

### THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE DAY

**Alexandra Eveleigh (Wellcome Collection)** [00:00:08] So to start us off it's my great pleasure to introduce Professor Catherine Clarke who's Director of the Centre for the History of People, Place and Community at the Institute of Historical Research and as part of that role she's also the Director of the Victoria County History of England. And if that wasn't enough she's also Visiting Professor in English at the University of Southampton and a specialist in medieval literature and cultural history. Catherine.

**Catherine Clarke (Institute of Historical Research)** [00:00:40] Thank you very much. Well, thank you so much for the invitation to be part of today. I'm really looking forward to our collaborative seminar today and I know I'm going to learn a lot from the different perspectives and experiences brought together in the room.

As you've heard, this opening session, together with the last session at the end of the day, will be looking at three questions sort of threading through lots of our conversations today beginning with framing and opening those questions and returning to them at the end of the day.

I did notice that in his introduction just now Philip said, because I noted this down, we will be posing and answering these questions. Now I have to be honest, I'm going to pose some questions in this short talk now but I don't really have any answers. Maybe by the end of the day we'll have travelled towards some clearer answers as a group but I think many of them are very open.

So I'm going to start with this question, what is co-production? And I'd like to begin by illustrating that with a couple of examples of projects, very different projects, based in our Centre for the History of People, Place and Community at the Institute of Historical Research.

The first is the wonderful Layers of London project that you're going to be exploring and learning more about later today with your own chance to make your own contribution to the project in the workshop led by Adam Corsini. So I hope some of you have this project on your radar already, you may have come across this. It's funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and it involves working with archives, community groups, local people, right

across London to crowdsource and gather different kinds of histories, personal histories, memories, experiences of the city, and there are wonderful collections curated on topics from London pubs, to Greek restaurants, history of my school, even there's a brilliant project on London's vents. So a really capacious, imaginative crowdsourced public history project.

Alongside that a very different kind of project; I'd place the Victoria County History of England which you heard mentioned in my introduction just then. So I would describe the Victoria County History as a crowdsourced public history project but it was founded in 1899 so long before terms like that, terms like 'co-production' were part of our vocabulary.

It's an ongoing national project to write the history of every county in England. There are currently 17 active counties and the project is entirely based around local community clusters, local Victoria County History trusts working with archives, local museums, local government, volunteers alongside professional historians. So for me, that absolutely models and has done for 120 years what co-production can look like.

I also want to touch very briefly on some of my experiences of co-production in my own work and in my own research.

So in my own research I've been involved in, in many projects involving co-production. For example in Chester, working with museums and local groups on projects around mapping the medieval city and representing that in public facing resources, and in a museum exhibition working with local community groups to recover and develop and explore their knowledge and understanding of their city.

Another really interesting project that I led was in Swansea and for me that's the only project in my academic career so far which began with an approach from an external agency. Swansea City Council approached me, responding to the work that my team and I had done in Chester, to ask whether we could collaborate with them on something in Swansea.

The council had a very real, practical challenge. They had some EU convergence funding and they wanted to transform the city centre of Swansea, putting heritage at the centre of Swansea city centre.

So that was a really exciting opportunity to work on a regeneration project working with local government, again working with local community groups, working with Macwest Glamorgan archives and Swansea Museum to bring research and collaboration into this renewal and regeneration project in Swansea.

Most recently, I've led a project called the St Thomas Way, developing a new heritage route from Swansea to Hereford and that's involved again collaboration and co-production with a range of very different partners from Hereford Cathedral to local parish churches and community groups all the way along the heritage route, to technical partners, commercial partners helping us develop our digital resources and in a personal career kind of high for me, we also worked with a micro-brewery to develop a medieval-themed beer. It doesn't get much better than that.

So for me, if co-production is essentially about working with, then I'd see it really as a kind of more radical kind of collaboration, working with more diverse partners and perspectives and bringing those together.

