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The Speed of Organization

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Peter Case, Tom Owens and Simon Lilley (eds.)
The Speed of Organization

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You Shall Know Our Velocity

Peter Case, Simon Lilley and Tom Owens

The threat of our contemporary speed of organisation, explicit in the title of this opening chapter, is writ large for us all. But real as the threat certainly is, it is also a little laughable, a little *unreal* as well. It is somehow too Biblical, and thus too inchoate with that of which it speaks, to be taken really seriously. Except of course by those who seek the serious in the portentous pronouncements of the characters of such contemporary classics as *Yu-Gi-Oh*¹ and indeed all manner of less animated, but equally absurd, so-called ‘action’ movies.

In the novel *White Noise* some rather different characters are confronted with an ‘airborne toxic event’ (as it is ‘officially’ described) and the ways in which Don DeLillo renders their reactions to it rather delightfully epitomise both the horrors and the absurdities of not only the contemporary speed of organisation but also of the causal reversals and impossibilities to which its hyperrealities give rise:

Babette’s head appeared at the top of the stairway. She said a neighbour had told her the spill from the tank car was thirty-five thousand gallons. People were being told to stay out of the area. A feathery plume hung over the site. She also said the girls were complaining of sweaty palms.

‘There’s been a correction’, Heinrich told her. ‘Tell them they ought to be throwing up.’ (DeLillo, 1986: 112).

In the tumult of the hypermediated, hurdy gurdy world that the novel describes, the protagonists live not as simple subjects of old, inhabiting an environment that affords them certain possibilities whilst precluding others. Rather this world is one in which the throttling tautness of the speed of the narration of the times becomes increasingly productive of world and times themselves through feedback loops so accelerated that they begin to feed forward. When media messages reach Heinrich to inform him that the symptoms deemed consequent upon the ‘airborne toxic event’ now include vomiting, the lack of this activity on the part of the girls is read not as a

¹ Ask your own or your neighbour’s kids!

deficiency of this information, nor of its source. It is not even read as mere prediction, as a disinterested account of a future yet to come to be. Rather the reality in which vomiting is not yet present, and the girls who participate in that reality and not the one described, authorised, and indeed prescribed by media messages, are all to be seen themselves as deficiencies. The girls and their reality are outmoded, out of date and out of time, in the face of the new account, in relation to which they are so clearly lacking. They are realities incongruent with and inimical to the really, *really*, *real*, real that is the hyperreal. Simply too slow to take place in the hypermodern world.

It is, it seems, *Hasta la Vista, Baby* to the present, and increasingly so, in an ever accelerating pursuit of terminal velocity. A contemporary condition of sufficient significance to warrant organising, for and against, a ‘postmodern’ condition – captured by Harvey (1989) in terms of a radical increase in the compression of time and space. In such circumstances time apparently increasingly becomes a competitive issue, and the speed and responsiveness of an organization becomes that which delivers comparative advantage. (See, for example, Kreitzman, 1999: 121–2 and the critical commentary of Armitage and Roberts, 2002). And we are cursed and blessed to live in times so interesting that they are ‘speeded up so as to make, as the saying has it “twenty-four hours a very long time”’ (Harvey, 1989: 285).

Increasing speed – of production, of information flow, of capital moving through deregulated financial and trading systems – couples with the more familiar increasing speed of transportation rendering, perhaps more explicitly than ever before, economies as systems of time and space as well as of value (Lash and Urry, 1993: 10–11). But with so much going on, and going on – and thus apparently changing – so quickly, how can it all, indeed any of it, be attended to? As Paul Virilio, perhaps the foremost theorist of speed, puts it: ‘The twin phenomena of immediacy and of instantaneity are presently one of the most pressing problems confronting [us]’ (1995; see also Virilio, 2000). Virilio sees this not so much as the result of the forces of capitalism, favoured as explanation by Harvey, but rather as the result of the imperatives of war, played out through a military industrial complex. The racing of information through its ever new circuits and the problems associated with such racing, Virilio terms *dromology*.

Although somewhat pessimistic, nostalgic and conservative (Kellner, 1999, particularly 103), Virilio is far from alone in seeing danger in our thrall to speed, not least in terms of our ability to grasp and grapple with the realities so created. For Harvey, for example, the ‘time-space compression’ attendant upon our acceleration ‘always exacts a toll on our capacity to grapple with the realities unfolding around us’ (1989: 306), thus leaving us in a world accelerating out of control. Or at least a world in which control is increasingly carried out (solely) in the symbolic realm – material being simply too lumpy and sticky to move fast enough. A world increasingly

realized through economies of signs, cultural developments within which identities can be formed and commitment seduced into being (see Lash and Urry, 1993; Baudrillard, 1990).

It seems that the speed of organization can be studied, then, from many points of view. In this book we have selected themes which resonate with Marxian thought. Like him or hate him, Marx has dictated the basis of intellectual debate on economics, business organization and sociological issues in general for the past hundred and fifty years. Our first theme concerns the manner in which capitalism becomes perceived as common sense, rather than as a social class which must be overthrown, through the identity of (largely but not exclusively) business organizations as permanent institutions serving the public good, thus our first section 'The Speed of Organizational Identity'. Our second theme deals with technology, by which labour and information are transformed into commodities and power, respectively. Indeed, the organization itself is the 'machine' of capitalism, suggesting a technology of organization structure and behaviour superimposed on the transformation technologies. In 'The Speed of Organizational Technology', our contributors examine technologies of representation, structure and information processing. The final theme is reification, the unconscious process of regenerating abstract ideas as concrete objects, which turns brand names into things-in-themselves and stifles questioning with the sedimentation of layers of agreement and acceptance. Branding, of course, applies to ideas as much as to products, through which we think we know the concept through deep familiarity with its name.² Our contributors examine this process in our final section 'The Speed of Organizational Imagery'.

Organizational identity is the public perception of an abstract entity, which is regarded as distinct from the collection of single individuals which created it. Gramsci says:

'If each of the single components thinks of the (organization) as an entity extraneous to himself, it is evident that this organism no longer exists in reality, but becomes a phantasm of the intellect.' (Forgacs, 1988: 243)

Elsewhere in the prison notebooks, Gramsci says that reality cannot be seen as something existing on its own, of itself, but only in a historical relationship with us, who modify it. We accept our need to distance our organizations from ourselves in a kind of philosophical space. We understand our need to have these organizations project themselves on to our consciousness so that we can provide boundaries for them there. Does this provide an opportunity for our exploitation? So that we remain unwitting of our exploita-

² Kearney (1986: 151) tells the story of Berthold Brecht throwing up his hands in dismay when 'Walter Benjamin informed him in 1938 that he had been writing and reflecting on the Marxist revolution for over twenty years without ever having read *The Capital!*'.

tion, must the exploitation process, the hijacking of organizational identity, be carried out very fast indeed?

