



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

THE COMPOSITE IMPOSSIBLE: FORBIDDEN SYMMETRIES

STEVE TROMANS INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER
HEIDI SCHMIDT UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY



Listen at https://youtu.be/_S3VT86FXC8

This work is a collaboration between Steve Tromans and Heidi Schmidt, and operates in the fold between sound art and philosophy. Both researchers recorded improvised monologues on themes of folding, space and time, and the “tesseract” (a three-dimensional geometric representation of a four-dimensional shape). Tromans remixed these monologues together in a composition that utilises time and pitch stretching, stereo-field panning, and delay and echo-bounce effects to provide for the listener an experience of time and space “impossibility.”

Impossibility is a concept found in Gilles Deleuze’s reformulation of certain aspects of the philosophy of Gottfried von Leibniz. While Leibniz had embraced the notion of an infinite number of possible worlds (“I think there is an infinity of possible ways in which to create the world, according to the different designs which God could form”), the principle of non-contradiction restricted each of those worlds to elements compossible with one another: “the universe is only a certain kind of collection of compossibles; and the actual universe is the collection of all possible existents, that is, of those things that form the richest composite” (as quoted in Look 2013). For Leibniz, compossibles are all individuals that can actually exist together in one world.

The impossible, reformulated via Deleuze, similarly embraces the infinite, though “not only in the totality of possible worlds, but in each chosen world” (Deleuze 2004 [1968], 332). In the infinite foldings and unfoldings it engenders, impossibility implies neither opposition nor contradiction but, rather, “divergence” (59). Unlike Leibniz, Deleuze affirms the existence of divergent series, dissonances of Being that fall outside of Leibniz’s harmonious world. Deleuze describes this multiplicity of distribution, or of divergence considered in affirmative (*i.e.*, not negative or contradictory) terms, as the “play in the creation of the world” (62).

The piece’s composite impossibility is created through the superposition, unfolding, and enfolding of the voices—transforming their original space and time into a “forbidden” zone: the event of the piece’s tesseract. The final composition happens in the listening, rendering the listener a co-composer / compositor.

The text of each monologue is as follows.

Tromans

Folding. Unfolding. Folding. Enfolding. Folding. The ultimate fold. The tesseract. Folding of time. Folding of space. Time is folded. Space is folded. The folding of time and space. Movement across an ocean. Between two continents. Through time and space. Via the medium of the spoken word. The voice. The voice is a folding of the body. The body and the mind enfolding together. This unfolding of this piece. This movement. From one channel to the other channel. Across to the other side. An act. Folding a tesseract. The ultimate fold. Two voices. Discussing. The same topic. But differently. The difference-in-itself. A Deleuzian fold. A Deleuzian-Leibnizian fold. The movement. The movement through time. The movement through space. I stand here now [and] record this. The universe. The cosmos unfolds. It unfolds in multiverses. Multiple movements. All at the same time. All around me. All the senses alert. I concentrate on my voice and my words. As they move gradually. From one side. To the nether. The nether side. The movement from high to low. From

low to high. From left to right. From right to left. The folding. The fold-ness of it all. The fold. The tesseract. The ultimate movement. From one. To the other. Experience it. Dear listener. Experience it now. Hear that fold. Hear it in operation. It's already folded. Your ears. Your senses are folding it. A further time. Make connections between the two. Between these two voice tracks. Recorded separately. Improvised. The thought of the fold. The thought itself is a fold. The act of listening is a fold. This is the tesseract.

Schmidt

Monologue 1: Space is not empty. What we think of as a vacuum contains the possibility of the creation of elementary particles. Given enough energy. In fact, these potential particles are impatient. Virtually excited. Sparking in space for unimaginably short moments in time. There's this thing called the tesseract. It's a four-dimensional representation of a cube. And it always you to manipulate – no, it exists beyond space and time. To understand the tesseract think of an ant at the hem of your skirt. If the ant wanted to get from one end of your skirt to the other it would have to walk all across the hem. But with the tesseract you can fold the pieces of the skirt. And the poor little ant finds itself all the way over on the other side. Immediately. And I wonder what happens inside that fold. Is all the space and time still going on? Are they all going on at once? Did the ant miss out? I think it may have. Scientists recently discovered a thing called a quasi-crystal. A crystal that's not supposed to exist. I think they're calling it a *trinitrite*. Because they're naming it after the bomb explosion that created it. The nuclear blast that allowed a crystal that has forbidden symmetry. Which I find elegant. It has a symmetry that doesn't repeat. But it's infinite. Sort of the manifestation of the notion of *pi* and everything else that's irrational in our world that is propelled by energy. And time. In our own space right now.

Monologue 2: Forbidden symmetries sounds like something Borges would come up with in his labyrinth of twisting paths. Sounds like a composite composition. A synthesis of time. What's inside the fold anyway? I think there are tales that are untold and paths new and old. And that there's a composite compossible that exists and twists through the labyrinth of you and me. And the fold itself. What's inside the fold? You are the composition. You are the synthesis. You are the synthesizer. Key of change. An interweaver. Bridging the gap. You are the tesseract. With forbidden symmetries. Oh-my-god particles everywhere. Cosmic rays and messages that shouldn't exist.

Works Cited

- Deleuze, Gilles. 1968. *Différence et répétition*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- . 2004. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Continuum.
- Look, Brandon C. 2013. "Leibniz's Modal Metaphysics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz-modal/>

Biographies

Steve Tromans is a UK professional musician (pianist and composer) who has been active since the 1990s in the fields of jazz, rock, improvised, Indian, Mongolian, folk, electronic, and experimental musics. He has given over 6,000 performances at festivals and venues (at national and international level) with his own projects and as part of others' ensembles. As a composer, he has written 100+ works. Since the 2010s, he has been involved in artistic research in the intersection between music and philosophy, leading to the award of his PhD (University of Surrey, 2020) investigating a link between the practices of philosophy of time (via an array of concepts from Gilles Deleuze) and his own improvisation and composition for solo piano. In his doctorate, Tromans created a new, multimodal concept, *Rhythmicity*: a way of expressing "the musical-philosophical" in a complex mix of sound and word. His work can be heard online at: <https://soundartphilosophy.bandcamp.com> (*Performance Philosophy* readers may be especially interested in his triple album of piano and spoken word, *ELLIPSES: notes musical & philosophical*, available through his Bandcamp page.)

Heidi Schmidt, Becker Fellow, lives and writes in Roanoke, Virginia. She is pursuing her doctoral degree in Philosophy and Cultural Inquiry at the University of Kentucky.

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