

## **Swoosh time: Nike's Art of Speed advertizing campaign and the Blogosphere.**

By Anna Notaro

*O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
(Hamlet, I, ii)  
The reality of time has been replaced  
by the advertisement of time.  
(G. Debord)*

The 'problem of time' is conjectured to "become to the twenty-first century what fossil fuels and precious metals were to previous epochs" (Shaw & Weibel 562). This paper, while sharing such a conviction, focuses on what I define as the 'dromology of consumption'<sup>1</sup> by discussing Nike's Art of Speed ad campaign. In May 2004 Gawker media designed a blog micro-site for Nike to promote the project, which consisted of a short film series showing 15 digital artists' interpretation of the concept of speed. Web logs (better known as blogs) are beginning to surface as part of the marketing landscape and the campaign represented an interesting new approach to blog advertising. This paper discusses the impact of the contemporary culture of acceleration on the phenomenon of Internet branding, and engages with the interaction of commercialism and art in the context of today's new media practices. The short films produced by the 15 digital artists who were commissioned to create their own visions of speed through a "Nike lens" (to quote from the Gawker blog) are contrasted with the discourse of speed developed by the Australian artist David Noonan. In Noonan's videos, speed has been voided of competition or a useful end. These are never ending races, infinite loops without a winner, in which speed becomes almost hypnotic, to the point where it reaches its limit: inertia.

## **Swoosh Time**

Nike is most famous for ‘The Swoosh,’<sup>2</sup> the term given to the symbol that appears on Nike products. The design of the swoosh logo was inspired by the wing of the Greek goddess Nike. An important aspect of identification is the name associated with the product: Nike is the personification of victory — a goddess that can run and fly at great speed — Nike’s corporate identity revolves around the concepts of victory, success and speed.<sup>3</sup> As if it were a living organism, Nike has appropriated the same conception of speed, making it part of its own genetic code, its own history or genealogy.<sup>4</sup> This is apparent if we consider the ‘**Nike**Genealogy’ web site (‘Nike’ in red in the original. The two words are fused to stress their symbolic connection).<sup>5</sup>

Before entering the site we are invited to turn off any pop up blocking software, in order “to enjoy the fastest possible experience”. Once inside, we are presented with “The History of Speed” — *à la* Nike, of course — and with the following short text in a rapid sequence:

Speed is our Obsession

These are the Stories that make us who we are

This is our family history

This is our GenealogyofSpeed (words fused in the original)

This text is soon followed by the image of a rather atypical genealogical tree made up of Nike’s shoes, from Geoff Hollister’s Steeplechase shoe of 1972 to the ‘Zoom Monsterfly’ shoe of 2004 (the web site, produced in the run up to the 2004 Olympic Games, has not been updated since). Admittedly, Nike has always been clever in its advertising campaigns at blending themes of personal empowerment and transcendence with media irreverence.<sup>6</sup> The Genealogy of Speed is only one of several web sites produced by the company in the attempt to use the Internet for brand communication or ‘brand imprinting’, i.e. implanting in the consumer’s memory a brand ‘node’ that links a variety

of associations - brand name, brand characteristics, advertisements about the brand etc. In this case, the sort of associations the site is meant to foster are: the global corporation Nike has 'human' characteristics, making it similar to any other living being, Speed is in its DNA (in an interesting amalgam of genetic terminology and software language code, the script 'loading Genome' flashes in front of our eyes before the image of the genealogical tree appears). In addition, Nike is just like one big family (designers' names often appear next to the shoes they produced) and workers and customers are its members.

In the end, Nike has not only commodified sport, as it is often claimed, but has also branded a crucial temporal dimension of contemporary society: Speed. Time has become 'Swoosh Time'.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, one could argue that Nike's marketing strategies, as exemplified in The Genealogy of Speed web site and the Art of Speed campaign discussed below, epitomize what I call a 'dromology of consumption', i.e. the bringing together of the logic of speed that is the foundation of technological society (Virilio 1997, 22-34) with global capitalism and cultural commodification.<sup>8</sup> For the time being it suffices to say that although Nike often presents itself as a 'family' business of sorts, this image clashes with the reality of its status as a "transcendent super-brand". As Naomi Klein argues in *No Logo*, many companies in the mid-nineties took branding "to the next level: no longer simply branding their own products, but the outside culture as well" (28). For companies such as Nike, Klein claims, "branding was about thirstily soaking up cultural ideas and iconography that their brands could reflect by projecting these ideas and images back on the culture as 'extensions' of their brands, Culture ... would add value to their brands" (29).<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The Age of Access* (2000), describes a similar process. In his book, as well as in several interviews, Rifkin has made the controversial claim that the days of the property-based capitalist economy are numbered. He notes that companies such as Nike own little more than a concept, a lifestyle; hence in the future we will be purchasing experiences rather than things, so much so that this form of exchange will seep into every area of our lives. In other words, "We are commodified. We're moving from commodifying goods and services to commodifying culture". (in Borger 2000). Nike CEO, Phil Knight, seems to endorse Rifkin's views when he

acknowledges that rather than manufacturing shoes or clothes “The most important thing we do is market the product” (Knight & Willigan 92).

