

‘Feeling blue’: the ordinary pleasures of mundane motion

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“... and how far do our feelings take their colour from the dive underground?”

(Virginia Woolf to Janet Case, cited in de Mille 2011, p. 376)

“Perhaps I am no one.

True, I have a body

and I cannot escape from it.

I would like to fly out of my head,

but that is out of the question.”

(Anne Sexton, *The Poet of Ignorance*, in *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, 1975)

Introduction

The abstract proposes a clash of depictions of machinery and prosody, thus juxtaposing representations of science and humanities. It is the indoor-rowing machine that provides the means for the mundane motion declared in the title of this paper. The contemporary physically active body has an inextricable relationship with machines, science and the scientific. Scientific discourses permeate all sporting cultures and practices (Hoberman 1992). Statistics, measurements and quantifiable outcomes are familiar and prolific ways of interpreting physical activity (Brohm 1978, Guttman 1978), and the indoor-rowing machine is one means through which such scientific discourses are produced and reproduced.

Feminist writers Virginia Woolf and Anne Sexton created both poetry and prose to communicate, publicly, their personal struggles with patriarchal–societal systems (in the UK and USA), and how these systems of male control and female subordination affected their mental health. Their reflexive writings offer evocative yet elusive allusions to their innermost, private worlds of, amongst other things, depression. Both women took their own lives (Woolf in 1941 and Sexton in 1974). In sharp contrast, scholars of sport and exercise often discuss conditions of the mind in definitive and precise (pseudo-scientific) ways. It is difficult to find socio-cultural perspectives and narratives regarding sportswomen’s mental health.

In this paper, I consider the abrupt collision of machinery and prosody – through the tropes ‘mundane motion’ and ‘feeling blue’ – to explore my own emotionality and my regular overriding feelings of low affect. To do this, I rely on a sensation-based methodology – namely autoethnography – to help communicate the ordinary. Taking an autoethnographic approach means that, ‘... the text might wander, twist and turn, changing direction unexpectedly’ (Short *et al.* 2013, p. 2). And that subjectivity, narrative and emotionality are celebrated rather than dismissed as methodologically unreliable (Ellis 2004, Denzin 2010). Through this approach, I aim to bridge the schisms of body and mind, and to elide some of the perhaps-artificial divisions between science and

the humanities. I draw from my experiences of sustained rowing on a machine (see abstract) to offer a view of the possibilities for pleasure through monotonous and slow bodily motion.

This is my favourite place to sit...¹

Ignoring the grunts from the hefty young man on the rowing machine next to hers, she settles in to her own flows of legs-stomach-arms. Repeatedly, her heels and bum, knees and shoulders press together, for the shortest time, before her body uncoils, again, and again. After the leg-drive, when her upper body rocks backwards, she feels the long, luxurious stretch in the deepest tissues of her gut. Each time, at the end of every drive and pull, she opens up, like a big cat exposing its underbelly. She loves this cycle of coiling and recoiling, in and out; the slippages of the powerful and the vulnerable; the churning of the strong and the weak.

The mundane has received limited coverage in sport studies. Hockey (2005) does consider the usefulness of mundane knowledge in relation to distance running. In his autoethnography of running, the mundane – characterised as knowing running movements and running routes – is naturalised as instrumental to achieving aerobic, anaerobic and injury-free fitness, which aides efficiency and allows runners to race effectively. In contrast, Cherrington's (2012) ethnographic study of UK University male basketball players reveals the everyday, repetitive habits and routines of players beyond the spectacle of playing the game. He argues that the everyday and mundane practices completed by players contribute originality to debates surrounding sport, identity and the body. I offer a different focus: I use narrative (flash fiction) to explore the visceral, sensual and cerebral pleasures of recurring and sustained physical movement. Also, I use minimalist prose to capture the bleak conditions of 'feeling blue'.

Miasmas of Misery

But could she give voice to an elusive malaise, that melts like a cloud, that swirls like the wind? She didn't have the words, the opportunity, the courage. (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* 2003 [1857], p. 38)

Recently, in UK popular media, the names of a number of professional sportsmen have been associated with the term 'depression': Frank Bruno, Stan Collymore, Robert Enke, Andrew Flintoff, Steve Harmison, John Kirwan, Neil Lennon, Ian Thorpe, Marcus Trescothick, Jonny Wilkinson and Michael Yardy. Additionally, there is the unnamed Secret Footballer from *The Guardian* newspaper who, according to Clark (2012), '... writes powerfully of his struggle with depression ...' (¶. 9). To date, there is no such coverage of sportswomen.

