

Speed: Through, Across, and In — The Landscapes of Capital

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Over the past four years we have been constructing a website entitled *Landscapes of Capital: Representing Time, Space, and Globalization in Corporate Advertising*. Our research is based on a data set that includes 1000 television commercials aired between 1995 and the present. The ads in our database feature the state of the corporation more than the commodities they are selling, and our database tilts toward certain sectors of Capital. Predominant in our sample are ads for companies in the communications, information technology, financial “services,” and energy extraction and distribution sectors.

Our website is arranged in terms of six interrelated inquiries: *Mapping Global Capital*, *Global Capital*, the *Semiotics of Advertising*, *Grand Narratives Revisited*, *Landscapes: the Geography of Capital*, and *Speed: Conquering Time and Space*. It also contains a glossary, a bibliography and our searchable video database covering all the commercials in our study. Here, we have drawn from that project to present one section of our inquiry into how advertising represents the relations of time and space.

Our project addresses how Capital constructs itself in advertising discourse. We are interested in how Capital ideologically envisions its relationship to both Society and everyday life at a moment of vast historical transformation across the planet. We are interested in how Capital represents itself in relation to globalization and to the development of high technology. We are mapping the relationships between the system of commodity signs that advertising produces and the emerging global system of production and investment. More precisely still, in this essay, we want to consider how representations of speed might be related to a global system of producing time and space.

A series of closely intertwined narrative frames recur throughout the TV ads we have examined. Speed is consistently linked to the values of freedom. This is especially so in ads aimed at consumers. But speed is also linked to values of productivity, efficiency and control in ads directed at investors. It is portrayed as reducing friction and abolishing constraint. It is often depicted as populist in spirit—leveling hierarchy and putting an end to unfair privilege. Instant information flows are cast as the key to future profits as if approaching absolute speed can abolish all constraint and all limits to the growth of capital. In this sense, speed is sometimes cast as a means to a glorious end— heaven on earth.

What we see on TV of course is not speed in and of itself but a simulation of speed— it is spectacular speed. A first obvious but necessary point—depictions of Speed, on television, are mostly Visual. Speed does not eliminate landscapes, but is dependent on the presence of visually signified landscapes for its own signification. Still, representations of speed often hollow out space, hollowing out landscapes. Spaces become places to be passed through. And Speed, though it is sometimes paired with Nostalgia, tends to be incompatible with any profound sense of history or memory. After all, if everything is always a perceptual blur of speed, a blur of things rushing past, how is it possible to grab hold of the referentials that are whizzing past? Speed negates the referentiality necessary for history and memory to be constructed.

Speed becomes the visual semiotic codes used to signify “speed.” And we, as viewers, have learned to distinguish between multiple significations of speed—there is out of control speed, in control speed, good speed, bad speed, frenetic speed, frozen time, indices of speed, internal speed, external speed, pleasure speed, fear speed.

Sometimes a signifier, sometimes a narrative frame, in this essay we explore some interrelated aspects of speed's representation. First, we focus on the speed of Capital and how advertising represents infrastructure in relation to time and distance. We examine the relationship of speed to flexible accumulation and some of the practices associated with it—just in time production, supply chain management, organizational flexibility, system integration, and rapid response time, and the ability to conduct markets in real time.

Second, we look at how Capital represents the relation between everyday life and these emergent corporate economic formations. Here speed overflows the boundaries of production and investment into the domain of everyday life and the world of consumption. And while constant acceleration is celebrated within production and the marketplace, it has the potential to disrupt everyday life. Managing a home and simultaneously keeping up with pressures of work is often a daunting task. Stressing time savings and the efficiency of electronic communications technologies, this advertising seeks to balance out the imperative to fill consumption time to the max with the desire to maintain control over time and space.

Third, we reflect on the representation of Speed itself. Representation does not stand autonomously outside of Capital. The logic of representation exists in a dialectic with Capital as a political economic formation. We argue that the dominant processes in each of these realms, abstraction and deterritorialization, are joined at the hip. In both, cultural signifiers are freed from their material origins and speed through the electronic circuits of Capital.

What can we learn about time space compression from the ways in which it is represented? Bound both to questions of Speed and Representation are questions about “deterritorialization.” The flip side of time space compression is deterritorialization. So too, abstraction is inherently weighted towards representations of deterritorialization. How are matters of “place,” “community” and “collective memory” represented when older conceptions of time and space are under pressure? What does it mean to exist outside time and space? What does it mean to conceptualize our moment in history as taking place outside time and space?

In the larger project from which this is drawn, we see that as capital spreads across the globe, advertising becomes a legitimation discourse for the new globalism, representing corporations and their practices as beneficial to individual and social well being. Taken as a whole, the ads that we have examined construct narratives saturated in mythologies of universal humanism and the wondrous power of technology, science, investment, and free markets. The same body of ads can be seen building up, and working off of, a language of images. In this way, a “pop” idiom has evolved, circulating through the various stations of the advertising cycle, that today visually establishes the assumptions for any public discussions of relations between science, technology, capital, the government, and you, the consumer.

But this political goal is not the only agenda at play in these corporate ads. The ads are also devoted to building up the sign values of the sponsoring corporation. The sign value is generally viewed as a “brand.” Just as the sign value of a beer has a lot to do with which corporate beer sells the most, so the corporate sign value can be deployed to either give the brand an equity valuation pop, or be used to offset tremors in the marketplace that are the product of anxieties. In our view, advertising is a mechanism that permits the manufacture of sign values constructed out of the raw materials that are cultural in their constitution. Advertising is in this sense an “appropriation” machine, lifting meanings out of context, putting them into a relationship with a commodity or a corporation. The surge of Wall Street and the bubble market in the latter 1990s brought into being rapidly emerging bodies of corporate capital in the telecommunications sector. Companies such as Cisco, Nortel and Lucent, their market capitalization swollen on dizzying stock prices for their shares, felt compelled to both identify themselves as major players in the contemporary capitalist order, and to bolster their position in a widening investor space by building up an enhanced brand identity and brand equity. In the course of trying to bolster their public image and trying to pump up stock prices further, many companies have attempted to position themselves in terms of speed.

Speed and the Logic of Capital: Conquering Time and Space

Karl Marx, writing in the *Grundrisse* in 1857, anticipated how the contradictions of Capital could spur on the “annihilation of space by time.” He wrote, “While capital ...must strive to tear down every barrier...to exchange and conquer the whole earth for its markets, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time.” (Marx 1973:538 539) Certainly, advertising has done its best to equate gains in speed with general notions of progress—how often have you heard an ad refer to gaining time by using a particular product? In a world seemingly packed to capacity with things to do and places to be, the technology of speed promises to deliver us to a better place.

Breaking speed barriers is not a new obsession. Speed of movement not only signals our capacity for overcoming the fixity of geographical distance (space), it also has come to suggest the possibility for increased flexibility, efficiency and productivity. Since its inception, capitalism has measured value in terms of time inputs since the amount of labor required to produce a commodity could most easily be measured in units of time. So it stands to reason that our “common sense” understanding of technologies of speed connote a future liberation from material scarcity. In contemporary society, where time itself has become perceived as a scarce resource, appeals to instantaneity and immediacy are seductive. Has speed annihilated spatial distance? Paul Virilio writes that one of the most revolutionary transformations occurring today “is the invention of a perspective of real time.”

Real time now prevails above both real space and the geosphere. The primacy of real time, of immediacy, over and above space and surface is a *fait accompli* and ushers a new epoch. Something nicely conjured up in a (French) advertisement praising cellular phones with the words: “Planet Earth has never been this small” This is a very dramatic moment in our relation with the world and for our vision of the world. (Virilio 1995)

Virilio sees a dark side to the hegemony of speed. Sometimes referred to as time space compression, sometimes as deterritorialization, this process threatens/promises to transform not only the ways in which we work and do business, but also the ways in which we conduct and experience our private lives. Virilio contends that hyperspeed induces a general “loss of orientation.” How do corporate ads represent hyperspeed in our lives?

Here it is important once again to distinguish between what actually goes on in the world and how it is represented, or at least leave open the question of how these are related. Our own position is that while time space compression and deterritorialization are real processes, not simply discourses, they produce neither homogeneous time nor homogeneous space. Capitalism is nothing, if not uneven, in the production of space and time.

Close inspection of the ads in our database does not reveal a singular kind of hegemonic speed, but a more contradictory set of representations. Indeed, while “faster” is everywhere presumed to be the goal in these commercials, the technologies of speed and commodification are no less obsessed with repetition—so much so that latent meanings of speed in the ads suggest that efforts at eclipsing space have placed us in an infinite loop. But the efforts at representing digital networks operating in “real time” require a shift in our vision of the world—a shift in our vision of how time, space and culture can be viewed as coordinates on a map.

Time Space Compression

Perhaps we should revisit the question of space time compression that stems from market driven races for short term profit. Few would argue today that the rhythm of business life is changing—time is compressed, pace has accelerated, and the materiality of distance is shrinking. Change is moving at Internet speed!

David Harvey advances the concept of “time space compression” to signal “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves.” (1989:240). Harvey points out that many of the transportation and communication technologies advanced by capitalist corporations have had the effect of shrinking space. Spatial barriers have been overcome largely through speedier methods of sending material goods, information, and people. As distance has been overcome, time too becomes compressed.

Our social spaces are more and more designed and built by capitalist firms to facilitate greater efficiency of transactions with customers. Wal*Mart, like the large grocery megamarkets it competes against, has worked hard to streamline the purchasing/exiting function, so as not to slow up the transactions that may follow. Soon, we may well see a supermarket like the one shown in this 1999 IBM ad which follows a trench coated man who walks up and down the aisles grabbing goods and stuffing them in his pockets. Egged on by the dramatic music and the surveillance camera catching his image as he stuffs his pockets full, we might assume that he is shoplifting. And as he exits the store, the voice of the security guard calls out from behind him, “Excuse me sir...You forgot your receipt.” The speed and invisibility of total scanning technologies permits the abolition of “check out lines”—one of the time vortices of everyday life in the modern world. Firms like this will introduce the entire shopping cart barcode scanner— self service (elimination of labor costs) and greater speed of transaction in one move, not to mention the extension of the panoptic capacity of the company, and the elimination of shoplifting.