According to Rifkin, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century time itself will be similarly commodified, together with all our “experiences, and even fantasies”.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, for the purpose of this paper, Rifkin goes on to argue in the above quoted interview that: “The big struggle is going to be between culture and commerce in the 21st century”. For Naomi Klein such a struggle began in the mid-nineties with the appearance of the transcendent super-brand, “as more and more companies seek to be the one overarching brand under which we consume [and] make art” (130). The next section will show how the new digital technologies have the potential to take this threat to the next level.

### **Making Art in a Hyper-commercial Age**

Undoubtedly, the relationship between culture and commerce was contested in nature well before the 21<sup>st</sup> century began. The role of art in the context of the emerging practices of advertising was discussed in the following terms in 1924 by the architectural critic Sir Lawrence Weaver:

It is quite commonly felt ... that it is rather an oddity, even a disrespectful oddity, that the artist should give of his best to commerce. But I am persuaded that there is no greater hope for the correction of some evil aspects of the industrial revolution than *the whole-hearted devotion of art to the service alike of manufacture and salesmanship; and this in the interest both of artist and business man....* The *Times* has said that *advertisement has been elevated to something approaching the dignity of a fine art.* I look to the time when the arts of display will have achieved a more positive character. They will not approach; they will have arrived...Nothing will stimulate them more than the employment in the exhibitions, and in all forms of publicity of the future, of the finest minds and hands that the artists of the world can bring to the task. So best can everyone, manufacturer, merchant, publicity expert, and the great public itself, prove that *the artist is not the servant of the few or the creator of the single precious thing, but the alchemist who brings at least seemliness and at best distinction to commerce,* and touches to persuasive beauty the thousand things of the common life. (*emphasis mine*)<sup>11</sup>

This is not the place to trace the history of the permeable border between artistic and commercial practices<sup>12</sup>, however it is significant that after many years the sort of Cartesian split Weaver describes between fine and commercial arts is not yet resolved, notwithstanding the fact that contemporary digital technologies often make such a distinction harder to draw. Here is what the critic David Thompson has to say in 2004:

...fine art is faced with a very real problem presented by a rapidly evolving technological world, which means, in effect, a rapidly changing commercial world. What actually distinguishes "fine" art from the advertising techniques that it parodies and appropriates? As a result of this uncomfortable proximity, the modern art establishment seems gripped by the institutional equivalent of existential angst. As the tools of artistic endeavor converge with everyday commercial paraphernalia, most obviously in the realms of digital imagery, video and installation, a whiff of paranoia is becoming difficult to ignore. The proximity of "high" and "low" culture, in methodology and consumption, has apparently driven many artists to make great efforts to ensure no one confuses their work with mere commercial pleasure...The aversion to being associated with the commercial world, except as an ironic commentary, could be viewed as a kind of "credibility anxiety", a fear among many artists that, should their work be stripped of its artistic context, very little would remain.<sup>13</sup>

Artists have used computers to make art since such machines have been around and it is interesting that one of the sites that functions as an archive for some of their productions uses the category 'fine arts' in conjunction with the word computer<sup>14</sup>. The Internet in particular has proven to be an exciting tool for artists, filmmakers, graphic designers etc., promoting collective forms of authorship<sup>15</sup> and interactive engagement with the public. Today, however, the question is whether the cyberspace imaginary will become a highly monitored and regionalized social space or whether the Internet will retain its radical potential for independent endeavors and ideological exchange. With these opposing scenarios in mind, the political implications of the Internet as a social network, and the role of media in general, present rich issues for creative and critical cultural production. Since the late 1990s, Weblogs, or 'blogs' in particular have been at the forefront of creative and critical cultural production. They are a site of online communication that has sprung up in the margins around several forms of mainstream public discourses and

professional communication practices. In this context, it is not surprising that, when Gawker Media designed the blog microsite for Nike to promote the company's Art of Speed project for a month between May-June 2004 —such ephemerality is particularly appropriate when promoting speed — the initiative caused quite a stir among media analysts and bloggers alike.<sup>16</sup>

