

## CONCLUSION

### *Memory Routes and Destinations*

Conclusions are difficult to write. They promise findings and outcomes, claims and counterclaims. Where does the story of deportation begin and end? Is it more than a journey caught between rhetoric and pain? Why are the trains seemingly on standby to return us to the past, as though we had never left it? Although the Holocaust took place in the 1930s and 1940s in Europe, its memory routes remain open and continue to guide passengers to the dark places of compulsive return and witness. Recall the scene at Oswiecim, Poland on 27 January 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp. At that location, survivors, diplomats, and representatives of foreign governments gathered to participate in a post-Holocaust community of remembrance. There was no screeching halt of the train and no smoke from the burning of bodies. Rather, the opening ceremony of this arrival was guided by the recorded rumble of an approaching train, and held where new arrivals were transported to the camp and put through selection. This arrival scene included survivors of the camp, along with journalists, photographers, and a multi-faith community, an audience for the performance of Auschwitz “remembering,” witnesses to the landscape of what made Auschwitz without logic, a world populated by, in Vera Laska’s words, “strange smells and stranger people.”

The commemorations were a provocative simulation of Holocaust transit. The production of a contemporary Auschwitz arrival came with all the features of the historical entries: train tracks, sounds, and flames. The terminal meaning of an Auschwitz arrival was reinforced in the comments of the then Israeli president Moshe Katsav, who commented: “It seems as if we can still hear the dead crying out,” and “when I walk the ground of the concentration camps, I fear that I am walking on the ashes of the victims.”<sup>1</sup> The commemoration scene reinforced the locations of the symbolic geography of the camps with Auschwitz as its center, yet the arrival narrative, as I have argued, is crucially dependent on the role of transport and the victims who survived deportation journeys and the camps. Recent exhibitions devoted to the role of railway networks in the Holocaust are confirming this

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centrality. The unique journey of the traveling exhibition, “Train of Commemoration” returns to origins and itineraries. In early November 2007, trains commemorating the deportation of 12,000 German-Jewish children left Frankfurt, Germany, for a six-month “train relay” throughout the country. The train’s final destination was the Auschwitz memorial and museum site in Oswiecim.

The train comprises a 1921 locomotive and four train cars with historical commentary, visual illustrations, and artifacts highlighting the role of the DRB in transporting children from across Europe to the camps in Poland. The train’s memory work is not only self-referential. It is also a generational witness that uses deportation as an intervention and moral instruction for the present. The recruitment of deportation for this purpose is not unusual. The organizers commented that the exhibition “is a warning against the return of racist hatred, right-wing extremism and national megalomania.”<sup>2</sup> This was not the first memorial project devoted to the fatal use of railways.

In 1996, the Deutsche Bahn DB, an amalgamation of the Bundesbahn of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Reichsbahn of the German Democratic Republic, sponsored a design competition for a memorial to commemorate the deportation of Jews from the Berlin suburb of Grunewald. This effort at memorialization was an example of what Tony Judt described as the “Western solution to the problem of Europe’s troublesome memories.”<sup>3</sup> The deportation memorial, “Platform 17,” at the Grunewald S-Bahn station, an outer suburb of Berlin, is a stunning evocation of departures and imprints. Visitors can reach the platform by following the path of deportees who have been etched as silhouettes into concrete walls. The memorial is one example that acknowledges the complicity of the DRB in deportations, an involvement that its successor, the DB, is keen to isolate.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of memory work is “Serving Democracy and Dictatorship: The Reichsbahn 1919–1945” at the Deutsche Bahn Museum in Nuremberg, an exhibition generated from historical research into the complicity of the DRB in deportations, and in awareness of its “special responsibility to society.” This multimillion-dollar gift to the “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” foundation, a donation that is advertised on the DB website as just and moral, as the DB was not the “legal successor” of the DRB.<sup>5</sup>

In January 2008, an exhibition initiated by Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, titled “Chartered Trains to Death: Deportation with the German Reichsbahn,” opened at the Potsdamer Platz station in Berlin. The traveling exhibition was not initially supported, with the head of the DB, Hartmut Mehdorn, citing ethical conflicts of representation in the spatial normalization

of historical immobility: “The subject is far too serious for people to engage with it while chewing on a sandwich and rushing to catch a train.”<sup>6</sup> Susanne Kill, a historian with the DB, commented that “the industrial murder of millions of people would not have been possible without the Reichsbahn.”<sup>7</sup> It has been my objective to probe the tellability of the victims’ history of that critical transport link, which is now being memorialized in contested ways in Germany and around the world.

There are innumerable memorials and museums in Europe dedicated to the deportation of Jewish communities. Some of the memorials, for example, in the location of the former transit camp Drancy, embed the rail car into the landscape. Others, such as “Le Cyclops” in Milly-la-Forêt in the Gâtinais Français Regional Nature Park in Essonne, just south of Paris, saw sculptors Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle design a cocoon-like structure for a “goods wagon.”<sup>8</sup> Away from Europe, the deportation journey is present in many references to Holocaust trains in museum exhibitions, memorials, and memory sites. The display of boxcars and railway infrastructure at Yad Vashem in Israel, in several cities in the United States, and at the Cape Town Holocaust Centre in South Africa, connect the remembrance communities of postwar perpetrator, survivor, and diaspora nations.<sup>9</sup> They also build an alternative geography of post-Holocaust journeys, a route map that links persecution, transit, and refuge, and evocations of ethnic return.

