

A Sociology of Slow Academia

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Abstract: The notion of slow academia has been in vogue for some time now. This article maps recent literature vis-à-vis the acceleration of academic life and academic slowdown, offering five points problematising slow discourse within academia without denouncing it altogether, and makes some conceptual clarifications. It then offers an alternative concept—responsively stagnant academia—drawing on an account by Stevienna de Saille et al. (2020) of responsible stagnation contrasted with slow academia. This article concludes with the provocative question: How come multi-millionaire businesses often originate in academic corridors whilst progressive ideas that aim to reform universities remain stuck in academic publications rather than in praxis?

Keywords: slowdown, academia, temporality, time, research

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The popular image associated with scholarly life is one of autonomy, restfulness, solitude, and slowdown. It has its foundations in an ideal of contemplation that stretches back to ancient Greece and its *agoras*, in which, as Allen (2011, p. 2–3) summarised, philosophers were ‘identified with time spent away from practical realities in peaceful retreats where ceaseless conversation could be orientated towards securing knowledge, not society’s daily needs.’¹ Bourdieu (2000, p. 1). Described as *skhole*, this was ‘free time, freed from the urgencies of the world, that allows a free and liberated relation to those urgencies and to the world’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 1). Bourdieu also revealed that the academic field is a battleground, which makes it misleading to refer to ‘academics’ as a homogenous ‘community’ of shared interests. We can see the lived experience of this reflected in the personal correspondence of Richard Rorty, one of the most original 20th-century philosophers. When his friend Richard Watson inquired in 1980 as to how he was finding life at Princeton, Rorty expressed immense satisfaction with his working life alongside his customary disdain for the philosophical profession:

Am I ‘perfectly happy as a serious professional at Princeton?’ A serious professional what? Philosopher? No. Writer? Yes. Universities permit one to read books and

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¹ See also Pels (2003). It should be stressed that Allen (2011) offered this summary of the orthodox conception in an account of its limitations, convincingly arguing that Plato was much more engaged in political affairs than is commonly assumed.

report what one thinks about them, and get paid for it. I'm delighted that I lucked into a university which pays me to make up stories and tell them. About 'the philosophical profession' I could care less (Gross, 2010, p. 385).

This resonant description might lead one to imagine Rorty's temporal experience—taking long walks in the late morning through the gothic grandeur of the Princeton campus, leading to long afternoons in front of a roaring fire where he reads through important volumes, occasionally picking up a pen to report and annotate what he thinks about them, or perhaps even going so far as to share these thoughts with his students. We can assume the students are as privileged as Rorty himself—if not more so. This remark reflects Rorty's own privilege as a white male and tenured professor at an Ivy League university in the United States. If his remarks were accurate, then they were only for some, and arguably very few within certain privileged institutions. My use of them here is not intended as historical evidence but as a thematic preliminary to my argument. The ideal of temporal autonomy, following the pace of the work rather than the pace of the world (if such a distinction can be made), lingers on as a powerful ideal in academic life even if it sits very uneasily with the contemporary reality of academic temporalities (Gibbs et al., 2015; Vostal, 2016), which is socially differentiated and highly situated.

Rorty's ideal is embedded in an image of the 'slow academy,' (Slow Science Academy, 2020), which for many carries a sense of nostalgia and 'lost past,' a loss of leisured academic pace that has been engulfed by the 'cult of speed' (Berg & Seeberg, 2016; Gearhart & Chambers, 2019). The attendant notions of the slow professor/scholarship/science/university (hereafter slow academia) have become increasingly prominent in recent years (e.g., Leung et al., 2010; Martell, 2014; Mendick, 2014; O'Neill, 2014) and account for cultural and political projects aiming to transform the institutional configuration of academic space and time, critically targeting 'fast time' that is allegedly exclusively associated with the now normalised 'academic capitalism' (e.g., Hackett, 1990; Slaughter & Leslie, 1998; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). While I critically interrogate slow academia on political, sociological, and conceptual grounds, I do not deny that the institutional and individual life of academia is unevenly accelerating. Therefore, my aim is not to denounce the notion of slow academia altogether but rather problematise it and subsequently call for the consolidation of a robust sociology of slow academia as a research programme that will explore the nuances of academia via a temporal lens. The article's argument unfolds as follows. First, I unpack the sedimented claim that academic life is accelerating by stressing both the problems and serious aspects that such a claim carries. Second, and relatedly, I raise several critical commentaries aimed at the slow academia movement and attendant slow discourses. Finally, I suggest that the study of scholarly time needs to bypass the reductive fast and slow dichotomy (Vostal, 2019) and explore various multiplicities, interactions, hybridities, and interminglings of different temporal orders in academia. Finally, as a counter discourse to slow academia, I propose responsively stagnant academia, inspired by de Saille et al. (2020), and suggest

