



# **The Flâneur, the Hot-rodder, and the Slow Food Activist: Archetypes of Capitalist Coasting**

**Jeffrey Blankenship**

Department of Art and Architecture  
Hobart and William Smith Colleges  
blankenship@hws.edu

**Jessica Hayes-Conroy**

Women's Studies Department  
Hobart and William Smith Colleges  
hayes-conroy@hws.edu

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## **Abstract**

The flâneur was a modern literary figure that characterized the relationship of capitalism to urban alienation in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris. Our contention in this paper is that the flâneur can also be seen as an exemplar of a broader archetypal figure that exists across time, in multiple landscapes of capitalism. Following the work of Lauren Berlant on “slow death,” we identify this broader archetype as an adept “capitalist coaster”—one whose embodied “art” is the successful making and movement of the self within the maelstrom of capitalist modernity. We describe three examples of this archetype—the flâneur, the hot-rodder, and the slow food activist—arguing that all three personify a particular sort of privileged mobility that enables surviving within contemporary life. Tracing this archetype through time and space, we suggest that attention to the figure of the capitalist coaster is useful

for interrogating how privilege produces specific forms of embodied coping within the varied landscapes of capitalism. We argue that attention to this coping is important for understanding the relationship between capitalist resistance and reproduction, as well as the structural conditions that impact the uneven embodied consequences of coping.

### Keywords

capitalism, slow death, bodies, flâneur, hot-rodder, slow food

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Is ‘life’ as the scene of reliable pleasures located *largely in those experiences of coasting*, with all that’s implied in that phrase, the shifting, diffuse sensual space between pleasure and numbness?  
(Berlant, 2011, 117; emphasis added)

### Introduction

The flâneur is often evoked as an archetype of 19<sup>th</sup>-century modernity, a figure that conveys much about the relationship of capitalism to urban alienation in the “capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”—Paris (Benjamin, 1973). Our contention in this paper is that the flâneur can also be seen as an exemplar of a broader archetypal figure that neither begins nor ends with 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris, but exists across time, in multiple landscapes of capitalism. We identify this broader archetypal figure as an adept “capitalist coaster”—or one who is particularly capable in the art of capitalist coasting. Following the work of Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*, coasting here is meant to describe a sort of “lateral” or “interruptive” agency within the capitalist landscape: “a mode of *coasting consciousness* within the ordinary that helps people to survive the stress on their sensorium that comes from the difficulty of reproducing contemporary life” (2011, 18, emphasis added). While Berlant is specifically interested in the coping mechanisms of disenfranchised workers within capitalism that give rise to “slow death”—the “condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life” (Berlant, 2007, 759)—we identify the capitalist coaster as a more middling- or middle-privileged figure: one who is able to stave off slow death a little longer, and to experience the “reliable pleasures” of life more easily. For Berlant, coasting describes a temporary sideways movement that interrupts prescribed life-building in capitalism to instead spread out in the pleasure or numbness of self-abeyance—like when eating junk food or drinking excessively, for example. For our purposes, the point is that interruptive agency for more privileged persons allows this sort of side-stepping resistance to the forward march

of capitalism without also necessitating a temporary halt to life-building—to building a successful life as a capitalist subject. Thus, the middle-privileged person is insulated from some of the harsher, embodied impacts of capitalism. We elaborate on this point, and its connection to landscape, in the theoretical section that follows, but here it is important to note that we are ultimately interested in the coping capacities of middle-privileged persons because we wish to argue for an ethics of conscious coping. An ethics of conscious coping would not only recognize coping *as such*, but would also make visible the structures of privilege that determine the availability and embodied effect of coping practices across lines of (dis)advantage.

For the purposes of this paper, we describe three examples of this capitalist coaster archetype—the flâneur, the hot-rodder, and the slow food activist—and we suggest that these three examples are prototypical but not comprehensive. In other words, our point is not to suggest that these three figures are the only examples of capitalist coasting to be found, nor that they must always be considered through this lens. Instead, we focus on these figures because we find instructive benefit in tracing their similarities and differences across various landscapes of capitalism. We use the term *archetype* because we are interested in both the exemplary utility of these figures in describing a particular set of relationships between bodies, capitalism, and landscape, and because we are interested in tracing the reoccurrence of these relationships across time and space.

The flâneur will likely be the most familiar of the three examples, standing as the epitome of high capitalism in the modern city of Paris, according to Walter Benjamin, and the subject of much poetry and prose, from Balzac to Baudelaire. His flânerie is defined by the slow, rambling manner in which he makes his way through 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris, the disengaged, intellectual observation through which he mediates his connection to the city, the pleasure he finds in the bustle of outdoor life, and the privileged, yet solitary condition that enables his leisurely wandering. The flâneur was an artist (a writer, a poet), and this practice of flânerie turned his “unique, and uniquely modern, relationship to [Paris] into...a projection of the imperative need to make sense of the [modern, capitalist] city” (Ferguson, 1994, 81). To be sure, the flâneur has been studied, theorized and debated extensively, and in the sections that follow we engage some of this work. However, in this paper we are most interested in the way that the flâneur depicts a middle-privileged figure—a gentleman, yet “subtly *déclassé*”—who’s most striking characteristic describes his embodied relationship to the emerging capitalist landscape; as Elizabeth Wilson notes, “He might be seen as a mythological or allegorical figure who represented what was perhaps the most characteristic response of all to the wholly new forms of life that seemed to be developing: ambivalence” (Wilson, 1992, 93).

The second of our examples is the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century figure of the hot-rodder. Likely less familiar to many, the hot-rodder was a figure of interest to mid-century authors like sociologist David Riesman, poet Reuel Denney, essayist/landscape

theorist J.B. Jackson and author and “new journalist” Tom Wolfe. The hot-rodder typifies an American culture drawn to the open road, but also serves as an entrepreneurial rebellion against standardization and mass-production in the auto industry (Denney, 1957). For the hot-rodder, the landscape of engagement is not Paris but rather the roadscape of the sprawling Western United States, from the custom auto shops and highways of Los Angeles to the vast open spaces of Utah (Lucsko, 2008). In one of J.B. Jackson’s most iconic essays, “The Abstract World of the Hot-Rodder,” Jackson describes the hot-rodder as a youthful figure who desires a new visceral engagement with the landscape, accomplished not through the slowness of flânerie but instead through the speed of the souped-up automobile (Jackson, 1957-58). In fact, it is this speed itself that creates the hot-rodder’s relationship to the landscape, allowing him to take pleasure in the thrill of his own mobility while blurring the ravaged, and ostensibly “placeless” scenes of mid-century America. Like the flâneur, the hot-rodder is most commonly depicted as a masculine figure, whose particular mobility is defined and aided by the existence of a “hot-rodding fraternity” (Lucsko, 2008, 59).

