

## Episode 2.27 Slow Down!

August 3, 2018

Hannah (Host): [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] I'm Hannah McGregor and this is Secret Feminist Agenda. I'm really delighted that so many people shared my joy in listening to Emily Hoven talk about sourdough last week. If the episode didn't work right in your podcatcher, don't despair. I deleted the charming but entirely superfluous videos and it should work now if you refresh your feed. Anyway, I've been back in Vancouver for about a week now and I'm still riding that vacation high, or rather I should say I'm still riding that pleasant vacation low. And that's exactly what I want to talk about this week. My secret feminist agenda isn't quite going low. It's kinda going slow. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] I was having dinner with a friend of the podcast and definite future guest Zena last week, and I was talking about how since I got back from vacation, and actually sort of starting during my vacation, I've been finding that I feel so much more emotionally able to handle the things that are going wrong. So things haven't stopped going wrong. Vacation didn't magically cure my problems, but all of a sudden, or bit by bit over two weeks, the problems when they happen aren't deeply devastating, soul destroying, day ruining existential crises. They sort of feel manageable. In fact, life in general kind of feels manageable right now, which is pretty incredible considering that almost nothing has changed in the past few weeks except that I went away and I slowed right the fuck down. And Zena suggested that what I did was heal my nervous system enough to, to make me actually capable of handling things. You know, it's like recovering from burnout and giving yourself enough time to repair so that you, you know, top your tanks back up. God, I'm, I'm mixing a lot of metaphors right now. But the thing that I think, I think there were a lot of things about this vacation that we're healing, and restorative, and regenerative, and all of those synonyms, but I think a key one was going slow. I really loved going slow at the cottage. I loved waking up when I felt like it. I loved lying in bed. I love drinking a coffee on the deck, contemplating breakfast all at the pace I wanted it, at whatever pace felt good. And so I've been thinking about what it might mean to bring some of that slowness back home with me, what it might mean to have some of that slowness be part of my regular life in a way that mitigates against the frantic feelings I often have, the anxiety, the, the drive towards ever greater productiveness, the drive towards treating myself and living a lifestyle that promotes burnout. At the same time, I'm really aware that slowness is a kind of privilege. I mean, I'm particularly aware because I've, it's been a really long time since I've been able to indulge in any kind of slowness. Right? I had, I had to reach a point where I was in a tenure track job before taking two weeks off was a possibility. And then at the same time I'm thinking about how that assumption that the norm or the default should be keeping up with a particular standardized level of productivity is also a kind of privilege and an ableist kind of privilege. And, and I'm also asking myself if the fact that slowness is a privilege means that checking my privilege means continuing to work myself to the point of burnout because that actually doesn't sound quite right. Part of what's in the

back of my mind here is a conversation that I had with my friends Erin and Bart whilst at their cottage about a book called *The Slow Professor*. I haven't read it, but it was making the rounds a couple of years ago and lots of people had lots of opinions about it. The basic thesis of the book is that academia is getting faster and faster, that is there sort of this frantic pace to working in the university these days, and that professors need to slow down to avoid burnout. Basically. I mean, I'm summarizing a whole book here. Anyway. Bart's critique of it was that the book failed to account for the way that slowing down is an option only for the tenure track and ultimately really just for the tenured and that it was impossible for the many, many people precariously employed in relation to the university to slow down. It's just not a choice you have. If you slow down and what, teach fewer courses? You don't make enough money to live. So the question emerged in that conversation, what does a version of slowing down look like that doesn't happen at the expense of others? Others who end up having to go fast or having to pick up the slack. Now I do like some of the questions that the authors of *The Slow Professor*, that is Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber, are asking. I'm particularly interested in the way that they insist the question is "what's wrong with this system?" Rather than "what's wrong with me and the fact that I can't keep up?" They're insisting that we don't internalize a failure to produce adequately or a failure to feel good while producing adequately. Instead, we need to ask questions about how we've internalized this culture of frantic speed. Now there's a question there about internalizing and about the difference between people who don't have to go as fast as we're going, and have the option of slowing down and must make a series of very deliberate changes to do so and those who don't have the option of slowing down. That's not, of course, not just people who are precariously employed at the university, but also you know, people who work, who are working two or three or four jobs to make ends meet. People who are working jobs that pay so poorly that they couldn't possibly work less. That they constantly have to work more. I mean, I'm thinking even of the stories that we've all heard about Amazon, and the way that the people who work in Amazon warehouses have these, these devices on them that beep every time they're expected to have completed a task. That, that speed is built into the logic of late capitalism and opting out is, is really not available for a lot of people. So part of the logic of slowness, I think, has got to be sustainability. I mean that's actually at the heart of a lot of the versions of sort of the slow movement and that's the book of *The Slow Professor* is emerging out of this slow movement that was about slow food and slow living and slow reading. They're all really about building a life for yourself that's more sustainable. So when you think about it in relation to your work life, it's about slowing down so that you don't burn yourself out, so that you're actually able to keep going for longer. Now when we think about it at an ecological level, it's about slowing down so that we consume fewer resources so that you know, we can actually, you know, not burn the earth out as fast as we are doing. And of course sustainability is always about relation. So your personal sustainability can't come at the expense of others, and if you're going to try to create a sustainable lifestyle for yourself, it's got to be one that would be sustainable for many. One that would be sustainable for everyone ideally, otherwise, it's not really