Most of our electronic devices are dedicated to speeding things up—more CPU power can mean more cycles per second, and hence more “work” and greater productivity. In a world obsessed with cutting out wasted time and going faster, experience may grow more and more ephemeral and fragmented. Harvey’s concern is that spatial and temporal relations become so destabilized as a result of constant flux that these can provide little in the way of

anchoring social relations and social formations (Harvey 1989: 238 239). This tension is heightened by the fact that abstract spaces relentlessly peck away at, and replace, places. Though we are loath to romanticize “place,” we do agree with Harvey that this historical process draws out “place bound nostalgias” (1989: 218).

Many corporate ads in our database seek to represent space time compression either as a product of high technologies, or as a function of globalized business. They depict globalization as a serial montage of landscapes. In the video strings of landscapes that frequently make up these ads, each scene carries roughly the same weight or significance as that which precedes it or that which follows. These landscapes suggest spaces defined by equivalency, bound together by the ad, and by extension, the sponsor. The panoramic version of this landscape style was evident in a 1995 AT&T ad depicting the integration of China into the world system. Time and space appear to dissolve as variables, so that the space of a Chinese peasant can appear to be simultaneous with that of an urban apartment in a North American city because now it’s all “one world.” The various spaces referred to in this ad are all signified as abstractions —carefully simulated, over stylized backdrops. Telephony is presented as the means of shrinking and overcoming the barrier of distance. A solo male voice draws out this sentiment in song, “it’s all within your reach.” And a reassuring male voice over offers this closing summary: “AT&T. That’s your true choice.”

In this vision of technologically integrated globalism, AT&T wants less to assert the primacy of space over place, than to deny that speed is antithetical to geographical territory. According to AT&T’s cosmology of globalism, advanced telecommunications do not displace geographically located cultural identities, but instead unify them—leaving intact the cultural primacy of territory, but overcoming all its limits.

The vision of social relations emoted throughout the AT&T ad campaign is colored by humanistic connotations of spirituality. The music orchestrates a sweet (almost saccharine) version of spiritual fulfillment as rooted in caring personal relations in a world characterized by the global separation of families and kin groups. What goes unsaid here is that these people are likely separated by the dynamics of labor migration prompted by now global capitalist labor markets. But this does nothing to diminish the AT&T claim that they have deployed the civil technology to reunite that which capitalism stretched asunder.

We have previously dubbed ads like this as legitimization ads because of the way they ideologically promote an institutional system. “AT&T. That’s your true choice.” “it’s all one world.”

Real Time and Time Space Compression

In the discourse of corporate advertising, the subject of real time comes up in relation to various agendas: 1) general issues of competition in the marketplace, where speed becomes its own justification and where faster to market means more profits; 2) the immediacy of computerized stock trading brings the promise of lower costs and premise of fairer exchanges 3) organizing complex and far flung divisions of labor within a globally extensive corporate world; 4) being able to monitor sales and inventory supplies on a daily and even hourly basis in order to control costs and integrate systems management; 5) the video simulacrum where time space compression is achieved via the magic of cameras and computers.

A 2001 IBM ad addresses the rationale of “real time” directly as a matter of profit imperatives. IBM’s spokesman situates the question of real time in an ominous and menacing tone:

Here the hegemony of real time is presented as a hostile necessity, as a *fait accompli* driven by inexorable market forces that cannot be resisted or debated. A meta narrative of speed weaves itself into narrative assumptions regarding competitive markets. The voracious and the insatiable appetites of market growth demand greater speed in the circulation of Capital. The forces of capital driven markets are also likened to the laws of nature—“Time waits for no man or woman or business . . . everything faster. Products to market, ideas to profits.” The IBM ad unfolds this way, offering an almost structural Marxian interpretation of how the underlying forces of capitalism become more and more determinant in the decisions and choices that actors must make. Here we have the contradictions of capital circulation—as capital matures and there is greater competition and profit margins grow thinner, then being able to do things faster makes a lot of sense—faster to market brings with it competitive advantage and offsets the tendency for the rate of profit to decline. But going faster carries its own price, it takes competition into the realm of circulation time. But panic marketing offers a quick way out—“powerful software” (scientific magic) can tame the imperatives of market speed by controlling real time—the absolute present.

Telecommunications companies intent on selling the technologies of bandwidth situate the mastery of real time in terms of the immediate availability of all knowledge, anywhere and anytime. For firms like Qwest, real time refers to the totality of instantaneous consumption options available in the here and now. No need for deferred gratification here. In the universe depicted by corporate advertising all stages of the capital circulation process begin

to be characterized in a similar way—one can consume instantly, trade stocks instantly (e*trade and Ameritrade), make markets instantly (NYSE), distribute goods overnight (UPS and FedEx), and share ideas instantly (AT&T). Hence the insistent repetition of the 1999 NYSE ad campaign's choral refrain—"Right here. Right now. Right here. Right now."

To investors, the speed of a trade's execution is all important. The trade that takes place in real time is the holy grail, insofar as all market information is time sensitive. The bid and ask quotes of ten minutes ago can be a liability if a trade takes that long to execute. The slower the transaction of trade request, the less advantaged one is in the marketplace. Hence, the transaction speed of brokers becomes a signifying highlight in their competition for business. One Datek ad from 2000 takes viewers on an imaginary trip inside the electronic circuitry and pathways that constitute the computerized innards of the trading system, inviting viewers to experience the simulated speed of an electronic transaction just as if you were on the ride itself. Datek then promised that every trade would be executed within 60 seconds; by 2004 Ameritrade guarantees the market execution of orders in 5 seconds or less!

AT&T's 2001 commercial for its broadband network services presented real time in relation to organizational efficiency and the task of reconnecting the various elements of a now globally dispersed division of outsourced labor, thus also casting real time in terms of time space compression. Visually and aurally this ad shrinks the global landscape in relation to the matter of speed—conceiving a strictly bounded world in which the flows of information, goods and people are restricted by neither time nor distance. Such commercials also speak to the time space compression implicit in both electronic communications and globalization. According to AT&T "real time connectivity" means that a decentralized corporate division of labor dispersed across the planet can interface seamlessly and "boundlessly."

AT&T visually compresses spatial distance by presenting the world system on a scale comparable to that of a model train. Indeed, the speed of connectivity is presented metaphorically in terms of train speed—a form of modern transport that helped initiate time space compression. Like technologies of telephonic long distance, technologies of railroads and trucking aimed at conquering the limitations of distance by reducing transit time. Advertisers deploy imagery of earlier technologies in an effort to make comprehensible a new stage of communications technology that claims to transcend altogether the limits of time and geographic space.

Like AT&T, other advertisers pursue similar representational strategies to create a tangible picture of the corporate information economy. How does one depict the transport of goods that are not objects? The adoption of the modern train as a visual metaphor for the information economy is not uncommon. GTE's 1998 campaign explicitly linked the train to a multiplicity of landscapes to conjure up the concept of an information economy—an economy in which the most the "most precious cargo" [read commodity] to be moved is "your ideas."

This type of picture seems closely tied to the imagery of a global civil society suffused by a spirit of ideas. It moves them via long distance, wireless, video, internet, directories and local telephone lines. It's a company you might have thought was just a telephone company Until now—GTE. Fig. 6 Microsoft 2002 prosperity, civility, peace and freedom from want or conflict. It is interesting that such an aggressively competitive marketplace could be shown as giving rise to a civil society that seems marked precisely by the absence of competitive conflicts. Indeed, in stark contrast to the speed of technology and business, the relationships of civil society seem caught in a time warp. Jean Baudrillard addresses speed from almost every angle of his musings—from his theory of simulacra to the paradoxes of history. For Baudrillard history has come to a standstill, even though its internal mechanism whips along at hyperspeed. Indeed for Baudrillard it is the logic of hyperspeed that has arrested history. The mechanism is similar to the weed killer known as Roundup that so accelerates the growth of the plant that it exhausts the weed, killing it.

Corporate ads (as opposed to consumer goods ads) also seem to present a curious "end of history" and an "end of ideology" (as absurd as this might seem given the news of the day). Advertising envisions an end to history made possible by the mastery of speed in the marketplace. Given that this is a post Fordist economy, the question of speed in business has to do less with production processes than with the circulation time of exchange. The biggest difference between the cosmology presented in the ads and that of Baudrillard is that in the ads, hyperspeed produces not a living death, but a virtual paradise on earth. Hence the curious propensity for so much slow motion in television ads that aim to signify the advantages of speed in our lives. Whereas economic time speeds up in these representations, turning laborers into a ghostly blur, consumers/citizens live at an almost pastoral pace in civil society.

Microsoft also offers a real time solution to the problems of business integration in a global marketplace. Microsoft refers to its solution as "one degree of separation." Here speed is depicted through total calmness and control. In one ad, an accident in a wine storage room occurs, and even as the bottles are falling and breaking in slow motion, a manager in Asia using a handheld device reacts to the sharp and immediate spike in prices for the wine as

supply is diminished elsewhere in the supply chain. Distance and time are no longer obstacles to perfect information flows necessary to both inventory controls and integrating supply and demand. Global markets across space and time become unified and synchronized. Speed, or rather the perception of speed, also disappears because it is no longer necessary to accentuate speed when there is but one singular space—one degree of separation.

Friction Free Flow

Accumulation is a temporal activity. Decades of state regulations of industries brought a political backlash of deregulation in the Reagan era precisely because business interests complained that government bureaucracy created so much friction in the conduct of markets that profits were restricted. As capitalism matures and becomes dominant, rates of profit become more and more difficult to sustain. Many commercials for telecommunications, computing, internet and software portray the solution in the use of new technologies to both accelerate and integrate the cycle of production. Productivity is seen as a function of the velocity of the flow of objects, goods, personnel, services, signs, and data that move through organizations and extra organizational systems. But how fast can the flow move before systems break down? On the flip side, what are the obstacles and friction points that limit or restrict velocity?

