



A collaborative research manifesto! An early career response to uncertainties

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





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ABSTRACT

Social researchers have been adapting methods and practices in response to COVID-19. In the wake of these adaptations, but still in the midst of intersecting crises that the pandemic has exacerbated or shifted (e.g. health-social-political-economic), researchers face a future suffused with methodological uncertainties. This paper presents a Collaborative Research Manifesto that responds to this by promoting markers for meaningful collaborations in future research. The manifesto was co-written primarily through a series of workshops and events that were designed to identify challenges within, and potential for, collaborative research. Through this exploratory collaborative qualitative process, we highlight what the future of such research could look like and describe methodological commitments that collaborative researchers should embody. The discussion draws on wider methodological literature to articulate the key role that 'collaborative research' can offer in uncertain times whilst being sensitive of the limitations of our assertive and radical programme.

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Introduction

This paper presents a Collaborative Research Manifesto born from our decision, as early career researchers, to write a research provocation that imagines ways through the crises and uncertainties we identify and operate in. Collaborative research is far from new but through our chosen medium we have sought to breathe 'new life' into existing methodological debates (Hanna et al., 2019). We did this by refreshing our visions for how to respond to *times of intersecting crises and uncertainties*, partly pre-existing and partly brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The manifesto was developed through a series of collaborative workshops and a shared 'living document' contributed to by a diverse group of 15 early career researchers (see section 3.1 for details). The process of finding our voice together, which is also recounted in this paper, exemplifies and illustrates our aspirations towards *meaningful* research collaborations on the path ahead.

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Our manifesto was conceived as a direct response to the intimately connected societal and methodological uncertainties we identified through our collaboration, in both its style and content. Consistent with the style of its genre, the manifesto declares that a reimagining of social research activities is urgently needed for the contemporary context, and that collaborative research, whilst not new, can form a powerful ideological (i.e. ethical and epistemological) and pragmatic response. In discussing the content of our manifesto, we promote a renewed vision of how meaningful collaboration can be achieved, and how structures *should* bend to support it. This vision is assertive but also open and engaging with the intention to affect research praxis and gain support by connecting with readers, regardless of their background, profession, or political orientations. As such, the medium and message of our manifesto aims to be accessible to, and resonate across, diverse audiences (e.g. policymakers, publics, business, scientists and a diverse range of social researchers and humanities scholars). In this paper, however, we focus on targeting an audience of social researchers, who likewise continue to grapple with institutional barriers and societal and methodological uncertainties just by existing within these spaces. Here our aim is to use the manifesto to *move* readers to depart from the status-quo to join our call for more meaningful collaborations.

To this end, we begin this paper by providing background to key themes that situate our contribution through our critical reading of three fields of literature. First, we review the contemporary context in relation to the intersecting crises and uncertainties. We then situate our focus on collaboration with the wider ‘interdisciplinary’ methodological field. In the final background section, we sample manifestos from tangential methodological fields with a view to contextualise our process and product. The method of co-writing the manifesto, inspired by Hanna et al. (2020) and guided by an exploratory qualitative method developed by Jewitt et al. (2021), is then outlined. This is followed by the presentation of the manifesto statements and a discussion of how the key messages contained within these relate more widely to methodological debates. The discussion closes with a provocation in the form of a call for dramatic change to support collaborators in navigating these uncertain times.

Background

The first two sections of the background to this paper shed light on the connections between crises, uncertainty and research methods, in order to sketch the context in which this manifesto was born. Following this, we review the genre of manifestos and related examples. This leads to a reflexive note on why we chose to respond to this moment of crises-uncertainties (that we experience through our research and observe/sense across society) by ‘coming together’ to engage in a process of co-writing this very particular type of output.

Times of intersecting crises and uncertainties

Early in the pandemic, Teti et al. (2020, p. 1) recognised that ‘COVID-19 is not just a medical pandemic; it is a social event that is disrupting our social order’. As time elapses, such ‘disruptions’ continue reverberating far and deep in complex and intersecting ways. From our diverse (disciplinary and background) positionalities we have been differently exposed to the growing a wealth of evidence that suggests that the pandemic has exacerbated or shifted intersecting relations and inequities (e.g. health-social-political-economic). We therefore plotted these as a web of crises that include but are in no way limited to:

- A loss of trust in knowledge production from traditional institutions (e.g. higher education institutions and governments) and more generally ‘expert’ knowledge; for example see Wright (2021) for an account of the spread of misinformation during the pandemic.

- The redrawing, contestations over, and fragmentations of, global borders; for example, during the pandemic, EU member states have increasingly reconfigured their external border controls by making exterritorial practices, such as visa policies, legally applicable within EU territory. This ‘internalization of externalized border controls’ (Zaiotti & Abdulhamid, 2021, p. 106) in turn amplified discussions on how freedom of movement is deeply entrenched with questions of racial and class-based notions of mobility injustices (Heller, 2021).
- The increased levels of armed conflict during the pandemic (Ide, 2021) where the displacement of refugees adds to the increasing migration of people effected by climate change.
- Enduring and widening inequalities; for example, certain groups have been more greatly impacted by the unequal conditions created by the pandemic (May et al., 2022) and are expected to face a slower socioeconomic recovery (Stantcheva, 2022). One such group that has been disproportionately impacted are doctoral students and early career scholars who are experiencing greater financial challenges and reduced professional development opportunities (see Levine et al., 2021).
- Mental health challenges and restrictions in social contact; for example, both loneliness and perceived personal risk of COVID-19 may constitute precedents for low mood, depression and anxiety (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2022).