Our third and final example of a capitalist coaster is an equivalent figure within contemporary neoliberal capitalism that we name the “slow food activist.” While the international organization Slow Food has influenced this figure, we use the lower case “slow food” to recognize that interest in local, minimally processed, and sustainable food systems extends beyond the organization itself. Though not always named such, the slow food activist has become a common figure in contemporary popular culture. Writers like Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat Pray Love*, 2006) and Barbara Kingsolver (*Animal Vegetable Miracle*, 2008) portray the figure as a slow “foodie” of sorts—someone who recognizes the transformative power of local culinary adventures, and who not only takes the time to eat “right,” but who experiences (the pleasures of) self-building as a result. As caricatured in the *Portlandia* sketch “Is the chicken local?” (Krisel, 2011) the slow food activist is hyper-aware of the origin of food and of its environmental impacts—perhaps to the point of self-aggrandizement—and acts diligently to ensure that no harm comes from their food choices. Much like the flâneur, the slow food activist is defined by a deliberate slowness, which in this case mediates their relationship to the everyday landscapes of agricultural production and consumption, from farm to table. As we discuss below, the slow food activist is just as often portrayed as a feminine figure (a care taker, a homemaker, a cook), in contrast to the more overtly masculine and commonly male figures of the flâneur and the hot-rodder—although the journalists Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser and Mark Bittman have demonstrated that men can indeed be slow food activists as well.

Tracing this archetype through time and space, we argue that attention to the figure of the capitalist coaster is useful for interrogating how privilege produces specific forms of embodied coping within the varied landscapes of capitalism. This coping allows certain bodies not only to “get by,” but even to experience the sensation of thriving or “success.” Importantly, however, as our examples will

illustrate, attention to this coping also reveals the slippery relationship between capitalist resistance and its reproduction, demonstrating the importance of recognizing coping as a practice that is capable of both. In all three examples, the coping mechanisms that enable the figures' coasting are also tied to the reproduction of specific capitalist social relations that are particular to the landscapes in which they coast. As we summarize in Table 1, the flâneur, the hot-rodder, and the slow food activist all coast differently, owing to the particularities of both the time and place within which each is mobile. Moreover, it should be noted that none of these figures is static, defying portrayal within a singular, cohesive plotline. Nevertheless, these three figures are also alike in notable ways: their occupation of a position of relative privilege; the insulated quality of their bodily engagement with the capitalist landscape; and their subsequent capacity for feeling pleasure without accelerating slow death. We detail both their shifting particularities and their notable parallels in the sections that follow. Before this, however, we pause to reflect on modernism, mobile bodies, and capitalist landscapes.

Archetype	<b>Flâneur</b>	<b>Hot-rodder</b>	<b>Slow Food Activist</b>
Social Class	Petty Bourgeoisie	Entrepreneurial Working Class	(Upper-) Middle
Time Period	Mid–Late 19 <sup>th</sup> Century	Mid 20 <sup>th</sup> Century	Late 20 <sup>th</sup> –Present
Era of Capitalism	High	Consumer	Neoliberal
Landscape	Hausmann's Paris	Western US Roadscape	Farm-to-Table
Form of Resistance	Leisurely Pace	Fast Driving	Slow Food
Reproduction	Commodity Fetishism	Mass-Consumption	Consumer Citizenship
Coasting Form	Drunken Dwelling	Abstracted Thrill	Authentic Eating

**Figure 1:** Archetypes of Capitalist Coasting

### Notes on Modernism, Mobile Bodies and Landscapes

Modernism, as it is employed in this paper, describes the various modes of creative cultural production that have sought to acknowledge, experience, and resist the alienation that is endemic to capitalist modernity and its associated shifts in social relationships and values. More specifically, we are interested in the embodied creativity that typifies the modern *art* of capitalist coasting; that is, the visceral, kinesthetic maneuvering—or we might say, mobility—that enables one at least temporarily to survive the sensorial stresses of life within capitalism.

Following the now classic work of Marshall Berman (*All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 1982), all of the archetypical examples we discuss are therefore modernists—modern figures who:

...experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, [who] find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: [who are] part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to *make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents* in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows. (Berman 1982, 345-346, emphasis added)

The art that we seek to understand is the successful making and movement of the self within this maelstrom of capitalist modernity—“the [creative] activity of doing what's necessary to lubricate the body's movement through capitalized time's shortened circuit” (Berlant, 2011, 115-116). As Berlant describes it, this art involves a temporary side-step out of the normalized flow of capitalism, a momentary spreading out within the pleasures of everyday life (Berlant, 2007). In *The Critique of Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre similarly describes “the art of living” as an art that privileges the pleasures of everyday life, an art that “presupposes that the human being see his own life—the development and intensification of his life—not as a means towards ‘another’ end, but as an end in itself” (1991, 199). Berlant notes that, “Henri Lefebvre...calls the mode of enacting life through habituated gestures that stretch the present out so that enjoyment is possible a kind of autopoetic, proprioceptive ‘dressage’ (*Rhythmanalysis* 38-45). One might also think about *coasting, cruising, or drifting...*” (2011, 63, emphasis added).

Thus, the modern art of *coasting* specifically describes the activity of spreading out in the present, a sideways movement that allows the body to retreat from the stresses of capitalism, and thus to cope with modern life. Importantly, however, while Berlant is interested in the ways that this coping halts the life-building activities of disenfranchised workers, ultimately decreasing one's chances of success within capitalism (and hastening slow death), we are interested in interrogating a second kind of coasting: a coasting that is enabled by privilege, such that the temporary side-step away from capitalist life does not speed up slow death but actually enhances one's chances of survival and success as a capitalist subject. In other words, the middle-privileged figures that we analyze are able to enjoy capitalist coasting in two senses of the word: both the temporary, pleasurable spreading out that typifies the “art of living”; and the advantageous, effortless positioning that enables the art of not yet dying (that is, of succeeding, and even thriving, as a capitalist subject).