As you'll all know there are lots of different definitions and theorisations of co-production like this, which I think is a pretty straightforward definition: research with, by and for communities and that comes from this report from the AHRC Connected Communities project a few years ago. But I think even there, in that very simple language, there's so much to unpack, isn't there?

What's meant by communities? I think sometimes in this language there's a sense that it's a very particular kind of community. A local or perhaps non-professional community. Each of us, of course, belong to multiple different intersecting and overlapping communities. I belong to my academic community, a couple of different disciplinary communities, also my local community and many different social and cultural communities. It's a very complex, multi-layered kind of discourse.

I think this report is a really interesting starting point for thinking about co-production but I want to pick up on some other language here, some of which I find challenging and potentially problematic, and we might want to think through during the day.

You'll notice that co-production here is described multiple times as a solution to the relevance gap. I think that's quite an interesting provocation there. Do we want to think about co-production as solving a problem, a solution, a justification? Or would we rather think about co-production as something desirable and positive in its own right, and valid in its own right as a pathway into research, as a research methodology?

Briefly in this slide (I had lots of fun making word clouds a couple of weeks ago), I wanted to pick up on some of the different vocabulary that's used around co-production and to define co-production. Now of course, as soon as I sent off my slides, I thought of a dozen different words that aren't here. Straight away I'd think of maybe 'co-creation' or perhaps 'citizen history. Or I learned just this last week of a new buzz phrase in this area – 'public involvement', which should probably be up on the slide as well.

Now it isn't comprehensive and I should also say that I don't necessarily use or endorse all this vocabulary myself but I think it's an interesting starting point. There are words there that I think many of us are familiar with when talking about co-production – engaged, participatory, reciprocal. There are terms like amateur and professional that I think I see very much in the historical discourse around something like the Victoria County History, but which absolutely we can and should be troubling today and I think we do.

Lots of this terminology has to do with levelling or collapsing hierarchy or democratising. There's also some very specific theoretical language I've included in this slide: sedimented, the idea of sedimented history. So Sarah Lloyd, who's here I think and you'll be hearing from later today, and Julie Moore have proposed a concept of sedimented histories to honour the diversity of interests and perspectives and idioms really in co-created histories.

That term 'impact' is there as well. For those of us within the academy that's a very loaded and fraught term within our professional context. Impact is often a driver of co-production in research projects. But of course it's very instrumentalising again. It's a term that harnesses co-production in the service again of some kind of solution or delivered benefit.

Moving on to more of our questions, so what is co-production and when is it most effective? I think for me, it's clear that co-production produces different kinds of results, different kinds of knowledge, different varieties of expertise, different methodologies,

different values, different modes, idioms and registers. And for those of us working within higher education, that's a challenge. It results very often in different kinds of output: websites, performances, artworks. Moving us away, I think, from what's often the academic reliance on the monograph and the article.

For me, co-production has been most effective when it's been working with, I think, creative partners and methodologies and involving community groups in creative methodologies that during a lot of my academic research I don't have the opportunity to explore. So for me, working with artists, working with community groups to develop content from the archives through creative expression has been incredibly valuable.

And I'm actually just beginning a new project, at Alderley Edge in Cheshire with the National Trust, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, led by Vicki Flood in Birmingham. As you can see I'm quite happy about this project because I sometimes get to wear a hardhat, which is very exciting.

And we're going to be working with local people to explore place-making at Alderley Edge through story-telling, looking at the folkloric traditions, the experiences of local people. Interestingly, not very long ago, there was a huge Leverhulme-funded research project on Alderley Edge on its history looking at the geology, the archaeology, the history. Our project is also going to be exploring histories of Alderley Edge but through very different means and working with very different co-creators. And I wonder how different our outcomes and our insights will be.

My final slide I want to return to the third of our questions which clearly I think is, is very important. Is co-production useful or exploitative?

