Creative Arts-Based Geographies:
Some Cautionary and Hopeful Reflections

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Abstract

This paper is a response to growing excitement about arts-engaged research in geography. More and more geographers are practicing participatory arts projects to co-investigate pressing issues with communities. However, there are a lack of reflexive discussions about the limits of this work within the confines of the neoliberal and colonial university pressuring researchers to produce 4-star work that makes an impact, or measurable change. Here I add criticality to our understanding of the pitfalls and potential of arts-based analyses. I reflect on interviews with women, queer, non-binary and trans artists who I met during my time as a post-doctoral researcher in Glasgow. I also offer an auto-ethnographical account of my attempts to practice research exchanges with artist and activist Ailie Rutherford and the Peoples Bank of Govanhill (PBoG)'s Swap Market, a collective that co-researchers and collaboratively practices alternative economies in Glasgow's South Side Govanhill neighbourhood. Moreover, I critically reflect on my experiences attending professional development workshops that were a mandatory part of my research fellowship. As I recount these experiences, I speak back to neoliberal and colonial university enclosures reinforcing heteropatriarchal and white supremacist understandings of knowledge production. Inspired by queer feminist performance theorist and artists, I also show how arts-based research points to strategies for unsettling neoliberal and colonial university enclosures.

Keywords: Feminist geographies, queer geographies, arts interventions, neoliberal policies, diverse economies, arts activism

Introduction

I am a university researcher, teacher, and amateur performance artist currently working in the unceded and occupied territory of the Secwépemc people, a territory colonially known as Kamloops, British Columbia. With performance interventions, I investigate the implications of neoliberal urban policies. I also strive to foster anti-capitalist and collectivist alternatives to extractive and competitive scholarly research. Over the years, I have engaged in participatory arts-based research with Do-It-Yourself cabarets and performance collectives to interrogate the impacts of entrepreneurial creative city policies designed to make over cities for investment. I have also co-produced creative research projects with artists and arts organisations that have drawn attention to the connections between the policing of urban space, historic and ongoing settler colonialism, and gentrification.

While I practice this work as a cis-gendered, able bodied white woman settler, I am also committed to anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-oppressive, and radically inclusive arts-activism and scholarship. I strive to make the world a better place and I realize that this work is a struggle and that failing, learning, and failing again is an ongoing and uncomfortable process to dismantle deeply rooted oppressions (Kobayashi et al. 2014; de Leeuw 2017a).

This paper is a response to the excitement about arts-engaged research in geography. A growing number of geographers are engaging in participatory arts practices to co-investigate pressing issues with communities. However, it seems that few geographers are having challenging, humble, and reflexive discussions about the contradictory politics of this work within the confines of the neoliberal and colonial university pressuring researchers to produce world leading 4-star work that makes an impact, or measurable change. Here I show how pressures to professionalize our arts-based research "outputs" distorts and degrades creative and experimental research. To do this, I wrestle with enthusiastic understandings of participatory arts-based research and the contradictions of these practices within the corporatized, metric-oriented, hetero-patriarchal, white supremacist, and colonial university sector. As someone who values arts-based research, I feel that we need to step back and interrogate and critique our work so that this under-represented mode of inquiry is in a "better position to thrive" (Zitcer 2021, 6). At the same time, I also chart possibilities for reciprocal arts-based research exchanges, hopeful, reflexive, and humble feminist and queer lines of flight for creative inquiry and pedagogy that can unsettle exclusionary structures and relations.

To do this I reflect on interviews with women, trans and non-binary artists who I met during my post-doctoral research fellowships at the University of Glasgow between 2014 and 2019, an analysis of how artist-run centres, social enterprises, and cooperatives are supporting communities in a time of imposed and prolonged austerity. I also offer an auto-ethnographical account of my attempts to practice research exchanges with artist and activist Ailie Rutherford and the Peoples Bank of Govanhill (PBoG)'s Swap Market, a collective that co-researchers and collaboratively practices alternative economies in Glasgow's South Side Govanhill neighbourhood (People's Bank of Govanhill 2021). As I will explain in more detail, I met Ailie on the Community Economies Research Network's (CERN) listserv well after I started my research in Glasgow. Moreover, I critically reflect on my experiences attending frustrating and surreal neoliberal professional development workshops that were a mandatory part of my research fellowship. As I recount these experiences, I grapple with the contradictory politics of corporatized university enclosures reinforcing heteropatriarchal and colonial understandings of knowledge production and arts practice. At the same time, inspired by queer feminist performance theorist and artist Moynan King, I demonstrate how queer feminist researchers and artists continue to "resurface again and again" (King 2011, 191) from the margins to build the worlds that they want to live in.

In the first part of this paper, I provide an overview of geographical research on the limits and possibilities of participatory art-based analysis within a neoliberal and colonial university context. I also discuss the potential of feminist research exchanges taking place within, alongside, and against these regimes. In the second part, I reflect on my interviews with working-class and racialized, women, trans, and non-binary arts activists in Glasgow. I then show how even well-meaning creative research collaborations can reproduce heteropatriarchal and white supremacist hierarchies. Then, in the third part, I reflect on my attempts to practice research exchanges with Ailie Rutherford and the PBoG. Here I discuss how university impact imperatives hindered these activities. However, I also show how these restrictions point to strategies for responding to these tensions and co-creating reflexive and ethical feminist and queer arts-based research with those who "inhabit the university's boundaries and those historically excluded by these institutions (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2019, 218)."

