16 Cavernous impossibilities

Jewish art music after 1945

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> For a Jew, to respond through memory and witness is to commit himself to survival as a Jew. To dedicate oneself as a Jew to survival in the age of Auschwitz is in itself a monumental act of faith.
> – LIONEL RUBINOFF, "AUSCHWITZ AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE HOLOCAUST," IN PAUL D. OPSAHL AND MARC H. TANENBAUM (EDS.), *SPEAKING OF GOD TODAY: JEWS AND LUTHERANS IN CONVERSATION* (PHILADELPHIA: FORTRESS PRESS, 1974), 121–43 (122–3)

Introduction: cavernous possibilities

As others in this volume have already noted, the deceptively simple question – What is "Jewish music?" – poses crucial questions about the nature of Jewish identities, musical experiences, and investigatory methods. The problem of "Jewish music" becomes more complicated, however, when combined with other terms that also resist easy postwar classification. From the vantage point of the late twentieth century, what qualifies as "art music"? Does the term refer only to highbrow extensions of serialism, or does it also embrace popular idioms? What does one mean when speaking of music "after 1945" or, more specifically, "Jewish music after 1945"?

Central to these questions is the concept of artistic postmodernism, which Jonathan Kramer refers to as a "maddeningly imprecise musical concept."[1] The term implies some kind of relationship to modernism, the specific nature of which remains elusive. As Judy Lochhead notes, postmodern music can be characterized as either "discontinuous or continuous with the modern trajectory" and as potentially "negative or positive" in its outlook, a point nuanced by Kramer, who avers that the term can signify "a repudiation of modernism or its continuation" because it "has aspects of both a break and an extension."[2] Moreover, postmodernism resists delineation into neat categories of genre and style. As Kenneth Gloag explains:

> We cannot simply decide to be postmodern and there is no one postmodern style that merely coexists with other non-postmodern styles . . . [Rather] it is the coexistence of many different styles[,] . . . potentially endless, some of which may still reflect aspects of modernism while others may be more obviously postmodern, that becomes the identifying characteristic of postmodernism.[3]

Kramer identifies several possible characteristics of musical postmodernists, including composers who "react against modernist styles and values"; who

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"seek originality in . . . disunifying fragmentation, in pluralism, and in multiplicity"; and who consider music "as relevant to cultural, social, and political contexts."[4] While not intending to provide a definitive list – indeed, postmodernists would scoff at the notion – Kramer makes inroads into addressing the concept's complexity.

More generally, postmodernism surfaces as an attitude rooted in intellectual and social developments of the twentieth century. One key aspect of postmodernism is its rejection of modernist metanarratives (the "grand narratives") and embrace of the micronarrative (the "little narrative"), which becomes the "primary form of imaginative invention."[5] As Gloag emphasizes:

> In making this move there is also a resulting shift from the singular . . . to the plural. If the "little narrative" is now primary there can . . . be many such little narratives . . . [T]here are now many stories to be told, and many different voices with which to tell them. These multiple stories, and voices, now suggest a culture made up of . . . a plural and fragmented cultural, social and political landscape, with each fragmentary [micronarrative] potentially claiming its own identity and value.[6]

The pluralistic and anti-temporal nature of postmodern music problematizes traditional modes of narrative and history, which can make the assimilation of postmodernism into a cogent narrative of music history difficult. As a result, scholars working with postmodern music often adopt a case-studies approach to the repertory, allowing for micronarratives to be explored for their individual significance.

Additional historical consequences arise for postwar "Jewish art music," in that the prepositional phrase "after 1945" evokes the most catastrophic moment in modern Jewish history – the Holocaust. So devastating was that event for Jewish life and culture – arguably for humanity worldwide – that scholars throughout the disciplines have interpreted it as the "end of modern history." This *post-histoire* viewpoint has become "a *topos* of Holocaust research," one whose wide-reaching implications Jacques Derrida characterized as omnipresent in postwar discourse:[7]

> [It is] the end of history . . . the end of philosophy, the death of God, the end of religions . . . the end of the subject, the end of man, the end of the West . . . and also the end of literature, the end of painting, art as a thing of the past, the end of the past . . . and I don't know what else.[8]