What happens when the unexpected occurs? Can an organization respond in a flexible and timely manner? It is no longer enough that an organization run efficiently. Efficiency must now extend beyond organizational structures into the world of supply and demand. In a marketplace where consumers come armed with “smart” credit cards and wireless technology and are encouraged to expect that all commodities and services will be within 24 hours reach, corporations are expected to design friction free response mechanisms. On the other side of the supply chain, B2B technology providers promise just in time delivery of production materials as needed. Flexible, friction free integration of the supply chain is an of repeated mantra in the contemporary corporate world. Advertising reflects this in two ways. IBM commercials often depict episodes of failed integration in which corporate employees and executives confront system breakdown. Against the backdrop of overwhelming anxiety associated with failure and the threat of job loss, IBM presents itself as providing the services that can keep complex technological systems from failing. On the other hand, with an upbeat musical score in the background, Siemens’ commercials show Siemens’ systems responding fluidly to Last minute changes in corporate decisions. The imagery of integrated instantaneity permits undisturbed production to continue seamlessly.

The premise of a friction free economy harkens back to Adam Smith’s model of a market driven by an “invisible hand” that assumes all market participants share complete access to unrestricted information flows and act rationally. This is an assumption that even Thomas Hobbes would have rejected, recognizing that power comes not simply from having access to all relevant information, but that power often comes to those actors who can take advantages of disrupted and uneven flows of information. Indeed, the rationally maximizing market agent is one who may in fact instigate bottlenecks and delays to maximize self interest.

Using representations that blend speed and integration, the UPS “Brown” branding campaign promises integrated supply chain management. The campaign depicts persons positioned at different points in the corporate hierarchy: CEO, CFO, logistics manager, shipping manager, and the mailroom guy. Each figure speaks to UPS’s ability to ensure the proper rate and flow of data and materials under their supervision/surveillance. Speakers link UPS’s integrated system to reduced levels of personal anxiety in their work lives. A smooth running system proves therapeutic.

In *War in the Age of Intelligent Machine*, Manuel DeLanda states that “...a commander must track the points at which friction may be dispersed within tactical, command systems in order to preserve the efficiency and integrity of a war machine during battle” (DeLanda 1991: 61). The role of the commander is to disperse “the “friction” (delays, bottlenecks, noisy data) produced by the fog of war” (DeLanda 1991: 23).

In this UPS ad the CEO confidently states that he is able to both track “minute by minute” and to anticipate unexpected events (a herd of zebras cross in front of a herd of elephants) in order to avoid chaos and disaster because UPS provides the necessary supportive structure. Moreover, like other corporate representatives depicted throughout this campaign he seems anxiety free.

Not only must the organizational apparatus run friction free, it must also at any given moment have the appropriate personnel along the supply chain to locate the position of any object (or the data simulation of the object) as it moves through the process. UPS presents itself as self contained system that will accelerate the flow of objects and data while simultaneously tracking every element. Scanning technology and tracking numbers function to position every object in the flow. Increasingly, this technology has been applied to human movement across borders, through airport terminals, across toll bridges (EZ Pass), at cash registers, etc. Ironically, the need for speed results in

an expanded demand for panoptic control.

Speed of Capital

In the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/1978) penned the famous phrase, “All that is solid melts into air.” Already in 1848, so soon into the era of Capital, Marx and Engels had noticed Capital’s propensity (under the direction of the Bourgeoisie) for an accelerated pace of change. Later, when Marx wrote about labor time as the central determinant of exchange value, he dwelt on the fact that speed would be a crucial variable in the development of capitalist political economies. Still, Marx might have understated the degree to which a labor theory of value is dependent on a theory of speed—or more properly, a theory of accelerating production. Teresa Brennan’s (1993) reexamination of Marx’s argument explicitly recognizes the role of space and distance in the value composition process. Drawing on the theory that labor is the source of all value, Marx focused the labor theory of value on a critique of exploitation—with special emphasis on the character of capitalist exploitation. Within his argument about the structural character of unequal exchange, Marx showed how capitalists recognized time, or more specifically, labor time as the crucial measure of value in its reified form—namely money. That way, Capital could make every diverse form of labor commensurate with a universal standard of measure. The category of wage labor rests precisely upon abstracting out from any particular kind of labor the time expended in labor as measured in hours and minutes. Our measures of efficiency depend on this.

Those following in the tradition of Marx observed that Capitalists have historically sought to wrest (exploit) more value from labor by means of “the speedup.” In pointing to the exploitative power relationship that drives speedups, this Marxian tradition has located these as class struggles between Capital and Labor over power on the factory floor. And yet, though class conflict was the practical matter at hand, there was more than class conflict at work here—because speedups of production also aimed at overcoming another fundamental contradiction of capital accumulation.

Marx pointed to the general speedup in production processes when he addressed the contradiction between the commodity form and the dead time that occurred in the cycle of commodity production, distribution, sales and reinvestment. Marx variously referred to this phase of Capital in the circuitry of circulation as “fallow time” or time “at rest”— but his point was always that such time represented “negated” Capital (Marx 1973: 546; 621; Harvey, 1982: 85). When Capital takes the form of stock inventories, this is time when Capital cannot be “at work.”

Delays in the circulation of the commodity through its cycle represent opportunity costs, for any time that the commodity form spends in warehouses, or sitting on shelves, means that the money equivalent of that commodity could not be reinvested and “earning” more return on equity. In short, time spent in circulation is time not spent in production or commodity realization. David Harvey puts it this way:

There is, therefore, considerable pressure to accelerate the velocity of circulation of capital, because to do so is to increase the sum of values produced and rate of profit. The barriers to realization are minimized when the “transition of capital from one phase to the next” occurs “at the speed of thought” (Marx 1973:631). The turnover time of capital is, in itself, a fundamental measure which also indicates certain barriers to accumulation. Since an accelerating rate of turnover of capital reduces the time during which opportunities pass by unseized, a reduction in turnover time releases resources for further accumulation (Harvey 1982: 86).

Marx defined circulation time in terms of how long it takes to “realize the value embodied in the commodity through the exchange process” (Harvey 1982: 62). The speed and efficiency of the transformation of the commodity form of capital into the money capital is pivotal to the reproduction/expansion of Capital (Harvey 1982:71).

In the century and a half since Marx began writing, Capital has come up with many new institutional mechanisms for overcoming drags on commodity reproduction. The massification of the credit system in the early 20th century still stands out as a dramatic intervention. The nurturing of marketing and advertising systems to stoke up additional demand for goods comprises another familiar approach. Each successful intervention was soon mimicked by competitors, and thus each advancement in shortening cycle time contributed to a further quickening of commodity circulation, until today speed and turnover are the watchwords of the Marketplace.

Speed has as its referent not just time but also distance. Speed refers not only to how quickly or slowly the digital pulse of a timepiece moves, but also to movement across space. For firms like FedEx and UPS the question of speed refers to how fast they can transport goods from one geographic site to another place. FedEx and UPS have defined themselves as supply chain management specialists. They claim to be able to move as fast as is necessary to keep up with the integrated global supply chain in such a way that clients can minimize warehousing costs.

For companies like Intel in the semiconductor chip manufacturing sector the question of speed refers to how rapidly a processor can cycle and cycle again, and to the way in which Moore's Law continues to play itself out (Moore's Law states that chip capacity doubles every eighteen months). Measured in Gigahertz, every corporate research group is competing to build the fastest chip yet.

For firms like Amazon.com, the question of speed refers to the absence of time spent in physical infrastructures—the effort to overcome the idle time of products sitting on a shelf that Marx referred to as a barrier to value realization. Amazon.com's business model touted its being an Internet business—the store on line as opposed to the more prosaic land locked storefronts—land and buildings have rents, taxes and insurance costs associated with them, while Amazon's cyberbusiness promised consumers nearly immediate shipment of the books at discounted prices. Why leave the house, when we can rush it to you?

Teresa Brennan (1993:147;150) observes that “speed, measured by distance as well as time, involves a linear axis, time, and the lateral axis of space.” Brennan's point is that the space time of short term profit comes into conflict with the “generational time of natural reproduction” and that in the struggle to overcome the contradictions of the profit mechanism, the market driven space time of speed eventually displaces (she says “takes the place of”) generational time.”

Brennan's distinction hinges on the assumption that generational time is a biological constant. But is it? Not according to the mass media—which with their own axe to grind have held that generational time itself has undergone a speedup in recent decades, shrinking adolescence into a series of fashion cycles. This prompts concerns about how children are growing up too fast, losing out on the romance and innocence of childhood. Generational time itself has been turned into a commodity and is thus subject to the same internal pressures as any other commodity.

Brennan builds her argument on an opposition—a contradiction between the “competing dynamics” of 1) the Speed of Capital, driven by the demand to realize short term profits and further Capital formation, and 2) the existence of a Natural Order, whose rate of reproduction must remain relatively constant (1993:133). The premise of a natural order driven by biological imperatives seems to us problematic. Isn't such recourse to claims regarding “Natural Entities” yet another socially constructed fantasy, although always important nonetheless, precisely because it is social fantasy? Maybe it is one of our most important collective fantasies, a need to believe that we are part of some natural history.

Brennan's theory poses the contradiction stemming from the Speed of Capital in terms of the postulate of “organic time.” Is this organic time, the pace at which generational change takes place, a question of empirical reality or metaphysics? Indeed, why pose the social contradictions of speed in such Rousseauian terms? Is it because it assumes something of Marx's critical ideal of “species being?”

Perhaps because we still want to believe that our most inherent sensibilities will prompt us to snap back against mounting forms of capitalist alienation, this argument about a fundamental schism between the accelerating cycle time of commerce and the “natural” time of organic life becomes inviting. The myth of organic time beckons because it offers the prospect of achieving a form of spiritual salvation.

