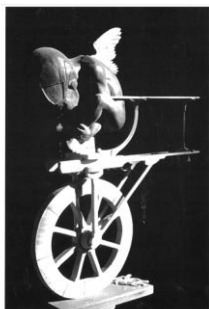


## *The Vivid yet Elusive Experience of Time*

**Camilo Peñaloza**



Time, what is time but seeing another moment drift by, one after another after another for eternity or is it? How to define time has always been a troublesome task, in St Augustine's words:

*"What then, is time? If no one asks me, I know. If I wish to explain it to someone who asks, I know it not"*(Fraser, p. 35)

It certainly seems that our daily experience of life is just another glimpse of the vast reality out there, a never ending, everlasting reality. A reality that goes on and on, step after step and it does so with or without us. We may owe this view to Sir Isaac Newton who proposed over 300 years ago a new view of the world in which he confined us to the idea of an absolute space and time. This hypothesis was questioned at the

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Albert Einstein and his theory of relativity. In it he proposed that space and time (Space-Time) are moulded by light, therefore concepts such as time dilatation and length contraction arise. This view of life certainly questioned the physics of the time yet it has been proven correct throughout the years. However it surely feels in our daily lives that Newton's idea is more familiar, it makes more sense to our daily perception and experience of the world.

I believe this is a fitting subject for further exploration and inquiry both for time and space; in this case I will only inquire in time and our direct experience of it. When studying physics I came upon Einstein's relativity and the Lorentz transformations for space and time. These transformations allow for the physical laws to remain unchanged regardless of the frame of reference and are key elements in carrying out any calculations in both special and general relativity. However when working with these transformations I found myself struggling to figure out how to transform time, then finally I "cheated" and used simple algebra to rearrange it in a way for it to work. Then it struck me, where can I find time? When or how do I experience time directly? Is it all in my head? After my first experience with the science of qualities; the study and further exploration of time through Goethean science was an unavoidable path.

When doing Goethean science we are encouraged to go directly into the phenomenon itself, where meaning – in Agnes Arber's words – *"may be held to signify the intuitive knowledge gained through contemplation of a visible aspect"*(Bortoft, p. 19) and as Goethe himself named it *Anschauung*. In doing so – as Henri Bortoft puts it – you experience the phenomenon "Upstream" instead of "Downstream". In this case Upstream can relate to the Primary act and Downstream to Secondary acts; however in this context Primary and Secondary don't relate in a linear causal way as we are used to, but rather in a dynamic interplay in which the Primary is the ever-present essence and Secondary is any possible manifestation of this essence. Knowing this, the intention is now clear that in exploring time through this method the aim is to obtain time in its Primary state.

Before going into the endless possibilities and experiences that Goethean science brings, let us explore how time works in our modern world. This could be an endless task and for the purpose of this paper I shall only approach this from a physics perspective knowing that this is clearly restrictive and that there are many other perspectives that could shed light on such a subject. If we go to a dictionary we find that time is defined as: *"Originally measured by the hour angle of a selected point of reference on the celestial sphere with respect to the observer's meridian. The fundamental unit of time measurement now is the second based on an atomic oscillation"*(Dictionary of Science and Technology)

Seeing such a definition is somehow striking since it strays far away from what our reality and experience of time really is. Yet it allows us to understand the fundamental way of recording and defining time in our modern perspective and that is by periodic effects. A period is the *"Time taken for one complete cycle of an alternating quantity"*(Dictionary of Science and Technology)for example for the earth to go around the sun. With the help of better technologies our ability to measure time more precisely has increased greatly; however it seems clear, by the definitions shown above, that our knowledge of Primary time has not been fully explored.

