

Time-Sickness
By Randy Lubin

Millions of people suffer from kinetosis, better known as motion sickness, when they accelerate or travel too quickly. This sometimes triggers vertigo. Is it possible to suffer from time-sickness?

For a while now, I have felt as though time is speeding by at an absurdly fast rate. The years always passed quickly but the months, weeks, and days always flowed at a normal speed, or even slower. The last few semesters have passed quicker than usual but now everything is starting to blur. This does not sit well with me. I am very happy with my current life and am by no means ready to grown any older.

It isn't just the fun parts that are going quickly, my friends don't believe me but even my most boring classes are whizzing past. Hours are collapsing into each other and I sometimes feel as though I'm jumping forward in fifteen minute increments, with negligible time in-between. Where is the emergency brake?

* * * * *

The day had been zipping past, as most at the beginning of the semester tend to do, and my many chores and errands had left me little time to notice the passing hours. I was standing in line to pay for books at the campus bookstore. I had no idea who she was but she quickly captured my attention. On a different day, we may never have spoken but as luck would have it, the

line was moving slowly and we were buying the same textbook. Perfect excuse to start up conversation.

“You’re taking Music of the Beatles,” I half-asked, half-stated. “I’ve been trying to take it for years but this is the first time I’ve gotten off the waitlist.”

“I’m actually 27th on the waitlist but I heard it’s the professor’s last semester here and I’m going to take it, with or without credit.”

“Nice, it’s supposed to be fantastic”

[Small talk, banter]

The conversation seemed to have been going well but we were almost at the register and I had to run across campus.

“Want to grab coffee sometime soon?”

“Alright,” she replied. I couldn’t tell if she was pleased or wary.

“What’s your number, I’ll call you and figure out a time that works,”

“Sure, “ and she rattled off her number, “and my name is-”

Before she could properly introduce herself, I cut her off “Don’t tell me, it’ll just encourage a bit of Facebook stalking and I’d like to find out about you from... well, you, and not your profile.” Pause for laughter. She smiled. Excellent.

“I’ll put you in my phone as Mystery Girl.”

I paid first and walked out with a cursory “see you later” directed at her before heading for the exit. Was that too abrupt of an exit, should I have made formal plans then, was I too forward, was the Facebook comment weird? No, she smiled. Call her now.

I could see her through the window, still at the register as she picked up her phone and raised an eyebrow at the number.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Mystery Girl, how about coffee at 9 tonight?”

I glanced down at my watch; twenty minutes on a line never went so quickly.

* * * * *

Chance pervades nearly everything in life. My core group of friends goes back to our freshman year, when we lived on the same floor. While it would be nice to think that we would have found each other and still been friends if the school had not placed us together, I find it unlikely. We probably would not have become close and it is even possible that we would dislike each other. Though I’m not sure how the school allocated my housing, my guess is that if I had prioritized my housing request slightly differently or sent it in on an early or later day, I would have been placed elsewhere.

As I search for a job, it occurs to me that a slight variation in any number of actions I take could result in a drastically different future. This could be

approaching the company representative on the right versus the one on the left, at a career fair table. It might be applying for a position at a different time of day. These little variations could lead to me living in completely different parts of the globe and doing entirely different activities; I find this terrifying. What's more is that it will affect who I meet, become friends with, and ultimately who I marry. Terrifying.

My ignorance is my only respite. If I had even the slightest foresight into the ramification of my minute actions, I am sure that I would become paralyzed with inaction or quickly lose my sanity. The irony is that even if I had complete control over how I wanted my life (or even the next few years) to develop, I would be at a loss.

* * * * *

A short bike ride later and I was back at my apartment. I walked in and found my roommate, Bob, sitting in front of TV. The sound was off and he was scribbling intensely on lined music composition paper, pausing occasionally to glance at the screen.

Bob is a senior in the music department and a bit of an anachronism. He enjoys composing classical music, in the style of Bach or Mozart and intends to do so after he graduates. Unfortunately, the market for new classical music is not very large; the genre's sales had been declining for decades and very few people are interested in new compositions. However, Bob understands the career difficulties ahead and has plans to sidestep the hurdles. His most

recent compositions have been Elevator Music in C#, Lobby Fugue #3, and the Please Hold Overture and he is currently in talks with OTIS and the Marriott Corporation.

I grabbed the TV remote up off the coffee table but Bob grunted, “Wait a second.”

He finished the measure he’s working on and glanced up, “I’m trying to capture the emotional tension of Days of Our Lives in a brief concerto.” Typical Bob. He put his pencil down and turned off the TV. “What’s up?” he asked.

“So I asked out a girl at the bookstore today,” I said with a smile, then preempted his next comment. “I know, ‘Who asks anyone out in college?’”

“Really? Nice. Was she cute, did she say yes?”

“Yes, on both counts. We’re actually going to grab coffee later today.”

“Wow, moving quickly.”