According to our first contributor, Ben Agger, the exploiter is capitalism, succeeding through its very pervasiveness. It reaches into every aspect of our lives, so that we perpetuate it unwittingly. To observe its advance we need distance. Agger prefers temporal distance to distance in space. Spatial distance is easy enough to conceptualise and operationalise. But distance in time? Historicity has been a useful construct, back to the time of Marx. However, Agger believes, perceives, that capitalism has put on speed since that time, particularly post world war two and even more so since the advent of the Internet. To create the necessary temporal distance so that we can 'see the big picture' we need to slow down time itself. This means slowing down the pace at which we live our lives. As an old-time radical, Agger finds this easy enough to accomplish. Having directly experienced the dropping-out and turning-on social phenomenon of the 1960s, he has produced himself as an actor of his own philosophy. Authentic, existential, Marxist Agger suggests slow-modernity as counter-hegemony to that of capitalism.

This is a brave step. We know, from Althusser (2001) that capitalism gained its hegemony through becoming the dominant ideology of society. It achieved this through the integration of individuals into the system through membership of trades unions and political parties (Althusser, 2001), by manipulating public opinion through exploitation of religion and education (Gramsci, 1971) and by harnessing morality itself (Weber, 2001). How could 'slow-modernity' replace capitalism as the dominant ideology?

Slow-modernity is a concept of modernist manufacturing and information technologies being utilised to decelerate the pace of existence. We need to slow things down because the stability of our own identities is under threat from fast capitalism. We learned in the 1960s that self matters, that everyday life, food, sex, exercise and culture are political. Presentation of certain behaviours become political statements, political acts. Today these items are better seen as battlefields. On one side we have fast capitalism attempting to gain new markets and depersonalising us in the process. On the other side, we have the revolutionary or dropping out impulse fighting against, or effectively ignoring, the colonising forces of capitalism. This fight is not easy for us. Today everybody is involved in performance – essentially so that the existing order can be reproduced. Our focus on the big picture is blurred through forced concentration on tiny aspects or dimensions of being. By slowing down the world we can understand it and re-order it.

The first place to start is with children. Slowing down children's lives in combination with enriching them creates a 'delicate but not impossible balance'. Children can learn that capitalism 'need not endure forever'. Second, we can help ourselves by concentrating on ways of fighting capitalism through behaviours which mimic performativity. We can attempt to change

ourselves and in that process, collectively, change society. Ironically the Internet can be a powerful tool in the advancement of a hegemony counter to that of capitalism. Ironically, for Agger, because the Internet is undecidable. Is it an instrument which destroys discourse? Or one which produces greater democracy? Might this speedy tool help us to slow things down?

Can we help ourselves through the 'slow food' movement? Perhaps not, if this simply leads us to a 'supposed golden age of pre-modern life'. As metaphor 'Slow-life' is appealing. The problem is that it risks an anti-technology posture crystallising in switching off the TV and computer, sending the kids out to play and having family meals prepared from scratch. 'The problem is not technology but its uses', as Marx had it. Slow-food and slow-life are goals to be situated in modernity. The slow-food movement means nothing if it does not result in the demise of agribusiness and supermarket chains. If it is simply lifestyle, it changes nothing. We need to reconceive progress as productive harmony with nature, not as conquest. Slow modernity, a stage of civilisation in which the best of the modern and pre-modern coexist will 'restore and redeem nature as a standard by which other activities and arrangements are judged'.

Ever the optimist, Agger concludes with a 10-point self-help 'agenda' to guide us through the 21st century. His work is erudite, eclectic and sheer fun to read. And his final image of Marx, brandishing a bowl of pasta as protest, lingers long in the memory.

In the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx (1999) writes of commodity as fetish. A fetish is an object of some kind or a principle, revered for possessing a magical property. Marx used the term to highlight the separation of the worker from his work. Commodities appear in the market as if by magic; capitalism encourages us to focus on the goods, not on that which brought them into being. We learn to develop an unnatural devotion to things and their acquisition. If we use that perfume we will become attractive, if we drive that car we will become powerful.

Adrian Carr uses the language of psychoanalysis to explain the fetish concept and the manner in which certain individuals develop fetish attachment. His focus is on the generally observable pre-occupation with speed, which for some is raised to the level of fetish. That there is a modern pre-occupation with speed is evidenced by the terms we employ for everyday items. Our telephones have speed-dial facilities, we eat in fast-food restaurants. Carr is fascinated by the process whereby general pre-occupations emerge, providing a reading of the present based on Freud's theories of the psyche.

From initial studies of adults displaying inordinate, 'extravagant', devotion to physical objects, Freud could identify erotic, perhaps sexual, impressions formed in childhood. Leaving the full implications of this aside, as pertaining to the few, Carr traces Freud's development of theory through his second model of the psyche, as pertaining to the many. The technical

language of the model has since entered mainstream speech. Although Carr believes we are mostly familiar with terms like id, ego and super-ego, he reminds us of the tensions set up by interaction between these elements and between the ego and reality. Conflict between the ego and the superego, where we are prevented by conscience from doing something we might otherwise have done, can be eliminated through group processes, whereby we replace superego imperatives with the need to achieve group ideals. In that same process, the ego has identified with others in the group according to the extent of gratification received.

Carr's argument, to this point, creates a platform on which he builds a discourse on pre-occupation with speed and its social consequences, based on a reading of critical theory. Citing Marcuse, he argues that the superego can be shaped to fit in with social restraints set by others. The individual's behaviour in affirming and reaffirming these restraints becomes instinctive. Following Atkinson, we see that the individual not only wants to conform to societal norms but must, to avoid feelings of guilt. Societies may produce a 'reality principle', according to Marcuse, arising from their material conditions. In capitalist societies, the reality principle is based on competitive economic performance, output determining social strata. Carr draws our attention to Gramsci's earlier conclusion that the power of a dominant group cannot be maintained indefinitely by force alone, needing also the consent of the subordinate group. This consent is enlisted through persuasion that interests are served through acceptance of the prevailing order.

This brings to mind Lukács' (1971) observation that consciousness is reified as commodities are fetishized. The idea is that products become our lives, rather than exist in them. We assert ourselves through the brand names of the food we eat, the clothes we wear, our 'life-styles'. But as this happens our consciousness freezes, we lose our criticality. We are non-people, consumers merely, persuaded that this state leads to our happiness.

Carr turns to Debord for suggestions as to the triggers and mechanisms used to persuade us. Entertainment, it seems, creates our reality for us through its images. These show us how we should live, how we want to live. They inform us, perhaps, of the group's ideals, to which we surrender our sense of self. The current reality principle emphasises speed as a characteristic of performance efficiency. Speed, itself, can become elevated in our consciousness to the level of fetish. We all become preoccupied with it, as an object of our devotion. Carr fears that this preoccupation may lead to the condition of stimulus entrapment, a psychological disability, which permits no inner life to the individual. The concept itself is a fitting metaphor for the condition of a society that has lost its internal reflective, or moral, mechanisms.

Being fast is being sexy, being powerful. Fast organizations and instant messages serve the public good, surely? The speedier organization is identi-

fied as more admirable, speedier products are more valuable, speed itself is pure magic.

Critical theory and psychoanalysis are two routes to understanding our economies of signs and the identities they support. They share objectification of the problem as an approach to a solution. They place distance between the observer and the phenomenon observed. They try to be on the outside, looking in. The ethnographer, on the other hand, writes from the inside out, sending out observations of the inside world. The ethnographer is part of, and apart from, the culture observed. Tuomo Peltonen observes the culture of mobile professionals and managers as a highly mobile academic. His study contains descriptions of mobility in an absolute sense, in that he provides insight into the joys and problems associated with travel itself. Peltonen goes further, determining the existence of that other who informs – indeed forms – the culture observed relativistically. Since his culture is essentially dynamic, the other is, perforce, static; his people are nomads, the other is rooted; the nomads are constantly moving, the other permanently stuck. Once we accept mobility, speed and distance as positive factors, those with access become superior to those without.

