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## Third Line

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## Project Description

the Thing that eludes  
our grasp and the distorting  
screen that makes us miss



Installation view from the 2014 *International Žižek Studies Conference: Parallax Future(s) in Art and Design, Ideology, and Philosophy*, Cincinnati, Ohio.

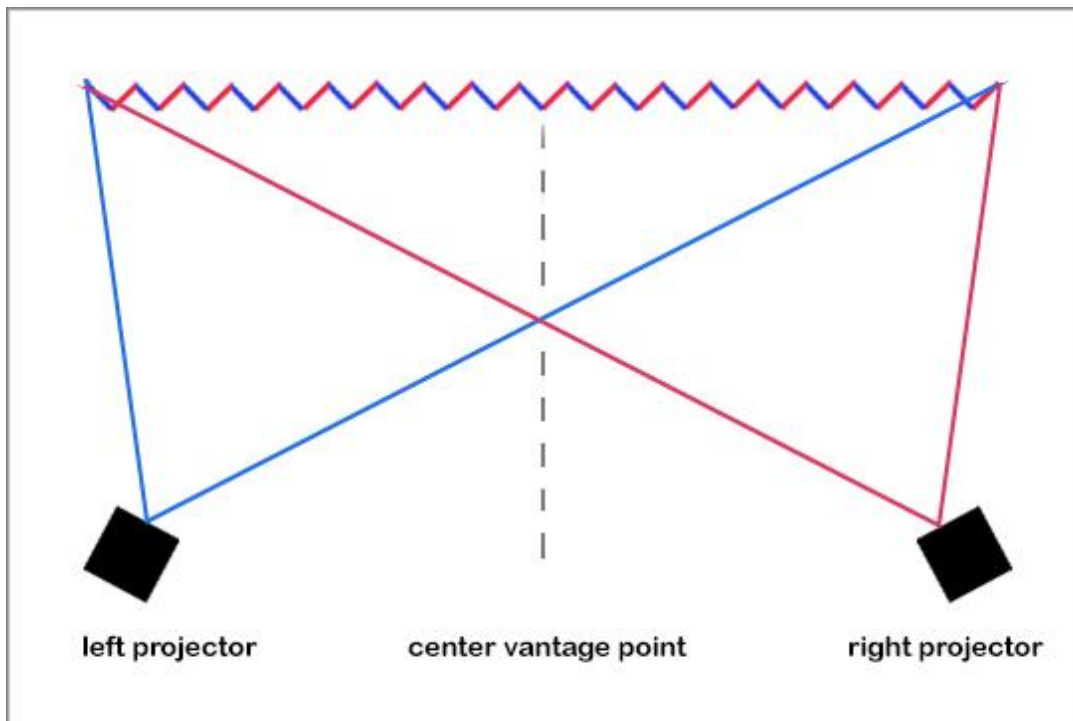
*Third Line* is a collaborative installation of video projections and selected artefacts, presented at the 2014 International Žižek Studies Conference: Parallax Future(s) in Art and Design, Ideology, and Philosophy with the support of the Ontario Arts Council. Our project is a self-referential account of its own materialization, incorporating ephemera such as found objects, textures and process sketches, collected throughout the development of video sequences and our parallax system of projection. We collected items and images as a way of mapping and documenting experiences of habit and circumstance, which are wrought with fragmented instances of ideological entrapment. Our objective was to confront our material experience of ideology as a kind of “hyperobject” – defined by Timothy Morton as any phenomenon that is too immense to comprehend in full. A “hyperobject” can only be perceived in parts and only through

the painful, reflexive acknowledgment of personal entanglement in the symbolic order and the world at large (Morton, 2013, p. 27-37).

A small sample from a quote taken from Slavoj Žižek's writing instigates the visual and literary root of our project (our italics) (Žižek, 2008, p.37):

While we are bombarded by the heart-warming news of a debt cancellation or a big humanitarian campaign to eradicate a dangerous epidemic *just move the postcard a little to catch a glimpse of the obscene figure of the liberal communist at work.*

The postcard Žižek was referring to is a paper novelty item engraved to reflect simultaneously from two angles, a secondary image appearing as the page is turned, revealing a smutty joke. We examined such engraved and holographic postcards and determined that we could create a projection system based on this concept – projecting two video images onto a 'holographic' screen. Folded in ridges the screen mimicked the sharp 45° groove of the engraver's tool. Content was created and assembled once our 'parallax video system' proved possible.



Schematic diagram showing the placement of video projectors and the folded screen.

We pointed two projectors diagonally at 45° angles toward a screen, which we fashioned in a vertical accordion-fold pattern to receive the projected imagery from two angles. If the viewer stood facing the screen from the vantage point of either projector, the image from this vantage point was clearly visible while the other projection was obscured from view by the folds in the screen. If the viewer stood between the two projectors facing the screen from the middle, both of the projected videos were visible in a fragmented, striped pattern.



View of the folded projection screen from the middle vantage point.



Detail of the projection screen from the middle vantage point.



