

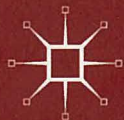
CONSUMPTION AND PUBLIC LIFE



CULTURE OF THE SLOW

Social Deceleration in
an Accelerated World

EDITED BY NICK OSBALDISTON



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Culture of the Slow

Social Deceleration in an Accelerated World

Edited by

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Slow Culture: An Introduction

Nick Osbaldiston

If we carry on at this rate, the cult of speed can only get worse. When everyone takes the fast option, the advantage of going fast vanishes, forcing us to go faster still. Eventually, what we are left with is an arms race based on speed, and we all know where arms races end up: in the grim stalemate of Mutually Assured Destruction.

(Honoré 2004, p. 11)

To keep up in this competition, the average individual needs to earn more money. This means that he or she must work longer hours, take higher-paying but more demanding jobs, and so on. *Ceteris paribus*, these processes will lower the fraction of productivity growth which individuals desire to take as free time, and increase their demands for income.

(Schor 1998a, p. 123)

Introduction

There is a powerful message permeating our social lives today, found in our self-help networks, talkback television and radio shows, and online forums. It is a warning that, through technology and modernisation, our lifestyles have become increasingly hectic, fast, complex and immediate. 'Life', writes online author Leo Babauta (2009, para. 2), 'moves at such a fast pace that it seems to pass us by before we can really enjoy it'. We are encouraged to take a step back, to breathe deeply and 'slow down', in order to recapture the essence of 'real' living. By doing so, we can escape the seemingly endless stresses associated with our multi-tasked, time-compressed and instantaneous speed culture (Tomlinson 2007). This

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book presents illustrations of how people are beginning to disentangle themselves from a speed culture by embracing slowness. It is not simply a matter of slowing down, as the term implies, but of undertaking changes in the way we do things at an everyday level. Underpinning these transformations is a concern, as Babauta (2009) suggests, with the uniquely stressful lifestyles we are living in contemporary culture.

These concerns are certainly not unmerited. The reality of increasing technological advance and the expansion of consumer capitalism is that social life has become increasingly more complex and accelerated. In particular, advances in communication and information technologies in the market, in social networks and in the work place (as well as sport and mass media) have created a culture of 'immediacy' or instantaneity (Tomlinson 2007; Macnaughten and Urry 1998; Featherstone 2007). In other words, we no longer have to wait for information; it is with us 24 hours a day. Devices such as smartphones, in particular, ensure that we are never too far from the network. While we sleep, our non-human counterparts receive emails from across the world, online transactions take place in our bank accounts, newspaper articles appear in our favourite broadsheet 'application' and messages from friends and family are delivered through our social media networks. It is not just a 'culture of speed' that we live in, but a 'culture of immediacy' wherein the gap of time and space is not simply compressed but completely transcended (Tomlinson 2007, p. 91; Giddens 1990; Bauman 2001).

The changing pace and ethical virtues of new telecommunications and 'fast' capitalism (Agger 2004) have been well studied over the past few decades sociologically and theoretically (Lash and Urry 1987, 1994; Beck 1992; Giddens 1990; Virilio 1997; Tomlinson 2007; Bauman 2001; Sennett 1998; Ritzer 2010). For Agger (2004), the market place, the industries and, of course, the technologies which facilitate them have speeded up considerably since the writings of Marx in the nineteenth century. The economies of the world are no longer based on stable, localised and ordered industries which encourage class conflict. Rather, as Lash and Urry (1987, 1994) state in their now dated works, capitalism has become disorganised, flexible, fluid and volatile. The dynamics of the market and a globalised financial system mean that local economies can fall or rise rapidly according to speculation and multi-national corporate activity. The recent global financial meltdown, which is reaching its zenith in the Eurozone as I write this introduction, is a testament to this.

These recent dramatic changes in capitalism have taken many by surprise, including Agger (2004, p. 3) who writes:

The rate of communicating, writing, connecting, shopping, browsing, surfing, and working has increased since the Internet came on the scene. I was correct, in 1989, to notice that capitalism has sped up since Marx's time, and even since the post-World War II period in which the Frankfurt School theorists wrote about domination and the eclipse of reason (see Jay 1973; Wiggershaus 1994). But I didn't foresee the extent of acceleration and instantaneity we have come to know today. Who could have?

