

5

Re-sensing economies

Artistic and embodied knowing for more-than-capitalist futures

Heather McLean, Molly Mullen, Aviv Kruglanski, Leo Hwang & Kelly Dombroski

Can we think our way out of the current climate and political crises with human and ecological health intact? Or, perhaps thinking alone is not enough to get us out of the harmful extractive economic systems that shape our life-worlds from the intimate to the global. In this chapter, we propose the need to open up our ways of knowing beyond the rationalist abstract ways economic theorists have been known for. We draw on art and embodied creative practice to seek out and generate new ways of attending and attuning to the world. What insights would emerge if we were to consider theory as an artistic practice and artistic practice as theory? One insight is that we can connect economic theorising to important but overlooked bodies of knowledge, including knowledge in bodies, which may hold transformative economic potential for shaping wiser economic (and environmental) futures.

Arts practices offer strategies for practising radical tenderness and the embodied presence to work with the tensions, difficulties, and pain of historical and ongoing colonial modes of thinking and being (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). This chapter explores economic theorising through a patchworking of artistic and embodied practices. Beginning with the body, the local, and the more-than-rational, we offer some tentative insights into re-sensing economies towards postcapitalist interdependencies.

But first, who are we—these bodies re-sensing economies? We are a group of scholars, artists, and makers from different places in the world. We know each other through the Community Economies Institute, an organisation that theorises and

practices diverse and community economies thinking and hosts the Community Economies Research Network. Building on J.K. Gibson-Graham's (1996, 2006) feminist critique of political economy, the diverse economies (DE) approach challenges mainstream, overdetermining and capitalocentric framings of 'the economy'. Capitalocentric framings understand 'the economy' as inevitably and always capitalist. A DE approach instead thinks of economic practices as sites of politics and transformation that might be postcapitalist (Gibson-Graham, 2006) or even just "more-than-capitalist" (Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020, p. 11). Rather than retheorising capitalism per-se, we draw on DE scholarship to retheorise economy in a way that decentres capitalism. In orthodox economics and in much everyday discourse, 'the economy' is typically represented as predominantly, or even singularly, capitalist, which has made it almost impossible to imagine alternatives (Gibson-Graham, 1996).

Even the anti-capitalist imagination can position capitalism as the central, all-determining force or structure that needs to be resisted or overthrown. From the anti-essentialist perspective of DE thinking, there is no privileged centre nor one primary determining force or structure of transformation. As DE scholars and practitioners, we aim to approach economies as sites of diverse, vital and abundant economic practices (Gibson-Graham et al., 2021). We amplify the work of artists, activists, and communities who are enacting economic, social and ecological change in multiple ways (McLean, 2022). Working with communities in all kinds of teaching, research and activist projects, we experiment with and practice more-than-capitalist alternatives (Gibson-Graham et al., 2017).

We want to be upfront here; if you are looking for a chapter that comprehensively sets out how DE thinking is theorising capitalism, this is not it.¹ But the practices and approaches presented in this chapter have grown from our engagement with DE thinking and its performative ontology. For over three decades, DE scholars have highlighted that the way the economy is theorised is performative; economic theories come to make and remake the world in their image (Gibson-Graham, 1996). Starting with performative ontology involves seeing theory as more than a tool for explaining economy. Instead, theory plays a part in making particular economies possible or not. What would it look like then to refuse to retheorise capitalism once again, and instead theorise or re-sense something else—something at the very edges of our abilities to think, rationalise and understand? And how might art and embodied practice help us to do this?

Gibson-Graham make some space for exactly this in their shift from DE thinking to community economies (CE) thinking. In their 2006 book *A Postcapitalist Politics*, they sketch the outlines of an ethical space of negotiation in which new forms of economy might arise in sporadic yet ubiquitous and punctiform ways. Rather than defining what such a new form of economy might look like, they outline four ethical coordinates around which such an economy might negotiate ways of being together and three

¹ You might like to try Gibson-Graham, J. K., & Dombroski, K. (Eds.). (2020). *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*. Edward Elgar.

sets of politics that might help diverse, place-based groups get there. Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 88) suggest that a community economy might organise around questions of:

- what is *necessary* to personal and social survival;
- how social *surplus* is appropriated and distributed;
- whether and how social surplus is to be produced and *consumed*; and
- how a *commons* is produced and sustained.

For Gibson-Graham (2006, (pp. xxxiv-xxxvii), “negotiations around these key coordinates and the interactions between them could inform an ethics and politics of community economy” (p. 88), which is indeed what we see in the art and embodied practices we outline in this chapter. The politics of imagining and enacting new economies, as outlined by Gibson-Graham (2006), consist of:

- A politics of language
- A politics of the subject
- A politics of collective action

