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# Simultaneity and the Parallax in Art: The Fallacy of Absolutes

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*Simultaneity I-V* is a series of art works that exhibit dual durations to be experienced together and separately. As discussed in Einstein's Theory of Simultaneity, different observational reference frames result in different distances of light and sound travel. It is thus impossible for multiple objects or events to be perceived simultaneously (Einstein 1920: 34-37). As a parallel, Zizek describes the parallax view as "a constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible (Zizek 2006: 17)." Both theories suggest that two things cannot exist or be perceived without altering the perception of the other. *Simultaneity I-V* is informed and inspired by these explorations of time perception as they pertain to our psyches, emotional states, and physically aging bodies.

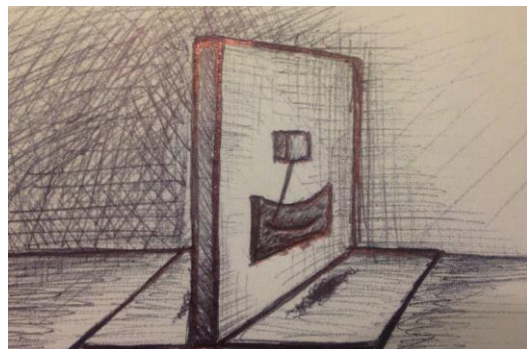
Visual art presents alternative experiences of space and time. The spatial considerations of three-dimensional artwork immediately and automatically work to define a physical world for us while durational experiences often cause one's perception of time to fluctuate. Because space and time make up the physical attributes of all waking life, these fluctuations consequently cause a wrinkle in the viewer's interpretation of reality.

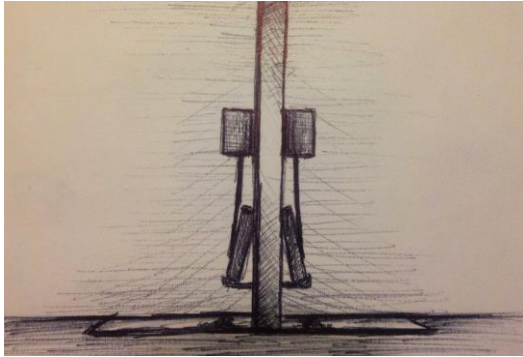
Within this discussion of the impossibility of perceivable truth, *Simultaneity I-V* offers viewers the opportunity to experience the phenomenon that Einstein and Zizek describe. While the viewer quickly understands the spatial occupation of mass, the durational progression is often perceived as happening simultaneously to one's own existence. This is where durational aesthetics can play a major role in creating an awareness of time passage.

In *Simultaneity I-V*, I slowed and/or altered durations to create a phenomenological situation in which the time duration of the exhibited occurrence becomes an experience rather than a measured interval. Using an array of materials, I utilize both natural and synthetic processes to offer a lifespan that goes beyond the instantaneous viewing. The viewers are encouraged to experience the present, develop a past, consider the future, and realize their place within the continuum of the work.

The first sculpture, *Simultaneity I*, creates a pair of events that progress together in space and time. The kinetic sculpture consists of two oscillating rods that drag back and forth at different paces over two blocks of casted chromite, slowly wearing them down to create a drawing on the floor below. The two pieces hang on opposite sides of the same wall, allowing the sounds of both sculptures to be heard on either side. This allows the viewer to sense different aspects of both pieces at the same time, while only being able to perceive other aspects separately. The dual perception of this durational work is representative of Einstein's Theory of Simultaneity and the Zizekian Parallax in that it is impossible for either piece to be experienced and fully understood

simultaneously by any two people throughout its existence.





See video here: <https://youtu.be/TEY-yU4xgAo>

Every work in the series has a minimalistic aesthetic. In my opinion, editing the work to its most basic requirements allows viewers to have a more expansive interaction, allowing one's senses to lead their consciousness into places that only they can reach. Minimizing pastiche also helps direct the viewer to the essence of the artwork, emphasizing the desired point of discourse.

The presence of industrial materials and processes within the series brings the work into the context of social progression. Largely due to industry, we now live and perceive the world as we do. Throughout human cultural evolution, many developments have profoundly shifted our relationship to time. Agriculture, industry, and digital technology are all enterprises that have molded our temporal perception. As society continues to accelerate toward a more industrial and structured world governed by technology, we implicitly succumb to the idea that time is a commodity and a currency. This leaves us with the notion of an unnaturally fast-paced temporal experience, which brings costly effects on our psyche, emotional stability, and physically aging body (Dery 2004: unpaginated).



*Simultaneity II* visually slows down an involuntary action that every human engages in – breath. The piece consists of two rooms, each displaying a video that shows a series of different people taking a deep breath and holding it

until they cannot hold it any longer. However the videos are slowed, creating the illusion that they are holding their breaths for an impossible amount of time. By adjusting the normal pace of things, the work causes the viewer to become aware of the time progression of the video, the present moment of the viewing, and themselves.

See video examples here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM2miP1ygiA>

The “apparent slowing of time comes from the power of intense attention to reduce the duration of individual frames,” as opposed to the rapidly moving moments in which “sensations followed one another so numerous and so hurried that true appreciation of time was impossible” (Sacks 2009: 81). *Simultaneity II* offers the viewer a chance to become subtly aware of what they are experiencing. This is one manner in which the aesthetic of duration can be used to cause an adjusted temporal awareness.