Blurred Labor Time

A 2001 Cisco commercial hypes the ability of Cisco Systems to integrate a just in time production system for manufacturing and shipping bicycles. Located in a warehouse/production facility, the commercial distorts and speeds up motion to create an impression of hyperactive productivity. Most of the movement takes place around a packing crate (the primary signifier for on time inventory). The music races along, relentlessly hyperactive, edgy but energetic, framing a manufacturing and shipping process that also races along in a blur of motion. We also see what appears to be a snippet of a speeded up assembly line of bicycle production. Once again, both the method of signifying speed and the ultimate signifier of speed is time lapse photography. Though time is accelerated, space is held constant here as the camera circles the men and the packing crate. Space is held constant, while technology races to eclipse temporal limits, and with them the asynchronous dilemmas—i.e., inventory problems, too late, too soon bottlenecks that cut into operating margins. Of course, the goal and the achievement in the advertising narrative is to get as close as possible to friction less synchronous time.

The speed of an Internet facilitated just in time production process is simulated by the acceleration of the video. Here speed is depicted through video time compression. The technique is hardly new, but it is pivotal to the representation—film a day's worth of activity and compress it down to 15 seconds. What remains is the perceptible blur of meaningful activity, rather than the meaningful specificity of the activity itself. And yet as the ad winds down, as it seeks to drive home its message about gaining control over the inventory process, the music calms and soothes

out, just as the video slows to focus on a title frame that reads, “Inventory management on the Internet.” This gives way to a computer screen showing part inventories and an image of the “black widow [bicycle] crank.” This image brings us to a sequence of two nearly still scenes of an older worker (a craftsman) checking a bicycle wheel as it slowly rotates, followed by someone wearing a welder’s mask poised as if welding a frame.

Why does Cisco follow the imagery of a high speed workspace with two portraits of craftsman like characters? The pace and duration of these scenes lead us to perceive the persistence of craft in production. But why? There is a hint of nostalgia here in this moment of apparent stillness, albeit a nostalgia for the future of a computer system facilitated craftsmanship. This mythological “return of craft” is a product of a semiotic opposition between the faceless blur of a workday in which, truly, workers have become just another factor of production (Braverman 1976). By contrast, the image of an older male’s face suggests the revival of craftsmanship because it is, by far, the least abstracted image in the commercial. Indeed, Cisco suggests that harnessing the power of the Internet returns the face of humanity to work. While all other workers have been blurred into fleeting anonymity, his is the only face recognizable as such, the only face on which we can see the traces of motivated subjectivity. And yet he performs no activity—we only see him looking at the wheel, not producing it. An ensuing image of a welder as a signifier of a skilled producer is also mobilized strictly for the purpose of signifying the craftworker, since he merely feigns the act of work.

This last portion of the ad aims to distinguish pure speed from controlled and managed speed. One message that may be taken from this ad is that a competitive advantage can be gained in synchronizing the division of labor via the Internet as a technology that permits the asynchronous management and coordination of data. Managed time in this worldview permits un alienated labor. What then does this ad have to tell us about working at hyperspeed? What values are being promoted in depicting human labor as a time compressed blur? And what is the relationship between a time compressed labor process that adheres to the competitive logic of capitalist time and the almost paradisiacal craft labor time that Cisco technology makes possible?

The imagery of accelerated human movements in the workplace is not new. Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* captured the shift from craft to assembly production taking place in the 1930’s. There, Chaplin worked on an assembly line that was subject to constant speed and panoptic surveillance by an all powerful factory boss. Even the lunch break was automated with an experimental feeding machine designed to adjust the individual to the predetermined movement of objects. Finally, after one too many speed ups Chaplin has a breakdown and runs amok, a wrench in each hand, frantically tightening anything with a bolt. He is finally caught and carted off to a psychiatric hospital. The capitalist dream of high velocity production system reaches a limit: the physiological and psychological limits of the human body. But the logic of capital as Marx demonstrated is to continually speed up production to extract more out of labor. Time motion studies, robotics, electronic surveillance, cube farms, etc. have one end—integrated and accelerated production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Both the practice and the ethos of craft wanes under the continuous assault of demands for efficiency and productivity, and the panoptic sensibility becomes less overtly visible and authoritarian, the boss’s eye of *Modern Times* replaced by Cisco’s management systems. What is most intriguing about the difference between *Modern Times* and the Cisco account of supermodern times is the different tone and attitude toward speed. Whereas *Modern Times* posed critical questions about the limits of speed in the workplace—about what human beings could tolerate both physically and psychologically—the Cisco ad poses no critical questions about the workplace or the human condition. In fact, it could be argued that Cisco 15/34 presumes that speed goes hand in hand with an unalienated workplace and work experience.

Speed, Simultaneity, and Identity—Casino Cyborg

Critiques of free market capitalism focus on the structure of markets and their relationship to social institutions. The instability and volatility of active markets can devalue the economic base of real lives, or in more macro scenarios can lead to the collapse of national and regional economies. Susan Strange (1986: 9 10) calls this instability “casino capitalism,” a phenomenon she links to five trends: innovations in the way in which financial markets work; the sheer size of markets; commercial banks turned into investment banks; the emergence of Asian nations as players; and the shift to self regulation by banks.

According to Strange the speed at which markets work combined with their now, near universal pervasiveness results in a volatility that extends globally. Approximately \$1.5 trillion dollars are invested daily as foreign transactions (Khor 1998: 2). It is estimated that 98 per cent of these transactions are speculative. In *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, investment guru George Soros (1998) also highlights the potential for disequilibria in the financial system, and the inability of non market sectors to regulate markets. In *False Dawn*, John Gray (1998: 74) echoes

that “national governments find themselves in environments not merely of risk but of radical uncertainty.” Gray attacks neo liberalism for weakening social and political institutions in both First and Third World nations. “In the late twentieth century there is no shelter—for corporations or for governments—from the global gale of creative destruction.” (Gray 1998:76)

The rapidly shifting economy driven by markets has real consequences for the lives of individuals. The velocity of social, economic, and technological change as well as the shifting of ownership in the forms of mergers and takeovers results in an unpredictable relationship with work. In *Corrosion of Character*, Richard Sennett (1999) explores the impact of flexible capitalism across two generations of workers. For workers in industries as diverse as baking and software engineering, the rules of success have become increasingly illegible and job security increasingly tenuous. Technological innovation drives organizational instability. Shifts in technology can destabilize whole sectors of the economy both eliminating and creating jobs. Sennett describes Rico’s effort to hire young tech wizards since his knowledge has become outdated. Risk and uncertainty lurk on the edges of one’s work. Adapting to the volatility and unpredictability of the economy is difficult and anxiety ridden.

Reflecting market volatility and the creative destruction energies of the technology sector, the shadows of risk and economic uncertainty lurk in the background of this genre of advertising. The risk appears in the form of investment insecurity, failure to innovate technologically, the lack of flexibility and speed, or being overwhelmed by information. Ironically, the bottom stratum most susceptible to financial volatility is absented from these commercials. The risk experienced is by investors or by executives. But with risk there is opportunity.

This is precisely the premise of an IBM ad (2000) that features a young businessman sitting on a bench surrounded by pigeons in an Italian Square. He is wearing a voice activated computer. As he excitedly buys and sells commodities and jumps into the air, pigeons take flight. After his last sale, his computer phone rings and he lets his wife (or girlfriend) know the meeting went well and he is taking the next flight home.

“Traveling light, rather than holding tightly to things deemed attractive for their reliability and solidity—that is, for their heavy weight, substantially and unyielding power of resistance—is no asset of power.” (Bauman, 1999: 13)

Capital flows everywhere and this new highly mobile elite both aids it and travels as lightly as capital does. Our young entrepreneur travels light in many senses. First, his technology is light, a wearable computer with a wireless connection to both the Internet and global communication network. The computer screen is a miniaturized for the eye. The computer itself is not visible. Voice activation frees his hands to feed pigeons as he interacts with a global economy. Second, his relationship to space is light. He sits on a bench in front of St. Mark’s Basilica. An operatic background connects images of St. Mark’s Basilica with the selling of commodities. The space is weighted with connotations of sacredness and tradition. And yet, our young entrepreneur has no relationship to history or meanings associated with it. Third, this space affords him emotional freedom. Could he express such emotion in an office space? He is freed from organizational restraints on personality and demeanor. Fourth, his relationship to the commodity market is speculative. The tonal structure of his voice mimics the excitement of the crap table. The ad captures a psychological dimension of casino capitalism. Winning the game has intrinsic emotional rewards for the player. Fifth, his relationship to family is expressed nonchalantly as if he were down at the corner grocery store. It does not seem to matter that he is in Italy. These nomads do not have ties to community but to a scaled down nuclear family.

Donna Haraway (1991) refers to “a cyborg as a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.” IBM’s cyborg is juiced on adrenalin, his methamphetamine like buzz designed to match the speed of the market. His animated, out of breath style mimics the speed of capital and the kind of competitive excitement that goes with it. He wheels and deals in the hypercommodity markets of commodities futures. Here one needs to don the cyborg apparatus just to stay abreast of the speed of the marketplace. Being a cyborg is a response to acceleration.

Speed and Everyday Life

Advertisements reference numerous kinds of time. In their efforts to reference everyday life, advertisements may portray the time of consumption, the time of labor, the time of capital and markets, the time of reproduction, family time, and the time of transit. We offer these as heuristic categories, recognizing that there is overlap between

these representations in advertising.

An example from AT&T illustrates an effort to draw together the multiple spheres of time in everyday life. The ad hails middle class women who perform the roles of working mom. “If this is you,” yours can be a harried day, divided into distinct blocks of time, each dedicated to a scheduled activity. The typically busy day may begin with a run across the great wide open of the Western landscape to keep one’s body and mind fit. This is labeled “breakfast,” and it is followed by an image of a commuter plane labeled as “your carpool.” We begin by peeling away one scene at a time, because each scene has been selected as a way of signifying the elements of a fast paced daily life. So after you take a commuter flight to the city where you work, you check in with your wealth o meter—the “scoreboard” of stock prices, for this has become your measure of well being.