that many multi-million-dollar projects emerge in the corridors of academia, whereas progressive ideas with the potential of reforming universities remain in dissent or circulate as academic papers.

Apprehending scholarly acceleration

What does it actually mean to say that academia or academic life is accelerating? In the accelerated academy—characterised by increasing volumes of publications and shortening deadlines—one must adopt strict ‘performance discipline’ and ‘anticipatory techniques’ (Müller, 2014) in order to thrive and perhaps survive in academia—to keep a job and/or get a promotion. One must write prolifically. It is not uncommon for some researchers in various disciplines to publish 20, 30, or even 40 papers a year, with a clear trend towards further increases (Fischer et al., 2012). One must win grants and receive positive evaluations from funders, and ensure that one’s writing is actually read, increasingly giving rise to viral self-marketing to be heard above the din of competing voices (Beer, 2012; Carrigan, 2019, ch. 6). One must engage with the public and generate impact through one’s research. In some areas of the academy, one must demonstrate expertise in using social media platforms to engage with a wider community (Carrigan, 2019). To a large extent, this trend follows from the expansion of a managerial apparatus that relies on opaque standards embedded in costly corporate audit procedures to ensure quality control.

As a result of these multiple shifts, academics and scientists report chronic busyness, being often overloaded, pressed for time, and needing to keep up, meet deadlines, and press ahead (see e.g., Noonan, 2016; Osbaldiston et al., 2019; Ylijoki, 2013; Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003). Framing the accelerated academy can help draw out the temporal challenges that ‘academic capitalism’ creates for academics, as well as how their responses to them feed into the broader process of its transformation. However, I again caution against seeing this as a diagnostic correlate to the slow university, identifying the ‘disease’ to which deceleration will be the cure. Instead, my intent is to understand what has led to this pervasive sense and experience of ‘speed up,’ as well as what grounding this has in deep structural changes within institutional academic life and what this means for agents who are orientated purposively towards this shifting framework of working life. An increase in what academics are expected to do, as well as an associated transformation in how those expectations are imposed and assessed, arguably leads to an acceleration of the pace of life (Vostal, 2016).

An important tradition within sociological thought maintains that it is possible to distinguish societal domains (e.g., law, the economy, politics, media, art, science) according to their temporal ordering and logic, and that one social system differs from the other precisely due to their distinctive temporalities and rhythms (see Rosa, 2013). Scholarly life and its institutional organisation (academia) represent a particularly apt example of a distinctive ‘timescape’ (Adam, 1998; Vostal, 2021a) with its own temporal orderings. There are temporal dynam-

ics organising the academy that represent its *differentia specifica*, often in socio-historical and epistemic terms (Pels, 2003; Stengers, 2018) on the aforementioned perspective, sensitising us to how institutional change within the sector unfolds through shifting temporal logics, sequences, and priorities. I see this position not as *contra* Latour's (1993) flat ontology where different systems—social, natural, and technological—interpenetrate one another, but as a complementary one precisely because the distinctive temporal order characterises the unique nature of academia as a societal domain and treats time as such, and is an ephemeral entity tightly woven into the fabric of human and non-human lives. Also, taking some clues from the metaphysics of time on the nature of time and how difficult it is to think about time—whether it is possible to change past events, whether 'now' can objectively be considered as the present, whether time stands still or moves forward—I note that time-as-perspective and time-as-technique may actually bridge what Latour (2005) called 'sociology of the social' and 'sociology of associations.' From this perspective, acceleration is indeed one temporal modality characterising academia—however dominating—alongside delay, slowdown, standstill, waiting, and stagnation, among others.