“You know how it is, the further out you make plans, the more likely they are to be cancelled or rescheduled. Plus I wanted to set a time before I second guessed myself.”

“Yeah, I guess... Who asks anyone out? Well anyhow, well done. So who is this girl?”

“I, uh, told her not to tell me her name... so that I couldn’t look her up on Facebook.”

“What? And she *still* said yes?

“Well I kind of said that afterward... I put her in my phone as ‘Mystery Girl’.”

* * * * *

One of Joseph Heller’s characters was a pilot so sure of his imminent death that he threw himself into boring tasks in an effort to slowdown time and delay the inevitable. If time continues to accelerate for me, or even if it continues at its current breakneck pace, is my death imminent as well?

Does it feel like time is accelerating? Maybe it has been speeding by the entire time and we’re just getting better at gauging the pace. How about this: we’re in a car going down a steep hill and we’re only now finding out there aren’t any brakes. Or- as though we were thrown out of a plane at birth and are only now beginning to notice the ground rushing up at us:

The green blur of land resolves into patches of development and wilderness. Formerly smooth expanses of brown turn into wrinkled mountains and hills; as day turns to night, webs of city lights stare back at me. By the time my eyes adjust, its already getting brighter and I can already see myriad communities and the roads connecting them. What awaits me at the bottom of this descent? In the second or so before hitting the ground, I see what appears to be a pasture but is clearly a cemetery as I get nearer. I fall neatly into a waiting coffin, and its lid slams shut as I land.

* * * * *

The cool night air rushed past me, through me, as I pedaled across campus. I can't say how many times I'd traversed these paths, but several times a day for the previous three years must add up to a staggering quantity. As I passed by the student center, I could picture translucent echoes of myself walking and biking all of the past paths I had taken. Most of these ghost trails stuck to the central paths but there were deviations where I had cut across a lawn, stopped to talk to a friend, or fallen off my bike. As I approached the coffee shop, the paths thinned out; I had only been there here a few times so there weren't as many past iterations of me around. When I reached the bike-rack, around back, I was by myself. The other ghosts had vanished but I could see a new path emerging behind me as I walked toward the entrance.

* * * * *

Einstein, when asked to explain relativity, likened it to how an hour spent with a pretty girl could seem like a minute and how a minute spent on a hot stove would feel like an hour. Is a fast, interesting life worth its relative brevity?

* * * * *

"Good news," Bob said, as I reentered the apartment.

"Yeah?"

“OTIS wants to sign a deal. They’ve been playing my stuff in their test facility and everyone loves it.”

“Congrats- maybe you’ll make their greatest-hits album.”

“Ha. How’d the date go?

“Neh,” I grunted, with a shrug, “probably not to be repeated. We didn’t really have much to talk about; I didn’t really feel any chemistry.”

“That’s too bad, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine, I’m still glad I asked her out. And now I’ve learned that slow moving lines are a great place to pick up girls. Plus, I think the barista was flirting with me.”

* * * * *

What if there is no death? Futurists such as Ray Kurzweil believe that within the next few decades, technology will advance to the point of eliminating death by natural causes. Furthermore, we will be able to augment our brains to enhance our thinking ability. Will we get to a point where we are able to think faster and thus the world will seem to move more slowly around us? Will that actually make a difference for the larger time units or will the years continue to scream past, despite the elongated seconds?

Hawking has an interesting conjecture about the apparent speed of time: time seems to pass more quickly because it is an ever-decreasing fraction of

one's entire life. A year to a kindergartener is a fifth of their life whereas it is only $1/80^{\text{th}}$ of an octogenarian's. If one were to live forever then that fraction would approach zero as one continues to age. Maybe there will be simultaneous developments, such as the ability to accurately store and vividly recall memories that will fundamentally alter how we view time.

Say we could stretch each moment out longer by enhancing our rate of thought. Perhaps so much more would be packed into each day that our pasts would feel even further away. Yesterday could feel like last month, last week like a lifetime ago. On the upside, people would have much wittier conversations as they would have time to formulate the perfect quip.

* * * * *

The last chord of *A Day in the Life* echoed through the apartment and I began packing up for my Beatles class. Bob, who had been lost in the music as well, spoke up as I zipped my backpack and headed for the door.

"Do you still talk to MG in class?" Bob asked.

"MG?"

"Mystery Girl... does she know I call her that?"

"No, she doesn't. And, yeah, I'll talk to her from time to time. We don't sit next to each other anymore though." It had been a few weeks since our second and final date.

“Too bad that didn’t work out... and too bad none of her cute friends were into me.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I replied, “So it goes...”

I left the apartment and hopped back on my bike. I expected to see the translucent trails where I had previously traversed but was greeted by an entirely different specter. As I pedaled back across campus, away my apartment, there was a fresh set of ghosts biking ahead of me and splitting off in every conceivable direction. The moment I passed a juncture, though, all paths vanished except the one I choose and the trails ahead of me gained a few degrees of opacity.