

## **Restorative, Heterotopic Spacing for Campus Sustainability**

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**Contact details: Associate Professor David R Jones, Dept of Leadership, Strategy and Organisations, Bournemouth University**

**Email: [drjones@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:drjones@bournemouth.ac.uk) Tel No. (0)12022-961702**

### **Abstract**

This paper proposes an alternative spatial form for a university campus, which embeds itself within the region, in which it is located. The proposed campus spacing is inspired by recent research from the environmental psychology discipline, around Attention Restorative Theory (ART), along with its central four principles. Furthermore, the paper explores how a critical interpretation of Foucault's six heterotopic principles, following Harvey, maps onto ART principles and reflexively unmasks the dialectic tensions of what is termed 'restorative, heterotopic spacing'. In order to focus on the potential implications to campus sustainability, a specific campus initiative called the Oberlin Project will be critically explored, in relation to the potential enactment of ART, from an academic and local community perspective. It reflects on the significance of an artistic, regional set of trans-disciplinary integrated initiatives for such restorative spacing, within the expanded urban and regional notion of Oberlin campus. However, it concludes by expressing a concern over the extent to which the generative embrace of diverse Oberlin actors, both on and off campus, is being fulfilled.

Key Words: Sustainability, university, heterotopia, Attention Restorative Theory, space.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper focuses on alternative, contested geographies, within university campuses and their localities, in the context of ecological sustainability. It draws on the field of environmental psychology for inspiration in spatializing such alternatives. As Tucker (2010, page 526) argues, 'theorising psychological activity as a spatial product appears a logical extension of moves in social theory to emphasize the role of space and place in the consideration of experience.' The focus here is around spatializing the increasingly influential theory from environmental psychology, Attention Restorative Theory (ART) (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

The paper aims to contribute to three areas of human geography research through the integration of psychology theory. Drawing from Hopkins (2011), the first human geography research area tends to focus on how university campuses are sites of activism and resistance. For example, M'Gonigle and Starke's (2006) study, published in this journal, is a particular inspiration, as it explores campus-based activist activity around sustainability. The second research area tends to focus on the relationships between university campuses and the local region and city. The third research area explores how the internal places, structures and processes are experienced in empowering or exclusionary ways.

As Hopkins (2011) points out, there needs to be a greater focus on integrating these different areas of research. More specifically, this paper contributes to how new potential geographies of social and spatial relations within higher education institutions could contest the way university campuses are constructed, managed and experienced, in relation to sustainability (Philo and Parr 2000). Many university and college actors, such as academic faculty, students, and local community groups, are struggling to contribute meaningfully to sustainability, in the institutional context of league table demands. More specifically, many academic actors are feeling cynical, powerless, and mistrustful of the ecological sustainability agenda of their universities.

In light of the above institutional pressures, this paper poses the question of how university actors could contribute more and gain a more involved relationship to the campus sustainability discourse. Could an alternative university campus space offer a way to rupture the usual horizons of time and space within universities? Searching for clues, this paper is inspired by Beyes & Michels (2011), and asks the question

of how universities can enact 'other spaces', which open up to positive emancipatory power, where surprising things may happen, rather than closed down for negative control. It also follows Davies (2006), who reminds us that university actors can dissent from normalizing categories and spaces to subvert and disrupt the institutional status quo.

How can we conceptualize and enact these 'other' spaces, both on campus and within the city and region where they are located? This paper is inspired by ART to conceptualize a campus 'other' space, embodying its de-familiarizing narrative. Initial research around ART was based on the significance of underlying spatial attributes shared by specific natural environment– person interactions, in which an individual's involuntary non-directed attention is effortlessly engaged, without mental fatigue, in order to restore an individual's directed attention (Herzog et al., 1997). In contrast to the directed attention demanded by the institutional, immediate tick-box demands of sustainability league tables, could ART's focus on in-directed attention open up possibilities for contestation. Furthermore, could ART also provide a bio-cultural pathway to affect institutional change? Further emergent research around person - natural environment interactions, exhibiting ART factors or attributes, show how they have not only restored directed attention but also have reduced stress, have improved physical and emotional well-being, have fostered reflection and have increased pro-environmental behaviour (Hartig et al., 2007). Could the realisation of ART's multiple psychological, reflective impact and its potential behavioural agency offer a conceptual basis for restoring our diverse bio-cultural relationship with campus sustainability agendas? As Ouellette et al. (2005) argues, there appears to be a paucity of research around the conceptualization, enactment and benefits of restorative university settings. The paper's contextual focus on universities follows other ART research around museums, favourite places and monasteries (Kaplan et al, 1993; Korpela et al, 2001; Oullette et al, 2005), in fostering a critical, bio-cultural engagement.

The main aim of the paper is to spatialize the above ART conceptual lens by mapping the restorative principles of ART, with a dynamic and critical interpretation of Foucault's (1984) heterotopic spatial principles i.e. the notion of 'restorative, heterotopic spacing' implied in this paper's title. The latter focus on the processual and critical notion of a heterotopia offers an emancipatory mechanism to explore any emergent tensions over time and space between what is planned and what is enacted.

## **2. Conceptual & Methodological Structure: Mapping ART/Heterotopic Spacing within the Oberlin Project**

The core of the paper will specifically endeavour to explore the role of ART's four principles or attributes (elaborated within later sections) within the socio-spatial enactment of such potential restorative settings, around university campuses and their locality (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989):

- 1) Being-Away;
- 2) Fascination;
- 3) Extent;
- 4) Compatibility.