I'm sure throughout today we'll be thinking a great deal about these questions around ethics, labour, values, ownership of the content that's developed through co-creation. For me, risk, the unforeseen and the unexpected are really key when thinking about co-production. For me, it's one of the huge excitements, one of the huge positives of co-creation. You don't know where you're going to end up. But that's a challenge isn't it when you're speaking to your funding body, when you're planning your research or when you want to honour the unexpected but also kind of manage it too.

The same with friction and difference. Through co-creation and bringing together multiple partners, we're often not going to generate consensus. How do we acknowledge and honour differences in perspective without silencing or levelling?

Questions of sustainability. What happens when we initiate a project and for reasons of resources for example have to step away from it? How can we keep projects alive and keep that commitment to local communities?

And I just want to take a moment to, to focus in particularly on that term useful, is co-production useful or exploitative? And I wonder is that entirely the right word? Is it the word that we want to use in relation to co-production? Or does it bring us back to a potentially exploitative or instrumentalising model? Who might it be useful for and in what ways?

Again there are the realities of funding mechanisms and showing the value and usefulness of what we do. But we don't want to come back to a discourse of commodifying, instrumentalising and solutions.

And the final thought that I'd leave us with for today is, I suppose, is co-production primarily about producing and about production? About productivity? Are there complications in a word that privileges outputs and results in that kind of way? Or is co-production uniquely more about the journey, more about creating spaces for shared practice and for collaboration?

So that's the question that I would leave us with at this point and I look forward to our conversations through the day. Thank you.

**Alexandra Eveleigh (Wellcome Collection)** [00:13:38] So our second speaker is Dr Ayshah Johnston who fairly recently finished a PhD on poor relief and social services in the Anglophone Caribbean which was a collaborative award between Newcastle University and The National Archives.

So I'm beginning to think that this panel is made up of former collaborative award holders with a familiarity with the East Coast Main Line and that includes me. Ayshah also joined the Learning and Outreach department of the Black Cultural Archives in January last year and in that role she works with programming and wider public engagement and hopes to

use her research experience as a historian to develop research collaborations to help disseminate the BCA's collections. Ayshah.

**Ayshah Johnston (Black Cultural Archives)** [00:14:35] Morning everybody. Thank you Catherine for that wonderful presentation which has really given me a lot of food for thought really about some of the terminology that we use.

When I was asked to speak today and I looked at the theme of the conference the first thing I had to ask myself was 'what is co-production?' I thought is this something that's theoretical, is it specific to archives, does it mean something that I'm not aware of or does it have a more general meaning? And I spoke to a friend who said that how she understands it, is that it means, working collaboratively to produce research outputs, such as articles, blogs, etc. based on an archive's collections.

And I thought well, we're not currently doing that at Black Cultural Archives. We have our written subject guides but these were written long before I ever joined the organisation, so I wouldn't be able to talk about that.

So I thought well, what else could it mean? And she told me about a conversation she had with a historian – who we'll call Dr C, who related an incident where he was sitting in an archive conducting his own research and he heard somebody approach the desk and ask a question about a particular collection. He felt that the information the researcher was given was incomplete and he said that in his opinion the archivist will never know everything there is to know about a collection, and they must involve the historian to bring out the richness of the collection's history.

So I thought, ah! If we're going to think about collaboration initially as being between the historian and the archivist, that's a good place to start in terms of our work at Black Cultural Archives where we're not, as I said, not currently engaged in producing written outputs but we do collaborate in furthering the ethos and mission of BCA, which is to preserve and celebrate certain narratives and bring them from the periphery to the centre.

About BCA. So Black Cultural Archives is a national institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and celebrating the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain. Our work recognises the importance of lesser-known stories and provides a

platform to encourage enquiry and dialogue through our exhibitions, public programmes and events. And finally, we place people and their historical accounts at the heart of what we do.

So in addressing the three questions as to what co-production means for us, we can see that from the outset BCA does not aim for neutrality if, indeed, the concept of neutrality even exists anywhere. Rather, the archive grew out of the activism of those who subsequently deposited their collections with us. And staff choose to work at BCA because they feel invested in the mission, often personally as well as professionally.

