

High Speed Society and Art

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Time in Nature and Time in Technology

The time appears in the phenomenal world as a certain duration. The articulations of such a duration in the nature are not optional, but they are predicated according to the species and they are the critical points of the specific generation or metamorphose, and also of the declination to the death. So the time in the nature is like the tide in the sea. Now in the technology the time is nothing more than the mathematical calculation of the speed of the necessary movement-duration for the aimed function. On such a dimension the time must be eliminated as fast as possible. More the speed, less the time! This is the motto of the technological operation. The articulations for various durations must be universalized here as optional buttons controlled by the machinal dictator as computer. The world where the change is far from the nature is the kingdom of the speed. In this domain there is no dignified place for the time. There will be found much of leisure, but there is no phenomenon "to be in time" for maturity, because there are only the machinal things made by the technology, which produces only speed and which forgets the time as natural duration. Where is no time duration, there is only spacial identity. Topology without chronology! It means substantive without verb. Without verb? Averbial connection? The kingdom of the sign without poem, without history! In the shadow of the glorious high speed, the time is going to die. We must find out the way for the time to survive in this violent high speed society. Let us hear the voice of a poet.

*Thinking to make it bloom in a night,
I warmed the potted plum tree with a flame,
But bloom, it did not.*

*Takuboku Ishikawa
"Sad Playthings"*

For all life, time is the dimension of the process of generation. Until the time for the tide has come, the tide will not wet the banks. Likewise, until the time for blossoming has come, flowers will not bloom. Thus the poet laments: thinking to speed up the blossoming, he warmed the tree with a flame, but all was in vain. Why in vain? Because his effort did not go beyond a tree, a thing of nature, and a flame, also something natural. In the interaction of elementals, the laws of nature dominate like inexorable fate.

However it is possible to speed up the time of flowering. But first it is necessary to generalize the time of flowering from individual cases, and to bring it about with scientific technology. When you have established an island of eternal spring, making use of glass roofs, heating and moisturizing equipment, plums will always be in bloom there. No, correctly speaking, it will be constantly the time for blooming there. If you want your plum to bloom in a night, take the plum tree in its pot to the hothouse—and if you are insistent on seeing it bloom the next morning, then exchange the pot in your hands for another pot already in bloom in the hothouse.

Instead of waiting out the time for the action (*ἐνέργεια*, *actus*) of a certain function of one object, you may simply buy another object exhibiting the desired function. Or, say, if you desire the scent of plum blossoms, you may compound a scent which achieves the same function and make it into a liquid which you place in a room, thus doing without plum blossoms themselves.

“Thinking to make it bloom in a night”—when the desire for a speed-up expressed here has been achieved in the form of a “high-speed society” using scientific technology, the situation will be distinguished by five characteristics, as shown in the above example.

The first is the abstraction of time through technology. This differs from abstraction in the sense of a merely theoretical generalization of the time framework necessary for generative processes. It is the setting up through technology of one *kairos* (i.e. one segment of a given process), such as the time of flowering of a plant. This leads to the second phenomenon: a small world, centered on just one of the many such *kairos* which exist all mixed up together in the larger world of nature, is isolated from nature and established on its own. This is nothing other than the setting up of a completely new environment, quite unlike the natural environment where the process of generation takes place according to laws directly related to natural elementals. This is a man made segmentation of the world.

The third trait is that things are treated as functional entities interchangeable with each other, and so the existence of the individual thing is ignored. And going further, the fourth characteristic is that the function may be isolated on its own, and the individual things which were thought of as interchangeable with each other, themselves become no longer necessary. One comes to desire a reality which encompasses only certain limited functions. This is a conversion to a world which completely denies nature.

Now the state of affairs (*realiter debere*) in such a life will definitely not accord with the logic which obtained in the world of the past, where, with nature as the determinant environment, there was one unique accepted mode of existence. This leads to the fifth trait, that a real change in values (*agatho-dynamics*) will be experienced. I would like to discuss these points in more detail.

“High-speed society” resulting from speeding up, confronts problems common to those which modern society, linked to technology, faces in general. However we

must not forget that here we are examining these problems from the approach of high speed. These problems, if looked at from a philosophical point of view, lead to issues such as time and space dynamics, and the individual's adaptation to or challenge in response to these.

The Technological Abstraction of Time

When we look at the process of generation in nature from a constructual point of view, rather than as merely the narration of historical facts, we can see the results of generation as following a necessary and fatefully determined historical process. In other words, if the structure of the process is made clear, then the beginning of the process need not be considered as a special historical situation. Thus the fateful necessity of an existing historical process is nothing less than the theoretical necessity of the historical development. Therefore, time, which has as its quality duration, may be reconstituted according to this theoretical necessity.

