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# COMPOSER LOOKS EAST

The last decade or so has witnessed a dramatic increase in scholarship on musical minimalism and the music of Steve Reich. Such scholarship includes Edward Strickland's pathbreaking history of minimalism's origins, Robert Fink's dissertation on musical teleology (which deals extensively with minimalism), K. Robert Schwarz's popular-press introduction to minimalist composers, and Keith Potter's monograph on the "core" American minimalists - La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Reich, and Philip Glass.<sup>1</sup> During the last few years in particular, scholars have begun to address the question of Reich's use of non-Western music, usually within broader discussions of the relationship between non-Western music and American experimental composition.<sup>2</sup> This new attention to minimalism

*Steve Reich  
and  
Discourse  
on  
Non-Western  
Music*

by **Sumanth Gopinath**



provides a valuable opportunity to re-examine Reich's composition *Drumming* (1971), a piece that is often described as both "minimalism's first masterpiece" and "overtly influenced by non-Western music."<sup>3</sup>

**I**n the summer of 1970, Reich traveled to Accra, Ghana, to study Ewe music at the University of Ghana, Legon, with the master drummer Gideon Alorworye. After five weeks of hard work, taking lessons and transcribing music, Reich contracted malaria and returned to New York soon afterwards. In Reich's words, the musical experience was "overwhelming," "like being in front of a tidal wave,"<sup>4</sup> and after a hiatus of creative activity during his stay in Accra, he began to compose again. The result – a year after his return – was *Drumming*. Reich and his performing ensemble premiered the piece on December 3, 1971 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and received a standing ovation after a one and one-half-hour long performance. Tom Johnson, a composer and critic for the *Village Voice*, attempted to explain the audience's overwhelming enthusiasm for the piece, citing various reasons including the work's eschewal of dissonance, unusual timbral combinations, and sensual appeal. One of Johnson's comments, however, speaks to a different aspect of the work's success: "...the pleasure of seeing African and European elements so thoroughly fused – almost as if we really *did* live in one world."<sup>5</sup> Johnson's appreciation for the fusion of musical cultures is stated explicitly in the review, a perspective that he would favor in later articles on new music. For example, in "Music for the Planet Earth," written on January 4, 1973, about a year after the review of *Drumming*, Johnson states that "the single most important influence on contemporary music...[is] the infiltration of non-Western ideas."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the enthusiasm Johnson showed for *Drumming*, the unqualified emphasis on cultural fusion in the review might have alarmed Reich somewhat. The year before, just before his trip to Ghana, Reich wrote in his manifesto-like "Some Optimistic Predictions about the Future of Music" of May 1970:

*Non-Western music in general and Afri-*

*can, Indonesian and Indian music in particular will serve as new structural models for Western musicians. Not as new models of sound. (That's the old exoticism trip.) Those of us who love the sounds will hopefully just go and learn how to play these musics.*<sup>7</sup>

As early as 1968, in his now famous essay, "Music as a Gradual Process," Reich expressed displeasure with new music's emphasis on improvisation and Indian music. In May 1969, in program notes for a concert at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Reich stated explicitly, "I am not interested in improvisation or sounding exotic."<sup>8</sup> A musical aesthetic based on the intersection of Western and non-Western music could be easily criticized by skeptics of musical fusion and lead to charges of contradicting his prior aesthetic stance. But the above-mentioned comments in May 1970 demonstrate a shift in his distaste for musical hybrids. In anticipation of his formal study of Ewe music – perhaps after having taken two lessons with the Ewe master drummer, Alfred Ladzepko in New York – Reich apparently began to articulate a solution to the problem of music-cultural fusion, which had apparently seemed either unethical or in bad taste just a year earlier.<sup>9</sup>

What could be the reasons for such an aesthetic shift? In his 1972 essay, "The Phase-Shifting Pulse Gate, Four Organs, 1968-1970: An End to Electronics," he describes his increasing dissatisfaction with electronics as a compositional resource, which came about as a result of an intense period of experimentation with a new device of his own invention. After composing *Four Organs* (1970), Reich noted that:

*the experience of composing and then rehearsing with my ensemble was so positive, after more than a year of preoccupation with electronics, that another piece for four organs, Phase Patterns, happened very spontaneously a month later in February of 1970. In this piece the four of us were literally drumming on our keyboards in what is called a 'paradiddle' pattern in Western rudimental drumming. This piece proved to be as positive an experience as Four Organs and led, together with other factors, to a trip to Africa to study drumming.*<sup>10</sup>

Up to that point, electronics had played

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a significant role in the composer's output. The "phasing" process, which served as the basis for most of his pieces of the late 1960s, had its origins in two pieces for tape: *Its Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966). In these pieces, two tape loops of the same recorded fragment are played simultaneously, and gradually go out-of-sync due to the slight difference in the lengths of the two loops. Reich's disavowal of electronics was a slap in the face of the musical avant-garde that had valorized electronics as the future of composition. This shift required that he find a new basis for musical composition that could match the "cultural capital" of electronic technology.<sup>11</sup> Various historical and biographical factors, including Reich's prior exposure to and appreciation of non-Western musics as an undergraduate at Cornell and afterwards, the increased institutionalization of ethnomusicology as a professional discipline, the black liberation movement's promotion of the politics of difference, the intensification of the anti-Vietnam War protests, greater support for environmentalist (and anti-technological) causes, and the Immigration Act of 1965, which reopened the country's doors to foreigners after forty-one years, served to make the particular historical moment one in which the ideal of genuine musical-cultural fusion might have been valued over electronics-based composition within Reich's community of New York composers, musicians, and artists.