Marketers have been quick to recognize the potential of the Web as a word-of-mouth enabler ('viral marketing' is the preferred term)<sup>17</sup>, but their success in using it in this way has been mixed. In 2003 the corporation Dr Pepper/7Up attempted to recruit bloggers to launch its new product 'Raging Cow' but the attempt backfired.<sup>18</sup> The question of branding the so-called blogosphere — a term coined by William Quick (2001) to indicate the "intellectual cyberspace that bloggers occupy" — is a controversial one. According to one analyst, "The response to the Nike's sponsored blog has been extremely positive. As with anything on the Web, there are some purists who resist the notion of commercializing blogs — much the same way some people reacted to banner ads a few years ago — but it's steps like these that legitimize the medium and help ensure it's here to stay" (Park). It is also argued that "The fractious media environment and audiences growing resistance to marketing messaging are *forcing* marketers to look to any virgin territory they can in which to place their messages and catch our attention. What one appreciates about Nike's method is that they seek to be part of the flow experience rather than be an interruptive force" (Ibid. My emphasis). Most experts agree that "blogs are starting to find their way into the marketing landscape because everything that has the potential for being a public vehicle of communication can inevitably be part of that landscape" (Ibid). The fact is that blogs, in essence, are personal expressions that have nothing to do with commercial enterprises<sup>19</sup>, as a consequence:

To let companies co-opt that is to undermine the very power blogs have that are attracting marketers to them in the first place. Savvy marketers know this, so they start their own blogs, as is the case for Art of Speed on Gawker. But there is nothing very authentic (or special) about a marketer putting up a Web site in support of a product, which is essentially all this is (Ibid.).

For Nike, as well as for other big companies that have linked their brand names to ‘arty’ products on the web<sup>20</sup>, “the blog experiment is only a drop in a marketing ocean, a narrow-cast tactic being employed to engage a quality audience, not a certain quantity of audience” (Oser). In the end, the fact that Nike is not going to see a massive increase in revenue is not important. What matters is the fact that they are going to generate some “good feelings and low-level buzz” (Ives). The Art of Speed blog did exactly that, with its cool, speed related trivia and, above all, with the film series showing 15 digital artists’ interpretation of the concept of speed. Although the blog had no direct advertising for Nike, it did have a banner ad linking to Nike’s main web site (www.nike.com) and the swoosh symbol appeared prominently. The site was so ‘cool’ that, as one reads in the last posting, it was visited every day by “several hundreds of bored Adidas employees”. The mix of young talent, digital film-making and blogging was irresistible even for the competition!



Gawker Media blog site for Nike (reproduced with permission)

Before being launched on the Gawker’s blog,<sup>21</sup> the Art of Speed project first appeared on Nike’s own web site, where we have a reiteration of some familiar themes already discussed with reference to the Genealogy of Speed site: the ‘obsession’ with speed, the image of the ‘humanized’ super-brand, which has come a long way from its legendary humble origins in a garage laboratory to the contemporary virtual Lab (the Nike main

web is also known as Nike lab, <http://www.nike.com/nikelab/>). Once again economics and culture are presented as intertwined. In the following brief statement regarding Nike's design philosophy — *The perpetual development of lighter, more flexible and resilient materials. The sculpting out of extraneous components. The shaving of hundreds of seconds. This is the Art of Speed. And it culminates in the Nike Mayfly (the featured product)* — we notice an increasing emphasis on “artsy” metaphors and terminology (i.e. the ‘sculpting out’). This is a design philosophy which is uncannily akin to Michelangelo's philosophy of “sculpting out extraneous components” in order to liberate the ideal form hidden inside a piece of marble. In Nike's case the aim is “the shaving out of hundreds of seconds”. Speed, it would seem, is the measure of all progress for Nike, the most democratic of brands. Speed has become art and, as often is the case with art, it also imitates nature. This is exactly what the Mayfly shoe, the featured product on the web site, does. Such a shoe, just like the insect from which its name is derived, is so light that has only an ephemeral existence, the time/space of a marathon (a classical reference which is well in keeping with Nike's sporting ethos).<sup>22</sup> As Celia Lury (1999) acutely points out, the durability of the product is independent of the durability of the brand. It is also worth noting that the featured product, the commodity itself, is *literally* an artistic creation: when we click on ‘launch the exhibition’, the Mayfly quickly appears out of the videos that make up the Art of Speed exhibition.<sup>23</sup>