In passing, Peltonen notes that capitalism confers these values on its more senior practitioners, increasing in magnitude with higher positioning in capitalism's hierarchy. Owners and senior managers are the most mobile, the most unburdened; made most powerful in consequence. Capitalism moves faster in our times, it circulates faster, with faster meaning more successful in the rhetoric of speed. Perhaps this means that capitalism is becoming more successful. First, because we become less pervious to its encroachment on our private lives; second, because workers increasingly emulate capitalist practice. A new elite is formed of those with access to 'speed', shaped through 'speedy' performance, objectified through the necessary comparison with those who are slow, those denied access. Peltonen tightens his focus on the frequent-flyer, of which he himself is one. He explains his research methodology as being in the spirit of actor network theory rather than as 'pure' inductive ethnography. The appropriateness of this choice becomes obvious as he helps us to see the culture of this new elite in terms of its dependence on supporting technology and infrastructure. Furthermore, it may be a culture in relative terms only.

As we read, we are drawn into Peltonen's world. This is as much a testament to his wit as to his methodology, for Peltonen is more than alive to the absurdities of our current velocities. We are reminded of the 'hurry-up, slow-down' aspects of modern air travel, of our dependence on the support systems being made obvious only when they fail. The method of exposition includes boxed paragraphs of Peltonen's lived experience. These present themselves as windows on the world of the new elite. As they (we) gaze from the window of the airliner they can feel their power, their literal superiority.

And as we peer through Peltonen's boxes, we too gain power voyeuristically. Certain conclusions are reached in the course of our travel. We learn that the meanings of speed and mobility are formed through the participants' discourse. We learn that speed's dependence on technology produces two effects, of which humans becoming more machine-like is the first and the granting by us to machines of faculties of wisdom and potency, the second. Finally, Peltonen confronts his own standpoint. Since he is an observer of the new, speedy elite, he is made 'heavier' and 'slower' by his research, than those who are totally immersed in the liquid world of lightness, speed and mobility. They are not troubled by the 'inner dynamics of subjectivity' as Peltonen is. This leads logically to questions of the separation of research from research objects, of science from practice. Scientists may experience envy of those 'faster' than they can be. Developers of theory may feel 'somehow incomplete and impure' relative to the actors of speed.

It seems reasonable to claim that this first section establishes capitalism as the dominant ideology of our times. Capitalism works faster than in Marx's time, the ethos of performance has become the reality principle, business executives literally move faster than before, as work and reward simultaneously. We recognize success, of organizations, of their executives, of their products, according to their ability to construct an identity of speed.

In the second part of our edited collection *The Speed of Organizational Technology* takes centre stage. Marx approved of technology. Indeed, he seems to have been pleased with the speed with which capitalism employed new technology in the production process, because this would tend to bring its demise closer. During the formative years of industrial capitalism (generally regarded as the fifty years from 1870 to 1920), technology meant production operations technology, typically mass production and continuous flow production. Engineering of machines to process materials has latterly given way to the engineering of machines to process information. And the speed fetish is at work in information technology as obviously as in the production of organization identity.

We open here with Scott Lawley whose fundamental concern is reality itself – which is no bad place to start! Is there such a thing as objective reality and if there is, can we know it? His intellectual forebears are metaphysicians, for all that he locates his argument in the discourse of post-structuralism. And Lawley is a realist, his starting point and his touchstone is the existence of reality independent of our perceptions. The problem for him, then, is the correspondence between our perceptions of the real world and its objective existence. Reality is difficult to perceive because of its ephemeral nature. Constantly changing, omni-present, it refuses to be pinned down. It is as if reality were moving so fast that we may only perceive a blur. Lawley cites Lee's metaphor of infinite speed for the movement of reality – a speed beyond the concept of measurement, making perception impossible.

For Lawley, these two positions are reconciled through mediating structures. Reality exists. It cannot be perceived directly. Our perceptions are formed, therefore, by representations of reality, enabled through technological structures. Representations are substitutes for reality in the sense of role; representations are performances of aspects, or facets, of reality, in the sense of event, or object. For the latter sense to be operative, reality must be 'slowed down', 'frozen in time'. A photograph freezes reality at the camera's shutter speed. The photograph is a performance of reality and reality's 'representative'. The more 'realistic' the photograph, the more we are willing to accept it as real. Magritte's image of a pipe becomes a pipe, according to its degree of realism, as it were. Lawley argues that the 'photographer', in choosing one snapshot from the infinite number possible, controls our perception of reality. By extension, those who construct representations of reality exercise power over those who receive them. This is an insidious power. On the receiving end, we imagine we are looking at reality when, in fact, we are looking at chosen instances of reality. Furthermore, our perceptions inform our actions and these constitute elements of reality. So in this way, controllers of representations of reality tend to control reality itself.

Lawley's text is complex and challenging. He assumes, perhaps demands, a readership of a high intellectual order, well-read in philosophy, linguistics and semiotics, in addition to his vehicular discourses of post-structuralism. Inevitably, in his short treatment here, these texts not only resonate in a post-modern manner but positively interrupt each other. His usage of hyper-reality is contingent on specific discourses, although simply epithetic of reality, in the aggregate. Yet, that a train timetable is hyper-real, in the sense that it is 'more real' to us than the entire system, or its infrastructure, cannot be in doubt. The printed timetable is a representation, therefore, of the hyper-reality of the transport schedule. This step lets us see how control is exercised over reality. The hyper-real facet is selected from reality, then promulgated through a broadcast representation. The selection activity slows reality down but then accelerates the hyper-reality. The Internet is the most recent acceleration device, which Lawley considers as much for its internal workings as for its role in this power performance. Aspects of the Internet infrastructure enable the slowing-down of representation broadcast (from its own speed of light) and the creation of private zones for representation reception. The boundaries of these zones become the new boundaries of organizations.

Lawley's chapter forces us to consider the most basic questions of philosophy. What is the world in which we live? How do we know that world, how do we interpret it, how do we communicate it? All approaches to these fundamental problems can be placed in two categories: idealism and realism, labelled by Heidegger (1997) as studies of being by a worldless subject and of a subjectless world, respectively. We seem not to be able to do both

at once, because of our presence as subjects in the world. The interested reader will find Eco (2000) instructive on the development and current state of this argument. Nobody seriously suggests a lack of objective reality anymore. The issue is the meaning of 'being there'. What does it mean to study the world as it is, by us, as we are? History is in our consciousness, there is only a constant fleeting present. Photographs are representations of things no longer true. The speed factor we must contend with is intimidating. Virilio (1997) says that speed leads to collision, greater speed leading to bigger collisions. The digital reality of information technology produces a different concept of time and space. The internet world has no concept of night and day; no concept of a topos. The study of 'being there' implies an ethnographic methodology, axiomatically.

