To cite Adorno again, "The totality only appeals to him when it results from irreplaceable musical details."³⁴ By that rule, composing a recapitulation that is largely a carbon copy of its predecessor (the exposition), as is the very definition of "recapitulation" in a Classic Era symphony, would be vastly antithetical to Mahler's compositional philosophy.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

The rapidly changing society in which Mahler lived, a society vastly different from the one that facilitated the creation of the sonata form and the symphony, lacked to some degree an aesthetic environment in which classical forms had much relevance, the idealism of the French Revolution and its aftermath replaced with a general and growing cynicism about the future of society. In this sense Mahler's greatness comes, in part, from the way that his music is so obstinately anchored in its own historical moment, as opposed to perpetuating the anachronistic, dogmatic appropriation of another, which in one light describes the essence of neoclassicism.

Of course, other composers were writing neoclassical works in the first half of the twentieth century as well, including Copland's beloved Stravinsky, but much of the modernism that Copland studied in Paris had led to a thorough destruction of classical forms that rendered neoclassicism regressive, especially in a post-war context. To paraphrase one of Adorno's early claims against Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*, Stravinsky, through neoclassicism, had put the binding back in music. In addition, the popularity of neoclassicism as a formal technique was already waning going into World War II. Perhaps Copland sought to provide simply a snapshot of American culture in his moment, to immortalize the spirit of his people. Regardless, at the intersection of Copland's socialist realism and European modernism lay his neoclassicism, and in it, a symphony that was fundamentally incapable of providing the listener with anything truly new.

Where Mahler sought to achieve an organic growth and maintenance of his themes—mostly in canon—in the third movement of his First Symphony, Copland co-opted a variant approach in the fourth movement of his Symphony but did not achieve the

same breakthrough, which, for Mahler, amounted to a mostly open form, freeing him from the bonds of repetition. Mahler's music, a funeral march in the key of D minor, begins with a canon. The original theme is repeated on at least ten distinct occasions, always by different instruments, often coming into counterpoint with itself. The opening section concludes, giving way to one of Mahler's most interesting and prominent modular shifts; the movement quickly reassembles itself in the major mode, employing a quicker tempo, with an introduction of a raised second scale degree, giving the impression of a Klezmer song. (This is one of the ways that Mahler, like Bartók, favored essence.) In this way Mahler's music has a self-conscious element, each subsequent section adding a new emotion to the one before it, giving the apt listener, indeed, the impression of reading a novel whose present chapter has come to a close, a new one beginning. This sort of effective modularity continues through the remainder of the piece, introducing new and beautiful ideas that eventually intertwine towards the end of the movement.

Mahler was very much aware of this technique, one that he used often: the caesura, a subjective interruption in the music that causes the listener to come to consciousness and to contemplate the way he or she is experiencing the music. Mahler's caesuras usually gain their vitality by creating a contradiction between what the listener expects to happen and what the composer actually provides. Copland must have been aware of this technique from his intense study of Mahler's work; his Symphony rarely contains such moments, however.

In the Third Symphony Copland famously decided to use his previous work, "Fanfare for the Common Man," as the basis for the fourth movement. Like Mahler, he

set out to develop his opening themes throughout the piece, but when he reached the second chapter, where a break in the music seemed set up to be a modular opportunity, he continued to work with the same thematic material, failing to endorse Mahler's particular brand of modularity. Instead, the bassoon entrance in the second section rings out with the same theme that began the movement, proclaiming the chapter simultaneously a success and a failure. In these moments the individual voices of the work do not offer distinct soloistic interjections as much as merely repetitions of the main themes and melodies.

Although the piece deals largely with the same thematic content throughout, it does seem, as with Mahler, to communicate a quality of breaking free from itself, a feeling that something has been accomplished, even though it begins and ends at point A. This phenomenon occurs at measure 294 of the fourth movement.³⁵ The course of the music reaches what would be a typically Mahlerian breaking point, in which all the lines come to consciousness, disrupting the temporal flow, submitting a highly dissonant chord *fff*. In Mahler this kind of moment, which forms a metaphysical bridge between the listener and the work and forces the wandering ear into real time, is meant to signify a change in the music: something terrifying will become peaceful, as in the finale of the Second Symphony, or a fond memory will be abrasively interrupted and transformed into its inverse, which occurs in the first movement of the Ninth. Again, Copland failed to heed his own call, as the piccolo resumes its improvisatory melody from the second section of the movement, which simply continues to fall back on itself, seemingly incapable of becoming something new. One must wonder whether Copland thought his audience sophisticated enough to endure violent stylistic shifts in the music, or whether

