

The slow university: inequality, power and alternatives

Article (Published Version)

Martell, Luke (2014) The slow university: inequality, power and alternatives. Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 15 (3). a10. ISSN 1438-5627

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/50389/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

The Slow University: Inequality, Power and Alternatives

Luke Martell

Key words: slow;
employment;
capitalism;
inequality;
ownership; higher
education; work

Abstract: The slow university is said to be an alternative to the fast one. But what is behind speed at universities? In this article I argue that it is important not to fetishise speed or slowness and see them as autonomous processes, or the cause of their effects themselves. This distracts from where they come from. Instead we need to look for the economic and social processes behind speed and slowness. And what is slow about the slow university? We also need to ask if slow is what slow is really all about. This affects what solutions we look for to the problems that slow identifies.

Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. The Slow Movement](#)
- [3. The Fast and Slow Universities](#)
- [4. Marketisation and Managerialism at Universities](#)
- [5. Work and the Marketised University](#)
- [6. Technology and the University](#)
- [7. Who Can Go Slow?](#)
- [8. What is Slow Actually About?](#)
- [9. Society Solutions](#)
- [10. University Solutions](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

1. Introduction

Slow is the converse of fast. Why do we go fast and value speed? It may be technology that speeds up our lives. This can be media that increases the volume of information, or the use of machines that allow us to produce more material goods, so we need to work more to earn money to buy them. Or it can be pressure from work. Behind these and a force in its own right is capitalism, in the form of the push for productivity and profits, which wants more out of us faster. Slow can be a taboo or stigma at work or in our personal lives. If you go slow at work it's not only your boss but also your colleagues that may not be impressed, although slow has also been a method of industrial action to achieve better rights and conditions at work. Slow is sometimes a negative characterisation of someone, as a personal description of their personality or speed of thought. [1]

These examples involve cultural or structural forces that pressure us to go fast. There are also personal and individual dimensions to the pace of life. Speed can be exciting, from driving fast to writing fast when inspired. Some people want it

all. They want to pursue everything they can at work and in their personal lives, because there are so many stimulating and exciting things to do. They work hard and play hard. To fit it in requires going fast. Some of us may pursue speed and activity to avoid dwelling on things, insecurities or problems we want to avoid. Stopping or slowing makes it more difficult to avoid our demons. But these individual or psychological dimensions to speed are not independent of structural or cultural forces, social or unconscious, that push us into positions of wanting individually to go fast. [2]

2. The Slow Movement

The idea of the slow university follows from discussions of slow and the Slow movement across a range of areas. Slow is said to have started with slow food (ANDREWS, 2008). This is not so much about making food at a more sedate pace but about doing it from scratch, and seeing it through the process from growing via preparation and cooking to eating. It involves more time but not necessarily going slower. It is more labour-intensive. And it concerns knowing and being in control of the whole process. This gives some clues that slow is about something more than, or even different from, slowness. Relatedly, slow dating also seems to be less about speed and as much about depth (SCATURRO, 2014). The Slow movement has also been about natural and organic food, opposition to mass production and globalisation of food, and a preference for local and regional cuisine. [3]

Many who are interested in the advantages of going slow are looking for a better work-life balance. This means more family time, more for children and leisure and slow parenting. It may mean less time at work to create time to spend with children. It's also about a slower schedule for children, and less of a stream of classes and clubs encouraged by pushy parents (HONORÉ, 2008). There is a gender dimension to this because it can mean, for one thing, men spending more time in domestic and childcare roles. Here women in relationships with men often take on much more than half the burden, leaving them less space for public or work lives. Or they do a double shift, entering public life while doing most of the hours at home too. But doing less paid work so kids have their parents around more can be negative for women. They often earn less than men so may end up being the ones who retreat from hard won places in paid work and the public sphere to spend more time in traditional childcare roles that need to be distributed more evenly, not less so. [4]

Slow can be about hours of work and the nature and volume as well as pace of work. New technology means we should be able to produce as much as before while working less. But technology is often used to make us produce more while working just as many or even more hours. It is significant that the pursuit of money by employers and employees is not, or not only, about speed at work, but also how much work, for how long, or control at work. [5]

Information and communication technology (ICT), the information age and social media are seen to impose a pace and demands on our lives that are difficult to

keep up with. This is especially relevant to universities that are information industries and where information workers and their students are very linked up to social media and the internet. I will come back to this theme. But it is important not to focus just on the technology. What is significant is as much who controls it and how. [6]

Cities are seen to be places where the speed of life is fast. Volumes of people and stimuli pass us with little interruption. Sociologists like SIMMEL (1950 [1903]) have said a blasé and impersonal character develops in urban areas, to cope with the impossibility of engaging all the time with the demands on our attention. Slow city networks are about rolling back the stress and de-alienation of urbanism. One way is through localism in the city, which allows for greater connectedness with our surroundings and people in the community nearest to us. [7]

