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# The Testimonial Aesthetics of *Different Trains*

AMY LYNN WLODARSKI

I am other. I speak and my voice sounds like something other than a voice. My words come from outside of me. I speak and what I say is not said by me.

—Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*

In 1988, Steve Reich completed *Different Trains*, his *magnum opus* for string quartet and tape in which he splices together spoken recollections by three Holocaust survivors to create a narrative of Jewish suffering during World War II. As he explains in the program notes, the piece was not merely a historical meditation but a personal response to his own Jewish heritage:

The idea for the piece comes from my childhood. When I was one year old, my parents separated. [. . .] Since they arranged divided custody, I traveled back and forth by train frequently between New York and Los Angeles from 1939 to 1942, accompanied by my governess[, Virginia]. [. . .] I now look back and think that, if I had been in Europe during this period, as a Jew I would have had to ride on very different trains. With this in mind, I wanted to make a piece that would accurately reflect the whole situation. . . . The piece thus presents both a documentary and a musical reality, and begins a new musical direction.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Reich, “*Different Trains* (1988),” 151–52.

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Reich cast the work in three movements, all of which include recorded voice samples. In the first, “America: Before the War,” the listener encounters the voices of Reich’s governess, Virginia, and of Mr. Davis, a retired Pullman porter; both describe a series of destinations designed to recall Reich’s youthful journeys across the country by rail. The second movement shifts the focus to “Europe: During the War” and features excerpts from the recorded testimonies of three Holocaust survivors—Paul, Rachel, and Rachella—who describe their traumatic experiences of prewar anti-Semitism and the genocide. The final movement, simply titled “After the War,” merges the voices of the first movement with those of the second, signifying the geographic relocation of the survivors to America and the lingering memories that they carried with them.

Within Reich’s corpus, *Different Trains* functions as the culmination of several composition projects he developed during a period of spiritual awakening in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Encouraged by his partner Beryl Korot, who shared a similar interest in rediscovering her own Jewish past, Reich enrolled in courses on Hebrew and the Torah, which led to private studies of cantillation at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1976 to 1977.<sup>2</sup> Reich put this new-found knowledge to work in his *Octet* (1979, revised in 1983 as *Eight Lines*), which showcased musical gestures derived from Hebraic declamation.<sup>3</sup> In 1981, he turned to Old Testament texts in *Tehillim*, a Hebrew setting of selections from the Book of Psalms that marked Reich’s return to vocal compositions after a decade of producing only instrumental works.<sup>4</sup> Reich adapted several of the choral techniques of *Tehillim* to his next work, *The Desert Music* (1984), which set fragments that Reich selected from several poems of William Carlos Williams.<sup>5</sup> *The Desert Music* signified a return to overtly political composition for Reich, who admitted that Williams’s poetry had appealed to him on both personal and ideological levels:

I have loved Dr. Williams’s poetry since I was sixteen years old . . . [and] have continued reading his work to the present. I find [his] best work to be his late poetry, written between 1954 and his death in 1963 at age 80. It is from this period in the poet’s work that I have selected the texts for *The Desert Music*—a period after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>6</sup>

2. Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 538.

3. Reich withdrew his *Octet* in 1983, rescoring the piece by adding a second string quartet in order to solve several performance difficulties. See his “*Eight Lines* (1983),” 119.

4. Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 537, 545. Puca notes that during this period of Reich’s career, the composer also studied Hebrew and the Bible and resided in Israel for several extended periods of time. See also Reich, “Hebrew Cantillation and Its Influence on Composition (1982),” 105–18; and Dadson, “Steve Reich in Conversation with Philip Dadson.”

5. Reich remarks in the program notes that the textual “arrangement was my first compositional activity.” After organizing the texts into a large dramatic arch, Reich began musical composition, working with polyrhythmic pulses that “grew out of the two- and three-beat groupings found in *Tehillim*.” See Reich, “*The Desert Music* (1984),” 120–24.

6. *Ibid.*, 124.

As he intimated in a conversation with Jonathan Cott, Reich associated *The Desert Music* with a variety of ideas that would reemerge in *Different Trains*, including Jewish exile, trips “to and from California . . . through the Mojave,” and rumination on the horror of a nuclear holocaust, as represented by White Sands and Alamogordo in New Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

Antonella Puca argues that Reich’s reengagement with Judaism fundamentally changed his approach to text setting and the voice; instead of manipulating sound objects to the point of distortion, as in the 1966 composition *Come Out*, “the rediscovery of his Jewish background in the mid-1970s oriented [Reich’s] approach . . . in a new direction, one that aims at preserving the integrity of speech in terms both of its acoustic quality and of its semantic meaning.”<sup>8</sup> This new method of text setting informed the composition of *Different Trains*, in which Reich digitally sampled excerpts from taped interviews and used them to create “speech melodies,” Reich’s term for a type of musical transcription that attempts to replicate the distinctive rhythm, intonation, and inflection of human speech.<sup>9</sup> For example, the opening speech melody of the piece derives from a description given by Reich’s governess of their cross-country travels; Reich isolated a single phrase (“From Chicago to New York”), identified its musical characteristics, and then composed a motive that reflected his hearing of the musical qualities of the clip (see Ex. 1). By deliberately maintaining the acoustic integrity of the sound clips, Reich respected the semantic meaning of the testimonies and amplified them by using the speech melodies to generate musical motives for the live string quartet.<sup>10</sup> The result is an interplay between the individual voices heard on the tape and the musical representations of those voices performed by the live instruments. The final performance therefore comprises six distinct layers of sound: the live string quartet; the prerecorded voice samples (tape); three tracks, each prerecorded by the string quartet, that generate the background of the piece by mimicking the constant motion of a train (tape); and a final track containing recorded samples of train whistles and air raid sirens.<sup>11</sup>

7. “There is another desert that is central to *The Desert Music*: White Sands and Alamogordo in New Mexico, where weapons of the most intense and sophisticated sort are constantly being developed and tested. Hidden away from the eyes of the rest of the world are these infernal machines that could lead to the destruction of the planet—and it is to this possibility that the words of William Carlos Williams, which I set in the third movement, refer.” Reich, “*The Desert Music*—Steve Reich in Conversation with Jonathan Cott (1984),” 127–28.

8. Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 538.

9. Reich, “*Different Trains* (1988),” 152.

10. *Ibid.*, 151.

11. The first movement “establishes a counterpoint of crossing bells and American steam locomotives’ wonderfully evocative chime whistles.” In the second movement, the sampled sounds change to reflect the new context of wartime Europe. “This time, testimony is set against German locomotives’ shrill whistles and—increasingly—against wailing air-raid sirens. Whistles’ pitch sharpens subtly as this section approaches its climax.” Carter, “Train Music,” 290.

**Example 1** Opening speech melody (“From Chicago to New York”), *Different Trains*, from Reich’s “Note by the Composer” in the score; the passage appears in Viola 1 in mvt. 1, mm. 45–46



The work was premiered in 1989 by the Kronos Quartet to great critical acclaim and has since enjoyed a healthy reception. *New York Times* reviewer Allan Kozinn immediately heralded it as “Reich’s most affecting, emotional work” and lauded the composer’s ability to use “interview snippets—usually only a date or a few words—[not only to form] the basis of his melodic and rhythmic material, but also to convey information about time, place, and mood.”<sup>12</sup> Less than a decade later, Richard Taruskin affirmed the work’s canonical status with a veritable coronation in the *New York Times*, asserting that *Different Trains* “went the full distance and earned [Reich] his place among the great composers of the century.”<sup>13</sup> Even more significantly for my study, Taruskin proclaimed that Reich had “solved the other problem. He has composed the only adequate musical response—one of the few adequate artistic responses in any medium—to the Holocaust.”<sup>14</sup> Taruskin argued that Reich’s compositional method escaped the traditional pitfalls of Holocaust representations, allowing *Different Trains* to transmit neither agendas nor authored texts but recordings, a decision that preserved the emotional aura and voices of the original speaking subjects, avoided textual manipulation, and, above all, rejected Hollywood-esque melodrama:

There are no villains and no heroes. There is no role for a Ralph Fiennes or a Werner Klemperer to flatter your sense of moral superiority. And there is no bathetic glory to comfort you with a trumped-up “Triumph of the Human Spirit.” There is just the perception that while this happened here, that happened there, and a stony invitation to reflect.<sup>15</sup>

According to this analysis, *Different Trains* succeeds less for its musical structure or aesthetic advancements than for its singular moral victory, and it is on this basis that Taruskin nominates Reich as one of the few twentieth-century composers whose works will matter in the future.

In recent years, *Different Trains* has been included in music history surveys and textbooks; outside of musicology, scholars have advocated its use in Jewish Studies courses as a means of teaching cultural issues surrounding the

12. Kozinn, “Reich’s Trains, Friendly or Menacing.”

13. Taruskin, “A Sturdy Musical Bridge to the 21st Century”; repr. in Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, 101.

14. *Ibid.*, 101.

15. *Ibid.*, 102.

Holocaust to high school and college students.<sup>16</sup> The perception that Reich presents the archival evidence in a straightforward and unsentimental manner facilitates acceptance of the work as documentary rather than dramatic. Reich appears to overcome the moral challenge imposed by the Holocaust and to defy mythology by presenting “things as they happened.”

Reich himself has emphasized the absence of any emotional or narrative program in the work by stressing that he merely transcribed the survivors’ speech melodies. And yet even in his early writings, Reich admitted freely to the theatrical dimension of *Different Trains*, explaining that he set out to use archival materials in order to create a “theater . . . in the mind, since there is nothing visual beyond the musicians.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the climax of *Different Trains* in movement two is highly theatrical: Reich uses excerpts that evoke suspense (“Quick, go! Don’t breathe!”), uncertainty (“into the cattle wagons for four days”), and terror (“it was smoking”). He also sets the sonic stage for the movement with prerecorded tracks laced with air-raid sirens. As the characters reach Auschwitz in the closing measures, the string quartet’s simulation of a train eases and finally comes to a halt, suggesting the arrival of the cattle wagons and the beginning of the selection process.