The installation of network parts such as train tracks in museums outside of Europe also shifts the memory geographies of the Holocaust from the principally European sites of commission to immigrant and diaspora locations where refugees sought postwar resettlement and security, and took the transit narrative with them—to Israel, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. These locations, especially in the British Commonwealth, represented alternative destinations for survivors. The postwar passages of survivors to countries outside of Europe contest the finality of Holocaust deportation journeys. Transit after the war and refuge in new locations away from Europe provided the possibility of ethnic group reconstitution, and yet another chapter in the history of Jewish transit.

What do these contemporary cultural uses of the cattle car, and other parts of the European railway network, tell us about the meaning of Holocaust deportations today? The acquisition of freight cars and other artifacts of transit are obvious material examples of trying to reach the witness’s existential truth, yet once delivered and installed, they do not offer much meaning beyond cold and empty shells. Their freight has long been deported. The work of ethical witness rests with the viewer, spectator, or museum visitor. Their resonance as artifacts rests on a cultural knowledge of traumatic transit testimony, accumulating over decades from survivors, war crimes trial testimony, film, photography, visual culture, commemoration, literature, and poetry. The

quest to acquire and exhibit authentic references of deportation transit attests to the problems of evoking sensory memory, like David Boder attempted in his “Traumatic Inventory”: what are the ethics of listening to and presenting ethnically specific body traumas and memories as a moral universal?

This book has not lingered on the contemporary transit routes of memory trains of those I briefly described. Rather, it sought a return to their experiential origins in Europe. It has been concerned with the inner world of the trains as embodied and represented by the deportees-as-victims. Their world was suspended between life and death. This book has exhibited a historical consciousness in returning to the cattle cars as the first physical testimonial of transit, to the traumas generated in the space of that mobile abyss. Its method has been to provide an anthropological interpretation of witnessing in and after captivity in trains. The somatic dimensions of this witnessing have potential impacts to make in the writing of Jewish social histories that move beyond the written text as a source of everyday experience. This trend was noted by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her analysis of the “corporeal turn” in Jewish cultural studies and its challenge to the authenticity of traditional text-based sources in the writing of Jewish history.<sup>10</sup> The impact of the performative genre of video testimonies since the 1980s as life telling and visual history may yet contain further destabilizing impacts on the authority of the text for the future telling of Jewish everyday life histories, and also rich insight for an anthropological approach to the Holocaust victim-as-witness.

My use of testimony in telling deportation’s traumas has aspired to fill the gap between empirical histories of deportation and the victims’ experiences of it. Stories of deportation had to first make their journeys in testimonial form of the types I have used for this book, before they could be used as the content for stories and vignettes of the returning witness in postwar cultural practice such as art, film, visual culture, poetry, and commemorations. The testimony of deportation transit was not only written and spoken, but also visual and musical—in graphic arts, illustrations, painting, and song.

My main argument was that sensory destabilizations provoke a rethinking of witnessing, its frailties and truths. I suggested that the instability of the claims of vision inside the train carriages produced a recast perceptual truth that challenged sight as a normative and persistently available condition from which to tell Holocaust experiences. This destabilization of vision was not consistent throughout the transit experience. To the Nazi officials and bureaucrats who coordinated and implemented deportation, the freight car was a symbol of genocidal possibility and delivery. The concealment of deportation’s shocking truths was achieved, to some extent, in the use of language and travel artifices to construct journeys worth taking, but the ruse was repeatedly undermined through the conditions of transport, the

violent treatment of deportees by guards and police, the compression, and the escape attempts.

As explored in the chapters that focused on the victims' experiences during the different stages of transit, deportees were subjected to thorough and sustained attacks from which few of them recovered. These attacks, I argued, relocated the intense traumas of sensory assault, particularly of excrement, urine, and stench, from the camps and to the cattle cars. In their written and spoken form, I argued that the postwar writing and telling of these memories allowed some form of recovery and reconstitution of the self, yet the existential truths of train journeys remained private and at times beyond historical and social utility.

This argument was pursued in three themes that defined the tellability of the deportation experience: transit, captivity, and witness. I explored these themes as a sequence: how enclosure in freight car trains shaped captivity, and how the notion of witness was challenged by this bodily and spatial compression. I examined how the perpetrators' presentation of deportation as resettlement shaped victims' responses. In chapter 2, "Resettlement: Deportees as the Freight of the Final Solution," I explored the construction, implementation, and threats to the transit image that promised safety, security, and future mobility. For the victims, the administration of this forced relocation continued their social death through objectification and dehumanization. The stripping of the victims' personal property and cash in ghettos and transit camps was a preface to their forced captivity, and the plundering continued during transport, and after arrival in the camps.