Of course, our focus on creative self-production is not to attribute a kind of normative goodness to the figure of the capitalist coaster, nor to the embodied art that they<sup>1</sup> are able to create. Rather, we are interested in describing and analyzing the mechanisms of *privileged mobility* that enable and sustain their creativity—that facilitate their particular ability to deal with, work through, and react to this maelstrom without hastening slow death. Here *privilege* describes that second meaning of coasting: the advantageous, effortless positioning that facilitates thriving and keeps slow death at bay. We understand privilege to signify unearned advantage, including for example the advantages conferred by race, gender, class, age, and bodily ability (we detail the specific privileges of each figure in the sections that follow). But it is important to note that the capitalist coaster is not a particularly elite figure. Indeed, the flâneur was often described as a marginal wanderer, typically on the edges of society. There is a distinction to be made here, then, between elite and privileged. While the elite constitute a designation of the highest order—the power of the upper class, the Bourgeoisie, the 1%—the capitalist coaster occupies a privileged, middle position. We focus on middle-privilege not to deny the coasters’ social power, but precisely to give it attention and emphasis.

In turn, we use the term *mobility* because we understand this privilege to be both embodied (affective) and spatial (relational). That is, the capitalist coaster describes a person who has over time—as a relational and developmental being—learned to be affected by particular conditions of modern life in ways that are advantageous to their physical and mental well-being. As Bruno Latour has suggested, “to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning ‘effectuated,’ moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans” (Latour 2004, 205). Thus, privileged mobility describes the coaster’s learned bodily capacity to move and be moved successfully within a particular landscape of capitalism.

Of course, in all three of our examples the capitalist coasters are not just moved in an affective sense, but they also move their bodies in space—they slow down, speed up, walk, drive, gaze, and savor, all within particular landscapes of capitalism. These two senses of movement are far from mutually exclusive (Latham and McCormack, 2004), but this second sense of the word is also important because, as our examples will demonstrate, each figure’s ability to be moved in particular ways depends in part upon their (somewhat) deliberate and productive movement within particular landscapes—what Michel de Certeau calls a “spatial practice” (1984, 91). Indeed, the form of coping that our examples highlight is one in which the coasters’ affective capacity to remain insulated from the stressors of capitalist life is facilitated by their ability to engage in productive—

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<sup>1</sup> We use the gender-neutral pronoun “they” when referencing the coasting figure in general. Though we discuss gender privilege in each of our examples, the coasting figure at large is not definitively a man or woman.

resistant, even transgressive—spatial practices. As our examples will show, this form of mobility is also facilitated by privilege. Thus, while de Certeau focuses on “the art of composing a path” (1984, 100)—on the ways that everyday movements manipulate and reproduce the city—we are interested in how and when such productive acts become mechanisms of coping that facilitate life within capitalism—that stave off, rather than hasten slow death.

What, then, is slow death, and where is it located? Berlant defines slow death as the “physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (2007, 754). As she goes on to describe, the phrase is meant to give emphasis to the wide-spread weakening of physical bodies under global and national regimes of capitalism—and to the ways that, within such regimes, “life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable” (2007, 754). In other words, as a worker struggles to succeed as a capitalist subject via particular coping mechanisms, their body becomes increasingly weaker, and thus less able to compete and survive within the capitalist system. As we have suggested, we are interested in highlighting the conditions of privilege that allow capitalist coasters to avoid this weakening by enabling coping mechanisms that enhance rather than decrease their capacity for success as a capitalist subject. However, it is important to make clear that we are not ultimately interested in promoting these “successful” coping mechanisms, nor in advocating any approach that centers on individual behavior as a solution to the stresses of capitalist life. Rather, our purpose, again, is to argue for an ethics of conscious coping that demands attention to the broader conditions that require coping in the first place, and to the inequitable distribution of coping resources.

Therefore, while the individual body is the most immediate terrain for such coping, the body that we theorize here is always relating to, and developing within, a specific and uneven spatial context. Berlant says that, “slow death prospers in temporal environments...in which everyday activity; memory, needs, and desires; diverse temporalities and horizons of the taken-for-granted are brought into proximity” (2007, 759). She explains further: “an environment is made via spatial practices and can absorb how time ordinarily passes, how forgettable most events are, and overall, how people’s ordinary preservations fluctuate in patterns of undramatic attachment and identification” (2007, 760). This concept of *environment* is useful because it describes the co-constitutive relationship of bodies and space, not as intense and intentional but as ordinary and fluctuating—as making and made up of everyday practices, including those that facilitate different forms of coping. While we find this term helpful, we choose the term *landscape* over Berlant’s term *environment* for reasons of specificity; that is, the landscapes that we describe constitute *specific* environments—19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris, the Mid-Century western U.S. roadscape, and the contemporary, farm-to-table “foodscape”—and are produced through *specific* types of bodily relationships—a strolling meander, a speeding drive, an unhurried meal. As J.B. Jackson has



described, “a landscape is a space deliberately created to speed up or slow down the process of nature...it represents man taking upon himself the role of time” (Jackson, 1984, 8).

All of these landscapes are products of, and productive of, capitalism; and, they are so not just in the historical sense of formally constructed capitalist landscapes (the city, the highway, the farm), but also in the sense that landscape (as a concept) has come to be defined by the everyday (Jackson, 1984)—by the ordinary practices and entanglements of life within capitalism. Of course, though these landscapes are specific with regard to time and space, they are by no means fixed; we conceptualize neither bodies nor landscapes as static. Indeed, what is interesting about both is their changeability—their developmental quality, their ability to both change and be changed through the processes of everyday life, including especially through the processes of capitalist production. As scholars Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore remind us:

...the long term survival of capitalism is premised upon the “production of space” (Lefebvre, 1991). Yet, due to its inherent dynamism, capital continually renders obsolete the very geographic landscapes it creates and upon which its own reproduction and expansion hinges... As the effects of devaluation ripple through the space-economy, processes of creative destruction ensue in which the capitalist landscape is thoroughly transformed. (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, 354-355)

In the subsequent sections, we illustrate the entwined changeability—the creation and eventual obsolescence—of the coasting figure within three particular landscapes of capitalism. Importantly, this changeability is what lends a condition of impermanence to both the success of the capitalist coaster—their methods, their art, their ability to cope— and also to the specific, capitalist landscapes in which their coasting unfolds.

### **Strolling Through the Capitalist City**

The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity. He is not aware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him and it permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers (Benjamin, 1973, 55).