Good ethnographers are good story-tellers. Living within their host cultures, they tell the history of that culture as it unfolds. Through their stories we learn of their feelings and impressions of people and events as well as of those people and events themselves. Whereas Peltonen might represent the accidental ethnographer, Sam Warren is deliberative. Nonetheless, they share an interest in people who move faster than others; whose faster movement characterises them as successful, progressive, achieving individuals. Both researchers identify alienation symptoms. In Warren's observation, their employer's goals and methods oblige employees to be in constant motion, thereby preventing any sense of rootedness, of belonging, to develop.

Warren concentrates on 'Dept. X', an organisational unit of a large firm in the information technology industry. 'Dept. X' designs web-sites for the firm's customers. The firm is convinced that customers have 'an expectation of immediacy' regarding the satisfaction of their needs. The company response is to work faster, using 'hot-desking' as a speed device. Warren understands the short-run economic benefits of this usage but worries about long-run diseconomies caused by employee resistance and disaffection. Hot-desking, as she explains the term, means employees sharing desk space with each other. Because of the varying demands on employees' time and the opportunities provided by online work operations, employers found investment in desks and desk-space wasteful. The provision of this space becomes economical when organised on a shared basis. A further benefit may lie in reorganising such (reduced) space so that, for example, employees working as a team may be grouped together physically as well as strategically. The root source of benefits to the employer, Warren concludes, is speed. Speed of online communication and project-sharing means employees can work from home. Speed of responsiveness to clients means employees can work on clients' premises. Speed of project completion means speedy regrouping for the next project.

Here we see three distinct technologies in play. The first, and most obvious, is a work-space optimization technology used to reduce investment in

fixed overheads, Marx's 'constant' capital; the second is a production process technology used to provide a more valuable product to the customer, which means more utility for the same price, in a narrow economics sense; the third is a productivity enhancement technology used to derive additional value from the labour cost, Marx's 'variable' capital. Marx's labour theory of value states that labour is the only ingredient of cost that can yield a surplus. The worker is exploited according to the expropriation of surplus. Warren's study sheds light on the ways in which the Internet facilitates the exploitation of the worker, through its pervasiveness and its speed.

There are though, clear benefits to the employees – flexibility of working, excitement, novelty. What is not so clear is what the disadvantages are and this is what engages Warren the most. Among these are the loss of the concept of home as haven, the loss of symbolism of personal office space – in terms of size, location, furnishings, and the loss of a sense of individuality and control associated with the loss of a personal place at work. It is this latter issue which prompted Warren to use photographs as a research tool. Her sample of sixteen employees photographed their current work-space and used the photographs (displayed on a computer monitor) to discuss their concerns. The photograph is, at once, explicit of its content and a stimulus for memories and associations. Furthermore, it enables a sharing of data with the reader of the research. As a research tool, therefore, it generates rich data. Like Lawley she thus sees photographs as both performances of reality and propulsion towards further performance. And in her desire for her subjects to 'own' the process of research in which they are engaged, she buttresses Lawley's claim that the photographer, in selection of shot, controls the perception of reality so produced.

We learn, through this study, of the respondents' needs to aestheticise and personalise their work-spaces and thereby, establish a sense of community, seen as vital for productivity. Indeed, there is evidence suggestive of an informal push-back against the hot-desking requirement enforced by these needs. Warren is clear that her conclusions are not capable of extrapolation, for all that they resonate with those from other studies. It is tempting, though, to believe that the workers in 'Dept. X' may be attempting to slow down the carousel of capitalism.

Lawley argues that information technology (IT) has the potency to misrepresent reality, Warren provides a sketch of the worker in a modern IT environment and now Tamar Zilber deals with the IT industry directly, at the time of the 'dot.com Bubble', in Israel, a country whose economy is hugely dependant on the Hi-Tech sector. She discovers through her research that speed is the informing term of Hi-Tech discourse and that Hi-Tech rhetoric came to pervade all published discourse. As she deconstructs speed in Hi-Tech, therefore, she offers insight into 'the broader cultural world', as well as into Hi-Tech itself. In Zilber's context, Hi-Tech is a general term for the

information industry, including both hardware and software sectors as well as information disseminators and managers. Hi-Tech firms are characterised as operating under extreme time pressures, within an environment characterised as risky, dynamic, uncertain and highly competitive. In this context, speed becomes a 'technical, or functional requirement'.

Zilber identifies four dimensions of the Hi-Tech discourse through her research. These are technology; change of scale; competition; and crisis evaluation. She postulates that speed acquires symbolic power in its reference within these dimensions. Under technology, we find employment advertisements using speed rhetoric as smoothly as product advertisements. Faster product speed can be a unique selling proposition. In job ads, speed is coupled with wealth, with progress, with wisdom. Zilber reflects on the circumstance of product improvements being too much, too soon for consumers, yet not impeding the speed of speed rhetoric's social acceptance. Under change of scale, Zilber focuses on economic time scales, organisational trajectory and presentations to funders. Although the Hi-Tech industry is, at least, thirty years in existence in Israel, the widely shared perception is that it is a mere two to five years old. One element of this perception is that Hi-Tech success occurred within that time-frame; another element is the 'exit' strategy of transformation into a public company or of being acquired by another firm. Either form of exit ends the history of the start-up enterprise.

When these firms presented their plans to funders (typically venture capitalists), they did so in '15 minutes or less', in 'one sentence, one bullet-point'. Change of scale produces increasingly smaller technological 'gadgets', increasingly higher start-up valuations, increasingly younger owners and managers, increasingly inexperienced. Zilber wonders if the sense of the future becomes lost in the process of celebrating youthfulness and disregarding experience.

Under competition, Zilber finds the rhetoric of comparison. To be fast means being faster. So that one competitor can be faster, another must be relatively slower. Finally, under crisis evaluation, the final irony: an industry characterised by speed collapsed 'at the speed of light'. The same rhetoric of speed that had been used to glorify the Hi-Tech industry was now used to mourn it. And yet another irony is to be found in the aftermath of the dot.com bubble. It seems the subsequent recession will prove to have been the shortest ever. The rhetoric of speed may prove to be the Hi-Tech industry's lasting legacy.

This means that speed itself becomes valuable and morally correct. The imagined value of speed during the dot.com bubble may have been based on a new productivity technology, leveraging substantially more labour value through full or shared ownership of intellectual property. In the new economy of the Internet, slow equals bad, fast equals good. Speed has become a virtue.

The third and final part of our text deals explicitly with *The Speed of Organizational Imagery* and we begin the end with Jo Brewis and Gavin Jack's special offer: an account of the development of fast and convenience foods and their role in modern society. They counterpoint this development with a commentary on the slow-food movement, a phenomenon we have already encountered with Agger. Their exposition centres on a study of television advertising of 'fast' foods and a deconstruction of these messages.

Messages of speed and convenience are valuable to those pressed for time. Brewis and Jack explore western notions of time and locate these in a discourse of dialectical materialism. New oppositions are found, as for Peltonen, between being time-bound and space-bound, between being time-poor and time-rich. In the latter case, they trace development of conspicuous commodity consumption through leisure consumption and back as characteristic of varying stages of capitalism.

