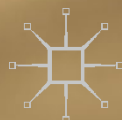




The Psychology of Time Perception

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Preface

The composer Gustav Mahler is supposed to have said “A symphony must be like the world. It must contain everything.” While this might be true of a Mahlerian symphony, it certainly is not true of this book on time perception. The volume you are reading does not contain everything that is known about time perception, or even everything that you might want to know. Its content is intended to provide the reader with an overview of some of the main trends in fairly recent work on the psychology of time, carried out over the last 30 or 40 years, although some historical issues are also discussed, as is a small amount of the philosophy of time. It is a personal selection of topics, albeit—I hope—a choice that is not too idiosyncratic. My aim is to provide the reader with an introduction to work in time perception which I believe to be interesting, important, and influential. An emphasis in the book, which reflects my own interests, is on ideas and theories underlying time perception research, rather than with just providing a summary of results, although a significant amount of experimental data is discussed, sometimes in considerable detail. The theories I mention have generally been simplified in the cause of exposition, and are all more complex than I am able to describe in this book, but the reader may consult the original articles cited in the text for details. I only hope the inventors of these theories agree that my discussion of their work has captured most of their essence, if not all the minutiae. Some topics that people might have wanted to read about, like

rhythmical timing or time in music, are not included, as they have tended to develop separately from what I consider to be mainstream time perception, which has been strongly focussed on the perception of duration, the judgement of how long things seem to last. I have also omitted any discussion of the cognitive neuroscience of time perception. Although this topic occupies the attention of many researchers at the time of writing, thus far their efforts have resulted in few firm conclusions that can be easily communicated. Indeed, none of the topics treated in the book would be significantly illuminated in any way by the neuroscience of timing in its present state, at least in my view. Finally, the reader is warned that my own contribution to the field has been exaggerated here, but if you are not interested in your own work, why should anyone else be? In any case, the considerable effort of writing this book, which among other things has brought home to me how little I know about the subject, has surely earned me this privilege.

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Contents

1	Overview	1
2	A Brief History of Time Perception	5
	Philosophers and Time	5
	The Early Years of Time Perception Studies	11
	Chemical Clocks	15
	The Dawn of Internal Clock Models:	
	Creelman and Treisman	19
	Summary	24
3	SET and Human Timing	27
	Basic Principles	27
	Isolating the Pacemaker-Accumulator	
	Clock	38
	Isolating Temporal Memories	46
	Decision Processes	56
	Summary	59
	Simple Mathematics of Pacemaker-Accumulator	
	Clocks	59

4	Theoretical Models of Temporal Generalization and Bisection in Humans	65
	Temporal Generalization Models	66
	Temporal Generalization with Standards (Wearden, 1992)	66
	Episodic Temporal Generalization (Wearden, 2004)	70
	Bisection Models	71
	Wearden (1991b)	76
	Allan and Gibbon (1991)	77
	Wearden and Ferrara (1995)	78
	Kopec and Brody (2010)	80
	Summary	83
5	Cognitive Processes, Emotion, and Timing	85
	Attention and Timing	88
	Theoretical Explanations of Attentional Effects	95
	Predictive Studies	99
	Emotion	105
	Summary	115
6	Retrospective Timing and Passage of Time Judgements	117
	Retrospective Timing	117
	Differences Between Prospective and Retrospective Timing	127
	Passage of Time Judgements	131
	Passage of Time Judgements in the Laboratory	131
	Passage of Time Judgements in Everyday Life	134
	Summary	141
7	Time Perception in Children	143
	The Child's Conception of Time	144
	Neo-Piagetian Studies	149
	SET-Based Studies of Timing in Children	152
	Summary	166

8	Timing and Ageing	167
	Ageing and Performance on Standard Tasks of Timing	168
	Time Experience in Older People	176
	Summary	181
9	Animal Timing	183
	Timing in Early Animal Research: Pavlov and Skinner	184
	Properties of Animal Timing	191
	Explanations of Animal Timing According to SET	195
	Competitors of SET	201
	The Behavioural Theory of Timing	201
	Learning to Time	211
	Summary	219
	Appendix: Correlations Between Performance Measures from the Peak Procedure	220
10	Methods Commonly Used in Time Perception Research	223
	Temporal Reproduction	223
	Interval Production	226
	Verbal Estimation of Duration	227
	Discrimination Methods	228
	Bisection	229
	Temporal Generalization	231
	References	233
	Author Index	253
	Subject Index	259

List of Figures

- Fig. 2.1 Time taken to count to 60 at a rate judged to be 1 count per second, plotted against body temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. Data from Mrs. Hoagland taken from Hoagland (1935) 17
- Fig. 2.2 Sketch of the internal clock model proposed by Treisman (1963). A pacemaker, the rate of which is affected by the activation level of a specific arousal centre, produces regular pulses which are counted in a counter mechanism, and which can be stored in a longer-term store. The contents of the counter and values retrieved from the store can be compared in a comparator mechanism, and the results of this comparison used to generate a behavioural response 21
- Fig. 3.1 Diagram of SET. The pacemaker is connected to the accumulator via a switch. Accumulator contents are transferred to a working memory store, and if the event timed constitutes a “standard” duration, are then transferred to the reference memory. To generate behaviour, the contents of working memory are compared with a sample taken from reference memory, and a decision process operates on these two time representations to produce an observed response 28

Fig. 3.2	Data from Wearden and McShane (1988). Four participants repeatedly produced time intervals ranging from 0.5 to 1.3 s, and received feedback after their responses. The data shown are the relative frequencies of times produced plotted against their duration, and are shown separately for the different time requirements. The curves shown are best-fitting Gaussian functions	30
Fig. 3.3	Data from Wearden and McShane (1988). <i>Upper panel:</i> Mean times produced plotted against target time. The <i>line</i> shown is the best-fitting regression line, and the numbers in the panel indicate slope, intercept, and r^2 values for the regression. <i>Lower panel:</i> Standard deviations of times produced plotted against their means. Once again, the regression line and slope, intercept, and r^2 values are given in the panel	31
Fig. 3.4	Temporal generalization gradients from Wearden, Denovan et al. (1997). The standard durations were 2, 4, 6, and 8 s, and the data shown are the proportion of YES responses (judgements that a comparison duration was of the same duration as the standard), plotted against comparison stimulus duration	32
Fig. 3.5	Superimposition data from Wearden, Denovan et al. (1997). Temporal generalization gradients from the conditions shown in Fig. 3.4 plus some others are plotted on a relative scale. For this, the duration of each comparison stimulus was divided by the standard in force for that condition	32
Fig. 3.6	Data from Wearden and Jones (2007). The task was to estimate the elapsed percentage of a standard (in different cases 10 s or 9.5 s) when comparison values varied from 10 to 100 % of the standard. The lines shown are best-fitting regression lines. See text for other details	40
Fig. 3.7	Data from Penton-Voak et al. (1996). <i>Upper panel:</i> Verbal estimates of the duration of auditory stimuli (500 Hz tones) preceded by no clicks (0 s) or 5 s of	