There are discussions of slow transport. With increased time, for example, we could travel more by public transport and bicycle, which would be good for the environment, stress and health. Although going by bicycle can often be faster than by motor vehicle. There is slow fashion. This abides by the same kind of rules as slow food. It's about craft production from the start of the process to the end, DIY clothes, and against mass production. It takes more time. Slow fashion involves repairing and re-using clothes and less disposal, ethical and green dimensions found across areas of the Slow movement. [8]

Many who are interested in slow are so because of its links with physical and mental health and there is overlap with ecological and quality of life movements. Common themes of slow include stress, lifestyle, quality over quantity, happiness, depth that comes with time, localism, connectedness, doing-it-yourself, and holism, seeing the whole process through. [9]

3. The Fast and Slow Universities

There has been much interest in slow reading (KINGSLEY, 2010), [slow science](#), and [slow scholarship](#). Slow reading can be done offline, where it is possible to focus on one item at a time away from the online bombardment of sources. Offline reading allows us to focus on a thing in depth, rather than lots superficially. PELS (2003) argues that speed is especially problematic for science, which works best when there is lack of haste and withdrawal from fast cultures like politics and business. He says science benefits from slowing down and slow personalities who read and write more. For him it is different from decisionist, stress-driven cultures. But speed in science is being imposed by external pressures for performance defined in certain ways, by a kind of enterprise culture and the growth of a media and celebrity system of academics. Slow science and reading are relevant to the slow university. But there is more to the slow university than just slow scholarship. [10]

In 2004 Harry LEWIS, the Dean of Harvard College, wrote to new undergraduates. His letter was entitled "Slow Down: Getting More Out of Harvard by Doing Less". He advised the new arrivals not to take on too many things, to do

them slower and fit in alternatives to study. The letter told them to be careful about opting for short (faster) degrees, and to consider taking a term or a year off, and to go abroad. He advised them not to be too vocational in their choice of studies. LEWIS said they should emphasise choice rather than compulsion in their education, doing things that they want to rather than what they felt they should. He told the students to leave things for after they graduated, to join student groups rather than necessarily trying to start one, and not to try to juggle too many extra-curricular activities. He advised them to think of their health and to take time off to do non-work things. He told them not to try to be perfect. [11]

Cross the Atlantic and come forward 10 years. LEWIS' welcome is very different to the recommendations of Edward ACTON (2013), CEO of the University of East Anglia. He wrote an article in the British Times Higher Education newspaper on the themes "you get out what you put in" and "how can universities support students to work harder". ACTON was responding to student experience data from the Higher Education Policy Institute, especially about study hours that students work. His focus is on driving up student work hours, measuring progress at university by this indicator, hard work and proposing separate contracts for staff that teach and those that do research. His vision emphasises quantitative over qualitative ways of measuring quality, the former as the basis and indicator of success, over equality of staff, free time, resources and depth as contributors to, or indicators of, quality in higher education. What he says responds to the rhetoric of the UK Conservative government stressing the virtues of hard work and the deserving, over the idle, scroungers, the undeserving and immigrants here for free welfare and health benefits. There is a correspondence in the fetishisation of hard work. [12]

What or who is the slow university about? When we are talking about slow do we mean students or staff, and amongst students undergraduates specifically? Concerning staff are we focusing mainly on academics? Amongst them there is much variation, for instance many who are not permanent and full-time. British universities have high proportions of [temporary](#) academic staff, PhD students teaching on an hourly paid basis, on insecure zero hours contracts, and employees on fixed term contracts. [13]

When people discuss staff at universities they rarely mean support staff, cleaners, caterers and estates staff, lower paid and many facing outsourcing to inferior [contracts](#). It is striking that much talk about fast academia is not about this poorly paid, long hours, insecure, job-juggling group of workers, often subjected not to university discipline but to that of the cost-cutting for-profit company who manages an outsourced contract (see JEFFERYS, 2012). Work and time are central to these groups but they do not get covered much when people talk about slow. Slow university discussions are mostly about academics. Low paid workers can afford much less than them to choose to go slow. [14]

Once we work out who we are talking about, what are we talking about? Is the slow university about hours of work, pace of work, content or volume of work, connected but also all different. Pace of work is a "slow" issue but there is a

danger these things get run together without us being careful to delineate them. Hours of work, for instance, are not necessarily about pace or speed, but are about time and amount. Long hours can be done quickly or slowly. Volume of work can be about long hours rather than fast work, although of course it can involve the latter too. [15]

