

# This is not 'interesting' research: Authentically Co-Creating Participatory Action Research in UK's Post-Covid Culture Industries

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**Abstract** This essay explores methodological, ethical, and practical aspects of authentically co-creating participatory action research (PAR) in post-Covid 19 participatory arts contexts in the UK. It analyses the limits and possibilities of PAR methods into leadership pathways in the UK's arts and culture sector. In critical dialogue with decolonial and intersectional frameworks that seek to challenge and transform institutionalised privilege in the wake of the Covid pandemic, we investigate the financialisation of participatory strategies of cultural co-creation, with a particular focus on questions of racial and class dynamics in the arts. This essay develops a decolonial political ontology of PAR through a critique of both authenticity and its financialisation in participatory action research projects. Drawing on recent critical analyses of 'post-extractivism' and 'co-creation' in participatory research, we suggest that the recent financialisation of 'impactful' participation is an increasingly important but neglected 'matter of concern' for critical PAR methodologies.

**Keywords** participatory art, participatory action research, creative industries, financialisation of art, decolonising participatory art, Covid-19 and cultural production

## INTRODUCTION

Participatory action research (PAR) and associated cultural practices of participation have become the objects and instruments of financialisation in varied ways. In the process PAR has been re-valued in relationship to social impact, risk, civic integration, and ethical research policy in and beyond higher education institutions (HEIs). For the purposes of this essay, financialisation is defined as an old but now qualitatively and quantitatively new array of racial capitalist accumulation strategies and forms of valorisation tied to 'unearned increments' of surplus value in the form of rents (derivatives, licensing fees, service fees, user fees, copyright, assets, NFTs, intellectual property, etc.). After the 2008 economic crisis, in which poor women of colour and Black women in the USA were disproportionately targeted for high-risk 'sub-prime' mortgages, it has become widely recognised that financialisation works not only through the production of ever-more sophisticated algorithms and financial technologies but also through the development of methods for speculating upon, harnessing, recalibrating and recoding social life itself. For critics of financialisation such as Randy Martin and Max Haiven, the deployment of financial instruments such as the derivative enabled not only financialisation to advance but also answered the political challenges of deepening capitalist crises, new social movements, and decolonization by reordering social and economic life in the process.

Within financialisation, differently valued social and neurological capacities and qualities are folded into the system through for instance data-mining, consuming practices, digital profiling, and risk metrics; seemingly inscrutable algorithms and protocols aggregate us into communities of shared risk without our consent and often without our knowledge (Haiven, 2018; Martin, 2008). The

processes of financialisation are far from transparent; the work of Dymksi et al. (2013), Moten (2013), Bhandar and Toscano (2015), and others have shown that in the USA the subprime borrowers were indeed targeted on a set of criteria opaque to themselves. Financialisation, under the speculative logic of the derivative and through mystifying technologies of rent and debt, re-orders and re-organizes people and their different aspects into new “cryptic aggregations” all the time, constantly combining and recombining them to produce small differences. The financialised logic of the derivative is one that seeks to identify, isolate and leverage these small differences into large payback, or advantageous temporary configurations, to recognize a pattern that might become a transformative moment for surplus value accumulation. This essay argues that one of these small differences that becomes decisive for the financialisation of cultural production in participatory action research is “authentic participation.”

This essay, then, explores methodological, ethical, and practical aspects of authentically co-creating participatory action research (PAR) in post-Covid 19 creative industries in the context of the financial rentiership of the UK. It questions the assumption and function of authentic commitment that supposedly grounds participation and action in this form of research. It seeks to problematise the jargon, ideology and aura of authenticity that functions as a mystifying rent seeking mode of capture of participation in research-council funded action research (Adorno, 2013). Contemporary scholarship of the creative industries has turned increasingly to the relationship among art, racial capitalist accumulation, dominant organisational forms and their deconstruction, and the social reproduction of resistance as individualised civic participation (Federici, 2004; Haiven, 2018; Hardt & Negri, 2017; Harney & Moten 2010, 2013, 2021; Harvey, 2017; Negri, 1979; Silva 2021); and in the cultural studies of financialisation and rent seeking, the creative participation of subjects in art projects has also increasingly come under critical scrutiny (while not the focus of this essay, participatory art and its methodologies as we shall see are important for the broader re-consideration of participation in PAR). In this research context, the conditions of possibility of ‘authentic participation’ in participatory action research are shown to be at least partly in the overlapping worlds of financialisation and rent: What happens to authentic participatory action research, in terms of its temporalities, routines, and valorisation, under neoliberal regimes of the financialisation of everyday life and the rentierisation of cultural production? (Haiven, 2014, 2018; Martin, 2015; Ranciere, 2010, 2011) The exploration of this question grounds our decolonial political ontology of PAR, one that foregrounds as we shall see a deconstruction of transparency and extractivism in PAR infrastructures.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

