

Different Trains: An Essay in Memorialising

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Abstract

Steve Reich's *Different Trains*, a work for string quartet and tape written in 1988, is widely recognised as one of the most significant musical compositions of the last thirty years. Built around speech samples that are mimicked by the quartet, alongside recorded sounds of train whistles and sirens, *Different Trains* can be an overwhelming experience of mechanical power and also of memory and loss.

Reich famously wrote about the central conceit of *Different Trains*: 'I travelled back and forth between New York and Los Angeles from 1939 to 1942 accompanied by my governess. While these trips were exciting and romantic at the time, 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 very different trains.' The piece is in three sections. The first, *America – Before the war*, recalls Reich's experience travelling between his divorced parents. The second, *Europe – During the war* uses the sampled speech of three Holocaust survivors to evoke the trains that took so many to their deaths. The third section, *After the war*, offers some kind of integration of these two experiences, but not a reconciliation.

The musical strength of *Different Trains* is immense. In this paper, however, my interest is more psychoanalytic, focusing on what the piece conveys about the complex issue of how to respond to trauma in ways that balance empathic identification and 'austere' separateness and resolve into creative forms of memorialisation.

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‘and the war was over.’
‘Are you sure?’

Witnessing

In the literature on trauma, testimony and witnessing that has arisen from the Holocaust and other sources, an issue sometimes surfaces without often being discussed. This is the question of what it might mean to remember something one was not part of, to memorialise an event or experience that happened to others with whom one might not be linked through ties of family or friendship – or even not linked in any ‘objective’ way, but simply through an act of imaginative identification. There are various forms this question might take. For example, there is the ‘negative’ form of it in the sense of a felt culpability for something that was not in fact one’s responsibility, yet which one is implicated in simply by virtue of one’s position in a particular place or time. This is, for instance, the culpability that might be felt and acknowledged by those who ‘come after’, as in the responsibility some British people feel for colonialism and slavery, or some Germans for the actions of their Nazi forbears – even if their actual forbears were not Nazis. Alternatively, there is the kind of traumatised identification that can be made with those who have suffered, even if one has not suffered in the same way oneself. The horrified, albeit sometimes phobic, identification that people can have with parents who have lost children is an example of this, and it might even be the case that certain ‘empathic’ identifications leading to charitable giving and social action *depend* upon the capacity of people to identify with and take responsibility for suffering that they themselves may have had no direct experience of (Seu, 2013).

This issue of identification with suffering that has happened to others is an important and awkward one, but it is a mainstay of much artistic work. Indeed, if I can hazard a generalisation, one function of creative work might be to help us imagine what it is like to have gone through things that we have not actually encountered ourselves; this can be seen as part of the ethical function of art. It can, of course, get out of hand: not only is some ‘trauma’ art lurid and voyeuristic, but under some circumstances the claims of an artist can be a kind of betrayal of the reality of suffering of those she or he is ostensibly trying to represent. The scandal of Benjamin Wilkomirski’s (1996) *Fragments* is a very well-known example of this. Celebrated as a memoir when first published, it was then ferociously denigrated as a betrayal of Holocaust survivors once it became clear that it was a ‘fake’; yet, there is evidence that Wilkomirski himself believed in his creation and had adopted the persona of Holocaust survivor as a lived experience and not simply as a fraud (Frosh, 2002; Lappin, 1999). In contrast, another ‘invented Holocaust memoir’ of that period, Anne Michaels’ (1996) *Fugitive Pieces*, which was explicitly presented as fiction, had a different fate. Although it too raised questions of authenticity and the right to speak and fictionalise about the Holocaust, its strength was that it was built around a structure of memorialisation in which the point is precisely that those who have no

immediate relations or friends to remember them must be remembered by others. A large part of the poignancy of *Fugitive Pieces* lies in its intense evocation of loving memory of those with whom one has no necessary connection.

