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Could Slow be Beautiful? : Academic Counter-Spacing within & beyond “The Slow Swimming Club”

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Abstract

This paper proposes a specific form of academic counter-spacing, based on an auto-ethnographic account of an initiative called the “Slow Swimming Club”. The justification for this initiative is to contest what is contextualised as the pervasive fast pace of universities, driven by contemporary marketization, new public management and neo-liberalism. The proposed counter-spacing is analysed here through a conceptual lens, inspired by recent research from the environmental psychology discipline around Attention Restorative Theory (ART), along with its central four principles. By using such a conceptual frame, it allows a way of exploring the impact beyond the personal day-to-day micro restorative counter-spacing opportunities, such as the Slow Swimming Club (which take place outside the university space), towards counter spacing back on campus. It thereby endeavours to explore how such counter spacing not only reflects and disconnects through a restorative coping mechanism but collectively resists and challenges the fast agendas on campus.

1.0 Introduction

In 2004, a convocation address by former Loyola Marymount University President, Fr. Robert Lawton, S.J. pointed to some criticisms levelled by Bertrand Russell against the faculty of Harvard University:

If Russell liked, even admired, the students, he had little good to say about the faculty, which persisted in trying to recruit him. “Dull”, “tiresome”, “complacent” people, forced to spend them-selves in endless teaching and to produce “quick results”, they were deprived of the patient solitary meditation ... that goes to produce anything of value. They lacked, he said, the atmosphere of meditation and absent-mindedness that one associates with thought – they all seem more alert and businesslike and punctual than one expects very good people to be. (Lawton, 2004)

Brian Treanor, a philosophy professor at Loyola Marymount University, reflected that Russell was painting a picture of the life of the mind as one characterized by a certain amount of leisure, not in the service of laziness, but in order to make room and time for the patient meditation that any thinking of real import requires. Such a life is at odds with quick results, overfull schedules, multitasking, “working lunches”, and all the other “businesslike” practices that are encroaching on or are well established in universities (Treanor, 2007).

What’s wrong with this picture? And, more importantly, what can universities do to fix it?

Inspired by Russell, in the summer of 2007, Treanor initiated the idea of developing a “Slow University movement”, based on a “Slow University Manifesto” at Loyola Marymount University Campus. Treanor (2007) invited faculty members, students, staff, and administrators to join him in slowing down. He began the experiment by establishing, posting, and maintaining explicit “slow hours” in his academic schedule. During these times he did not, under any circumstances, work.

In his own words again,

My slow hours are spent letting my thoughts wander, walking along the bluff, or talking and eating with family, friends, colleagues, and students. This is not out of a desire to be an idler per se, but out of recognition that at a certain point the more I do the worse I become: worse as a scholar; worse as a teacher; worse as a colleague; worse as a husband, father, friend. I believe that these slow hours actually result in better contributions here at LMU: better publications; better relationships with students; and better relationships with my colleagues.

The paper is inspired by the spirit of the “slow university manifesto” representing an academic response to what is argued here as the current fast, instrumental higher educational context. There is recognition that the pace of Higher Education for academics across the career spectrum has been driven by a combination of marketisation, new public management and neo-liberalism, particularly in the UK and the U.S.A. (Craig et al., 2014). For academics this has manifested itself as a continual busyness, around complying with various accountability metrics.

This higher educational context has resulted in what Craig, et al. (2014) argue as, increased social and psychological risk and stress-related illnesses. Increasing quantitative targets, which are externally imposed are seen to be in conflict with traditional academic values such as freedom, autonomy and belonging to a community, and this has led to insecurity among those who do academic work (Knights and Clarke, 2014; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013). As Muller (2012) points out, “...the current neo-liberal structures that dictate its activities and processes make it more competitive, less friendly, and often isolating”.

So what is the wider academic reaction to this institutional pressure? As Clark et al. (2012) highlight, academics acknowledge their culpability and complicit participation in

managerial corrosive processes in universities. Most academics comply with performative requirements; accepting practices of surveillance, self-surveillance and even peer surveillance (Fleming & Spicer, 2007), to ensure that behaviours are regulated in ways, which were both normative, pragmatic and to some extent hegemonic. For example, the acceptance of the research audit culture reflects and reinforces the tradition of publishing, through which many academics secure their identity, despite recognising its divisive and oppressive effects, such as around a loss of collegiality and an instrumental, self-marketing, conservative bias, with an ensuing decrease in radical and innovative output.

However, such tensions have led Prichard and Willmott (1997: 312) to argue that many academics, albeit complicit in the managerialist project, are tending to “resort to a variety of local tactics to evade and subvert as well as to accommodate and appease” managerialist demands. This paper concurs with this perspective and follows Anderson (2008), who advocates researching such academic responses to managerialism and the emerging anxiety and demoralization within the academy (see also Knights and Clarke, 2014).

But how could such academic micro responses manifest themselves? Looking closely at the enactment of the Slow University Manifesto, it represents a socio-spatial response by Treanor. He emphasises (above) his slow hours are spent “walking along the bluff, or talking and eating with family, friends, colleagues, and students”. This would imply the significance of a spatial perspective to understand how academics respond to and counter managerialism. The quote also reminds us of the importance of a processual agency with a generative, embodied notion of space, where space becomes spacing (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012, p. 53).

Reflecting further on Treanor's Slow University Manifesto, the specific form of academic spacing here represents not only a respite, but a form of creative resistance with the intention to not oppose, but to enhance academic work. In this way, it also follows research by Taylor (2013) in this journal, who searches for particular, local moments and spaces, which provide an alternative lens that enable the individuals concerned to see some significant aspect of organizations (White, 1996). Such a spatial turn shares a broader understanding of resistance, which recognizes "more routinized, informal and often inconspicuous forms of resistance in everyday practice" (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p.686). As Anderson (2008) argues, academics are by no means passive recipients of managerial change. However, their resistance may be seen as acts to ameliorate, rather than to over-throw managerialism, considering their complicit participation in the managerialist process. Influenced by post-structuralist understandings of power, researchers have acknowledged such "a multitude of less visible and often unplanned oppositional practices in the everyday world of organizations" (Prasad and Prasad, 1998, p.227). This recognizes the more mundane manifestations of resistance - those practices that "make daily life bearable" (McNay, 1996, p.64). Scott (1990, p. 192) thus alerts us to the creative enactment of subtle forms of such mundane resistance, to which subordinated social actors may have recourse, when "frontal assaults are precluded by the realities of power". This creative resistance is enacted through what could be defined as "counter-spacing". The notion of a counter-spacing is drawn from Beyes & Michels's (2011) research, on how academics can enact "other spaces", which are opened up to positive, emancipatory power, where surprising things may happen, rather than being closed down for negative, top-down control (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). This

follows research which explores how spacing is used to not only express opposition, but also to enact political and social change (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012).

