



## 3rd floor – TIME

### Human time travel

*Turn the table disc.*

*In the visual wedge you see events from the course of time. Do you notice how the events follow each other more and more closely the closer you get to the present?*

*Much more is happening today than in the past.*

*For billions of years, almost nothing happened on Earth until life arose.*

*Then it took millions of years until humans came along. Humans have been around for 200,000 years, but most inventions come from the last 200 years.*

#### **Acceleration:**

Hartmut Rosa's theory of acceleration states that the history of modernity is a history of social acceleration: life is getting faster and faster, the density of events seems to be increasing exponentially - that is: at a furious pace. But acceleration stories can also be told from an earth-historical or civilisation-historical perspective: In the first billion years since the formation of the Earth, almost nothing happened - then the first single-celled organisms evolved. It took many hundreds of millions of years before they became the first aquatic animals.

Again, many millions of years later, the first animals crawled onto land - and from then on things went faster and faster until finally the first mammals and primates emerged. In comparison, the Neanderthals only lived 'the day before yesterday' - and humans have only just emerged; it was already 'five to twelve'.

#### **Inventions accelerate us**

A very similar picture emerges when we think of the great inventions of humankind: for hundreds of thousands of years, our ancestors lived essentially from the work of their hands and from nature. Then prehistoric man used fire about half a million years ago. They started using domestic animals like pigs and cattle and practising agriculture 10,000 years ago. The ability to forge iron is only 5,000 years old. Round wheels and carts appeared on the streets about 6,500 years ago, and gunpowder was first used about 1,100 years ago. Letterpress printing in Europe began with Gutenberg around 1450, and only a good 250 years have passed since the invention of the steam engine. If the history of civilisation were an hour, that would be less than a minute ago; barely seconds have passed since the invention of the computer.

## **Acceleration cycle: The motors of speed**

**Turn one of the cranks on the accelerator motors.**

**It drives one of the acceleration fields.**

**This increases the acceleration.**

**The other acceleration fields also pick up speed and increase the general acceleration.**

*Life in our society is getting faster and faster. This can be observed on three levels: Machines and devices, for example vehicles and computers, are becoming faster and faster (= Technical Acceleration).*

*The world around us is changing faster and faster, so that we constantly have to relearn and reorient ourselves (= social change) We try to do more things in less time (= pace of life).*

### **Acceleration of life**

Since the 18th century, people have felt that life in modern society is getting faster and faster. What is the basis for this? In fact, with the means of scientific observation, one can show that acceleration occurs in three fields at the same time.

### **Technical acceleration**

The first is the field of technical acceleration. It mainly concerns transport, communication, but also the production of goods and services. With the car, the railway and the aeroplane, we move things and ourselves faster from place to place. Even the bicycle is a modern invention. With the telephone and e-mail, the internet and television, we transmit information across the world at the speed of light. And the industrial revolution was also nothing other than an acceleration revolution.

### **Speed of change**

The second field concerns the speed of change: The pace of social change is incessantly increasing, the world around us does not remain as it is. Waves of fashion, discoveries, reforms, relocations, career changes, etc. follow one another at an ever faster pace. We have to relearn and reorient ourselves at ever shorter intervals. Philosophers also call this 'present shrinkage': the half-life of our knowledge is shrinking, what is valid today was different yesterday and will be invalid tomorrow. Because the world around us is changing faster and faster, people have to run faster and faster to keep up, to stay 'up to date' and not be left behind..

### **Speed of life**

Therefore, as a third field, people's pace of life is increasing: they try to do more tasks in less time. To do this, they invent things like 'fast food', 'speed dating' or 'high-speed naps'; they try to eliminate all breaks and waiting times or do several things at the same time (multitasking).

### **Acceleration cycle**

Because these three fields drive each other, sociologically we also speak of an 'acceleration circle': technical inventions drive social change, and the faster it happens, the faster people have to run to keep their place: They feel like they are in a hamster wheel. Because they are running out of time,

they demand technical acceleration: They want the computer to boot up faster, the dryer to dry faster, the oven to bake faster. This closes the cycle.

### **Additional motors of speed**

However, this acceleration cycle is also driven by three other, 'external' motors. The first motor is the economic system of capitalism and its principle of competition: because the faster one wins and time becomes money, time is always scarce in capitalism, it must be saved like money. The wheel of acceleration is also driven by what sociologists call 'functional differentiation': Societies are becoming more and more dynamic through ever finer division of labour and specialisation; new arenas and arenas are constantly emerging in which things change and develop. But we humans are not simply the 'victims' of capitalist pressures to accelerate. We also seek and enjoy speed; for us it holds a promise of happiness and freedom that flashes briefly on a roller coaster ride, for example. Cultural scientists also see in our addiction to acceleration a form of repression of our fear of death, a panicky flight response. We all know that we have to die one day, and that we can only do a limited number of things and have a limited number of experiences before that happens. However, if we live twice as fast, we can do and experience twice as many things - we then have two lives in one, as it were. And if we become infinitely fast, we can have an eternal life before death! Of course, this calculation doesn't add up - but we usually only notice that when it's too late.