

Time

Peter Botsman

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Old people will often say that, beyond their aches and pains, they still feel the same as they were when they were young.

Time is a trickster. Whether it is malevolent or benevolent is a moot point.

Time slows down when you are waiting for a kettle or a loved one or building a house. It speeds up when you are catching a train or a plane or attending a meeting.

Time can be your friend but you have to devote yourself to its service above all else.

Frederick Taylor's time and motion, piece work is strangely mesmerizing and satisfying.

The assembly line at Ithaca Gun had a strange satisfaction. 200 gun barrels reamed and honed in a trolley each day. There was a special concentration required to monitor the oil and the drills and the rhythm of the process. Meanwhile the President had resigned.

Jack Lang told the young Paul Keating to 'run son run or it will soon be too late'. Good advice because time can also slip away like a thief in the night.

Being on time is a virtue. Bad things can happen when you have to rush, you can run over a wombat or Sergeant Quinn may issue you with a speeding fine.

Everything compels us to stay on an even keel these days. The nanny state or the voracious state, take your pick, fines us for the longer we live away from the bureaucrats world. They and a million million others have commodified time. In the inner sanctum it is not possible to imagine travelling hours to a meeting or an event or driving twelve hours a day for five or six days through all sorts of towns and terrains, not just for holidays up the coast.

Poor fellas, the opportunity only comes at the end of a working life serving time, too late. There is a whole new mob every winter that leaves, dragging the kitchen sink with them up the open road. Pulled over each day at 5, the satellite aerial goes up, and on comes the blue haze. Just like home, in the middle of the Barkly Tablelands. With luck they may get caught in an early wet season storm that blows the cob webs out.

How long does a non-galvanised nail take to rust in a deck? 5-10 years maybe? Longer if you're lucky, indefinitely if protected by a roof. The story of government is to save money on the non-gal nails, the decision makers in local councils especially are notorious. They will be long gone by the time the boards start to pry and turn and come loose.

As an old man you'd like to pass on these truths in a way that might be useful. They never seem to be. The ever present now rules over elusive Father Time or is it simply corruption or ineptitude.

The Japanese nation have turned back time with their bullet train and in the frictionless atmosphere planes have too.

Australians love planes for good reason. There are two long tunnels before Yerrinbool and a narrow passage sliced out of stone, replicated around the circumference of Australia, a million times. Imagine organizing the slow and fast trains to thread these needles.. It's why even the XPT is always late. Due respect to the comptroller-generals who keep us safe through these narrow passages.

A bullet train would work between Darwin and Adelaide but do the residents of these fine cities have the power of a North Shore resident wanting to sleep in a little longer before the commute

to the office and to be home five minutes early from work? As the population of cities grows, we tax ourselves unmercifully to drill tunnels to save minutes and hours.

Slow has become a thing.

Charles Throsby was one of the first white fellas to walk from his farm, Glenfield, to Wollongong, to Orange, to Lake George and to Kangaroo Valley and Jervis Bay via Moss Vale.

He stole from the Tharawal, the Gandegara, the Wodi Wodi and many other clans the knowledge of walking to Parramatta and Cullunghutti for ancient ceremonies. Throsby was a benevolent magistrate, a relatively good man in a dark age, because he knew how much time and effort Thothoit and others had saved the colonial invaders.

We have cut through mountains and ravines to save time. The great djungiar from Mata Mata said that it hurt her to feel the great cuts in the earth as we drove from the airport to Kangaroo Valley, a freeway down the path that Throsby had walked. She did not hesitate to build the bridge over the rainbow river connecting Mata Mata and Gi'kal so that in the wet season the great divide between dhuwa and yirritja lands could be traversed. If it had been a through way for millions I think she would have had other thoughts and opted to keep the old single lane highways through Picton and Mittagong.

Thankfully there are still some places where you can feel the paradise of 1814 and walk as if you were Throsby being shown the way by the mighty Thothoit. Maybe you can even walk for an hour or so before you hit a national park sign or a barrier or a carved out fire trail. We have Bob Carr and Myles Dunphy to thank for a lot of what remains on the South Coast of NSW. Carr may have been NSW greatest Premier just for that.

There is a wisdom in keeping the sacred trails secret.

It is like covering up your sugar from the voracious white ants.

Aubrey Tigan, the immortal pearl carver, said mundanely "tide waits for no man" in a place where the tides would lift the heaviest ship or sweep away the strongest structures in an hour or two. Time is something like these strong tides of the north, enveloping, dominating, elusive, waiting for no-one, it pays to contemplate its power and meaning.