From here, the pace of urban nightlife starts to get pumped up by a techno beat on the soundtrack. Visually the ad draws on the now standard signifier of speed—the blurring, pulsing beams of light, produced by using time lapse photographic techniques of urban traffic to stretch out time visually. We have captured this sequence of scenes and edits from the ad—but we have reduced the number of frames, slowed it down and isolated it from the signifiers on the sound track. This permits us to defuse the speed—not because we want to downplay it, but because we want to highlight how viewers “read” the codes for expressing speed. The pulses of light identified onscreen as “your sandbox”—these are supposedly the space and speed coordinates of your daily life.

What does “this is your sandbox” suggest? This is the place where you play? This is where you are the master? The maestro? The connoisseur of consumption in the global city? You are at home here, you are comfortable here? But how does one feel at home in the blurring speeds of green light bursts?

The question the ad poses is whether or not “you” have the tools to keep this lifestyle from flying apart at the seams. The lifestyle in question refers to a suburban, neo country space where women raise families by scheduling their days into personal time, transit time, market time, work time, and family time. AT&T’s message is that “finally communications has caught up with the way you live.” Under the campaign rubric of “AT&T’s personal network,” this commercial translates the struggle to keep spatially scattered everyday lifeworlds integrated into well adjusted and fulfilling family lives into a story of heroic vitality and celebration. Speed and busy ness of schedules are turned from negatives into the glue of daily life. Where normally having too much to do in too little time in too many places is a recipe for stress and anxiety, the AT&T ad turns the psychology of stress into imagery of heroic vitality and accomplishment. The ad celebrates (toasts) the individual woman who accomplishes the impossible everyday, and does it with a smile. This is a woman who is more full of love for her family at the end of the day than at its beginning; this is a woman able to balance the pressures of professional performance with being a loving parent, a woman who can be everywhere at once.

...Networks are appropriate instruments for a capitalist economy based on innovation, globalisation, and decentralised concentration; for work, workers and firms based on flexibility; for a culture of endless deconstruction and reconstruction; for a polity geared towards the instant processing of new values and public moods; and for a social organisation aiming at the supersession of space and the annihilation of time (Castells 1996:470 71).

Time overwhelms space in AT&T’s ad. It does not so much eclipse space as to “fold” it back in itself to form a new kind of space. Here, for example, the spatially dispersed family now appears in its sublated form—connected by communications devices rather than actually occupying the same space. Visually, the ad makers signify the eclipse of place/space by carving the temporal frame into three simultaneous parts—one holds your significant other, the second symbolizes your baby (children), and the last is you—or at least, your hands doing the communicating. The network holds together your life—in this sense, the ad offers a therapeutic solution to speed insofar as the network becomes the means for holding together the nuclear family. The need for a therapeutic moment is acknowledged in the humorous reference to “your analyst,” which turns out to be the family dog. Of course, as Sigmund Freud observed, jokes often reveal more of ourselves than we are normally disposed to show. Your pet dog as your analyst is funny because it might be the truest moment in the commercial. It is at once a clever way of acknowledging the necessity of some therapeutic time and space in a world as hectic as this one is, while also admitting that maybe things aren’t so socially and psychologically perfect. After all, if the only one you can really talk to honestly is the dog.. hmmm, how much good is a new package of communications services going to do?

AT&T defines its new product as a highly flexible, customized communications solution for “the way you live.” They name their service, “the personal network.” What is the relationship between self and network? AT&T sounds confident that whatever its nature, it will change “forever, the way you communicate.” The last scenes offer a visual representation of the new way of communicating—the relationship conducted between two mobile communications

users. Wireless and mobile, they chat and correspond in transit. Making use of otherwise “wasted” time, they redefine the way they communicate. Is it any accident that the male in this pairing appears as an isolated individual in the most abstracted of spaces?

Saving Time and Accelerated Consumption

“It goes real fast but it sure feels good.”

“It goes real fast but it sure feels good.”

“It goes real fast but it sure feels good.”

– Reverend Horton Heat “Texas Rockabilly Rebel”

Given the obvious consumption bias of most advertising, it is hardly surprising that a major pitch concerning time has to do with speed of delivery, speed of service, speed of cook time, speed of bill paying. This Chase Bank ad takes a carefree, almost humorous, approach to touting their on line banking service as giving you, the consumer, “more time bonding” which is visually defined as having fast and furious fun with your loved ones.

In this narrative, one gets to pursue pleasure frenetically with one’s “honey” or children or pets. people’s leisure consumption space is defined as a are free to spend less time with their money and more time with their honey. With new Chase on line banking, it’s so easy to check balances, transfer money, pay bills [pause]—on your time, wherever you are. So spend less time banking and more time bonding. Open a Chase better banking account and get free Chase on line banking. Chase. The right relationship is everything. realm of freedom—a freedom from the demands of managing money, especially the amount of free time that it consumes. But with Chase’s on line banking service, people “all the world over” can now be “free to spend less time with their money” (the world of necessity) “and more time with their honey” (the world of personal choice). Or, as they put it, banking made “easy.” The promise of well managed technology once again claims to increase our spheres of freedom by giving back to us our time, wherever we are.

Notice how, in the ad, the time of bill paying becomes calmer and slower, and seems almost to be ceasing, while the time of being with one’s loved ones accelerates. People like us zoom along in these scenes, carrying canoes over their heads, devouring pizza and pancakes, being “wacky” and fun. The pace of their consumption seems to be linked to the pleasure they appear to be experiencing. Speed, as it is represented here, signifies both personal mobility and thrilling pleasures.

You must have wondered by now about why leisure would need to be consumed in such accelerated bursts? What background assumptions premise your interpretation of this ad? Go back through it now, if you would, and consider the assumptions the ad makes about you. How does it address you? What does the ad assume, if anything, about the amount of time spent working and the amount of time spent on taking care of the many necessities of daily life? And how are these related to family, leisure and the subject of personal freedom?

Our own interpretation of the ad begins with Juliet Schor’s (1991) study, *The Overworked American*. Schor’s research debunks the notion that Americans have progressively more free time at their disposal. In the last decade, hours worked per week have actually increased, making home life a bit more harried. Moreover, an increasing number of households depend on more than one income. Here it is not simply a matter of working more, but also a matter of integrating schedules. And when we factor in the necessity of ‘reproduction’ activities (cleaning, washing, cooking, repairing, shopping, and indeed, paying bills), free time becomes even scarcer. Hence, it makes some sense to represent consumption as a time of energetic expression. But there is another dimension to this as well. There is a sense in which such representations address the reality of consumption oriented to immediate gratification—the satisfactions of such consumption are relatively short lived, and even at that, incessant pursuit of immediate gratification may indeed contribute to a declining half life of consumption based gratifications. No single act of consumption is sufficient to achieve satisfaction; rather consumption must be engaged continuously. Here the immediacy of frenetic gratification forms the flip side of political economic necessity—for the economy to function efficiently there must be ever expanding consumption. Speed is fun, as the lyrics from The Reverend Horton Heat emphatically declare. And while excessive speed may strike some as rebellious, it also takes shape in the underbelly of conformist consumption. As repetitive as they are is, the lyrics speak to more than just the pleasure of speed; they also speak to hyperactive addiction.

Capital's Codes of Speed

The twentieth century witnessed accelerating speed in both the capital accumulation process and the cultural circulation process necessary to keep a system of commodities continuously moving along—relentlessly spurred along by the pressure of reporting ever improving fiscal quarter after fiscal quarter. And not just moving along, but growing at a rate that attracts investors who seek the high multiples of price/earnings ratios. Inflated multiples represented very high expectations of future earnings, which in turn spurs pressure to grow profits in a clockwork fashion.

In this institutional framework we conceptualize advertising as promoting a “cultural economy of signs.” We believe that the cultural economy bears a structural resemblance to the conventional economy which gave birth to it. Advertisers seek to invest goods and services with iconic difference and value to make them stand out. The more vigorously sponsors compete, the greater their risk of oversaturating image markets. In this competitive image environment, companies resort to more and more rapid image turnover. A frenetic competition has unfolded amongst the corporate advertising industry as they race to stylistically differentiate the value of one good (a commodity) over another. Advertising is an industry that tries to build values by rearranging “the meanings of things. By tearing “meanings” from their contexts and stitching them back together advertising seeks to establish commodity symbols. But the constant circulation of cultural references needed to serve these engines of profit also runs the risk of devolving into a stew of meaninglessness.

For most of the twentieth century, critical social thinkers worried about the consequences of organizing cultural spheres of meaning around the operating logic of the commodity form. After nearly a century of treating culture as a range of commodities, we now confront additional layers of historical self contradictions that have taken shape around the practices of commodity culture. Treating culture as a system of commodities seems to have followed a similar path of contradictions to those Karl Marx outlined in the 1857 *Grundrisse* when speaking about a capitalist economy of industrial production. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973) demonstrated from one angle after another how the structures of capitalist markets prompt social contradictions that, left untended, might undermine institutions of commodity relations.

During the 20th century, commodity culture came to dominate, first in the US, then in Europe and now globally. In discussions of globalization, the term “Americanization of culture” generally refers to this commodity culture, which grew up first in the US mass media. In our view, this hallmark of the transition to late capitalism shows how the sphere of symbolic interaction has of necessity become increasingly central to the capitalist mode of production. This means that the reproduction of Meaning through languages, whether spoken, or written, or pictorial has become a central part of the process of generating and reproducing value in the global capitalist system.

We have discussed these processes extensively in *Sign Wars* (1996) and *Nike Culture* (1998). We have argued that the systematic rerouting of symbolic meaning toward the service of building exchange value lends itself to the dispersion and fragmentation of Meaning. This is because processes of cultural commodification feed an accelerating circulation of meaning in the sphere of culture.

The technology of digital reproduction has transformed industry after industry, and it now drives markets—especially stock markets that we view as public and intersubjectively negotiated social spaces. This same digital revolution has also transformed the tools for producing and displaying electronic culture. Hence in order to make our case, we must examine the intensifying digitalization of cultural space both as a material force in the expansion of global capitalism and simultaneously as a representational force.

