

And Each Moment Is A Day

I would like to tell you about a few different qualities that time can have in the Western culture and elsewhere. Some of these time qualities you may know well. Some you may remember from your childhood. Some may be new to you. Try and listen to both at the same time: to what I am telling you and to how your body responds. It is quite all right if you pursue your own thoughts and fantasies at times. Let it be and come back to us.

To ask how people experience time, is actually to ask how they live. But then: the way we get along with our time is not very individual but mostly dictated by society (school, employment, transportation, media etc.). We all follow the same rhythm, and the hours, days, weeks, months and holidays are the cornerstones of our social life. Since we all have been socialised according to these basic rules, we think that our way of living in time is the “natural” order of things. Only when we get to know another culture with other rhythms, only then do we realize that ours is only one way of living in time among many. I remember returning from Tibet how I thought for a moment watching the people at the main station in ZH that they were like the characters in these old mute films where the movements are accelerated. After 3 weeks spent in Tibet I was out of sync, tuned in another, a slower mode.

Our lives in the Western culture are structured by the linear, mechanical time of Newton’s physics. Our daily routines are ruled by the ticking of our watches. We communicate with people around the world thank to this regulated time. We are used to planning our lives according to exact time references. Our occupations, daily commuting with public transportation, our travels, meetings with friends, or events like this forum are all neatly planned. Days such as today that are filled to the brim with wonderful activities would be impossible without the ticking of mechanical time. The ticking makes us efficient, functional, mobile, predictable. It can make our days exciting – but sometimes also breathless and stressful.

So much so that we sometimes forget that our psyche knows of a completely different, of a relative, elastic time, that is as flexible as the unconscious and can expand or contract to the point of No-time.

Our brain does possess a time-giver and our experiences and emotions tell us of duration, of the passage of time where things unfold. But our estimations of time vary greatly. Our sense organs come to different results. Our hearing for example measures time intervals more accurately than our sight. Our sense of time varies also with our state of mind and our feelings. Time flies when we are excited. It trudges when we are bored. And we lose every sense of time in moments of deep concentration or intense emotions.

So the time we experience is much more plastic than clockwork. This “Me-Time” (as some like to call it) is like a stream made of the daily events, of our relationships with others and with the world around us. It is a very individual time reality, with many different forms and paces.

Michael Ende wants to make the difference when he writes in his novel *Momo* :

“[The great and yet daily secret] is time. There are calendars and watches that measure time but this does not mean much. For everyone knows that a single hour can seem like an eternity, or then can pass like an instant, depending on what one has experienced in this hour. *Because time is life. And life abides in our hearts.*”

The poet Erika Burkart also wonders about this in her poem:

“Dates in my life
Tell little.
Long
The hours,
The minutes longer,
But a few seconds
Endless.”

There are still people in large parts of Africa or Asia, also among the American Indians, who live in their communities not after the clock but according to the needs of the community, their religious rituals, the seasons and the weather. In many of these places, the people have developed a multiple time consciousness. African

industry workers for example live after the clock during the week but change to the time of the extended family when they return to their villages on the weekend.

Vincente Lopez, a psychologist from Mexico explains that when he crosses the border from the United States to Mexico, he commutes between 2 different times, *hora inglesa* and *hora mexicana*. During the 5 years where he commuted between Tijuana in Mexico and San Diego in California, every time he crossed the border he felt as if someone was pushing a button in him. Coming from Mexico to the States he had the feeling that his whole being was gearing up. He would walk faster, drive faster, speak faster and keep his appointments. But on his way back, as soon as he would see the Mexican custom officer his body would relax and he would let himself sink into the event-time. He believes that just like him, many Mexicans choose to stay in Mexico. He says: "In Mexico we are within time, we don't control it. We live with time."

The Mexican writer Jorge Castaneda explains what "living with time" like this: "Mexicans are just different. It is more important to meet a friend of the family than to arrive at an appointed time or to be punctual at work. Very often, time is not money in Mexico. Time divides our countries [Mexico and the States] more than any other factor".

So "living with time" has to do with letting themselves sink into and be carried by the flow of time. In contrast to the wilful, controlled pace of life in the States, theirs is a surrender to the here and now. The saying from Haiti says the same in a nutshell: "You have watches, we have time."

Time management shapes a culture profoundly. For the psychoanalyst Neil Altman from NY, the 1st of his 2 year stay in southern India, working in a Peace Corps project, was a deeply unsettling experience: "I needed a whole year to get rid of my typical American feeling that I was responsible for something to happen. As an American, and a rather compulsive one, I was trying to feel more secure mostly by getting something done. To feel valuable meant for me to achieve something. It makes you very tense to encounter people who live in another time than you. You say for example: "When can we meet to talk about growing vegetables?" The other

says: "At 4." You drive over at 4 and there is nobody there because the other didn't take the appointment seriously. So you become very tense because you would like to get something done and the others won't go with it. In the 2nd year I felt no disappointment any more when nobody was there, because actually I didn't even expect to get to anything. I would instead sit in a tea house, meet new people or watch the children, the animals, or whatever would pass by. Sometimes other things happened than what I had intended. Sometimes not. But everything that really needed to be done came to me by itself. In my 2nd year I had internalized the 'Indian time'".

He had also learned to wait in this 1st year. Waiting is something that people of other cultures are very often much better at than we are. The writer Eva Hoffmann tells of her discovery during a journey through Eastern Europe of how pleasing silence and doing nothing can be: "Here we are, waiting again. We sit facing each other. Balkan time. We sit as Zen masters sit. There is no embarrassment, no nervous nodding or comforting smile. I begin slowly to feel how surprisingly relaxing this is. I glide into a perception of things where you don't insist on realizing a plan. You just wait for what happens next."

Akin to the waiting time is the immersed time of creativity. Time stretches then to a No-time. It can have been minutes, but it has often been hours when we finally come back into reality and realize how long we have been absent of this world, oblivious of everything.

C.G. Jung owes his psychic health to this kind of useless, idle hours. During his crisis in 1913 after the break from Freud he finally decided: "I do not know anything, so I will just do whatever occurs to me". And he started to play with stones as he used to when he was a 10 year old boy. This he did for many weeks in every free hour. He realized later on that this giving in to the unconscious had been a turning point in his life. He had resisted it for a long time and when he finally gave in, it was "with a keen feeling of resignation and humiliation at not being able to do anything but play." His playing with stones proved extremely fruitful. It triggered a stream of fantasies and brought him a few months later to trying an Active Imagination for the 1st time.

If we are willing to listen, the unconscious will speak to us in these purposeless, idle moments, often through bodily sensations. It will make us see things of our lives in another light, come up with new ideas, but also bring back important things happening around us that we had hardly noticed, or painful incidents too quickly glossed over.

So time can be many things . Bur most of all it is our life. This is why it is good to remember that time is many and that our psyche is at home in every one of them.