4. Marketisation and Managerialism at Universities

The marketisation of universities is behind a lot of issues thrown up in discussion of the slow university (see COLLINI, 2013). In England high student-paid tuition fees have been introduced. Private for-profit providers are moving in to take over the functions of universities, support services but also university degrees. Universities are becoming like businesses, chasing money and customers, rather than about educational values or the social good. Management style is changing accordingly, less collegial and more top-down. Managers want to get as much out of employees as possible, and pursue quantitative indicators that focus on amounts rather than quality. Metrics are used to measure achievement. [16]

Discourses of performance are less about doing a good job and increasingly concern achieving "excellence" (MORIARTY, 2014). Excellence is said to be needed to succeed in a competitive environment, so is rooted in marketisation. It is often linked to quantitative gradings of research assessment in the UK, themselves being reached in part on the basis of metrics such as citations and journal rankings. At some universities failure to achieve "excellence", even if performing well, is seen as grounds for employees being dismissed from their employment (JUMP, 2014). [17]

This is happening in a context in which conflict between employers and labour is skewed to the power of the former over the latter. Managers impose more and unions are weaker. Governance has been changed to reduce the role of staff and students and increase the power of management and business. Academics continue to be individualistic rather than putting up a collective response. These structures are behind speed at the university. [18]

DOCHERTY (2013) warns that speed in the academy is killing learning. Two-year degrees offer a faster qualification. These can involve teaching over the summer vacation. So they are less accessible to poor students who need to work in the holidays to finance their studies. Such fast track learning is more available to those from better off backgrounds. Online marking can involve automated instant feedback. Perhaps most significantly changes in governance of the university-run-like-a-business have led to management imposition of decisions over inclusion of the community and consultation. The latter takes time, and one slow that has been discussed is slow democracy (CLARK & TEACHOUT, 2012, 2013). The former is faster. Employer and employee power imbalances are behind speed at the university. [19]

5. Work and the Marketised University

Working hours and conditions are an issue at UK universities. A study by the University and College Union (GROVE, 2012) for academics and administrators showed many (WILKS, 2012) members working more than 50 hours a week and reporting higher than average stress levels. When the union held a work-to-contract action over pensions in 2011 the campaign became also about work-life balance. Academics who held to the maximum 48 hour week found they were cutting their working hours (WILLIAMS, 2011) and rescuing their evenings and weekends. Many British academics' leave entitlement is loosely defined and a lot do not take the notional amounts they do have, or take working holidays, where they report as on leave but research and write. Academic Eleanor HIGHWOOD (2013) talks about an 8 days a week job culture (see also NEL, 2014). [20]

Work could be redistributed so the unemployed have work but all of us work less. We could live in societies with less production and so less paid work, that valued non-material values over consumption and, consequently, over earning income to finance it. This would reduce carbon emissions, be better for the environment and allow us more time for non-commodified activities and life outside paid work, such as caring, relationships, free creative work, and political activity (see NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION, 2010). [21]

Important to the lower work society is space for autonomy, away from work and employment, as much as less work itself. And what I am discussing at this point is long hours, not necessarily speed. In fact longer hours can be worked to take time over things and do them more slowly, while shorter working hours can lead to faster work to get work done in the limited time. [22]

University academics also report juggling multiple tasks and obligations, often of quite different kinds. They teach, research and carry out administrative and sometimes managerial tasks. There are a number of things they have to do, but this is not the same as speed or quantity of work. [23]

Within the academic community, there are especially acute working conditions for PhD tutors who work what are effectively minimum wage hours under conditions of stress, insecurity and with little status. Junior lecturers have to work more on preparation, often teaching courses for the first time, on lower salaries and under greater pressure to prove themselves in terms of research. Ruth MÜLLER (2013) has discussed the conditions of and pressure on postdoctoral academics. There is a gender dimension because women have to do more to advance in their career, for instance through promotions (see GROVE, 2013), and can feel under greater pressure to perform than men. They make up a greater number of the large proportion of academics on temporary and insecure contracts who feel the need to work especially hard to get permanence and security. [24]

But autonomy to do things in good space and time is undermined and pushed out by wider change. Working hours, juggling, pressure and conditions need to be seen in context and we should look at what is behind these. They do not happen

in isolation. The business university in a competitive market demands more from less, volume and quantity. And these happen within an imbalance of power between employers and employees. [25]

6. Technology and the University

Digitalisation is said to have speeded life up in society as a whole and at universities. Social media, e-communications and smartphones have led to a pace and volume of information that is hard to keep up with and demand constant engagement. There is an expectation to be constantly in touch with the workplace. This is especially relevant to work in the information professions and jobs like those in academia where people work away from their office a lot. [26]