So advertising culture is not only accelerating, it also seeks to represent economic speed as our already emergent future. In the commercials mentioned above, speed has become synonymous with Progress. Such advertising casts the future in terms of the benefits to be enjoyed by harnessing technologies of speed. Ultimately for the consumer, this is the speed of delivery—of pizza, prescription drugs, information, and movies. Particularly around the emergent Internet, what's important is the speed at which data move. Qwest ads from 1999 2000 are a case in point: “Moving at the speed of light.”

The Speed of Information—Decoding Beams of Light

Think for a moment of not one ad but the entire mix of ads that you have seen. What unites them is a common language of advertising—consisting of codes and formulas. Corporate advertising routinely uses specific signifiers to represent some form of speed. Time must be a visual concept in the world of television advertising, though the visual codes are usually supported by sound effects and music. Once time is given representation, time is never again

neutral; it now has an ideological dimension.

Signifiers of speed take multiple forms. Referential signifiers take an object that can be photographed or filmed to connote speed—e.g. a “speeding” bullet, or a motorcycle, or a beam of light. Cinematic signifiers are film techniques used to speed up motion either within a shot or externally, the length of time shots are held, or how much the photographic technique “warps” the usual relations of time and space. Referential signifiers generally are given perceptual velocity by cinematic techniques. For example, the speed of light cannot be signified without referring to the frozen traces left behind by blurred light paths. The blurred speeding path of streaming or pulsing light is especially appealing to advertisers because it also offers a metaphor for information flows in an information economy.

Cinematic devices are used to create an illusion of perceptual speed by appearing to accelerate the velocity of the moving image to the point that recognition of image content moves ever closer to the threshold of perception. The viewer’s eye strains to keep up with the movement and, when accelerated to extreme velocities, may not be able to decipher actual physical referents. The internal rhythm of a shot is accelerated by having objects or persons move quickly across the frame, time lapse photography, swish pan camera movements, or rapidly shifting lens focal length—the zoom. Each technique creates a blur. Blurring is a form of abstraction in which the accelerated speed of the quotidian disguises the boredom of the everyday (see Lefebvre 1974).

Light beams seem an ideal signifier because fiber optics utilize laser beams to carry packets of information. Moreover, the success of the information economy is contingent on reliable and rapid flows of information that are instantaneously available on demand. Companies that design or maintain networks often use the light beam to visually demonstrate the superiority of a particular network. Beams of light often shoot through electronic circuitry or across the metaphoric landscape of the semiconductor microchip.

Beams of light moving through a physical landscape have to do with meanings about the “annihilation of space by time”—about collapsing distance by bridging it with instantaneity. Here, a favorite signifier used by advertisers to signify SPEED is time lapse photography of highway traffic at night. The technique came of age in a film, “Koyanasquatsi,” and has since become a clichéd metaphor for the speed of life in modern society.

Into the Vortex of Hyperdrive

In Star Trek, Captain Kirk would order chief engineer Scotty to send the Starship Enterprise into hyperspace at warp speed—a momentary burst of light trails signified the starship’s escape from the usual forces of nature that limit us to the speed of light. Kubrick used this technique in 2001: A Space Odyssey to signify the passage of humankind through its next evolutionary stage. Pop science presentations often conclude with this abstracted imagery of streaks of light bursting outwards into a distant vortex of the future.

In modernist art and design, stream lines displace the heavy physical referents of conventional realism. Many corporate ads turn equations, numbers, binary and genetic codes into visible, but fleeting, signifiers that fly across the ad screen on streaming fields of whitish green or blue lights and enter the mix of abstraction. As signifiers they point back to the power of pure mathematical abstraction, the power of Enlightenment solutions to life’s problems. This is the positivist dream that a mathematical equivalent underlies all forms of reality, and once mastered, so too reality can be controlled. As the camera moves toward the vanishing point, this motif suggests we are entering the future at a hyperspeed driven by technological innovation. Some ads complete this cinematic movement with a burst of light, the “dawning of a new age.”

The Train as Digital Metaphor

Paradoxically, while corporate advertising for new technologies is full of images of jets, rockets, fiber optic cables, and satellites, it is the train, that early modern signifier of the Industrial Revolution, that seems to be a signifier of choice for the Information Revolution. The train speeding through a landscape is used to signify multiple forms of speed.

As a metaphor for Internet speed, Akamai uses a train speeding across a horizon foregrounded by five monitors replaying the same scene to the chant, “The Internet is faster because of us.” Likewise, Nortel juxtaposes the word “faster” over a speeding train to answer their question, “What do you want the Internet to be?” Qwest signifies the capacity of the Internet by sending a stream of fused data hurtling down train tracks that lead into the vortex. MCI WorldCom’s opening ad in 1998 self consciously used the railroad as a metaphor for the first stage of American business, and its transition via a burst of light to the networked society and global business scapes.

Time space compression is the image sought by a 2002 AT&T commercial that shows a model train traversing

from one disconnected landscape to another, depicting time space compression of a AT&T managed global network. The commercial ends with a train speeding around its simulated blue globe. While the train once symbolized the national landscape, now it speeds across scenes from various countries and continents. Juxtaposed to the train's former functionality as a mover of heavy goods, GTE uses the imagery of a train to signify the transition to light modernity and the movement of the most precious cargo—ideas—across networks.

Train travel changed perceptions of time and space in the 19th century. Train travel “destroy(ed) the close relationship between the traveler and the traveled space” (Schivelbush 1986:53). “The train was experienced as a projectile, and traveling on it as being shot through the landscape—thus losing control of one’s senses” (54). Vision emerged as the dominant sense when travelers watched the landscape fly by, even as their “visual perception was diminished by velocity.” (55)

Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveler saw the objects, landscapes, etc. through the apparatus that moved him through the world. That machine and the motion it created became integrated into his visual perception: thus he could see only things in motion (Schivelbush 1986:64).

Looking out the window, the foreground blurred away into nothing, leaving an appreciation for the wider landscape. Glimpses and glances—the fragmentary recognition of a moment and the momentary recognition of signifying fragments—emerged as a visual trope for the experience of speed as rapid transit. The landscape was perceptually transformed into a flow of discrete fragments speeding past in a continuous stream separated from the viewer by the window of the train.

How is this different from watching an advertising montage? The flow of the physical landscape from the train window is continuous and contextualized; the flow across the TV monitor is composed of disparate signifiers that, when placed on video tracks, travel across the screen for an almost imperceptible moment. The ghosts or traces of these rapidly moving signifiers register after they have actually left the scene, replaced by others. At best we the viewers inadvertently glance at salient signifiers.

In an earlier stage of modernity, Simmel observed an intensified nervous stimulation in the city, and Schivelbush (1986) notes that 19th century experiences with increased stimulation associated velocity with stress (Georg Simmel, 1950). Just as the urbanite’s blasé attitude developed as a buffering response to the accelerating pace of urban life in the early 20th century, by the end of the century audiences grew blasé, about the accelerating velocity of decontextualized signifiers that are cut up and forced through the engines of advertising. On the one hand, this drives sign wars and the attempt to differentiate advertising and brand identity from the overflow of clutter. On the other hand, it also contributes to clutter itself. Signifying speed accelerates representational flows and boosts the volume of signifying debris.

The Bustling City

When enhanced by time lapse photography shots of human figures, the imagery of exaggerated speed of movement on city streets and sidewalks is often used to establish the pace of modernity. Cars speeding through streets or hordes of pedestrians streaming into buildings or through subways are favorite shots for representing the pace of modern life.

Opening with a burst of light, a 2004 SBC montage depicts a fast moving city life connected by wireless technology. The ad’s backdrop is the architecture of modernity: cloverleaves, freeways, revolving doors and escalators. Cinematic techniques such as speeded up superimpositions, bird’s eye shots of freeway traffic, and blurred shots of speeding automobiles quicken the pace of the commercial. At times the distorted soft focus and superimposition create a ghostly Kertesz like impression of modernity with its spaces of anonymity. Here we may recognize human subjects but we are spared their subjectivity. The ghostly presences mark them as temporary occupants of non places, as they shuttle through the spaces in between home and work, between an ever more nebulous here and there. SBC’s male voiceover celebrates the American frontier experience and the mobility of modern life.

SBC invokes cultural history as a way of narrativizing the imagery of a privatized ghost culture which they promptly rename “mobile society”. Where there seems to be no continuity or connectivity, SBC deftly inserts its wireless technology to supply the image of new forms of connectivity. The difficulty of course is that in a mobile society unending movement makes the matter of social connection a problem. Rather than condemn the automated circuits of movement that swirl about in a murky sea of abstraction, SBC hails the social privatization, isolation, and

anonymity that are carried along in the paths of a mobile society—the secret lies in wireless technology.

Affective Speed

Representations like this of impersonal speed of city life are ambivalent images. While they can be framed as the heartbeat of a vast and efficiently rationalized economic system, or as symbolic equivalent of unrestricted movement within a market society, the same images also carry anomic overtones. Advertising uses representations in both ways. Usually the music functions to code the viewers affect and thus the reading of the advert. In either event, corporate practices, commodities and/or services make speed manageable. Advertising offers images of good speed and bad speed. Good speed is controlled speed or integrated speed. Bad speed is chaotic, debilitating or uncontrolled.

In the Information Economy “bad” speed occurs when the flow of information overwhelms the receiver and turns into Noise. A 1998 Invesco ad opens with a montage of distorted shot clips of the NY Stock Exchange characterized by a roller coaster ride—turbulent, indecipherable cacophony of speed. Shots whiz along in a video editing assault on the viewer’s nervous system. Jumpy camera movements, disruptive transitions, random color shifts, and lens distortions, all are speeded up to frame the realtime perceptual disorder and dislocation of the stock exchange floor. The volume and intensity of data coming at us are like riding a bullet train. The music is discordant, grating and sounds as if someone were scraping finger nails over a blackboard. But then we pause in a white light and the screen asks, “How do you separate knowledge from noise?” Ans. “Call Invesco.” The mood suddenly becomes relaxed and quiet; the corporation buffers the investor from the stress of the accelerated information flows.

