Slow

in *Photography and the Optical Unconscious* edited by Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski (Duke University Press, 2017)

Terri Kapsalis

March 13, 2014. An audience of more than eight hundred people fills the Rubloff Auditorium at the Art Institute of Chicago. Guitarist Thurston Moore is on stage facing the audience with his electric guitar and amp, his back to the seventy-two-foot-wide screen. The lights dim. James Nares's 2011 film *Street* begins. What am I seeing? A rich color image of a New York street. Are those models or actors on the sidewalk? The image is still. A photograph. No, it is not. There is movement. A pedestrian's eyelid. The pinks and reds of neon shop signs pulse up and down the street, beating like a vast circulatory system. We spectators float down the street by way of a tracking shot. *Street* is something between a photograph and a moving image, unlike anything I have ever seen. As my eyes and mind acclimate, I perceive more of the pedestrians' glacial movement. One man's finger unfurls into a point. A woman in a T-shirt, both palms facing out at chest level, flaps her fingers like a slow bird. This cannot be staged. It is found. I thought I knew what a person walking down the street looked like. Had I been misled by that second meaning of the term *pedestrian*—tedious, dull, monotonous? That definition must have been created by somebody who wasn't looking carefully.

Moore's guitar is dense and driving. His decision to turn his back to the screen infuses his improvisations with an element of chance. Surprising punctuations and unanticipated emotional tones arise through the indeterminate relationship between image and sound. The film scrolls from one tableau to another. The Times Square naked cowboy is a cutout midstrum, a visual

counterpart to Moore's guitar sounds. Television monitors in a storefront window blink like square eyes. So many mouths caught open. A woman's arm crawling upward on the way to hailing a cab—a slow salute or a gesture to the heavens? A man, palm to the sky, pulls three fingers toward him. A woman stands at the corner, earbuds in place, her face in a serene trance with eyes closed; her arms hover as if conducting a cloud of spirits. Two cops lean against metal rails like reliefs in reflective yellow vests. A baby's fat legs in pink tights float forward from her father's belly as if walking into air.

Nares made *Street* with a Phantom Flex high-speed camera, shooting 780–800 frames per second from the window of a car, while being driven around the streets of Manhattan. The street serves as a track, with the car providing the motion for the tracking shot. Nares could only shoot six seconds at a time because, if he wanted to keep the shot, he would need to transfer the files from the camera, which took a good ten minutes. Over the course of a week he shot a total of forty minutes in six-second increments. Forty minutes of real-time footage transformed into sixteen hours of slow-motion footage, which then was edited into an hour-long film with a soundtrack comprised of Thurston Moore twelve-string guitar improvisations. For the Art Institute performance, the film's recorded soundtrack was silenced and Moore created an improvised soundtrack on the spot.

A month or so following the screening I run into Margaret, a friend who had also been a member of the large audience that night at the Art Institute. She says she can't stop thinking about *Street*. I tell her I am haunted by it. We discuss favorite moments. The two young sisters who spy the camera in the car and transform from smiles to impish vixens with blazing hand signs. The

sparrows that lift off to the liquor store awning like four beams of light. And the fly, the inimitable fly like a small hovering helicopter with wings that are nearly visible. We discuss two or three seconds of real time as though they are complex narratives.

In 1933, film theorist Rudolf Arnheim wrote, "[Slow motion] has hitherto been used almost exclusively in educational films in order to show the individual phases of rapid movements. In this way the technique of a boxer or of a violinist, the explosion of a bomb, the jump of a dog, can be analyzed closely. Slow motion has hardly been applied at all yet to artistic purposes, although it should be very useful. It might, for instance, serve to slow down natural movements grotesquely; but it can also create new movements, which do not appear as the retarding of natural movements but have a curious gliding, floating character of their own."[1]

Vision Research makes Phantom Camera Products for the entertainment, scientific, military, aerospace, and automotive industries. One camera is orbiting the earth on the International Space Station, where it will "provide high-speed image capture for ground breaking zero gravity experiments."[2] Phantom high-speed cameras catch things in fast motion: airbags inflating, dogs drinking water, spray bottles spraying, basketball players jumping, a rocket launching, sharks hunting, a crash dummy during impact, a table saw, a missile path, New York pedestrians.

Walter Benjamin wrote, "Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride."[3]

A subject's quick tempo makes for more surprising slow motion. Muybridge shot a galloping horse, not a tortoise. Nares shot New York City streets. According to research conducted in the 1990s by social psychologist Robert Levine, New York City has the sixth fastest walking speed in the world. He was surprised by the results, expecting New York City to clock in faster, but after retesting, he found that clock speed does not account for the manner in which New York pedestrians maneuver streets—dodging cars and other pedestrians. There is a "skill and assertiveness on the streets of New York that doesn't necessarily show up on the stopwatch."[4]

Street could be seen as following in the slow-motion educational film tradition that Arnheim mentions. Take a fast-moving organism, like a running horse, and slow it down to see if all four feet are suspended at one time. Is there any reason to shoot with a Phantom camera on the Greek island of Ikaria where a large population of centenarians avoid watches and live with broken clocks?