This imbalance might be explained by the simple, feminist observation that typically sportsmen are represented, through versions of sporting masculinities, as invulnerable. After all, most sport naturalises a carapace of invincibility. So-called mental frailty and mental weakness do not figure on the sporting landscape, especially for men. Nevertheless, these stories of men's depression are newsworthy because they are viewed as atypical. The dominant sporting discourse is that a strong and powerful [man's] body is paralleled by emotional toughness, control over feelings and a concomitant lack of mental health issues. It seems that sportsmen are expected to seek and embody emotional stability as well as display emotional highs in sport-related arenas. And yet, when they reach an emotional nadir, their experiences come to the fore, publicly. Ironically, these recent

stories do have the potential to counter, challenge and re-set popular views of sporting masculinities.

However, my point is that the topic – of sportsmen’s struggles with mental health – becomes popular because of the incongruence with previous prescriptions of what it means to be a sportsman (controlled, strong and tough). In contrast, sportswomen’s emotional landscapes vis-à-vis mental health and depression are normalised because emotionality is – as Woolf and Sexton attest – regularly associated with femininity, female and being ‘woman’. It is often the case that media representations highlight the emotions of women athletes. For example, sport commentators amplify ‘traditionally feminine physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours (e.g. small, weak, beautiful, graceful, emotionally unstable, dependent, self-sacrificing and concerned for others)’ (Wensing and Bruce 2003, p. 388). This social construction consistently binds emotionality, femininity, female and womanhood to weakness – as well as abnormality and, in some cases, insanity.

What I’ve got they used to call the blues
Nothin’ is really wrong
Feelin’ like I don’t belong
Walkin’ around
Some kind of lonely clown
(The Carpenters 1971)

In the past, and in present times, women’s mental health has often been marginalised, trivialised, ridiculed and even demonised. For example, severely punitive practices have defined witches, witchcraft (sixteenth century – twenty-first centuries) and hysteria (nineteenth – twentieth centuries). These practices emerged from widespread and deeply entrenched pathological notions of the uterus, linking it to insanity (e.g. discourses of hysteria and the practice of forced hysterectomy in the UK in the 1800s). Dominantly male-judicial and male-medical professions have repeatedly assigned the uterus to be contaminated, imperfect, unstable, weak, evil and venomous. Sport feminists have shown how such prejudicial attitudes influenced and often denied girls and women sport-related opportunities, and impeded their participation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (c.f. Hargreaves 1994, Lenskyj 1986, Vertinsky 1990).

Tears

Do you think it’s a form of self-harming? Dee asks as she prepares our meal.

I look at her, she is chopping onions. She turns and looks at me.

This is what I tell her.

It is first thing of a Monday morning. I head for the classroom. I leave my office building and enter the teaching building. I finger numbers into a panel. The door opens. It sounds like a big machine.

I check my post. They are checking their post too. Hello they say. I smile, a big smile. How do I do that? Smile.

How was your weekend, they say. I lie. Great. How was yours, I say.

I go to the classroom. It's cold. I turn on the computer, and wait. The first slide appears on the screen. A student comes in.

Hi, I say. Then I leave and go to the toilet. The toilets smell of cleaning fluid. Clean, white, bleached.

I look in the mirror. I look all right.

You look good. You look strong, Dee tells me.

I smile. But, you know.

I return and start the lecture. I finish the lecture.

I wander back to my office. I close the door. Lock it. I lie on the floor and cry.

Mental health is a broad and deep area of study. In many academic realms, like physical health, mental health is usually medicalised and scientised as well as pathologised. Within sport studies, accounts that embed mental health issues within qualitative methodologies are scarce. To name a few, Stone (2009), through auto-ethnography, provides a moving and candid treatise of his distance running and psychosis; Douglas and Carless (2010) offer an ethnographic fiction of an organised golf programme (nine weeks) for '... men with severe and enduring mental health problems' (p. 336); and Hefferon et al. (2013) explore how Boxercise – in the form of a structured six-week programme – had an influence on the mental health (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosis) of four men and six women participants.