³⁵ Aaron Copland, *Third Symphony* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947), 135.

such stagnancy was part of the populist aesthetic he had been developing. These regressions are Copland's cultivated accessibility incarnate; but they are bereft in their own banality, their sameness. Terror, sadness, triumph—any emotion in a piece of music—comes effectively not with the incessant proclamation of a concept but with its juxtaposition against its antithesis. (This is certainly the case with another of the great symphonic variation movements, one that is occasionally summoned for comparison with Mahler's funeral march: the second movement Allegretto of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, a double variation.) The impeccable design of the third movement of Mahler's First Symphony dictates that despite its funeral march quality, sadness is only characterized by its opposite, by the Klezmer band commentary, by the other moments in the work. Consequently, when the funeral march theme recurs intermittently throughout the movement, it is always in a new context and, therefore, always retains its fresh quality and potent impact.

In this movement life is given meaning by the event of death, and vice versa. Such is true in life itself, and perhaps none have expressed it better than Vladimir Nabokov in his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1951), which begins with the following line: "The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness."³⁶ This knowledge, the situation of life and death, informs Mahler's greatest works as well.

Setting aside form for a moment, the content embedded in Mahler's symphony is fundamentally different from that of Copland. To illustrate, the Third Symphony contains traces of the traditional approach to symphonic composition that Mahler sought to overcome. Mahler used, for example, the opening movement in his First Symphony to

³⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York: Random House, 1989), 19.

set up a formal expectation for the listener that he purposely denied in the recapitulation, whereas Copland's work somehow never seems to isolate itself and, in the process, to escape its predecessors. Arthur Berger placed Copland in a relative light to Mahler, however, and speculated that both derived many thematic and compositional ideas from similar places. In fact, Berger went so far as to argue that, "His [Copland's] Third Symphony falls into the broadly rhetorical pattern established for the form from Beethoven and Schumann through Mahler and adorned in our time by Shostakovich."³⁷ The term "broadly rhetorical" likely refers to the symphonic gesture in general, but something of a fraternity among Copland, Mahler, and Shostakovich has been alluded to by writers, both positively and negatively; Elizabeth Crist, in the "Wartime" chapter of *Music for the Common Man*, wrote of Shostakovich and Prokofiev: "These Soviet symphonists seemed to some Americans to be writing music consistent with the sociopolitical and aesthetic goals of the cultural front."³⁸ In her dissertation, quoting a lecture by Copland at an unspecified 1939 performance, she asserted that "Copland saw Shostakovich in particular as a stylistic example to be followed, impelled as the Russian was 'by the very circumstances under which he lived to address his works to a large mass audience—an audience that could of necessity only understand music which was simple and direct.'"³⁹ Adorno's opinion of Russian composers in the subsequent few decades, which most likely included Shostakovich (but not Prokofiev who died in 1962), was, as previously noted, that "often the Russian composers of around 1960 sound like

³⁷ Arthur Berger, *Aaron Copland* (New York: Oxford Press, 1953), 75.

³⁸ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Music for the Common Man*, 179.

³⁹ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946)*, 121.

vandalized Mahler.”⁴⁰ While the possibility of Mahler finding his way into Copland’s symphony abstractly via the composer’s interest in Soviet music is unlikely, the relationship among the composers is still valuable to consider.

The Beethoven element of Berger’s earlier comment is particularly interesting, especially when examining the opening sections of Mahler’s First and Copland’s Third symphonies. The beginnings of both pieces inhabit similar atmospheres, and they both open with the interval of a descending fourth. The opening of Mahler’s symphony has been compared to the beginning of Beethoven’s Ninth, which, at the outset, sounds like the tuning of an orchestra and quickly evolves into a theme that also starts with a descending fourth. The thematic genesis of Mahler’s First Symphony suggests a similar mercurial quality by opening with the strings playing an A over a number of octaves, representing a natural, pastoral awakening. (In fact, Mahler described the first movement in the program for a 27 October 1893 Hamburg concert as the “awakening of nature from a long winter’s sleep.”)⁴¹ Adorno claimed in an address on the occasion of Mahler’s 100th birthday that Mahler was the first composer after Beethoven to develop the formal language of music truly;⁴² therefore, if Copland can be categorized in his neoclassical period as engaging in relation to these composers—Crist has alluded as much in her passage involving the three—then one must wonder to what degree Copland’s place in

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, 46.

