Accelerating Academia
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The Changing Structure of Academic Time

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To Luděk, Milena and Julie
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Preface and Acknowledgements

Academics today face a burgeoning list of charges: they must cultivate a metric mindset, adopt performance and productivity discipline, publish in the right journals with the right publishers, get cited and learn to exist and thrive in regimes of audit, surveillance, ‘excellence’, ‘accountability’ and business-driven administration structures, often justified by neoliberal assumptions. Turbulent changes with manifold, often ‘toxic’ implications, are everywhere in academia and the responsibilities which define intellectual and academic life (scholarly as well as administrative duties, meetings, conferences, deadlines) accumulate incessantly. Yet one thing does not change: the time they have at their disposal for pursuing such activities. Because of this, they compress their time frames and horizons, accelerate, push ahead, rush, skim, and, as a result, often become distracted, frustrated, burnt-out. The world of publishing is a litmus test for such shifts. As recently presented evidence indicates, scholars live in a world of steadily growing academic and scientific production.\(^1\) Canons evolve quickly, paradigms shift rapidly, disciplinary fields expand excessively, journals, articles and books abound, and academic texts proliferate exponentially. The publications that academics produce might, after a brief shelf life, be cast into programmatic obsolescence.

Through the process of writing this book and developing an analytical awareness of contemporary academia I was not exempted from such pressures and was able to experience them in two different settings: the UK and the Czech Republic. The shifting conditions of academic life, self-observations and endless reflections were integral to a junior critical social scientific mind-in-the-making. This book as such, no apologies or warnings intended, may be symptomatic of the times and places in which it was produced and of the specific time-binding circumstances that, however resisted, will have inevitably shaped it and myself. It might simply bear witness to a historical conjuncture of dramatic shifts in academia, and perhaps there are good reasons to read this book as such.

I would like to express my gratitude to Gregor McLennan and Susan Robertson. Gregor’s combination of sharp and uncompromising criticism, continuous encouragement, and thoroughgoing engagement with my work made this book possible. I am very appreciative of his patience, advice and time. Among many other things, Gregor taught me the importance of pacing – ‘speeding-up’ and ‘slowing down’ – in
developing a scholarly argument. It has been an honour to work with him. Susan provided crucial and thoughtful input; her breathtakingly up-to-date knowledge of globalizing academia, mingled with her generosity and personal support, stand behind some of the directions my intellectual development has taken. I also want to thank Tom Osborne for his original and provocative ideas, which have significantly influenced my thinking and triggered the overall self-reflection of what it means to be an academic. I would like to acknowledge John Holmwood’s advice and Dick Pels’s insights and critique of various parts of the book. Special thanks goes to my dear friends Rosa Vasilaki and Lorenzo Silvaggi who have continuously inspired me and provided valuable suggestions in various stages of writing and thinking about acceleration and academia. Many thanks also go to the interview participants and Al Charitable Trust who supported some of the fieldwork conducted. Thanks also go to Maria Elisa Balen, Jan Balon, Pavel Baran, Douglas Dix, Tomáš Dvořák, Adolf Filáček, Ben Grove-White, Alena Grütter, Tom Hayes, Miluše Juřičková, Milan Kružík, Costas Mimis, Laura Morosanu, Thomas Muhr, Lukáš Paleček, Mark Anthony Pearce, Benoît Pelopidas, Mariagrazia Proietto, Horia Tarnovanu and Dan Whillis, for their help and inspiration, intellectual or otherwise. I thank Robert Kiene, Adale Robertson, Xing Su and Mitchell Young who proofread and edited the chapters. For editorial advice, I am grateful to Judith Allan and Philippa Grand from Palgrave, and to Richard Freeman and Katherine Smith, the series editors of Palgrave Studies in Science, Knowledge and Policy.

