

# Cooking a Pot of Beef Stew: Navigating Through Difficult Times Through Slow Philosophy

Tanya J. Behrisch

## Abstract

The Slow Movement offers feminist scholars permission to inhabit multiple identities and recognizes the inherent value of care work as work. Against an intimate living backdrop of pancreatic cancer, COVID-19, and overwork, I practice Slow scholarship by embodied caring for three elders while experiencing powerful anxiety. Identifying as a daughter, mother, carer, student, friend, leader, and scholar, I look to a variety of wisdom sources outside universal concepts of value and time to ground myself in the present. Zen, Taoism, and existentialism suggest staying with anxiety as a viable means to live in an uncomfortable present.

## Keywords

slow scholarship, anxiety, feminist, care, existentialism, Zen, stop, instrumentalism, audit culture

## Wide-Awake

I'm pancreatic cancer  
The decline of my loved one  
A pandemic, and the sunlight that shines softly at dawn  
A child of the universe,  
A toddler in the pluriverse,  
Always becoming, multiplying, degenerating,  
Like baby stars, cancer cells and COVID19  
Animals, plants and rocks living life and ignoring us.  
Our private agonies and pleasures play out at home  
Pandemic sweeps over us all,  
Spring doesn't pause, not for COVID, cancer, and especially not me.  
I'm not ready for this joyful unfurling,  
What can I do?  
I can stop.  
Look. Feel. Hear.  
Wide-awake. Just here. Now. This.

planning and writing this article. I read dozens of articles and books. Between tasks, I contemplate how all the parts fit together. As I drive to work, I consider the list of urgent pressing issues facing me in all realms: personal, professional, academic, parenting, health, financial and I wonder, "How can I tackle these with any depth and quality?" I've become expert at skimming mountains of information to synthesize and make decisions quickly which will impact people whom I love and for whom I care for deeply, at home, work, school, and community. Skimming, parsing, synthesizing, multitasking, flinging action items onto email, and hoping someone will catch my meaning and enact my half-baked plan without consulting me, because I've got other troubles to consider. Life-changing troubles.

Amid my anxiety, I read about Slow feminist scholarship in my graduate class and discover a viable approach to my troubles and the good things in life. It's called the Slow Movement. What's Slow? Slow resists Fast time, instrumentalism, and neoliberal values, like outputs and efficiency and turns toward wise old practices grounded in the embodied experience of the "here" and "now." Slow leaves room for self-doubt, ambiguity, even futility. Slow is rebellion and

## Introducing Slow as Rebellion and Love

Contemplating how to write a paper about Slow Scholarship, I'm struck by the irony of how little time I have to spend

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love. Slow comes from within our bodies; it has seasons and reasons that reason cannot know. It's disruptive and immeasurable. This article explores the practice of "staying with the trouble" amid great anxiety (Haraway, 2016) by Slowing. Right. Down.

Fast Thinking is rational, analytical, linear, logical. It is what we do under pressure, when the clock is ticking; it is the way computers think and the way the modern workplace operates; it delivers clear solutions to well-defined problems. Slow Thinking is intuitive, woolly and creative. [It's] what we do when the pressure is off, and we have the time to let ideas simmer at their own pace on the back burner. It yields rich and subtle insights. (Honoré, 2004, p. 120)

Peter Cole (2002) builds a conceptual canoe out of words to discuss his ideas about "aboriginalizing" methodology, eschewing punctuation as resistance to Western values and comparing neoliberal academic culture to a "disease which is its own vector" (p. 447). Cole's creation of a word canoe to transmit his ideas inspires me to cook a massive pot of beef stew for three beloved seniors and mentors, my father, mother, and 75-year-old friend Gitxsan elder Margaret, as a way to care for them. Preparing and cooking this pot of stew is both metaphor and embodied practice of Slow scholarship and the ethic of care. Caring is acting, doing, and foregoing other work. It is not hollow sentiments, like "thinking of you." It's rolling up my sleeves, saying no email, and doing something for living bodies (Figure 1).

