"Hiding within the Glass Cage": Performance Management as Surveillance—A Case of Academic Spaces as Resistance Spaces

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Abstract

Universities have become toxic sites characterised by anxiety, depression and humiliation. Following new managerialism, leadership and management in universities have been driven by the mandate of achieving efficiency, which has led to the implementation of stringent performance management systems, increasing accountability and authoritarianism. While performance management is justified as an accountability tool that drives efficiency and effectiveness, its demand for absolute transparency has created "panopticons" and "glass cages". These have produced a stifling atmosphere in academic spaces, often characterised by competing demands for high research outputs and quality teaching, thus placing academics in subjected positions where their agency is threatened. In view of academics silently constructing uncontrolled and uncontrollable spaces to avoid increasing surveillance, I argue that academics are resisting universities' demand for the invading transparency of performance management. Through a critical social constructionist case study of academics and heads of departments, this article explores the paradoxical position of performing academics—those functioning within the "performative culture" while undermining neoliberal performative inscriptions. Framed by the notion of power and resistance and drawing on critical geography and workplace resistance literature, the study reveals that academics' acts are going against the controlled daily grind of systematised practices that are often meaningless in relation to quality education. They are reimagining and reconstructing lecture halls, stairs, offices and conference spaces as "invisible" free spaces outside direct managerial control.

Keywords: performance management; academia; university; power; resistance; space; panopticon; glass cage

Introduction

This article interrogates how academics are responding to a surveilled and controlled performance management (PM) culture, which has turned universities into toxic sites characterised by anxiety, depression, and humiliation. I argue that although academics are confined in the "panopticons" and "glass cages" of PM in universities, they are silently creating free spaces of resistance. Universities in South Africa adopted academic PM as a managerial strategy to ensure the achievement of higher education's (HE) transformational imperatives (Cloete 2014). A complex context of redressing historical inequalities of access and quality while simultaneously responding to the fast-paced, competitive global educational trends and shrinking financial resources has obliged universities to adopt corporate managerial practices. Consequently, universities have redefined structures and processes that drive institutional performance to ensure accountability and foster efficiency and effectiveness (Davis, Jansen van Rensburg, and Venter 2016). As one of the strategies to achieve accountability, academic PM serves to align all performances with institutional objectives. PM is a human resources tool, which creates a process of determining and appraising employees' performance in line with institutional strategic goals (Lorenz 2012). The PM process in universities is target-driven, scale-rated, tied to achievement rewards and requires transparent accountability through quantifiable measures (Ball 2016). Even though managerial practices, including PM, are justified as accountability tools that drive efficiency and effectiveness, they are negatively affecting universities' key functions of teaching, research and community engagement (Teelken 2012).

Unintended though it may be, within the South African context these PM practices are becoming subtle disciplinary forms that, through the manipulation of rewards and punishment, are confining and subjugating academics (Seyama and Smith 2016). As a result of these practices, a captured performance is emerging. A captured performance in this context is a subjected performance where academics' performance is tied to predefined, marketised and corporatised educational outcomes that primarily serve capitalist interests (Seyama 2018). Such performance has a colonising outcome and is effected through transparency mechanisms that place academics in glass cages under the watch of the panopticon, threatening punishment for failure to adhere to requisite performance demands (Seyama and Smith 2016). As such, academics find themselves trapped under the surveillance glare of the performative masters, which produces a stifling atmosphere in academic spaces, and places academics in controlled subjected positions where their agency is threatened (Clarke and Knights 2015). As Wessels (2015, 14) observes, such threatened agency is stifling "academics' critical, investigative and risk-taking inclination", killing the human spirit that is requisite in realising the existential purpose of higher education institutions (HEIs).

In line with Gabriel's (2008, 320) observation that "even within today's glass cages, employees create niches that are unmanaged and unmanageable", I argue that academics trapped within the confines of neoliberally constituted university corridors are crafting

