

An Overabundance of Signifiers:

Centres, Authors and Origins in Hans-Joachim Hespos' *Weißschatten*

Vocal tone colours, consonants swung backwards and forwards, over-tones, no vibrato, unfiltered, still not moving, open, barely audible attack and release

These are the instructions for the opening note of the soprano part in Hans-Joachim Hespos' *Weißschatten*, composed for me in 2017, an extended *Lied* for soprano and piano.¹ This level of detailed instruction, conveyed both through text on the score, in the preceding glossary, and in musical/visual notation, continues throughout the entire eleven minutes of the work for both players, and is typical of Hespos' style of notation throughout his career. The score is in the form of four A2 landscape pages, with each system being subdivided into irregular periods of time, notated in seconds below the staff. The piano part is notated over four staves throughout the entire duration, and detailed instructions for the use of all three pedals are also included. All of Hespos' scores arrive with a densely set out, three-page glossary² of general pictorial, directorial and phonetic explanations and instructions, appropriate to each category of interpreter, on top of which the score itself has several more layers of text instructions for the performer. So Hespos gives the performer detailed information on either *types* of sound, for example singing or laughing,³ where the composer leaves the means of producing the sound up to the performer (figure 1), and specific *ways of producing* sound⁴, where the composer prescribes the actual method of making the sound e.g. specific mouth shapes—which produce overtones for the singer—rather than notated overtone pitches, or for the pianist, the use of fingernails to create a black note guero motif on the piano (figures 2a and 2b).

¹ I had previous experience of performing Hespos' *Bing* (2010) for solo soprano. Hespos has also composed *Shut Ups!* (2019) and *YAPA* (2020) for me.

² I was curious to learn if Hespos had supplied this glossary with all scores from the outset, and he confirmed that this was indeed the case (email communication, 1 June 2019). All of Hespos' scores (including his earliest works) come with the glossary, demonstrating an unusually consistent compositional programme, somewhat similar to Derrida's philosophical undertakings. Singers also receive additional phonetic information, as do instrumentalists who are required to utilise phonetic material, in whatever form.

³ From 'laughing' further questions could arise: how should the laughter be accomplished? Should the performer take the laugh from 'life,' almost entirely erasing the pitch content of the motif, or maybe instead, cackle on a pitched f sharp? Should they base the laughter on an earlier performative-musical model, for example *Mein Herr Marquis* (The Laughing Song) from Johan Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus* (1874), or the Sherman Brothers' *I Love to Laugh* (*Mary Poppins*, 1964) or Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969)?

⁴ See also Mieko Kanno's use of the terms 'prescriptive' and 'descriptive' for similar concerns regarding the notation in John Cage's *Freeman Etudes*. (Kanno, 2009, 52–54)

Sop.
unplötzlich

f →

3

6

Lachen

Figure 1. Hans-Joachim Hespos, *Weißschatten*, p.no.2

unruhig

Sop.

u → e a ei

3

p → reine mundstellungen
 rasch

Figure 2a. Hans-Joachim Hespos, *Weißschatten*, p.no.1

Figure 2b. Hans-Joachim Hespos, *Weißschatten*, p.no.1

Hespos' scores are striking visually, their notation consisting of a mixture of adapted note-heads and pictorial indicators, standard musical notation, customised indicators of time (traditional rhythmic indicators are guidelines only and there are no rests), phonetic information, varied (handwritten) fonts, extended use of staves, and variations in size and boldness of character (all of which can be seen in *Weißschatten*). The notation encompasses practically every standard musical parameter (although some are ambiguous, for example the note lengths) as well as (in many cases) the method of producing the sound. In, for instance, *Zerango* for bayan, violin and 'cello (1985), string players are asked to 'press down bow with force so that a grating noise is produced. If this sign is combined with any others, it denotes covering of possible reverberating open strings.' In *Duma* for alto flute (1980) there are directions for 'half harmonics; key not completely closed, the result is a buzzing sound, or a kind of overblown *frullato* sound.' Five different types of *glissando* are described in the glossary; and, for singers, the dynamics and pitch of non-sung (spoken, muttered, whispered, screamed, stuttered, etc.) material (figure 3), are notated through variations of 'fat and thin, large and small letters . . . their position above and below [the] central line indicates pitch,'⁵ somewhat similar to

⁵ Examples can be found in *Canzone* (2002), and *Bing* (2010), for solo soprano, and *Weißschatten* (2017), *Shut Ups!* (2018) and *Yapa* (2020) for soprano and piano.

Haubenstock-Ramati's notation in *Credentials* (1961). Hesperos includes eight different types of vocal delivery in the general glossary, and the score includes more variations still.