Creative Geographies: Possibilities and Pitfalls

Up until the 2020 COVID 19 pandemic, there was an upsurge of geographers engaging in participatory arts-based research methods and methodologies to investigate the politics of space and place. These research techniques, including cabaret performances, creative walking tours, photography, cabaret, slam poetry, eco-arts practices and collaborative painting provide geographers with creative, participatory and relational methods to explore how we make and remake spaces, places, and human and more-than-human relationships (Hawkins 2015; Mclean and de Leeuw 2020; Antipode Collective 2020). Collaborative arts-based methodologies also offer creative strategies to interrogate the presence or absence of certain voices in our work, to decolonize dominant pedagogical and research approaches, and to share our research with diverse audiences (Nagar 2011; Noxolo 2016).

Critical feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and decolonial geographers have engaged in arts-based research with communities to co-investigate the intersectional dimensions of precarious work, the exclusionary politics of neoliberal urban policies, the violence of austerity, the prison-industrial complex, food sovereignty, and unnatural disasters to name just a few areas of inquiry (Han 1998; Christian 2017; Mclean 2017; Hurricane Season 2017; Johnston and Pratt 2019). This work includes the artistic collaborations of scholars, scholar-activists, artists, and community members who identify as working class, Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (I-BPOC), Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME), and Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer, and more gender-expensive identities (2SLGBTQI+). This abundant and growing field of creative research also includes co-created zines, cookbooks, murals, cabaret performances, plays and walking tours (Bagelman and Bagelman 2017; Ustundag and Donovan 2017; Vasudevan 2019). In many ways, these relational and collaborative methods can unsettle what 'counts' as theory as they break down hierarchies separating researchers and researched communities (Hawkins 2018). They can also offer accessible and irreverent strategies for engaging communities in conversations about challenging topics, as well as forging solidarities across difference (Nagar 2011). Moreover, poetic and aesthetic research approaches can encourage people to co-create imaginative alternatives to oppressive structures. As Audre Lorde wrote, "poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action" (Lorde 1985).

While these methods of inquiry point to feminist and decolonial research possibilities, critics, including Sarah de Leeuw and I, have questioned the extent to which such practices can also reproduce intersectional and colonial hierarchies. Specifically, we are uncomfortable with persistent "naïve readings and doings of these practices as somehow beyond the confines of extractive and colonial institutions and relationships" (Mclean and de Leeuw 2021). We have found that journal articles about performance in public space, craftivism, urban arts interventions, and gardening meant to "reclaim"

public spaces rarely grapple with the difficult politics of class, white privilege, settler colonialism, citizenship status, ability, and who embodies the privilege to take up space in these ways, especially in a time of precarious work and pandemic and climate emergency anxiety. Overall, in our experience in symposiums, workshops, and panel discussions about arts-based methods and methodologies, we noticed how researchers rarely engage the critical and reflexive analytical tools developed in social and cultural geography to reflect on the politics of their work.

Practicing collaborative arts-based research within the colonial and neoliberal university where competition, extraction, commodification, and consumption have become "hardwired into academic production through institutional demands" (Pain 2014, 21) also raises vexing questions about the pitfalls and potential of creative methods. Collaborative arts-based inquiry currently aligns with university branding strategies, efforts to market institutions as community-engaged, creative, and innovative. Often these initiatives are interconnected with broader urban regeneration projects that are spatially and discursively gentrifying neighbourhoods globally (Boilevin et. al 2019; Moos et. al 2019). Creative place-marketing and regeneration projects can also reduce working class, BAME, I-BPOC, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities into consumptive spectacles (McLean 2018; Harvie 2013). Moreover, efforts to brand university spaces as sites for progressive community engagement often co-opt and commodify the community organizing, activism, and arts interventions of structurally excluded artists and activists (Boilevin et. al 2019).

Within a neoliberal context, participatory arts-based methods can also reproduce uneven power dynamics when they are mobilized as impact or knowledge mobilization strategies. In the UK, the current impact agenda is pressuring university researchers to translate their work into collaborative, community-based projects that make demonstrable and measurable change. According to the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) site, impact refers to the potential for research to have "an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life beyond academia" (ESRC 2020). The impact agenda was part of the 2020 UK Research Excellence Framework, a scheme that has pitted universities across the country in fierce competition for resources (O'Reagan and Gray 2018).

To forge what UK funding bodies and university administrators refer to as "pathways to impact," academic researchers across the country have streamed into neighbourhoods and communities across the globe seeking out competitive yet collaborative projects to boost their metrics (Pain 2014). As a result, precarious researchers on short-term contracts (like myself) pilot into neighbourhoods to engage in projects with communities that they have little or no knowledge of or connection to.