Reich's shift to a non-Western based musical aesthetic required that he modify his harsh opinions about the use of non-Western musics and promote the importance of such music as a new basis for composition. The composer's interest in West African music, which intensified just prior to his trip to Accra in the summer of 1970, then found a legitimized outlet in his own compositional practice. In particular, by positing the type of binary opposition between sound and structure which is implied by his comments of May 1970, non-Western influence is rendered acceptable on the structural level, even as it remains unacceptable on the surface, sound-oriented level.<sup>12</sup> By shifting the focus of his critique away from musical fusion in general and towards surface-imitation in particular, Reich leaves himself breathing space to justify certain uses of non-Western music.

By 1973, Reich already had begun sys-

tematically putting into practice and reaping the benefits of his new non-Western based compositional approach that avoided the use of electronics. In May of the same year, an ensemble billed as *Steve Reich and Musicians* gave a substantial concert of acoustical works at the John Weber Gallery in New York, including *Clapping Music* (1972) and the premiere performances of *Six Pianos* and *Music for Mallet Instruments, Women's Voices, and Organ*. In the summer of the same year, Reich would undertake a study of Balinese Gamelan at the University of Washington, Seattle. The following year was pivotal for the composer's career: Reich's group would record *Drumming*, *Six Pianos*, and *Music for Mallet Instruments, Women's Voices and Organ* for the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label, which recorded various "avant-garde" composers including Karlheinz Stockhausen.<sup>13</sup>

**D**rumming (1971) begins with a single beat on a bongo drum tuned to A#, repeated several times in unison by two, three, or four drummers. Then, suddenly, another note is heard, a B, slightly after the A#, and the new pattern repeats a number of times. Then we find another note (also a B, just before the A#), and another (a G# after all three notes) and so on, until we hear an energetic 12/8 pattern that uses the pitches G#, A#, B, and C#. (See example 1 for this sequence, in mm. 1-8.) In this way, the rhythmic pattern that serves as the basis for the entire composition is built up from a single, basic pulse. Once the complete version of the pattern is set in motion, all but two of the drummers drop out. The remaining pair of drummers engage in a "phase shift" — a characteristically Reichian technique found in most of his compositions after *Its Gonna Rain* (1965). One of the drummers begins playing slightly faster than the other and continues doing so until the two drummers are playing the same pattern one beat "out-of-sync" (see example 2).

Once the drummers settle into this new configuration, a new possibility emerges: musical patterns made from the new relationship between the two out-of-sync parts called "re-

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sultant patterns." The drummers who are not playing one of the phased parts then play various resultant patterns, either those suggested in the score or composed independently. The process then continues, as the drummers are phased again, and new resultant patterns emerge. At one point, a rhythmic process inverts the opening "construction" process (called a "rhythmic reduction"), reducing the music back to a single pulse before gradually rebuilding the original rhythmic pattern (with different pitches). After proceeding on tuned bongo drums for some time, this set of musical processes is then transferred to three marimbas in the second movement, and the resultant patterns are sung by women's voices. The third movement does the same with glockenspiels and whistling, and the final movement combines all groups of instruments, with the voices and a piccolo performing the resultant patterns. The complete performance time ranges between one hour and ninety minutes, depending on how quickly the different changes are made.<sup>14</sup>

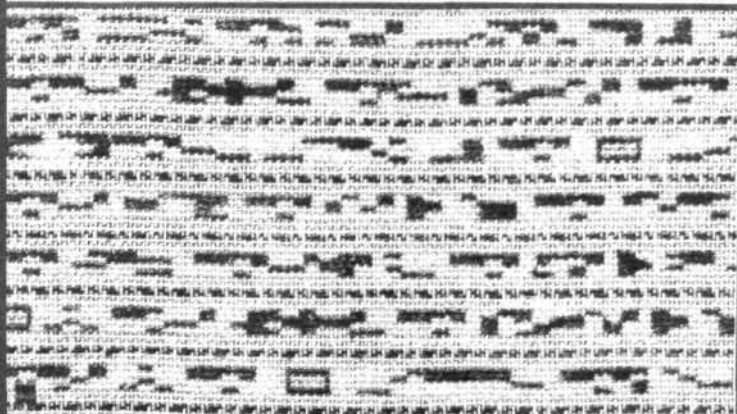
Many comparisons between the various rhythmic and melodic techniques in *Drumming* and those found in Ewe music have been made by Schwarz, Potter, and others. In particular, these scholars attribute Reich's use of 12/8 meter, hocketing, polyrhythmic structures, and constant pulse to his exposure to non-Western (and particularly traditional Ewe) music.<sup>15</sup> A good example of this type of influence can be found in the complete 12/8 pattern of drumming (see example 1, m. 8): the upward stemmed notes form a pattern with a different "downbeat" than the downward stemmed notes, which are played with a different hand than the upward stemmed notes.<sup>16</sup> This technique is also found in pieces such as *Piano Phase* (1966), which suggests that Reich's reading of A.M. Jones's *Studies* may have been the source of such ideas, rather than his later trip to Accra.