Sop. hoch erregt und krank durch stobert
 quietsch-lach-kixx

geklicker
 5
 →p→

und
 durchsetztes
 springpalaver

knobtski
 pulkretsfatu
 kEnifmatsikae

gejuchz, gejacher, aufkreisch
 P/f

Figure 3. 'Stuttering,' Hans-Joachim Hesperos, *Weißschatten*,

p.no.2

And what of this information, this soundscape overload, this 'surplus of signification'?⁶ To what purpose? What is Hesperos hoping for, if anything? While I and my accompanist were rehearsing with Hesperos over a three day period in January 2018, we discussed some of these issues, although in a roundabout way, sometimes via avant-garde theatre, or maps, or the forms of hippeastrums, or trees, or cookery, or other music, or book collecting. ... In other words, 'answers' were deferred. In fact, often the discussion simply produced more questions, and Hesperos would rummage through one of his bookcases and retrieve a treasured tome either as a result of or, more likely, in order to engender further discussion. One of the overriding concerns to emerge, however, was the importance of surprise for him. In many instances he did not want to know what was going to happen next; he did not want to know what the next sound event would be, only its possibilities.⁷ The 'jester,' the arch creator of surprise, the 'wild card' (a Derridean parallel if ever there was one) seems to be a strong presence in Hesperos' music,⁸ and the use of information saturation, or overabundance, is one of the ways of achieving this. The performers are so busy trying to execute, for example, eight simultaneous instructions, that the task becomes impossible to achieve; the end result is a surprise for both performers and composer and it will be different every time. The surprises emerge from this unpredictable assembly of requests. There are both too many choices, and no way of precisely controlling how the assembled sounds and actions will emerge during performance.⁹ This effect is amplified considerably in performing of the various types of improvised elements found in the work.

⁶ Derrida, 2001, 366.

⁷ There were, however, places where Hesperos knew *exactly* what he wanted. Hesperos does not encourage a totally rule-less, free-for-all approach to interpretation.

⁸ This extends also to Hesperos' avoidance of conductors. Although perfectly normal practice in standard chamber works, it is most unusual for orchestral scores of great complexity to dispense with the services of the conductor entirely, instead, having all the players work from full scores. Is this a kind of utopia or a rejection of the author, the director, the centre, or all three? See also the discussion of authorship in Cage's *Four*⁶ in *Inter Muros*.

⁹ Rather like trying to stuff too many tennis balls into a bag; some of them will 'escape'.

Also, consider the title (and I think it is significant) *Weißschatten* (Whiteshadows), and what it could imply. A plane of colour, with blurred figures (shadows) of virtually the same colour, like Jasper Johns' *Canvas* (1956),¹⁰ an overwriting of tone on tone and destabilising of the concept of the canvas itself; or like Simon Hantai's *Peinture* (1958) and *Peinture (Écriture rose)* (1958-1959),¹¹ a swirling, writhing mass of detail that is barely discernible to the eye, and yet lines and forms *will* emerge, the performer/viewer/listener *will* focus on particular points in this mobile hierarchy, this chain of reference, whilst simultaneously experiencing (or striving to deliver) a particular version of the 'whole.' Consider the title: not 'white shadows', but 'whiteshadows.' They are different and the same, they imply substitutes, possibilities in sound like echoes, a strand of permutations, such as Schatten . . . Schattenbilder . . . shattered . . . interred . . . intersection; they form an opposition challenged, they are undecidable, they are in a constant state of movement, emerging and retreating in turn. For Hespos, the title implied the possibilities inherent in surprise, the unexpected, how 'events' can emerge from the shadows and then retreat back into them. Consider the score, the love of the visual;¹² *Weißschatten* is present in two (or more) domains simultaneously (music, art, literature...), as it is saturated by artistic concerns.¹³ Consider the love of *écriture*, the pleasure of writing, the layering of multiple systems of notation and information, the play of 'play' as explicated by Derrida in *Writing and Difference* and, most particularly for this discussion, in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.'¹⁴

So to deconstruct *Weißschatten* I intend to explore the ways in which Hespos combines different information systems and how these *play* out in the performance; how he uses language (in glossaries and instructions) and musical notation (another model of a linguistic practice, here utilising both 'conventional' notation and 'graphic' notation) to create shifting layers of reference and infinite, or 'overabundant,' chains of signifiers, to allow the space for collaboration, to allow the performer the agency to create, thereby keeping the performer-composer-audience (as readers and aural performers) interface (or hierarchy) in constant movement; a movement that is mirrored in Derrida's own literary style. And always present (and not present, for *play* is the disruption of presence) is the Derridean concept of *play*, drifting like smoke and ash through the entire work's shifting *maelstrom*— or should that perhaps be '*tonstrom*'?—of referential possibilities.

