

A Watch for Freedom
By
Joshua D. Nathan

You can recognize Venice's Torre dell'Orologio in St. Mark's Square from the Grand Canal because of its iconic blue face, which displays the hour, day, month, zodiac sign, and moon phase.

What you may never be able to tell, though, is the time. Two imposing Moor figures at the top announce each hour by ringing the clock's bell two minutes *before* and two minutes *after* each hour.

*The clock never rings **on** the hour. It never has, never will, and all since its gears first began running on February 1, 1499, after only four years under construction.*

Employed by the city that runs exclusive tours inside the clock tower are guides, one of whom tells me, "It's impossible to know the exact hour here. But this is really a masterpiece of technology and engineering."

A masterpiece of technology in a clock from which no one can tell time? Oh, do go on...

Operated by the same family, generation after generation, until 1997, when transferred to the Fondazione Musei Civil di Venezia, the figure to the bell's left strikes early and the figure to its right, late.

"One is always looking to the past and the other looks to the future, which is why they ring four minutes apart."

Even after adding digital-like wheels in the 1700s, one can only approximate the time using minutes revealed in increments of five.

It seems strange to build a clock from which it's impossible to know the time in a city like Venice where time has always been an enemy.

Despite thriving for more than two millennia, it's no secret rising tides, sinking foundations, and a flood of young people leaving each year threaten its livelihood. Ten years ago, the approximately 300 bridges linking every small island making up compact Venice used to boast of a population numbering 300,000. Now, a water taxi driver tells me he is one of about 70,000 residents left with no future generation wanting to take over, or able to afford the upkeep on, their ancestral inheritance. The similar post-dominant malaise those sad at the passing of time exude, though, is only natural. It is a unique landmark differentiating them from those in the United States.

Instead of accepting time, Americans fight to control it. But this is one war in which the victor is easy to predict, which we must intuitively realize. Many wager that a battle with *time* can be won, to a large extent, despite recent studies explaining why we each have a different perception of time's passage.

The changing number of synaptic pathways created, and maintained, in our brains causes us to perceive time differently as we age. While our neurons grow synapses when young toddlers, some of these same synapses short-circuit and disappear when older; a process researchers in 1999 dubbed Synaptic Pruning. It explains why we *sense* that an hour or a month *feels shorter* with each passing year; we *perceive* these differences at different rates based on the memories and synapses to which we maintain a neuron-level pathway. That previously-unknown process propelled a longtime preoccupation with time throughout history.

Time has always been civilization's natural enemy and a favored subject in music and poetry, each trying to address the art of how to spend it well or live beyond our years. I still see us listen to the music, albeit while working, and enjoy some of the poems, albeit it while speed-reading.



Like any addict, we look for *time* constantly. Like any drug, *time* has us hooked. Like anyone struggling with abuse, when we try to escape *time's* grips, we are met with only its loss and a hunger for more of it.

We are time's addicts and our addiction has worsened.

In our society, we watch clocks on our phones and on our wrists. We set alarms and reminders in our calendars, through which we plan and compartmentalize the future. We sometimes make room for old, pen-and-pencil "Date Books" to remind us of the things we once did, which we naturally tend to either romanticize or vilify. Like the lit floor numbers as we pass them on an elevator, we also stare at time in so many different ways than ever before. We complain about how slow a computer's "rainbow wheel" processes our requests. But we still wait and watch, and on increasingly faster computers. In an ironic twist, the technology we believed would save us time further tightened *Time's* noose. In paving the way for us to spend more of it in leisure, technology enslaved society and we do not appear to discern this, particular oppressor.

As we lose our balance with time, we lose the freedoms for which we so fervently fight. In a world filled with choices, Americans have seemingly given them up and, instead, elected Time our King. Is this a conscious choice? Is this what we want our legacy to be? Do we want time to become a pressure-cooker instead of allowing it to roam free like our own potential?

Venice and America: Powerful Legacies

The Venetian Clock Tower represents a great leap in technological advancement for its people, but some deference and respect to *Time* was paid, embodied in the statues of the Moors, which ring the bell once each hour...just not *on* the hour.

Perhaps they thought it would be less offensive to *Time* that way?

Opposite are recent technological advances designed to tame and direct this meddlesome beast. But the newest phones and tablets smart, visibly biting into our freedoms.

Faster computers, *faster* wifi, *faster* ways for us to do and see more. Watching and waiting, screen after screen, is enough to make anyone scream with frustration. "Information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment," President Obama said when commenting on his own addiction to the BlackBerry.

