2 Mapping the contested terrain of co-creation in participatory research and qualitative inquiry

Practices of "co" are all over the place

When I'd just started writing this chapter, the pain in my shoulder had reached the point where I felt propelled to make an urgent appointment with my GP. To get an earlier timeslot than otherwise, I booked an appointment with the trainee doctor on secondment at my GP's practice. As a preamble to presenting different treatment options, he said, in a friendly tone, that the decision about which treatment to choose was one neither he nor I would be making on our own; rather, we'd be arriving at it jointly through co-creation – yes, he said co-creation (in Danish, "samskabelse"). As I left the surgery my husband arrived for his appointment with the same doctor. Comparing notes afterwards, he told me that the doctor had said the exact same thing to him. Oh, I thought immediately, the doctor must have just been on a course on co-creation and collaborative decision-making in health care as part of his training.

I imagine that you can think of episodes in your everyday life where, in similar, mundane fashion, you have been asked to take part in a collaborative decision-making process in an institutional or community setting – if not about medical treatment then perhaps about organisational change at your workplace or community development in your neighbourhood. Your memories of participation in those activities may well be overshadowed by the feeling of having been subjected to a pseudo-dialogic process in which top-down decision-making was couched in the rhetoric of co-creation. In his regular guest lecture on one of my university courses, Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen, a researcher and consultant with years of experience of action research in organisations, used to dub such pseudo-dialogue "dialogue as deodorant". Deodorant masks odour; the rhetoric of co-creation masks the stink of deception, the masquerading of a top-down decision-making process as a bottom-up one. It was a bit like that in my case: the doctor steered the discussion strictly towards acceptance of what he knew, in his biomedical wisdom, to be the right thing to do about my shoulder (which turned out not to be the right thing after all, but that's another story…). But this is not to say that the doctor engaged in deception or manipulation. According to the theoretical approach to co-creation I present in this book, co-creation is

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always complex and imbued with power, it is never a pure, straightforward process that can be contrasted with bogus dialogue. Together with related terms such as participation, dialogue, co-production and empowerment – it is often embedded in a discourse which romanticises it as a smooth process of inclusion in which equal partners participate on an equal footing; and this makes it difficult for us to embrace the messy complexities of the practices constructed in its terms.

Practices that are construed as co-creation are instances of a broad societal development variously dubbed the collaborative turn, the dialogic turn, the participatory turn, the participatory zeitgeist and, increasingly at the time of writing, the turn to co-production. Central to the turn, no matter what we call it, is the emergence of a collaborative paradigm of political governance, collaborative governance. Within this paradigm, policies stipulate collective processes of knowledge production and communication across public institutions, private and third sector organisations, professional bodies, politicians and civil society as means of addressing societal challenges. So, with this paradigm as a central motor, collaborative forms of producing and communicating knowledge and practice change have gained ground in everything from patient and public involvement in health care (re clinical decision-making, organisational change and research) to employee involvement in organisational change, to citizen involvement in social housing initiatives and community capacity-building, to bottom-up climate change projects, to the co-design of digital media platforms and a whole lot more. And, to support, legitimate, develop and improve such practices, a plethora of collaborative research projects are commissioned and carried out. On a writing retreat to work on this chapter, when I introduced myself to the five other researchers from different universities at dinner, two of them asked me for relevant articles because, independently of one another, they found themselves working with the co-creation of knowledge without having a background in it; everybody around the dinner table nodded when I said that co-creation had spread everywhere. Along similar lines, in a recent guest lecture on a master's degree course on organisational change on which the majority of students were public sector professionals, several said to me that there wasn't a single area of the public sector in Denmark where the requirement to involve citizens or users in co-creation was not in force!