Although Reich has pointedly described *Different Trains* as a “musical reality” that “accurately reflects the whole situation” of American and European Jews during the war, his emphasis on objectivity is problematic. To a certain extent, his language harkens back to the rhetoric of early minimalism, when composers sought forms that resisted cohesive narrative and attempted to focus attention on the musical object through repetitive or gradual musical processes. Minimalism was not without its critics, however, who argued that such aesthetic arguments were misleading and directed attention away from the fact that minimalist art is staged with an audience in mind. In *Different Trains*, the dramatic use of survivor testimonies adds another layer to the dilemma by recasting fragments of very emotional testimonies as purportedly unmediated documentary. The kind of authority attributed to these sources has come under scrutiny in the field of Holocaust studies, with scholars debating the consequences of transforming highly subjective survivor testimonies into a historical discourse in which their witness is lifted out of its emotional context and made to serve as fact rather than memory. Distrustful of this practice, a new generation of scholars has refocused attention on the historiography of the Holocaust and the role of secondary witness—intellectual interpretations of survivor testimonies that are advanced without the author revealing his or her own subjective standpoint or scholarly agenda.<sup>18</sup>

16. For example, see Leibman, “Teaching the Holocaust Through Music.”

17. Reich, “Chamber Music—An Expanded View (1989),” 158.

18. Naomi Cumming, in “The Horrors of Identification: Reich’s *Different Trains*,” similarly questions the objectivity of *Trains*, arguing that “a bifurcation of ‘the music’ from ‘the listening subject’ is a mistake” (130). She notes that Reich’s use of repetition in *Trains* engenders the

This study brings these debates to bear upon *Different Trains*, arguing that the piece functions as a form of secondary witness susceptible to the representational dangers outlined above. In my analysis, I rely heavily on the primary source recordings, housed at the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University and the Wiener Oral History Library at the New York Public Library, to ascertain the processes by which Reich made his selections from the original witness accounts of Paul, Rachel, and Rachella. Consultation of the source tapes reveals that as Reich worked with extracts from the testimonies, the original meaning and tone was often altered.<sup>19</sup> Reich also misheard certain phrases, producing transcription errors that significantly reframe key moments by substituting his account of the Holocaust for that of the primary witness. Such revelations prompt reevaluation of the moral and political success that has been claimed for *Different Trains*, since—as study of the original recordings shows—the compositional process could never have been as objective and self-effacing as Reich and his critics suggest. Rather, *Different Trains* is itself a problematic secondary witness, one susceptible to the same fracture of subjectivity endemic to the accounts of primary witnesses, in which survivors struggle not only with the ruptures of memory caused by trauma, but also with the impossibility of translating those memories into language and narrative. As a result, *Different Trains* is itself shaped by the aesthetics and inaccurate nature of testimony: ultimately, it is Reich's own Holocaust testimony, one crafted from the voices of witnesses other than himself.

## The Holocaust as Minimal Object

Though seemingly unrelated, both minimalism and Holocaust criticism emphasized the need to establish objective forms of discourse as a response to the highly ideological movements of the 1930s and 1940s. For their part, minimalists espoused an objective approach to art as a corrective to what they considered the ideological illusion of expressionist movements in both art and music. Central to the minimalist aesthetic was the principle of wholeness and the rejection of complex contrapuntal designs that allowed specific elements in an artwork to distinguish themselves as separate from the whole.<sup>20</sup> As the

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audience's emotional identification with the survivors: "Insofar as [the listeners] may share a response to a given rhythmic 'feel,' it may also be argued that they have some means of access to the emotional connotations of that 'feel,' as it may be experienced by others. A shared experience of motion does not, however, determine that emotional responses between listeners will be entirely commensurate with one another" (131).

19. Reich acknowledges his use of the Fortunoff Archive and the Holocaust Collection of the American Jewish Committee's William E. Wiener Oral History Library in several statements pertaining to *Trains*. I am grateful to Joanne Rudof for helping me to locate Rachella's testimonial record.

20. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 118.

sculptor Donald Judd remarked, an artist should have in mind “a definitive whole and maybe no parts, or very few,” in order to create, as nearly as possible, “one thing, a single Specific Object.”<sup>21</sup> He achieved this uniformity through the repetition of identical units that were simple in shape and argued that “anything that is not absolutely plain begins to have parts in some way.”<sup>22</sup> The sculptor Robert Morris went further, arguing that minimalist works produced “facts of space, light, and materials [that] have always functioned concretely and literally. . . . One sees and immediately ‘believes’ that the pattern within one’s mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object.”<sup>23</sup> Morris also recognized that the establishment of this singular correspondence between object and one’s perception of it required deliberate control of “the entire situation,” including how the object was placed in its exhibition space.<sup>24</sup>

Like their artistic counterparts, minimalist composers also reacted against personal expression and narrative, focusing instead on the acoustic properties of an isolated musical phrase, which they often highlighted through repetition.<sup>25</sup> Just as Frank Stella rejected programmatic approaches to art, declaring his painting to be based “on the fact that only what can be seen there is there—it really is an object,” composers such as Philip Glass began to refer to minimalism as “intentionless music” that did not attempt “a calculated effect [or] paint a picture.”<sup>26</sup> What set their aesthetic apart from the reductiveness of Webern’s serialism or the nonintention of Cage’s indeterminacy was the fact that it was, in Glass’s words, “non-narrative.”<sup>27</sup> It avoided dramatic devices such as contrast, opposition, climax, patterns of tension and release, and large-scale form and development, instead treating musical sounds in a nonrelational way. Repetition in particular narrowed the focus to a singular musical cell, eschewing counterpoint and developmental tendencies in such a way as to reference only the musical object at hand.

Reich embraced the movement’s self-referential impulse, arguing that the subjectation of recorded voices to external processes effaced the self, and

21. Donald Judd, cited in *ibid.*, 117, 119.

22. Judd, cited in *ibid.*, 119.

23. Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” 223, 226. In his sculpture from the early 1960s, Morris stressed architecture, the body, and movement; only later did he refine his views, ridding his art of such allusions and finally arguing for a purely abstract, literal art. See Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 51.

24. Morris, cited in Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 127.

25. Hitchcock, “Minimalism in Art and Music: Origins and Aesthetics,” 316.

26. Kostelanetz, “Two Tonal Composers,” cited in Hitchcock, “Minimalism,” 316.

27. Roddy, “Listening to Glass,” cited in Hitchcock, “Minimalism,” 316. The roots of minimalism in the pointillism of serialism, Cage’s indeterminacy and chance music, and the Fluxus movement are discussed by Hitchcock in *ibid.*, 309–10; and by Nyman in *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 139–40. As Nyman notes, minimalist pioneer La Monte Young took inspiration not only from his involvement in the early Fluxus movement, but also from Webern’s tendency to repeat pitches at the same octave positions throughout a section of a movement, thereby grounding the work in a foundation of repetition and stasis.

therefore emotionality, from his texted compositions. Early works like *It's Gonna Rain* (1964) and *Come Out* (1966) presented the recorded voice of an individual without altering the sound source itself. Instead, Reich developed musical counterpoint through manipulative techniques external to the samples themselves such as phase shifting and tape looping, both of which create what Keith Potter describes as a “rich interaction of musical and semantic levels” that ultimately adds an “‘emotional layer’ provided by words and their cultural resonances.”<sup>28</sup> As Reich explained in “Music as a Gradual Process,” this emotional layer lies outside of the work, since processes such as phasing liberate sound from any “intentions,” allowing sonic phenomena to “occur for their own acoustic reasons.”<sup>29</sup> Focusing on the musical process made possible “that shift of attention away from *he* and *she* and *you* and *me* outward toward *it*.”<sup>30</sup> The experience of the musical process becomes “impersonal; *it* just goes *its* way.”<sup>31</sup> Here Reich articulates his own form of “acoustic positivism,” a term developed by Jeremy Grimshaw to describe minimalism’s focus on sonic materiality rather than semantic meaning or musical context.<sup>32</sup>

It was perhaps this interest in musical objectivity that drew Reich to the idea of using survivor testimonies in *Different Trains*, especially given the increasing value accorded to them as the foundation for a new type of Holocaust history, one based on the collection and dissemination of firsthand accounts. Directly after the war, historians mined a variety of sources as they tried to discover the course and extent of the European genocide, including official Nazi documents, physical evidence left at the sites of extermination, and the accounts of traumatized survivors. As Zoë Waxman observes, early histories of the Holocaust were highly concerned with maintaining an objective tone, so as to avoid being dismissed as Jewish or Zionist propaganda.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, most of the early accounts avoided citation of survivor testimony “in an attempt to infuse their work with objectivity.”<sup>34</sup> The publication of several survivors’ diaries between 1945 and 1965, however, emphasized the importance of eye-witness accounts in reconstructing a broader picture of the

28. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, 177, 178.

29. Reich, “Music as a Gradual Process (1968),” 35.

30. *Ibid.*, 36.

31. Reich, “Early Works (1965–68),” 20.

32. Grimshaw, “Music of a ‘More Exalted Sphere’: Compositional Practice, Biography, and Cosmology in the Music of La Monte Young,” 180. Grimshaw’s theory of acoustic positivism emerges from his study of the music of La Monte Young, especially works like the *String Trio* (1958), in which Young deliberately suspended or slowed down musical development in order to intensify focus on the sound itself. As Grimshaw notes, “Young sought ways of describing and organizing sounds with respect to what they *were* rather than what they might be made to *do*. Hearing a melody, Young surmised, entailed connecting dots; he was interested in the dots themselves.”

33. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*, 97.

34. *Ibid.*

Holocaust. As literary critic Edouard Roditi prominently argued, the “steadfastly objective eye-witness observations” of Holocaust diarists were valuable for their “selfless objectivity” as historical data.<sup>35</sup> In making this assertion, Roditi shifted the claim of objectivity back to witness testimony, which could now be understood as a form of hard history rather than soft literary reconstruction.<sup>36</sup> As a consequence, writers on the Holocaust began practicing what James E. Young characterizes as “an almost obsessive tendency . . . to rid their narrative of all signs of style in order to distinguish between factual and fictional works.”<sup>37</sup>

Reactions to these inclinations—to claim objectivity for both minimalist artworks and Holocaust narratives—intersected in 1967, when scholars began to critique such claims as little more than “rhetorical moves in their own right . . . a rhetoric of anti-rhetoric [designed] to convince the reader that such facts, now of a particular color and cast, had been established.”<sup>38</sup> In “Historical Discourse,” Roland Barthes prominently challenged the “so-called ‘objective’ mode of historical discourse, in which the historian discards the human persona and replaces it with an ‘objective’ one.”<sup>39</sup> He argued that authorial self-effacement was a highly ideological technique, a “referential illusion, where the historian tries to give the impression that the referent is speaking for itself.”<sup>40</sup> More importantly for this study, Barthes observes that the practice was not restricted to historical texts alone but had become an aesthetic, particular to certain types of fiction and most notably realism, in which “novelists galore . . . considered themselves ‘objective’ because they had suppressed all traces of the ‘I’ in their text.”<sup>41</sup>

Later that year, the art critic Michael Fried took aim at minimalism’s purported objectivity in his provocative essay, “Art and Objecthood,” which appeared in *Artforum*. Responding to the writings of Judd, Stella, and Morris, Fried countered that “the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater.”<sup>42</sup> Instead of focusing on *it*—the minimalist object—Fried insisted that the audience for minimalist art also be taken into account, contending that “the experience of literalist art is of an object *in a situation*—one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder* . . . *belongs* to the beholder—it is *his* situation.”<sup>43</sup> When observed by a viewer, the object becomes staged, endowed with “a theatrical effect or quality—a

35. Roditi, “Post-Holocaust Prophets,” 51, 53.

36. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, 6.

37. *Ibid.*, 8.

38. *Ibid.*, 9.