View of the folded projection screen from the vantage point of the right projector.

Models of various scale and complexity were built in the process of developing the idea. The appropriate material for the making of the screen proved to be simple drawing paper that was large and pliable enough to withstand the eighty or so folds required. Projectors were purchased, DVD players were acquired and random discs served as stand-in content for proof of concept prototypes.

The project's title refers to Žižek's explanation of the haiku structure, where the third line of a haiku is the momentary event of bodiless affect when reality loses its substantial mass. The final line of pure affect is expressed by the sequential collision between the first line (material situation) and the second line (the motion of an event) (Žižek, 2012). The objective was to create a visual experience that affiliates the haiku structure with an experiential system of visual perception.

Through the use of projected text haiku poems, *Third Line* addresses the idea of 'parallax' in Žižek's discussion of haiku itself, meant to emulate the structure of a haiku, such as in this 17<sup>th</sup> century poem by Bashō (Lowenstein, 2007, p.55):

Already I can see  
my own wind bleached bones.  
A cold wind cuts me.

To create our animated haiku text and image video we appropriated phrases extracted from Žižek's writings, forming metaphrasms - prose text that is altered or cast into a different form - in the template of a 5-7-5 syllable structure. While some of our found haiku are necessarily more successful than others, none were chosen by any means of poetic discrimination. Rather, they all obey close adherence to classical haiku syllable structure and narrative form.

just move the postcard  
a little to catch a glimpse  
of the obscene figure

The haikus are not cited in reference to their source texts, which was our deliberate decision – to contextually detach from the source literature and other specific

ontological associations. In many cases the phrases carry a distorted poetic meaning that is not necessarily in line with Slavoj Žižek's sequence of thought, and so we deliberately decided not to keep track of the citations and to appropriate the phrases as found items entirely isolated from their original context, selected for their incidental linguistic and quantifiable attributes.



View of the folded projection screen from the vantage point of the right projector.

Animating approximately 70 haiku meant that the viewer could be in attendance for five minutes before encountering textual repetition. There was no beginning point or end to the image/haiku loop. As background to the text, printed color and typography on discarded packaging and media appears in melting snow, often appearing conversely as melted forms on a white page or screen. Scanning through Žižek's texts at random in search of incidental haiku patterns and counting syllables in a process of trial and error was not unlike our habitual, happenstance process of collecting trash and performing photographic studies of materials and text fragments.

and ex-sistence, and that the price we pay for access to meaning is the exclusion of ex-sistence. In these terms, we might say that it is precisely woman that 'exists', that persists as a residue of enjoyment beyond meaning, resisting symbolization; which is why, as Lacan puts it, woman is 'the *sinthome* of man'.

This notion of the ex-sisting *sinthome* – the proliferating 'undergrowth' in Highsmith's stories – is thus more radical than either symptom or fantasy; for the *sinthome* is the psychotic kernel that can neither be interpreted (like a symptom) nor 'traversed' (like a fantasy). What, then, do we do with it? Lacan's answer, and at the same time the Lacanian definition of the ultimate moment of psychoanalysis, is *identification with the sinthome*. The *sinthome* represents the outermost limit of the psychoanalytic process – the reef on which psychoanalysis sticks. At the same time, is the experience of the radical impossibility of the *sinthome* final proof that the psychoanalytic process has been brought to a conclusion?<sup>15</sup> We reach the end of the psychoanalytic process when we isolate the kernel of enjoyment which is as it were immune to the operative mode of the discourse. This is the ultimate Lacanian reading of Freud's motto 'Wo es

Documentation of haiku extraction process.

if, for a moment, the 'projection' of the outside world has stopped working; as if we have been confronted momentarily with the formless grey emptiness of the screen itself, with the Mallarmean 'place where nothing takes place but the place'. (The same dissonance and disproportion between inside and outside are reproduced in Kafka's stories, whose sinister architecture – the block of flats where the Court meets in *The Trial*, the uncle's palace in *Amerika* – is characterized by the fact that what appears from outside a modest structure metamorphoses miraculously on entry into an endless maze of halls and stairways reminiscent of Piranesi's drawings of the subterranean labyrinths of prisons.)

It seems that, as soon as we wall in a given space, there is more of it 'inside' than appears possible to an outside view. Continuity and proportion are not possible, because this disproportion, the surplus of inside in relation to outside, is a necessary structural effect of the very separation of the two; it can only be abolished by demolishing the barrier and letting the outside swallow the inside.

Documentation of haiku extraction process.





View of the folded projection screen from the vantage point of the right projector.

Image sequences in sets of three were paired with comparable or contrasting lines as they appeared consecutively, in numerical reference to the three-line haiku structure as well as the triad alignment of optical interference. Transition speed heightened a sense of visual limitation and increased the demand for attention. These were projected onto the screen from the right side.

The left side projection is a cross-dissolved loop between a small, flaming object and a metal fragment dissolving in acid. These images were originally created for different applications, but here they become found video loops as they lose their former associations. They are purposefully unclear and the long dissolve transition between them added to the insubstantial nature of each sequence.