German sociologist Arnold Gehlen first referred to the post-historical in 1952 and described an "epoch characterized by a state of stability and rigidity, devoid of utopian ideas, change, or development."[9] And yet, as Anton Kaes notes, there is something strikingly utopian about longing

for the "end of history" – an opportunity to "create a pure moment of origin that is not contaminated by history."[10] In this regard, he sees a connection between postmodern aesthetics and the tradition of *post-histoire* utopianism: "the ease with which a postmodern artist . . . uses the past as 'material' that can be quoted at will is based on the belief that history and progress have reached their limit and have come to a standstill; the present is itself no more than an assemblage of quotations from the past."[11] From this standpoint, stylistic recycling has replaced modernism's emphasis on originality and innovation and the narrative of progress has been supplanted by one of free deconstructionism.

Obviously, no survey could ever capture the breadth and depth of "Jewish art music after 1945." Therefore, I present three case studies that explore the questions raised by postwar responses to the Holocaust in musical composition. The Holocaust provides one such locus for postwar musical discourse in that it has been engaged by composers with diverse relationships to their Jewishness, including religious, secular, ambivalent, and non-identifying figures. For the sake of some cohesion, this chapter focuses on the aesthetic and cultural questions raised by three composers of Jewish birth working in America whose compositional style was directly impacted by their engagement with the events of World War II. Works by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), George Rochberg (1918–2005), and Steve Reich (b. 1936) serve to illustrate some of the cavernous possibilities of postwar musical expression while also raising the question of whether musical representation of the Holocaust remains a cavernous impossibility.

Arnold Schoenberg: modernism's transcendent failure

Despite the previous emphasis on postmodernism, it is important to note that modernism did not suffer a definitive closure in the latter half of the century. As David Patterson writes, all modernist composers "did not retire *en masse* after the war in deference to those involved in creating a new era."[12] In the specific case of Arnold Schoenberg, widely acknowledged as one of the progenitors of musical modernism, the composer felt compelled to respond to the Holocaust in the modernistic terms he knew best. His cantata *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947) sets the composer's fictionalized account of a Holocaust survivor who recalls a transcendent moment of Jewish resistance – the singing of the prayer *Shema Yisroel* (Hear O Israel) in the Warsaw Ghetto – through the lens of traumatic witness. "I cannot remember everything," the narrator intones, before he attempts to reconstruct the events from the recesses of his fragmented memory. Schoenberg harkens back to his expressionist roots in the piece, which also utilizes the

twelve-tone technique to structure its melodic and harmonic material.[13] Motives associated with the text – atonal trumpet fanfares; weeping gestures; shrill dissonant cries – arise from the texture, only to be submerged as the recollection passes. At the conclusion of the work, the survivor assumes a more prescient role in his recollection; his narration becomes increasingly synched to the musical soundtrack, which ultimately erupts in a dodecaphonic (or twelve-tone serialist) choral setting of the *Shema Yisroel*.

As musicologist Klára Móricz notes, Schoenberg's return to abstract musical expressionism recalled a language of anxiety from his prewar compositions:

> [Schoenberg's *Survivor*] gave concrete dramatic meaning to certain fearful gestures . . . The short, discontinuous nervous phrases, the frightening, abrupt signals . . . the sudden dynamic changes . . . are all tied to expressions of anxiety, fear, and violence in Schoenberg's earlier style.[14]

Schoenberg not only exploited these stylistic associations to characterize his narrator, but also provided corresponding textual references that helped the audiences comprehend his musical imagery. As musicologist Sabine Feisst recognizes, this was a period in which Schoenberg began to aim at the "widest possible dissemination of his music and audience appreciation, [including catering to] features of mass culture."[15] Expressionistic gestures such as those in *Survivor* would have been familiar to contemporary audiences due to their incorporation in film scores of the time, a fact that Schoenberg acknowledged with some annoyance in a letter to the critic Kurt List.[16] Moreover, *Survivor*'s twelve-tone structure and recurring motives display affinities with a more conservative, tonal presentation, suggesting that Schoenberg may have been exploring an engagement with "functional and politically engaged music, which were very topical among American composers in the 1930s and 1940s."[17]