This preparation stage of deportees for resettlement also relates to interpretations of railways for destructive purposes in the Holocaust, and the commitment to the project as reflective of Nazi bureaucratic efficiency. Historians' readings of bureaucratic efficiency in the administration of deportation have marginalized the ideological and human commitments of individuals to this project. To be sure, the term "cattle car" is not isolated to the Holocaust. Its undeniable link to the rationalization or efficacy of slaughter methods evokes a visual connection to the railway transport of animals in the mid-nineteenth century. Historian Daniel Pick contends that in the 1860s, technology, factory production, and calculated death were coming together in new ways: "Take the modern assembly-line slaughterhouse. Just as rails now transported soldiers to battle, they bore animals to their death. The coming of the railway in the first half of the nineteenth century had opened up new possibilities in the assembly process, enabling the reduction of delays and friction between each productive stage."<sup>11</sup> The use of trains for deportations in the Holocaust was the twentieth-century's railway shock, yet it also belongs to historical studies of railway administration and bureaucratic organization, as well as cultural and geographic studies of

war, transit, mobility, and displacement. To move the Holocaust deportation experience outside of World War II and into contexts of displacement under state-sponsored projects of ethnic cleansing and demographic resettlement impacts on interpretations of victims as self-constituted subjects through their dislocation in different cultural, geographic, and temporal contexts.

By far the bulk of my analysis has concentrated on the experience and tellability of train journeys; how victims interpreted their confinement and captivity, and the conditions that inhibited and produced witness truths in this space, as examined in chapters 3 through 6. In chapter 3, “Ghetto Departures: The Emplotment of Experience,” I argued that captivity was anticipated before it was experienced, though not to the degree of excruciating invasion reported from accounts of having survived it. The pre-history of captivity in testimonies placed the reader in ghetto space and its multiple crisis scenes of an experiential, ontological, and interpretive nature. The story of victims’ experiences of a diminishing life-world through deprived space in transit was also a telescope to applications of state and civil power marked on the body, of how constraints on mobility in ghettos were early conditioning forces for captivity in trains.

Testimonies of deportations to the East also produced a revealing commentary about town- and cityscapes—how ethnic space, community, and architecture were visualized and plotted in the streets, houses, hospitals, public squares, and synagogues. Testimonies of departure initiated not only a geographical exile in the Holocaust, but an additional exile from language as uttered in the constant repetition of words like “unspeakable” and “incomprehensible,” and persistent ethical and representational tensions of telling and not telling. Although language was not redundant as a tellable medium for these experiences, it was certainly not sufficient. Deportation testimonies engage a long-standing secular exile literature, and radicalize this exile into extended scenes of the self in crisis and ultimately, decline. Deportees represented themselves and others as figures of alienation and marginalization, displaced from where they once lived and worked.<sup>12</sup>

Testimonies of cattle car captivity marked the newness of the Holocaust, a departure from the previous scripts of Jewish persecution, and archetypes of displacement in Jewish history. David Roskies asserts that the writing of the Holocaust archetype before the conclusion of the war testified to a determined ethno-cultural self-representation under duress. Roskies recognizes the specificity of transports for death rather than the economic and inter-continental migration of Leah Garrett’s reading of transit as a theme in forging visions of Jewish modernity through literature: “from the early stage of awareness when it seemed as if everything was a replay of the Middle Ages—ghettos, yellow badges, Jewish councils and mass expulsions—to the final mapping of a landscape where everything was new—cattle cars

and transports, death camps and gas chambers. That the process was complete before the end of the war had ended testifies to the vitality of Jewish cultural responses to catastrophe.”<sup>13</sup> These testimonies contributed a dark and important chapter to Jewish transit history. Particularly significant in this telling were women as narrators of war and of bodies at the frontlines of war, as evidenced in the testimonies of decline, nurturing and survival during train journeys.

My objective in chapter 4, “Immobilization in ‘Cattle Cars,’” was to invite the reader into Zalmen Gradowski’s “rushing cages” and become a passenger to what he called the “monotonous travelling life” of the deportee. Monotony was just one response among many where brutalization, olfactory terror, and psychological ruin reigned. The reportage-like reconstruction of deportees’ experiences permitted its detailed analysis in chapter 5, “Sensory Witnessing and Railway Shock: Disorders of Vision and Experience,” in which I interpret two representational legacies from transit: the tellability of its traumatic moments as transactions between the body and language, and the emergence of sensory memory as a suggestive witness truth and knowledge of captivity.

Chapter 5 extended the analysis of transit’s tellability, particularly the olfactory degradation that intrudes on survivor memories and shaped it in different outputs. Indeed, it was the feeling of being trapped, powerless, and dying in the train that provided the most disturbing of experiential parallels. This parallel was not the epic voyaging of descent into Dante’s “Inferno,” but rather the Holocaust’s unknowable epicenter, the simulation of a gas chamber death. The analogy is a revelation about the muting of deportation transit experiences in contemporary understandings of what can be claimed as an authentic witness space as fixed in the concentric circles of Auschwitz and of transit experiences as an inassimilable corporeal truth in the geography of memory.

In chapter 6, “Camp Arrivals: The Failed Resettlement,” I reconnected with the deportees and their journeys to the camp. Arrival occurred before unloading; it included intense anticipation about the destination of resettlement, and once the ruse was exposed, the genocidal separation of families and sexes through the ruthless selection process of doctors and commandants who ultimately favored men and young boys, and discriminated against women, mothers, children, the elderly, and the physically incapacitated. In describing arrival scenes, deportees revealed that the marginal restoration of vision could not cope with the outcome of resettlement: the constant threat and infliction of terror and violence, killing and abjection of the camp world. The hope of resettlement was conclusively shattered.