The possibility for high-speed society to abstract time technologically was shown in the example of the plum tree. It is not necessary to wait for early spring in the plum groves in order to see plum blossoms. One may make plums bloom even in late fall in the hothouse. This is to abstract the *kairos* of blossoming from the time structure of plum trees—and it is thus possible to see white plum blossoms even amidst autumn leaves. However, this is limited only to the *kairos* of blooming. Even if you were able to make the *kairos* of blooming continuous, there is no assurance that such an abstraction of one *kairos* would be able to bring about another *kairos*, like fruition, making use of the time which must succeed the first *kairos*.

To speed up the blooming of plums is therefore to ignore the order of nature. From amongst the various joints which make up the natural linkage of events in a process, we set our intent on one *kairos* which subjective human desire has designated. And through this we cut it off from the joined linkages relevant to it.

This makes clear that high-speed society has established a new order different from nature, and that this new dimension takes the workings of human intelligence as its norm, and is anti-natural. It stands to reason that in this new dimension, which takes human desires as its norm, humanity is not considered in its entirety. As a result, one phase of human life is shaved off from the whole, and progress along one line only is emphasized. This is the propensity of civilization to bring about human deformity. Concretely, what form will this take?

Consider the technological abstraction of a *kairos* like flowers blooming. In so far as we are thinking of it in relation to high speed, the abstraction of the result of flowers blooming is brought about through discarding the process leading up to the flowering. This new dimension derives from a new order distinct from nature. It is a world which brings into frequent occurrence spatial dynamics that shorten the time which must elapse in order to bring about generation as desired by nature. The time-durations involved in the work of generation, production, or labor, are a

dimension of effort, which has some effect as its objective. Therefore the elimination of these time-durations to bring about a desired shrinking of time, is certainly efficient, but it means a denial of effort.

As for the very time which is denied in the elimination of these time-durations, the existential essence of human beings is time-oriented through consciousness. We learn in our daily lives from our youngest years such virtues as service and sacrifice, and the endurance and effort necessary for work, and are brought up with these virtues. These days, in our new high-speed dimension, the rejection of time-duration amounts to driving from our daily lives occasions to inculcate such virtues.

Also, as a consequence of goods being easily and quickly produced, the surplus of the resulting goods is striking. These products then become interrelated, resulting in a surplus of things which differs from the abundance of nature, and this man-made new environment isolates man from nature.

As a result, paradoxical thinking which is un-natural, anti-natural, grows up. For example, it takes longer to travel from Tokyo Station to the Seminar House in relatively nearby Hachioji than to go to Nagoya University. This is something we take for granted as being decreed by technical considerations such as the speed and organization of the transport system. But if you think about it, the far is near, and the near is far. This is nothing less than the formation of paradoxes opposed to common sense. The use of the same word in two ways does not do away with meaning; the situation is that one is using at the same time a statement and its reverse ("doxa" and "paradoxa"). That is to say, people are living in a world in which they turn meaning backwards. This is not merely a distortion of humanity—it is its dissolution. I am in no hurry to make value judgements whether this is good or bad. I only wish to draw attention to a fact.

While the tendency in men to strive towards a high-speed society is leading them to a more efficient world, it is engendering personality fragmentation. Even before the advent of high-speed society it is not that there was no such thing as split personality. We must admit that by virtue of the existence of human society, people must divide themselves between the public and the private. And in the life of the individual there is always the division between the internal and the external. However these were, in any case, the two sides naturally provided to man's life. Even when shifts in value were intended they did not beget reversals of the meanings of words.

But a world which takes the perversion of meaning as a normal state of affairs is indeed an "anti-world." Human beings are now dividing themselves between the natural world and the unnatural "anti-world."

The technological abstraction of time as seen in the abstraction of a *kairos* takes as its premise the elimination of time as seen in the elimination of time-duration. When one thinks about it, this is like cutting out childhood and youth and joining infancy directly to the prime of life. One would lose the pathos of aspiration inculcated in childhood and youth. The fact is that most of what we desire in our

daily lives lies before our eyes or in easy reach, that is, we pass our daily lives in an unnatural society which has brought about the speeding up of desire and its gratification. While basing ourselves on these facts, there is also the fact that no man can escape sufferings and death. People are divided between these two dichotomies, and instead of purifying themselves through suffering and attempting a path which aims to transcend nature, they seek momentarily to forget their sufferings with drugs or comforting amusements, and so lock themselves into unnatural high-speed society. People come to see nature, which they are themselves a part of, as a slow-speed world, and run away from it, rushing into anti-nature.