So, collaborative practices have proliferated across societal fields including research. But what are all these collaborative practices called? The answer is that they are called lots of different things, and it's a very crowded, confusing terrain full of different *and* overlapping usages of the same terms – co-production, co-creation and co-design. With respect to the joint production of public service and community initiatives and the research and development projects designed to support them, co-production, co-creation and co-design have come to be the preferred pivotal terms, superseding earlier preferred pivotal terms such as dialogue, public/citizen engagement, (public) participation and (public/user) involvement (see e.g. Cornish et al., 2023: 12). In the literature, "co-production", "co-creation" and "co-design" are sometimes

labelled the "*co-approaches*", and the label is often applied expansively to describe *the creation of knowledge and practice innovations through collaborative decision-making and problem-solving in dialogue across different stakeholders* (e.g. Grindell et al., 2022; Messiha et al., 2023).

Not surprisingly given the traction of the collaborative turn, the list of research traditions or approaches revolving around the co-creation of knowledge is very long indeed. It includes arts-based research (ABR), citizen science, co-design (including participatory design), co-production, collaborative action research (CAR), collaborative (auto)ethnography, collaborative writing as inquiry, community-based participatory research (CBPR), critical participatory action research, Indigenous/decolonising methodologies, feminist ethics of care methodologies, inclusive research (IR), patient-led research, patient-oriented research, patient science, participatory action research (PAR), participatory health research (PHR), patient and public involvement (PPI), service user-led research and survivor-led research (mental health). I'm sure I've missed some out, and, since the writing of this book, I'm sure more have appeared in practice and print. Across all the traditions, participatory research in health care is particularly pervasive.

What this chapter is about

My aim with this chapter is to give a picture of the terrain of co-creation that I hope can serve as a sort of heuristic – a tool to think with – that you can put into productive dialogue with your own reading of the research landscape and your own approach when planning a collaborative practice. Or, if you're new to the field, the idea is to provide some support for making choices from scratch about how to understand and work with the "co". The chapter is divided into *four parts.* In Part 1, I give an outline of the main principles that, across their great diversity, all approaches to participatory research subscribe to. Then, in Part 2, I give an overview of five different currents that are each based on a distinctive take on co-creation. In Part 3, I frame the landscape of participatory research as a contested discursive terrain and identify differences in currents as manifestations of the workings of different discourses that ascribe different meanings to "co-creation", knowledge and the outcomes of co-creation. According to the theoretical approach on which I base this book (labelled IFADIA), these different meanings have colossal significance. This is because IFADIA theorises *co-creation* as *a complex and tensional product of situated relational practices in which negotiations of meaning play a central part*. These negotiation processes are imbued with power understood as *dynamics of inclusion and exclusion*. In those dynamics, particular discourses – which each ascribe particular meanings to "co-creation" and to the project "we" – dominate, and others are excluded. Co-creation comes into being and is enacted through dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within and across discourses. By reflexively confronting how dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are constitutive in enactments of co-creation in research, the IFADIA approach embraces the messy complexities

of co-creation. To indicate ways of navigating in the contested discursive terrain of co-creation in the context of specific projects, Part 4 gives examples of research that follow different strategies in relation to collaborative research relations within and across some main currents.

The picture I give of the terrain is simplified but I've also tried to include quite a bit of complexity. This is a difficult balancing-act – to use a tired metaphor, there need to be enough "trees" to give a sufficiently rich description of the content but not so many that the contours of the "wood" are hidden from sight. I've agonised about what nuances to make, and, not least, what terms to use. I've picked "co-creation" instead of "co-production" as the umbrella term for collaborative processes of producing knowledge and practice change in participatory research and qualitative inquiry – not just in this chapter but throughout the book – on the grounds that there is a current ("the current of co-production") that ascribes a distinctive meaning to "co-production", as I discuss later on. I've picked *participatory research* as the umbrella term for all the approaches on the list above on the grounds that it is probably the most ubiquitous umbrella term. But I have a number of reservations about the choice of this term. First, and very importantly and confusedly, the terrain I identify as "participatory research" spills over into the terrain of qualitative inquiry – which is why, in this and other chapters, I refer to the contested terrain of co-creation in *participatory research and qualitative inquiry*, rather than solely participatory research. Second, "collaborative research" (see e.g. Phillips et al., 2013) and "co-produced research" (see e.g. Banks et al., 2019; Howard and Thomas-Hughes, 2020) are also ubiquitous umbrella terms. Third, there are approaches on the list that do not fit all that well under the umbrella of participatory research since they actually only share some of the features; and, crucially, some of these approaches do not adhere, or only play superficial lip service, to what is probably the central ideal of participatory research: namely, *the democratisation of knowledge production through the inclusion of people with lived experience and their experiential knowledge in co-creation with a view to challenging knowledge hierarchies and furthering social change and social justice.* Approaches that do not pursue this ideal tend to involve co-creation only between researchers and practitioners or only between different researchers; many of them are constructed solely or primarily within the technocratic, neoliberal discourse and positivist, scientific discourse, as I come back to later. As Rosen (2023: 600) points out, "participatory research is a loose term"!