Schoenberg's historicized return to expressionism and his conflation of abstract modernist techniques with fictional realism have caused the work to encounter both praise and condemnation. Early reviews in America and Europe praised the work's humanitarian message and cited it as evidence that modernism was relevant in the postwar landscape. Others have asserted that *Survivor* enacts the transcendent release of a specifically *Jewish* modernism from a "history that was in the process of terminating the [Jewish] moment" itself, what David Liebermann characterizes as a reclamation of modernism from the Germans.[18] But for many, *Survivor*'s overt text-music mimesis muddies Schoenberg's abstract modernist pedigree; its artistic literalism met direct challenge from the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno,

who countered that Schoenberg's transcendent version of the Holocaust re-victimized the dead and trivialized their suffering.[19] More recently, Móricz has reiterated this discomfort with the work. "It is hard," she writes, "to dismiss the feeling that the *Shema* stands for an illusory triumph – for the attempt to re-create the spirit of those whose bodies perished in the Holocaust. The artistic cliché of transcendence used here has little to do with the brutal reality."[20] Ultimately, Schoenberg would defend his representational decision along ethical rather than aesthetic lines: "We should never forget [the Holocaust], even if such things have not been done in the manner in which I describe in the *Survivor*. This does not matter. The main thing is, that I saw it in my imagination."[21]

The popular success and potential failure of *A Survivor from Warsaw* sets the stage for postmodern musical responses to the Holocaust. By casting the choral *Shema Yisroel* as an act of resistance – and by setting it to a twelve-tone row – Schoenberg seemed to suggest a possible utopian transcendence for Jewish life, faith, and modernism after the war. But when tired allusions to previous style periods supplant modernist expectations for innovation, aesthetic consequences arise. Here, Schoenberg's modernism becomes regressive and reified rather than progressive and novel. Thus, by appropriating his own musical vocabulary to articulate personal ideas about Jewish faith and suffering in a post-Holocaust world, Schoenberg ultimately posed a central question for Holocaust representation: can the historicized language of modernism adequately respond to the genocide, or is a new direction necessary?

George Rochberg: postmodernism's response

For George Rochberg, there was "something profoundly moving about Schoenberg's search for faith, his struggle to regain his roots in Judaism, his deep need to raise a protective barrier against the godlessness and loss of values of his generation."[22] Rochberg had also struggled to define his own relationship to Judaism – a spiritual process he described as frustrating to Canadian-Jewish composer István Anhalt:

> Have I ever mentioned my abhorrence of the religion of Judaism, its narrow-chested, nationalistic legalism, rituals, tribal echoes – none of which I can identify with in the least? Of course, this is only part of my general distaste for *all* orthodox religions of whatever stripe. Yet I am religious[.] [M]y life is dominated by a sense of the awesomeness of whatever powers fashioned this incredible universe [and] maintains it.[23]

Throughout his life, Rochberg struggled with his identity, wondering whether "buried under layers [and] layers of secularized living" the

non-religious Jew carried with him "a kind of 'genetic' suffering that comes with being born a Jew."[24] As he admitted to Anhalt, "I start[ed] reacting badly to the whole [Jewish] question, [rejected] it, because it insists on . . . partness and my deepest inclinations [and] thoughts . . . are toward . . . wholeness, the oneness of man, of the universe, of what others call 'God' but I think of as 'world-consciousness.'"[25]

These comments derive from Rochberg's mature postmodern period, generally accepted as beginning with the Third String Quartet (1972). But in the previous decade – the compositional period in which Rochberg initiated his "postmodern turn" – the composer more openly incorporated Jewish ideas into his musical compositions and critical essays. As he admitted to Anhalt in 1969, "the urge [to reaffirm my Jewishness] is tied up with music . . . [M]usic is being corrupted today, is being *lost* in the vagaries of 'false idols.' It has become *unclean*."[26] In his admonitions, Rochberg draws parallels between postwar modernism and the dangers associated with idolatry in the Second Commandment.[27] Serialism had become the Golden Calf of the musical world, assuming "the condition of a quasi-religious status among its followers and practitioners. In the process [it] becomes externalized, is abstracted away from the realities of human existence, and gives birth to an inviolate dogma or doctrine in its own right."[28] The end-result was an "uncritical and unqualified 'pursuit of truth' – without regard to the consequences for the values of human existence."[29]

