

SEEING OUTSIDE THE PRISM

On the Limits of Temporal Imagination, and How to Think Past Four-Dimensional Time

Christopher E. Etter · Catharturgy Corpus · 2026

Abstract

Several arguments of the Catharturgy Corpus require the reader to conceive of a register outside four-dimensional time — the dimensional reconciliation of omniscience and freedom, the bounded fractal across registers, the perpendicular formal register of qualitative properties, the dimensional-intersection cosmology. The difficulty these arguments face is not a lack of information but a structural feature of the four-dimensional mind: every mental image available for picturing timelessness is itself temporal, so that the very tools the imagination reaches for to grasp a timeless register smuggle four-dimensional time back in. This paper is a disciplined exercise in subtraction. It does not explain the block view of time or argue for it; it identifies, one by one, the ways in which the attempt to picture a timeless or higher-dimensional vantage betrays itself, and it shows how to remove the temporal residue from each attempt. The traps it names are the frozen-block trap, the viewing-the-block trap, the already-and-still trap, and the dimensional-analogy trap. The method throughout is via negativa with respect to time: not the construction of a positive image of the timeless, which is impossible for a temporal imagination, but the successive removal of the temporal smuggling from each image, so that what remains is the concept that survives when the temporal residue is subtracted. The aim is to bring the reader to the edge of what can be pictured and then to mark, precisely, what lies past it — a region the Corpus's dimensional arguments require but no mental image can depict.

Keywords: Time · Block Universe · Eternalism · Temporal Imagination · Tenseless · Via Negativa · Higher Dimension · Perpendicularity · Omniscience · Apophatic Method · KEP · Catharturgy

I. The Problem Is Not Information but Imagination

Several arguments in this Corpus ask the reader to think outside four-dimensional time: the reconciliation of divine omniscience with human freedom, which requires a register perpendicular

to time from which the whole worldline is apprehended at once; the bounded fractal of contained multiplicity, which recurs across dimensional registers; the perpendicular formal register from which qualitative properties flow; and the dimensional-intersection cosmology generally. In each, the reader is asked to conceive of a vantage or a register that is not within the temporal order as we experience it. And in each, a characteristic difficulty arises that is not a difficulty of information.

The reader who has understood the block view of time perfectly well — who can state that past, present, and future are equally real, that the temporal whole is laid out as a four-dimensional manifold, that the moving present is no more objective than a privileged ‘here’ — will nonetheless find, in the act of trying to picture it, that the picture keeps reintroducing the very thing it was meant to remove. This is because the imagination of a four-dimensional mind is itself temporal: every image it can form unfolds in time, is scanned in time, or describes a state that obtains at a time. The tools available for picturing timelessness are made of time. The result is that the attempt to imagine a timeless register does not fail by producing no image; it fails, more insidiously, by producing an image that looks adequate but has smuggled four-dimensional time back in through its own structure.

This paper addresses that difficulty directly. It is not an explanation of the block view, which is given elsewhere, nor an argument for it. It is a disciplined exercise in subtraction — a *via negativa* with respect to time. It does not attempt to construct a positive image of the timeless, because a temporal imagination cannot construct one; the timeless is not a possible object of a temporal image. Instead it identifies, one trap at a time, the specific way each attempt to picture the timeless betrays itself, and it removes the temporal residue from each. What remains, when the residue is subtracted, is not a picture but a concept — the concept the Corpus’s dimensional arguments require, marked off precisely as what lies past the edge of what can be depicted.

II. The Frozen-Block Trap

The first and subtlest trap appears the moment the block view is grasped. Told that the whole of time simply is, laid out all at once, the reader pictures a static, frozen object: a glacier, a sculpture, a film reel sitting on a shelf, a landscape that does not move. This image feels like the correct opposite of the flowing present — if time does not flow, it must be frozen. And precisely here the trap closes.

Frozen and static are themselves temporal words. To be frozen is to be not-changing over time; to be static is to be unmoving through time. Both predicates are defined by the absence of change across a temporal interval, which means both presuppose the temporal interval they are meant to deny. A truly tenseless whole is not frozen, because freezing is something that happens in time and persists through it. The block is not motionless, because motionlessness is still a temporal property — the property of having the same state at successive moments. The opposite of a flowing time is not a frozen time. The opposite of a flowing time is no-time-at-all in the relevant dimension, which is not a state that obtains throughout an interval but is not the kind of thing of which intervals can be predicated at all.

