



As Soon As Possible *Acceleration in Contemporary Society*

Ten international artists – Tamy Ben-Tor, Marnix de Nijs, Mark Formanek, Marzia Migliora, Julius Popp, Reynold Reynolds, Jens Risch, Michael Sailstorfer, Arcangelo Sassolino and Fiete Stolte – will address the theme of time in our “high-speed society” and today's pressured lifestyle with rapid communication and production dictated by new technology. *AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Acceleration in Contemporary Society* will be on view at the CCCS - Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, from 14 May to 18 July 2010.

Time is the dominant imperative of contemporary society resulting in expectations of increasing growth in productivity and longer working hours. The ultimate goal to be more efficient and our constant hyperactivity impact on every area of life today, invading our private lives with such things as *speed dating* (for our love lives), *power naps* (for our health and exercise), *quality time* (for being with the family) and *fast food* (for staving off hunger).

This desire to control and optimise every aspect of our lives is matched by a nagging feeling that we never have enough time; thus time has become an essential asset for everyone. The predominant feature of today's world is dictated by technological development, which has massively increased people's potential for worldwide mobility, triggered a constant flow of information, spawned the concept of a globalised and permanently expanding economy, and spread the idea of constantly rising productivity. Yet for some decades now we have been approaching what is virtually the ceiling of this accelerated growth, as evinced by the gradual collapse of nature's ecosystems which no longer have time to regenerate, and by widespread anxiety and depression which are frequent indicators of the malaise of people living on the edge of their own potential in a high-speed world.

Today's world is characterised by what philosopher Paul Virilio calls “dromocracy”, the dictatorship of speed governed by the principle which states that “if time is money, speed is power”, yet revealing the paradoxical effect of real immobility which ends up taking hold of us as we are submerged by new and ever faster technologies that lead to cultural sclerosis and to the paralysis of ideas.

In an effort to impart some kind of systematic order to such phenomena, German sociologist Hartmut Rosa identifies “social acceleration” as a typically Western phenomenon. The technological acceleration in the Western world has led to increasing rapidity in every aspect of daily life. Private life, work, and even social and romantic relationships are classified on the basis of their time span rather than on the basis of their quality. This results in a constant state of pressure and anxiety. Insecurity and relativism are the dangers perceived by philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, who has coined the term “liquid modernity” to describe how every certainty and

truth in the world is fated to fall under the blows of the corrosive speed of a consumer society that seeks only the gratification of the moment.

The works of selected artists will endeavour to express this aspect of today's world. They have been chosen on the basis of the various different ways in which they address the themes of time, speed, acceleration and our reaction to those themes. The exhibition can be seen as a journey designed to involve the spectator in experiences in space and time aiming to highlight the inconsistencies of our "high-speed" society.

Arcangelo Sassolino (Italy, 1967) interprets the tension of modern acceleration through the creation of *Dilatazione pneumatica di una forza viva [Pneumatic Dilation of a Living Force]*, a closed, transparent environment that creates a self-contained reality in which a glass container gradually fills up with gas until it is suddenly overtaken by an unpredictable explosion. **Tamy Ben-Tor** (Israel, 1975) has created a video entitled *Normal*, in which she plays a woman in the clutches of the neuroses and anxieties of modern life, who acquaints us with her e-mail correspondence, the responsibilities of her job and with her very full schedule of activities, in the course of a frenzied monologue.

Similarly, **Fiete Stolte** (Germany, 1979) builds a project around himself, highlighting the contrast between time as we experience it and real time, by "stealing" three hours from every day of the week, thus putting together an eighth day and experiencing the compression of time and human alienation in the constant struggle against the acceleration of the world. The works of **Michael Sailstorfer** (Germany, 1979) focus on the intrinsic rationale of materials and objects in their activity in real space and time. *Zeit ist keine Autobahn [Time is no Motorway]* shows a tyre spinning on a wall at high speed, not actually going anywhere but simply wearing down on the spot, hinting at the rapidity with which things are consumed in an ironic depiction of "motionless acceleration". Sculptor **Jens Risch** (Germany, 1973) manages to impart a physical feel to time, producing sculptures consisting of countless knots on silk thread up to a kilometre long and meticulously recording the progress of his work over the years.

Marnix de Nijs (The Netherlands, 1970) will present an interactive installation *Accelerator* where each visitor will pit themselves against the accelerated vision of images of a big contemporary city. On the other hand, **Reynold Reynolds'** (USA, 1966) video-installation *Secret Life* depicts the condition of a woman trapped in her own apartment, where the passage of time becomes a physical and psychological experience in which natural and human time diverge enormously, creating a world caught midway between reality and imagination.