## Cooking and Caring for Elders

I'm a doctoral student with big responsibilities at home, work, and school. My parents live with me; my father has pancreatic cancer. In my job at a neoliberal university, I manage a team of 16 staff and report to four Directors and a Dean. I'm trying not to get sick from COVID-19. What can I do? I love my father. I want to support my mother. My beloved elderly friend, Margaret, is ill and confined to her townhouse. I want to connect with her, help her, and receive her counsel on staying with the trouble. I have a term paper due that's worth a large portion of my final grade. My staff are bewildered by the rapid transition to online program delivery in response to staying home to avoid the spread of COVID-19. What is worth doing right now? Fear shifts its weight from one foot to the other inside me, waiting, watching, hovering. "Fear is not good enough . . . *How* to address the urgency is the question that must burn for staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016, p. 6). I choose to cook for and feed people to address the urgency (Figure 2). I'll stay with the trouble by caring for my elders. "Ethical caring is more than a feeling or an intention; it involves action in response to the expressed or perceived needs of the other" (Beck & Cassidy, 2019, p. 34).



**Figure 1.** Assembling fresh ingredients for beef stew, despite anxiety and hangover.



**Figure 2.** Peeling garlic takes time. Lots of time.

I feel anxiety, about my job, pancreatic cancer, and COVID-19. I observe my thoughts. "Once I finish assembling this stew and bring it to Margaret this afternoon, I'll start drafting an outline for my paper about Slow scholarship and the ethic of care," I see myself planning. Over the rising steam of frying onions and drone of the hood fan, I see that I am practicing Slow right now in this moment; the pot of beef stew *is* my process, my care, my term paper, my way of coping with COVID-19, my team's distress, and my way of staying with the trouble. There's no division between what I'm doing right now, cooking, worrying about work, school, my elders, caring, and staying with the trouble. Slow scholarship, leading others, caring for myself, caring for others; they're the same. They're unbounded, just like my identities as woman, daughter, wife, mother, leader, student, and animal.

Do not shy away from talking about life and how intertwined life and work are. We need and want to be able to do this with our students as well. Taking care may also involve working

with, and on behalf of, our research communities as feminists committed to participatory, activist work. This scholarship raises the question of what counts and for whom and expands our community of care beyond those in the academy. Ensuring that our scholarship is *taking care of others* may also help us to engage in different ways of experiencing and valuing time (emphasis mine). (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1251)

Haraway rejects notions of autonomy and boundedness in the midst of our global environmental crisis. “Bounded individualism in its many flavors in science, politics, and philosophy has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, technically or any other way” (Haraway, 2016, p. 5). She advocates “making with” other species and life forms, sympoiesis, to go forward into a precarious future. Eschewing individual autonomy, Haraway argues that we’re joined in an unbounded web of relations with each other and other species, cancer, and COVID-19 among them. Staying with the trouble means *making* our way forward *with* others, *making with* to navigate through the difficult times. This idea of making with and *staying with* discomfort is a cornerstone of Kierkegaard’s existentialism (Marino, 2018).

This process of cooking for others connects me to their bodies, to the animals whose meat I cut and fry, and to the earth from which these vegetables come. I’m part of a circle of nourishment, feeding myself, feeding others. There is no beginning and no end, just nourishment and gratitude, two currencies of care work. Before the advisory to practice social distancing was issued, I spent hours with Margaret, who suffers from limited mobility and a bad cold, and her adult daughter. I let my email and paper wait. Those hours spent visiting with Margaret nourished me. Rather than viewing those hours in neoliberal time as “lost hours,” I want to shift to a Slow appreciation of “gained hours.” I gained a renewed a sense of reconnection with someone I love. Care work requires Slowing down, taking time to notice what should be done, for whom, when, and how. The Slow movement invites me to explore this relational process through research, writing, and embodied practice of cooking for others (Figure 3).

## The Stop

My mountain of email accumulates and manuscripts lie scattered in piles recusing me of neglect. Every quarter hour that slips by, I’m aware of not attending to my administrative and academic work. To attend to this other work would clear a massive psychic weight for me. I feel anxiety. Pressure. Fear. Resentment. Deida’s writes that to live fully is to open to each moment and to *be* each moment. If I follow Deida’s advice, I see that *I* am anxiety. *I* am pressure. *I* am fear and resentment. These are not outside of me. *I* embody them.