The dominant discourse in contemporary tech-savvy academia—in both corridor parlance and scholarship—is that academia is accelerating relentlessly. This awkwardly holistic claim needs at least two correctives: there is either something—a propeller, motor, or amplifier—accelerating concrete processes in academia, or we are dealing with a personal time experience projected on academia as a whole. However, both may be accurate. In fact, both positions reporting academic acceleration are of undisputable relevance. The problem, however, is not the motors or experience, but often an inflated, undifferentiated, and over-dramatised juggernaut of all-encompassing academic acceleration, in which there is 'no time to think' (Levy, 2007), read, write, and live.²

There is now an established research canon that has been critically monitoring time pressure, increasing workloads, levels of stress, deteriorating mental health, and other psycho-phenomenological implications of ever-changing academia (e.g., Gill, 2009; Menzies & Newson, 2007; Parker & Jary, 1995). However, there are also several accounts that registered similar experiences in early modernity and even in the pre-modern era. Fyfe et al. (2020) noted that academics in early 20th century England were busy and lacked time to serve as referees in the peer-review process—a familiar academic experience in 2024. Odstrčilík (2012) noted how in the Middle Ages, some European universities recommended to their scholars how to study and maintain a daily time regime that would prevent them from overworking. Such testimonies provide interesting evidence of the mythologisation of a golden past of leisured and slow academia and also problematise the exclusive connection between time pressure and academic capitalism. Even if research on stress, time pressure, fatigue, and neurasthenia—to

² See Carrigan & Vostal (2018) for a reflexive auto-critique of the term 'accelerated academy.'

use contemporary vocabulary—in 19th century academia is unknown to me, I assume that general trends in social experience manifested in academia as well.

Contemporary accounts mapping the acceleration of academic life and their ramifications are extremely valuable as they connect how academic capitalism—and its multiscalar dimensions—directly impacts on the material, psychological, and cultural conditions of existence in academia and beyond. They look not only on the professional impacts of fast ideology but also on how it interacts with more personal matters of individual lives, such as illness, child care, and overall time for relaxation. However, many tend to explore predominantly and *a priori* negative experiential modalities with time experience both implicitly and explicitly at their *loci*. Existing scholarship barely inquiries into (1) the pleasures and conveniences associated with the academic profession, especially in comparison to other cognitive and ‘knowledge-intense’ professions; and (2) the pleasures and conveniences of acceleration (see Balint, 1959; Duffy, 2009; Saward, 2015; Tomlinson, 2007; Walker, 2016; in academia Andrews & Harris, 1972; Vostal 2015).

Without in any way underestimating the seriousness of mental and physical injuries associated with job demands, overwork, and precarisation (see Gill, 2009), it needs to be said that (1) in many cases, the agonising acceleration of the pace of work takes place in bouts and is not usually a continual process resulting in some sort of ‘overheating’; (2) acceleration, against all odds, can be productive; (3) when acceleration is couched as busyness, we may be dealing with a ‘badge of honor’ (Gershuny, 2005); and (4) comparatively speaking, when considering other professions in cognitive or knowledge capitalism, even if academic labour mirrors to a considerable extent a psycho-cultural ambient of a given zeitgeist, as argued above, many scholars—on the whole—still maintain considerable control and flexibility over their time. The question then becomes how this control is distributed and copies (or not) power and class hierarchies in the academy.

Still, such a dissection of acceleration in and of academic life is rare. The prevalent temporal sentiment is that life, including life in academia, is speeding-up and produces negative implications that allegedly impact everyone. There is no wonder, then, that such scholarship has prepared a fertile ground for arguments pleading in favour of slow academia, which I now turn to.