PART 1: Main principles of participatory research

In outlining the main principles to which all participatory research approaches subscribe, I'm going to refer to one example of a participatory research project that systematically was designed to adhere to all the principles (far from all participatory research projects do that!). I'd like you to bear in mind their status as *principles*, not descriptions of practice; as all but the most naïve idealists know all too well, tensions arise between espoused principles and the messy contingencies of practice. Here's the example:

*In health research, patient involvement typically takes the form of consultations in which patient representatives have an opportunity to influence research priorities by commenting on research agendas which have been set by researchers mostly within the terms of biomedical knowledge production. As an alternative to this format, a participatory research project led by Tineke Abma in the Netherlands (Abma, 2019) was designed, in close collaboration with the Parkinson's Association, to co-create an agenda for research into Parkinson's that was rooted in the experience-based knowledge of people living with Parkinson's and that the Parkinson's Association would be able to follow and promote. "While consultation accepts power differentials and inequalities", Abma asserts, "collaboration and coownership work actively toward more equal power relationships through dialogue and deliberation" (*2019*: 430). In order to make space for the Parkinson's Association members' voices and thereby seek to minimise power inequalities in the research process, Abma developed a "dialogue model" consisting of six phases, in which the co-researchers and the other stakeholders were involved from start to finish. Abma points out that, in applying the dialogue model, it is important to take into account that patients' voices are easily marginalised (2019: 431). She therefore continuously paid critical, reflexive attention to power dynamics, and, in the process, noticed that power dynamics were at play, for example, when the patients' speaking time was limited and when researchers gave negative reactions or used technical terms (2019: 431). Thus, Abma (2019) not only used the dialogue model as a basis for co-creation but also took a critical reflexive approach to the use of the model during the project as a strategy for minimising power inequalities.*

The research team consisted of four academic researchers (Abma and three junior researchers) and three co-researchers (two people with Parkinson's and a relative of a person with Parkinson's). The team set up a "voice-over" group and an advisory group. The voice-over group consisted of people with Parkinson's and relatives (15 at the beginning and 8 who actively participated throughout the project). The name "voice-over" highlighted the patient voice and that the group provided a kind of running commentary of the research team's knowledge-claims. The advisory group consisted of six patients and seven health professionals and researchers. Their role was to attend to the relevance of the results and further their dissemination and implementation. A co-researcher and an academic researcher carried out interviews with people with Parkinson's and their relatives about their illness experiences and also with health professionals and researchers about ongoing and future research and their expectations for patient involvement in research. In addition, they held focus groups for sharing experiences using collaborative arts-based methods such as drawings and collages to create openings for dialogue on taboo subjects. They also organised dialogue meetings where the stakeholder groups, including representatives of funding bodies, discussed and prioritised various research topics on the basis of the experience-based knowledge of participants with Parkinson's. The Parkinson's Association approved the research agenda in the programming phase and a group of 20 members of the Parkinson's Association were trained to communicate the research agenda at various research institutions around the country.