What interventions do these conclusions make in relation to deportation as a transit story like few others? The interventions of cattle car transit and

the embodied form of witnessing that were internalized by deportees impact on interpretations of modernity, memory, and narrative representation. I argue for the historical and ethical importance of the victims' voices of transit captivity and their disclosures about uncomfortable and repressed sensory truths. I make several claims for victims' testimonies of deportation trains as an unsettling and unsettled knowledge. The first claim is to see deportees' testimonies of confinement, explored closely in chapters four, five, and six, as a difficult but necessary practice of recovery, a methodological salvaging of disturbing and taboo topics in the everyday experience of the Holocaust.

These uncomfortable sensory truths were powerfully raised but under-realized in Terrence Des Pres's *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. His focus on the camp world minimized the transport invasions of shit, urine, and vomit as a preparatory attack compared to its work of defilement of individuals in the camps. Indeed, experiences of olfactory trauma during deportation transit may suggest that it was in the trains rather than in the camps that excremental assault imposed its most intense defilement of the self. To the architects of deportation—Himmler, Goering, and Eichmann—train journeys were a bridge of critical facilitation in the progression to the Final Solution. From the victims' perspective, experiences of deportation transit undermine the perception that the camps were the most degrading, and authentic site of witnessing. The experience of transit captivity challenges the perception that conditions progressively worsened for victims the closer their proximity to the camps. Deportation transit ruptures the spatial and temporal boundaries of the Holocaust's symbolic geography of central and peripheral zones of impact. Victims' olfactory experiences of deportation trains, in particular, became an extended punishment and degradation of transport shame.

This method in reading captivity as chaotic and fetid is the deliberate antithesis to historians' description of deportation in freight cars. Many deportees felt they were treated, and were forced to behave, "like animals"—an indication of feeling victimized, beyond the human, and beyond care. Thus, the unsettling yet frequent employment of "cattle car" is a victims' phrase of empowerment and a semantic vindication of inhumane treatment. The cattle cars' scenes of drama, death, and repeated escape attempts provide a critical corrective to the image of Nazi order and the rhetoric of submission of all victims to that space. The analysis also subverts a prevalent image of Holocaust deportation transit as a perpetrator process of effective management, offering its difficult human administration in the "reception traumas" of Josef Jäcklein's Belzec report and Franz Stangl's Treblinka "reenactment" scene while traveling on a train in Brazil.

A second claim is to offer the disgust and defilement of transport shame as a valid and usable testimonial truth of the Holocaust's spatial history



and entrapment of bodies. My analysis attempts to reclaim an ordinary witness position for the forgotten victims, people whose emotions, voices, and words have been displaced in literary and critical analyses by the words of well-known survivors, whose widely disseminated stories of persecution and refuge have become meta-truths of the Holocaust experience.

An interpretation of deportation transit from “below,” from the ordinary witness, also offers important claims about testimonies as sources of alterity and exception in the writing of Holocaust history in general, and particularly in reconstructions of victims’ experiences of space, place, and immobilization—elements that are marked as suspect through their marginalization, if not repression. The experiences of captivity, of the repeated scenes of urine trauma, of excremental assaults, of internal journeys that negotiated shame, degradation, and moral transgressions, contributed to the undoing of deportees in space and the stripping of their humanity. Experience and representation are fused and temporally indistinct, so that the representation is the memory of the body in captivity, the residue, trace or imprint of what is a lost or repressed truth.

The Nazis’ intention to present deportation as resettlement also provides a radical and extreme redefinition of “railway shock.” If, as Schivelbusch argued, nineteenth-century train travelers felt themselves and their bodies removed from the sensual, felt, and tactile experience of the landscape, and through forced and socially uncomfortable discourse with other travelers, then transit in cattle cars reversed that disengagement. This was a sensory onslaught of unparalleled invasions. Primal, carnal, unimaginable, suffocating, disgusting, and putrid—these words resonate as the journey’s vocabulary of assault, yet they are still bereft in their anchoring to the sustained trauma of those mobile chambers. That moment, as we have seen, has been represented as a death akin to the real center of the “concentric circle”: the crushing of bodies in transit captivity as comparable to that of gas chambers. Does not this analogy complicate the authenticity of the truth claims carried from and within the space of Holocaust deportation trains?

Deportee testimonies reveal the attack on the body—particularly as recalled by female deportees—as a site of invasion, trespass, and violation. The trauma of train transit, as one of submission, is an interesting gendering of transit’s tellability. Indeed, one way of reading this space is to see it as the triumph of Nazi power as inherently masculine over feminized Jewish submission. Of course, this argument should not be overstated or repeat the tropes associated with gendered stereotypes of Jewishness in biological and cultural discourses. My argument, however, is about the application of power to the controlled intention of transit as an experience of decline, its implementation by men, and its interpretation, or lack thereof, as a valid historical experience. The largely concealed traumas of deportation train

space reveal a gendering of perpetrator-victim relations and their distillation in the conquest of freight car space: perpetrator power that generated the policy and implementation of deportation policy in the Third Reich and the Final Solution was overwhelmingly “male,” as was the surveillance of deportees in transit. The reactions of deportees of feeling powerless, trapped, and accommodating its deprivations, were overwhelmingly “female.” The associations that can be read from train space may account to some extent for its historiographical neglect in interpretations of gendered zones of experience in the Holocaust.