Drawing from the above points, the focus in this paper explores a particular form of academic counter-spacing, representing a possible counter balance to contest this dominant fast performative, institutional agenda. It offers a specific research aim exploring the empirical and conceptual, spatial possibilities of academic “slow” counter-spacing, as a form of creative resistance (Hartig, et al., 2007)? In order to explore such slow spacing empirically, this paper critically focuses on an autoethnographic account of an initiative set-up by the author, called “The Slow Swimming Club”. It was set-up in the context of increasing academic powerlessness and distrust, with respect to the way in which multiple academic targets were driven from the top-down. A common perception was that research and teaching agendas, along with opportunities for career progression, were being driven by managerial technocrats, which led to much frustration and anxiety on campus. As a few academic colleagues remarked:

The lecturers now feel like they are the underclass in this university – admin, management and students for that matter are put way ahead of academic interests.

We are losing so many talented researchers here – only last year, mentioning no names, two great newer academics left here because they felt a complete lack of thought that anyone was looking out for them – you can’t imagine how many times I was on the phone to them as they cried their eyes out.

The rationale for critically exploring this initiative is that it represents a potential slow space to respond to such pressures, socially produced over a period of 6 years, by university academics. Could such an on-going experiment, with a focus around emancipatory, personal growth, in-directed attention outcomes (in contrast to the instrumental, directed attention outcomes measured and reported within the academic members’ universities), prove a pertinent

context, for the critical enactment of a space, which appears to resist fast academic work. It also follows recent research in this journal around, “paying attention to the human body, the senses, and breathing, and by doing slow movement exercises, sensory and experiential knowledge can contribute to the emergence of new cognitive insights in the mind” (Karssiens et al., 2014, p.238).

In order to conceptualize and critically analyse such potential enactment of a slow space, this paper draws on an emerging theory from environmental psychology called Attention Restorative Theory (ART) (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Following a review of the organisational spatial focus, the following section will provide the conceptual underpinning for why ART could prove pertinent for understanding the emergence of the Slow Swimming Club. It will also reflect on how ART may be particularly pertinent for the enactment of academic counter-spacing, both within the Slow Swimming Club and back at the respective universities of the academics concerned.

The central section of the paper will then endeavour to explore the role of ART’s four principles or attributes (“Being-Away”, “Fascination”, “Extent” and “Compatibility”- defined within later sections) within the socio-spatial enactment of such spacing (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Herzog et al., 1997; Herzog et al., 2003). As research around these four ART principles has only been described in broad terms, this paper moves further and endeavours to develop a conceptual clarity around such an emergent enactment. Although physical or spatial qualities of ART are sometimes implied, the way in which the principles may be expressed in socio-spatial form has not yet been elaborated upon, particularly with respect to a university context.

2. Conceptual Underpinning

This paper aligns itself with attempts to “bring space back in [to]” critical organization theory (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004, p. 1095). Such research has focused on how, for example, organizational spaces are performed through embodiment (Dale, 2005; Tyler and Cohen, 2010), the spatial hybridity of workspace (Halford, 2005), the way in which a design object stimulates creativity and spatial transformation (Dobers and Strannegård, 2004); the organizational boundaries enacted by physical, social and mental space (Hernes, 2004), the different spatial scales in which organization is embedded (Spicer, 2006; Taylor and Spicer, 2007) and possible contesting spaces drawing from literary fiction (Zhang et al., 2008).

The paper specifically follows research from Beyes and Steyaert (2012), who orient the understanding of organizational space towards its material, embodied, affective and minor configurations. This is crucial here, as the experience and development of the Slow Swimming Club represents a collective, embodied meeting space which takes place outside the central university space. Moreover, as Beyes and Steyaert (2012, p. 53) argue, being attentive to the open-ended and processual notion of “spacing”, rather than “space”, directs the organizational scholar towards embodied affects and encounters generated in the here-and-now and assembled from the manifold (im)materialities. By following a spacing perspective, this paper explicitly recognizes that university actors conceive, appropriate and socially produce their own lived, experienced, embodied spaces. The spacing perspective sharpens our awareness of provisional spatio-temporal constellations that are in process, alive and unstable. It provokes openness towards everyday creativity, experimentation and the potentials of transformative spacings. As

the Slow Swimming Club is an emergent on-going lived experiment, the notion of academic spacing offers such openness to potential transformative agency.

In order to conceptualise a pertinent potential form of slow transformative spacing, the paper draws on the intent of Taylor and Spicer (2007, p. 326) who point out that, while “the field of organizational spaces is approaching maturity”, stronger links need to be made “between this emerging field and other social science analyses notionally ‘outside’ the field”. We focus here on the link with environmental psychology, specifically drawing on an influential theory of Attention Restorative Theory. The specific rationale behind the choice of ART is its suitability to critically conceptualise alternative socio-spatial contexts, such as the Slow Swimming Club, in which an involuntary or non-directed, absorbed attention is “slowly” fostered (Herzog et al., 1997). In fact, ART was derived from research primarily around specific natural environments, which are generally perceived and experienced as more restorative than urban environments (Hartig & Staats, 2006). Furthermore, there is evidence that some other urban, physical and socio-temporal contexts provide the attributes necessary for a restorative experience, and thus have the ability to “create a sense of peace and calm that enables people to recover their cognitive and emotional effectiveness” (Kaplan, Bardwell & Slakter, 1993, p. 726). For example, ART research has been conducted around museums, favourite places and monasteries (Kaplan et al., 1993; Korpela et al., 2001; Oullette et al., 2005). Similarly ART research has begun to focus attention on people in their everyday contexts, such as in the residential and workplace setting, where people could ordinarily and regularly find possibilities for restoration over an extended period (Kaplan, 2001; Wells & Evans, 2003).

Looking across these different research areas, in response to working in stressful contexts, ART proposes that well-being could be restored through the process of stimulating non-directed attention. With respect to this paper, it is argued that such highly stressful contexts manifest themselves in Higher Education, arising from the directed attention demanded by the immediate, tick-box institutional demands of fast academic work. As Koutstaal (2012 p.559) points out, directed attention involves the capacity to inhibit or block competing stimuli or distractions during purposeful activity. Directing attention and inhibiting distractions requires effort, and prolonged directed attention, which is increasingly demanded by academia, leads to directed attention fatigue. This fatigue leads to reduced ability to focus attention, increased performance errors, and heightened irritability and anxiety.