Walter Benjamin described Paris as the “capital of the nineteenth century”—the quintessentially modern city whose rapidly transforming spaces and experiences embodied the logic of “high” capitalism in an era of emergent

commodity fetishism (1973, 155-176). Benjamin and other German intellectuals theorized high capitalism as the period beginning with the industrial revolution and ending roughly in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century with the World Wars. More specifically, high capitalism is most often associated with the particular changes wrought by European bourgeois capitalism in places like Paris. What began in Paris in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the gilded commercial enchantments of the arcades was eventually overshadowed by Baron Haussmann's wholesale renovation of Second Empire Paris from a dense tangle of medieval streets to broad tree-lined boulevards. This creative destruction of the urban fabric of the pre-capitalist city opened up a landscape of spectacles characterized by ornamented facades, spacious parks, and gleaming department stores—what Benjamin referred to as “phantasmagoria turned into stone” (Benjamin in Ferguson, 1994, 108).

The newly created wide-open spaces, and the people who flowed through them, were the subjects of fascination for a new class of artists who were self-consciously aware of capitalist modernity's impact on everyday life. That modernist art first flourished in the Paris of the 1860's was no coincidence. These modernists experienced both the exhilaration of modernity and the sense of loss that accompanied the destruction and transformation of so much, so quickly. One of these early modernists, Charles Baudelaire, describes in his poem “The Swan” this feeling of dislocation from the past: “Paris changes! But nothing of my melancholy is lifted. New palaces, scaffoldings, blocks, old outer districts: for me everything becomes allegory and my cherished memories weigh like rocks” (Baudelaire, 1857/2006, 115). Benjamin's great-unfinished *Arcades* project looked to Baudelaire as “a lyric poet in the era of high capitalism,” and sought to read a philosophical and materialist history of this transitional period through Baudelaire's evocation of the flâneur as an archetypical Parisian figure who sifted through the detritus of urban life with the eye of a detective (Benjamin, 1973, 40).

The flâneur as a recognizable type emerged among a host of similarly caricatured figures of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Parisian life through the widely popular *physiologies* that documented the diversity of the city's citizens with pseudoscientific precision. Early texts in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century paint the flâneur as simply a lazy dawdler, bored into idleness. This early incarnation of the flâneur was not particularly significant or noteworthy. But, as the sociologist Pricilla Ferguson notes, the character of the flâneur evolved to become emblematic as “the urban personage par excellence of the middle third of the nineteenth century” (Ferguson, 1994, 83). Indeed, Benjamin suggests “the soothing little remedies which the physiologists offered for sale were soon passé. On the other hand, the literature which concerned itself with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life was to have a great future” (Benjamin, 1973, 40). The flâneur would become a figure, a narrative device, for making sense of this transitional period.

In this context, the flâneur came to represent a figure of a certain petty bourgeois privilege and intellect who was able to walk aimlessly among the crowd

without being absorbed into the masses. His class privilege was obvious from the leisurely pace with which he was able to explore the streets while the crowds around him rushed to their destinations. Although scholars have argued for the existence of a female flâneur (Buck-Morss, 1986; Ivanchikova, 2006; Wilson, 1992), the flâneur is most often described as a man. Wilson explains:

Bourgeois men, [in contrast to bourgeois women], were free to explore urban zones of pleasure such as—in Paris especially—the Folies Bergères, the restaurant, the theatre, the café and the brothel....The proliferation of public places of pleasure and interest created a new kind of public person with the leisure to wander, watch and browse...” (Wilson, 1992).

The flâneur’s cultivated position of “neutrality and objectivity” was also particularly associated with male privilege; he neither desired objects nor was himself an object of desire, and was thus able to walk alone and at random through the city, an activity that would have quickly rendered a (bourgeois) woman suspect (Ferguson, 1994, 84). Intellectually, he was also often portrayed as a journalist or novelist, a poet or a painter; in other words, an artist whose wanderings might serve as the raw material for creative cultural production. In this sense, the artist-flâneur as an archetype possessed the intellectual characteristics and sensibilities that made him a particularly inquisitive interrogator of urban life.

As an artist of modern life, the flâneur’s embodied relationship to the city—his form of coasting—can be described (following the quotation that opens this section) as a sort of “drunken dwelling,” a refined intoxication of the artist who was affected by, yet insulated from, everything he saw and experienced. Dwelling here refers to the flâneur’s ability to linger, take in the whole of the urban cacophony, and be pleasurably fascinated by the spectacle (that is, to cope). Drunkenness, on the other hand, describes the privileged veil of distance that numbs the flâneur from the underlying reality of capitalism—in this case, the social alienation in high capitalism that is expressed through commodity fetishism. The flâneur emerges here as a capitalist coaster because his form of coping (his lingering, or loitering) does not preclude capitalist life-building, but instead enables it. Unlike others who loiter—the streetwalker, the sandwichman, the pauper—the flâneur neither wanted for objects nor was an object himself (Buck-Morss, 1986). His position of intellectual neutrality allowed him to find pleasure in the commodity while remaining distant from the embodied consequences of social alienation in a stratified society. Thus, he was able to engage in “the art of life” while also succeeding in the life-building that capitalism renders compulsory for survival.

Though distant from its impacts, however, the flâneur was not himself an advocate of high capitalism; the slowness of his drunken dwelling was both his method and his protest. Benjamin describes the flâneur as an unwitting political

activist of sorts: “His leisurely appearance as a personality [was] his protest against the division of labor which makes people into specialists. It [was] also his protest against their industriousness.” Benjamin continues, “Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The flâneurs liked to have the turtles set the pace...If they had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace” (Benjamin, 1973, 54). For the flâneur, then, his slowness was not a passive state—it was a form of creative, embodied politics; it *mattered*. In this way, the flâneur engaged in capitalist resistance.

Ironically, however, the flâneur’s personal act of resistance to capitalism—his detached drifting—also facilitates its reproduction. When Benjamin says the flâneur “shares the situation of the commodity” (Benjamin, 1973, 55), he means that both have an abstracted, detached relationship to the social world. To fetishize the commodity is to see only the allure of objects as enticement, while being blinded to the labor and social relationships that produced them. Similarly, the flâneur fetishizes the metropolis by being drawn to the excitement of the crowd while being insulated from the indifference of capitalism. The relationship between capitalist resistance and reproduction in the case of the flâneur is not, we assert, by accident. Indeed, this relationship can be found across all three of our examples. It is, rather, an effect of coasting—of engaging in privileged coping as a form of resistance. When coping occurs within a stratified social environment, even forms of capitalist resistance become commodities. This is why, as Berlant illustrates, the kinds of coping that are both a cause and effect of slow death increase among the disenfranchised, but not the more privileged, as conditions of social disparity intensify (2007, 2011).