**Figure 3.** Peeling vegetables instead of reading email.

You are trapped by that which you feel partially, recoil from, and refuse to be as openness. If you feel anything fully—even your mother’s hate or your own bodily pain—then you can feel as it, open as it, and live free amidst hurt . . . To feel fully is to open fully. (Deida, 2005, p. 16)

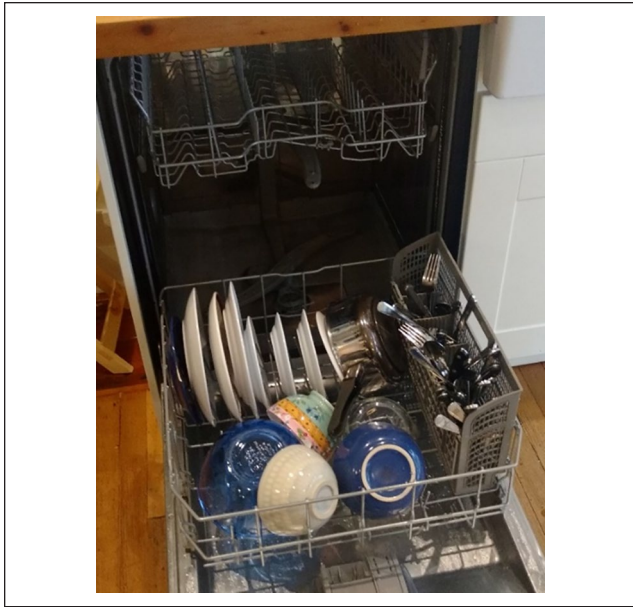
I’m awash in anxiety, fear, and resentment. As I write a list of ingredients for the stew, I stop pushing these feelings away. There’s no escape from these thoughts or from my mounting administrative work. The only option is to surrender to what’s here right now. I stay in the kitchen *with* my conflicting feelings and set other work aside. Once I make this transition to “be here now,” I feel a shift. Not *from* entrapment. *As* entrapment. I feel paralyzed and am acting anyway.

Freedom doesn’t mean freedom *from*. As long as you are alive, you can never be free from pain, from loss, or from death. Things come and go, including your loved ones and your own body and mind. True freedom means freedom *as*. True freedom is to feel fully . . . feeling as this entire moment, opening just as this moment is. (Deida, 2005, p. 17)

Each moment is a new present to which I’m unevenly aware. At moments finely attuned, I’m most often distracted by the need to *do* something. The trigger to shift from doing and distraction to “being here now” is a “Stop,” a sudden or emergent event interrupting my stream of consciousness. While investigating how everyday disruption inform her teaching practice, Lynn Fels practices performative inquiry research using Appelbaum’s concept of “The Stop.” “Stops” invite Fels to pivot from her usual processes and habits that arise automatically (Fels, 2012).

I have come to understand that these stops matter, that they are action sites of inquiry, and that these moments, if reflected upon through a lens of inquiry, hold within them possibility for new understanding of what we thought we knew. *A stop is embodied data*. (Fels, 2012, p. 54).

Like Fels, I’m drawn to Appelbaum’s (1995) “Stop” concept. My father’s cancer, COVID-19, and multiplying



**Figure 4.** Freedom as a cluttered dishwasher, as email piling up.

administrative work have interrupted my daily rituals and sense of well-being in the world. These troubles are real, deadly, even. Physical, spiritual, psychic weight hangs upon and within me. There's no escape from my anxiety. These serious combined threats represent a "Stop," an opportunity to Slow down and pivot from the "deadliness of doing," and from my usual response to work faster. The work will never be completely done, so I am choosing to do what needs doing most. Now. After setting out stew ingredients, I realize some cooking tools are still in the dishwasher. I need to unload and clear this before I start cooking (Figure 4).

## Neoliberal Values and Audit Culture

Before turning to explore Slow alternatives, an inventory of neoliberal values is useful. Metrics, speed, and efficiency click neatly together in a seamless triad underpinning my neoliberal university culture. Generating quantitative output and avoiding liability are valued over other currencies, such as cultivating and repairing interpersonal relationships and keeping healthy. Audit culture pervades most aspects of my workflow; weekly statistics around Co-op work terms, student applications to jobs, workshop attendance, and absenteeism provide useful metrics showing how smoothly our program is running. When numbers drop, there are few ways to explain why, necessitating looking outside standard audits to more fuzzy social and environmental factors, many of which are unknown or difficult to identify. Contemplating the unknown is unfamiliar in neoliberal audit culture. Citing Henry Neave, Holt highlights our neoliberal obsession with metrics.



