



A Geography Of Time: The Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist

By Robert V. Levine

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In this engaging and spirited book, eminent social psychologist Robert Levine asks us to explore a dimension of our experience that we take for granted—our perception of time. When we travel to a different country, or even a different city in the United States, we assume that a certain amount of cultural adjustment will be required, whether it's getting used to new food or negotiating a foreign language, adapting to a different standard of living or another currency. In fact, what contributes most to our sense of disorientation is having to adapt to another culture's sense of time. Levine, who has devoted his career to studying time and the pace of life, takes us on an enchanting tour of time through the ages and around the world. As he recounts his unique experiences with humor and deep insight, we travel with him to Brazil, where to be three hours late is perfectly acceptable, and to Japan, where he finds a sense of the long-term that is unheard of in the West. We visit communities in the United States and find that population size affects the pace of life—and even the pace of walking. We travel back in time to ancient Greece to examine early clocks and sundials, then move forward through the centuries to the beginnings of "clock time" during the Industrial Revolution. We learn that there are places in the world today where people still live according to "nature time," the rhythm of the sun and the seasons, and "event time," the structuring of time around happenings (when you want to make a late appointment in Burundi, you say, "I'll see you when the cows come in"). Levine raises some fascinating questions. How do we use our time? Are we being ruled by the clock? What is this doing to our cities? To our relationships? To our own bodies and psyches? Are there decisions we have made without conscious choice? Alternative tempos we might prefer? Perhaps, Levine argues, our goal should be to try to live in a "multitemporal" society, one in which we learn to move back and forth among nature time, event time, and clock time. In other words, each of us must chart our own geography of time. If we can do that, we will have achieved temporal prosperity.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

On time, out of time, time out, time is money--if our vernacular is any indication, the concept of time has certainly infiltrated American culture. Does *everybody* in the world share the same perception of time? In *A Geography of Time*, psychologist Robert Levine puts time to the test by sending teams of researchers all over the world to measure everything from the average walking speed to the time it takes to buy a stamp at the post office. Levine scatters his findings among engaging accounts of his own encounters with the various perceptions of time in different cultures. From the history of clocks to how people tell time today, *A Geography of Time* is jam-packed with "timely" information.

From Library Journal

Not limited by conventional notions of time?or "clock time," as he calls it?Levine (psychology, California State Univ., Fresno) presents a wide-ranging work loosely organized around a social construct of time. The result is an intellectualized "places-rated" guide containing observations on where people are the most generous and talk the fastest, as well as discussions of how "time wars" are waged and deeper insights into South American, Japanese, and other cultures through their perception of time. The first part of the book covers concepts of time and the history of the techniques used to measure it. The focus then shifts to the author's cross-cultural research on pace of life and its social implications. Time literacy, a type of multiculturalism, is advocated in the final section, which also contains advice for approaching life in "slower" cultures. Unique, wry, and readable, this well-documented book is recommended for social psychology collections and public libraries for sophisticated readers with the time to spare.?Antoinette Brinkman, Southwest Indiana Mental Health Ctr. Lib., Evansville

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From Booklist

In this well-crafted treatise on the history of time, psychologist Levine does a good job of keeping the text lively. Working with potentially dry subject matter, Levine has fashioned an entertaining book that examines the history of time, timekeeping, and the various ways that time is experienced in different cultures. Using clever anecdotes and comparisons between hectic U.S. lifestyles and those of other more relaxed cultures, Levine contends that by learning to understand and accept three different perceptions of time--"clock time," "nature time," and "event time"--we can begin to experience a more flexible and rewarding life. Scholarly yet still informative, this book contains valuable perspectives and lessons for those caught up in and frustrated by the hectic modern lifestyle. *Kathleen Hughes*

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Mary Partee:

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