Therefore, following O’Neil’s (2014) advocacy of Higher Educational spaces to contain anxiety, could research on ART factors or attributes critically guide how to reduce stress (restoring the capacity to direct attention), improve physical and emotional well-being and reflection through the Slow Swimming Club (Hartig et al., 2007)? This extends the notion of Norling et al. (2008, 2010) conceptual framing of ART to move beyond an environmental context to incorporate behaviours and activities around exercise, such as running. ART identifies 4 underlying spatial attributes shared by specific environment– person interactions or activities, which foster psychological restoration. These attributes are “Being Away”, “Extent”, “Fascination” and “Compatibility”, described by Kaplan (1995) and Herzog, Maguire, and Nebel (2003). “Being Away” involves distancing oneself from the usual activities that lead to attention fatigue. “Fascination” is involuntary attention, which does not require effort or inhibition of competing stimuli and allows a fatigued attention system to rest, restoring the capacity of

directed attention. “Extent” exists in an environment that has sufficiently rich content and coherent structure to be perceived as a “whole other world” (Kaplan, 1995, p.173) and provide enough to see and think about to fully engage the mind. Finally, “Compatibility” occurs when the setting fits what the individual is trying to achieve; the individual’s goals must be consistent with demands made by the setting and the environment must provide the information needed by the individual, to achieve those goals.

Therefore, this paper uses each underlying attribute to critically explore the emergent spacing of the Slow Swimming Club. This integrative, interdisciplinary search for compatible socio-spatial principles also aligns with the work by Beyes and Michels (2011, p.531) in the call for education to embrace “the imaginative geographies of spatial production”.

Looking at ART more closely, it is pertinent to note that restorative experiences have been shown to not only facilitate recovery from individual mental fatigue, but also lead to improved longer term emotional and cognitive functioning (Hartig et al., 2003), creating knock-on institutional benefits for both organizations and communities. In fact, ART attributes represent a two-stage process perspective: An initial stage primarily focuses on fostering an individual restorative experience, through the principles of Being Away and Fascination, followed by a second focus on how these individual experiences relate to any institutional change. Moreover, the principles of Being-Away and Fascination relate to individual, “disconnected” reflective, non-instrumental spacing, whereas Extent and Compatibility principles relate back to a collective, “connected”, embodied and generative set of slow continuum of integrated experiences. ART’s focus on these different stages reminds us of Schley’s (2006, p.97) observation that slow spacing reflects a reflective cycle “where people

start to deliberately slow down their lives to cultivate broader awareness and reflective practice”. This initial “slowing down” and disconnection is a critical factor it seems, in allowing individuals to then value, understand and connect to themselves, other people and the world around them in new and creative ways. It is pertinent to note that Schley (2006) suggests that developing this slowness consists of a reflection and contemplation stage, before the other interconnected learning phases can develop: deeper awareness of connections to all life; creative tension caused by the awareness of the gap between desired futures and current realities; and coherence of action that connects mind, body and heart.

In summary, this paper positions ART beyond individual, temporal strategies such as the Slow University Manifesto and endeavours to link initiatives like this with other (on and off) forms of campus spacing, like the Slow Swimming Club. It thereby offers a conceptual lens to view the impact of the Slow Swimming Club in socio-spatial sense on its members, within and beyond (back at their respective universities) the Slow Swimming Club. As Leung et al. (2010) point out, no "individual strategy can overhaul the structural causes ... that have transformed the modern university into its workforce of precarious lives". It will explore the extent to which the Slow Swimming Club is not only a coping, restorative mechanism for the academics' stressful working lives, but how the experience of slow spacing is translated into the way in which these academics contest dominant fast Higher Educational practices and also offer any new slow solutions. In this sense, Ryan (2011) is a particular inspiration, with her focus on counter spaces within an educational context. Other organizational inspirations are around Zhang et al. (2008), who explore how planned spaces contain an underworld of peripheral “lived” spatial processes, where disgruntled groups struggle to resist the encroaching spatial hyper-organization.

Moreover, they highlight that these peripheral lived spaces grow until they actually consume those planned spaces, degenerating rapidly into a dystopian space of unrestrained deviance. Pertinently, lived space here is a “terrain for the generation of counter-spaces, spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginal position” (Soja, 1996, p.68). Such lived spaces are pertinent in the context of the dominant fast institutional pressures on universities, as they represent a means to point to different, other spaces that contest the space we live in, whilst providing a context for action (Steyaert, 2006). It is pertinent to note that in research by Zhang et al. (2008), those engaged in resistance no longer simply appropriated the existing spatial terrain, but actually began planning new spaces of deviance.

Could the Slow Swimming Club offer possible lived counter-spacing in the academic context? In other words, could it offer new ways to contest the fast spacing around the central Higher Education social order (Zhang et al., 2008)?

3. Methodological framing

An autoethnographic approach was adopted here, which develops “theoretically relevant descriptions of a group to which one belongs based on a structured analysis of one’s own experience and the experiences of others from one’s group” (Karra & Phillips, 2008, p. 547). It draws on several papers in this journal, which adopt this methodology, in relation to the Higher Educational context (Cohen et al., 2009; Minocha and Reynolds, 2013; Haynes et al., 2014; Jonsen et al., 2012). Hayano (1979) first coined the term “autoethnography”, describing it as “a study among those who share a common activity in which one is himself or herself engaged”

(Wolcott, 2004, p. 98). Schultze (2000) has argued that the ethnographer can use his or her actions as a thinking agent that brings his or her own subjectivity to bear on the construction of knowledge in a self-reflexive and self-revealing fashion.

A focus in this paper is on personal narratives around key moments that are remembered and perceived to have significantly affected the 11 members of the Slow Swimming Club (both within and beyond the Slow Swim), including the author, as individuals and collectively, over the past 6 years.

As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) highlight “ethnography should draw upon narrative; include the point of view, voice and experience of the author and experiment with ways of telling” (p. 139). When you use your own experience as the object of your inquiry, your observations and conclusions will have a high degree of authenticity (Marvasti, 2004). To understand our own “native” processes, we need to be open-minded, accept subjectivity inherent to the method (Moore, 2011).