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Introduction: The Pulse of Modern Academia

*The Thomson Reuters Web of Science* database (which is by no means exhaustive of the entire global academic output) lists more than 3,000 social science journals. The journals classified as economics alone contained approximately 20,000 articles last year. This implies that one new journal article on economics is published every 25 minutes – even on Christmas Day. This iceberg-like immensity of the modern social sciences means that it is going to be difficult to say anything coherent and truly general across them. Nobody walking the planet has read more than 1 per cent of their published output. Most of us have not read 0.1 per cent. (Goodall and Oswald 2014)

[Peter Higgs] ... had little enthusiasm for the changes that had transformed academia by the time he retired in 1996. ‘Today, I wouldn’t get an academic job. It’s as simple as that. I don’t think I would be regarded as productive enough.’ His published papers can be counted on two hands, whereas academics now are expected to churn out several a year, and when I ask if he feels this has come at the cost of space for intellectual thought, he says: ‘I was certainly uncomfortable with it. After I retired, it was quite a long time before I went back to my department. I thought I was well out of it. It wasn’t my way of doing things any more. It’s difficult to imagine how I would ever have enough peace and quiet in the present sort of climate to do what I did in 1964.’ (Aitkenhead 2013)
As I am writing this article, I should be writing something else: an email to an editor, an email to an author, a letter of recommendation, notes for tomorrow’s classes, comments on students’ papers, comments on manuscripts, an abstract for an upcoming conference, notes for one of the books I’m working on. I cannot remember the last time I ended a day having crossed everything off my to-do list. (Nel 2014)

Critical literature inquiring into the transformation of academia increasingly features reflections and observations indicating how diverse academic operations, processes, experiences and activities intensify. Diagnosing the state of contemporary British academia, which this book is largely preoccupied with, Thomas Docherty warns that ‘structural impatience’ and the ‘need for speed [in academia] kills learning and crushes the reason’ (2013). In his book For the University, Docherty further stresses that academics ‘now live in a culture that has no time for professional experience or knowledge … [they] live in a kind of foreshortening of time itself … [and as a result] give no time for learning or teaching or thinking’ (2011: 144). Similarly, reflecting on their book-length treatment of the changes of the Australian university, Simon Marginson and Mark Considine note: ‘What was often surprising to us, during the course of the case studies underpinning this book, was the speed and the extent of the changes now taking place’ (2000: 2). Or, reflecting on the ‘hurried and harried’ American academia, Robert Bullough Jr noted how academics now need to absorb and manage unprecedented information overload, abounding numbers of publications and fleeting attention spans of their students, which results in a loss of integrity and control over one’s life (2014: 20–22). He adds that paradoxically ‘speed and fast thinking actually undermine individual and institutional efficiency’ (2014: 22). Some writers go even a step further – not only by assessing the frenetic pace of the contemporary world, but also by declaring that classical academic disciplines assume a specific temporal task associated with knowledge production. In this respect, the French philosopher Alain Badiou reclaims the need to slowdown and warns against the dangers that omnipresent acceleration possesses for philosophy:

The singular and irreducible role of philosophy is to establish a fixed point within discourse, a point of interruption, a point of discontinuity, an unconditional point. Our world is marked by its speed: the
speed of historical change; the speed of technical change; the speed of communications; of transmissions; and even the speed with which human beings establish connections with one another. This speed exposes us to the danger of a very great incoherency. It is because things, images and relations circulate so quickly that we do not even have the time to measure the extent of this incoherency. Speed is the mask of inconsistency. Philosophy must propose a retardation process. It must construct a time for thought, which, in the face of the injunction to speed, will constitute a time of its own. I consider this a singularity of philosophy; that is thinking leisurely, because today revolt requires leisureliness and not speed. This thinking, slow and consequently rebellious, is alone capable of establishing the fixed point, whatever it may be, whatever its name may be, which we need in order to sustain the desire of philosophy. (2005: 38)

These more or less cursory observations refer to an important temporal dimension of contemporary academia and its attendant practices. This book, rather than taking these observations at face value, seeks to explore questions around the increasing pace of human and social life, speed of institutional change and different forms of cultural speed in the contemporary world and the ways in which they relate to academia.

Though evidence exists to suggest the tempo of academic life is speeding up, which may have negative consequences for professional aspirations, self-management of time and well-being (Chandler et al. 2002; Menzies and Newson 2007; Gill 2009), the speed of change and apparently larger forces of speed that Marginson and Considine and Badiou respectively refer to remain relatively unexplored. I understand these observations as an invitation for further inquiry because they appear to grasp only one of the possible aspects of the problem. Apart from the issues of time-pressure, workload and stress associated with the changing nature of the academic profession, the temporal aspects – and structural and cultural dimensions of acceleration in particular – have appeared only sporadically in the abounding critical analyses of contemporary academia (for systematic treatments of acceleration in and of academia see mainly Pels 2003; Gibbs et al. 2015). On other rare occasions when acceleration in and of academia is discussed and investigated, it is often done in pre-emptively pessimistic terms.