The flâneur, like all of our examples, is ultimately a fleeting (or ephemeral) figure. Although he continues to be of interest to scholars today, he does not persist as a literary figure with the same type of cultural resonance. If the creative destruction that was central to Haussmann’s Paris is an enduring quality of capitalism (as David Harvey argues, 2008), the capitalist landscape that gave rise to the flâneur is once again transformed. But the flâneur does not simply disappear. Instead, he is rendered obsolete through subsumption. Indeed, it is the parallel between the commodity and the flâneur that makes the figure itself fleeting. As Susan Buck-Morss argues, “if the flâneur has disappeared as a specific figure, it is because the perceptive attitude which he embodied saturates modern existence, specifically, the society of mass consumption (and is the source of its illusions)” (1986, 104). Similarly, Ferguson suggests:

[T]he flâneur's temporary suspension from society [becomes] the urban condition. No longer one of many social roles that the urban dweller may adopt from time to time, the flâneur occupies a full-fledged social status that defines and confines existence itself—a negative construct of truly modernist proportions (Ferguson 1994, 109).

The demise of the flâneur as a distinct and useful typology therefore comes about as his once-unique capacity for pleasure and numbness becomes a description of the urban condition at large—rendering everyone, in effect, drunk on commodities. As the huge department stores made possible by Haussmann overtake the arcades as the commercial center of Parisian life, the flâneur disappears back into caricature as an anachronistic dawdler in a time of Taylorist efficiency. His slowness is challenged at every turn, eventually yielding to the ultimate challenge of automobility.

### **Speeding Down the Highway Strip**

The distinctive sign of nineteenth-century urbanism was the boulevard, a medium for bringing explosive material and human forces together; the hallmark of twentieth century urbanism has been the highway, a means for putting them asunder. We see a strange dialectic here, in which one mode of modernism both energizes and exhausts itself trying to annihilate another, all in modernism's name (Berman, 1982, 165).

In *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Marshall Berman employs a passage from Le Corbusier's 1924 book *The City of Tomorrow* as a modernist parable of the moment the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century architect saw the future of the city as a city of cars. It is a passage notable for its uncharacteristically romantic longing for the Paris of pedestrian boulevards, the Paris of Baudelaire, and of Le Corbusier's youth where he lamented "the road belonged to us then." The boulevards remained, but they were now crowded with traffic. Berman suggests "Haussmann's enormous vistas spread out before them all [students like Le Corbusier in his youth], leading to the Arc de Triomphe. But now the idyll is over, the streets belong to traffic, and the vision must flee for its life" (1982, 166). Later in the same passage, Le Corbusier's mournful tone is quickly replaced with poetic enthusiasm: "...traffic. Cars, cars, fast, fast! One is seized, filled with enthusiasm, with joy...the joy of power."

Le Corbusier was part of an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century generation of poets, philosophers, artists, designers, filmmakers and architects who sought to articulate and represent the increasing motion and speed of capitalist modernity. With the 19<sup>th</sup> century in living memory for many of them, these modernists embraced—even celebrated—the temporal and existential experience of 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity's accelerating pace. Their philosophy was embodied in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's "Manifesto of Futurism" when he stated, "We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed" (1909/1961, 181). For these modernists, speed was aestheticized as synonymous with progress, the future, while also representing a wholly new bodily experience. Literary scholar Enda Duffy, in *The Speed Handbook* (2009), builds on Aldous Huxley's claim that the only new pleasure invented by modernity was speed. Duffy argues for the

existence of an “adrenaline aesthetic” (3) in which he theorizes that speed—especially via the automobile—represented an opportunity for the masses to “feel” modernity in their bones.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the landscape essayist J.B. Jackson—in one of his most iconic essays, “The Abstract World of the Hot-Rodder”—brought his critical eye to how mobility and speed were transforming the way Americans experienced the landscape. Jackson painted a picture of how everyday Americans were finding little satisfaction in the quiet contemplation of picturesque, natural scenery and were instead seeking out dynamic new forms of adventure and recreational activities that propelled them through the landscape, often at great speed:

The new landscape, seen at a rapid, sometimes even terrifying pace, is composed of rushing air, shifting lights, clouds, waves, a constantly moving, changing horizon...The view is no longer static; it is a revolving, uninterrupted panorama of 360 degrees. In short, the traditional perspective, the traditional way of seeing and experiencing the world is abandoned; in its stead we become active participants, the shifting focus of a moving, abstract world; our nerves and muscles are all of them brought into play. To the perceptive individual, there can be an almost mystical quality to the experience; his identity seems for the moment to be transmuted (Jackson, 1957-58, 24).

In Jackson’s “abstract world” of visceral pleasure, the hot-rod<sup>2</sup> supplanted the flâneur; the kinesthetic experience of space challenged the slow contemplation of place. It wasn’t an accident that modern art at this time also celebrated the abstract, swapping detail with color, precision with sensation. While the flâneur was a figure most often portrayed in the “high” cultural productions of literature and poetry, the hot-rod was largely a fascination of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century popular culture. Hot-rod culture emerged after World War II with the first national exposition held in Los Angeles in 1948 and with *Hot Rod* magazine starting the same year (Balsley, 1950). The popular art form of customizing cars to enhance performance for racing was declared a disturbing trend by highway safety advocates; however, contrary to the perception that hot-rodders fancied danger, most hot-rodders considered themselves to be innovators—pioneers of car safety, operation and performance. “Very few hot-rod enthusiasts want[ed] to risk their specialized equipment for use as battering rams. The fact their cars [were] built so

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<sup>2</sup> Our focus on the hot-rod is not to deny that there were other forms of travel, before and during the rise of automobility, which may have been liberating or transformative. There are also other “car” cultures that would prove interesting case studies on speed. We focus on the hot-rod because we find the parallels between the flâneur and the hot-rod to be useful in tracing a history of privileged coping.

that they attract attention [became] an automatic psychological brake which govern[ed] their driving activities . . ." (Balsley, 1950, 354). In *The Lonely Crowd*, the sociologist David Riesman suggested that hot-rod culture emerged from a desire among young hobbyists to rebel against—and compete with—the mass production in Detroit's auto-industry (Riesman, 1969, 293). This rebellion was also indicative of a broader American anxiety about conformity in an era of intense consumer capitalism.