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 (such as the significance of different physical or conceptual settings to restore directed attention), how the principles may be expressed in socio-spatial form is not elaborated, particularly with respect to a university context. Therefore, the following endeavours to gain a social-spatial understanding of restorative university spaces, through connecting the different ART principles with Foucault's (1984) notion of different forms of heterotopias and their constituent heterotopic principles. Such heterotopic principles are used here as they represent, (similar to ART) a means to point to different, other spaces that reflexively contest the space we live in, whilst providing a context for action (Steyaert, 2006). They also both possess the disconnecting and connecting spatial quality, which could be complementary. These six heterotopic principles (also elaborated in the following sections) are as follows:

- 1) heterotopias have systems of opening and closing;

- 2) heterotopias function in relation to all remaining space;
- 3) heterotopias are linked to 'slices of time';
- 4) several spaces may be juxtaposed in a single heterotopia;
- 5) the function of a heterotopia may change over time;
- 6) heterotopias may be either based on crises or deviance.

It is pertinent to point out that Harvey (2009) is particularly critical of Foucault's notion of a heterotopia, compared to Lefebvre's (2005) perspective. He argues that the former is an escapist, fairy-tale like fetish, with an emphasis on the separateness of 'other spaces', in which non-normative practices can emerge, which are somehow outside the dominant social order. He moves on to assert that it is no accident that Foucault singles out the seafaring 'ship' as the 'heterotopia par excellence', since in highlighting 'pirates' and 'adventure', Foucault reveals this fairy-tale like separateness of a heterotopia (Harvey, 2009 page 160). Alternatively, Harvey (2009) reveals that we must embrace Lefebvre's more dynamic version of a heterotopia, which focuses on a dialectical tension in the interplay between the heterotopia's space of desire and the restless colonization of the dominant order. The usefulness of a heterotopia does not rely on 'segregation and separation, but about potentially transformative relations with all other spaces' (Harvey, 2009 page 162). The emancipatory potential of a heterotopia lies in avoiding being entirely reclaimed by the dominant praxis and altering that dominant praxis in some progressive way.

Both spatial properties of contestation and agency around Lefebvre's dynamic notion of heterotopia could prove pertinent here. Such a notion could act as an ontological check to Foucault's conceptual frame, considering the dominant institutional pressures on universities to focus their attention on rising up compartmentalized sustainability league tables, rather than acting as bio-cultural societal change agents (Cortese, 2003). In this context, the paper follows the notion that a university is viewed as offering generative, process-based, heterotopic 'other' spaces (Saldanha, 2008). Moreover, as Beyes and Steyaert (2012, page 53) argue, being attentive to the open-ended and processual notion of 'spacing', rather than 'space', directs attention towards embodied affects and encounters generated in the here-and-now. Such heterotopic spacing highlights neglected spatialities and invents new ones (Amin & Thrift 2002, page 4). Therefore, the notion of 'spacing' offers such an agency, compared to the use of 'space'. It puts space back into the hands of the different actors and reminds us that ultimately someone's conceived fairy-tale can be someone else's living nightmare. As Saldanha (2008, page 2091) reminds us, the Derridean question remains: alternate to whom? This would then align with the argument that no space is free of some internal discordance and conflict.

Focusing on inventing and naming neglected spatialities, the paper develops a heuristic conceptual framework around what could be termed restorative, heterotopic spacing. It does this by mapping the above six heterotopic principles based on their congruency with the four overarching ART principles. In order to take account of Lefebvre's dialectic tension perspective on heterotopias, the paper will highlight any possible tensions between different actors, emerging from the potential enactment of each ART principle. Put in another way, this heuristic could be used to critically understand how the potential of new forms of campus sustainability activities are not only conceived but also received by different actors, in both contesting and potentially changing institutional campus sustainability agendas. This reminds us of the difference between what Lefebvre (1991) aptly calls conceived space and lived space. Whereas conceived space refers to conceptually constructed space, finding its expression in plans, images and models as well as in physical manifestations, lived space refers to the non-specialist production of space by bodily enactment, arising from users making symbolic use of objects.

But how can these alternative campus spacing activities be identified? Reacting to the polarisation of space and place, could Braun's (2001) notion of extending the notion of campus by experiencing it as an event or project space prove pertinent here? This research suggests that the history of place erupts in the present, suggesting that we reconceptualise 'place' as an event that happens. The distinctiveness of a physical setting is not essentially of that place, but is constituted elsewhere.

Translating Braun's (2001) research to this paper, this notion of restorative, heterotopic spacing could mean enacting campus place where it is historically not enacted, which does not consign the essence of particular places to an ever-receding, nostalgic past. This could effectively extend campus spacing to

include the town/city/region but also actors beyond local place boundaries, dependent upon the enactment of the overarching spatial principles. This reminds us of M'Gonigle and Starke's (2006) research around sustainability activism on campus, where they assert that the unique potential for innovation exists specifically in the local – non-local intersection, where the university begins to take its place-based boundedness and global relationality seriously. M'Gonigle and Starke (2006 page 340) reiterate that the promise lies in creating a new form of place-based 'community', where one does not presently exist. It is rooted in one place but linked to other places, with its wider influence manifest as activities which 'construct place as a project'.

One such illustrative example of a new spatial sustainability campus event or project space is the aptly named 'Oberlin Project', in Ohio, U.S.A.. The Oberlin Project was initiated in the summer of 2009 by one senior academic, David Orr, with an alternative regional vision for Oberlin College. This vision is to create a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum neighbourhood, including Oberlin town and its surrounding area, encompassing a 13-acre piece of land the college owns in downtown Oberlin. Orr (2011) describes its aim as to revitalize the local economy, eliminate carbon emissions, restore local agriculture and forestry, and use the entire effort as an educational laboratory relevant to multiple disciplines. In terms of institutional support, in 2010, the President of Oberlin College became a lead partner with the College signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Clinton Foundation Climate Positive Development Program (CPDP) to attain climate neutrality by 2025. More recently, Daneri et al. (2015) point out, key actors represent not only the four full-time members of staff in the project office but Orr's students themselves, who are driving a range of sustainability projects on and off campus.