Our archivist is not an impartial custodian of the material, having completed her doctoral research on the development of, of black-led archives in London; and our learning manager (myself) is also a historian of the Caribbean. And most of us who work there also share African or Caribbean heritage, so as I said we feel invested on a personal, as well as a professional level.

So collaboration happens really in a couple of ways. On a daily basis between the archivist and historian. It also happens between archivist, historian and donor. And we also seek other collaborations which enable us to further our mission because we are a very small organisation that's not publicly-funded. So without collaboration with other, with partners we would not be able to do our job as effectively.

So I'm going to give just a couple of brief examples of how this works in the two key areas: Exhibitions and Learning.

So these slides are actually just going to move ahead as I speak, so just don't worry about that. So this particular slide here I think shows us how the impetus for establishing an archive in the first place came from the people, and so therefore our work must respect and include communities whose work formed the foundation of our collections. And we can see here people campaigning for the right to have an archive and museum in the first place.

In terms of our collections, sorry our exhibitions. So to give two examples, we have a photographic exhibition by Neil Kenlock. Neil Kenlock was the official photographer for the British Black Panther party, and he took photographs not only within the context of the



Black Panther Party but also of people, ordinary people, in their work, in their lives, some who were the first in their fields, some who were just ordinary people going about their business.

And he also is a local Lambeth resident. He's lived in Lambeth since 1963 and he's Jamaican. So we were very much collaborating with him and his daughter in terms of thinking about how this photographic exhibition was going to be presented at BCA.

Another exhibition was called Family Ties, which was the result of a family from Ghana called the Adamah family who went on holiday to Ghana and came back with a huge box of papers dating from 1850 to the early 1930s, which really was a history of their family throughout the colonial period. Because their ancestor was King Togbe Adamah II, who was King at a very pivotal moment in West African history, whereby he was almost like a liaison between traditional African rulers and the British. So we were able to see this from the point of view of an African family. And they themselves being of the family were also part of the exhibition. Their oral histories, their family tree, and so naturally we couldn't have had the exhibition without their being on board with us in that.

In terms of other exhibitions, we also utilise corporate collaborations. For example our current headline exhibition is called Breaking Barriers: Stories of Black Leadership, and was sponsored by J.P. Morgan. So originally the exhibition was on their premises, so they had a remit and a say in who was selected to be part of this exhibition. And it was ultimately a joint decision between members of their board and members of our board. But BCA retained control over content and curation.

Moving onto Learning though, I think there again, there are two main ways in which, I think, collaboration or co-production is relevant for us in Learning.

One model is when a lecturer will call us and say they want to bring their students to Black Cultural Archives for a seminar on a particular topic that they are studying, or it could be because they've already visited the British Museum and the National Gallery and they want to bring the students to have a more diverse experience, or because it's a more diverse experience of community-led archives. In that situation, either myself or the archivist, or both of us, will be delivering this seminar.

The other model that works for us very well is one where we have, one of our partners is King's College London who have a module on Black British History and that's jointly delivered, half on their premises, half at Black Cultural Archives, which really enables us to present the archive material and lecture, and invite the donors and authors to be part of that process.

So the students have their essential reading, they come in, they've read the books by a particular individual and they come into Black Cultural Archives, they see the primary sources produced by that particular author, and they have author and donor right, standing in front of them speaking to their own material and experience.

Thus, to go back to Dr C's statement that the archivist must involve the historian, at BCA we feel privileged to be able to combine archivist, historian and collection donor in one place, thus providing a unique and valuable learning experience for researchers and students.

Now I haven't touched on potential for exploitation yet. Perhaps that could be taken up more in the questions and answers, but I did just want to show two slides in particular which I think are very interesting.