A range of critical scholars have raised concerns about the negative effects of research strategies to make and evaluate impact within limited time frames. UK impact agendas are often "very narrow and unreflective of diverse approaches to creating knowledge and affecting change that researchers utilize" (Pain 2014,19). These research agendas can also reinforce colonial, white supremacist, and heteropatriarchal power structures as they reward individual researchers to translate messy, collective, and relational projects and collective processes into sole authored articles written by research leaders or principal investigators (Pain 2014; Mekdjian 2016). These research relations can reinforce ivory tower privilege as scholars race to build what one impact coach at a workshop I attended described in settler colonialist language as 4-star creative "research pipelines" (Mclean and de Leeuw 2021). This coach even advised us that publications in "more popular," non-academic publications counted less on our CVs and would impede our professional trajectories. "Don't be a leaky pipeline," she cautioned us (research notes, 2018).

At the same time, arts-activists continue to critique market-oriented universities and arts institutions for reinforcing extractive relations with historically under-represented working-class women, BAME, I-BPOC, and 2SLGBTQI+ artists and communities. For example, the White Pube, a London and Liverpool-based intersectional feminist arts collective, critiques extractive and colonial research relationships with clever blog posts and creative interventions (White Pube 2020). Their interventions consistently challenge universities and arts institutions to reflect on the impacts of research in structurally-excluded communities led by individual high-profile white artists and privileged researchers.

Proliferating Solidarities with Arts-Based Research?

Committed to forging research solidarities, many feminist, queer, anti-colonial and decolonial arts-based researchers, including Richa Nagar (2014), collaborate with community organisations to creatively re-work and resist colonial research relations. For Nagar, it is imperative that we build across difference because if people sitting in unequal places will not come forward to forge alliances, then "gulfs between our intellectual and material struggles will only continue to widen" (Nagar 2014,148). Critical and creative scholars are also leveraging impact and knowledge mobilization strategies "simultaneously within, against, and beyond the university" (Meyerhoff and Noterham 2019, 229) to contest "predation, instrumentalization, (wilful) misinterpretation or violation" (Mitchell 2016). Through these activities they can offer tools to support and resource communities engaged in politicized research projects (Pain 2014; Pain et. al 2015).

Anti-colonial, decolonial, queer, critical disability, and feminist researchers, including diverse economies researchers, also point to generative possibilities as they move beyond reiterating stories about the power and durability of neoliberal practices and the doomed subjects that they reproduce (Gibson-Graham 2006; Kern and Mclean 2017; Nagar 2019). For example, in a booklet titled *Towards Braiding,* Indigenous curator Elwood Jimmy and Indigenous scholar Vanessa Andreotti and white settler scholar Sharon Stein (2018) offer critical insights into practicing relational arts collaborations across Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, scholars, communities, and universities. The research in this booklet investigates the conditions that make possible "ethical and rigorous engagement across communities in historical dissonance that can help us move together towards improved relationships and yet-unimaginable wiser futures, as we face unprecedented global challenges" (Jimmy, Machado de Oliveira, and Stein 2018). Importantly, their accessible writing outlines strategies for learning to live and co-create together to enliven these ethics with "generosity, humour, (self) compassion, depth, and rigour without turning away from contradictions, paradoxes, difficulties, and discomfort" (Jimmy, Machado de Oliveira, and Stein 2018).

In a similar vein, incorporating anarchist theories and practices of prefiguration, diverse economies researchers approach research as heterogenous, performative, and always-in-processes of becoming. Working with artists, scholars, community development practitioners and activists, community economies researchers also engage in diverse research exchanges to share ideas and creative alternatives to dominant neoliberal economies, including the knowledge economy (CERN 2020). From this standpoint, arts-based research exchanges can offer strategies for collectively fostering reciprocity and care and co-creating the kinds of economies we want to live (Community Economies Institute 2020).

Diverse economies researchers and artists are crafting all kinds of creative exchanges to envision and enact alternatives (Böhm and Szreder, 2020). As part of my past research in Toronto, I performed with *Dirty Plötz,* a 2SLGBTQI+ and feminist cabaret collective made up of a mix of established and amateur artists and performers, tenured scholar/artists and precarious scholar/artists/workers (McLean 2016). Together we performed in cabarets that drew attention to the connections between the corporatization of the settler colonial university, gentrification, and the ongoing erasure of women and

2SLGBTQI+ people in the arts. All our performances honoured and celebrated the tenacious ability of devalued and under-represented women and 2SLGBTQ+ artists to collectively build worlds from what *Dirty Plötz 's* founder and curator, performance researcher and artist Alex Tigchelaar, describes as the generative "crazy making margins" (McLean 2013; See also King 2017; Tigchelaar 2022). The cabaret also provided a space to practice feminist exchange and reciprocity: performers read each other's work and shared knowledge on feminist and queer performance, urban politics, and arts interventions. Through these acts, we amplified historically excluded subjects and challenged ongoing power geometries in the arts. As Dirty Plötz performer and theorist TL Cowan writes, cabarets offer space to "hack together" (Cowan 2017) the queer feminist worlds that we want to see and live.