With his work entitled *bit.fall*, **Julius Popp** (Germany, 1973) imparts shape and form to the ceaseless bombardment of material we get from the media: key words taken from the Internet can be seen in the guise of drops of water that are visible only for a brief second in a spectacular waterfall. **Marzia Migliora** (Italy, 1972) alludes to a speed and media hero of the calibre of Marco Pantani, presenting a carpet designed to resemble a road, on which the legend *Vado così forte in salita per abbreviare la mia agonia [I'm going uphill so fast to make my agony that much shorter]* is symptomatic of the cyclist's performance angst and personal tragedy.

Mark Formanek (Germany, 1967), with the cooperation of *Datenstrudel*, offers us *Standard Time*, a clock which may look digital but which has a "human circuit" comprising 70 workmen who are constantly shifting and assembling minutes and hours in an ironic race against time itself.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue in Italian and English, published by *Alias – Mandragora*, which explores in greater depth the themes addressed in the exhibition, with essays by **Hartmut Rosa** (lecturer in sociology at Jena University) on the notion of social acceleration and of time as a primary resource; **Andrea Ferrara** (professor of cosmology at the *Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*) on time and its relativity in the context of astrophysics; **Alessandro Ludovico** (critic and editor of the magazine *Neural*, devoted to digital culture) on the concept of time and acceleration in an increasingly virtual and technological society; **Zygmunt Bauman** (sociologist, philosopher and professor emeritus at Leeds University) on the concept of liquid modernity and life; and **Sandra Bonfiglioli** (lecturer with the Department of Architecture and Planning at Milan Polytechnic) on the birth of town-planning projects linked to a city's temporal structures.

AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Acceleration in Contemporary Society

Venue:

Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozgina (CCCS), 50123 Firenze, ITALY

Opens:

Friday 14 May 2010

Closes:

Sunday 18 July 2010

Website:

www.strozzina.org

Public Info:

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Summary:

Ten international artists – Tamy Ben-Tor, Marnix de Nijs, Mark Formanek, Marzia Migliora, Julius Popp, Reynold Reynolds, Jens Risch, Michael Sailstorfer, Arcangelo Sassolino and Fiete Stolte – will address the theme of time in our “high-speed society” and today's pressured lifestyle with rapid communication and production dictated by new technology.

Opening Times:

Tuesday to Sunday 10.00 - 20.00; Thursday 10.00 - 23.00; Monday closed

Admission Prices:

(ticket valid one month): € 5.00 full price; € 4.00 concessions (university students and other concessions); € 3.00 schools;

Thursday, admission free from 18.00 to 23.00

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FRANZISKA NORI

Project director

Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi CCCS

As soon as possible *

ASAP – as soon as possible. This acronym routinely used on Internet has become a symbol of our relationship with time management in general. Everything must be done immediately, or actually, it should have been done yesterday.

Time is one of the paradigms that most profoundly characterize contemporary life. Our society is marked by its increasingly flexible work hours and ever more individualized and pluralized lifestyles. The tendency to acceleration and twenty-four-hour-a-day activity manifests in daily life in constant haste, lack of time, and difficulty coordinating our many commitments. Indeed, the apparent scarcity of time and its consequent value as a resource are defining elements in both the economic sphere and everyday life. Along with phenomena of compression, continuity, deregulation or individualization, acceleration is one of the main trends not only of the Western world but of the entire global village. Mobility, information, economy, agriculture, industry, education and even daily life and leisure time: no sector of society is free of the temporal dictate. Economy and efficiency characterize the relationship with time in all social spheres, including even the micro-economy of feelings.

We are forced to live and work within smaller and smaller units of time. To survive in this way, we try to avoid downtime, to compress our activities, and to do a number of things simultaneously (indeed, the expression “multitasking” has been absorbed into common speech). However, an unchecked increase in the pace of life pushes people to their physical limits. The moment comes when their personal energy and time resources verge on depletion, when the rhythm of life can accelerate no further. Eventually, the excessive speed upsets our economic, ecological, social and psychological equilibrium and the demands of economic growth exceed the regenerative capacity of ecosystems. The acceleration of traffic leads to an increase in accidents, emissions, and the need for space and energy. Growth hormones added to fodder increase animal morbidity. The everincreasing pace of innovation causes stress among entrepreneurs and workers. The cost of accidents due to fatigue is rising all the time, as is the number of people who get sick or depressed because of their working conditions (otherwise known as “hurry sickness”).