So these are the authors of a book called *The Heart of the Race: Black (Women's) Lives in Britain*. I don't know if many of you have heard of it. It was published in 1985 and it won the Martin Luther King prize for literature but a new edition has been published. So these three women, Stella Dadzie, Beverley Bryan and Suzanne Scafe. Beverley Bryan and Suzanne Scafe have donated their collections to us. Stella Dadzie who's on the right here, her collection on her work in the black women's movements. So they were radical feminists of the 60s to 80s. That's our most popular and most consulted collection. But she is also available from time to time, and Suzanne Scafe, to come in and address students so they can understand. And the other, the slide here is actually, the next one, if it will come up now, my favourite.

So this was the Adamah family coming in in 2017 to deposit their collection and that lady on the right is called Promise Adamah Togoba and I just love the expression on her face. I can really see she's saying 'I'm watching you, I am holding you to account. These are our collections, what are you going to do with them? This is my family history'. And we have

our archivist here looking very earnest, convincing her, that don't worry, this is going to be fine and you know.

We then employed a curator and it so happened that the curator, as she was going through the material to curate the exhibition, discovered aspects of her own personal family history within the papers and so she was able to do a lot with bringing elders together from the community as well. From a West African community, which is a community we haven't engaged with largely because our founders are mostly from the Caribbean. So our collections mostly speak to a Caribbean experience. But of course, as demographics change we have to reach out to new communities and that was one very enabling experience.

This final slide I just put up because I think it's very nice. So we have on the side of our building there, we projected the face of Darcus Howe, who was a late activist. He died in 2017 but was involved in many, many historical campaigns and movements. And his wife was part of the Race Today collective, which published periodicals which we have in our collection. And so everybody was able to come together to celebrate his life at Black Cultural Archives with the exhibition and public programmes.

I'm going to leave it there and I'm looking forward to hearing the other presentations and to discussing other aspects such as, as I said, I didn't get on to talk about possibly negative aspects of collaboration. I think for me it's been a mostly positive experience so far but thank you all for listening.

**Alexandra Eveleigh (Wellcome Collection)** [00:25:27] And so our third speaker is Dr Victoria Hoyle who's currently a Research Associate in the Department of History at the University of York, where she is working on the social and cultural history of face transplants it says here, so I think I'll leave Victoria to explain that one. And from September this year she'll take up a permanent position there as a Lecturer in Public History. Victoria.

**Victoria Hoyle (University of York)** [00:25:55] Good morning everyone. So my own experience of co-production is somewhat different to the collaborations and co-produced projects that both Catherine and Ayshah have described, in that they've been with small

groups of people with lived experience, often in the context of social injustice and movements of social change.

As both a historian and an archivist I am interested in how history is produced, circulated and performed in public. How do the ways in which we construct understandings of the past impact on people in the present? How do the histories we make, the archives we keep, shape perspectives, influence decisions – at individual, local and national levels – and how do they generate emotions in us?

At the heart of these questions are issues of power: how we distribute power in our historical and archival practice often determines whose history we consider important and how that history is remembered. The stakes are highest when the histories we produce as academics and practitioners, and as representatives of institutions, touch upon trauma or injustices which are ongoing for people today.

In my own work I have explored how co-production with communities and individuals can be a more equitable basis for research, impact and action. For me, co-production has been a way to disrupt disciplinary assumptions and established narratives about what archives are and what history does, by expanding the circle of people involved in my practice to include perspectives, life experiences and feelings that are very different to my own and beyond my skillset.

I want to explore the three questions that we have been posed this morning through the lens of my own experiences of co-production, which I would say have been both imperfect and yet wonderful.

So first as a PhD student, exploring strategies for public engagement with archival collections, I worked with a local community group with personal experience of housing insecurity and poverty to produce a history of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century slum clearance in the city of York in an area called Hungate, which was at the time being redeveloped as executive housing.

Later, as a postdoctoral researcher, I worked on MIRRA, a research project based at UCL that explored the role of archives and records in supporting the memory and identity needs of care-experienced people, who'd been in care from the 1940s to the present.

