

## Preamble 2

### Hidden in Plain Sight: Improvisation as Parergon and Temporary Autonomous Zone in Hans-Joachim Hespos' *Weißschatten*

...in a similar way as before, but also different, improvise an ecstatic chain of spontaneous, hounded figures (shadows, shapes) in spurts, chased, gradually lose control, freak out, until totally over the top...ad lib

(Hans-Joachim Hespos, *Weißschatten*)<sup>1</sup>

Neither simply outside, nor simply inside.

(Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*)<sup>2</sup>

Improvisation (in *Weißschatten*, 2017) has the ability to be both partially intrinsic and extrinsic simultaneously: it is part of the 'work,' inasmuch as Hespos specifically requests (and identifies) it in the score; and yet it is outside of the work, as Hespos has no 'control' at all over the performative content of it. He makes descriptive suggestions, suggestions that he then counteracts by asking for similarity and difference, a loss of control, and, finally, for whatever content there is to be performed *ad lib*. This material is 'undecidable' then (in the Derridean sense, in that it not only embodies something that refuses to obey conceptual, metaphysical order but also is, in some sense, in a state of constant motion, and not just from one goal to another, which would imply a clear metaphysical connection, but in a state of movement *per se*), ideally being spontaneous, individual, and temporary whilst also the result of a specific request or call for action within a larger, planned, entity. So, in a sense, it could be seen as occupying a heterotopia, or a space that waits for an event within the composer's intentions, an opening for a 'temporary autonomous zone' where performer individuality, or agency, takes over completely, in a moment of invisible (un-notated, unknowable, indeterminate) festal excess, a surplus, a guerrilla tactic to 'strike and leave': improvisation as a walk through the borderlands, or 'margins', of music. Improvisation as parergon.

Within its approximately eleven-minute duration, Hans Joachim Hespos' *Weißschatten* (2017, for soprano and piano) contains a discrete c.50 second 'episode' of improvisation in the voice part (of *all* content—pitch, duration, amplitude, text, etc.), as shown in the first quotation above. Moreover, all of the 'text' is improvised (except for c.52 seconds of composer-directed phonetic content; for example, on the second system of page 1, Hespos directs the singer to call out 'k tscho n nul ba'). Thus, a considerable portion of *Weißschatten*'s content is at the performers' discretion, allowing a prominent role for performer agency. This raises the following questions: in what ways could improvisation, within a conventionally, or unconventionally, notated work (for *Weißschatten* employs both),<sup>3</sup> be considered? How do episodes of improvisation co-exist and function with(in) what might be termed the more 'defined' areas of composer intention within a work? Does it matter that listeners cannot 'hear' where the improvisation starts or finishes unless they have an intimate

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<sup>1</sup> Hespos, 2017, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida, 1987, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Both types of notation found in *Weißschatten* can have unpredictable results—sometimes because of their intrinsic difficulty, sometimes because they are instructions for action, not results.

knowledge of the piece (and sometimes even when they do)? Do sections of improvisation continue to 'resonate' after they are completed, leaving spectral traces in their wake?

From the undecidability of Cardew's graphics in *Treatise* (1963-67) to Cage's empty time brackets in *Four*<sup>6</sup> (1992) and beyond, these questions arise with remarkable frequency in the performance of late twentieth century and contemporary music, opening a complex field of relationships between composers and performers and problematising the concept of the 'limit' as edge or border. To embark on possible ways of approaching these questions, I suggest applying close readings of the first two sections ('Lemmata' and 'Parergon')<sup>4</sup> of Jacques Derrida's 'Parergon' (*The Truth in Painting*, 1987) and Hakim Bey's *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (2003) to Hans Joachim Hespos' 'Weißschatten.'

## §

'I write four times here, *around* painting.'

(Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*)<sup>5</sup>

Concerned with questions of 'the frame, the title, the signature, the legend etc.'<sup>6</sup> and the internal order of the philosophical discourse of painting itself, *The Truth in Painting* offers an overarching deconstruction in four essays (the sides of the frame) of what Derrida calls the 'right to painting'<sup>7</sup> through a forensic questioning of key texts by Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. In *Parergon*, Derrida deconstructs the frame (again, four times over) via a close reading of specific sections of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790).<sup>8</sup> But what has this to do with music; specifically, improvisation *within* or *around* notated music? Could Derrida's deconstruction of the frame, as something 'neither simply outside nor simply inside,'<sup>9</sup> be of use? And could that 'inside' imply an incision (Derrida's 'pure cut')—a positive/negative, appearance/disappearance 'inside,' as well as 'outside,' the *work*?