We have included illustrative references above, but it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive cross-sectional review that reproduces the empirical basis for our heightened sense of intersecting crises; instead, our opening gambit makes the case that we are ‘in times of crisis’ where greater uncertainties are being produced through which we are forced to navigate as citizens, researchers, and society.

Kara and Khoo’s (2022) edited volume on qualitative and digital research methods likewise describes the contemporary moment as a *crisis* that is producing societal and methodological uncertainties. The range of rapid methodological responses to the transforming world has been impressive with numerous special issues (Markham & Harris, 2020), crowd sourced documents (Lupton, 2020), reports (Nind et al., 2021) and other resources providing insight and guidance to research communities. This literature offers veritable guidance for collaborative researchers and critical reflections on the future of (inter-, multi-, trans-, cross-, un-) disciplinary modes of knowledge production (reviewed in the following section). There is now ample literature that provides sound advice for adapting methods to work through disruptions and conduct research in times of uncertainty. Our manifesto, however, responds to these times of crisis not as another form of guidance but as a provocation (see 2.3.1) that charts a bold research direction and calls for a radical reimagining of research methods and activities in these times of accentuated uncertainty.

For us, the contemporary context calls forth and signals a transition to a disrupted social order that accentuates uncertainties in terms of higher stakes, apparent fragility, and wicked problems (see Lönnngren & van Poeck, 2021) for a mapping review in sustainability literature) where risks have become more complex and interconnected. We situate the uncertain nature of these problems further by drawing on, and expanding from, sociological theories of the risk of the modern era. Thirty years ago, Beck’s (1992) seminal account of the *Risk Society* brought attention to the (unequal) distribution of risk as the hallmark and logic of capitalist developments. Midway between then and now, in *Liquid Times: living in an age of uncertainty*, Bauman (2007) observed the transient nature of social structures and institutions in describing conditions of ‘enduring’ or ‘perpetual’ uncertainty – where the burden of ‘the responsibility for resolving the quandary is generated by vexing volatile and constantly changing circumstances are shifted onto the shoulders of *individuals*’ (p. 3, emphasis added).

The point we labour here is not that researchers have previously been operating in a time devoid of uncertainties, nor that ‘participants’ ever lived in secure and certain worlds, but rather, that in recent times, the unknown and its consequences have become more palpable amid these intersecting crises. Indeed COVID-19 has highlighted, like never before, that risks are unequally distributed

(rigged by intersecting economic, ecological, social and other factors) (see Graham, 2020). Therefore, the navigating of these uncertainties cannot rest upon the shoulders of *individuals* but is our collective responsibility. We follow this societal observation to methods, following the logic that as the world changes, the methods we employ to understand and act on it (should) also evolve. In doing so, we accept Kara and Khoo's (2022) suggestion that the pandemic invites us to 'return to more perennial problems and considerations' (p. 5), joining their call for this moment to act as a turning point for the collective research imaginary: our catalytical mode of initiating this was co-writing a research manifesto.

In this section, we have depicted the contemporary context as suffused with *both* social and methodological uncertainties against which we will argue, through discussing our manifesto, that collaborative research gains both political and pragmatic value. We now turn to situate our focus on collaboration against the established interdisciplinary methodological terrain. This helps to frame the distinctiveness and provocative nature of our contribution.

Collaborative research, interdisciplinarity and uncertainty

In this section, we situate our focus on collaboration with reference to the wider 'interdisciplinary' methodological field. There are persistent and evolving relations between interdisciplinarity and complexity (Klein, 2004; Pedersen, 2021) and uncertainty. Here, we outline two dominant threads: one that promotes collaboration-*for*-uncertainty and another that positions collaborations-*as*-uncertain. Through this brief review, we expose aspects of the relations between uncertainty and collaborative research that run across the literature and that we, as early career researchers, engaged with and seek to provoke through the development of the manifesto.

One common assertion is that collaborations are key to tackle complexity (i.e. collaboration-*for*-uncertainty). This claim surfaces across a wider range of methodological debates, such as promoting work that engages 'in collaborative and creative exploration of wicked problems' (Lönngrén & van Poeck, 2021) in sustainability studies. It also appears through a range of forms, including manifestos (as exemplified later, 2.3). Furthermore, this argument is advanced across epistemological and pragmatic levels and has gained traction since the pandemic. One example of an epistemological claim is present in the argument of Wahaj et al. (2022) that the pandemic has unveiled intersections (e.g. between a virus, climate change and public health policy) that bring attention to a 'mosaic of uncertain contexts' (p. 16739). This broad observation is used to frame their argument that 'collaborative effort is the key to combating [the wicked problems of] COVID-19 and climate change' (p. 16739). Furthermore, since the pandemic began, collaborative research activities with community partners have been developed and expanded in efforts to continue fieldwork when direct access is not possible, safe, or practical. This notable response to the uncertainty and methodological disruptions of the pandemic contributes to a longstanding theme within the collaboration-*for*-uncertainty rhetoric where the case has been made that in 'the increasingly complex and professionalised worlds in which we live, collaboration can be considered a pragmatic response' (Martínez, 2021, p. 167).