spaces that afford them some invisibility within highly visible spaces. In this way, they are managing to resist universities' demand for the invading transparency of target-driven PM systems and finding meaningful ways to account for their performance in their private spaces. This article provides a narrative that answers the question: How do university academics respond to the repressive surveilled academic spaces? The argument of this article is inspired by Foucault's (1977) use of Bentham's metaphor of the panopticon and Gabriel's (2008) metaphor of a glass cage, which reflects the contemporary university's demand for transparency of academics' performance. I view the glass cage as an extension of the panopticon, where its walls are replaced by glass, thus enabling total exposure and eventual control and discipline. I argue that power is embedded in the panopticons and glass cages that materialise spaces. However, within this setting, subjugating academic spaces are being turned into spaces of resistance, thus becoming spaces that enable academics to explore their emancipatory potential. For the purpose of this study, Courpasson, Dany, and Delbridge's (2017, 238) conception of resistance forms the essence of the article: "Resistance is a social experience through which individuals shape physical places and exploit the geographical blurring of organizations to develop political efforts that can be consequential." Accordingly, these physical spaces are reconfigured as free spaces outside the glare of managerial control, permitting a rejection of subjected identities (Courpasson, Dany, and Delbridge 2017). In this article, a critical examination is offered on how academics are silently constructing uncontrolled and uncontrollable physical spaces to avoid increasing organisational surveillance and control.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I position the context of education as a space that enables control and freedom. Second, I conceptualise the notions of power, subjectivity and resistance as ways to theorise academics' construction of oppositional identities and practices. Third, I briefly relate the study's methodology, and lastly, I provide the readings of academics' accounts of their oppositional identities and practices and offer concluding remarks.

Space as an Enabler of Control or Freedom

In recent years, questions have been asked about why academics as public intellectuals with the responsibility to interrogate institutions' ideologies, policies and practices are under surveillance (Clarke and Knights 2015; Lorenz 2012) and being complicit in their subjugation as effected through managerialism (Alvesson and Spicer 2016). Following managerialism, leadership and management in universities have been driven by the mandate of achieving efficiency, which has had the effect of creating a performative culture and increasing authoritarianism (Davis, Jansen van Rensburg, and Venter 2016). This performative culture that is enabled by academics' PM produces academics who typify productive, post-industrial blue-collar workers struggling under managerial power (Fleming and Spicer 2003). Cairns, McInnes, and Roberts (2003) argue that the what, why, how and when of academics' work have been reduced to predetermined, measurable economic activities. Consequently, academic institutions are becoming

hostile environments as PM is becoming more controlling (Ball 2016), confining academics in mental and physical spaces of panoptic surveillance and measurement (Crane et al. 2008).

Panopticism as a metaphor borrowed from the prison watchtower (Foucault 1977) explains how academics are forced to behave appropriately under the watch of the disciplinary gaze of line managers. According to Seyama and Smith (2016), panopticism enacted through prescriptive performance contracts enforces visibility, which becomes instrumental in controlling and changing the behaviours of those watched. Inspired by this notion, Gabriel (2008) uses the metaphor of an organisational glass cage to illuminate people's efforts to publicise their idealised personal brands or performative identities. Gabriel (2008) points to various forms of invasive glass cages within contemporary organisations—quality reviews, appraisals, reports, checklists, and rankings. Therefore, space, objectively or subjectively defined, is of consequence in the workplace.

In academia, space is reducible to the performance stage where academic actors demonstrate their prowess in the art of "academics" and derive power through "excellent research performance" or lose power through "poor performance". Of interest is how the same glass cages become intrusive and entangle academics in perpetual exhibitionism. In this way, the glass cages lend themselves to being the chain around academics' necks—the chain being loose or tight depending on the actor's perceived levels of performance. The problem with the glass cages is that while they are critical to shaping and affirming academics' identities and value as performers contributing to institutional visions and strategic goals, they desist from being personal spaces where academics can claim their rights to autonomous identity and intellect. In this way, academic space can simultaneously serve as a subjugating and an emancipatory mechanism (Cairns 2002).

To make sense of how academics conceive of their spaces and see possibilities for resistance, it is worth considering Lefebvre's (1991) representations of lived space as being both objective (material) and subjective (mental). Cairns, McInnes, and Roberts (2003) clarify that space does not only serve a physical purpose—it also represents people's thinking and the meanings they make of their experiences within such spaces. Consequently, the uses and effects of space can only be understood in terms of how people experience it and how such experiences are key to shaping their identities in relation to their daily realities (Shields 1991). Cairns, McInnes, and Roberts (2003) argue that while organisations are engaging in subjecting panoptic practices, their contexts are an imperfect panopticon because the power exercised within is not totalising. Therefore, within the exercise of power there is embedded resistance to such power (Foucault 1980). From this emerges the dynamic of struggle (Fleming and Spicer 2008) against disciplinary technologies that are intent on eradicating employees' opposition to managerial prescriptions. Indeed, academics are existing within the conundrum where the struggle for their personal autonomy is part of their daily

experiences within their workspaces. In view of academics' control through PM, it is arguable that the inclination for resistance also grows and changes depending on contexts or events. Space matters in power–knowledge relations as experienced by academics because it provides a predetermined setting for performance discipline (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983).

