



NEWSLETTER

Social Justice Research Institute (SJRI)

April 2020: Part One

The SJRI is a vibrant collective of affiliates, associates, fellows, and members brought together by a shared concern for pressing social justice issues. The month's newsletter comes to you in two parts: this **first** part announces the most recent recipients of SJRI Grants and provides information regarding revised plans for SJRI's semi-annual general meeting; the **second** part showcases insights from some SJRI affiliates regarding some social justice implications of the current global pandemic.



Spring 2020 SJRI Grants Recipients

Congratulations to these most recent recipients of the [SJRI Grants Program](#) competition, which runs each Spring and Fall as a way to support affiliated members with their transdisciplinary social justice research:

SJRI Research Seed Grant

<i>Recipient(s)</i>	<i>Project Title</i>
Simon Black	Advancing Decent Work for Domestic Workers: The Role of Worker-Based Organizations in Jamaica (\$3548)
Diane Collier	Visualizing Citizenship: Children Reading and Writing Photographs (\$3968)

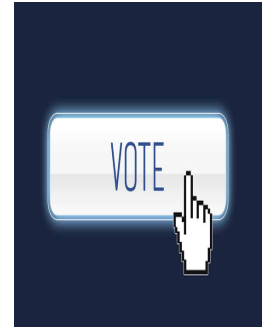
If you would like to learn more about this program generally and/or to discuss a specific project for which you might seek SJRI support for the Fall 2020 competition, please contact SJRI Project Facilitator, Julie Gregory at jgregory@brocku.ca.

Semi-annual General Meeting: revised plans



As per the **COVID-19 Action Plan** released by the university in March 2020, SJRI will not be hosting a face-to-face semi-annual meeting on Wednesday May 20, 2020.

- Rather, current plans include **electronic** reporting to, and voting by, current SJRI affiliates.
 - More information, including a **Notice of Motion**, will be shared with SJRI affiliates by Friday May 8.



Please click [here](#) for more information about Brock's COVID-19 Action Plan, as well as related community resources.

April 2020: Part Two



In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, SJRI affiliates were once again invited to provide short reflections on the importance of thinking about this event - and related issues - from a social justice perspective. We have compiled these insights below.

From Asma Zafar, Assistant Professor, Goodman School of Business:

Over the past month or so, we have been asked to stay at home, repeatedly. However, today I was pushed to ask myself, 'how can homeless people self-isolate?' My local community newspaper read today, "Directives for Niagara... Stay home as much as possible and only leave the house once a week if required..." (The Lake Report, April 09, 2020). Reading this statement led me back to the Fall of 2016 when I first started collecting data for my doctoral dissertation. The focus of my dissertation was a homeless-serving organization in Western Canada, where hundreds of homeless people congregated every day, not only to access necessary services, but also to meet their community. During my time of data collection, I was told (and observed) that for many, the organization was their 'home.' Though this home remains open amidst the current COVID-19 crisis, it only welcomes a limited number of people at time, in accordance with the guidelines provided by the regional health authority. I cannot imagine going home only to be denied entry or even waiting for a long before being able to enter my own home. As an organizational theorist, I am curious about the

ability of organizations, serving marginalized groups of people, to stop their already vulnerable clients from being marginalized further. That said, hope is on the horizon with some officials also thinking the same – Niagara region has opened up a homeless shelter to allow homeless people to self-isolate (The Standard, April 6, 2020). Facilities such as expo-centers in Western Canada are also being temporarily converted to physical distancing spaces for the homeless community (Global News, March 23, 2020).

Click [here](#) to learn more about Dr. Zafar’s work.

