



The Sociology of Religious Movements and the Sociology of Time in Conversation

Massimo Introvigne

Above: Giacomo Balla (1871-1959), *Speed of a Motorcycle*(1913)

Operation Sparrow



- ▶ The Pentagon's DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) diverted millions of dollars from projects on terrorism to the study of white crown sparrows

The Most Amazing Sparrow in the World



- ▶ This is not surprising. The white crown sparrow stays awake for seven days, then needs to sleep only for a few hours. Understanding why may lead to create soldiers or managers able to work for days without sleeping. Or so DARPA believes

«Ye are of more value than many sparrows»?

- ▶ «Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? ...Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows» (Jesus in *Luke 12,6-7*)



Consider the Sparrows, by American Christian artist Brian Jekel

21st Century Gold

- ▶ For some, white crown sparrows today are of more value than many humans, as they possess in a record quantity the gold of the 21st century: time – time to spend without sleeping



Chrono Shredder, by Susanna Hetrich



Time and Christianity

- ▶ Time has a lot to do with religion. In many religions, time is cyclical. Judaism and Christianity – where Jesus is the center of the year, represented in the Middle Ages by the Zodiac – gave us our linear notion of time, with a beginning and an end of human history

«Christian» Clocks



- ▶ Clocks (Bern, above) and later watches were born, starting from 13th century, in Christian Europe, where liturgy and prayer had given to the population the feeling of a time divided and segmented

The Reformation of Time

- ▶ Max Weber (1864-1920) in his famous, if controversial, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, argued inter alia that the Protestant Reformation radically changed our relationship with time



Time and Predestination



William Hogarth (1697-1764), *The Idle 'Prentice Turned Away and Sent to Sea* (1747)

- Although some later disagreed with him, Weber argued that theologies of predestination looked at idleness as a sign of negative predestination, and insisted that «losing time is the most capital of capital sins»
- While the Catholic time of liturgy and confessions was somewhat more relaxed, Protestantism – or so Weber believed – gave to our relationship with time a new urgency

Secularizing Time

- ▶ Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution kept alive the Protestant urgency by secularizing it. Losing time was no longer a sin against God but against the moral order of capitalism (satirized here by James Ensor, 1860-1949), and later against the State. Time was reorganized based on the notion of «working time» in the factory



Hartmut Rosa: Modernity as Acceleration

- ▶ German sociologist Hartmut Rosa emerged as the leading exponent of a new «sociology of time» with his monumental *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013). He believes that acceleration is the main feature of modernity. It started with Protestantism, and increased spectacularly since the 1970s



Three Accelerations

- ▶ Rosa describes three dimensions of social acceleration:

Technical Acceleration



Acceleration of Social Change



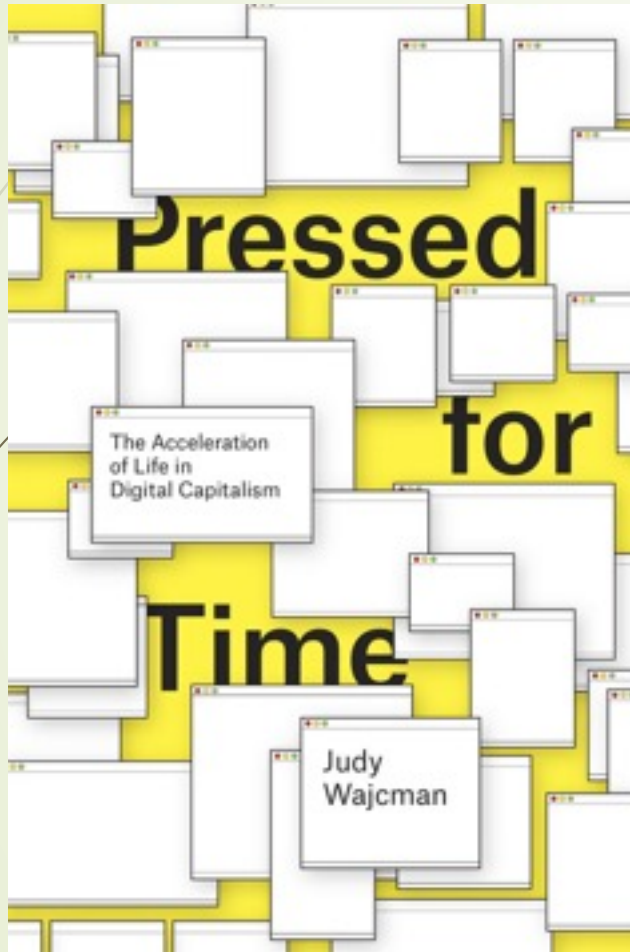
Acceleration of the Pace of Life



The Washing Machine Paradox



- Theoretically, technical acceleration should give us more free time. But we do not feel like it
- This is also known as the washing machine paradox: when women move from washing clothes by hand to the washing machine, after a few months they discover that the time they devote to washing clothes has *increased*