As for the 15 digital artists involved in the project, they are as diverse as their results suggest, combining multi-media backgrounds in filmmaking, graphic design and architecture, among other disciplines. Still, they have something in common with each other, and with Nike, of course: “A desire to innovate and a willingness to push – and even cross – the boundaries of their craft”. I will omit here a discussion of the aesthetic merits of the 15 works presented. Overall, they are both an exploration and a celebration of what speed means to the human experience. Significantly, Nike having appropriated Speed and made it part of its DNA, human experience itself is (in)corporated into the ‘transcendent super-brand’ sphere of influence, in a new ‘dromology of consumption’. The risk is that “we become collectively convinced not that corporations are hitching a ride on our cultural ...activities, but that creativity...would be impossible without their

generosity” (Klein, 35). Not surprisingly, the digital artists involved in the Art of Speed fall short of mentioning such preoccupations in the interviews released in connection with the launch of the project. One of such artists, Saiman Chow — co-author with Han Lee of ‘Oggo’, an eye-popping animation of adrenaline cells, named ‘oggo’, each outdoing each other in a race that shows how speed is ruthless and relentless — talks enthusiastically of his Nike commission experience. In his words, he was never told “you have to sell this!” Instead he was given a theme — in his case Speed and the related ones ‘Rush and Repetition’ and left alone to work on them freely. Nike was “super open” to his ideas and once he presented them with his project, they simply said, in pure Nike self-empowering style, “Great, do it!”<sup>24</sup> Chow seems to walk on thin ice or, worse, to suffer from selective amnesia, when he seems to distance himself from commercial artists working in advertising — whose commission would state in clear terms “you have to sell this!” He ‘forgets’ that Nike is not sponsoring his creative efforts ‘for the sake of it’, but to sell shoes (admittedly, not in as massive quantities as other ad campaigns using different media aim at doing). ‘Oggo’ is a standout piece in the Art of Speed project. It presents an amazingly rich animation style, using a massive collection of images and illustrations that sew together a visual story comprised of iconic social, cultural and historical references. One cannot help wondering, though, whether the landscapes created — all comprised of shoes and shoe parts, some even featuring recognizable models like the ‘Zoom Miler’ shoe – would have been imagined any differently, were Nike not the sponsor.<sup>25</sup>

But perhaps we are missing the point here. Maybe we should not be asking such questions and simply enjoy the visual feast of kinetic psychedelia that ‘Oggo’ presents. Or perhaps the exact opposite is true and questions still need to be asked because there might be lessons to be learned from the past. The debate about commercialism and the arts echoes the one about art and power that had art critics at loggerheads for years, blinding them, in some cases, to the aesthetic merits of artists such as the Italian Futurists (whose obsession for Speed is only matched by Nike). In other words, the (digital) avant-garde of today might be as subservient to the power of big corporations, as (some of ) those in the 1920s-1930s were to the power of the totalitarian state.<sup>26</sup> In a short piece

included in the catalogue of the exhibition Art and Power (Howard Gallery, London October/January 1996) David Elliott elaborates on the age-old question of the autonomy of art:

Like all ideals, complete artistic autonomy is impossible, but it is a symbol which should be cherished. For a free society, art is both a reflection of its complexity and an intimation of its capacity for change. As a result, modern art –almost by definition – has an incompatible or critical relationship with the culture in which it is made. In a politics of totalitarianism...it is easy to overlook its value. But like a canary down a coalmine, its state...maybe an indicator of potential disaster. In the world of metaphor which art resolutely occupies, the health of the canary is of the greatest importance; the essence (and paradox) of the autonomy of modern art is that it should be valued not only for itself but also as a sign and guarantor of other freedoms – particularly when it turns to peck the hand that solicitously tries to feed it (35).

The short films that make up the Art of Speed project fall short of pecking the hand that feeds them. Even when they might appear to do so, as in ‘The Shortest Race’ by Jonathan Miliott and Cary Murnion, which flips the idea of an athletic event on its head with a ‘race’ of just one stride, precisely 39.9 inches, from start to finish, the films don’t engage in the sort of subversion that would get Nike worried.<sup>27</sup>

This whole debate, which is only briefly sketched here, is all about lines that should not be crossed ‘for art’s sake’ or for the sake of ‘other freedoms’ — to quote from Elliott’s point above — and yet, as Peter Lunenfelds reminds us, that is exactly what artists do: *they cross lines*. His reasoning, tinged with personal frustration, is worth quoting at length:

I’m regularly misunderstood on this point. It’s not that art and commerce are the same thing, just that all art exists in relation to the economic activity of its era. After Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, it’s impossible to speak of lines between art and commerce that ‘shouldn’t be crossed,’ because, after all, that one of the things artists do -- cross lines. For thirty years or more, art historians and critics have been hashing this out, and it’s pretty hard to ignore this fairly obvious point when you talk about the complex intertwining of art, design and commerce in the realm of the digital. (Christopher)