In terms of wider data collection around what Cohen et al. (2009) call collaborative autoethnography, each of the 11 members of the Slow Swimming Club initially wrote and shared short autobiographical reflective pieces around their experiences, in the form of vignettes. This began in August 2014 and lasted over a 3 month period. As Cohen et al. (2009) argue, such collaborative ethnography develops our understanding of not only our own, but each other’s experiences as well. Stories and vignettes are commonly used in exploring aspects of the self in the autoethnographical tradition (Boje & Tyler, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Learmonth & Humphreys,

2012). Autoethnography enables the academics to understand their own experiences within the research process (Haynes, 2006). It allows for dialogical inquiry of both the self as other and the self in relation to theory, such as ART (Cohen, et al., 2009). Following Spry (2001), the choice of autoethnography here is that it endeavours to not simply offer a confessional tale but a provocative weave of story and theory. As Wall (2008, p. 40) points out, we continued to “converse with the literature” throughout the process. We duly met, shared, and discussed our autoethnographical writings (normally held immediately following our “Slow Swim” – lasting approximately one hour, 3 times per week) and if there was any relationship with ART, which prompted further debate and discussion of their meaning (Ellis, 2004). This is crucial to assure reflexivity and to minimize any individual bias (Bryman and Cassell, 2006, p.46). It was crucial that we challenged each other through these autoethnographic conversations, by asking probing questions and reflecting on alternative interpretations—engaging in an interactive process of co-authoring our stories (Cohen et al., 2009). As many of these stories were culturally and politically sensitive, it must be noted that any ensuing quotations in this paper have been kept anonymous. This was a crucial factor in not impinging on the mutual trust, which has been developed over the 6 years within this eclectic group of academics.

In terms of the specific process over these 3 months, there was an initial general discussion around our experience of the Slow Swimming Club which lasted for 2 weeks. We decided to write our thoughts down under emergent themes, which we then shared within the third and fourth weeks. We began to see common thematic areas, which we used to identify and discuss pertinent conceptual frameworks. At the end of the fifth week we had unanimously decided that ART was the most suitable. It was decided that in the sixth week that we should

collectively discuss which vignettes most aptly represented our collective experience. This took a further 2 weeks. It was only in the final month that we started to discuss how our experiences and vignettes could be understood more coherently, around each ART principle. Discussion around each principle took approximately 1 week, with the choice of the various vignettes further refined. It is pertinent to note that the most contested discussion was around the principle of Extent, reflecting the different political and cultural tensions experienced by the various academics, back in their universities. At the very end of the process, we each read the final set of vignettes, under the various ART categories and made final amendments, reflecting the diversity of opinion and experience. A key concern was the final balance between reflecting a shared collective experience whilst recognising a diversity of opinion.

By seeking to manage this tension, this paper follows Ellis & Bochner (2000, p. 750) and aims to evoke, “the research evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or your own”. Following Minocha and Reynolds (2013), the possibility here is that the paper invokes “resonance”, “me too moments” (Pelias, 2004, as cited in Leavy, 2009, p. 37) and “aha moments” (Napier et al., 2009) around convergent and divergent academic lived experience.

4. Enacting Slow Counter-Spacing through an ART Lens

4.1 Being-Away: implies a setting that is physically or conceptually different from one’s everyday environment.... situations that involve psychological distance from aspects of one’s usual routines (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

Enacting the principle of Being-Away represents part of the spatial disconnection, required by ART, to stimulate a restorative process, which then moves on to potentially contest and to then enact possible changes to the Higher Education institutional context. Of course, the Being-Away disconnecting challenge of any potential counter-spacing is dependent upon notions of cultural and political distance as well as psychological distance (Maletz and Nohria, 2001). Whilst this could be a particular challenge if such spacing takes place within the university campus itself, could off-campus spacing provide such cultural and political distance?

As an off-campus initiative, could the “Slow Swimming Club” offer one of several possible “Being-Away” spacing experiments, around such reflective, political and cultural disconnection?

The Slow Swimming Club was initiated in September 2009, as a reaction to the many unproductive, disembodied meetings on campus. Often, these meetings were bodily tick box exercises, with minimal emphatic, face-to-face, physical interactions and dialogue with others. I found myself searching for social spaces, which fostered a much more critical, self-reflective and playful dialogue with my colleagues. Although my own campus provided several designed office spaces, nothing seemed to quite offer the escape myself and many of my colleagues needed. This notion of escape was not so much a physical escape, but a need for a political and cultural disconnect, from the fast pace and the continual directed attention demands of our university. This was even evident when we endeavoured to hold meetings outdoors, particularly around what could be construed as a physical disconnect, when we met along the riverbank, which

flowed within the campus grounds. It was then I realised the power of the political and cultural panopticon – on several occasions, sarcastic remarks were made, such as “you must not have much work to do if you were able to sit around outside” and “I wish I had time to put my feet up”. In other words, high levels of performative peer surveillance around fast work diminished any sense of freedom to choose where and when one engaged in dialogue with other academics. Even more crucial to this paper is the fact that these very same academics exhibited growing concern that they needed to be seen to be busy. They are aware that this is also counterproductive, but are wary to challenge the status quo, other than to complain, rather than to act. They are also aware that they are complicit in this process, but feel they have no other options, particularly around their career. As one mid-career academic pointed out:

I am constantly aware that I need to keep up appearances and play the game. To be honest, I hate this as it changes the way I see myself and what I am becoming.... all I do is management tasks rather than what I am good at, but that is the way you get promoted here.

It was clear that we needed to find a space and time outside of work, which allowed a freedom to escape the embedded fast, managerial politics and culture and be able to think creatively and to reflect. I suggested that we all meet at a local private leisure club, where I had been a member since 2009. From my own perspective, I had been swimming there regularly, every other working day, to individually find a way to channel my creativity. I always found the meditative, in-directed attention of a particular type of swimming - what I called “slow swimming”, a suitable space to restore my directed attention, when I left the leisure club. “Slow swimming” was an analogous reaction to the multiple fast-lane, competitive “spaghetti-junction”, swimming culture of leisure clubs.

Could this equally provide a way of developing a socio-spatial restorative context for these academics? However, the initial four academics who met up at the leisure club all dashed straight for the fast lane of the swimming pool and duly entered into the dominant fast, competitive swim with each other. Put differently, the organic primitiveness of the body and its biological, circadian, and cosmological times of existence and experience (Archer, 2000; Melucci, 1996), were subordinated to a socially constructed, instrumentally quantified, and commodified notion and practice of Euclidean space—for example, the number of metres to be covered, in a certain amount of time, in a successful lane swim (Payne, 2003). They were physically away from the university but psychologically and culturally locked into target setting mind-set.

It was only after around five swims that one of them decided to join me, beyond the fast lanes and wondered inquisitively, what I was doing and why I was not taking part in their competitive pursuit. After explaining to him about slow swimming, he then began to swim with me and to my surprise, he spent the whole thirty minutes creating his own slow space. Following our slow swim, we then met up in the leisure club's café and realised that our conversations had been enriched, by the nature of what we had just experienced. A similar occurrence happened with each of the other three academics over the next 2 months. This represented a turning point, in terms of breaking the perception that this was just a 'Swimming Club' and in contrast had a direct relationship to improving our academic work. In other words, this disconnect was a qualified one, in which the Slow Swimming Club served a purpose. This was crucial to engage the more sceptical of my colleagues i.e. Being-Away was an enacted form of disconnection, for the purpose of connection back into the workplace.