ICT and social media are in tension with the advantages of autonomy of space for academics. Academics can work remotely and hence, sometimes and to a certain extent, keep their own hours and have more control over pace. In the early days of ICTs it was thought these would help with employees freedom to work remotely, away from the eyes of their bosses. But in many ways it has not worked out this way. Some autonomy has declined with email and smartphones. Academics are expected to be available and are under surveillance even when away, calculable through whether they are receiving and responding to communications and information. So autonomous time is affected negatively. [27]

Rebecca SOLNIT (2013) says there are no longer big gaps between information, where we can pause and reflect. We have to juggle more and faster information from more media sources at the same time. This leads to superficiality rather than depth, as we skim to take it in. Big spaces and solitude have gone. DUROSE and TONKISS (2013) come to a similar conclusion about blogging, social media and research. [28]

Blogs are quick and small and part of an attempt to be relevant. They lead to fast scholarship, which they say is reactive rather than generative, and produce a volume and constancy of information it is difficult to keep up with. This is contrasted to slow blogs, advocated by the "manifesto" for slow scholarship (TREANOR, 2007). These take longer, appear more infrequently, and involve more sustained research. [29]

But we shouldn't fetishise technology. We shouldn't treat speed, quantification or ICT as if they're independent processes or causes in themselves. This conceals what underpins them. The changes to academia described are not caused by technology itself in isolation, but by the use of that technology within relations of power. This is power in the context of pressures from marketisation and associated managerial imposition in a direction that is more quantitative and related to income streams and less about real quality and depth and related to education. There is a push to extract the most out of us, power of employers over us, pressure to perform, and our feeling we have to perform. What's behind these is the business university taking over from the university that's about education,

with employment at the end of increasingly managerial and capitalist types of power. [30]

Technology is situated within relations of power and structural change. This power in this context of change happens not just in relation to technology, but is a general phenomenon at universities. And it is not only an issue for the autonomy and well-being of people, but also their work performance which can be negatively affected in terms of quality by such pressures as much as quantitatively accelerated. [31]

It's possible to polarise things too regressively between old and slow on one hand as good, and new and fast as bad on the other. There can be much that is engaged and progressive about real-time involvement with current debate and the public sphere, and with the possibilities of new technology and fora for information and discussion. It is conservative and disengaging to portray this as a negative development and to define the specificity of science in a way that excludes it (see MENDICK, 2013 and VOSTAL, 2014). [32]

Progressive aspects of speed are not just in possibilities for academics in the research process and public engagement. They are also connected with power. If you work in an information industry, strongly connected to social media in your job, then managing a speed and volume of information and contributing to it can be one way you stay ahead in terms of knowledge of those in hierarchies more powerful than you, but less connected and resourced in these specific ways. Blogging and social media also allow you to publish from below without having to go through political or corporate channels, a revolution in access to voice for academics and others with internet access. [33]

7. Who Can Go Slow?

And who can opt out by not checking their email so often, or not keeping up with the latest social media information? There are power, inequalities and domination behind technology and the use of it. So we are compelled to use this technology by more than just the technology itself. It's not so easy just to drop it. Zooming in on slow diverts from these underlying causes, and so where solutions need to be. [34]

It's easy to say slow down and take more time for yourself. TRENOR (2007) advocates academics adopting slow periods in their days at work. But he also argues that speed is in part an institutional demand, in which individuals will suffer consequences for their employment and careers if they do not comply. He points out it is an unequal option, with particular risks for those who are junior and in non-tenured jobs. As one academic says "If I did my work at a pace I thought allowed me to do my work best I would get fired, because I wouldn't have enough done. I would be seen as ineffective" (VOSTAL, 2014, p.11). Slow is not a choice or something that is in isolation from underlying structures and pressures. As such it is really an issue of those structures and pressures more than it is about speed itself, or a matter of individual decisions. [35]

Self-help slow experts can advise us to improve our own lives by going slower. But this is not too far away from university managers who respond to stress and overload by pushing it away from the institution and structures on to individuals, by proposing solutions such as stress counselling or time-management training. And can we all slow down? HONORÉ says (in SCHARRENBURG, 2014, n.p.): "I do think it is possible for everyone". But slow can be code for "I have the money to take time". Slow food, for example, is labour intensive and involves taking longer over the growing and making of what we eat. It can be done more easily by those who have the income to take time outside work to do more in the growing and creating of their food, and is less available to those with lower incomes working longer hours. For slow for everyone more structural solutions are needed. Food counter cultures like freeganism, skip diving (EDWARDS & MERCER, 2007) and punk cuisine (CLARK, 2004) challenge power and inequality more than the Slow food movement does (for a critique of which see SIMONETTI, 2012). And slow food may be as much an issue of displaying a liberal middle class identity as about food itself. [36]