During the 1960s, the aesthetical and the ethical remained closely tied for Rochberg; he polemically described science and technology in terms that recalled the apocalyptic events of World War II, suggesting a corollary between fascist ideologies and the artistic "exclusionary tactics pronounced by false prophets such as Boulez."[30] He bluntly decried modernism as a form of "aesthetic cleansing" that fosters "aesthetic ideological repression" and leads to "the narrowing of thought and gesture . . . the destruction of the possibility of multiplicity . . . in favor of single ideas, images, and means."[31] Against such a current, Rochberg cultivated the polystylistic technique *ars combinatoria*, a compositional method that utilizes "styles from all historical periods in the making of new music . . . [in order to craft] a critical commentary on the accepted teleological approach to history and its implications in the study of music."[32] Rochberg's musical pluralism was not simply an "array of different things" but a way of "seeing new possibilities of relationships; of discovering and uncovering hidden connections and working with them structurally; of joining antipodes without boiling out their tensions."[33]

While most scholars contextualize *ars combinatoria* as an aesthetic retort to serialism, two works from the 1960s suggest that it was first developed as a means to respond to Jewish suffering in the twentieth century. The

unpublished *Passions According to the Twentieth Century* (1964–7) predates Rochberg's early attempts at collage and assemblage and uses textual and musical juxtaposition to dramatize a historical narrative of Jewish suffering. With the *Passions*, Rochberg attempted to "deal with the enormity of the human tragedy that had overtaken the twentieth century, without falling into obvious clichés and pathetic sentimentalism."[34] The ambitious choral work merged two periods of Jewish persecution – Herod's slaughter and Hitler's Holocaust – in a dramatic structure that utilized musical texts ranging from the medieval period to the twentieth century.[35] Therein, Beethoven's "millions" from the Ninth Symphony encounter laments sung by the millions exterminated in the death camps; abstract jazz motifs are overcome by the banal insistence of the "Horst Wessel Lied." In his program notes, Rochberg emphasizes not the aesthetic aims of *ars combinatoria*, but its usefulness as a cultural tool of confrontation: "Since we who live in the twentieth century have inherited all of history . . . [it] seem[s] right and plausible [to] use . . . musical quotation . . . In this cultural 'folding over' . . . we cannot escape any longer the peculiar and powerful sense that all things and all times, however worthy or unworthy, belong to us. At least, we have not been able to escape their consequences, humanly and artistically."[36]

Ultimately, the *Passions* was never performed, but its dramatic concept was incorporated into Rochberg's Third Symphony (1969), which was intended to convey "the sufferings of millions upon millions of human beings at the hands of an anthropomorphized 'Twentieth Century.'"[37] Instead of vernacular citations of Jewish laments and Nazi songs, Rochberg's Third Symphony engages the Western art music tradition. A recurrent refrain from Heinrich Schütz's "Saul, was verfolgst du mich?" (Saul, Why Do You Persecute Me?, 1650) evokes the theme of Jewish persecution throughout history – from the biblical figure of David to Holocaust victims.[38] Other musical quotations suggest a spiritual meditation on mortality and human suffering, including quotations from "Durch Adams Fall" (J. S. Bach, c. 1713–14), the *Missa Solemnis* and funeral march from the Third Symphony (Beethoven, 1819–23 and 1803–4), and *The Unanswered Question* (Charles Ives, 1908, revised 1930–5).

Rochberg's assemblage explores specific sonic and structural resonances, but the intent is not purely musical. As Rochberg explains, the Third Symphony is "an offshoot of [the *Passions*] . . . The texts – each of which has its associated 'music' drawn from a specific work of another composer – bear their load of awesome religious-theological meaning and unify themselves around my idea of twentieth-century man's . . . struggle with his own nature."[39] Rochberg's decision to embed the *Passions*' program more abstractly into the Third Symphony suggests that the composer