Let's pause for a moment, and take a closer look at the structure of *Parergon*. It is composed of four sections (the frame), each one separately titled: 'Lemmata,' 'The Parergon,' 'The 'Sans' of the Pure Cut' and 'The Colossal.' Thus, Derrida immediately begins to embed his argument into the actual *writing* of his proposition, which forms a frame within a frame, not just into the *content*. *Parergon* is a deconstruction of the 'frame' in multiple, layered fields, its constituent sections each framing and being framed by the others. *Lemmata* examines questions of interiority within a pre-existing discourse, and its title is significant, for from the outset of *Parergon*, *Lemmata* sets out the possible course of Derrida's text: lemmata (or *lemma* in the singular) as subsidiary propositions (assuming some kind of truth) used to demonstrate a principal hypothesis; as a theme or subject indicated in a

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<sup>4</sup> The third (The *Sans* of the Pure Cut) and fourth (The Colossal) sections are principally concerned with questions of aesthetics pertaining to the sublime and beautiful in Kant's *Third Critique*.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, 1987, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, 1987, back cover.

<sup>8</sup> Also referred to by Derrida as Kant's 'Third Critique.'

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, 1987, 54.

title; a word or phrase which occurs in a glossary; a word considered as citation as well as inflection; a theme, especially when used as the subject of a title. So when Derrida asks 'Does the *topos* of the title...command the "work" from the discursive and the juridical instance of an *hors d'oeuvre*, a place outside the work...even if the definition operates in the manner of a performative? Or else does the title play *inside* the space of the "work"?'<sup>10</sup> he throws the entire subject open to discussion, not only that of importation and insertion from one work to another but also, outside of a work, that of the 'being next to' or 'before' (*hors d'oeuvre*) a work and the construction, nay, existence, of the 'frame' and its function within/without the work (*ergon*). We find similar preoccupations in Brian Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* (1981), of course, a superscription (Lemma), followed by a description (Icon) of a possibility put into actual pictorial form—a frame, concluded with an attempt to unite the two (Epigram). So, a problematising of edges, of margins and borderlands, perhaps? Of zones within zones, circles within circles: [*step without step/step without not/not without step/not without not*]<sup>11</sup>

And the link to improvisation? To Hespos? From the very beginning of *Parergon*, Derrida already raises questions of the presence, function, and formulation of the frame through the possibilities of the title as framing device, interior or exterior, '...the possibility of a framing system that is both imposed and erased.'<sup>12</sup> A frame of what, precisely, remains to be seen, but if we deconstruct the title of *Weißschatten*, a frame is immediately revealed, not only in the sense that the 'title' is a 'juridical instance of an *hors d'oeuvre*'—the title that begins the work, is part of the work, is also outside of the work, by its very *topos*—but also in the invisibility of the frame here, the disappearance of the interior frame of the zone(s) inhabited by improvisation. Thus: 'White Shadows.' Regular, dark shadows are created by the obscuring of a light source; they have visible edges, whether sharp or diffuse makes no matter; however, white shadows, we can reasonably assume, are still the result of a process of obscuring the light (otherwise, they would not be shadows), but they would have no edges, no visible borders, and yet they would still be present as autonomous zones. They would be hidden in plain sight, hidden in plain *sound*, as is all of the improvised material present in *Weißschatten*, whether as a *parergon* to the composer's inscription in the form of performer supplied (improvised) 'text,' or as an 'invisible' temporary zone of completely improvised material, material that is 'similar...as before, but also different...spontaneous...ad lib.'<sup>13</sup> It seems that the presence of improvisation can much more easily be 'read' than heard in *Weißschatten*. This raises the question of improvisation as *différance*, which is Derrida's term for the privileging of writing whilst maintaining speech as a possibility. *Différance* supplies both a loss and a surplus of meaning by inhabiting the 'in-between,' challenging a fundamental binary opposition.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, improvisation's *différance* in this instance is principally present in its inscription, and, furthermore, its lacunary function unsettles and delays a final 'understanding' of *Weißschatten*, an understanding that will never be achieved, for it merely comes back on itself, differing *and* deferring as it does so. There can be no 'final' performance of *Weißschatten*, for every performance is a supplement of both Hespos' work and every 'other' performance, added to which is the mutable nature of any instance of improvisation. The performer's agency is indivisibly intertwined with the composer's, and whether the improvisation is

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, 1987, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Hespos, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See both 'Différance' in *Speech and Phenomena*, p129-160, 1973, and 'Différance' in *Margins of Philosophy*, p1-28, 1984.

a part of Hespos' *Weißschatten* or the performers' *Weißschatten*, or both, is an open question the answer to which is undecidable.