The Collapse and Rebuilding of Space

Natural space is gradually being invaded by the anti-natural technological space dwelled in by people seeking high-speed life. One aspect of this is that the conditions of people's lives have improved, and so one cannot say that this invasion is entirely minus. However, the changes wrought by high speed in our perception of space as it exists in nature have brought about the collapse of our sense of space, and induced a turn towards a new space. This is something which I would like to discuss.

Our sense of space when we are experiencing speed is completely different from our sense of space when at rest. To give a very ordinary example, the trees standing vertically along a road look gradually smaller as they grow more distant from us, whereas when sitting in a fast-moving car, they look like nothing but slanted spears flying towards us, and if you increase the speed, they appear to be like arrows aimed at us. Our perception affects our understanding of an object and as a result the situation differs from the world of nature where it is possible to classify objects according to our perceptions.

If instead of trees we had, say, telephone poles lined up, they would still seem like nothing but spears or arrows, so long as we proceeded at high-speed. Therefore, in the reality of high-speed society, i.e. when we are actually experiencing high speed, human perception is completely inappropriate for understanding the natural world. This is to say that the classical pattern of consciousness—from a shape of perception to a form of consciousness, or from a perception of shape to a consciousness of form—is insufficient in the dimension of anti-nature.

Here is a difficult question posed by the undeniable newness of the world view offered by high speed: When we are passing with the speed of a train over a bridge lined with steel beams, what we see out of our window is a view different from the usual state of affairs of the world. Before our eyes stretches a thin steel plate, like a colored curtain, but it is transparent, and through it blink glimpses of a river, a golf course, and the river banks. We should expect the steel beams to cut off the view, and that being so, the scenery would not continue to be visible, and the whole would not appear to be imbued faintly with the color of steel beams.

But the physiology of after-images makes it possible for us at high speed to experience the magic of looking through metal. Our visual perceptions do not, in high-speed society, lead to understanding. Therefore, people act without direct correspondence to their perceptions of the outside world.

The piloting of an airplane is such a case. Piloting depends on the use of a map and the information provided by the flight machines. But when the plane is in zero-visibility clouds, it depends only on such mechanical information. One could say that our "action space" has completely collapsed and that we fall into zero-perception. Acting on mechanical information, we reconstruct our activities according to calculated mathematical quantities and geometrical lines. This is, in other words, mathematical space, the space of physics.

Here there are neither the patterns of history nor the mystery of local spirits. Such space follows demarcations (*linea nationalis*) which have lost their local quality, and when high-speed reaches its consummation, this space is no more than a world of illusion which has lost all connection to reality. But when we take action, it becomes truly more real to us than concrete nature. And thus high-speed society teaches people the emptiness of direct perception and at the same time, casts doubts on traditional philosophy (i.e. the tradition from Plato onwards). In people's lives, the space which they depend upon differs in actuality when they are at rest or in motion. Rest and motion, seen from opposite points of view, appear to each other like illusions, like regarding the farther shore from this shore, or regarding death from life.

People have lost a basis on which to establish their identities as entities, and people find themselves wondering on what standard to base their identities. In the past, people sought to base their identities on heaven, as the land of the gods (with churches and temples as its worldly symbols), or on earth with its mundane authority (with the emperor as its actual symbol), and variations on these themes were played out until recent times. The sacred and the profane divided authority between them. But these days, when both democracy and socialism are destroying such authority, once again people are wondering where they intend to base themselves—on nature or on technology as found in high-speed society. To the extent that city life continues its development, people will assign all authority to high-speed society and entrust their identities to it. However, if something does not happen, if there is no movement to maintain time as duration, and if the natural order of generation is not preserved, people's identities will end up completely mechanized.

The Transformation of Mankind

High-speed society has already transformed mankind to a considerable extent. Until the time of the bicycle, which is faster than running, the physical attitude of highest speed was of leaning forward, both feet moving forwards and backwards.

However these days, when people are moving fastest, they are sitting down. Through the paradox that the attitude of rest is the attitude of speed, high-speed society has made irrelevant human physical movement and effort.

High speed results from the desire to eliminate labor. Consequently, the fact that we are living in high speed is inviting changes and transformations in the human body. As elimination of labor through high speed reaches its fulfillment, old people stand up straight. This is because the labor of carrying heavy burdens has been reduced. However, the inner transformations in mankind are equally remarkable.

People respond correctly and quickly like a reflex to a traffic signal; they work together in groups in response to orders. To the extent that people will not work together like insects, high-speed society will not operate. As the examples of the assembly line and the traffic signal show, in high-speed society, thought (*meditatio*) is merely hesitation (*hesitatio*).

As the elimination of labor becomes more and more thorough through the speeding up brought about by machines, time-duration is rejected, and to sum up the results in a word, leisure increases. As leisure grows, there should be the time for thought, education, and reflection.