Another common thread is collaboration-*as*-uncertain and the basis of such claims has been complicated further by the pandemic. First, as Callard and Fitzgerald (2015) recognise becoming, or being seen to be, 'interdisciplinary' can mean facing uncertain research career trajectories. A collaborative research path is particularly risky for early career researchers due to a mismatch between the ideological pervasiveness interdisciplinarity (Holmes & Marcus, 2021) and the established structures of prestige and advancement within institutions. These infrastructures are also operating in and navigating increasingly uncertain fiscal and cultural climates since the pandemic. For us, these perceived risks are underscored by the contestation and conflation within the methodological field around what constitutes collaborative and interdisciplinary research (Klein, 2021). Furthermore, doing collaboration is well understood as containing inherent tensions that, for example, revolve around 'the complex interweavings of issues of meaning-making, difference and

the co-production of knowledges, dynamics of social exclusion and segregation become visible in the nexus between evocation and interpretation' (Pedersen, 2021, p. i). Reflections on the uncertainty of outcomes and complexity of practice evoke methodological explorations on communication and power dynamics (Klein, 2021), and the spatiotemporal zones of where interdisciplinary work occurs (Callard & Fitzgerald, 2015). Since the pandemic, the *inherent complexity* of both these dynamics and zones has been complicated further. For example, the normal workings of physical spaces, architectures and procedures built to arrange people together to collaborate have been disrupted.

To conclude this section, we draw attention to examples where the uncertainty of doing collaboration has been positively framed as a productive resource. Indeed researchers are urged to embrace experimenting and speculating (Lury et al., 2016) and are encouraged to discover unexpected partnerships between very different and diverse disciplines such as between the social sciences and neurosciences (Callard & Fitzgerald, 2015) or between art and anthropology (Martínez, 2021). Indeed, the case continues to be made that employing creative and speculative methods can help generate routes through uncertain times (see Jewitt, Barker & Golmohammadi, 2022, also in this issue).

Manifestos: research methods, collaboration and genre

Recently, several social science method manifestos have been published on topics that overlap with themes of collaborative research and uncertainty. In this section, we provide an important backdrop to the distinctiveness of our contribution and approach by reviewing a sample of relevant manifestos. We also frame and situate our manifesto (presented later, see section 4) and discussion (see section 5) by expanding on the style of manifesto that inspired our process.

The *Manifesto of Interdisciplinarity* is perhaps the closest in terms of topic, and like many (Klein, 2004; Lury et al., 2016; Pedersen, 2021), including ours, recognises that the 'world faces a host of challenges that cannot be addressed by any one discipline in isolation. (Szostak, 2021, n.p). This example, however, was written for interdisciplinarians (and therefore a narrower, and largely converted, audience as reflected in its use of specialised language) and is single authored.

The *Colleex Manifesto* (Colleex, n.d.) promotes ethnographic experimental collaborations between artists, designers and anthropologists. Whilst their manifesto was written by a network of scholars (like ours) their provocation targets very particular disciplinary convergences and with a specific methodological approach in mind.

An *Updated Manifesto* (Holmes & Marcus, 2021) on collaborative ethnography promotes the notion of 'epistemic partnership' and suggests that ethnography advances today 'by risking collaborative encounters of uncertain outcomes for the production of ethnographic knowledge' (p.26). As will become apparent this example shares features with ours around harnessing and embracing uncertainty in the collaborative process but adopts a distinctively different long form and scholarly tone.

A *Futures Anthropologies Manifesto* (Salazar et al., 2017) also connects with the social and methodological uncertainties we respond to (2.1 & 2.2) and that stretch into the future. This manifesto was also written by a research network who declare, 'We are bold enough to engage with complexity and stay with differences and uncertainties' (p.2). This example employs a common style of ten statements (see also Jewitt et al., 2021) that we imitate, but again was born from a more homogenous group of academics targeting a relatively narrow audience.

The main differences in addition to those highlighted above are that the manifesto presented in this paper was born in a different moment (i.e. explicitly responding to times of intersecting crises and uncertainty in the wake of COVID-19) and through a more diverse composition of contributors (i.e. the methodological diversity across our working group from across an institutional network of early career researchers, see 3.1 for details). Furthermore, our process of finding our voice together (outlined in section 3) served to author our distinct visions and tones against similar quasi-scholarly manifestos on related topics.