39. Barthes, “Historical Discourse,” 149.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 125.

43. *Ibid.*, 127.

kind of *stage* presence . . . that *depends on* the beholder, is *incomplete* without him; it *has* been waiting for him. And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone.”<sup>44</sup> When art “demands that the beholder take it into account, that he take it *seriously*,” Fried contended, it is partly the result of the artist having staged the work so that the beholder “knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended—and unexacting—relation *as subject* to the impassive object on the wall or floor.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, by masking this staging, by hiding the work’s intent and anthropomorphism, the artist engages in further theatrics—those of smoke and mirrors—and ultimately threatens the integrity of his or her art, which degenerates the more closely it approaches the condition of theater.<sup>46</sup>

The critiques of Fried and Barthes would later find common ground in *The Minimal Self* (1984) by the social critic and historian Christopher Lasch, in which he contended that minimalism’s siege on subjectivity reflected its own post-Holocaust anxiety. Arguing that the Holocaust had threatened the creative imagination by its very extremity, Lasch concluded that minimalism had emerged as a survival tactic for artists, who managed to establish control over the Holocaust by narrowing their focus and conceiving of trauma as an artistic object. This strategy required the neutralization of the Holocaust’s emotional core, which minimalism achieved through reification and detachment:

By turning horrible events into images, tearing these images out of context, re-arranging them in new combinations, and characterizing the viewer’s responses in the bland jargon of scientific neutrality . . . [minimalism] deadens the emotional impact of events, neutralizes criticism and commentary, and reduces even the “death of affect” to another catchword or cliché, one that reinforces the very condition it describes.<sup>47</sup>

Lasch argued that as an anti-art, minimalism “concerns itself with surfaces [and in doing so] not only denies the reality of inner experience but denies the reality of surrounding objects as well. It annihilates the subject and the object alike.”<sup>48</sup> The result is a passive, voyeuristic attitude toward history that conveys “the experience of unreality.”<sup>49</sup> The minimal artist becomes, in a sense, akin to Holocaust survivors themselves—able to narrate plausible representations of an event, but in terms ultimately disconnected from their inner experience of trauma.<sup>50</sup>

Four years later, the Holocaust became Reich’s minimal object, a series of testimonial facts that he resituated into a narrative inhabited by numerous

44. *Ibid.*, 140.

45. *Ibid.*, 128.

46. *Ibid.*, 130.

47. Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*, 141.

48. *Ibid.*, 149.

49. *Ibid.*, 162.

50. *Ibid.*

characters, voices, and memories, all of them framed by Reich's own stagings. In light of the skepticism advanced by Barthes, Fried, and Lasch, it seems time to question how the processes used to compose *Different Trains* refocused the meanings of the recordings Reich sampled, ultimately producing yet another personal interpretation of the Holocaust. More crucially, as we better understand the psychological pressures that may have weighed on the compositional process, the moment seems ripe to reevaluate the moral approbation garnered by the work. The following analysis explores how *Different Trains* presents the multiple subjectivities and testimonial aesthetics of its secondary witnesses and considers the consequences of applying minimalist techniques to Holocaust testimony.

### Testimonial Aesthetics in *Different Trains*

In 1982 Yale University established the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies in order to preserve the witness of Holocaust survivors for future generations. Citing an "increasingly media-centered era," the archive collects interviews only on videotape, which supposedly facilitates an "open-ended, free-flowing interviewing process [that] discloses expressive details about the day-to-day experience of the survivors" in ways that written or audiotaped testimonies cannot.<sup>51</sup> Most of the recorded sessions (which range from thirty minutes to four hours) consist of questions being posed by interviewers to a Holocaust witness, who generally appears alone before the camera. As Lawrence L. Langer notes, "all the witnesses . . . volunteered for the interviews . . . [and the] two interviewers . . . practiced a mainly noninterventionist strategy [that] encourag[ed] the free flow of memory to recapture the interviewees' thoughts and feelings about their experiences."<sup>52</sup> As Langer discovered in his study of the nearly 1,400 interviews archived at Yale by 1989, the testimonies not only document facets of the Holocaust firsthand, they also establish the problematic nature of traumatic memory itself. As the witnesses stumble through the "ruins of their memory," they frequently encounter narrative gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions created by psychological phenomena such as post-traumatic repression, blackouts, and humiliation. Just as often, they seem genuinely frustrated at their own inability to translate their Holocaust experience into words and images that the non-survivor would understand.

This struggle to translate memory into narrative comes to the fore in an interview with a survivor identified as Chaim E., a participant in the Sobibor uprising, who blames the disconnect not on his faulty memory but rather on

51. "Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony: About the Archive—Our Concept," <http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about/concept.html>.

52. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, xvii.

the absence of “a common ground between [his] reality and [the audience’s] attempts to imagine it”:

I see the picture in *front* of me; you have to *imagine* something. The one that listens has to imagine something. So it has a different picture for me than for the one that imagines it. At least I think so, because sometimes I hear telling back a story that doesn’t sound at all the same what I was telling, you see; it doesn’t sound the same. It was horrified and horrible, and when you live once with this tension and horrification—if that is the right word—then you live differently.<sup>53</sup>

For Chaim E., the imagination of the listener converts the survivor’s memory into something incongruent with the primary remembrance, in this case removing some of the emotional terror from the original. This prompts him to amplify the word “horror”—horrified . . . horrible . . . horrification—in an attempt to underscore the emotional scars of Sobibor and invest them with appropriate rhetorical weight for his audience.

In the Fortunoff videorecordings, more serious cases of revision result from the intervention of the interviewers, who do not merely listen to the accounts but help to shape them through questions, interjections, clarifications, and even direct (although perhaps not intentional) censorship. Sometimes the words of the witness vie directly with those of the interviewers for supremacy, as both parties try to establish truth and meaning even as they end up “offering a stunning instance of the near impossibility of achieving a purely objective oral text.”<sup>54</sup> Langer recounts one exchange in particular, between two Fortunoff interviewers and Hanna F., who survived two deportations to Auschwitz:

Interviewer: You were able to survive because you were so plucky. When you stepped back on the line . . .

Hanna F.: No, dear, no dear, no . . . no, I had no . . .

[*meanwhile, the two interviewers are whispering audibly with each other off camera about this exchange, momentarily ignoring the witness, who wants to reply*]

Hanna F.: How shall I explain to you? I know that I had to survive. . . . especially the second part, the second time, being back in Auschwitz. That time I had determined already to survive—and you know what? It wasn’t luck, it was stupidity.

[*At this, the two interviewers laugh deprecatingly, overriding her voice with their own “explanation,” as one calls out, “You had a lot of guts!”*]

Hanna F.: No, no, no, no, there were no guts, there was just sheer stupidity. I just, you know . . .

[*more laughter from the interviewers, one of whom now stands up between camera and witness, blocking our vision, silencing her voice, ending the interview. Why?*]<sup>55</sup>

53. Chaim E. Holocaust Testimony (T-736), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library, as reprinted in Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 62–63.

54. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 63.

55. *Ibid.*, 63–64. The transcription is Langer’s own account of the exchange, including his frustrations with and analysis of the interview. It has been reformatted for clarity.

As Langer notes, the exchange is indicative of the tension between primary and secondary witnesses as both approach the account from separate perspectives: “Her use of language . . . is memory-specific, while the interviewers’ response is identified with a long tradition of historical behavior and expectations. . . . The confrontation dramatizes the irreconcilable clash between the differing value-spaces that the two points of view inhabit.”<sup>56</sup>

To deem these types of revision irresponsible or intentional would be to oversimplify the phenomenon, since in many cases the misunderstandings result from “preconceived, culturally nourished moral expectations” about the Holocaust, its significance, and its primary tropes.<sup>57</sup> Just as the survivor clings firmly to her memory of events, listeners attempt to posit these images in their own understanding of the Holocaust. The accounts are thus ripe with hermeneutical tension, contested memories, and a multiplicity of narratives that run from the initial remembrance of the primary witness to the retellings of secondary witnesses.

Perhaps because Reich spent a good deal of time at the Fortunoff Archives viewing the videotaped testimonies, *Different Trains* exhibits several striking parallels with the interviews themselves. Reich preserves the aesthetic tension between episodic flashbacks and progressive sequencing by alternating between repetitive stasis, in which the survivors appear to be held captive by a recurring memory, and harmonic modulation that leads the piece to a new topic. Such forward motion requires external intervention, and just as the interviewers attempted to direct the survivors’ episodic memories into a coherent narrative, Reich also steers their memories into chronological templates that benefit the staging of *Different Trains*. That Reich frames his archival selections is not surprising, given the work’s deep immersion in the original psychological content and technological format of the videotaped testimonies. As Oren Stier observes, the Fortunoff videos possess two internal frames—a narrative frame and a filmic frame—both of which “delineate a distinct layer of presentation, actively producing meaning or actively disrupting the transmission of the witness’s experience, or both, because of varying degrees of structural limitation.”<sup>58</sup> In *Different Trains*, Reich appears to duplicate or augment the internal frames of the original interviews, suggesting that his experience of their testimonial aesthetics definitively shaped his own secondary witnessing of their accounts.

56. Ibid., 64.

57. Ibid., 64–65.

58. Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, 77. Robert Kraft also makes the distinction between “core memory,” which constitutes the “representation of the *original phenomenal experience* in the form of perceptual, emotional, and physiological experience,” and “narrative memory, [which is] constructed from the images in core memory and shaped in accordance with narrative conventions, and conveyed primarily through language.” See Kraft, “Archival Memory: Representations of the Holocaust in Oral Testimony,” 316.

Most studies of trauma note that Holocaust survivors experience a feeling of simultaneity as they make their testimonies, during which they seem to be narrating not only for their audience but also for themselves what they are re-experiencing during the interviews. As psychologist Dori Laub notes, the Holocaust was an event that effectively obliterated an “independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed”: those who directly experienced or observed its trauma were silenced either by death or a process of dehumanization that incapacitated their ability to remain a “fully lucid, unaffected witness.”<sup>59</sup> As a result, survivors often carry with them dual frames of reference that surface in the narratological structure of their testimonies, which oscillates between continuity and fracture, past and present states of being, and emotional possession and dispossession.<sup>60</sup> Psychologists Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart explain that trauma ruptures one’s personality, creating a dichotomous existence in which the freeze-frame of the traumatic moment intrudes upon, or perhaps more accurately, grates against the continuity of lived experience in the present. “As the trauma is fixed at a certain moment in a person’s life, people live out their existences in two different stages of the life cycle, the traumatic past, and the bleached present. The traumatized, fixated, inflexible part of the personality has stopped developing.”<sup>61</sup> In his studies of the Fortunoff videotapes, Langer also observed this breach in temporality, describing it as a “permanent duality, not exactly a split or a doubling but a parallel existence. [The witness] switches from one to the other without synchronization because he is reporting not a *sequence* but a *simultaneity*.”<sup>62</sup> Thus a testimonial aesthetic begins to emerge, one of cohabitation of self, multiplicity of testimonial voices, and vacillation between paralysis and progression.

In many regards, *Different Trains* preserves the testimonial aesthetic of co-referential frames via musical decisions Reich made at both the melodic and harmonic levels of the work. The melodic doubling of the textual excerpts, rendered in speech melody by the string quartet, creates a dualistic presentation of them that allows the listeners to experience both simultaneously. When we hear these melodies without accompanying text, we experience them as conveying specific textual content; they move beyond simple mimesis to the level of linguistic communication, constituting a multivoiced expression of tes-

59. Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,” 66.