As our post swimming conversations began to explore different research possibilities, collaborations and potential solutions to our general academic life, we began to see the impact on our directed attention to such issues. This realisation was reflected in the difference in attendance between the time before and after the establishment of these post swim meetings. Prior to the meetings, attendance at the club was sporadic, whereas after these meetings, attendance was much more regular with a real commitment to attend. An example of the latter, was how an academic travelled directly from a conference to the club, rather than to their respective university. Such a priority did cause some problems at first for several of the academics, back at their universities, in terms of prior work commitments. However, as time went by, many of them managed to arrange or rearrange their meetings and other commitments around the Slow Swimming Club. This is significant, as it contrasted with the way they initially tried to rearrange the Slow Swimming Club activities, around their university commitments. As one academic remarked:

This represents my most productive place so I would be daft to not prioritise it in my working life.

This represented the start of what became the “Slow Swimming Club”, a club which has grown to include eleven academics, drawn from the local universities, from diverse disciplines, such as business, engineering, geography, politics, chemistry, the arts and architecture. These academics represent different levels of career progression, from one new lecturer to two professors with over 20 years of experience. In terms of gender diversity, the group currently consists of 5 female and 6 male academics. Some indicative reflections on the “Being- Away” spacing of the Slow Swimming Club are as follows:

Finally, somewhere that offered an escape from the managerial bullshit of my working life. It was something about the combination of doing something so personally and collectively rewarding in another place where I would not bump into my students but even more importantly my so-called colleagues.

You know, I felt trapped for years in an endless circle of pretence around portraying myself as incredibly efficient all of the time- you know answering emails in the early hours of the morning, going to meetings which to be honest did not add anything to the university.... I could go on. It increasingly made me feel like an administrator rather than a research professor. What the SSC (Slow Swimming Club) did for me was to keep me sane as it provided an retreat from this daily grind and provided a freedom to think and feel about being truly a researcher again. I feel like my professional identity has been restored with what initially seemed like a deviant act – to have the audacity to get in touch with myself.... shocking I know.

As a senior professor remarked:

This is the first time, I could engage more deeply with fellow academics without thinking about personal agendas, egos and hang-ups.

We now turn to how this collective spacing has changed the nature of my initial slow swim in my local leisure club. This will be reflected upon, in relation to whether such spacing enacts the principles of Fascination, Extent and Compatibility.

4.2 Fascination: is an involuntary or non-directed, absorbed attention in which an individual's attention is effortlessly engaged, intrigued and captured without mental fatigue. Our attention is aesthetically engaged, although no response from us is required (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

The Fascination principle represents the way in which the aforementioned Being Away space is spatially characterised and enacted. It forms the second and integral part of ART's disconnecting quality, in order to then be able to connect critically. It can vary in intensity along what Kaplan (1995) refers to as a "soft-hard" dimension. It is argued that soft fascination, which is moderate

in intensity and generally focused on aesthetically pleasing stimuli, permits an opportunity for attention restoration. Primarily focusing on the visual aesthetic, ART research findings have emphasised the significance of watching clouds, the motion of leaves, or the play of light, as examples of soft fascination (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). In contrast, hard fascination rivets one's attention and generally does not allow for attention restoration. Both overload and arousal theories argue that human perceptual systems can become overloaded and stressed in places that have a high level of complexity or intensity - in visual terms or through noise and movement. "Both theories imply that restoration from stress or perceptual fatigue should be fostered by settings having stimuli...that are low in intensity and incongruity.... that reduces arousal and processing effort" (Ulrich & Parsons, 1992, p.95).

Moreover, the primary focus here on the aesthetic/experiential does not mean that the rationale, cognitive forms of knowing are neglected, merely slowed down i.e. in the cognitive sense. Moreover, it reflects that this experiential or aesthetic knowing is not only a separate way of knowing, but that other forms of knowing such as those derived from rational thought depend on, and grow out of aesthetic experiences (Gagliardi, 1996). This is at the core of ART, as it asserts the importance of non-directed attention in restoring our directed attention. In other words, aesthetic experiences are constantly spilling over and being integrated into other activities, enhancing and deepening them (Shusterman, 2001).

What are the specific implications of the enactment of the soft fascination principle on possible slow counter-spacing for academics here? Could the Slow Swimming Club move beyond the visual and embody a kinaesthetic form of soft fascination, for this eclectic group of

academics? The Slow Swimming Club certainly offered a context for a corporeal sensibility, as the focus of the club was initially to raise the aesthetic sensibility with our own swimming stroke and to begin to appreciate the affective impact of swimming as more of an art form in itself. The technique which I adopted focused upon developing and enjoying the swimming stroke in itself, my breathing and the aerodynamics of the water flow around my body, with the aim of a greater sense of embodiment and aesthetic sensibility. It is closely related to the Shaw method for swimming, although this was not the underlying justification for slow swimming (Purdy, 2011). The Shaw Method is based upon the Alexander Technique, gaining a hands-on awareness of the alignment of your head, neck and back within the water.

The significant factor, not reflected upon initially, was the realisation that people began to help perfecting each other's swimming strokes. The other significant impact was this generosity and hospitality did not attempt to develop one perfect, universal stroke. Moreover, people began to appreciate and enjoy the differences in each other's swimming strokes, through a recognition that each represented personalised art forms, which reflected their own individual wider differences. This reminds us of an empathetic-aesthetic perspective (Gagliardi, 1996), which is related to being connected to others, the experience of being part of something bigger than ourselves (Sandelands, 1998). What pervaded this aesthetic empathy was a collective mental quiet or cognitive slowness.

As a senior lecturer and a new professor respectively retorted:

The art of swimming is something that I would never have thought would make such a difference in the way I communicate – it made me appreciate that less talking, thinking and doing could help me know myself and other people on a deeper personal and professional level.

Slow swimming not only gave me a personal meditative space to find myself and to recharge my batteries, it also made me appreciate the impact of something simple like swimming would have on how I relate to other academics. I would have never have talked to these guys on this level, because I always thought that I was the only one searching for something different. It provided an antidote to my frustration back in my university that I was not being myself, going to endless, pointless meetings about justifying and dressing-up research and teaching of my department rather than actually wholeheartedly engaging in research and teaching – my creative, reflective passion seemed to have been overtaken by the paranoid mad dash to tick some boxes.

Several swimmers remarked about the corporeality, in-directed attention and immersion of such swimming, allowing worries from university to fade and enabling them to focus on the present, on themselves and on others. They also highlighted how slow swimming had helped them back in their universities, in problem-solving and in resisting the bureaucratic dash for being seen to be accountable.