Fascinating though the account is by itself, just like the toy that comes with a Happy Meal, it is the style that engages our attention most. The narrative hurtles along, with a mixture of bullet-points, journalistic section-headings, references drawn from popular media as well as from respected academic sources. They find faux-nostalgia, a longing for a past that never existed, and time-poverty, being impressively busy, as Hallmarks of our culture. Capitalism asserts, confirms, echoes these mental states through marketing.

Their argument starts with a depiction of the spectacular growth of the McDonald's corporation worldwide. The best-known product in the world is perhaps, McDonald's Big Mac, a fast-food item. Two factors are suggested for this development. The first is that society seems to have changed its eating habits, turning eating at home into a weekend or special occasion event. The second is that fast-food consumption may transcend cultural preferences or indicate cultural assimilation and/or convergence.

To what extent are these factors caused by marketing or simply, reflected by marketing? Brewis and Jack tackle this argument full-frontally, juxtaposing Marx (and others) with those, like Toivonen and Mort, who emphasize the autonomy of the consumer. Consumers can 'resist and subvert' marketing messages, in a way, surely, to be hoped for. But perhaps these are merely 'Culinary Luddites'.

Next, they turn their attention to the relationship between consumption of fast-food and living a busy life. The concern is clear. The busier we are at work, the less time we have for 'ourselves'. Brewis and Jack trace the discussion through the study of cultural attitudes to time, and cultural differences between the developed and developing parts of the world. Successful people in the developed world are Peltonen's frequent fliers, Kivinen's speedy cyclists (of whom more in a moment), Zilber's IPO promoters, all 'time poor'. Those who want to be successful, or be regarded as such, can emulate the

time-poverty syndrome, at least. Grabbing a Big Mac, for example, can suggest our success since we don't have enough time for anything more complicated. As general support for their arguments, they outline a series of television commercials for fast and convenience foods through the adoption of a couch potato methodology. The commentary is always witty, sometimes hilariously so. Finally, if consumption of fast-food can be interpreted as rebellious the slow-food movement is a further stage in revolution. They remind us of the distinction between speed and acceleration. Speed is transformative, radical; acceleration is adaptive, conservative. We may only be conscious of the effects of acceleration, since speed has already become an accepted element of life. Speed is a fetish, our consciousness of it is reified.

Nina Kivinen declares her interest to be an understanding of visual representations of concepts, things and people. Her attention in this chapter is focussed on the representation of corporate identity through images of the corporation (corporate imagery). She stresses her lack of care with outcomes of these projected or broadcast images. In other words, she is concerned with a translation of the image's meaning and not with the variety of effects on human behaviour such images (or their meanings) might have.

An image on an Internet home page is doubly provocative to her, since the image and its medium of expression are both objects of study in themselves. Her work resonates with the Internet argument – effective circulator of signs (information), new technology predicated on existing conventions, agent of fast capitalism – but is not preoccupied by it. Rather she reflects on the ease with which images are used and circulated on the Internet. Inevitably this increases the number of images surrounding us, rendering those images as things in themselves, rather than repositories of meanings. Consequently, we may be losing our ability to 'read' images, leading, perhaps, to 'stimulus entrapment' as described by Adrian Carr. Kivinen's own ability to read images is centred on her understanding of semiotics. There are two aspects to this, being the identification of objects in an image and the ideas and values expressed through objects (and their composition).

Her reason for choosing the precise image treated here is that it was the only image on Enron's home page in the autumn of 2001, an image of a young man on a bicycle. The image has been created with a 'blurred' effect, so that certain features of the cyclist are indistinct, as is the background. According to Kivinen's ekphrasis, it is suggestive of a city-scape, the cyclist appearing to move against a fixed background. There is a grid superimposed on the image with certain 'squares' of different colour to the overall scheme. She interprets the composition and construction of the image as intending reality and 'high tech'. She responds to the image by adding values and probabilities to the image from her own cultural inheritance, as this technique requires. She interprets the cyclist as representative of the company. This, in turn, presents more possibilities for interpretation, in the sense of Barthian

connotation. The bicycle is an old invention but confers an advantage of relative speed (possibly its only advantage) over other road users. The company, it seems to say, uses old technologies in new ways to create competitive advantage. Chief of these is relative speed. Naturally, for one to be faster, another needs to be slower, pace Peltonen.

The bicycle speaks of the past, as a mode of transport, or of leisure; it is not an icon of speed. The bicycle may then be used as a trope of nostalgia, ala Brewis and Jack. The company may be hoping to suggest old-style, willingness to use traditional methods, conservatism.

Enron was an energy trader. The cyclist provides a faster way of delivering certain packages than other methods. Enron could, the image suggests, deliver energy from one with excess to one in need, faster than its competitors. Kivinen points out that the cyclist's relative speed depends, in part, on 'cutting corners' and in part on disregarding certain traffic regulations, which slow others down. To assess the inherent risk in this approach, we need not look elsewhere than, in hindsight, at Enron. Kivinen contributes to the current study by organisational theorists of aesthetic phenomena, using semiological tools and her rich imagination.

We close with Steffen Böhm, for whom the essence of capitalism is its expansion, achieved through circulation. Without circulation, the surplus value created in the production process sits in inventory. Böhm roots his argument on circulating capital firmly in Marx. He points out that Marx knew indeed that distribution and marketing are essential factors for capitalism's success. Böhm searches for a metaphor for capital, which needs to circulate constantly and which needs to return constantly to the fixed point of production. His love for Benjamin leads him to the image of a child on a carousel.

Engagingly, Böhm treats us to a discourse on Benjamin's political awakening. We learn of his early academic life and his frustrations. We are helped to form a picture of Benjamin writing, on the one hand, to secure university tenure and on the other, to develop his own understanding of the world in which he finds himself. This more subjective writing required a new, different method. Images of modern city life would present the materiality of the world, its concreteness, in a way that 'coherent argument' could not. As Benjamin became more interested in the relationships between people and things he read more deeply into materialist philosophy, notably that of Lukács. Benjamin resonated to Lukács' account of reification, finding human relations in modern cities increasingly thing-like. From this, it is a short step to commodification of human relations and the elevation of ordinary things to spectacles and presentations.

Böhm now revisits Marx. His reading shows that Marx sees capital as a process rather than an entity. The process transforms labour commodity into material commodity into money into increased transformation of

labour and so on. Capitalism thrives on the productivity of the capital process. The more efficient the process, the greater is the increase in capital. Nor is efficiency limited to labour productivity, since technology creates benefits of scale as well as speed. Given competition between firms as a reality, advantages created by one are soon reduced by equivalent development by rivals. As a consequence, there is an enhanced need for new technology and methods, which will spur relative productivity gains. The carousel keeps turning but moves faster with each turn.

Again from Marx, we see that capital can prosper through market expansion, indeed markets must expand if no further improvements are obtainable within existing demand. Capital *needs* to be in a constant process of circulation. Capital *needs* to increase as it circulates. Ironically, this signals the inherent weaknesses of capitalism. If demand is lacking, Böhm offers as example, capital freezes in time. Consequently, the speed of circulation, the speed of the carousel, is produced by expanding markets, an expansion of the system itself. As this takes place, capitalism becomes the entire social system. The boundaries between private life and capitalist endeavour become blurred.