It should be noted at the outset that this research received funding directly from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and from the research HEI responsible for ethics approval, and indirectly through Arts Council England, the Wellcome Trust, researchers’ personal funds, unpaid social reproduction, and resource support through the cultural capital that became associated with Changing Leadership Models (the anonymised name of the action research project around mentoring at the complex intersections of race and class [and gender and ability] in the UK’s performance sector funded by the AHRC’s ‘emergency’ Covid response fund). The PAR research emerged from the already thoroughly financialised cultural context of the UK in which authentically participatory research and cultural production are risk assessed, measured for impact, and valorised in relation to other financial assets across the global economy. We take this as a self-critical point of departure. Within and against this financialisation, we pursued participatory action research methods that were grounded in a practice of ‘authentic co-creation’ (we define this concept more fully below). Both co-researchers were “foreign” to the UK: one born in the UK and lived in Ghana till he was 17; the other, born in India and raised in the USA, came to the UK mid-career. We had

friends in common, we have sat on arts organisation boards together, and we have read each other's writings. Essilfie has a background in electrical engineering and multicultural educational infrastructures work; Rai has an academic and activist background in post-colonial affect studies and participatory action research.

First, a note on our methods. This project brought together PAR methods with diversity affirming leadership pathways in the UK's arts and culture sector. We engaged in semi-structured interviews, participant observation, collective policy document analysis, organisational and sector diagramming, and resistant allyship network building (through informal and formal means), all aimed to maximise participation and stay focused on diverse 'actions' around racial and class equality in the arts. Our PAR methodology drew on (post)workerist organising experiments in workers inquiry, and decolonial, feminist, Black radical, Dalit, and intersectional frameworks that seek to challenge and transform institutionalised privilege. We experimented with action-focused participatory methods grounded in a refusal of the extractivism and rent seeking of neoliberal academic research, 'resilient' support/care networks, and activist and collective arts practice that aimed to build alliances for resistance and change across the cultural and creative sector. We worked with artists and artist collectives, producers, arts administrators, funding bodies, and arts and cultural organisations to develop pragmatic strategies to call out and dismantle racial, gender, ablest, and class hierarchies in the creative and cultural industries. These strategies affirmed an anti-racist and intersectional ethics of allyship in PAR research and methodologies.

We developed (at first reluctantly, see below) interventions in cultural policy around precarious freelance workers. Through our research we learned about ongoing struggles for justice and equality in the arts and cultural sectors, and we supported and provided material support for resistance movements to do their own organising (Barbican Stories, Diverse Actions). As a participatory research project conducted in partnership between creative industries researchers at a 'left-leaning' neoliberal business school in London and a recently formed experimental and decolonial arts support organisation, we focused on exclusionary dynamics and resistant strategies of race and class stratification in the sector. Over time we came to incorporate methodologies of power and exploitation analysis from Black feminist scholarship on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017; Davis, 1981). More concretely, we developed strategies that addressed the *temporalities*, *routines*, and *valorisation* of PAR in the contexts of organising co-created workshops for pragmatic skill sharing around funding and freelancing, engaging in the process 'marginalised voices' (with an acute sense of the ironies of representation) through a network of mostly women and some men of colour and Black allies across the creative sectors. We, thus, aimed to contribute to the commoning of creative, cultural, and financial resources and infrastructures. These were all different experiments in how best to sustain inclusive forms of cultural and community organising. At times, our participatory research was characterised as authentic (by academic colleagues, policy advocates, and grant writers) supposedly because of its commitment to and collaborations with marginalised communities, but also because the valorisation of authenticity ties PAR to Biblical critique, regimes of truth, modes of dissent, practices of (self)governance, and the order of knowledge as possible elements of its cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987; Foucault, 1997, p. 45). Our participatory research into the processes and infrastructures of financialisation and rentierisation in the arts and cultural industries aimed to historicise the value of this often racialised and always classed authenticity and to contribute to decolonising the relationship between financialisation and participatory action research in terms of its temporalities, routines, and valorisation.

Our itinerary in this essay follows decolonial, anti-extractivist, intersectional, and postcolonial insights into the theory and practice of contemporary participatory action research within and against financialisation. Three narratives from our research highlighting key aspects of PAR methods and dynamics of rent seeking and financialisation follow. These narratives developed from the

process of organising and conducting semi-formal interviews with Black, working class, and people of colour creatives in the UK during the second and third Covid lockdowns. In these ethnographic narratives, we explore the themes of exclusion, resistance, radical care, and co-creation that our participatory research focused on, seeking to draw out their implications for PAR methodology, ethics, and practice. We conclude by attempting partial and pragmatic syntheses of our different arguments, highlighting resonances for contemporary critical paradigms of participatory action research.

