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Felt Time: The Science Of How We Experience Time (MIT Press)



Synopsis

We have widely varying perceptions of time. Children have trouble waiting for anything. ("Are we there yet?") Boredom is often connected to our sense of time passing (or not passing). As people grow older, time seems to speed up, the years flitting by without a pause. How does our sense of time come about? In *Felt Time*, Marc Wittmann explores the riddle of subjective time, explaining our perception of time -- whether moment by moment, or in terms of life as a whole. Drawing on the latest insights from psychology and neuroscience, Wittmann offers a new answer to the question of how we experience time. Wittmann explains, among other things, how we choose between savoring the moment and deferring gratification; why impulsive people are bored easily, and why their boredom is often a matter of time; whether each person possesses a personal speed, a particular brain rhythm distinguishing quick people from slow people; and why the feeling of duration can serve as an "error signal," letting us know when it is taking too long for dinner to be ready or for the bus to come. He considers the practice of mindfulness, and whether it can reduce the speed of life and help us gain more time, and he describes how, as we grow older, subjective time accelerates as routine increases; a fulfilled and varied life is a long life. Evidence shows that bodily processes -- especially the heartbeat -- underlie our feeling of time and act as an internal clock for our sense of time. And Wittmann points to recent research that connects time to consciousness; ongoing studies of time consciousness, he tells us, will help us to understand the conscious self.

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Customer Reviews

... [A] fascinating inquiry into how our subjective experience of time's passage shapes everything from our emotional memory to our sense of self.--Maria Popova "Brain Pickings "

Marc Wittmann is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health, Freiburg, Germany.

I'm interested in time--as the context in which I and everyone else lives. I'm 75 years old, so I'm more conscious of how I think about and use my time than I have ever been before. I've read a few other books on this topic. This one is the best! It is very informative about a wide range of topics on which time plays a major part. It draws on a wide range of sources, integrates them creatively, and adds fresh insights on each theme addressed. It is well-written and quite an engaging read. I couldn't put it down until I had finished it. It was relatively short, but so jam-packed with ideas that it felt like I had been on a long and fascinating journey. Its ideas kept returning to my mind long afterwards. I recommend this book highly!

An absorbing read on a topic that few write about with the kind of research background that Wittmann has. I've been able to take his descriptions of felt time and apply them in the classroom when explaining some of the dynamics of substance use and the challenges of recovery from misuse. Time perception lies at the heart of many disorders of thinking and behaving and a focus on this one dimension of human perception offers a unique and fresh way to enter into how different consciousnesses take in the world. Delightfully, the book is short and does not suffer from what seems the norm these days - endless repetitions of contents that could be handled with economy. This is a well written and well supported set of ideas about how our perception of time affects our views of self and situations. Highly recommended.

The topic of the book is very important, but the book is written in such a way that it is not interesting to read. I struggled through about 2/3 of the book, and then stopped.

Very informative and thorough. Help rethink and shape some of my perceptions and preconceptions about time, self and the prospect of death.

Mindfulness philosophy meets neuroanatomy. Great and quick read. Highly recommend!

Don't look for any thought-provoking insights into the subjective nature of time. This is a neuroscience text. And a fairly dry one at that.

Given the title I was expecting a book with a more empirical and focuses review of the time perception literature than what this book delivers. Much of it was sort of interesting but much of it also was only tangentially related to actual time perception. This is especially true of the first chapter which presents a wandering discussion of how people value costs and benefits in the future as opposed to the present. The best part of the book is that on why time appears to have gone by faster as we get older. The idea here is that during adolescence we encounter in our lives many events and experiences that are new to us and so leave a lasting impression in memory when we look back years later. In contrast, after adolescence our lives become quite predictable and pretty much the same year after year. Thus those post-adolescence years have fewer events that stand out in memory and when we remember back to those years the fewer specific events that come to mind make those years appear to have passed rapidly. It's a version of the filled time illusion - which the author somehow never mentions. The author has a philosophical bent so there is the expected amount of hand waving and obscurantism. For example, on page 102 where Jana is quoted: "For something can only be present if there is someone for whom it is present." This reminds me of Chomsky's famous sentence "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously." I understand the meaning of each word in these two sentences but the sentences themselves are devoid of meaning. The lack of an index speaks of a penny-pinching publisher. For a much more experimentally based review of the time perception literature see Grondin's (2008) "Psychology of Time."

Interesting read...on the right track, but...

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