As a means of connection for the viewers, the subjects are framed very explicitly as portraits. As the viewer identifies with the person in the video, they become aware of their own breathing and the consideration of time passage is achieved. The human face is key in communicating emotions. We have the ability to recognize large amounts of information by simply glancing at another's facial expression. It also contains information about our history and how we have progressed to look and feel the way we do. Consequently, mirror neurons give us the capacity to represent the mental states of others, causing us to automatically empathize with people's emotions through facial expressions (Gallese and Goldman 1998: 495). By exhibiting the video in two separate rooms at the same time, as per the perceptual theories of Einstein and Zizek, the two people in the video have a spatial and temporal relationship in that no one can truly experience.

*Simultaneity III* is a durational sculpture that consists of two large spheres of ice encased in two 9 ft tall tapering steel frames. As the ice melts, the circumference shrinks causing the sphere to slowly drop down the length of the steel rods. The water dripping



from the spheres ultimately collects in the tanks at the base of the piece. The dueling durations enframe the process of transformation from a solid to a liquid while the viewer continuously investigates one after the other in an attempt to discover which will complete the transformation first.



As the viewer moves their focus from one ball of ice to the other, a disconnect must happen. The process gives a hint as to the progression status of each piece within the time continuum. The viewer can formulate a rough estimation of the amount of time that has passed by looking at the amount of ice that has melted. The viewers themselves also play a role as their accumulating body heat causes the proximal ball to melt faster. It acts as a phenomenological clock. However, regardless of the amount of information that the viewer can retrieve, it cannot truly be perceived as simultaneous nor can it truly be perceived as a spatial absolute. This is the gap that Einstein and Zizek speak of.

During the *International Zizek Studies Conference: Parallax Future(s) in Art and Design, Ideology and Philosophy*, I exhibited *Simultaneity IV* in pairs throughout the building as an example of the durational and spatial gap that occurs when observing the two pieces.

Much like the melting process above, *Simultaneity IV* uses growth as a means of connecting the spatial and the temporal. With the use of organic processes one can portray a natural progression that everyone is familiar with but normally doesn't acknowledge. The growth of grass is a symbolic reference to the earthly durations that exists outside of human dependency. Other than the beautiful shades of green that are produced, the fact that the grass is alive draws a certain amount of respect from the viewer. Its duration is not merely a transformation nor a predetermined interval, but a lifespan. It is born, lives, and ultimately dies... an echo of our own mortality.

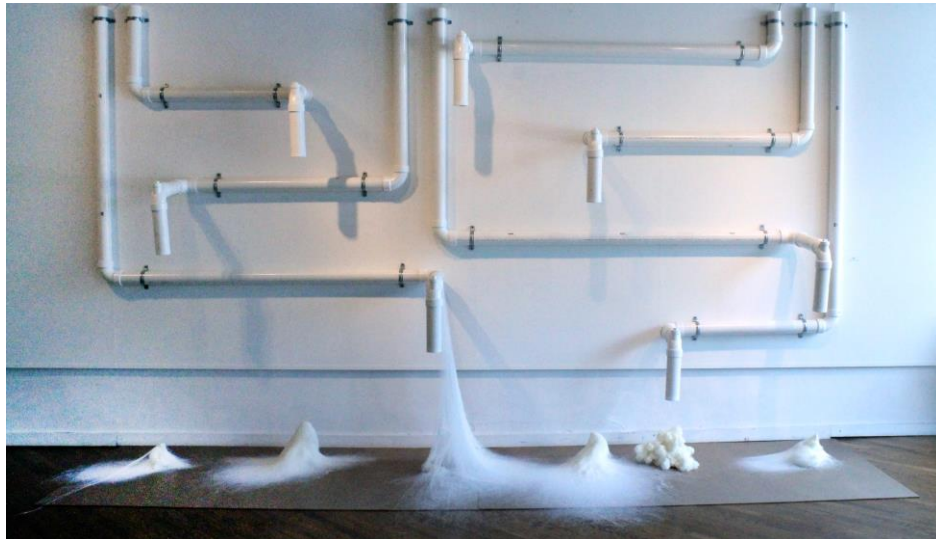
In *Simultaneity IV*, grass grows from pairs of 8-foot tall bent PVC pipes. This rids

the grass of the “lawn” associations, as the pattern of growth is to be the focus. The growth process is a slow one, to the extent of being boring. Such durations make us aware of our own pace. As we become bored there is no consciousness other than time (Sacks 2009: 78).



Formally, I incorporate curved lines into the forms to break away from the more structured appearance of a straight edge. Within the temporal context, straight lines hint at a linear progression, which is not in accordance with the cyclical. Bergson explains, “A curved line changes its direction at every moment, every new direction is indicated in the preceding one. Thus this perception of ease in motion passes over into the pleasure of mastering the flow of time and of holding the future in the present (Bergson 2001:12).”

The final piece of the series, *Simultaneity V*, uses modern industrial materials to present an unknown process to the viewer to create a multifaceted durational installation. It consists of a system of 3" PVC plumbing and the “unknown process” which slowly emits a synthetic substance that culminates on the floor below.



See Video Here: [http://youtu.be/1U\\_zZ4i3c9E](http://youtu.be/1U_zZ4i3c9E)



The presence of a residue gives evidence of a previous timeframe of occurrence. It is completely up to the viewer to piece together the clues that create their own abstract timeframe. It places the viewer into the role of the creator, which automatically makes the imagined timeframe true. When this is the goal, it is imperative that a viewer never sees the entire process, to ensure that “the work concerns itself with things whose interrelationship is beyond direct perceptual experience (Eleeey 2009: 34)”.

As the viewer sees the residue of the previous drops, the story begins. How long has this been dripping? Will it fill up the room? What will it look like in a week, month, year? Then the relations to the self enter the dilemma. Will I see something significant happen while I am here? How much of my time will I spend here watching it? What else could I be doing with my time, and is it worth it? The simultaneity of all existence might then be considered as a final act.

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