## §

Consider this lengthy quotation:

The *parergon* stands out [*se détache*] both from the *ergon* (the work) and from the milieu, it stands out first of all like a figure on a ground. But it does not stand out in the same way as the work. The latter also stands out against a ground. But the *parergonal* frame stands out against two grounds [*fonds*], but with respect to each of those two grounds, it merges [*se fond*] into the other. With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall, and then, gradually, into the general text. With respect to the background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background. There is always a form on a ground, but the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy.<sup>15</sup>

Such a complex passage, with its multiple meanings, deliberate overlappings, and omissions, will require a certain amount of untangling. Of course, this untangling may also reveal that the knots and stitches are in fact one and the same... but different.<sup>16</sup>

Derrida suggests that the *parergon* stands out from the work and the milieu; so if, as I am suggesting, improvisation is an interior (inserted)<sup>17</sup> *parergon* within *Weißschatten*, then I need to establish what the work is, and what the milieu is. The work is easier to identify: *Weißschatten*, a discrete entity written by Hans-Joachim Hespos, written for a soprano and a pianist, with lacunary sections to be inhabited (written) by the said performers. Well and good, but what is the milieu here? Is it avant-garde music, is it vocal music (Hespos describes the work as a *modern Lied*, belonging to the canon of German song), is it all song? Is it just 'music'? Is it sound, or is it the topos of performance itself, the 'where?' Since Derrida says that the *parergon* stands out against two grounds—that the frame of a painting stands out against both wall and the work—then I'd suggest that the wall (as milieu) is the place of performance, the concert hall or rehearsal room in effect for music. I cannot justify that the milieu here is sound though, because that would surely be analogous to paint, rather than to the wall. In other words, as a temporal medium, music needs a 'place' of performance which is part of the performance and yet is not part of it. That is only one possibility, for if the wall is painted, then sound could be brought back into the field of play and the *parergon* of improvisation in this instance would merge into the *place* of performance, the *work* *Weißschatten*, and the *total field* of sound.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Derrida, 1987, 61.

<sup>16</sup> The same but different? I offer as example the embroidery stitch 'the French knot.'

<sup>17</sup> Rather similar to the use of quotation, or the transference of arguments, between texts.

<sup>18</sup> All of which were questions that interested John Cage—see *InterMuros* and 'Trumpet, Bubble, Humming, Fah!'

Now let's consider Derrida's closing sentence in the earlier quotation 'the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy.' So, here, I'll bring in the temporary autonomous zone, which has, so to speak, been waiting in the wings as *parergon* to this text, 'which is neither inside nor outside the exposition, neither inside nor outside its content...'<sup>19</sup>

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I have deliberately refrained from defining the TAZ—I circle around the subject, firing off exploratory beams. In the end the TAZ is almost self-explanatory. If the phrase became current it would be understood without difficulty... understood in action.

(Hakim Bey, *TAZ*)<sup>20</sup>

TAZ (The Temporary Autonomous Zone) is a concept most closely associated with the writer Hakim Bey, the pen name of the American post-anarchist author Peter Lamborn Wilson (born in 1945). First published in 1985, the text also includes the separate essays 'Ontological Anarchy' and 'Poetic Terrorism' and assorted supplementary appendices (frames again). Wilson is most closely associated with anti-authority, anti-hierarchical structures in politics and poetry, and with the rave subculture of the 'free party.' The edition (2003) to which I refer herein establishes these anti-authoritarian credentials very clearly on the publication information page, where it states 'Anti-copyright, 1985, 1991, 2003. May be freely pirated and quoted—the author and publisher, however would like to be informed at Autonomedia...' Pirated is an important word for Wilson, historical pirate utopias forming a significant part of the formulation of the TAZ for Bey,<sup>21</sup> as '...most of the pirate utopias were meant to be temporary; in fact the corsairs' true 'republics' were their ships, which sailed under the Articles.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, the TAZ has a place in time and space, even if virtual, but it is both temporary and nomadic; the TAZ is an action and, to at least some extent, defies categorisation (Bey is reluctant to supply a fixed definition). 'The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it.'<sup>23</sup>