These examples of arts-based research exchanges unsettle research hierarchies and uneven power relations by fostering what Maria Elena Torre (2005, 2) describes as "contact zones where differently situated people worked together across varying relations to power and privilege." Instead of piloting into communities to make swift and measurable impact, researchers collaborate with artists and communities with a diverse range of creative and experiential activities, including performing alter-ego characters. Such practices disrupt a neoliberal and colonial focus on production mania by fostering feminist ethics of collaboration through provisional alliances and care. Nurturing humour, hilarity and friendships, these activities also unsettle colonial hierarchies by fostering a "culture of joyous and raucous co celebration of the relationships which make our time here possible" (Todd 2017). Importantly, reciprocal research relationships are built at what adrienne maree brown refers to as "the speed of trust" (brown 2017), not in the fast, frenetic, fear and scarcity-based time frames that university funders and administrators encourage.

At the same time, white, able-bodied, cis-gendered researchers like me must be careful not to romanticize the political potential of our forays into research exchanges. And we must not assume that our collaborative projects are not free from colonial, classed, gendered, and racialized power dynamics (deleeuw et al 2013; Machado de Oliveira 2021). Even though neoliberal university regimes pressure us to perform and measure our "global leadership," white researchers cannot accrue currency or brand ourselves as self-appointed commanders of de-colonial arts-based research. Instead, we must understand ourselves as "never off the hook" from our complicity in deeply oppressive institutions (Machado de Oliveira 2021, 179). Moreover, we must keep doing our best to be mindful of when to step back, to listen, and to take seriously the research refusals of working-class, BAME, I-BPOC, 2SLGBTQI+, and crip/disabled collaborators and co-conspirators (Todd 2017; Daigle 2018). Overall, creative research collaborations offer opportunities to continually learn from our mistakes and keep reminding ourselves that the "path to good intentions is often a deeply flawed and colonial project" (de Leeuw and McLean 2020). At the same time, tensions, vulnerability, failure, and mistakes can also offer learning opportunities and point to strategies for enacting reflexive and humble anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist solidarities and forays into experimental geographies (Kullman 2014; Nagar 2014).

Creativity and Collaboration in a Neoliberal University Context

In this section I add nuance to arts-based research methodologies and praxis by reflecting on my attempts to practice this mode of inquiry in Glasgow. When I first arrived in the UK, I was excited to forge creative research collaborations in a new city. My goal was to build on my PhD research, an intersectional feminist critique of creative city policies (Mclean 2014). This project grew out of years of engaging in conversations and collaborative work with artists and activists in Toronto about the corporatization of both the urban planning and university sectors.

As I planned my new research in Glasgow, a few senior colleagues urged me to immediately start engaging in projects that would make research impact in neighbourhoods that I had no personal

connection to or history with. I soon realized that the short-term structure of a post-doctoral fellowship set me up as what one Glasgow poet who I encountered described as a "drag and drop artist" out to "save" neighbourhoods with art (interview with Glasgow-based poet 2014). Ironically, this positionality mirrors the white male creative city pundits who go from city-to-city catalysing and measuring creativity who I critique (Mclean 2016).

In interviews, women, trans and non-binary artists working in Glasgow also expressed discomfort towards these neoliberal research trends. Specifically, a few women artists expressed wariness towards the current rush of university researchers catalysing arts-based collaborations across the city. According to one woman, the surge in popularity in these projects is interconnected with the spread of neoliberal public-private partnerships in universities. Within this context, she claimed that "what look like progressive creative research collaborations are part of strategies to brand universities as world leaders in innovation and urban regeneration projects" (interview with Glasgow-based artist 2018).

She and others pointed out that city officials and developers have partnered with the city's four universities and the Glasgow School of Art to transform the former industrial powerhouse into a world leader in culture-led regeneration for more than three decades now (Strickland Distribution 2014). These interventions include initiatives meant to attract IT companies and media firms to a city home to some of the UK's most disinvested neighbourhoods (Mclean 2020). Following culture-led regeneration models, higher education institutions have directed their energies to building student housing, boutique hotel, and conference facilities that discursively and materially transform neighbourhoods into sites amenable for tourists and middle-class professionals seeking investment opportunities. At the same time, market-oriented arts funding bodies including Creative Scotland have encouraged artists and arts organisations to engage in neighbourhood-based partnerships with community-engaged arts practices promoting economic development and regeneration (Strickland Distribution 2014; Mclean 2020).

Echoing feminist critiques of participatory arts practice (Harvie 2013), my interviews with women artists also uncovered how collaborative and creative research initiatives often align with neoliberal community development policies in an era of enforced austerity. One woman reflected on her participation in a university-led research project that promoted what she described as the "holy trinity of place-making, resiliency, and regeneration that the third sector and arts funders love" (interview with Glasgow-based artist 2018). For her, creative research collaborations celebrating local resiliency often end up reinforcing neoliberal policies as they offload care responsibilities on to disinvested neighbourhoods. She stated: "Glasgow neighbourhoods are home to some of the highest poverty rates in the UK, but universities and arts organisations keep hiring middle class university educated artists and university researchers to practice feel-good, short-term projects that paint over poverty" (interview with Glasgow-based artist 2018).