## FINANCIALISATION AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The UK has explicitly financialised participatory cultural production. As Christophers notes, the UK has long been a heartland of financial rentierism (Christophers, 2019, pp. 7-9). Nonetheless, Christophers urges a certain caution: financialisation is not equivalent to rentierisation (financial rents are only one form of rent, and one form of financialisation). Drawing on the work of Thomas Piketty, Andrew Sayer and Guy Standing, Christophers defines rent as income derived from the ownership, possession or control of scarce assets and under conditions of limited or no competition. Thus, the UK economy, he suggests, has not only been financialized; it has, more generally, been rentierized. Since the beginning of the 1980s, economic activities have massively shifted in favour of 'rentiers' in the sense that they are structured around the control of, and generation of income from scarce assets. Today, financial assets have proliferated in importance, and their expanded creation and circulation has been integral to financialisation. Thus, the financial sector can better be thought of as the 'leading rentier sector', and financialisation as a/the leading edge of rentierization. Christophers notes that the rentierization of the UK economy has entailed the disproportionate growth of rents derived from assets extending far beyond finance and property alone (Christophers, 2019, p. 2). For the HEI and arts and cultural sectors in the UK, this has meant an increasing focus on intellectual property rooted in authentically participatory cultural production and research.

In relation to the participatory arts and participation in PAR beyond the UK specifically, critical scholarship into the culture industries, financialisation and rentierisation have noted the hype around the production of non-fungible tokens for different kinds of fine art and participatory cultural production (Radermecker & Ginsburgh, 2023, p. 25). As suggested above, financialisation in cultural production is also observable in the emergence of derivative markets in fine art and participatory arts projects and the recent enthusiasm for social impact bonds; the neoliberal administration of risk assessments, and the valorisation of entrepreneurial, rent seeking and speculative modes of creative research (Birch & Ward, 2023; Martin, 2015, 2014); the increased emphasis on the speculative exploitation of artificially scarce intellectual property and rent seeking cultural production; and the racial capitalist and gendered production of debt and indebtedness in the administration of precarity and austerity in the HEI, arts and cultural sectors. These forms of cultural production are all more or less directly financialised through speculative and digitised practices of rentierisation, risk management, revenue-stream diversification, and the entrepreneurialisation of culture, art, and creativity.

Drawing on Martin, Max Haiven has argued that financialisation organizes and accelerates the exploitation and integration of capitalist production on a global scale, reaching intensively into daily life, into social relationships and into the realms of subjectivity. In the PAR of the 'decolonial option', authenticity is shown to be itself financialised in the sense that participation, because it supposedly requires the authentic or "free and uncoerced" participation of agents in cultural co-creation, lowers the risks of sabotage, resistance, refusal and subaltern self-valorisation ('civil unrest') (Negri, 1979). Participation thus lowers the risks of multicultural sociality, through authenticity itself; participation supposedly increases social impact, which can now be invested in as bonds on the

market; participation helps to fold informal counter-public spheres into a more and more securitised and yet culturally differentiated civil society. As we will discuss in the narratives that follow, these dynamics and processes of financialisation and rentierisation in participatory arts are entangled in the production and modulation of racial and classed subjectivity in and through cultural production (O'Brien et al., 2017, 2020).

## **TOWARD A DECOLONIAL, ANTI-EXTRACTIVIST, INTERSECTIONAL, AND POSTCOLONIAL PAR**

In this section we draw out a method of PAR that enables us to both engage with the complex history of resistance movements in their specific intersectional complexity, while also engaging in methodological experiments in the potentialization of resistant action itself. Ecologies of resistance in the creative and cultural industries (of which HEIs are one part) are shaped, as in the larger racial capitalist world, by measure, extraction, debt, and efficiency, and attendant biopolitical categories such as risk. In neoliberal conditions of financialised austerity, the resistances that have traditionally been ascribed to participatory action research have each been encircled, surrounded, yet without being subsumed in financialisation. Through an engagement with the critical work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Gayatri Spivak, and Edouard Glissant, the problems of action research will be tied to processes of racial, class, and sexual stratification and conflict, and to the opacity of intersectionally lived experience of co-creators of action research value. Here, as we will see further below, the question of what constitutes authentic participation in action research will emerge as crucial.

The analysis of PAR praxis activates postcolonial, anti-extractivist, and decolonial framings of culture, creativity, and resistance. With Gloria Anzaldúa we draw on the concept of the post-colonial borderland, a contact zone/interzone of hybridity (Pratt, 2007), authenticity, violence, racism and complex negotiations of the state-prison-police complex, private capital, and (communist) social reproduction (Anzaldúa, 2007). Anzaldúa's solidary celebration of "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'"—situates our PAR work on race and class in the opaque, 'vague and undetermined place' of the (post)colonial Borderland/La Frontera (2007, p. 3). From the work of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, we draw on the critique of transparency in political and philosophical representations of the other (Silva, 2007; Spivak, 1999). Spivak's famous distinction between *darstellung* (mimetic representation) and *vorstellung* (imagination, idea, perception, performance, protest) in her reading of Marx's 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire brings the question of representation into sharper focus. Linked to the post-structuralist critique of writing and representation (Deleuze, 1994; Derrida, 2016), Spivak enables us to see that authenticity is first and foremost a demand for representational transparency through a Eurocentric metaphysics of presence (Adorno, 2013; Butler, 2004; Derrida, 2016; Hartman, 2022; Moten, 2017; Silva, 2007; Spivak, 1999). Thus, the authentic subject of voice-consciousness must be fully present, and fully present to themselves first and foremost. This, by definition, excludes a certain postcolonial "right to opacity" (see below). Spivak's critique of voice-consciousness in representations and politics of subalternity problematises all claims to originary authenticity and full transparency in PAR processes. The aura and force of authenticity claims in PAR are often grounded in a metaphysics of originary, pure unity, full transparency, and presence of the participating research subjects; in our research it was precisely this metaphysics of presence which we sought to deconstruct through committed interaction and dialogical process with the authentically participating agents. Spivak and, more recently, Silva enables us to see that there is no authentic and originary transparency to fall back on in participatory action research whether conducted in the interests of indigenous, abolitionist, anti-caste, feminist, queer, revolutionary, environmentalist or anti-capitalist organising—in all these emancipatory movements, difference is irreducible.

