

Internal Time

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Martial artists, philosophers, medical specialists, artificial intelligence engineers and psychotherapists to name a few are greatly interested in the conscious/sub-conscious/unconscious process employed by the human bodymind in dealing with external reality. From my own reading and experience I have found the following approach useful:

The conscious appears to be a survival tool developed to run “what if?” thought experiments and intellectual models as a way of greatly improving living conditions, adapting to new environments, new social situations etc. – clearly these cannot run in real time but there is a survival benefit to running them as fast as possible in the conscious mode where they can be used as a constant moment by moment “reality check” against internally accepted norms, or used in planning situations where the model can be observed and adjusted or adapted to consider input/action/outcome relationships.

This creates an internal clock as a necessary by product of the need to stop/start/speed up these models. This appears to be individual dependant – based on the specific connections of each brain – perhaps a sort of harmonic circuit or pattern (there seems to be much debate about the mechanism for this but either actual or virtual – the effect is the same) - which sets the natural harmonic or “clock rate” as different for each person, although calibrated to external real world events such as the day/night cycle and even with an integral 24 hour function, which allows us to wake on time or make quantified time judgements. However the internal clock is difficult to remove from our experience, since all conscious experience necessarily passes through the conscious mind, then the clock function becomes overlaid on the real experience as it is processed.

So there appear to be two factors in play:

- a delay caused by the extra layer of processing
- the non-synchronous nature of the self-imposed clock rate which puts our timing “off”.

In normal activities this extra layer of conscious processing is beneficial – it allows constant checking of external events against our internal models, checking for consistency, fit, completeness and of course, possible outcomes – the benefit of getting it right in running complex internal social and technical models before we act, outweighs the cost of a slower performance – since ultimate speed is not normally critical in day to day life.

In reality we are running slow – behind events – all the time.

However beneficial this is in normal life there are two difficulties arising:

1. For many people the clock keeps scanning even when there is nothing to process and this creates a “busy mind” – boredom, a feeling of restlessness, of searching for something to do and it also affects the body by constantly keeping it in a state of nervous tension. It seems that meditation can slow or attenuate the clock so removing the imposed activity and with it the boredom/restlessness experience. Immersion in manual activities also seems to have a similar effect – perhaps by synchronising the internal clock with realworldtime.

2. In activities such as those envisaged in martial arts then ultimate speed becomes vital and imposition of an unreal clock rate together with the buffer of online reality checking are simply

too slow and too much of a constraint, as these are imposed on top of the experienced events and are too slow to adapt to events – the process not only creates a delay but also tries to force all experiences to fit a particular frequency.

So using our conscious mind habit we try to catch up, either by instructing our body to move physically faster (which can never be fast enough really to catch up) or by attempting to leap ahead i.e. anticipate (and often getting it wrong) as well as dipping in and out of realworldtime, because of this internal mechanism.

However in personal survival/self-defence this simply does not work adequately – so we seek to relinquish the conscious habit and free the bodymind to act unfettered by internal intellectual constraints and to operate in true realworldtime or its timing simply will not match that of an opponent – it will always be just behind or just in-front.

Thus the practice of clearing the mind and the body in a meditative way – this has the effect of diminishing the intrusion of the intellectual clock, allowing direct connection to the sub/unconscious and of calming the nervous tension, so allowing the body to enter a balanced physical state. Careful partner practice provides immersion in realworldtime manual activity so helping to minimise the unwanted interference of the conscious in this situation while synchronising internal and external time. The bodymind is thus aware but uncommitted and so fully potential – prepared for anything and capable of instant unrestrained movement.

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