Avant-garde and revolutionary manifestos ‘materialize in moments of crisis’ (Hanna et al., 2020, p. 17) aiming to provoke and prompt new ideas. Appealing to our shared sense of restlessness within the social and methodological landscape, Hanna’s et al. (2020) handbook on the incendiary form became a key inspiration for our joint actions and process of co-writing. In self-acknowledging rapid, rash, and passionate review of the genre, some loose instructions (e.g. ‘do it the hard way’, ‘repeat’, ‘mess with English’ and ‘caution will get us nowhere’) and common styles (e.g. confrontational, playful, distorted, refreshingly biased, attention grabbing, short, statements) provided us with enough of a sense of how we might engage with this co-writing project and process – that was markedly different to our academic training temporarily freeing us ‘from the confines of careful speech and rational argument’ (Hanna et al., 2019, p. 2). We saw value in this to breathe new life and tones to methodological debates in a bid to capture the moment as a turning point for the collective research imaginary (Kara & Khoo, 2022). Finally, it is imperative to acknowledge that the structure of workshops and the process through which our manifesto was developed was inspired by the methodology presented in the *Manifesto for Digital Social Touch in Crises* (Jewitt et al., 2021).

Reflexive note on decision to a manifesto as a response to uncertainty

Here, we note some reasons why we collectively chose to write a manifesto in the incendiary form and as a very particular response to uncertainties (contextualised in section 2.1 & 2.2). Our motivations to write a manifesto for collaborative research stemmed from our desires to come together to work on massive and wicked problems; produce a manifesto as a different form of output; stimulate disruptive thinking; be heard; catalyse innovation within/across disciplines.

Our early career positioning is important to reflect because, although our ages varied, to some degree we shared a generational angst of the current times. Our reasons for writing a manifesto, as listed above, reflect a restlessness with the methodologies on offer and display our anxieties with the unstable and ‘high-stake’ character of the world in which we live and produce knowledge. Moreover, we observed a paradox strengthening in the wake of the pandemic: on one hand, the need for collaborations to navigate intersecting crises (Wahaj et al., 2022) has been gaining strength as a pervasive ideological force (Holmes & Marcus, 2021) attracting funding, while, on the other hand, many forms of collaborations, such as those that rely on physical co-presence, have become difficult to pursue. These opposing dynamics led to our sense that a radical and affective interjection would be timely and should take a form unfamiliar to rational scholarly argument.

In other words, we were collectively drawn to the performative space of the revolutionary avant-garde model (Hanna et al., 2020) because of these shared motivations and for the contrast it offered to our academic training that afforded the freedom to break conventional ways of thinking, writing, and imagining together. We now outline this process and the methods through which our manifesto was co-written.

Finding our voice together: methods for co-writing a manifesto

The impetus for the *Collaborative Research Manifesto* stemmed from a series of conversations with researchers at various events organized by our institutional early career research network for Collaborative Social Science. The concentrated process of ‘finding our voice together’, as one collaborator put it, took place over a five-month period (January to May 2022).

Our manifesto was forged through an exploratory collaborative process. The process involved two half-day collaborative workshops (held on Miro, a collaborative online platform), a writing ‘lock-in’, and was accompanied by spaces for continued discussions and analytical attention. The key vehicles for sharing materials, resources and thoughts were a ‘living document’ and Microsoft Teams group (an online platform for meeting and collaborating). Not only did these accompaniments help inform our activities, processes, and discussions, but they also enabled our ideas and

writing to co-evolve. The iterative and emergent process that we outline here was further guided by a growing awareness of the two-way relation between our theoretical discussion (on collaboration) and our practice for co-thinking-and-writing, where advances and experiences in one informed the other. We return to specific examples of this dialectic as a way to illustrate key ‘markers for meaningful collaboration’ in 5.2.

Collaborators

A ‘Call for Collaboration Comrades’ was advertised in late 2021. The call was written by Barker and Pervez, who were acting chairs of UCL’s Collaborative Social Science Research Domain’s Early Career and PhD networks respectively. This call sought to attract a diverse group of researchers who would bring a range of experiences and perspectives of collaborative research to the group. It also set out the expected commitments to filter out those who would be unable to fully engage in the process. The call was disseminated via email, social media and other network channels available to UCL’s Collaborative Social Science Research Domain. Twenty-seven responses were received. Participation was limited to 16 people to ensure that the discussions were thorough and provided everyone the ample opportunity to contribute (without making the working group too narrow or too crowded). Collaborators were recruited on the basis of their motivation (as judged from their short statement responses to the question ‘why are you answering this call?’) and guided further by a desire for the group to be as diverse as possible (in terms of field of study and career stage). Potential collaborators’ motivational statements were considered strong if it demonstrated the participants personal commitment to, and prior experience of, engaging with collaborative work and research.

The working group started with 16 collaborators (including Barker and Pervez who were initially ‘facilitators’ in workshop 1, guiding dialogue through planned activities, but over the collaborative process strove to become equal collaborators by loosening control/direction over the process). One collaborator was lost through attrition (moving institution). Therefore, the final group comprised 15 researchers; 9 PhD students, 4 post-doctoral researchers, and 2 researchers on teaching contracts, who work across a wide array of fields, including mathematics, psychology, education, global prosperity, body studies, health sciences, mechanical engineering, science and technologies studies, architecture, and security and crime. Each collaborator, to varying degrees, often worked with established social science methods across these diverse subject areas. This stated, over the course of the process a collective decision was made to talk about collaboration more generally rather than explicitly in relation to the social sciences to broaden the appeal of the manifesto but also because the term (for some) did not encompass the full range of approaches they engage with nor define the interdisciplinary professional identities they wish to forge.