This moves the question of transparent representation toward an ontology of relations. In Glissant's writings on the poetics of relation, opacity works to (un)represent authentic being and becoming. But never without relation. Here, authenticity becomes ontological, fully ecological, becoming feedbacked with sets of habituated capacities to affect and be affected. That is authenticity as opaque, processual power-essence also becomes an expression of a certain intensive, 'fuzzy', stochastic and opaque capacity of acting-in-relation, experimentally resonant and in processual incipience (Manning & Massumi, 2014; Ruiz & Vourloumis, 2021). For PAR, this becoming ontological of authenticity necessitates that the participatory aspects of research be fully processual and feedbacked with all the other critical dimensions of research: its temporalities, routines, and forms of valorisation. Participants must become expressive nodes activated and networked through the research itself, thereby materially contributing, together with the researchers, to a PAR commons (Harney & Moten, 2021, pp. 16-17).

As Joanne Rappaport notes in her study of Orlando Fals Borda, PAR has genealogies in post-colonial contexts of underdevelopment and socio-economic struggle in various parts of the world from the 1960s onward. PAR is today a widely used methodology first developed by democratically oriented social movements and non-governmental organizations, and today used by corporations, bureaucracies, and international development organizations. Rappaport situates PAR (and helps to relate it to contexts beyond the UK) thus: "Working in numerous locations, including Brazil, Colombia, India, Tanzania, and the Appalachian region of the United States, participatory researchers constructed a methodology that would foster horizontal relationships, erasing distinctions between researchers and 'the researched,' encouraging a dialogue between academic and people's knowledge, and transforming research into a tool of consciousness-raising and political organizing" (Rappaport, 2020, p. xvii).

Orlando Fals Borda was a Barranquilla-born Colombian sociologist, and founder of the Sociology Faculty of the National University of Colombia. He conducted pathbreaking ethnographic research in the 1950s on peasant economies in the Colombian highlands (Fals Borda, 1955, 1957) and participated in an advisory capacity in the Colombian agrarian reform in the 1960s; he was a supporting actor in the rise of the radical wing of ANUC, the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos-Línea Sincelejo [National Association of Peasant Users-Sincelejo Line], and developed his approach to action research at the regional level, and later at national and international levels (Rappaport, 2020, pp. vi-vii).

In Orlando Fals Borda's work, learning to interact and organize with PAR is based on the existential concept of experience. As Fals Borda puts it: "Through the actual experience of something, we intuitively apprehend its essence; we feel, enjoy and understand it as reality, and we thereby place our own being in a wider, more fulfilling context. In PAR such an experience, called *vivencia* [experience] in Spanish, is complemented by another idea: that of authentic commitment" (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 4). For Fals Borda, the combination of experience and authentic commitment "allows one to see for whom such knowledge is intended": the groups and people who are participating in the actions. Here, authenticity of committed participation functions as a kind of synthesiser of difference. Thus, while there are two types of "animators or agents of change"—those who are external and those who are internal to the exploited classes—both types are unified in one sole purpose: authentic commitment to the "shared goals of social transformation" (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 4). We can see how a certain notion of authentic commitment grounds the experience of authentic participation. Fals Borda defines authentic participation in the following:

Thus to participate means to break up voluntarily and through experience the asymmetrical relationship of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/object binomial. This is the essence of participation. The general concept of authentic participation as defined here is rooted in cultural traditions of the common people and in their real history (not the elitist version), which are

resplendent with feelings and attitudes of an altruistic, cooperative and communal nature and which are genuinely democratic. They are core values that have survived from original praxis in spite of the destructive impact of conquests, violence and all kinds of foreign invasions. Such resistant values are based on mutual aid, the helping hand, the care of the sick and the old, the communal use of lands, forests and waters, the extended family, matrifocalism and many other old social practices which vary from region to region but which constitute the roots of authentic participation. Recognition of this constructive and altruistic mode of participation, as a real and endogenous experience of and for the common people, reduces the differences between bourgeois intellectuals and grassroots communities, between elite vanguards and base groups, between experts (technocrats) and direct producers, between bureaucracies and their clients, between mental and manual labor (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 5).