Deportation transit was an experience of forced submission, disorder, and capitulation, and its injuries were revealed in embodied terms as imprints, wounds, and scars on heads, chests, arms, hands, legs, and feet. Survivor testimonies of the Holocaust (and of this experience in particular) are considered by some scholars as emotional, irrational, subjective, and unreliable, suggesting that it is an experience that cannot be integrated by historians who prefer to think of sources of history in terms of empirical truth, order, objectivity, and evidentiary quality. The disorder and emotion of testimony should be embraced. Although train space was an agent of decline in both experiential and tellable terms, it also accommodated other reactions of social togetherness, such as care, community, and compassion. Striking, too, were many instances of deportees’ fierce will to resist the journey’s impacts and destination through escape and agitation. This resistance subverted the Nazis’ written record of Jews as voluntary, a record commonly associated with the “sheep to the slaughter” judgment that prevails as an explanation of the predominant response of Jewish victims under duress.

A third claim relates to how transit captivity produced in witnesses a sensory and embodied knowledge that rethinks the spatial locations of incarceration in the Holocaust. As seen in David Boder’s analysis of transit in his “Traumatic Inventory,” deportation trains were a discrete space of mobile deculturation. This process of deculturation was already well advanced before deportation, heightened during transit, and terminally concluded in the camps. Without the role of the trains in the commission of the Final Solution, the concentration camp system would most likely not have existed in the extremes of its wartime functions.

A fourth claim about deportation transit concerns its tellability in a contemporary ethics of reception through writing and reading, a commitment that I outlined earlier as a “testimonial alliance.” Dominick LaCapra alluded to this alliance, commenting on the necessity of developing an ethics of address in Holocaust writing: “the problem for a theoretically informed historiography is to elucidate precisely how ‘pieces of the [traumatic] real’ are embedded in historical experiences such as the atrocities of war and genocide. The related problem is how to recognize one’s own vulnerability

or constitutive anxiety, related to the structural dimension of trauma, without historicizing or localizing it in misleading ways and projecting its cause onto others as scapegoats.”<sup>14</sup>

In my interpretation of deportation testimony, I have attempted to confront the committed but fraught alliance between the survivor as a witness and testifier and the interpreter who seeks intellectual clarity and understanding. In terms of method, I created a “train journey,” a collected testimony based on primary and secondary sources that included perpetrator representations of deportation, historiography, and victims’ published and unpublished testimonies. The narrative order imposed in this book is shadowed by the disturbances of sense memory’s threat of spontaneous intrusions to ordinary behavior and life experiences. Memories of deportation trains often incite in former deportees explosive, embarrassing, and uncontrollable reactions in the resurrection of primal, excruciating captivity scenes through unprovoked sensory association and visual identification.

A lasting claim from exploring deportation train experiences is the notion of transit itself, and the vast amount of experiences and journeys that its inference of motion and liminal experience encapsulates. The conceptual possibilities of transit are endless, and suggest broadened approaches, namely, from cultural geography and anthropology, to writing victims’ histories of space, place, and suffering. Transit applies to states of mobility and immobility in ghettos, subterranean places and closed sites of hiding, in camps, and in the epic foot and train journeys of camp inmates during the evacuation phases of the camps in early 1945. These experiences of transit, like others in the Holocaust, remain underscrutinized in their geographical, corporeal and embodied dimensions. Rather than universalizing the corporeality of the Holocaust, I have tried to argue for its utility in reclaiming the personal experience of war and suffering in relentlessly impersonal environments.

Although I focused on recovering the testimony of deportation and using it to explore the bases of witnessing and perceptual truths, I ended the story of the deportees with their arrival at camps. I did not trace how this story moved in and beyond the camps during the war, what itinerary it took, and how it arrived in the postwar world. Thus, an uneasy feeling of detachment from the deportees and their memories lingers. The passage of imprints of dark memory from survivor to collective witness exhibited yet another chapter in the ongoing story of how the Holocaust has migrated from World War II and continues to make indelible imprints in contemporary memory cultures around the world. Although this book exhibited its own feature of temporal return to wartime transit by focusing exclusively on Jewish testimonies of captivity in trains, it limited the application of transit to deportation train journeys, and not to other, equally valid and compelling stories of mobility under the Nazi regime and in the postwar era of displacement. I have not

entered into the experiential depths of the camp world, nor continued in the footsteps of surviving deportees and their routes out of the camp and between labor camps, and into other scenes of captivity and deprivation, such as death trains used in evacuations, as immortalized in the Dachau death train, post-liberation DP camps, and into the world of future refuge, rehabilitation, and ostensible recovery.

How did the story of deportation make its way out to the world? This is the work of my future encounters with Holocaust transit, of how the stories of railway shock made their journey back to the world. This journey narrative—another form of journey talk—struggled to find a social space and listeners, not least because it profoundly unsettled perceptions of how wartime transit experiences of trauma and displacement could be spoken and written about. How were train stories told when words and voices failed? If, after the end of World War II, refugees struggled to find an idiom and audience for their experiences before their utterances received the moral authority of the word “survivor,” what happened to their stories? Albert Memmi has argued that after World War II, Jews were in a state of “persistent exclusion” from their stories, commenting, “as much as abjection itself was silencing, silence was also imposed on abjection.”<sup>15</sup>

With the words and voices of survivors as a guide, I have attempted to explore what is a tellable truth when cattle car memory remains embodied and intimate, a captivity that is known only to the witnesses who were there. Deportees journeyed with the living and the dead, were witnesses to and victims of suicide, became violated and violators in cramped conditions, and were bathed in the sensory reminder of their pestilential degradation and deprivations. It is for these reasons that deportation train journeys were, for many survivors, more painfully inscribed as an intrusive and inexplicable memory than other experiences of suffering. More than trains to death, they were trains of death, a stand in for the unknown gas chamber experience.