All collaborators took part in the online workshops and contributed to the living document. Due to unexpected or unavoidable work conflicts, only 10 collaborators took part in the writing lock-in session online via the process outlined in section 3.5, but those absent contributed after the event online.

Workshop 1

Prior to the start of workshop 1, collaborators were added to a Microsoft Teams group. Members were invited to introduce themselves and outline their interest in the activity, this led to the initiation of a sense of community and shared purpose.

The first workshop continued these discussions with an introductory activity centring around exploring the identity of the working group and our aims (our position statement, see section 4, emerged from these initial conversations). This was followed by four short videos (four-five minutes each) presenting ‘problematizations’ on the theme of collaborative research that Barker and Pervez defined and developed together (titled: ‘types of collaboration’, ‘communication and collaboration’, ‘context and collaboration’, and ‘power and collaboration’). The content of the videos was based on reflections of conversations that had taken place across the institutional

early career network, during, for example, panel talks, launch events, and ‘ask me anything’ discussions with established interdisciplinary researchers. The intention was to frame our explorations, not through a set of agreed concepts or observations but to provide common points of reference (or methodological problems) against which our dialogue could open up. After watching the videos, we broke into small group discussions before feeding back to each other in a bid to develop our understanding of points of connection, and contentions between us. We left traces of emerging themes by commenting on the Miro board, returning to these discussions throughout the process. The workshop concluded with an unstructured space for reflections on where we were in our explorations and what we should do next. From this, we decided to create a ‘living document’ to facilitate the process of thinking and writing together and to maintain momentum between scheduled meetings.

The living document

Emails were exchanged after the first workshop (discussing the development of a living document), and it was decided we should extract all the text on the Miro board and upload it to a Word document that all of us could edit and comment on. The ‘data’ were then translated into short summaries on emerging themes as Barker and Pervez led the initial analysis of the collective material. The entire group commented on, added to, or questioned these summaries. As the project developed, this iterative cycle became an analytical process that was key to forging and refining the ideas and text for the manifesto output, and this paper. This process was collaborative in its very nature and was constantly facilitated by an environment of togetherness and co-production. This document and the ongoing analytical discussions and reflections also laid the groundwork for workshop 2.

Workshop 2

The second workshop built on the ongoing discussions with a view to explore further our shared sense of intersecting and complex (or uncertain) crises that all our research operates within and that gives collaboration new/heightened import. We started by reflecting on how we felt the process (that we were developing together) was unfolding. The activity that followed involved mapping out, on the Miro board, the wider context in which we were writing the manifesto. To facilitate this, we plotted thinking zones that included institutional, material, and cultural contexts. Collaborators were asked to independently populate the board, and then to survey the map in randomly assigned pairs before we reflected as a group on the nature of the contemporary moment (characterised by crises and uncertainties) and the (potential) role that collaborative research can play in addressing this.

The second half of the workshop involved Manifesto material generation exercises. The exercise facilitated both the construction of draft manifesto statements and discussions around the content and language of these initial statements. The process was divided into three cycles of generating, reviewing (critically engaging and discussing), and rewriting statements.

Co-writing the manifesto: ‘lock in’ session and review process

The notion of a ‘lock-in’ emerged from our ongoing discussions, desires to experiment with ‘tempo of action’ (see Statement 5 in Manifesto) and to harness external (time) pressures to facilitate *compromise*. The intention was to create an unstructured playful/experimental space where a *symbolic* social contract would commit us to work through frictions and uncertainties in the co-writing process. Excerpts and draft statements from the workshops were printed out and scattered across the table and the living document was displayed on the projector. Without a clear guiding structure, we wrote on post-it notes and flipchart paper, organically

moving between small-group conversations and larger collective conversations. We developed and agreed upon the first full draft after approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes.

This handwritten draft was typed up (Version 1). We then developed this through four review stages, lasting 1 week each. Our initial draft was reviewed by the working group, and members were encouraged to comment on, add to, and reorder the text they felt the need to do so. Based on extensive comments, the first draft was revised (Pervez and Al Haj Sleiman). Version 2 of the manifesto expanded to 10 statements that were then roughly settled. This draft was once again reviewed by the working group, and their comments and suggestions were incorporated to form Version 3. Here, we decided to remove specialised terminology (such as epistemology) to broaden the accessibility of the manifesto and worked towards balancing the tone and style of the individual statements.

We received feedback on Version 3 from six critical experts that were selected for their experiences in collaborative research and/or manifesto writing. The reviewers commented on the structure, tone, and content of the individual statements of the manifesto. The consensus was that the draft was ‘exciting’, ‘interesting’ and ‘important’ but some specific points were in conflict – such as in relation to how the tone was received (e.g. ‘too strong’ versus ‘love this’) and its perceived potential to resonate beyond the social sciences. We engaged with full range of feedback from critical experts from a perspective of not ‘seeking validation’ but rather to assist us in compiling a declaration that we believe in but also has potential to expand our voice further afield. We now present and then discuss the outcome of this process.