Some indicative remarks were:

My mind seems to switch off when I swim – I often went in the swimming pool with so many problems and issues which I could not solve, no matter how much I thought about them. It was only when I had spent ten minutes in the pool and I had found my stroke that I was able to get them out of my mind. Strangely, this helped me solve some of these problems when I left the pool, as I seemed to reframe them in a different light. So swimming has become crucial for my academic day and not just about time out.

I always felt like a new person when I left slow swimming and felt I had to some degree regained my academic identity which made me much more assertive to ironically cut short and quicken the pace of meetings, which were drifting into a bureaucratic mire. This gave me more time for my own slow, research time.

These quotes highlight the subject of the next ART principle of Extent. What is the extent of the personal and institutional impact beyond the spacing of the Slow Swimming Club?

4.3 Extent: is the quality of a physical or conceptual setting sufficiently rich and coherent that it can engage the mind and promote exploration...a whole other world from a person's perspective (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

In the context of ART as a whole, the Extent principle represents the part of the restorative process, which critically reconnects, following the disconnected qualities of Being Away and Fascination principles. ART points out that an endless stream of stimuli both fascinating and different from the usual would not qualify as a restorative setting for two reasons. Firstly, lacking extent, it does not qualify as a restorative, but merely an unrelated collection of impressions. And secondly, a restorative space must be of sufficient scope to engage the mind. It must provide enough to see, experience, and think about so that it takes up a substantial cognitive processing of the mind (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). These two aspects to "Extent" have prompted some authors to expand the number of components of Extent by subdividing into "Coherence" (or connectedness) and "Scope" (Purcell, Peron, & Berto, 2001).

Reflecting on the way in which The Slow Swimming Club has enacted the "Coherence" principle, it is significant to note that several of the academics involved in slow swimming have integrated this into a wider emergent slow spacing experiment, on and off campus. Slow swimming has developed into slow meetings, slow research, slow teaching and slow community and business engagement. This was characterised not only around time, but in terms of a greater socio- spatial sensibility on where, when, how and why such slow spacing emerged and how they were connected.

In terms of the extent to which The Slow Swimming Club has enacted the “Scope” principle, a significant finding emerged quite early on, around 3 months after the original four academics had met up in 2009. It started with spontaneous meetings in the café outside the swimming pool, where a productive interdisciplinary dialogue began to unfold. This dialogue then moved towards several meetings inside the respective universities, particularly around how research could be slowed down enough, to bring back what was perceived as a lack of informed passion for individual and joint research directions. It was felt that this passion was in a particular danger of being extinguished for doctoral/post-doctoral researchers, who were increasingly being pushed down a project to project management route, prioritized by the latest funding opportunity. As a few academics remarked:

Slow swimming reminded me of why I became interested in research – I wanted to find how I could make a difference in the world and thought academia could provide the freedom to choose wisely. I am trying to do something about this in my own little way back in my university as I do not want the new guys on the block to end up like me -a professor who to be frank has lost his research direction and justifies his existence through endless admin.

Slow swimming has made me change as an academic as I do not do anything the same as I did a few years ago. I just hope that it pays off for not only myself, but my doctoral students as well.

Furthermore, whilst there was evidence that one academic was actively calling for research to slow down, he was simultaneously calling for administrative activities to speed up. Moreover, combined with this temporal realization, was the increased spatial sensibility reported by one senior lecturer in particular:

I began to realize that I could actually do something about my frustration with long, tedious and to be honest with you, meaningless meetings about justifying some initiative around a flavour of the month accreditation. I realized that where, when, how and what we discuss has a real impact on how quickly we can get through them. This puts admin in its box and has opened up more time to devote to where, when, what and how my research is conducted, at a sensible, manageable pace.

Following Kals et al (1999) and Hartig (2007), could a cumulative set of such counter-spacing initiatives on and off campus offer the potential for institutional changes on campus? As Hartig et al (2008) point out, an isolated experience will ordinarily do little to support adaptation in the long run. The discreet, temporarily bounded restorative experiences may have an aesthetic and emotional impact, but this impact may be short-lived and the spill-over effect into the day-to-day lived, embodied experience of organisational actors could be negligible. A central concept in Dewey's educational philosophy is the continuum of experience: "... the central problem of an education based on experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1938, pp. 25–28). Therefore, it conforms to John (2001) argument that worthwhile aesthetic knowledge must be able to travel a bit beyond its acquisition site, allowing us to build upon that knowledge in other contexts. With its potential for long-term exposure, could a combination of internal and external counter-spacing of university campuses, offer the possibility of such a continuum of experience?

Some indicative quotes around emergent institutional changes are as follows:

I could not believe how different I was after spending a few months in the Slow Swimming Club – I began to realise that where I taught and when was crucial for learning. I started to think about the importance of what sparks creativity in my business students much more and who I needed to bring on board. I started to invite my art school colleagues over to do quite a few guest lectures and began to engage with them much more seriously than before. We now have designed several courses around creativity and innovation, which several schools feed into.

I do not see the Slow Swimming Club as an isolated event now because I have tried to build the essence of what I get from this into my department's working day much more. In this way, I don't feel like I am being moulded by the university because I am much more proactive in developing the particular context, which makes my department most effective for the job they are doing at that time.

Slow swimming has developed such an aesthetic appreciation of what makes me tick, back in my department. I hardly ever use my office now because I have realised that much of my work can be more productively done at home, even in cafés which makes me see that I was totally unaware that I was constantly running the 100 metres, when I actually needed to run a marathon or the pentathlon. All my different job roles need different training regimes and different skills, which I now am so aware of. This appreciation has led to myself getting involved in management development in the university – I now use the Slow Swimming Club as a case study in how micro initiatives, particularly emphasising slowness, could change the way you can work more productively.

It is pertinent to note that these institutional initiatives have been met with mixed enthusiasm, particularly with middle management in their respective university. Working cross faculty, changing departmental routines to embrace slowness in an isolated sense and management development around slowness have all had their challenges. The brutal neo-liberal reality for these academics has been to sacrifice the career ambitions, albeit temporarily. As one professor aptly remarked:

I both love and hate the Slow Swimming Club – on the one hand it has inspired me to swim against the current of what is being fed to us in our university. Excuse the pun. However, the cost of doing this has been that I have been stuck on a low professorial grade for years. To be able to rise up this grading, I need to tick so many boxes that HR can rubber stamp. I have come to the conclusion that I am not prepared to rise up the ladder and lose my integrity. Call me a masochist but by making it harder for myself I do feel much more of a sense of achievement than purely a pay rise which is linked to locking me into someone I'm not.