The conception of geographical space is both abstract and concrete (Stanek 2011). It is largely comprehensible through the objects that occupy it; however, it does not owe its existence to such objects (Shields 1991). Space, as a physical void, which contains objects, is not experienced as neutral and a container of objects. It constitutes a certain atmosphere, which influences social relations among the bodies (human) in that space (Shields 1991). Treating space this way provides an understanding of how space within a particular contextual frame constructs compliant identities as well as resistant agencies.

Power and Resistance: Conditions of Freedom in Organisations

The conceptualisation of power within the Foucauldian (1980) paradigm has been very influential within contemporary critical management studies (CMS) and organisational resistance research (Alvesson and Willmott 1992). Foucault (1980) concepualised power as temporary and non-enduring and within reach of everyone. Foucault believed in the simplistic nature of power—insofar as it exists and operates at all levels in varying social relations, and importantly, within individuals. In this way, power permeates all social relations, be they formal or informal, influencing discourses and practices. Contingent upon how power is exercised, it is always productive either in generating repressive actions or resistant response (Foucault 1980). In its dynamism, power is then experienced both explicitly and implicitly with varying implications. Foucault (2002, 324) emphasised that "power is exercised over subjects, only insofar as they are free". Consequently, freedom itself constitutes the exercise of power and resistance is embedded in power even in conditions of domination (Foucault 1980). Therefore, people are permanently positioned in conditions within which they can act in a number of ways, either to reproduce the effects of power relations or resist their subjugating effects (Fleming and Spicer 2008).

Historically, resistance has been conceptualised negatively within factory labour relations, representing radical responses (Thomas and Davies 2005), and thus treated harshly. However, the more nuanced, non-radical and less blatant forms of resistance are being revealed as feasible responses that are not displayed to the public and are sometimes known only to the perpetrators. Placed in a paradoxical relationship with power, resistance is imprecise and uniquely produced, and it demonstrates more than just truant behaviour (Contu 2008). Outside the collective and explicit labour resistance (strikes) against capitalist greed, "resistance can also be understood as a constant adaptation, subversion, and remodeling process of dominant discourses present in confrontations between the individual and the organization" (Thomas and Davies 2005, 387). This posture on resistance opens theorisation on academics' individualistic, subtle

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and concealed forms of resistance that work towards a retreat into spaces of harmony where they can carry out their ethical and social mandate (Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2009). For academics, such social good ought to be realised partly through their public intellectual role to provide social critiques of corporate organisations, institutions, government, and so forth. If PM represses this critical agency of academics, such social imperatives will be lost.

However, while there is the possibility of turning power on its head for individuals to free themselves, Contu (2008, 4) is cautious about the Foucauldian "resistance", arguing "these transgressive acts that we call 'resistance' are akin to a decaf resistance, which changes very little". However, before disregarding ways in which academics "resist" unenviable conditions, it is crucial to understand their context and feasible actions that would give them some reprieve. Jones and Patton's (2020) study demonstrates how the Slow Swimming Club (SSC) located outside the university campuses offered academics free, unmanaged and playful space to escape and disengage from the suffocating managerialism in their academic spaces. In this space, academics were able to rethink the rules of engagement in an enterprise university and provided opportunities "to be openly productive" (Jones and Patton 2020, 381):

> Such enacted spacing here has increased academics' creative resistance and political leverage back on campus through greater aesthetic sensibility and cross-disciplinary collaboration, back on campus. In other words, the academic political voice has increased through what appears on the surface as a disconnected leisure pursuit. (Jones and Patton 2020, 386)

If Contu's (2008) lens is used, such acts are not yet disruptive, as they do not dismantle the power structures and discourses. However, within the academic context, micro-emancipations at a conscious and intellectual level do emerge from decaf resistance. These micro-emancipations are worthwhile insofar as they lay foundations towards macro-emancipations. The paradox whereby resistance is both mentally and materially constructed implies that a one-dimensional conception of resistance cannot be adopted.

Context, Case and Method

To explore critically how academics are responding to a surveilled and controlled neoliberal performative space, I undertook a critical social constructionist approach (Hosking 2008) and conducted a case study of university academics in South Africa. I drew on critical management studies' notions of power and resistance within constraining organisational spaces (Courpasson, Dany, and Clegg 2012). This was done to make sense of the panoptic and glass cage educational spaces that are emerging post the implementation of PM in HE. Public HEIs are funded by the government and are mandated accordingly to account for their performance to the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and this process cascades lower down to individual academics. It is at this lower level where daily work encounters are influenced by PM practices, hence the focus on them.