Sport and exercise have also been considered, qualitatively, by those working within professions such as social work (e.g. Leedy 2009) and mental health nursing (e.g. Crone and Guy 2008). The titles of these studies provide interesting metaphors of coping and survival: they centre sport and exercise as a remedy. For example, "'I can't cry and run at the same time": Women's use of distance running' (Leedy 2009), and 'I know it is only exercise, but to me it is something that keeps me going' (Crone and Guy 2008).

These and similar research projects and publications are valuable contributions to our growing qualitative understanding of the links between sport/exercise/physical activity and mental health. That said, mental health is a complicated topic for discussion. This is because definitions often rely on diagnosis, diagnosis often relies on medical models and classifications, and models and classifications often stigmatise individuals. These models and classifications are situationally located and they are determined by the temper of the times (e.g. gendered definitions of insanity, witches and hysteria). Currently, in the UK, an assessment of one's mental health usually depends on an individual presenting to authorities. For some individuals, this is neither desirable – because the issue is stereotyped as weakness – nor professionally viable. For example, having on record a diagnosis of 'clinically depressed' might prove difficult in some professions (e.g. fostering and adoption, social work, police service, teaching). These processes of labelling and stigmatisation can make mental health an invisible feature of contemporary UK society.

On a personal level, it has been difficult for me to admit to myself, and others, that I struggle with my mental health and that I have all-consuming embodiments of low affect. The places it has been most difficult to communicate this admission have been at work and at sport. In my lifetime, I have

perceived these places as highly competitive environments. As a consequence, the admission of mental frailty seemed impossible and this further complicates my lived experiences of bouts of depression. This autoethnography, like the work of Barbara Jago (2002), seeks to: ‘... encourage both the development of our understanding of depression and continued inquiry into the highly stressful academic culture in which we live and work’ (p. 734).

When considering the relationships between sport/exercise/physical activity and mental health, there are often dominant, and over-arching, discourses of progress, improvement and recovery. This emphasis might mean that rehabilitation provision based on physical activity participation is often within weekly timeframes and participants’ feelings can be correlated with how often and/or how many times they take part (e.g. Douglas and Carless 2010, Hefferon *et al.* 2013). This accent on timing and duration is no surprise given that the dominant cultural practices of sport and physical activity aim to promote achievement and success through measurement of time. I avoid this framing because, for me, highly structured plans of progression have forged a form of personal stoicism, which on reflection served to mask my desperate emotional landscapes. Instead, I consider the routine and sustained physical activity of rowing (on an indoor-gym machine) as a habitual companion to feelings of low affect. Despite echoing the repetitions characteristic of intense negative rumination, the sequential rowing motion opens the possibilities for bodily pleasures found within the mundane.

It is through personal narrative autoethnography (Ellis 2004), I present ordinary pleasures acquired via mundane motion as significant to living alongside certain forms of mental health. Autoethnographic writing often works to make visible categories of stigma as well as provide a therapeutic process for writers and readers (Ellis 2004). I’m keen to adopt autoethnography because I suspect in modern and late-modern societies there are politically- and economically-driven desires to name, fix and mend aspects of mental health. Such desires overlook the broader issues surrounding stigma and the therapeutic potential of writing our own stories. The politically- and economically-driven solutions to mental health are evidenced through the increases in related drugs, drug company activities and costs (profits) as well as increases in the number of related professions (in privileged societies), such as therapy and counselling. Additionally, I am wary of conspicuous, capitalist consumercultures, which breed rapidity and expediency in relation to contemporary pleasures and ideals of feeling good and feeling better.

Mapping the Mundane

To reiterate, the mundane and banal have received limited coverage in sport studies (e.g. Hockey 2005, Cherrington 2012). However, the mundane has been examined in a range of areas, for example, in tourism (Edensor 2007) and geography (Binnie *et al.* 2007); and, in relation to slow living (Parkins and Craig 2006), objects (Lemonnier 2012), poetry (Furman 2007), song lyrics (MacFarlane Williams 2001), talk (Widdicombe 1995) and driving a car (Edensor 2003), as well as in the context of ‘A Mundane Manifesto’ (Brekhus 2000). Often, studying the mundane is met with resistance because there are assumptions that we already know it. Also, it involves a kind of studying down. As suggested by EP Thompson (1963), studies of ordinary, everyday, habitual and routine behaviours are often devalued as studies of so-called low culture. Felski (1999) has also made the point that the term the everyday ‘... is deployed by intellectuals to describe a non-intellectual relationship to the world’, which becomes ‘synonymous with an inauthentic, grey, aesthetically impoverished existence’

(p. 16). And yet, both writers go on to verify the significance of studying the everyday in expanding our understanding of the human/e, social and cultural.