A collaborative research manifesto

A co-written position statement is presented in [Figure 1](#). below, before the manifesto, to provide the reader with an insight on the authors who wrote the manifesto, and their reasons for doing so – contextualising the discussion that follows (section 5).

‘We’ came together to co-write a manifesto and offer it below as a provocation in what we deem to be a critical moment defined by social, material, and methodological uncertainties produced and felt in the wake of recent and seismic disruptions (see [Figure 2](#)).

We...

Share a collaborative epistemology and commitments to inclusive, diverse, and decolonising forms of knowledge production

Believe that meaningful knowledge is generated TOGETHER, because the world is too complex to be understood or advanced through any (disciplinary) perspective alone

Sense a problem with, and critically question, the function of disciplinary boundaries in producing and containing knowledge, and ask for more collaborations to be embedded within our training and research experiences

Emphasise the value and importance of (collaborative) research to discover, create, navigate problems, TOGETHER

Search for bridges, common ground and values across and beyond disciplines. We seek real-world connections and impact

Expand our thinking, embracing creative and unconventional methods. We **are** fearless of the unknown, uncertainties and messiness; we welcome and are lured to them because they are the world we live in and research

Will bring important questions and problems to the fore while shedding light on silos and entrenched approaches that urgently need to CHANGE. We are a catalyst to challenge the status quo and for reimagining research to radically include a variety of ways of knowing and expressing

[Figure 1](#). Authors Position Statement.

A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

We've lost touch. We are left **unsure** of what really matters and **do not know** where we are heading.
How do we proceed through our precarious times? How can we harness such uncertainty?

Our answer is **TOGETHER**

It's time to unite! Following these 10 statements will help us navigate a way forward together.

M A N I F E S T O

- 1 Produce and mobilise valuable knowledge together**
Come together with TRUST and respect for individual and group knowledge. Jointly engage through critical responsibility. Find common ground. Embrace the risk of failing together and work towards greener pastures
- 2 Share diverse points of view; hear all voices**
Promote the power of argument and compromise to work through problems as they are perceived.
- 3 Seek Cooperation. Reject Competition**
The goal is to form mutual directions. Equalise risks/rewards-inputs/outputs. Celebrate and harness diversity. Do not turn against our goal or each other. Stay committed
- 4 Ignore Convention: flatten control**
Let go of ego and notions of 'high impact-publication'. Do good research. Do MEANINGFUL research. Flatten **FLATTEN** dynamics between us. Share roles, responsibilities, writing and doing
- 5 Entwine ACTION and reflection**
Always striving to reach destinations will **stop** momentum. Play with and inject fluctuating tempos of action and thinking. **erACT, reACT** – step backwards, in circles – run out of control & sync cadences – but however we move, let's move together
- 6 Stimulate joy in the process of meaningful collaboration**
Pleasure spurs and binds. Exhilaration can be found in the pursuit of partnership. Leverage community. Wonderfully generate the conditions for creativity freedom together. This will amplify and expand networks
- 7 Co-innovation for co-liberation**
Celebrate creative practices and innovating cross-fertilisations. Make room for the unstructured. Where might this take us? To be sure, these movements will lead to our emancipation
- 8 Learn to communicate through collaboration!**
Accept initial frictions in the many (and different) voices. Always seek ways to share and understand. Take time <-> give effort. Understand each other's language to find shared meaning
- 9 No BOUNDARIES. Build BRIDGES**
Feel the fear but do it anyway. Cooperative action is transformative, and hopeful. Cultivate and spread a collaborative mindset. Lay down and pass over bridges. Collectively build our future – but wherever we go, let's go together!
- 10 Dramatically change.**
Bring about environments, experiences, infrastructures, and events to nurture collaborative skillsets

Ditch the siloed and tired approaches!
Invest now in collaborative research



Figure 2. A Collaborative Research Manifesto.

Discussion

In this discussion, we expand on the content and messages that formed the manifesto, articulating our collective vision for collaborative research as both an epistemological and pragmatic response to uncertainty. Collaborative research is far from new and therefore we seek to connect our manifesto (written intentionally to avoid specialised language – see 3.5) to key threads across the wider methodological literature, as reviewed in section 2.2.

Whilst the manifesto functions as a discrete entity, we also wish to emphasise and draw out key provocations by organising our discussion across three levels. We start by distilling what we mean by our ‘collaborative epistemology’, and its distinctiveness, focusing mostly on statements 1–3. Then, we turn to our refined shared vision of how collaboration *should* be done, referring to statements 4–8 as ‘markers of meaningful collaboration’ and by reflecting on our process of ‘finding our voice together’ to illustrate these markers in action. To close the paper, we consider the reach and depth of transformation required to challenge existing structures to realise the paradigm shift we have called for (statements 9–10).