Problematizing scholarly slowdown³

Recently, several scholars have flagged the notion of ‘the slow’ as a prospective desirable feature of academic time (see especially Berg & Seeberg, 2016; Gearhart & Chambers, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015; Stengers, 2018). Drawing mainly on the popular discourse of the ‘slow movement’ (Honoré, 2004) rather than on the

³ Some sections of the article appeared, in a much more condensed format, in Vostal (2021b). Thank you to Michael Taster, the managing editor of the *LSE Impact Blog*, for granting permission to re-use some of the points (re)articulated below.

scarce but important academic literature critically engaging with various aspects of slowness (Koeprnick, 2014; Osbaldiston, 2013; Parkins & Craig, 2006), arguments that have emerged under this rubric (the slow academy, slow scholarship, the slow professor, etc.) claim that academia is now unprecedentedly fast, which is not the case, as shown above. Therefore, the entire corresponding discourse of slow academia takes much inspiration from slow movements and is often situated on the threshold of slow movements and attempts at scientific discourse. These hybrids then try to mobilise their agenda and conceptual objectifications and push back the entire ideology of fast that has proliferated in modern academia. Via particular modes of clarifications and abstractions, they aim to generate a particular kind of social change in contemporary academia.

There are many good elements about doing particular activities in slow motion, slowing them down, and abstaining from acceleration, whether imposed (which is difficult) or self-imposed (arguably easier). One thing is clear: who could be against slowing down and slowness in academia, or even beyond? I guess that academics know the story all too well: too many things going on, papers, chapters, teaching prep, reviews, recommendation letters, and grant proposals. Activities and 'entities' with a great likelihood of failure (e.g., when a manuscript or grant is rejected after a long period of waiting) followed by frustration and the proverbial self-mollification of rejection are, alas, part of academic life.

Be that as it may, the frustration and psychological effects remain. Keep going, press ahead, speed-up—just to stay where you are. Follow social media, get involved, 'FOMO' never sleeps. It is quite understandable that calls for a slowdown in academia have proliferated in recent years. Likely the first allusion to slow science appeared in *The Scientist* in a commentary by Eugene Garfield (1990).

As mentioned above, there is indeed a parallel, if not direct allusion, here to the 'slow movement' more broadly conceived and most iconically represented by 'Slow Food,' which has now (or at least a part of it) moved far from what it originally represented in the 1960s and 1970s. As Stephen Schneider (2008) noted when he chronicled the early life of Slow Food, it actually played an active and distinctive role in Italian leftist politics:

During the 1960s labor movement lay at the center of a number of more broadly constituted social movements (...) [t]he emergence of the autonomia movement, with its strategy of refusing work, provided the backdrop against which intellectuals such as Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and Paul Virilio came to maturity. (...) While the energies of autonomia expanded to other areas in Italian society in the 1970s, the decade was also witness to the violent actions of the Red Brigades and the 1978 murder of Christian Democratic Party leader and former prime minister Aldo Moro. (...) One can see the emergence of Slow Food as both a materialization of the Italian left's energies and a rejection of the violence that increasingly ruled the latter half of the decade (2008, pp. 385–386).

These progressivist ideas and energies are long gone, as we will see below. In the past decade or so, one might have registered the largely unchallenged prolifera-

tion of initiatives, such as Slow Science, Slow Academy, Slow Professor, and Slow Scholarship (e.g., for the recent book review symposium of *The Slow Professor* in *Sociology* journal, which raises some critical points but also praise, see Barnes, 2019; Edmunds, 2019; Scott, 2019; Telling, 2019). I have received wind that there is another slow iteration in academia under development, this time called the *Manifesto for a Slow Research Revolution*. Indeed, these often come from the left or centre-left, criticising the current state of academia. However, they omit several important moments that render the slow movement politically toothless and burnt-out, if not reactionary. I have the following five reservations about slow academia and its iterations (for a critical assessment of slow academia, see Horgan, 2011), which can be summarised as follows:

(1) 'The slow' is now a commodity (e.g., Slow Watches, Slow Travel) to be purchased on a market (Vostal, 2019) and a middle-class metropolitan lifestyle. It is quite simple: one needs material/financial resources to prepare food and cook all day, to buy watches and tune into the slow watch community, and to travel slowly. At the same time, many of us, including academics—especially junior ones—must simply be at work to make a living. This textbook reification and cooptation (Lukács, 1923; Marcuse, 1964) of the slow utterly compromises the original autonomist ideas and thus is not particularly productive as a catch-all term for progressive change in academia and elsewhere.