For us, these points of ethical negotiation and politics of imagining and enacting new economies cannot just be projects of *thinking* but must be projects of embodied experimentation and sensing new ways of being in the world. Our language intervention then, is to shift from *rethinking* and *retheorising capitalism* to a language of *re-sensing economies*. Our intervention in the politics of the subject is to engage with the embodied subject in its fullness, including *more-than-rational embodied engagement and experimentation* with postcapitalist ways of being in the world. Our intervention in collective action is to quilt *an assemblage of artistic and embodied practices together*—to bring together unlikely bedfellows, enabling a collective re-sensing of what economies have been and could be. For those of us in academic positions, working as scholars, it is hard to be comfortable with such loose quilting, to not have everything tied up and to “mean the same thing” (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 6), or to have a sense of mastery on a subject. But that is precisely the kind of uncertainty we need to practice and cultivate in order to be open to multiplicity, possibility, and to wide pluriverses of reality where things can be something other than what they are now (Escobar, 2018). It is these “richest junctures” that Sedgwick (1994, p. 6) is referring us to—but we must first cultivate ourselves as subjects that can let this be. And this is where we think art and embodied practice are essential to imaging and enacting economies differently.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 2, performing artists Molly Mullen and Heather McLean contribute two critical pieces to our quilt, sharing and reflecting on projects that they have worked on. Both Molly and Heather engage in performance, comedy and satire to critique capitalist and colonial systems and structures, as well as to 'co-sense' alternative economies with their communities. In section 3, Aviv, Kelly and Leo contribute experimental quilt pieces, experiments with community gatherings,

gardens and improvisational music. We then reflect on how these three divergent practices offer strategies for imagining and enacting postcapitalist possibilities.

Embodying playful economic critique

The first two quilt patches describe projects that invite participants and audiences to experience and participate in the ridiculousness of capitalist imaginaries. In these projects, a politics of language and the subject is performed in light hilarity. Rather than using negative affect to problematise and educate about capitalism and colonialism, the artists draw on a sense of the ridiculous to provoke generative critique.

Molly: The devaluation station in Aotearoa New Zealand

I have been questioning the relationship between capitalism, value and evaluation in the context of community/participatory arts since the late 1990s. In 2014, having just submitted my PhD thesis (which interrogated this relationship through the lens of feminist and diverse economies thinking), I saw a call for proposals for the Festival of Uncertainty at the Auckland Old Folks Association (OFA) in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Figure 1. Old Folks Association Hall, 2024, photo by Molly Mullen

The OFA is an incorporated society founded in 1945. Its hall still stands, but in 2011 the purposes of the association were extended to include supporting intergenerational exchange through arts and culture. The OFA committee has since experimented with new ways to enact service and generosity to its communities, including arts

communities, by, for example, hosting unfunded or un-fundable projects for little or no cost.

The call for participation in the Festival of Uncertainty, organised by Feasting House, read as follows,

...If excellence, market value and profile were set aside and money were not an issue, what else might be possible? What projects might emerge and where could art go?

Feasting House seeks projects that foster art as an activity of radical uncertainty.

This is a platform for the entirely unachievable, non-viable projects and career death experiments. Art that slips by, that fails to eventuate, that lacks quality or craft, that is impossible to find, that plays out in isolation, or in a social crowd; ideas, sketches, hopes, obsessions, all as simply a process of continued and unstoppable practice...

<https://ofa.org.nz/festival-of-uncertainty/>

I felt compelled to respond. I had had no time or head space for creative practice since starting my PhD, and was fed up with writing and talking about 'what else might be possible' in articulating the value of participatory and community arts. I wanted to involve others, generate possibilities, and perhaps some joy. My partner Tom Beeston and I responded to the call:

...with the ethos of your festival, you're probably not planning to collect feedback or to conduct an evaluation. While you have put market value, excellence and profile aside, we'd like to bring it back to the fore in our perhaps absurd, slightly satirical 'devaluation' process. Evaluation (in the most basic sense) is about measuring something's worth/effectiveness against specific prescribed standards for some utilitarian purpose, e.g. to improve practice and provide evidence of 'performance' or success.

We propose to design and conduct a thoroughly pointless exercise in evaluation that may, at the same time, invite people to think in different ways about 'value'.

I was inspired by the concept of 'bullshit' in relation to social impact evaluation in the arts (Belfiore, 2009). Eleonora Belfiore proposes that, in the UK in the 2000s, pressure to justify public funding of the arts resulted in the idea that the socio-economic value of the arts could be measured using impact assessment tools. Belfiore unpacks the political bullshitting that went on at this time, with ministers stating in one sentence that it was essential to use quantified measurements to convince the 'system' of the value of the arts and in the next, acknowledging such evidence to be meaningless. But the centripetal dynamic of capitalocentrism kicked in, and impact became a proxy for value, with value standing for 'value for money'. The popularity

of impact evaluation is rooted in the anxiety of justifying the value of the arts and the assumption this must be done using the assumed-to-be-universal language and tools of capitalism (Belfiore, 2009). What is overlooked is the way the arts generate contextually and culturally relevant methodologies for sensing and articulating diverse forms of value. How might evaluation be reimagined, remade, as a *pluriversal* practice, in which multiple notions of value and practices of value are made possible and can co-exist?