## Notes

1. “World Marks Auschwitz Liberation,” BBC News, 28 January 2005, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4210841.stm>.
2. “Memory Train to Auschwitz,” *Spiegel Online*, 9 November 2007, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,516430,00.html>.
3. Tony Judt, “From the House of the Dead: On Modern European Memory,” *The New York Review of Books* 52, no. 15, October 2005, available at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/18298>.
4. Recommended reading is “The Memorial at Grunewald Station, Platform 17,” available at [http://www.db.de/site/bahn/en/db\\_group/corporate\\_group/history/topics/platform17/](http://www.db.de/site/bahn/en/db_group/corporate_group/history/topics/platform17/)

- platform17.html. For an overview of the cultural and memorial use of freight cars in Germany, see Alfred Gottwaldt, "Der deutsche Güterwagen: Eine Ikone für den Judenmord?" *Museums Journal* 13, no. 1 (1999): 14–17. The "Platform 17" memorial was vandalized in July 2007. See "Vandals Attack Berlin 'Platform 17' Holocaust Memorial," *Haaretz*, 12 July 2007, available at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/880958.html>.
5. "Reichsbahn in the Third Reich," available at [http://www.db.de/site/bahn/en/db\\_group/commitment/reichsbahn\\_\\_thirreich/reichsbahn\\_\\_thirreich.html](http://www.db.de/site/bahn/en/db_group/commitment/reichsbahn__thirreich/reichsbahn__thirreich.html).
  6. See "Death Trains: Controversy over Exhibit on Railway's Role in Holocaust," *Spiegel Online*, 25 October 2006, available at [www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,444580,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,444580,00.html).
  7. See "Exhibition Highlights Role of German Railway in Holocaust," *Spiegel Online*, 23 January 2008, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,530543,00.html>.
  8. See <http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/getHomeAction.do?langage=en>, the Web site of the Shoah Memorial in Paris, France. The Drancy site is due to be upgraded in 2009. On "Le Cyclops," see the Public Art Web site at [http://www.art-public.com/cyclop/cyclop\\_g.htm#presente](http://www.art-public.com/cyclop/cyclop_g.htm#presente).
  9. The following select titles focus on memory cultures outside of Europe in their national and comparative contexts. See Omer Bartov, "Chambers of Horror: Holocaust Museums in Israel and the United States," *Israel Studies* 2, no. 2 (1997): 66–87; Tim Cole, "Nativization and Nationalization: A Comparative Landscape Study of Holocaust Museums in Israel, the US and the UK," *Journal of Israeli History* 23, no. 1 (2004): 130–45; Jackie Feldman, "Between Yad Vashem and Mt. Herzl: Changing Inscriptions of Sacrifice on Jerusalem's 'Mountain of Memory,'" *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2007): 1147–74; Gwynne Schrie, *In Sacred Memory: Recollections of the Holocaust by Survivors Living in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Cape Town Holocaust Memorial Council, 1995); Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2003); Judith Berman, *Holocaust Remembrance in Australian Jewish Communities, 1945–2000* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2001), and Stephen Levine, ed., *A Standard for the People: The 150th Anniversary of the Wellington Hebrew Congregation, 1843–1993* (Christchurch, NZ: Hazard Press, 1994). Writing that specifically addresses the use of railway artifacts in museums in the United States include Liliane Weissberg, "Memory Confined," in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 45–76; Andrea Liss, "Artifactual Testimonies and the Stagings of Holocaust Memory," in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 117–25; Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), and Oren Baruch Stier, "Different Trains: Holocaust Artifacts and the Ideologies of Remembrance," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 81–106.
  10. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Corporeal Turn," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 447–61.
  11. Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 178.
  12. Michael Seidel quoted in Judith M. Melton, *The Face of Exile: Autobiographical Journeys* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), xv.
  13. Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 515.
  14. Dominick LaCapra, "Tropisms of Intellectual History," *Rethinking History* 8, no. 4 (2004): 501.
  15. Albert Memmi, *Portrait d'un Juif* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 49.

## EPILOGUE

### *Retelling Train Stories*

On a trip to Europe in June and July 2007, the themes of transit and memory weighed heavily on me, as they had for many years. But the weight of that past was intellectual. I labored over it, daunted by the responsibility of the task, letting the experiences of the European victims defeat me and my limited abilities at telling their stories. I sorted through the testimony, the theory, what other people had said about deportation, and how people suffered because of it. Trains and trauma were known mainly through books and other people's words, and not from experiences of situating myself in the locations of witness, as if that intimacy would bring me closer to them. The pilgrimage from the Antipodes, the ostensible end of the world depending on how you look at it, to Europe, was long and punishing. History made me take this journey and forced me to think that I must visit the sites of genocide that began with the Holocaust, but did not end there. There were too many places to choose from, and, as if a child frustrated by impossible choices, I imposed an irrational selection process that did not reflect any coherent sequence. I embarked on my own return tourism. I took with me intrigue that was probably in excess of what might be considered normal for scholars of genocide. The names in my memory route have become my companions—Berlin, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Krakow, and Auschwitz.