Whilst focusing on the heterotopic vision of the Oberlin Project's founder, this paper also reflects here on how such a potential conceived space is being received and produced by different actors, particularly Orr's environmental studies students and the wider local community. As Daneri et al. (2015) highlights the Oberlin Project is currently encountering numerous challenges around inclusion. By doing this, the paper responds to a heterotopic critique by Saldanha (2008, page 2091) who warns against 'simply picking out spaces and labelling them "heterotopic"', thereby ignoring the heterogeneity of power struggles and differences between different actors. The key point here is to find out where, how, and for whom difference erupts and maintains itself. In the context of sustainability, the local community is particularly significant to focus upon here as 19.4% of Oberlin's citizens are at or below the poverty line, compared to 9% for Lorain County, 10.6% for Ohio, and 12.4% for the U.S. as whole.

In order to gain an appreciation of different actors' views this paper specifically draws on any significant findings from Goldstein (2011), Johnson (2015), Daneri et al. (2015) and a specific report on local community perspectives (Management Assistance for Non-profit Agencies (MANA), 2013). Although the contribution here is more conceptual than empirical, this reflection around secondary research findings on the wider impact of the Oberlin Project is crucial to the paper's heuristic development. It is also recognised that this approach purely offers some indicative empirical research directions to explore around the on-going impact of the Oberlin Project.

The following sections will thereby endeavour to cover three themes. The first theme will explore the relationship between each ART principle and Foucault's (1984) heterotopic principles. The second theme will then explore the extent to which the different conceived elements of the Oberlin Project's match each principle. Finally, the third theme will explore how this space is being received by the students and local community, to ascertain the extent to which the different principles are enacted.

### **3. Enacting Attention Restorative Theory within a Higher Educational Context?**

*3.1 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).

In the context of enacting the principle of Being-Away, the emerging question becomes how could actors in and around universities find sufficient psychological distance to reflect on, contest and make changes to the aforementioned institutional sustainability agenda? In this context, the purpose of enacting the Being-Away

principle could be construed as not to purely temporarily escape, but also to challenge this emergent trend. In order to enact such a heuristic notion, it is argued here that Foucault's (1984) heterotopia could prove appropriate. The term heterotopia originally comes from anatomy, where it is used to refer to parts of the body that are out of place, missing, extra, or like a tumour, alien. Recalling Steyaert (2006) who highlights the dual role of a heterotopia, as offering a reflective space that potentially contests the space we live in, whilst also providing a context for action. As Foucault (1997, page 265) points out, heterotopias 'have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect'. He moves on, 'it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy' (Foucault, 1997, page 266). This potential contested relationship with instrumentalism within universities, reminds us of one of Foucault's heterotopic principles, which points at a system of opening and closing that both isolates heterotopias and makes them accessible in a special way. In other words, the notion of a heterotopia is both disconnecting and also connecting, in a contesting sense, towards the dominant institutional agenda. Heterotopias become such via their relation to other places.

For example, Foucault (1984) argues that a heterotopia of illusion is where space and time could be collaged at will (in museum period rooms or on stage) and codes of behaviour could change very rapidly. A heterotopia of illusion creates a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory. This assists in the conceptualization of the bio-cultural restorative heterotopia, as such a space clearly falls within the heterotopia of illusion, as it endeavours to expose what Bateson (1967, page 10) refers to as 'our absorbed societal beliefs and constructs which foster our illusions of supremacy, dominance, separation from the "natural" world and immunity from the consequences of our eco-systemic ignorance'.

The relationship between Being-Away and a heterotopia of illusion, is the emphasis not only onbeing physically disconnected, but it points towards a space which psychologically disconnects, with a reflexive agency quality, which critically exposes and contests. The following sub-sections will endeavour to illustrate this quality by initially identifying a pertinent conceived Being-Away space for the Oberlin Project and then reflect on its enacted potential by focusing on local community views.

### 3.11 Implications of 'Being-Away' to the Oberlin Project's Conceived Space

Is the Oberlin Project offering a potentially reflective, disconnecting space to more fully contest and then critically connect with and challenge the dominant institutional campus sustainability agenda? In terms of the former contesting function, Orr (2014) describes what could be construed as the 'Being- Away', disconnecting heterotopic quality of this campus conceived space, when he represents the intent of the Oberlin Project as 'a jailbreak from the conventional silos, boundaries, pigeonholes, disciplines, and bureaucracies by which we have organized governments, economies, education, social movements, and entire worldviews'.

For Oberlin, 'Being-Away' points towards a form of trans-disciplinary space, operating within a geographical and social extension to the campus, embracing the wider local, urban community. Orr reflects on the importance of extending the university definition to the population of Oberlin, within an interview by Carlson (2011), 'Imagine taking the whole population and making that the schoolhouse. Why not get a holistic education in Oberlin, with people learning from teachers at the vocational school, the tradesmen with businesses here, the avid gardener, or the retired seamstress who lives down the street?'

In other words, partnerships with the municipality, private enterprises, investors and local citizens could be seen as an opportunity to disconnect from the wider institutional sustainability agenda, with a view to then critically connect and change this agenda, based on the discourse and actions emerging from such partnerships. In terms of the potential for systemic change and challenge of the Oberlin Project, in an interview by Carlson (2011), Orr sees the Oberlin idea as a 'real-world experiment', one that could someday be copied by the larger cities, block by block. He reiterates the point that what will happen in Oberlin has to begin to happen everywhere.

However, reflecting on the principle of Being-Away, the question remains whether the whole range of Oberlin actors feel part of such a trans-disciplinary, conceived space? Therefore, the following

sub-section starts to explore the complexity of heterotopic thinking by exploring the emergent dialectical tensions of such a project, from different actor perspectives.