**Figure 5.** This knife is dull.

Note. I need a better tool for the rest of this job.

The industrial lobby [has] . . . persuaded Americans that numbers are everything: if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Nothing . . . could be further from the truth: 'The most important figures needed for management of any organization are unknown and unknowable. (Holt, 2002, p. 269)

Neoliberal values rely upon instrumentalism, which objectifies all things for their usefulness toward progress. Audit culture values speed, utility, power, and control in all our pursuits, including leisure and sex!

Hytten (2017) and Mountz et al. (2015) critique audit culture for rewarding competition between colleagues who could otherwise collaborate to create outstanding scholarship and deep thought processes as demonstrated by de Oliveira et al. (2015) and Mountz et al. (2015). These provide leaps in theory, but are excluded from tenure metrics because they don't allude to sole autonomous authorships, leading to what feminist scholar bell hooks (1994) calls "one-upmanship" in the neoliberal university (p. 179). The Slow movement invites us to engage beyond instrumental habits of performativity and productivity. I turn to the work of cooking and caring for others as a personal, scholarly, and embodied practice of navigating through my anxiety in difficult times. As I begin to cut into my peeled rutabaga, I feel the ineffectual dullness of my knife. It needs to be sharpened. There so many steps to assembling this stew. I just want to get this done. Wait. I can have freedom *as* a dull knife that needs to be sharpened. Breathe (Figure 5).

Referencing Michael Oakshott's phrase "the deadliness of doing," Andrew Sullivan traces our neoliberal fixation with staying busy and engaged in task-oriented activities.

There seems no end to this paradox of practical life, and no way out, just an infinite succession of efforts, all doomed ultimately to fail. Except, of course, there is the option of a spiritual reconciliation to this futility, an attempt to transcend the unending cycle of impermanent human achievement. There is a recognition that beyond mere doing, there is also being; that at the end of life, there is also the great silence of death



**Figure 6.** Wetting my knife before dragging it through the sharpening tool.

Note. I want this thing sharp.

with which we must eventually make our peace. (Sullivan, 2016)

The Slow movement permits us to transcend this cycle of impermanent human achievement to value things that matter profoundly: affect, feeling, imagination, pleasure, curiosity, and care. Mountz et al. (2015) rally scholars to push for counting what other’s don’t: careful work, failures that lead to new insights, relationships formed and maintained, our health, the health of our families, and a sense of well-being with the world.

### Slowness as Rebellion

Existentialist philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) describes the role of *doing* art as grounding the active agent in the world of experience, as

restor(ing) some kind of order, to repair, to heal. At the very least participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to *see* more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, when habit and convention have been suppressed. (p. 123)

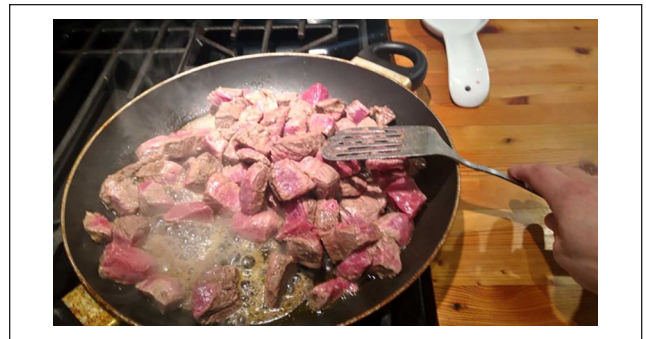
Cooking beef stew for my elders, I consciously defy pervasive neoliberal demands: productivity, performativity, and accountability (Figure 6).

Choosing to let those demands wait is an embodied political act. I say “yes” to love, care, and “now.” I say “no” to administrative work, my professional pride, and the rewards that come from delivering work ahead of time, on my weekend. Solnit (2007) and Sullivan (2016) describe Slow time as rebellion against the “deadliness of doing.” “Ultimately, I believe that slowness is an act of resistance, not because slowness is good in itself but because of all that it makes room for, the things that don’t get measured and can’t be bought” (Solnit, 2007).