A collaborative epistemology (1–3)

‘We share a collaborative epistemology’ was the first note written on the Miro board (workshop 1) and became the opening phrase of our position statement and acted as a point of departure for our continued conversations. As a diverse group of researchers (employing different methods across a wide range of disciplinary, geographic, and cultural contexts) there were few methodological and disciplinary convergences between us, and yet, through the process of thinking and writing together, we came to jointly emphasise methods and processes through which ‘valuable’ knowledge can be produced and mobilised *together* – as reflected in the heading of statement 1. We identified and developed three core features of our shared epistemology which both connect and depart from existing claims within the wider methodological literature.

The first key feature of a collaborative epistemology accentuates the need for collaboration-*for*-uncertainty (see 2.2), joining with various claims that to understand complexities, and to navigate uncertainties, requires more than one discipline (e.g. Klein, 2004; Szostak, 2021). In exploring our shared claims to knowledge, we conceived that specialised disciplinary methods fall short with regard to our uncertain times (as characterised in 2.1), for that when employed alone they only partially engage with complexities. Throughout the manifesto, we decided to favour the term *collaboration* (rather than inter-/trans-/multi-disciplinarity) to accentuate our claim that the production of valuable knowledge is only possible through collective enterprise, ideally involving diverse groups of people. The subtle distinction we make through favouring the term *collaboration* speaks to a disputed contention where interdisciplinary enquiry is routinely considered a team science but where in reality can be achieved by lone hybrid specialists (Klein, 2021; Lury et al., 2016). To clarify, our decision to emphasise collaboration is based on an insistence that valuable knowledge (that we give ethical privilege to – see below) is not merely produced through the coming together of *disciplines* but of *people*. Consequently, the knowledge this manifesto seeks to catalyse and mobilise cannot be achieved through a ‘layering’, or thin combination, of individual contributions within disciplinary entrenched methods but rather emerges through the *process* of coming together and seeking mutual directions (statement 3).

This leads to the second key feature of the collaborative epistemology: it is process-driven, requiring ongoing commitment (statement 3) and mobilisation. It is through this foundation that we continue to elevate the ongoing reciprocity of theory and action (statement 5). A collaborative epistemology therefore shares features with pragmatism (Morgan, 2014) and to some extent is a research expression of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). The action orientated pragmatism to ‘work through [real world] problems’ (statement 2) aligns with the stated function of collaborative methodologies in the context of political sciences but diverges in the sense that we fully commit to the notion that processes of meaningful collaboration *must* lead to tangible joint actions. In our case, throughout the co-writing process, we based our reflections on the value and meaning that we have drawn from our experiences of working on research projects that are orientated towards ‘on the ground’ impact, often in different geographies outside the Global North. For us, coming together to navigate a particular problem has demonstrated there is meaning in daring to succeed or fail together. In this, we emphasised the ‘risk of failing together’ (statement 1) as a call to ‘embrace’ or ‘harness’ the uncertainties of doing collaborative research. Through this, we seek to provoke collaboration-*as*-uncertain as a valuable approach to knowledge production while accepting the risk of failure (i.e. as a result of fundamental epistemic or personality conflicts between partners (Holmes & Marcus, 2021)) and seeking to offset this through the emphasis on commitment (statement 3) and the synthesis of argument and compromise (statement 2).

The third and final feature of the collaborative epistemology constitutes its ethical commitments. Despite a huge variation in methods of collaborative methodologies, they hold in common an attempt ‘to change the paradigm of conventional information extraction from marginalized or volatile communities for scholarly benefit and instead engage people as actors with agency rather than solely objects of research’. Through statements 1–3 but also 4 we attempted to bring such

commitments to the fore. Underpinning these is an ethic of accepting and acknowledging that valuable knowledge is never the product of lone geniuses, or researchers, it comes through the processes of doing *meaningful* research together. The collaborative environment must therefore be built around respect for this claim and seek to equalise the risks and rewards of the collaboration (statement 3).

Markers of meaningful collaboration (4–8)

The epistemological discussion above lacks, to a degree, a clear vision of how collaboration *should* be done. Here, we seek to translate a collaborative epistemology to a set of methodological markers, or praxis, relating to the role of power dynamics, experimentation, and enacting critical responsibility. In doing so, we seek to provide some practical direction for collaborative researchers that largely echo, and amplify, guiding principles across the methodological literature. We illustrate these markers in action by reflecting on and illustrating aspects of our process. We will also briefly touch on the relation between the praxis of meaningful collaboration and navigating uncertainties. Because of this focus, there is no room to expand on the full set of markers in this paper; however, there is scope for future work to do this and develop them into a methodological framework for collaborative research.

Reconfigure power dynamics. We have already touched upon ethical commitments to transform-ing and equalising power relations. Here, we add to this by making the case that to ‘flatten control’ is also a valuable methodological principle for powering collaborative research, despite acknowledging that achieving it is a continuous and complex process with uncertain outcomes. In the process we followed, it became clear that the size and diversity of the group, alongside external factors/motivators, were variables against which flattening power dynamics were complexified. Statement 4 underscores the need to ‘share roles, responsibilities, writing and doing’, and whilst this complicated the process (making its outputs less certain) it was vital for bringing our diverse perspectives and expertise together, for forging and refining our ideas.