may have realized the limitations of his initial Holocaust project. Such concerns were already at the forefront of his mind; in his notes for the *Passions*, he explicitly demanded that no historical footage of the Holocaust be used to dramatize the production. Those images "are too raw," he explained, "too factual, too literal."[40] Ultimately, the *Passions* would prove too direct an employment of *ars combinatoria*, especially when Rochberg himself was searching for an "indirect" way to address history and, ultimately, his Jewish sense of self. As he would recognize later, "the means of human expression are insufficient and inadequate to 'name' the horrors that constitute the depths of . . . [evil] human actions . . . like *holocaust, ethnic cleansing* . . . and *concentration camp*."[41] A more universalist tone, such as that of the Third Symphony, extended the consequences of modernism to all of humanity while constituting a "more open, pluralistic view that allows for bringing together all manner of disparate gestures and languages." Only this "veritable *inconsistency* of styles, ideas, and languages," Rochberg contended, could adequately wage war against narrow-minded zealotry, whether musical, religious, or political.[42] And yet, questions remain: are indirect methods of commentary effective, or does their lack of specificity dilute and compromise their political intent? If a diversity of voices is allowed to speak concurrently, will the audience hear the message above the din?

Steve Reich: musical documentary and secular midrash

For Steve Reich, the appeal of documentary sources grew out of a period during which the composer reengaged his Jewish heritage and incorporated myriad Jewish texts in his compositions. As Antonella Puca notes, "the rediscovery of his Jewish background in the mid-1970s oriented [Reich's compositional] 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."[43] The apex of this process was *Different Trains* (1987), a piece that featured an autobiographical program:

> The idea for the piece comes from my childhood . . . [During World War II], I traveled back and forth by train frequently between New York and Los Angeles from 1939 to 1942 . . . 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.[44]

In *Trains*, 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.[45] The process was distinctly linked to notions

of musical ethnography and Holocaust witness, two testimonial forms that Reich equated with the concept of "musical documentary," and took its departure from Reich's admiration of Béla Bartók, who had collected folk songs in his native Hungary and incorporated their melodic and rhythmic characteristics into his art music.

Archival evidence for *Different Trains* illustrates the degree to which Reich struggled with identifying the primary subject of the work, which originally held the working title "Triple Quartet/True Story."[46] Although he contacted several Holocaust-related archives early in the process, Reich resisted the idea of writing a piece exclusively about the Holocaust. On the first page of his sketchbook, he contemplates initial actors for the piece:

> Voice = ? ~~Bartok?~~ Survivor? Me?[47]

He then considers several possibilities: a four-movement work integrating autobiographical voices (Reich's own voice; Virginia, his governess; and Mr. Davis, a Pullman porter) with those of Holocaust survivors; a three-movement work exploring the different sonic possibilities of trains and air-raid sirens; and a two-movement work featuring only the voices of survivors. Initially, Reich seems wary of connecting his own personal experience to that of Holocaust survivors. In an online work journal, he remarks with some weariness that "after much thought and some depression, I have come to the conclusion that this piece will be about the HOLOCAUST. Only. World War II. All my words, those of Virginia and those of Mr. Davis seem quite trivial . . . The openings which [I have] worked out so far also sound trivial."[48] Three days later, Reich reverted back to his original idea and began contemplating how to create a contrapuntal fabric from his human subjects (the speech melodies) and his newly composed material.

Different Trains helped to move minimalism further from its postmodern origins as "intentionless music" that did not attempt "a calculated effect [or] paint a picture," what Philip Glass described as "non-narrative."[49] *Different Trains* possesses a narrative structure, distinct imagery, and compelling characters – all of which collaborate to present a vision of the Holocaust (and its after-impact) imagined by Reich. Even though he decided against incorporating his own voice as a speech melody, Reich functions as a speaking subject within *Different Trains*; his sequencing of the testimonial excerpts becomes a form of secondary witness to the Holocaust – a representation of his understanding of the event, its symbols, and its importance.[50] Such artistic control raises important questions about narrative and Holocaust testimony, in this case, who is the authoritative voice in *Different Trains*? If this was to be a "true story," as the original working title of the piece suggests, whose story is it and can it ever be "true"? Moreover, how

does the telling of *that* story affect the integrity and primacy of the other voices that appear in *Different Trains*?