It would seem, from Agger's (2004, p. 3) point of view, that the rapid speed with which capitalism has developed has not simply altered market places but also assaulted the boundary 'between personal and public life'. No longer are work, consumption and private lifestyles separated. Information technology means that we are subjected more now than ever to various mediums from social media and email to television, radio and smartphones. As Juliet Schor (1998a) warned a few decades ago, escaping either work or consumption is becoming increasingly difficult. Tourist advertisements depend somewhat on this.

Of course, the triumph of speed over the social had occupied the mindsets of the modernists well before the invention of the mobile phone. Georg Simmel's (1997[1903], p. 175) memorable study into the life of the metropolitan, for instance, demonstrates the growing impact of speed and 'rapid crowding of changing images' on the development of the individual. The overwhelming of the senses by the multitude of signs and symbols found in the city imbues the individual, for Simmel (1997, pp. 178–180), with a 'blasé' attitude toward things and a socially reserved persona toward other people.

Alongside criticism of temporal shifts, there were also the broader debates on the impact of increased consumerism on the individual. Frankfurt scholars such as Marcuse (1976), Fromm (1956) and Adorno and Horkheimer (1972[1944]), for instance, all expressed dismay at the proliferation of the commodity and the slavish influence it had on consumer choice. Marcuse's (1976[1964], pp. 22–23) declaration in *One Dimensional Man* that 'people recognise themselves in their commodities' is demonstrable of the style of thought of this group: that through consumerism, individuals would lose their grip on what was 'true' or authentic. Instead, the commodity lays 'claim' to 'the entire individual' and controls them through a process of reifying 'false needs' as 'true'.

These early remonstrations have continued in recent commentaries and debates on the influence and role of consumerism in Western culture (see, for instance, Schor 1993, 1998b, 2000, 2004, 2010; Soper 2007;

Soper, Ryle and Thomas 2009; Gorz 1999; Hamilton 2004; Hochschild 1990, 1997, 2003; Honoré 2004). Within these there is a common thread which ties consumer capitalism to declining trends in well-being through higher levels of stress. Central to such critiques are the pressures of time management and the penetrating influence of labour on previously protected times, as indicated in Agger's (2004) work also (cf. Adam 1995; Hochschild 1997). Popular figures such as Juliet Schor lament the decline of leisure in the West (in particular) where 'people' have 'become subject to a Prisoner's Dilemma in which they work hard to earn additional income to upgrade their status of living, but everyone else does the same' (Schor 1998a, p. 122). As a result, one's 'relative position' does not change. Rather, individuals continue to be locked into a cycle of dissatisfaction with their material position and return to the market place (Schor 1998a, p. 123). In addition to this sentiment, especially in recent times, there is the growing concern with over-consumption and its contribution to the degradation of the environment. Within this space, several researchers and theorists have begun seeking out strategies that promote sustainable forms of consumerism (see Schor, this volume, 2010; Soper 2007).

These criticisms of both consumerism and the increasingly stressful labour we are enduring are not limited to the academic sphere, however. As this book attests, across the world a growing discontent with the offerings of fast and instantaneous consumer capitalism and the speed of modern life has led individuals to explore alternative approaches to lifestyle. Manifestations of this, it could be argued, can be found in a variety of choices that individuals make in the everyday. Whether it is through food production and consumption, travel in both domestic and international spaces or even within intimate relations, there is broad evidence of a cultural reaction to the velocity, intensity and perceived meaninglessness of life. At times, this revolt is organised in the form of quasi-social movements such as Slow Food, Slow Cities/Towns and Voluntary Simplicity. These, in particular Carlo Petrini's Slow Food, are responsible for popularising the term 'slow' within the everyday rhetoric of public discourse.