These devices are at the core of an American culture turning increasingly toxic and forcing us to tap into the unhealthy aquifers of adrenaline and drugs. Educator Alan Moore estimates that many look at their smartphones an average of 200 times a day. We "power" nap to pull "all-nighters" all-too-often because we have to or feel that way. If borne from true choice, I am confident we would sleep more, work less, and slow the pace of our lives. We don't want that, for the most part, or we would find a way to get it in the land of the free, right? One could argue we are free in that therein lay our choice. I would argue the opposite.

Technology engendered a culture in America of measurable excess, from lawsuits to loans, and we peer perilously close to an eery financial and geopolitical global cliff because of it. Comical enough, now that you look at facts, technology is our good drug "Time's" enabler.

Merely to buy what we need to keep up has many working during the day only to head at night to a second job or school, or both. Internet technology drives our inner clocks and spikes stress because we face a constant stream of messages, many of which ask for immediate attention. What was once the gift of innovation has left us without the presence of time providing employers and friends alike the expectation of reaching us at almost all times in almost all places on the globe.

It's only a bit funny that, in our bid to stretch the span of each day, doing more and sleeping less actually cause us to perceive time as moving faster. Less sleep decays our minds

and the synapses upon which we depend for our perception of how quickly or slowly our days come and go. We accomplish a lot more during our days because of these tools, but does the stress we face accomplish inner peace or further to shorten our cultural lifespan? We seem like rubber bands about to snap and the heart to what we collectively cling--our freedom--hangs in the balance. The devices controlling us cost us our independence, a point to which author Chris Barez-Brown alludes. "The distraction of mobile devices...is the cause of many relationship issues" because we are no longer free from the vibrations or flashing lights indicating an instant updates or messages.

Like the hands on a chronograph watch, we, too, require revolution. Like the gears in the clock tower of Venice, our mindset also needs to shift. Therein lay our only salvation and the key to our own empire's existence. Perhaps the figures ringing the bell each hour in Venice are really trying to sound an alarm to passers-by.



Embrace time and, with that, your customs, freedoms, livelihood, and culture will survive its passage.

But like any problem, particularly addiction, we first must recognize that we have a problem. In trying to arrest *Time*, we forget what *Time* never stops doing; continuing. What we are allowing is for it to become our master. What we are electing, which I guess one could label a "choice," is to be *Time's* slave. After all, it's not as much the economic cost of technology that steals from us. It's the way in which these devices cost us our leisure time or in-person relationships that is critical. But how can one unplug from a society that has been attracted to more Apples

than Eve could have ever imagined?

In our technology-riddled, time-addicted culture, the only way to change is to choose to alter our use of the very pillars that define our modern infrastructure. We need to build a watch for freedom. Otherwise, in time, there will be *no* time left for us to wonder or wander the streets of unmechanized thought. We should cling to memories of a rich life *without* tablets, notebooks, and microchips. We should still use these tools as long as we are conscientious that the way in which we do is an individual rather than collective choice stemming from contemplation over social condemnation.

"By deliberately unplugging yourself, you will notice when technology is useful and when it is not," writes Barez-Brown in an excerpt from his recent book, *Love Your Work Love Your Life*. "Then you can deliberately choose when to embrace it, reclaim your freedom, and help escape from the 'shallows'."

If you find yourself trying to bribe *Time* through technology, you may be better off policing your *own* hierarchy of what's important based on a little time ensconced in thought. We know that each person, one-by-one, makes a difference (Gore v. Bush, anyone?).

If our choice is to lose our freedoms to time or technology, then let's at least come clean about it. We can fool a lot of people, but never ourselves. Though I wonder if this is what we know we created or if we have yet to think it through to this logical extent?

We can still grow our culture without stopping technological advancement or innovation. We just have to change our habits...and we must stop dreaming of controlling what billions of years of evolution never could or would.

Now is the time to recognize a need to make those changes in our culture. If not now, when? After the **complete** exodus of choice, thought, and time itself? Haven't we built a legacy *worth* leaving to time immemorial?

Instead of looking at time or technological prowess, let's be on the lookout for our freedom to choose what is or is not important. I propose you watch your freedoms so you can save them before they can no longer be seen among the scenery. I challenge you to disengage with the virtual in order to engage with the visible.

In erecting a watch for freedom, you may find yourself soon removing that other watch from your wrist, deleting your calendars, emptying the bottle(s) of Xanax you'll no longer need, and adapting to the slightly slower pace of the Venetians for whom time has always been running out and, often, been cruel. You may then join them in a more peaceful submission to time *and* technology, but at *your* election and as *you* wish rather than the "Joneses."

My guide reminds us, "Two minutes too early, two minutes too late...either way, it all becomes history."