sustainability, it's just green capitalism. I asked on social media today for people to recommend readings on slowness that they found interesting and my friend Nickeel suggested Rob Nixon's work on slow violence, which I thought it was a really interesting contribution to this conversation that sort of complicates things in interesting ways. So Rob Nixon has written this book called *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor*. And in it he's basically asking how the slow violences of globalization, that includes environmental devastation, the poisoning of the environment, toxic drift, deforestation, radiation poisoning, oil spills, the acidification of the ocean, and all these kinds of environmental crises that, due to environmental racism, disproportionately impact people who are already the most vulnerable, particularly people in the global south. And his point is that the very slowness of this violence makes it hard to tell the story of it because, in addition to capitalism being structured by the logics of speed, contemporary journalism in the 24 hour news cycle is also structured according to speed and privileges fast violence, obvious immediately devastating forms of violence. The news pays attention to wars that are happening right now, much more than it pays attention to people who are suffering from radiation poisoning because of uranium mining for wars that happened 50 years ago. So I'm gonna read you a quote from an article that Nixon wrote sort of about his book and about the ideas of slow violence in general. Quote, "to confront slow violence is to take up in all its temporal complexity, the politics of the visible and the invisible. That requires that we think through the ways that environmental justice movement strategize to shift the balance of visibility, pushing back against the forces of temporal inattention that exacerbate injustices of class, gender, race, and region. For if slow violence is typically underrepresented in the media, such underrepresentation is exacerbated whenever, as typically happens. It is the poor who become it's frontline victims, above all the poor in the southern hemisphere," end quote. So the speed of capitalism inflicts slow violence, speed itself becoming a form of violence, a violence that we see occurring globally and that we see occurring on individual levels as well. And that brings me back to the question of what do we do with any of this, with this knowledge of the way that speed is a kind of, of poisoning of our environment, of our relations, of our bodies? This question of how to choose ethical actions that are self sustaining while also sustaining in relation to our communities, and our environments, and our world. How to choose slowness in a way that is reciprocal and embedded in networks of relation rather than slowness in a way that privileges the self at the expense of others. Interestingly, my reading for this episode actually led me back to a major topic of last week's episode, which is the feminist ethics of care. So I found this really interesting article called "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," and it is written by so many people. I'm going to read them all to you right now because you know it's a feminist collective and everybody should be named. So it's written by Alison Mountz, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, Jenna Lloyd, Jennifer Hyndman, Margaret Walton-Roberts, Ranu Basu, Risa Whitson, Roberta Hawkins, Trina Hamilton, and Winifred Curran. They're a feminist collective, I believe they're all geographers, but in the article they're sort of thinking beyond geography specifically as a discipline and thinking more generally about the