Figure 2. The Devaluation Station and feedback form, images by Molly Mullen

Tom designed and made the Devaluation Station: a bright red laminate box, raised, plinth-like, on long timber legs. It was placed at the entrance to the OFA hall for the festival's duration. To complete the form and return it through the narrow slot is to participate in an individualised, predetermined practice of valuing. One form, one pen, one slot, one measure of value, a universal singularity. Form-filling is, typically, deeply mundane, and because of this, it can seduce us uncritically into a practice of judging value by arbitrarily capitalocentric measures. But the bright red box and ridiculous questions playfully call attention to and defamiliarise this practice.

When audiences received the form, there would be a slight shoulder sag, eye roll, or eyebrow raised at being asked to evaluate this event. The invitation to evaluate in this way was at odds with the Festival of Uncertainty, which eschewed market value. Some people discarded the form immediately. When others read the questions, though, they gave a slight smile, a laugh, or turned to check whether it was for real. Some completed the form, drew on it, wrote poems, or made paper aeroplanes.

There is no shortage of art that is critical of capitalism, but the Devaluation Station might be understood specifically as a practice of generative critique. Lea Schick (2021) proposes the term generative critique, drawing on the work of Latour (2004) and Verran (2014) who “formulate a kind of critique [. . . that] aims at ‘adding to’ or generatively

help develop the subject matter” (Schick, 2021, p. 484). Schick argues that some art practices go beyond revealing/exposing a problem and instead encourage people to engage with it in critical *and* productive ways. The devaluation station playfully engaged people with the bullshit of measurement, inviting the audience to recognise it, to get a feel for it, to laugh at it and reconsider their participation in it. Looking back, I wonder whether the devaluation station inadvertently recentred capitalism by making capitalocentric concepts and practices the focus. I am also uncertain if, ultimately, it was both critical *and* productive. We tried to catalyse a shared process of deconstructing the concept and practice of impact evaluation, but could we have done more to prompt reimagining or collective experimentation with postcapitalist alternatives? As people participated in and responded to the Devaluation Station, whether they completed and returned a form, turned it into a paper aeroplane, or simply laughed at it, were they, if only in a small way, putting ideas, imaginings, of economy and capitalism into motion in different, unexpected ways? Through prompting a sense of hilarity and playful participation, perhaps this work did do more than just inflame people's negative feelings about capitalocentric evaluation in the arts, generating, at a more-than-rational level, some sense that evaluation could be otherwise (Schick, 2021), it could be fun, funny, collective, creative, embodied, non-representational.

Heather: Honey Bucket Housing in Secwepemculecw British Columbia

As I reflect with DE co-conspirators on the ways that arts practices can foster sensing more-than-capitalist futures, I see how, like Molly, my performance-based work is also a form of generative critique. As Schick (2021) argues, “art as generative critique may provide a productive and vital mode for intervening into [energy] futures in-the-making” (p. 483). For the artists I work with, generative critique takes the form of a satirical planning workshop that includes a portable toilet and a lot of laughing.

I am a white settler of Scottish, Irish and English descent who researches mutual aid and the arts in Secwepemculecw, a territory colonially named British Columbia, Canada. This is where I grew up. Since 2020, I have been meeting with Mi'kmaq musician and comedian Nakuset Gould and Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux comedian, poet and visual artist Chris Bose online and in person to create comedic responses to the escalating climate and housing crisis impacting our communities. Through improv games, collage making, and performing as our alter-egos, we co-create surreal, satirical urban planning projects.

My alter-ego is Toby Sharp, a self-proclaimed world leader in innovation and creativity. I originally created Toby when I was working as a community development planner in Tkaronto (colonially named Toronto) and performing with Dirty Plotz, a cabaret collective that shared stories about the historic and ongoing erasure of women, 2-Spirit, non-binary people, and trans women in arts scenes. Toby was my response to the proliferation of expert consultants charging municipal governments and nonprofit organisations exorbitant fees to learn how to be more ‘creative’ while working with increasingly cut back resources. Because Toby recently decided to become a ‘world

leader' in research on Indigenous entrepreneurs, he is now collaborating with Nakuset's Skus Akwesan, a drag-king Instagram influencer, and Chris's Donny Dreamcatcher, a leg wrestling coach and property developer. Honey Bucket Housing is one project that emerged from Toby, Skus and Donny's collaborations. This initiative, which encourages people to move into the plastic portable toilets often found on construction sites, is Donny's response to the growing housing crisis across so-called British Columbia.

While working online for Thompson Rivers University in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, a city colonially named Kamloops, I connected with Chris, an old friend from the local art and punk scene. Stuck in our hometown for the first few months of Covid, we met for walks around the city. As our alter ego characters, we filmed each other discussing urban development and oil pipeline expansion. Unintentionally, we were engaging in what Gómez-Peña et al. (2021) refer to as the anti-colonial research practice of alter ego performance art. The local landscape shaped by colonial and capitalist expansion, as well as more-than-capitalist community building and care, offered endless topics to investigate and discuss on our performance walks. For example, we walked on the beach where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had recently arrested Indigenous Elders and women Water Protectors. These groups had set up an encampment to protest the drilling of the TMX oil pipeline to transport Alberta tar sands sludge under the local river. We also stopped in to chat with neighbours working for a grassroots mutual aid organisation run by moms and Elders responding to the city's opioid crisis.