Levine observed that pedestrian tempo in a city correlated with other characteristics of that city. The more robust the economy, the faster people walked. The more industrialized the country, the faster people walked. The bigger the population, the faster people walked. The cooler the climate, the faster people walked. And then there is this characteristic: "Individualistic cultures move faster than those that emphasize collectivism." In individualistic cultures, Levine surmises, more emphasis is placed on achievement than on social relationships, which "usually leads to a time-is-money mindset."

A few months before the Art Institute of Chicago's screening of *Street*, cultural critic Anne Elizabeth Moore and I talk with students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. We have been invited to address issues of diversity and the critique process. Toward the end of the event, Anne talks about the idea of "radical noticing," that to actually notice the people near you seems like a radical act. I add that radical noticing requires time. How can we actually notice or see the person standing there if we do not slow down? How can we listen and take note of what they are saying or not saying? So, yes, noticing is radical, but what about slowness? Isn't that perhaps one of the most rebellious ways to be these days? Hands shoot up. Students want to discuss this slowness. There is a craving in the room.

As the discussion unfolds, I list as many slow movements as I can remember (food, museum experiences, television). In 2013, *Sakte-TV* or Slow TV was named "word of the year" in Norway. Half the country's population tuned in for a 134-hour live broadcast of a ship's voyage from Bergen to Kirkenes. Then there was a twelve-hour-long broadcast titled *National Firewood Night* that included eight hours of a live fireplace.[5] Soon after reading about Norwegian slow television, I saw an advertisement for an American Animal Planet special called *Meet the Sloths*.

I hadn't yet learned about Lorenz Potthast, a German artist, who designed the Decelerator helmet when he was a first-year art student. "The helmet is simply a shiny metal dome that records the view from a front camera and processes it through a small computer to a screen in front of the wearer's eyes. The slow-motion is controlled by a handheld remote. 'The first three minutes are just confusing, but then you get a feel for it and you become the director of your own perception,' he says. 'It's alienating, because you're experiencing time at a different speed to your own surroundings so you can't really interact, but it's also somehow fascinating. People often don't want to take it off again.'"[6]

Potthast did not intend to market his helmet, but he has been contacted regularly by interested parties. In March 2014, Potthast was contacted by the director of a physical rehabilitation clinic in Italy. “After numerous studies with volunteer patients at the clinic, Potthast and the Italian doctors eventually found an intriguing possible use for the helmet. One patient, who had suffered a stroke and could no longer fully open his hands, was motivated to overcome this physical barrier after wearing the helmet during his exercises and seeing his fingers unfold in slow motion.”

I wonder aloud if slow might be an antidote for this fast world. If slow might be an important first step toward understanding and respecting how we are different from each other.

One student at the back of the room raises his hand. “But how can I explain this slowness thing to my mother, who works two jobs to pay for my education?” He is sincere with pen and notebook out, ready to take notes.

I answer that slowness doesn’t necessarily mean that less gets done. I talk about days of quickly doing many things at once and then, at the end, wondering what actually happened. And then there is the slow, plodding person that always seems to have another project completed. Remember the tortoise and the hare?

Am I convinced by my own answer? Partly. Is slowness a privilege? Is slowness a luxury? And conversely, slowness is not always a matter of choice. “Slow” can be used as an admonition, even an accusation. So slowness must be considered in the context of a culture where expendable laborers are judged on the speed of their production. Where the health of an economy is measured by the quick rate of consumption.

Is slowness a possible form of resistance? As much as I question the prevalent emphasis on achievement over social relationships, I, too, feel the pressures of speedy production. I do not

say to the students that there are times I feel deep shame for my slow working process and have excused myself with an apologetic tone: “I write slowly. Very very slow. So slow. Like a painter setting out on a wall-sized canvas with a single-hair brush.”

I do not tell the students that, at times, I catch myself waiting to speak in lieu of listening to what someone is saying. That I find myself walking quickly from one place to another with a sole focus on arrival. Putting slow into action is not easy.

“Participants are invited to run a race with the aim of losing,” writes Brazilian theater innovator Augusto Boal. Boal designed exercises to "undo the muscular structure of the participants" so they can understand how their labor and life shapes their bodies. Included within these disjunctive exercises is the slow-motion race: “The last one is the winner. Moving in slow motion, the body will find its center of gravity dislocated at each successive moment and so must find again a new muscular structure which will maintain its balance. The participants must never interrupt the motion or stand still; also they must take the longest step they can and their feet must rise above knee level. In this exercise, a 10 meter run can be more tiring than a conventional 500-meter run, for the effort needed to keep one’s balance in each new position is intense.”[7]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: “There is a wonderful story about an 18th-century rabbi, Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, who is looking at people rushing to and fro in the town square. And he wonders why they’re all running so frenetically. He stops one and he says, ‘Why are you running?’ And the man says, ‘I’m running to make a living.’ And the rabbi says to him, ‘How come you’re so sure

that the living is in front of you and you have to run to catch up? Maybe it's behind you and you got to stop and let it catch up with you.'"[8]

It's there in the thesaurus. How did "slowness" become a synonym for "laziness," "idleness," and "sluggishness"? How did "slowness" become the antonym of "activity"? A sloth is not lazy. A sloth is just being a sloth.