8. What is Slow Actually About?

What is the real issue? What is slowness about? Speed and time may be a symptom, or part of it. But at root slow is not an issue of time or speed. They are a symptom of something else. Slow is being advocated as a means to what we want, but it's not the end. [37]

Amounts of work are not the same as speed. We should be careful about conflating speed of work with volume. And some people are not against lots of work. In response to arguments about overwork in higher education, academic Joanna WILLIAMS (2013) argues that her work is where the heart is and that she loves her job. [38]

Work is not a bad thing, but autonomous work is desirable. Many who argue against too much work are in favour of more free time but envisage autonomous work being done then, for instance creative or voluntary labour, as well as more time for non-work activities like spending time with family or friends. WILLIAMS mentions autonomy over work hours, and the possibility of working at home which academia allows, as important to her for childcare and her research. So autonomy over work may be the issue rather than work itself. This means less of the boss. A Danish study suggests depression at work has more to do with the boss and unfairness on the part of managers than workload (SJØGREN, 2013). [39]

Speed may not be the issue but, rather, speed all the time. Lots of us like speed but have it too much, so we need more times when we slow down. But there are other times when we are driven and excited by pushing ahead fast at something. As argued above, speed can be progressive and in terms of knowledge and information something that academics can pursue which is engaged and puts them ahead of those in power. So the issue is not speed, but control over speed. This is important because it changes the crux of the matter from slow to self-determination over being able to go slow. This raises further questions about

what constrains or could allow control. Focusing on slow simplifies the issue to one of going slow, when it is about whether we can decide whether to go fast or slow, and what is behind this (VOSTAL, 2013, makes a similar point). Slow makes the issue pace rather than power, agency and autonomy. [40]

Slow lumps a lot together. As such it has a bit of an identity problem (as argued by DOTAN, 2008). But if you want to find something at the core of all the slow advocacies it may be lifestyle and quality of life. Lots of things are grouped together which are about this. In effect what slow is reintroducing is being human and well-being. Slowness is part of this but the bigger issue is autonomy. And what is underlying autonomy is power, the ability to reclaim our lives for ourselves and have the option of slowness and other lifestyle choices. [41]

HONORÉ (2004, pp.14-15 and 275-277) argues that slow is shorthand for a way of being which is calmer, more careful, about quality over quantity, deeper and more meaningful. He says it does not always mean slow but living better. For him the word that sums it up best is "balance". It is about fast when fast is needed but the right speed rather than always fast. This has echoes of SCHUMACHER's (1973) book "Small is Beautiful", which argued for appropriate scale rather than necessarily small scale. The issue is controlling the pace of life, not that you are always necessarily slow. So it's not even about the balance between slow and fast, but about having control over the balance, whether to go fast and when. The focus on time and pace distracts from the real issue, not balance itself, but power and autonomy. [42]

For all workers at the slow university this means employment and management either by bureaucratic executives or capitalist employment, wage labour and ownership and control. Consequently, when I ask what's behind the problem that slow addresses, and what slow is really all about, it's about control and ownership from above and for staff at the university much of this is about the employment relationship. [43]

So shorter working hours can be a search not for less work but for more hours away from power and control. Academics have traditionally been less subject to surveillance and managerialism. It's a reason why many chose academia, and now many are being more subjected to this. Reducing hours can be as much to regain autonomy as to work less. [44]

I have raised the question of what's behind speed at university. It's important not to discuss speed as if it's an isolated fact not embedded in wider processes. If you discuss it in isolation you distract from what it is based in. You are also likely to suggest solutions that put the onus of change on the individual rather than structures or systems. I am saying speed at university is embedded in the university as a business and employer power over labour. The former is more recent and to do with neo-liberalism, the latter older and to do with capitalism more generally. We need to see slow not as a fact in itself, which distracts from rootedness in this structure. I also asked at the start what slow is really all about. Again, to see it alone distracts from what the underlying issue is. Slow is about

more than slow. It's about power, inequality, conflicting interests and seeking autonomy, more than speed itself. It's in these structures, or getting away from them, that we can determine pace. We need to look beyond slow and see that the issue and change is in these structures. [45]

9. Society Solutions

If speed is a state of mind, slow may need psychological change. People can try to get out of a fast mind-set, follow guides about taking time out, turning their phones off and letting go of their need for the adrenalin rush (HONORÉ, 2014). From this perspective it's down to us. It needs wider cultural change, where we value slow more in society and what goes with it. Then we can pursue individual lifestyle change. However this puts too much onto individuals as responsible for going too fast and as having the capacity to slow down. It diverts away from structures that impose speed and constrain slow. [46]