Certain aspects of *Drumming*, however, merit closer comparison with Ewe music. For example, the timbral configuration of the piece bears important similarities to and differences from Ewe drum ensembles. At the most basic level, the emphasis on percussion instruments in the work was most certainly influenced by Ewe music, as is well documented.<sup>17</sup> Even specific choices of instruments mirrored certain important timbres in the Ewe drumming ensemble. For example, as Reich has noted several times in print, the use of glockenspiels in *Drumming* reflected an earlier desire to use West Af-

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rican bells (the *gankogui* and *atoke*) in his composition.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, for the most part, the timbral fullness of the ensemble in *Drumming* was inspired by a similar richness of sound found in Ewe music, even though the inclusion of marimbas is not paralleled by any similar keyed percussion in the Ewe ensemble.

An important timbral difference, however, between the Ewe drumming ensemble – say in a *Drum* (a performance genre) such as *Gahu*, about which Reich has written an essay<sup>19</sup> – and Reich's ensemble in *Drumming* is the lack of a deep bass sonority in the latter. In fact, Reich's mature works through *Drumming* are notable in their omission of bass frequencies, and thus from a certain perspective, Reich's timbral practice is merely a continuation of his earlier work.<sup>20</sup> However, a notable "absence" in *Drumming* is a function or role analogous to that of the master drummer: the performer/musician who "control[s] the dramatic effect of the entire performance."<sup>21</sup> The master drummer plays the deep bass drum (*boba*) in the Ewe drumming ensemble, which provides a timbral foundation for the rest of the ensemble. Thus, it is reasonable to interpret *Drumming* as employing a Western transplant of the Ewe ensemble, in which the timbral and dramatic function of the master drummer is omitted.

The exclusion of the "master drummer" function on a musical level suggests an inquiry into how an analogous role is carried out or expressed in *Drumming*. In the Western classi-



cal music tradition, control over the dramatic effect of a performance is allocated in large part to the composer, the person who writes the musical score to be performed. However, there are important social and cultural differences between the Western composer and the Ewe master drummer: in Ewe culture, the master drummer is simultaneously a creator, lead performer, and figure of significant social status, whereas these roles are, to a large extent, separated and autonomous from one another in contemporary Western art music culture.<sup>22</sup> According to Locke, "master drummer" is "a title that refers to the musician's social status, a status earned not only through demonstrated excellence in performance but also through knowledge of traditional ways of living and a commitment to community."<sup>23</sup> Despite the pronounced lack of cultural integration between "the arts" and society in the West, the composer nevertheless plays an important social role within an artistic community, serving as a nexus of interpersonal connections and institutional affiliations that provides opportunities for him/her and performers of his/her music.<sup>24</sup> With respect to a work such as *Drumming*, then, it seems that Reich himself is the person who retains the most cultural and social authority within his community (the downtown New York musical avant-garde of the early 1970s).<sup>25</sup>

But the issue of authority is more complicated. Reich is also a performer in his ensemble, playing a part that is non-authoritative in the sense that it is not distinguishable from the other parts and doesn't require any particular virtuosity above and beyond the rest of the parts. Unlike many composers in the Western tradition, Reich never maintains for himself a prominent solo role that reinscribes the social and cultural hierarchy between composer and performer. The tension between Reich's authority as a composer and his lack of authority as a performer might in some way manifest itself in the extreme control Reich exercises compositionally over his performers: relatively little possibility of performer choice, no real freedom in the performance style (a mechanical precision always being favored), and absolutely no improvisation.<sup>26</sup> While many authors, including the German critic Clytus Gottwald, have interpreted this tendency as a kind of musical fascism, Reich prefers to see it as "more analogous to yoga," a form of control "imposed from within."<sup>27</sup>

In fact, Reich has expressed (implicitly and

explicitly) that his "mediocre" performing abilities have much to do with the sound of his music. Henahan notes that "Reich is disarming in his insistence that his musical style flows largely out of his own limitations as a performer and a composer."<sup>28</sup> One can sense a wistful quality in his description of the composer (read: himself) attempting to learn non-Western music in "A Composer Looks East":

*Alternately, a composer can give up composing and devote himself to trying to become a performer of some non-Western music. This will take many years of study and may, even then, only lead to mediocre performing abilities when judged by African, Balinese, Indian, or whatever appropriate Non-Western standards. (If the performance of non-Western music were available for musically gifted Western children and teenagers to study, this would then undoubtedly lead to American and European-born virtuosos of non-Western music.)<sup>29</sup>*

Reich's sense of lack, concerning his own performance abilities, perhaps has its roots in his attempts to improvise collectively with an ensemble in the early 1960s in San Francisco. The composer must have noticed the contrast in instrumental control – essential to the success of improvisation – between John Coltrane, whom he observed at the jazz workshops in San Francisco at the time, and himself, in his avant-garde improvisation ensemble.<sup>30</sup>

The sublimation of Reich's desire for performance authority into the compositional sphere parallels another such transference – his desire for authority as a scholar of non-Western music. A self-described "amateur musicologist,"<sup>31</sup> Reich has undertaken a number of scholarly projects including an analysis of the Ewe musical genre, *Gahu*, and an attempt to record performances of the Hebrew cantillation tradition.<sup>32</sup> However, Reich has prioritized composition in his life, and as a result has never been able to produce "masterpieces of scholarship like Colin McPhee's 'Music in Bali.'<sup>33</sup> In an essay on *Gahu* of 1971, Reich adopts a somewhat apologetic tone for his scholarly incompleteness, which came about, in part, as a result of his illness, but he seems nonetheless proud that he provides "the first and at present the only transcription of both the *Hatsyiatsya* patterns and the basic drumming of *Gahu*."<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly enough, Reich's experience as an ethnomusicologist is also transmuted into the compositional structure of *Drumming*.