In his Manifesto, Brekhus (2000) makes these points:

The study of social life often neglects the ordinary in favor of the extraordinary. Historians study 'eventful' time periods more than 'uneventful' ones, cultural anthropologists are generally drawn to distant and exotic cultures than familiar ones, sociologists tend to study important social problems over quotidian reality, and journalists focus more on extra ordinary individuals and groups than ordinary ones. The history of mediocrity, the sociology of the boring and the anthropology of the familiar are neglected fields. (p. 2)

Other commentators have warned against this neglect of the mundane, the everyday, the banal and boring because there is a danger we miss a more-nuanced appreciation of the sensual (Edensor 2003, 2007), the existential (Furman 2007) and the ways people construct meanings and identities (Widdicombe 1995, Parkins and Craig 2006, Furman 2007). For example, Edensor (2003) shows us how his experiences of daily driving along England's M6 motorway recreate autospace, and driving, as nonlinear. For him, the car, the driver and the road become '... enmeshed within unpredictable, multiple flows of ideas, sensations, other spaces and times, narratives, and socialities' (p. 151).

Sustained rowing on an indoor rowing machine (see abstract) – like motorway driving – might be described as automatic, desensitising, featureless and linear. The person doing the rowing might be viewed by others as alienated; and, as someone performing physical activity within a sterilised, non-human/e gym space. As Edensor (2003) highlights, this state of being is usually interpreted as a stark reminder of dystopia: the epitome of modern and late-modern capitalist societies. Such a reading is often used to critique contemporary forms of employment (e.g. Fordism), the relationships between human beings and machinery, and the daily experiences of assembly-line workers (Gramsci 1949).

However, there might be more to such seemingly robotic, mundane, everyday practices. To me, my regular, sustained rows on a rowing machine are not dull and unsensual, they are polydimensional affairs and my pleasures are embodied, sensate and visceral. The flows of bodily movement require, despite their habitual and repetitive nature, open possibilities for the aesthetic, incandescent, reflexive and rhythmic. My curvilinear mundane motion becomes ambivalent, fluid and labile. The ordinariness of this repetitive physical activity is punctuated by flows of enjoyment and satisfaction. These disruptions can provide breaks on an emotional landscape of low affect – a landscape Virginia Woolf aptly describes as '... the dive underground' (cited in De Mille 2011, p. 376).

Slowness

Mundane motion does not operate alone in the formation of small pleasures. The productive potential of mundane motion can often implicate speed.

Speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man [*sic*] ... Why has the pleasure of slowness disappeared? (Kundera 1996, p. 4)

Rarely are we taught to go slowly. As Parkins and Craig (2006) point out, '[t]he very idea of slow living is provocative' because within contemporary global culture increasing speed is 'seemingly

equated with efficiency and professionalism ...' (p. 1). In the realms of sport and physical activity, temporal order is fundamental to success, which is defined and assessed through aspirations to increase physical output within timeframes and/or reduce timings (cf. Brohm 1978, Guttmann 1978). In many cases, science and technology are used to improve and ensure speed and time-related achievements, especially in sport culture (e.g. designs of clothing, footwear, equipment, playing surfaces and the accuracy of clocks/stop watches). Performances, and satisfaction (pleasure) with these performances, are often rated by how fast one can achieve an outcome. Slowness of human movement is not, usually, celebrated. Having said that, I suddenly recall the 'slow bicycle race' at my Primary School Sports Day, and I wonder if this was one teacher's cheeky attempt to disrupt our indoctrination in to sport and speed. It is difficult to tell, especially when the event was actually a race, albeit a quirky one and child-participants dared to go as slowly as possible during – what I remember as – an intense competition to win.