1 The ideal of democratising knowledge

Abma's project was a systematic attempt to break with the knowledge hierarchy in health research and mount a serious challenge to funding bodies' previous prioritisation of biomedical research by placing patients' experiential knowledge at the core of knowledge production through the use of a participatory methodology. Here, it followed a central principle of participatory research – namely, the ideal of democratising knowledge and knowledge production. This ideal is based on an extended epistemology – that is, an expanded understanding of *what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts*. It entails that multiple forms of knowledge are recognised *as* forms of knowledge and organised as legitimate and valuable, and research-based knowledge is stripped of its traditional monopoly on truth. In particular, the embodied knowledge of people with lived experience of the topic – for instance, people with personal experience of living with, or caring for, someone with a health condition, and of using health and social services, as in Abma's study – is recognised as a form of expert knowledge and people with lived experience of the topic under study are recognised as experts by virtue of their direct experience (often dubbed Experts by Experience in social and health care services in the UK and sometimes in participatory research). So, participatory research creates space for the articulation of multiple forms of knowledge, the participation of people with experiential expert knowledge and the co-creation of new knowledge in dialogue across multiple knowledge forms. According to the extended epistemology, experiential, embodied knowledges encompass affective and sensory knowledge tied to the expression of emotions and senses, and aesthetic knowledge tied to creative, artistic expression. Accordingly, to elicit embodied, experiential knowledges and hence to try to "avoid replicating injustices" (Foster, 2023: 1), participatory research often makes use of arts-based research methods based on creative, artistic activities such as photo elicitation and collaborative writing as inquiry (e.g. Abma et al., 2019; Leavy, 2019). Abma's project made use of the arts-based methods of drawing and collage.

Crucially, democratising knowledge production is often understood as a way of combatting "epistemic injustice", a concept coined by Fricker (2007; see also 2017) to understand and critique the exclusion of groups and communities from mainstream sites of knowledge production. Thinking with the concept of epistemic injustice directs our attention towards which voices are recognised and heard or marginalised and silenced, and what and whose stories are told and listened to (see e.g. Walker and Boni, 2020). Qua its anchoring in the ideal of democratising knowledge, participatory research is understood – sometimes in heroic terms – as inclusive, democratic processes that further epistemic justice.

2 Co-creation/co-production with co-researchers

Another central principle of participatory research is that co-creation is pivotal to the research process. The "co" is obviously closely tied to the ideal of

democratising knowledge. As the account of Abma's project illustrates, the aim is to make space for the co-creation of knowledge in which people with experiential knowledge participate as *co-researchers,* together with academic or other professional researchers. This active participation of people with lived experience of the topic under study is a defining feature of all participatory research projects across their diversity (ICPHR, 2013). A common mantra goes: participatory research is research "with" or "by" people with experience-based knowledge rather than research "about", "to" or "for" them (e.g. Reason and Bradbury, 2013). A similarly pithy slogan, which emanates from disability rights movements, is "nothing about us without us". Many participatory researchers use "co-production" – rather than co-creation – to describe processes in which people with lived experience of the topic take part on the basis of egalitarian, democratic principles (e.g. Banks et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020).

Participatory researchers stress the importance of establishing trusting relationships from the beginning, as Abma's study did. As Abma et al. (2019: 13) put it in a textbook on participatory research for health and social wellbeing, "the process is a relational one in that it does not work if you do not create trusting relationships at the start". Building on relations of mutual respect and trust as a prerequisite for mutual learning, researchers' stated intention is to involve people with lived experience in the initial formulation of the research questions and project design, including at the stage of applying for funding.

Sometimes – but not as often as you would think even in projects that are claimed to involve co-researchers in co-creation from start to finish – co-creation is extended to the dissemination phase. While the tendency is still to work with a clear separation between research and dissemination whereby the former is understood as knowledge co-production and the latter as knowledge transfer (the dissemination of finished results), there is a movement underway to view the production and communication of knowledge as intertwined processes (for example, see Boydell et al., 2012; Canto-Farachala and Larrea, 2022). This means recognising and cultivating the communication of knowledge as sites for collaborative inquiry in which new knowledge is co-created dialogically. In this understanding, the communication of knowledge takes places in co-creation by co-researchers and researchers in the research process as well as at the end. I see this book as part of this movement, and I try to illustrate this dialogic approach to producing and communicating knowledge by enacting it throughout the book in a mix of evocative, embodied knowing and detached analysis.