I slow down to look at the steps I have unconsciously completed: writing a list of ingredients, loading the car with



**Figure 7.** Browning meat for stew.



**Figure 8.** Stirring browning meat to lock in the flavor.

Note. I’ll figure this out as I go along.

shopping bags, hunting for and buying ingredients, unwrapping three packages of beef stew meat; all with a hangover and anxiety (Figures 7 and 8).

There seems to be an underlying misunderstanding of feminist politics and ethics of care at work in some of the reactions to slow scholarship. To us, care work is work. As Audre Lorde and Sara Ahmed both wrote, care work is not self-indulgent, but radical, necessary, and risky, imposing a burden on those who undertake it. (Mountz et al., 2016)

By embracing Slow Time, we gain the ability to feel and name values that are out of reach in Fast time. These include

subtleties—epiphanies, alliances, associations, meanings, purposes, pleasures—that engineers cannot design, factories cannot build, computers cannot measure, and marketers will not sell. What we cannot describe vanishes into the ether, and so what begins as a problem of language ends as one of the broadest tragedies of our lives. (Solnit, 2007)

Such values are nebulous and difficult to quantify.

### Reaching for the Minimum

One of the most profound ideas advanced by feminist Slow scholars is to “reach for the minimum (i.e., good enough is

the new perfect)” (Mountz et al., 2015), allowing people to focus on quality, careful scholarship, caring for self and others. It shifts expectations away from performative excellence toward other things that matter to Slow: nourishing relationships, quality work, health, respect, and care for the earth (Hyttén, 2017). This flies directly in the face of “modernity’s shiny promise” of progress outlined by de Oliveira Andreotti et al., who eviscerate the neoliberal notion that modernity embodies progress for everyone and that “*everything is awesome.*” Everything is *not* awesome, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and my father’s pancreatic cancer. Reaching for the minimum is not lazy; it frees space up for creative insights that otherwise have no room to germinate in a speed and output-oriented culture.

### Slow Time Versus Fast Time

There is no universal concept of time. Time is diverse and pluriversal, a construct perceived differently by various ontologies. Indigenous and Buddhist ontologies treat time as a continuous cycle, holding that what came before now will return again and again. “On Canada’s Baffin Island, the Inuit use the same word—*uvatiarru*—to mean both ‘in the distant past’ and ‘in the distant future.’ Time, in such cultures, is always coming as well as going” (Honoré, 2004, p. 29). Zen philosophy holds that there is no future and no past. All we have is the present moment; all else is a construct. Here. Now. And now. In Zen, the present moment is the great reservoir of human experience. Time is not fleeting; the present is not approached from behind, advanced upon, apprehended, passed by, and left behind. It is here, now. Always unfolding. In Zen, to be aware in the *present* moment is to be *present*. I am present in the present. I am *the present*. What we perceive *is* the moment. Right now is all there is, there’s nothing else.

Memories are somewhat abstract, being a knowledge *about* things rather than *of* things. Memory never captures the essence, the present intensity, the concrete reality of an experience. It is . . . the corpse of an experience, from which the life has vanished. (Watts, 2011, p. 92)

My living experience is right now, standing over my steel mixing bowl, decanting overflowing stew from a smaller pot to stir ingredients without spilling them onto the stovetop (Figure 9).

The Western concept of time is linear and progressive, moving from the past, passing through the present, and extending forward into the future. When something is going to happen in the future, like the death of a loved one, it is *ahead* of me. As this event approaches, time compresses between now and what’s coming; it becomes shorter. I fear the pain that future event will bring. When that event happens, it happens now. As soon as it happens, it’s passed and



**Figure 9.** Decanting ingredients into a mixing bowl from an overflowing pot.

Note. The magic is in the mixture.

in the past. The line stretching from the present to that painful event lengthens and grows longer as linear time elapses. Wise people say, “time heals.” This implies that as more time elapses, the less acutely I’ll feel agony in relation to the painful moment that happened. It’s past; it hasn’t happened before and it won’t come again. Time is “an arrow flying remorselessly from A to B” (Honoré, 2004, p. 29).