### 3.12 Implications of 'Being-Away' to the Oberlin Project's Campus Spacing

To what extent do the Oberlin local community perceive the Oberlin Project as inclusive? Clearly, Orr's environmental studies programme students are being given the opportunity to experience such a space, in their involvement with the local community. However, even for Orr's students, to what extent is their experience of this space truly trans-disciplinary? To what extent are they experiencing a 'Being-Away' psychological distance from their campus space by embracing alternative spacing suggestions from different actors, such as from across the local community?

Some indications that such a conceived trans-disciplinary space is experiencing some tensions, even with the student body, could be drawn from Johnson's (2015) recent research, which highlights how students are starting to recognise the weaknesses of such a college led initiative. As one respondent highlights, there is a need for the Oberlin Project to embrace, '...talking across...lines like I disagree with you but also talking across like departments; like public works needs to talk to utilities and sociology needs to talk to psychology... we've been in silos ...And now we have a really, really big complicated problem that's totally interconnected and we have to learn across those silos.'

Similarly, drawing from research about how the local community view the Oberlin Project, Goldstein (2011) points out that many of the community participants responded that information about the Project had not been spread adequately to the wider general public. Looking more specifically, Johnson (2015) highlights the most common concern about Oberlin's future is how the Oberlin College does not engage the southeast quadrant, representing the lower income, mainly African American part of Oberlin population. A faculty member went as far as to say, 'there is an unbelievable amount of hatred towards the college among certain sectors.' (Johnson, 2015, page 108). This perpetuates what most participants in Goldstein's (2011, page 122) research highlight as the existence of the tense town-gown relationship. The MANA report (2013, page 5) reflects on some of these town/gown resentments: 'students are wealthy relative to many local residents', 'Oberlin College doesn't spread the resources' and 'College runs everything'.

Although much of the Project's rhetoric centrally is around community engagement, this is still framed in quite a top-down, carbon-centred approach rather than to open up and involve the local community in the more systemic, *raison d'être* of the Oberlin Project. Carlson (2011) highlights that observers say one of the project's main risks is that it could be perceived as an effete, academic, environmental endeavour. As Tony Mealy, a local resident states, '...they are lecturing to us' (Carlson, 2011). As Johnson (2015) argues, could environmental action here be the privilege of those who could afford to be engaged. Orr recently reflected that such an initiative, no matter how well intentioned, had to integrate 'a background structure of laws and regulations that deters gentrification, because the environmental movement is increasingly trendy' (Donohue, 2015). Clearly, environmental issues could be seen as highly fundable and are indeed complementary to the branding of Oberlin College as socially progressive. It could be seen as supporting a financially elite set of students and donors. Seen through a wider lens, as an elitist liberal arts college, it leverages its class privileged background to attract funding by large individual donations and grant agencies (The Oberlin Project 2015). As of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Oberlin endowment funds totalled \$814.3 million (Oberlin, 2015). In July 2015, students demanded that Oberlin College actively expand its board membership to reflect the narratives of individuals it claims to represent such as transgender, queer, low income communities, and communities of colour (Trupin, 2015). Although Oberlin College publically strives to be inclusive, such demands remind us of the fact that 69.5% of the student population is white, approximately representing the local Oberlin population. Meanwhile, the African American student population of 5.5% is almost 3 times lower than the African American local community population, in Oberlin town itself (Oberlin College, 2015).

One participant's response from Goldstein's (2011, page 93) research summed up the feeling of participants, 'I would like to see balanced development, and by balanced I mean development that takes

into account the needs of the entire community. We have a downtown area that logically orients itself to the needs of the College. I would like to see....development that reaches across class.'

In summary, it would appear that the enactment of the principle of 'Being-Away' may not yet be realised, within the context of the Oberlin Project. Considering the lack of local community involvement in the design of the various parts of the Project, the level of trans-disciplinary spacing needs to be encouraged not only for the benefit of wider local community actors but also for Orr's students themselves. Within Johnson's (2015) research, it warns against a limited environmental definition of sustainability and recommends that more attention be given to issues conceived by the community. It thereby reflects heterotopic tensions between financial, environmental and social elements of sustainability discourse. It moves on to highlight that the Oberlin Project may need to put more time and effort towards projects that would benefit the people who are most economically marginalized, rather than pressing ahead with its funding and academic aspirations.

*3.2 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).

Apart from the multiple restorative benefits discussed in the introductory section, the above non-directed attention was originally shown to be critical to restoring us from the mental fatigue of our overused directed attention (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). This aesthetic attention varies 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, common in natural settings, permits an opportunity for attention restoration. Watching clouds, the motion of leaves, or the play of light are examples of soft fascination (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Research indicates that being in a natural setting, or viewing natural settings can effectively induce non-directed attention. 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 great deal of complexity or intensity. Both theories imply that restoration from stress or perceptual fatigue could be fostered by settings having stimuli, that are low in intensity and incongruity (Ulrich & Parsons, 1992). Welsch (1997, page 25) recognizes that 'our perception needs not only invigoration and stimulation, but delays, quiet areas and interruptions too'.

In order to enact a soft fascination aesthetic, this paper focuses on alternative heterotopic campus spacing, focusing on a particular 'aesthetic as [bio-cultural] connection', as described by Taylor and Hansen (2005). This concurs with the selective, low intensity, reductive palette of how a few aspects of nature are absorbing or fascinating to the eye. In other words, the focus on restoring the diverse cultural connection with the natural environment, represents identifying restorative, aesthetic spacing opportunities around cognitive slowness. This bio-cultural spacing around the primacy of embodied, tacit aesthetic/sensory knowledge offers fresh insight and awareness, enabling us to see in a new way (John, 2001).

This primary focus on the aesthetic/experiential, rather than the instrumental, within restorative spacing does not mean that the rationale, cognitive forms of knowing are neglected, but 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 as well (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).