⁴¹ Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 1993), 28-29.

⁴² Theodor W. Adorno, “Mahler,” *Quasi una Fantasia*, 85.

this lineage was compromised by his social and political goals and his personal reading of music history.⁴³

The short opening of Copland's Third Symphony is a curious event. The piece begins in, and maintains, the key of E major—the first two notes representing the tonic and dominant scale degrees. Copland developed this initial theme similarly to the way he opened various other pieces, such as *The Red Pony*: by creating and maintaining a pedal point that other notes venture from and return to. This technique creates the illusion that Copland is trying out a number of different intervals, searching to find the correct one before continuing the piece, as if the final interval (in this case, the same fourth as the opening interval) is the correct password, allowing him to move on. This is an approach similar to that of Mahler in the First Symphony, in which the opening interval represents not the tonic and dominant, but the dominant and secondary dominant (A and E in the key of D minor). Copland's perpetual search for the "right interval" is telling, as it shows an attention not only to the final product but also, as with Mahler, to the process by which it is discovered or revealed, which certainly has modernist undertones.

Naturally, each composer developed the opening motif of his symphony somewhat differently. Mahler continued on past the first descending fourth, establishing a series of falling fourths and thirds, all related by step: A-E, F-C, D-Bb. This Bb is the point where the listener is first thrown a chromatic curveball, and Mahler uses these few measures to reveal the tonic key, D minor, in not one, but two ways. He develops the opening motif, outlining the tonic key, relying on the embellishing notes E and C to reinstate the tonic, then introduces a Bb to create a Neapolitan situation, which is elaborated on by the clarinets, who then play a Bb arpeggio.

⁴³ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Aaron Copland's Third Symphony (1946)*, 199.

Where Mahler revealed the tonic key in variation, Copland showcased it by repetition, which is indicative of a larger trend in each composer's respective methodology. Elizabeth Crist pointed out that the opening theme in Copland's symphony can be approached similarly to many other themes in the work: they can be "analyzed as triads related by a common tone."⁴⁴ This is certainly true when considering the primary pitch class set that comprises the opening few measures, [E, B, G, A]—in the case of the opening theme, a modal embellishing chord, G major, occurs in bar 7. The embellishing chord is a technique that Copland uses often, as it is a clever way to emphasize the tonic key of E major without having to modulate. When considering this opening theme, it is also important to note that the primary motion of the melody is downward, falling in sequential fourths; this is both similar to Mahler's symphony and also a mirror of the opening interval and one of the main melodic fragments of the fourth movement.

Copland contra Copland

In the previous section, I expounded on what Copland did not do in the Third Symphony. I highlighted a few ways in which he failed to reproduce the avant-garde qualities of Mahler's work, and, prior to that, via his writing on Mahler, I speculated about his consciousness of history and its relation to his personal politics. These assertions led to a discussion of the aesthetic of accessibility that Copland developed in the 1930s and 1940s as he sought to continue his exploration of European modernism and suffuse it with some of the traits of Soviet music and socialist realism. These aspects of this project have informed my approach to the Third Symphony, how to understand it in

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

relation to Copland's prior work, his politics, Mahler's music, and ultimately history itself.

Contemplating the logic of these ideas, I came to the realization that I have idealized Mahler's music as fetishized modernism, whereas it is only one product of that moment. His music is just one of the forms of modernism, as is the music of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and all the other composers of that moment. The question I have asked up until this point has been "How did Mahler influence Copland?" Attempting to answer this has been fulfilling and informative, but also paradoxical, as it has not been my Sisyphean attempt to answer this question, but the question itself that has been the problem. The way to answer the question about Mahlerian influence is to answer a different question: how did the Third Symphony respond to the crisis of modernism?

Under capitalism there is no longer the unity among art, philosophy, and religion that there had been in other moments of history preceding it, and as a result, one can no longer relate to art in the same way. With the emergence of the proletariat in the nineteenth century, the societal balance of the Classical Era had all but vanished, leaving a diaspora of forms in its wake. It became art's operation not to represent reality or to achieve balance with it, but to detach itself from reality, to attain critical distance from it. "Its autonomy," Adorno claimed in *Aesthetic Theory*, "its growing independence from society, was a function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom that was itself bound up with the social structure."⁴⁵ With the decimation of revolutionary politics in the 1930s—New Deal politics essentially neutralized radical politics on a large scale, providing the foundation for a series of reforms that would ultimately give the

⁴⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 225.

government more control and further obfuscate the essence of social reality for working class people—this consciousness of freedom transformed and became buried under the guise of democratic progress. After modernism, it is likely that not even a critical distance was possible, as the culture industry had become the condition for the possibility of experiencing art, neutralizing even its most radical works.