The hot-rodder was also a figure of some privilege, similar though not identical to that of the flâneur. We identify the hot-rodder's class status as "entrepreneurial working class." What we mean by this is that hot-rodding was culturally working class, both on the roads and in the custom auto shops. And yet, the modification of a car for the purpose of improved performance was, and still is, a rather high-end industry. As Riesman notes, even by 1948, an 8-million-dollar business had built up to supply parts to these hobbyists (1969, 294). Those who performed these modifications were often skilled professionals (many of whom also engaged in weekend racing as well); "the number of technicians and engineers whose careers began in the hot-rod industry and ended in Detroit (and vice versa) is staggering" (Lucsko, 2008, 9). Many of these workers were therefore well paid, and unionized. Moreover, as David Lucsko explains, the most successful hot-rodders were "enthusiast-entrepreneurs," (white) men like Vic Edelbrock, Dan Moon, Phil Weiand, Fred Offenhauser, and Ed Iskenderian, whose names literally became brands in the industry (Lucsko, 2008, 91).

Apart from the hot-rodders who benefitted financially from the industry, even the average, weekend hot-rod enthusiast was a middle-privileged figure. He had, for one, the means to afford the materials of his hobby. And, he also had the privilege of time—with hours to spend on mechanical tinkering and time to meet up with others in the hot-rod fraternity (time that women in domestic roles rarely had). This meant that hot-rodding was an activity dominated by young men. While wives and girlfriends attended races as spectators, they rarely participated in either racing or wrenching; hot-rod culture communicated a particularly masculine set of skills and expectations to young, working-class men (Lucsko, 2008, 59). In addition, although African Americans occasionally participated in racing, hot-rod culture was predominantly white. All of the big (brand) names of racing were white men, and indeed the auto racing industry at large—including hot-rodding—was (and still is) dominated by white men (Rogers, 2017).

From this middle-privileged position, the hot-rodder's form of coasting emerged as the bodily sensation that we call "abstracted thrill." J.B. Jackson believed that hot-rodding was most significant, and attractive, because it provided a new, pleasurable experience of landscape. To Jackson, there was pleasure in speed itself—"a moment to be transmuted" from the more mundane experiences of everyday life (Jackson, 1957-58, 24). Like the flâneur, the hot-rodder was energized by the landscapes that others came to mourn, fear or simply to ignore. However, the primary bodily sensation of landscape was no longer sight (the

flâneur's gaze) but feeling, and more specifically, thrill. The "abstract world" that Jackson claimed to be at the center of the hot-rodder's experience was a result of how speed not only blurs the visual field (the abstraction), but also how it totally engages the body and senses in ways unfamiliar to the pedestrian. The hot-rodder celebrated speed for the excitement and the freedom it provided from boredom; this was how he coped. As he embraced speed, the visceral experience of landscape became more internally focused, whereas the relationship to the external was blurred, or abstracted; the details of the landscape that others mourned did not matter for the hot-rodder—they moved too quickly to be seen!

When one moved less quickly, what was to be seen in these auto-oriented American landscapes had become increasingly criticized for its deadening sameness and orientation toward capitalist consumption: a chaotic riot of gaudy signage and cheap roadside establishments. In retrospect, Jackson articulated the transformation of local place into abstract space that we now recognize as characteristic of modernity's mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century landscapes (Lefebvre, 1991). The logic of capitalism toward abstraction and efficiency was first widely accepted as a sign of progress in post-war America. The oft-cited "shock of the new" that resulted from the rapid technological, social, and environmental changes brought on by the industrial modernity of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, become a permanent state of existence, with daily reminders of this unfettered march toward "progress." However, in the 1950's, the shock of the new had begun to wear off, and was replaced by the shock of loss and an existential dread in the face of rapid change.

The hot-rodder was, like the flâneur, numbed to this sense of loss and dread; speed itself was his veil from these landscapes of sameness and mass-consumption. As the hot-rodder existed prior to the oil crisis (and its 55mph speed limit), the negative effects of his speed on the natural and political environment were not (yet) significant to him. As a counter-cultural figure, the hot-rodder also had the distinction of being different from the masses, bucking the conformity, and transforming the sameness, that so many others came to fear. His resistance to capitalism emerged both through the innovative tinkering that remade his automobile as distinct from the mass-produced cars of Detroit, and also through the thrilling, even freeing, experience of speed that this innovative tinkering allowed.

Moreover, despite the highway safety critics who decried hot-rodding as unsafe, this (resistance-as-) coping did not necessitate a halt to capitalist life-building. To the contrary, as the hot-rodder tinkered and tested his work, he also built his skill set, and thus his capacity for competitive success within the capitalist system. Indeed, this is why, as Lucsko (2008) notes, there was so much cross-pollination between hot-rod shops and the Detroit auto industry; what started as after-market tinkering and innovation often found its way back to the drawing boards of Detroit automakers. Moreover, as Tom Wolfe commented in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, car companies took note of and capitalized upon the hot-rod phenomenon: "if Ford can get [the hot-rodders]



hooked on Fords now, after [they're] married they buy new Fords. [And, they'll influence others about] which car is considered 'boss'" (Wolfe 1965, 80). Thus, the hot-rodder's resistance also became an act of consumer capitalist reproduction.

Duffy suggests that speed was a compensatory pleasure in this moment of consumer capitalism—and a fleeting one (Duffy, 2009, 270). Ironically, the hot-rodder began to disappear as a figure of fascination in the mid-1960's as Detroit released its own "pony" and muscle cars—effectively capturing the market for speed, and turning what was started as a counter-culture resistance into a mainstream industry. Ultimately, speed itself was challenged in the 1970's by the oil crisis, as well as a broader concern for the environment and increasing safety regulations. And speed was also challenged by the loss of faith in progress that characterized the 1970's. The forward march of capitalism during the post war period in America had been carried out under an illusion of progress, a belief that capitalism was for everyone, consumption was liberatory, and resources were infinite. That the resources required to make speeding possible were both politically and environmentally bound, however, became quickly apparent during the oil crisis, leading to large-scale changes to American economic policy and ideology.

### **You Are What You Eat**

[In neoliberal capitalism] we are told to have all we want...in short to be utterly acquiescent to being the good consumer. To argue from the obverse, can there be any doubt that neoliberalism was also a response to the 'consume-less' ideas that circulated in the 1970s crisis period which spawned its emergence? 'Eat less' may well be construed as a threat to capitalist growth much like 'drive less'—a concept that many consider to be laughable these days. (Guthman and Dupuis, 2006, 445).