60. In light of this division of self, Hayden White has proposed the need for a new mode of expression called the “middle voice,” which would allow a different subject position in relation to the event—one that is neither active nor passive but that situates the agent inside the action. As Ernst van Alphen describes, “the agent takes part in, is affected by, the action or event without being either subject or object of it.” See Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*, 47.

61. Van der Kolk and Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” 177.

62. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 95. Emphasis is original.

testimonial self.<sup>63</sup> Reich's style of text interpolation also thwarts narrative continuity, imbuing the work with a sense of inherent fracture that mirrors the fragmentary nature of the memory. As Holocaust scholar Robert N. Kraft contends, the "primary unit of remembering is the episode . . . [which] is usually a narrative—although it can be impressionistic. . . . Typically, survivors recall individual episodes one at a time, proceeding from one episode to the next."<sup>64</sup> This episodic quality emerges in *Different Trains* as Reich's repetitive treatment of the sound clips undermines the smoother-flowing chronicles of experience. The narrative remains mired in repetition until an excerpt has exhausted its musical potential, at which point the piece modulates to a new key area associated with a new sound clip. The result is a modular approach to testimonial narration in which musical progression signifies narratological advance while repetition denotes a sense of stasis similar to moments of emotional paralysis found in Holocaust testimonies.

Overall, the Fortunoff interviewers prefer an "open interview" format that "gives as much autonomy as possible to the interviewees and does not take the initiative away from them."<sup>65</sup> As noted earlier, however, the testimonies are not completely unguided; two interviewers generally prompt the survivors, asking them to clarify details and steering them along a general course that begins with a description of their lives before the war, followed by their wartime experiences and stories of liberation, and closing with a description of their immigration to America and reflection on their contemporary life in this country.<sup>66</sup> These general parameters create a dimension of artificiality, not in terms of the truthfulness of the memories, but in their having been directed from without (by the interviewers) rather than from within (by the witness). Indeed, as James Young notes, the simple, opening question—"Start at the beginning"—raises a host of questions for the witness:

The survivor must determine where this beginning came. Was it when the family moved to Germany from Russia . . . or when they heard on the radio that Hitler was appointed chancellor, or was it Kristallnacht? . . . And where then does one's testimony end? At liberation from the camps, or on one's arrival in Israel? When the tape runs out, or when the interviewer grows tired? Can memory ever have closure? Depending on where the beginning and end of

63. Here, I suggest that the "speech melodies" of *Different Trains* work differently than Reich's treatment of text in the early tape pieces from the 1960s, in which he manipulated speech samples in such a way that they "lost their original linguistic connotation." Antonella Puca makes a similar point, arguing that Reich's new method evolved from his studies of Hebrew cantillation in the 1970s: "[After the cantillation studies], the preservation of the semantic meaning of the words became for Reich a central concern, and sound aspects of spoken language, such as intonation, timbre, melodic cadences, and metric accentuation became the defining elements of musical structure." See Puca, "Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation," 537.

64. Kraft, "Archival Memory," 315.

65. Ballengee, "Witnessing Video Testimony: An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman," 218.

66. Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 76; and Alphen, *Caught by History*, 53.

testimony come, particular premises, conclusions, and meanings are created for the whole of testimony.<sup>67</sup>

As a result, the Fortunoff testimonies generally begin and end in so-called normalcy, situating the traumatic memories “in the midst of a zone of relative comfort that eases the witness, along with those accompanying her on her memorial journey, into and out of the more traumatic aspects of her experiences.”<sup>68</sup> The resulting narrative is not only artificial, it risks diluting the force of the Holocaust trauma.

Reich maintains the typical format of the Fortunoff interviews in *Different Trains*, which bears a three-movement structure moving from prewar memories to postwar reflection. The work begins with discussion of events “Before the War,” as if Reich had been asked by an outside interviewer to “start at the beginning.” Not unlike Paul, Rachel, and Rachella, he selects an early childhood moment as a starting point for the narrative and works it into a metaphor flexible enough to address the subjects of both personal and historical tragedy without seeming mundane or trite. The phrase “from New York to Los Angeles” becomes his marker of an early childhood trauma—the divorce of his parents—and Mr. Davis’s mention of the “crack train from New York” provides the transition to the second movement, “Europe—During the War,” in which the “different trains” of the title finally appear. True to the format of the Fortunoff interviews, which generally leads their subjects to comment on their postwar American experience at the conclusion of the testimony, the piece ends with “After the War,” in which Reich reprises the voices of Virginia, Mr. Davis, Paul, and Rachella. At first, the inclusion of Rachella’s voice in this postwar movement appears to depart from the composition’s chronological ordering; she remembers an event that took place during the war at Auschwitz, not after the war as the other sound clips do. Consultation of the original source tapes reveals, however, that this memory appears at the conclusion of her testimony in response to a series of exit questions about the current state of postwar America.<sup>69</sup> In preserving the position of Rachella’s memory, Reich maintains the integrity of her witness in *Different Trains*. Despite the conclusion of the war, Rachella’s traumatic memories persist as part of her contemporary reality; past and present seem to know no definitive divide, either within her testimony or in the final postwar movement of *Different Trains*.

A secondary frame also exists in the Fortunoff collection: the technical, filmic dimension of the testimonies. How the witnesses appear on the screen—

67. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 159.

68. Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 76.

69. Unlike the Fortunoff interviews, at the conclusion of her interview, Rachella—whose testimony was recorded for preservation in the Weiner Oral History Library—is asked a series of fixed exit questions in order to gauge her current values and belief systems. They range from her opinion of the Vietnam War and postwar presidents to whether or not she still observes the Sabbath.

in tight focus, from a wider angle, with the interviewers off-screen—is perhaps the most obvious type of visual framing, one whose expressive ramifications have been well documented in the field of cinematic studies.<sup>70</sup> In the Fortunoff videos, the camera technician essentially edits the visual experience, allowing us to view the testimony from the perspective of one of the interviewers. We see only what the videographer allows us to see, and in this sense the camera not only acts as subtle narrator of the testimonies but also affects the reception of the witnessed account. As Stier contends:

Without this frame there would be no testimony, no mediation, nothing for us to watch. But this frame is also somewhat deceptive—it gives the illusion (partially true) that the witness is speaking directly to us, the viewers. This illusion is beneficial, for it lends a sense of immediacy to the testimonial proceedings. In actuality, the witness is speaking to us through intermediaries.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, because the prompting from the off-screen interviewers is limited, viewers tend to become subsumed in the emotional sincerity of the testimonies and forget the other layers of mediation.<sup>72</sup> Geoffrey Hartman warns of the power of this voyeurism, reminding us that the testimonies are not just “out there, complete, objectivated; [they are] also in a frame or with a dimension which is that of reception and therefore interpretation.”<sup>73</sup>

Testimony requires transference, a transmission from the witness to the listener, in which the narrative passes from one vessel to another, but at each stage—from recollection to utterance to receipt—the danger of misrepresentation arises. The listener plays, therefore, a central role in traumatic witness; indeed, Dori Laub argues that “by extension, the listener . . . comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself.”<sup>74</sup> The testimony therefore includes its hearer, who represents “the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. . . . But such an auditor is hardly and rarely untainted, for she brings to her side of the television screen her own interests and agenda and her own preconceptions of the Holocaust. She becomes the coauthor of the testimony.”<sup>75</sup>

70. See Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 70–72.

71. *Ibid.*, 74.

72. As Geoffrey Hartman observes, there is one significant advantage to the videotaped testimony, which is that “the immediacy of these first-person accounts burns through the ‘cold storage of history.’ It gives texture to memory or to images that otherwise would have only sentimental or informational impact. . . . In fact, these personal narratives, though less shocking and fixating than many photos, could overwhelm viewers or arouse inappropriate defenses.” See Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, 138.

73. Ballengee, “Witnessing Video Testimony,” 220.

74. Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, 57.

75. Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 92.

Similarly, Reich involves his listeners in *Different Trains* by conceiving of their imaginations as the stage for his documentary theater of the mind. This puts the representational onus on the audience, who are given short yet suggestive sound clips and expected to stitch together the fragmented memories extracted from the survivors' fraught testimonies. The drama is, in a sense, ours to construct from his raw material, which we trust is faithful to the original sentiments and tone of the primary witness. And yet, as Stier astutely argues, memory can never "make a 'first' impression here," since the receiver's mind is never a blank slate.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to revealing parallels between *Different Trains* and the structure and aesthetics of the primary witness accounts, consultation of the source recordings also provides insight into the way minimalist techniques shaped Reich's secondary witness. *Different Trains* was the result of a three-step compositional process in which Reich's techniques of *selection*, *suture*, and *substitution* alienate the distinct accounts from the experiences of the survivors, assembling them as Reich's own personalized remembrance. His psychological engagement with their traumatic stories is traceable in his editorial decisions, which reveal his involvement as a secondary witness. Far from a simple process of musical transcription, the piece illuminates the representational dangers inherent in secondary witness and uncovers the silent presence of more than a few different trains in the work.

### Identifying the Witnesses: Selection

Reich's chosen excerpts for *Different Trains* are scattered through nearly eight hours of prerecorded Holocaust testimony. In the years after the premiere, Reich remained cryptic about how he had selected the excerpts for the second movement, all of which derive from one of the three survivor accounts. When asked what drove his textual choices, Reich insisted that they were based on purely musical criteria, namely the rhythmic pulse and intonation patterns of the speech.<sup>77</sup> Later, however, in an interview from 1994, he acknowledged that he had also selected excerpts partly according to content, admitting that "what [the survivors] say [was] chosen both for the meaning of the words and the speech melody simultaneously."<sup>78</sup>

The intrusion of personal preference into supposedly unintentional compositions was not unprecedented at the time. In 1988, John Cage wrote *I–VI*, his indeterminate composition for the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University, using chance operations to select the textual material for the talks. As Jann Pasler revealed, Cage was not satisfied with the end result

76. Ibid.

77. Reich, "Questionnaire (1989)," 159.

78. Reich, "Answers to Questions about *Different Trains* (1994)," 181.

and therefore eliminated from the talks those words that he “didn’t want” in the composition, thereby heightening the political tone of the work: “He admitted his [revised] lines were ‘highly suggestive’ and that he ‘wanted that suggestion to . . . be in a spirit [he] agreed with.’ . . . As he grew older, communicating a message seemed to be more important, a message not only about music but also about the world and its future.”<sup>79</sup> Reich similarly suggests that his selections were motivated by his desire to create a coherent and emblematic account of Jewish persecution in Europe—in short, a narrative that accorded with his own understanding of the Holocaust.

Recovering the original context of these specific phrases exposes not only his aesthetic plans for the articulation, instrumentation, and repetition that would shape the piece, but also the emotional pull of his own experiences riding trains. In several cases, the testimonies arguably appealed to Reich for reasons that were later obscured by his narrowing of the sonic frame to brief textual passages, which reinforced the impression that the music (and not the program) drove his decisions. The archival sources reveal, however, that many of the key phrases derive from survivor memories that revolve around train travel during the war. This revelation suggests an even deeper relationship between the personal program for the work—the varied experiences of riding trains during World War II—and the vocal lines used in the wartime movement of *Different Trains*, most of which do not mention trains explicitly.