But perhaps I move too fast, for by using the word *strom* am I not guilty of referring to origins at the outset, to a centre, a source, the very thing that the Derridean concept of *play* seeks to question? Maybe something can be salvaged from the wreckage, though. The spiralling outer funnel of a whirlpool or tornado is full of 'things' (objects, sounds, words) picked up *en route*, whirling in a kinetic dance, at times fusing or being grafted onto one another, at times being deconstructed or transfigured; but, like a Calder mobile, they are always *connected* by space. And yet at the centre of

¹⁰ *Canvas* is particularly interesting in relation to Hespos, since Johns plays with the binary opposition of recto/verso, overturning and absorbing the back of the frame and superimposing it onto the front of the picture, all the while covering the 'surface' with a swirling mass of differentiated greys, so the paints, the signifiers (in artistic terms) mediate between the flat plane of the canvas and the three dimensional angle created by the superimposition of the smaller recto frame. 'Once the canvas can be taken to have any kind of spatial meaning, then an object can be taken to have that meaning within the canvas' (Rondeau, 2012, 34-35).

¹¹ <https://simonhantai.org/en/oeuvres/detailsperiode/6/ecriture-rose-1959#oeuv-2>

¹² Hespos frequently referred to his love of Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (1925) and its importance in his work during the rehearsal period in January 2018 prior to the world premiere in April 2018.

¹³ There are many similar examples: the Stable Gallery, New York showcased pages from 'scores' by John Cage during 1958s twenty-five-year retrospective of his work (Nicholls, 2011, 19), and Stockhausen's 'scores' and visual sketching material have featured in a significant number of exhibitions (Oelschlägel, 2018, 126–27).

¹⁴ Derrida, 2001, 351–370.

the funnel is an absence, a lack; but is it perhaps a positive 'lack'? Is it in any way analogous to Derrida's centreless structure, to the 'bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play'?¹⁵

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I shall examine the *play* at work in *Weißschatten* through a detailed consideration of Derrida's text 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', and offer some thoughts on possible correspondences with music. 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' is one of the essays in *Writing and Difference* (original publication date 1967), one of the earliest works by Derrida to systematically, albeit elliptically, 'discuss' or set out deconstruction and its processes as applied to language, literature, and the gamut of Western philosophical concepts, especially metaphysics.¹⁶ Derrida's discursive method, or perhaps that should be style, is to begin with a quotation which opens a field of enquiry that Derrida then proceeds to systematically undermine, exposing its weakness, problematics, its areas of *aporia* or perplexity; and the structure, the format of each essay will, in some way, echo the topic under discussion.¹⁷

'Structure, Sign and Play' questions notions of interpretation; of sign systems; of ruptures and redoublings; of the role of *presence*, of centres and origins in structure and how this relates to *difference* and *play*. The principal texts with which Derrida concerns himself are by the structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009),¹⁸ which motivates the inclusion of 'human sciences' in the title. But Derrida deconstructs the human sciences, for example ethnology, in order to illuminate broader philosophical concepts throughout 'Structure, Sign and Play'; in other words, he transfers his system of critique across domains, and will eventually include art, literature, theatre, politics, and architecture (among others) into this critique in later works, as all are subject to the same overriding metaphysical concerns. On this basis, the critique is equally applicable to music—indeed, in many ways, more so, for music operates in sound, script, time, space, negotiated interpretation, improvisation and reception simultaneously; in multiple systems of *language* and *writing*.

Derrida begins by considering the role of the 'centre,' which will then lead into a more detailed discourse on sign systems. Of the centre: 'it is the point at which the substitution of terms is no longer possible.'¹⁹ So the centre is unique, it is an origin, a point of presence; it governs and organises structure, but 'escapes structurality'²⁰ Derrida then proceeds to the centre's role within structure in classical philosophical thought, i.e. the ontotheological mode, before what he calls the *rupture* or the *event* that will allow for a new mode of questioning.

And what is this rupture? According to Derrida it is repetition, repetition of the 'structurality of structure,' 'repetition in every sense of the word.'²¹ If this is so, logically there cannot be a centre,

¹⁵ Derrida, 1982, 22.

¹⁶ The other two publications from 1967 dealing with structuralism and phenomenology are *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*.

¹⁷ Eight of the eleven essays in *Writing and Difference* employ this method.

¹⁸ Derrida deconstructs passages from the *Introduction to the Works of Marcel Mauss* (1950), *The Savage Mind* (trans. 1966), *The Raw and the Cooked* (trans. 1969), and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (trans. 1969).