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## Example 1

basic rhythmic patterns of *Drumming*, mm. 1-8

repeat each bar several times

perceived downbeat = \*

12/8

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8



In particular, the process of rhythmic construction and reduction that appears at transitional moments in the work is very similar to the kind of analytic process Reich went through while transcribing Ewe music. Reich describes the process as follows:

I took daily lessons with Gideon Alorworye and recorded each lesson. Afterwards I would return to my room, and, by playing and re-playing the tape, sometimes at half or one quarter speed, I was able to transcribe the bell, rattle, and drum patterns I had learned. The basis for learning each individual instrument was as follows: first I would learn the basic double bell (gong-gong) pattern which is the unchanging time line of the whole drumming. Then I would learn the rattle (axatse) pattern which is quite similar to the

gong-gong pattern and also continues without change throughout the entire performance. We would then proceed to the drums by my playing the gong-gong while my teacher played one of the drum patterns. We would then exchange instruments and I would try and play the drum pattern while he played the bell. I found that while I could pick up the drum patterns fairly rapidly by rote, I would forget them almost as rapidly. I couldn't really remember them until I could understand exactly what was going on rhythmically between the drum and bell patterns. This process of understanding was greatly aided and accelerated by re-playing the tapes of my lessons until I could finally write down with certainty the relationship between any given drum and the bell pattern. One drum after the other was

## Example 2

"phasing" process

Drummer 1 gradually accelerates with each repetition until...

Drummer 1

Drummer 2

repeat several times

10 ...this phase position is reached.

repeat several times

learned and written down in relation to the bell until an entire ensemble was notated.<sup>35</sup>

Similar to the mastery of Ewe drumming patterns attained by the act of transcription, Reich demonstrates a compositional "mastery" over his own materials in *Drumming*, by constructing and deconstructing the basic 12/8 pattern of the piece in various ways. One result of this process is that, at various points within the construction or reduction, different beats sound like downbeats (or stressed points of rhythmic articulation). This recalls Reich's adoption of A.M. Jones's understanding of the various repeated patterns played on different instruments in Ewe music: "each [has] its own separate down beat."<sup>36</sup>

A final aspect of *Drumming* that reveals both important similarities to and differences from Ewe music is its relationship to language and voice. Both musics demonstrate a significant timbral relationship between vocalized syllables and instrumental sounds. In Ewe music, a set of "nonsense syllables" is used to provide both a conceptual structure to the different drum pitches and a basis from which to mimic the sounds of language.<sup>37</sup> The importance of the "talking drum" phenomenon – the fact that linguistic messages can be directly communicated through drumming – is not to be underestimated; as John Chernoff argues, "[t]he relationship of drumming to language is one of the most important factors limiting the freedom of improvisation."<sup>38</sup> Reich himself was clearly

aware of this phenomenon, noting with gravity that "[w]hen it is remembered that there is no indigenous written language in Africa, and when the talking drums are considered, it may be seen that...there is actually a literal recorded history of these people in the drum patterns themselves."<sup>39</sup>

In *Drumming*, on the other hand, "nonsense syllables" are used, not to communicate linguistically, but rather to imitate the sounds of instruments. In Schwarz's words, "[t]he voices do not employ any text; instead, they are used to double and underscore the various resulting patterns that arise out of the phasing process."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the valued "meaning" of the work resides not in the transmission of language but rather instrumental sound.<sup>41</sup> This completely inverted use of vocalicity bears a powerful resemblance to David Locke's appreciation of Ewe music as "an aesthetically charged sonic phenomenon" rather than as a form of "story-telling," a "kaleidoscopic musical context of shifting aural illusions."<sup>42</sup> Such a description almost perfectly coincides with the descriptions of Reich's music as a kind of "op art," a music of "dazzling, constantly shifting figures,"<sup>43</sup> and suggests that a view of Ewe music similar to Locke's may have served as an inspiration for *Drumming*. It is also worth keeping in mind that Reich's practice of transforming language into sound is a predilection that begins at least as early as the previously-mentioned tape pieces *Its Gonna Rain* (1965)



and *Come Out* (1966). In these compositions, fragments of speech are repeated and phased numerous times, and are ultimately de-signified and liquidated into impressive sonic panoramas.<sup>44</sup>

**G**iven these various aspects of *Drumming* – the typically Reichian technique of phasing, the various technical influences of Ewe music, the sublimated performer and ethnomusicological impulses, and the dissociation from language – how does one go about constructing an interpretation of the piece? In my view, one can begin to make sense of the work by positing a crude narrative that situates the various elements in a temporal and hierarchical framework. For example, the fact that *Drumming* begins with the “transcription” moment suggests to me a state of ethnographic discovery, in which the music is “put together” by the ethnomusicologist-composer protagonist.<sup>45</sup> However, the music that is “discovered” is not Ewe music (or any non-Western music) but rather the music of the composer (Steve Reich) himself, which constitutes an already-formed musical style inextricably linked to Ewe music. In particular, immediately after the opening “transcription” moment passes (mm. 1-8), we hear a rhythmically complex 12/8 drum pattern that undergoes a typically Reichian phasing process and includes the use of “resultant patterns.” Excepting the different timbral effects of the drums, the music sounds quite similar to his earlier pieces, *Piano Phase* (1967) or *Violin Phase* (1967). During the course of the four movements of *Drumming*, the timbres of this “discovered” (read: constructed) music are also gradually assembled (tuned bongo drums, marimbas/women’s voices, glockenspiels/whistling, and all groups together), until a conglomerate, pseudo-ethnic Reichian ensemble is found at the end of the piece, replete with a birdsong-like resultant pattern played on the piccolo.<sup>46</sup> In other words, one might view *Drumming* as an ethnographic fantasy of self-validation, in which the narrative subject transcribes and analyzes the “music” in question only to “find”

