



How to slow down time

Description

Apple introduced a slo-mo video recording feature on the iPhone 5S (with its 64 bit chip) recording at 120 frames per second. So far there are lots of online slow videos of skateboarders, dogs shaking off after a bath, lips blowing raspberries and objects dropping into water. Here's another one.

The availability and ease of the slo-mo feature is bound to have an effect on how people treat ephemeral, instantaneous micro-events and therefore time. Here's another method. In his novel *Travels with my Aunt*, Graham Greene recounts a story of a bed-ridden gentleman housed in a large Italian villa. He desired a long life, and so arranged to be moved every week from one room to the next, along with goods and furniture, and with some effort.

The disruption, the sense of journeying, the anticipation, and the novelty made the first 15 weeks seem like a year to him, a sense that stayed with him as the weeks unfolded until his eventual death as he exited the 51st room.

Disruption

Greene's fictional story concurs with some findings in neuroscience that once we get used to a pattern of events along a regular time scale, any disruptive event seems to take longer than the rest. So if under laboratory conditions an experimenter flashes a picture of a shoe on a screen at regular intervals, the human viewer will get inured to, and even bored with, the sequence. If the experimenter includes an unexpected picture of a ball in the sequence then the participant will report that the ball incident was of longer duration than the rest, even though the duration according to clock time was the same.

There's more to the experiment than that, and there are various rival explanations of why this may be the case. The simple lesson is that if you want to slow down time, to make a holiday seem longer, or other things you enjoy, then pep it up with variety, or some major disruption.



Engagement

But what if you want time to go more quickly: a long haul flight, a boring lecture, or waiting for a train. The theory suggests you need to tone things down a bit to get bored. But there's a contrary phenomenon that time goes more quickly when we are engaged in a task. In fact one way to test how engaged someone is in a task is to ask them how long they think it took. The shorter the time estimate the more engaged.

Digital photography, sound recording, and the availability of online and in-hand sociability and diversion fills time. If I want the bus to come sooner, the journey time to contract and the wait before dinner to diminish then I find something to do on my smartphone or tablet. For 4G-enabled networked urban travellers there's no longer any **down time**, or any need to wait. Perhaps it's within our capability to regulate time to suit the mood of the moment.



Bibliography

- Eagleman, David. 2008. Human time perception and its illusions. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, (18)131-136.

Notes

- In Graham Greene's anecdote the patient's physician said ironically that his patient could have lived longer were it not for all that moving about.

- Here's a list of online advice guides to making time seem longer translating the work of neuroscientist David Eagleman into lay terms: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/20/slow-down-time_n_3567218.html; <http://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/how-to-make-your-days-feel-longer.html?nav=featured>; <http://blog.bufferapp.com/the-science-of-time-perception-how-to-make-your-days-longer>; http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/04/25/110425fa_fact_bilger?currentPage=all.
- Some of the comments on these sites are interesting. There seems to be a difference between recalling how long something took and how long it seems while actually happening.
- The movie *Total Recall* is interesting in this respect. Is the recollection of a long adventure a suitable surrogate for actually having one?
- It's also about a meditative state. See previous post [In meditative mood](#). Also see [Buying time](#) and [Audience disengagement](#).

Category

1. Media

Tags

1. engagement
2. slo-mo
3. slow motion
4. temporality
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