The empirical material for this article is drawn from a larger study of South University (SU) on heads of departments' (HODs) critical leadership of PM in HE. SU is perceived to be spearheading a mandatory, prescriptive and stringent academic PM system under the deans' autocratic and instructive leadership (Seyama and Smith 2015). HODs acknowledged that neoliberal PM constrained their leadership as it created surveilled performative spaces. Of significance is that "HODs are confronted by varying expectations from the leadership as institutional representatives and safeguarding its interests, whilst at the same time academics' expectation for the HOD to be their representative and shield them from executive leadership" (Seyama and Smith 2015, 2956). Confronted by tensions emanating from neoliberal PM, HODs resorted to critical leadership's dialectical approaches in an attempt to create amenable performance spaces that enable meaningful academic performances within the repressive spaces (Seyama 2018). In this way, they engaged dialectical leadership's interconnected dimensions of consciousness, deliberation and resistance. HODs have been trying to lead with an understanding of academics' constraining context, the dilemmas of high research outputs and quality teaching, and taking the foot off the petrol when necessary. They have been willing to ensure humane perspectives are adopted when addressing challenges. Where possible, HODs have enabled flexibility in how academics achieve the university's strategic objectives, creating deliberative spaces of engagement where people feel safe to raise concerns and negotiate. Furthermore, HODs have resisted and confronted regulations that undermine academics' sense of worth and freedom (Seyama 2018). With all their efforts, HODs have acknowledged that the neoliberal agenda continues to keep a strong panoptic hold on the university's PM systems, therefore they will try to create a pleasant and meaningful working environment for academics (Seyama 2018). It is a particularly interesting case to understand how academics have reimagined and reconstructed institutional physical spaces as resistance spaces.

While this is a single case study, it is possible that emerging PM practices at SU typify academics' responses to constraining PM in other institutions. South University's PM system has been in place for more than 10 years. Both academic and administrative staff's performance is managed at various institutional hierarchical levels, with HODs managing academics' performance. Individual academics' PM contract is aligned to institutional strategic objectives and is target-driven and rewards-linked (Seyama and Smith 2016). Performance appraisals at the end of the year determine the extent to which academics have achieved or exceeded the performance targets. Performance is rewarded when the targets have been exceeded (Seyama and Smith 2016).

Following a qualitative methodology informed by CMS's project of interrogating power-knowledge relations in organisations (Alvesson and Willmott 1992), I collected data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants about their experiences of PM and leadership thereof. I conducted 25 interviews with SU HODs and academics. Ten of the interviewees were HODs responsible for implementing PM at departmental level, and the remaining 15 were academics whose performance was managed by the HODs. All participants were full-time employees with academic

experience ranging between five and 20 years and held positions as lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors and full professors. Data was gathered during two academic semesters, post the signing of the performance contract earlier in the semester and after the mid-year performance reviews. These periods were outside the year-end performance appraisals, where academics' performance is judged against the specific contracted targets, then rewarded or penalised accordingly.

Post-interview field notes were also used to make sense of the impressions I had of the interview process and the participants. To ensure relevant and meaningful participation, purposive and snowball sampling, using consenting informant participants who pointed out other colleagues as potential participants, was selected. To avoid the possibility of identification, pseudonyms were used and individual contextual description was excluded from the report.

As an exploratory study, data analysis was driven by what emerged from the conversations between the participants and me. Using the strategy of applied thematic analysis, all the responses to a single question, "How are you coping and surviving in this performative space?", were extracted. In the first phase, the process involved recognising, analysing and reporting patterns within the data (Saldaña 2009). To do this, the data was arranged in line with the research questions, and then Saldaña's (2009) approach was employed to the process of manual coding, which consists of a number of stages, starting with pre-coding. Pre-coding offered a first glance or impression of the data. In the second phase of analysis, critical scholarship was used as an analytical tool and "one of the purposes of this style of criticism is to read and write to alter or shift public knowledge by illustrating how that knowledge has been constructed" (Sloop 2004, 18). This was done by distilling Foucauldian notions of power and resistance that could explicate how academics were responding to the surveilled environment. The extracted text was read, and a set of initial codes and explanations developed. Using an iterative codebook of text, two coders independently coded all text.