This picks up on the themes of postcolonial and decolonial criticism, namely the non-representational 'essence' of participation, the political ontology of essence-as-power, the opacities of resistance in endogenous and intersectionally complex experience, and the active construction of Anzaldúan facultads of intuitive care, cooperation, and solidarity across human and non-human ecologies (see above). Fals Borda also highlights the importance of creativity in PAR processes. The "immense and dynamic potential for creativity" is experienced through the "break-up of the subject/object binomial" and through the "rejection of dogmatisms and vertical authoritarian structures, whether planned or centralized, and traditional patterns of exploitation and domination at various levels" (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 5).

This break-up of the subject-object binomial in the opaque work of creativity in PAR methodology has also resonated with recent calls for anti-extractivism in and through participatory art allied to the critique of extractivism in participatory action research (Serafini, 2022). In this work, a thoroughgoing anti-extractivist critique of participatory arts grounds a decolonial renewal of PAR processes blurring the line between action research and artistic creativity. This is where the overlap between participatory art and participatory action research becomes necessary to consider critically. For Haiven (2018) and Emily Rosamond (2016), the rise of participatory forms of cultural production (from art to research) is not simply tied to neoliberalism, but specifically to financialisation. Thus, the emergence of "socially engaged art" overlaps with "social impact investing" into socially impactful research; both are "symptomatic and constitutive of financialisation, and in many ways at the vanguard of that set of processes" (Haiven, 2018, pp. 120-21). As Haiven notes, social impact investing names an array of techniques whereby the logics and processes of the financial markets are applied to pressing social problems, and where, conversely, pressing social problems are reframed as financial dilemmas. For Haiven, "SIBs and the broader world of social impact investing attempt to financialize (what remains of) the welfare state, replacing what are imagined to be ineffective, inefficient and exploitation-prone public services which, while allegedly serving the same ultimate ends, are beholden to and organized by the austere and uncompromising logic of the market. The framework behind the vast majority of social impact investing schemes presumes that the market as natural, neutral, efficient and fair is an inherently benevolent force" (Haiven, 2018, pp. 120-21). Haiven along with many others today help us to see how financialisation not only relies on authentic participation, but is, in fact, a format for the orchestration of both authenticity and participation; the higher the authenticity the greater the financial valorisation of the work (at least partly unpaid) of participation (Lotti, 2019). It operates and expands cultural capital precisely through "genuine" inclusion and by making us each into agents of its operations and rent-seeking expansion (Bourdieu, 1987; Haiven, 2018, p. 153).

In this brief discussion, we have sought to bring together several conversations regarding the politics and phenomenology of authentic participatory action research, bringing into encounter the postcolonial and decolonial work of Anzaldúa, Spivak, Serafini, and Glissant, with the Marxist

phenomenology of Fals Borda and Max Haiven. This can seem like a too facile and willy-nilly assemblage of critical theorists for a realistic renewal of PAR practice. Yet our aim here is not a systematic consideration of each of these thinkers but, by marking a hybrid genealogy of resistance, to diagram more intensively a field of action, policy, and discursive practice that today is financialising participatory action research through a neoliberal political ontology of its temporalities, routines, and valorisation (Christophers, 2019). It is enough at this point to note that, while NFT arts sales topped 1.5 million in a single month in 2021, around 75% of NFT investors globally are male, linking financial technological innovation to both the volatility of a highly speculative market and to prior structures of gender inequality controlling access to these innovations. In the sections that follow, we suggest that it is precisely (representational) authenticity that is being measured as social impact and embedded in the financialisation of intellectual property rents across the creative and cultural sectors, and that what is at stake in all this is the ongoing colonisation of the ontological powers of authentic co-creation.

## CO-CREATING PAR AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF SUBALTERN IDENTITY

In this section we present three narratives that demonstrate the limits and possibilities of authentic co-creation under financialisation and rentierisation in PAR methodologies. Our project was conducted over three years with Black, urban, working class, and of colour creatives in the experimental arts sector in the UK. All participants were recruited through the networks of artists and creatives of partner organisations working in the sector. This research was conducted moreover amidst the changes wrought by Covid-19 and on-going social movements for radical and structural change in the neoliberalised, entrepreneurialised, and precaritised arts (Vishmidt, 2021, p. 14; Vishmidt, 2017). These narratives aim to draw out the temporalities, routines, and forms of valorisation at work in PAR processes, while working through a certain postcolonial opacity that complicates any claims to transparency and authenticity itself.

