

Kevin Hamilton, Lutz Koepnick, Katja Kwastek, and Erin La Cour

# THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF SLOWNESS: A CONVERSATION

*In order to approach the concept of slowness in its relationality, we invited KEVIN HAMILTON and LUTZ KOEPNICK to engage with us in an open conversation to explore where scholarship on the topic is—or should be—headed. While this conversation is the first in which all four of us engage in the topic together, it is also a continuation of a long-term academic exchange that started in 2007 when both KATJA and KEVIN were invited for the final critiques of the MFA student projects of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Digital + Media Department, and—ending up in the same hotel in Providence—took a long walk along the coastline together. When KATJA was asked to participate in a summer school on the topic of “The Arts and the Future” at Ludwig Maximilian University Munich in 2012, she invited KEVIN over to co-teach a class on slowness. KEVIN and KATJA presented and published their thoughts on what they called slow media art at the Media Art Histories conference in Riga in 2013 and at the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) in 2015.<sup>1</sup> As they had been using LUTZ’S book during their conversation, they took the 2017 ASAP/9 conference in Berkeley/Oakland as a chance to organize a panel on slowness.<sup>2</sup> In parallel, KATJA approached ERIN with the suggestion to organize an ASAP symposium on the topic of slowness at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2018.*

Our various backgrounds—Kevin, a fine arts scholar and practitioner, Lutz, a media arts scholar and aesthetic theorist, Katja, an art historian, and Erin, a comics studies and literary scholar—led us on quite a meandering path in our conversation, which productively allowed us to unpack the multiple dimensions of slowness, and the potential of the concept to highlight the relationality of speed, in an interdisciplinary exchange. Starting with the advent of the slow movements, we proceed with a consideration of slowness as an aesthetic and phenomenological concept—as a means to experience the present in all its spatial and temporal complexity. In questioning what slow means, as well as what it means in different contexts—whether cultural, economic, racial, and/or gendered—we examine various situated moments of individual and collective slowness. Taking as examples the politics of border crossings and social mobility, as well as our own agency within academia, we consider the political implications of instrumentalizing slowness as a potential means of protest and, contrarily, oppression. Moving back to media aesthetics, we connect these political concerns to the various mediums that help negotiate our understanding of slowness. In looking closely at digital media, we question how human perceptions of slowness need reexamination in light of discourse on the Anthropocene, deep time, nuclear time, and planetary time—as well as media archaeological time, which finally leads us back to question our own practices as scholars and institutional policymakers.

—Erin La Cour and Katja Kwastek

**KATJA KWASTEK/** *We'd like to start our conversation with what the majority of Western audiences from the cultural sector will probably first associate with the notion of slowness: the slow movements. Perhaps the most famous of these is the Slow Food movement that was inaugurated in 1980s Italy to counter the accelerating global food culture by promoting local food production and calling attention to the actual processes of producing and consuming food. This was followed by several other slow movements, among which is the Slow City movement. As the slow movements are so*

*widely known, we want to start by asking both of you to introduce your own interest in slowness, relating it to this more general notion of slowness as a cultural movement.*

**LUTZ KOEPNICK/** In my work on questions of slowness in contemporary art, I have seen various slow movements over the last few decades as important points of departure. However, my hope was to develop slowness as an aesthetic category, not an existential one, nor as a question of lifestyle. Moreover, in my work I want to highlight certain blind spots in the

conceptualization of these slow movements—perhaps one of the most significant of which has to do with the fact that the category of the slow itself often remains rather undertheorized. What does “slow” mean? Is your slow the same as my slow? Are certain cultures’ understandings of slow different from others? How can we actually define “slow” without just claiming it as the inversion or the critique of the fast and accelerated—and thereby surreptitiously reconfirming their dominance?

What I hoped to develop, and am still developing, in other words, is an understanding of slow as an aesthetic category that doesn’t need the fast and speedy in order to gain conceptual contours. What this concept is meant to emphasize are forms of aesthetic representation and experience attuned to the co-presence of multiple and different temporalities in what we call the present, the fact that each present consists of multiple narratives, of multiple stories to be told, the fact that there isn’t just one stream of experience and one accelerated flow toward some presumed future, but a messy plurality of temporal dynamics. Slowness, in this understanding, does not simply want to take the speed out of contemporary life, but actually allows us to experience our present with all its different speeds, and in all its complexity and diversity. It describes a mode of registering, representing, and perceiving the present as being comprised of a simultaneity and multiplicity of times. This may not imply a repudiation of slow movements, but it is designed to make our understanding of the slow a bit more complex, to see it as more

than just a negative to the rule of speed and acceleration.