The cognitive slowness reminds us of another of Foucault's heterotopic principles around special slices of time. Elaborating on this Foucault (1997, page 272) argues, 'heterotopias are as much special spaces as special slices of time, so-called heterochronies, times where people break radically with their traditional time, such as when you enter a cemetery, where time stands still, or when you enter a library or

museum that tries to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, an immobile place that is itself outside of time.

Therefore, the relationship between Soft Fascination and heterochronies here is explored through those enacted non-directed aesthetic spaces where time appears to stand still. The following sub-sections will endeavour to understand to what extent such spaces are conceived and enacted around the Oberlin Project.

### 3.21 Implications of 'Fascination' to the Oberlin Project's Conceived Space

In the context of the Oberlin Project, the campus ethos around the central importance of the Arts, within the built and social fabric of Oberlin College, corresponds mostly with the conceived enactment of the Fascination principle. Pertinently, Packer (2014) argues that the Arts, particularly the performing and fine arts, have the capacity to embody a cognitive and temporal slowness, through their potential aesthetic immersion. Packer and Bond (2010) highlight that the introspective, immersed experience is the best predictor of restorative outcomes. They argue for the use of visual art, poetry, and music as a means of stimulating reflection and this sense of Fascination. More systemically, as Finley (2008) argues, 'arts-based enquiry' ideally combined with a radical and even revolutionary politically-active social science responds well to pressing social and environmental problems.

An example of such conceived Fascination within the Oberlin Project is the central significance and expectation placed upon the construction of a 13-acre 'Green Arts Block', within Oberlin town centre. Reddell (2010) describes the Oberlin Project as a 'green arts district' which would catalyse a green redevelopment of the city and surrounding area as a whole. It will feature LEED certified buildings such as an arts museum, restoration and expansion of a performing arts centre, a black box theatre and a centre for ecological design (Orr, 2015). In terms of the cognitive slowness of the Oberlin Project, in an interview by Carlson (2011), Orr argues that universities such as Oberlin will need to become genuine anchor institutions, relying on a particular form of intellectual leadership for moving forward in an era that is going to be radically different. He argues that such leadership will move beyond our abstract, intellectual disciplines which often produce a paralysis of will because they do not link intellect to affect or to the ecologies of particular places (Orr, 1994).

Reflecting upon the importance of the inclusion of the arts within a wider aesthetic, emotional and cognitive engagement around sustainability, Orr in the interview by Carlson (2011) reflects on the Oberlin Project, where he envisions a 'fertile intersection' of the arts with the issues of sustainability: 'This would involve all the arts... to encourage a conversation about human survival and sustainability.' He moves on to argue this point: 'communicate the hard things, the uncomfortable things, about climate change and the lifestyle changes it demands, through music, painting and dance - and so reach the emotion, not just the intellect'. Orr admits, however, that it represents a challenging concept for his most pragmatic supporters, 'the sciences can tell you down to parts per billion what's wrong in the world and with the climate - but can give you no particular reason to want to survive. But humans are meaning-seeking creatures, and this project is also aimed at fostering the big conversation in a way that only the arts - and religion and philosophy, too - can really do.'

In summary, there appears to be much rhetoric around the importance of the Arts as a counter balance to the Sciences, in the Oberlin Project's conceived space, both in a physical and social sense. We now move onto to focus more on any tensions associated with the enactment of this conceived Fascination for different Oberlin actors.

### 3.22 Implications of 'Fascination' to the Oberlin Project's Campus Spacing

To what extent are any tensions surfacing within the Oberlin Project? Despite Orr's pedagogical vision of involving virtually all disciplines in experiential education for sustainability (Daneri et al, 2015), many disciplines and faculty in Oberlin College have yet to become involved in the Oberlin Project. At present, the majority of student engagement occurs through the specific aforementioned undergraduate

environmental studies programme, outside of which many faculty do not identify with the project or see relevance to their discipline and teaching.

Consequently, there has been a predominance of cognitive, information based technical solutions, based upon environmental criteria, rather than focusing on the participative design process for the Oberlin Project. For example, a possible illustrative initiative is the 'Bioregional Dashboard' which has been solely designed by a group of Oberlin environmental studies students, faculty and graduates evaluating various approaches to delivering real-time feedback as a mechanism for breaking down the bio-cultural disconnection of many of Oberlin's wider set of actors (Orr, 2011). Orr (2014) highlights his environmental, technological and cognitive orientation here, when he points out that they have been investigating what happens when people are made immediately aware of the resource flows necessary to support their activity in the built environment, and how the use of visual displays of resource usage might ultimately change behaviour and promote conservation.

However, Orr (2014) does move on to assert that initiatives such as the Bioregional Dashboard will only be successful if they create models of both thought and action that inspire others. Similarly, a respondent from Johnson's (2015) recent research on the Oberlin Project reflects that technology cannot solve their problems in and of itself. It must be used in conjunction with a learning community willing to engage with the physical and social aspects of the technology, to produce an outcome like carbon neutrality. Indeed Orr does recognise that this will require collaboration among several disciplines, including the Arts, in order to enact the Fascination principle reflected upon here. The drawback of initiatives, such as the Bioregional Dashboard, is that they do not aesthetically and emotionally engage the attention of different actors, such as from the wider local community. As a student from Johnson's (2015, page 108) research remarks, 'I mean I think that this engagement issue is also really big, that there's a desire to engage people but not an understanding of how to engage people....' Therefore, there has been a lack of aesthetic input into the design stage of the project by many different parts of the local community. The result is the blind hope of a change in behaviour by the Oberlin Project's protagonists rather than to truly endeavour to aesthetically engage and understand the different actors' behaviour and potential. In fact, rather than enacting the principle of 'Fascination' within the local community, many of the participants are sceptical, wary and even apathetic. As the MANA report (2013) points out, considering the broad perception that, for many Oberlinians, the College's Green Arts District plan is the centrepiece of the Oberlin Project, the report authors were surprised that the subject attracted relatively few comments from the local community. For the development of the Green Arts District, this paper thereby concurs with Daneri et al. (2015), who advocate much earlier involvement of the artistic community, including both faculty and local community in the design process of the Green Arts District and the respective architecture and technologies which underpin its development.