From Susan Spearey, Associate Professor, English Language and Literature

What the Coronavirus crisis has taught me – via online teach-ins by the likes of Naomi Klein, Angela Davis, Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor and Astra Taylor; by a whole range of community-based initiatives mobilized to support those made most vulnerable by various imposed restrictions; and by individual acts of solidarity and mutual care – is that there are real and flourishing alternatives to the prevailing social, economic and political relations that brought us to this point of crisis, and that isolate us from one another in ways far more pronounced than physical distancing. Jess Auerbach, a postdoctoral fellow at South Africa’s University of Stellenbosch, has curated an [archive of kindness](#) in hopes of offering a record of these alternative social relations, as well as a blueprint for moving forward when restrictions are eventually lifted. In an article in [South Africa’s Daily Maverick](#), she writes:

People are now in contact who in normal circumstances would never know of the other’s existence. Urgently formed Community Action Networks (CAN) are linking not only neighbours, but neighbourhoods in ways that bridge the divides of apartheid urban planning.

People are asking for help and in many cases they are receiving it through personal cash transfers organised via social media. If you were hungry in South Africa three weeks ago, that was your problem and yours alone, but suddenly there are any number of Facebook groups to appeal for help on, and any number of people cooking food. Sitting at home, we are connected as a nation in different ways.

This connection is changing us. Once you have seen, you cannot un-see, and across South Africa, people are seeing one another with fresh perspectives. The archive is being made so that we do not forget that such change is possible.

This lesson is a profound one from which we can all learn.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Dr. Spearey’s work.

From Gyllian Raby, Associate Professor, Dramatic Arts

I've printed off some of the comments made by SJRI members in the last newsletter, so I can draw their inspiration without having to look them up. They help to reduce my sense of being stuck in a silo as I worry about artists and others living in precarity who've been cast adrift in the sinking economy. Freelance artists frequently live below the poverty line, making up livable incomes through restaurant and hospitality industries that were among the first to be closed by the pandemic. As the YWCA's Cardboard House project highlighted, many live one pay-check away from homelessness. In a call-in discussion on the performing arts (April 22), Canadian Actor's Equity Association made an 'optimistic' projection of a 4-month hiatus in income (five or six while the cheques are in the mail). Equity They has laid off staff and taken pay cuts. They voice relief at Justin Trudeau's shout out to artists in Canada when he changed the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to enable free-lance "gigging" individuals to be eligible. Nonetheless, I fear the suspension of live arts gathering might crush this vital stratum of our society, along with others who are most oppressed by poverty.

In this mean time, the arts, like the caring professions, will be vital if we want to come out of the pandemic situation with "a new concept of how we all benefit from social responsibility" (thank you Natalee!). It matters how we live while enduring it. Among life-style adaptations, we need to think past on-line consumption to make ourselves a program of self and community care in which art inevitably features; to move past the consumption of art in order to produce it. We need to encourage fresh appetite for authentic expression: personal, local and world conscious.

Everyone, I have the impression, is bingeing Netflix and equivalents. A steady diet of hot button premises involving serial-killer-cop-self-loathing-vigilante-zombie-war-sex-profit-glamour tropes thicken the flow of subjective fantasy and imagination. I observe from teaching improv that if we don't exercise our imagination these tropes can take over. For imagination needs conscious exercising if it is to shape to the self – you have to **use** it for the synapses to spark, the neurons to constellate, and expressive patterns to form. In these times, while our self-identified, professional artists are scrambling to survive, it helps if everyone embroiders a story, dances out a tune, scribbles a memory image, spices up a soup, plants a garden of ideas or flowers and generally wakes up to smell the spring outside. I've been inspired by colleagues. I've been inspired by artists – I was invited to an on-line clown fancy-dress party this very morning! In Dramatic Arts, we're interviewing students who just can't wait to start their education, and their trust is humbling. Knowing a laugh, a surprise, a new piece of info, and a reflection are around the corner helps motivate us all to share and to keep imagining. These small joyful steps into the uncertain future underpin activism for systemic change – thanks to everyone who contributes.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Dr. Raby's work.

LET'S STAY CONNECTED

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Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome @ jgregory@brocku.ca!