



Slow Living

The Gentleman's Monowheel, Mike Savad

Stop the World – I Want to Get Off.
Anonymous Graffiti, c. 1960

IN 1986, CARLO PETRINI DECIDED that he'd had enough of the ceaseless inroads the multinational fast food industry had been making in his native Italy, after the McDonald's Corporation announced that it planned to open an outlet near the historic Roman tourist site, the Spanish Steps.

The protest organized by the 39-year old activist unexpectedly grew to become an international news story, and the organization Petrini founded, Arcigola, would a few years later be renamed 'Slow Food.'

As if testifying to the idea that one determined person can indeed change the world, the 'Slow Food' meme would spread to over 160 countries, and in time spawn a host of similar, sympathetic movements.

(Surprisingly, almost two decades would pass before the term 'Slow Movement' first appeared in print, coined by Carl Honoré in his landmark 2004 book, *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*.)

Among the numerous spinoffs of the Slow Food movement are Slow Cities, Slow Travel, Slow Fashion, Slow Aging, and perhaps most incongruously, Slow Technology—all of which we might collectively characterize as **Slow Living**.

In an amusing example of a reverse-engineered acronym—or 'backronym'—some have suggested that SLOW stands for Sustainable, Local, Organic, and Whole.

These principles are most appropriate, of course, in the case of **Slow Food**, whose advocates encourage the use in our food of quality ingredients, sustainability, and local production and consumption.

Slow Cities encourages city-dwellers to slow down the typically hectic pace of urban living, and urban planners to design space for people, rather than for car traffic. (Like Slow Food, the Slow Cities movement began in Italy, as *Cittaslow*.)

Slow Travel is a complement to Slow Cities, in which visitors going abroad are encouraged to think of themselves not as tourists but as travellers, or even locals. This entails traveling at a modest pace rather than rushing through one's trip, and immersing oneself in the local culture rather than simply visiting the popular tourist sites, snapping photos, and buying souvenirs.

Slow Travel also implies seeking low impact ways to travel, such as avoiding air travel and making use of local transport.

Slow Fashion is a particularly needed trend, with 'fast fashion' increasingly taking over the fashion world in recent years.

'Fast Fashion' subdivides fashion trends into shorter seasons in order to increase sales, encourages frequent discarding of clothing, and often makes use of sweatshop labor and toxic chemicals in textiles.

In contrast, Slow Fashion favors more durable, eco-friendly clothing, often produced in limited quantities. It can also refer to buying second-hand ('vintage') clothing and repurposing rather than discarding no longer wanted clothes.

Slow Aging refers to habits that can significantly slow the aging process, such as eating a healthy diet, being active, getting enough sleep, quitting smoking, and maintaining a healthy weight.

Slow Technology promotes selective, moderate use of technological innovations like cell phones, video games, and virtual reality—opposing the increasingly addictive attachment people have to their gadgets.

Slow Living has much in common with Minimalism or Voluntary Simplicity, as it takes a 'less is more' approach, advocating for decluttering both physical and—perhaps even more importantly—mental space.

While it prioritizes activities and relationships that align with one's personal values, it's not about 'doing' so much as 'being:' living less habitually and more intentionally.

As a philosophy, Slow Living also shares much with Zen Buddhism, in its preference for stepping off the treadmill of modern life and spending more of one's precious, limited time living in the present moment. (The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn—a famous advocate of **Slow Walking**—advised us all to "Smile, breathe, and go slowly.")

There is even a name for this reflective aspect of Slow Living: **Slow Thought**, which harkens back to meditation, in which one learns to become detached from one's thoughts and to live more mindfully.

The belief that speed saves time is actually an illusion, as it assumes that each minute or hour of the day is like any other. But as the old saying goes, "Haste makes Waste." Speed not only causes mistakes that take time to correct, but it accelerates time, making it seem to pass more quickly.

In order to slow time down, we need to fully experience each passing moment rather than mindlessly rushing through it. (Ironically, this paradox of **Slow Time** is nowhere more evident than when we 'slow travel.' When reflecting on a two-week trip that was particularly eventful or memorable, it can seem like months have passed.)

As the saying goes, "Nothing can stop an idea whose time has come." As *In Praise of Slowness* author Carl Honoré said, "The Slow revolution will be slow. But it will happen."

Still, there's no rush, so take your time. ■