As Laurent Jenny observed a generation ago, whenever new technological possibilities come into the hands of artists “there is a tendency for the various arts to blend into one another. This occurs not only stylistically and thematically but also technically. In other words, modernist inter-textuality explodes into a post-modernist inter-mediality”. (Qt. in Wood) What is important to stress is that the ‘blending’ of the various arts, as envisaged by Jenny thirty years ago, finds a contemporary parallel in Lunenfeld’s ‘obvious point’: i.e. the interweaving of “art, design and commerce in the realm of the digital”. In this light, I think that Weaver’s 1924 definition — quoted in the previous section — of the artist as “not the servant of the few or the creator of the single precious thing, but the alchemist who brings at least seemliness and at best distinction to commerce”, might still be of some use today. The fifteen artists selected for Nike’s Art of Speed ad campaign are the new ‘alchemists’ of the digital age. They faced a difficult challenge: how to become ‘Imagineers’, i.e. the producers of images for consumer culture, while salvaging art, creativity and freedom from the sameness of market commodification, thus avoiding, in Simmel’s words, being “swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism” (Qt. in Mathews). Unfortunately they were not entirely successful, since they were ultimately swallowed up by the ‘dromology of consumption’ mechanism outlined above. Nike, the most dromocratic of brands, the corporation with Speed in its DNA, commissioned these fifteen young talents to celebrate its own branding identity. Digital art became complicit in ‘selling’ us consumption as the only way to live, and in viewing consumer identities as the only way to be. The next section will provide a rather different example of the artist as ‘imagineer’.

Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (and Time)  
Culture is moving into what I call a visual velocity.  
Sometimes I wake up and I think to myself that it  
Looks like it’s going to be a 60 mph day.  
(S. VanDerBreek)

While the fifteen artists of the ‘Art of Speed’ project framed their purpose within the easily recognizable armature of new media: interactivity, multimedia, and the inclusion of the sponsoring brand’s products in their work, David Noonan is the kind of artist whose predilections are toward more singular metaphysical problems. His work is not

focused on evoking the discourse of advertising or marketing. Noonan's career encompasses over fifteen years of experimentation, throughout which he has worked with a wide range of media and a variety of topics.<sup>28</sup> In 1994 with his video work 'Unique Forms of Continuity in Space', Noonan approached the subject of speed from a contemporary perspective, wherein the pace is set by the virtual world of digital reality. His obvious influence is Italian Futurism. However, as Huppertz argues, Noonan's work seems "to be more of a critique of contemporary values than an homage to the art they created. Using videos and stills from fast-paced contemporary sports, Noonan closes in on the contemporary discourse of speed" (Huppertz).

Noonan's 'Unique Forms of Continuity in Space' is named after Umberto Boccioni's famous sculpture, which was produced in 1913, the same year that he also produced the painting 'Dynamism of a Cyclist'. Boccioni's 'Unique Forms of Continuity in Space' is a three-dimensional sculpture depicting a barely discernable human figure in motion, in the process of becoming something else. The figure bears an underlying resemblance to a classical work over 2,000 years old, the 'Nike of Samothrace'.<sup>29</sup> There, however, speed is encoded in the flowing stone draperies that wash around, and in the wake of, the central figure of the work. In Boccioni's sculpture, the body itself is reshaped, as if the new conditions of modernity were producing a new man.

Noonan's four-minute video loop 'Unique Forms of Continuity in Space' reworks a typical Futurist theme — the human form depicted as an inextricable part of a machine dedicated to speed — by tracking a competition cyclist around a velodrome. As Huppertz puts it:

In Noonan's videos, speed has been negativised or neutralised of competition or useful end. These are infinite races, loops of infinity without a winner. The Futurist project was the first attempt to subordinate the energy and intensity of the machine age to the reasonable mind, to arrest speed in two or three dimensions. At the end of the 20th century, the limits of physicality have been reached, and are repeated in the negation of matter through speed. In Noonan's videos, speed is hypnotic to the point where the cyclist appears to be barely moving. He reaches the ultimate limit of speed – inertia (Huppertz 1997).

Noonan's infinite race also focuses on the mechanistic movements of technological bodies in space.

The human body becomes part of a projectile, a machine of maximum efficiency and precision. Through training, discipline and control, the human body is 'improved'. With the streamlined continuity of body suits and helmets, human beings are not using machines as a tool but *becoming machines*. ...The human body is merely a functional unit in a speed machine dedicated to the economy of time (Ibid. My emphasis).