A few words here. A sentence there. If lucky, a paragraph appears. When sitting at a keyboard or with paper and pen, is stillness the same as inactivity? Oftentimes, through stillness something happens. How to tell the stillness of activity from that of inactivity when they look the same?

Perhaps this is why *Street* is so comforting. Nares takes us deep into what might be considered unproductive time, the time of the movement between here and there. Hidden within these unremarkable pedestrian moments are exceptional micro-performances. A person does not appear to move distractedly from point A to point B. There is something at play that is much more complex, like a single word unfolding itself into a book-length poem.

Street sticks. Walking in downtown Chicago, I try to picture what I cannot see, the tiny dramas locked into the expressions and gestures of pedestrians who pass by. An older woman walks toward me, her eyes focused on a building in front of her. Her right hand rubs her left. If I could see her with *Street* vision, how might she appear? Joyful? Ecstatic? Forlorn?

I am not one to make sounds while watching a film, but while watching *Street* I find myself making utterances as though I am watching a spectacular display. Nares shows me the magnificence in the mundane—a billowing shirt or a pigeon's lift-off.

Might this slow vision be the superpower we need for these times? Take "faster than a speeding bullet" and flip it on its head? Slower than a sprouting seed! *Street* has changed the way I see.

How has *Street* changed the way Nares sees? I ask him about this in a phone interview. Nares's speech is slow and deliberate, which makes his words a dream to transcribe. He answers the question before it is asked.

James Nares: . . . A big part of *Street* is how the viewer acclimates. You begin to understand what's going on and you're able to see more things happening within the moment. Myself, after watching it again and again, I've developed an ability to see live in the street. I can see things happen. I can take a little snapshot in my mind and see it as though it were in the film. Life is pretty rich when you look at it that way. There's so much going on.

Terri Kapsalis: I planned to ask if making *Street* has changed the way you see.

JN: It's changed . . . my ability to look. It's changed . . . yes, it's changed the way I see. It's changed how I see and what I see. And I appreciate the choice we have in what we see. The eye is nonjudgmental and absorbs everything coming at it. It's the mind that isolates and then does things with the things it isolates. Psychology and culture take their toll on what we see. That's why I love the way babies look. They just look. It's nonjudgmental and that's why they look so wise. . . .

Urban theorist Jane Jacobs observed her stretch of Hudson Street in New York City. In her 1961 book *Life and Death of American Cities*, she notes how the daily rituals of inhabitants can be seen as a "sidewalk ballet": "Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance . . . to an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole. The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with improvisations."

She offers a detailed description of the sidewalk ballet in her neighborhood that includes the following: "Mr. Lacey, the locksmith, shuts up his shop for a while and goes to exchange the time of day with Mr. Slube at the cigar store. Mr. Koochagian, the tailor, waters the luxuriant jungle of plants in his window, gives them a critical look from the outside, accepts a compliment on them from two passers-by, fingers the leaves on the plane tree with a thoughtful gardener's appraisal, and crosses the street for a bite at the Ideal where he can keep an eye on customers and wigwag across the message that he is coming."

She surmises, "I have made the daily ballet of Hudson Street sound more frenetic than it is, because writing telescopes it. In real life, it is not that way. In real life, to be sure, something is always going on, the ballet is never at a halt, but the general effect is peaceful and the general tenor even leisurely. People who know well such animated city streets will know how it is. I am

afraid people who do not will always have it a little wrong in their heads—like the old prints of rhinoceroses from travelers' descriptions of rhinoceroses."[9]

When filming *Street*, Nares and his vehicle stayed on streets that allowed for a consistent speed of around thirty miles per hour. Perhaps that is why we don't see many of the kind of leisurely, neighborhood interactions that Jacobs describes. Or perhaps it is the fact that in the fifty-plus years since Jacobs wrote these words, cities have experienced unprecedented acceleration of growth as well as an increased speed associated with the growing consumption of digital media and technology. The sidewalk ballet has shifted to a quicker tempo, which, according to Levine, coincides with a pull to individualism.

Theoretical physicist Geoffrey West explains how this quicker tempo is actually counterintuitive when considering the growing city as a sprawling organism: "Every other creature gets slower as it gets bigger. That's why the elephant plods along. But in cities, the opposite happens. As cities get bigger, everything starts accelerating. There is no equivalent for this in nature. It would be like finding an elephant that's proportionally faster than a mouse."[10]

Nares slows the city organism and its frenetic streets and presents this elephantine organism in a pace proportional to its size. We can witness the city as a massive creature, pedestrians like cells on sidewalk pathways, neon lights that pulse and circulate. Beneath the city's slow streets, out of view, are unhurried sewer systems and electrical currents. In the tradition of early slow-motion education films, *Street* encourages us to consider the mystery of the organism and the way its many parts move and interact. Whereas in real time, pedestrians might appear as isolated, discrete units, in *Street*, at times they appear to be reaching out to each

other, as if to grasp one another's arms or to shake hands in the peaceful and leisurely manner of Jacobs's improvisational sidewalk ballet.

TK: Is there a particular moment when the idea for *Street* came to you? Something you saw or shot?