Findings: Resistance Tactics

The findings emerged from the reading and reflection on the materiality of academic physical spaces as free spaces reimagined by academics as mechanisms of resistance in a performative entrepreneurial university. Within this setting, the article shows how academic spaces, experienced as panopticons and glass cages, constitute subjugating spaces that can be turned into resistance spaces. Noting that the glass "is also liable to crack, break, and collapse" (Gabriel 2008, 313), I argue that the academic spaces within participants' terrain are becoming spaces that enable academics to explore their emancipatory potential in reclaiming their primary purpose—critique, autonomous knowledge production and critical conscientisation of students. Emerging from the analysis of participants' accounts of surviving the paradoxical and uncomfortable setting are five resistance spaces: lecture rooms, stairs, offices, and conference and special interest group spaces. Each of these reveals a unique way in which academics

use physical spaces to engage their agency to emancipate themselves from suffocating PM spaces.

Resistance in Lecture Rooms

Aaron (academic), in recognition of the university as a structure embedded with power dynamics, posits the following:

> I understand that we can within the particular space … manoeuvre. We can have liberated spaces within that system [performance management]. So … for me, what we need to critique is the space … the entrepreneurial university … as a structure, so then we can talk about structural agency. Within the structure, we find agents who may or may not have agency to change or transform the structure.

In relation to Aaron's view, some academics in this study used lecture rooms as resistances spaces to initiate nuanced resistance against the panopticon and glass cage forces as related to PM. As a common point of disquiet in the performative culture, the demand for high research outputs is one source of resistance. For instance, Zama (academic) offers a compelling argument against academics who are using perceived "unethical" practices to achieve more research units:

> Yes, you're getting the units …, but are the papers … you're producing … groundbreaking? Are they making sense to the humanity? Or are we writing papers for the sake of writing papers? And, I'm … one of those people reluctant in writing papers for the sake of writing papers. Otherwise … you're just proliferating the space with something that is already … known. And, so, I'd rather spend my time with my students.

In defiance, the academic is deliberately choosing the lecture room as his resistance space rather than going to a conference or sitting in his office writing what he calls meaningless articles. Like Anderson's (2008) participants, he is disregarding the expected output targets. Instead, he is pursuing what he perceives to be worthy in line with the primary goal of education, which is facilitating learning for students' development as critical and active citizens.

Sharne (academic) is also using the lecture room as a resistance space where she engages students on the constraining political, social and economic conditions of the country:

> I realise that I have to choose between the quality of my teaching and research outputs. But I get my inspiration from engaging with students beyond the disciplinary content. It is important for me that we engage students on political and social issues facing our country. In a world obsessed with capitalism and control of people, I have to conscientise my students to engage in the ethics of self-care. They need to understand issues of control like governmentality.

Sharne brings debates on political and social issues into the classroom so that students can begin to critically interrogate their impact on society and particularly on neoliberally

driven universities. She talks to students about Foucault's (1977) notions of panopticism and governmentality that are useful as lenses through which students can understand how power is exploited to control people. She sees these mechanisms as ideal to facilitate students' development of a consciousness about power in their daily lives. In this way, she hopes such engagements form the basis of students' critique and that they build towards an ethic of self-care as emphasised by Foucault (1980). Notwithstanding his criticism of research, Zama acknowledges its positive role in the university, noting:

> It's a catch 22 situation in my view as the students want to associate themselves with the high performing institution. But that high performance doesn't have time for them because now the lecturers that are supposed to be engaging with them are busy researching.

Carly (HOD) also uses the lecture room as a space of resistance. She regards herself as a change agent, an academic activist who will defy the governmentalising discourses and practices perpetuated in her discipline's curriculum. She explains:

> I'd say I would use it [lecture space] once again to break through the cracks and openings. I deconstruct the whole role and I find the space to actually empower … students. I … search for empowering moments in a curriculum which may be static. … I see myself as a change agent. I see myself as developing the agency of learners. … I deviate from the prescribed work very often and going to places where I know I'm helping them to open their minds and develop vertically.

While the lecture room is a "legitimate" space for compliant performativity, in this instance Zama, Sharne, and Carly use it as a space outside the reach of managerial control. They use it for critical performativity (Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2009), which is a refusal to subjugate students (Ball 2016).

Resistance on the Stairs

Patrick (HOD) refuses to perpetuate a commodified student subjectivity, and he has creatively chosen the institution's stairs as a resistance space. Patrick has initiated an exercise project where he and his students walk up and down the stairs from the ground floor to the upper floor for about 30 minutes every morning before class. The essence of this project as a politically meaningful act is that Patrick uses this time to resist the demand for high research outputs that ought to be attained at the expense of teaching. The pillar of Patrick's resistance is his fundamental position about his role as a teacher. He stresses:

> I think teaching and learning are a serious priority. The greater majority of academics are here to develop the students … and they have been … pushed away from that priority to some extent or to a large extent.

