

Why Do We Delight in Visual Change

Why Do We Delight in Visual Change?

I was having a conversation with my buddy Peter Phan the other day-- and he told me he was listening to a lot of Stevie Wonder (blind musician). Peter told me the reason why he was interested in listening to the music of Stevie Wonder was this:

How does a blind person experience happiness without having visual perception?

For example, a lot people in modern consumerist society delight in visual and aesthetic things-- how big our homes are (the space), the design of our cars (as well as the color), and the aesthetics of our devices and clothes.

Which made me wonder:

Why do we delight in visual change?

Visual adaptation

In psychology there is a concept called 'hedonic adaptation'.

- Hedonic: Hedonism-- the feeling of pleasure
- Adaptation: Getting "used to" something

Thus, hedonic adaptation means:

No matter how pleasurable something is, we will adapt/get used to it.

For example, let's say you buy a new (blacked out) Lamborghini. You will feel pleasure for the first few weeks, but soon it will lose its charm.

I experienced this when I first bought my Leica camera (Leica M9). I dreamed and fantasized that I would be happy with it forever, and never desire another camera again, and never run out of inspiration to shoot. The first few weeks were phenomenal-- but after the first few months, it lost its appeal. Thus the lesson I learned with material objects, cameras, gear, equipment, and stuff is:

No matter how great, fancy, or awesome the things you purchase, you will "get used to it" sooner or later.

I think the same thing happens with visual things. No matter how beautiful anything is-- we will adapt/get used to it.

For example, I met a guy named Ted who owned this phenomenal beach-side home in Fort Bragg. I imagined to myself:

"Wow, if I lived in this home, I would be super super inspired every single day, and so happy for the rest of my life."

But in reality, he told me that you sooner or later "get used to it" and don't take it for granted (as much as you initially did, or you think you "should").

The same thing goes with clothes: no matter how fashionable or interesting your clothes are, you will sooner or later 'get used to it' or get bored of it-- this is why we keep buying new fashion items, to overcome our visual boredom.

The same goes with cars-- I think this is why people love to work on their cars, upgrade their cars, and tune their cars-- there is a great joy of seeing visual change in your vehicle; whether you change your rims, lower your car, or add body-kits, or any other aesthetic changes. I would actually think that the auto-tuner who is building up a cheap car and "modding" it will gain more hedonic/visual pleasure than someone who buys a really expensive and fancy sports car, but doesn't upgrade anything.

This is my theory:

Perhaps it is in our human DNA to delight in new views, because that is what helped us procure new resources, find more favorable living places, and to conquer/dominate more new lands.

If humans were easily satisfied, we would have gone extinct a long time ago. Or perhaps the humans in the past who were easily satisfied died off via 'natural selection'; it was the hungry, ambitious, and the easily bored who were able to thrive and give birth to more children, who survived and thrived until today.

Practical takeaways:

1. Recognize no matter how fancy (or shitty) your stuff, home, clothes looks-- you will get "used to it". For example if you get a dent on your car, don't fret too much -- you will get used to it sooner or later. Or if you crack your smartphone screen, you will probably get used to it sooner or later. Therefore human adaptation works in a positive way-- it helps us also get used to difficult situations and suffering.
2. Stick to a simple wardrobe: I wear the same all-black (all merino wool) outfit everyday. It is easy and simple. I don't worry about what I wear, which gives me more energy and focus to worry on more important things-- like creating art, doing research, and making stuff.
3. Don't be too picky with colors: You will sooner or later get used to the color of your car, laptop, phone, camera, outfit, etc. But when in doubt, choose black (it is easier and just matches everything) #allblackeverything
4. When possible, optimize for function over form: It is better to have a camera that works well, than a camera that just "looks cool". No matter how cool your camera or device, you will sooner or later get used to the look. I generally think performance of our devices and tools is more important.
5. Don't really care what your home looks like-- you will sooner or later get used to it. And I think having the dream/fantasy of living in a really really big house is a bit overrated-- because it is extremely expensive, and it won't bring you that much happiness (hedonic adaptation).
6. No matter how great the photos you shoot, you will probably get bored of your

own photos sooner or later. Thus, to overcome visual adaptation-- keep shooting NEW photos!

7. Keep finding inspiration in new photos and pictures and visual artwork: You will sooner or later get bored of all art-- keep finding new forms of inspiration.

Stay hungry, stay foolish! #stevejobs

ERIC