**KEVIN HAMILTON/** My path into thinking about and doing slowness comes from my artistic practice, in which I engage with the concept of duration, which is also present in much of the work that Lutz writes about. My early formation as an artist came from being affected by artists—especially video artists of the 1960s and 1970s—who were trying to provoke other experiences of time and other experiences of duration in a very phenomenological way. For me, that always had a draw, particularly for its contemplative dimensions. That said, I really didn’t start thinking about slowness until I began to engage with the public dimension of individual decisions to “go slow,” and how the performative study and experience of duration can construct other publics and other perspectives on the performer.

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For me, this was most specifically achieved through walking. As both an artist and a teacher, I was doing a lot of work on walking, and looking at all the different artists who had engaged with walking. I found walking to be a really great site to think about slowness because one can approach it in a very individual, phenomenological way, even as there is always a public dimension to who is walking and how others change because of how you're walking or who you're walking with. So the slow movement became one way to help me think about slowness as an individual, and even as a contemplative choice, as well as its broader social and public dimensions. The work of critical geographers such as Doreen Massey opened this up even more for me in terms of how well they talk about the multiple durations at work in any one space and time.<sup>3</sup>

**LK/** I really love what Kevin just said about the complexities that emerge once we actually attend to the fact that there are multiple durations that coexist in any given moment. This really opens a window to understanding slowness as a category that need not be designed to simplify life, to turn one's back toward the exigencies of our contemporary moment, or even to step away from the technological and mediated environments in which we live. Slowness, as I understand it instead, entails primarily an openness toward the contingencies and unpredictabilities of time, its heterogeneity. Rather than simplifying life, slowness as an aesthetic category can in fact do the opposite: it can make experience more complex and ambivalent because it urges us to

attend to and register diverging paths of duration at any given moment. The work of artists such as Janet Cardiff, for instance, underwrites this understanding. What her audio walks do—whether she takes us on a walk through urban or rural geographies, indoor or outdoor spaces—is fundamentally unsettle our perception and understanding, our sensory and cognitive maps of the world, because the different layers of sound she engages leave us unsure about our location in time and space in the first place. In a way, her walks intensify but also profoundly derail the user's perception and experience. They put us in a place and time where we don't quite know where we are. Although this might often produce discomfort, there is also a certain beauty and, of course, cognitive value to experiencing our surrounds through the perception of someone else—and hence in a more complex fashion.

**KK/** *While you do not contradict each other in your perspectives, could we say that for you, Kevin, it is the social potential of slowness, with an emphasis on interaction, that attracts you to the concept, whereas for you, Lutz, it is more about the layeredness within the aesthetics of slowness?*

**KH/** I certainly spend more and more time thinking about the public and social dimensions of slowness, both in my collective work as an organizer and artist and in my scholarship.

**LK/** I am fully on board with this as well. Although many artists I've been interested in in my previous writing explore slowness as a

category of phenomenological importance, I am also profoundly interested, like Kevin, in how this translates into public and collective practice, how our insistence on the plurality of stories and durations and our continued insistence on contingent futures is something deeply political, in particular in times in which the future becomes ever more elusive due to the damage we have done to our planet.

**ERIN LA COUR/** *I'd like to engage a bit more with how you see particular artworks as prompting an experience of multiple temporalities and durations. For example, in *On Slowness*, Lutz, you open by saying that you want to put aside certain artworks, like John Cage's *ORGAN<sup>2</sup>/ASLSP* (As SLOW as Possible), which slows down and sustains sound, in order to focus on other, more contemporary conceptions of aesthetic slowness. As a start, could you elaborate on why you think that Cage's work and others of this nature do not meet such conceptions?*

**LK/** I don't want to sideline Cage's experiments in general, nor his piece *As SLOW as Possible* as it has been installed in Halberstadt, Germany, where it is supposed to run for the next 621 years. I do find some intriguing value in it, but I guess the point I wanted to make in *On Slowness* is the fact that a work that simply extends the durational experience of the viewer or the listener doesn't do all that much to meet some of the demands that I want to address with a conceptually more rigorous notion of slowness.