The particular question of how to memorialise the Holocaust in a sober way that nevertheless does the event some justice and does not produce overblown claims of entitlement, is one that recurs and is perhaps ever more urgent as the generation of those who directly experienced it fade away. I have had my own trouble with this, noting the awkwardness of evoking something I was not part of at the start of a previous book. 'Those many of us,' I wrote there (Frosh, 2013, p.2), 'who were not even "second generation victims", the children of survivors, how could we speak of the Holocaust without falsifying it, without demanding an inheritance that was not actually our own? What kind of inauthenticity were we playing with there? Yet, something keeps cropping up, something that hovers a little in the background and cannot be put to rest, but which cannot be expressed without embarrassment, self-dramatisation, insufficiency and inaccuracy.' This uncertainty, this worry that in memorialising such trauma and suffering we might actually be colonising it, laying claim to it as 'our' experience and thereby belittling and distorting it, is one of the blocks to recognition and mourning, and perhaps one way of silencing what still needs to be spoken about. How are we to get the tone right; how are we to strike the balance between identification with this suffering and taking it over so that it loses its specificity and hence its meaning? This echoes some points made by Thomas Trezise (2013) in his book, *Witnessing Witnessing*, which deals with the conditions under which testimony of trauma can be heard. After developing the argument that the issue for trauma sufferers is not that they cannot *speak*, but rather that the people they speak to often cannot *listen*, Trezise raises the question of what kind of listening might actually be a way of 'witnessing' the traumatised subject's testimony. Facing, in good faith, the other's account of suffering, one is also faced with a question of how to find a way of being that is both subjective and objective, the former in that it contains identification and empathy; the latter in that it resists the colonisation involved in reducing the other's position to one's own. Trezise defines this as a 'paradox':

the first person of testimonial memoir represents not so much a place one might occupy, as a site of tension between the speaker who says 'I' and second persons who, as potential first persons, are invited to identify with the speaker and yet simultaneously forbidden to do so, since identification can obliterate the difference between survivor and nonsurvivor and hence renew, in effect the silence that the survivor seeks to break. (p. 80)

We have to be separate if we are to be worthy of being listeners; this is not dissimilar from Winnicott's (1969) claim that to be 'useful', an object has to be other than the subject that needs it. But this separateness has various, sometimes contradictory elements. It cannot be a get-out, it cannot deny the other's experience but nor should it convert it into something else; it needs to stay close to it. If trauma matters, then we need to situate it as a genuinely causal element in psychic life and one from which we cannot back away; but also one that we should not mystify, but respect as 'just' a very difficult, but not impossible, element in intersubjective space that requires lines of communication to be opened up. Trezise comments (p. 89), 'testimony as an art of survival begins and ends with the act of communication, with the communicative relation, whose severance is indissociable from victimization.'

In this paper, I want to take up one example of what I see as a mostly successful attempt to balance the relations of empathic identification and ‘austere’ separateness that nevertheless allows ‘communication’ in Trezise’s sense and resolves into a form of active memorialisation. This is an artistic – in this case, musical – response to the Holocaust. In some ways it is immensely ambitious, in others very specific and ‘domestic’, in that it links a relatively ordinary experience – travelling on trains in America – with extreme trauma. My argument is that many lines of tension and moments of uncertainty can be seen in this piece; but also that it is a model of what we might strive for, faltering all the time. Indeed, the faltering and the achievement are part and parcel of the same thing.

Different Trains

Steve Reich’s *Different Trains*, a work for string quartet and tape written in 1988 for the Kronos Quartet, is widely recognised as one of the most significant musical compositions of the last thirty years. Built around speech samples that are mimicked by the quartet, alongside recorded sounds of train whistles and sirens, *Different Trains* can be an overwhelming experience of mechanical power and also of memory and loss. It is a twenty-seven minute, three-movement piece for string quartet (when played live, this includes three taped string quartet lines as well as the live quartet) and taped recordings of American and European train whistles, sirens and spoken voices. The key ‘conceit’ of the piece is to move from the American trains ridden on by Reich in his childhood, between about 1938 and 1941, and the memories of three Holocaust survivors of that same period, plus reflections after the war. In his sleeve notes to the Kronos Quartet recording, Reich states that ‘in order to prepare the tape, I had to do the following:

1. Record my governess Virginia now in her seventies, reminiscing about our train trips together.
2. Record a retired Pullman porter, Lawrence Davis, now in his eighties, who used to ride lines between New York and Los Angeles, reminiscing about his life.
3. Collect recordings of Holocaust survivors Rachella, Paul and Rachel – all about my age and now living in America – speaking about their experiences.
4. Collect recorded American and European train sounds of the 1930s and ‘40s.’

The Holocaust survivor testimonies were in the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University and the Wiener Oral History Library at the New York Public Library. In the sleeve notes, Reich explains the origins of the composition:

The concept for the piece comes from my childhood. When I was one year old, my parents separated. My mother moved to Los Angeles and my father stayed in New York. Since they arranged divided custody, I travelled back and forth by train frequently between New York and Los Angeles from 1939 to 1942 accompanied by my governess. While these trips were exciting and romantic at the time, 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 very different trains. With this in mind I wanted to make a piece that would accurately reflect the whole situation.