For her, current third sector and university funding strategies ensnare even politicized artists and arts organisations into what she described as a "corporate trap" (interview with Glasgow-based artist 2018). She laughed as she described how "buzzwords like resiliency, creativity, and collaboration appeal to university and arts funders… so we, artists, use these words too in our grant applications because that is how you get your hands on the money" (interview with Glasgow-based artist 2018). While she admitted that she does her best to "direct funding to activist and anti-capitalist projects…but arts funding connected with regeneration projects can undermine community organisations because we get bits of support to do creative work, but these tiny projects do little to address peoples' lack of access housing and cuts in funding for community programs and social centres." One woman also described how, to access arts funding, she was required to attend training workshops where community-engagement coaches offered guidance on strategies for marketing their work and creating the "creative buzz" required to access future funding and networks. She laughed when she described how a community engagement

coach who had worked with private sector partners shared "best practices" in personal branding derived from the fast food and automotive sectors at one of the workshops (interview with Glasgow-based artist 2018).

The women I interviewed also described how creative research collaborations can reproduce particularly intersectional inequalities. One woman pointed out how mostly white women university researchers leading such projects often fail to provide adequate financial compensation for working-class women to participate, especially BAME women, LGBTQ+, and refugee and asylum-seeking community members. Specifically, she reflected on research projects where "refugee and asylum-seeking women were invited to engage in arts-engaged research but were only compensated with transit fare and a free meal for their time and labour" (interview with Glasgow-based activist 2018). She also charged that white women university-based researchers end up building their careers and academic prestige from their encounters with racialized refugee women and LGBTQ+ communities. Echoing Ahmed (2017), such research encounters create an impression of collaboration and diversity that university administrators and research funding bodies value. However, these projects can reinforce classed, racialized, and colonial hierarchies of worth as white women scholars extract from communities while they accrue currency as benevolent, community-engaged, creative, and innovative.

A Scots-Arab theatre artist also described the exhausting emotional labour of having to perform friendly collaboration with white women university researchers. For her, arts-based research with scholars is a way to share theory and practice, encounters that have "enriched my learning and understanding about a range of issues including gentrification and austerity" (interview with Glasgow-based playwright, 2018). However, she also described "feeling exhausted pretending to be nice…when I discuss racism, white women academics and community organizers often don't want to discuss these topics because they are negative…so I watch what I say because they hold the purse strings and access to future grants, networks, and opportunities." Evoking critiques of the limits of feminist solidarity work (Mohanty 2003), she described how "white women often think we are working together, but our experiences are very different."

Moreover, she pointed out how the Scottish context is particularly challenging because Scottish researchers, artists, and activists often tend to "reproduce the narrative that they are colonized subjects and therefore not as racist as England" (interview with Glasgow-based playwright 2018). As a result, she finds it difficult to engage in difficult critical and reflexive conversations about intersectionality, especially racialized and classed power dynamics, and white supremacy, while involved in collaborative projects.

At the same time, a few women pointed out how arts-based research involving participatory walking tours, collaborative meals, drawing workshops, and performance interventions have spurred critical dialogue and co-inquiry into pressing political issues in Glasgow's arts scenes. One woman described a project initiated by who she referred to as "intersectional feminist researchers trying to embody their politics" (interview with Glasgow-based artist, September 2019) that engaged communities in politicized discussions about gentrification, migrant rights, and environmental justice. This project included a series of collaborative dinners where Glasgow School of Art students learned from Ubuntu, a collective run by and for BAME women, trans and non-binary activists who have experienced the violence of UK detention centres. For her, the meals were reflexive and politicized spaces of inquiry where "Glasgow School of art artists learned how they can work as allies with racialized asylum seekers and refugees" (interview with Glasgow-based artist, September 2019). Because Ubuntu members are politicized, anti-colonial, racialized activists who refuse to engage in extractive research, the meals provided a space to learn about feminist and queer research refusals. By listening to the members of the collective, she learned to "step back and do my best to not profit from the activist labour and lives of

racialized refugee and asylum-seeking women's experiences…to find ways to use our resources to support their work, to figure out how to support each other" (interview with Glasgow-based artist, September 2019).

For What It's Worth? [1]

My forays into practicing creative research exchanges with Ailie and the PBoG that I reflect on here also deepened my understanding of the uneven power dimensions and possibilities of arts-based research. As I learned more about Glasgow's diverse arts-activist scene, I came across Ailie and the PBoG on the Community Economies Research Network's listserv. Ailie spearheaded this feminist arts collective as part of her broader practice of fostering activism and alternative economies in Glasgow's Govanhill neighbourhood. These activities include transforming a former pawn shop into a Swap Market space where communities can share, barter, and trade everything from English-as-a-Second language and music lessons, to food, clothing, and tools for home repair (People's Bank of Govanhill 2020).

Currently, 70% of children in Govanhill residents are living in poverty and their families are bearing the brunt of austerity policies (Understanding Glasgow 2018). Home to a high number of new immigrant and working-class families, the neighbourhood is also undergoing rapid gentrification as artists and middle-class residents are buying up the affordable tenement buildings. Over the past five years, the neighbourhood has transformed into a popular site for community arts spaces, coffee shops, bars, and organic food stores. At the same time, at *Market Forces,* a Swap Market event held in 2019, community members discussed how artists in Govanhill have played a significant role in the neighbourhood's political activism and radical history (People's Bank of Govanhill 2019). These insights echo Winnifred Curran's analysis of the contradictory role of feminist and queer artists in gentrifying Chicago neighbourhoods. Even though property developers value the arts for development, feminist and queer arts-activists keep reclaiming care as a radical practice, creating collectives and publics, and unsettling "dominant neoliberal constructs of value" (Curran 2018, 95).