Patrick believes that teaching is paramount in a university and that academics need to spend more time with students to assist them with also developing their "soft skills"—

life skills outside the fundamental discipline knowledge and competencies in non-curriculated socio-political activities. He explains:

> The purpose of the stairs project is to help strengthen the individual ethic. So that when difficulties do come then they have the capacity to resist that temptation or whatever it is. It is simply doing something that other people might look at it and say, oh you are so stupid; can't you just use a lift [instead of walking up all the stairs]. But you're standing up for something you believe to be better and you stick with it. I believe that using an elevator is … a metaphor for somehow to the top without effort. So, I believe for any success on any individual person and myself in particular you need to subject yourself to difficulties. Not too difficult that you fail.

On the face of it, the stairs are an objective free space, with no other meaning than its physical purpose. Nevertheless, they offer Patrick a meaningful space outside his office where he should be writing research articles:

> I'm going on with my stairs. I'm not sure that the research effort … would produce some of the results that I'm producing … Because I know when you talk to people about this particular project, they love it. They think this is the answer to a social degeneration that has happened and is happening.

On the stairs, Patrick wages his struggle against the performative demand for research production and instrumentalist education that narrowly focuses discipline knowledge. He is emphatic that he does not care if he does not meet the research targets. If the project does contribute to his research, it would be incidental.

Resistance behind the Office Doors

In the era of surveilled PM, it is apparent that employee visibility has become an enabling control tool used by institutions to enforce economically subjected identities. The question is whether employee invisibility is an emancipatory or resistance tool. At SU, it appears that some academics, such as Gerry (academic) and Sarah (academic), are choosing invisibility within a transparent performative space to wage their battle against subjected identities. Under the gaze, they are finding ways to be invisible, denoting the metaphor of "hiding within the glass cage". They are content in this seclusion and being on the fringes of the obligatory performative spaces.

Gerry and Sarah choose to close their office doors, which seems to go against the unwritten corporate or institutional policy of keeping office doors open. Open office doors indicate not only an academic's presence at work, but also more importantly that they are working. Gerry does use the space accordingly, as she spends extended hours in the office beyond the prescriptive office working hours. Her struggle with surveillance emanates from her colleagues' perceptions that she is less competent because she does not have a PhD. As a junior, she is treated with suspicion. Her movements and activities are closely monitored. She reports:

> I don't care what happens outside my office. I sit in my office and work hard and I am going to publish and become a professor as well. This is my space and I do what I want in here.

Here the academic is demonstrating that the confines of the office provide a "shelter" from the harsh autocratic atmosphere, and she finds comfort within the margins of the obligatory spaces, albeit limited. Sarah, in defence of closing the office door, argues:

> With so many rules that one has to abide by—mostly unnecessarily because people want to stamp their powerless positional authority, I choose to do what I want. But, it's strategic. In the midst of panopticism where people want to know everything about you—where you are, what you are doing—it's good to get them guessing—feeling unsettled about your whereabouts. I know that they expect the worst of me; that I'm not in the office. So when they come with that attitude and open my door to find me there, I always think—the joke is on you. I'm not going to fit in your subjecting mould. I'm my own person.

The resistance Sarah's office space offers extends to other colleagues' offices outside her department. She notes:

> My department represents a repressive space that constrains my being, so I withdraw from it and I choose to socialise with academics from other departments and faculties and that is when I get a reprieve and escape from the prying eyes.

Sarah's response is indicative of Schwartz's (2014, 111) observation that "healthy and smart people do not stay in toxic spaces that cause them harm" and it demonstrates agency and engaging in ethics of self-care (Foucault 2001), that is, refusing repression. Sarah's socialisation outside of her department offers shared spatial-social distancing. It enables her to create a space that offers emotional and intellectual safety, and nurtures harmony in sharing values and affirmation of academics as critical agents.

Resistance within Academic Conference and Self-Interest Group (SIG) Spaces

Jeremy (academic), Sharne (academic) and Abigail (academic) choose the conference and self-interest group (SIG) spaces to air their discontent with the institution's PM system. Jeremy reports:

> I have my space. There are two abstract papers I have written and presented somewhere, where … I'm indirectly attacking this mindset … by looking at issues from a philosophical paradigm … and my own paper that I will present at SAERA [South African Education Researchers Association]. It's clear I'm hitting on managerialism … and my main argument is that it is making the university to become less of a university.