In the Western tradition, the great reservoirs of time reside in the past and in the future. The past is held within memory and the future is held in expectation. The present is almost imperceptible; it is here and then it’s over. If the present is painful, we want it to pass and be in the past. If it’s pleasurable, we want to hold onto it. But it slips by, into the past, into memory, to be revisited in our recollections that vaporize and revise themselves over time.

The power of memories and expectations is such that for most human beings the past and the future are not as real, but *more* real than the present. The present cannot be lived happily unless the past has been “cleared up” and the future is bright with promise. (Watts, 2011, p. 34)

Staying with the trouble by adopting Slow time, I am present to the pain, anxiety, and pleasure of cooking for my elders.

### Velocitization and Natural Time

In Fast culture, time is parsed into units of hours and seconds and sold as a commodity. Time is money, wages are paid by the hour, not by the job accomplished or project finished (Honoré, 2004, p. 24). The faster things get done, the more money someone gets, leading to acceleration of work and overall life experience. Honoré calls this trend of speeding up “*velocitization.*” This is resisted by the Slow time which moves in line with Natural time (Honoré, 2004, p. 22), originating in the earth and in our bodies. Natural time is measured and experienced by natural rhythms, like

diurnal, menstrual, seasonal, lunar, and tidal cycles. Daylight and nighttime regulate waking and sleeping patterns. Monthly ovulation, linked to the lunar cycle, regulates fertility. Seasons provide cycles of growth, harvest, and dying. A full human life, a generation, is part of a long connection of ancestors and descendants to come. In Buddhism, this is not a line, but a never-ending cycle, of birth, death, and rebirth. These longer more organic rhythms are slower than the hours and seconds in Fast time.

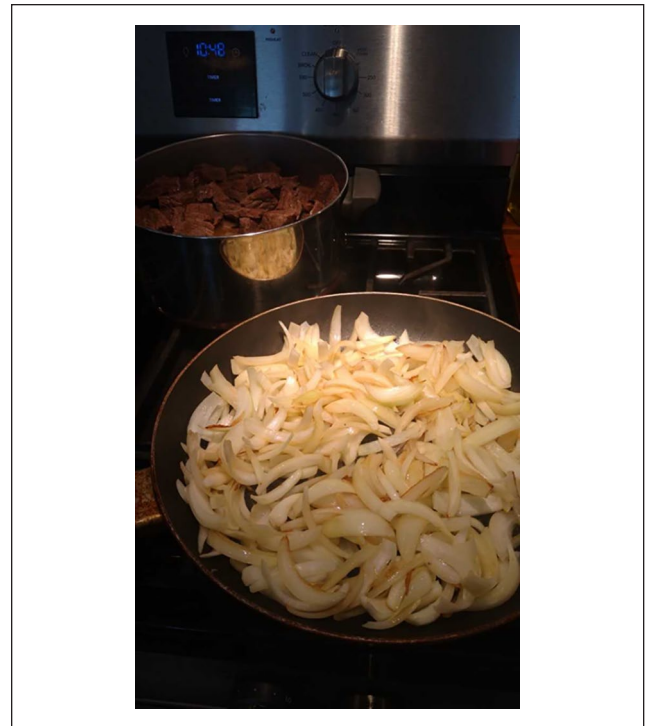
Feminist scholars call for a closer alignment of scholarship with Natural time. “The relentless acceleration of work will continue until we say ‘no’ to wildly outsized expectations of productivity” (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1250). Natural time affords time to look after loved ones *and* the self while producing scholarly work, just more slowly than neoliberal fast time. Natural time, the time it takes to cook this stew and clean up, will take hours. I am forced to surrender to this fact. I cannot speed this creation up, produce, and deliver it faster than it naturally takes to cook stew from scratch. Chinnery (2003) writes about surrender as an integral part of moral agency. I surrender to the fact that this is going to take at last half my day. Slow and Natural time take longer. They break the relentless arrow from A to B and force me to surrender to the uncomfortably present.