A friend at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) asked me if Chris and I would like to perform in a small online conference on women and environmental research. We reached out to Nakuset, who I had been following on social media since meeting her while working with the Toronto Free Gallery, an artist-run centre that supported underrepresented Indigenous, Black and People of Colour artists, 2-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ artists. Nakuset, Chris and I started to meet on Zoom to create the UNBC talk, which led to us creating more comedy videos. We drew attention to the voracious forest fires and intense flooding that have impacted our communities over the past few years. We also made connections between the climate crisis, increasing gentrification and precarious work in the arts, university and community development sectors. As Indigenous land defenders, water protectors, artists and scholars point out, these ecological disasters and power asymmetries signal historic and ongoing settler colonial violence across so-called Canada (Elliott, 2020; Farrales et al., 2022).

When we discussed the Honey Bucket project, Chris joked that living in a small portable toilet makes sense because it feels like we live in increasingly irrational and dystopian times. For Chris, his puerile humour is an effective way to respond to the growing number of families living in caravans, mobile homes, and temporary modular homes after forest fires and floods have devastated communities across Secwepemcúlecw. He also shared how his mom's ancestral village, Camchin, colonially named Lytton, completely burned down in 2021 after the area was enveloped in a 50-degree Celsius heat dome, the hottest recorded temperature in the Northern Hemisphere that day.

In 2023, we further developed the Honey Bucket project for a satirical urban planning workshop for the rEvolver Festival of Performance's Indigenous Emergence Triple Feature and Community Gathering in East Vancouver (Up in the Air Theater Company, 2023). In this performance, participants planned their own Porta Potti housing. As Skus, Donny and Toby, we facilitated a collaborative session where participants created collages with cut-out images of police, high-end art, designer beer, flowers, various critters, and many other images. As participants created their collages, we discussed the ridiculous state of urban politics in Vancouver, including how the current Mayor, Ken Sim, was endorsed by billionaire Chip Wilson, the owner of Lululemon yoga pants. Implementing his law and order platform, since 2022, Sim has aggressively worked with police to harass the growing unhoused population in a violent clean the streets campaign. In the rEvolver gathering, participants responded to Mayor Sim by creating their own Porta Potti plans that poked fun at policing and gentrification with collages featuring cops in expensive yoga pants serving expensive craft beer and high-end art found in some of the city's trendy neighbourhoods.

As we develop our alter-ego performance research, I see how our toilet humour and comedic collage-making foster sensing more-than-capitalist futures in small ways. Alter-ego and comedy provide us with tools to engage in generative critique. First, in performing Toby, Skus and Donny, we unsettle power hierarchies perpetuated through embodied gestures and how these repetitions universalise white supremacist, ableist, and heteropatriarchal economic discourses and structures (Lane & Mancini, 2021; Stephens, 2012). Comedic alter ego performance also offers us ways to undo mastery, or the expertise of planners, developers and researchers upholding colonial and neoliberal policies and practices (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). Moreover, in collaboration with rEvolver participants, we co-created a space to laugh at, learn from and be with "the precarity, brokenness and imperfection of our collective existence" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 53) in increasingly gentrified and policed cities in so-called Canada.

Importantly, the satire of Honey Bucket Housing also echoes feminist DE calls for embodied and slow scholarship that takes time to grow. While practising this work, Chris and Nakuset have reflected on the many times university researchers have approached them to provide land acknowledgements and create Indigenous curriculum or to create art projects with minimal financial support. Their insights have taught me to slow down and practice hyper-reflexivity as a white cis-gendered settler researcher with ongoing complicities in colonial, neoliberal systems and structures. Taking inspiration from DE thinkers and practitioners collaborating with Indigenous, Black and People of Colour scholars, queer and feminist scholars, I take cultivating networks of interdependence and care seriously as we create more projects. With our crappy creations, we aim to laugh, dream and stumble towards more abundant, wise and kind futures.

Experiments in sensing postcapitalist economies

In the following three examples, Aviv, Kelly and Leo narrate experiments with sensing postcapitalist and community economies. Leo's band Vimana gives insight into the politics of collective action and a community formed through commoning in their album *Space Triangle of Love*. In this case, the collective making of music enabled a deeply embodied experience of what it means to do things together. Aviv's intervention of the open door invites a politics of the subject built on the concept of 'swerve' where new subjects emerge briefly and unexpectedly (Gibson-Graham, 2006), perhaps literally swerving through an open door and into a new way of being in the economy. Kelly's garden began as an experiment in embodied knowledge production and transfer between herself, a new environment and her children. It also performs a politics of language, where *thinking* of economies as gardens with both flourishing surplus and overdetermined crop fails involves *sensing* economies differently. Each of these quilt pieces is an experiment: partial, transient, not fully rationalised or given meaning, but they offer some tentative re-sensing of what different forms of economy could look like. As adrienne maree brown reminds us: "experiment, gather feedback, experiment again. That is how we learn" (brown, 2017, p. 106).