Sharne says:

> Since I cannot be as open as I need to be in the institution, I love going to conferences. I regard them as legitimate spaces to share my intellectual freedom about the effects of

managerialism. Interesting is how other academics flock to my presentations because they are facing the same conditions. If it means talking about the repressive nature of PM as a way for me to meet the requirements for conference presentations and publishing, then I'm okay with that.

Similarly, Abigail (academic) acts like a smart person by withdrawing from what causes her discomfort and problems and uses an alternative safe space: "I've learned that it can be quite brutal and it's a very unhealthy environment. So I do self-protect. I kind of withdraw from anything that can complicate." Abigail uses the SIG of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning for Social Justice (SoTL) group's space as a resistance space, indicating:

> I've been very vocal about decolonisation, about how universities are run, about managerialism. I will go to sessions where the dean is sitting there and I will speak openly about how … there are kinds of mechanisms for silencing, [and] mechanisms for punishment.

Here Abigail is engaging in parrhesia (Foucault 2001) by openly and courageously speaking truth to power, while risking retribution. In this way, Jeremy, Sharne and Abigail are outside the critical institutional eye, but within a safe scholarly space that is also pertinent towards achieving the performative demands.

Discussion and Conclusion

Performance management (PM) of academics is justified as a necessary tool to align their performance to institutional strategic objectives, assisting with a collective approach for universities' accountability to stakeholders. Nonetheless, in the neoliberal university, the surveilled nature of PM is producing a captured performance, which is confining and subjugating academics (Seyama 2018). From this perspective, academics are not escaping the worker-labourer stereotype of being condemned to repressive PM conditions that provoke resistance. Empirical evidence in this study suggests that for academics to loosen the performative chain around their necks, they are finding spaces outside the reach of management's control. They are using academic spaces to break through the cracks and openings and repurposing them to defy managerialist approaches to education. Vieira et al. (2015, 746) refer to these emerging "forms of resistance used by academics [as a way] to re-establish the dignity of teaching practice". Vieira et al. (2015, 747) are adamant that "people need dignity and autonomy at work, and that when these conditions are not met, they manifest themselves as a strong tendency to resist and adopt deviant behaviour practices".

The findings in this article reveal that some academics are engaged in resisting the system in unique ways. They are using physical spaces within and outside the university to escape the panoptic eye and glass cage of PM or its symbolism in the way academic spaces are set up and culturised as performative spaces. These academics experience the uncomfortable surveillance glare of performative masters and they claim that there is

repression beyond the paper of the performance contract. Likewise, the physicality of their space was also tied into the repression.

Despite the dispiriting context and pessimistic view of academic life (Wessels 2015), academics' acts are going against the controlled daily grind of systematised practices (Crane et al. 2008) that are often meaningless in relation to quality education. Through reimagined lecture halls, stairs, offices and conference and SIG spaces, academics in this study are loosening the performative chain around their necks. Within the exercise of power as advanced by Foucault (1980), these have become material and symbolic spaces outside the reach of management's control to resist repressive control (Crane et al. 2008). The use of lecture halls, stairs, offices and conference and SIG spaces shows that spaces of resistance take different forms, depending on the context and individuals' agential propensity to wage "productive" resistance (Fleming and Sewell 2002).

In this regard, *where* and *how* resistance is effected are significant for understanding how academics "free" themselves. As space is always productive in offering diverse meanings for different people (Lefebvre 1991), academics are putting these spaces to work in order to achieve critical performativity outcomes that serve to counter instrumentalist outcomes. In this "openness of meaning", participant academics are reconstituting captured identities and reclaiming their "own" space by reconstructing the meaning of the experienced space to refuse the prevailing domination (Mumby 2005). Some academics are using lecture halls as critically conscientising spaces that engage students beyond the confines of their discipline and enable interrogation of the influence of socio-economic and political discourses, practices and contexts on students' development and futures. The lecture halls become reflexive spaces in which students can question assumptions underpinning how education is offered in neoliberal universities. In this instance, the academics' actions are congruent with those of academics in Anderson's (2008) study who spoke with students about the disingenuous plan of managerialism to underfund resources and enforce large class sizes and less contact time, undermining meaningful teaching and learning. This orientation towards students' needs means academics are willing to re-engage education as critique—"to learn an attitude, a method, a relation to our own historicity, and our existence within and in relation to power" (Ball 2017, 35).