(2) What the slower in academia usually radically demand—and rightfully so—is the undoing, dismantling, and destruction of neoliberalisation, managerialisation, and ubiquity of the audit and corporate culture that have colonised academia for a long time. The problems of such processes, trends, and tendencies have been discussed in a much more sophisticated fashion by many critical higher education scholars for decades (e.g., Collini, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), if not centuries (Weber, 1946; Veblen, 1918). Here, the slow gang is knocking on an open door. I have been assessing (Vostal, 2019) one such account. Namely, John Smyth's *Toxic University* (Smyth, 2017) offered a detailed, sharp, and uncompromising critique of contemporary academia, as did Peter Fleming's *Dark Academia* (2021). The question of how capital shapes and re-shapes academic and scientific institutions, discourses, and practices is now centre stage in critical discussions on the contemporary condition of academia. Such inquiry is vital, as 'the academic enterprise becomes increasingly dependent on allocation of capital from without and on the accumulation of capital within, [and as a result,] it cedes freedom, purpose, and the ability to act as an independent moral force in society' (Hackett, 2014, p. 637).

The initial concerns animating investigations of academic capitalism have been the growth in '[s]cientists' alienation, dissatisfaction with research, and eroding conditions of employment' (Hackett, 2014, p. 635). One way of looking at how capital re-shapes academia while keeping the aforementioned concern in the epicentre is by focusing on how the expectations underpinning academic work are being transformed. It is now far from sufficient to be committed and competent in a discipline, intellectually engaged with a research theme, and to enjoy teaching. There is an ideal of excellence manifested through the metricisa-

tion of academic work. There are also numerous other up-to-date accounts looking at the transformation of the university in contemporary conditions capitalism (see e.g., Flemming, 2021; Smyth, 2017).

(3) Perhaps more problematically, as a sociologist of time, I see a conceptual conflation in the following: what slow promoters ask for is probably not slowness *per se* but duration, sometimes long duration, which does not mean slowness nor slowdown, as one of the long-lasting scientific experiments testifies. It is being undertaken at Michigan State University by a group of biologists led by Richard Lenski. Lenski and his team are experimentally tracing genetic changes in twelve (initially) identical populations of the asexual bacterial *Escherichia Coli*. The team began its experiment on 24 February 1988⁴ (and its theoretical roots reach back to 1966. My reckoning is that given scholarship takes time, academics are looking for similar temporal conditions that have allowed Lenski et al. to keep working on their research (of course, this would be discipline and research focus specific, but I use Lenski's example as an extreme exemplification to illustrate my point). In one of the most influential articles on slow scholarship, Mountz et al. said: 'Our politics foreground collective action and the contention that *good scholarship requires time* to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, organize, and resist the growing administrative and professional demands that disrupt these crucial processes of intellectual growth and personal freedom' (2015, p. 1236, emphasis added). Duration and slowdown are, however, two different things from a temporal perspective. This is not to say that some processes within academia should not be subject to a debate when it comes to tempo, rhythms, and slowdown, but I think that slow academia is simply undesirable, as the complexity of knowledge (re)production comprises numerous rhythms, both fast and slow (Vostal, 2019; see also Smith, 2015). Moreover, academic labour (research, teaching, service) usually combines various paces, tempos, and rhythms that are variously intertwined. Hence, the morally charged dichotomy that slow = good and fast = bad is not particularly convincing—either conceptually or empirically. It is therefore better to think about temporal autonomy as a fundamental assumption that needs to stand in the centre of the aforementioned hybrids situated on the threshold of movements requiring social change in academia, and of scientific discourse requiring conceptual objectifications.