Leo: Space Triangle of Love

In the midst of the pandemic in July 2022, Vimana, the band I play guitar in, along with Brian Rodriguez on bass and Bruce Todd on drums, went into the studio to record our first album. While this is our first official recording, we have been performing together for over ten years. We play all original instrumental music, which at times veers towards jazz, psychedelic rock, or a little bit of funk and blues. Whatever it is, it is esoteric, so in some ways having 220 copies of an album pressed onto vinyl seems like a highly questionable enterprise. But in other ways, the music we create is beyond the simple calculations of production. It is beyond enterprise.

Our particular kind of instrumental music is simultaneously rooted in structure and improvisation. The songs have a firm foundation, a pattern, specific phrases, and then over many weeks, we learn how to embellish that structure through improvisation. We try different textures, different colours, different patterns until the song takes shape and becomes something less ephemeral and more like an object you can touch and feel with your hands.

Sometimes, we have remarked how playing music together is our form of therapy or meditation or prayer. It is something centring for each of us, it provides a space where we can exist on a different plane than our ordinary work or home life planes. We have to be open to our nonverbal communication with one another. We have to awaken different aspects of our selves.

Before the pandemic, the band would perform in public about once a month, but once the pandemic hit, all public performances ceased. As a local band with few diehard fans, when we play at local establishments, we are typically bartering our services for free drinks, sometimes dinner, plus tips. A few venues will add a little bit

of money ranging from fifty to a few hundred dollars. But we are not focused on music making as commerce. The real objective of this endeavour is to share our music with other people. The National Endowment for the Arts (2010) notes, “it has been fruitful to consider not only attendance—visiting museums or going to ballet, for example—but also arts creation or performance (...). This latter type of activity (...) represents a phenomenon often labelled as the ‘informal’ arts” (p. 2).

A year into the pandemic the Massachusetts Cultural Council released a grant focused on helping artists who had been impacted by the pandemic. We applied and received one of the grants to enable making a record. Suddenly, our little basement trio was able to book time in a local studio, Sonelab, with a well-known engineer, Justin Pizzoferrato. We had the tracks mastered by Carl Saff in Chicago and finally pressed onto vinyl by Citizen Vinyl in Asheville, North Carolina. The cover art was done by Bruce's teenage daughter. My son Simon appears on a few tracks on keyboard, and my father Bo Youp also appears on a track on violin. A local graphic designer and friend, Max Germer did the final layout of the album cover, and local photographer Julian Parker Burns took the photo on the back.

The result is 220 copies of our album, *Space Triangle of Love*, many of which will be gifted to family, friends, and people we want to impress. And the rest we hope to sell at gigs or record stores, with a hope to seed some of the funding for the next album, but primarily our hope is to get our music out into the world and listened to.

In many ways, this would be considered a broken economic model. It is not a business model in the traditional sense where profit is extracted from the production. Yet, the endeavour, this rural activity, has produced something in this world that did not exist before. The value, intrinsically rural, intrinsically personal, and lacking a commercial market in the capitalist sense, is nevertheless transformative in its small scale. We might say “when the ‘informal’ arts are considered, however, the urban arts primacy generally fades. Metro and non-metro residents tend to engage in these activities at the same rate” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2010, p. 3). The creativity is still production, whether it is in a small rural town or a large metropolitan city.

I think back to my very first conversation with Julie Graham² where she dared me to define an economy. What we came up with was that an economy is a system designed to improve the quality of life for people. In that regard, *Space Triangle of Love* qualifies as economic activity. It is non-capitalist in its endeavour and its expectations. The album emerges from what Jay Salinas calls Cultureshed:

1. A geographic region irrigated by streams of local talent and fed by deep pools of human and natural history.
 2. An area nourished by what is cultivated locally.
 3. The efforts of writers, performers, visual artists, scholars, farmers and chefs who contribute to a vital and diverse local culture
- (Salinas, 2012, as quoted by Barrett, 2012, p. 1).

² Julie Graham, with Katherine Gibson, wrote under the pseudonym J.K. Gibson-Graham. We draw on their shared work in diverse and community economies throughout this chapter.

The album is the product of a local ecosystem of exchange, some in currency (including a pandemic relief grant), some through gifting of time or talent. While the additional gift economy created through pandemic relief funds was instrumental in the production of a physical product, the ecosystem of local artists, musicians, restaurants, bars, local festivals, art galleries, and audience members created an economy that is more than capitalocentric, it is centred and reliant on community. As musicians, we are interested in the transformative nature of art production, how it changes the artist, the audience, and the environment in which we exist.

Aviv: Economies as sculptures, physical objects in space

Famously annoying artist Richard Serra created the “Tilted Arc” in Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan in 1981. People had to walk around it. It blocked their way, creating much controversy. This particular work of macho metalwork can help me make a point: art objects form part of public/social space, of people's daily lives. Unlike the typical functional objects that surround us, they inhabit space differently, leaving room for ambiguity, posing questions. Every office worker passing through the plaza had to engage their body with the questions posed by the imposing and annoying Serra. The economic/artistic projects I would like to discuss are not there to annoy or provoke, but like Serra's arc, they are physically, socially and economically present in the space of daily life. What kind of *economic* sculptures can we create in our neighbourhoods? Two elements are important in this story: the provocation of open doors and some experiences of meandering paths.