And currently I am part of AboutFace, which as Alex mentioned, is an international study of the development and practice of facial transplantation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This project is produced collaboratively with people with significant facial differences.

So in each of these projects co-production has looked different, felt different, was meaningful and valuable to people in different ways, and had different outcomes.

So that my immediate response to the question 'What is co-production?' is that it is not readily defined, at least not by a list of steps or requirements. And it comes in many shapes, and forms, and levels of commitment.

For me, it's a fluid, dynamic and responsive way of working collectively with others, often others from different backgrounds and perspectives, but with a shared focus. It is an approach whereby historical and archival practices are designed and fitted to the needs and capacities of the people involved. And in this way it is similar to participatory research, which Kindon, Pain and Kesby define not as a methodology to follow but as 'an orientation to enquiry that requires methodological innovation to adapt and respond to specific contexts and problems.'

Nevertheless, as an orientation, I suggest that co-production has four critical starting points, which have been true to all of my experiences.

- First, that in co-production, power must be recognised and distributed, between co-producers, co-researchers or community actors. That distribution of power doesn't have to be equal but it has to be based on a mutual and explicit agreement.
- Second, the value of different forms of knowledge and expertise should be acknowledged and respected, so that lived experiences, emotional responses and community identities are accepted as valid alongside academic and archival expertise.
- Third, that while motivations for being involved in the work may be different, there is a benefit for all involved and that everyone's expectations for the work are shared and understood.
- Fourth, that decisions are made together. And that doesn't mean that everyone has to agree all of the time, but all of those involved should be heard and have the ability to participate in all stages of a project or process if they wish. Negotiation and

compromise at times of conflict is a fundamental part, I think, of the labour of co-production.

And I can track those qualities through each of my own projects, some more successfully and consistently achieved than others.

As I've said, projects have always been most effective when power has been identified, surfaced and openly discussed, not just at the outset of the project but throughout. So during Hungate Histories, my PhD project, I initially struggled with this, because as well as being a PhD researcher I was also at that time York's City Archivist. As a practitioner I was used to exercising my power over both archives and histories in multiple ways – so by controlling the terms on which a community member could encounter the collections; by enforcing norms of archival practice through cataloguing and preservation; by asserting authority over stories about the past.

I was accustomed to being instructive and not co-productive. These forms of power I found were alienating and off-putting to my colleagues from the group, who drew on alternative sources of authority through their lived experience and struggles. They were accustomed to being ignored and disrespected by both 'the Council' and 'the University', both of which I represented.

I was not used to listening, or having to listen, and they did not expect to be heard; which is a recipe for conflict and disaster. And I feel that in many cases that is the jumping off point from which co-productive relationships begin. And in that case we had to be honest and bold about expressing those feelings and experiences to work through it. And I was very lucky in that first encounter with co-production that the people I was working with were not afraid to tell me all the ways in which I was wrong.

And in addition to helping me recognise the effects of power that were often invisible to me, they taught me that effective co-production is a long-term exercise in self-reflection, a process of building trust and mutual regard that doesn't come ready-made. Focusing on the points of disconnect in fact, the rough edges and the tensions between us, was the best approach to acknowledging and distributing power and was very productive in terms of our relationship.

As an academic and an archivist that has required me to divest myself of a lot of my professional assumptions and norms, because I think we often confuse 'the right way to do things' with 'the way I've been taught to do things'. And in this instance it required me to let go completely of the necessity of the logics of provenance, original order, linearity and even factuality. These ways of thinking simply did not make sense to my co-producers.

And acknowledging their different forms of knowledge and expertise helped me to expand my understanding of the repertoire of 'how to do things': how to do archives, how to do research, how to make histories. And together we produced a history of slum clearances quite unlike the one that I would have made alone, which used the archive in messy and chaotic ways, as a repository of feelings that helped us all to think through housing injustice and the way that it was impacting on their lives in the present.