One thing that can be said, it appears that our measuring of time is directly related to our ability to distinguish realities. If we were unable to distinguish between day and night, our understanding of the passing of time

would be completely different; further if we were unable to distinguish anything at all we would not be able to measure time at all. As Richard Feynman puts it “Does “time” exist on a still smaller scale? Does it make any sense to speak of smaller times if we cannot measure?”(Feynman, Leighton, & Sands, p. 50) In the ability of distinction we find our ability to measure and register time, but does this have anything to do with how we experience and live time? Does the act of distinction also influence our direct experience?

Many will argue that time is only what is measured and that our experience adds no value since it may be tainted with subjectivity. I believe that through the qualities explored by the Goethean method we can not only add value, but discover new dimensions to time and what it means. When going into time and trying to see time from a Goethean perspective, which is by experiencing the phenomenon of time directly, it is barely or not at all graspable. There is a need to be able to contemplate the phenomenon directly to be able to glean some intuitive knowledge from it, as it is possible to do when we study plants as Goethe did. Therefore the question arises, ‘How can we do phenomenology if the phenomenon is barely graspable?’

As I explored this idea, I found that time went by, and then I understood that my experience of time is related through the experience of what I am doing. For example when I am at a lecture, I am having a direct experience of the lecturer, the topic being discussed and the people surrounding me. Additionally as all this is going on, however unconscious or unaware I am, I am having a direct experience of time. But to take the example further we may ask ourselves the following question ‘Why does my experience of time feel different through a particular lecture if I know all lectures last an hour?’

It is at this point that it must be noted, we are slowly entering the realm of Primary time since it feels as if we are embarking upon a dark and unusual path.

‘So is this example then of an exception or is it the rule?’ Well there are certainly several more examples that relive this same experience, a perfect example from our daily lives is with movies. Good movies usually tend to go by smoothly and surely time seems to fly by, hence the expression. On the other hand when watching a bad movie, time seems to drag. So we can see that even though this is the same event, the same situation, the same sensory perception, the experience is completely different. At first glance the reason appears to be obvious, what I find dull makes my experience feel longer and what I find interesting makes it otherwise. Even though this may be so, what this suggests is that time is relative to the perspective of the subject and not absolute as Einstein suggested in his Theory of Relativity, however this time it is a knowledge coming directly out of my experience and my direct relation to it.

In Einstein’s Relativity we need incredible speeds to be able to see how time and space become relative, what is it in this case that triggers the possibility to make our experience of time relative? My guess is that meaning is responsible for this. So whether I give a positive or negative meaning to what I’m doing, my experience of time can shift from either flying by or dragging, therefore our experience of time is directly related to that of meaning in some way. It feels as if time is a consequence of giving meaning to an experience. So what if we tried to examine time before meaning, it definitely appears as if we would be looking at the picture of the giraffe all over again (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1** “Many people at first see only a random patchwork of black and white areas; but on looking further some people will suddenly see(...) the head and upper neck of a giraffe” (Bortoft, p. 51)

Apparently then there is a “moment” in between giving meaning to an experience and actually living the experience and we can call this the coming into being. Bear in mind in this case, *moment* refers to an a-temporal feature since it is before time (This shows how limiting language can be when dealing with such a subject. To avoid further confusions, from now on any other word which by itself refers to time will be italicized to suggest its a-temporality). So it is just after I give meaning to something that my analytical mind quickly separates the variables so it can interpret the experience. Now before we go on with this journey it must be pointed out that by mentioning meaning we are entering a realm which is much more complicated than what this paper can deal with, therefore I will use the definition best suited for the purpose here; however I am aware of other several other possibilities that might be considered.