### *Narrative One*

Our first narrative concerns an early breakdown in communication between academic action researchers and community stakeholders, highlighting pitfalls in assuming temporal resonance between actants in PAR. Three months into the emergency Covid-19 AHRC research grant period on race and class privilege in the performance sector in the UK, we are trying to stick to our agreed Gantt chart. It is, however, proving difficult, as we come to realise we had promised the funders more than we could produce. Interviews have started and we are due for our second steering group meeting with the collaborating organisation. About two weeks before the meeting, a call for policy engagement around leadership in the arts from a government body goes out, and one of our steering group members, a Black working-class woman academic from the North of the UK, who we will call G, forwards the call to our research partner, who then sends it on to the action research team. All of this happens on email and text messages. Pressed for time between interviews, and unclear if the remit of our research allowed for such an early shift to addressing policy concerns, the research team, not understanding the timely importance of this context for G and her community partners, responded to the government's online questionnaire in a rushed and cursory way. The tone and manner of response alienated G from the entire research team and trajectory. Understanding that policy was not an area the research team could action, G asks for resources from the original grant to fund a research associate so that she could pursue the policy implications for her own research. The researchers respond negatively to G's request for reallocating grant resources; again all communication happens through email, and often through collaborating



intermediaries or gatekeepers. G resigns from the steering group denouncing what she sees as the arrogance of the research team, and particularly its lead. At the next steering committee meeting, the failed process of communication leading to her resignation is critically discussed and carefully contextualised. Members of the research team meet with other steering group members through videocall for feedback and to check-in about the departure of G. The research team would continue to be affected by that breakdown in communication.

Here different temporalities of action research, interpretations of resistance, productivity enhancing digitally networked interfaces, expressions of radical care, free labour, and (failed) co-creation show a conflictual and complex ecology of relations. G's academic background in political theory and political economy disposed her to engage what she thought were the crucial policy contexts of our research. She had spent a good portion of her professional career resisting racial, gender, and class exclusion in her university and the public sphere of cultural organising. While our research was explicitly grounded in the principles of the co-creation of accessible, justice-oriented, disruptive and critical research through the full participation of all stakeholders, the interaction with G showed us that the interests of our stakeholders were not always aligned with ours, and that we needed better processes to enable that alignment. What is the *temporality* of such a resonance? As we marked above, time was in a complex swirl during the period of these events; feelings of rushing, hurriedness, breathlessness in our bodies were modulated by digitally networked technology, with its own rhythms, assemblages, and breakdowns, with its own co-evolving relationship to living research labour and its distribution and valuation. Making those changes in communication routines and interfaces, shifting our attention from interviews to include policy initiatives, took time to recalibrate. Gradually, months after G's departure from the process, forms of allyship and collective organising emerged through the PAR collaborations that we hoped would be resources for resistance, resilient social infrastructures for anti-racist and intersectional creative networks, and dynamic organisational practices for diverse participatory research models, all of which we believed would provide an even sturdier evidence base for social justice policy and cultural initiatives—Dave O'Brien and his research group have activated such initiatives for activists, researchers, and policy makers (Brook, O., O'Brien, D., and Taylor, M. 2020; O'Brien and Taylor, 2017; Taylor and O'Brien 2017 ). Indeed, in the ways that this narrative of developing socially just participatory research was often reduced to a question of the specific minoritized racial and class identities of the researchers and collaborators, this ironically further legitimised claims to authentic participatory and resistant cultural engagement through the PAR project: here the failure of communication becomes an effective if ironic sign of authentic participation. The developing networks of creatives brought together through the PAR processes formed the basis of the ongoing financial viability and impact generation (knowledge exchange) of the PAR research itself.

### ***Narrative Two***

Our second narrative concerns the evolving funding environment for this form of participatory action research. It is a story of the 'successful' financialisation of participatory art and action research together. It expresses the ongoing impact of white gatekeeping, and the production of speculative, fictitious, and manipulated financial profits from the authenticity of PAR and art. Financialisation in art and of PAR methodology, as David Harvey, Max Haiven and Randy Martin have all suggested, is an art of monopoly rents on collective and cultural claims to authenticity. Rents can be secured through, for instance, IP licensing, different rent, service, and debt instruments associated with participatory research, and through derivatives formation. Indeed, the now passé fintech non-fungible crypto-tokens (NFTs) were merely an attempt to further monopolise the artist's authenticity/aura by authenticating monopoly control of creative production through the technological fix of the blockchain and associated protocols (Haiven, 2018).