In fact, the destabilizing and even dangerous social and human consequences of acceleration tend to – very often, however, justifiably and convincingly – preoccupy and monopolize the emerging academic literature on this topic (e.g. Hassan 2012; Taylor 2014). This ethical
dimension in most of the literature means that it consequently considers the ethos of slowness, implicitly or otherwise, as a desirable and often redemptive (Agger 2004; Carp 2012) or progressive (Harvey 2014: 294) antipode. The argument that this book will develop challenges such causal readings. It will revisit the temporal modes of the ordering of academia by investigating the culture and experience of time and speed in contemporary academic life. The analysis will employ accounts dealing with acceleration in critical (Rosa 2013), salutary (Duffy 2009) and ambiguous (Connolly 2002; Tomlinson 2007a) terms. However, equally importantly, it must be stressed that the argument advanced in this book recognizes and strongly acknowledges the existing scholarship on the topic that is predominantly critical – particularly as it is associated with a critique of the neoliberalization of academia – and thereby is not in any way an apologetic account of acceleration. Nor is it justifying the current condition of academia – far from it. This book should not, however, be read as an account promoting slowness as a crucial and organizing principle underpinning existing critiques of contemporary academia (for such accounts see e.g. Hartman and Darab 2012; Hunsinger 2013; Berg and Seeber 2013; Martell 2014; Müller 2014; Mountz et al. 2015). Even though the book is largely sympathetic to and in many ways supportive of such arguments, it also seeks to identify and analyse specific forms, manifestations and dimensions of various forms of accelerations in academia, before it considers the issue of slowness.

There is a very intimate connection between the ‘cultured’ diagnostically-oriented assessments of various forms of acceleration (as Badiou’s) and the need for slowness which follows from them. It has, for example, become intellectually fashionable to criticize acceleration and embrace slowdown as if these deeply relational temporal modalities determine and assume a fixed ethical dimension. In November 2009, the London Review of Books (LRB) published a promotion of books which introduced and advanced the theme of slowdown (see Appendix 3). It was conceived as a micro book review that was intended to promote twelve works about slowdown that readers might want to buy in the magazine’s bookstore. The assumption of the editors of the LRB and of the authors of the books introduced is identical: the world we live in is too fast and there is a desperate need for slowdown. Personally and collectively, ad hoc and systematically, modern agents are advised to slow down and find refuge from a busy and frenetic tempo and hustle, in idleness and indolence, by taking their time, by taking it easy. The LRB is not alone in this agenda. The contemporary social mood of having no time, of ‘runaway world’, drive the bourgeoning Slow Movement which
in its various forms reclaims convivial events, collaborative projects, sense of place, aesthetic appreciation, regard for health and the body, improvement in the quality of lived experience, ecological integrity and local economies (Carp 2012: 104). Attractive indeed.

A closer look at the time-span of the books’ publication dates in the LRB’s review reveals another important indication. The intellectual and literary compulsion to challenge and resist the mood of an accelerating world is not a unique characteristic of the rhythms of the 21st century’s techno-savvy social life as the mushrooming slow initiatives try to evoke. Ryan A. Vieira examined historical accounts that express similar worries and dissatisfaction about an accelerating world in turn-of-the-century Britain. He found that ‘numerous British historians have noted the prominent position of acceleration in the late-Victorian and Edwardian imagination’ (2011: 373). Similarly, Walter Benjamin (1997) famously noted that mid-19th-century Parisian flâneurs protested against increasing ‘industriousness’ by taking turtles – that set a slow pace for them – for a walk in the arcades. In this vein, Hans-Georg Brose (2004: 8), meditates on a key problem that incidentally adds onto Vieira’s observation and Benjamin’s anecdotal comment: Is the perception of acceleration in our contemporary society a recurrent issue, raised preferably at the turns of centuries or has acceleration become an independent dimension of social evolution? The investigation of acceleration in and of contemporary academia embarked upon in the following pages maintains that perception of and discourse about acceleration, as well as acceleration being a unique modern phenomenon, are not necessarily polarized or reducible to either/or conundrums and attitudes. It might well be the case that these two realms – discursive and evolutionary – are deeply intertwined; and it also might well be the case that opposing temporal modalities of speed and slowness, stability and change, acceleration and rigidity are related and find their diverse yet unifying expression in the cultural experience of modernity.