The Paradox Solved

- As LSE sociologist Judy Wajcman argued in her *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (2015), there is no necessary connection between technical acceleration and an increase in free time
- In fact, technical acceleration produces acceleration of social change, which in turn produces acceleration in the pace of life. Having acquired a washing machine, a woman is expected to wash the family's clothes more often. E-mail is quicker than regular mail, but we are expected to respond much sooner, and to more mails, than before

Acceleration and Identity

- ▶ Social acceleration is a complex phenomenon, involving repeated changes in identity that were once much rarer. We change our jobs, political affiliations, spouses, places where we live... *and religion* much more often than one or two centuries ago



René Magritte (1898-1967), *Lovers*(1928)

Acceleration in the Pace of Life



- Acceleration in the pace of life is what gives us the feeling of not having enough time:
- 1. Direct acceleration in certain fields: sociologists of time tells us that we eat much more quickly than one century ago, and that the number of words a Western man or woman says in one minute when speaking is constantly increasing



Antanas Mončys (1921-1993), Two Orators

2. Pause Time Reduction



- ▶ Our pause time is constantly reduced. The most spectacular reduction concerns the time we devote to sleep. It decreases constantly and significantly in the Western world from 1970 onwards

Above: Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980), *The Sleeping Girl (Kizette)* (1935)

3. Multitasking



- We also become «social jugglers», constantly performing more than one task at a time (we listen to this speech but we check our email at the same time...)

The Tourist Gaze



- Sociologists of tourism such as John Urry study the «tourist gaze», a habit of looking quickly, and forgetting quicker, that affects also religious pilgrimages. In order not to forget, we take pictures – then we forget where we took them



Causes

1. The Economic Motor

- Rosa identifies three motors of acceleration:
 - First, the economic motor: «time is money», as Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) said well before Disney's Uncle Scrooge. Karl Marx (1818-1883) noticed that capitalism needs continuously to sell to us new products, in need to be replaced soon because they break or become obsolete



2. The Social Motor



- ▶ The second motor is *socio-structural*. We have multiple identities as scholars, parents, parishioners, social activists. Each activity tries to «colonize» the others, creating the perpetually stressed men and women described in TV serials such as *Desperate Housewives* (above)

3. The Cultural Motor



- ▶ The main motor is cultural. Culture and peer pressure persuade us that those who do not appear to be continuously in a hurry are losers. By going faster, it seems, at the end of our life we would have accumulated more experiences. This is the delusion Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) alluded to with his convolute watches. We cannot beat time. Every new experience opens the possibility of others, and so on ad infinitum

Time Diaries

- ▶ Time diaries are a favorite tool of sociologists of time. They are also used by sociologists of religion, normally to show that time devoted to religion decreases and attendance to religious services is over-reported
- ▶ Sociologists of time also offer an explanation why. Religious practices used to occupy the «free time» but, at least for the upper classes, the distinction between «free time» and «working time» is increasingly blurred

Figure 1. A Principle diary

Diary/ person id	Starting time	Ending time	Main activity	Parallel activity	Who with:				Where/mod e of transport
					Alone	Spouse	Small child	Other pers.	
A	04:00	07:20	Sleep						At home
a	07:20	07:50	Shower						At home
a	7:50	08:30	Had breakfast	Read newspaper			Ch		At home
a	08:30	08:40	Walked to bus		A				By foot
a	08:40	09:00	Bus to job					OP	By bus
a	09:00	11:20	Paid work					OP	At work
a	11:20	11:50	Lunch break: meal	Talked with colleag.				OP	At work
a	11:50	12:00	Lunch break: walk	Talked with colleag.				OP	By foot
a	12:00	12:30	Lunch break: walk		A				By foot
a	12:30	16:30	Paid work					OP	At work
a	16:30	16:50	Bus to home	Read newspaper	A				By bus
a	16:50	17:00	From bus by foot		A				By foot
a	17:00	17:40	Cooked supper	Talked with children			Ch		At home
a	17:40	18:20	Had supper	Talked with family		Sp	Ch		At home
a	18:20	19:10	Dish washing	Listened to radio	A				At home
a	19:10	21:00	TV			Sp	Ch		At home
a	21:00	22:10	Took a walk	Talked with spouse		Sp			By foot
a	22:10	22:20	Shower						At home
a	22:20	04:00	Sleep						At home