### Costs and Gains of Slow Time

Slow time permits us to care for ourselves and others as part of our overall burden and joy of work, while simultaneously pursuing leadership, management, and scholarship. Our jobs do not preclude us from engaging in the most intimate aspects of care we can offer another. Although many who advance a feminist ethic of care are women, care work is not the sole domain of women. Feminist ethics theorist Nel Noddings

pleads agnosticism on the question of whether women are by nature more inclined to caring. She simply observes that throughout history and across cultures, women have been and are the primary care givers . . . Authentic human liberation and social justice . . . can only be achieved by caring people in caring communities. (Bergman, 2004, p. 151)

Caring for self and others takes time; there’s an opportunity cost to caring, which is not rewarded within neoliberal culture. This cost is offset by the imperative and opportunity to strengthen, nourish, and protect our loved ones and to show respect for each other and the earth. “Slowness involves living mindfully and being present with others; it entails using our time in ways that we deem worthwhile and meaningful, and not simply to respond to perceived external pressures” (Hyttén, 2017, p. 157). Slow advocates taking more control over time and essential difference from Buddhism, Zen, and Tantra which reject any notion of control. For these traditions, there is no control over anything, ever. The only



**Figure 10.** Lots of onions frying. Look at those beautiful wedges.

*Note.* Browned beef sits on the backburner, literally, not figuratively. My email recedes onto a *figurative* back burner (not pictured here).

way to face the present is to surrender now. Not later. Onion wedges fry right here, right now. They’re more real than email. Back to the stew (Figure 10).

### Always-Arising Self

Nel Noddings’s ethic of care involves the relational self that is always becoming, always arising, co-authored by our self and our relations to others. We are not born as a self; we’re continually shaped by the relations in which we live (Bergman, 2004), echoing Haraway’s “making with” others mentioned above. Writing from a Zen tradition, Watts (2011) describes the self as a stream of “nows,” inseparable from the present, flowing like a river.

There is no other reality than present reality . . . it is just this reality of the present, this moving, vital now which eludes all the definitions and descriptions. Here is the mysterious real world which words and ideas can never pin down. (p. 52)

My awareness of myself and the present is continuously arising. I’m always becoming, unfolding, learning, discarding, and starting anew. This idea of the always-arising self follows in the wisdom of 83-year-old Maxine Greene, existentialist philosopher and role model for women beginning personhood anew in midlife (Hancock, 2001).

## Self-Emptying, Engrossment, and Surrender

To care for another, I must set aside my afflictions and clear room to feel what they are going through. Noddings describes engrossment as displacing the self within, to open capacity for the experience of another. “To say that the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive the other describes well what I mean by engrossment. I do not mean infatuation, enchantment, or obsession but a full receptivity” (Noddings, 1992, p. 16). Amie Wolf writes beautifully about self-emptying within the Taoist tradition. Our “capacity to listen, that is, to really hear and resonate emotionally with the voice of another person . . . This special sort of listening requires emptiness—the ability to be attentive in a way that is open rather than self-acquiring” (Wolf, 2010, p. vii). To simultaneously empty myself and be anxious appears to be a paradox. How can I be *something* and *empty* at the same time? Navigating through difficult times, staying with the trouble, feeling anxious, and “feeling with” another; I want to study these concepts and paradoxes reading ontologies including Zen (Watts, 2011), Taoism (Le Guin, 1998; Wolf, 2010), existentialism (Greene, 1977, 1995; Hancock, 2001), Buddhism (Bai, 1998, 2003, Deida, 2005), feminist care theory (Beck & Cassidy, 2019). The Slow movement offers me an invitation to explore a pluriverse of wisdom (Mignolo, 2008; Figure 11).

## Embracing Shadow as Within Ourselves

Part of staying with the trouble is embracing the shadow that underlies all life. Like flourishing life and creativity, suffering and insecurity are always present. They linger in the shadow, obscured by the light and vitality of life until we encounter a stop, like pancreatic cancer or COVID-19. Noddings asserts that evil is perpetuated when our shadow side is cast as “the other” *outside* ourselves. Trouble lives within the shadow side of life. Our first instinct is to reject it as “the other,” as outside ourselves, and not within. This is defensive; it’s how we protect ourselves. To claim the shadow, pancreatic cancer, and COVID-19 as part of myself, as part of “me now” is to surrender to a fearful thing over which I have no control. This trouble, this “other” is here now, inside my rather, permeating everything I am doing right now. There’s no escape. The only viable option is to fully embrace this uncomfortable “other” as here and now. “The other—as me, as not-me, and as not-us—will be reclaimed, will be owned. Self-knowledge will provide the foundation for resistance . . . that would demonize the enemy” (Bergman, 2004, p. 159). My would-be enemies are cancer, COVID-19, and mounting admin work. I allow my enemies to stand beside me, to be part of me, while I cook stew and do something truly worthy of my time (Figure 12).