Recent years have witnessed a lot of so-called endurance art, stretching the duration of a

time-based artwork or a particular performance that makes it virtually impossible for any audience to attend the piece in its entirety. Think of Marina Abramović sitting in the foyer of the Museum of Modern Art for more than two months staring into peoples' eyes. Think of Christian Marclay's *The Clock* and its twenty-four-hour time frame that exceeds typical gallery and museum hours. This is all interesting work. I take it very seriously. But to just stretch time and demand considerable commitment from oneself as artist or from the audience doesn't quite meet what I want to emphasize as aesthetic slowness. Abramović and Marclay place some pressure on the fast-paced timetables of contemporary art, unsettle a thinking that wants artists to produce ever new work in ever shorter time frames to be recognized. But there is also, rhetorically, a certain kind of athleticism attached to this work that I'm just not really so interested in.

**KH/** One of the things that I found really helpful about Lutz's book was how he articulates that an engagement in duration and slowness, and the experience of duration and slowness, requires a consideration of space as well as time. In this way, you get a kind of spatial thickening, a spatial depth that emerges. You sense this especially in the way that Lutz has written about some multichannel video installations and sound installations. I appreciate this distinction between the prolonged and the way in which through a different attending to duration, different sensory registers open up that we might properly talk about as spatial.

**LK/** The emergence of multiscreen video art as we have experienced it over the last twenty years or so is a wonderful example to think through what contemporary slowness can do and how we can experience it. We often think of multiscreen settings as a cause of visual overload. They require the viewer to multitask and prohibit traditional forms of visual focus. Think, for instance, of what happens in sports bars. Multiscreen installation settings might feed into this, but they can also put this to work, reroute it, connect it to what I call experiences of slowness. Multiscreen choreographies can invite audiences to attend to multiple streams of time at once, to probe and negotiate our attention. In their public settings, they have the potential of giving us time to reflect on and attend to the acts of other people looking and to be curious about their movements in the gallery space all the while we also attend to moving images on screen. In this, they can open up a space for very complex experiences and perceptions that are quite different from the distracted mode we typically associate with sports bar setups.

**KK/** *This could, however, be seen as contradicting the idea of slowness due to the complexity you emphasize. That is, with so much information overload, can such artworks still be addressed with a concept of slowness encouraging us to take a step back, meditate, reflect?*

**LK/** What I want to suggest is that even a certain overload can be approached as an invitation to take time to attend to complexity.

What is slow about it is the taking of time to attend to the space of moving images in all its potential multiplicity and chaos, even in its speed and thwarting of traditional expectations of focused attention.

**KH/** This takes me back to some of the work that Katja and I have thought about over the years as we have tried to articulate taxonomies and modalities for the very different kinds of work that all seem to “go slow.” Among all these—but not present in all of these—is this slowing down of perception itself, a slowing down of the connection of sensation to action, a slowing down of the ready understanding of what one expects to see or thinks one sees. In Cardiff’s walks, it’s those moments of hearing something that doesn’t align with what you are seeing that might most provoke someone to that experience of slowness that the Slow Food movement seems to treasure: “If only I could taste where I am in the world, it would take me out of my too-easy consumption of food that I don’t really think about.” It’s the slowing of experience and cognition toward a transformed sensorium.

**LK/** For me, to “go slow” is to maintain or cultivate the ability to look left, right, and maybe even backward, as one is moving forward. A rigid regime of speed and acceleration often prohibits this because we, in our haste, have to be constantly on guard and attend to what is right in front of us.

**KK/** *This again relates back to the slow movement in terms of the Slow City movement and*

*the idea of the flaneur, as promoted by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. Already in our earlier conversations, Kevin brought up Benjamin's famous statement that, in nineteenth-century Paris, the flaneur would take a turtle for a walk in the Paris arcades, to have them set the pace.*<sup>4</sup>

EL/ *On the other hand, there was an article in The Guardian this week about mindfulness and meditation apps that supposedly allow us to carve out, say, twenty minutes of our day for reflective contemplation—to relax, to take things slowly—when in fact they not only add extra stress with their pings and demands to do it right now, but also problematically bolster individualism rather than any ethical consideration of the world and people around us.*<sup>5</sup> *What I am wondering is, in terms of thinking about the flaneur and taking these moments of slowness outside of an art space and into an everyday experience of life and aesthetics, do you also see this as potentially adding to our societal problems?*