¹⁹ Derrida, 2001, 352.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Derrida, 2001, 353.

and therefore the centre cannot be thought of as a present being. The centre is a *function*, not a place; *everything* is discourse. The centre is ‘a sort of *nonlocus* in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play,’²² and further, discourse is ‘a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.’²³ Similar preoccupations can be seen in art during the 1960s; Jasper Johns remarked in 1965 regarding the undecidable space between paint, canvas, front, back and display surface: ‘The canvas is object, the paint is object, and object is object.’²⁴ We might even apply this idea to Hespos’ treatment of the piano: the lid (key cover) is used as another source of signifiers; it is slammed up and down by the pianist. Is this an instance where the piano’s ‘body’ is canvas *and* paint? And, of course, lid slamming turns the traditional way of silencing the piano into a sound event in its own right; the strings are no longer the only source of piano sound.²⁵

After considering attempts by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud to shake metaphysics (all ultimately futile, in Derrida’s opinion, as they are trapped in an endless circle of criticism that is dependent on utilising the concepts of the system that they attempt to destroy), Derrida examines another metaphysical concept, that of the difference between the sign and the signified. If the transcendental signified does not exist and play is limitless—and he has already shown that ‘the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely’²⁶—then *sign* as a concept becomes meaningless. However, Derrida explains, we cannot reject *sign* as a concept or word²⁷ for *sign* can only operate ‘as sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified.’²⁸ Once the distinction between signifier and signified is removed, then we must lose the signifier also, thereby making this type of critique of metaphysics impossible. As Derrida says: ‘If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word “signifier” itself which must be abandoned as a metaphysical concept.’²⁹

But perhaps ethnology could suggest the beginnings of a critique able to challenge metaphysics more effectively? Maybe Lévi-Strauss could offer a clue to a way forward? But why might ethnology (rather than any other ‘ology’) be a useful stepping stone in challenging metaphysics? For Derrida it represents a rejection of Western society as a *centre*: the West no longer sees itself as ‘the culture of reference.’³⁰ In other words, ethnology rejects ethnocentrism, just as Derrida is trying to reject, or overturn, metaphysics, the philosophy of binary oppositions and origins. However, ethnology is still a ‘discourse’ and operates in full awareness of ethnocentrism even as it rejects its tenets: ‘the

²² Ibid.

²³ Derrida, 2001, 354.

²⁴ Rondeau, 2012, 34.

²⁵ During the public *probe* in Germany (2018), the piano we were provided with had two issues (although a beautiful instrument in other respects): its key cover was unattached to the body, so every time the lid had to be raised and slammed at speed, it moved position so much that there was a very real risk of it coming off altogether; and the wheels were both unlocked and very free, so during the morning rehearsal the piano would periodically glide off across the floor, as though of its own volition. Perhaps the singer could be considered as ‘canvas’ in some respect too; but, would apply to the internal, physical mechanism of singing (Derrida’s ‘mark’ discussed at length in *Archive Fever* 1998) or might it apply to the body as a whole as sound generating mechanism (apart from actual singing/vocal production)? *Nai* incorporates a stamped dance, clapping and vocal wa-was, all of which have some percussive, body ‘canvas’ element to them.

²⁶ Derrida, 2001, 354.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Derrida, 2001, 355.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Derrida, 2001, 356.

ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he denounces them.³¹ So 'it is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem of *economy* and *strategy*.'³²

Let's examine the ramifications of the phrase 'which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself,' for it seems pertinent to some questions that arise for the performers on encountering works such as *Weißschatten*. *Weißschatten* requires the soprano and pianist to use a lot of sounds and techniques that are not usually found within the confines of a narrow definition of classical singing or piano technique, such as grunts, screams, spits, pops, improvisation etc; and indeed, from time to time, performers—who specialise in 'extended techniques'—might assert that such a performance style rejects one aspect or another of what is usually called 'Western classical technique' (or training). However, both from the standpoint of 'borrowing from a heritage' (of which the performer is a part), and through *play*'s infinite chain of signifiers, it would seem that a performer can only reject classical technique in a manner of speaking, for the performer also utilises that which they might claim to reject. The performer cannot 'unhear' the sound itself, or 'unlearn' the pedagogical means of production, the technique, associated with classical style.³³ The aural process and the pedagogical process belong to the chain of (sonic) signifiers that eventually must link all known sounds together. So in this respect, *Weißschatten* is undecidable; it resides in multiple spaces simultaneously; the work itself asks its performers to interpret 'undecidables'; and, although Hespos describes it as a 'modern *Lied*,' it not only is situated in the category of Western art-song but also, in fact, forms part of the much wider totality of the trace. Truly an overabundance of signifiers.

Following this line of argument, I might claim that the low growls and grunts are completely outside of 'classical' singing, which I therefore reject—but actually, I could be taking the method from Tuvan throat singing, another 'classical' style, with a lengthy heritage of repertoire and pedagogy. I also combine the growl (a sound that is undecidable in its historical and cultural situatedness, being both classical and non-classical depending on an individual's viewpoint³⁴) with numerous examples of *bel canto* technique, and I combine both of these in a Western classical work that has a substantially improvised text (questioning the idea of an author) and, moves from the fully (and conventionally) notated to passages of almost total improvisation (questioning the idea of an author again), touching on all points in between. So *Weißschatten* is saturated with the *play* of the trace, the disruption of presence; and its situatedness is undecidable on many levels.³⁵

³¹ Ibid.

³² Derrida, 2001, 356–7.