The question of authority is key with regard to Holocaust testimony, as survivors have emerged in the postwar period as a new secular authority within Jewish culture. The rise of a post-Holocaust crisis of faith – in which the presence of God as "the ultimate Author" is often rejected in light of extreme Jewish suffering – favors a more postmodern, multi-vocal approach to Judaism in which secular voices, especially those of survivors, bear significant weight in theodic and cultural debates about God, the nature of suffering, and Jewish history. Reich asserts as much in the musical documentary that followed *Different Trains*, the video-opera *The Cave* (1993/2003), in which biblical passages from Genesis are interpreted through musical *midrash*, the rabbinical practice of scriptural interpretation. Traditionally, such exegesis is the domain of Jewish religious leaders, who possess the authority to examine and reinterpret the incongruities and questions raised by the Torah in an act of "commentary [as an] authorized form of creative thought."[51] In the first act of *The Cave*, however, Reich presents midrashic texts in counterpoint with critical commentary drawn from interviews with contemporary Israelis. For example, in the scene "Who is Abraham?" the *midrash rabbah* (non-legalistic biblical exegesis) is immediately followed by an exegetical collage created by Reich from a secular cast of intellectuals – a professor of Jewish art, a social worker, an archeologist, and a political satirist. These secular voices dominate the work, and the weight that Reich gives their opinions suggests their increased interpretational authority in a post-Holocaust world.

In an interview with Jonathon Cott, Reich acknowledges that the counterpoint between the primary voices (the interviewees) and the secondary voice (the composer) constitutes a key procedural component of his secular midrash. "The speech melody of each person," he argues, "is a kind of musical portrait of that person. It's *their* melody . . . From their answers we edited out the rest of our libretto . . . The reality is that Abraham and the others only live in the words and thoughts of the living. [In] *The Cave*, they live in the words of the people we interviewed."[52] But, what ethical dimensions are raised when the musical process of secular midrash engages a historical event like the Holocaust rather than a biblical text? Reich's intervention – his *use* of the survivors' voices to perform an authoritative act of secondary witness – raises several crucial questions about Holocaust representation and artistic license in the late twentieth century. Should the voices of survivors be held as sacred voices, or can they be manipulated to tell stories that are not their own? Can anyone be an interpretive authority, and if so, what dangers arise in the free incorporation of victimized voices into art? Can an artist ever assume the voice of another without

repercussions? In a postmodern era, are any historical events sacred, that is, beyond material use?

Conclusion: a cavernous impossibility

As this sampling suggests, artistic engagements of the Holocaust raise more aesthetic and ethical questions than solutions. As Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg contend, the debate over Holocaust representation has come to signify one of the central paradoxes of postmodern historical interpretation. They explain that postmodernism compels one to "question the traditional understanding of the relationship between 'facts,' 'representation,' and 'reality' . . . [But] if truth is discourse-institutional and context-dependent, if there is no final truth, but rather truths in the plural, are we really left with . . . anything goes?"[53] This concern figures heavily in the post-war debate over Holocaust aesthetics, which historian Alan Mintz describes as consisting of two basic positions: exceptionalist and constructivist.[54]

Exceptionalists view the Holocaust as a unique tragedy comprised of essential historical "facts" that become distorted and manipulated through the process of artistic representation. As Michael Wyschogrod bluntly declared in 1975, "any attempt to transform the Holocaust into art demeans the Holocaust and must result in poor art."[55] More recently, Berel Lang has specifically targeted postmodern relativism and its potential to negate the historical "truth" of the Holocaust. He argues that when everything becomes a matter of interpretation, it is possible for audiences to confuse figuration for historical "fact" or, even worse, to "distrust the tale as well as the teller – with no place else to turn."[56] Elsewhere he explains:

> Figuration produces stylization, which directs attention to the author and his or her creative talent. Next, figuration produces a "perspective" on the referent of the utterance, but in featuring one particular perspective it necessarily closes off others. Thus it reduces or obscures certain aspects of events.[57]

Saul Friedlander shares Lang's concerns, worrying that "the equivocation of postmodernism concerning 'reality' and 'truth' – that is, ultimately, its fundamental relativism – confronts any discourse about [the Holocaust] with considerable difficulties."[58]

As Hayden White outlines below, constructivists ask the same questions as exceptionalists:

