

## **Revelation is the Core Unit of Time**

The first time I ran across the notion of “User Stories” as a method of organizing software design work I found a large pad of sticky paper - the kind you rip off the easel and stick onto the wall - and some markers, went into an empty room in the offices of TechTrader, and wrote user stories for the application we were building. Each story covered the value proposition to the user, the elements of the software that would be involved in enabling it, and even to some extent the data structures that I foresaw would be required to make it work.

Each story I drew up led to one or more other stories that followed on from it. My imagination took off down a few rabbit holes and dead ends, but mostly the users I conjured had names and faces of the people I worked with who were trying to use the system we were building to conduct their business every day on their side of the office. Folks like Packaging Insider were using our SmartMarket system to send out and collect RFPs, RFQs, Ps, Qs, contracts, the whole paperwork chain leading up to a sale of packaging services. I did my best to inhabit their minds as they went about their work and used our system, documenting the work processes they had to do and how our software could most easily accommodate them.

At one point I found myself sticking the pages to a bookcase because there wasn't room on the walls anymore. At that point I looked at the time - it was after 8PM and I had been working in that room since noon. I was hungry, late for dinner, had to pee, but until I awoke from my work trance I had felt no sense of the passage of time. It could have been 1PM or 1AM and I'd have been equally indifferent.

Everyone undergoes this experience of time compression, or time dilation, or time indifference. Maybe your experiences tend to come while reading a great book, listening to a great album, having a great conversation. The common denominator across these experiences is revelation.

On the first listen, a great symphony impresses us with memorable melodies, separated by possibly incomprehensible or unmelodic transitional passages. By the fourth or fifth listen, a great symphony reveals its internal logic, and those transitional passages perform inescapably necessary functions leading from section to section. Each time something clicks into place for you while you experience it, the work is revealing a new element of craft and beauty. When you have the symphony on in the background as you prepare to catch the 7:35, you never experience something new from the music. You enjoy what you have already absorbed.

Your openness to revelation is directly proportional to your indifference to the lapse of time.

When I have spoken to people who have been reprieved from death - perhaps by an unexpectedly positive result of a cancer treatment, or a successful surgery, or release from a dire situation - they unanimously describe the weeks and months following their reprieve as being “full”. “Every day now is full of new and beautiful experiences.” “My heart fills with joy when I see simple beautiful things that I used to take for granted.” “I can focus my attention on whatever I'm doing to its full extent, which is greater and more powerful than I ever thought

possible before.” These people have opened themselves to revelation at every turn: revelation from external sources such as beauty, art, conversation, love, as well as revelation of their own responses to it, “greater and more powerful than I ever thought possible before.” They often cannot help sharing their experience of openness to revelation with others, speaking or writing or creating with their new internal configuration of talent and reality - this itself is revelation, revelation to others of their own states of being. And others reveal their own response to these messages, with gratitude or commitment or financial generosity. At these moments, they too are indifferent to the passage of time.

Steve Clement describes the phenomenon of “time compression” as an intrinsic element of the new reality of work. Technologically time compression is brought about by digitization: computer-based intelligence gathering, communications, modeling, logistics, mobilization, ad infinitum. People in this environment experience constant, continuous, often contradictory revelation, and must balance their state of mind between openness to revelation - which is indifferent to the passage of time - and deciding how and when to act as a result of what they have learned - which is intrinsically bound to the passage of time by choosing the correct moment.

The athlete and the warrior, the musician and the financier, they ride this wave surface at the intersection of revelation and action, timelessness and timeliness. This is how they consistently exert the least force with the most skill at the best moment for greatest impact. But this is not fundamentally the basis of their experience of time.

Does the athlete measure their life and career in terms of their impact on games? Does the musician measure their life and success based on which shows brought the most applause? No - they measure their life by the moments of revelation: when the instrument revealed itself to be the means of the musician’s salvation and livelihood. When the game revealed the player’s passion to excel and dominate. When the sword became liquid in the hand as foretold by the samurai’s instructors.

Revelation is the core unit of time. Greater openness to revelation enables greater utilization of one’s time. Framing action-in-time as revelation of one sort or another - external to internal, subconscious to conscious, internal to external, episodic to reciprocal - provides a useful method for describing one’s effectiveness at work across time. And understanding the depth and breadth of revelation of which an individual is capable, given an unlimited stream of new information as has been the case for the past couple of decades, enables one to choose the complexity of circumstances into which to place them.