This account is quite reticent about Reich’s feelings, but it does immediately make one important connection: the ‘whole situation’ involves both his childhood journeys, which, despite the context of his parents’ divorce, were ‘exciting and romantic’; and the ‘very different trains’ that he would have ridden ‘as a Jew’ at the same time in Europe. This is

presented as a kind of cognitive link ('I now look back and think'). However, in interviews Reich has often been more animated. For example, talking with Stuart Maconie on a British (BBC) radio programme in 2006 (BBC, 2014), he described how he was commissioned to write a new piece for the Kronos Quartet, and was keen to use the keyboard sampling technology that was emerging at that time. Looking for a topic, he first thought about Béla Bartok, then Ludwig Wittgenstein – both of them important influences on his thinking about speech and silence – before alighting on his subject. His parents, as he reports in the sleeve notes, had divorced when he was one year old, and his mother, who was a singer and songwriter, had gone back to live in Los Angeles whilst his lawyer father remained in New York. Rather than his parents 'arranging custody', a court decided that he would spend six months in each place. On the trips he then took on trains from New York to Chicago and Chicago to Los Angeles and back again, he was accompanied by his nanny/governess, Virginia, who, he comments, 'was like my mother.' Recalling this, Reich describes the process of deciding on the content of the piece.

I thought, 'I'm going to record Virginia's voice, I'm going to record the voice of a black Pullman porter who were always riding those trains, and as they speak, so I'm going to write.' And then I started thinking to myself 'now, when did this happen? When did I take these trips? 37,38,39,40. What was going on in the world then? Well, what was going on in the world then was Mr Hitler was trying to take the world over and killing every Jew he could get his hands on. And if I had been born in Dusseldorf or in Brussels or in Budapest, you and I wouldn't be having this conversation.... I was lucky to be riding the trains from New York to Chicago and Chicago to Los Angeles and I could have been riding east and out of the picture entirely. And then I thought, 'Well how can you deal with the Holocaust, I mean that's impossible to deal with.' But then I thought, 'Wait, I'm not going to deal with the Holocaust, I'm going to deal with certain individuals who survived it, and I'm just going to take their voices and I'm going to take their melodies as they speak, as they speak so I will write, just like I'm going to do with Virginia, my governess, just like I'm going to deal with Mr Davis, the black Pullman porter, and their voices will simply recount matter-of-factly what happened to them in their lives.' And that's why the piece works.'

There is a lot of information in this account. First, it starts with Reich's direct experience. He lights on his own personal situation, which one would assume was charged with emotion – as a very young child (he was born in 1936), travelling with the governess who was 'like my mother'. Reich says little about this, so it is important not to over-psychologise about it; nevertheless, it is hard to believe that it was a neutral or solely happy experience ('exciting and romantic' as he writes in the sleeve notes) and it was certainly strong enough to stay in his mind for later creative use. He makes a decision to return to his now elderly governess, Virginia, and he also seeks out what we might hypothesise to be a paternal figure, one of the 'black Pullman porter[s] who were always riding those trains.' The coupling here can perhaps be thought of – again speculatively – as a reparative move between his actual, separated parents: the Pullman porter (Lawrence Davis) and Virginia who together occupy the first movement of *Different Trains*, reconstructing the recalled idyll of these journeys. Perhaps it is this fantasy of parental togetherness that overcomes the loss of a united parental couple, a loss made evident by the need to take the train journeys in the first place?