In 2009 Adrian³ signed a lease on the ground-floor storefront in Santa Dolors Street, (Maricel, Spain). They drippily painted the name of the project on its big green doors. At the end of a cul-de-sac, these doors opened to create one big space, half of it inside and half outside, in the shade of a tall Tipuana Tipu tree. Once open, five years of dinners, workshops, meetings, film screenings and other kinds of loitering commenced. Everyone who drifted in was offered a cup of tea. These were years of gratifying social activity, sharing, celebrating, questioning, debating, inviting. They were also years of not knowing, doubting, waiting. They ended with a couple of years of getting in debt and collectively, exuberantly responding to crisis. This storefront was an attempt to create community economies in a street corner lacking much social infrastructure. The big open doors were central to its functionality, nourishing its program with new ideas, letting activities spill out onto the street.

Years later, Adrian and his collaborator Adel were walking around the Avenue neighbourhood in Whykham, the northern British city in which they now lived. On this particular day, they bumped into a small one-story building, a village hall. In it, they met Kid, a fifty-something hippy with a goatee beard, long hair, and an ironic sense of humour imbued with a generous sense of humanity. He ran the space, referring to himself alternately as the mis-manager or the dictator of the hall. The hall was a hub of activity, diverse cultural groups using it for a variety of purposes during the week.

³ Pseudonyms used in this vignette.

The story of the hall also involved the two elements discussed here: the meandering paths of not knowing and the porosity of boundaries in open doors. The hall existed for about 15 years, a grassroots form of social infrastructure. Reflecting back, Kid says, “I opened the door and thought, ‘will anybody come in?’” Kid’s words describe a state of not-knowing: not knowing who will come through the door, not knowing what proposals they might bring with them, not knowing what direction the character of the hall might take. The hall counted on people’s trajectories meandering through the open doors and populating its calendar, creating the activities that flavour the space, bringing the income that paid expenses. At the same time, it was not ‘anything goes’. Both had a certain ethics, a certain aesthetic, that helped them drift in a particular way, enabling community economies in the neighbourhood around them.

Adel and Adrian started a weekly online community radio show from the hall. Defined as a radio/teahouse, it was an open space for people to wander in, interview, get interviewed, request a song, have a warm beverage. After several years, it expanded into a weekly market. But when the owners of the building wanted it back, the hall was shut down, and the projects abruptly ended. Adel and Adrian started a market/radio/teahouse in an old abandoned Victorian church recently acquired by a local housing charity, and the cycle began again.

In these stories, open doors are physical embodiments of the porous boundaries of community economies. People and ideas wander in, and encounters occur. The other element present in all of these stories is their drifting around in a state of not-knowing for long stretches of time. These projects are vulnerable explorations, aiming to create grassroots social infrastructure for neighbourhoods that need them. Could they have materialised in the way they did had they followed a concrete plan (a business plan)? Probably not. Could they have gained a higher level of stability, taking root and staying for longer in service of the communities in which they were entangled? Probably. But what we have instead are experiments in doing economies in community.

Kelly: Retheorising and re-sensing economies through the garden

I moved to a new town a little over a year ago. In the first few weeks, I started a vegetable garden. With the cost of living crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand, there had been a lot in the news that year about how vegetable gardening was not really a solution to food insecurity—it was a rich people’s activity in that people could spend so much money setting up a garden and only get a few vegetables right at the time they were cheapest in the supermarket. My garden began with some gifted plants and some found materials. I want to tell you about two different beds in my garden.

For the first garden, I repurposed some wood from a fallen tree and old bricks to make a low garden. I covered it all with half-ready compost, buried some more food waste in it, then a bit of commercial compost and pea straw. In this garden, my aim was to firstly build the relationships of microorganisms in the soil to support nutrition for both the plants and our family, and secondly, to create a beautiful display of vegetable plants in a mixed planting and multi-layered arrangement that was attractive to the children (aged between 4 and 16). I wanted a range of spring and summer plants that

would pique their interest giving them an embodied sense of where food came from and helping them form relationships with soil and place and food.

In early spring, with my preschooler, I planted corn plants along the back. My teenager pitched in with a story of the ‘three sisters’ (corn, squash and beans) she had heard in the audiobook version of “Braiding Sweetgrass” (Kimmerer, 2013). So, we planted small cucurbit plants, including cucumber, zucchini and small pumpkins. And we planted borlotti beans, to experiment with drying and preserving them for winter consumption. We also planted some gifted climbing beans that had been continuously cultivated by Italian immigrants and never commercialised. We planted tomatoes that my son had grown from seed—a heritage range of different colours, sizes and shapes, including some shaped like bums, much to the delight of the younger two children. We planted herbs and cultivated a spearmint that just popped up in the middle of it all. The youngest child took delight in trying all the leaves and experiencing the different flavours, while another child started making herbal teas. The corn began to grow tall, the tomatoes growing up the corn, developing in beauty and productivity.