Northern Light, a corporate search engine, uses the cinematic devices of montage and blurring to demonstrate the difference between a blizzard of data and the precision of knowledge. A lone individual enters a white walled isolation chamber. He pushes “enter” on the keyboard and a woman intones, “World Wide Web.” Suddenly, accelerated information flows traverse the walls and the ceiling of the cubicle, surrounding him in a totality of humankind’s recorded discoveries. The sound effects are again grating, discordant, disorderly and stormy. In the Information Society there is no escape from too much information too fast. The walls flicker with a myriad of informational forms: symbols from ancient peoples, mathematical formulae, computer program binary encodings, cells and skeletal forms, suggesting that all knowledge is immediately available. But how does one make sense of so much meaning when there are no spaces between the meaning, when all the senses of meaning blend into one massive sense? Northern Light organizes the info stream into manageable categories. As the music softens, icons appear on the wall: artificial intelligence, semantics, intelligent agents, psychology of learning.

Both of these ads use cinematic techniques to accelerate the flow of images, creating cognitive turbulence. Blurring, speeded up movements, distortions, and perceptually disruptive transitions blend together to create a synergistic explosiveness. Music functions to exaggerate visual stress before giving way to psychic relief.

These same techniques can also be used to create a human cohesion, a global community based a time space compression designed to serve the human condition. In the late 1980’s many advertisers produced hyperactive ads for commodity goods. Brands such as Levi’s and Nike were at the forefront of this genre of advertising. Heavily influenced by MTV, these commercials aimed at a young, hip, media savvy audience. In 1995 Wieden & Kennedy (also Nike’s agency) produced a commercial for Microsoft that typified this drift in advertising towards accelerating the velocity at which visual information had to be decoded. This 60 second commercial is composed of 105 shots supported by a layered voice track which weaves in and out. Microsoft mixes global signifiers with images of its software in a hyperactive barrage. Subjected to more than three shots every two seconds, this machine gun pace is supported by disruptive camera, lighting, and editing techniques such as flickering light, overexposure, jump cuts, jerky pans, objects passing in front of the camera, obtuse camera angles, extreme close ups, use of a fish eye lens, mixing black and white with color, and decentered subjects (Goldman and Papson 1996). This accelerated hyperreal style is organized around cutting to discontinuity. Photographs of physical reality flicker with the new reality of the computer monitor, simulations. Texts are everywhere, often in fragmented, multi lingual multi genre forms.

This Microsoft commercial is premised on the use of fragmented and decontextualized images. The flow of visual particles mixes the European with the Asian, children and the elderly, black and white, home and office, the natural with the urban and the simulated. Brought together, they signify access and power in a global arena. Buried in this “image in a particle accelerator” approach is a content that expresses “Humanity in itself” powered Microsoft software. Microsoft celebrates the collapse of boundaries—physical reality and simulation, representation and reality, the social boundaries of age, ethnicity, gender, class and nationality.

Like a powerful force of nature, Microsoft has unleashed its power on the world and “the world will never be the same again.” Video speed serves a purpose here, allowing a never before imagined practice of human differentiation

to unfold simultaneously everywhere across the cultures of the planet. Traditional boundaries and limits are abolished, enabling individuals to challenge the restrictive boundaries of conventional wisdom—to accept the imperative to be creative and transcendent—“make trouble.” Anti authoritarian connotations mixed with those of personal creativity suggest the demise of old institutions that have historically determined and constricted people’s lives.

Malcolm Waters’ (1995) description of a global culture as a fragmented chaotic form parallels the montage structure of Microsoft’s commercial. The hypercommodification of culture is overwhelmed by signs and simulations in which status is associated with style choices that are hyperdifferentiating at accelerating rates. Like the shopping mall, it is composed of decontextualized signs plundered from a variety of referent systems— nature, history, and exotic cultures. Like surfing the Internet, there are no coherent maps, no ultimate authority, just a cultural world in a permanent state of flux. This view of the global cultural economy is hyperanomic. There is no center. Sign hierarchies are in constant flux. While the form of the Microsoft commercial mimics this chaos, the content is given meaning by the voice over and the tagline, “Where do you want to go today?” to create a sense of unfolding freedom and opportunity for individuals located here, there and everywhere because of the power of Microsoft software.

This ad reveals a parallel to the political economy in which flows of capital prompt anomic formations—and even disarray and confusion while corporate public relations legitimize corporate practices as beneficial to humanity in general. Classical humanism modeled after “The Family of Man” exhibition is turned into a look, which positions the corporation as global, humane, and multicultural.

In a 2000 US West commercial communicative speed is equated with friendship networks and a rich exciting “packed” leisure. The ad starts with a nostalgic sense of the past: kids talking into two tin cans connected by a string, telephone lines cutting across a rural landscape, a young man stands by a fence. Suddenly a flock of birds fly by and the ad moves into “hyperdrive.” The video breaks up, suggesting an ontological leap into the future. A row of satellite dishes realign setting off a montage of disparate images— Seattle at night, a skier kicking up powder, the painted desert, hay fields. These are mixed with friendship groups of multiracial children smiling and mugging for the camera. In one, an elderly female artist photographs and e mails her painting; a father touches the image of a child on a computer screen in wonder; even a deaf child receives a text message from a friend inviting her out to play. Here the speed of connectivity empowers human relationality. The speed of montage violates the boundaries of perception.

Deterritorialization & Mythologies of Speed

One mythological representation played out in some ads is the science fiction version of time space compression and deterritorialization in virtual reality. Here territorial space is figuratively abolished by the overcoming of time. Though this vision of a new unitary world space is predicated on the accelerated development of computerized communications technologies, there is only minimal visual reference to speed as such in these representations because, as we have pointed out, there is no need for the illusion of speed when all relations can be conducted in a unified time space coordinate. By annihilating space, time is presented as becoming synchronous and unified. Harbinger represents itself thusly in a darkly futuristic, neo Orwellian style.

The space that connects those who conduct market exchanges is a virtual space. We enter this dark space mediated by a Matrix like female oracle and spokesperson who appears as the face of Harbinger: “Welcome to a whole new world of e commerce— Harbinger.net. Created by the company that helped 40,000 businesses and 85% of the Fortune 500 succeed in business to business e commerce.” Her face emerges from darkness before being multiplied twenty six fold, defining the video landscape that commands this whole new world of virtual space. Old school landscapes disappear in this style of representation, and the markets of the world are converted into a giant wall of video monitors representing companies’ sign presence—Dell, Deutsche Telecom, Genentech, BP, AT&T. As Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (2000: 347) observe, deterritorialization “imposes a continuous and complete circulation of signs.” The corporate signs symbolically replace the companies they stand for, so that business to business commerce can occur in this imaginary world that Harbinger.net represents as the virtual space that will outmode the spatially far flung and dispersed marketplaces composing global markets.

Though this is a hollowed out space, it is also depicted as a completely fluid space. Notice the ceaseless movement of symbols and people even though their movements seem to lack any apparent direction or agency unless we presume that their robotic patterns are programmed in pursuit of profit. Like other ads that cast themselves in cyberspace, the Harbinger ad ontologically and epistemologically redefines the world via an array of monitors— “welcome to a whole new world of e commerce.” The monitors form the background, the new landscape, and speed

of movement is embedded in this layer in the form of mediated digital and video information. Meanwhile, in the foreground, humans perform their duties in a regulated and controlled fashion.

The monitors' prominent architectural presence suggests an encompassing capacity for a total global mediation and synthesis of reality; they form a necessary structural condition for an emergent world of 24/7 commerce. Where commerce is an uninterrupted stream, these screens do not simply evoke mediation, they become digitally constitutive—they have come to define the nature of reality itself, they form its skin.

The membrane of monitors lights up the space, while mediating the dispersed speech acts occurring in synchronous moments. This video membrane is a communications device that makes it possible to have an efficiently rationalized world market—decomposed and fragmented into an infinite array of fields that cannot be fully mastered until re mediated through the computerized video apparatus of Capital. Here we encounter not just a series of blue flickering simulations, but the one true simulacrum—the copy that precedes the original—for the assumption here is that this is reality, but with value added!

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory . . . (Baudrillard 1995: 1)

In a world shrouded in darkness, Harbinger appears as an intensely focused beacon of brightness. In this representation of casino capitalism, like Las Vegas, one can no longer tell day from night. Harbinger claims to abolish the impediments of time and space because of the restrictions these impose on the possibility of uninterrupted processes of circulation and exchange of capital, magically compressing the time space relationship into a virtual cyberspace where none of the laws of gravity seem to apply anymore. Hence, the most vivid, and the weirdest, image in the commercial is that of a floating man, who looks very much like an inflatable balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving parade, drifting into position to consummate a handshake (now the universal signifier of a non coercive market exchange) in space with another floating hand. "Here customers and suppliers connect and trade on the net. Here business is conducted globally in real time." It is worth noting the contradiction in this imagery of weightlessness to represent the supersession of time and space. Weightlessness has been a correlate of deterritorialization and the annihilation of time. This particular imagery of floating man to represent freedom and possibility, however, transforms the representatives of capital more and more into puppet like entities, unable to control their own movements, but governed instead by the extraordinary magical powers of the new sorcerer (presented here in female form). What makes this version of time space compression possible? Harbinger is unequivocal in its answer. The ensuing image of giant telecommunications satellite dishes is shown precisely as the voiceover refers to the conduct of business to business exchange in real time.

While the monitors that form the skin of this universe display the circulation of corporate signs, all references to nations have been omitted. If deterritorialization refers to the elision of national boundaries and the authority of states to enforce territorial codes and laws, then Harbinger depicts itself as the sovereign of this new spatial universe. Cyberspace defined this way, as an absence of nations or territories, foretells the end of a Weberian sociology based on the "legitimate use of organized force within a given territory."