If Schoenberg and Stravinsky were the two extremes of modernism, the former exhausting the possibilities for subjective expression within tonality and the latter presupposing the absence of subjective freedom, Copland's cultivated accessibility trades in these notions and gestures towards the impossibility of a meaningful aesthetic experience. The Third Symphony looks past the myth of a dichotomy between high and low culture, past who can and who cannot understand its internal mechanisms, accepting that the symphonic form itself is meaningless in 1946, completely inadequate to its time. Adorno wrote that "Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear; later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations."⁴⁶ The question of whether the Third Symphony is indebted to Mahler is rendered vacuous when questioning whether even the most radical aspects of Mahler's music would have any cultural import whatsoever in Copland's moment. Copland knew that they, of course, would not.

When compared against nothing but itself, the Third Symphony is a remarkably beautiful and complex work. From the dense polyphony of the first movement and the rich orchestration of the second to the exciting and triumphant finale, it rings with originality and idealism. The third movement invokes the sparse, eerie orchestration of the "Washington's Birthday" movement of Charles Ives's "Holidays" Symphony, taking as a motivic model the second theme from Copland's own symphony. To appropriate

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

one of the composer's comments on Mahler, this symphony has the stuff of living music. But with that diagnosis comes the Symphony's central question: what is the point of living if someone or something is not also in a state of becoming? Or, rather, what meaning can one derive from art in a society in which becoming—true emancipation—is such a remote possibility? It could be said that Copland's cultivated accessibility seems to achieve meaning only by exposing the impossibility of deriving true meaning from art in a society whose domination by capitalism is total and absolute.

Conclusion

In his essay "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," Adorno arrived at the following conclusion: "In every bar he presupposes the emancipation of music, especially where he voluntarily enters into bondage."⁴⁷ Stravinsky succeeded in showing the lack of freedom of the subject under capitalism precisely by invoking neoclassical forms and exploiting their balanced mechanics. A Mahler symphony, on the other hand, is similar to a novel that unfolds temporally, freely. Rather than forcefully pursuing such freedom or unfreedom formally, Copland sought in his Third Symphony to indulge a more direct sociopolitical connection to reality, and it represents a prelude to a new period in American history, as much as it is a recapitulation to the two world wars and the Depression. Ideologically, the Third Symphony is paradoxical, as it shows Copland situated in the 1940s, writing nationalist music in spite of his communist interests, doing away with easily recognizable folk images in spite of his prior compositional tendencies and his debt to socialist realism (one of whose fundamental criteria is the use of relatable,

⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," *Quasi una Fantasia*, 153.

accessible imagery), and engaging with the symphonic form in spite of his modernist interests. Regardless of his relationship to Mahler, Copland created in his Third Symphony a wholly American work; if it had acquired a nickname, it may well have been known as the “Melting Pot” Symphony.

To invoke again Adorno’s quotation in the epigraph to this chapter, Copland’s symphony bears the marks of a work saturated with intention. Regardless of whatever social import Copland intended, the Third Symphony is ultimately a symptom of the beginning of the New Left movement, which rose up out of the disintegration of revolutionary Marxism in the early 1930s. The homogenous, teleological nature of the Third Symphony mirrors the continuous homogenization of the American political environment in the twentieth century. Copland may have believed himself to be supportive of some aspects of communist ideology, influenced by Soviet art and deeply passionate about change, but conversely he did not strive towards criticism of empirical reality.