3 Co-created knowledge must contribute to transformative social change

All participatory research approaches refer to the principle of producing knowledge for social and practice change. Frequently, transformative social change based on principles of social justice is the declared overall goal of co-creation. As Bell and Pahl put it (2018: 107), "the 'turn' to co-production [..] presents an opportunity for those interested in remaking the world according

to principles of social justice". In participatory health research, for instance, goals typically include the improvement of the health and well-being of a particular group, for instance, through the amelioration of living standards, policy change that redresses health inequities or organisational change that improves the quality of services (ICPHR, 2013: 10). Here, it is imperative not just to contribute to the research field in question but also to changes benefiting the co-researchers and the communities to which they belong (e.g. Herr and Anderson, 2015; ICHPR, 2013: Wilson et al., 2018; Wright and Kongats, 2019). Hence, research results are appraised in terms of the contribution to both research and practice. In the case of Abma's project, the aim was to produce, as a concrete product, an agenda for research practice on Parkinson's that was based on the experienced needs and wishes of those who usually only were objects of that research (people with Parkinson's) and was oriented towards improving their lives.

Sometimes, arts-based research methodologies are used as a way of understanding change in terms of potential openings for transformative world-making through the creative imagining of alternative futures. One main body of arts-based research directed at world-making works with co-design in which participants engage collaboratively in creative design processes. Since Abma's project isn't framed as a creative design process of world-making (although it does make use of arts-based methods), here's a wee example from another project. Chiles *et al.* (2019) *describe their participatory research project in which residents in the Park Hill blocks of flats in Sheffield used specific materials – drawings, models and images – to think through the design of their flats and "re-imagine" their design on the basis of a "making and joining-in epistemology". Chiles et al. engaged in reflexive consideration of the value of "thinking with materials" as a mode of co-production (*2019*: 116). They emphasise the socially transformative power of dreaming: "perhaps our biggest role [..] was to 'allow' the residents to dream and hope for building a successful community and home they wanted to stay in" (2019: 133).*

4 Change is emergent in the research process

All participatory research approaches refer to the value of the research *processes* themselves, understanding them as relational practices of mutual learning hinging on relations of mutual care among all the research participants (e.g. Cornish et al., 2023). Across most participatory approaches, change – including its construal as "impact" – is understood to be *emergent* in research processes: "the overlapping and interweaving of process and action creates opportunities for impact to occur at any point on the research journey" (ICPHR, 2020: 5). It is often pointed out that co-researchers gain knowledge, skills, values and a sense of hope and purposiveness that empower them as agents of change both within and beyond the temporal and spatial bounds of the research process (e.g. Banks et al., 2019: 22; ICHPR,

2020: 5–6). In relation to Abma's project on Parkinson's research, she notes that dialogue revolving around participants' storytelling about their everyday experiences contributed to the co-researchers' empowerment; co-researchers experienced that, through mutual learning, they gained co-ownership of the research agenda and thus an increased ability to promote the inclusion of patients' voices in Parkinson's research (Abma, 2019: 445). Commentators in the literature also make the point (e.g. Staley and Baron, 2019) – though less often – that academic researchers also gain knowledge, skills and values that transform the research process and future research in ways that may challenge knowledge hierarchies and further social change. Another key theme in the literature is that change is furthered in processes of dialogic reflection in which attention is paid to normative patterns in play in power dynamics between different actors in the practices under study (e.g. Abma et al., 2019; Bradbury, 2022); dialogic reflection is often understood as critical reflexivity, the sixth feature of participatory research, which I describe soon.