I think co-production really is most effective when it takes everyone out of their comfort zone in this way. So the MIRRA project at UCL was co-productive from the outset, unlike Hungate Histories (which I designed myself). The project was scoped and designed with care-experienced people before funding was sought, and then we worked together throughout, collecting data, presenting at conferences, creating outputs.

It took co-production to a new level for me, because it meant sharing every aspect of the research process with others and integrating their priorities and needs, which often conflicted with academic agendas.

And it was only effective because it was written into the DNA of the work programme; it was recognised from the outset that navigating co-production itself is a resource intensive process. And this again is where a lot of other work, sort of co-productive work I've been involved with as a practitioner has failed, because they start from a mistaken belief that a job shared is a job halved. And that has not been my experience; real investment is needed if you want the greater return of higher value, if you want the more impactful research or activity. And that investment is not just in terms of generous time and budget allotments but also in terms of the emotional labour on the part of all involved.

So for me, although perhaps not for everyone and in all circumstances, all of my experiences of co-production have been deeply emotional, because in building relationships outside of our institutions we have to confront the feelings of others.

Negotiating and managing those feelings is often challenging and ‘above and beyond’ what you might think of as the job.

And indeed that is one way in which co-production can be exploitative, in that it may lead you to interact with people in ways that are outside your salaried position. However, that openness to emotion is also transformative and productive, because it builds empathy. And perhaps one of the provocations I would make today is that empathy is what makes co-production effective.

In both MIRRA and AboutFace a shared agenda has been essential, even where motives have been different. So for MIRRA this was a determination to do research that supported care-experienced people to find and access archives and records about their childhoods; in AboutFace it is an ambition to better understand how an extreme surgical intervention like a face transplant affects people who have facial injuries and differences.

These shared missions support mutual respect and reflexivity, by focusing on what unites and motivates people rather than their inevitable differences. And that provides that solid basis for addressing and resolving conflicts when they inevitably arise.

In addition to empathy then, I would say that effective co-production can only take place when everyone involved is able to articulate, in their own way, why what they’re doing is worthwhile and important to them, and how their contribution of knowledge and experience fits into a bigger picture.

So from this it’s probably clear that I think co-production can be incredibly powerful for all involved – ‘useful’ I would say, I would query this term as Catherine did, is too bland a word for it. Valuable or meaningful may be better ones; in the case of the MIRRA project I would describe it as transformative, for me and for many of my co-researchers. But co-production can also be the opposite, exploitative, even actively damaging, if we don’t enter into it for the right reasons.

I found this question in fact the most revealing of the three posed for this panel, because it speaks to me of the main ‘wrong’ reason that people embark on co-production, which is that historians, practitioners, institutions and funders may be motivated by their own gain. If we enter into co-production for the *appearance* of co-production, because it is what



funders want and we want their money, or because it generates REF-able impact, or because it enhances our reputation as an institution, or because we have a deficit of labour and we want people to work for free, then it is exploitative.

Avoiding these problems is hard because our contexts often make co-production exploitative in exactly these ways, even when our motives are good and mutual benefit is at the heart of our project. Our institutions, for example, often expect co-producers to give their time and energy for free, while we are paid; our institutions often don't recognise co-producers as having equal rights to our facilities (such as libraries and staff rooms) or allowing them to reap the benefits (such as travel to conferences); admin processes often expect co-producers to pay their expenses and then claim them weeks later.

And this event is a case in point because I spent the money to come to this event in January and I won't get it back until April. And for many people that is simply not viable. And staff are exploited too, because the emotional labour of co-production that I mentioned isn't recognised as part of their workload.

I don't think these are universal dangers of co-production, but they will always be risks where there is a reciprocal but inevitably unequal relationship between people and an institution or an organisation, and where complex interests and agendas are at play. So acknowledging and negotiating these is an essential part of what co-production means to me, and I anticipate we will discuss many of them and come back to these issues throughout the day. So I'm very much looking forward to hearing your thoughts. Thank you.