The symphony as a form is a historically contingent mode of representation, and, like all works, symphonies that seek to transgress the barriers of contingency implicitly answer the mysteries of their own existence. These answers are found through immanent critique, through unveiling the ways in which they are critical or affirmative of social reality. The concept of the Third Symphony, the objective component within it, is a true picture of twentieth-century American social life, for better or worse. In this work Copland embraced, rather than criticized, its commodity character, choosing to take the route of cultivated accessibility. Therein lies Copland’s Faustian folly: in abandoning the freedom immanent in the works of high modernism, he instead wrote a symphony meant

merely to describe freedom, to present a celebration of it, to act as the semblance of it. Ironically, Copland's Third Symphony, forever mired in the opacity of ideology, is a rich piece in spite of itself. In contemporary society the composer's work has found its way into television commercials, political campaigns, films, and the Olympics; this is what the sterilization of Mahler's idiom afforded him. The phantom of Mahler is present, consciously or unconsciously, between the staves and bars of the Third Symphony. He haunts its ideals, yet Copland's result does not contain the same avant-garde qualities that characterized the European composer's work. Still, art cannot lie, and the dialectically excavated rational kernel of truth in Copland's Third Symphony, the increasingly unradical nature of the Left and its art after the 1930s, the fossilized finger pointing towards its own emancipation, continues to provide a shimmering effigy of the freedom that has yet to be achieved.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In order to explain the idea of a period of culture-bearing in the development of the working class more concretely, let us consider the historic succession not of classes, but of generations. Their continuity is expressed in the fact that each one of them, given a developing and not decadent society, adds its treasure to the past accumulations of culture. But before it can do so, each new generation must pass through a stage of apprenticeship. It appropriates existing culture and transforms it in its own way, making it more or less different from that of the older generation. But this appropriation is not, as yet, a new creation, that is, it is not a creation of new cultural values, but only a premise for them.

—Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*¹

Over the course of this project I have sought to organize certain applicable portions of Copland's discourse on Mahler, simultaneously engaging in a discussion of his neoclassical aesthetic, in order to create a methodology to illuminate the social and musical anatomy of the Third Symphony. Its skeletal structure, its particular kind of homogeneous modularity, and its abstract representations of American folk parlances may not directly bear the mark of Mahler, but as surely as folk music can be intuited through the manifestation of its essence, Mahler, too, lives in this work. For regardless of whether one can locate melodies, harmonies, or formal techniques that seem redolent of Mahler, the fact that Copland, given all of the advantages of a well-trained musician and historian, decided to write a symphony in the 1940s forms the question in itself.²

Copland's symphony inherently contains the history of the symphonic form not in direct

¹ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 161.

² To take up the question of the 1940s symphony in general would be a worthwhile and interesting project; however, I am more interested here in how we can understand this particular symphony in light of Copland's evolution as a composer.

application of techniques from specific works but in how it responds to them dialectically. Just as human DNA contains the story of evolution in the biological information it holds, an artwork, when viewed in the context of how it came to be, contains a similar truth, whether its creator is conscious of this relationship or not.

Proving whether Copland consciously or unconsciously appropriated Mahlerian techniques in the Third Symphony ultimately contributes very little to an immanent critique of the work. Studying his writings on Mahler in order to uncover the means by which he understood Mahler's work and determining how that understanding comported with his overall consciousness of history has, nevertheless, been helpful in penetrating his neoclassical aesthetic, the greatest manifestation of which is the Third Symphony.

In Chapter II I presented selections from Copland's literary discourse on Mahler, which included excerpts from interviews, lectures, essays, books, and the composer's autobiography. The first evidence of exposure to Mahler's work that I was able to locate in Copland's writings can be found in his autobiography *Copland: 1900 through 1942* in his very fine account of the lessons he took from Nadia Boulanger when he studied in Paris from 1921 to 1924.³ In those lessons Copland studied Mahler's orchestration in great detail, playing through the composer's scores at the piano.

When he returned to the United States, Copland penned numerous high-profile articles on the composer. In response to what he perceived as a general ambivalence towards Mahler's works on behalf of music critics, the composer submitted a letter to *The New York Times* titled "Defends the Music of Mahler," in which he argued in favor of his

³ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984).

predecessor's avant-garde approach to orchestration and instrumentation.⁴ Copland furthered these thoughts on Mahler's compositional merits, as well as his historical value and influence on future composers, in numerous other places, including his own formidable book on music history, *The New Music, 1900-1960*,⁵ and, even more pointedly in regards to specific works in an article co-authored with Jack Diether for *Hi-Fi Music at Home* titled "Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library," in which the composer offered a list of his favorite recordings of Mahler's music.⁶ These writings were important in accounting for Copland's study and defense of Mahler's work, both chronologically and qualitatively, in order to understand the role that the latter played in the former's conception of music history and how that history pointed towards his own work.