KH/ That takes me to one of my favorite recent books on the social experience of duration, Sarah Sharma's *In the Meantime*, which I drew

from more heavily the last time I spoke about slowness with Lutz and Katja, at the ASAP 2017 conference at UC Berkeley.<sup>6</sup> Sharma points out how as mindfulness becomes a premium product, we should also examine the multiple durations present at any moment that make mindfulness possible for one person by stealing time from another. We construct such forms of mindfulness almost as a luxury item. Perhaps I am able to look all directions when I walk down the street because of the power and authority I have in that space, while others can only focus on whether or not they are being seen because of the threat of being policed in that space. So I have been increasingly appreciating the interdependencies of those different positions and experiences of mindfulness in that way.

EL/ *And we can say the same about the Slow Food movement: Who is cooking? Are they paid? Who benefits? Here, we also have to think about gender and indeed a multiplicity of identity politics.*

LK/ I think this kind of reflection is absolutely necessary. The same holds true for Erin's earlier remark on the current preoccupation

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with mindfulness and wellness, which often seems to be driven by a new type of categorical imperative requiring us to be attentive and mindful at all costs amid all the distractions imposed by the everyday. I sometimes cannot help but wonder whether we, amid our neoliberal economy of attention and mindful self-management, would not do better if we were to explore certain states of semi-attentiveness, of being only half there. The surrealists of the 1920s were known for hopping from one movie theater to the other, just sampling a few random minutes of a given film and then arbitrarily deciding to move on rather than watch the whole thing. Their aim was not to be or become prolonged attentive viewers, but to find inspiration and creative insight at the edge or even beyond the perimeters of focused attention. I like to think of them as half-attentive viewers, yet such semi-attentiveness turned out to be a source of unexpected wonder. Today's mindfulness and wellness industry can have the tendency to throw the baby out with the bathwater: it demands attentiveness at all times and precisely thereby depletes the very resources we need to be truly attentive, to attend to something, to stretch our mind and senses toward the world, in the first place.

**KH/** That sounds like a *dérive* in psychogeographical terms, with a *dérive* often being a group walk in Paris in the same way. Coming back to your questions, Erin, I feel that so many of our current consumer opportunities for mindfulness are indeed individually oriented while so many of our greatest traditions of contemplation and mindfulness

and slowness are collective, from the various religions and their practices of togetherness—which, as you might expect, is precisely where my interests are.

**KK/** *This leads us to the political potential of slowness. Erin already mentioned gender and identity politics. Generally speaking, is global inequality the main issue we should address in terms of a politics of slowness, or are there other aspects you consider relevant? When does the concept of slowness become interesting politically and how does this, in turn, relate back to the aesthetic?*

**KH/** My interest in the politics of slowness lies not only in the heuristic dimensions—who is experiencing slowness and what makes it possible?—but also within the political potentials of slowness as a collective act. The “slow down” can also be a form of labor protest, as in David Noble’s examination of worker resistance against the automation of labor in his book *Forces of Production*.<sup>7</sup>

Yet my interest in the politics of slowness also stems from aesthetics. It is because I value the role of aesthetics in political action, understanding, and transformation that I am still at this and why I enjoy coming back to it with you. Especially as I don’t see enough engagement with the aesthetic in the worlds where I am engaged with political change, this becomes a place to do that.

**LK/** I have recently been really interested in different concepts and practices of listening.



The art of listening has an intriguing relationship to what we discuss here as the aesthetics of slowness. The act of listening has not fared well in cultural criticism and political theory. It has been associated with passivity and mere receptivity, has been sidelined as infested by emotion and affect, and has been relegated to the realms of privacy and interiority and seen as a mere addendum in philosophies trying to define the virtues of public life, the dynamics of political leadership, and the condition of the human. We celebrate eloquent speakers, admire crafted verbal arguments, fear the rhetoric of demagogues, and abhor the lies of powerful politicians. We think of speech in both public and private realms as the decisive medium to negotiate differences, carry out conflict, act in the world, and through such action constitute our human identity, define the contours of the social, and navigate the realms of the political. But rarely do we praise good listening and understand patient listening as a precondition and virtue of private and public life. I would love for us to foster and encourage the art of listening, to stress the importance of pausing and attending to the voices of others before we move into action or contribute our own words to various conversations, including in the political realm. Populist politics, as we have come to know it in recent years, does not know of verbal pause and deliberation, let alone a careful listening to the voices of others. What I call aesthetic slowness can serve as a training ground to become better listeners who are attuned to the multiplicity of voices, including the voice of nonhuman entities that are around

us—attuned to the fact that, in contrast to the rhetoric of populism, there is always more than one voice. To promote better listening in society is one important facet of a contemporary political practice of slowness. It's at once timely and untimely.