³³ We can take this further if we consider the *physical* impact any musical technique leaves on the body after a period of time. Muscles are trained in certain ways, and develop their own 'memory' of musical functions. Muscles, tendons, etc., can also be abused, leaving a *permanent* mark on the body. Even if after surgery the damage is repaired, the mark of the change and its overturning will still be there—considerations that Derrida discusses in some detail in *Archive Fever* (1998).

³⁴ Or it could be mimesis (or not) of a 'natural' sound: I could just be imitating my cat, imitating clearing my throat, actually clearing my throat, etc., but all within the performance of the culturally loaded 'modern *Lied*.' See also note 3.

³⁵ This raises some interesting questions regarding both technique and authenticity. If we allow the play of the trace to carry us with it, it not only refers to the past but also projects forwards into the future (see Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, 1993, for a very detailed discussion of the forward projection of ontology). Performance technique thus becomes both relevant and able to move freely backwards and forwards throughout the historical flow of repertoire, further problematising the idea of an 'authentic,' and therefore 'fixed,' historical performance.

Let's return to Derrida and Lévi-Strauss. Derrida suggests that in Lévi-Strauss, a similar undecidability arises in proposing an opposition between nature and culture—an opposition that Lévi-Strauss both uses and simultaneously rejects through a discussion of the 'incest prohibition.'³⁶ If nature is universal, and if culture depends on a system of regulatory norms, then the two would appear to be in permanent opposition. However, the incest prohibition seems to combine the two simultaneously: incest pertains to nature, but a prohibition pertains to cultural norms, so incest 'no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition.'³⁷ Hence incest is another of Derrida's 'undecidables': terms which operate in more than one state simultaneously and require categories which reject binary oppositions and poison systems of 'order,' thus ultimately rejecting centres and metaphysics. So, as far as systems which utilise traditional concepts of differences and oppositions are concerned, the incest prohibition 'is something which escapes and certainly precedes them—probably as the condition of their possibility.'³⁸

Is there a musical parallel? Sound is universal, it is of nature; music, even more so in the notated (written) form of a 'language,' is cultural, a system; but the two combine in indeterminate or *undecidable* works. Let's examine an example taken from *Weißschatten*. The first page contains an event in which the soprano is directed to *spitz kreisch heftig*, literally 'sharp screech/scream piercing (heavy)' (figure 4). The scream is universal, biological, it is of nature, but here it is grafted onto a category that is part of culture; its place thus becomes undecidable. The scream in *Weißschatten* rejects the nature/culture opposition.

³⁶ Found in the *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 1969. Derrida, 2001, 357.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Derrida, 2001, 358.

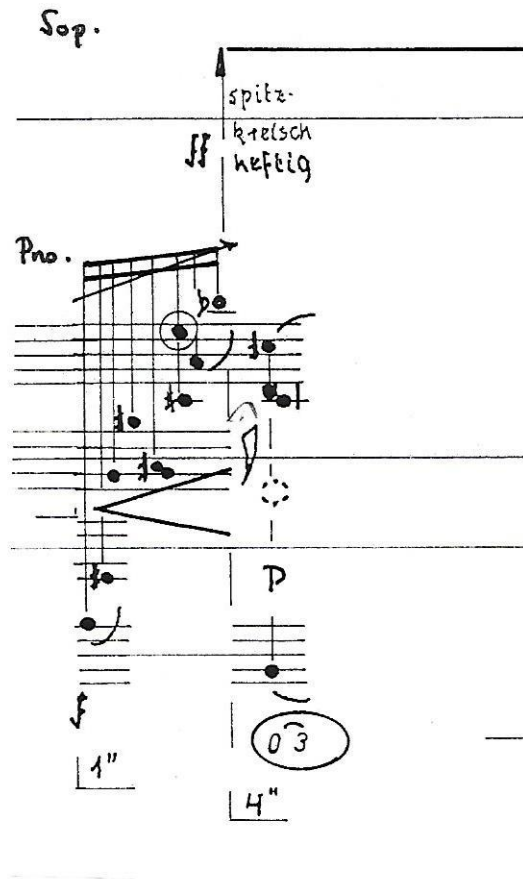


Figure 4. Hans-Joachim Hespos, *Weißschatten*, p.no.1

Derrida suggests that 'language bears within itself the necessity for its own critique'³⁹ and that undecidability is an important part of this. Through its use of language, the critique may either question the history of oppositions like nature/culture, or, as with Lévi-Strauss, it may attempt to separate method from truth by using concepts as tools without assigning any truth to them. The attempt to undermine the system using concepts which already belong within that same (empirical) system (like our *bel canto* conundrum) leads to a proliferation of displaced, undecidable things (sounds and techniques, in the present instance), scattered through categories that they simultaneously justify and call into question. This proliferation leads Derrida to another key concept: *bricolage*. Derrida writes, 'there is therefore a critique of language in the form of bricolage.'⁴⁰ That is, bricolage is another attempt to overcome the nature/culture opposition, another attempt to overcome the centre.