It is on the various reactions against the mainstream through the 'slow' that this book uniquely focusses. While it is important to accept that movements such as Slow Food are pinnacle realisations of this, it is also wise to consider the wider narrative within which it is situated. Slowness, it is proposed here, is not simply a term that reflects organised, politically embedded social movements. Rather, the thought of 'living life more slowly' is one that has provoked significant individualised

changes within the everyday. From this perspective, slowness is not simply a rebellion against speed. Rather, as key authors Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig (2006, p. 3) write in their work *Slow Living*, slowness reflects a style of living that is dislocated from the norms associated with fast capitalism and is synonymous with meaningfulness. At times, perhaps, it is also demonstrable of a more reflexive individual (Giddens 1990; Bauman 2001). They write:

At its heart, slow living is a conscious attempt to change the temporal order to one which offers more time, time to attend to everyday life... But slow living should not be thought of simply as a slow-motion version of postmodern life; it does not offer or make possible a parallel temporality for slow subjects to inhabit in isolation from the rest of global culture. Rather, its patterns and practices, like others in contemporary culture, are non-synchronous, albeit deliberately and consciously... 'Having time' for something means investing it with significance through attention and deliberation. To live slowly in this sense, then, means engaging in 'mindful' rather than 'mindless' practices which make us consider the pleasure or at least the purpose of each task to which we give our time.

(Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 3)

Subsequently, themes that repeat throughout the slow movements are 'care', 'attention' and 'mindfulness' (Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 4). While Parkins and Craig (2006) focus their analysis on the political/social/cultural complexity of organised movements like Slow Food, it is clear that such narratives resonate with activities found in the everyday. For instance, can we exclude within this space the rise in popularity of cycling in the West? As Ryle and Soper demonstrate in this volume, this particular enactment of slowness is one that we cannot ignore. It is, as Soper (2007) argues elsewhere, another example of alternative actions wherein the individual seeks to reappropriate something subjectively pleasurable, such as the feeling of being out in the 'open air' and enjoying the sensations of riding, which also have some wider ecological benefit. Slowness here is not entirely politically driven, but emerges from a rejection of automobile travel and the lack of pleasure that is derived from it.

By analysing slowness in this manner, there is no doubt a danger of attracting criticism regarding what exactly slow culture involves. If the slow narrative can be reduced to small everyday acts such as cycling (as is analysed in this volume), does this strip away the ethical and

revolutionary potential that the vernacular of the more established social movements expresses? In other words, do we risk debasing the whole paradigm of slowness by seeking to see its foundations in areas that are at their heart mostly apolitical? This is certainly a worthy question and should be considered briefly in this introduction.

Exploring slowness – the Parkins and Craig model

The notion of the 'slow' is one that captures the imagination of a disenchanted public. Our relative unease with the ethics of fast-paced life, the ubiquity of consumption and the pervasiveness of technology has many testing the waters of alternative lifestyles. Slow advocate Carl Honoré (2004, p. 47) proposes that this is the motivation behind an increasing interest in spirituality. 'These days', he writes, 'many people are seeking refuge from speed in the safe harbour of spirituality' (Honoré 2004, p. 47). Certainly, we have witnessed an increase in the popularity of pseudo-spiritual activities such as T'ai Chi, Yoga and meditation (cf. Possamai 2005). However, the return to meaningful, attentive and careful activities is not found only in spiritual activities. As a host of authors have demonstrated, numerous people in the West have begun swapping 'materialist values' for a lifestyle change that enables 'more time, less stress, and more balance in life' (Schor 1998b, pp. 113–114; Hamilton 2004; Elgin 1981; Etzioni 2004). Unlike 'decelerators from the hippie generation', these new reactions against the mainstream 'are driven less by political or environmental scruples than by the desire to lead more rewarding lives' (Honoré 2004, p. 47). Across the world, downshifters, seachangers or lifestyle migrants have demonstrated this through their willingness to give up the consumerist life for simpler existences, sometimes in completely new locations (Osbaldiston 2012; Benson 2011; Parkins and Craig 2006; Hamilton 2004; Schor 1998b).