To subtract the residue: take the image of the frozen block and remove from it the implicit ‘and it stays that way.’ The block does not stay any way, because staying is endurance through time. Remove, too, the implicit contrast with motion, since the block is not the still alternative to a moving thing but is not on the moving-or-still axis at all. What remains is not a frozen object but a whole of which the predicates frozen and moving are equally inapplicable — a whole that is, tenselessly, without thereby being static. The frozen block was time smuggled in as stillness. Remove the stillness, and what is left is not a colder, stiller time but the absence of the temporal axis along which stillness and motion are the alternatives.

III. The Viewing-the-Block Trap

The second trap is the most consequential for the Corpus’s arguments, because those arguments speak of a higher register that sees the whole of time at once. The moment the reader imagines viewing the block — surveying the laid-out timeline, looking along the worldline from the height, taking in the whole four-dimensional manifold — an observer has been placed outside the block who is taking time to look. The eye, even the mind’s eye, scans. Scanning is sequential. Sequence is time. So the image of seeing all of time at once has quietly introduced a second time, a meta-time, in which the seeing occurs.

This is fatal if left uncorrected, because the higher register’s apprehension must not be a scanning-over-time from a second timeline. If the higher being reads the worldline very fast, it is still in time — merely in a faster time, or a longer one. A being that takes in the whole of history in a single sweep has still taken a sweep, and a sweep has a beginning and an end and a direction. No matter how fast the survey, a survey is temporal, and a faster survey is not a timeless one. The limit of faster-and-faster scanning is not the timeless apprehension the argument requires; it is only a very fast scan. The timeless apprehension is not the limit of that series at all. It is categorically off the series — an apprehension without traversal, a grasp that does not move across its object because it is not the kind of grasp of which movement-across can be predicated.

To subtract the residue: take the image of the higher being surveying the worldline and remove the survey. Remove the scan, the sweep, the taking-in-over-an-interval, however brief. Remove, too, the single instantaneous snapshot, for a snapshot is a state at a moment and so still locates the seeing at a time. What remains cannot be pictured, because every picture of a seeing is a picture of a seeing that takes time or occurs at a time, and both have been removed. What can be marked, though it cannot be depicted, is the structure: an apprehension whose relation to its object is not traversal and not snapshot but the holding-present of the whole without any temporal act of holding. We denote it; we do not depict it. The Corpus’s phrase ‘seeing-whole’ is to be read as this denotation and not as the description of a survey, however total.

A being that reads the whole of time very, very fast is still in time. The timeless apprehension is not the limit of faster and faster scanning; it is off that series entirely — a holding-present of the whole with no temporal act of holding, no sweep, no snapshot, no traversal. We can denote it. We cannot picture it, because every picture of a seeing smuggles in the time the seeing would take.

IV. The Already-and-Still Trap

The third trap is lodged in language rather than in pictures, and it is the hardest to notice because it operates below the level of deliberate imagery. To express the block view we say that the future already exists, that the dinosaurs are still there at their coordinates, that the events of next year are already laid out. But already and still are tensed words. Already means before now; still means continuing up to now and onward. Both presuppose the privileged, moving present that the block view exists to deny. There is no already in the block, because already locates a thing earlier than a now, and the block has no privileged now from which to reckon earlier and later in the tensed sense.

The trap is that the only natural language for asserting the reality of the future is tensed language, and tensed language reimports the moving present. When we say the future already exists, we picture, against our own intent, a present moment at which the future, somehow, is also present — which is incoherent, and which is not what is meant. What is meant is tenseless: that the events at future coordinates are real, full stop, without an already, in the same tenseless sense in which events at distant spatial coordinates are real without being here. The cure is the spatial analogy applied to the language: we do not say a distant city already exists or is still there; we say it exists, tenselessly, at its location. The block view asks the same tenseless assertion of temporal locations. The events of next year exist at their temporal location — not already, not yet, not still, but tenselessly, as the city exists at its place.

To subtract the residue: strike every already, yet, still, and now from the assertion, and replace the tensed verb with the tenseless. Not ‘the future already exists’ but ‘events exist at future temporal locations.’ Not ‘the dinosaurs are still there’ but ‘events exist at past temporal locations.’ The temporal residue in the block view’s own slogans is the tensed vocabulary in which they are usually stated; removing it does not change the claim but removes the moving present that the vocabulary keeps reinserting. The claim that survives is flat, tenseless, and spatial in form: reality is not confined to a moving slice; it is the whole manifold, and temporal locations are real as spatial locations are real, without tense.

V. The Dimensional-Analogy Trap

The fourth trap attends the Corpus’s most powerful aid: the analogy by which a higher register apprehends the four-dimensional worldline as a two-dimensional vantage apprehends a one-dimensional line, seeing whole what the lower being could traverse only point by point. The analogy is genuinely illuminating and is not to be discarded. But it carries a leak, and the leak must be made explicit or the analogy will betray the argument it serves.