(4) Slowdown and slowness are often not particularly desirable. The tendency of acceleration literature to treat agency as a cypher uniformly moulded by the forces of inexorable change mitigates against this by occluding the situational specificity that Wacjman (2015) so incisively demonstrated is necessary to understand the issues that are the concerns of acceleration literature. We need to talk about the concrete situations that people find themselves in as opposed to seeing acceleration as a mega-force to which individuals either adapt or fail to do so.⁵

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._coli_long-term_evolution_experiment

⁵ It should be stressed that acceleration theorists like Rosa (2013, 2014; also Rosa & Scheuerman, 2009) are far from alone in this tendency. We can see comparable examples in the 'juggernaut' propounded by Giddens (1990) in his theory of late modernity.

I also share Wajcman's Science and Technology Studies-grounded criticism of the tendency to assume that 'technologies are used in a uniform way overall and everything, revolutionizing work, leisure, education, family relationships and personal identities' (Wajcman, 2015, p. 21). The implicit antipathy towards science and technology found in much sociological work obscures the possibilities digital technology offers for 'control over time, enabling people to have not only more time but time of their choice' (Wajcman, 2015, p. 26). The point is not to offer an optimistic view of technology as a counterpoint to a prevailingly pessimistic view but rather to go beyond this dichotomy and see the latent potential for constraint and enablement within technology, as well as the situational specificity through which they operate.⁶

(5) Research in many discipline needs to be in sync with the world it investigates. Fast and slow again work together here in a dialectical interplay. To put it bluntly, one needs enough time for experiments, measurements, writing, reflections, etc., but, at the same time, to aim to publish insights and conclusions ASAP, as well to translate them into public policies, legal arrangements, regulations, and social and commercial innovations. The Covid-19 crisis illustrated this principle perfectly when the vaccine was developed incredibly quickly. Also, various rapid publications platforms following the model of arXiv.org offer very fast publication opportunities—not just publishing but getting to what has been published ASAP. Delfanti, in his important study of high-energy physicists, noted that

Preprints submitted to and accepted by arXiv are published every weekday at 8:00 p.m. EST, listed in order of submission; these number between one and three dozen each day. There are several tools that physicists use to tap into this daily flow. They can open the main website, arXiv.org, or use other technologies that provide the day's list of preprints every morning, such as RSS feed, an email alerting service, and a smartphone app called 'arXiv mobile'. Not surprisingly, the latter is especially used by younger physicists, such as advanced PhD students and postdocs, who might use it to browse the daily set of articles while on their morning commutes (2016, p. 638).

In other words, fast and slow do not stand in opposition but complement and interpenetrate one another. After all, I have not seen any initiatives promoting slow publication or slow refereeing. What matters is always what we want to slow down. Hence, undertaking relatively powerless exercises demanding slow academia, no matter how attractively the slow label might appear in a world where many processes are admittedly accelerating, has not proven to be a convincing vehicle for change, notwithstanding the community that has grown around it. Some research (or its phases) need to be conducted or realised very quickly. The volume of activities, expectations, and commitments related to the broader con-

⁶ See Haraway (1999) on embracing the positive features of technologies for progressive purposes.

dition of the majority of junior academic labour needs to be addressed. The most important factor, I think—rather than an abstract slowing down—is the reduction of publication output that goes hand in hand with how evaluation systems and thus funding schemes are configured. Of all the issues, this certainly needs to be addressed relatively quickly.

For responsively stagnant academia

I have heard and read many accounts on how academics suffer from chronic time pressures, are convulsively busy, and are passive victims of some more-or-less hidden temporal conspiracy of time-thieves and accelerating academic structures. I even wrote a book about this (Vostal, 2016). Over time, I realized that by drawing attention to accelerating academia, I was co-generating calls for slowdown and escalating the victimisation discourse and culture of excessive complaining. Mushrooming and often radically voiced critiques of academia—including my own—have had very little effect on academic culture, governance, management, and performance ideologies. Hence, I would like to take a different approach.