**KH/** I really appreciate that and have been thinking a lot about listening in my new administrative role as dean of a medium-sized college. If there is anything I can do to create conditions for collective flourishing, it is only going to be if I listen! What that also takes me to though, Lutz, is the way that this conversation about slow aesthetics has helped me think about and understand aesthetic reflexivity—the Brechtian breaks in an audience's experience—as a path to a different orientation to others. Your thoughts on listening remind me about how one of the most effective pieces of telecommunication art was not meant to be art at all. In the early days of

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the internet, Godfrey Daniels made a website as an homage to this strange phone booth in the middle of the Mojave Desert—nobody knew why it was there, but it was probably left over from a mining operation years ago. By publicizing this operational phone booth and its number on the web, callers around the world began to ring the place up, and on the weekend people would drive out from Los Angeles to gather and take turns answering calls from around the world. It was never about the conversation—it was just about the connection. I’ve always been taken by that slowing down of the normally smooth, uninterrupted act of telecommunicative connection to just “Wow I’m connected to you! Who are you? Where are you? Hey everybody I’ve got someone from Algeria on the line!” A very performative act of listening, a breaking with communication’s usual speed in turn catalyzed a collective gathering and celebration—all around this artifact of technical history in the middle of the desert. How can we be prompted to listen and notice our connections to others through these kinds of breaks?

**LK/** I find it really important to keep in mind that to stress the art of listening doesn’t mean to deny the demands of political activism. On the contrary, it should be seen as a precondition of meaningful and effective political intervention. It would be a misunderstanding to accuse advocates of virtuous listening as advocates of political passivity or defeatism.

**KK/** *For sure. We could even relate these thoughts back to the origins of philosophy and*

*the Socratic method of posing questions, and draw lines to recent philosophy, such as Jacques Rancière’s praise of the emancipated spectator, which would bring us back from listening to the variety of modes of perception.<sup>8</sup> But I’d like to tease out some further, complicated aspects of a politics of slowness. We’ve already touched upon the fact that one individual’s “slow” not necessarily being available for someone else. But we haven’t gone so far as to address what Rob Nixon puts forward in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, where he explains how slowness can help disguise contested policies or actions.<sup>9</sup> Slow processes often don’t have these culminating moments that would immediately draw the attention of the media, the public, or the global community, and therefore call for critique or protest. In such cases, slowness can become a very problematic political strategy. Do you have any thoughts about these negative associations to slowness?*

**KH/** The word that comes to mind right away with that is “waiting” and the role of borders in that regard. Who goes fast through a border? Who goes slowly? For some, life and death hang on such questions, and for all of us, border technologies utilize speed in the construction of political subjects. Slowdowns at borders ensure awareness of one’s place in a larger system. As in the earlier part of our conversation, the relational nature of duration is key. Whether we are talking about a multiscreen video installation or the interface between two nation states, we experience slowness through duration in relation to other durations.

LK/ I really appreciate your comments on the politics of border crossings and social mobility and how there is a precarious difference between those who are allowed to move fast and those who are made to slow down in order either to be channeled and surveilled or to be shut out from certain border crossings in the first place. Needless to say, this is a major problem in our contemporary moment. How the movements of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are brought to a halt by the United States at the border with Mexico is no doubt part of a politics of slowness as well. It reminds us of the fact that the slow is not a good object in and of itself.

