Book Review

Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*,
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Numerous books have been written about time pressure, modernity and
acceleration. The phenomenon of speed has tickled the minds of social
scientists and philosophers as various as Paul Virilio, Barbara Adam,
Helga Nowotny, Zygmunt Bauman, and more recently Hartmut Rosa.
So, what new or unexpected could be said about a subject on which such
a great deal has been written?

Quite a lot, we learn from Judy Wajcman's book *Pressed for time: The
acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. Being an expert in science and tech-
nology studies (STS), she draws on literature from STS to reach a nuanced
understanding of the sociomaterial networks and practices that shape our
daily dealings with time. The main principle of STS is that technologies are
inherently social: they are related to social norms that evolve as technolo-
gies become integrated into everyday life. The relationship between society,
time and technology is thus one of ongoing mutual shaping.

In contrast to some of her colleagues in social science, she is reluctant to
provide a grand narrative or a conclusive theoretical explanation of the
causes and social effects of acceleration. Instead, she explores in everyday
life situations how technologies, especially digital ones, shape men's and
women's sense of time. In her book, she moves back and forth between
theory and empirical data, thus interlinking abstract social theories and
empirical studies. Starting with an open attitude towards technologies, her
'social shaping perspective' aims to bring technology back into the social
science conversation about space and time. In line with this perspective, she
argues for an optimistic (as to the control that individuals can exercises over
time), well-rounded understanding of the relationship between temporality
and technology and for the democratization of technoscience: 'deciding
what sort of technologies we want and how we are going to use them' (p. 27).

Wajcman's familiarity with social theories of time is clearly shown in the first chapter where she analyses the dominant social scientific narrative about acceleration and modernity. Common in most social science theories is the idea that technologies have caused a shrinkage of temporal and spatial distances ('time-space compression' as geographer David Harvey (1989) called it) and a speeding up of economic, social and cultural change. Technology, and especially Information and Communication Technology (ICT), is seen as the main force driving acceleration. Wajcman considers most of these abstract theories as too schematic to capture the 'multiple temporal landscapes, both fast and slow, that come into play with digital devices' (p. 18). She observes an implicit technological determinism in the analyses of Manuel Castells, John Urry or Paul Virilio. In her view, most theories of high-speed society lack a genuine interest in technology and fail to see the co-evolution of technological and social developments. How, why and even if using ICT unstoppably leads to the acceleration of everything remains unclear. Moreover, these theories are not very clear about what acceleration is.

In order to understand how time has been shaped or reshaped in the past, Wajcman provides a historical perspective on the cultural narrative of acceleration of modern life. Edward Thompson's (1967) classical text 'Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism', which frames clock time as disciplinary and closely related to the commodification of time, is taken as the next target to criticise. Wajcman wants to move beyond this narrow focus on clocks 'as talismanic artifacts' (p. 43) to also understand the liberating forces of clocks and other technologies. Moreover, she argues that new technologies are not the only ones determining the pace of life. Acceleration and speed are also highly dependent on the resources that people have and the choices made possible by these. Sociologists such as Urry and Bauman who emphasize the mobility and liquidity of modernity seem to be blind for the empirical fact that the majority of the population lacks the resources to move and is geographically sedentary, Wajcman argues. Although the point she wants to make is clear, her critique is here not entirely fair, especially not to Urry, who carried out various empirical studies on travel time and mobility resources.

Her scepticism about grand narratives, her 'feminist sensibility' (she is a well-known feminist scholar as well) and her open interest in technology attune Wajcman to concrete social settings, where technologies shape the perceptions, ideas and experiences of social time. Starting from Hartmut Rosa's distinction between technological acceleration, acceleration of social change and acceleration of the pace of life (Rosa, 2005), her main focus is acceleration of the pace of life: how do actual women and men coordinate their timepractices in real-world contexts?

A remarkable finding in empirical time-use studies is that there is little empirical evidence supporting the claim that the average length of the work-week has changed in recent decades. Overall, in both the United States and Europe, the average number of working hours has not increased. In some European countries, such as France and Germany, they have even declined. And yet, a growing proportion of the population reports a rising deficit of time. How to account for this time-pressure paradox? One explanation is that time-use differs among different social groups. Single parents for example have more time stress than couples without children. Wajcman shows how changes in work patterns, family composition, expectations about good parenting and gender relations are central to explaining feelings of time pressure. Harriedness is presented as a multidimensional experience, which encompasses the pressure of (limited) clock time, the disorganization of life caused by a loss of life rhythms, and a growing 'temporal density' due to multitasking and juggling. As women are more affected by these dimensions than men, they have less high-quality leisure time than men.

The last dimension of harriedness, the growing temporal density, is especially experienced at the workplace, where ICT has dramatically transformed work. Many authors portray the contemporary worker as having no control over her or his time, due to information overload, multitasking and endless interruptions. Here again, Wacjman criticizes the implicit technological determinism underlying this stereotype. In her social shaping perspective, the contemporary office has become a 'technoscape', a technological and social landscape. Here, the use of ICT has positive effects for workers such as more flexibility in the timing and allocation of activities and more temporal coordination, thus providing more time control, as well as negative implications such as intensification of work, fragmentation of the workday, extension of work's reach. Using her STS lens, she deems socio-economic conditions of work, such as the reorganizing of the workplace in the face of increased global competition to be more important in producing acceleration than the information and communication technologies per se.

Even the prevailing view that ICTs blur the boundaries between work and home and colonize all time outside the workplace is disputed by Wajcman. She prefers to understand ICTs as 'fostering new patterns of social contacts, providing a new tool for intimacy' (p. 138). Her main opponent here is MIT-psychologist Sherry Turkle, whose empirical research shows that ICTs have a disastrous effect on human communication and intimacy (Turkle 2011, 2015). Although Wajcman claims that 'a plethora of studies show that heavy users tend to have more, not less social contact', the empirical evidence provided by Turkle that the reverse is true seems to be as plausible as hers.

This scientific dispute about what digital technologies do to human communication proves that the ultimate truth cannot be found in either theory

or empirical data. Theory and empirical findings are interwoven, as Wacjman herself explains. Theoretical perspectives guide the scientist in the gathering, analysis and interpretation of the empirical data, while empirical outcomes on their turn support theories. When Wacjman argues that technological devices 'can be allies in our quest for time control, preserving time as well as using it' (p. 139), this statement is not only based on empirical data but also on theoretical insights from STS. It is tempting to join her optimistic view and to 'embrace the positive possibilities that speed contains for thought, judgment, human connection and cosmopolitanism' (p. 27). Yet, as long as other scientists present empirical findings that contradict her point of view, technophobic concerns about time pressure caused by digital technologies will not fade away.

Pressed for Time is a great book to learn about time and modernity. It provides the reader with a critical and comprehensive overview of the social science literature on acceleration and modernity, a historical perspective on speed and time-use and a detailed insight of empirical studies on time use, gender issues and the hybrid relationships between technologies, time and the organization of everyday life. Less positive is the recurring search for opponents to explain her own point of view. Still, Wajcman's social shaping approach challenges time scholars to critically re-examine the prevailing theories on time pressure and technology and to connect these theories to the outcomes of empirical studies of how women and men use and experience time in everyday life.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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