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A Watch for Freedom

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Examining how people perceive, and spend, time, this socio-cultural essay begins with signs seen in Venice's 15th century iconic clock Torre dell'Orologio. Insight into how Venetians treat time illustrates a perspective in need of consideration and contemplation. At the heart of the modern Human Condition is a central question: Have we lost certain personal and collective freedoms to the latest apps and devices? Advances once designed to save time now cost it. Hours pass by quickly when engaged in social media, leading to a technological paradigm shift that further accelerates time's passage. Platforms designed to attract attention are as alluring and addictive as any drug, leading to questions about societal foundations. Should we not change course—taking a cue from the Venetians—the semblance of immortality for which many strive may morph into shaky ground akin to quicksand for unrecognized substantive contributions.

Introduction

You can recognize Venice's Torre dell'Orologio in St. Mark's Square from the Grand Canal because of its iconic blue face, which displays the hour, day, month, zodiac sign, and moon phase. What you may never be able to discern from it, though, is the time. Two imposing Moor figures announce each hour by ringing the clock's bell two minutes *before* and two minutes *after* each hour.

The clock never rings *on* the hour. It never has, never will, and all since its gears first began running on February 1, 1499. Employed by the city that runs exclusive tours inside the clock tower are guides, one of whom tells me, "It's impossible to know the exact hour here. But this is really a masterpiece of technology and engineering."

Operated by the same family, generation after generation, until 1997, when transferred to the Fondazione Musei Civil di Venezia, the figure to the bell's left strikes the clock's bell early and the figure to its right, late.

"One is always looking to the past and the other looks to the future, which is why they ring four minutes apart," explains the guide. Even after adding digital-like wheels in the 1700s, one can only approximate the time using minutes revealed in five-unit increments.

It seems fitting to build a clock from which it's impossible to know the time in a city like Venice where time has always been a natural enemy. Despite thriving for more than two millennia, it's no secret that rising tides, sinking foundations, and a flood of younger residents leaving each year—no longer able to afford the upkeep on their ancestral heritage—threaten Venice's livelihood. Trying not to cede further ground, a water taxi driver tells me that, despite rising costs, he'll stay. For now.

Discussion

As most people try to control time, recent studies explain why we each have a different perception of time's passage. While age may be a factor, *time pressure* – the feeling that we do not have enough time to get things done – has been determined to be the main contributor to why we feel time goes so fast¹.

How has time treated Venice and how Venetians are treating time is the beginning of a larger question: Have we ceded certain personal and collective freedoms to the latest apps on the latest devices, which threatens how we further perceive time's passage?

Like any good drug, time has us hooked. Like any addict, we look for time constantly. Like any harried soul, when we try to escape time's grips we are met with only its loss and a hunger for more. Add a dash of the latest favoured app and the enabler is in place. Opportunities pass by us despite innovative ways to pack more into each day.

¹ Friedman, W.J. and Janssen, S.M.J. (2010). Aging and the speed of time. *Acta Psychologica* 134: 130-141 and Janssen, S.M.J., Naka, M. and Friedman, W.J. (2013). Why does life appear to speed up as people get older? *Time and Society* 22(2): 274-290.

We are time's addicts and our addiction has grown.

Devices originally designed to *save* us time may have become our vices, now designed to *cost* us time. The newest phones and tablets often smart, biting into one freedom or another depending upon perspective and contemplation.



Photo: Torre dell'Orologio, Venezia, Italia.
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Faster computers, faster Wi-Fi, faster ways for us to do and see more without ever having to leave home or even come face-to-face with another person. Wading through screen after screen would seem enough to make most scream. But not us. Not now. Not here.

What was once an aquifer of dreams has become a sea of adrenaline creating toxicity in a people begging for "power" naps in order to pull "all-nighters" all-too-often because they have to or it feels that way. If borne from true choice, one would think we would use technology to help us sleep more, work less, and slow the pace of our lives. One could argue, though, that many have already made a choice: immeasurable excess leading to an eerie global cliff.

Merely to buy what we need to keep up has many working during the day only to head at night to a second job or school, or both. Texts, emails, and apps drive inner clocks and spike stress as we face a barrage of messages, many of which command immediate attention. What was once the gift of innovation has left us without the presence of mind to prevent employers and friends alike from the expectation of reaching us at almost any time and in almost any place.

Like rubber bands about to snap, though, it is the heart to which we collectively cling—the freedom to choose how to spend our time—that hangs in the balance. Misdirection helps accelerate this loss, with eyes glued to iPhones instead of each other. Relationships wilt when we feed our growing addiction as the focus turns from live *scenes* to graphic *screens*.