Later in the spring, my husband dug a sandpit for the children. He piled all the topsoil to create another bed. He broke up the clods, but it was hard and dry. I did not really have much of a plan but wanted to use the space to grow more food somehow. My son and I had already planted a whole packet of pumpkin seeds we had been gifted into old plastic planters. We decided to use the pumpkin seedlings to break in the garden since I figured they are usually resilient. We watered the spot and planted them all out in the poor soil, adding a little compost as we planted each plant. We covered it over with a thin layer of bark mulch sourced from a friend. Soon, the whole garden was covered with prolific pumpkin vines. Yet, after a few weeks of this insane growth, I noticed some spots of powdery mildew on the pumpkin leaves. I called my dad and brother, who work in horticulture. They agreed I should remove all the infected leaves and then spray all the plants with garden oil.



Figure 3. The garden at its peak growth, photo by Kelly Dombroski.

I follow their advice that same day, but by the next week, the mildew has spread to the whole bed and started into a few plants in the other beds. I use eco-fungicide,

which is made of potassium bicarbonate. Despite all that prolific growth, there are actually only about five pumpkins growing. I had now spent about \$45 trying to control the mildew. The following week, I again cut out all the infected leaves, and this time I harvest four of the larger pumpkins. Another one has rotted already from disease, and two small ones I leave on the vine hoping it might recover. The plot looks devastated, the ground dry and lumpy, the plants all white, yellow, and disintegrating before our eyes.

Meanwhile, the other garden is also partly full of dead plants—but dead plants at the end of a good life. We have harvested and eaten all the corn but leave the stalks standing as they still support tomatoes. I harvest all the borlotti beans, which come to about half a jar, possibly enough for one meal—or enough for a crop next year. The tomatoes are coming to the end of their time, and we are collecting bowls of them and using them to make pasta sauce. The zucchini still produce each day and have been resistant to the spots of mildew, unlike their sisters in the other garden nearby. The herbs are flowering, the marigolds around the edge are enjoying a comeback as the vegetable plants die back. It is ready for an autumn planting.

What does all this have to do with retheorising economy? J.K. Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) discuss how we often think of the economy as some kind of machine with levers to pull and inputs and outputs. They give us the example of the Moniac machine, built to replicate and predict the effects of interest rates and savings on the national economy. The machine represents ordinary people interacting with the economy as a set of variables who respond in predictable ways—saving when interest rates are high, borrowing when they are low, and just generally responding predictably to the levers pulled by the ‘real economists’. Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) invite us to think of the economy as something much bigger than the Moniac machine—and also much smaller. They invite us to think of the economy as a community garden, where the inputs of sunlight, rain, people's time and energy, gifting, harvesting, composting and more represent the interactions and complexity of the economies we are all living in. In that economy, we all have agency to do things together to make something different, and we all participate in a variety of ways. As I work in the garden, I begin to re-sense the economy as something I participate in with some agency.

Like many in urban settings, I have experienced metabolic rift, embedded in a ‘throw it away’ economic rationality, unable to see where our waste goes. Aotearoa New Zealand produces masses of food for places around the world. The food waste is thus often returned to the soil—or landfilled in anaerobic purgatory—somewhere else in the world (Goburdhone & Dombroski, 2023). We extract from our soils to feed the world, and then we have had to extract fertilisers from countries like Nauru to replenish our soils enough to continue to produce food. While a machine model of the economy treats all inputs and outputs as much the same (standardised as money), sensing the economy as a garden allows us to see that it really matters where the inputs and outputs come from and where they go to. My gardens worked in small-scale experimental ways to nurture my family and close some of the metabolic rift. We ate the produce, and we learned about what works in our area. We returned our waste

to the soil. While I was hoping to use the cheap and free pumpkin plants to do the work of breaking up the soil for me, of establishing the relationships of fungi, microbes and rhizomes in the soil, these plants succumbed to disease, and I spent a lot of money on outside inputs to try and fix it.

In all this, the children are watching and sensing and learning. One asks, "Why did the pumpkin patch all die off, and the other patch produce so much food?" My other children note how you get sick of eating to the seasons—the in-season vegetables losing their relative value. But how this means we easily give them away to others, too. My son bikes around the neighbourhood gifting people grapefruit and zucchini. The garden is our theory of the economy and also allows us to interact with the economy differently. Our experiments in feeding ourselves are experiments in closing the metabolic rift and nurturing different kinds of active economic subjectivities.

Sensing as theory

Our patched-together quilt of creative interventions does not fit within a tidy summary or conclusion. Rather, in the spirit of the DE approach that encourages embodied, material, creative, and contextualised theorising, our quilt of creative practices in this chapter offers a glimpse into some ways our work helps us experiment and practice more-than-capitalist economies. Reflecting on our quilt, we also draw from performance studies and DE thinking. Both draw on the concept of performativity to consider how discourse, texts and practices go beyond representing 'the world' or 'the economy' and, instead, can bring particular worlds or economies into being, making them more or less possible. When assembled together, the quilt patches of practice in Parts 1 and 2 offer a sense of the 'both/and' relationship between anti-capitalist and postcapitalist thinking and action proposed by DE scholar Ethan Miller (2015). Miller asks, "[c]an we not construct forms of action and subjectivity in which both critique and experiment, rage and hope, opposition and possibility, co-exist and even co-constitute one another?" (p. 3). We contend that creative and artistic practices can offer such forms of action and subjectivity because of their capacity to bring together elements that might be viewed as incoherent or incompatible in other contexts. Also central to this chapter is the idea that embodied and sensorial experiences have a crucial but overlooked role in sensing, imagining, enacting and embodying more-than-capitalist economies.