5 Ties to collaborative modes of public governance

As I pointed out, at the beginning, the proliferation of processes of co-creation is closely tied to the emergence and spread of collaborative modes of public policy and administration. Many scholars have classified these collaborative modes as a new paradigm of "collaborative governance", often referring to Ansell and Gash's inaugural use of the term (2008). Collaborative governance is widely understood as a challenge to New Public Management. New Public Management is based on market principles and, accordingly, citizens are positioned as individual consumers who actively make personal choices with respect to public services; in contrast, citizens in collaborative governance are considered active participants in co-production both individually or as part of communities (e.g. Ansell and Torfing, 2021).

In early conceptualisations based on Elinor Ostrom's definition (1996: 1073), "co-production" was understood as the co-production of public services by "individuals who are not in the same organisation" including individual service users (1996: 1073). Further developing Ostrom's definition, work has been carried out that stresses that co-production consists not only in individual service users co-producing their own public services with service providers but also in long-term relationships between users/citizens, organised groups of users/citizens and service providers in which organisational and institutional changes are co-produced (e.g. Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen et al., 2018). These conceptualisations share the understanding of collaborative governance as a framework for collaborative decision-making across public institutions, private and third sector organisations, professional bodies, politicians and civil society (citizens and community groups) as a means of solving complex societal problems. In a systematic literature review, Bandola-Gill et al. (2023: 290) organise work drawing on Ostrom as a cluster of literature that construes co-production as an "intervention" designed to further the use of evidence in public policy and services through strategic knowledge exchange

and transfer. This is one of five different clusters Bandola-Gill et al. discern, which revolve around the co-production of knowledge and imbue co-production with different meanings. The approaches across the clusters share the assumption that the current complexity of societal problems – often classified as wicked problems (problems that appear unsolvable) – calls for innovative strategies for meeting the policy challenges. And they accord co-production in the interface between policy, academia and practice a central place in these innovative strategies (2023: 285). With its orientation towards shaping research policy, Abma's research project (2019) is firmly located in this interface.

Bennett and Brunner (2022a, b) home in on this interaction between people inside and outside academia in conditions shaped by collaborative governance; they dub it "the collaborative shift". With the collaborative shift, research practices and outcomes have been profoundly reshaped, and academic researchers have to navigate in extremely complex settings shaped by multiple, and often competing, organisational agendas (2022a, b).

6 Critical reflexivity about the messy complexities of co-creation

This is the sixth and final main principle of participatory research on my list. As I pointed out in relation to the goal of change as an emergent part of the process, researchers often point rhetorically at the importance of reflexivity with respect to power dynamics in the practices under study as a way of furthering social transformation. In action research, for instance, reflexivity is central to the periods of reflection in the cycles of planning, action and reflection/analysis. For instance, Abma's study involved ongoing reflexive attention to power dynamics in the research process. Many accounts of action research advocate reflexivity about the research process as a strategy for aligning theories and practices with research principles, aiming towards "greater congruity between the values one espouses and values one enacts" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 11). This is often within the terms of "first-person action research" where the object of reflection is the researcher's own background, experiences and attitudes towards the other participants (e.g. Bradbury-Huang, 2010: 98).

However, paradoxically – in the light of the espoused commitment to reflexivity – many critical voices have found fault with reports on action research – and collaborative, participatory research in general – for not providing sustained argumentation for the quality of the methodologies, co-produced knowledge and results (e.g. Howard and Thomas-Hughes, 2020). Critics point at the dearth of detailed analyses of the potentials and challenges of co-production (e.g. Flinders et al., 2016; Metz et al., 2019). Howard and Thomas-Hughes (2020: 790–791) note, for instance, that research reports often take "a celebratory tone" where it is postulated without backing that the quality of the results has been raised by the participation of community members in co-production. This goes, too, for the impact: it's sometimes just assumed, without any evaluation, that participation in co-creation benefits the participating co-researchers and the communities to which they belong (Howard and Thomas-Hughes, 2020).