The recent interest in “slowness” is a phenomenon that grew in response to these speed-related problems. The invitation to slow down being heard from all quarters may in fact be the only practical solution. The so-called “slow food” is taking the place of fast food; cities pride themselves on being “slow cities”. Even advertising has discovered a nostalgia for slowness and new, less stressful rhythms. Seeking slower rhythms as a solution to all the problems of modernity is not always the way, however. When it comes to gender equality or civil rights, for example, it is better to move ahead briskly rather than little by little. Likewise, the social and environmental sustainability of agriculture and industry must be achieved as quickly as possible before we risk total ecological breakdown.

What is life like in an acceleration society? Time is money! One must adopt a rational approach to the time factor, since here too the principle of economy rules: maximum production per unit of time. Fat salaries await those who work faster or reach higher growth rates than the competition. Society calls for flexible, timely reactions, effected without hesitation or loss of time. All concentration is on the present moment. The identity of a structurally-adapted individual could be called a “situational identity”; i.e., my ego constructs itself on the basis of the social context in which I find myself in a given moment, on how I behave or present myself in each different situation. Thus life splinters and becomes episodic.

Applying this analysis to the entire community reveals how the dynamic of acceleration provokes a new organization of society. Typically, those who have time have no money (due to age, unemployment or illness) and those who have money have no time. Thus, lack of time becomes exalted as a status symbol and those who have too much free time feel excluded from the system, virtually abnormal. Even worse, such alienation puts them at risk of depression pathologies. Meanwhile, thanks to medical advances, life expectancy has increased significantly, yet many elderly people find themselves with insufficient economic resources and suffer terrible solitude and depression. Each one of us has a given budget of time, which is our life, into which we must fit time for work, time for relaxation, and time for sleep, not to mention time for family and friends. In fact, today's most pressing issue is the distribution of time, which is usually resolved by multiplying the time dedicated to work. The motto is "live faster and die slower".

Even in the political sphere, the focus is increasingly on local, sectorial issues rather than any vision of the whole. Some may say it proceeds pragmatically, but in truth it is moving with tiny, unsure steps, not knowing how to make reforms that involve complex, gradual restructuring. (One need only think of the measures taken regarding ecology or pensions.) The number of decisions to be made grows while the temporal resources for each decision shrink. There is plenty of expertise but applying it in practice to such a complex reality seems almost impossible.

Capitalism itself is an acceleration of the means of production. In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx states that the means of capitalist production are constantly being improved in the interest of increasing productivity. An effective way to achieve this goal is the acceleration of work. Driven by a desire for greater surplus value, the individual capitalist is helped in his efforts by the "uninterrupted flow of science and technology". Beyond that, the laws of competition do their part to guarantee that the new speed of production spreads everywhere. While the rhythms of agricultural society were determined by nature and religion, the advent of industrial society, with its technological innovations and new economic needs, gradually separated social rhythms from natural ones and lengthened economic and social life (night shifts, night life). This tendency is even more pronounced in the service society.

In 1977, the French philosopher Paul Virilio coined the term, and the concept, of "dromology" (literally, "the science of speed"), identifying speed as the hidden face of wealth and power and thus as the ultimate factor defining modern society. From this point of view, historical epochs and political events transpire according to the criteria of speed. Speed negates space and compresses time. In the essay *Polar Inertia* (1989), Virilio theorized that the increased acceleration is a result of the omnipresent stream of images bombarding and manipulating us relentlessly. This dynamic immobilizes the spectator insofar as he or she can be omnipresent without even moving physically, thanks to digital images and screens. People become voyeurs or, at most, extraneous participants in a reality captured by surveillance cameras. In his book *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, American sociologist Richard Sennett describes the effects of the new "flexible capitalism" on people: an acceleration of work organization, ever-greater demands, decreasing job security, and a need to move constantly from one place to another. Not only do these conditions provoke a decline in traditional values and virtues such as loyalty and a sense of responsibility, but they also lead people to forgo immediate gratification and to refrain from pursuing long-term goals. Pressure on the individual intensifies drastically, manifesting itself in a new interpretation of the concept of time as well.

