

Foreword

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL CHANGES have a habit of sneaking up on us. They are easy to detect from a temporal distance but much harder to identify while they are happening, and we are inescapably implicated in the processes of change and their effects. It is difficult, for example, to notice the threshold when a novelty becomes pervasive and begins to restructure the way things are done at the widest possible societal level. The subject matter of this book addresses just such a situation. It deals with communication and information technologies that have become an integral part of almost every contemporary institutional practice in the industrialized world and beyond, and it seeks to understand this change in relation to the much older and slower, if equally pervasive, processes of global change associated with the social relations, technologies, and economies of time.

To achieve its task, the collection of essays draws on the combined expertise of the two editors in both these areas of investigation. The editors, in turn, have assembled an interdisciplinary panel of international academics whose individual knowledge bases complement each other and who have produced an extraordinarily rich body of work. Their contributions illuminate both the relation between networked time and information technology and its sociocultural and socioeconomic time-space distantiated effects. Looking at the issues in the round, the collection of chapters offers its readers an almost holographic perspective on social relations within the network society, dealing, on the one hand, with the temporal relations of acceleration and,

on the other, with nonstop activity in the sphere of work, communication, consumption, and profit creation.

Methodologically the book is a treatise in explication. It renders explicit what forms a largely taken-for-granted feature of the socioeconomic practices that structure our everyday existence. It foregrounds issues that have invaded our lives almost unnoticed until social and cultural scientists, historians, and philosophers awoke to the resultant contradictions that began to pull their routine assumptions and unquestioned frameworks of meaning into bizarre shapes, jolting everyone into the unaccustomed temporal realm of networks. Where we used to deal with space, materiality, and quantity, we are now required to encompass time, virtuality, and networked processes. Yet the latter is not replacing the former but operates in contexts of everyday materiality and spatial linearity. Information Communication Technology (ICT) temporality is embedded and functioning within social contexts of clock time that are continuing to play their dominant role and have *not* evaporated with the event of ICT time. This means, for example, that the control of time, afforded most prominently through clock time, and the loss of control through ICTs have to be understood with reference and in relation to each other. This requires a new temporal imagination and an approach to the social that leaves behind the world of either-or choices and moves toward the realm of temporal multiplicity. Complexity rather than simplicity is the order of the day and demands from researchers new strategies that transcend the dualisms of old.

To encompass that complexity, some of the authors of this collection begin to unravel the historically distinct temporal logic of the network society. In the course of this work they show how this logic enframes not just understanding but also daily practice at the personal and collective level, acting as both unbounded opportunity and restricting framework that delimits room for maneuvering in every sphere of social life.

If we understand the temporal relations of industrial society as a steady development toward increase of control, commodification, and colonization, we begin to realize that with networked information and communication technologies operating at or near the speed of light, control and commodification have begun to implode whilst the colonization of time and space has risen to previously unknown heights and depths. On the one hand, ICT provides the potential to be connected anywhere, anytime; on the other hand, it affords the capacity to be everywhere at once and nowhere in particular. This places users of ICT in the realm if not quite of the gods then at least of angels.

ICT time, we need to appreciate further, departs significantly from the established clock-time norm. It is globally networked rather than globally zoned. It is instantaneous rather than durational and causal. It is simultaneous rather than sequential, marked by a chronoscopic temporality rather than spatially constituted clock time. This raises problems for time control: with instantaneity (which means processes without a gap between cause and effect in the linear chain of events) there can be no interception, no intervening action. With simultaneity (which means action that is happening at the same time and is dispersed across space) there can be no certainty over effects. That is to say, when there is no durational gap for establishing difference and change, when there is no discernible sequence, and when the speeds involved operate outside the capacity of the conscious mind, then the control achieved over clock-time processes is rendered inoperable. A similar effect applies to the relation between clock time and money: when there is no longer a gap that can be spatialized and quantified, the commodification of time becomes difficult if not impossible. As this book shows, new strategies need to be and are established for creation of both profit and political action.

The contributions to this collection analyze these processes and critically evaluate associated debates. Together they provide important insights and create a much-needed window on a largely unquestioned aspect of our lives that seems to operate beyond our influence. By bringing together such a breadth of expertise in one volume, the editors have opened up for discussion and academic scrutiny an important contemporary development that impacts sociocultural existence almost anywhere on this planet. I wish readers much enjoyment and intellectual challenge.

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