(i.e., construct) himself – perhaps playing his own music in a vaguely “exotic” context. Such an interpretation mirrors Reich’s own description of the effect that his trip to Ghana had on his music:

*The question often arises as to what influence my visit to Africa had on Drumming? The answer is confirmation. It confirmed my intuition that acoustic instruments could be used to produce music that was genuinely richer in sound than that produced by electronic instruments, as well as confirming my natural inclination towards percussion.*<sup>47</sup>

The interpretation of *Drumming* as being profoundly ethnomusicological speaks to its moment in U.S. cultural history. As Tom Johnson noted, “almost all of the composers [in the New York avant-garde of the 1970s] had a keen interest in non-Western music, and ... their interaction with ethnic music and ethnomusicologists was crucial in the evolution of this music at this time.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, many musicians, including jazz players and popular musicians, negotiated the boundary between West and non-West through innumerable attempts at musical-cultural fusion.<sup>49</sup> The historical moment is also central to Reich’s career, redirecting his enduring preoccupation with (and possible self-definition through) The Other, from an “internal other” (African Americans) in his pieces of the early to mid-1960s to an “external other” (West Africans) in *Drumming* and beyond.<sup>50</sup> And when we recall that Reich’s music both directly inspired ambient and New Age musicians and generated a market for itself, one begins to realize the important links between ethnomusicology and the music industry, which were realized in more ways than simply the creation of a nascent “world music” market.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Clytus Gottwald’s dystopic critique of Reich’s compositions as an industrialized non-Western music would augur the future imitations of pieces such as *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (1976), which would go on to sell 20,000 copies in its first year of release.<sup>52</sup>

The previously outlined historical context might provide a way of assessing the cultural impact of a work like *Drumming* without either ignoring the influence of Ewe traditional music on Reich’s composition or simply characterizing this influence as a “good” act of multicultural hybridity or a “bad” act of appropriation.<sup>53</sup> Reich himself has discussed the most negative of these interpretations, noting that his ostensible “skimming the surface off of

**While I do not believe that Reich's sound/structure opposition is either a valid measure of (un)ethical appropriation or an accurate description of his own music (which does resemble certain Ewe performance genres in some ways), Reich's act(s) of appropriation must be situated within the context of Western (post)modernity itself.**

another art form" would make him "as guilty as Picasso was when he looked at African sculpture."<sup>54</sup> More recently, Reich has mentioned the term "cultural imperialism," suggesting a full awareness that some scholars and writers critique the ethics of Western cultural interaction with the non-West.<sup>55</sup> cc<sup>56</sup> In James Clifford's view, the West has long been an "interconnected world," and thereby, "to varying degrees, 'inauthentic'" – at least since the early twentieth century.<sup>57</sup>

Even if appropriation were simply an unavoidable fact of such a world, two particular aspects of Reich's intersection with the music of the non-Western Other, especially Ewe music, are worthy of mention. The first is that the "ethnomusicological moment" of the late 60s and early 70s in the U.S. was one in which composers and enthusiasts gained greater access to the music of non-Western cultures, thereby democratizing a sphere of cultural interaction previously controlled by academic and institutional figures.<sup>58</sup> The second aspect of Reich's interaction with Ewe music is that his interaction was predicated on a search for origins – particularly those of African Americans. In particular, Reich has noted that in 1970 I was still thinking about [African musical influences on his own work] and about non-Western civilization generally, and beginning to appreciate its importance. Undoubtedly it grew out of an interest in jazz and an interest in American black people. ... The interest in African music was very much a feeling (particularly with Coltrane in his late music) that American black culture was simply a European overlay on an African culture.<sup>59</sup>

Such a fact might suggest that Reich's thinking at the time worked within what Edward Said has called "the symmetry of redemption" – which I would (mis)interpret as the possibility of self-discovery or validation through the recovery of origins.<sup>60</sup> Clifford points out that [q]uestionable acts of purification are involved in any attainment of a promised land, return to "original" sources, or gathering up of a true tradition. Such claims to purity are in any event always subverted by the need to stage authenticity in opposition to external, often dominating alternatives.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, the authenticity "staged" by Reich's use of Ewe music, which was realized through the sound/structure dichotomy, suggested the immediate paradox that the musical "origins" being sought were not related to the composer's personal heritage – pointing to-

ward the possibility of Reich's rediscovery of his Jewish ancestry. For these and other reasons, *Drumming* seems to stand on the brink of a broad set of cultural and personal changes that the world and composer would undergo through the turbulent decade of the 1970s.GR

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Edward Strickland, *Minimalism:Origins* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1993); Robert Fink, "Arrows of Desire: Long-Range Linear Structure and the Transformation of Musical Energy" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1994); K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996); and Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Some of the cultural-theoretical treatments of non-Western music in American experimentalism that discuss Reich's work include David Nicholls, "Transethnicism and the American Experimental Tradition," *The Musical Quarterly* 80/4 (Winter 1996), 569-94; Alex Lubet, "Indeterminate Origins: A Cultural Theory of American Experimental Music," in *Perspectives on American Music Since 1950*, ed. James R. Heintze (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), 95-140; and John Corbett, "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others," in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 163-186. Considering non-English scholarship, one might include Sylvie Lannes, "Coro de Berio et *Drumming* de Reich: Deux compositions intégrant les polyrythmies africaines, comme expérience de renouveau musical," *Canadian University Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes* 11/1 (1991), 101-127, which does attempt to map out some of the relationships between Reich's music and Ewe drumming.