However, the leisure produced by high-speed society is within the context of high-speed society, and so it takes its basic color from high speed. Even if we wish to return to nature, or to return to thoughtfulness, in order to achieve this we must travel to find silence. That in itself brings on fatigue, and so leisure ends up being nothing more than a holiday. It is difficult to concentrate men's spiritual power and to restore the strength to devote to thinking.

Leisure is either like a festival, with all the excitement and noise of a festival—or it is like the convalescence room in a hospital, with the post-illness lassitude. In any case, there is none of the intensity here, fact to face with death, such as could be found in the morning prayers (*matins*) or hand work in a workshop of a monastery, for example. From the point of view of the inner side of human nature, in high-speed society people are only running vainly about, as if afraid of stopping, and cannot turn leisure into time for thinking.

Therefore people cannot read in peace. Books become thinner every year. In contrast to the age when people used to copy out what they read, thin little books are required that one can read and understand at a glance, thin pocket editions suitable for stealing a reading in a brief moment of spare time while travelling, say, on an airplane. Therefore, thinkers are kept at a respectful distance by publishers. Books of serious thought which one may look into again and again for years, are forgotten by the public. Universities, in accordance with the times, become crowded apartment buildings filled with small talents skilled at quickly turning out clever theses. The tendency for human expression to grow thin and cheap is overwhelming.

In thought which does not probe deeply the problems of identity, though there

may be, so to speak, the sounds of things, there will not be the words of men. In so far as such thought lacks human words on which we may base our identity, it can express nothing but thin common conventionalities, and cannot speak of any colorful creativity.

A world without creativity is a reversion to mere reflex and repetitive conditioning, and it is not far from the dimension of animal life, where, while the generations succeed each other, history cannot take place. Looked at in this way, the terminal point of high-speed society is a scene where beasts with men's faces squirm this way and that, where words are reduced to a minimum, and all move about by signals.

Checks on High Speed

This being so, we must put a brake on high speed. It could be checked perhaps by danger speed limits in transport, or limits on human pressure, or other such quantitative measures. Or perhaps it will reach its own limits, like those of a machine. Nonetheless, for the time being, scientific technological checks will only be regarded to be detrimental. There is no doubt that high speed will increase. Amidst this we must find something which will restore to us the quietude in which to revive and resuscitate our human spirits.

This is not to suddenly put an end to high speed, but to seek the restoration of time as duration which high-speed society is rejecting. This "something" must move in parallel with technological society's high speed, and also it must be a thing which not only the elite, but all men may easily experience in common. It must revive inner spiritual effort and be a phenomenon which makes thought possible.

I feel that the thing which fits these difficult requirements is art. Art can move in parallel with the fast transportation, publications, and information of high-speed society, and while making use of them, enrich itself. Moreover, in order to enjoy creativity, a unique process involving time is absolutely necessary. People will be forced to take the time to read and consider, just as they would not digest at high speed the "Tale of Genji" with the words, "A tale of love and desire between a man and a woman." Each art has its interest and its corresponding variety, and people may do more than merely enjoy themselves sensually.

It is desired that people should think conceptually. This is the transcendental experience of interpretive thought. To go into this, however, would lead into the special field of aesthetics. But the cheapening of spirit which is one of vices of high-speed society would be ameliorated by artistic aesthetics.

In the end one may say that this argument should not be rejected at once, at high speed, but thought about deeply as a serious argument.

Intellectual Challenge of Aesthetic Experience Against the Machinal Speed of Computer

Many people say that the aesthetic experience of art is really aesthetic in the sense of "aesthetic" which Paul Valéry used, namely that the art-experience is sensitive. But this is very big mistake. If you wish to say that our experience of picture is sensitive, because we can not see the picture without eye, then I must say that our mathematics is sensitive, because we can not understand without seeing mathematical formula in the blackboard, and that the study of philosophy is sensitive, because we must have eye to see a philosophical book. I do agree that the aesthetic experience of art has the stage of the sensitive perception. But this stage is found at the first perception as "rencontre" with the work of art. Since Aristotle and since Confucius it is clear that we human being can not think without something which we gain from our sensitive perception. But with only sensitive cognition we can not form our aesthetic experience. It is the task of our intellect to make the complex structure of this experience. Without grammatical knowledge and semantic research we can not understand any line of a poem and the required knowledge is the subject of intellect. The intellect knows the way of stagnation. It does not run like computer. The intellect rounds the thema and meditates it. It knows the way to wait upon the *kairos*, to attend to be evoked. Its adventic character is the principle of the hope. This is the reason why I propose the effect of the aesthetic experience of art as challenger against the hopeless rush of speeding up within the metallic world.

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