In any event, the adult Reich thinks back to this childhood and considers 'what was going on' in the world at that same time. Why does he do this? For one thing, Reich had often made 'political' connections in his work, as in his *Desert Music* of 1984, which was resonant with the post-Hiroshima nuclear threat. In addition, he had turned with interest to studies of Judaism and particularly of Hebrew cantillation; and he had used these studies to extraordinary effect in his Hebrew-language *Tehillim* of 1981, which had also marked a return to the use of voice in his music. But the reasoning was not just musical and artistic; it also arose from an awareness of the arbitrary division between his own relatively safe experience (looked after by the substitute parent couple and immersed in the benevolent power of the American trains, we might say) and what might have been the situation for him if he had been born in Europe. 'And if I had been born in Dusseldorf or in Brussels or in Budapest, you and I wouldn't be having this conversation.... I was lucky to be riding the trains from New York to Chicago and Chicago to Los Angeles and I could have been riding east and out of the picture entirely.' The light turn of phrase here is undercut by the immediacy of the realisation: in the interview, it represents a reminder to the interviewer, implicitly saying, 'I might easily not have survived.' At this moment, it would be possible to imagine that Reich's identification with the victims of the Holocaust and the emergence of *Different Trains* from his own childhood experience would produce a work that was about him and his precariousness or his emotional response. However, Reich adopts a characteristic and very important, if contentious, move. He argues that rather than work from the 'subjective' position of one who might have been destroyed, he will follow the 'objective' line both of his childhood figures, Virginia and Mr Davis, and of those who lived through the Holocaust: 'as they speak so I will write.' The importance of this ambition, in all its apparent modesty, cannot be overstated. It is Reich's way of dealing with the impossibility of writing about the Holocaust ('Well how can you deal with the Holocaust, I mean that's impossible to deal with') by 'domesticating' it to claim only to represent some voices ('I'm going to deal with certain individuals who survived it'); and having individualised it in this way, it is also an attempt to remove himself from the picture so these survivors are given their voice ('their voices will simply recount matter-of-factly what happened to them in their lives'). This might seem ironic given that the juxtaposition in *Different Trains* is so personal – Reich's childhood against that of the survivors – yet it is also an ethical claim for a necessary balance of the kind described earlier, between the impulse to identify and the need to let the other speak across a significant, perhaps unbridgeable divide. For Reich, achieving this balance is what makes the piece work, and he may well be right.

Authenticity and Documentary

The search for a kind of 'authenticity' that would be true to the experiences of Holocaust survivors and yet would also allow for an imaginative recognition of the nature of those experiences by others, seems to have been crucial for Reich. In an interview extract replayed on the BBC in 2011, Reich makes the following claim about what he did in relation to the speech he sampled for *Different Trains*.

People talking about their own lives are inarguable, they're simply witnesses to the facts that they lived, and their tone of voice, the music of their speech, like when Virginia says 'From Chicago'... that's her melody, that's her tune. I can accentuate it by having the viola double it, which I do, but the rule of *Different*

Trains was basically as they speak so I write, taking dictation. So, if *Different Trains* works as a piece of music, and it seems to, this is why it works: because the melodic content and the 'documentary' content are really one and the same. The generation of all the musical ideas comes directly, audibly, from the documentary material.

Reich's idea about the 'documentary' nature of his work is an expansion on the working method he describes in the previous quotation, but here he makes a grander claim about the 'inarguable' nature of people's personal accounts. In doing so, he is writing in line with others who respect the first-person testimonial as incontrovertible because of its 'narrative truth' (e.g. Laub, 1992) and he accentuates this idea by drawing on the 'as they speak so I write' formula, with the added notion that he is 'taking dictation'. There is a specific musical technique at work here, to which I shall return; but the general idea seems to be that each speaker has a 'melody' or 'tune' and that this is personal and truthful. The integration of this 'melodic content' with the 'documentary' content of the speech is what gives *Different Trains* its power and authenticity: the invented music follows from an accurate and honest transcription of 'the facts that they lived.'

The idea that personal testimony is reliable is one that is heavily contested, not just in historical discussions (Trezise, 2013) but also generally in psychoanalysis, where the assumption is that memory and speech – perhaps especially when arising from a traumatic situation – will be 'distorted' by defensive psychological processes. Some things are emotionally too hard to absorb or to recall; in other situations, the social context for speech (for instance, the conditions under which someone is interviewed for an archive) may interfere with the freedom with which people report things they actually know. 'People talking about their own lives are inarguable' is not a psychoanalytic statement; it is precisely such talk that psychoanalysis continually 'argues' with, even if in the end a certain kind of 'truthful' and hence 'inarguable' speech about one's own life is what is sought. In addition, there is the subtle and difficult process of listening and selecting that also prevents a work of reproduction, particularly when it involves imaginative re-invention, from being pure 'documentary'. Christopher Fox (1990, p.2) notes that Reich selects just 46 spoken phrases in *Different Trains*, culled from several hours of interviews and Holocaust archive recordings; these are often broken up and repeated, creating a fragmentary, echoic atmosphere that is clearly resonant both of the experiences of childhood and of the Holocaust, and yet cannot be seen as journalistically transparent. Rather, the defence of *Different Trains* as somehow 'objective' has to be made through examining the way in which it represents the necessarily *subjective* reverberations of the conditions it describes. Here, one can say that Reich is remarkably successful, with some important and informative – and essentially creative – moments of 'failure'.