That we inhabit a dynamic, volatile, restless world cannot be reduced to a mere impression, mood-driven mindset and assumptions of folk wisdom. Change, motion, energy are integral to what Marshall Berman called the ‘maelstrom of modern life’:

[fed by] great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class
struggle; immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurrying them halfway across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies; increasingly, powerful nation states, bureaucracy structured and operated, constantly striving to expand their powers; mass social movements of people, and peoples, challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control over their lives; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist market. (1982: 16)

Modernity is indeed a multifaceted, deeply contested and ambiguous process; it is not a monolith, but a subtle and dialectical experience; it is a qualitative, not a chronological category (Osborne 1992). In Berman’s apt diagnosis, we can note that motion, dynamics and acceleration are defining features of the modern experience. There are also indications in Berman’s quote that point to the question of what sort of role science, research and education, and by extension their institutional habitat, modern academia, have played in these dynamic processes. Many important scholars have recognized that academia is a bastion of modernity (Readings 1996; Delanty 2001), a site of reason, enlightenment and progress. Next to knowledge, creation and higher learning, academia has been central to social reproduction and cultural and scientific inventiveness. At the same time, through the generation of political elites and the economic workforce, academia has also been a key social institution for the reproduction of liberal democracies and capital accumulation, respectively.

In temporal terms, modern academia itself appears to be both subject and object of modernity, entangled in the processes Berman unfolds. Historically, it has been subjected to various external societal currents and has had to react and reinvent itself in relation to larger societal developments. In the latter sense, as an object, modern academia has also played an active and indispensable role in social evolution. Gradually, it has become an institutionalized social space accommodating men and women with capacities, visions, intentions and utopias. These men and women seek to initiate new ways of looking at the world, experiment, intervene, advance knowledge and generate ideas which aim to change social and natural environments, make discoveries that generate wealth, promote principles of human betterment. In other words, individuals (academics, scholars) and institutions (academies)
have not merely been ‘plugged in’ to modernity; they are also capable of responding to, judging on and acting in the modern and changing world they inhabit.

Modern academia thus is a force in its own right. Notwithstanding the socio-cultural and political-economic turbulence of the 20th century and the associated changes of academia, some generalizations can be made about temporality and its modern status. Modern academia is connected to, but also separate from, the wide social formations in which it is located. Different types of modern academies are oriented to different kinds of socio-cultural and political circuits and economies, some of them local, other regional or more global. Simultaneously, they are also indeed characterized by a commitment to (re)production, circulation and transmission of knowledge. Prevailing assumptions – those which Docherty and Badiou allude to – tell us that modern academia has its own temporal orderings, its own time, which affects how the institutional life of the university is organized and experienced (Pels 2003). In this sense, it might be said that modern academia has historically assumed two temporal modalities. It has been an institutionalized space struggling to secure time for thought, consideration and the slower, time-consuming and lengthy scholarly and scientific conduct deliberately detached from the faster pace of capitalist production, media, politics and their ideological apparatuses; at the same time, it has also been a symbol and an instrument of modern progress, where individual academics and scientists have formed disciplinary associations and alliances, and advocated (to various degrees, and in diverse incarnations) socio-political, economic, scientific and cultural change.

Analytical Strategy

In a general sense, Berman’s unrivalled account might be instructive for the overall framing of this account’s investigation of acceleration in modern academia in another cognate sense. Berman identifies an enigmatic vital force intrinsic to modernity that differentiates it from its ancestors, a force that generates a richness and dynamism, an impulse and desire for development, for a better future and progress. It is difficult to detach modern academia from these forces as it has been a vanguard in pursuing this ethos. At the same time, social and human developments achieved and initiated by these energies, such as the enormous scientific and human progress of the last one hundred and fifty years, often turn out to extract unwanted human costs (Berman 1982: 39–40). The ambivalence Berman ascribes to
the problem of development might also be attributed to modernity’s experiential characteristic and defining features – including, as we shall see in Chapter 1, the phenomenon of acceleration (Eriksen 2001; Rosa 2003). In Berman’s spirit, we will also see that next to the consequential human and social costs of acceleration (such as the time-pressure that generates pleading for slowdown) there are many temptations and promises related to the modern idea of the liberating and rational forces of acceleration. On the one hand acceleration may assist us, please and ease us, and bear much of human betterment (in Berman’s sense – through science, knowledge, education, progress); yet on the other hand, it can and does return as a disenchanted offshoot, an unwanted or unintended social experience, as a ‘tragedy’, as a modern predicament. As Peter Wagner also notes, many critics of modernity often tend to foreground its pathologies and ills, and decry the loss of moral orientations that accompanies modernization (1994: xii). In terms of acceleration, such one-dimensional perspectives, however, underestimate the subtle difference between the liberating/convenient features of acceleration and oppressive/involuntary speed-up.