Figure 11. Adding flour thickens the stew.



Figure 12. Beautiful bountiful Slow beef stew.

Note. Stew contains ingredients from the earth: meat, veggies, flour, oil, seasonings.

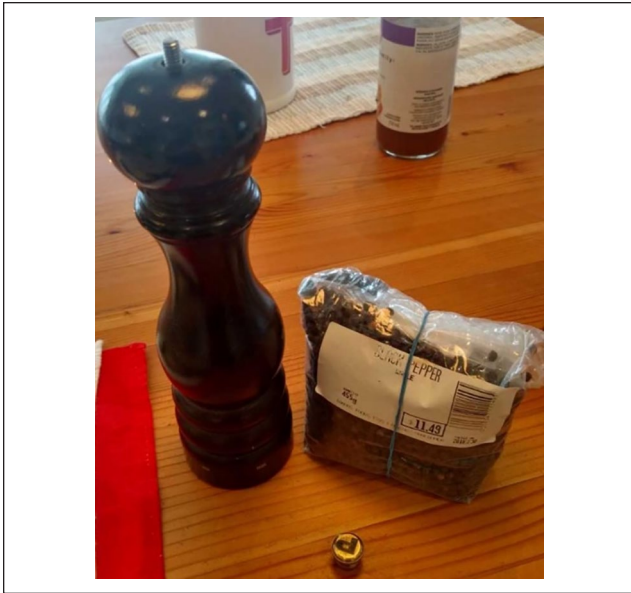
Indigenous scholar Eber Hampton (1995) acknowledges that shadow and light co-arise from the same source, the “same Creator who made the beautiful forests . . . traces the cracks in the sidewalks and puts rainbows in oil slicks on city streets” (p. 22).

## Wide-Awakeness

Once I consciously choose to detach from my administrative work and fully immerse myself in cooking, I’m fully conscious of the detailed care work I do all the time; preparing food, creating meals that will nourish, satisfy, and delight. The delight of others is nourishment for me, deriving from more than the stew’s taste, texture, and savory smell; it will confirm for my elders that they’re loved and cared about, creating a virtuous circle between them and myself. Existentialist Maxine Greene describes the wide-awake self as the site of active engagement with life.

By the term “wide-awakeness,” we want to denote a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. Only the performing and especially the working self is fully interested in life and, hence, wide awake. It lives within its acts and its attention is





**Figure 13.** Filling the empty pepper grinder.

exclusively directed to carrying its project into effect, to executing its plan. This attention is an active, not a passive one. Passive attention is the opposite to full awareness. (Greene, 1977, p. 162)

This active attention echoes the Zen concept that nothing exists aside from the present moment; no barrier stands between what we feel and what we are. Greene’s wide-awakeness relates closely to “the eternal now—an awareness without the sense of separation from it” (Watts, 2011, p. 53) described by Zen scholar Alan Watts. I taste the stew. It needs spice. Fresh pepper will do. I reach for the pepper grinder and hear one or two pepper corns rolling around inside. This won’t do (Figures 13 and 14).

### **Conclusion: Decanting Stew into Containers to Bring to My Loved Ones**

To engage in the “now” is to detach from the “deadline of doing” in Fast Time. Feelings of anxiety and certainty commingle. Right now, I choose to Slow down. There’s no escape from anxiety and so I surrender and choose freedom *as* anxiety. While anxiety is trouble, I confront my fear and stay with it. This is the active site of Slow scholarship, the care of my loved ones while letting other work wait. I embrace the shadows of pancreatic cancer and COVID-19 as here right now. I’ve got to live with them. To deny my shadows, my anguish, is to deny my selfhood. I am wide awake; shadow, love, and care. It is all here around me, in my kitchen, within me. This is now I navigate through difficult times: being here now, cooking stew for my elders (Figure 15).



**Figure 14.** Freshly ground pepper will make this taste better.



**Figure 15.** Preparing to bring stew to Margaret.  
 Note. Bringing extra container of stew to put in elder’s freezer for a later dinner.

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