For some, the beauty of the slow revolution is the counter-punch it could in the long term inflict on the culture of speed. Tomlinson (2007, p. 148), for instance, recognises at the end of his treatise on 'speed' that the 'contemporary slow movement in the main deploys a politely dissenting discourse, orientated toward exploring change in personal practices'. While the turn away from dominant forms of lifestyle appears 'unlikely' to 'challenge the institutional grip of the condition of immediacy' in any significant way, it can 'in the longer term be consequential' (Tomlinson 2007, p. 149). Establishing that the 'slow' is in fact a form of providing some 'balance' which is somewhat missing in contemporary

governance structures and institutions (that are endlessly caught up in the speed cycle), Tomlinson (2007, p. 154) argues:

In such a context, ideas of balance, measure and proportion become crucial to the governance of modernity. Whilst there are no guarantees that these values will prevail, the hope must be that the attractions of personal balance may resonate in the political cultures of democracies. Thus, in establishing a cultural politics of immediacy, it may be the value of balance that provides a bridge between the personal-existential and the political realms.

The 'culture of immediacy' can be 'disturbed' through cultural reasoning and transformation of normal everyday practices, which can in turn have a long-term influence on how we view speed in both personal or social settings and within our institutions. For instance, a broader collective reevaluation of our environment could create a collective reevaluation of institutional dealings with our ecology (cf. Szerszynski 2005).

While some slow movements appear less politically focussed than broader complex social movements or, as Lindholm and Zúquete (2010) describe them, 'aurora movements' (such as anti-globalisation movements), there are those which have political and ethical undertones. Parkins and Craig (2006), who have written extensively on the analysis of the slow, appear to focus on the latter. The complexity of their argument, however, is not entirely bound up in political motivation. Rather, the essence of their project lies in the potentiality of slow living to alter the landscape of consumption and production in a global capitalist society (not just local politics), similar to others already discussed above. Specifically, the two authors concentrate on the 'creative and ethical potential' that is found within everyday practice (Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 7). Closely aligned to Beck's (1992) individualisation thesis, Parkins and Craig (2006) propose that in contemporary culture individuals are opened up further to a negotiation of lifestyles and a need to construct their own 'biographies' in the wake of a waning of traditional structures and institutions (such as churches). They contend:

Such practices of individualization which throw into question the assumptions and practices of everyday life have seen the category of the everyday take on a new currency, both in popular culture and political discourse (Chaney 2002:55). From the extraordinary proliferation of lifestyle television in the past decade to recent political

debates about the urgency to find a 'work/family balance', the everyday is no longer the background against which important public issues are considered, it is itself the issue.

(Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 8)

As individuals adopt a more reflexive stance in the everyday, the opportunities for 'utopian possibilities' within that space are increased. In other words, as individuals begin to question established social practices and traditions (or, in the case of slowness, consumerism) there are chances for the transformation of behaviour to align with political ideals such as those found in sustainability, environmentalist and post-materialist movements (cf. Tomlinson 2007).

However, an increased presence of individual reflexive awareness is only part of the picture. Indeed, if individuals have been adopting slow practices through a cognitive reflexivity, what is it that they are critically engaging with? The answer lies for Parkins and Craig in the vices and virtues of a globalised world culture. 'Contemporary forms and practices of slow living,' they argue, 'arise from, and in response to processes of globalisation' and not just 'immediate pressures of daily life' (Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 9). Yet unlike that of anti-globalists, their argument does not hinge upon the notion that global forces produce the 'dislocations and dissonances that make slow living seem an appealing alternative' (Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 9). Rather, the processes of globalisation are treated in a sophisticated manner as almost binary. On the one hand, there are the structural impacts of the phenomenon which involve a quickening of social, economic and cultural life as technological advances increase the 'time-space compression', leading us into a 'runaway world' (Giddens 2002). From this standpoint, slowness is a desire to return to the traditional as an escape from the accelerated social world that globalisation has encouraged, produced and institutionalised. It is a quaint form of living not too distinct from the alternative movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

On the other hand, however, globalisation can actually also be seen to unintentionally encourage the types of social attitudes that oppose its fast persona. Once more tuning into Beck's (2006) conceptualisation of cosmopolitanism, the authors suggest that an opening up of the local to the global allows individuals to reflect upon their actions in a wider sphere. 'Slow living' becomes not just a 'retreat to the local', but is also part of a 'reconfiguring of local social relations and identities in new reflexive ways' (Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 11). They argue, further – using Beck's (2006) position that cosmopolitanism involves an internalisation, individually, of globalism – that the 'impulse towards

slow living' demonstrates reflexive engagement with broad global outlooks.

