



## BOOK OF THE MONTH

**About time - Speed, society people and the environment**

Greenleaf Publishing 2005, £xxx

One thing that unites all the disparate issues fought over by environmentalists, activists and those campaigning for a fairer world, though it is something we rarely discuss – is time. Industrial agriculture aims to make the production of food faster. Giant supermarkets make shopping faster. Packaged meals make cooking faster. Transport is about getting places quicker. The pursuit is of doing what was done before, but in less time. The promise was that if the job was done quicker, there would be room for leisure. The opposite is true; the job gets done quicker, leaving more room... for more jobs. Or fewer people are needed to do it, so more people are out of work. Not leisure – unemployment. To unemployment, add stress, cancer, obesity – these are the consequences of a world living ever faster. It takes a tree a hundred years to grow, but only seconds to fall to the ground. When we convert our forests into flat-pack furniture, we are abusing time as much as nature. The essays in *About Time* gather together some of the best thinkers on this subject to approach this issue from every conceivable angle. Philosopher Mary Warnock tackles the ethics of time. The Work Foundation's Will Hutton writes on time and money. David Boyle shows how concepts such as timebanks are beginning to re-evaluate the importance of the hours spent working, so that people working in traditionally low paid, but essential services can trade their time with others, thus enabling each to afford services they previously could not, showing that it is their time that is truly valuable. The Astronomer Royal takes the long view, reminding us that in a universe that ticks to planetary time we are but a blip. Jay Griffiths, author of the wonderful *Pip Pip - a sideways look at time*, calls for time to be made free and fluid once again and not constrained to the controlling mechanism of GMT. We are all slaves of time. We wake the same hour every day. We work the same hours to enable us to take the same days off to watch the minutes tick away before we return to do it all again. *About Time* reminds us that it really is about 'time' we unchained our wrists and set ourselves free.

**Reviewed by Sebastian Boshier**