I have mentioned that meaning somehow precedes time which is by itself a very contradictory affirmation since the word *precedes* already suggests a notion of time, having this in mind let us understand meaning as an act of distinction. Let us go back to the measuring of time which is done by working with oscillations between two different states. It can be safely said that time is directly related to change and this is something related to our day to day experience. Now in measuring time it can be said that there is a measurement of the changes the system goes through, in this case between two different states (recall atomic oscillations mentioned before). The differentiation of these states and therefore our possibility to measure time, is linked to our ability to distinguish one from the other, if this were not possible then my ability to measure time would be lost. Therefore in the *moment*, in which something is distinguished, the ability to measure time is regained, however within distinction, meaning comes along. However this raises a couple of questions, 'Is there something *before* distinction?' I believe there is. And if so 'is it meaningless?' If this is true, 'how do we tap into this world *before* time and distinction?' When trying to experience the phenomena upstream, you go through the process of searching for the moment where it comes into being. It is my belief that there are several different paths that may allow one to experience this world, even if it is only a glimpse, a peak into a timeless reality. Before actually discussing the possibilities of what this might mean I shall talk about the process itself that I have explored not only by myself but with other people which will enable us to understand a little bit more of the coming into being of time.

### THE EXPERIMENT

The intention of this experiment is to explore the nature of time through our experience of music. This experiment arose thanks to a suggestion made by Henri Bortoft in one of his lectures. Before going into the results, experiences and possible conclusions, let me briefly describe the experiment.

The experiment consists of 3 steps:

1. Listening to a song, with no special mindset.
2. Listening to the same song, this time "concentrating on the beat and fixing the rhythm" in your mind, the description might be: "a line, a wave, a curve" and secondly it must not contain symbols, pictures, forms.
3. Listening to the same song, this time allowing the music to manifest freely, with no expectation whatsoever of what should be manifested, enjoying this manifestation.

This simple experiment was conducted three times, two of which involved only one person and once with a group of 17 people. In all the experiments, the song used was the same - "Adagio in C Minor by Yanni".

### Results:

It is important to underline that the results search for the qualities instead of quantities, therefore quantities were not measured.

With that in mind the results try to gather as far as possible the different qualities reported by the participants.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Time:

There was a general consensus that the tune appeared to be longer, however no attributes were described or given.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Time:

The participants found that listening to the tune required much more effort and concentration; expressions suggesting this were "Heady", "Difficult", "Hard", "Tense". Also reported was the quality of non-involvement given by words like "Counting", "Score", "Equalizer", "Two-dimensional".

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Time:

This time there was a sense of unboundedness and openness as well as a sense of participation, which can be understood by the following expressions "Free", "I saw Colors", "It was a Story", "Songness of the song", "Timeless", "I could appreciate the music". When asking for a broader description of the images perceived by different listeners, there was a broad consensus in the terms applied such as "Spirals", "Forests", "Leaves Falling".

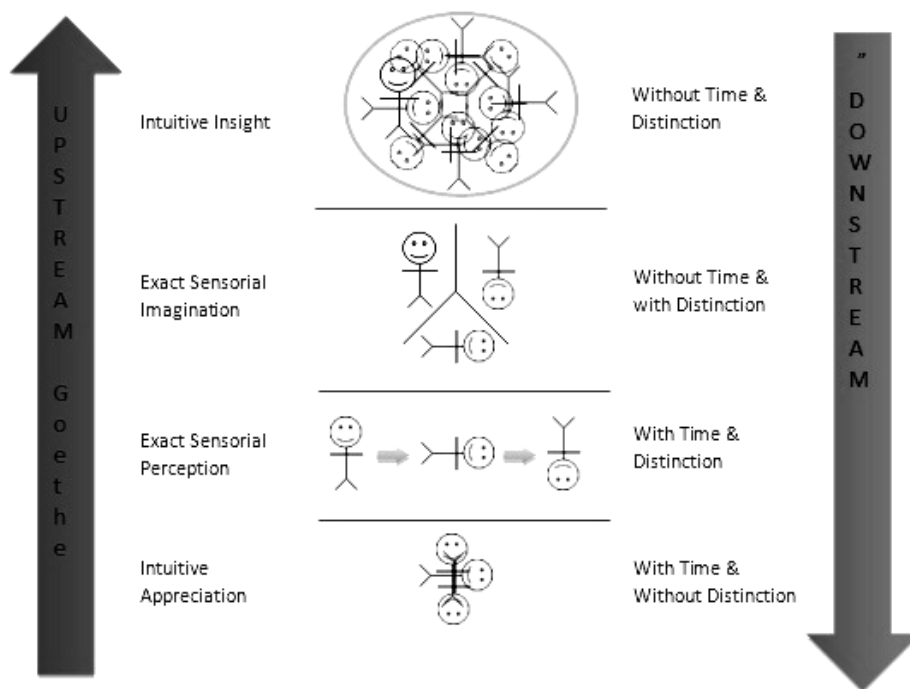
So how does this experiment and these experiences relate to time? If we recall, we were trying to explore the possibility of a world *before* time and distinction and my suggestion is that this method may allow us to glimpse this world. Before analyzing the possible meanings of the results it might be stated that each mindset is just a way of allowing ourselves to start comprehending time. For example the second time certainly refers to the conception of time as the abstract absolute feature to which Newton referred to, it is that conception of