It's the late spring of 2022. We are toward the end of our AHRC funded grant, some of the most immediate pressures from the pandemic have receded somewhat, as cultural organisations gradually programme performance spaces again. Our interviews with around 20 leading organisers and administrators of cultural production in the UK have concluded. We were in a process of assessing next steps; it always seemed in interminable, body-cramping, environment-devouring videocall meetings. There had been intermittent excitement in the work that we had done; the successive waves of authentic collective power that few of us had ever experienced before, and never in the context of academic research, seemed to confirm the trajectory of the research. But the two authors of this essay were exhausted; we had ourselves gone through intensive processes of self-reflection around issues of class and race, white supremacy, violence, gender privilege, actively participating in collective audits regarding the ethics of our collaborations, and psychologically supervised self-care. The social pressures wrought by Covid weighed heavily on us both. We both felt it was time to stop working on this, and to have a moment to breathe. It was at precisely this point, perhaps having reached the point of an organisational phase transition in feedback loops with our PAR research into inequality and intersectionality, that the partner organisation went through its own organisational and financial transformations, Board reshuffle, and new hiring. A central question came to the fore: When does physical and mental exhaustion in one part of the PAR team become a limit to the work that is possible between the other participants in the ongoing research? Through the course of that spring, we learnt that we had several routes opened to us regarding further funding: the research was financially viable even as our mental health was becoming less and less so. We are meeting weekly, the meetings have become tense, confusing, unsettling. After a great deal of back and forth between the partner organisation and researchers, after long prior processes of soul searching and collective questioning of ambivalences, the researchers declared their desire to end their participation in the research. It was heard with disbelief. The disconnect that had characterised much of the PAR research infrastructure linking the HEI with the partner organisation was much more than a failure to communicate. It had to do with the failed correspondences between the different, yet already entangled timescales that compose an interdisciplinary and praxis-oriented PAR program (Barad, 2007; Ingold, 2021). Resonating timescales, rhythms, and routines between actants in PAR shape the conditions for authentic co-creation as well as its claim to social impact and so monopolistic financialisation. Once again that resonance failed us as agents of community building and commoning, but opened doors to further financialise our supposedly authentic participatory action research.

### ***Narrative Three***

Our third narrative offers a method of decolonising the rentierisation of data generated through participatory action research in the UK. In this last narrative, we consider our research in relationship to the rentierisation of intellectual property in the form of the data management plan (DMP). The DMP is a relatively new habituation of research routines organised around the financialisable non-fungibility of securitized, singular, scarce, and authentic research data. This is particularly relevant to PAR methodologies as data that is generated through participatory methods are often quite sensitive and confidential. These DMPs are modes of assessing, first, existing data sources, including prior secondary research data and creative and cultural industries (CCI) studies, DCMS Creative Industries data, and social impact assessments of creative industries research; these are examined as potential sources of publicly available data on various aspects of PAR into inclusive creative workforces and filling employment gaps in the sector. In addition, a major aspect of the collaborative dimension of the PAR processes of ally network building required equitable access to institutional knowledge (data), policy level contacts and employment databases held by DCMS, ACE, and other government bodies on inclusive employment and their implementation. Even a

cursory glance at the contemporary field of cultural production will show that several unresolved copyright and intellectual property issues relating to accessing such 'scarce and authentic' data are in fact vectors of the routinisation of rent seeking not only in and through PAR processes but also through irreducibly extractive knowledge exchange infrastructures today. (Chief among these is the relationship of financial rents to the new domain of academic assessment in the UK, the Knowledge Exchange Framework.)

In the DMP for our PAR project, after several consultations with legal experts and cultural IP strategists, we chose the Creative Commons Attribution—Non-Commercial—Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0) license in which licensees are free to share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and to adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material) (Creative Commons, 2023). The PAR researchers were asked to engage with the legal vehicles for copyright protection and maximise access to the data. To ameliorate potential security risks (e.g. data theft), we decided no data would be permanently retained on any data capture equipment (e.g. audio recorders, laptops) used in the PAR project. All source data is then to be securely deleted from the data capture equipment. Data exchange between the PAR partners is to be arranged in a secure way through encryption of files or encrypted hardware devices (USB drives, external hard drives). As we wrote in our DMP:

All relevant data created by each organisation, and the intellectual property rights therein, are subject to the intellectual property policy of that organisation. The data created by each institution will generally be the property of the respective institution, unless agreed otherwise. This FoF prototyping project will result in a consortium agreement to be established which is to clarify ownership and IP, along with considerations of restrictions on data sharing and permissions for re-use. The data management plan will be used throughout the duration of the programme as a tool to manage the ownership of workshop data. Data will be managed in two tiers: data that will be made fully publicly accessible, e.g. data compiled in research project working papers; and data that will be made publicly accessible in fully anonymised summary form, e.g. workshop transcripts, which will only be available to the immediate research team in non-anonymised form.

This was written after a complicated and circuitous series of conversations that involved different actants conversant with IP law in the creative and cultural industries. On the one hand, these conversations displaced the tendency of rent seeking in our DMP, toward resistant, hacker-friendly, and communitarian ecologies of IP. In our PAR contexts of the entangling of complex dialectics of race, class, and intersectionality, the embodied displacements were intensive, opaque, and molecular. The concerns of the partner organisation, by contrast, were often expressed in the affects of suspicion and revolved around how not to fall again into extractive data management and IP relations with the HEI housing a research council funded PAR collaborative project. These concerns were vetted before several IP experts and legal advisors, the project steering committee, the partner organisation's Board of Trustees, and informal networks of friends of friends who were in some way IP-based rentiers.