This is the aesthetics of the cyborg, a figure first defined by Haraway as “a cybernetic mechanism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (149), which has become a familiar figure in many different incarnations in popular media.

The new economy of the late 20th century is also addressed in another of Noonan's cycling videos, 'Omega Time' in which “mechanical timekeeping devices, with their complex cogs and tiny screws, become worn; they 'lose time'. Digital time promises to overcome the potential inaccuracies of the physical world by inching closer to the infinite present. This virtual world of ones and zeros is the latest attempt to master the physical world through technology” (Huppertz).

## **Conclusions**

This paper has discussed what I have defined as the new 'dromology of consumption' in the context of Nike's Art of Speed ad campaign, launched in May 2004 by Gawker media via a specifically produced blog micro-site. The Art of Speed ad campaign was the culmination of Nike's long-standing efforts to 'in-corporate' the concept of speed within its own 'corporate image'. The short films produced by the fifteen digital artists involved in the ad campaign have been considered not for their aesthetic merits, but in the light of contemporary practices of Internet branding, practices that have revived the age old discussion about commercialism and the autonomy of art. The essay has finally contrasted the above-mentioned artists' vision of speed through a 'Nike lens' with the discourse of speed by the Australian-born artist David Noonan. His reference to the Futurists is an ironic reminder of the dangerous continuities between the rhetoric of the

earlier avant-garde and that of the new, digital artists. Such dangers arise when art and technology conjure up images of a digital utopia wherein “the holy pursuit of speed through technology has become a common sense, value-free model of thought” (Huppertz). Noonan’s work, exempt from the pressurizing language of advertising, invites us to slow down, so that we can ask the most urgent questions about the politics of technology, the role of new, inter-mediated artistic practices and finally the future of our increasingly mechanized bodies. What we need is a ‘go slow’ ad campaign; too bad Nike has run one already.<sup>30</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Virilio is the inventor of the term 'dromology' — from 'Dromos' the Greek word to race, meaning: the science (or logic) of speed. For Virilio the logic of speed is the foundation of technological society and is important when considering the structuring of society in relation to warfare and modern media. He notes that the speed at which something happens may change its essential nature. See his *Speed & Politics: An Essay on Dromology* New York: Semiotext(e), 1977 [1986],

<sup>2</sup> The Swoosh trademark was created in 1971, for a fee of USD 35, by Carolyn Davidson, a graphic design student. The evolution of Nike's logo is emblematic of the logic of the sign economy. It "began as an arbitrary drawing which possessed no intrinsic meaning whatsoever, has grown to the point that it now expresses a philosophy, and is viewed as projecting a multidimensional personality". (Goldmann & Papson 1998, 79).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that before it meant velocity the Old English 'spede' or 'sped' meant something more like success and prosperity.

<sup>4</sup> Nike's Genealogy reflects the construction of a linear historical development and it is obviously diametrically opposed to Foucault's subtle deconstruction of this concept as discussed in his "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977). The article is available online at <http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk/ngh.pdf>. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this paper for drawing my attention to this point.

<sup>5</sup> View at <http://www.nike.com/speed/genealogy/detect.html>

<sup>6</sup> On this point see Goldmann & Papson's *Nike's Culture* (1998) for a clever deconstructive analysis of the themes and structures of Nike's advertising that outlines the contradictions between image and practice, and explores the logic of the sign economy.

<sup>7</sup> A parallel could be drawn between the branding of time by the Swiss watch company Swatch, see their 'Swatch beat' web site at [http://www.swatch.ch/fs\\_index.php?haupt=collections&unter=beat](http://www.swatch.ch/fs_index.php?haupt=collections&unter=beat) and Klein's brief discussion of it in *No Logo*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting discussion of the neglected dimension of the political economy of speed (dromoeconomics) which recognizes the centrality of speed in contemporary societies in conjunction with “relationships of power, of exploitation ... and the accelerating characteristics of the work and market places in global capitalism”, see Armitage and Graham, “Dromoeconomics: Towards a political economy of Speed” <http://www.philgraham.net/Dromo.pdf> p. 23 and John Tomlinson’s discussion of ‘Fast Capitalism’ in his *The Culture of Speed*. London: Sage 2007, pp.80-93. Also, consider the concept of ‘Critical dromology’ as defined by the performance artist and activist Ricardo Dominguez at the recent symposium ‘Trajectories of the Catastrophic’ dedicated to exploring the work of Paul Virilio (October 24-25 2008, San Francisco Art Institute). According to Dominguez, “By extracting the core ideas from the canon of Virilian thought and mixing them with new modalities in art and performance, a new paradigm emerges- a radical dromology for our time”. <http://va-grad.ucsd.edu/~drupal/node/642>.