## Paul

Even before he begins to share his wartime memories, Paul’s nervousness is readily apparent to the viewer of his archival videotape. Beads of sweat stream down the sides of his face and stain his denim shirt. In Paul’s remembrance, the camps are not central images, since he often found means of escaping the various ghettos to which he was confined.<sup>80</sup> There is also an intense, emotional schism in Paul’s testimony that is audible in his voice. As he remembers his relatives, his voice softens into a quiet baritone and a smile overtakes his face; often the interviewers have to prompt him to continue when he seems paralyzed, lost in reverie. At other times, he sounds angry and percussive, especially when remembering humiliating moments of anti-Semitic discrimination. One such instance, at the hands of his second-grade teacher, finds its way into *Different Trains*:

He started to make a speech, and the speech began something like this. He said, “*Black Crows invaded our country many years ago . . . and they were eating*

79. Pasler, “Intention and Indeterminacy in John Cage’s *I–VI*,” 373. See also Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 3.

80. Paul and his mother avoided deportation several times through a series of bribes, alliances, and an extensive period of hiding in the forests of Hungary. He did spend time in the Kosice Ghetto, but smugglers later helped him escape before the liquidations.

away at the flesh and blood of our country. And these crows were the JEWS” and *he pointed right at me*. It was horrifying, and I was very scared and I was also very, very angry. I remember my anger.<sup>81</sup>

These anti-Semitic attacks confused the young Paul, who had never self-identified as a Jew except during a year when he lived with his grandparents, who were themselves religiously observant. As an adult, this early disconnect from his own Jewishness continued to manifest itself in a recurring nightmare in which God violently splits him in two, a total bifurcation and annihilation of self. His internal schism is no longer purely emotional or spiritual—it is physical and destructive.

Reich’s use of Paul’s testimony allowed for greater musical contrasts in *Different Trains*, a benefit that Reich himself noted in an interview in which he discussed the gendered manner in which he assigned the speech melodies to the string quartet: “In the finished piece, each time a woman speaks she is doubled by the viola, and each time a man speaks he is doubled by the cello.”<sup>82</sup> These shifts in instrumentation not only involve the obvious parameter of timbre, but also impact the musical textures of *Different Trains*, since the short motives intoned by the lower instruments generally become subsumed by the dense soundscape of the full ensemble. Perhaps for this reason, Reich chose excerpts in which men articulate their narratives percussively, often with marked emphasis on hard consonants, which allow their motives to emerge from the background (“The Crack Train” “Black Crows”).

Even when the verbal excerpts are not distinctly articulated, Reich created motives from them that are rhythmically intense, a quality that causes Paul’s speech melodies to contrast with those of the women, to whom Reich accorded more lyrical and *legato* musical realizations. Paul’s final utterance in *Different Trains*—“and the war was over”—is one such case in point. Here, the speech melody precedes our hearing of Paul’s text, and its initial, isolated statement in the cello sparks a series of crisp, angular countermotives in the upper strings (see Exx. 2a and 2b). When Paul finally speaks in measure 28, we are conditioned to hear his text in this intense and dramatic manner, delivered with a sense of urgency that seems to drive the words from his mouth.

In the original testimony, however, Paul’s remembrance of the war’s end is anti-climactic, an afterthought sparked by the interviewer’s interruption of a more poignant memory of his mother:

Paul: (smiling at a photo of his mother) The general in charge of the Hungarian army fell in love with my mother, and he kept courting her, and he got together a musical ensemble from this troop and serenaded her. It was nice. (Smiles and begins to laugh quietly)

81. Paul D. Holocaust Testimony (T-0048), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 2, mm. 89–105.

82. Reich, “Questionnaire (1989),” 159.

**Example 2a** Paul's speech melody ("And the war was over"), *Different Trains*, mvt. 3, m. 28

(and the war was o - ver)

**Example 2b** Opening musical context for Paul's speech melody, *Different Trains*, mvt. 3, mm. 23–27

Interviewer: (prompting) And it was the end of 1944 . . .

Paul: (calmly) This is now the beginning of '45. This is now February '45. And then . . . one day, there was an explosion and guns and fighting and we hid in a cellar. And then, the next thing we knew, a Russian soldier came into the bunker, *and the war was over*. And—um—the next day, we were free.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike its presentation in the third movement of *Different Trains*, the denouement in Paul's wartime testimony is nonchalant, said with a shrug that downplays the conclusion of his story.

83. Paul D. Holocaust Testimony. The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 3, mm. 28–57.

Paul's tone and experiences differ from those of the two female protagonists in the piece, and his remembrances of trains are more carefree and joyful than those of Rachel and Rachella. Early in his testimony, Paul recalled the moment at which his family decided to smuggle him out of Slovakia, a memory that persisted not because it contributed to his survival but because his innocent anticipation of the train ride was so strong:

A lot of the kids, the children from Slovakia who had the opportunity, were at this point being smuggled to Hungary—to safety. [. . .] I remember telling [my mother], trying to convince her that this would definitely be a safe place for me. But all along what I really wanted to do was have the adventure of a train ride, because I knew I would be going on a train. [. . .] I wanted the adventure. So, I didn't think this would last for a very long time. It just felt like a fun thing to do. That I know. And so, when the train left, I was sitting on the train with the smuggler, a woman. I was being smuggled across as her son. I remember I was really filled with excitement.<sup>84</sup>

Such youthful enthusiasm recalls Reich's own memories of criss-crossing America on trains and riding the rails with his own adult female companion, a common moment of excitement and childlike eagerness.

## Rachel

Rachel's appearance in *Different Trains* is brief, perhaps because in her Holocaust story, she rarely rides trains. Instead, she walks. In 1941, soon after her seventh birthday, her family delivered her to a priest, who hid her from the Gestapo in a series of Catholic orphanages. Whenever the nuns feared that she would be discovered, they would shuttle her clandestinely from one safe haven to the next, always on foot and under the cover of darkness. During the next four years, Rachel remembered living in four convents and assuming at least three pseudonyms—Rosa La Fleur, Genevieve Le Brun, and Marie Rose DuPont—names that marked her experience of the various stages of the Holocaust. At the conclusion of the war, she was reunited with her mother, who survived three years in Auschwitz, but not with her father, who had died in the camp. Shortly after their reunion, the two women emigrated to America with Rachel's new stepfather, whom her mother met in the line of a food-bank sponsored by the Red Cross.

In *Different Trains*, Reich employs Rachel as a transitional figure, one who provides a short but necessary segue from Paul's story to Rachella's memories of Auschwitz. Although the specific details differ, Paul and Rachel share the experience of anti-Semitic taunting at school, and Reich capitalized upon this connection.<sup>85</sup> After Paul's excerpts, Reich spliced in Rachel's remembrance of

84. Ibid.

85. It should be noted that Rachella speaks only briefly of her education in her testimony, mentioning only that she had to attend a segregated Jewish school after the Nazi invasion of Holland.

a note that she brought home from school one day: “*No more school* for your child. No more Jewish children in school.”<sup>86</sup> This note plays an important role in Rachel’s testimony; it defines the moment when she first became aware of anti-Semitism, the instance when the “whole thing really started.” A few weeks later, her father brought her to the local train station to meet the priest who took her into hiding. It was from this train that she last saw her father alive:

The tramway was like a block away from the house where [. . .] we lived. And my mother could not take me to those people—my father took me. My mother was crying and crying so . . . my father took me to the tramway. [. . .] I remember the tramway. I remember my father crying like a baby in the middle of the street while he was taking me to those people—to strangers. And he explained to me: “Don’t forget, you’re a Jewish little girl. We’re going to see you again. But you must do that. *You must go away*. And we are doing this for your best.” Because of course I couldn’t understand. [. . .] So I went on the tramway with those people.<sup>87</sup>

To the casual listener, Rachel’s two lines appear more functional than emotive, a means of moving the libretto from childhood memories of school (“no more school”) to the actual trains themselves (“you must go away”). In reality, these two lines reflect the most traumatic moment of Rachel’s life—the “beginning” of her Holocaust testimony and her final farewell to her father.

Reich’s musical treatment of Rachel’s lines imbues her fragile voice with a sense of foreboding not present in the original excerpts. While her second statement derives from a passage in which the adult Rachel is palpably overwhelmed (a passage that therefore required little dramatic framing), Reich’s truncation of her first line heightens its drama. In the original testimony, Rachel’s phrase, “No more school for your child” is delivered calmly and with a natural pacing. It swells in both dynamics and inflection, peaking at mid-sentence (“school”) and then subsiding. Reich’s cut occurs right at the highest point, which causes Rachel to sound full of trepidation (see Ex. 3). And because the phrase has no close, the cut gives the musical realization a sense of forward motion and abrupt interruption.

Considering the small role that Rachel plays in *Different Trains*, it is fair to wonder why Reich included her testimony, which duplicates the instrumentation of Rachella (viola) and contributes little significant material to the second movement. Why was her voice so important? It is possible that personal reasons were at play. At the conclusion of her testimony, Rachel recalls a recent visit of her mother to her home in Boca Raton:

My mother came to visit me two months ago, [. . .] and I was careful while she was here. I was careful not to go on the railroad. It was on my mind. But, one

86. Rachel G. Holocaust Testimony (T-139), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 2, mm. 115–122.

87. *Ibid.* The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 2, mm. 123–134.



## Rachella

Rachella's testimony, which is preserved on audio tape at the Wiener Oral History Library, is isolated from any visual cues, yet the cassette mesmerizes the listener as she recounts her Holocaust experience with a certain emotional distance that allows her to speak calmly and clearly. The measured pacing of her account not only ensures the comprehensibility of her tale, which contains a cache of vivid images, poetic sentiments, and specific details, but also reduces the dangers of voyeurism—the listener's need to witness a survivor's suffering in order to feel satisfied or emotionally moved by the account. Rachella is a steadfast and earnest witness, and her colorful metaphors and conversational tone make her voice apt for translation into speech melodies. Indeed, her lyrical voice comprises the majority of the second movement, to which she contributes memories of the Nazi invasion of Holland and her journey to and internment in Auschwitz. Of the three survivors whose testimonies appear in *Different Trains*, Rachella is the only one to have experienced the camps directly, and images from her narrative ground *Different Trains* in a common set of Holocaust tropes. Her descriptions ring familiar; we know them from other sources.

As in the well-known story of Anne Frank, Rachella and her family hid in the attic of a friend's business in Holland. Upon discovery, she and her family were deported, a degrading scene that unfolded as it did for many: "You had to secure yourself a little place in that [cattle] wagon to survive. And if you did not secure a place, you could be standing for weeks. Just standing, hanging because we were . . . there was room for thirty or forty people, and there were, like, eighty people in one of those wagons."<sup>89</sup> What follows in her testimony—cattle cars, shaved heads, tattooed forearms—are the central images of Holocaust literature and art. Thus, by selecting Rachella's testimony for *Different Trains*, Reich ensured that the memorial contours of his piece would resonate for his postwar audience, who would have encountered similar portrayals of the Holocaust in media as diverse as Elie Wiesel's novel *Night* and Meryl Streep's films *Holocaust* and *Sophie's Choice*.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps not inconsequently, the pivotal moments of Rachella's wartime narrative either take place on or involve trains, and Reich derives most of his speech samples in the second movement from the passages in which Rachella recalls them.<sup>91</sup> In her first appearance, she intones the year "1940" and the

89. Rachella M. Holocaust Testimony, P, Oral Histories, Box 189, no. 1, Holocaust Survivors Project, William E. Wiener Oral History, tape 2, side A.