Everyday experience is understood to have global implications and effects beyond the personal implications of a slower, more attentive approach to life. Indeed it could be said that attention is directed outward as well as inward in practices of slow living. The person who walks rather than drives may be cognizant of the environmental implications of fossil fuels and freeways as well as the pleasures to be derived from bodily exercise, for instance... the slow subject may live a kind of 'ethical glocalism'.

(Tomlinson 1999: 195–196; Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 11)

It is within the local, therefore, that the individual can enact a reconfiguration of the consumer ethic that embraces broader global concerns and other alternative political narratives.

Like Soper (2007) and to a lesser extent Tomlinson (2007), however, the Parkins and Craig (2006) project is not blind to the 'hedonistic' aspects of slow living. Pleasure, joy and a feeling of enchantment are integral to empowering slowness. Slowness is almost the antithesis to Weber's now famous prediction of a social world enveloped by an 'iron cage'. Following Jane Bennett's thoughts, the authors suggest that within slow living the 'cultivation of an enchanted sensibility' is a fundamental aspect of the embracing of alternative lifestyles or modes of consumption. The importance of sensuality and pleasure within their thesis is highlighted in an entire chapter designed to explore what they call 'situated pleasures', which professes that pleasure is 'firstly grounded in the body – in the physicality and affectivity of the incorporation of food – and secondly based on an attentiveness to the location of the body' (Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 87). Thus, while the political dimensions and ethical potential of slow living are a key characteristic of quasi-social movements like Slow Food, one cannot disregard the pleasurable and powerful emotions that reward the individual for their alternative approach to everyday lifestyle.

Reflections and departures

The above, albeit brief, introduction to the examination of the 'slow' provides some grounding for this volume of work; however, we depart somewhat from it. While advocates such as Parkins and Craig (2006) focus their attention on the political and ethical potentiality of a broad

uptake of slow within contemporary society, they perhaps analyse and implicitly characterise slowness too narrowly. In *Slow Living* in particular, their work highlights mostly those movements that hold the title 'slow' and which are now well-established organisations with, interestingly, bureaucratic models of governance. Yet despite focussing on movements like Slow Food, Parkins and Craig (2006, p. 139) seem apprehensive of carving out a definitive characterisation of slowness:

We have resisted delineating a set of practices that would constitute or define slow living, even as we have used a number of examples throughout (cooking, knitting, walking, gardening, cycling, reading, meditating – although, with the possible exception of meditating, all of these activities can also be done quickly!). Rather than defining slow living by its practices, then, we have proposed that slow living is a way of cultivating an ethical approach to the everyday. Thought of in this way, slow living becomes as much an attitude or disposition as an action, one that combines wonder and generosity.

(Parkins and Craig 2006, p. 139)

Yet from this admission, we can still see that embedded in the notion of the slow person is a broader ethical concern or 'disposition' which embraces wider ecological or social concerns while also preaching private hedonistic enjoyment. In doing so, I would contest – as is demonstrated in this work – that slow living becomes tied inherently to a political ideal, or agenda, which seeks to challenge broader institutional practices and values.