<sup>9</sup> Addressing the vast debate about consumer culture is beyond the scope of this essay. Still, it is worth mentioning that Zygmunt Bauman, in associating consumption with speed, also considers consumerism as extending beyond the mere act of consumption. Bauman identifies a ‘consumerist syndrome’: “a batch of variegated yet closely interconnected attitudes and strategies, cognitive dispositions, value judgments and ... explicit and tacit assumptions about the ways of the world and the ways of treading it”. (Bauman 2005, 83. Quoted in Tomlinson 2007, 126)

<sup>10</sup> See the BBC “Back to the Future interview series” January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/special\\_report/1999/12/99/back\\_to\\_the\\_future/jeremy\\_rifkin.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/special_report/1999/12/99/back_to_the_future/jeremy_rifkin.stm).

<sup>11</sup> Sir Lawrence Weaver, “Art in Advertising” in *The Advertising Yearbook for 1924*, John Clyde Oswald ed., Doubleday, Page and Company for The Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, 1925, 428-429. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG00/3on1/tobaccoads/adver.htm>

<sup>12</sup> On this point see Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* London: Routledge 1988 and Michelle H Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997.

<sup>13</sup> David Thompson, “Death of the Gallery”, *The Guardian*, 15 April 2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,1192250,00.html>

<sup>14</sup> For the period 1995-2005 see <http://web.archive.org/web/20050405224929/http://www.computerfinearts.com/index2.html>

Also consider the Digital Art Museum, that archives works from 1956 to the present at <http://www.dam.org/artists/index.htm> and the article by J.A. Labadie, “The New Media Soup: Some thoughts on newer technologies and the visual arts” at [http://web.archive.org/web/20060630075022/http://www.moca.virtual.museum/jal1\\_02.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20060630075022/http://www.moca.virtual.museum/jal1_02.htm)

<sup>15</sup> I discuss this issue in my article “Technology in search of an artist: questions of auteur/authorship in contemporary cinema” *The Velvet Light Trap, Journal of Film and Television Studies*, issue, 57, 2006.

- <sup>16</sup> See, among others, Janis Mara, “Gawker Media, Nike Team for Blog Promotion” *ClickZ News* 4/6/04 <http://www.clickz.com/news/article.php/3363541>  
 Nat Ives, “Nike Tries a New Medium for Advertising: The Blog”, *New York Times* 7/6/04  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/07/business/media/07gawk.html?ex=1402027200&en=c11f337e8aa8cd5a&ei=5007&partner=USERLAND>  
 Kris Oser, “Nike-Gawker Deal Tests 'Art of Speed' Online Feature. A Blog That May Not Be a Blog”, <http://www.flytip.com/blogs/advertising/archives/2004/06/index.shtml>  
 Eunice Park, “A New Brand of Blog” 14/6/04  
<http://www.imediainconnection.com/content/3634.asp>  
 Tessa Wegert, “Ads on Blogs, Blogs as Ads, Part 1”, *ClickZ*, 24/6/04  
[http://www.clickz.com/experts/media/media\\_buy/article.php/3372431](http://www.clickz.com/experts/media/media_buy/article.php/3372431)  
 Nat Ives, “Madison Avenue Ponders the Potential of Web Logs”, *New York Times*, 27/10/04  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/27/business/media/27adco.html?ex=1256616000&en=c18f183b6aecc1a&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland>  
 Lauren Gard, “The Business Of Blogging” *Business Week online*, 13/12/04  
[http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04\\_50/b3912115\\_mz016.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_50/b3912115_mz016.htm)
- <sup>17</sup> Of note is the difference, according to some, between Viral marketing and guerrilla marketing, “Guerrilla marketing ambushes the viewer and grabs their attention when they least expect it. Viral marketing is advertising that you voluntarily pass around because it’s cool, not necessarily because you want to help build publicity” .  
<http://weburbanist.com/2008/06/12/guerrilla-marketing-versus-viral-marketing/>. On the more general issue of the commercialization, or marketisation, of the media sector over the past ten years see Els De Bens ed. *Media Between Culture and Commerce*. Bristol: Intellect Books 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> See Rob Walker, “Blogging for Milk”, *Slate*, 14/4/03 <http://slate.msn.com/id/2081419>
- <sup>19</sup> Although one might argue that, in some instances, by promoting the Self, blogs are similar to any other commercial enterprise.
- <sup>20</sup> See the BMW sponsored short films produced for the Internet and now archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050209074032/www.bmwfilms.com/clap.asp?template=international&country=&film=>. See also the Audi viral marketing campaign, inclusive of a cool virtual reality game, archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050828095934/http://www.jalopnik.com/cars/ads/promotions/is-missing-audi-a3-a-marketing-ploy-038028.php> and the Levi’s sponsored Digital Arts Award at <http://www.levis.com/>. Following in the footsteps of the already mentioned Dr Pepper/7Up ill-fated blog venture, Levi’s also appeared to be looking for bloggers to cast into a new ad spot titled "A Style for Every Story" <http://www.gawker.com/news/media/advertising/bad-idea-jeans-bloggers-as-models-032594.php>. In an arrangement believed to be a first for the book industry, it is worth mentioning Fay Weldon’s Bulgari-themed book *The Bulgari Connection*, London: Flamingo, 2000.
- <sup>21</sup> Now archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20040610073307/http://www.gawker.com/artofspeed/>