Taking this critical stance, there's a substantial body of critical reflexive analyses across participatory research of how its ideals are difficult to live up to in the concrete practices of research; this body of research attends critically and reflexively to the complexities and challenges, paradoxes and dilemmas in participatory research (e.g. Abma, 2019; Abma et al., 2019; Bain and Payne, 2016; Banks et al., 2019; Cook, 2009; Groot et al., 2019; Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen, 2020; Olesen and Nordentoft, 2018; Olesen et al., 2018; Phillips, 2011; Phillips et al., 2018, 2021, 2022a, b; Thomas-Hughes, 2018). A key point across this work is that power relations prevail in contexts for knowledge production and circumscribe the extent to which experiential voices are expressed, listened to and heard; for instance, the embedding of participatory health research in a context dominated by biomedical expert knowledge often marginalises or silences the voices of people with lived experience and their recognition as experts by experience, as Groot et al. point out (2019: 287). And, in spite of the ideals of democratising and decolonising knowledge production, professional researchers tend to have much more control over the research process than people with lived experience of the topic (Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019: 33). In this book, I present a particular take on critical reflexivity which draws on and, I hope, offers a distinctive contribution to the existing body of work.

PART 2: Main currents in participatory research

Above, I have presented the principles that all participatory research processes share (as ideals, not necessarily as actual practices). I will now place the participatory research approaches, which I listed at the beginning of this chapter, within the currents I suggest they belong to. The point is to sketch out heterogenous patterns in the landscape of co-creation in theory and practice. These currents are – in the order in which they appear in the pages to follow – the currents of co-production, action research, Indigenous/decolonising research, feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthuman approaches, citizen science and co-design.

The current of co-production

As well as being a pivotal and umbrella term *across co-approaches*, "co-production" also refers to a particular tradition of public sector practices and research and development projects in which people with lived experience participate as co-researchers. I organise it as a distinctive current of participatory research on the basis of a lot of reading which points at its use in this way. It's also known as mode 2 research (Nowotny et al., 2001). Gillard et al. (2012), for instance, distinguishes between "co-production" *and* participatory action research (PAR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) on the grounds, that in co-production, knowledge is the end-goal, along more traditional academic lines, whereas, in PAR and CBPR, action

and change are integrated into the ongoing research process. The respective distinctiveness of action research and co-production is reflected in the decision of Bandola-Gill et al. (2023), in their exploration of the different meanings of co-production, to omit participatory action research and community-engaged research from their systematic literature review and only include co-production, co-creation and the co-creation of knowledge. Co-production is a widespread (but not the only!) current across the health research approaches of *patient and public involvement* (PPI), *participatory health research* (PHR), *patient-led research, patient-oriented research, patient science, service user-led research* and *survivor-led research*.

It is more common for projects that organise their approach as "co-production" to use conventional research methods than projects that belong to the action research current, as the example of Gillard's study later on in this chapter illustrates. This reflects the prevalence – if not dominance – of a technocratic, neoliberal discourse and its co-articulation with a scientific, positivist discourse in projects labelled "co-production"; I hope I don't confuse you with this abrupt mention of discourses, I will expand on this soon in my outline of the participatory landscape as a contested discursive terrain.

The current of action research

The current I label "action research" includes *collaborative action research, community-based participatory research, critical participatory action research, inclusive research* (with people with learning disabilities) and *participatory action research* (there are other forms of action research not mentioned here). Action research has a very long history, stretching back to the 1930's when Kurt Lewin and his colleagues carried out their pioneering work (see, for example, Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen, 2020).

It is quite common for researchers to divide action research into two sub-currents consisting, respectively, of research that aims to create new knowledge and practice change in institutional and organisational settings *and* research that aims for transformative change on the basis of a decolonialising agenda of social justice for marginalised groups (see e.g. Cordeiro et al., 2017; Delgado-Baena et al., 2022; Rosen, 2023). Typically, the first sub-current is identified as approaches rooted in the global North and the second sub-current as approaches emanating from the global South. The first sub-current usually goes under the broad label of Action Research and refers to Kurt Lewin's and team's work during and after World War II as its foundation. Over the years, it has been further developed and used widely by professionals such as nurses and teachers to improve their practices and to further bottom-up organisational changes across the public and private sectors. Participatory action research (PAR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) are the main traditions belonging to the second sub-current. PAR grew out of the tradition of "popular education" in Latin