*EL/ As we're all sitting in university offices at the moment, we can also think about our position as scholars who consistently face institutional waiting periods. Of course we've all seen the increase in funding cuts for the humanities, which prevents the advancement of research and career trajectories—sometimes to the extent of them never even starting. I'm thinking here specifically about the precarious position of adjuncts.*

LK/ One of the areas where terms such as “precarious,” or “the precariat,” or “precarious lives” have found a strong foothold is in the academy—in its efforts to come to terms with adjunct academic positions. In the academy, these terms highlight the extent to which higher education today regulates expectations, flows, trajectories, and itineraries of highly trained individuals who are trying to move into the system but then are

being moved out again. It therefore is entirely appropriate to discuss the politics and economics of higher education today as a politics of speed, slowness, and temporality, as a system trying to negotiate different borders and walls to regulate the movement and velocities of its members. It deserves mentioning when discussing issues of speed and slowness in university settings to point out that our often relatively liberal and open-minded institutions are nevertheless some of the slowest moving institutions in society, quiet resilient to change, constantly eager to brake innovative experiments. I cannot fully explain why this is the case, I don't know what histories have led to the tardiness of university reform. But the retardation and hesitation we often observe is quite stunning. You would hope that universities serve as breeding grounds for creative and transformative energy, but for some reason it is really hard to transform these institutions.

KH/ You're making me want to go and write about this right now! Again, what is helpful about these approaches to aesthetics and politics is that they always take us back to naming the positions, and what is visible and senseable from each of those positions. I can name a few examples that are really interesting in combination. Right now on my campus, speed and slowness is an issue because we are revenue-starved and no longer supported by the state the way we were for most of our existence; we are now more reliant on tuition. In response, departments in finance, business, and engineering are in a great hurry to spool up new degree programs imagined to be

high revenue generating. And now we have a logjam because our governance processes for approving these degree proposals are going appropriately slow in examining these proposals for true academic merit and alignment with the university's mission. The question of whether such revenue-oriented programs are compromising our values and mission has become a major political fight at the moment on our campus—and this conflict has largely emerged around the speed of evaluative discourse.

At the same time, from another subject position, I could point to our youngest undergraduate students and particularly our students of color as impatient about the pace of change in ending racism at the university. They see what their predecessors called out as in need of address and see that things aren't changing fast—they're right to be frustrated. We have to find some ways to move faster for them and to show them that we're actually doing something. As students, they measure change over a four- or five-year timeline, but we should be able to help them see the longer change they're part of. So it is interesting who perceives slowness and where, from very different subject positions and very different areas in the university right now.

**KK/** *While this is a highly interesting thread, I would like to invite you to move on to another topic, which is the technological side of slowness. All four of us are also interested in the question of how slowness is related to mediation and the different mediums we*

*use. Would you say that there is a difference between live slowness and mediated slowness? And is there a specific slowness to a specific medium?*

**KH/** I appreciate you starting with the question of medium rather than media. Certainly that takes us to our previous discussions about the nature of the digital and the different ways of encoding and transferring information, which is the way we think about mediums in our moment. Such an approach to media begins with a speed paradigm, drawing from information theory and the transmission of information. In my teaching, I toggle back and forth between digital and analog media in order to help my students gain awareness of the relational duration of information translation. I have them work in tape-based recording technologies, for example, to watch the medium move across the capstan and observe the spatialization of time.

I also think here of the work of scholar John Durham Peters, who has been pushing us to broaden our definition of mediums in communication to include clouds and water, and to let the nonhuman world better inform our understanding of communication.<sup>10</sup>

**LK/** This is a good moment to come back to what we discussed earlier. I want to ensure that no one misunderstands what I mentioned earlier about multiscreen video art as a direct conduit to experiences of slowness. I am far from claiming direct links between a certain medium and the kind of experiences

of slowness that mediums in certain contexts may trigger. The same kind of medium can be used in slow and fast ways. The recent concept of affordances, however, is helpful to illuminate this. It directs our attention to the fact that certain mediums and media tend to offer affordances that gravitate to a slower rather than a faster use without themselves determining this. Nothing I wrote in *On Slowness* or in my more recent book on the long take wanted to assume the fashionable rhetoric of media determinism.<sup>11</sup> I remain deeply interested in what people actually do with different kinds of media and in what kind of environments. There is always more than one medium that is working on us and that we are working with at any given moment.