It is my contention that not all manifestations of the 'slow' need be founded in a dialectic of ethical and personal interests. Rather, by focussing attention on the cultural aspects of the slow, we can broaden the defining features to include areas which at times appear apolitical. For instance, individuals who embrace the Amenity or Lifestyle Migration phenomenon have often been portrayed by analysts as less concerned with environmental issues and more focussed on a quest for slower, meaningful and more communal lifestyles (Ragusa 2010; Moss 2006; Osbaldiston 2011, 2012; Benson 2011). In other words, the emphasis in this movement is not (though admittedly, at times, it can be) centred on issues of ecological or broader post-materialist concerns. Rather, through a process of migration, individuals find solace from the stresses and strains of the city through rural or country living (cf. Benson 2011; see also Osbaldiston, this volume; Ragusa, this volume). Under a slow-living paradigm established by Parkins and Craig (2006), however,

this phenomenon becomes a weak manifestation of the slow philosophy because it narrowly focusses on the re-enchantment of lifestyles and the self (such as in cycling – see Ryle and Soper, this volume).

Consequently, this work is founded on a less stringent view of what slowness is and what it can or cannot be, departing somewhat from Parkins and Craig's (2006) theory of the slow. By emphasising it as a broad collective revaluation of meaning and action, whether or not this is ethically motivated by ecological or materialistic concerns, we can witness slowness within various pockets of everyday social activity. Again, this characterisation could be criticised as diluting the power within slow discourse to a mere transitory phenomenon. However, as this volume suggests, if we can envisage slowness as not just an organised response but a broad cultural reaction against speed, then the paradigm itself can be seen to have more influence than is at first recognised. People are reacting against 'fast capitalism' in a way which embraces meaningful or even authentic relations with environment, people and the self. Whether this has revolutionary potential or is simply another 'phase' of consumer capitalism is a question we will seek to answer in the chapters that follow and in the conclusion.

Overview of the book

As described above, the message of the chapters found in this book is that there has been a cultural shift toward slowness in the embodiment of activity in everyday life. Transformations have been from the significant, including the complete removal of individuals from the city to rurality, through to the minor, such as how one journeys to work daily. Slowness here does not simply encapsulate or encourage 'stillness' (Bissell and Fuller 2011, p. 13) but rather creates alternative spaces, times, socialities and experiences from the normalised everyday expectations of an advanced 'fast' capitalist society. While some contributors are sceptical of the intentions of those embracing the slow metaphor in lifestyles, especially Lindholm and Lie (Chapter 2), most describe slowness in terms of its potentiality to challenge the problems of contemporary life. For that reason, some of the chapters here are broad commentaries while others are specific descriptions of movements as they happen on the ground.

This volume reflects the many diverse traditions that are embraced in the social sciences and humanities. While most concentrate on the cultural, and this is the basis for their inclusion in the volume, some also engage with the movement at the political level. In the first chapter, Kim

Humphery offers a detailed exploration of the 'Time of Consumption'. Here, consumerism and consumer ethics are described in terms that are not simply associated with quickness, instantaneity and the fast. Rather, Humphery argues that we consume in a space that 'occupies numerous temporalities'. To talk of a politics and cultural transformation of consumption which embrace slowness need not require an actual measured change in how we consume time. For example, hyper-consumption, the type of practice that slow critiques, is not simply fast but also wasteful. Slowness attempts to revalorise the way in which we use time so that it is exercised 'well' and 'meaningfully'. The temporal question itself, especially in relation to clock-time, misses the point of performing the slow. We can indeed live our lives quickly, but also meaningfully. From this position, slow is not simply about slowing down our rushed existence. Slowness is a transformation of ethics around 'how' we consume time. Humphery's piece therefore provides a type of theoretical commentary and platform from which the remaining chapters emerge.

Demonstration of this is especially evident in Chapter 2. Here, Juliet Schor discusses the creation and expansion of alternative modes of fashion and consumption that are currently growing in importance in the USA and beyond. In particular in fashion, an industry where the turnover of goods within one's own wardrobe can be volatile and transient, Schor describes the new breed of 'young innovators' seeking to create a 'sharing economy'. In what she terms a 'connected consumption' movement, people have begun trading and exchanging social goods or commodities rather than buying new products in the market place. She explores this further, demonstrating how, through this activity, the lifespan of the use of goods is extended, which serves also to limit waste. Notably, therefore, not a post-materialist/consumer movement, the 'sharing economy' nonetheless produces a powerful critique of wasteful capitalism. While the numbers are too low for a prediction of the impact of 'sharing economies' on fast consumer capitalism, the growing popularity of 'connected consumption' illustrates another manifestation of slowness amidst a broader reaction against mainstream economic and social activities. This is significant also given the current economic crises of the USA and the Eurozone.