In Berlin, I was overloaded with possibilities of perpetrators and victims, or at least traces of them. Wittenbergplatz U-Bahn: the memorial near the station's entry announces the origins and destinations of German Jews (see Figure E.1). I did not yet have my map of memory sites in Berlin, so it must have found me. In Charlottenburg, the stumbling stones in the footpath told me of the people who once called these streets their home before their deportation.<sup>1</sup>

Outside of Berlin, the Wannsee Villa, an administrative meeting point of the Final Solution, beckoned. To get there, I took the Potsdam line on the S-Bahn, which passed through Grunewald. I could have missed it. With my camera, I imagined myself as a chronicler of sorts, documenting today's witnesses on a very pleasant June afternoon. There were not that many; I

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Notes for this section are located on page 223.



Figure E.1 Memorial, Wittenbergplatz U-Bahn, Berlin. Photo by Simone Gigliotti.

might have noticed two people there at Platform 17. They were remote, carving out their place for memory work and reading dates on each side of the platform. These dates timetabled the destinations of the Berlin Jews, an inventory of deliveries. I went to leave, and the hollow people, in the concrete walls, seemed to disappear. I am sure they would have wanted to join me (see Figure E.2).

Memory also took me to Sarajevo, and then to Srebrenica, and perhaps it left me there. It was not a big leap from Berlin to Sarajevo in today's transit terms, but fifty years separate their traumas. The theme of transit was imposed upon us as we traveled from our conference location in Sarajevo to Srebrenica for a journey of around one hundred and thirty kilometers (about eighty miles). It took four hours to transport seven buses of genocide scholars under police escort to Srebrenica, to the Potočari memorial, and to Budak, the site of a mass grave that was unearthed in late June 2007. The mass grave was advertised as voluntary viewing in our conference program. It immediately became unmissable.

We were allowed the right of witness, or so it was told to us. When I looked at this grave, and when I think about it now, the scene is still blurred. An ambulance was parked next to the grave. Was it on standby for the



**Figure E.2** Memorial to deported Jews, Grunewald train station, Berlin.  
Photo by Simone Gigliotti.

genocide scholars? They could suffer. There were around two hundred of us, and we could not wait to see. To see the bones of skeletons that were under forensic examination and that rested in the pit on the mountain that was our first appointment with genocide memory on that day (see Figure E.3). I thought about the mass grave, and then the invasion of us as foreign genocide witnesses to local memory, to the name calling of the dead, to the burials. Transit and movement were important in Srebrenica and in Bosnia, and to the Serbs' forced relocations and ethnic cleansing. But transit on this day seemed threatened by local expectations of us to stay, witness, and tell the world with our cameras and words about the Bosnian national trauma. We had seen it, and now we were immobilized by the politics of memory.

Krakow and Auschwitz: The train journey between them was not so long. The name Krakow suggests a foreign past, not known to me except through testimonies and nostalgia. From the photos, I remember seeing horses and carriages, street sellers, and children in need of shoes. Perhaps they were from the ghetto. I was excited to be in Krakow, and closer still to Auschwitz, yet the logistics of getting there reminded me of the frustrating delays in waiting for trains that never arrived, delays that would not have been tolerated during deportations. I could wait another hour or two for my Auschwitz memory. The Galicia Jewish Museum sold maps of the Krakow Ghetto and Kazimierz. I would begin my own transit from the Podgorze square and the deportation memorial. I noticed some repairmen replacing





Figure E.3 Mass Grave, Srebrenica. Photo by Simone Gigliotti.

the lights that illuminated the chairs in the memorial square in the evening (see Figure E.4). From there, I went in search of physical traces of the ghetto: the post office, the orphanage, the resistance headquarters, and the hospital, among other locations of former Jewish life. When I remember Krakow, I think of the emptiness of the word “former” to describe absence. It prefaces countless descriptions of Jewish history. When I think about Krakow, as origin, I think of “former” and then of “future,” to Auschwitz, a particularly Jewish destination. When I don’t see “former” to describe the Jews, I seek evidence to the contrary.

Auschwitz was familiar in virtual and visual productions, and testimonies helped me imagine it, but I could not know it. En route from Krakow on the retro-looking train I thought about interiors and exteriors, grass and graffiti, industry and villages. I thought about the deportees, too. Arriving at Auschwitz I with my travel partners, we enact our own selections. I want to separate, and not be part of a group witness experience. But how could I not? I was competing with other foot traffic in the thousands of the white shoe and t-shirt brigade for viewing space. Competition for the best viewing



Figure E.4 Podgorze ghetto memorial, Krakow. Photo by Simone Gigliotti.

position of the chimney, the hanging area, and the experimentation rooms. I went around the grounds of Auschwitz I and into the memorial rooms with stories of individuals and communities destroyed. I am delayed, for I see Charlotte Delbo. She is a shadow on the wall. I am thinking of her poem “Arrivals, Departures.”<sup>2</sup>

But there is a station where those who arrive are those who are  
leaving

A station where those who arrive have never arrived, where those  
who have left never came back.

It is the largest station in the world.