Fox (1990) offers one reading of *Different Trains* which highlights some of the decisions made by Reich and defends them as presenting a version of Holocaust survival that is consistent with the survivors' experiences and also with the way in which the Holocaust needs to be understood as having lessons for contemporary (American) society. This involves not just selecting and representing some quotations above others, but also using them in such a way as to reinforce the affective impact of the contrast between the American and European experiences. For instance, Fox suggests that 'when the Pullman porter, Lawrence Davis, says in the third movement, "But today, they're all gone", he is recalling the luxurious transcontinental trains on which he worked; however, for the

listener, these words can also become an elegy for the millions of people who died between 1933 and 1945.' This immediately sets up one of the ironies of the claim for the 'documentary' status of *Different Trains*: that it is designed to have a certain *effect* – one might call this the overall 'harmonics' of the piece – and this effect is comprehensible through a specific pre-reading of the Holocaust. For Amy Lynn Wlodarski (2015), whose examination of the relationship between the original Holocaust testimonies and the way they are used in *Different Trains* is both an important critical analysis of Reich's work and a major intervention in studies of memory and artistic representation, the very structure of the piece reveals a pre-formed understanding of how a narrative might be organised. She notes (p.129) that there is a highly 'theatrical' element to Reich's use of his excerpts; for example, at the end of the second movement, '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.' Moreover, '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.' More generally, the work is structured like the testimonies it draws upon.

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, and Rachella. (Wlodarski, 2015, p. 139)

What this suggests is that *Different Trains* is organised in part to create a kind of narratively coherent 'story' linking past and present in a way that is familiar and that represents a temporal and cultural grid placed over the experiences being recounted. This does not of course mean that it falsifies these experiences – Wlodarski shows, for example, that the use of samples from Rachella in the 'After the War' movement is consistent with her testimony, in which the anguished memory of a girl singing appears as part of the 'exit' section. Wlodarski glosses this (p.139): 'In preserving the position of Rachella's memory, Reich maintains the integrity of her witness in *Different Trains*.' Nevertheless, as will be described later, there is a difference: Reich reads the memory of the singing girl in a way that is at odds with the actual testimony that Rachella provides, and tends towards more 'reconciliation' and narrative resolution.

Wlodarski (2015) offers a number of other examples of how Reich selects for narrative coherence as well as for sound, showing that with a couple of important exceptions (which will be returned to below), these selections conscientiously retain the sense and context of the originals. For instance, at the opening of the third movement two samples from Paul and Rachelle are presented as if they were a conversation: 'and the war was

over' (Paul)/ 'Are you sure?' (Rachella). Wlodarski notes (p. 154) that 'some critics have interpreted [this] as a political statement concerning the persistence of fascism and anti-Semitism.' Reich himself has not signed up to this reading. Wlodarski reports that Rachella's query is a genuine one – when liberated, she did not at first believe the war was over, so the dramatic device of having her question Paul's more definite assertion may be fabricated, but it does not falsify her situation. Whether it *also* suggests continuing antisemitism is a question for a listener rather than a criticism of Reich's use of the samples in this way. For Fox (1990), this moment is an important one in preventing *Different Trains* from resolving into what he calls 'some pat recapitulatory conclusion' (p.2). Whilst elements of this threaten to creep in – the formal structure of the third movement as an integration of the first two, using the voices of both the Americans and of the survivors; the 'opening out' and lightening of the texture of the music when Rachelle says 'going to America'; and the lyrical beauty of the final bars – the echoes of Rachelle's question 'are you sure?' continue, and the melancholic reverberations of Lawrence Davis' 'but today they're all gone' confirms a sense of irredeemable loss. Fox (1990, p.4) comments, 'Reich would seem to be suggesting that while America provided a new world in which to escape the external reminders of Nazi oppression, the internal wounds of the Holocaust are not so easily resolved.' We might note about this that whilst it seems accurate, it also indicates a certain 'moral' for the work, as well as possibly a psychosocial reading of the experience of the survivors, again at odds with Reich's 'documentary' aspiration. Running through the piece is a set of motifs that link past and present in a way that suggests closure and may itself be connected both with the social norms of such narratives of suffering and recovery, and Reich's own reparative impulses towards the split situation of his childhood, which becomes resolved in the pairing of his American witnesses.