Could greater input by the arts offer such a participatory approach which not only encourage ongoing and consistent listening and dialogue but also offer the aesthetic and emotional space and time required to even engage the historically disenfranchised.

*3.3 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).

ART Researchers have begun to focus their attention on people in their everyday contexts, such as in the residential and workplace setting, where they could ordinarily and regularly find possibilities for restoration over an extended period (Kaplan, 2001). This research highlights that an endless stream of stimuli both fascinating and different from the usual would not qualify as a restorative setting for two reasons. First, lacking extent, it does not qualify as a restorative, but merely an unrelated collection of impressions. And second, 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 et al, 2001).

In order to enact the 'Extent' principle, Foucault's (1984) notion of heterotopia is revisited again, through exploring one more of his six heterotopic principles. Conceptualising the 'other world' connected scope aspect of 'Extent', Foucault (1984, page 272) argues, a heterotopia 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'. With respect to this paper, restorative campus spacing would connect strategically through space and time and thereby offer the cumulative potential for challenge at the organizational, sectoral, regional and national levels. The principle of 'Extent' thereby relates to how heterotopic spaces connect, not only to other heterotopic spaces but to how they critically connect, in terms of contesting and then challenging the dominant institutional campus sustainability agenda. Foucault (1984, page 272), through another of his principles, argues that heterotopias, 'have a function in relation to all the space that remains.' Therefore, it conforms to John's (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.

The significant point here is that, following the principle of 'Extent', the adoption of connected and integrated restorative spacing across campus and/or local community projects (significant for urban universities) could be a way of developing more critically engaged actors, towards institutional sustainability agendas. Through such increasingly connected spacing activities, could the more instrumental sustainability agendas, potentially become relatively less significant to overall campus sustainability? As different university actors prioritize diverse bio-cultural responses as an alternative form of spacing, could a restorative, heterotopic agency emerge as central to campus sustainability?

In summary, it is proposed here that the principle of Extent, with its emphasis on the scope and connectedness of campus spacing, can be spatially enacted here through Foucault's principles focusing on spatial multiplicity (aligning with scope) and relationality (aligning with connectedness) respectively. What Foucault's principles add here is that it reminds us that restorative campus spacing moves away from the individual towards embracing the campus as a wider set of social, cultural and political actors, along with the tensions between them.

### 3.31 Implications of 'Extent' to the Oberlin Project's Conceived Space

On face value, the Oberlin Project's vision appears to embody the Extent principle, not only in terms of coherence but in scope as well. Orr (2014) describes the Oberlin Project as 'an attempt to "connect the dots" between the various parts of sustainability and thereby give form and operational vitality to the word "systems" in the public realm, and to extend the time horizon by which we judge our successes and failures and our profits and losses.'

In terms of coherence, Orr (2011) warns against reactionary, disjointed, one-off, overly expensive, ad-hoc responses to sustainability and argues for envisioning and creating an integrated system in which the parts reinforce the resilience and prosperity of the entire region. Orr (2014) explains that the Oberlin Project's intention is that each of the parts reinforces the prosperity, resilience, and health of the larger community. He remarks, 'we propose, in other words, to give practical meaning to the idea of systems in the day-to-day affairs of the City, the College, and the local economy.' It aims to replicate the project at varying scales and in different regions through a national network of diverse communities and organizations (e.g. the National Sustainable Communities Coalition) with similar goals. He stresses the success of the Oberlin Project is dependent upon how it engages with the other towns in the region and beyond. As he highlights, '...like salt in stew, we are small by volume but we can and often do change the flavour of issues beyond our borders' (Orr, 2014).

In summary, there appears to be a systemic understanding of the potential impact of the Oberlin Project at different local, regional and national levels. However, the next section will explore how this intention to leverage systemic impact has been received by different actors, particularly the local community.

### 3.32 Implications of 'Extent' to the Oberlin Project's Campus Spacing

Unfortunately, the wider scope and coherence of the Oberlin Project has been limited to date, due to the primacy placed upon Orr's environment studies students in implementing his vision. This has in turn created a lack of involvement both internally (across faculty) and externally in terms of the emergent strategic direction for the Oberlin project. There has been a top-down focus on students 'engaging' other actors, with a core environment remit, rather than developing a trans-disciplinary, 2-way process of wider involvement. A local community example illustrating this point, is a recurring 'Community Voices' exercise, where students specifically interview community members, but these are specifically selected to focus on pro-environmental thought and behaviour. Quotes are extracted and paired with photographs, then broadcast on the aforementioned digital bio-regional dashboards or monitors around town, including all public schools (Daneri et al., 2015).

The lack of connectedness of the Project to the local community's wider concerns was emphasized by several local community members in the research by Goldstein (2011, page 105) when she pointed out that, '...the Project is going to get too out in front of the community....to feel a part of it.... it's purely telling them what they are doing. What needs to happen is full inclusion...allowing the Project to be informed and rethought by what the community thinks, but that is not happening to the best of my knowledge.' As the goals of the Project are largely predetermined and appear in the Project's foundational document, there is currently little opportunity for citizens to engage in the design and visioning process. The MANA report (2013, page 4) similarly highlights the way in which the local community wished to change the goal of 'economic development that spreads benefits throughout the community', towards being 'interested in ways different entities in the community can create their own ideas/choices and manage their own futures using their strengths.'

