

A speculation on Time

Our normal understanding treats time as the strictly linear measure of successive moments or events. This is the forward motion of time's arrow. Relativity theory suggests that it is bi-directional; the mathematics work equally well in either direction.

But what is time? P-Orridge coined the phrase 'Time is that which emits', and this provides a clue which I propose to explore. Time is significant to P-Orridge, and its significance lies in his intuitive grasp and ritual experience of time's thickness.

We can restate P-Orridge's phrase as a simple equation: TIME=EMIT. The one is the mirror of the other. We can take this a step further and propose that 'time' is the expression of energy (an emission). It is important here to note that this is *not* the same as saying that expressions of energy take place *in* time, but rather that what we consider as the movement of time *is* an expression of energy.

Now for some proposals:

The first proposal is that there is a relationship of identity between energy and time, and that when we consider what we mean by time we are considering the function of energy under another form.

The second is that we can consider our thoughts or mental activity as constituting high-energy states in contrast with physical existence or activity which occurs in low-energy states. All physically manifest objects (including atoms) are to be considered 'low-energy'.

I leave the third step to Alfred North Whitehead, noting first that he requires that every entity has both a physical and a mental aspect (or 'pole'):

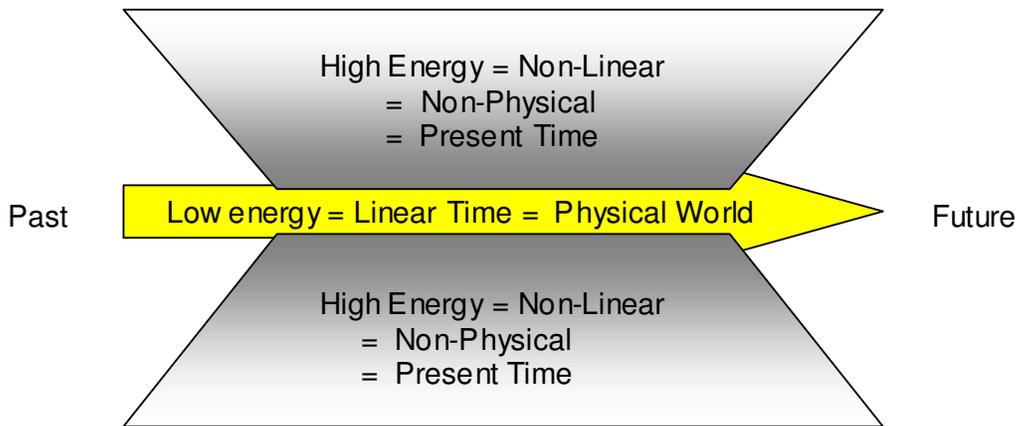
The mental pole is the subject determining its own ideal of itself by reference to eternal principles of valuation autonomously modified in their application to its own physical objective datum. Every actual entity is 'in time' so far as its physical pole is concerned, and is 'out of time' so far as its mental pole is concerned. *It is the union of two worlds, namely, the temporal world, and the world of autonomous valuation.* (*Process and Reality*, p248)

The 'world of autonomous valuation' is, for Whitehead, 'out of time'. We need to take this to mean 'out of linear time', since the process of valuation necessarily effects some degree of change in what is being valued. We cannot under a process metaphysic consider the possibility of timelessness since that would imply a lack of process, a lack of change. And any change must be an expression of energy and thus of time.

If the mental pole exists outside linear time, but cannot (because of its inherent activity) be 'atemporal', it must therefore be expressing time in some other way. We know from physics that the addition of energy increases the level of activity of atoms (they move faster), and that in the physical plane a large increase in energy alters the physical state of materials (solids melt, liquids vaporize). We also know that time is relative to the observer, and that rapid movement *slows* the passage of time relative to

a fixed or stationary point. Atomic clocks run slow at altitude, and someone orbiting the earth in a satellite ages marginally less quickly than those on earth even though an hour or a day feels the same under both sets of conditions.

What this is leading to is the suggestion that our sense of linear time is simply the result of relatively low-energy existence. In order to retain physical coherence there are limits (even at the atomic level) on how much energy we can express, and this limit is directly linked to our notion of linear time. But if time bears a relationship of identity with energy, and energy (which is simply activity by another name) is increased, then it becomes possible to imagine that at high levels of energy the physical limits are broken and existence emerges outside the tight constraints of linear time. This suggests that 'time' as fully conceived has thickness or extension.



The Thickness of Time. The arrow represents the normal progression of time and the location of physical entities. The shaded areas represent the realm where high energy entities emerge outside the linear constraints.

I propose that mental activity (thought) is simply the emergence of entities into high-energy states. This goes beyond what Whitehead claims but is arguably implicit in his position. We should also note here Whitehead's description of the non-temporal world as one of 'autonomous valuation', and take care to distinguish between the physical brain activity through which we engage with thought and the thought itself. But if we make the conceptual leap, we can begin to see how, for example, the mystic is able to transcend the limits of normal temporality and reach both into the past and the future. In the language of the magical traditions this is the realm of hidden or occult activity. The aether. The astral plane.