> *Can* [the Holocaust] be responsibly emplotted in *any* of the modes, symbols, plot types, and genres our culture provides for "making sense" of such extreme events in our past? Or [does] . . . the Final Solution belong to a

> special class of events, such that . . . they must be viewed as manifesting only one story, as being emplottable in one way only, and as signifying only one kind of meaning? . . . [Are there] set limits on the uses that can be made of [it] by writers of fiction or poetry?[59]

Unlike the exceptionalists, however, constructivists maintain that the Holocaust possesses no inscribed meaning beyond its factual core; its cultural and historical significance derive, instead, from its placement into postwar narratives, which constructivists see as the product of a dialogical relationship between event, artists, and their audiences. For White, Holocaust art is both a cultural representation of the genocide and a portrait of the artist's mode of understanding. Indeed, for constructivists the goals of representation could never be historical objectivism or literalism, notions rejected as cultural constructs themselves. Instead, artistic representations reveal contemporary relationships to the Holocaust, and their descriptive figuration becomes an undeniable marker of the relativity of Holocaust meaning within culture.

As with most debates, the "truth" lies somewhere between the poles, with postwar Holocaust representation emerging as a cavernous impossibility – resounding in its potential narratives and yet unable to approach the actual scope and horror of the genocide. As Martin Jay warns, the Holocaust "can never be made absolutely safe from either oblivion or distortion," and thus requires "an institutional framework, however imperfect, . . . for critically judging our reconstructions."[60] In these three case studies, the questions posed draw attention to the aesthetic limitations and failures of each representation, illustrating that none of them solve the representational quandary. Indeed, no representational act could. But, as Berel Lang astutely notes, limits can only be defined through perceived transgressions, which themselves raise questions about aesthetic appropriateness. Recalling Adorno's infamous dictum – "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" – Lang concedes that artistic barbarism is sometimes necessary:

> A justification might be argued for the barbarism he warns against as a defense against still greater barbarism – against denial, for example, or against forgetfulness . . . [I]t could be held that even certain common *mis*representations of the "Final Solution" in imaginative writing . . . may nonetheless be warranted as within the limits.[61]

In closing, he observes that the limits of representation are just as culturally constructed and authored as the representations themselves. This leads him to wonder whether the limits even refer directly to the artistic product anymore, or have they become about "something else, . . . a psychological or biological impulse for boundaries and taboos, perhaps . . . an intrinsic

incompleteness in all systematic structures."[62] Another impossible cavern to explore . . .

Notes

1 Jonathan D. Kramer, "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism," in Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (eds.), *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13–26 (13).
2 Judy Lochhead, Introduction to Lochhead and Auner (eds.), *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, 1–11 (5); and Kramer, "Nature and Origins," 13, 16.
3 Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12.
4 Kramer, "Natures and Origins," 22–3, 16.
5 Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 6.
6 *Ibid.*, 5–6.
7 Anton Kaes, "Holocaust and the End of History: Postmodern Historiography in Cinema," in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 206–22 (207).
8 Jacques Derrida, cited in *ibid.*, 206.
9 *Ibid.*, 218.
10 *Ibid.*, 222.
11 *Ibid.*, 218.
12 David Patterson, "John Cage and the New Era: An Obituary-Review," *repercussions*, 2.1 (1993): 5–30 (30).
13 See Amy Lynn Wlodarski, "'An Idea Can Never Perish': Memory, the Musical Idea, and Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947)," *Journal of Musicology*, 24.4 (Fall 2007): 581–608.
14 Klára Móricz, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 284–5.
15 Sabine Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World: The American Years* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 139.
16 Letter from Schoenberg to Kurt List, November 1, 1948, in Nuria Schoenberg Nono (ed.), *Arnold Schoenberg Self-Portrait* (Pacific Palisades: Belmont Music Publishers, 1988), 105.
17 Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World*, 139.
18 Philip V. Bohlman, *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15; David Liebermann, "Schoenberg Rewrites His Will: *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Op. 46," in Charlotte M. Cross and Russell A. Berman (eds.), *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Garland, 2000), 193–230 (212–13).
19 Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," in Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 240–58 (252).
20 Móricz, *Jewish Identities*, 297.
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