As a feminist collective committed to practicing radical care and social justice work, the Swap Market organises public workshops on the intersectional dimensions of housing justice, alternative feminist economies, and precarious labour. The collective also implements various arts-based projects to envision and enact alternatives to extractive neoliberal economics and relations in Govanhill and they aim to support under-resourced seniors, single parents, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

When I first approached Ailie, she was understandably cautious about jumping into a project with an academic working for a sector rife with labour inequities and extractive practices. For some time, she had been creating artistic work about unpaid labour, precarity, and market-oriented funding models in the arts sector, including the *In Kind* project with artist Janie Nicoll.[2] When I approached her, I was one among many researchers who had contacted her and the Swap market hoping to forge collaborations. In fact, in one week, she received emails from nine academics seeking to analyse the collective's projects and establish research collaborations (interview with Ailie Rutherford, 2018). Ailie also described the uneven power dynamics that she had encountered in arts-based research, including uncomfortable encounters where university researchers "were surprised at how articulate and politicized community members were when they took part in Swap Market activities" (interview with Ailie Rutherford, 2018).

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[1] For What It's Worth is the name of Ailie Rutherford's art project on feminist economies and art in Aarhus, Denmark. Available at: https://improvedfutures.wixsite.com/rum46/events/where-we-live-looking-for-safe-ground-3-3

[2] See Janie Nicoll and Ailie Rutherfords 2018 project for the Glasgow International Arts Festival, *In Kind: In Kind: The Hidden Economies of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art*. Available at: https://www.artistsunion.scot/in_kind_gi

Ailie was also understandably wary about collaborating with me because she and the activists, artists, and residents working with the Swap Market have engaged in challenging, honest, and reflexive work building mutually supportive relationships in Govanhill. For some time, the collective made up of mostly white cis gendered arts-activists have practiced reflexive and difficult anti-racist, anti-colonial, and intersectional feminist politics in their projects. This includes consistently working to dismantle white supremacy and heteronormativity in community organizing and engaging and resourcing BAME, working class, and LGBTQ+ artists, including racialized Roma women community members. Because they have worked collectively to forge these solidarities, Ailie was uncomfortable with research that would extract from this reflexive and collective work and elevate my individual profile as a "research leader" (interview with Ailie Rutherford 2018). She and the other Swap Market members also challenged me to consider the uneven power dimensions of research collaborations that position me as an expert who profits from the emotional labour and time of precarious moms and caregivers in the creative, non-profit, and service industry sectors who make up the collective.

Committed to forging generative alternatives, Ailie encouraged me to engage in a reciprocal research exchange with the Swap Market. Together, we discussed ways that I could share my research and arts practice with the group rather than documenting their activities in interviews and workshops. She also asked if I would perform my drag king character *Toby Sharp, the Tool for Urban Change* at one of the Swap Market's events, a day-long public workshop on feminist economies. Facilitated by Ailie and feminist artist and urban planning activist Alex Wilde, the public workshop created space to explore the potential of feminist cryptocurrency and use of fintech like blockchain within community currency (Rutherford and Nissen 2019). The activities that day included a talk by economic geographer Al James on the gendered dimensions of precarious work in the tech industry. Rutherford and Bettina Nissen also engaged workshop participants in playful and creative experimentations that investigated the pitfalls and potentialities of on-line currencies.

I contributed to the workshop by performing a satirical drag performance that critically explored public-private planning partnerships across Glasgow and how these partnerships are implicated in the racist policing and surveillance of Govanhill residents. Specifically, my drag Toby talk provided an overview of Glasgow City Council and think tank collaborations to install surveillance cameras and facial recognition software in the neighbourhood developed by an Israeli military technology firm (NICE 2014). I made connections between the privatization of planning, the securitization of public space, and the racist policing of Govanhill's Roma community with software developed to monitor and control both Glaswegian and Palestinian communities.

By co-facilitating a public discussion after my performance, Ailie, Swap Market members and I created an accessible and relational space where community members shared their experiences and embodied knowledge about policing and gentrification in Govanhill, as well as broader austerity policies shaping planning politics across Glasgow. The discussion was also a way for Ailie and me to co-research the limits and possibilities of arts practice to foster critical dialogue about austerity and the securitization of space in a context where planners, developers and arts funding organizations value the arts for reinventing neighbourhoods for investment.

Impact's Enclosures and Cracks

As Ailie and I practiced this feminist research exchange, the professional development and research impact training that I was required to attend as part of my fellowships presented all kinds of uneven power dynamics and tensions that rarely appear in celebratory accounts of arts-based research. Throughout my fellowships, I was required to attend university-led workshops on how to make and measure impact via collaborative research. Even though I critiqued this training, as a post-doctoral

researcher who had worked as an adjunct at universities back in Canada, I was concerned that I did not possess the privilege to refuse it. A few senior scholars also advised that I should learn to make and measure impact to accrue a competitive edge on the job market.