In our third and final example of capitalist coasting, we explore the figure of the slow food activist, a "citizen-consumer" (Guthman and Dupuis, 2006, 443; Pudup, 2008, 1238) who has figured out how to survive and thrive within the contemporary food system by purchasing and eating local, sustainable food products. While eating may seem like a departure from our previous examples of walking and driving, the popularity of food in contemporary Western society—from questions about what is good to eat to anxieties about where foods come from—has revealed eating as an activity through which bodies and landscapes intersect in important ways. Indeed, the farm-to-table foodscape has become increasingly visible as a platform of social and environmental action in which eating becomes "an agricultural [and political, and moral] act" (Berry, 2010, 145). Moreover, as Julie Guthman and Melanie Dupuis argue in the opening quote, eating has also emerged as an important, self-defining activity in neoliberal capitalism, wherein individuals "are expected to be prudent, calculating actors

who...[embrace] responsibility for their bodies and the choices that they make” (Schüll, 2016).

It is notable that Berlant developed the concept of “slow death” in connection to the observation that many of the mechanisms of coping within contemporary, neoliberal capitalism are food-related, leading to serious issues with obesity and dietary disease. “In short,” she argues, “the bodies of U.S. waged workers will be more fatigued, be in more pain, be less capable of ordinary breathing and working, and die earlier than the bodies of higher income workers” (Berlant, 2010, 33). While we are skeptical of the assumption that obesity necessarily leads to ill-health (see Bacon and Aphramor, 2014), there is no denying that dietary diseases like Type 2 Diabetes are on the rise, impacting poor and non-white communities at much higher rates than wealthier, white communities (Gregg, 2014). Further, we agree with Berlant’s observation that in neoliberal capitalism, consumption (of food/drink in particular) has become a primary means of dealing with the ubiquity of exhaustion, as it allows workers a short respite, or a quick energy boost, that enables them to get through the day. That the bodily impacts of these food-related coping mechanisms are distributed unevenly across lines of social difference should come as no surprise.

We choose to focus on the figure of the slow food activist, then, because in this context they represent the ideal “citizen-consumer,” solving social and environmental problems not by consuming less but by consuming “correctly”—in ways that enhance not only their own bodily health, but presumably also the health of broader ecological and social communities. Again, we use the lower case of slow food to signal that we include more in this title than just the activists who officially participate in the international Slow Food movement, although this figure has certainly been influenced by this movement. Indeed, the Slow Food movement has inspired many popular “foodies,” from Michael Pollan to Alice Waters to Mark Bittman (Pollan, 2003; Parker-Pope, 2009; Bittman, 2011). And, as Bittman notes, although not all are Slow Food members, “there are millions of people throughout the country who routinely buy and cook ‘slow food’” (Bittman, 2011). As such, the slow food activist is not necessarily always identifiable *by name* like the flâneur or the hot-rodder, but they are nevertheless recognizable to many as a particular sort of “foodie”—popularized in numerous works of both fiction and non-fiction (see, for example, Knisley, 2013; Gilbert, 2007, Kingsolver, 2008; Pollan, 2007; Waters, 2007). The slow food activist is someone who lingers over local, sustainable meals, carefully crafted from farm market produce. Like the flâneur, the slow food activist uses a deliberate slowness as their form of capitalist resistance, this time extending the slowness beyond their physical body to insist that their food also become slower—a counter to the omnipresence of quick, highly-processed convenience foods.

Slow food is an important example for several reasons. As a social movement that is both critical of but embedded within the capitalist system, Slow Food (the official organization) promotes the modulated pleasures of the table: the

cultivated tastes of heritage crops, the unhurried pace of lingering over a shared meal, the particular satisfaction of farm-to-table purchasing (Petrini, 2003). Yet, slow food (the official organization as well as the broader practice) has been strongly critiqued for its unreflexive elitism (Leitch, 2003; Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Indeed, despite their progressive intentions, slow food activists have frequently come to be associated with economic and racial privilege. This is because the pleasures of pace and palette that they endorse are not, of course, universal but rather learned; they are both deliberately and unconsciously crafted as embodied resistance to the ubiquity of fast, processed foods. As such, they constitute a particular type of privilege—a bodily ability to enjoy, desire, or otherwise be “turned on” by (these) particular foods and food ideologies. As many scholars have shown, these bodily capacities tend to adhere particularly to wealthier, white bodies (Slocum, 2008; Guthman, 2008; Hayes-Conroy, 2010).

Unlike the flâneur and the hot-rodder, however, the figure of the slow food activist is just as likely to be a (white) woman as a (white) man. Indeed, Alice Waters has served as the vice president of Slow Food International since 2002. Nevertheless, the involvement of women in slow food activities is probably not due to the improved social status of women as much as to the continued association of women with traditional gender roles, including the procurement and preparation of food for others (Hayes-Conroy, 2014, 128-135). Moreover, men are still much more likely than women to benefit from food professionally—as farmers or as chefs, for example (Allen and Sachs, 2007). Thus, while gender identity is variable for the slow food activist, this does not necessarily mean that gender-based privilege does not exist within this example, as it did with the previous two. Nevertheless, regardless of gender identity, the slow food activist is certainly, for all the above reasons, a contemporary example of a middle-privileged figure—a citizen-consumer who has the time, money, and cultivated bodily desire to adhere to the tenets of local, sustainable food(ie)-ism.

In contrast to this figure of a devoted citizen-consumer sits an imagined *other*—personified as the (overweight/unhealthy) masses. As slow food leader Alice Waters laments: “How can most people submit so unthinkingly to the dehumanizing experience of lifeless fast food that's everywhere in our lives? How can you marvel at the world and then feed yourself in a completely un-marvelous way?” (Waters, 2009). Here, the slow food activist emerges as a conscientious and creative consumer—someone who both knows how to *really* enjoy their food (to feed themselves marvelously) and knows why they should feel good about their own affective abilities, or why their cultivated enjoyment supposedly elevates them above the dehumanized, lifeless masses. This embodied “art” is an example of what we call “authentic eating”—the slow food activist’s form of capitalist coasting. Like the drunken dwelling of the flâneur, or the abstracted thrill of the hot-rodder, authentic eating describes the way that the slow food activist successfully navigates the capitalist food landscape, by cultivating a bodily desire for healthier, less processed foods, and by becoming a lauded citizen-consumer in

the process. Unlike the disenfranchised others in Berlant's example, who cope through more unhealthy food behaviors, the slow food activist is able to spread-out in the pleasures of the table while also engaging in successful life-building as a neoliberal capitalist subject.