90. Streep starred in two Holocaust dramas credited with bringing awareness of the genocide to a mass public in both America and West Germany: the 1978 television mini-series *Holocaust*, and the 1982 feature film *Sophie's Choice*.

91. In the second movement, Rachella's phrase, "She said, 'Quick! Go!' And he said, 'Don't breathe,'" derive from her remembrance of a Nazi raid on the house where she and her family were hiding. The remainder of her excerpts all center around experiences involving trains or deportation.

phrase, “The Germans walked in,” both from her account of the Nazi invasion of Holland. Here, the gravity of the situation becomes a reality for the young Rachella only after her father is unable to reach Rotterdam by train:

It was his day to go. He used to travel to Rotterdam to see his clients, and the train ran on the railroad track up until that day they had blocked that city, and then you couldn't see where you were. I remember he came home and cried, he was so upset. It was absolutely flat. There was nothing left of that city. And, in the night especially, the bombs were dropping, and we would go and sit in the house, and we would have everything black, dark shades down, and. . . . It was a terrible week, and thank God, it only lasted a week. It was so terrible. And, after five days, *the Germans walked in*.<sup>92</sup>

After the invasion, Rachella and her family went into hiding in Scheveningen, a small town on the coast. In 1944, after several months of hiding in the attic of a local store, she and her family were arrested and deported to Auschwitz. In one passage, from which Reich sampled the phrase “into cattle wagons for four days and four nights,” Rachella painfully tries to describe the loading process:

This time we were all put *into the cattle wagons*. We went to the railroad and there they were. I don't know how many of them. And half the camp was emptied out *into the cattle wagons*. There were quite a few of us. I don't remember exactly how many. I would say maybe a few hundred. Also, the men were loaded *into the cattle wagons*. The men with the men, and the women with the women. We were *into those cattle wagons for four days and four nights*. Then they stopped and they would go on again.<sup>93</sup>

Detached from its original context, Rachella's incorrect preposition in her sampled phrase (“we were *into*”) draws no attention; during the performance the listener can easily supply several possible constructions: “We were herded into” or “They placed us into.” Knowledge of the full quotation, however, allows us to see the linguistic process by which Rachella arrived at the quote sampled by Reich, a process in which the phrase “into the cattle wagons” becomes something of a mantra in her account that punctuates her final statement: “We were into those cattle wagons for four days and four nights.” Given the minimalistic aesthetic of Reich's earlier tape works, in which short samples are repeated and gradually transform themselves into new manifestations, the mutation of Rachella's refrain brings to mind Reich's tape loops and presents an interesting aesthetic connection between her ways of remembering and Reich's compositional processes.

92. Rachella M. Holocaust Testimony, P, tape 1, side A. The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 2, m. 29.

93. *Ibid.*, tape 2, side A. The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 2, mm. 185–200.

Rachella's liberation from Auschwitz also took place on the railways, as the Nazis shuttled her and the other interned girls between camps in an attempt to prevent their capture by the Russian Red Army. She remembers how she first heard that the war was nearing its close on one particular transport from Poland to Germany:

We were put on a train again and brought to another camp. It was not very far away. I think maybe we spent a day on the railroad, stopping and going, stopping and going. [. . .] The war was closing in on them and they were losing. [. . .] We had also heard rumors of that. As I said, there was a way that you did found [*sic*] out these things, that the war had . . . was coming to an end.<sup>94</sup>

In a passage that follows, Reich found his opening material for the third movement of *Different Trains*, which employs the phrases "Are you sure?" and "The war was over" from Rachella's final transport:

As we come [*sic*] into the Danish station, the German Wehrmacht left the train and the Danish Red Cross people jumped on the wagons in their blue uniforms. And they said to us in German, "You are in Demark now. You are free." And we said, "*Are you sure, are you sure?* Is it really true? It is not true. You are not telling us the truth." And we touched them and we . . . they said, "It is true. You are free. You are in Denmark. [. . .] You are free. *The war is over.*"<sup>95</sup>

Like the cattle wagon passage, Rachella's narrative is here full of repetition and restatement, in this case as a means of conveying her initial disbelief at the report of liberation. Reich's decision to draw many of Rachella's excerpts from refrains in her speech ultimately connects his musical preference for repetition with her own testimonial reiterations. In *Different Trains*, these textual repetitions, whether explicit or hidden, find an appropriate backdrop in the music of the prerecorded string quartets and sampled train whistles, which provide the regular and persistent hum of the rails as accompaniment.

## Rewriting the Holocaust: Suture and Substitution

That Reich selected these sound clips and removed them from their original contexts is part and parcel of his compositional process. Yet, greater intervention is apparent in several instances in which he appears to have rewritten the testimonies to some extent, largely by repositioning the isolated, decontextualized fragments. Here his "composing" ventures beyond mere editing, and, according to critics of the notion of historical realism, it constitutes an act of writing. In the words of the literary scholar Robert Scholes, "all writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct

94. Ibid., tape 3, side A.

95. Ibid. The excerpted phrases (designated by italics) appear in mvt. 3, mm. 66–100.

versions of it. There is no mimesis, only *poiesis*. No recording. Only constructing.”<sup>96</sup> As for historical realism, Scholes argues that there are no “objective texts” but only relationships between texts that are subject to the poetics of the author. Within Holocaust studies, this view has been championed by James Young, who notes that “both [historical] events and their representations are ultimately beholden to the forms, language, and critical methodology through which they are grasped” by the author; the resulting transcriptions are thus limited by the artist’s own impressions of the Holocaust.<sup>97</sup> Such poetic engagement with trauma merges the materials of life with the tropes of fiction; as Hayden White reminds us in *Tropics of Discourse*: “‘Poetizing’ is not an activity that hovers over, transcends, or otherwise remains alienated from life or reality, but which represents a mode of praxis which serves as the immediate base of all cultural activity.”<sup>98</sup>

In *Different Trains*, two layers of poetic translation contribute to the final form of the libretto. The first is the poetics of primary witness, as Holocaust survivors remember their experiences and attempt to articulate them in language (the challenge faced by the survivor Chaim E. cited earlier in this article). The second involves Reich’s compilation of these mediated excerpts into a master-narrative of the Holocaust (secondary witness). In the composition, Reich’s interpretations penetrate the primary accounts of Paul, Rachel, and Rachella and reshape their narratives according to a poetics of the Holocaust that involves small but not insignificant revisions to their testimony. In a few instances, these points of contact between Reich’s poem (the libretto of *Different Trains*) and those of the survivors (their testimonies) result in malformations and misprisions that deviate from the originals in both style and meaning.<sup>99</sup> These constructions, whether intentional or not, remain hidden to listeners, whose only guide is Reich’s official transcript of the testimonies, provided in the concert program or liner notes, and his assurance that what you are about to hear is a “musical reality.”

Analysis of the source material reveals two primary methods of poetic construction, which I term *suture* and *substitution*. Suture denotes a merger of two distinct texts along shared textual or contextual lines with the goal of preserving situational or linguistic resonances between discrete testimonies. Substitution indicates those places where Reich replaces words in the original testimony based on his (mis)hearing of the narratives, effectively supplanting the survivor’s interpretation of the Holocaust with his own reading of its cultural and literary tropes.

As noted earlier, Reich uses musical repetition to create static episodes in *Different Trains*, with each harmonic block generated from a single speech

96. Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future*, 7.

97. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 1.

98. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 126.

99. See Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 20.

melody. And yet, with the exception of two phrases from the first movement—“from New York to Los Angeles” (Mr. Davis) and “one of the fastest trains” (Virginia)—none of the speech melodies appears twice in the piece.<sup>100</sup> Reich says he intentionally tried to avoid textual repetition, especially in the second movement, in order to focus attention on the spoken speech melodies, stating “it seemed appropriate not to repeat what was said. If you don’t hear what one of the Holocaust survivors says, you miss it.”<sup>101</sup> One of the means by which Reich edited textual redundancy out of *Different Trains* was through splicing together excerpts and omitting phrases that seemed duplicative. The result was a new Holocaust narrative generated by Reich’s interpretation of the connections between the discrete testimonies. His process is akin to that of filmic suture, a procedure theorized by film scholar Kaja Silverman. She argues that the directorial intention of film, including documentary, is “articulated and the viewing subject [revealed] by means of interlocking shots . . . which are the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, as the agency whereby meaning emerges and a subject-position is constructed for the viewer.”<sup>102</sup> In her view, a filmic suture both structures absence and loss (with narratological fissure and fragmentation being enacted in the cuts) and reveals the invisible subject of any film—its editor-author.

When one consults the full testimonies, it becomes clear that textual parallels and analogous historical contexts inclined Reich to hear excerpts as related, regardless of their disparities. In many cases, Reich sutures together two phrases that contain nearly identical textual phrases, preserving and heightening instances of shared vocabulary between the discrete testimonies. For example, Rachella’s account of the Nazi invasion of Holland (“the Germans walked into Holland”) precedes Paul’s announcement that “the Germans invaded Hungary” (see Table 1). Reich appears to have linked these two excerpts not only because their subject matter is similar (both are descriptions of Nazi invasions) but also because they share a common phrase: “walked in.”<sup>103</sup> It remains hidden from the listener, who hears only Rachella use it due to the truncation of Paul’s narrative. Reich’s editing probably aimed to avoid musical and textual redundancy, since both of Paul’s testimonial phrases possess a similar cadential structure. Had Reich included the second phrase, it would not have generated new musical material and therefore would have kept the piece from moving toward a new speech melody, typically the generator for new harmonic centers in the work.

The historical context of these excerpts also appears to have influenced the form of *Different Trains*, an insight that helps explain one of Reich’s most

100. Reich reprises these two speech melodies in the third movement, where they remind the listener of the earlier memories of the historic trains, thus prefacing Mr. Davis’s next speech melody, “but today, they’re all gone.”

101. Reich, “Answers to Questions about *Different Trains* (1994),” 182.

102. Silverman, “Suture,” 220.

103. Paul D. Holocaust Testimony, and Rachella M. Holocaust Testimony, P, tape 1, side A.

**Table 1** Shared Textual Motifs in the Original Testimonies of Paul and Rachella

The text corresponds to the speech melodies from mvt. 2, mm. 29–50.

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A. Suturing of Paul and Rachella's Testimonies, mvt. 2, mm. 29–50

Rachella:	Paul:
And I remember very well	And then the Germans invaded, um
<i>on my birthday</i> , May 15th,	<i>Germans invaded Hungary</i> .
the Germans <i>walked into Holland</i>	Well, they just <i>walked in</i> .
[. . .]	
It was a terrible week and thank God	
it only lasted a week, it was so terrible.	
And after five days, <i>the Germans walked in</i> .	