The question is about getting power and self-determination, on the basis of which we can shape our pace of life, and work and the economy have a lot to do with this. At work the major aspect of power and autonomy is that we are wage labourers, in other words in the employment of others. So to escape the imposition of this on speed, volume, and freedom, I can see three solutions. [47]

One is individual withdrawal from paid employment. This is what a lot of people, sometimes called downshifters, who try to slow down do. They go part-time, self-employed or freelance. Some of those who go self-employed or freelance say they have a lot of work to do, sometimes more than before, and it's still a life of speed. And some get out because of bullying and harassment at work, rather than pace. But because they are free from institutional employment and what goes with it they feel liberated. So self-determination rather than pace or volume is the issue here. But for others quantity of work, long hours and pace of life is the issue, and this is why they withdraw. [48]

But can people afford this? It's easy to say withdraw from employment or go part-time. This is an option for people with certain kinds of assets or sufficient income. To tell people about the virtues of them slowing down does not engage with unequal chances for this or the structures that make this impossible for many. It is at the level of structures and unequal possibilities that the issue needs to be identified and addressed. [49]

A second more structural solution is a reduction of hours in paid employment in society and so a greater realm of autonomy. MARX and KEYNES discussed how technology and production of abundance allows for this (SPENCER, 2014). Technology means we can produce the same in less time so reduce working hours for all. André GORZ (1982, 1985, 1999) argued that we can redistribute work so all have work but all work less. The employed would have more free time and the unemployed would have some of their work and become employed. Less paid work could be enabled by a universal guaranteed minimum income that would allow all to choose more free time. This can be funded by fairer taxes, such

as financial transactions taxes, and closing off tax loopholes and havens. In universities the redistribution of work fits with the need to end the casualisation of labour. Proper employment could be redistributed to the casualised, for instance through job shares. [50]

A third solution is to re-establish control over the workplace and overthrow paid employment. This means collective ownership in the economy. We have had socialist-style ownership via the state. This happened in state planned economies in "actual socialist" countries and the nationalised sectors under social democracy. There were problems with these approaches, on liberal and efficiency grounds. But it's not clear versions of them in areas of the economy and public sphere are redundant. There are also other forms, employee-ownership and workers co-ops, for example. If people collectively control production and work they can have greater control over volume and pace of work with a greater structural basis for slow. [51]

Is this compatible with capitalism? You can pursue regaining power and autonomy within capitalism. There can be individual withdrawals or pools of co-operative ownership. But overall, lack of self-determination over work is part and parcel of the wage labour relationship. So we need to reduce employer-employee relations so employees regain control over their work and non-work lives, which has to mean greater communal ownership. This is antagonistic with capitalism, which is based on private ownership and an employer-wage labour relationship. Change to lifestyle and quality of life involves control that isn't compatible with a system in which we lack control over the economy and work as basic principles of these spheres. [52]

HONORÉ (2004, pp.278-279) argues that slow is compatible with capitalism. He argues that slow involves making humans and the environment valuable assets rather than disposable inputs. This requires lower growth and measuring life by things other than GDP or competition. But these are all central to capitalism, so it is difficult to see how they could be achieved without limiting and rolling back capitalism. HONORÉ says what slow needs is persuasion, leadership, legislation and international co-ordination. But how can these be effective within capitalism where power lies in the hands of private capital, whose interests are in conflict with lower growth and the reduction of competition and priorities other than production and profit? [53]

Big corporations like Google and Amazon may be on the look out for slow training and keen to give employees more headspace to come up with creative ideas. The theory is this makes for better products and productivity. But is this a norm or exception? How far does it extend beyond top managers and creative workers? Do the caterers and cleaners get access to opportunities for slower work? Or Amazon warehouse workers who have a set number of items to collect and dispatch each hour, their targets monitored electronically? [54]

Abolishing capitalism is a tall order. There are questions about whether this is desirable or feasible and what would replace it, given theories and practices of

collective ownership in the past. But that this is a challenging and complex issue does not alter that essentially slow is not compatible with private ownership for profit and lack of employer control, which are what capitalism are about. [55]

10. University Solutions

What can we do specifically in universities (see AMSLER & AMSLER, 2014)? One thing is to fight for the democratic [public university](#), which we never really had in the past but we had more than now as managerial power is marginalising staff and student input, for instance in governance and consultation. Staff are treated more as employees subject to management control, and students as consumers rather than either groups as citizens in a community. There's a shift from inclusion in decision-making to "engagement" via consumer surveys about changes already made. So a genuinely public university with inclusive governance is needed, and more so than we had before. If the issue is not slowness but control over speed and work this could help re-establish it. Democratic higher education (DEFEND EDUCATION BIRMINGHAM, 2013) is one basis for the slow university. This should include students and non-academic staff as part of the community of the university, and insecure and temporary staff, as well as permanent academics. [56]