For academics, closing their office doors gives them privacy within the requisite transparency and protects against further intrusion on the already limited privacy. Such practices reflect resistance through distance (Fleming and Spicer 2008), which does not confront managerial control (Gabriel 2008), but uses creative and nuanced resistance tactics that do not expose them to the risk of reprisal. On the other hand, using stairs involves repurposing the university space to facilitate academics' activism. This activism as undertaken by Patrick encompasses a refusal of neoliberal subjectivity—a choice to spend more time on teaching instead of prioritising research. At the same time, this stairs project is a response to the calls for development of students as critical agents with appropriate life skills.

The findings also reveal that academics feel the burden of the glare within the institutional glass cages, and hence resort to using conference and SIG spaces as free spaces outside managerial surveillance, where there are no voices shouting them down when they raise their concerns, as would happen when inside their institution. Within the conference and SIG spaces, academics are taking their struggle outside the university, and what is significant about their tactic is that it could also serve as a space for the collective voice of academics similarly affected. In raising their voices, academics turn their voices into resistance tools that reject subjugated identities and oppressive practices (Gabriel 2008). These serve to highlight the problematic impression given by neoliberal managerialism that universities' purpose can be redefined primarily in economic terms. Shahjahan (2014, 223) views these as meaningful resistance strategies "through which we heal" and gain a sense of freedom. Such healing is paramount in view of Wessel's (2015) observation that surveilled and highly managerialist practices repress the human spirit.

In making sense of the value, meaning and productivity of academics' resistance spaces, Postma's (2015, 33) submission that "the limitation of acts of resistance is that they often remain within the logic and the problematic defined by the dominant order" is relevant. It is indeed the case in this study that academics' attempts at resistance are confined within the panopticons and glass cages of the neoliberal environment. Nevertheless, these are giving hope for some small measure of reprieve from repression and thus offer a temporary and transitory escape from the watchful eye. While participants' accounts suggest that at this point resistance tactics are not necessarily working against institutional neoliberal demands, this article argues that there is some "potency" in what Contu (2008) calls "decaf" resistance. These academics' resistance tactics are efforts to preserve some personal autonomy and respect, keeping intelligent selves intact (Clarke and Knights 2015) and dis-identifying with managerial power (Fleming and Spicer 2003). Their acts are not provoking direct or legitimate managerial punishment; however, not overlooking the typical managerial response, the punishment for such acts would possibly be meted out in the nuanced way that governmentality tactics are being used. What is noteworthy is that academics engage in these activities to mediate against demoralisation, which is detrimental to individuals' well-being and eventually to their scholarly progression. Here, the acts of academics correspond with the understanding of resistance as a coping mechanism that enables them to escape regimes of control.

Taking the radical humanist approach, which embodies the achievement of incremental micro emancipations, participants' resistance tactics are still worthy, particularly when they influence a critical consciousness of oppressive practices. A particular context with its dynamics of power determines the extent to which academics can use their resources and choose the nature and ways of resisting. Additionally, different motivations for resistance permit all accounts of resistance, explicit or implicit, decaf (Contu 2008) or productive (Courpasson, Dany, and Clegg 2012). Resistance should not be prescriptive, otherwise the same problematic deterministic and objectionable control of

performativity will be invoked. This position is strengthened by Foucault's ethic of self-care, that is, choosing to do what does not destroy your soul (Postma 2015), which gives meaningful emancipation in individuals' life contexts. Fundamental to productive resistance, Postma (2015) argues, is care for the self. Such a choice enables academics such as Abigail, Carly, Zama, Gerry, Jeremy, Patrick, Sarah, and Sharne to stay true to whom they are as academic activists. For these academics, resistance spaces are consciously used to escape the glare within the glass cage, which can be quite blinding, and overwhelming—chaotic and violent to the mind (Cairns, McInnes, and Roberts 2003).

The noted spatial micro-emancipations are noteworthy insofar as they are vital towards keeping a critical view of performativity to prepare for macro-emancipations. It is in the interest of academics to recognise that most repressive tendencies are very nuanced and context bound; hence subverting them equally demands nuanced tactics and academic activists cannot always expect legislative recognition of the micro-emancipations. Generally, nuanced repressive acts are committed within the safety net of regulations. The spaces academics use as resistance spaces are personal spaces that have been part of their work life; however, the meaning and purpose of these spaces have changed following the painful panoptic and glass cage encounters. It would be interesting to explore the possibilities of resistance outcomes in cases where academics use spaces external to the university.

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