Slowness dislocates dominant sporting and physical activity temporalities. It has creative and ethical potential within these contexts as well as within everyday life (Parkins and Craig 2006). In his book *Slowness*, Kundera – drawing from Epicurus – introduces the idea of pleasure as the 'absence of suffering' (p. 8) and that speed operates to displace suffering:

There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting ... In existential mathematics, that experience takes the form of two basic equations: the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory: the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting. (p. 34 & 35)

I'm not an advocate of the exclusionary binary – pleasure–suffering – or the notion of existential mathematics, for that matter. However, I recognise that velocity, haste and alacrity can work to displace and misplace feelings of displeasure, misery and sadness. At the same time, I wonder how the gradual and leisurely might relieve the unpleasant and facilitate the pleasant. For instance, it might be that pleasure is the central value of slowness.

As with the possibilities for pleasures through mundane motion, there is little of the potential of physical slowness in qualitative studies of sport. There is work on so-called mindful fitness that involves slow movement patterns: pilates, yoga and Tai Chi (Markula 2004). These activities are analysed by Markula from a Foucauldian perspective and in terms of their capacity to regulate and discipline both the body and mind of women participants. However, the connections between bodily motion, slowness and pleasure are not fully explored.

Within qualitative sport studies, we have not made a space for slowness – which is interesting in many ways. In terms of daily pleasure, we have not explored fully the joyful rhythms within slowness:

I want to relish the rhythm of his steps: the further he goes, the slower they are. In that slowness, I seem to recognise a sign of happiness. (Kundera 1996, p. 131)

This is my favourite place to sit ...

Lost in the librettos of 1970s disco divas, she reaches forward and then she hauls backward, time after time. The hyperboles of love in the songs make her smile. The sultry vocals filling her head are warming; the disco-beat is infectious. Up against this rhythm, her body glides through moves of stretching, swinging, squeezing and pulling. Her hands are light on the handle, feet flat against the plate. She is balanced and in constant motion. She is free to play with her body's movements and free to fantasise with her mind's desire. There's time to slow down, time to go slow. And, time to be lost.

Tears

I feel cut off. There are no colours in my world. I can't connect with anyone, or anything. I'm alone.

You have so many friends, Dee tells me.

But, you know. I tell her, again.

There's a knock at the door. I stand up and unlock it.

He says, you remember that offer, if I needed to chat? Yeah, I say. Well, I do.

What did he talk about? Dee asks.

He was standing outside the classroom, he had to teach. It was 9 o'clock. The students were there. He didn't want to go in. He's taught for years. He didn't feel like it, he wanted to cry.

I look at him. I can't see his misery. He says things, they are sad things.

He leaves.

How many people feel like this? Dee asks.

I don't know.

We sit down to eat. I look at Dee.

Monday night, I go to bed. I can't sleep. I sleep a bit. I wake up. I think about not sleeping. I think about you not sleeping, I think about him not sleeping.

This is my favourite place to sit ...

Someone sits next to her. She senses their presence, smells their being and she catches their form in the corner of her eye. But she doesn't stop; she doesn't turn and look. On few occasions she rows alongside friends. Most of the time she rows with strangers. When this stranger gets going she slots into their rhythm. She doesn't do this with the fast, only with the slow. She adapts the length and pressure of her strokes to make them fit. She can row with a stranger for a long time. She loves these unisons without eye contact, without words; the gentle console of silent, human, physical synergy.

Tears

That's what I mean. Crying. Desolation. Rumination. Not sleeping. Not saying. Not telling. Do you think it's a form of self-harming? Dee asks again.

How can it be? No.

Why not? She asks.

I go to the gym. I sit on the row-machine. I sit, rowing, for ages. I like it. I like the cycles of movement, the repetition. No one speaks. It's nice, I tell her.

I can see you row. Dee looks at me.

What is self-harming? I ask.

It's the thinking that keeps me awake at night.

I look at her. I can see her misery.

This is my favourite place to sit ...

She closes her eyes, tired of the constant battle to ignore the digital monitor. Sitting solid, shoulders square, she makes her moves in the dark. She hears the flywheel sucking in air. She extends her legs and the sound builds to a discord. With a final push, she locks down her knees. Here, at the 'finish' of the stroke, she anticipates the quiet slide forward. Her hands go round 'the turn' and she breathes out; she feels air passing over her lips as it leaves her body. A drop of sweat trickles down her temple, like a displaced lonely tear. Gently approaching the 'catch' of the stroke she tries hard to taste the air as it enters her body. It's not easy.