And I am almost there. A witness to traces. But this is Auschwitz I and now I am waiting for a shuttle bus to transport me and my travel partners to Auschwitz II-Birkenau, once resident to the largest station in the world. I wanted to walk the route of the deportees, but they objected. “It is too hot, no?” “It is too far, no?” It was not more than three kilometers. We are transported in compressed conditions in the name of memory. I cannot wait to get out. We arrive and we separate. I am not unhappy with that outcome. The trip has been creating stress. Perhaps Birkenau would give me some relief. When I was back in Berlin I wrote to my friend, Roger, a scholar of German film in Australia, about Auschwitz. His reply was to e-mail Peter Weiss’s *Meine Ortschaft* (My Place), written in 1964.<sup>3</sup> Weiss

wrote: “But after a while silence and numbness set in here, too. A living person came, and what happened is closed off from this living person. The living person who comes here, from another world, possesses nothing but his knowledge of figures, of reports written down, of testimonies, they are a part of his life, he grapples with them, but can only comprehend what happens to him himself.”

I write this in Wellington, New Zealand, and I am thinking about what I was doing on that day in Auschwitz. I was closed off from history. I thought I could rise above it and think about Auschwitz through memory. Auschwitz is outside of history, and only for memory. History is fixed and memory is disordered. On the platform, I remembered what deportees told me and others in their testimonies of arrival. Was this where they stood? Was that the barrack they saw and to which they were taken? The platform was long, endless, an almost spectacular and important welcome for the deportees in the largest station of the world. Film crews, backpackers, and families on day trips: Auschwitz has broad appeal (see Figure E.5). At the end of the day, I reconnected with my travel partners. I was exhausted. Exhausted from thinking about what happened to the deportees after they arrived in this place and went to *that* place, and from carrying their memories inside of me. It was a long-delayed arrival.

I think about my European journey to genocide and its sites of commission as one small gesture of recovery. But what does rewitnessing actually achieve? I was a statistic in the economy of pilgrimages that includes Zionist group witness such as the March of the Living where youth and adults



Figure E.5 Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Photo by Simone Gigliotti.

from around the world make their own Holocaust journeys to Auschwitz, and then to Israel, and scholarly excursions, including that undertaken by the historian Martin Gilbert. Chronicled in *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past*, the diary is an account of Gilbert's two-week trip to sites of Holocaust deportations in Europe, including Berlin, Prague, Krakow, Zamosc, Lublin, Treblinka, and Chelmno. The book's explicit witness tourism was dramatized as an "unforgettable voyage of discovery,"<sup>4</sup> a voyage that promises discovery as a disturbing passage that reroutes the historical displacement of Holocaust arrivals.

Discovery, displacement, and exile shape transit stories and travelogues. These stories include others both near and distant to my location of writing. They are stories that evoke deportation as a departure that originated in Europe but has now moved far beyond it. They include the stories of Ruth Wajnryb, an Australian-born daughter of Holocaust survivors, who spoke of imagined pasts while standing in the freight car that rests in the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: "How can I not think of my father in such a place? Like other fragments of stories that we heard, it elicits memories of events never personally experienced but many times imagined."<sup>5</sup>

Claire Kahane's memoir of her trip to Poland, "Geographies of Loss," advertised itself as a "document of my effort to mourn."<sup>6</sup> A first-generation American, she negotiates a disturbing inheritance, as her parents had "come from this part of Europe and had been part of its history and culture; each of us had lost some part of our own history with the disappearance of European Jewry in the Holocaust."<sup>7</sup> The theme of disappearance is evoked in her entry of "May 9, 1994: The Train." In it, she recalls her journey from Warsaw to Krakow. She is not in the train, but it is with her, a companion in the fusion, and confusion, of scenes of witness:

The sound of the train from Warsaw to Krakow, the sound of the train moving through Poland, is a sound familiar to me from old nightmares. I look out the graying window at a dreary, wet landscape, and I'm in a story I know, have heard, have grown up with in films and fantasy, a story in which I assume the role as victim. I am being transported.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Ruth Wajnryb and Claire Kahane, my own transit stories are not freighted with memories of generational or family connection. I write in their absence, from the words and voices of people I do not know, people who are known to me in misery, pain, and recovery, in ways they never should have been. I see them in photographs, gathering belongings, and saying farewell as they are about to leave. Occasionally, they stare back. What happened inside the trains? To this they are the only witnesses.

## Notes

1. The “stumbling stones” are a reference to the *Stolpersteine Project* by German artist Gunter Demnig. Tiles are placed in the footpaths of streets across Germany. See <http://www.stolpersteine.com>.
2. I have tried to preserve the format of the extract as it appears in “None of Us Will Return” from Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 3–10.
3. Peter Weiss (1916–1982) was a German dramatist and novelist. The son of a Jewish father, his family left Germany in 1934 to escape Nazi persecution and eventually settled in Sweden. Auschwitz and the Nazi era preoccupied Weiss’s writings and plays, and *Meine Ortschaft* reflects on a destination he did not know. I thank Roger Hillman for his translation of it. Among many writings on Weiss, see Jürgen E. Schlunk, “Auschwitz and Its Function in Peter Weiss’ Search for Identity,” *German Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (1987): 11n30.
4. Martin Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997).
5. Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 2–3.
6. Claire Kahane, “Geographies of Loss,” in *Shaping Losses*, 30.
7. *Ibid.*, 31.
8. *Ibid.*, 36.