JN: I think it was just a slow meeting of a few areas of my interest and of different parts of my mind. One of which was super-slow-motion cinematography/videography. I guess my first slow-motion stuff started in 1975 with a Super 8 camera and continued in 1998 with a 16 mm high-speed camera. And I've always loved the *actualité* films, the films where they just stuck a camera on a cable car around the turn of the twentieth century, how they would drive it through the streets of London or New York.[11] And the camera wouldn't move—it would just look straight ahead in those films. It was a straight document and there was no interfering with what happened in front of the camera. There was just an absorption of what was happening on the street, in the world, and those films would usually show the streets of New York in Chicago and would show San Francisco in New York. You'd get to travel without actually having been there before travel became so easy. I think the most famous of those kinds of films was San Francisco before and after the earthquake. It was called "A Trip down Market Street." And the guy just happened to film it a couple of days before the earthquake, so he went back right after the earthquake and shot the same film. It's pretty great. There are other ones of going through the lower east side, Orchard Street, things like that. I've always loved those films and I've always loved Andy Warhol films, like the screen tests, and I love things where he just turned the camera on and let it run and really, no one did that. I guess people figured out how to use film, how to manipulate reality to tell a story, to piece it together to change what was happening. Even with

things that were supposedly documentary, people learned how to tell or to show their bias through the documentary. And really, nobody just turned the camera on and let it run until Andy Warhol came along and revived the idea, but it was seeded with the very first motion pictures. The very first motion pictures are of somebody blowing a bubble or somebody smoking a cigarette or a bird flying through the air, events that are unmanipulated in a way. They may be set up, like when Thomas Edison electrocuted an elephant to show the magic of his new invention, but still I always responded to the idea of just turning the camera on. In *Street*, I just wanted to show what was out there in the world and try and allow people to see it a little differently. . . .

TK: *Street* shows me that some pedestrian movements, some gestures, are almost spiritual. They are not of this world.

JN: I saw my friend John Ahern the sculptor last night. He used that word last night, *spiritual*. And other people have used it. I am so happy that my plan worked. I was just looking at the very first footage I shot from a little Casio camera that had an ability to shoot at a high frame rate, very low resolution. But I was driving in the city with one hand on the wheel and one hand pointing out the window with the camera. When I started looking at the footage and putting it together, I realized there was something there. I saw what I had found. And it was immediately apparent to me that there were these beautiful moments that could encapsulate something that we could each identify with and to elevate the simplest things into a spiritual realm. I wrote a proposal for the film about three years before I actually shot it, and one of the things I said was something like, I will be filming in the city, looking for ordinary moments, not looking for moments of dramatic interest, but moments that could reveal the drama in the brief moments of our lives, the small dramas that are happening all the time. I feel I succeeded in doing that. . . . It

has given me great pleasure to discover how people across the board seem to like this film—from kids to old people, people who know about film and art, people who don't. That's more than I could have hoped for.

TK: I wonder if part of that is due to the times we're living in with regard to speed.

JN: Yes, to see people slowing down and realizing that even though this thing is glacial in its movement through time, the fact that it's moving slowly doesn't mean that your mind has to move slowly too. You realize you become a very active participant in looking. It gives you time to look, and your eye can flit around the screen and see things and pick them out. . . . Particularly, it gives me pleasure when young people get hooked into it because the times we live in are so quick and multitasking with so many things happening simultaneously. There's such a sensory overload in the world, and it's nice to be able to do something that is completely opposite to that but to keep it interesting.

In 1923, spiritualist and writer Alexandra David-Neel saw a "moving black spot" on the horizon that, with the help of her field glasses, proved to be a man. She and her caravan were traversing the Tibetan countryside and had not seen another human being for ten days. The black spot approached quickly, and one of David-Neel's company proposed that this man was a *lung-gom-pa* lama. David-Neel was warned not to stop him or speak to him, for breaking his meditation would certainly kill him. She wrote in her book *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*: "By that time he had nearly reached us; I could clearly see his perfectly calm impassive face and wide-open eyes with their gaze fixed on some invisible far-distant object situated somewhere high up in space. The man did not run. He seemed to lift himself from the ground, proceeding by leaps. It looked as if he had been endowed with the elasticity of a ball and rebounded each time his feet touched

the ground. His steps had the regularity of a pendulum. . . . He went his way apparently unaware of our presence." After seeing the lung-gom-pa lama, David-Neel spoke with various people she met along the way and calculated that the lama had been running at that swift speed for a minimum of twenty-four hours straight. She then describes the spiritual purpose of the lung-gom-pa lamas' runs and their training, which included intensive breathing exercises, practices to lighten the body in order to make a form of levitation possible, and a three-year sitting meditation in darkness and seclusion. "It is difficult to understand that a training which compels a man to remain motionless for years can result in the acquisition of peculiar swiftness."[12]

At the same time that David-Neel was observing the lung-gom-pa lama, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, efficiency engineers in the scientific management movement, were conducting time and motion studies in the United States. They filmed a worker's every movement and, using slow motion, identified any "waste" motions. They also developed the "standard time" needed for each job down to the thousandth of a minute. A wide assortment of laborers was analyzed, including typists, bricklayers, and handkerchief folders. A number of critics, including union organizers, were suspicious of the Gilbreths' time and motion studies and saw them as yet another way to speed and exhaust workers. So the Gilbreths pitched their work as beneficial to employees, leading to increased efficiency and higher pay.[13] Frank Gilbreth wrote, "There is no waste of any kind in the world that equals the waste from needless, ill-directed, and ineffective motions, and their resulting unnecessary fatigue."[14]

I write four words. I eliminate two of them and replace them with two others. In the previous sentence I remove three and swap in four different words. Then while writing the most recent sentence I delete three letters that start a word I decide I do not want and replace it with another.

