

The Relativity of Time

Brock's Banter

By Brock Weir

Do you ever get that strange feeling that the laws of time and space have been left permanently off-kilter over the course of the global pandemic?

Don't get me wrong, we're always in a state of adjustment as far as COVID-19 is concerned ? and, let's be real, we're always in a state of adjustment as far as time is concerned as well, and I'm not talking about this weekend's leap forward on the clock front!

When we were youngsters, I am sure we can all agree that time felt like it passed arduously slow. Chalk it up to short attention spans, or simply to not knowing any better, but I remember a time when sitting through a 90-minute movie seemed like a relatively tall order. A year seemed like an eternity, especially considering the distance between one Christmas and the next. Then, of course, there was a special cachet for a nine-year-old when they acquired that much-talked-about double digit.

Somewhere in the early years of that double-digithood, however, time seems to catch-up to your attention span and what feels like an equilibrium sets in.

All of a sudden, a year doesn't seem like very much time at all, a movie can practically go by in the blink of an eye, and the next Christmas rolls around before you know it, and certainly before you're prepared for its return.

You don't especially relish adding another strike into your tally of double digits (that relish, understandably, takes a rebound the closer you get to adding a triple digit to your CV, but that's a column for a different day) and, at the same time, you lose your sense of being able to ballpark the ages of others with reasonable accuracy.

Some of us may resign ourselves to these being simple facts of life, and that's fine ? but COVID has upset the delicate balance. Two years of essentially being on pause can do a number on any one of us!

Activities you did, people you met, places you went in the first couple of months of 2020 both seem like yesterday and a lifetime ago. If someone asks me for a specific date on something that might have happened two or three months ago, what used to be pretty easily accessible information in my grey matter now takes a few more lobe flexes before coming clearly into view.

Maybe this is a new normal. The information isn't gone, it hasn't been forgotten, but time, something they always tell us is relative, has become somewhat estranged!

As has the simple act of being ?people.?

We often talked about how difficult it was to ? and has been ? adjusting to public health measures as they were handed down or lifted again, with varying levels of justification in either direction. But far less has been said in comparison on how difficult it also is to adjust to varying returns of normalcy and finding our places amongst throngs of people when isolating and re-isolating for so long.

On Friday night, for instance, I was out at the movie theatre to see The Batman, perhaps the first post-ish-COVID blockbuster.

I had been to the movies a handful of times during the pandemic, including the brief window of normal we had last summer, but without capacity limits last week, it was, as far as experiences go, something else again.

Going by the interactions I saw as people came into the increasingly crowded theatre, I got the distinct impression that a lot of other patrons felt like they were thrown into the deep end. Sure, academically, we knew we would be in a crowd, but maybe we forgot what being in a crowd was like.

There was the hesitation of just how to clamor over fellow audience members in the way of you and your pre-booked seat. There was a visual half-step back when people rounded the corner and saw far more people seated in the place than they had anticipated leaving the house. There were groups and couples trying to figure out, again, what the appropriate volume was to share the experience without disturbing those who were focused on the film.

Over the course of COVID, people forgot the simple action of opening up their most crinkly of plastics before the trailers were over, the art of turning off their ringers before the proverbial curtain went up and, in the case of this particular screening, it was forgotten they weren't actually watching the film on a streaming service in the comfort of their living rooms ? at least judging by the handful of screen-rattling belches that came up and wafted across Gotham City over nearly three hours.

Additionally, if the detritus left behind in just about every aisle of the theatre was any indication, I would hate to see the state of their respective living rooms.

The point is, we have all been down this road before.

We've hunkered down for months on end, only to have places to go and people to see once again, and each time there has been an extended pause in our regular human interactions, once that holding pattern is lifted, it feels like we're all renegotiating the rules of a vaguely familiar game.

Our conversation muscles may have atrophied a bit in face-to-face interactions as we've gotten so comfortable with navigating a remote world. Those oh-so-convenient ?mute? and ?camera off? buttons can make engagement beyond this controlled (rather, self-controlled) environment feel somewhat daunting and in need of further practice.

In our temporarily-shrunk worlds, until the emergence of many recent tragic global events, our subjects of small talk were decidedly tiny if COVID-related topics were taken out of the equation. Without normal day-to-day interactions with others, our abilities to pick up common social cues might have been weakened as well.

But all is not lost. Some of us are at different places in this familiar game and need more time to catch up than others.

Some of us are just counting down until that as-yet-unspecified date that we can all hang up our masks again and get on with our day to day lives.

Some others have already decided that they're less comfortable unpacking their N95s as soon as they get the green light to do so and, instead, will opt to wear them until questions, anxiety, and, yes, fear subsides.

Some of us, for better or worse, have been living life as though there have been no restrictions and that, too, is another factor of uncertainty for others.

Regardless, none of us are on completely unfamiliar ground, but we might need more time to fully find our footing.

Until we're all there, let's all be conscious of our respective levels, those of others, and respect one another on this common journey.