We go back to Benjamin. Or, perhaps like the carousel, we go forward to arrive at the point we left. The carousel shows us a changing world with every second but brings us back always through the same point. 'The carousel of capital give the impression of speed and change, but for Benjamin this is only a phantasmagoric illusion.' The image of the child on the carousel can, nonetheless, be an image of hope. Children, for Benjamin, can make the most creative connections. They may find a way, through riding it, of transcending the carousel.

So capitalism really is conservative. The logic of capitalism is to demonstrate apparent rather than real speed, or perhaps acceleration rather than speed, since the carousel ride doesn't actually take us on a trip to anywhere. The real, transformative speed is already reified. Capitalism provides an exciting life, not a worrying one.

If we question this, we need method. Böhm's moral is in his method. He introduces his chapter with a short section on translation. We cannot translate adequately from one language to another. Rather, we can attempt to understand text by going through an author's experience and expressing that in the target language. Böhm demonstrates this in relation to Benjamin by bringing his readers on a carousel ride. Böhm's text progresses and returns to its starting point. His discourse on capital is, itself, in constant circulation, expanding with each turn and culminating in a valiant attempt at transcendence. His fixed-point of Benjamin starts with a quotation from *One-Way Street*; turns through front covers of his work; turns again through Benjamin style quotations (from Marx, Blumenfeld, Toynbee); again a Benjamin quotation; a pictorial image of a carousel; finally an image of

a child on the carousel, the image of hope. This is entertainment for the intellect and a fitting non-end for a collection reflecting on the speed and acceleration of organisation. All aboard!

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SECTION I

The Speed of Organizational Identity

Fast Capitalism and Slowmodernity

Ben Agger

I (Agger 1989a) have argued that capitalism has quickened since WWII, especially with the advent of the Internet. People work harder and more; their private space has been eroded; kids are doing adult-like amounts of homework and activities; people eat badly, on the run, and then embark on crash diets and exercise programs. The world is ever-present and omnipresent, saturating us with stimuli, discourses, directives. It is difficult to gain distance from the everyday in order to appraise it. Our very identities as stable selves are at risk. We need to slow it all down.

Tuning In, Turning On, Dropping Out

Slowing down is easier said than done. The self is so embattled, bombarded from all sides at all hours via all media, that reclaiming it, as if we ever had it in the first place, is a tall order. Heroic measures are usually futile. And yet the 1960s taught us, first in the anti-war and civil rights movements and then the women's movement, that the self matters. The self is political, as are everyday life, the body, food, sex, exercise, and culture – even if not all politics involves the personal, sexual, dietary, and cultural. Critical theory and postmodernism powerfully teach us that discourse, language, writing, media, cultures, bodies and bedrooms are the new contested terrain of post-WWII, post-Fordist, fast and now faster capitalism. The forces of capital and control, those who benefit from disempowering selves, have colonized what used to be off limits to the social and political. They have done so, as I have been arguing, largely to find new markets and at the same time divert people from the revolutionary deed or, as Timothy Leary and hippies preferred during the sixties, from dropping out (and perhaps dropping acid). Marcuse (1955) said it well when he talked of the late-capitalist performance principle, according to which all life, experience, diet, sex, and leisure are mobilized in order to reproduce the existing order, denying a Dionysian desire that would recognize the prospect of liberation inscribed in advanced technologies capable of finally delivering us from scarcity. Performativity is

the logic of faster capitalism, subjecting all of life, and even children's existence, to scheduling, producing, connecting, messaging, immersing oneself in the quotidian and therefore losing sight of the bigger picture.

This bigger picture, like a complicated jigsaw puzzle or mosaic, can only be grasped from the vantage of distance. Adorno (1978) and his Frankfurt colleagues preached distance as the vantage of critical reason from which we can appraise our damaged lives, figuring out what bonds us and then what we can do to burst free. Marcuse argued that distance, and thus critical consciousness, was being reduced because in late capitalism people are so immersed in everyday life that they can't stand outside of it in order to appraise it. This is one of my main contentions about a fast and faster capitalism: People's lives are so accelerated that they cannot slow down sufficiently to take stock let alone begin to change things. It is all people can do to keep up with the frenzy of cyberspace – e-mail, cell phone calls, instant messaging, directives from the boss, children's frantic schedules, a substantial and growing work load that respects neither temporal nor physical boundaries.

Adorno chose the spatial metaphor of distance and closeness to characterize the predicament of the social critic who must work hard to separate himself from the everyday in order to gain a critical vantage on it. I choose the metaphor of time, passing rapidly or slowly, in order to suggest that social critics must slow down their worlds in order to grasp and then re-order them. We must turn off television and the cell phone; we must not obsess about our e-mail; we must insulate our children against an incipient, premature adulthood; we must slow down and think things through, carefully evaluating modernity for its strengths and weaknesses and not simply accepting existence as a plenitude of social being.

Although people in modern cultures are better educated than in Marx's time, Marx could gain the vantage of social criticism more easily than we can because the issues were more basic then – getting enough to eat, finding shelter, providing for one's family, escaping political tyranny. Today the issues seem more nuanced as we live amid abundance, if not for everyone. Let us not forget that one out of every four Americans lives near, or below, the poverty line, which is currently considered to be an annual income of \$17,900 for a family of four. Try to buy groceries, pay rent, perhaps maintain a car, acquire health insurance, and even save modestly for future education on that pitiful sum! And without education one's children will be destined to relive one's own penury, locked into a cycle of poverty that seems natural, inescapable, for its tenacious hold on minds and bodies.

Barbara Ehrenreich documents the working poor who subsist at the margins of our economy and society, desperately clinging to the edge of subsistence while doing exhausting, degrading part-time jobs without benefits. But the lives about which Ehrenreich writes do not include her own, which affords her not only distance – and with it education, time, hope – but also

the luxury of shedding her life and taking on another, “going underground” to experience first-hand what it’s like to live as the working poor do. Ehrenreich does this as a literary methodology, a way of getting inside other selves much more desperate than her own. But no matter how bleak her lot while working at Wal-Mart or for a maid service, she always knew that she was “going home”, out of penury and back to security, from the vantage of which she could engage in important social criticism. Ehrenreich masterfully combines distance and immersion in order to tell the stories of selves denied the privileges of time, food, housing, health care – stability.

For the poor and desperate, distance, and with it hope as well as systematic anger – expressed as theory – is unattainable and probably even unimaginable. For the comfortably college educated and middle class, distance, contemplation, and critical thought are rejected as a violation of utility and performativity. They are “good for nothing”, a waste of time. As the vast majority of my students ask me and my colleagues, “Is it going to be on the test?” “Am I responsible for the lectures or the readings?” “Do I have to have footnotes?” “Exactly what pages do I have to read?” Some of my colleagues, in utter frustration, give objective tests, supposing that real understanding can be sacrificed for a modicum of content, given that most of our students are unmotivated, turned off by the intellectual life. They merely imitate their parents and the culture at large, which substitute performance for thought and utility for intrinsic value. The theoretical life won’t pay the mortgage, car note, tuition, or credit-card bill.