Now I read these three sentences. In the third sentence, I delete four words and replace them with a single word. Some people cannot compose on the keyboard, but I am comforted by the disappearance of the edits. I am left with some words that appear to be exactly how they were intended to be from the beginning. I will reread this paragraph.

In an interview, William Burroughs said, "Most people don't see what's going on around them. That's my principal message to writers: for Godsake, keep your *eyes* open. Notice what's going on around you. I mean, I walk down the street with friends. I ask, 'Did you see him, that person who just walked by?' No, they didn't notice him."[15]

Writer friends claim they write slowly too. But if we were to conduct time and motion studies side by side, they would be astounded. A morning might reveal a single sentence, like one short take in a film. Then day after day, others appear. It is slowly additive, with intensive editing all along leading to innumerable drafts. Once a critical mass of paragraphs has accumulated with ideas adequately harvested, scissors are taken to the pages and discrete units are cut apart. They are then sorted and rearranged, not unlike the physical splicing of tape or film.

According to Burroughs and Brion Gysin, "All writing is in fact cut-ups." Gysin's early experiments with the "cut-up" involved short texts from newspapers and letters. He found that when he took scissors to a page and rearranged the four quadrants, new messages were revealed. "Word-locks" were cracked open and, at times, as Burroughs said, "The future leaked out." They claimed the cut-up as a "new optic" with a history that went back to Dada. Gysin wrote in 1978,

"The cut-up method brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years. And used by the moving and still camera. In fact all street shots from movie or still cameras are by the unpredictable factors of passerby and juxtaposition cut-ups."

. . . Hailing a taxi becomes pinks and reds floating behind her. Slow down children. Pale nails with no hint of impatience. A cold cigarette caught midexpression above the sidewalk. As if in prayer, a man and his cane keep moving.

A ghost in the form of a man that dresses like a little girl.

Little girl, alone on the sidewalk, holds an image of his church. . . .

Flaubert spent a full month writing a single sentence of *Madame Bovary*. Do people now complain, "That Flaubert. What a waste of time. How idiotic to spend a month on a single sentence of *Madame Bovary*!"?

Am I writing a confession or a manifesto?

JN: Another thing that became very clear to me in making *Street* and in the editing process was—it's something that still photographers know but I, in a way, discovered it because it was so obvious to me—the importance of what we bring to what we're looking at, the importance of how we see it. The example I've used time and again—but it's a good one—is . . . there was one shot I had, it didn't make it into the film but it was a shot of a guy walking down the street in

Chinatown, and he's looking down at the ground. His head is bowed like he's lost everything. It's the end of his world. His wife has left him. Who knows what. He just looks really dejected. You get to see that very clearly and in great depth. But when you see it in regular speed as I did because we were scrubbing through, the guy is just glancing at his shoelaces to see if they're tied. To the same extent that the high-speed camera reveals things which we cannot experience or which we cannot see with the natural eye, it also obscures and creates things that don't exist. It obfuscates the world. . . . It's so obvious in a way. It made it very clear to me how our individual realities are a dance between one and the other. . . .

TK: In *Street*, I felt I could often see people think. The internal landscape has been slowed down as well.

JN: Yes, definitely. You can see thoughts forming. You can see people's minds moving from one thought to another. It seems to make thoughts visible in a way that is different from a still photograph. The relationship with still photography is strong, particularly with history. There's such a history of street photography. I think about that a lot. The film showed at the National Gallery in Washington at the same time as the Gary Winogrand show. Fantastic! So there was Gary Winogrand, his life's work there, and then *Street* playing a couple of doors down between Winogrand and nineteenth-century American furniture or something like that. And it made me realize—it didn't make me realize because I knew it already—that I could see the same things in moments that stood still. I like that about my film. It resides somewhere between motion picture and still photography. These things pass by with very little movement happening. They are like still photographs, but you see what happened just before and just after. You get just a little more information.

Scientists studied the rate at which various species perceive flashes of flickering light. They found that "the smaller an animal and the faster its metabolic rate, the slower time passes for it."[16] That is why the fly is so adept at avoiding the swatter. The fly perceives the world in the equivalent of slow motion and therefore has a greater ability to make quick decisions.

Neuroscientists David Eagleman and Chess Stetson found that during frightening experiences such as accidents or trauma, "the brain may lay down memories in a way that makes them 'stick' better."[17] Through recall, the exceptional density of memories offers the perception that time slows down during the actual event.

