

The Persistent Clock

by

Joseph H. Boyett and Jimmie T. Boyett

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This story is absolutely true, although it seems impossible.

I was working on an article about concepts of time over...well, time. I had reached the point in the article where I intended to discuss the arrow of time and why we perceive time as flowing in only one direction. It was tough going since the idea that there is no real reason time must flow from past to future instead of future to past is a concept foreign to most people. As Carlo Rovelli points out in his book, *The Order of Time*, "If we observe the microscopic state of things, then the difference between past and future vanishes." (pp. 32-33) In reality, we only perceive time passing like an arrow flying from the past to the future rather than the other way because most of us cannot comprehend the world as it really is. As I said, this is a difficult concept to convey in a simple article, so I was having some difficulty explaining it.

I had been working on the article alone in my office for several hours when there was a sudden storm that knocked out my computer for a moment. Luckily, nothing was damaged and I was soon able to bring the article back up on my screen. I discovered that I had only lost the portion I had written since the last backup. Unfortunately, I lost much of the discussion of the arrow of time. I would have to recreate that from my notes.

As I began to write again, it occurred to me that I needed to check the time. At 4PM, all of the major networks were covering a live conference on developments in the struggle to contain the latest pandemic. I wanted to watch it.

I checked my Apple watch and it registered 3:15. I noticed that the battery was nearly dead, so I took the watch to the bedroom where I kept the charger and put it on to charge. It was my only watch so I was going to have to depend upon the clock in my office to know when to turn on the news.

My office clock was an old analog wall clock we found at a flea market. It had a wooden frame that matched the color of the desks and bookshelves in the office. The hands of the clock were metal and there was a sundial near the six o'clock position. If you looked at the clock from the right angle it looked like a face. We bought the clock primarily because of the way it looked. Additionally, we got a very good price given its age and condition. The seller almost seemed anxious to dispose of it for some reason. We brought the clock home and placed it where it now hung. To our surprise, the old clock actually kept very good time. You had to wind it regularly, once a week or so. If you did, it was amazingly accurate, easily matching the accuracy of my Apple watch or any other modern device. The clock signaled when it needed to be wound. It would emit a loud, piercing sound, almost a scream for attention until you opened the case and wound the mechanism with a special key. Once wound, it would become quiet. The only sound you would hear from it was soft ticking.

I checked the wall clock when I returned to my office. It read 3:22.

I opened the article and began writing, recreating the portion on the arrow of time that I had lost due to the storm. I'm not sure how long I had been at my task when I stopped and glanced up at the clock to check the time. As I said, I wanted to be sure to shut down in time to watch the 4PM conference. My always accurate wall clock said the time was 3:20. Impossible.

I got up and checked the clock to see if maybe it had stopped running. Nothing seemed wrong. I could hear the soft ticking sound like always. I needed to reset the clock.

I guess I could have checked the time on the computer but I did not think of that. Instead, I got up and went into the bedroom and checked my Apple watch which was still charging. The Apple watch said the time was now 3:34.

I went back to my office, set the wall clock to 3:35, and went back to work.

I brought up my article. The entire section on the arrow of time was missing. Everything I had entered since the storm was missing. I couldn't understand how I had lost all my recent work. I was sure that I had saved the article at least two or three times. And, I had Word set to save a copy automatically every 5 minutes. There was nothing to do but start over.

I began recreating the section on the arrow of time once again. This time I made sure to save the article every few minutes. I wrote a few paragraphs and looked up at the wall clock. It read 3:33.

Damn't, I had reset the clock to 3:35. I was sure of that.

I went and got my Apple watch. It still wasn't fully charged but it was charged enough to give me a reliable source for the time. I was determined to stop in time to see that conference at 4PM.

I was worried about the old clock. As I said, we bought it for the way it looked but I had gotten used to relying upon it for the time. I would have to find someone who could do repairs on old clocks to get it fixed.

I reset the wall clock based upon the time showing on my Apple watch. It was 3:46.

I sat down at the computer and brought up the article. The damn stuff on the arrow of time was missing. I tried loading a backup copy. Same thing. It was like I hadn't written a word about the arrow of time although I knew I had.

I started over. Before I could finish even two sentences on the arrow of time, the wall clock started making its "wind me" ear-piercing sound.

I got up and opened the face of the clock. I tried winding it. It didn't need winding.

I went back to my computer and opened the article. Once again, the sentences on the arrow of time were missing. I started over. I typed several words and the wall clock started making its racket once again. I got up, opened the clock face and the sound stopped.

It went like that over the next few minutes. I would start writing about the arrow of time, the clock would start making a noise, I would get up to stop the clock from making the irritating noise and then find when I went back to work on the article that the arrow of time stuff had been deleted.

The same thing happened over and over and over. I was mad as hell and getting nowhere. At this rate, I was never going to be able to finish the article.

I checked the time on my Apple watch. It was almost 4:00.

I gave up for the day. I started to save the article, absent the arrow of time stuff. Before I did, I typed one line: "The arrow of time only points in one direction, past to future."

I saved the article and shut the computer down.

I glanced at the wall clock just as I was leaving the office. I swear, the damn thing looked like it was smiling.