In the case of these two composers, historical consciousness can be viewed through the dilemma between being and becoming. In my view Copland envisioned in the Third Symphony a society in which every individual voice is part of the whole, in harmony with it, even representative of the whole. Each line is clear and discernible but also contributes to the fullness and richness of the sound. Each aspect of this symphony is an absolute necessity, and the absence of any individual line would, theoretically, put the whole work in jeopardy. Mahler's First Symphony and Copland's Third both appear to value the primacy of the whole over the part, yet Copland's work seems to be of a more directly political nature, which points explicitly and clearly to the necessity of the

⁴ Aaron Copland, "Defends the Music of Mahler," *The New York Times* (5 April 1925), X: 6.

⁵ Aaron Copland, *The New Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

⁶ Aaron Copland and Jack Diether, "Aaron Copland Suggests a Basic Mahler Library," *Hi-Fi Music at Home* IV/1 (March-April 1957), 26, 66-70.

realization of its ideals. This is to say, in my opinion, that in his symphony Copland expressed a hope for a reconciled society, which he pursued through his application of tonality, the symphonic form, and quotation of his *Fanfare for the Common Man*, all of which sensuously imply in this single work the unity that he desired for the world.

The greater difference between the two works, however, is that Mahler's music is constantly in a state of becoming through form, creating itself through development, similarly to the works of Beethoven and Schoenberg, while Copland's music seems to be more of an overt prognostication of freedom that he does not actually discover through the formal vernacular of his music. What is missing in the Third Symphony is the radical quality, the critical protest against reality and against bourgeois social relations that the music of Mahler, the symphonist to whom Copland has most often been compared both by himself and by other musicologists, seems to contain.

In Chapter III I sought to give an account of the history of Copland's symphony and what I believe he aimed to achieve with it. Until receiving Koussevitzky's commission to create a symphony for the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the composer had not completed a fully-conceived work in this genre—the primary symphonic works he had produced at that point were the *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* (1924), a student work; the *Dance Symphony* (1929), an arrangement of ballet music from *Grog*; the *Symphonic Ode* (1930), a dense, single-movement transitional work that was scored for what Copland called “a Mahler-like oversized orchestra”; and the *Short Symphony* (1934), a brief, three-movement piece.⁷

⁷ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, 163.

In setting out to create a full-scale symphony, Copland was contending not only with the history of the symphonic form but with his own political and aesthetic views as well. As a Left-leaning composer, he knew that he had a rare opportunity to reach a great number of people with his ideas and, therefore, found himself torn between his earlier modernist interests and developing a more accessible, relatable style of music. Bound up in this conflict, too, was Copland's interest in Soviet music, which was, at that time, limited to a State-enforced dogmatism in the form of socialist realism. Copland grasped the opportunity to integrate these ideas, which he pursued most pointedly in his compositions for radio, leading to a development of his trademark "American" style of composition. One of the most crucial aspects involved in the accessible style of the Third Symphony was the composer's approach to folk music; although the Symphony contained no direct folk quotations, Copland seems to have instilled in it the essence of American folk music by adopting melodic and harmonic techniques, notably an emphasis on open fourths and fifths and the use of what was ultimately a quite tonal harmonic vernacular. The effort to draw out the essence of folk music is a method that I suggested Copland admired in the works of not only Mahler, but in those of Bartók as well. What I have interpreted as a folk essence is the binding with which Copland was able to pull together aspects of modernism, socialist realism, and neoclassicism, creating a new kind of large-scale work that could be enjoyed by virtually any listener, regardless of class or musical training.

In the Third Symphony, and in the seeds of his neoclassical style that preceded it, Copland attended to the advances that Mahler had made with the symphony, returning it to the balance that characterized its form in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries. Copland's symphony is not a false step, however; in fact, it is quite the opposite, perfectly adequate to its moment, conforming to the listening habits of those most unwilling to deal with the jarring emotional expressionism of the modernist works of the prominent composers who immediately followed Mahler, notably Schoenberg and Webern. It mirrors precisely, in fact, the subjectivity of its own moment. Copland's cultivated accessibility, his path of least resistance, allowed him to circumvent many of the most radical aspects of the avant-garde movement and to return to classical forms. Of course he is not the only composer to do so, but, to invoke the epigraph from Chapter I, my treatment of his work is not concerned with neoclassicism as a stylistic movement, or Copland's cohort therein, but with the truth and the freedom contained in his symphony, itself a product of his particular aesthetic choices, some of these possibly having been bound up with his knowledge of Mahler's work.