Another path is individual freedom within the university. This means autonomy over working hours and conditions, and academic freedom. There could be less pressure from external audits, to carry out tasks that are not educationally or socially useful, less quantitative over qualitative demands, which suck up time with useless things. Not all of this is completely externally determined. It also needs a personal rethink by academics about their orientation to promotion, recognition and career development. But these are done in the context of structural power and expectations. Trade unions, students' unions and protest are important to this path. [57]

A third solution at the university is alternatives to public higher education and private business-oriented money-seeking universities. This can be sought in free universities. These operate in a third sector, set up and run by their staff and students, autonomous from the state, from the market and profit. In the UK examples include the [Social Science Centre](#) in Lincoln, and more informal free universities that spring up and come and go in many towns and cities (LAZARUS, 2013, SOCIAL SCIENCE CENTRE, 2013). [58]

What is behind the pace of universities is power. This is something over people, that requires speed of us. And lack of power, which includes inequalities in capacity for economic independence, holds many back from being able to choose slow. Focusing on slow distracts from power, inequality and self-determination. And it can be regressive, because it excludes those that can't afford it, and because speed with information is a way of fighting the powerful. We need to be able to pursue autonomy from power. This is not to be slow necessarily, but to control speed and our lives. This shouldn't be on the basis of business criteria,

put into practice through capitalist and managerial domination. It should be on the basis of what's good for humans, and under our own control. [59]

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Maggie O'NEILL for initiating this slow university project and inviting me to take part, and to Heather MENDICK and Paul WAKELING for very helpful comments on this article.

References

- Acton, Edward (2013). How can universities support students to work harder? *Times Higher Education*, October 17, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/how-can-universities-support-students-to-work-harder/2008166.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Amsler, Sarah & Amsler, Mark (2014). Imagining unthinkable spaces. *Argos Aotearoa*, 1, <http://argosaotearoa.org/work/imagining-unthinkable-spaces/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Andrews, Geoff (2008). *The slow food story: Politics and pleasure*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Clark, Dylan (2004). The raw and the rotten: Punk cuisine. *Ethnology*, 43(1), 19-31.
- Clark, Susan & Teachout, Woden (2012). *Slow democracy*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Clark, Susan & Teachout, Woden (2013). Slow democracy. *openDemocracy*, September 20, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/susan-clark-woden-teachout/slow-democracy> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Collini, Stefan (2013). Sold out. *London Review of Books*, 35(20), October 20, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n20/stefan-collini/sold-out> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Defend Education Birmingham (2013). Statement from the occupation—why we need a democratic university. *Defend Education Brum*, November 21, <http://www.defendeducationbrum.org/statement-from-the-occupation-why-we-need-a-democratic-university/> [Date of Access: July 21, 2014].
- Docherty, Thomas (2013). In the academy speed kills learning. *Times Higher Education*, July 18, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/in-the-academy-speed-kills-learning/2005764.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Dotan, Hamutal (2008). Carlo Petrini's slow food, a review. *Green Prophet*, October 31, <http://www.greenprophet.com/2008/10/slow-food-book-review/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Durose, Catherine & Tonkiss, Catherine (2013). Fast scholarship is not always good scholarship: Relevant research requires more than an online presence. *LSE Impact of Social Science*, October 11, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/10/11/fast-scholarship-is-not-always-good-scholarship/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Edwards, Ferne & Mercer, David (2007). Gleaning from gluttony: An Australian youth subculture confronts the ethics of waste. *Australian Geographer*, 38(3), 279-96.
- Gorz, André (1982). *Farewell to the working class: An essay on post-industrial socialism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gorz, André (1985). *Paths to paradise: On the liberation from work*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gorz, André (1999). *Reclaiming work: Beyond the wage based society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grove, Jack (2012). Stressed academics are ready to blow in pressure-cooker culture. *Times Higher Education*, October 4, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/stressed-academics-are-ready-to-blow-in-pressure-cooker-culture/421388.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Grove, Jack (2013). Gender survey of UK professoriate, 2013. *Times Higher Education*, June 13, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/gender-survey-of-uk-professoriate-2013/2004766.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Highwood, Eleanor (2013). Workload overload. *Times Higher Education*, June 13, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/letters/workload-overload/2004738.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].