Athletes have recounted the experience of slowed time or what we might call "fly consciousness." Michael Jordan described his experience of key plays, of making decisions, seeing openings, reaching, jumping, and shooting as if the clock were suspended along with his body. As though the photographs and slow-motion replays of Jordan, hanging in midair, are evidence of his memories.

A similar phenomenon affects a child's perception of the passage of time. What Nares describes as "the way babies look," seeing things without judgment, is related to the idea that children perceive a vast array of new and therefore noteworthy sensory experience. Eagleman explains, "When you are a child, and everything is novel, the richness of the memory gives the impression of increased time passage—for example, when looking back at the end of a childhood summer."

In *Street*, a young girl runs down the sidewalk. Her arms and shoulders extend fully. There is a curve at her wrists. Her neck rocks. Later in the film, having spied the camera, a boy with an

expansive smile runs alongside the car, nearly keeping pace. Legs and arms push with a slowed abandon. *Street* teaches us to notice the fully animated gestures and expressions of these energized creatures who are smaller and speedier than their adult counterparts.

Guido van de Werve is not walking on a street. In his video *Nummer Acht (#8) Everything Is Going to Be Alright* (2007), van de Werve is a small dot on a cold, white landscape. He walks at a steady, relaxed pace across the hard ice surface of the Gulf of Bothnia in Finland toward the stationary camera. Precariously close behind him, a giant ice-breaking ship crushes its way through the surface. As van de Werve and the ice breaker move closer to the camera, we can hear the crunch of his footsteps along with the roar of the mammoth ice breaker that crashes through the thick ice that van de Werve has stepped on just seconds before. How I would like to be reassured by the piece's title.

Nares says that *Street* moves at a glacial pace. But even glaciers don't perform that way anymore. No matter how quickly we move, the earth's decline nips at our heels like a giant ice breaker.

Part of the pleasure of *Street* is a kind of magical thinking. If New York City streets can be slowed, then why can't other speedy things be reversed? Is there a way to slow the earth's destruction to 1/25th of the expected rate of collapse? Is it a coincidence that there are slow enthusiasts at a time when there is an acceleration of decline?

If we can see thoughts form, might that enable us to make better decisions? Would fly consciousness allow us to avert the swatter?

Australian Buddhist nun Robina Courtin is a tornado of teachings. She hurries into the hall, a blur of saffron robes. She speaks at a tremendous clip in full essays, without distraction. Eight hours each day, for nine days, teaching without referring to a single written note. She says something like, it's not about being all slow and holy. You can think fast, you can act fast, you can speak fast, but what are you thinking, what are you doing, what are you saying? Another day, she exclaims, all this talk of mindfulness. A thief is mindful! A murderer is mindful! What do you *do* mindfully? Check up!

The Search Inside Yourself Institute was founded in 2012. From the website: "Developed at Google and based on the latest in neuroscience research, the Search Inside Yourself (SIY) programs offer attention and mindfulness training that build the core emotional intelligence skills needed for peak performance and effective leadership. We help professionals at all levels adapt, management teams evolve and leaders optimize their impact and influence."

If efficiency engineers Frank and Lillian Gilbreth were still alive, would they have paid thousands of dollars for tickets to the 2014 Google-sponsored Wisdom 2.0 conference in San Francisco? During a session on three steps to corporate mindfulness, a local activist group called Heart of the City surprised the presenters by taking center stage and hoisting a banner that read "Eviction Free San Francisco." With the help of a bullhorn, they asserted the connection between escalating rents and housing problems and the influx of high-paid Silicon Valley employees. As

a guard played tug-of-war with a protester and her banner, one of the three seated workshop presenters diverted attention away from the fair housing intervention and, in a voice both slow and holy, asked the auditorium filled with participants to "check in with your body and see what's happening and what it's like to be around conflict and people with heartfelt ideas."[18]

On one full lane of Chicago's Michigan Avenue, a large and diverse group of bicyclists ride by at a leisurely pace. Some call out "Slow Roll" as they pass, and many of the riders wear "Slow Roll" T-shirts. Slow Roll Detroit has come to join Slow Roll Chicago on this ride. They have just biked from Pullman, where they visited the only black labor history museum in the nation and learned about the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. "'We ride slow because it's more about the journey than it is the destination,' says Olatunji Oboi Reed, 40, one of the co-founders of the initiative. . . . 'I really think that with Slow Roll we can change the narrative and participate in various forms of economic development,' says Jamal Julien, 40, a childhood friend of Reed's and a co-founder of the Chicago group.'"[19] Slow Roll has focused its rides on struggling communities on the West and South sides of Chicago. "'We ride because we believe the more people that ride in our community, the better we stand an opportunity of our communities being improved,' Reed said."[20]

TK: I wanted to ask you something about Thurston's soundtrack but now I realize that my question also relates to what you were saying in terms of Warhol and early cinema and turning on the camera and seeing what happens. Do you think there is a particular relationship between improvisation and slow motion?