So both the *parergon* and TAZ can operate in a spatial sense, as borderlands or frames, and the TAZ can also operate as a space that may wait for an event,<sup>24</sup> as the *parergon* could presumably wait for content to 'frame.' Both can also operate as insertions into pre-existing structures, as commentaries, explications, or radical actions, or as acts of disappearance—entities which are hidden in plain sight. Thus, although '...the TAZ begins with a simple act of realisation,'<sup>25</sup> 'as soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it *will* vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring

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<sup>19</sup> Derrida, 1987, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Bey, 2003, 97.

<sup>21</sup> See also, *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs & European Renegadoes*, Peter Lamborn Wilson, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Bey, 2003, 117.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>24</sup> See also Derrida's discussion of Parc de la Villette's *folies* as 'a writing of space, a mode of spacing which makes a place for the event' in *Point de Folie—Maintenant l'architecture*, 115, Tschumi, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle,<sup>26</sup> which corresponds with Derrida's assertion that the *parergon* 'has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy.'<sup>27</sup> We have already seen that the instances of improvisation in *Weißschatten* are acts of realisation by the performers (as well as topoi of realisation 'left' by the composer), and they are temporary, in that they are created in a moment's action—even though there are prescribed temporal lacunae, in which they can occur, left within the structure of the work. They defer resolution, they cannot be easily heard, only easily read, therefore they 'disappear' in a sonic sense, and because of this hidden, effacing quality, they melt 'away at the moment [they] deploy their greatest energy': the act of their creation makes them invisible, the empty (silent) lacuna being clearly audible *before* it is inhabited. And of course, as a temporary medium, one that is effaced the moment it is created, leaving only traces and memories, and possibly unreliable memories at that, the performance of music itself is a form of TAZ, unless it is recorded, when it is no longer a TAZ, but instead becomes part of the apparatus of the mediated state, preserved and open to repetition and commodification.

## §

And what of improvisation as a form of excess, or surplus? Would this have a correlation with the *parergon* and the TAZ?

...the TAZ is an intensification, a surplus, an excess, a potlatch...<sup>28</sup>

The frame labours [*travaille*] indeed. Place of labour, structurally bordered origin of surplus value, i.e. overflowed [*débordée*] on these two borders by what it overflows, it gives [*travaille*] indeed. Like wood. It creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product, overflows it and is deduc(t)ed from it. It never lets itself be simply exposed.<sup>29</sup>

Accordingly, the use of improvisation can be seen as an addition to something that is (potentially) already complete and therefore a supplement in the Derridean sense.<sup>30</sup> It is an *excess*, but a festal excess, a holiday, a place of soft borderlands, where although it is 'outside' of the work (*ergon*), it must still operate within a beginning and an end—thereby making it 'inside' the work, whether as exterior frame or insertion (with framed 'edges'). If the frame co-operates as it breaks down, could the physical archive of a performer's (in my case) classical training be thought of in this light? Improvisation as the overflow that co-operates in production, but is not 'simply exposed' *because* it is already an intrinsic part, i.e. I cannot perform as though untrained, because the 'mark' of my training cannot be erased, although it *can* be intentionally diverted to other means. Hidden in plain sight? It certainly could be an excess in the form of a potlatch as Bey suggests, in that the composer cannot respond, only facilitate its topos, or, as Hespos requests, 'improvise an ecstatic chain of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, 1987, 61.

<sup>28</sup> Bey, 2003, 110.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, 1987, 75.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed explanation of the supplement, see *An Overabundance of Signifiers*

spontaneous, hounded figures (shadows, shapes) in spurts, chased, gradually lose control, freak out, until totally over the top...ad lib,' the key words here being 'ecstatic, lose control, freak out, totally over the top' and 'ad lib'. If the performer is totally over the top, where does that leave the composer?<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the overflow is the topos of cooperation between all parties in an undecidable and mobile hierarchy, in a place that resists classification? It seems that the *parergon* and TAZ keep their secrets even while flaunting their excesses.

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<sup>31</sup> There is a long section of almost spectral material after the improvised section—the composer does indeed seem deliberately unwilling to (initially) respond to the performers' unknowable 'potlatch'.