- Honoré, Carl (2004). *In praise of slowness: Challenging the cult of speed*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Honoré, Carl (2008). *Under pressure: Putting the child back into children*. London: Orion.
- Honoré, Carl (2014). *The slow fix: Lasting solutions in a fast-moving world*. London: William Collins.
- Jefferys, Steve (2012). Shared business services outsourcing: Progress at work or work in progress? *WLRJ Working paper 11, Working Lives Research Institute, London Met University*, <http://workinglives.org/fms/MRSite/Research/wlri/Working%20Papers/WLRJ%20Working%20Paper%20no%2011%20Progress%20at%20work%20or%20work%20in%20progress.pdf> [Date of Access: July 21, 2014].
- Jump, Paul (2014). Sheffield academics balk at HR chief's sacking threat. *Times Higher Education, February 27*, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/sheffield-academics-balk-at-hr-chiefs-sacking-threat/2011636.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Kingsley, Patrick (2010). The art of slow reading. *The Guardian, July 15*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Lazarus, Joel (2013). The emergence and growth of "free universities" in the UK. *Oxford Left Review, 9*, <http://oxfordleftreview.com/olr9-5/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Lewis, Harry (2004). Slow down: Getting more out of Harvard by doing less. *Harvard University*, <http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/harrylewis/files/slowdown2004.pdf> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Mendick, Heather (2013). Is slow academia conservative? *CelebYouth.org*, <http://www.celebyouth.org/is-slow-academia-conservative/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Moriarty, Philip (2014). The vacuity of "excellence". *Physics Focus*, <http://physicsfocus.org/philip-moriarty-vacuity-excellence/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Müller, Ruth (2013). Racing for what? *CelebYouth.org*, <http://www.celebyouth.org/racing-for-what/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Nel, Philip (2014). In search of lost time. *Inside Higher Ed*, <http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2014/03/03/essay-why-faculty-members-work-so-much> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- New Economics Foundation (2010). *21 hours: Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century*. London: New Economics Foundation, <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/21-hours> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Pels, Dick (2003). *Unhastening science: Autonomy and reflexivity in the social theory of knowledge*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Scaturro, Michael (2014). Im gegenteil, the German dating website on a go-slow. *The Guardian, May 3*, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/may/03/im-gegenteil-german-dating-website-go-slow-berlin> [Date of Access: July 21, 2014].
- Scharrenberg, Joost (2014). Interview Carl Honoré, ambassador for the slow movement. *Sloyu*, <http://sloyu.com/blog/english/2014/02/11/interview-carl-honore/> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Schumacher, Ernst F. (1973). *Small is beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered*. London: Blond and Briggs.
- Simmel, Georg (1950 [1903]). The metropolis and mental life. In Kurt Wolff (Ed.), *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (pp.409-24). New York: Free Press.
- Simonetti, Luca (2012). The ideology of slow food. *Journal of European Studies, 42*(2), 168-169.
- Sjøgren, Kristian (2013). The boss, not the workload, causes workplace depression. *ScienceNordic*, <http://sciencenordic.com/boss-not-workload-causes-workplace-depression> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Social Science Centre (2013). An experiment in free, co-operative higher education. *Radical Philosophy, 182*, <http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/news/an-experiment-in-free-co-operative-higher-education> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Solnit, Rebecca (2013). Diary. *London Review of Books, 35*(16), August 29, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n16/rebecca-solnit/diary> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Spencer, David (2014). The case for working less. *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/the-case-for-working-less-22454> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].
- Treanor, Brian (2007). *Slow university: A manifesto* [Personal website], http://myweb.lmu.edu/btreanor/Slow_University.html [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].

Vostal, Filip (2013). Should academics adopt an ethic of slowness or ninja-like productivity? In search of scholarly time. *LSE Impact of Social Science*, November 20, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/11/20/in-search-of-scholarly-time> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].

Vostal, Filip (2014). Academic life in the fast lane: The experience of time and speed in British academia. *Time and Society*, online first, DOI: 10.1177/0961463X13517537.

Wilks, Vicky, (2012) Survey reveals hidden high stress levels and long-hours culture at universities. *ucu.org.uk*, October 12, <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6344>

Williams, Joanna (2013). Work is where the heart is. *Times Higher Education*, August 8, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/work-is-where-the-heart-is/2006261.article> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].

Williams, Rachel (2011). Pensions dispute gives academics work-life balance. *The Guardian*, November 7, <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/nov/07/academics-pensions-dispute> [Date of Access: April 30, 2014].

Author

Luke MARTELL is professor of political sociology at the University of Sussex, UK. He is author of "The Sociology of Globalization" (Polity Press, 2010) and is writing about alternative societies.

Contact:

Luke Martell

Department of Sociology, University of Sussex
Brighton, BN1 9SP
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1273 678729

E-mail: l.martell@sussex.ac.uk

URL: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/1720>

Citation

Martell, Luke (2014). The Slow University: Inequality, Power and Alternatives [59 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 15(3), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1403102>.