B. Reich's Libretto

*On my birthday* (Rachella)  
*The Germans walked in* (Rachella)  
*Walked into Holland* (Rachella)  
*Germans invaded Hungary* (Paul)

---

debated decisions. At the opening of movement three, Reich juxtaposes Paul's remark ("And the war was over") with Rachella's question ("Are you sure?"), an exchange that some critics have interpreted as a political statement concerning the persistence of fascism and anti-Semitism.<sup>104</sup> In 1994, when asked whether this moment constituted a potential moral for the work, Reich responded that he "had no such question in mind. It is rather the tentative quality of [Rachella's] voice and [the] feeling that 'Are you sure?' gives, along with its purely musical content, that made me choose it."<sup>105</sup> Reich avers that his concerns were exclusively musical, but the archival recordings suggest that he might also have sutured along contextual lines (see Table 2). Both excerpts derive from passages in which the witness learns that the war had ended. In the case of Rachella, the Red Cross workers tell her that the war is over, she questions the statement, and then her rescuers confirm that the war is indeed over. Reich preserves her dramatization in *Different Trains*, in which he interpolates Paul's deep voice and juxtaposes it with Rachella's, creating the same exchange between two characters. Such contextual considerations also explain why Rachel's voice is absent in movement three, since her testimony does not contain a story about when she heard the war had ended. Thus, the source recordings suggest that Reich used silent sutures to preserve the historical and dramatic commonalities between Rachella's and Paul's accounts.

104. See Reich, "Answers to Questions about *Different Trains* (1994)," 182. Here, interviewer Wolfgang Gratzner asks Reich whether it was his intent in this section "to keep the quoted skeptical question in mind as a question about present forms of fascism."

105. *Ibid.*, 183.

**Table 2** Dramatic Suturing of Paul and Rachella’s Discrete Testimonies into Reich’s Final Libretto

The text corresponds to the speech melodies from mvt. 3, mm. 1–100.

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A. Suturing of Paul and Rachella’s Testimonies, mvt. 3, mm. 1–100

<p>Rachella: As we come [<i>sic</i>] into the Danish station, the German Wehrmacht left the train and Danish Red Cross people jumped on the wagons.</p> <p>And they said to us . . . “you are free.” And we said, “<i>Are you sure? Are you sure?</i>” [. . .] And we touched them and we— They said, “It is true. You are free [. . .] You are free, <i>The war is over.</i>”</p>	<p>Paul: We hid in a cellar. And then the next thing we knew, a Russian soldier came into the bunker, <i>And the war was over.</i> And the next day, we were free.</p>
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B. Reich’s Libretto

*And the war was over* (Paul)  
*Are you sure?* (Rachella)  
*The war is over* (Rachella)

---

Such keen attention to textual and contextual parallels reflects Reich’s contention that *Different Trains* “accurately reflected the whole situation.”<sup>106</sup> In interviews and essays, Reich always speaks with deference for his subjects and rejects accusations that he manipulated their voices and stories. As he insists, their “phrases cannot be played with in the same manner as those in the first movement.”<sup>107</sup> His respect for the individual testimonies also boosts his claims of responsibility, which Reich considers paramount to his intent in the work: “What makes this piece work is that it contains the voices of these

106. Reich, “*Different Trains* (1988),” 151.

107. Reich, “Answers to Questions about *Different Trains* (1994),” 182. One wonders why he excludes Virginia and Lawrence Davis from this discussion—why their voices *can* be “played with” without regard for the integrity of their stories. Considering that most Pullman porters working at the time of Reich’s travels were black, the notion that Mr. Davis’s comments are free for manipulation and distortion (unlike those of the Holocaust survivors) raises questions about racial representation and musical appropriation in *Different Trains*. While outside the scope of this study, a history of black suffering (and its omission from *Different Trains*) also seems to underscore Reich’s development of a narrative suited to his own interests, in this case, a focus on Jewish persecution. Since the premiere of *Different Trains*, Lawrence Davis’s recollections as a Pullman Porter have been published in two studies of oral history and his personal effects featured at the Smithsonian exhibition, “America on the Move,” at the National Museum of American History. See Isay and Wang, *Holding On: Dreamers, Visionaries, Eccentrics, and Other American Heroes*; Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters*; and the online program for the Smithsonian at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ONTHEMOVE/exhibition>.

people recounting what happened to them, and I am simply transcribing their speech melody and composing from that musical starting point. The documentary nature of the piece is essential to what it is.”<sup>108</sup> Reich’s final assertion is problematic, however, in that his work is not just simple transcription of “what happened to them” but also a record of his own hearing of the testimonies. Moreover, in some spots in Rachella’s testimony, Reich’s transcription substitutes alternative words or phrases (whether consciously or unconsciously). These substitutions complicate Reich’s statements—which consistently emphasize documentary, objectivity, and essence—and potentially affect the memorial experience of the work for the audience.

Rachella’s testimony is pivotal, since hers is the one that provides the familiar narrative of Auschwitz. As movement two progresses, the other survivors are cited with less frequency, in part because their experiences are less reflective of the emblematic ways in which Americans imagine the Holocaust. When Rachella is finally deported to a concentration camp, she is sent to Auschwitz, which allows Reich to tap into a number of familiar icons that have come to signify the broader dehumanization of the Holocaust: being stripped of her hair, clothes, and name.<sup>109</sup> Such symbolic images were important to Reich, as he admitted in an interview with Rebecca Kim from 2000:

I copied [from the testimonies] what I felt were not only riveting stories but stories told in a musical tone of voice. Then I came back and went through all this material, stopping every time I got to something that seemed emblematic—“Nineteen forty-one”—emblematic in what it said, and emblematic in the speech melody of how it was said.<sup>110</sup>

Reich facilitates the staging of *Different Trains* in our minds by selecting familiar images, making it possible for us to imagine the drama and bridge any narrative gaps in the libretto. I would hypothesize, however, that the cultural strength of these symbols affected Reich’s own imagining, leading him to substitute or mishear partly because he expected to hear the usual tale of Auschwitz: deportations, selections, exterminations, and cremations.

The first substitution occurs at the conclusion of movement two, in which Rachella (via Reich) describes her arrival at Auschwitz in 1944. Reich closes her account with the phrase, “Flames going up to the sky—It was smoking,”

108. Steve Reich in an interview with Rebecca Y. Kim, “From New York to Vermont: Conversation with Steve Reich (2000),” [www.steverreich.com](http://www.steverreich.com) (accessed 4 July 2007). As James Young notes, “the ‘docu-novelists’ and ‘docu-dramatists’ of the Holocaust work as hard at manufacturing their own testimonial authority as part of their fictional discourse.” See Young, “Holocaust Documentary Fiction,” in *Literature of the Holocaust*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004), 75.

109. It should be noted that some of these experiences, which have now become icons of the Holocaust writ large, were actually specific only to Auschwitz, such as the tattooing of identification numbers on the forearms of the inmates. Within memorial culture, they have come to function as a visual metaphor for the greater genocide.

110. Kim, “From New York to Vermont.”

imagery that calls to mind the mass cremation of Jews. In this instance, Reich has revised Rachella's testimony, since the account derives from an experience she had while being unloaded from her cattle car:

Then it was our turn. They opened our cattle wagon doors and we went down on the platform. It was very dark and when I looked up to the sky, it was kind of like a red sky and kind of *flames going up in the sky. It was smoky* and I said to my—the girls around me. Look at that pretty sky, it's red.<sup>111</sup>

In order to emphasize this moment, Reich uncharacteristically rearranged the chronology of Rachella's account, placing this excerpt out of historical sequence.<sup>112</sup> In the original testimony, the excerpt appears before Rachella's account of being shaved and tattooed and refers to her arrival at Auschwitz. Reich's repositioning of the line imbues the final image, as he heard it, with a greater impact, instilling it with rhetorical weight.

Significantly, Reich's substitution transforms Rachella's memory of her arrival at Auschwitz—and her description of the pretty red sky—into a grave realization of the murderous activities of Auschwitz, coloring the excerpt with historical retrospection. In her testimony, Rachella notes that the platform was “smoky,” not “smoking,” a subtle (and admittedly difficult) difference to hear, but one confirmed by the official transcript of the testimony, edited and approved by Rachella herself.<sup>113</sup> Reich's mishearing, whether intentional or not, alters the meaning of this final statement and the audience's hearing of it. As sirens fade in the distant soundscape, audience members call to their minds—the self-confessed stage for Reich's drama—Jewish suffering and Nazi inhumanity; but these imaginings are engendered by Reich's hearing of her adjective as an active (and incriminating) verb with an implied source: it—the crematorium—was smoking.

A second substitution occurs at the conclusion of movement three, in which Rachella recalls an impromptu concert performed at the women's camp by her friends. In her testimony, Rachella uses the story to illustrate how humor helped her to weather the traumatic experience of Auschwitz: “[We made] jokes out of a tragic situation . . . I think so that we could survive to be able to laugh at ourselves.”<sup>114</sup> Unaware that some German guards were watching, the women in her tale are startled when their overseer begins to laugh at their comedic antics and calls for an encore, a moment whose irony was not lost on the teenage Rachella: “And she was laughing her head off. I remember and I couldn't believe it. One day she would hit you black and blue and there she was, sitting and laughing with us.”<sup>115</sup>

111. Rachella M. Holocaust Testimony, P, tape 2, side A. The excerpted phrase (designated by italics) appears in mvt. 2, mm. 319–352.

112. This is the only instance of chronological revision in *Different Trains*; all the other excerpts from survivor testimonies adhere to the order of the original accounts.

113. Rachella M. Holocaust Testimony, P, tape 2, side A.

114. *Ibid.*, tape 4, side A.

115. *Ibid.*

**Table 3** Comparison of Rachella's Original Testimony with Reich's Final Version in the Libretto

The text corresponds to the speech melodies from mvt. 3, mm. 522–670.

