



We started as a group of friends with the same problem: difficulty in our personal life to manage our time, being always in a hurry, and being always suspended between past and future. This philosophy—part Deepak Chopra, part Hannah Arendt—was recently proffered by Bruno Contigiani to explain the genesis of *L'Arte del Vivere con Lentezza* (The Art of Living Slowly), an organization that he founded two years ago, with his wife, Ella.

One recent afternoon, the Contigianis found themselves in Bryant Park, which Bruno rapturously termed “a Zen metropolitan garden.” Both had recently received compliments from New Yorkers—Bruno for his pink shirt (at MOMA), and Ella for her rhinestone-studded glasses (at Grand Central). An unhappy and perpetually flustered businessman in Milan, Bruno decided several years ago to consult a life coach; the gambit for happiness worked, and then some—Bruno ended up marrying the coach.

After they found fulfillment for themselves, Bruno and Ella said, they decided to draw more people's attention to the overlooked idea that “time is wealth.” Last year, they created a new holiday, the first Global Day of Slow Living. Despite its ambitious name, the event was confined almost entirely to Italy, where the Contigianis orchestrated a number of whimsical events: a reverse bicycle race in Ferrara (where the last rider was declared the winner); an afternoon of grandfathers reading poetry to children in the main square of Follonica; a celebration of the emblematically slow animal, the donkey, near Livorno.

Last August, Bruno and Ella visited New York for seventeen days—“to understand if we could do something like this in this beautiful town,” Bruno said. The Contigianis stayed in south Harlem (“It reminded us of a small village in the south of Italy”). They were dazzled

by the friendliness and efficiency of the city's bus drivers. “In New York, the typical phrase is ‘How can we help you?’” Bruno said, beaming. “And to us that is wonderful.”

When they returned to Milan, Bruno wrote an article for an Italian travel magazine titled “A Slowed-Down Life in New York.” Taking as his epigraph Holden Caulfield's existential musing on the wintertime fate of Central Park's ducks, Bruno wrote, “Take the time to walk around the central lake, do not run, simply walk. However, do it counterclockwise. You will realize that Central Park is a sort of old alarm clock, with an external ring, daily wound up by people running around the lake.” The article is full of tips on where to stay (“south Harlem, Alphabet City, the East Village, or a little place on Columbus or Amsterdam”) and what to do (“Why not seize the opportunity to have your hair cut for only 10 dollars?”).

One Monday last month, the Contigianis staged a New York version of the Day of Slow Living (“It has to be a Monday, the worst day to try to slow down,” Bruno explained). As part of the celebration, Bruno was issuing phony speeding tickets to pedestrians rushing through Union Square. He was wearing a police badge and cap, mirrored sunglasses, and a sandwich board proclaiming, “Caution! Speed-walking camera in action!” Wielding a stuffed turtle with a “STOP” badge on

its belly, he flagged down passersby and handed them postcards printed with fourteen “slowmandments.” (No. 4: “Write your text messages on your cell phone with no symbols or abbreviations and get in the habit of starting with ‘Dear . . .’” No. 7: “Avoid being so busy and full of work that you don't have time for yourself and the delight of thinking about nothing.”) “Read once a day and keep the doctor away,” Bruno counselled one woman who stopped to pick up a brochure. “You will be on YouTube!” he shouted gleefully to another retreating figure.

“Many said, ‘I can't do, New York is too fast,’” Bruno admitted. “But many stopped, they read, and they said, ‘This one is good for me.’ Because trying to slow down is like trying to stop smoking: at the beginning is very difficult, but at the end you live better and more.”

The “face of slowness” in Italy is a negative, outmoded one in Bruno's mind; to him the clichés of the simple Italian way of life are really just inefficiency masquerading as charm. The movement is not without its own brand of rigor—“If you are late, you are a thief of my time,” Bruno explained. When asked about their plans for the future, Bruno and Ella looked at each other and chanted the name of the city they have chosen for next year's Global Day of Slow Living: “Tokyo!”

—Katherine Stirling



“Luckily, I was able to get out on the ground floor.”