Bricolage is perhaps a term most usually associated with the visual arts, where it refers to the combination or assemblage of items taken out of their normative contexts and repurposed for artistic ends. *Bricolage* may also be applied in other contexts; it likes to borrow things, like concepts, and to adapt them for its own purposes. It applies concepts that might be useful to undermine a discourse even if those very concepts are part of that discourse. Bricolage encourages the general rather than the specific: within a given culture or heritage objects, practices, sounds and so on can be combined and freely adapted to other uses, to new uses, even if they thereby contradict their

³⁹ Derrida, 2001, 358.

⁴⁰ Derrida, 2001, 360.

original function or operation. So bricolage works within and against a heritage: it undermines the system from within.

§

I shall now introduce two important new players in Lévi-Strauss' argument: the engineer and the bricoleur. The engineer is a constructor, the figure who builds a system from scratch, a totality, a labyrinth with no exit. The engineer thus would appear to be godlike, an ontotheological presence. The bricoleur, on the other hand, is a craftsman who creates objects not from scratch but by the assemblage of diverse existing materials—that is, from other objects. But Lévi-Strauss also says that bricolage is mythopoetic and that the engineer is not only mythical, but also a species of bricoleur. Curiouser and curiouser, for if the engineer is a myth, the opposition between the engineer and the bricoleur cannot exist. If the opposition does not exist, then bricolage itself must be under threat and, as Derrida writes, 'the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down.'⁴¹

Not so fast, though. Lévi-Strauss suggests another approach: not only is the engineer mythopoetic but that also bricolage itself is a mythopoetic activity: and because of this, the discourse on myths—which Lévi-Strauss calls the *mythologicals*—is able to reflect on and criticise itself. So this discourse—the *mythologicals*—refers back to the mythopoetic nature of bricolage; it introduces a mode of decentring, and with decentring we are able to return to wider questions of play, opening what might formerly have been supposed to be music's unequivocal (rather than undecidable) cultural locus from the inside out.

Let's pause for a moment and consider some of the musical implications of this stage in Derrida's long chain of reasoning. One way of applying bricolage to music is to argue that ANY composition is a form of bricolage, a reworking of pre-existing materials, whose building blocks can be drawn from within cultures, such as cultural systems already at hand, or can be drawn from nature, from the universal that lies outside existing cultural and musical systems. Bricolage could be seen as one of the ways things get done: concepts from within known systems (whether cultural or natural) are taken and used to new ends. Thus, graphic notation could be viewed as a notational system that is drawn from a different cultural domain—that of the visual arts— and as a notational system that, because it *challenges* exactitude, allows for greater performer agency⁴² than, for example, the evolving traditions of classic Darmstadt serialism, where the composer attempts to *precisely* notate and control all parameters by staying within the traditions of an established musical language system. Similarly, music made of ambient sound or music that utilises 'natural' sound (Cage's 4'33', Hespos' scream) would fall under the category of bricolage. So, the scream in *Weißschatten* can be seen as one of bricolage's borrowings, one of its adaptations. It rejects the nature/culture opposition and is therefore part of the theme of decentring, and a virtually limitless signifier.

We can take this further, though. *Weißschatten* embraces bricolage not only in its inclusive use of sound (in the widest sense) but also in its deployment of notation. It critiques itself (and its archive) through its sonic components *and* its written components. The notation employs standard Western classical notes but uses no rests and is without time signatures; it appropriates from writing, but it

⁴¹ Derrida, 2001, 361.

⁴² Rather than depending on a system of performative practice traditions to create an exact model of performance, as in, for example, medieval notation.

uses letters to represent more than one function. Hespos' 'fat and thin, large and small letters, all indicate degrees of volume, their position above and below [the] central line indicates pitch.' Letters thus indicate not only a sound (a phoneme, in this case) but also a relative pitch range and a relative dynamic range; Hespos uses bricolage to appropriate from two different discourses—music and writing—to indicate compound sound actions, and these sound actions are inexact. He uses graphic art in the same way: graphic symbols are used both for various indications of time (pauses, etc.) and non-standard effects (which themselves draw from the 'natural' rather than the 'cultural' side of singing), such as mouth formations and miming. At other moments his bricolage combines elements from different notational systems: the 'lip pops' on page 3 combine a standard semiquaver, a written (text) instruction, an Italian dynamic indication, and two different graphic indicators as well—all for one sound (figure 5).