But the structuring of *Different Trains* around a beginning-middle-end narrative also means that, for a listener, there is a kind of familiarity of the account that is possibly in tension with what in other ways (the fragmenting of speech, the repetitions and loops) is an alienating, disconcerting deconstruction of narrative expectations. It is as if Reich is using his own restructuring of the original testimonies to produce a broader, more coherent version of things. This is refracted through his experiences and associations, but is still part of a recognisable normalisation of what might in other ways be thought of as traumatically unsymbolisable. This is a kind of 'therapeutic' move, if the therapeutic can be thought of as offering a kind of narrative satisfaction; it is reconciliatory and leads to a feeling of closure or completion that is augmented in *Different Trains* by the musical lyricism of the ending. However, at risk of being slightly 'purist' about this, it is not necessarily an 'analytic' move, in the sense that analysis pursues a kind of 'truthfulness' that does not make therapeutic integration its primary aim. Given the nature of psychic and social life, psychoanalysis will at times – perhaps especially in traumatic situations – reveal precisely that there is no 'narrative integration' to be found; it has to be willing, in other words, to leave things unresolved and in fragments (Laplanche, 2003). One of the remarkable aspects of *Different Trains* is that it seeks narrative coherence, yet also leaves many traces of the pull in the other direction, the 'analytic' pull. This is most obvious in the fragmentation of speech and the repetition of speech samples, which is used by Reich to build up a kind of poetic story, but which also suggests the precariousness of meaning, the way speakers strive towards it, yet find it always on the point of falling apart. This seems true to the enormity of the situation that Reich is trying to portray.

Some Comments on Musical Technique

Whilst this paper is not a musicological one, some of Reich's innovative technique is important and relevant to the question of the traces of subjectivity that resonate through *Different Trains*. The sleeve notes describe the core method:

In order to combine the taped speech and the string instruments I selected small speech samples that are more or less clearly pitched and then notated them as accurately as possible in musical notation. ... The strings then literally imitate that speech melody. The speech samples as well as the train sounds were transferred to tape with the use of sampling keyboards and a computer. Kronos then made four separate string quartet recordings which were combined with the speech and train sounds to create the finished work.

This technique of generating the music from the speech is a dramatically successful one. It musicalises the voices of the speakers, rather than have the music illustrate or carry the words, and allows the texture of *Different Trains* to be built up around haunting patterns of anticipation and repetition. Reich called this development of Schoenbergian *Sprechstimme* 'speech melodies'; whereas *Sprechstimme* is deliberately artificial in its alienating quality, speech melodies preserve the timbre, intonation and tempo of the speaking voice, making the voice the source of the music. The instrumentation then amplifies the voices, with the viola being used to play the 'melody' of the women and the cello that of the men. On the whole, the tempo of the piece is given by the tempo of speech, which means that the different movements are not distinguished by speed but rather by the pitch given by the voices used and by the different 'thickness' of the sound texture, as well as by the differences in pitch between American and European train whistles. All this makes for a complex experience in which the words (which can just about be followed without access to the libretto, but which are more difficult to hear in the second movement) resonate melodically through the instrumentation as well as in their own 'voice'. Fox (1990, p.7) comments, 'These instrumental imitations act both as indication that a new phrase is about to be introduced and – especially useful in the second movement, where some voices are almost submerged in the instrumental music – as a recurrent impression of the voice's inflection, enabling the listener gradually to piece the phrase together. At the same time an intriguing ambiguity is set up between the gradual unfolding of the music's narrative and that of the speakers' various stories.' This ambiguity works closely with the general tension of the composition between the 'past-present narrative' and the more fragmentary way in which traumatic memories often resist integration. There is a powerful forward momentum to the whole piece, something implicit in the movement of the trains, even though the compositional device is to repeat fragments of text and melody; this momentum is audible throughout but especially in the first movement's speech sample of 'one of the fastest trains', which recurs in the third movement. Nevertheless, there are also various brakes and interruptions in this movement. Between the first and second movements there is a sudden shift in tone and tempo, and a transformation of the train whistles into sirens, a rather programmatic representation of the European war; between the second and third movements there is a short break, and then a lighter texture as the war ends and the survivors find themselves in America. An accompanying figure that generates the sense of train motion is played by the string quartet throughout the first and second movements (though more slowly in the second); this disappears in the third movement. Fox (1990, p.8) reads this change metaphorically: 'Thus, while the renewed vigour of the music at the beginning of the third movement may initially imply a return to the

“America – Before the war” from which the work began, the absence of this accompaniment figure suggests something quite different.’