The leak is this. When we picture the two-dimensional being seeing the whole line at once, we imagine its gaze taking in the line — and that gaze occurs in its time. We have given the higher being a temporality of its own and pictured it surveying the lower figure within that temporality. So the analogy, used naively, does not actually remove time; it relocates time to the higher register

and then has the higher being scan the lower one within it. This is the viewing-the-block trap reappearing one dimension up. The two-dimensional viewer scanning the line is no more timeless than the four-dimensional being scanning history; we have only moved the scanning upstairs.

The correction is to insist that the analogy is about structure, not phenomenology. What the line-and-plane analogy legitimately shows is the relation between the registers: that the whole of the lower-dimensional figure is, to the higher register, laid out and co-present rather than traversed — that what is extension-requiring-traversal below is whole-and-given above. What the analogy does not show, and must not be taken to show, is what the higher apprehension is like, how it feels, or how long it takes, because the moment we supply those we have supplied a higher time and a higher scan. The analogy is a diagram of the relation between registers, not a depiction of the higher being's experience. Used as a diagram of structure, it is exact and indispensable. Used as a picture of a higher mind looking at a lower figure, it smuggles time upstairs and undoes itself. To subtract the residue: keep the relation the analogy shows — lower-extension as higher-co-presence — and remove the higher gaze that the picture supplies. What remains is structural and true; what is removed was the temporal phenomenology the analogy was never entitled to add.

VI. What Survives the Subtraction

The method of this paper has been subtraction, not construction. It has not produced an image of the timeless, because a temporal imagination cannot produce one; the timeless is not a possible object of a temporal image, and every attempt to make it one reintroduces the time it was meant to exclude. What the method produces instead is the concept that survives when the temporal residue is removed from each failed image: from the frozen block, the stillness is removed, leaving a whole off the motion-and-rest axis; from the viewing of the block, the scan and the snapshot are removed, leaving a holding-present without a temporal act of holding; from the already and the still, the tense is removed, leaving the tenseless reality of all temporal locations; from the dimensional analogy, the higher gaze is removed, leaving the structural relation of lower-extension to higher-co-presence.

These subtractions converge on a single recognition. The four-dimensional prism is not a window through which time is correctly seen and merely needs supplementing; it is a mode of apprehension whose every feature — flow, present, sequence, traversal — is a feature of apprehension within the register, not a feature of the temporal whole as such. To think past the prism is not to picture a larger thing but to subtract these features and refrain from reinserting them. The reader who has done the subtraction will not come away with a vivid image of timelessness — there is none to be had — but with something more useful for the Corpus's arguments: the trained capacity to notice when an image has smuggled time back in, and to set the smuggled time aside. That capacity is what the dimensional arguments require of their reader. They do not require that the timeless be pictured. They require that it not be mispictured as a frozen, surveyed, already-laid-out thing scanned by a higher gaze — for each of those is the prism reasserting itself under the appearance of having been escaped.

When the Corpus speaks of a register perpendicular to time, of a worldline seen whole, of the

divine apprehension of the whole free history at once, these phrases are to be read as denotations of the structure that survives the subtraction, not as descriptions of a picture. The perpendicular register is not a place from which time is viewed; the seeing-whole is not a survey; the all-at-once is not a single instant of higher time. Each phrase points past the edge of what can be depicted, to the region the arguments require and no image can enter. The discipline of this paper is the discipline of pointing without depicting — of bringing the reader to the edge of the picturable and marking, exactly, what lies on the far side of it.

The four-dimensional prism cannot be supplemented into a view of the timeless; it can only be subtracted from. Remove the stillness, the scan, the tense, the higher gaze — and no image remains, because none was ever possible. What remains is the trained refusal to mispicture: to stop calling the timeless frozen, stop surveying it, stop saying it is already there, stop giving the higher register a gaze. The arguments do not ask the reader to picture what lies past the prism. They ask only that it not be dragged back inside.

References and Related Papers

Etter, Christopher E. *Omniscience and Freedom: The Dimensional Reconciliation*. Catharturgy Corpus, 2026.

Etter, Christopher E. *The Bounded Fractal of Contained Multiplicity; The Perpendicular Qualities of Matter; Kenotic Effluent Panapotheism: The System Stated*. Catharturgy Corpus, 2026.

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V (the eternal present as non-sequential, not as a temporal instant).

Minkowski, Hermann. 'Space and Time' (1908), the four-dimensional formulation of spacetime.

McTaggart, J. M. E. 'The Unreality of Time.' *Mind* 17 (1908), for the tensed/tenseless (A-series/B-series) distinction.

Standard treatments of eternalism, the block universe, and the tenseless theory of time in the philosophy of physics.