relationship between the slow movement and collective feminist politics in a way that I found very helpful for these questions I was asking about, about what it looks like to slow down in a way that, you know, doesn't negatively impact others. A way to slow down that isn't complicit with being positioned such that slowness is an option for you. So here's what they say. Quote "For us, slow scholarship is about making the university a place where many people, professors, and students from multiple places of privilege or marginalization can collectively and collaboratively thrive," end quote. Later on in the article they evoke Jack Halberstam's work on the queer art of failure, which I found really interesting. You'll know from an earlier episode that I'm still really sort of caught up in these imaginations of failure, and what it looks like to embrace failure, and to celebrate the possibilities that exist in failure. Emily and I talked about this last week with, with sourdough as well. And they link failure and slowness, that failure becomes something you can celebrate when slowness is something that isn't just allowed but, but even possibly valued. And ultimately they, they end the article with a number of strategies, like really concrete strategies, which I find helpful because I like the list. And that includes specifically organizing. They're talking about organizing within the university, that's organizing for livable wages, for better treatment of the precariously employed, but you can extrapolate out to, to whatever context you're looking at, that, that part of advocating for your own right and capacity to slow down has got to include organizing and advocating such that that's something everyone can do. They also talk about taking care, that is building into your work the extension of care to those around you, not just to yourself, as well as things like saying "no" and "yes" judiciously, placing value on different kinds of work, and building community consensus around other ways that life and work can look. So I'm going to quote from them one more time. They write, "As a feminist intervention, slow scholarship enables a feminist ethics of care that allows us to claim some time as our own, build shared time into everyday life, and help buffer each other from unrealistic and counterproductive norms that have become standard expectations," end quote. Now, as I was just about to start recording this minisode, I saw a tweet from former guests front of the podcast Cynara Geissler who tweeted, and I quote, "I'm not good at being in a transitional time where my fatigue is so powerful I can't even begin to want to be creative, and so I've decided to put out into the world what I need to hear, which is that you don't need to have a million projects going on to be interesting to me." And isn't that like a great, really practical version of what it means to say, "I'm going slow right now and I want to figure out how to extend that as an option to those around me." And in this case, it's about sort of denormalizing a version of creative life that is about constantly having a thousand projects on the go, that sort of internalization of the logics of productivity that says that you are more valuable depending on how many side hustles you have. That's going to be an important part of the work of, of collectively slowing down and so is, you know, protesting, and organizing, and advocating around living wages and around, I don't know, things like a guarantee of housing as a human right. You know, things that will actually work actively against capitalism's, sort of poisonous normalization of speed and productivity. And hand in hand with that, activism has got, I think, to be a sort of extension to yourself of permission to

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say, "it's okay for me also to slow down while I'm doing this." That if it's about collective and collaborative thriving, then you also have to thrive. You just have to thrive in a way that doesn't come at the expense of the thriving of others. And oh boy, that is not an easy thing to do. The world's kind of built in a way that discourages it, but I'm going to be thinking about this. I'm going to be thinking about what it looks like to slow down and to slow down, not at the expense of others, to value the health of my nervous system, and the building for myself of a sustainable life that still prioritizes a feminist ethics of care, that wants that sustainable life to be available to everyone. I don't know. Maybe you want to think about it with me. Feel free to at me. You know who's always free to at me? Kaarina. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Kaarina:

Hello and welcome to Kaarina's Cozy Self Care Corner. This week I'm thinking about stuffed animals and how frickin wonderful they are for my self care and myself. Sometimes I feel a little ashamed of being an adult who sleeps with and on stuffed animals, but then I think about how little impact it makes on the world around me to have a small, fluffy friend who keeps me company and activates my imagination. So I was just curious if any of you have stuffed animals and how they add to your life. So I have a stuffed bear named Alfie who I've had since I was very, very, very small and my partner has his own teddy bear and these teddy bears are best friends. They have lots of adventures together. They eat peanut butter and play checkers and they do somersaults and they reminisce about their lives before being our stuffed animals. So one of them used to be a dentist for sea creatures. I like spending time with my stuffed animals. I like checking in with them at the end of the day. I like having a friend who's always there when you wake up and always there when you go to sleep. And I like the kinds of personalities they develop. We also have a little stuffed sheep named Daisy who is a bit of a narcissist. She talks about herself a lot. She really likes her own reflection. She really likes to dance. So here is my shout out to stuffed animals and all the wonderful ways they can make you calm and happy and feel imaginative and loved. If you want to tell me about your stuffed animals, hit me up on Twitter at @kaarinasaurus. Hashtag #secretfeministagenda. Maybe I'll post a picture of my wonderful Alfie bear, so have a great weekend. Bye. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Hannah (Host):

Show notes, and the rest of the episodes of Secret Feminist Agenda are, as per usual, on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter or Instagram @hkpmcgregor. You can follow Kaarina @kaarinasaurus, and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. And you know what? There hasn't been a new review of the show in Apple podcasts for a while, so why don't you go be the change you want to see in the world. The podcast's theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album Chub Rub. You can download the entire album on freemusicarchive.org, or follow them on Facebook. Kaarina's theme song is "I Will" by Mitski. Secret Feminist Agenda is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh first nations, where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been Secret Feminist Agenda. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]