This brief list of some of Reich’s musical devices does not do justice to the composition, but what I want to draw out here is the relationship between the speech fragments, the forward motion of the piece, and the issue of narrative synthesis and complexity. By treating the speech samples as musical entities, Reich creates a soundscape of great thickness, with melodies echoing between voice and instrument and the qualities of the voice being used to create a kind of trace effect. Even when there are no words spoken, or the words are hard to decipher, the outline or echo of a voice can be heard, haunting the music; and in the second movement in particular, where the Holocaust survivors are describing their experiences and where the accompaniment is full of sirens as well as whistles, the sense is of penetrating horror. Wlodarski’s (2015, p.137) commentary is again to the point: ‘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 testimonial self.’ This question of the ‘voice’ is an important one both in testimony and in psychoanalysis. There is a considerable amount of psychoanalytic work on the rhythmicity of music and sound in general, and its unconscious impact (e.g. Schwartz, 1997; Nagel, 2013). But there is also something else about the disturbing nature of the human voice, which Mladen Dolar (2006) references and which contradicts the idea of a ‘testimonial self’ even if it allows for a broader notion of ‘testimony’ to arise. Dolar adopts a longstanding musical idea of ‘acousmatic’ sound, referring to a sound without an identifiable cause, and builds on the cinematic theorising of Michel Chion (1994) to describe the acousmatic voice as,

simply a voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place. It is a voice in search of an origin, in search of a body, but even when it finds its body, it turns out that this doesn’t quite work, the voice doesn’t stick to the body, it is an excrescence which doesn’t match the body – if you want a quick but vivid example of this, think of Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, which revolves entirely around the question ‘Where does the mother’s voice come from? To which body can it be assigned?’ We can immediately see that the voice without a body is inherently uncanny, and that the body to which it is assigned does not dissipate its haunting effect. (Dolar, 2006, pp.60-1)

There are some useful terms here. The voice without the body is ‘uncanny’. From Freud (1919) we have the convention that the uncanny is a repetition of something familiar but out of place, something known yet not quite belonging where we find it. Dolar’s argument is that even when a voice is clearly embodied, something uncanny is left over: ‘the body to which [the voice] is assigned does not dissipate its haunting effect.’ Slavoj Žižek (2001), who is also quoted by Dolar, offers his own, universalising version of this:

An unbridgeable gap separates forever a human body from ‘its’ voice. The voice displays a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person talking, there is always a minimum of ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker’s own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks ‘by itself,’ through him. (Žižek, 2001, p.58)

This claim that there is a *necessary* separation of voice from body may be overstated; but in a musical piece such as *Different Trains*, where human speech is fragmented and the sound qualities of the voice are used to convey something ‘in excess of’ the content of the speech itself, it seems very apposite. Reich presents his technique here as part of

his 'documentary' representation, and there are ways of reading his amalgam of voice, tape and music as deeply democratising and respectful. Neil Haydock (n.d.) for instance, ends his analysis of *Different Trains* by claiming that it 'points us to an era where all voices are respected, each and every individual has a statement to convey, and a story to tell.' However, it also disembodies the voice and converts it into a sound pattern that undoubtedly carries meaning; yet this meaning is no longer that of the 'story' told by the survivors in their Holocaust testimony – and why should it be, as the recordings of the testimonies contain those particular meanings perfectly adequately? It is rather a kind of evocation of a 'more than', an *excess* that is stage-managed in Reich's piece, a flow of echoes back and forth, sometimes static and sometimes propelled violently forward, in which the uncanny nature of repetition and narrative irresolution underpinned by the thick texture of musical sound replaces any simple linear reconstruction of what a witness might say. In this there is another psychoanalytic resonance: the creative harmonics of the musical witness triggers responses that are not just to the individual narrative, but also to something that speaks through it. And it is in part because of this feature of the voice – its disembodied uncanniness – that its effect can never quite be reduced to what it says.

Laughter and love

In her comparison of Reich's speech samples with the original transcripts of the Holocaust testimonies held in the Fortunoff and Wiener archives, Wlodarski (2015) notices two significant instances of a subtle 'mishearing' or 're-hearing' by Reich. These are used by her to support her careful presentation of Reich as a 'secondary witness' shaping his material in order to present a certain kind of account of the Holocaust. I take this analysis to be convincing and in a way predictable: as Wlodarski notes, there is a considerable amount of literature attesting to the impossibility of the kind of neutral witnessing that Reich seems to claim. This in no way reduces Reich's achievement; it just places it in the realm of active creative engagement rather than of a fantasy of mechanical reproduction. Interestingly, however, Wlodarski's two main examples work in opposite directions; one to increase the emotional disturbance of the piece, and the other to reduce it.