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000: 326 27) argue that Capital in its current historical stage can be understood as "deterritorializing and immanent" insofar as the governing mechanism shifts from fixed structures to the fluidity of "sets of equations and relationships that determines and combines variables and coefficients immediately and equally across various terrains without reference to prior and fixed definitions or terms." The premise here is the same as we have already recounted with respect to Capital's imperative toward speed as a means of reducing circulation time. Just as friction reduces profit margins, so too does fixity—whether it be the fixity of traditions or the fixity of place or the fixity of nation state boundary locations. How is this aspect of deterritorialization represented in the Harbinger ad? There is unceasing movement in the ad—the peripatetic movement of feet and legs across this dark space, along with the numeric shadows that wander across otherwise blank eyes and face. The nonstop flow of numerals represent the symbolization of the most perfect form of abstracted knowledge that permit relationships of general equivalence to be articulated and swept away so that the process can be repeated over and over again.

Once again, Jean Baudrillard was among the first to warn about how the representations of time and space were changing, and the possible political consequences of such changes. Writing over twenty years ago, Baudrillard observed that:

The body, landscape, time all progressively disappear as scenes. And the same for public space: the theater of the social and

theater of politics are both reduced more and more to a large soft body with many heads. Advertising in its new...dimension invades everything, as public space (the street, monument, market, scene) disappears. It realizes, or, if one prefers, it materializes in all its obscenity; it monopolizes public life in its exhibition... It is our only architecture today: great screens on which are reflected atoms, particles, molecules in motion. Not a public scene or true public space but gigantic spaces of circulation, ventilation and ephemeral connections. (Jean Baudrillard 1983:129 130)

An element of postmodern theories has to do with the ways in which time and space become annihilated. Telecommunications and computer technologies have materially challenged traditional, and even modern, ways of experiencing time and space. Just as significantly, when joined to the mechanical reproduction of images, these technologies have challenged the ways we represent and conceive of time and space. If we only looked at the Harbinger advertisement, we might readily agree with Baudrillard about the disappearance of “body, landscape and time,” but if we look across the many ads touting time space compression we might see this as hyperbole. Baudrillard’s assessment seems particularly attuned to Harbinger’s ad. By transforming landscapes into the architecture of screens, public space becomes reduced to darkness illuminated only by the power of Capital’s eye, and Capital’s eye shines only on the locus of the most lucrative transactions. Everything else drifts towards the shadows. Just as landscapes are displaced by the apparatus for mechanically reproducing photographs, so too the self motivated body is taken over by the technological capacity to digitize all relevant market information turns.

Deterritorialization and Abstraction — “No Sense of Place”

Throughout our exploration of how speed gets represented in corporate advertising, we have tacked back and forth between a series of related questions. We have talked about the matter of how speed gets represented. But we can break this down further. There is the question of the phenomenon that gets signified—speed and its relation to deterritorialization. But then there is also the matter of how it gets signified. On the one hand, the subject of speed is a content issue; on the other hand, the manner of its signification can be crudely thought of as a form issue. The very form of advertising, we shall argue, contributes to the experience of speed and deterritorialization.

The very medium of television advertising is structurally constituted towards deterritorialization, no matter what the subject is because television advertising is predicated on abstraction. This decontextualization process always—and necessarily— involves lifting meaningful action out of its time space coordinates. These coordinates may be reestablished or recontextualized through the framing process, but given the premium on brevity in television advertising, the tendency is almost always towards condensation and abbreviation.

In *Sign Wars*, we argued that the same logic of capital that has played itself out with regard to material objects throughout prior historical stages of commodity production, now also applies to the production of images. The rule can be stated quite simply—there is a tendency toward the accelerated circulation of commodities in order to offset the tendency toward a declining rate of profit. When the commodities in question are already abstracted images—signs—the tendency towards deterritorialization becomes compounded because the duration of images diminishes while the velocity of turnover increases. Not just in a single advertising campaign but across the whole of advertising then, there is a tendency toward a worldview of a world without moorings—a world in which decontextualized signifiers sometimes float, sometimes rocket about. This is one meaning of deterritorialization to us.

In a rudimentary way, the historical processes of deterritorialization have been rooted in historical evolution of commodity abstraction. As Marx pointed out, the money form permitted all forms of value to be converted into their general equivalent. Money of course was the universal currency that facilitated this process. When land became a commodity that could be bought and sold, the process of deterritorialization was already well under way. When the forms of value tied to that land—e.g., iron ore, coal, trees— could be extracted and shipped elsewhere in exchange for currency, these too were steps along a path of deterritorialization.

As commodities are made ever more sophisticated to create new possibilities for profit, markets elaborate ever more abstract forms of the commodity. The first of these were commodity futures which calculated the difference between the present and future values of a particular commodity. In recent decades financial capital has spawned all sorts of new commodity derivatives to hedge risk and create more potential planes or surfaces on which to seek profits. The result, as Pryke and Allen (2000) have argued is that derivatives function effectively as new money forms that not only accelerate time space compression but monetize time space relations as well.

Montage and Deterritorialization

An impression of deterritorialization is conveyed routinely via the montage approach —so routinely that most of us are apt to stop noticing. The montage is one of the most frequently used signification strategies in corporate

advertising. Viewers may be familiar with this style of ideologically depicting deterritorialization in ads such as those for GE, Siemens, and Boeing. When used in corporate ads, the montage series glance across and over the cultural and natural geographies of the planet, the speed of the editing and the music dictating our experience of speed through the world system.

The montage permits corporate ads to tie together a collection of geo culturally marked spaces that evoke memories of territory. The motive force connecting these markers is the corporate entity/identity itself defined as a meta agent. Using a fast paced video editing style in conjunction with musical orchestration, the advertiser seeks to reintegrate the disconnected and floating markers of territorial space under the aegis of the corporate sign. In ads such as these it is difficult at times to distinguish between trans territorializing and deterritorializing. Though cultural stereotypes remain as markers of place in this global system, once again the boundary locations of nations vanish. But unlike, the Harbinger ad where Baudrillard's prophecy appears to be realized, the montage rarely permits viewers to lose sight of either landscapes or bodies. Though both landscape and the body are hollowed out and turned into second order signifiers, it is clear that this representation of deterritorialization is based less on the disappearance of landscapes than on their reverberating echoes and traces— mostly visible now in the floating signifiers of language, garb and gesture.

Indeed, the montage approach signifies speed in part by how rapidly the sequences of photographically abstracted and isolated landscapes fly past. Because these ads aim to signify the global reach of the corporation by flattening the world into a linear sequence of landscapes as well as signifying how the speed of technology has allowed these firms to make distance a non issue—"No matter where you are anywhere in the world, you're never very far from a Siemens product"—the landscape remains a necessary element in the signification process. So too, the importance of the human body and its capacity for expressive gesture is crucial counterweight to speed as a means of legitimating the firm as a force committed to sustaining communal life.

In ads such as that for Siemens, these quick shots of marked spaces help create what we might call "grounded montage." Siemens uses a recurring image of a man leading a camel across a desert dune. But this desert is not about place, it is instead symbolic of the reach of the corporation. Siemens sutures together images like the desert scene to construct a montage of a unified and coherent world—a world made coherent by the necessity of Siemens' technologies. Siemens also naturalizes this deterritorialized space with a reassuring male voiceover that states: "No matter where you are anywhere in the world, you're never very far from a Siemens product." It turns out that the overcoming of spatial distance is a function of the civilization process.

General Electric has long been recognized for its stylized corporate montages complete with signature songs and signature slogans—"We bring good things to life." Cheerleaders for global capitalism, GE ads are often considered sappy and celebratory representations of an empire of peace and prosperity unified by the connective tissue of GE's technologies. Listen to and read the lyrics to the GE song and think about them as they seek to reframe the dissociative video logic of deterritorialization back into a warm sense of place.

Visually the ad exudes speed of movement, but many of its scenes latch on to images of warm, affective human relations. The ad taps into an ethos of universal humanism as it relocates "place" in the deepest human longings to touch and hold our children, to love and be loved. With the recurring refrain of "what are we doin' here" the ad repeatedly uses "here" to identify place as the locus of meaningful human action. Using the device of blurring and rapid cutting, the ad swings from the particular to the global and back again so seamlessly that we might scarcely notice the fragmentation of space and time. "What are we doin' here" emerges as a device for articulating general equivalence. Just as the money form once provided the means for constructing conditions of general equivalence, GE uses the advertising form to construct a universal currency out of images abstracted from time and space.

Speed of Representation

Our exploration of the Representations of Speed in the discourses of corporate capital cannot be separated from questions regarding the Speed of Representation. Critics have suggested that "fast capitalism's" slice and dice strategies for appropriating bits and pieces of cultural value degrade public discourse (Agger 1989). Representational speed is not simply a product of pictures of speed, but of the very process of turning culture into commodity signs. As Capital grows ever more competitive in trying to extract additional sign exchange value for commodities, the circuitry of signification speeds up. Does the accelerated velocity at which semiotic particles pass through the circuits of capital "whittle down" the capacity for critical reflection?

Just as each particle follows its own trajectory, each fragment shines for a moment in the heavens of simulation, then disappears into the void along a crooked path that only rarely appears to intersect with other such paths. This is the pattern of the fractal—and hence the current pattern of our culture (Baudrillard 1993: 6).

Speed is both a means of countering the tendency for the rate of profit to fall and a chief culprit in accelerating that process. The culture industry spreads this tendency from the economy to culture by trying to force culture into the service of commodities. The obsessive quest for value undermines the very condition of valuation, yet further contributes to the speed of abstraction and decontextualization which is a necessity in a political economy of sign value. But as free floating, weightless signifiers proliferate and whiz about in search of meaning, it becomes ever more difficult to engage in a discourse of critical reflection.

The representational structure that best fits the slice and dice signification strategies of fast capitalism is the montage. Predicated on a relentless flow and movement of images past the viewer, the montage reduces the possibility of reflective critique despite the gross distortions that are inherent in its use as a signification practice. Unless one is willing to remove the montage from the flow of television, slow it down, pause it, freeze frames, and separate sound and narration from image, the capacity for critique is dulled by the twin forces of representational velocity and decontextualized referent systems. As each text goes speeding past, what remains is the blurred ideological framework of global capital. The “blur” turns out to be the perfect signifier for the current moment of hegemony for global capital.

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