Following Pullen and Rhodes (2014), could such a reflective focus on maintaining one's integrity in resisting the perceived unjust career structure be seen as a form of ethico-politics of resistance. Such resistance is derived from a "passionate politics that would work through generosity for a justice that is yet to arrive" (p. 194).

4.4 Compatibility: according to ART, is a quality of a setting that fits with and supports one's inclinations or purposes and the kinds of activities supported, encouraged, or demanded by the setting (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

This subjective aspect of "Compatibility" is key to the definition of the other attributes (and is embedded within them) as it describes them as "properties of a person-environment interaction, rather than of an environment per se" (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, p.482). For example, Kals et al (1999) argue that restorative experiences are mediated or moderated by the extent to which this experience has meaning for the individual concerned. As Gagliardi (1999) argues, the design of an aesthetic experience needs to account for the subjective and contingent willingness to embrace the quality of the object. Therefore, ART's "Compatible" context here means not simply a preference for a physical setting or physical aspect of the environment (e.g. its natural or built features), but multiple potential restorative experiences (Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Korpela et al., 2001), contingent upon the physical, cognitive, emotional qualities of this human-environment interaction within the restorative space at that time (Canter, 1977). As Lefebvre (1991, p.59) argues, "Change life!" "Change society!" These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space....new social relationships calls for a new space, and vice versa.

In terms of the extent to which The Slow Swimming Club has enacted the "Compatibility" principle, it is important to note how the original leisure club venue for the Slow Swimming Club now includes several further venues, based on different preferences from various academic members. One significant change has been the move to a "Slow Beach

Swimming Club”, which was in response to a need to be more in touch with the bio-physical environment when swimming. In fact, this concurs with D’Amato & Krasny’s (2011) research around the “mental quiet”, psychological benefit of being in a biophysical environment (Kaplan, 1983). This form of counter- spacing is particularly pertinent as D’Amato & Krasny (2011, p. 244) highlight the de-stressing potential of the bio-physical environment to regain a sense of balance and what they highlight as “internal quietude”. This follows research by Hartig et al. (2007) who indicate that being in a natural setting, or viewing natural settings can effectively induce not only non-directed attention and restoration from stress or perceptual fatigue, improved physical and emotional well-being and reflection but also increased pro-environmental behaviour. The latter finding is significant as the swimmers who have formed this separate club, without exception are interested in research around environmental and sustainability related issues. Therefore, this generative, compatible component of ART has been enacted by those individuals who wish to embrace counter-spacing, which enhances their bio-cultural sensibility.

As one senior business academic swimmer passionately remarked:

Slow swimming makes you more in touch with your aesthetic needs and my gripe with what we do in universities is that we talk a lot about sustainability and lifestyle changes but we do not really touch the dominant disconnection of ourselves with the wider environment. By swimming in the sea, I feel more in touch with not only my body but the wider natural environment I am swimming within. Slow swimming in a chlorinated pool is an oxymoron. If we are really in tune with our aesthetic selves then I want to be in touch with my own, others’ and the wider natural environment’s aesthetic cues..... this has made me question my whole approach within the Business School.

The latter part of this quotation is again reflective of the wider connective impact arising from the compatibility of the Slow Swimming Club. A recent example of how this academic has

critically connected back into the university, is the fact that he has begun a review process, both in research terms and more operationally around responsible management accreditations. He is having considerable success, around the way in which the responsible management education implementation process is integrated, not only cognitively but aesthetically into the organizational change process.

Other examples of this Compatibility principle are around how the interdisciplinary conversations within the café post swim developed into three separate sub-groups, which in turn developed into further dialogue back in and across faculties and universities. This then developed into an interdisciplinary collaboration on writing and research bids, not envisaged before the initiation of the Slow Swimming Club. This collaboration is reflected by these academics:

We now get so much from this- who would have thought that I would be getting involved in projects with engineering and architects - it has taken me down roads that I would have never gone down if it wasn't for the SSC.

We split into a smaller group of five, quite early on in the café discussions - what is interesting is that nobody from my department is in this group but I get so much from our discussion - I have more in common with people doing vastly different things to me but somehow we get on because we all share in a particular perspective on making a difference with our research.

It is pertinent to note that this generative splitting of the Slow Swimming Club group members into sub-groups was based, not on discipline or epistemology, but around the wider purpose of research. This form of compatibility developed a strong allegiance from the members to these sub-groups and was seen to be surfaced through their involvement with the Slow Swimming Club. As one academic commented:

I seem to relax my biases here and talk about what I came into academia for - to research issues that impact on people lives positively.

5. Conclusions

The central contribution of this paper is the way it adopts a spatial perspective to understand how academics are responding to managerialism in the UK Higher Education sector. It suggests that centrally planned spaces, such as within universities, are actively being contested not only internally, but externally, off-campus so to speak. Moreover, rather than directly challenging university practices, this resistance is borne out of a process initiated from a restorative coping mechanism, with the increasing anxiety and attention fatigue from academic work. The paper's other contribution is around how an initial individual reflection and restoration changes into an impetus for individual and collective agency, back into the university. Therefore, the Slow Swimming Club could not only be seen as a restorative escapist strategy (Fleming & Spicer, 2007), but as part of an effective counter-spacing pathway, leading back into the university.

Therefore, this attention to the incremental temporal process of spatial resistance adds to Zhang et al. (2008) research, which reminds us that struggle around space will transform through time, and as it is transformed, will change the space it is targeted against. It thereby adds to the wider literature on the way employee resistance changes managerial intentions, around such areas as mobile hot desking (Halford, 2004; Warren, 2005).

The next contribution of this paper, is the way it draws from other disciplines to inform how best to critically explore academic counter-spacing. By specifically drawing from the emerging findings from environmental psychology, this paper has offered a new conceptual framework which critically explores how academics are contesting the fast pace of higher education, through an off-campus initiative jointly developed by the academics. The proposed set

of restorative principles offer a way of critically reflecting on the various individual and organizational impacts of an on-going initiative called the Slow Swimming Club. Moreover it offers a spatial reflection around ways of enacting possible forms of slow spacing in Higher Education.

This paper's central tactical suggestion or proposition is that rather than directly challenging universities' intent to embrace fast academic spatial practices, could academics actively search for and engage in generative restorative, counter-spacing opportunities. Following Beyes and Steyaert (2012) tactical suggestion, could the Slow Swimming Club potentially represent a heuristic slowing down, cognitively and performatively, for universities to more centrally invent "new slogans", "experiments" and "maps" which are more fully "attuned to affect, sensation and atmosphere" around slow spacing.