the adding of moments to construct our sense of time. On the other hand the third time could be conceived as a moment before distinction, therefore of a time which has no meaning and is less graspable.

In the study of phenomenology and Goethe's way of science. we encounter different ways of knowing - relating these steps to the experiment will allow us to understand it better ( See article by Henri Bortoft for description of this method).

The experiment and its results can be understood having this structure in mind. The 1<sup>st</sup> time could be the intuitive appreciation and as said before this is an unconscious process therefore the lack of description. The 2<sup>nd</sup> time is the exact sensorial perception as we constrain our way of knowing to what we "measure" which is consistent with the common interpretation and sensation of being in the head. In the case of music, measurement also comes as musical notes therefore the impression of "counting" or "scoring" was described in what was heard. The 3<sup>rd</sup> time the liberty to let the music express itself allows for the fluid movement of the exact sensorial imagination to kick in. Even though the descriptions of the experiences are different there is a constant sense of freeness and of appreciation of the music in which several stories were manifested suggesting a direct participation of each listener. However having covered all of the results, two questions remain: 1. 'Where is the 4<sup>th</sup> way of knowing, intuitive insight, expressed in this experiment?' 2. 'What do these experiences have to do with our discussion of time?'

The answer to both of these questions is probably the same, since it is in this seeing and beholding where we experience the time *before* time. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> time some people experienced an intuitive insight directly into the Primary nature of the song expressed by some as the "Songness of the song". This insight into the Primary state (sometimes called Wholeness) could be demonstrated by some of the coincidences that appeared within the experiences. Interestingly enough, some other people said that they experienced a sense of timelessness. It is my belief that this is two different expressions of intuitive insight which try to convey the same idea - a sense of wholeness. In Figure 2 this idea is expressed and later discussed in relation to the experiment.



**Figure 2:** Exploration of the ways of knowing, distinction and time through the phenomenon of rotation.

This picture illustrates both the experience and concept of wholeness and how this relates to time by using the symbol of rotation. In the first level the named intuitive appreciation is related to a moment in time but no distinction is portrayed. This is an initial direct understanding of the system however it by no means gives a clear concept which can be meaningful. Moreover, this suggests the need to spend more time on the phenomenon so as to be able to understand it. Gradually it is seen that time is needed to be able to understand.

This is evident in the next level when distinction appears. This allows us to understand each element separately and comparatively so as to understand all the facts of what rotation is; all of this within the

framework of time. However the idea of how to have rotation is not fully grasped, therefore we need to step into level three and try to imagine this in a fluid manner.

This is never an easy task, especially when trying to do so through a rigid framework, a framework such as time. This is because it challenges our imagination to go beyond this framework and as a consequence of such an act, the once useful framework must now go. But after leaving time it becomes evident that the next immediate step must be the letting go of distinction. Slowly we approach the last level in which finally the wholeness of the phenomenon expresses itself.

