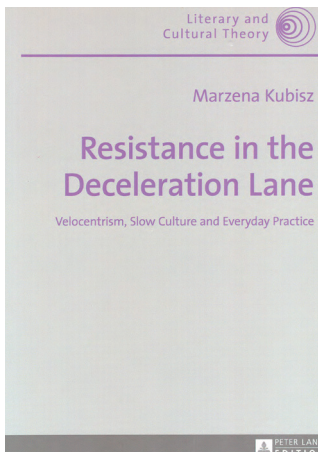


RESISTANCE IN THE DECELERATION LANE

Velocentrism, Slow Culture and Everyday Practice

by Marzena Kubisz

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Even though our theoretical ‘toolbox’ is rather spacious, its contents, by and large, remain limited to the instrumentarium worked out within the frames of dominant methodologies in the area of humanities—both those central in the past and the ones ‘in power’ today. However, when we face new problems, or when (for any reason) phenomena allegedly well known unexpectedly become ‘defamiliarized’, it is out of sheer necessity that we tend to adaptively transform

the tools at our disposal, to creatively combine their explanatory power, or to ‘borrow’ instruments from the toolboxes used by researchers representing disciplines other than our own. The last of the three cases seems to illustrate the option chosen by Marzena Kubisz in her *Resistance in the Deceleration Lane. Velocentrism, Slow Culture and Everyday Practice*, in which book the Author, recognizing the interrelations between economics and processes responsible for the development and present-day state of material and intellectual culture in the context of the major metanarratives of the West, makes an attempt at diagnosing a reality the experiencing of which is a resultant of the *topos* and the time. Such reality is understood as a complex (dual) effect of diachronic pro-

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cesses and of the dynamics of synchronic relations manifest in 'tangible', non-verbal, yet discursively determined, space. Combining space (distance) and time (measure of movement) in one equation, Marzena Kubisz builds an instrument allowing one to adequately describe culture (which pulses in *both* these dimensions and *along with them*) in light of one, now common, criterion: the criterion of *speed*.

Speed provides the fundament to Marzena Kubisz's concept of *velocentrism*. In her book, Kubisz offers an original theoretical perspective, in which cultural transformations are gauged by means of the *topoi of velocity*. In light of her argument speed manifests itself as a unique aesthetic category. Its uniqueness consists in its independence of the Gadamerian 'moment of tradition', since—even though both the metaphors and the rhetorics of speed undergo transformations over time—velocity *as a phenomenon* remains unchanged. As such, it may be treated as a reliable measure of movement not only in space, but also between subsequent evolutionary stages of cultural history, the effects of which are visible in both major spheres of culture: material and intellectual. This, as may be argued, is a key component of the theory of velocentrism proposed in the book: as opposed to aesthetic categories born out of particular philosophical systems and rooted in particular time and place, *velocity*—unlike, for instance, *sublimity*—is free from temporal and spatial limitations. It never is an *anachronic* category; it never 'disappears'; it never is 'ahead of its time'.

Such a tool allows the Author to study the evolution of the culture of the West by tracing periods of acceleration and deceleration in its development, seeing them as a function of particular relations between the conditioning of the culture's material dimension and its economic, religious and philosophical substrate. Observing culture through such a prism, Kubisz is able to distinguish and explain particular patterns in the metamorphoses of human attitudes toward reality. The evolution of such attitudes, documented both in cultural texts and in the changes manifest in the material sphere of culture, indicates, on the one hand, the direction

of the evolution of the concept of identity and, on the other, it illustrates the succession of the dominant philosophical discourses, which determine the definition of a human being (in power at a given time), the relations between man and world, between man and the Other, as well as the ethical norms along the lines of which these relations are axiologized.

Speed as a category manifests itself as a culturogenic factor not only in its 'simple' technological (and therefore also economic) dimension—in which its importance triggers no doubts—but also in the area of *self-identification*. It comes in very handy in the *diachronic* analysis of the conceptualizations of the body (*citius—altius—fortius*), and, at the same time, it allows one to efficiently describe the dynamics of individual and social *synchronic* interactions, responsible for the emergence of such phenomena as ageism, the cult of youth, the beauty myth, or corporate work ethics. Studying products of culture through the lens of velocentrism, Marzena Kubisz arrives at an alternative periodization of subsequent stages in the history of the modern West, beginning with the 'age of the running start' (which, in her calendar, refers to the culture of the 17th and 18th century) up until today's stage of the 'streamline culture', characteristic for a visible tendency to remove all obstacles preventing one from instantaneous satisfying one's own needs and desires (constantly stimulated in the consumerism-dominated world). Needless to say, this tendency manifests itself in the drive toward the elimination of all and spatial and temporal limitations hindering immediate satisfaction. Adopting such a concept of the 'history of speed', it is possible both to indicate turning points in culture and to provide explanations for moments of crisis, after which periods of acceleration or deceleration ensue. Building her argument along such lines, Marzena Kubisz convincingly explains the birth of a new type of man (*mis-man*) as well as the mechanism responsible for the centralization (or apparent centralization) of the *Slow Culture*, for the transformation (or alleged transformation) of the system of the valorization of speed, and for the takeover of the attributes of *Slow Culture* by the late capitalist main-

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stream and their subsequent commercialization. This stage in the history of speed is referred to as 'post-slow': the commercialization of slowness becomes, as Kubisz claims, a *signum temporis* of the culture of today.

The potential of Marzena Kubisz's proposition, however, allows for much more than what has been described thus far. The theoretician demonstrates that speed as a category may prove to be a helpful tool in studies on Otherness (understood as functioning at the 'slow' end of the spectrum of possible formulas of existence in the 'velocentric culture'), territory ('new territorialism' vs. deterritorializing tendencies in the culture of globalization, as illustrated by the examples of *Slow City* or *Slow Home*), new models of community philosophy, or new types of ecological awareness, rising in the overworked Western societies. Furthermore, the category of speed facilitates the grasp of the essence of the new concept of pleasure, rooted in the dynamics of the relation between hard work, workaholicism and idleness. And, last but not least, it allows one to efficiently explain the fundamentals of the immanent poetics of some new literary genres, which Kubisz collectively describes as *Slow-Lit*.

Velocentrism of the western culture, studied on the basis of cultural and literary texts as well as by reference to documented cultural practices, proves to be the driving force behind a plethora of phenomena, which, albeit described in fragments by researchers Kubisz quotes, have been presented systematically and fully only now. Beyond doubt, *Resistance in the Deceleration Lane* is an important study, which—meeting the demand for a new, modern theoretical tool facilitating the description (and hence understanding) of the mechanisms driving late capitalist culture—allows the reader to see thus far unseen dimensions of the allegedly 'obvious' reality. Beautifully written, erudite and original, Marzena Kubisz's new book may certainly inspire new directions in the academic reflection on culture, directions particularly important for the study of the Americas—suspended between slowness and speed—both today and in the past.