View of the folded projection screen from the vantage point of the left projector.

As the viewer moved across the installation, the two projections appeared to come together or fall apart depending on the vantage point. As the right screen side showed the sequence of haiku texts laid over photographs of found textures, objects and debris, the left projector revealed an alternation between two simple ambient chemical events.

For us, flow of transition and formal consistency was of great consideration from one texture to the next. The content of the photo imagery consists predominantly of roadside detritus and cultural trash, however it is not only the content's allusion to ideological excess that defines the viewing experience. We hoped to aesthetically and mathematically find a momentary collapse of the symbolic order through perceptual combinations. Žižek notes in the film *Examined Life* (2008):

... We should develop ... a much more terrifying new abstract materialism, a kind of mathematical universe where there is nothing, there are just formulas, technical forms ... the difficult thing is to find poetry, spirituality, in this dimension; to recreate, if not beauty, then aesthetic dimension in ... trash itself.

Using the idea of trash as an aesthetic medium and given our ongoing interest in useless, 'melancholic' objects, we spent four months prior to the installation selecting found materials that we would re-contextualize on a surface in a gallery setting. This table included such items as sketches, found objects and materials that had been photographed for the production of the video, and other items of coincidence and habit.



Detail view of the table display.

Formally and perceptually, this tableau is an entirely separate viewing experience, however it follows the same principles of selection and distribution as the haiku video. The artefacts are arranged evenly on the entire surface of the table with spacing and formal flow of colour, texture, shape and size, much in the same way as the background photography in the haiku video was timed with transitions to not give specific, hierarchical emphasis to any one image.

Instead of negotiating subjective aesthetic choices, it was the materials – whether substantial or representational – that were the actualization of haiku objects incorporated into the installation. In whole, the installation was an assemblage of fragments without value-based categorization. The process of transaction with the viewed projections and artefacts was intended to place the viewer in the haiku space

of immateriality. The installation was perceptually calculated to invite an aesthetic experience of collapse and reformation of the material present.



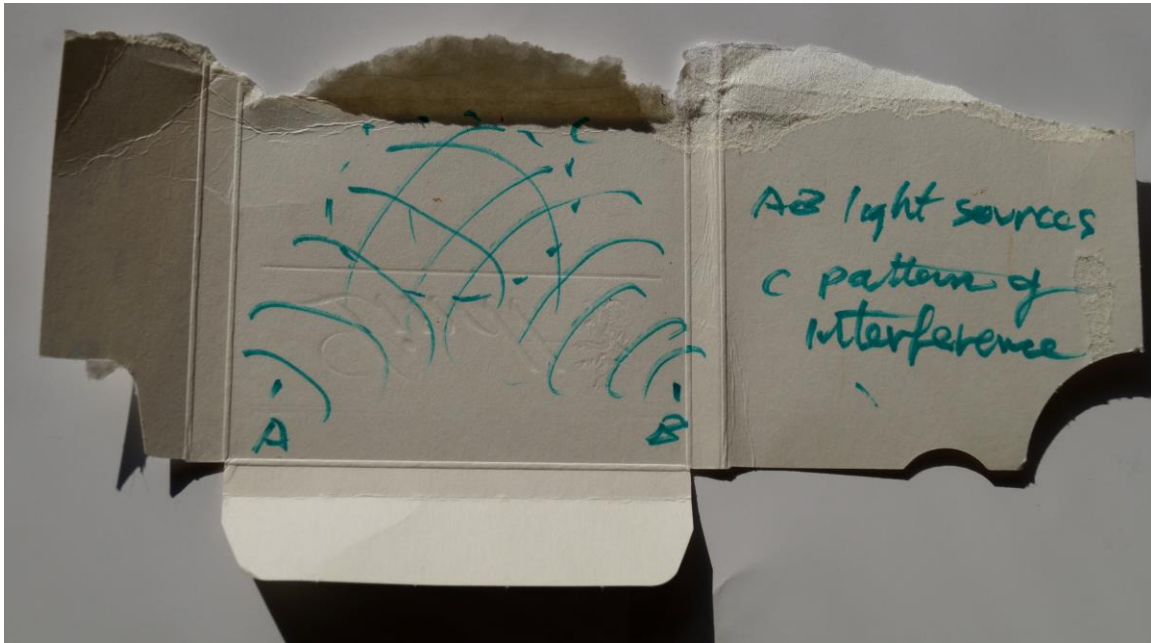
Detail view of the table display.



Detail view of the table display.

For us, the installation was a study of interference through the optical function of patterns of light. The point of interference was physically separated by the screen into segments – the colliding images meet in one place, while at the same time appearing as

two separate fields. This paradoxical segmentation of optical interference was intended to allow the viewer to perceive and absorb a conceptual interference of thought between the content and its temporal arrangement. The viewer was presented with fragmented information in oscillating increments.



Process sketch showing a diagram of light interference.

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