**EL/** *During the ASAP symposium and in his contribution to this special issue, Wolfgang Ernst discussed process-oriented ontology, which perhaps adds another consideration for us in this conversation of media. His main question was, first of all, where is the medium? And of course we have heard such questions before with the advent of photography—where is photography?—but the example he gave, which was especially interesting in terms of time, was radio. He asked: Where is radio? Is it the actual sonic waves? Is it the machine? Or is it the moment of translation? In that way, he asked us to think outside of the human to consider the time of the machine as opposed to the time of experience.*

**LK/** I would insist that what makes questions of temporality and experiences of media

aesthetically interesting are situations in which multiple temporalities are present and rub against each other. Consider cinema. A film, to be sure, has its own temporality, its own time. It features twenty-four frames per second, its screening takes ninety minutes to tell a narrative that, let's say, may last two months. There is therefore a time in or of the medium, but is that really the only thing that matters when I go to the movies? No. What really matters is the relations and tensions between the mechanical time of the film, the plot time of the film, the story time of the film, the time it takes to watch the film, and the kind of time that we bring as viewers to the auditorium, our memories and anticipations, our patience and durational commitments, our expectations and curiosity—and it is the meshing and interactions of all these different times that makes the experience of watching a film aesthetically interesting.

**EL/** *Talking about the different kinds of experiences of time and what is in the media or what is in the viewer, as well as our memory of all of these things, I think what Wolfgang is aiming for is a kind of refusal of a human time in looking specifically at what a medium does. Perhaps an easy example to use is the idea of command and execution in algorithmic code and specifically the moment of it not working—that is, that a command doesn't necessarily mean that there is an execution, which brings to the fore a thinking in a completely different kind of time that is not human but machinic. Katja and I were talking earlier about a rise in animal studies, which raises similar questions*

*of time: What is it to be an animal? What is it to be a machine? Such questions offer an interesting alternative to a focus on the individual or the social, and maybe even a reconfiguration of them.*

**KH/** Perhaps what defines the deterministic approach to media that Lutz is pushing against is a preoccupation with media that are of immediate instrumental use to human and even colonial enterprise. Maybe the idea of a medium bringing inherent qualities stems from the valuing of media primarily for control. Some of these broader, more ontologically oriented approaches to media are allowing for the existence of multiple narrations whether or not we perceive them, whether or not they register for us. That's where Lefebvre's notion of rhythmanalysis has been particularly helpful to me because of how it allows for the plurality of being and acting in a temporal way, and one that allows for some rhythms as so big or so small that humans might not even perceive them as rhythms.<sup>12</sup> Some rhythms are off our sensory register and will only reveal themselves from another being's point of view.

**LK/** Aesthetic slowness, as I would like to understand it, is a mode of experience in which viewers or listeners engage in complex negotiations between human and machinic or media time, and thereby possibly partake of a derailing or unsettling of the temporal templates of the everyday. Listening to Kevin mentioning Lefebvre, I had to think about the fact that, for instance, in music we need to distinguish between meter and rhythm. Meter

is, if you wish, the "clock time" of music. A musical piece that just sticks to its meter, that tries to fulfill its obligations to its meter, might not be of great aesthetic interest. Things get interesting in music when rhythm starts to push against, works with, tries to transform, and inhabits meter. If music imprints its meters onto the listener, what we have is the imperative form of a marching tune. Rhythm messes up the order of the march, temporality starts to fray and lose its firm grasp, and things become aesthetically more vibrant and interesting.

**KK/** *It is interesting that the role of technology within slowness leads us to questioning humanistic positions more generally. This is where it seems very productive to investigate the role of slowness within the Anthropocene discourse. While largely human-centered from the outset (denominating the period when humans left an everlasting trace on the earth's crust), the notion of the Anthropocene can help us to think about social time, technological time, and human time in relation to deep time, archaeological time, planetary time. That is also what I appreciate in Lutz's approach. It enables*

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*. . . the role of technology within slowness leads us to questioning humanistic positions more generally.*

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*us to see complex layers of time in interrelation. Do you have any thoughts about the new ideas that are propagated within the so-called environmental humanities? Can Anthropocene or post-Anthropocene studies be pushed or unpacked by means of concepts of slowness?*

LK/ In *On Slowness*, the concept of the Anthropocene didn't really come up. If I had to write the book again, I would certainly make a stronger effort to develop slowness as a category that allows us to attend to, attune to, and reflect on the times and durations of nonhuman objects, entities, and vibrational forces on our planet. What energized the Anthropocene was the fact that humanity, once proud in its effort to control this planet and to define itself through this sense of control, grafted one particular understanding of time onto its environments. It would be intriguing to think of slowness as a way of recognizing that geology, our climate, plants, and animals have times as well, and that ours is only one among others. But don't get me wrong: I am not arguing that we can save the planet simply by slowing down. Considering the state of climate change, we need much more than just a mere slowing down of economic, technological, or political developments.