The distinguishing which made time possible now merges back into the same original unity from which everything was created, back into wholeness. Thus the quality of distinction, which separates the wholeness into understandable parts, is now lost. This ability to distinguish internal from external, objective from subjective is left behind when stepping into this new realm of wholeness.

This last picture illustrates how this can be an experience often indescribable and mind blowing as all the possibilities within this phenomenon are expressed in a timeless manner. Having said this it must be understood that this experience is such as to bring clarity, as Goethe himself says *"If we imagine the outcome of these attempts, we will see that empirical observation finally ceases, inner beholding of what develops begins, and, at last, the idea can be brought to expression."* (Holdrege, p. 24)

It may certainly seem as if this ultimate knowledge or insight is the goal to aim for when doing Goethean Science, but this would also be a mistake. It must be remembered that our own framework is the one that enabled us in the first place to then make the necessary leap into a broader knowledge. If we look in more detail at what has been said we will find out that this methodology somehow suggests a loop between going upstream and downstream constantly so as to acquire a deeper knowledge of any phenomena. Hence we must constantly return to our initial framework as to expand our possibilities of growth. Thereby embracing the constant dynamic flow of this process which enables these glimpses of wholeness to become ever so much more natural and insightful.

If we go back to the initial dilemma 'what is time?' after going through this journey. would we be able to answer it? I believe not. I believe that as stated before, this is a process which involves going over and over and over again through the same steps and to embody the process ever more often. However it can be said that there are new qualities of time that are now better grasped and probably even explained. For example the sense that time is an ever changing independent feature of the world is certainly questioned by our paradoxical experience of timelessness which suggests otherwise. And even the direction of time is challenged which certainly seems as if it could go both ways. Time then becomes a paradox through our vivid yet elusive experience of itself.

A feeling of disappointment certainly arises as we "fail" to obtain a conclusion, or more precisely a sense of "knowing" of the phenomenon of time. What is it then that we are left with? We are left with an incredible way of knowing the world, which on a deeper level challenges and transforms our need to "know" the world into the need to "LIVE" the world. A beautiful way of embodying the natural dynamic flow of nature unfolds into infinite wonderful possibilities.

### References

- Bortoft, H. (1996). *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way of Science*. Lindisfarne Books.  
 Chambers Dictionary (1999).  
 Dictionary of Science and Technology. Chambers Harrap Publishers.  
 Colquhoun, M., & Ewald, A. (1996). *New Eyes for Plants: A workbook for observing and drawing plants*. Hawthorn Press.  
 Feynman, R., Leighton, R., & Sands, M. (1964). *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*. Addison-Wesley.  
 Fraser, J. (1987). *Time: the Familiar Stranger*. The University of Massachusetts Press.  
 Holdrege, C. (2005). *Doing Goethean Science*. Janus Head, 8.1

**Camilo Peñaloza** graduated from physics at "La Universidad de Los Andes" in Colombia. Upon his graduation and seeking a more holistic and whole approach to science he enrolled to do a Master in Holistic Science at Schumacher college. Currently he is finishing this degree and searching for the best path to continue this search"  
 Email: [camilo.penaloz@gmail.com](mailto:camilo.penaloz@gmail.com)



**Ode to Master and his Emissary (continued)**

*The blind Left side lives in this box  
It cannot deal with paradox  
Cannot know mysterious life  
Which makes its entrance through the Right*

*The Right hemisphere is wider and bigger  
Holistic – confirming the words of Heidegger  
The Right sees pattern in its comprehending  
Faster more complex in its understanding*

*The implicit, unconscious, sublime and intuitive  
Can be expressed through Art, Myth and Music  
This is the province of Holistic Right  
Which disintegrates under philosophy's light*

*Philosophers generally work through the left  
But this faulty procedure leaves them bereft  
Using language as their analytical tool  
Is like speaking of 'Red' in the language of 'Blue'  
(... more follows)*