It is pertinent to note that slow restorative counter-spacing aligns with recent educational research by Payne and Wattchow (2008), who argue for an integrated practical and theoretical, de- and reconstruction of fast pedagogies. This research by Payne and Wattchow (2008) around "slow pedagogy" focuses on the importance of the body in education, as a necessary balance to the "fast pedagogies" that threaten to overrun and exhaust academics and students at every turn. They move on to highlight how slow pedagogy was derived from the need to slow down and reconnect in an embodied way, with the cycles of life that are all around us. Slow pedagogy is about spending time in places for more than a fleeting moment so that we can listen and receive meaning from that "place" (Payne & Wattchow, 2008). It is about creating authentic educational experiences that move us into a deeply reflective space, where we not only focus on the

“learning mind”, but also on the “sensuous physicality of the body” as we make new meaning in the world. Slow pedagogy draws us back into the sensuous and into our own bodies in ways that re-engage us with life and the living world (Abram, 1997). It takes seriously the corporeal and inter- corporeal turns in philosophy and nature discourses (Grosz, 2004).

By offering a new spatial heuristic and conceptual framework, this paper could be seen as part of a more systemic, processual challenge which not only reflect and deconstruct but re-construct dominant campus fast agendas. Reflecting on future research directions, could this paper open up a wider discourse around how to embed a slow counter-spacing on campus through restorative spacing off campus. In other words, the paper’s intent is to move beyond our own personal day-to-day micro restorative spacing opportunities, towards an appreciation of the ways in which these personal micro experiences feed into new diverse ways of interpreting and enacting slowness in the university campus.

The conceptual contribution of the paper is the development of the notion of restorative counter-spacing, as a form of creative resistance to managerialism in academia. This could be defined as an enacted peripheral aesthetic, social and political space (i.e. counter-spacing), which embodies a slow, in-directed attention for individual, group and organisational restorative outcomes (i.e. restorative counter-spacing). It conceptualises this notion, through the embodiment of the four principles of ART: “Being-Away”, “Soft-Fascination”, “Extent” and “Compatibility”.

Reflecting upon the principles, the paper initially focuses on the primacy of the “Soft-Fascination” aesthetic/non-directed experiential; where the cognitive forms of knowing slow down to the point of silence or “cognitive quiet” within a reflective, “Being Away” space. This is in line with Dey and Steyaert (2007), who argue that such a focus has the potential to expand the process of knowing beyond its cognitive limits to all senses, reintroducing “the body, the emotions, the affective mode of understanding, intuition, receptiveness, empathy, introspection and aesthetic understanding” (Gherardi, 1999, p. 110).

In the context of the institutional demands of fast academic work, this paper finally returns to the paper’s title, ‘Academic Counter-Spacing Within & Beyond “The Slow Swimming Club”’. For the eleven academics who are members of this club, it appears to have certainly offered a way of challenging and restoring their own aesthetic sensibility and has offered a much needed alternative pathway to affect slow spacing institutionally back on campus (through the “Extent” and “Compatibility” principles). However, as Honoré (2014) points out, there is no need to fetishise slow. Instead we need to find the appropriate pace for different activities such as around research reflection compared to say administrative meetings. Our lives are marked by accelerative and decelerative moments and speed can sometimes be necessary (Müller, 2014). It is this paper’s contention that decelerative moments and their respective restorative spatial context are particularly needed to balance the dominant fast spacing in Higher Education.

It remains to be seen whether such academic spacing will ultimately affect the structure and governance of higher educational institutions, including academic career structures. The earlier quote by the professor, who reflects upon the career implications of embracing slowness,

is particularly illuminating here (refer to section 4.3). Resistance by academics to neo-liberal higher educational structures certainly have a cost even at professorial levels. However, it must be pointed out that for this particular academic, the benefits outweigh the career costs. This concurs with Knights and Clarke (2014) who highlight that some of their respondents were resistant, refusing to ‘play the game’, even at a cost to their own careers.

What is of interest in future research is the fact that this same professor is from the same department, as one of the early career academics. It could be argued that the real challenge lies with these early to mid-career academics, where the career costs could be that much greater. This follows Grey (1994) who reminds us that rational and instrumental transactions are linked to career, the ultimate project of self. Considering the academic pressures to follow a fast academic research career route, could there be a role modelling effect from more established academics here, such as the aforementioned professor? This represents a longitudinal call for future research on the systemic, institutional impact of counter-spacing, such as the Slow Swimming Club. This would certainly answer the call from Clarke et al (2012), who advocate exploring collective resistance rather than individual resistance, which they found did not challenge or significantly change the institutional structure of academia. Such research could also map out the multiplicity of forms of systemic impact, which ensue from such emergent counter-spacing. It is pertinent to note that for many of the members of the Slow Swimming Club, their involvement has developed a more critical, proactive, productive stance back on campus, whilst for others it has meant opposing systems and structures, particularly around career. That said, what underlies both forms of responses back on campus, is a greater academic emancipation within the managerialist agenda. A key question is how universities will respond to such emancipation?

One major potential research direction is to look more closely at different forms of counter-spacing in and around academia to understand whether the particular aesthetic and temporal elements embodied within the slow swimming club, emerge as significant factors in the way such spacing impacts back in other universities.

The recognition of the powerful influence of academic career structures in this paper acknowledges the quotidian tension for academics' need to comply as a form of consent (as it is in their career interests to do so), whilst simultaneously resisting through a form of restorative escape (Knights and Clarke, 2014). Senior professors, such as the one above, have a key role to play in highlighting this tension and our complicity in fast higher educational structures. This reflects the fact that we are not passive victims of discourses of managerialism (Fleming & Spicer, 2007:89). Discourses of success and failure have seduced academics to conspire in exercises of performativity, a form of 'often subconscious, dysfunctional collusion' (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p.85). As Clarke et al. (2012) argue, academics would do well to reflect on their participation in corrosive processes perpetuating embedded intensification of work and managerial demands in academia. Could such senior professor commitment to contest and role model other pathways in academia, provide more credibility for initiatives like the Slow Swimming Club.

In summary, there are some slow signs that the Slow Swimming Club has started to develop a small pocket of solidarity or collective resistance (Courpasson, 2011). Whilst acknowledging its own form of escapist collusion in the dash for REF points, could this paper add to this collective resistance, by offering a possible shared reflection on academic counter-

spacing. Reflecting on the title of this paper, “could slow be beautiful?”, the Slow Swimming Club has certainly begun to restore a sense of community, conviviality and aesthetic sensibility back on the university campus. Coincidentally, it is pertinent to note that this appreciation of slow ideals in academia, is shared by the recent critically acclaimed book, “The Slow Professor” (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Could this confluence represent a growing need for such a counter-balance, to provide an emancipatory time and space for academics, to foster an emotional and intellectual resilience to the managerialist agenda of universities? Slow time will tell.

6. References

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