Both these examples concern samples taken from Rachella's testimony. The first is used by Reich in the second movement and is reproduced in his libretto as 'Flames going up to the sky - it was smoking.' Over the space of about a minute, this refrain is repeated over and over, both split into two parts and whole, accompanied by sirens until the movement gradually comes to a stop. The effect is to produce a shuddering evocation of the familiar images of Auschwitz, even if we do not know that this is where Rachelle found herself, as this is not stated in the libretto – although the immediately preceding sample in which Rachelle says they 'went through these strange sounding names/ Polish names' and the mention of travelling in cattle wagons, being shaved and tattooed is enough to allow such images to emerge. The flames going up to the sky and 'smoking' become clear associations to the crematoria in Auschwitz. Yet Wlodarski shows that in her testimony, Rachella actually says something very slightly but importantly different – and this can be heard in the sample once one is primed to do so. What Rachella said, according to Wlodarski (p.156) was, '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.' That is, Rachella was admiring a 'pretty sky' that looked 'smoky', rather than noticing that around her 'it was smoking'; this seems to have been a moment of peace and misplaced optimism. Wlodarski suggests that what has happened here is 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.' This is very likely so, but what matters is the effect: we have a devastating ending to the section called 'Europe - During the war' rather than a moment of humanising, if illusory, hope.

The second example works the other way around and is perhaps even more significant, because it comes at the conclusion of the whole piece and has been interpreted as a reconciliatory move on Reich's part, suggesting both that there might be something civilising or humanising about music, and that all of us – the audience to *Different Trains* as well as the Nazis – need to question ourselves as we applaud. The libretto here, again from Rachella, reads: 'There was one girl who had a beautiful voice/ and they loved to listen to her singing, the Germans/ and when she stopped singing they said, "More, more" and they applauded.' This appears immediately after Lawrence Davis' 'but today they're all gone' at about three minutes before the end; after a mix of lyrical and staccato voice and strings, the musical texture thins out leaving a beautiful refrain based on the speech melody generated by 'and when she stopped singing they said, "More, more" and they applauded.' Rachella's actual words, however, again audible once primed, were that the Germans '*laughed* to listen to the singing' (Wlodarski's, 2015, p.157). Wlodarski notes that the shift from 'laughed' to 'loved', which is acoustically tiny, is nevertheless semantically crucial: '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.' Wlodarski is interested in how this demonstrates the aesthetic nature of witnessing – its subjectivity and continued disruption of attempts at 'authenticity' and historical 'objectivity'. I would go slightly further than this to argue that in the 'mishearings' and hence reinventions that Reich engages in as he develops his work, he stages a significant artistic intervention that makes *Different Trains* an even more substantial piece than it might have been if it could have been affectively neutral. As argued at the start of this essay, a major problem for those who wish to evoke and respond to trauma, in this instance (as often) Holocaust trauma, is how to do so without claiming too much, without, that is, either over-identifying or under-imagining. *Different Trains* does a variety of things that result in it successfully treading the very narrow path between these dangers. It originates in a personal urge: one might call it Reich's urge to repair the split between his parents, and finding symbolic ways to do this through his 'mother' Virginia and the Pullman porter Lawrence Davis, mediated by the excitement and forward propulsion of powerful American trains. It then links through an act of imaginative curiosity ('What was going on in the world then?') to the ghostly voices of the Holocaust, which become specific and hence embodied through the testimonies on which Reich draws, but which are then *disembodied* and universalised through their conversion into the soundscape of the musical piece. This is all perfectly controlled and has a strong and familiar narrative urge: from the idyllic beginning, through the devastating suffering and loss of the middle, to the reconciliatory optimism of the end. However, this satisfying narrative is disrupted: the beginning is not quite so

idyllic (the separated parents); the middle has in it a moment of discursive uncertainty (the mishearing of 'smoky'); and the end carries its own sting in the 'unconscious' trace of bitterness in what appears at first to be a lyrical and reparative closure. In this way, *Different Trains* seems to enact the faltering and uncertainty that is needed for witnessing to be the required mix of empathic identification and austere separateness that allows some form of communication to emerge, however strongly we might be defended against it.

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