<sup>3</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 73, 75.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Reich, "An Interview with Composer Steve Reich," interview by Emily Wasserman, *Artforum* 10/9 (May 1972), 48.

<sup>5</sup> The description of the premiere of *Drumming* comes from a number of accounts, including K. Robert Schwarz, "Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process, Part II" *Perspectives of New Music* 20 (1981-82), 233; Edward Strickland, *Minimalism:Origins* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1993), 224-5; and Tom Johnson, "Steve Reich's *Drumming*," *Village Voice*, 9 December 1971, reprinted in *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972-1982: A Collection of Articles Originally Published in the Village Voice* (Eindhoven, The Netherlands: Het Apollohuis, 1989), 26-7; citation in *The Voice of New Music*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> *The Voice of New Music*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Reich, *Writings about Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1974), 28. Many of Reich's writings in this volume read like manifestos.

<sup>8</sup> *Writings about Music*, 11, 44.



<sup>1</sup> As Michael Veal has noted to me, Ladzepko's institutional affiliation with Columbia University at the time was typical of various Ghanaian musicians in the U.S. and was reflective of a particular historical moment in which the newly independent Ghanaian state sought to promote itself through indigenous art forms. Also, Reich has commented in an interview that his preoccupation with these conceptual problems was further triggered by learning of Ladzepko's presence in New York. See the interview with Reich in William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), 304-5.

<sup>10</sup> *Writings about Music*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> The cultural importance of Reich's rejection of electronics was emphasized to me by Eric Drott. "Cultural capital" as a metaphor derives from the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, in which knowledge-based prestige cultivated within communities can serve an analogous function to that of economic capital in the marketplace. See *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. and trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> The sound/structure dichotomy is Reich's idiosyncratic application of the modernist binary opposition between (deep) structure and surface, in which the former is privileged over the latter. Lubet points out Reich's ambivalence about the influence of non-Western music on his own, noting that he has been "enthusiastic about their impact on his structural ideas while denying an impact upon his sound, which in many works seems all too obvious to his listeners" (126-7).

<sup>13</sup> *Writings about Music*, 75-76. The concert at the John Weber Gallery was well received in the *New York Times* by John Rockwell, noting, "[i]t was an important concert." "Music: Reich Meditations," *New York Times*, 19 May 1973, 28.

<sup>14</sup> See Schwarz, "Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process, Part I" *Perspectives of New Music* 19 (1980-81), 387 (discussion of "resulting patterns"); and "Steve Reich, Part II," 230-8 (comments on African music, *Drumming*).

<sup>15</sup> Strickland, 225; Schwarz, "Steve Reich, Part II" 234-5. Michael Tenzer argues that the 12/8 rhythmic pattern of *Drumming* bears a conspicuous resemblance to the Ewe performance genre Agbadza, though Reich argues that 12/8 patterns are typical of Ewe music in general. See Michael Tenzer, "Western Music in the Context of World Music," in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 102; and *Writings about Music*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> David Locke's suggestion that there isn't necessarily more than one "downbeat" in Ewe music is relevant here. See his comments in *Drum Gahu: An Introduction to African Rhythm* (Tempe, AZ and Gilsum, NH: White Cliffs Media, 1998), 19, 34-6.

<sup>17</sup> Reich mentions the trip as the source of his use of drums in *Talking Music*, 305.

<sup>18</sup> Wasserman, 47. "[T]he glockenspiels...ended up being my bells as opposed to those African bells."

<sup>19</sup> "Gahu: A Dance of the Ewe Tribe in Ghana" (1971), *Source Magazine* 10 (Fall 1972), reprinted in *Writings about Music*, 29-37.

<sup>20</sup> Reich discusses the lack of bass lines and bass frequencies in his earlier music with Duckworth in *Talking Music*, 310-311.

<sup>21</sup> Locke, *Drum Gahu*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Chanan makes the point that the Western music, from Beethoven on, acts autonomously – more or less independently from broader cultural phenomena. *From Handel to Hendrix: The Composer in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 1999), 38. Carl Dahlhaus argues that "autonomy" is "relative," in that music is never completely separated from society, and emphasizes the importance of the idea of autonomy in Western classical music, especially beginning in the 19th century in Central Europe. *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 108-28, 144-50.

<sup>23</sup> Locke, *Drum Gahu*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Reich was working within a particular historical moment (late 60s-early 70s) and geographical location (downtown New York) which witnessed the idea of avant-garde "folk art" – particularly as part of a larger project to construct an avant-garde community – as well as the attempted breakdown of the composer-performer and composer-audience boundaries. See Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 31-107, 111-118. In the same period, the newly independent Ghanaian state, led by Kwame Nkrumah, promoted indigenous music through state institutions such as universities. This led to the relative "autonomization" of Ghanaian music, which affected the character and content of performances. Locke, *Drum Gahu*, 6; Reich, "Texture-Space-Survival," *Perspectives of New Music* 26/2 (Summer 1988), 276. This contradictory double movement – de-autonomization in New York and autonomization in Ghana – failed in the New York and succeeded in Ghana, ultimately preserving relative autonomy in both locations.

<sup>25</sup> However, a more literal function of the master drummer – signaling important musical changes – is allocated anonymously to the performance ensemble in Reich's piece. Various important changes in *Drumming*, such as transitions to new sections within the piece, are either signaled by a performer in real-time or predetermined beforehand. See Strickland, 226; and Schwarz, "Steve Reich, Part II" 233.