Could the Oberlin Project start to develop an embedded connectedness between its local community actors and initiatives to be able to realize its wider institutional change vision? The enactment of the principle of Extent also concurs with one of the key recommendations of the MANA report (2013, page 6), around the need for a broader representation of Oberlin, including the surrounding towns, such as Elyria and Lorain.

In summary, the enactment of the principle of Extent here appears to need greater involvement and connection to local community actors, within the wider institutional engagement of the Oberlin Project.

*3.4 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).

Concurring with Lefebvre's (2005) heterotopic critique, the subjective aspect of 'Compatibility' is key to the definition of the other principles, as it describes them as 'properties of a person-environment interaction, rather than of an environment per se' (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, page 482). 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. In other words, the extent to which an experience has meaning for the individual concerned is the central focus here. A compatible campus, conceived space here is related to openness to academic agency, in its multiple social forms. As Massey (2005, page 9) argues, 'without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space'. Implicit within the conceived restorative space, according to the compatible principle, there is room for the un-programmable. In Lefebvrian terms, these are 'conceived voids' or embedded redundancy that enables different interpretations and uses, where temporary loci of passion and lived situations emerge. Therefore, drawing on the compatibility definition, the quality of a setting can be judged by its generative 'potential for folding, that is not contained within any frame or grid ... What is thus implicit in a space, which it cannot frame, may at any point or moment break out of it and cause it to be reframed' (Rajchman, 1998, page 19).

Foucault's (1984) notion of heterotopia is again revisited in relation to conceptualizing 'Compatibility', in the context of potential restorative campus spacing. He argues that no single culture fails to constitute a heterotopia and emphasizes the contingent nature of a heterotopia. This fits the socio-spatial notion of the university as an opportunity for restorative spacing, as it represents an opportunity for all universities to enact a heterotopia through different spatial forms, depending upon the institutional

context. Such a space recognizes that a restorative space in one university context may be inappropriate in another. The meaning of space varies with context. This leads to another heterotopic principle which states that the same heterotopia can function in different ways, as it is played out in different settings or societies (Foucault, 1984).

In the context of this paper, a university campus could act as a context for heterotopic, restorative experiences, but for different reasons depending upon the individual and collective subjectivity at a particular time, which can be viewed as the result of complex human–environment transactions. 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 et al., 2001), contingent upon the physical, cognitive, emotional qualities of this human–environment interaction within the restorative space at that time. In terms of the earlier discussion around ‘Being-Away’, restorative campus spacing can be enacted as varying from illusionary, crisis and deviant heterotopic experiences (representing the final heterotopic principle) depending upon the subjectivity of the actors involved. Such compatible spacing can be seen as surfacing what could be seen as the underlying ‘crisis’ of campus sustainability (fitting within Foucault’s notion of crisis in terms of crucial but not always evident transitions in life and the body) and with offering shelter and emotional, cognitive and aesthetic agency, whether temporary or permanent, to actors who then wish to ‘deviate’ from such mainstream university norms and relationships and potentially contribute to restoring a more diverse bio-cultural connection.

So what are the implications of the principle of ‘Compatibility’ within campus spacing? Could the compatible campus conceived space embrace the need for political, cognitive, emotional and aesthetic margins, redundancy or slack. Such margins could continually enable different and even opposite interpretations, uses and experiences (Koolhaas, 1995). As Lefebvre (1991, page 59) argues, ‘Change life!’ ‘Change society!’ Space can be viewed here as not only socially produced but socially producing as well. New social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa.

In summary, it is proposed here that the principle of Compatibility, with its emphasis on restorative experiences being contingent on the subjectivity of the individual, can be spatially and collectively enacted here through Foucault’s contingency and dynamic heterotopic principles. By enacting the latter principles, could universities embrace generative opportunities for collective spatial production and contestation. We now turn to the Oberlin Project one final time to explore the implications and extent to which such compatible, generative campus spacing is being embraced here.

#### 3.41 Implications of ‘Compatibility’ to the Oberlin Project’s Conceived Space

In terms of conceived Compatibility, Andy McDowell, a field director with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy who is helping Orr establish the greenbelt, reflects that he doesn’t mention climate neutrality or use the term ‘greenbelt’ when talking to conservative farmers outside Oberlin (Carlson, 2011). He emphasizes reflexivity to community concerns and argues for a focus on economic stability, growing the local economy, and food security. He reflects that the strategic narrative requires a reflexive turn when attempting to engage with different actors in order for the strategy to resonate once it gets beyond the academic bubble. Orr (2014) outlines the generative challenge of the Oberlin Project as, ‘having lunch with many different kinds of people and attending lots of meetings to bridge the chasms that divide us by issue-areas, race, class, and political affiliation’.

In an interview by Carlson (2011), Orr himself acknowledges the importance of developing a balance between the strategic intent of the academics and the reflexive, emergent knowledge of the non-academic as a core factor in the implementation of the Oberlin Project. Looking to the future, exploring the generative potential of the Oberlin Project, Orr (2011) reflects that the participation and support of the town, the college, the alumni, the students, the faculty, the regional political leadership, and every academic discipline will be crucial for its success. In particular, the central artistic focus of the Oberlin Project appears to offer an ambiguous, non-performative and generative quality. Most optimistically, Orr (2014) recently argues, ‘we intend to do our work within the next few years to make sustainability the default - and then get out of the way. That is to say that we, as a project, aim to be catalytic and to set processes in motion, rather than establishing ourselves as a permanent fixture.’ This latter quote sums up the conceived

Compatibility space and the tension between top-down enthusiasm for environmentally driven change and the recognition that such changes cannot be made without a social, cultural and political dialogue with all actors.