Such a statement is not meant as a pejorative observation, as Copland's musical decisions can be understood not as products of a conscious understanding of history but rather as an expression of his ideological identification with certain political and social trends. The Third Symphony can certainly be viewed as responsive to his political attitudes from the 1930s and 1940s and more generally reflects the disintegration of the Left during that period. Although his position could be seen as communist-leaning progressive liberalism, one must question the degree to which such a position indicates a serious engagement with Marx's writings. Ultimately, however, through the lens of his work during this period, he should more aptly be described, aesthetically, as a radical populist. Copland's interest in socialist realism is especially pertinent when considered in conjunction with his desire to create increasingly accessible music in the 1930s. He

likely misrecognized socialist realism, however, for having revolutionary potential instead of understanding that its primary characteristics alone—realism, accessibility, and nationalist-oriented themes—lack any thoroughly critical dimensions, placing the results, some may argue, in the realm of kitsch, which is itself a form of modernism.

Copland's writings on Mahler, which began during his studies in Europe and continued throughout his life, also help bring to light how he felt about the state of counterpoint and orchestration in the modern epoch, especially as he embarked on composing his first and only work fully planned as a symphony. When examining his discourse with a focus directed to his Mahler-related articles, it is possible to chart Copland's interest in the composer both in terms of his own chronology and also with regard to Mahler's specific works and compositional methods. At certain points in his career, including his discussions surrounding the Third Symphony, Copland acknowledged similarities between his music and that of Mahler but denied any conscious or direct influence that the latter may have had on his work. In the second volume of his autobiography, he wrote of the Third Symphony that "It is an ambitious score, often compared to Mahler..." but that "as a longtime admirer of Mahler, some of my music may show his influence in a general way, but I was not aware of being directly influenced by other composers when I was writing the work."⁸

It would be fruitless to speculate further as to whether Copland was consciously aware of any debt to Mahler when composing his Third Symphony. Evidence certainly shows, however, that in his particular consciousness of musical history, Mahler played a significant role. As Harold Bloom most elegantly observed in *The Anxiety of Influence*,

⁸ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 68.

while charting effect of one author on another does not necessarily charge either party perniciously, an author's experience with prior works endures unconsciously as an anxiety that becomes stimulated when the author attempts to produce new works. Therefore, it is not the influences and works that the author consciously chooses to proceed from, but, rather, the way that an artist engages critically with his predecessors that determines how great, or how insignificant, his or her art is.⁹ Of course, the unconscious mind is an opaque and often inaccessible phenomenon, but Copland's breadcrumb trail of critical writings on Mahler, his historicist-leaning musicological books and essays, and the orchestral works, such as the *Symphonic Ode*, admittedly indebted to the late Romantic composer, certainly gesture towards the possibility for such an anxiety.

Consequently, Copland's literary oeuvre is one that begs to be analyzed further. The nature of the development and evolution of his opinions regarding music, which extend throughout his immense body of writing, offers a unique parallel to the changes in his approach to composition, especially as he experimented with increasingly diverging styles and modes of creation. To be sure, a study of Copland's writings on any of his other influences, such as Stravinsky or Fauré, would be of immense value in advancing an understanding of him both as a composer and as a historical thinker. The broad extent of Copland's interests and the vast number of styles and genres in which he composed do make his career remarkably fertile for future musicological, theoretical, and, most certainly, historico-political analysis. One project that would find itself absolutely central to continuing a critique of Copland's neoclassicism would be a thorough dialectical

⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

analysis of the composer's politics from the standpoint of Marxism and the Left after the Russian Revolution. This topic is one that I briefly discussed in Chapter III, but my analysis is by no means all-encompassing. I also believe that a new aesthetic discussion of Copland's serial works could offer a critique parallel to what I have attempted to do in this thesis.

The volatile wartime political climate of the 1930s and 1940s surely had an effect on Copland's compositional decisions; over the course of the former, he transitioned from writing esoteric, challenging proletariat work songs to beginning to solidify his more accessible, traditional neoclassical style. In Chapter III I attempted to explain this shift in his thought by giving an account of the disintegration of revolutionary Marxism in the 1930s and the increasing role of personal politics in Copland's growing oscillation between serious and popular music. Through readings of Elizabeth B. Crist's excellent article "Aaron Copland and the Popular Front,"¹⁰ as well as her book-length exploration of the same topic, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War*, I provided a background for Copland's "progressive liberalism," explaining how the lack of a radical political movement engendered the composer's relationship with political, socially-directed art.¹¹ Perhaps out of a desire to depict a harmonious, unified society, Copland actually began to write less subjective music. In Adorno's wartime and post-war writings on music, he feared that an aesthetic vacuum would appear, leaving no clear direction for art to follow after the atrocities of the National

¹⁰ Elizabeth B. Crist, "Aaron Copland and the Popular Front," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* LVI/2 (Summer 2003).