This situation is further aggravated by the close surveillance of production processes made possible by modern means of communication, contributing to an atmosphere of fear, impotence, instability and insecurity among a large percentage of the population. In *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2005), Sennett demonstrates once again how the new culture that emerged from the New Economy of the 1990s generated profound changes in the individual, in the organization of work and in society at large. Based on an analysis of the structure of global corporations and their demands on workers, Sennett speaks of the advent of "mp3 capitalism", whose watchwords are freewill and speed. No longer is there any need to learn and master a skill or trade; the new capitalism requires only the ability to adapt continuously to new situations.

Florence, 13 May 2010

* From the catalogue Edizioni Alias - Mandragora



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JAMES M. BRADBURNE
General director
Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi

The mission of the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi is to revitalise the public spaces of the Palazzo Strozzi, one of Florence's finest examples of Renaissance architecture, and to establish it as an exciting, dynamic and international cultural destination for visitors of all ages and interests. Now, after just three years, the exhibitions held in the Palazzo's grand spaces on the first floor are attracting international attention for their quality, their innovation and their diversity. The Palazzo's courtyard now hosts a café, a design and book shop and a permanent exhibition on the history of the Palazzo, as well as a varied programme of concerts, fashion shows and performances. From the outset, a key part of the Palazzo Strozzi project was to create a centre for contemporary culture at the very heart of Florence. The Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzi (CCCS) was created in the former wine cellars under the courtyard of Palazzo Strozzi—known as "La Strozzi"—which hosted Florence's most important international exhibitions in the years after the Second World War until the flood of 1966. The challenge posed by the Renaissance architecture of Palazzo Strozzi for contemporary art is a stimulus to treat each new event and project almost as theatre, constantly pursuing new possibilities of artistic communication, presentation and mediation. Since opening in November 2007, the CCCS has hosted exhibitions featuring the work of William Kentridge, Dan Perjovschi, Damien Hirst, Cindy Sherman and Andreas Gursky, and recently, Wolfgang Tillmans, Antony Gormley and Gerhard Richter.

Awareness of time drives contemporary society. The ultimate goal to be more efficient invades our private lives with such things as *speed dating* (for our love lives), *power naps* (for our health and exercise), *quality time* (for being with the family) and *fast food* (for staving off hunger). This desire to control and optimise every aspect of our lives is matched by a nagging feeling that we never have enough time. Technology has massively increased mobility, triggered a constant flow of information, spawned the concept of a globalised and permanently expanding economy, and created the expectation of constantly rising productivity. Yet we are now approaching the ceiling of this accelerated growth, as witnessed by the gradual collapse of nature's ecosystems, which no longer have time to regenerate, and by widespread anxiety and depression which show people living on the edge of their own capabilities in a high-speed world.

The fear of rapidly evolving technology squeezing out much needed time to think and reflect is not new. The German art historian Aby Warburg was particularly concerned about technology's impact on what he called *Denkraum*—the space for critical thinking—which he saw under attack by radio's obliteration of distance and the "The lightning speed of electrotechnical information". In 1920, after the First World War, Warburg wrote "We are in the age of Faust, in which the modern scientist endeavoured [...] to conquer the realm of reflective reason through an increased awareness of the distance between the self and the external world. Athens must always be conquered by Alexandria." Now, in 2010, we must ask the same question again, but about a technology far more potent than the simple pre-war wireless radio. Contemporary arguments for new technologies are often economic, and phrased in terms of cost-savings and time savings. In 1943, the French writer Antoine St. Exupéry queried the obsessive quest for savings of all kinds.

"Why are you selling those?" asked the little prince. "Because they save a tremendous amount of time," said the merchant. "Computations have been made by experts. With these pills, you save fifty-three minutes in every week." "And what do I do with those fifty-three minutes?" "Anything you like..." "As for me," said the little prince to himself, "if I had fifty-three minutes to spend as I liked, I should walk very slowly towards a spring of fresh water." (Antoine de St. Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, 1943)

At the end of the day we have to ask ourselves, along with Exupéry's *Little Prince*, what end does all this haste serve? What can we do with the time we save? Do we merely invest it in more time-saving activities until we spin completely out of control, unable to make the necessary split-second decisions that determine the future of stock market investments, our ability to compete for new jobs and even our ability to stay in touch with family and friends? As with every exhibition developed by the CCCS, the work of the artists shown in this exhibition asks us to reflect about the nature of the world we live in, and in this exhibition, to question our need to insist on real-time, always-on continuous information. Today, in a world sorely in need of tolerance and calm—"thinking space" perhaps—the issues explored by *As Soon As Possible* are ones that reward our close and critical attention.

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