«Free Time»



- ▶ *Actual* free time, they tell us, increases but *perceived* free time decreases. This happens because during their «free time» professionals are increasingly reachable through phone and email, and also because some free time activities are performed «semi-professionally» and very much resemble a job

Decelerators: 1. Natural Limits to Speed



- Sociology of time also discusses five main decelerators, and some have to do with religion:

1. The natural human limit. True, records are continuously beaten, but even in professional marathons those who accelerate too much would need to slow down

2. «Islands of Deceleration»



Religion is the main provider of «islands of deceleration», offered by communities such as the Amish, or by monasteries or communes of various denominations

3. Dysfunctional Side Effects



Acceleration may actually produce slowdowns. It takes now more time to travel around Manhattan with a car in the rush hour today than it did in the 19th century with a horse-drawn carriage

4. Intentional Deceleration



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Religion and the New Age also play a part in the industry of voluntary deceleration. It is pursued either as a temporary break, often as a retreat, or as an alternative counter-cultural lifestyle, such as the one offered by the Italian-born Slow Food movement



5. Depression

- ▶ As churches know very well, the main form of deceleration is individual, in the shape of depression, which substitutes pathological inertia to intolerable acceleration

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), *Sorrowing Old Man*(1890)

Acceleration Continues



- ▶ If we believe the sociologists of time, the combined effect of the different forms of deceleration is *not* slowing down acceleration. As the Futurist painters predicted, speed is invincible (above: G. Balla, *Abstract Speed + Sound*, 1913-1914)

Predictions? 1. Optimists

Learn About
Google's Self Driving Car



► Some sociologists of time also speculate on possible future scenarios:

1. Optimists believe that technology would eventually solve all problems created by acceleration. It would discover new previously unknown reservoirs of time, e.g. by shortening sleep chemically or by freeing us, through self-driving cars, from the large amount of time we devote to driving

2. Reactionary

- The reactionary attitude, found both on the extreme right and left of the political spectrum, hopes in a revolution that would react against acceleration and create new/old more quiet lifestyles. Some new religious movements and New Age communes offer precisely this alternative

SLOW
is a revolution,
an alternative to our obsession with speed.

You see more when you take things a little slower,
like you notice every little detail
when a film is shown in slow motion.

Slow can manifest itself in any
design, object,
space or image
that encourages a promotion of local artisans,
local designers, local flavours.

It's an endless idea
you can make your own in any way you want to.

Slow works to counteract fast life
and the disappearance of local traditions.

In a loud, crowded, crazy world,
it's good for the soul
to live life better by living slower.



3. Pessimist - Apocalyptic



- According to Hartmut Rosa, the «most likely possibility is the unbridled onward rush into an abyss». A «final catastrophe», after acceleration would have produced climatic and epidemic disasters and uncontrolled violence by the masses excluded from the main processes of growth

Above: *Apocalypse*, sec. XV, Basilica of St Catherine, Galatina (Lecce, Italy)

Women against the Apocalypse?



- ▶ Judy Wajcman thinks otherwise. A feminist scholar, she believes that the increased role of women and presence of female elements in our culture would have the positive effect of slowing down and humanizing the acceleration

Pieper: *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*

- ▶ Religion is at the center of many deceleration strategies. In 1952, a leading German Catholic philosopher, Josef Pieper (1904-1997), published *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, translated in the same year in English with a foreword by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)
- ▶ Pieper saw the excessive acceleration coming and offered as an antidote *leisure (otium)*, not to be confused with idleness. Leisure is the ability to find time for meditation and contemplation, and is typically supplied by religion



«Holy Time» with the Sick



- Sick people live in a different and much slower time. They tend to be marginalized by acceleration. Religions, and certainly Christianity, in contrast teach that «time spent with the sick is holy time» (Pope Francis). Not only because it benefits the sick, but because it teaches us how to re-order our relationship with time in general

Beauty and Contemplation

- Religion is certainly not alone in proposing a discourse about beauty – not necessarily identified with the contemporary discourse of the arts, increasingly dissociate from the theme of beauty. However, a surprising percentage of modern art is still produced in conversation with religion, often with newer forms of religion – from Theosophy to Christian Science



Hubert (1366-1426) and Jan van Eyck (1390-1441), *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, Cathedral of Ghent, Belgium



Frenetic Religion?

- Religion, of course, is not immune to acceleration. Religions, old and new, very often are caught in a frenzy of «church growth» programs and statistics, and lose their deceleration potential. Yet another reason to entertain a conversation between sociology of religion and sociology of time



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Above: Jan Provoost (1465-1529), *Allegory of Christianity*(1525)

Your time has ended, folks!