Conclusion

Like the inner workings in the Venetian clock tower, our mindset needs to shift gears if we are to free ourselves from time's addiction. Therein lies our only salvation and the key to any culture's future. Perhaps the figures ringing the bell each hour in Venice are really trying to sound an alarm to passers-by.

"Embrace time and, with that, your customs and culture will survive its passage," they whisper.

But in trying to arrest time, we forget that time never stops. How can one unplug from societies that are attracted to more Apples than Eve could have ever imagined? In our technology-riddled, time-addicted culture, the only way to change is to choose to alter our use of the very pillars that define our modern infrastructure.

We need to build a watch for freedom.

If we do not course correct, *in* time, there will be *no* time left for us to wonder or wander the streets of unmechanized thought that is not moderated by tablets, microchips, and proprietary algorithms. We can still use these tools as long as we become just as sentient as they are with a marked emphasis on conscientious, individual decisions that stem from *contemplation* rather than a feeling of *condemnation*.

Once we, again, remember that no X-box substitutes analysis for personal X-factors, we may find ourselves soon removing that other watch from our wrists and emptying the bottle(s) of Xanax we'll no longer need. We may then enjoy a more peaceful submission to time and technology, but at *our* election and as *we* wish rather than what the time-conscious collective dictates.

"Two minutes too early, two minutes too late...either way, it all becomes history," my tour guide reminds us, espousing an attitude that has helped Venetians adapt to a slightly slower pace of life for a people to whom time has always been running out and, often, been cruel.

After all, isn't a greater freedom from time and inner peace legacies worth watching and fighting for in order to leave them to time immemorial? ■

Submission Instructions

CrossBridge

An International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Progressive Research

Editor-in-Chief: Robert S. E. Caine, Ph.D.

We welcome speculative ideas, exploratory practices, position papers, manifestos, creative writing, art as well as traditional academic papers from both affiliated and independent scholars, students, practitioners, activists, and artists.

Submit written work according to the template and instructions (<http://www.waterhillpublishing.com/template-instructions.doc>), unless specified otherwise for a specific submission type (see below).

The following is a list of submissions types we are seeking:

- short research papers: 1800-2500 words main text plus abstract and references (the paper should fit within 4-7 pages of the template)
- long research papers: 2500-4500 words main text plus abstract and references (the paper should fit within 8-12 pages of the template).
- opinions or essays (similar to Op-Eds in a newspaper): 400-1200 words, no abstract, no references required but they can be included if needed, either as footnotes or in the format specified in the template.
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Important notes for all submissions: Please read carefully before submitting, including the content of the copyright agreement (3rd point below)

1. Selected CrossBridge submissions may appear on-line or in print, at the discretion of the editorial team.
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3. Authors must submit a signed copyright form (<http://www.waterhillpublishing.com/copyrightform.pdf>) before their work is published.

Dear Mr. _____

Kiera Knightley's latest nude photo shoot prompts a compelling question: Is there authenticity in excess of nudity or is there lack of it through the visibility of its excess?

The costs of style and style failure are evident in media. Yet both complement each other. The excess of nudity is an example.

Soon after Kiera Knightley stripped, Kim Kardarshian did a nude photo shoot for the cover of *Paper Magazine*. She broke many hearts as she intended to "break the Internet" with her fake self-inflated image. In comparison, Knightley's topless shoot can be more authentic. There is possibility of scandalous rumours that can contest Knightley's cause for the photo shoot: protest against the misuse of Photoshop that objectifies female celebrities. I strongly believe Kiera Knightley uses her unedited photo of nudity to raise new awareness on self worth that people need to know. The key is to understand her photo in relation to her words "Women's bodies are a battleground" that can be overlooked in controversies about her.

Would you be interested in a piece that sheds new light on the authenticity of Kiera Knightley's nude photograph? For the story, I could interview Dr. James Bennett, who has been a credible source on fame for *The Guardian*, and Dr. David Marshall who has appeared on ABC Radio National among others. I could also interview Shannon Skinner, host of Extraordinary Women TV.

The piece could be a short close reading of Kiera Knightley's nude photo, or expand to a more analytic essay that includes comparative studies of nude celebrities.

About me: As the Director of the Centre for Media and Celebrity Studies and author of *Fame in Hollywood North*, I have written for The Globe and Mail, Excalibur News, and Starbuzz Weekly. My Doctoral research and writing on fame have further led to several interviews in media including CBC, CTV Breaking News CP 24, CITY TV News, SUN Media, 24 Hours, VICE, Flare, Chatelaine, Hollywood North Magazine, Humber News, Hamilton Arts and Letters, and many more.

I look forward to working with you on this piece.

Dr Samita Nandy