<sup>26</sup> However, Reich surely accrued "cultural capital" within certain factions of the New York avant-garde for his aesthetic emphasis on amateurism, which perhaps for such factions acts in tension with his more professionalizing impulses (manifested in precision and performance control). For example, Banes discusses the avant-garde group Fluxus, which appeared in New York in 1963, and its emphasis on "amateurization" (81). See Banes, 6, 60-65.

<sup>27</sup> See Clytus Gottwald, "Signale zwischen Exotik und Industrie: Steve Reich auf der Suche nach einer neuen Identität von Klänge und Struktur," *Melos/Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (January-February 1975), 5; and Donald Henahan, "Reich? Philharmonic? Paratiddling?" *New York Times*, 24 October 1971, Section D, 26. Gottwald's critique of Reich's music, informed by the work of Theodor Adorno, is highly politicized; he characterizes *Drumming* as reminiscent of an "assembly line" (*Fließband*) and as being "more Eastern than [Eastern music]" (4, 6). Both relentlessly polemical and thought provoking, Gottwald's article can be interpreted as a conservative (i.e., pre-established avant-garde) reaction to the growing popularity of Reich's music that was typical of German new music critics at the time. See Amy Beal, "Patronage and Reception History of American Experimental Music in West Germany, 1945-1986" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 269-279. Reich responded to Gottwald's comments in "Steve Reich schreibt an Clytus Gottwald," *Melos/Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (March 1975), 198-200; and the composer later commented on the whole affair in an

unpublished interview with Ev Grimes, December 15-16, 1986, New York, NY, Major Figures in American Music Series, Oral History of American Music, Yale University, no. 186 a-i, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Henahan, D 13.

<sup>29</sup> Steve Reich, "A Composer Looks East," *New York Times*, 2 September 1973, D 9.

<sup>30</sup> Strickland, 183 (seeing Coltrane perform in San Francisco). Reich speaks disparagingly of his early improvisation ensemble, noting: "[u]ltimately, I felt it was kind of vapid and didn't really have enough musical content." In *Talking Music*, 295. The sense of performance inferiority seems to be a common trait in many American experimental composers and is possibly symptomatic of the encounter between white Western enthusiast-composers and nonwhite or non-Western virtuoso improviser-performers. For example, the composer Catherine Christer Hennix recently commented on Pandit Pran Nath – the Indian virtuoso singer who taught La Monte Young and Terry Riley – noting, "I remember La Monte playing [for Pran Nath] John Coltrane and he was very taken with him, he could feel the enormous soul behind Coltrane's music. But I don't think he felt we were up to Coltrane's level. He thought probably we should have practised tuning the tambura and singing our scales instead of doing our own adventures." Quoted in Marcus Boon, "Infinity's Pathfinder," *The Wire*, September 2001, 43.

<sup>31</sup> "Steve Reich in Conversation with Philip Dadson," interview by Philip Dadson, *Music in New Zealand* 9 (Winter 1990), 30.

<sup>32</sup> See *Writings*, 29-37, and Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 84.

<sup>33</sup> "A Composer Looks East," D 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Writings about Music*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. For example, in the opening rhythmic construction of *Drumming* (in example 1), the downbeat first appears on beat 9 (with the A#) in m. 1. Then, the downbeat shifts to the B on beat 11 in m. 2, and is reinforced in m. 3. In m. 4, however, the downbeat shifts to beat 1 (with the G#), and, for me, remains there for the rest of the formation of the pattern.

<sup>37</sup> John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 75-79.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 81.

<sup>39</sup> *Writings about Music*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Schwarz, "Steve Reich, Part II" 237.

<sup>41</sup> As Michael Klein has noted to me, the separation of sound from language is part of a larger modernist musical tradition that seems intent upon stripping sounds of their coded meanings.

<sup>42</sup> Locke, *Drum Gahu*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Schwarz, "Steve Reich, Part I" 385.

<sup>44</sup> David Schwarz notes that *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) use repetition obsessively to strip meaning just as it is about to take shape," in "Listening Subjects: Semiotics, Psychoanalysis, and the Music of John Adams and Steve Reich," *Perspectives of New Music* 31/2 (Summer 1993), 43. Also, the racial aspect of this treatment of language should not go unnoticed. In the two tape pieces, the recorded fragments are of African-American voices, and Reich's denaturing of African musical language reveals a strange tendency to represent the removal of "black" voices, which are instead transformed into "pure" sound. This tendency, whether a subconscious reification or conscious critique of Western civilization, might be understood within the context of Reich's implicit musical interest in the problems of "race." Lloyd Whitesell interprets these compositional procedures in the tape pieces as implicitly representing racial "whiteness;" see "White Noise: Race and Erasure in the Cultural Avant-Garde," *American Music* 19/2 (Summer 2001), 176-77.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Drott suggested to me that this moment might also be one that evokes music's historical and conceptual "origins," a kind of *creatio ex nihilo* that posits Reich's own music as the teleological endpoint of an evolutionary progression from "primitiveness."

<sup>46</sup> This resultant pattern played by the piccolo is quite prominent on the

Reich's most recent recording of *Drumming*. See *Drumming*, Steve Reich and Musicians, Elektra Nonesuch 7559-79170, 1987, track 4 from 7:00 until the end.