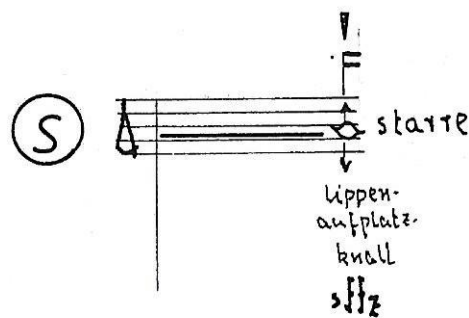


Figure 5. Hans-Jachim Hespos, *Weißschatten*, p.no.3

Sound, too, is subject to bricolage in *Weißschatten*. The singer goes through modes of sound production from classical *bel canto* (an archive in itself) to the 'universal' screams (and laughs) mentioned earlier, to the purely physical (lip pops, throat clearing, stuttering) to a complete absence (miming). And the emotional content is equally variable, or open to limitless interpretations: is the scream on page 1 a scream of fear, of surprise, of anger, of joy, of tyres, of metal, of pain, or 'just' of abstract sound? There is no way of knowing: the scream is undecidable.

Lévi-Strauss' discourse on myths, Derrida explains, has further implications for the theme of decentering that will lead to *play*—a decentering *par excellence*. Myths are transformations; there can be no such thing as an *original* myth, or it would not *be* a myth. So the idea of a reference myth, an original myth, makes no real sense. A reference myth, by definition, must be atypical rather than representative of a group; it must exist outside of the system, in fact. Therefore Derrida writes, 'the focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and non-existent in the first place.'⁴³ Ethnology is a human *science*, but it cannot use a focused, empirically based language to describe its own field of enquiry if that field is necessarily decentered. Furthermore, the discussion of myths must itself take the form of a myth; it must

⁴³ Derrida, 2001, 362.

decentre, must be acentric, must seek to avoid origins: 'it must have the form of that of which it speaks.'⁴⁴

Again, is there a musical parallel? Perhaps notation is a myth? Perhaps notation (and by extension the implied interpretation, or performance, and reception) is in actuality a mythomorphic discourse on music, not writing *of* music. Such a notation would reject exactitude, permit agency, allow a space for collaboration between users, demand collaboration—and, indeed, improvisation. It would decentre. Derrida, again: 'there is no real end to methodological analysis, no hidden unity to be grasped once the breaking down process has been completed.'⁴⁵ But here we might even take issue with the word 'completed': is it possible to ever complete a methodology of separation when it seems to be in the nature of things to regroup, to get tangled up again, to appear in a new guise?

The concept of the myth, then, seems to function as a way of imposing some kind of order, a structure, onto a group of concepts that would otherwise fragment into total confusion, a confusion of opposites. But the myth also rejects the possibility of a centre or origin. If the myth rejects the possibility of a centre, then who wrote it, and what is it about? What is its subject matter? We cannot really know. Again, there are parallels in music, as Lévi-Strauss is the first to recognise; 'Thus the myth and the musical work are like conductors of an orchestra, whose audience becomes the silent performers. If it is now asked where the real centre of the work is to be found, the answer is that this is impossible to determine. Music and mythology bring man face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows can be actualised . . .'⁴⁶

This is very interesting: not only is there a collaborative, improvisatory, *undecidable* space between the composer and the performer in works like *Weißschatten*, through notation which demands inexactitude, language which critiques itself and allows for endless permutations through its [over]use of signifiers, mirrored in the sonic components of music; but also the audience⁴⁷ are complicit in this game of referral. They perform as much as the performer does; everyone is an author, no one is an author; we all become users, inhabiting artistic heterotopias where heterogenous elements combine unpredictably in moments of artistic endeavour. And with this centreless discourse comes bricolage, with its mythopoetic function and the historical implications that arise: that centres are historical illusions.

If the centre is thrown into doubt, then the totality is equally suspect; it is never possible to know your own or anyone or anything else's limits. There is always more to add to the archive; nothing is ever complete. A musical performance comes from a prior object, a 'score' that in turn comes from a prior source, but the 'score' itself is open to an infinite number of interpretations (performances); it too can never be complete.

How can the limits of totalisation be approached? We could admit that there is simply *too much*; without a centre (a subject) the totality cannot be grasped or held; or, we could view totalisation from the angle of non-totalisation, from the concept of *play*. And what is *play*? Derrida: 'a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite...instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.'⁴⁸ Further, 'this movement of play...is the movement of *supplementarity*,' 'permitted by the lack or absence of a centre, or

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Derrida, 2001, 363, quoting Lévi-Strauss 1969, 17-18.

⁴⁷ I would include the 'performer' in this category, both in the learning stages (i.e. when the performer is 'reading' the work) and in the actual performance.

⁴⁸ Derrida, 2001, 365.

origin⁴⁹; and the sign which replaces the centre is a supplement, a surplus. If the sign is a surplus, then, Derrida suggests, neither the can centre be determined nor can totalisation be exhausted.