In a recent fascinating book by de Saille et al., they introduced a notion of ‘responsible stagnation’ as an economic model bypassing the dogma of endless capitalist growth. Importantly, they showed ‘that even in its purely economic definition, stagnation is not necessarily the outcome of [a] lack of innovation’ (De Saille et al., 2020, p. 12). Citing the European Commission, they stated that innovation should contain ‘ethics, better governance of technology, gender equality, open access to scientific information, science education and public engagement’ (EC, 2012, cited in De Saille, 2020, p. 8). They demonstrated that ‘innovation is something which occurs both within and outside market and stagnation – in a secular sense of *slowing down* – may in some case be desirable, even necessary, as it has been in the response to COVID-19’ (De Saille, 2020, p. 12, emphasis added).

I would like to apply this notion of innovation to the marketised academy, which clearly needs reform and should be the motor of these progressive changes, especially within its own realm. As a counter to slow academia, there is a need for a search for further alternatives. What de Saille et al. (2020) mentioned on the global economy holds similarly for academia: ‘Alternatives are clearly needed—not only to growth, but to the models, assumptions and discussions that limit our ability to challenge the doctrine that there is no other way to fulfil our needs and aspirations’ (2000, p. 4). The reason for this is that stagnation contains important temporal connotations—standstill, break, pause, stand-by, and stopover—that are worth addressing. When we look at the academic environment, we are both subjects to and co-shaped by our very activities and non-activities. I therefore argue for responsively stagnant academia as a form of temporal enclave that is both loosely connected and disconnected to its wider environments—especially when it comes to its temporal fabric and texture. I also ask whether two publishing-related complexes of practice—reflexivity and behaviour—might alter/challenge the temporal code of academia.

A fundamental distinction emerges when looking at academia from a temporal perspective: it is a unique social space oscillating between ever-more prevalent *Chronos* and diminishing *Kairos*, e.g., between strictly measured time and time marked by events. When we look at the past six or seven centuries (if not more), working in academia (and theological seminaries) has been organised around regular and more or less predictable rhythms of terms, semesters, lectures, and seminars of given time-length. There have been different temporal habits and norms in different higher education systems, but one thing they have in common is that they are fixed, mechanical, and repetitive—in the northern modernity of the past 200 years, they have been usually organised according to the Georgian Calendar and clock-time. One might say that the academic calendar and academic clocks co-shape the conduct of teaching and academic service, that academia has its own ‘opening hours.’

Scientific conduct is a different case. It is much more unruly and event-driven (e.g., certain biological processes/phenomena under investigation can hardly be temporally modified). Research has its own unique uneven rhythms, ebbs and flows, unknown unknowns, and unpredictabilities. Temporal unruliness contains various moments, lengths, and paces that are difficult to anticipate: slowing down, speeding-up, standstill, waiting, prolonging, extending, abruption, and stagnation. When it comes to the invention, search, and research many of us conduct, we have experienced eureka/aha-moments when everything under the micro/macroscopic clicks. In natural and technical sciences, various technological assemblages necessary for experiments might suddenly stop working and repair time plays the main role. Research conduct is very often accompanied by what I would call a productive waste of time and by indeterminate time for writing and rewriting. Thus, time in the academy oscillates between two basic modalities: it is driven by mechanical protocols grounded in mere functionality and repetition within precise temporal brackets, but is also highly unruly.

However, as we all know, the interplay between mechanical and unruly temporalities has been subject to neoliberal, economic, arithmetic, and one-dimensional rationality that currently dominates the organisation structures and cultures of academia. Dominant nodes in university governance are now the executives, finance committees, estates, sport facilities management, human resources, security, business development offices, and many more. There are two questions here. First, how is it that often leftist academics turned so smoothly into hardcore managers, and that academics allowed the takeover by ‘corporate menagerie’, as John Hutnyk (2020) called it? Second, and equally mysteriously, how come piles of critiques of contemporary academy are largely circulating in what I would call unconquerable hermeneutical circles? The ever-growing critiques of contemporary academia have very little effect on academic governance and underpinning ideologies that sustain them. Where is the often deployed and voiced critical tradition that reaches back to Weber (1946) and Veblen (1918), and more recently to Derrida (2002) and Readings (1996), as well as to campus novels, such as David Lodge’s famous trilogy? Latour (2004) might, after all, be right when he said that critique has run out of steam.