Rachella:	Reich's Libretto
And <i>there was one girl, who had a beautiful voice</i> and it [ <i>sic</i> ] would sing all these English songs.	<i>There was one girl, who had a beautiful voice.</i>
<i>And they laughed to listen to listen to the singing, The Germans</i> who were in charge of us.	<i>And they loved to listen to the singing, the Germans.</i>
<i>And when she stopped singing, they said "More, More," and they applauded.</i>	<i>And when she stopped singing, they said, "More, More," and they applauded.</i>

From this passage, Reich selected three excerpts for the conclusion of the work, but once again he misheard Rachella's testimony (see Table 3). Rather than Rachella's words, in which the Germans "*laughed to listen to the singing,*" Reich transcribes "*and they loved to listen to the singing,*" a substitution that transforms the closing excerpt of *Different Trains*—"and when she stopped singing they said, 'More! More!' and they applauded"—from a scene of levity or even mockery to one of aesthetic appreciation.<sup>116</sup>

What impact does this small mistake have on the conclusion of *Different Trains*? I would argue a significant one. The Jewish girl, instead of provoking laughter with her entertaining renditions of English songs, now sings so beautifully that she inspires "love" among her cold-hearted Nazi captors; from brutality and indifference, she moves them to applause. And, as they are moved, so is the audience listening to *Different Trains*, in part because Reich chooses this moment to introduce the work's most lyrical speech melody, which contrasts with the more angular motives heard just before (see Ex. 4). Amidst this scene of human compassion and aesthetic beauty, Reich loops Rachella's words, "More! More!" until the end of the quartet. After the final movement has receded into silence, the real memorial work of the piece begins. It is in this moment that the postwar audience plays an active role in Reich's drama; they begin to applaud—for Reich, the performance, and the memory of the singing Jewish girl. Their applause collectively reclaims her from the gaze of her Nazi audience and provides the work with a redemptive ending that effectively revises the closing text. Instead of "They loved to listen to the singing, the Germans," the audience's ovation might assert "We loved to listen to the singing, the audience." Here, at the close of the work, Reich provides the audience with a role to play, for our minds are the stage for this memorial play, and we are the site of remembrance itself.<sup>117</sup>

116. *Ibid.*

117. In a lively discussion at the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Quebec City, 2007, I was reminded by Richard Taruskin and Ralph Locke that the experience of hearing *Different Trains* varies greatly among audience members depending on whether the listener encountered the work live or via a recording. The reaction given in this paper reflects my own first experience of the work, which was at a live performance.



## Example 4 continued

Reich has admitted that *Different Trains* is a personal composition, but for him the personal resides in the inspiration and conception for the piece and not in the libretto that he fashioned from the survivors' testimonies. He explains: "You have to put something personal in every piece you ever do. [But if] you mean in terms of the verbal material . . . Well, it isn't really there. All that's really there is what I tell you in the program notes, if you have the program notes."<sup>118</sup> Reich's insistence that the recorded material of *Different Trains* lies outside of the personal realm reinforces his claims for the work as a musical documentary, and he resists the notion that his own editorial decisions encode the work with inherent subjectivity, whether personal or cultural. Such revisions are not fleeting; the authorized printed text for *Different Trains*—repeatedly reproduced in concert programs, printed in compact disc liner notes, and even included in Reich's *Writings on Music*—preserves a record of Reich's mishearing of the survivor narratives. While the "verbal material" might be spoken only once in performance, the texts witness Reich's role as a transcriber and reveal him to be the central narrator of *Different Trains*—he dictates its loosely framed plot, emblematic images, and textual montage and,

118. Kim, "From New York to Vermont."

at times, changes the story. While probably not intentional, Reich's substitutions reveal that this is a personal rendering, one that reflects his imagination of the Holocaust, as well as his dramatic and aesthetic preferences. He is a witness to their witnessing—a mediator of their media—and thus his *Different Trains* is susceptible to the limitations of his own hearing and imagination.

### The Limits of Representation: The Artist as Secondary Witness

Historians Terrence Des Pres, Lawrence Langer, and Geoffrey Hartman all characterize secondary, or intellectual, witnesses as adoptive narrators of the Holocaust, individuals who “make us feel like close and empathic observers” but who are not necessarily bound to “testify by a moral as well as an intellectual engagement.”<sup>119</sup> Such artists and scholars are removed from the trauma of the genocide itself, and thus their “imaginative discourses of art and language” are, as Ernst von Alphen argues, “secondary; that is, they can only work upon the historical discourse, which is primary.”<sup>120</sup> When Reich began working with tape in the 1960s, he believed that audio recordings would allow him to capture the authenticity of speech in a musical composition.<sup>121</sup> And yet much more is consequent from the use of Holocaust testimony in *Different Trains*, precisely because the survivor's voice resists objectification; it carries its subjectivity with it. Moreover, because it is impossible to work differently with materials as devastating as Holocaust testimony, secondary witness is no less susceptible to the difficulties and limitations of primary witness, precisely because traumatic memory resists the full grasp of the intellect and external control. By making Holocaust memory the focus of *Different Trains*, Reich overlooked the potential dangers of traumatic memory: it shatters both self and object, forcing both to retreat into imagination as a means of survival, leaving the artist to stitch together that which is permanently severed.

Witness, whether primary or secondary, therefore reveals itself as an aesthetic act rather than a historical one. As Walter Kalaidjian notes, it attempts to recapture “what escapes cognitive mastery in the event” and thus comprises an “encounter with extremity's unfinished business.”<sup>122</sup> This aesthetic dimension is not confined to secondary witness but also emerges in primary witness accounts, in which the survivors themselves select, suture, and substitute in order to make sense of their lives. Such practices do not argue against the realness of the Holocaust; rather, they communicate the emotional weight of

119. Hartman, “The Humanities of Testimony: An Introduction,” 260. See also Des Pres, *The Survivor*; and Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*.

120. Alphen, *Caught by History*, 42.

121. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 177.

122. Kalaidjian, *The Edge of Modernism: American Poetry and the Traumatic Past*, 10.

traumatic experiences in an authentic way. Dori Laub relays one such instance from his own research, in which an Auschwitz survivor inaccurately described four crematorium chimneys being destroyed in an uprising, when the historical record notes that only one was toppled. Laub argues that the witness “knew” in a way that none of the historians did, explaining that “she had come to testify not to the empirical number of the chimneys, but to resistance, to the affirmation of survival, to the breakage of the frame of death.”<sup>123</sup> Thus the aesthetics of witness “recognize human limitation” and “the difficulty of accommodating traumatic experience,” for, as Geoffrey Hartman notes, the inclusion of such inaccuracies is “less a form of denial than trying to get rid of the aesthetic dimension. . . . The testimonies do not belong only to [history]. They also belong, without making them literary in any way[,] . . . to aesthetic experience.”<sup>124</sup>

Indeed, as Holocaust survivor and author Aharon Appelfeld argued the year after the premiere of *Different Trains*, the Holocaust seems to defy objectification in part because it relies so heavily on memory:

The Jewish experience in the Second World War was not “historical.” We came in[to] contact with archaic mythical forces, a kind of dark subconscious the meaning of which we did not know, nor do we know it to this day. This world appears to be rational (with trains, departure times, stations, and engineers), but in fact these were journeys of the imagination, lies and ruses, which only deep, irrational drives could have invented.<sup>125</sup>

*Different Trains* is another of these “journeys of the imagination,” with Reich as its memory artist, attempting to make sense of the rational even as he is haunted by the irrational. As a secondary witness, it is natural that he should have bifurcated the subject of *Different Trains*, presenting both the survivors’ testimonies and a rewriting of the primary witness in his own musical voice. As Dori Apel contends, “the reinscription of the stories . . . makes apparent [the artist’s] desire to preserve the legacy of Holocaust experience and pass on the stories, but [it] also asserts the present conditions in which they are told . . . a contingency that necessarily shapes the narratives.”<sup>126</sup> Thus Holocaust testimony of any kind, whether secondary or primary, reveals itself to be an aesthetic act in its erosion of the boundary between history and memory.<sup>127</sup>

The specific limitations and dangers of Holocaust documentary fiction have been well addressed by James Young, who notes that the interpolation of testimony creates a “texture of fact [that suffuses] the surrounding text with

123. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 61, 62.

124. Ballengee, “Witnessing Video Testimony,” 231–32.

125. Appelfeld, quoted in Roth, “Walking the Way of the Survivor; A Talk with Aharon Appelfeld.”

126. Apel, *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witness*, 94.

127. Patrick Hutton has written convincingly on this false dichotomy in *History as an Art of Memory*.

the privilege and authority of witness.”<sup>128</sup> At the heart of Young’s critique is the notion of intentionality—especially as it bears upon evaluation and reception of Holocaust art—and he identifies a range of motives for authors who turn to testimonial aesthetics, among them evoking an emotional response from the audience, demonstrating a work’s factual basis, or establishing an authentic link between writer, text, and event. As Young contends:

If this “rhetoric of fact” is intended to provide an unusually compelling reading experience, merely to move the reader, then Adorno’s objections to “Holocaust art” retain a certain validity. For, in this case, the authors would indeed be wringing pleasure from the naked pain of the victims. If, on the other hand, these works . . . want to refrain from conferring an essential fictionality on actual historical events, then we might take into account both the legitimate impulse to document events *and* the manner in which “real past events” are inevitably fictionalized by any narrative that gives them form.<sup>129</sup>

That Reich deliberately avoids memorial terminology and dicta such as “Never Again” seems to absolve him of what Young considers cultural exploitation of Holocaust memory. Instead, *Different Trains* seems to fall into the latter category of documentation, a desire to present “things as they were.”

Reich’s failure, however, arises in his blind devotion to the realness of the testimonies, as seen in his staunch defense of their objectivity throughout his public writings on the work. He seems unaware that testimony inherently straddles the boundary between the aesthetic and the true and that his framing of primary witness creates a secondary one. As *Different Trains* courses along the journey of memory at two distinct levels, it transmits both the original aesthetics and inaccuracies of the survivors’ witness as well as Reich’s own hearing of their narratives, which itself is flawed by the limitations of his own artistic approach. In this regard, Taruskin’s assertion that Reich composed “the only adequate response to the Holocaust” bears merit in that *Different Trains* captures not only the difficulty of giving voice to traumatic memory—the limits of historical testimony and transmission—but also the crux of the representational crisis. If Adorno has shown us that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” then Reich demonstrates that to remember the Holocaust in any medium is an exercise in imagination and artistry. These problems recall Aharon Appelfeld’s assessment of his own Holocaust memoirs: “To write things as they happened means to enslave oneself to memory, which is only a minor element in the creative process. . . . To create means to order, sort out and choose the words and the pace that fit the work. The materials are indeed materials from [a] life, but, ultimately, the creation is an independent creature.”<sup>130</sup>

128. Young, “Holocaust Documentary Fiction,” 85.

129. *Ibid.*, 89.

130. Appelfeld, quoted in Roth, “Walking the Way of the Survivor.”

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## Abstract

Often praised as an exceptional artistic response to the Holocaust, Steve Reich’s *Different Trains* adopts a documentary approach to Holocaust representation in which Reich assembled short excerpts from three survivor testi-

monies and published transcriptions of their accounts in his libretto for the work. This article explores the consequences that arise when fragments from very emotional testimonies are recast as purportedly unmediated documentary. The authority attributed to this sort of historical narrative has come under scrutiny in the field of Holocaust studies, in which it is called “secondary witness”—an intellectual interpretation of survivor testimonies advanced without the author revealing his or her own subjective standpoint or scholarly agenda. I argue that Reich’s use of the voices of the survivors, Paul, Rachel, and Rachella, constitutes a form of secondary witness. Analysis of the original sources reveals that as Reich worked with extracts from the testimonies, in some cases his composition took on the aesthetics of the original testimonies, yet in other cases, he altered meaning and tone and even misheard certain phrases, producing transcription errors that reframed key moments by substituting his account of the Holocaust for that of the primary witness. Such revelations prompt reevaluation of the moral and political success that has been claimed for *Different Trains*, since the compositional process could never have been as objective and self-effacing as Reich and his critics suggest.

Keywords: Steve Reich, *Different Trains*, Holocaust, secondary witness, tape music