This book will work through several themes associated with the temporal structure of academia and will examine diverse sites of analysis and forms of data. It aims to unfold how the temporal features and tensions attributable to the ‘pulse of modernity’ identified above are experienced and manifest themselves in the contemporary university. To this end, the book will show how acceleration is not only a modern predicament, but also the intrinsic feature of modern cultural imagination, and that it can be seen as enhancing and energizing experience. It focuses on acceleration as a culturally significant phenomenon – especially in its discursive embodiments and lived expressions. It does so by analytically and empirically interrogating diverse forms of acceleration; by critically surveying existing sociological theories of acceleration and by engaging with provocations, à la Badiou’s quotation above, that deserve to be acknowledged and seriously addressed rather than reproduced and fetishized. Specifically the book explores four terrains:

1. the temporal underpinnings of contemporary higher education policy discourse;
2. the subjective experience of time and acceleration in the academic life-world;
3. a university site (business accelerator) that defines itself as ‘fast’; and
4. the rhythms of a ‘slow’ academic discipline (sociology).
Chapter 1 will thematize the topic of acceleration. Only recently have prominent contemporary social theorists and philosophers demonstrated a preoccupation with these ideas, despite the fact that both imaginary and material acceleration – and related dissatisfactions – are relatively stable and important aspects of modern experience. The core perspectives and developments in this emerging debate will be discussed. As we will see, negative preoccupation and positive fascination with specific forms of acceleration are intrinsic to modernity and this book takes this nuanced view as a departure point. This approach, however, appears to be in contention with dominant existing theoretical formulations. The opening chapter thus aims to problematize the debate concerned with the social experience of acceleration by emphasizing the contradictory valence of modern temporal experience.

Many authors recognize that speed and acceleration are tied to the political economy of capitalism (e.g. Marx 1973; Postone 1993; Harvey 2006). Chapter 2 addresses select axiomatic and reproductive principles of the capitalist economy and develops a conceptual apparatus by highlighting aspects associated with structural changes in 20th-century capitalism. The second part of the chapter will examine the issue of temporal asymmetry, which has been gaining prominence in social scientific accounts that explore temporal tensions between different societal fields and systems, and also within capitalist logic itself. This problem is relevant for subsequent chapters in which the issue of temporal asymmetry will be further elucidated in relation to academia. Chapter 3 situates higher education in the trajectory of particular shifts and dynamics in the nature of the political economy of capitalism. It looks at the post-WWII intellectual preoccupation with the idea of the knowledge economy by deploying recent concepts from the sociology of knowledge and intellectuals. This analysis provides context for Chapter 4, which seeks to examine specific ‘talks’ that aim to accelerate the desirable development of academia towards a more business-oriented model. In particular, it analyses performativity of rhetorical clusters by looking at temporal imperatives and assumptions that aim to reinvent contemporary academia according to business-oriented rationality. At the same time it discusses the conflictive nature of these discourses as expressed by members of the academic body.