One of the most popular contemporary reactions that aims to reclaim a particular way of living that academia always entailed is a call for slowdown—slow academy, slow professor, slow scholarship, and slow science. In fact, the very idea of slow in academia has been discussed ever since the early 1990s (Garfield, 1990), and it is only in the past few years that it has gained popularity. It would be welcomed if some specific processes and activities in academia would slow down, but I have never been sure about slowdown as an overarching common denominator that should define the new and desired academy. Slow discourse offers a well-known critique in a new guise.

It seems that it offers a fancy notion of slowdown that originated in the now upper-middle class slow food movement that was co-opted from Italian Autonomists. I would therefore suggest a different strategy embedded in practices, activities, and behaviours associated with something all too common for all of us: how we publish (nobody has come up with the idea of slow publishing so far). I would like to propose that many temporal modalities—duration, delay, acceleration, and stagnation—result from a particular set of intended practices, activities, and behaviour.

I often see many books and articles unintentionally reinforce what they criticise, as they are published by publishers whose drive is to make money rather than an intellectual/scholarly contribution. There are exceptions to this rule (e.g., Open Humanities Press, Mattering Press), but if you think about how essential publishing houses and venues are for academic culture, this issue cannot be treated independently from the broader socioeconomic structures of capitalism mediating academic practices. If someone publishes a highly critical book about the academy condemning (often rightfully so) almost every single aspect of contemporary academia, and the price of this book is GBP160, there is something awkward going off. I am also guilty of this, as my book *Accelerating Academia: The Changing Structure of Academic Time* now costs over USD100 in paperback. I hope we still have the capacity to reflexively learn from mistakes. Debatably, how we publish is possibly the first step leading to a responsively stagnant academy. This would surely require the renegotiation of requirements requested by funders and evaluation systems. Let us not forget that funders are more often than not bodies populated by academics, and that evaluations systems are calibrated by academics.

Moreover, the pace of global academic publishing output is unprecedented, rising annually by almost 10 percent. Evaluation systems and commitments to funders often force us to publish texts that nobody or hardly anybody will read. In 2015, my colleague and I published an essay in which we developed this argument. Some kind of functional fix is probably needed akin to Duchamp's *Ready-mades*, Le Corbusier's *Purism*, and the Bauhaus School's engagement with *New Objectivity*. These iconic eclectic figures/movements of the 20th century decided in certain stages of their existence that they would not come up with anything radically new or original—they modified, combined, composed, assembled, 'melanged' already existing artifacts or resources. They did not produce anything highly innovative but fixed what was functional, which, according to de Saille

(2015), could be interpreted as innovative in its own right. That was their unprecedented and, one might say, innovative artistic contribution. Translating this to the contemporary academy, we probably need more commentaries, rejoinders, debates, interviews, and synthetic books. I am not calling for the anti-progressive erasure of discovery and search for explanation but call for its reduction. This is the second step possibly leading to a responsively stagnant academy.

However, where is the responsibility in stagnant academia? It must be at forefront of the ongoing sociobiological, geoeconomic, and technoscientific challenges of the present. It must offer new utopias, different economic post-capitalist models, what 'good life' means, and ways to enact and legislate these ideas. I am not saying that this is not happening, but it is often lost somewhere in the cacophony of current academic over-production. Setting the academy into a responsive stagnant temporal regime is what we might call responsible.

Numerous instances of toxicity in the contemporary academy have their origins within academia, ranging from audits, KPIs, balance sheets, targets, and rankings to particular mindsets and ideological drives, along with the construction of a charged future sustained by mainstream economics and business schools. Academia has undoubtedly become the trendsetter with respect to the accumulation strategies of contemporary capitalism—strategies that first appeared in the corridors of universities. There are countless examples of this: Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp (Uber), Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, Nathan Blecharczyk (Airbnb). They all developed business models that have become paradigm-shifters while enrolled at universities. If such figures managed to transform once-wild, crazy, and geek ideas that were skilfully taming the available technological instrumentarium into multi-billion global capitalist enterprises, why are non-commercial and non-market-driven progressive ideas about the university (and social ordering) moving primarily into dissent or are, at least, very slowly implemented? Responsible stagnation might be a good candidate for such innovation.

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