On reflection, my experiences navigating the surreal and frustrating world of professional development demonstrate how the corporatized university hinders and distorts creative and experimental research methods. Even though these workshops were meant to sharpen our collaborative research skills, I quickly learned that this training mirrored the private-sector oriented workshops that the women arts-activists who I interviewed were required to attend. In these disciplinary entrepreneurial spaces, I encountered impact experts from the private and university sectors who shared their "best practices" about how to translate community-engaged research into measurable change that would appeal to public-private and third sector partners. In a few workshops coaches also instructed us how to share our unique "research brands" with effective tweets. The most memorable workshop featured an impact expert who described how he developed an advertising campaign for a lactose free cat milk product for a global cat food brand.

The impact workshops offering advice on forging pathways towards "global knowledge leadership" also fostered heteropatriarchal and colonial hierarchies while restricting and disciplining the fleshy, messy, and killjoy queer feminist analyses and arts practices that I draw inspiration from (see Schulman 2012). As an example, when I discussed how some of the artists and community members who I collaborated with expressed research fatigue with the constant flurry of university-led arts projects in their neighbourhoods, impact coaches and "impact champions" cautioned me that this information was "too negative" (meeting notes 2018). Instead, coaches disciplined my "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed 2017) instincts when they encouraged me to "re-frame" and tell "positive," not "alienating stories" when I write up my research "outputs."

In two different workshops, facilitators also cautioned me that I needed to prove the value of my research because I was spending public money that could have gone to hospitals or to schools. Meanwhile, in a breakout group where participants discussed strategies for making and measuring change in communities, colleagues warned me that drag performance was "too weird and unprofessional," something I should not put on CV, write about, and never to discuss in job interviews (meeting notes 2018). Overall, professional development training universalized particular modes of knowledge-making as desirable and successful while "delegitimizing and erasing" (Jimmy et al. 2018) queer, feminist, and decolonial sensibilities and practices. Moreover, this training reinforced colonial dynamics as it aimed to align experimental creative research with what Jimmy, Andreotti, and Stein refer to as, the "proper political, ideological and institutional structures that will in turn engender adequate social relations" (Jimmy et. al. 2018) within the corporatized university sector.

The impact workshops also reinforced hierarchical colonial research relationships and carceral logics as they encouraged scholars to discover, pin down, extract, and transmit community-based knowledges and practices. In one of the gatherings, when facilitators encouraged us to share our impact "best practices," I described my performance work as a research exchange practice with PBoG. In response, an impact coach suggested that I hand out forms immediately after my performances to measure how I shifted peoples' perspectives. According to her, it is possible to prove how a drag king performance can shift a person's thinking with an effective evaluation hand out. She also suggested that I follow the people who attended the drag performance for "up to five years" to find out "how I changed their minds," as she put it (interview notes, 2018). I still wonder what this would look like. As a white women researcher with considerable embodied privilege, was I really supposed to impose this surveillance logic in communities that were already sites of carceral police violence tracking people and asking "what are you thinking now? How did my amateur drag king performance at the Swap market

change your mind? How did my intervention about facial recognition software and gentrification back in 2018 shape your thoughts?" Furthermore, how would I go about staying in touch with precarious, working class and racialized Govanhill residents who would most likely move and change their contact information over five years?

Moreover, as professional development workshops reinforced these uneven knowledge hierarchies and relations, they impeded creative exploration and imagination. Consistently, a take home message of this training was that our primary role as researchers was to boost our university's and departments' reputation as "world leaders" and "world changers." According to the administrators, coaches, and senior scholars leading these discussions, a well-crafted social media presence can pave the way to this coveted leadership and expertise: #worldleader #anti-colonialfeminist #impact #worldchanger #dragking. As I attended this training, I kept asking myself, how can we engage in meaningful research exchanges that take time and require trust when we work for institutions caught up in this feverish race? And where is the room for experimental arts or amateur queer and feminist arts practice, the interventions that risk failing that I am committed to if we are obsessed with staging heteronormative, masculinist, and colonial notions of world leading expertise and excellence?

On reflection, working under pressure to produce fast paced, world leading, and impactful research, I also practiced rather rough shod ethics. For example, when I prepared the funding application for my fellowship, I initially allocated resources to work with an artist to share my research findings with communities. At that time, I was unaware of Ailie and her work with the PBoG. After learning about her work, I shifted my project's goals and budget to co-create map booklets with her about organizations practicing diverse economy exchanges across Glasgow.

While I strived to practice this partnership with the best intentions, I did not fully comprehend the detailed work, time and rich embodied knowledge that goes into co-designing and co-producing quality booklets. Creating the map booklets with Ailie, designer Jyni Ong (Ong 2020), and Glasgow-based community economy organisations required detailed layout, graphic design, and printing: skills and knowledge that I was unfamiliar with. I also unintentionally reproduced the "pathologies of precarity" (McRobbie 2011) rife in the arts sector as I practiced this research. Providing feedback on the booklet drafts was a time-consuming activity for Ailie and Jyni who were already juggling multiple contracts in the precarious arts and community development sectors and raising families. Even though I re-arranged my budget to pay them both Scottish Arts Council fees, I still fell short, and Ailie and I came up with more ways that I could engage in research exchange activities with the PBoG to cover costs.