In Chapter 3, Charles Lindholm and Siv Lie explore the movement that arguably popularised the notion of 'slow' – Slow Food. Providing a thorough overview of the food revolution, Lindholm and Lie propose that at its heart is the question of authenticity and taste. Specifically, Slow Food opens up space for the individual through a collective to critique and subsequently protest against global food production

and consumption. This is achieved, importantly, through seeking out 'authentic' local cuisine and tastes. Local traditions in food culture are important. Understanding tastes so that one can appreciate sensually the distinctiveness of high-quality foods is a long process of education and refinement. The problem associated with this, as Lindholm and Lie argue, is that these are subjective, constructed and often contestable even inside local communities. Who decides what is authentic? What does this then do for local cuisine that is deemed inauthentic? Is there room only for the middle classes at the table? These are certainly questions that cut to the heart of the entire book and which I return to later in the conclusion. Despite their tentative position on the ethics of Slow Food, Lindholm and Lie propose that through this movement other 'slow' narratives have emerged and grown in popularity – such as Slow Towns and Slow Travel. The trickling down of the slow 'ideal', whether it is embedded in a middle-class 'habitus' or not, could invoke changes for the good overall.

This is further demonstrated in Chapter 4, where I offer some notes on the slow in other transformations that occur through spatial negotiation. Looking predominantly into the manifestations of the slow in places, this chapter explores how objects and local amenity (environmental or cultural artefacts) can encourage contemplation, meaningfulness and a slowing down of usual activity. While the city is often viewed as the antithesis to 'slowness', it is shown here that it can also invoke both embodied and cognitive reflexivity through 'meaningful' narratives – especially through nostalgia. However, there is also often a strong desire to escape the city and the suburbs, manifested in the escapism of tourism and permanent migration. In this chapter, I explore Lifestyle Migration and the recent phenomenon of Slow Travel. Through these, people can be inspired by the romanticism of places far distinct from the city, which produces, as shown, changes in behaviour to slower forms. In the case especially of Slow Travel, the tourist intentionally journeys through locations in a less rushed and harried fashion in order to enjoy all the sensations that the land has to offer him or her – allowing for, it could be argued, more meaningful experience and a greater sense of self-authenticity. However, as Zukin (2008) argues and Benson (2011) demonstrates in her empirical work, who defines the authentic is a question worth asking. As gentrification projects around the world expand, we might question the ethics of some of the movements in question.

In keeping with the theme of spatial engagement, Chapter 5 examines a form of everyday travel and mobility that serves as an exemplar for the changing dynamic of lifestyle through slowness: the bicycle. Here,

Martin Ryle and Kate Soper interrogate the uptake of this more traditional form of transport in one of the busiest cities of the world, London. The recent proliferation of bike travel is also to be seen in other countries including Australia, the USA and other parts of Europe. While Ryle and Soper are cautious to attribute this rise to any ecological, political or ethical motivation, they make the claim that the riding of bicycles is evidence of a growth in alternative hedonistic practices (Soper 2007). Through practices that enhance the experience of the everyday, in particular travel, macro environmental issues, including traffic pollution and unsustainable practices, are challenged. Providing us with a brief but intriguing history of the bicycle and an overview of its use across the world, these authors present a stark case of how the everyday is being challenged and altered by a slow paradigm – or in other words, engaging in social practices that provide ‘alternative’ pleasures which are ecologically sound and sustainable.