What can we glean from this financialised discursive and material practice of data management, and all the displacements that entails? Low risk accessibility to data is common to financial rents and to participation, action, and research in PAR—which suggests that the ubiquity and standardisation of data management involves an intersectional racial and class but also technological struggle for the control of and rent extraction from a growing array of assets and more and more productive research labour. The aim is to increase research and cultural worker productivity, and implicitly to increase the financialisability of monopoly rents (seeking surplus value through derivatives formation). Who stands to benefit from IP maximalist modes of securing financial rents from authentically participatory action research? Our research suggests that it is rent seeking creative entrepreneurs best positioned to exploit these potential rents for sustained profits. Who are the

contemporary rent seeking creative entrepreneurs in the UK? Which class fraction of capitalists is able to take most profitable advantage of such financial rents? The provisional answer from our research is that rent seeking tends to privilege mostly (but not exclusively) white gatekeepers of cultural capital (data sets) involved in financialised rents and its emergent technologies.

To summarise and conclude this section, the three narratives highlight several key limits and possibilities for authentic participatory action research. They help us to diagram pragmatically the political ontology of PAR understood as the historically specific ecologies of temporalities, routines, and forms of valorisation at work in its processes and methodologies. Some of these processes and methodologies, especially when centred on authenticity claims, are extractivist. Our decolonial diagram of the political ecology of participatory research drew on the questions of transparent representation in postcolonial and Black radical criticism (Spivak, Silva) and has moved toward a political ontology of opaque participatory social practices and relations (with Glissant and Fals Borda). For example, non-resonant temporalities in PAR, the biopolitics of data management, the assumed limits and possibilities of supposedly transparent digital communication routines, the financialisation of knowledge exchange frameworks, the proliferation of technical interfaces and digital networks, habituations of organisational, creative, and research routines and how to understand the multiple effects of organisational change on PAR processes (Amaro, 2023; Clarke, 2016, p. 20). They require a shift of focus to the assemblages and ontologies that constitute those PAR processes. If the focus of PAR methods shifts to the intensive construction of assemblages of affect, technology, value, sense, and force, authenticity-as-representation can become for a time authenticity-as-collective and historically specific power for change.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the relationship among social and economic practices that have come to be associated with authentically participatory action research. Problematising the discourses of authenticity and participation, we have highlighted the ongoing financialisation and rentierisation of participatory or co-created cultural production and research in the UK HEI, arts and cultural contexts. The creative industries in the UK have been transformed by an unprecedented level of financialisation and rentierisation, often based on claims to representational authenticity of intellectual property or some other monopoly-controlled asset; the social and economic practices of these historical tendencies have come to shape the conditions of possibility for PAR. In this paper, we have attempted to connect the project of decolonial and anti-extractivist political ontology of PAR to the transformation of authenticity as performed representational difference to authenticity as the ontological process and power of a collectivity becoming (dis/re)connected to what it can do. Our three narratives have highlighted different but overlapping dimensions of these areas of change. Through them we have offered a heterodox political ontology of PAR in terms of temporalities, routines, and forms of valorisation, which while critical of the metaphysics of transparency affirms the postcolonial right to opacity. Much can be gained, we have suggested, through a critical understanding of the implications for PAR practice of time and temporality, and the technical mediation and intermediaries involved in the experience of time in PAR work. In mainstream social science research methodologies, as in all areas of racial capitalist applied sciences, time is money. (Non)resonant and entangled temporalities involve the composition of both human and non-human agencies in PAR, and the importance of attending to the complexities of time in research and organisational practice has been highlighted above. We have further sought to articulate our analysis with decolonial and postcolonial work beyond the biopolitical, toward practical deconstructions of racial capitalist risk management and rent seeking in participatory research and cultural production. When PAR processes involve the neoliberal practice of data management,

the calculation of the risks associated with information is an obfuscated and displaced expression of rent seeking in routines of data management. In our political ontology of rent seeking in PAR, participatory research is diagrammed in terms of the limits and possibilities of, for instance, digital communication technologies. In all our narratives, the networked and digital infrastructures for PAR communication during and post-Covid are active in their effects: splitting presence, transparency, and attention in spacetimes of routinised organisational interaction, the inordinate carbon footprint of videocalls, and the habituated and potential sensorimotor circuits co-evolving between (non) humans and digital media assemblages all require a reconsideration of the relation of the technical, organic, and value composition of racial capital to the financialisation of attention in ready to hand control and extraction machines (the abject phenomenology of our glowing boxes). In these media assemblages of attention, control, and financialisation in PAR, all processes affect and are affected by the attendant rise in the overall rate of exploitation. This is blithely covered over by the ideologies of passionate work in the creative sector. Finally, we have shown how, in the financialisation of knowledge exchange frameworks, and in intensive and variable habituations of organisational, creative, and research routines, we might explore ontological understandings of the multiple effects of organisational change on PAR processes. We end with a series of further provocations for PAR practice:

- How is financialisation challenging PAR methodology to decolonise toward anti-extractivism?
- In what way is participation a financialisable mode of control in and through PAR?
- What are decolonial political ontologies of PAR?
- What emancipatory strategies are viable in and through PAR after the rentierisation of cultural production?
- What do ideologies of authenticity affect in PAR, and what are their tendencies of monopoly rent?

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