¹¹ Elizabeth B. Crist, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War* (New York: Oxford, 2005).

Socialist party. Adorno wrote the essay in which the following passages appear in 1945, one year before the premiere of the Third Symphony.

What threatens to develop in Europe as well as in the rest of the world may be called the end of the artistic subject. The artist is no longer called upon in order to express independently his experiences, visions and ideas, but has come to understand himself as a sort of functionary who has to fulfill a social and productive duty. It is possible that this very fact destroys the true function of the arts. . . . But art does not fulfill its function in society by acting as a social functionary. . . . The more sacrifices the resistance forces and underground movements had to make, the more likely there are to arise demands for popular appealing art, intrinsically incompatible with the developmental phase reached by autonomous art itself. We must protect ourselves against the repressive implications of such a call for subordination and obedience of the individual to the demands of the majority and the so-called plain people, if we should not experience a revival of Nazi tendencies under an entirely different label.¹²

In this passage Adorno predicts the possibility of the death of the artistic subject, the result of a trend of bartering autonomy and imaginative power for a sort of collective drive towards social necessity and propaganda. Copland's Symphony arrived directly in the center of this transitional moment, which is why it can be clearly seen for what it is: a neoclassical work that Copland took to be progressive.

Viewing the Symphony through the lens of his writings, one begins to understand the relationship between the trajectory of Copland's work during this period and the degree of historical consciousness evidenced in the literature he produced, which can essentially be summed up with the composer's maxim in *The New Music* that "Mahler bridge[d] the gap between the composers of the early 18th century and the Neoclassicists

¹² Theodor W. Adorno, "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts," *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 385-86.

of [his] own time.”¹³ What Copland’s writings exhibit is that he believed Mahler to be an avant-garde late-Romantic composer whose music pointed towards the tonal modernism that characterized much of his own career. In one of his most well-known orchestral achievements, the Third Symphony, he relied on a neoclassical aesthetic whereby he filled a traditional symphonic form with techniques he had learned from other composers and composition teachers over the course of his career. From relying on the essence of folk music without using any actual folk quotations (ostensibly learned from Soviet music as well as perhaps Bartók) and experimenting with self-borrowing to attempts at pseudo-Mahlerian modularity and clear, sparse orchestration a la Mahler’s early symphonies, the Third Symphony represents a melting pot of experiences and ideas.

Ultimately, Mahler’s First Symphony and Copland’s Third determine each other. Both Copland’s understanding of Mahler’s compositional style and the success of his own Third Symphony concretized the latter’s destiny to be misunderstood by many, doomed by historicists to point towards the regressive neoclassic and post-modern modes of composition that followed the modernist works of Schoenberg and Webern, its avant-garde dimensions as unfulfilled in time as the French Revolution. For where a thinker like Copland saw social progress, the angel of history, as Walter Benjamin submitted, “sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”¹⁴ Copland’s Third Symphony is a reification, a necessary form of appearance, of this conflict in historical thought; it is a perpetuation of, rather than a working through.

¹³ Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, 34.

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¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 257.

Regardless of whether the Symphony is interpreted as a regressive work or a successful attempt at synthesizing numerous conflicting aesthetic ideas, it is thoroughly optimistic and hopeful. In the end, both composers pointed equally towards the necessity for social emancipation, but only Mahler consciously mobilized that notion through a radical approach to musical and formal language. What Copland achieved, through both his rich discourse of literature and music and his pedagogical legacy, is in some ways yet to be determined, as new angles from which to examine his work are explored. As it stands, his Third Symphony is a great and direct monument to American potential and to an idealism that, under the right circumstances, could have a profound impact on social reality. Like much popular culture today, regardless of its quality or genre the Third Symphony, one might argue, contains within it the desire for a reconciled, free society. Culture may not know how to achieve this change, whether it be through reform or revolution, but post-World War II art is certainly not to blame for its failure to point towards anything other than the poverty of the social reality that produced it. Therefore, it is not Copland's Third Symphony itself but his misguided idealism that remains the light that never goes out, flickering in the darkness, waiting to see if the potential for human freedom will ever be fully realized.

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