JN: I guess I do. I never really thought of it as a relationship between the two, but I was very aware that I wanted Thurston to improvise his soundtrack because I wanted it to be one person's interior, one person's mind wandering. I wanted it to wander in the same way that we wandered around the city. Our improvisation while we were shooting. Let's try Fifth Avenue, let's go across on Fifty-Seventh and see. I guess wandering and improvising are similar, and then improvising also has rules and limits, boundaries of some sort. And our boundaries were dictated by light and speed and accessibility and one-way streets and that kind of thing. So we were improvising while shooting the film and Thurston was improvising while he did the music. I'm not really a purist because we took Thurston's music and chopped it up and made a soundtrack out of it. In the same way that I took what I had filmed and chopped it up and made a film out of it.

I had also originally thought of *Street* as having a soundtrack that revealed things about what you hear in the same way that slowing down what you see reveals things you can't normally see, but I realized that sound is just a different thing. I tried slowing down some street sounds and it just made the film drag. It felt like you were walking through mud in big boots or something. . . .

It seemed very important to me that Thurston should continue to do other improvisations at screenings, and it's been different each time he's done it. I still feel he has eyes in the back of his head. Which is kind of what happens when you can feel something happening. You know when you do that exquisite corpse game? When you draw the head and you turn it over and you draw the body and then do the legs and pass it around each time? When you play that game, after a while everybody gets on the same page and there are amazing coincidences. And I think there's something of that in there. It allows connections to happen that are unplanned and unexpected.

TK: And then you have this third coefficient, which is the energy of an audience. So you have an audience reacting to an image track, and a sensitive performer can feel the energy of the audience.

JN: You're absolutely right. It goes round and round in a circle. . . .

JN: I did a guitar thing the other night with Thurston at the Printed Matter book fair opening at MoMA PS 1. And that was really fun. The first time we ever played together. And it was loud.

TK: I wish I could have been there. I had the opportunity to play with Thurston in the late 1990s. We improvised together at the No Music festival in London, Ontario.

JN: What did you play?

TK: Improvised violin. I was trained classically from a young age. Later, I had a car accident which caused damage to my left hand, so I realized I would never play classically again. The intonation was impossible—there were just things that weren't going to happen. Not long after that I met John [Corbett] and started improvising with him. I realized there was a way to use the instrument differently. Work with what you've got.

JN: Did you have a head injury as well?

TK: No, just the hand.

JN: I ask because I had a head injury in 2001. It wasn't an injury, it was a stroke, an aneurysm in my brain. I was very lucky to survive. Half of the people who that happens to don't survive and of the half that do, I think only half of those have their faculties intact. I'm very lucky, but there have been consequences of that that I still live with. And it changed my way of seeing things and I think that it actually has something to do with *Street*, although I've never talked about this, but I do think . . . I'm easily overstimulated and I do have a need to see things slowly and quietly. [The phone goes quiet. Nares stops speaking suddenly, begins again, startled.] Hello?

TK: Can you hear me?

JN: Yes, I can. That was just a funny sound.

TK: Oh.

JN: And I do have a need to see and hear . . . [again, startled] hello?

TK: I don't know what's happening.

JN: Are you hearing it too?

TK: No. I heard just an echo of a noise this time but not the last time.

JN: It was like a loud beep.

TK: Oh, I'm sorry, just as you're talking about the need for quiet.

JN: Yes, right, exactly [laughter].

TK: If it keeps going, I can call you back without the recording app.

JN: It seems to have gone away. . . . I was just going to say, it's not something I talk about as a rule but the truth is that it does have something to do with how I see the world. When I first came out of hospital I was very disorientated. I would be somewhere and I would know where I was but not recognize anything, or I would recognize things but not know where I was, and it was like everything was upside down and I saw the world in the same way as a baby, like the way I was talking earlier. It was like I had slightly lost the ability to distinguish between things. As we go through life, the mind forms a way of seeing, and it sees the thing that interests it and it sees the things it wants to see, to some extent. And I lost that ability and then slowly reconstructed it. It's funny actually, because now I'm much more aware of those choices, in a way, or the decisions that create them.

Quite soon after coming out, I did a video piece called *My Cacophony*, which is . . . you know when you walk into a guitar shop and there are all these people standing around at

different amps playing different instruments and it all happens at the same time? I did a five-screen guitar installation video, which I've never shown, where I'm just improvising on the guitar and the idea is that they would be shown all together in a room where they would create that kind of confusion and cacophony, so I was alert to different ways of seeing since then and I think to some extent the film *Street* came out of my reconstructed reality that I've had to create for my own survival.

Is slow motion another form of cut-up? A portal that allows us to witness what is there all along locked into our daily speed? What would Burroughs and Gysin have thought about the super-slow motion that high-speed technology allows? Time stretched like the pliable material that it is, but somewhere in there, a breaking open, the unhinging of movement into near stillness. A new optics. Would they have seen the potential of the Phantom camera as yet another layer of cut-up through which to discover "the enigmatic at first but ultimately explicit and often premonitory" narratives buried within the text of the already cut-up street? Yet another method for training us to keep our eyes open. See it slow enough and something is revealed. A devastated man in Chinatown caught looking at his laces.

. . . The fly was off. We could hear the thought in three inches. We see a picture of ourselves together in hair gone skyward.

Does slow motion know what they should be? A few seconds of smile. A turn of elation, not to be repeated. Head cocked, midsentence. A bird's heart . . .

TK: Have you ever read the film theorist Rudolf Arnheim on slow motion?