### 3.42 Implications of ‘Compatibility’ to the Oberlin Project’s Campus Spacing

Could the above catalytic role be seen as directing conversation rather than creating the context for a truly trans-disciplinary dialogue from the start? A faculty member within Johnson’s (2015, page 108) research, highlights this very point, ‘there’s a huge amount of economic diversity in this town and I sometimes worry that if the college is a catalyst for, is providing the catalyst or the impetus to get groups together, that you’re not reaching the groups that have been alienated by the college.’ He proposes that the issue is not so much about what the college does for the community, but how the community is included in that work. In Goldstein’s (2011) research study, participants were insistent that Oberlin Project planners should solicit the input of the wider citizenry specifically in relation to their needs. These participants believed that Oberlin Project planners should approach various specific groups and ask, ‘What can we do to help you be more sustainable in what you do?’ (Goldstein, 2011, page 98). According to one of these participants, ‘It’s about listening and responding to needs [and] addressing the root issues that people have in their lives’ (Goldstein, 2011, page 98). Likewise, within Johnson’s (2015, page 121) research, a student highlights the importance of listening: ‘I think for, especially for an institution, for a non-profit like the Oberlin Project, one of the most important skills is listening because resilience develops out of existing networks and structures and...so not just what [the] needs are but where people are moving right now and where their visions are right now.’

In the context of developing a generative redundancy underlying the Compatibility principle, one respondent in Goldstein’s research (2011) emphasized the necessity of leaders showing up to meetings, without an agenda to discuss. According to this participant, Oberlin Project leaders should hold a number of meetings in which the primary objective is to listen to the ideas and feedback of citizens in attendance, rather than spend the majority of meeting time informing and ‘engaging’ citizens of the Oberlin Project’s major carbon centred plans. Another participant felt that Oberlin Project leaders should, ‘be showing up without an agenda in place’ (Goldstein, 2011, page 106).

In summary, a conceived space which embraces non-performative redundancy appears to be a significant factor in providing the opportunity for generative campus spacing.

## 4. Conclusions

By taking a heterotopic spatial perspective and drawing from the emerging findings from environmental psychology, it is hoped that this paper contributes to a new way of viewing the challenge of campus sustainability. Moreover, the proposed restorative/heterotopic principles offer a way of critically reflecting on current sustainability initiatives within and beyond the university campus and pointing towards ways of enacting a more diverse bio-cultural connection.

This paper’s proposition is that rather than abandoning universities’ intent to rise up league tables, they could break free of the bio-cultural constraints of such a pursuit by actively and simultaneously being open to and engaging in generative restorative, heterotopic spacing. By offering a new heuristic, conceptual framework, it is hoped that experiments around campus initiatives, such as the Oberlin Project, can be seen as part of a more systemic, processual challenge which not only reflect and deconstruct but re-construct dominant campus sustainability agendas.

It is pertinent to note that whereas the principles of ‘Being-Away’ and ‘Fascination’ offer a ‘disconnected’ mirror, reflective, playful, non-instrumental space, this paper has not shied away from the question of how to then to foster a ‘connected’, embodied and generative set of bio-cultural integrated experiences with the principles of ‘Extent’ and ‘Compatibility’, to contest the institutional attraction of league table legitimacy. It is argued here that only through generative, integrated campus spacing, could the notion that such restorative spacing realistically contest and challenge the dominant campus sustainability institutional environment.

In terms of the central conceptual contribution around the combined notion of ‘restorative heterotopic spacing’, 4 ART principles were mapped onto the following 6 heterotopic principles:

1. Being-Away: heterotopias have systems of open and closing;
2. Fascination: heterotopias are linked to ‘slices of time’;
3. Extent: several spaces may be juxtaposed in a single heterotopia; heterotopias function in relation to all remaining space;
4. Compatibility: the function of a heterotopia may change over time, heterotopias may be either based on crises or deviance.

In order to understand how far we are away from such an imagined future, the restorative spacing conceptual frame has been used to critically explore the Oberlin Project’s campus initiative, which appears to embody the various ART/heterotopic principles. Whilst advocating an artistic, regional set of trans-disciplinary initiatives on the basis of embodying the ‘Being-Away’ and ‘Fascination’ ART principles, this critique also highlighted the significance of integrated, generative embrace of diverse Oberlin actors both on and off campus, with respect to embodying ‘Extent’ and ‘Compatibility’ ART principles. However, what seems to be emerging from the conceived aspects of the Oberlin Project are the social tensions of pushing ahead with implementation of the project by leading university actors, centrally around Orr and his loyal student alumni, at the same time as philosophically, emotionally and aesthetically engaging and reflexively responding to a diverse set of actors and their different forms of knowing. This paper has drawn out particular tensions, particularly with the poorer south eastern quadrant of the Oberlin local community and the way in which their voice has been under-represented within the Oberlin Project.

Conceptually, this paper adds value as it is the first time Harvey’s critique of Foucault’s notion of heterotopias has been used to draw out dialectic tensions within a campus sustainability context. Clearly, the Oberlin Project is a work in progress and thus it represents not only a planned and designed ‘other space’ but an emergent process of ‘other spacing’, with its on-going tensions between different actors.

Empirically, it remains to be seen whether the Oberlin Project effectively balances David Orr’s academic plan with the generative potential around wider regional engagement. This represents a justification for a longitudinal, ethnographic piece of empirical research to be adopted in future. This on-going research could also explore whether such an initiative has any significant institutional impact on the dominance of university sustainability league tables and rankings. Whilst the restorative, heterotopic spacing notion proposed here offers a conceptual frame to critically reflect on sustainability initiatives, such as the Oberlin Project, the above empirical research is crucial to understand its unfolding systemic impact. We could then test out M’Gonigle and Starke’s (2006 page 341) assertion that such campus spacing ‘is a one-place approach that seeks to create directly a comprehensive working precedent. A working precedent represents both the greatest threat to the status quo and the greatest opportunity for learning about what can be done.’

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