Through the achievement of cultivated tastes, the slow food activist therefore emerges (ironically) as the ideal neoliberal subject: capable of exercising self-governance while also spending more. The veil of the slow foodie—in terms of their ability to see, feel, or be deeply affected by the harsher realities of capitalist production (*vis-à-vis* the food system)—arises through a belief in the power of consumer citizenship. The slow food activist genuinely believes that by “voting with your dollar” at the farm market or local café they can create meaningful change in the food system. Moreover, they also imagine that this consumer act is, or at least should be, equally desirable to all (Hayes-Conroy, 2010). In this way, the resistance of the slow food activist to the fast conveniences of the capitalist food system—specifically their cultivated preference for slow, sustainable foods—ends up reproducing a central condition of neoliberal capitalism, “put[ting] individuals in charge of their own adjustment(s) to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies” (Pudup, 2008). That is, to be worthy of living longer, of garnering respect, of feeling (and looking) successful, one must become a skilled consumer citizen. The rhetoric of individualism and personal responsibility that enables the slow food activist to cope (to consume “well”, to choose “correctly”) also enables neoliberal capitalism to maintain itself—to demand consumption as a basic condition of citizenship and survival.

Ultimately, like the flâneur and the hot-rodder, the figure of the slow food activist is not—we predict—an enduring one. As Berlant's work suggests, the slow food activist is not immune to the slow death of neoliberal capitalism; they are simply better at slowing it down. And yet, as such consumptive practices become less and less available to many, we may come to witness not just the (slow) death of the slow food activist, but also “the death of neoliberalism—from within” (Chakraborty, 2016). From the Occupy movement of 2008, to the widespread resonance of Bernie Sanders' democratic socialist agenda, there are signs that the contemporary era of capitalism is perhaps coming to a close. And, surely the rise in climate-change-related disasters also signals a (slow) death of sorts—one that none of us will be immune to, even if some will be able to cope with it better than others. Speculation about what may come next is far beyond the scope of this paper. But, as capitalism “as a system of exploitation and domination” endures (Springer 2010), surely within it will emerge new forms of coasting that continue to sustain privileged surviving and thriving within the maelstrom of modern life.

### **Conclusions: An Ethics of Conscious Coping**

In this paper we have drawn upon and extended the work of Lauren Berlant, who theorizes about a “slow death” brought on by capitalism, and about the social mechanisms of coping therein. Focusing on the flâneur, the hot-rodder, and the

slow food activist, we have argued that the archetype of the modern, “capitalist coaster” is useful for drawing attention to the ways that privilege enables particular forms of creative, embodied coping within various capitalist landscapes. This attention is important because it allows us to better understand how privilege facilitates the creative activity of “doing what’s necessary” to minimize the stresses of modern capitalism on one’s body and thus to decelerate the phenomenon of “slow death” (Berlant, 2011, 115). This work also draws attention to how the coping mechanisms of such middle-privileged coasters, even and ironically when practiced as resistance, can also serve to implicate them in reproducing the conditions of capitalist life.

What other examples of this archetypical “coasting” figure exist? And, more importantly, what significance does this figure have in the pursuit of progressive social change? We have suggested that the figures that we identify are archetypical but not comprehensive; that is, they serve as useful examples, but are not the only examples to find of such coasting figures. We have also suggested that the utility of examining these figures is to work towards an “ethics” of coping—one that is more conscious of what exactly coping *is*, why it is significant, and how it can work to both resist and reproduce capitalist life. Like Berlant, we do not see the coping process as inherently good or bad; if anything, we see the daily practices of coping with capitalism as unavoidable. And yet, we argue that attention to privilege within these coping practices is essential. Amidst the myriad important calls within progressive social activism to recognize privilege *as unearned advantage*, we want to suggest that it is important to be conscious of—to identify and seek to dismantle—the inequities of embodied coping.

What does this mean, and *not* mean? To start, it does not mean that *everybody* needs to find pleasure in the same things, or be similarly affected by the world around them (even if such affects involve local foods, or “healthy” lifestyles). This type of embodied homogeneity is neither possible nor desirable. It also doesn’t mean that we should give up on our progressive agendas, even if they are also implicated in the reproduction of capitalism. Instead, an ethics of conscious coping would begin with an honest recognition of coping *as coping*. That is, the problem with coping arises when privileged persons fail to see it as such, and instead invoke claims of their own moral superiority (as we see so often today in calls for mindful eating). Beyond this, an ethics of conscious coping would also insist upon an interrogation of the structures of privilege and disadvantage that facilitate and/or disable particular(ly effective) mechanisms of coping. For example, as busy, time-crunched academics, we are sympathetic to the recent call to “challenge the culture of speed in the academy” by advocating the emergence of “slow” professorship (Berg and Seeber, 2016). But we also recognize that this call must take place alongside in-depth and action-oriented discussions of inequality within the academy—discussions about the plight of adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty, the realities of job market competition, the impacts of gender, race, and sexuality on job security, and many other structures of disadvantage that make

“slow” professorship untenable as a coping mechanism for many (see Mountz et al, 2015, for a feminist and collective vision of slow scholarship that addresses these issues).

A recent article in *The Guardian* instructed readers, “you can sneer, but [McDonald’s is] the glue that holds communities together” (Arnade, 2016). While the invitation to sneer is troubling (and telling), the article itself is significant, highlighting why so many poor, disenfranchised persons frequent the fast food chain—a space where they experience comfort, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of independence. And yet, so many progressive “foodies” express what seems to be genuine astonishment and displeasure about the popularity of “lifeless” fast food (Waters, 2009). Such is the danger of unconscious coping—the failure to see one’s own coping mechanisms as such, while at the same time demeaning others for their supposed moral inferiority. This is not to say that “slow foodies” should necessarily abandon their critique of fast food, but rather, that they should interrogate why fast food has become a coping mechanism for some *others*, and why their own preferred coping(-as-resistance) techniques are unavailable (and even undesirable) to many. In short, an ethics of conscious coping requires a consciousness of the political importance of the material body and its connection to landscape—an understanding of how coping is linked to particular feelings or sensations, a recognition of why such practices produce forms of embodied difference, and especially, a reflexivity about what has determined one’s own capacity for both pleasure and numbness.

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