Experimentation. Much has been made of the potential for experimentations through collaboration (see 2.2) and we bring attention to this by instructing, ‘make room for the unstructured’ (statement 7). In our process, we designed a symbolic lock-in as unstructured space that led to collaborators experimenting with writing styles, co-writing manifesto statements, and discussing their place within the manifesto. Our reflections on the project noted the enjoyment of the experimental and collaborative process and that this was beneficial in itself because it helped sustain our high levels of engagement. We therefore deliberately emphasised the role of *joy* through partnerships, or to appreciate ‘the unpredictable, complex, tensional, and *wonderful* processes of creating knowledges with others’ (Pedersen, 2021, p. 1, emphasis added), as a condition for experimenting in ways that lead to innovative cross-fertilisations (statement 6). We add here that trust and embracing the risk of failing together (statement 1) are prerequisites for collaborative experimentations.

Enacting critical responsibility. Our emphasis on ‘critical responsibility’ (statement 1) became a distinctive mark of our collaborative praxis. This consisted of *reciprocal* process where collaborators were challenged to not shy from or dominate exchanges. Through this, our process connects with the notion of ‘response-ability’ that is about ethico-epistemological process of *becoming* a collaborator (Pedersen, 2021). Enacting critical responsibility was easier to aspire in theory than realise in practice, and we do not claim to escape the complexities and tensions that this guiding idea implies. Nevertheless, living through an intimately collaborative process, we tried to emphasise and accept our responsibilities to ‘hear all voices’ and open ourselves to a risky process where our collective understandings (as well as our individual methods and insights) are continually challenged. As proclaimed in statement 8, we largely committed to work through ‘frictions’ that may derive from difficulties in ‘reconciling different epistemic cultures, styles of thinking and modes of interaction’ (Lury et al., 2016, p. 9). In co-writing this manifesto, the frictions that were noted in external feedback (see 3.5) mirrored some of the ongoing compromises that collaborators had been working through together. Time and effort were given to work through these tensions (statements 3 & 8) even as we

moved into the ‘design phase’ and critically discussed the importance of the visual layout (e.g. text arrangement) and outlook (e.g. colour, font, etc.) of the agreed text of the manifesto.

These three methodological markers elaborated and exemplified above, not only directly shaped the co-writing process and output, they were important factors in nourishing our individual motivations and sustaining our energies to engage in the process of finding our voice together and helped us to form and work towards mutual directions (statement 3).

Closing provocations (9–10)

Through our training and ongoing research activities, we experience outdated hierarchies of academia and the expectations of the neoliberal university that are less conducive to encourage meaningful collaborative research. Consequently, we look for and celebrate affective rewards such as inspiration, satisfaction, and joy as lubricants for doing collaborative research (statement 6). Yet we are aware that this is not enough. Consequently, we seek to imagine and realise a research paradigm that is based on collaboration or ‘cooperation’ and not ‘competition’ (statement 3), going against the neoliberal grain that universities operate (Docherty, 2015). The need for us (the wider academic body) to bring about the change we want to see is particularly difficult, but needed, in the contemporary context where research infrastructures are also responding to the (fiscal) uncertainties produced in the wake of the pandemic.

Against this we call for *dramatic* change (statement 10) not reform. The manifesto does not go so far as outlining how the structures should bend to nurture collaborative research – this is an area for future work beyond the remit of our small group. However, we indicate that to realise such a paradigm shift would require people and groups to continue to pass over boundaries/borders (statement 9) in their myriad of forms including national, disciplines and normative (Pedersen, 2021). We therefore seek to contribute to the discourse of boundary crossing (Klein, 2021) with an outright rejection of boundaries (no boundaries) as a radical call for accelerated erosion of disciplinary separation in how the university functions (Klein, 2004).

Concluding remarks

Our calls for dramatic change are proudly naïve and refreshingly partial (Hanna et al., 2020). The nature of our call reflects our positionality and motivations as early career researchers who acutely, and perhaps disproportionately (Levine et al., 2021), feel the weight of uncertainties through which we operate in the wake of COVID-19. Through our manifesto, and in this paper, we have promoted collaborative research as an epistemological and pragmatic response to times of intersecting crises and uncertainty produced and felt in the wake of COVID-19. Some may view the tone of certainty in our vision to be in conflict with the wider social-methodological uncertainties we identified (2.1); however, we offer the manifesto as part of an ongoing *process* of exploring some issues which open up others. The success and potential of this process, which included sharing drafts with expert (see 3.5) and anonymous reviewers, are already becoming apparent; responses to circulation thus far have highlighted many avenues for future explorations and developments.

The next step, therefore, is to launch the manifesto and follow these emerging threads, together, as communities of practicing researchers. As recognised throughout this paper, both collaborative research and our key messages are by no means new. This manifesto seeks to breathe new life into these discussions by emphasising a collaborative epistemology, sparking change to (and through) research praxis, and calling for action. In closing, our contribution intends to be as much of a rallying call as a roadmap. Its intended contribution rests on its *affective* potentials to provoke in union with its *directive* signals, written and shared in a bid to capture the moment as a turning point for the collective research imaginary (Kara & Khoo, 2022).

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