My argument risks being a romantic one for distance, contemplation, and quietude – life lived at a snail’s pace in order to take stock and then take action. Our culture needs romanticism in order to arrive at the electric moment when thought becomes action, first on the personal level and then collectively, even globally. It also needs humanism, as I will explore later, at the risk of offending postmodernists who have given up on selves. We need to contemplate utopia and implicitly our distance from it, even as we acknowledge that fantasies often turn into nightmares if accompanied by hubris, arrogance. It takes dexterity, subtlety, and nuance to engage in social criticism and visionary theory without being prescriptive; our problems are common, but our solutions may vary with context, culture, race, gender, generation. Most visions end up being hallucinations, distorting and deceiving. And yet not to fantasize condemns one to the quotidian, to what I am calling immersion and instantaneity, which block distance, critique, and action. My students are so utilitarian because the culture at large elevates performance and production over evaluation and reflection. Again, this is the meaning of Marcuse’s concept of one-dimensional thought.

Worldliness has become a plague, blunting critical insight by bending it back toward earth and not into outer space, with utopian reach. We are too worldly not only in the sense that we have too many experiences and know

too much trivia but also in that our experiences rush by so quickly that we cannot pause to consider what is happening to us, and why. Worldliness involves immersion and instantaneity, being swallowed up by things that, in themselves, are coveted, and living in the moment instead of considering many moments, both past and future. The present becomes eternal, devoid of history, which includes the possibility of a different, better future. The character trait best suited to this everyday world of instant, all-encompassing experience is versatility, the ability to adapt to whatever comes one's way, rapidly. We learn quickly, even as children, that we must be flexible, roll with the punches, compromise, accept what we cannot change. Of course, this acquiescence has always been taught by religion, which, as Marx knew, blunts critical consciousness and discourages utopia as well as revolution.

We begin to learn these lessons in school and in our early play groups (see Bowles and Gintis 1976). Many report cards have grades for "citizenship", which combines conformity and obedience. As kids we are also taught instrumental rationality, how to study for tests and turn in homework in order to earn good grades that will ease our way into comfortable adulthood. By the time we get to high school, many American kids already know what they want, which are essentially lives like their parents' – suburbia, white-collar jobs, vacations, cars, electronic technologies for entertainment and communication. Our needs have already been determined, indeed overdetermined, by peers, parents, and the media. It is already far too late to become critical theorists, let alone political activists. Childhood and adolescence have rushed by, barely allowing kids pause to locate themselves in a world not of their making and to question the value of values, let alone ask the question of questions. It is for this reason that we must turn to childhood and schooling in order to slow down the virtual self.

Raising Different Kids

My kids are already different from their peers. They aren't yet allowed to stay home alone. They don't know much about cars or colleges. They don't have boyfriends or girlfriends. They don't have their own phone line, or televisions in their rooms. They have traveled beyond North America, and they eat weird foreign food, but they aren't worldly in the sense of knowing what is on late-night television or the plots of the latest R-rated movies. We talk about sex, and define scatological terms for them in order to sate their curiosity, but they aren't yet sexualized. They play instruments, and sports, too, but not on "select" teams that require monthly fees, a contract, emotional intensity and rigorous practice and travel schedules. They go to bed early by their classmates' standards, and they never stay up overnight

in order to toilet-paper houses. Sometimes, they say they feel deprived by neighborhood and schoolroom, but we know better.

My wife and I are purposely slowing down our kids' lives where we can. Although they often have mountains of homework, we keep their schedules fairly clear so that they can decompress from the accelerated pace of school and of life. We want them to play, to rest, to explore, to think, to be kids. We know other parents who recognize that kids grow up too fast, and we encourage our kids to play with their kids and not with worldly, jaded kids. We put a premium on studiousness, but not on grades or test scores. As academics, we recognize that test taking is an art and that much homework, especially the taxonomic kind requiring mere memorization, adds little, if any, value (see Kralovec and Buell 2000). We want our kids to read, and to want to read. We want them to be creative, writing stories and plays, which they enact. They go to theater camp in the summer, and art classes during the year.

This combines a slowing down of life with enrichment, a delicate, but not impossible, balance. There is a difference between being worldly, in a superficial sense of knowing the "latest" cultural trends, and being firmly situated in the world and then being curious about it. We want our kids to ask questions, to interrogate authority and rules, to think critically and not accept what is given to them. We want them to be expressive and not passive or downtrodden. In the American south, including Texas, kids are often taught to call their elders "sir" or "ma'am". When I first heard this, I immediately read Southern "manners" for the social-psychological underpinnings of authoritarianism, involving deference and idolatry. We are Yankees (a Southern pejorative for states on the wrong side during the Civil War), and we want our kids to be Yankees! We also want them to be respectful. The challenge is to inculcate respectfulness while teaching children not to be submissive.

The challenge of raising kids, then, is to insulate them from the world while teaching them about the world. They need Adorno's precious quality of mind called distance, differentiating knowledge and the knower from the everyday in order to question its rightness and permanence. The key philosophical term here is *historicity*, a way of viewing the present, and facts, as grounded in the past, which bore them, and opening to a possible but not necessary future. Thus, one can analyze today's capitalist economy as stemming from feudalism and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, and stretching into the immediate and perhaps even distant future. But the economy, like everything else in the world that bears the human imprint, is defined by "historicity". That is, just because we have known capitalism for over a century, and know it today, does not mean that it must endure forever, as non-Marxist social theorists such as Durkheim, Weber and Parsons allege. History's final chapter has yet to be written.

We teach our kids to view the world through the lenses of historicity, recognizing “why” things are the way they are, rooted in the past, but at the same time recognizing that the social world is fluid and can be transformed. This transformation must pass through selves, people like you and me who inhere in everyday life and aren’t oblivious to it and yet who grasp the big picture, necessarily known through paradigms and not simply through the accumulation of piecemeal evidence. After all, evidence is a text, a mode of rhetoric, argument for one state of affairs or another. Positivism is a text urging people to give in and give up, to accept the given instead of recognizing their own potential for “giving” it, and giving it differently.

This argument for (or perhaps, better, from) agency risks being another politics of subjectivity, issuing in self-improvement and individual attainment, all the way from better jobs to better bodies and better mates. Although the personal matters, as feminism has taught us, so does the political, which, in these postmodern times, positions the personal as its accomplice. False needs are imposed on the self, and then internalized so that they appear to be one’s own choices. But politics is not exhausted by the personal, even as it mobilizes everyday life, sexuality, bodies, desire, even the unconscious. It is all too easy for our children to hear our arguments from agency – “you can be anything you want to be” – as personal and not also political arguments, which in some cases they certainly are. Todd Gitlin (2003) recently published a book, sold tellingly in the self-help section at Barnes & Noble, offering advice to young radicals and activists. Gitlin wants the next generations to commit the revolutionary deed, but with gentle guidance and admonitions from ancient 1960s radicals such as him and me! When I first saw the book, I realized that Gitlin and I were, in parallel ways, addressing the post-baby boom generations who, we hope, can learn to connect personal and political agency.

Self-Care, Alternative Lifestyles, Counterhegemony

The weight of what anthropologists call culture bears down heavily on all of us, unless we live on a desert island. The movie *Castaway*, in which forsaken airline passenger Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks) is stranded on just such a desert island, showed how culture and the self were called into question in its depiction of Noland’s struggles to stay alive and remain hopeful about his rescue. Noland had to create a modicum of civilization for himself, not just finding food and building shelter but also creating myths of meaning that revolved around his past life and his hope of regaining it by being found. He had little to sustain hope, apart from a picture of his wife that survived the airplane crash and a ball that he fashioned into a totem that he animated by giving it a name. He created his own culture, in solitary

confinement on that distant island, and thus he saved himself, giving himself the psychic resources with which to embark on a desperate but ultimately successful voyage home.