KH/ This frame of thinking is also why I've been engaged in temporalities of the nuclear in another part of my work. In our book *Lookout America!*, Ned O'Gorman and I unearth the significant role that time-based media played in the United States' rise to nuclear supremacy.<sup>13</sup> In that work, it struck us that time-based

representations of nuclear experiments played such a significant role in the fast-moving and shortsighted "race" to nuclear superiority. In everything from mineral extraction to waste disposal, worker safety, and the selection of test sites, the rapid rise of nuclear technology depended on the devaluing of other longer temporalities—that of the effects of radiation on living beings, for example.

We could also have another conversation about duration in the context of perception of nuclear power, the role of high-speed photography in documenting these tests, and the life of stills versus motion pictures in terms of the iconization of the mushroom cloud from the bomb. It is not something I have done work on, but I can see myself doing that in the future. There is even the question of the sheer volume of footage capturing nuclear tests for the purposes of science—and propaganda—which would be almost impossible for an individual to watch as it would take so long. That kind of comparative time base has also been helpful for me to explain what can seem like a scale that is sublime and too big to comprehend in terms of our documentary efforts.

LK/ This returns us to the beginning of the conversation: John Cage's *As SLOW as Possible*. The installation is fascinating, not because of its monumental gesture wanting to last for hundreds of years, but because it makes us think about durations that may exceed human existence. It is not entirely unlikely that in 600 years no human will be around to listen to this work. Cage asks us to pay tribute to material

environments whose vibrations may very well outlast the very thing we have come to call the human subject, and, in this way, he asks us to rethink how we have come to inhabit and map time on this planet.

**KH/** This discussion of “deep time” also brings me back to a fundamental question in my institutional work, namely: How I can convince my colleagues to make resource decisions with an eye to effects that won’t be visible until we’re long gone? How can I introduce other time bases into collective institutional life that are beyond our ability to comprehend? We need to learn from those facing this question from such positions as those of the Water Protectors at Standing Rock. The Indigenous peoples gathered to protest there are clearly thinking of the long-term effects *forward* of extraction. But they’re also thinking of the long-term effects *backward* of colonization that they still live with every day. Who else is holding such a long view in mind in institutional and political work? This is again why I come back to art and aesthetics, where I go to find rich affective experiences of the limits of our durational perception—art regularly helps people connect with durations that are outside themselves in a real way and in a motivational way.

**LK/** It is fitting to end this conversation by addressing the role of academic institutions and practices. Although it would be nice to be with all of you in the same room, doing this conversation via Skype has worked reasonably well. It makes me wonder about the carbon footprint contemporary scholarship and

scholarly communication produce, and about the curious prestige we have come to attach to the image of jet-setting global scholars in spite of the fact that much of what we do can be done without frenzied traveling and carbon emission. My hope for future scholarship is to become more mindful about its environmental footprint, about the movements and speeds of bodies as much as of materials that enable us to perform our business.

*This conversation via Skype took place between offices at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Vanderbilt University in Nashville, and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (The Netherlands) on April 18, 2019. We would like to offer a special thanks to Ellen V. K. Smith for her transcription.*

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### / Notes /

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<sup>1</sup> See Kevin Hamilton and Katja Kwastek, “Slow Media Art: Seeing Through Speed in Critiques of Modernity,” *Acoustic Space* 12 (2014): 25–34.

<sup>2</sup> See Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Under the panel title “The Aesthetics and Politics of Slow (Media) Art,” Kevin presented a paper entitled “Beyond Abstention: A Slow Aesthetics of Media Participation and Refusal,” Lutz spoke about “Unheard Resonances and Reverberations: Slowness in Contemporary Sound Art,” and Katja’s paper was about “Tidal Rhythms and Oceanic Streams as Metaphors and Agents of Slowness.”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Marion Werner, et al., eds., *Doreen Massey: Critical Dialogues* (Newcastle, UK: Agenda, 2018).



<sup>4</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 442.

<sup>5</sup> David Forbes, "How Capitalism Captured the Mindfulness Industry," *The Guardian*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/apr/16/how-capitalism-captured-the-mindfulness-industry>.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> David F. Noble, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (2008; London: Verso, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Lutz Koepnick, *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (1992; London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Hamilton and Ned O'Gorman, *Lookout America!: The Secret Hollywood Studio at the Heart of the Cold War* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2018).

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