At the same time, these back-and-forth negotiations with Ailie, Jyni, and the PBoG also echo diverse economies theorists and practitioners who approach neoliberal institutions and economies as always-in-process, emergent, and presenting opportunities for co-learning and co-creating alternatives (Böhm and Szreder 2020; Community Economies Institute 2022). Indeed, discussions with Ailie and community-based collaborators about pay, artists fees, and directing impact funding to support local community organizations for catering and holding events pointed to small strategies university researchers can implement to support structurally excluded communities. Community collaborators also provided important insights and guidance about paying community researchers taking part in projects the same wages as university research assistants. Moreover, we consistently discussed the importance of slowing down, building trust, and taking feminist politics of care seriously while working with community organizations instead of frantically rushing to make and measure impact. These conversations evoked what activist scholar Aziz Choudry referred to as the rich "under-the-radar learning" (Choudry 2010) that can occur in ethical community-engaged research.

Importantly, the white women arts activists who I met through collaborations with the PBoG also engaged in critical and reflexive conversations about confronting our white privilege. In these discussions we strived to not distance ourselves from whiteness but to sit with discomfort and reflect on the unequal power dynamics we are complicit in reproducing. We also discussed everyday ways to unsettle neoliberal university and arts funding structures promoting individualistic and colonial notions of research leadership, including directing university resources to forefront and amplify excluded I-BPOC, BAME and LGBTQI+ artists, scholars, and communities. Evoking Meyerhoff and Noterman (2019), with these interventions we aimed to do more than tinker with university structures. Rather, we aimed to overcome the material and ideological bases of the university itself "to create the conditions in which we want to live and the social relations we wish to have" (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2019: 29). While I realize that these are small interventions, and we have a long way to go towards chipping away and really shifting white supremacist and colonial institutions, PBoG's humble and self-reflexive interventions offer caring alternatives to hierarchical and extractive research relations.

Since I moved back to Turtle Island (AKA Canada), PBoG's Swap Market has continued to cultivate diverse creative economies via feminist arts practice. When Covid 19 forced the world into isolation the collective initiated a read and draw group where artists, activists, scholars, and curious community members from around the world met on Jitsi twice a month to share doodles and drawings in response to a list of articles we co-curated. Together we accessed funding from the Nordic Summer University (Nordic Summer University 2022) to co-organize the gatherings where we learned from the writing of I-BPOC, BAME, 2SLGBTQI+ and disability justice activists that centre the lives and leadership of sick and disabled queer, trans, Black, and Brown people. Not only did these lively discussions stave off our loneliness and isolation, but they also pointed to strategies for working collectively and creatively to support communities during Covid. Furthermore, to compost my frustrations with the neoliberal impact workshops, including the session led by the cat food impact expert, I created a Toby performance that critiqued corporate-oriented equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies (McLean2021). Together, these interventions show how the neoliberal university's contradictions and paradoxes continually offer opportunities to spur creative and critical queer and feminist sites for "hacking" (Cowan 2017) the worlds we want to co-create and live.

Conclusion

In this paper I critically respond to the recent excitement in geography about collaborative arts-based inquiry. To do this, I provide an overview of geographers who employ photography, performance-based work, and interactive art to investigate spaces, places, and identity formation. I also reflect on the contradictory politics of the recent turn to arts-based methods as university administrators and funding bodies pressure geographers to make and measure impact in communities. Moreover, I interrogate my experiences as a privileged yet precarious post-doctoral researcher who became caught up in the UK race to prove global leadership and prowess in feminist arts-based research. Reflecting on notes gleaned in research workshops, interviews, and going about my life in Glasgow, I also grapple with my complicity in reproducing research fatigue for BAME, LGBTQ+, and working-class women artists on the receiving end of a steady stream of community engaged arts research projects cropping up in their neighbourhoods.

Here I also reflect on my attempts to engage in relational research exchanges with the PBoG's Swap Market, a feminist arts organization proliferating alternatives to neoliberal economies. However, I also show how these activities became further ensnared in university-led professional development workshops. In these surreal market-oriented spaces, impact experts and coaches shared "best practices" on creating a research brand, marketing our work, and practicing safe and easy-to-consume creative inquiry. These narrow and restrictive understandings of arts-practice discipline and undermine fleshy and messy queer and feminist world-making work that that risks failing. At the same time, challenging and

reflexive discussions with arts-activists at PBoG pointed to opportunities for co-learning across communities and institutions, transforming university structures, proliferating diverse approaches to arts-based research and praxis, and forging provisional solidarities.

To conclude, more and more geographers are interested in practicing arts-based research to make measurable impact and implement creative knowledge mobilization strategies. My bittersweet reflections here demonstrate why we must remain vigilant of competitive research regimes pressuring us to professionalize and compete with artistic and experimental research. At the same time, I show how arts-based methods, including feminist research exchanges, can offer tools for forging the relational and transformative relations we want to live both within and beyond universities. Fore fronting care, reflexivity, humility, and humour, these practices can unsettle extractive research relations and structures.

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