Chapter 6 continues the interrogation of slowness in place by investigating the specific Lifestyle Migration movement known as Treechange in Australia. Angela Ragusa presents in this chapter a mixture of critical social theory and empirical research to question the ethics of this new form of ‘slowness’. Although on the surface the phenomenon appears to be motivated by a collection of individual and broad social needs, Ragusa questions through interview data whether it is a new form of ‘conspicuous consumption’ predominantly from the middle classes. In what is a delightful, revealing and enlightening chapter, Ragusa is able to show that despite initially seeking a transformation of self and consumer ethics, many participating in this social trend fail to adopt newer alternative practices of consumerism altogether. This conclusion is discordant with popular rhetoric on the subject of Treechange or Seachange in Australia and overseas (Osbaldiston 2012; Moss 2006) but is comparable with recent works from Michaela Benson (2011). From this perspective again, we begin to question whether slowness is a wider social paradigm embraced by all, or whether it is a mere life project entertained by the middle classes to develop a ‘better life’. As is concluded in my thoughts in Chapter 4, this question cuts to the heart of understandings of gentrification and displacement through slow-based movements like Treechange.

Moving away from the public or collective manifestations of the slow, we turn in Chapter 7 to the very private sphere of sexual relations. Psychoanalytical researcher and practitioner Barnaby Barratt offers in this chapter a highly engaging theoretical piece on the transformative potential of slow sex, or ‘tantra’. Piecing together the development and

attraction of slowness in sexual intimacy, he argues that despite its lack of organisation or bureaucratic structure (such as in *Slow Food*), this form of 'slowness' can be viewed as a form of rejection of the commodified body. In short, slow sex (though admittedly not a widespread term as yet) presents back to the individual a type of social practice that offers authentic modes of enjoyment and pleasure distinct from the usual mainstream and potentially pornified sexual act. Importantly, the chapter delves into the manner in which this very private act has been challenged by the slow – not merely as a political act (though there is potential for the political within it) but rather as a form of mutual experiencing between partners that provokes meaning and authenticity. Sharing commonalities with the other sites of slowness explored in this book, this act of slow sex requires, fundamentally, taking time to explore physical and emotional sensations not found in mainstream sexual activities.

Most of the discussions located in the book operate outside the mainstream market place and consumerism. Even though *Slow Food* is based on consumption, it also emphasises production and support of local food culture. Yet slowness, as Parkins and Craig (2006) also suggest, can impact various facets of modern life. To demonstrate this further, Roberta Sassatelli provides in Chapter 8 a rigorous theoretical commentary on the commodity and its relationship to the slow. Her analysis, argued through the works of economist Tibor Scitovsky, reminds us of the potential for the consumer object to enable experiences that invoke creativity, learning and patience. Here, Sassatelli expertly picks through assumptions about consumer culture to present a case for the object as something which can encourage slower, meaningful engagement and which promotes a longer pleasurable experience through skill development and possible social interaction. For instance, the camera which requires some technical ability to utilise it to its full potential can indeed encourage a slower form of enjoyment, which adds to a broader critique of contemporary fast-paced, wasteful and ephemeral consumer culture. Unlike what critical theorists such as Fromm, Marcuse and Adorno contend, the object provides a pathway toward greater development of the self. It enables space for enjoyment, fulfilment and technical mastery, which requires patience, thoughtfulness and attention. These types of objects, unlike other consumer items which often lie dormant in the cupboard or garage, can invoke attitudes that resemble the slow despite their location in modern consumerism.

In my final departing remarks, I complete the volume by offering some summations on slowness and ask questions about its underlying

logic. In particular, the inevitable question, posed with any new form of what appears as 'self-help' rhetoric, as to who exactly is participating in the movement is considered. Certainly, it is the hallmark of sociology and social theory to be sceptical about anything that appears tied to class, specifically the middle classes here. Yet, what this volume presents is a myriad of complex social theories and empirical examples that potentially answer this charge. While there is no doubt that slowness is predominantly enacted within the middle classes, can this always be treated with an air of discontent? As Tomlinson (2007, p. 159) suggests, the 'culture of speed' may well be in the long term unsustainable not only ecologically and economically but also individually. The chapters presented here provide an overview of the potentiality for 'slow' to 'disturb' the fascination with speed, while building momentum for cultural influence over institutional behaviour which is inherently tied to the middle classes.

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