We can see a process of surplus or supplementarity at work in Derrida's own writing in 'Structure, Sign and Play'. He frequently circles around an idea, giving several versions of it, taking the time for relevant asides, word linkages, and always adding comprehensive foot or end notes. The discourse is gradually revealed as being part of the system it describes; the structure of the writing is without a centre. Although Derrida addresses structure, sign, and play, he never provides an answer, he never gives us an origin, solid ground, an endpoint or a focus. The close of a paper by Derrida will always be the beginning of a newer, and probably much larger, discourse, which allows us to see the workings of play and supplementarity in action.

But now consider the supplement: it offers another challenge to metaphysical binary oppositions. The supplement is simultaneously an addition, extension, or repetition, *and* a replacement. It's another of Derrida's undecidables, crossing logical boundaries. Think of an apple tree: it is complete, but it flowers and an apple grows—an *addition*. Here, the addition, the apple, is added to something that is already complete. But how can the tree be complete if it needs an addition? It needs that apple or the species will die out, so the tree is *not* complete. The supplement, then, repeats; it extends by means of repetition. The apple shares some of the DNA of the parent tree, and biologically it is an extension or repetition, but it will also *replace* the tree. The tree+apple overturns binary logic. The tree is both complete and its own supplement (in the form of the next tree that will grow from the apple). It is the same but different. We can extend this further: the new apple+tree opposes—is different to, a replacement of—the complete tree (the parent). The apple opposes what it repeats, it opposes itself.

Is there a musical equivalent? Perhaps. The main areas of interest would seem to be the relationship between the score and its performances and between one performance and another. Is the score analogous to the tree? It is complete as it stands, it is a complete document, it doesn't *have* to be performed, it can be read, it can be internally performed; but it would seem to need a supplement, a physical performance. Is the performance the apple? It shares a bloodline with the score; it cannot exist without the score; but it also repeats *and* replaces the score in the moment of its actualisation, even while opposing itself. Is a chain of performances a series of trees+apples? Each performance is complete in its own right, but subsequent performances repeat and replace whatever has gone before; they oppose themselves; each is the same but different. The variability is increased when the score—the parent—includes indeterminate practice and notation; where the same/different opposition and repetition is multiplied tenfold.

So signification in a decentred field adds something—the *supplement*—and the supplement performs what Derrida describes as 'a vicarious function': it 'supplement[s] a lack on the part of the signified.'⁵⁰ Derrida then makes two significant points regarding the operation of *play*. First, quoting Lévi-Strauss, he describes this lack as having 'zero symbolic value . . . [it is] a sign marking the necessity of a symbolic centre *supplementary* [Derrida's italics] to that with which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required.'⁵¹ Second, he argues that the *play* of signification, 'the *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is thus the result of a finitude...a lack which must be *supplemented*.'⁵² We are back to our apple tree.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Derrida, 2001, 366.

⁵¹ Derrida, 2001, 366-7, quoting Lévi-Strauss, 1950, xlix

⁵² Ibid.

Like Derrida, Lévi-Strauss is attracted by the possibilities of *play*, of games such as roulette. Games of chance are important, they throw up unforeseen results, they are vital if we are to ignore the implications of history; but they are still part of the system of supplementarity and *play*; they, along with *play*, are part of a web of oppositional tension, a net. There is a tension between *play* and history. And remember that a web or net allows some things through while other things are caught—it both holds and frees simultaneously, like musical notation—it is undecidable.

But Derrida tells us that *play* is also in tension with *presence*. 'Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived before the alternative of presence or absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way round.'⁵³ In other words, play precedes presence, and it has both positive and negative implications. According to Derrida, *play* can be nostalgic—a yearning for the lost presence of the absent origin—or it can be positive, an affirmation of the play of the world, open to an active (one might even say hermeneutic) interpretation. '*This affirmation then determines the noncentre otherwise than as loss of the centre;*' *affirmation* here is free, and 'surrenders itself to the seminal adventure of the trace.'⁵⁴ This contrasts with what Derrida calls a '*sure play*,' which is 'limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present, pieces*.'⁵⁵

Once again we are dealing with binary oppositions. Derrida offers two interpretations of interpretation, both of which are equally valid, but seemingly irreconcilable. We can seek a centre which 'escapes play and the order of the sign, and lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile'⁵⁶ or we can affirm the lack of the centre, affirm *play* and turn away from full presence, turn away from 'humanism' altogether.

Surely after Derrida has presented us with such a chain of reasoning, all to try to overcome or to shake metaphysical concepts, he doesn't conclude with a lame binary opposition, like a film where an impossible ending is neatly sidestepped by an 'it was all a dream' get out clause? Of course not. Derrida concludes 'I do not believe that today there is any question of *choosing* . . . [for] here we are in a region . . . where the category of choice seems particularly trivial . . . We must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference.'⁵⁷ But Derrida acknowledges the challenge, admitting the task ahead faces philosophical thought with an 'as yet unnameable . . . and terrifying form of monstrosity.'⁵⁸

⁵³ Derrida, 2001, 369.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Derrida, 2001, 370.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

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