Molly and Heather's comedic interventions satirised the ridiculousness of capitalist imaginaries that have been taken very seriously across the arts, education, and urban planning sectors. Their examples show how satirical arts interventions that measure impact, or the value of art, and promote Porta Potti living can provide some hilarious, somatic release. These interventions create opportunities to laugh with and learn from glitches and failures in neoliberal logics and practices and to envision alternatives with communities. Both Molly and Heather's practices point to the potential of generative critique that can spur new possibilities rather than imposing change with

negative affect. Leo, Aviv and Kelly's quilt pieces offer glimpses into learning from improvisational music-making, experimental community gathering spaces and home gardening. These examples shine a light on the ways that each co-creative practice fosters interdependent economies and economic subjects through embodied and improvisational experiences. These community and diverse economies are being continuously theorised and retheorised, as much through bodies, feelings and relationships as they are through thoughts and words.

For each of us, the activities and experiments we share in this chapter propel us to feel and sense beyond the abstract and rational economic theory that tends to dominate theory and mainstream popular discourse. These adaptive, decentralised, interdependent, relational and transformative (brown, 2017) practices strengthen our ability to engage fully with the world and, practice radical tenderness and hold space for difficulties, tensions, and contradictions. Our practices also help us dream and build economies that forefront interdependence and care with our local communities and beyond, including our international community economies research network (CERN).

To conclude, we hope that, like Kelly's garden patch, this chapter will sprout more heterogenous, fertile and resilient spaces to co-sense and co-practice economies differently. Maybe we will experience glitches, blunders and failure. But, as we face accelerating socio-ecological crises globally, we can learn from missteps and co-imagine more healthy futures.

References

- Barrett, S. (2012, November 13). Rebuilding the front porch: An interview with Patrick Overton. *Art of the Rural*. Available at: <http://theruralsite.blogspot.com/2012/11/rebuilding-front-porch-interview-with.html>
- Belfiore, E. (2009). On bullshit in cultural policy practice and research: Notes from the British case. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15(3), 343–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630902806080>
- brown, a. m. (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press.
- Elliott, A. (2020, March 26). After the crisis, what kind of world do we want? Post-apocalyptic novels hold lessons—and warnings. *CBC Arts*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/after-the-crisis-what-kind-of-world-do-we-want-post-apocalyptic-novels-hold-lessons-and-warnings-1.5509721>
- Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Farrales, M., Hoogeveen, D., Sloan Morgan, O., De Leeuw, S., & Parkes, M. (2022). Framing futurities in photovoice, health, and environment: How power is reproduced and challenged in arts-based methods. *GeoHumanities*, 8(2), 415–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2022.2080095>
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J., Dombroski, K., Healy, S., & Miller, E. (2021). Cultivating community economies: Tools for building a livable world. In J. G. Speth & K. Courrier (Eds.), *The new systems reader: Alternatives to a failed economy* (pp. 410–432). Routledge.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996). *The end of capitalism (as we knew it)*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006). *A postcapitalist politics*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J., & Healy, S. (2013). *Take back the economy: An ethical guide for transforming our communities*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., & Dombroski, K. (2020). Introduction to the handbook of diverse economies: Inventorying as ethical intervention. In J. K. Gibson-Graham & K. Dombroski (Eds.), *The handbook of diverse economies* (pp. 1–25). Edward Elgar.
- Goburdhone, S., & Dombroski, K. (2023). Thinking with soils: Can urban farms help us heal metabolic rifts in Aotearoa? *New Zealand Geographer*, 79(2), 127–131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.12363>
- Gómez-Peña, G., Martínez-Cruz, P., & García-López, S. (2021). *La Pocha Nostra: A handbook for the rebel artist in a post-democratic society*. Routledge.
- Kimmerer, R. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.
- Lane, J., & Mancini, L. (2021). The clowns are here. *Canadian Theatre Review*, 183, 5–7.
- Latour, B. (2004). Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical Inquiry*, 30, 225–248.
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing modernity: Facing humanity's wrongs and the implications for social activism*. North Atlantic Books.

- McLean, H. (2022). Creative arts-based geographies: Some cautionary and hopeful reflections. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 21(3), 311–326.
- Miller, E. (2015). Anticapitalism or postcapitalism? Both! *Rethinking Marxism*, 27(3), 364–367.
- National Endowment for the Arts. (2010). *Come as you are: Informal arts participation in urban and rural communities*.
- Schick, L. (2021). The power of generative critique in art-energy projects. In H. S. Rogers (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of art, science, and technology studies* (pp. 469–487). Routledge.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1994). *Tendencies*. Routledge.
- Stephens, L. (2012). Rethinking the political: Art, work and the body in the contemporary circus [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Toronto.
- Up in the Air Theater Company. (2023). *rEvolver Festival*.
- Verran, H. (2014). Working with those who think otherwise. *Common Knowledge*, 20(3), 527–539.