JN: No.

TK: In "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin quotes Arnheim when he writes about slow motion. I wrote down a quote to read to you.

JN: What does he say?

TK: First, he talks about slow motion as mainly being used for educational films.

JN: Or scientific films. Like Eggerton. When I did the show here at the Met—which was such a gas, I had such fun doing it—we had all kinds of work from the collections, paintings and drawings and objects and like a Roman foot and an Egyptian head and I also had a few things on TV monitors. One of them was Etienne Jules Marey's cinematic experiments and they're so fantastic. Muybridge gets all the credit for that stuff but Marey's my man, all the way. Inventive. Like that gun that he made that makes photographs. Wow. Talk about shooting a film. He really did it. The other guy I had on a little monitor was Eggerton. Hummingbirds flying and that kind of thing. That shows what Arnheim is talking about.

TK: Arnheim came to mind when you were talking about your recovery. I'm thinking about the reeducation of the mind after something like an aneurysm. In a way, you've created your own educational film in *Street*.

JN: I like that. Reeducating myself.

TK: So in 1933, Arnheim writes, "Slow motion has hardly been applied yet to artistic purposes although it should be very useful. It might, for instance, serve to slow down natural movements grotesquely but it can also create new movements which do not appear as the retarding of natural movement but have a curious gliding, floating character of their own [Nares laughs]. Slow motion should be a wonderful medium for showing visions or ghosts."

JN: That's beautiful. Visions and ghosts.

TK: At first, I thought he was being metaphysical as in spirit photography, but then I realized he was talking about slow motion's use in narrative film.

JN: Visions and ghosts.

The Phantom camera reveals human vulnerability in the faces of *Street* pedestrians. Strangers are familiar. Release a few seconds from the burden of real time and feeling states are shed, past distraction or indifference or aggression to a certain tender openness that can be difficult to detect with the naked eye. Is speed a kind of armor?

Consider the maned three-toed sloth. Slow is his adaptive strategy, not the cause of his endangered status.

Street is an educational film showing visions and ghosts.

. . . Light and smoke and eyes aimed skyward. We see a picture of ourselves together without hesitation. Baby's fat legs in pink tights forward a rhythm with the shop window's neon sign. Hummingbirds hail cabs. Her father walks the wind, both hands upward as four sparrows lift off.

. . .

Endnotes:

[1] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 110-11.

[2] "Blasting Off with the Phantom v.7.3," November 13, 2014, https://www.phantomhighspeed.com/Blog/category/aerospace.

[3] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken, 1936), 235.

[4] Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time:On Tempo, Culture, and The Pace of Life.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 135.

[5] Nathan Heller, "Slow TV Is Here," *New Yorker*, September 30, 2014.

[6] Kit Buchan, "Decelerator Helmet: Viewing the World in Slow Motion," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jul/10/decelerator-helmet-lorenz-potthast-slow-motion.

[7] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 128.

[8] Jonathan Sacks. "His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, Jonathan Sacks, Katherine Jefferts Schori, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr—Pursuing Happiness," *On Being*, September 25, 2014, http://www.onbeing.org/program/pursuing-happiness-dalai-lama/147.

[9] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Random House, 1961), 50-54.

[10] Jonah Lehrer, "A Physicist Solves the City." *New York Times*, December 17, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/19/magazine/19Urban_West-t.html

[11] "Phantom ride" was a term used for a similar genre of film popular in the late nineteenth century. For these films, cameramen were often tied to the front of a moving train in order to shoot a film that offered the viewer the sensation of floating, ghostly movement through space. See Kolar, "Phantom Ride and Early Train Films," Mubi, accessed January 14, 2015, https://mubi.com/lists/phantom-ride-early-train-films.

[12] Alexandra David-Neel, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, (New York: Claude Kendall, 1932), 202-3, 209.

[13] Brian Price, "Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and the Manufacture and Marketing of Motion Study, 1908–1924." *Business and Economic History*, Second Series, 18 (1989).

[14] Frank Bunker Gilbreth and Lillian Moler Gilbreth, *Applied Motion Study: A Collection of Papers on the Efficient Method to Industrial Preparedness,* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 2.

[15] William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind,* (New York: Viking,1978).

[16] Rosa Silverman, "Flies See the World in Slow Motion, Say Scientists," *The Telegraph*, September 16, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/10311821/Flies-see-the-world-in-slow-motion-say-scientists.html.

[17] Chess Stetson, Matthew P. Fiesta, and David M. Eagleman, "Does Time Really Slow Down during a Frightening Event?" *PLoS ONE*, December 12, 2007, http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0001295.

[18] Alex Caring-Lobel, "Protesters Crash Google Talk on Corporate Mindfulness at Wisdom 2.0 Conference," *Tricycle*, February 2014, http://tricycle.org/trikedaily/protesters-crash-google-talk-corporate-mindfulness-wisdom-20-conference/.

[19] Tony Briscoe, "'Slow Roll' Cyclists Aim to Revive Neighborhoods," *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 2014, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-slow-roll-chicago-met-20140919-story.html.

[20] Adrienne Samuels Gibbs,."Bike for Good," *Chicago Sun Times*, October 17, 2014.