Even on this deserted island, Noland wasn't inured to the effects of culture. He brought with him both the material culture of his few remaining possessions and the ensemble of his ideal culture, including his values, impulses, priorities, and pragmatism – his theory, by another name. Culture – theory – saved him by giving him both hope and a game plan for escaping the island's lonely hold. Even the most isolated and forlorn among us, in prison or the mental prisons of our own making, can exercise Sartrean agency and change ourselves and even begin to change the world around us (see Sartre 1976). As Hegel and then existentialism demonstrated, consciousness can never be entirely imprinted by the edicts and structures, which often appear intractable, of the outer world (see Poster 1975). Marx seized on this insight and argued not for a solitary consciousness but for collective consciousness, of the proletariat, with which to uproot old orders and create new institutions.

Marx assumed that workers would communicate effectively with each other, beginning on the factory floor and in the everyday sites of their daily existences, about the evils of capitalism and how to overcome them in a new society. They would write and read pamphlets and theoretical treatises, opening themselves to political education that would overturn the falsehoods of bourgeois ideology. This ideology argues that the world cannot be changed, toward a communist utopia, and thus workers – everyone – must content themselves with their meager lot. People could hope for modest self-betterment, through savings and the acquisition of skills, but not for radical changes in social structures.

At stake in a faster capitalism is the status of consciousness, and then communication. Marx did not foresee the extent to which people's minds and needs could fall prey to advertising and pro-capitalist political theories. He assumed a mode of consciousness that could distinguish between true and false claims, and thus overthrow all ideologies. He assumed reason and rationality, where today they are very much at stake. He assumed the ability to engage in clear discourse and to achieve consensus. Fast capitalism, and its accelerated Internetworked version, has laid waste to reason and reasoning, requiring selves to work hard in order to escape the gravitational pull of the everyday in order to imagine, and work towards, different worlds.

The Internet is a literary vehicle, composed of, and calling forth, millions of literary and interpretive acts. One cannot find definitive answers if by that we mean we can find Web pages we can simply trust without questioning their authority and digging beneath their claims for what is left unsaid. Internet postings are no less literary, indeed fictional, than other literary versions. One finds contradictory, incomplete, question-begging, carping,

purposely deceiving and made-for-profit pages. This can be confusing for amateur surfers interested in finding out the truth of things, whether the cheapest airfare to Orlando or the best way to treat tennis elbow. The inherent ambiguity and indeterminacy of the Internet – of course, of all knowledge – is *undecidability*, by which Derrida means that sentences don't end other sentences but instead beget new ones, in questioning and clarification. Even science, as I and others have written often (Agger 1989b, 2000; Aronowitz 1988), is susceptible to a Derridean deconstruction, revealing science's text to be every bit as undecidable, as a poem, novel or music video.

This doesn't defeat self-education, and thus alternative lifestyles, via the Internet, in effect slowing down capitalism. It doesn't mean that we must be cynical about writings, and thus all theoretical systems, as nihilist deconstructors sometimes are. Rather, the occasion of the Internet's inherent democracy and polyvocality should be seized on as an occasion for new texts and thus new worlds – new ways to live, work, raise families, become educated, get fit, and eat better. Today, the weight and speed of capitalism compel private solutions to our problems, for which we consult self-help pages and enter chat rooms devoted to single issues. But it is conceivable that Internet-based reading and writing can do more than change individual lives, instead shifting power and building community in ways that defy the commodifying, conformist tendencies of capitalism.

As long as we understand that the self's experiences are fundamentally social, stemming from overbearing social structures of work, family, education, leisure, and diet, we can deal with the self's problems as social problems. Eating more fish and less meat, working out regularly, finding jobs that don't require dishonesty and alienation, and decelerating the pace of children's lives and schooling can become not only personal adjustments – alternative lifestyles – but genuine modes of counterhegemony, by which I mean fighting capitalism and figuring out alternatives to it that have meaning and momentum (Gramsci 1971). This risks being heard as a timeworn utopianism, a long journey beginning with a single step. I remain convinced, by feminists, existential Marxists and the Frankfurt School, that social change must change people – and requires people to be changed for it to occur, in the fateful simultaneity of self- and social change. What is so difficult today is imagining that self change can occur so massively, globally and rapidly that incremental changes cumulate into major structural transformations. And yet the Internet makes this easier to imagine than even 15 years ago, when I wrote *Fast Capitalism*, and certainly than 150 years ago, when Marx published *Capital* (1967, originally published in 1867). The Internet helps us imagine, and then exploit, the protean connection between selves and social structure as we enter others' worlds, and affect them, with quick keystrokes using DSL connections.

The Dialectic of Discourse: Decline or Democracy

As Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology helps us understand, discourse constitutes social structure – the ways in which we talk about, and then resolve, social quandaries, such as how to make ourselves understood in a rapidly moving, complex, imperfect, noisy world. We find ways to “do” social structure – of families, work, schools – from the ground up, using our ingenuity, inferential abilities, empathy and especially our literary skills, decoding what others and the media say, and then communicating with others. Garfinkel helps us understand that underlying social structure are discourse, consensus and sense making, not abstract social laws identified earlier by Parsons (1951) as the moving force of a sociological invisible hand. Parsons' law-like “pattern variables” of adjustment, integration, boundary maintenance and goal setting are fictions, just terms for what people ordinarily do as they read the paper in differentiating truth from fiction, help their kids with homework, finesse a micromanaging boss, or conduct themselves at neighborhood meetings. People “do” these things using their powers of discourse, inferring, interpolating, imagining, signifying – deconstructing, by another name.

The Internet is a sprawling, global, nearly instantaneous vehicle of discourse, and thus of social structure. It is replacing newspapers, magazines, television, movie theaters, stand-alone CD players and tapes and even books. It is replacing pulp, which comes from trees. When I chaired a faculty job search in my department, we no longer write letters of acknowledgment to applicants or to their references. We used e-mail to do the search, saving on postage, stationery, and telephone bills. Using e-mail helps speed up the process of a faculty job search, which, in this case, is probably a good thing because we are helping candidates sort out their job-market options more efficiently. But replacing pulp in other respects is very problematic, preventing people from writing and receiving letters, which they peruse and savor, attending public theaters and concerts, and reading and writing books that matter. The Internet, a frictionless vehicle of discourse and thus of social structure and self-change, has the potential for enhancing democracy and overthrowing capitalism, which thwarts democracy, but, in its conformist, commodified version, accelerates what I have called the decline of discourse. Democratized discourse resists and reverses discourse's decline, yet again demonstrating that the Internet is dialectical, possessing the contradictory potential for liberation and domination.

It is tempting to call for a return to pulp as a panacea – an era of slow publishing, transportation, mail, journalism, entertainment, education. Here, pulp is a metaphor for considered reflection, which takes time and requires distance from its object. But pulp can be a conservative metaphor where we return to a mandarin or high culture in which very few have the