No end

Emotions and affect associated with 'feeling blue' are not usually talked about in the public spaces of academia (workplaces, research journals and conferences). In a narrative critique of the audit culture in UK Universities, Sparkes (2007) enacts Pelias' (2004) methodology of the heart. Related to universities, one of the questions Pelias asks – and Sparkes pursues – is – '... why they [academics] have to keep their emotions in check ...' (p. 522, cited in Sparkes 2007). In this paper, I have applied this question to the mental health landscapes of a woman academic who studies sport. In other words, I have written about myself in a way that aims to relate the personal to culture and reflect the '... multiple layers of consciousness' (Ellis 2004, p. 37). I have constructed this autoethnography through the tropes 'mundane motion' and 'feeling blue' and with the aid of flash fiction and minimalist prose.

I began this paper with a turn to feminist literary writers Virginia Woolf and Anne Sexton, also, I cite Madame Bovary. The legacies of these actual and fictionalised women demonstrate the worth of the now-familiar feminist maxim 'the personal is political' and its value to autoethnographic writing. These and similar efforts by literary authors have made apparent the issues surrounding women's

(and men's) innermost states of mental health. Within the field of sport studies, we have compelling examples of elite sportsmen's confessions of depression and some qualitative exploration of the relationships between physical activity and psychosis (Stone 2009, Hefferon *et al.* 2013); depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (Hefferon *et al.* 2013). To date, there is less research on the ways women experience sport/exercise/physical activity and their own mental health. Intentionally provocative questions – embedded in this paper – are 'why is there this invisibility?' and 'what are the effects of historical and gendered social constructions in the naturalisation of women's mental health?'

Focusing on one woman and physical activity, I explore the usefulness of embodied pleasures in living with difficult forms of mental health. This is one view, only. There are different ways to interrogate the productive links between the mind and the moving body. However, the value of the mundane and slowness is set against the claim that mundane and slowness are often forgotten and/or lost within sporting cultures, discourses, ideologies and practices. Their silenced status might be because both mundane and slowness have little cultural value in sport and wider contemporary, globalised, capitalist societies. Both evoke the everyday, the ordinary and the banal, which are often dismissed as unimportant. And yet, as Parkins and Craig (2006) highlight through their reference to slow arts of the self, slowness itself offers a significant way to daily pleasures and the '... opportunities for "modest shifts" in broader articulations of social organisation and public culture' (p. 14).

It is not possible to find a quick fix for and/or mend some conditions of the human psyche. However, it is possible to write about personal experiences of depression with the aim to change dominant meanings attached to so-called mental frailty in sport and sport-related settings (including and especially academia). Also, it is important to write stories about the ways we live with troublesome conditions of the mind. As others have testified (Jago 2002, Ellis 2004, Smith 2013) written narrative has therapeutic potential. In this vein, I use minimalist prose and flash fiction to tell of episodes of depression and the embodied pleasures gained through habitual and routine physical activity (on a machine). The aim was to provide scope for further research and analyses of the incompleteness, and depth, of 'feeling blue'.

Notes on contributor

Jayne Caudwell is a reader in Sport, Gender and Sexuality at the University of Brighton. Her teaching and research seek to expand our understandings of gender, sexuality and research methodologies.

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Notes

1. One of the ways I capture the personal and biographical is through flash fiction. Flash fiction appeared as a named style of writing in 1992 in Thomas' edited anthology entitled: *Flash Fiction: Seventy-Two Very Short Stories*. Flash fiction is a form of short-story writing. It is usually sudden and brief, although there are variations on how brief (wordage).

2. The style of this piece is inspired by the writing of Raymond Carver and his short story *Fat*, which is in his collection entitled *'Will you please be quiet, please?' (1992)*. Carver was an accomplished writer of the everyday and ordinary. He had an exceptional ability to capture complex human interactions and feelings through simple, minimalist prose. The story *Fat* is an exemplar of how Carver was able to do this as well as represent the temporal layering of social meanings. My adoption of his style reflects the abilities of an academic writer, not a successful writer of fiction. And yet, I take this approach because I think it is a valuable and previously underused way to offer a commentary of the everyday, ordinary and routine of our socio-cultural worlds.

3. In addition, I argue that the mundane and slowness have little social, economic and political value in these contexts.

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