<sup>47</sup> *Writings about Music*, 58. The relationship of the narrative of ethnographic discovery to the "discovered" (constructed) music that is in part based on Ewe music suggests at least two possible interpretations of *Drumming*. One possibility is that the ethnographic narrative and "exotic" timbres of the ensemble reveal Reich's utilization of traditional Ewe music in his style since *Piano Phase*, particularly the 12/8 meter and ambiguous rhythmic patterns (heard in groups of both 3 and 4). Another possibility is that the narrative of self-discovery serves to mask Reich's prior use of Ewe music. Particularly, Reich's use of the rhythmic construction pattern creates the semblance of the narrative subject's discovery of the composer's own signature style, a notion that possibly could deflect attention away from that style's Ewe-based influences.

<sup>48</sup> *The Voice of New Music*, 357.

<sup>49</sup> In addition to rock bands such as the Beatles, who explored the use of Indian music in several albums, jazz musicians such as Herbie Hancock demonstrated ways to integrate West African musics into an experimental jazz aesthetic. See, for example, the track "Sleeping Giant" on the album *Crossings* (1972), which starkly juxtaposes pseudo-West African percussion music with electronic effects and a drum solo. In this instance, we find the drummer substituting for the "master drummer" but also providing a conceptual bridge to the (Western) experimental jazz-fusion and electronic music also found on the track. On the CD compilation Herbie Hancock, *Mwandishi: The Complete Warner Bros. Recordings*, Warner Bros. 2-45732, 1994.

<sup>50</sup> This distinction was suggested to me by Michael Veal. Veal also noted that its source might be the language of the "internal colony" – i.e., comparing the treatment of African Americans in the U.S. with the colonial treatment of Africans abroad – which was common in African American circles during and after the late 1960s. Wilfrid Mellers implicitly suggests that Reich negotiates this process of self-definition through the "external other" by importing the ritual aspect of Ewe music into the concert hall. For Mellers, the popularity of the piece is predicated on the existing lack of and human need for such rituals in (Western) urban centers. See Wilfrid Mellers, *Singing in the Wilderness: Music and Ecology in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 104. Others have noted the "ritual" aspect of the Reich Ensemble's performances of *Drumming*. See K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 75.

<sup>51</sup> John Schaeffer notes that the New Age pianist George Winston plays works inspired by Steve Reich; see his *New Sounds: A Listener's Guide to New Music* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 199. Reich himself noted with dismay that the New Age group Tangerine Dream's soundtrack to the film *Risky Business* was an imitation of *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (Strickland, 248). Also, Reich has recently discussed the influence of his own music on that of Brian Eno, the founder of ambient music (which is sonically related to New Age music). See Andrew Clements, "Looping the loop: Andrew Clements meets composer Steve Reich, an inspiration to everyone from Bowie to The Orb," *The Guardian* (London), April 2, 1999, The Guardian Friday Review Page, 14.

Two well-known articles both implicitly point to the late '60s and early '70s as a critical moment in the development of the "world music" market. Veit Ertmann, "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections of World Music in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 8 (1996), 474; Steven Feld, "Notes on World Beat," *Public Culture Bulletin* 1/1 (Fall 1988), 31.

<sup>52</sup> See endnote 50; K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 82. This notion of minimalism as industrialized, processed music suggested by Clytus Gottwald and others was later picked up by Fink in "Arrows of Desire," 217-52.

<sup>53</sup> Examples of all three perspectives can be found in the scholarly literature on Reich. In an extreme example of ignoring Ewe (and non-Western music generally), Jonathan Bernard argues that "minimal music is not non-Western in any meaningful sense," and that "there is no particularly compelling reason to expect the various analytical methodologies developed for non-Western music to have relevance to (thoroughly Western) minimal music." See "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, ed. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 263. K. Robert Schwarz celebrates Reich's rejection of "the exclusive primacy of the Classical Western heritage" parallels "a general turn against an



attitude that asserted the superiority of Western society" ("Steve Reich, Part II," 280). John Corbett, on the other hand, appears to accuse Reich of "conceptual orientalism" in reference to his use of non-Western musics ("Experimental Oriental," 173-74). Also, Wim Mertens argues that the minimalists' use of non-Western music appears as "a symptom of the ability of the modern culture industry to annex a foreign culture, strip it of its specific social-ideological context and incorporate it into its own culture products." See *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* trans. J. Hautekiet (London: Kahn & Avenill, 1983 [1980]), 88.

54. *Talking Music*, 305.

55. In a recent public discussion, Reich noted that cultural studies scholars would accuse one of "cultural imperialism" if they imitated the sound of non-Western music (instead of simply the structure). Composers Seminar, 18 January 2001, Yale University, School of Music, New Haven, CT, cassette recording included in *American Music Series, Oral History of American Music*, Yale University, no. 186 p-q. For a good discussion of the term, see John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

56. Although devising a more adequate ethics of appropriation is not the purpose of this paper, I would suggest that any such claims would have to be grounded in the material consequences of such acts. As such, some avenues of investigation might focus on personal financial gain and career advancement, possible destruction of the appropriated culture, willful misrepresentation

or ignorance in knowledge-production, and the creation of institutions, companies, and markets.

57. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 11.

58. One might argue that this "democratization" still only held for educated people of middle-class and higher socioeconomic backgrounds and was probably accessed primarily by those with liberal political beliefs. Such liberal values – with their roots in free-market ideologies – in turn, might have served to channel this new accessibility through a market-based system, setting the stage for the world music market of today.

59. *Talking Music*, 304-5.

60. See Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 150. Quoted in Clifford, 11.

61. Clifford, 11-12.

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