Chapter 5 moves on to the experiential dimension of acceleration. It presents and analyses evidence about the actual temporal experience in academic life and offers an account of acceleration typologies where each represents a distinct experiential modality. It argues that alongside the anticipated resentment expressed by academics, there
is, under specific circumstances, a scope – however thin – for positive appreciations of acceleration too. Subsequently, Chapter 6 looks at very specific actors within academia – ‘fast sites’ – whose task is to accelerate knowledge production and its trajectories into scalable and mostly commercially viable products or services. Again, it focuses on the temporality of the cultural dimension of the business ideology and the tensions it generates. It also argues that some explicit speed metaphors appear to be intrinsic to the ‘remissioning agenda’ of contemporary academia. In contrast, Chapter 7 offers an account examining the temporal rhythms of sociology, i.e. a ‘slow(er)’ academic site. It argues that new developments associated with ‘sociology 2.0’ represent important and promising re-invigorations for contemporary sociology. Yet, it also maintains that specific ‘slower’ modes of sociological tasks need to be maintained. Nonetheless, this reproductive spectrum of speed may be in jeopardy due to a different type of involuntary need for speed associated with new institutional rituals and audit culture. Finally, the conclusion addresses the question of whether heralding slowdown would be a viable political and resistance strategy against negative acceleration.
Is acceleration an unprecedented and defining feature of modernity? Or only of late modernity? Is it a sole effect of modern capitalism? Do we live in an ever-accelerating world? If so, what are the social, cultural, psychological, political and ethical implications? In the last two decades a lively debate has emerged around social acceleration as an object of systematic social scientific enquiry and these questions have preoccupied a number of contemporary commentators. Particular attention has been devoted to the investigation in three major and intertwined areas associated with this theme: (1) the implications of the individual and social experience of ‘living in a fast-changing world’; (2) the temporal structures of modernity and associated temporal politics; and (3) the cultural significance of acceleration. This chapter surveys the existing acceleration scholarship and sets the general framework for subsequent analysis.

Against the background of the overview provided, the chapter argues two things. First, classical and modern sociological canons and appraisals of the problem in pop-science and ‘avant-garde’ literature have predetermined the discursive trajectory of the majority of contemporary social scientific treatises on acceleration. Dominant accounts assess acceleration as an a priori negative phenomenon; acceleration, in most existing inquiries, is often rightfully understood as a modern predicament. Hartmut Rosa’s (2013) theory of social acceleration and his re-energized version of the Frankfurt School’s grounded critical theory can be considered the climax of this trajectory. His understanding and epistemological anchoring, however, neglects the gains, conveniences and opportunities associated with acceleration. Thus, and second, to understand acceleration as a multifaceted social phenomenon, more culturally oriented analyses that problematize the dominant discourse
are discussed. In sum, the aim of the chapter is both to introduce the relevant literature that frames and animates subsequent analytical tropes of the book, and to highlight that acceleration is by default an ambivalent social occurrence and experience.

**Acceleration as a sociological theme**

Canonical theorists of modernity and those of late modernity have already touched on the problem of acceleration. In classical sociological thought, acceleration occurred as an incidental appendix to other concepts: Karl Marx fostered the issue of turnover time when illuminating the social relations of production, but his primary concerns were the development of the capitalist economy and class antagonisms; Georg Simmel dealt with the phenomenology of acceleration against the backdrop of the emergence of metropolitan life as well as in relation to philosophy of money\(^1\); Max Weber, when unfolding the dynamics of the bureaucratic organization, made an explicit reference to the problem of acceleration (see Tomlinson 2007a: 5–7). Contemporary social theorists and globalization analysts treat the problem similarly to their classical predecessors: it is an adjunct to other important debates and reflections on digital technologies, connectivity, mobilities and the general transformation of time and space in late modernity. It remains integral yet largely implicit in Zygmunt Bauman's thesis of 'liquid modernity' in which individuals and social formations keep moving on 'thin ice' that prevents them from stopping, pausing or reflecting as the risk of 'drowning' and stagnation is too high. Manuel Castells' 'timeless time' takes the speed of systems and 'global flows' as an implicit context for his influential conceptual apparatuses. There are also important references to acceleration in the work of Helga Nowotny, Barbara Adam's pivotal contributions to the sociology of time, George Ritzer's 'McDonaldization thesis', John Urry's 'mobility studies' and even from geographers such as Nigel Thrift, Jon May, Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore and David Harvey.\(^2\)

These scattered treatments of acceleration are often made in substantial debates that aim to thematically and methodologically redress a unilateral concern with space in the social sciences by establishing a 'temporal turn' (Jessop 2009; Hassan 2010). Despite that, sociological analyses of time and temporality, as well as the relationship between space and time, are cardinal for understanding acceleration. In this book, acceleration *as such* will be foregrounded – indeed against the background of the problem of time and temporality, but also as, at
least analytically, a distinct social phenomenon. However, rather than conceiving of time and temporality as philosophical and ineffable categories, subsequent chapters will be concerned with the question of temporal ordering (cf. Moore 1963). One of the most important social analysts of time JT Fraser noted:

> Individuals and societies no less than commercial, industrial, political and ideological interest groups have their own proper times [Eigenzeiten]. That is, they have differing judgments about the role and importance of their own and of other people's and groups' times. Whether as abstract ideas or guidelines for action, all these proper times are in ceaseless conflict or, more precisely, the persons and groups maintaining those proper times are. (Fraser 1994: 4)

Therefore different temporal patterns, rates, rhythms, sequencing, timing – that is different speeds, their encounters, embodiments, implications and cultural meanings and discourses – are at the crux of the present analysis. More specifically, this analysis focuses precisely on the modes of temporal (re)ordering of contemporary academia, a more or less definable social terrain, in which acceleration as unique phenomena – not just as accompanying feature to other processes – has become significant, problematic, experienced and contested.

Pop-science literature is a rich and detailed resource for diagnosing acceleration as a stand-alone phenomenon, yet it also treats the issue descriptively and non-analytically. Nevertheless, it can serve as a valuable backdrop to more sociologically developed arguments. Not only has it animated the substantial analyses discussed in this book, it has also helped to establish a discourse of acceleration and the value-base that is commonly attached to it. These books account for a genre that expresses negative, if not downright apocalyptic, aspects of our relationship to the current age where ‘just about everything is accelerating’ (Gleick 1999); where anxiety-ridden restlessness is the defining experience accompanying the ‘cult of speed’ (Honoré 2004); which in turn results in the frustrations and stresses of having ‘no time’ (Menzies 2005); and consequently, we are advised to nourish ‘thoughtful idleness’ (Schnabel 2014). One problem of the genre is in its covering too many dimensions of social life and doing so far too superficially, scanning over complex terrains ranging from technology, the transformation of work, consumption, celebrity culture, mass media, travel, family, education and many more. In a sense, these treatments are symptomatic of acceleration: they are fast, without dwelling on thorough
and detailed analyses, unexpected of this genre of speed(y) literature. They often employ examples from their authors’ experience, recasting them schematically (but also provocatively) into societal problematics.

A similar type of projection and intellectualization of the subjective experience of acceleration is also present in, and may be deployed as the defining characteristic of, the controversial work of Paul Virilio. Virilio’s reception remains ambivalent, though rarely neutral; for some he is the pioneer of ‘dromocratic theory’ and one of the most ‘creative theorists of modern life’ (Armitage 2000; Redhead 2004; Hanke 2010); for others he is a ‘fast-thinking’ nihilist (Breuer 2009). Steve Redhead writes of Virilio: ‘Speed in/of modernity in general, not just in relation to technology and war, has become associated with his name, almost anywhere in the world’ (2004: 3). Virilio is concerned with examining the nature of speed, its conditions of emergence, consequences, effects and manifestations. Some credit him as the first to attempt to ‘understand the historical conditions of individual existence under tyranny of an unrelenting acceleration of every coordinate – economic, social, political, cultural’ (Armitage 2000: 145). Virilio’s conclusions are notoriously bleak: speed is the ‘defeat of the world as field, as distance, as matter’ (1986: 133); ‘speed is the essence of war’ and ‘war is the source of all technology’ (2009; Virilio and Lotringer 1983; also Virilio 2000a; 2000b); speed brings about a ‘derangement of senses’ (1991); acceleration leads to ‘liquidation and end of the world’ (2008). In spite of his notoriously inflated and problematic rhetoric, Virilio’s insights and provocations can be considered a foundational benchmark in ‘speed debates’. As will be shown, analytical fields discussed below and contemporary debates around acceleration have been in one way or another provoked by Virilio’s controversial observations. Despite the difficulty and obscurity of his texts, his legacy continues to be – albeit cautiously and critically – acknowledged in the sociological literature.

Critique of the fast world

There are several book-length accounts (Agger 1989; 2004; Eriksen 2001; Brennan 2003; Hassan 2003; 2008; 2009a; 2012; Taylor 2014) which bypass the previously mentioned genres by attempting to outline a social critique of acceleration. This body of literature synthesizes and, taken together, systematizes acceleration as a quintessentially modern and thoroughly (late) capitalist imperative with manifold negative consequences for the social and natural environments, self-determination and autonomy, social (and even biological) reproduction, well-being