<sup>22</sup> The mayfly is an aquatic insect that belongs to the order of Ephemeroptera (from the Greek *ephemeros* = "short-lived", *pteron* = "wing", referring to the short life span of adults). From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayflies>

<sup>23</sup> The relevant web page is no longer available, however it is interesting to note that as far the Design element is concerned, "The actual shoe and packaging is decorated with a collage of video stills taken from the Art of Speed clips. One of the more apparent bits on the shoes can be identified as Saiman Chow and Han Lee's Oggo creatures."

<http://www.beinghunted.com/v40/features/2004/mayfly/>

<sup>24</sup> It is worth remembering that 'Just do it' is one of Nike's most successful slogans, one of the reasons being that: "Nike provides a language of self-empowerment – no matter who you are, no matter what your physical, economic or social limitations". Goldman & Papson, *Nike Culture*, 1998, 19. More on Chow's 'Oggo' project and his Nike commission experience at

[http://www.onedotzero.com/artofspeed/saiman\\_chow\\_interview.html#](http://www.onedotzero.com/artofspeed/saiman_chow_interview.html#)

<sup>25</sup> There is an interesting comparison to be drawn here with the role that advertising plays in the entertainment industry (film, television and, increasingly, video games) where plots and characters are often built around the products within them. As the media critic Marc Crispin Miller puts it: "This is no way to have a functioning culture in a democratic society. It's a way that turns all the content of all the culture industries into [a] mere continuation of advertising". "The Persuaders", interview with Marc Crispin Miller, *Frontline*, 9/11/04

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/interviews/miller.html>. See also his Advertising: End of Story" in Marc Crispin Miller (ed.), *Seeing Through Movies*, New York: Pantheon, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> What we risk is a form of cultural totalitarianism. The current situation is assessed by Crispin Miller as follows: "So we're moving away from advertising per se towards a more fundamental kind of pitch, which is what propaganda, generally speaking, always wants to do anyway. Advertising is just a commercial form of propaganda. What propaganda has always wanted to do is not simply to suffuse the atmosphere, but to become the atmosphere. It wants to become the air we breathe. It wants us not to be able to find a way outside of the world that it creates for us". "The Persuaders", interview with Marc Crispin Miller, *Frontline*, 9/11/04

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/interviews/miller.html>

<sup>27</sup> The question is, as the anonymous reviewer of this piece acutely observed, whether or not commodity, by absorbing all critique, makes any subversion impossible.

Unfortunately, I have no solution to offer on this point, but to assess each case on its own merit.

<sup>28</sup> A profile of David Noonan with reproductions of the video works mentioned in this article is available at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery at

[http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/29/David\\_Noonan/185/](http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/29/David_Noonan/185/)

<sup>29</sup> For a picture of Boccioni's Unique Forms of Continuity in Space see

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Unique\\_Forms\\_of\\_Continuity\\_in\\_Space',\\_1913\\_bronze\\_by\\_Umberto\\_Boccioni.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Unique_Forms_of_Continuity_in_Space',_1913_bronze_by_Umberto_Boccioni.jpg). For a picture of the Nike of Samothrace see <http://www.theoi.com/image/S29.2Nike.jpg>

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<sup>30</sup> Significantly, Nike's first women's TV advertising campaign (February 1993) shot in artsy, black and white photographic style "constructed the appearance of soothing...spaces within a world that otherwise seems to be rushing past". Goldman & Papson, 128. For an analysis of the significance of the various initiatives (from slow food to slow cities) that go under the name of 'slow movement' see the chapter on "Deceleration" in Tomlinson (2007, 146-160).