America with particular inspiration from the work of the Brazilian action researcher, Paulo Freire (e.g. 1970). The Columbian researcher, Orlando Fals-Borda (e.g. 1987), made an important contribution to the development of PAR through dialogue across Latin American popular education movements in the 1980's. The decolonial perspective underpins the aim of giving voice to groups who have been oppressed, and whose knowledge has been subjugated, in particular through colonialism (e.g. Archibald et al., 2019; Delgado-Baena et al., 2022: 320; Fals-Borda and Mora-Osejo, 2003; Gumbonzvanda et al., 2021).

The current of Indigenous/decolonising research

As well as the foundational work of Freire (e.g. 1970) and later work of researchers such as Fals-Borda et al. (e.g. 1987), the decolonial perspective in participatory research draws on the strong current of *Indigenous/decolonising research* approaches straddling participatory research and qualitative inquiry (e.g. Archibald et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2017; Gumbonzvanda et al., 2021; Moreno-Cely et al., 2021). Indigenous/decolonising research overlaps with both action research and the feminist, poststructuralist and posthumanist current. The holistic, community-oriented and collaborative nature of Indigenous knowledges forms the basis for research stemming from a critique of how Western research has individualised problems and instrumentalised their solution and, in so doing, contributed to maintaining Western hegemony over the South.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work on decolonising methodologies (first published in 1999 and published in a third edition in Smith, 2021) has been massively influential. She famously wrote on the first page that "the word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary". One key focus in this research current is the further development of the concept of "epistemic injustice" (Fricker, 2007) in which the contestation of knowledge production based on Western and paternalistic thought is theorised as a decolonising process. The related concepts of epistemic violence (Spivak, 2010), epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2010) and epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2018) have been coined in Indigenous/decolonising theories and methodologies to spotlight the role of knowledge production in colonial oppression.

The current of feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist approaches

I view the approaches of *arts-based research, collaborative writing as inquiry* and *feminist ethics of care methodologies* as part of a current of participatory research which – to give it a name – I call *feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist approaches.* To minimise confusion (there's enough of that around already…), I'd better mention that this current is often classified as part of qualitative inquiry in methodology books and by

researchers themselves. As I've already indicated, the boundary between participatory research and qualitative inquiry is highly porous. A major reason for this is the collaborative turn in knowledge production: as collaborative forms of knowing and doing have spread, participatory research has expanded into a huge, heterogenous terrain with overlapping currents. To follow an activist agenda for social justice, research labelled qualitative inquiry often makes use of participatory methodologies such as Indigenous/decolonising methodologies and feminist ethics of care methodologies (see, for example, Gallagher, 2018). And, in the opposite direction, research going under the umbrella of participatory research routinely makes use of arts-based research methodologies and collaborative writing as inquiry in order to elicit experiential, embodied ways of knowing, in line with the participatory ideal of democratising knowledge and goals of social transformation and justice. There is also a considerable overlap with Indigenous/decolonising methodologies, and I deliberated about categorising the latter as part of the current of feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist approaches, but decided to keep it separate.

The current of feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist approaches has developed since the 1980's as a direct response to the "crises of representation, legitimation and practice" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). The crises were triggered by the social constructionist rejection of the idea that representations can directly reflect reality, including people's lived experiences. This rejection was based on the social constructionist premise that knowledge and identities arise in social negotiations of meaning in situated, socially and culturally specific, relational practices. Researchers often talk about "producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently" (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2008: 487). Research aims to further social transformation by engaging in creative, performative practices which challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge and are driven by care and responsibility for processes of relating (e.g. Gergen, 2021; Gergen and Gergen, 2012; McNamee and Gergen, 1999). A relational research ethics has been developed building on a feminist ethics of care that works with a constructionist view of knowledge and identities as products of situated, relational practices (e.g. Brannelly and Boulton, 2017; Groot et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2022b). With relational ethics, the researcher tries to foster mutually caring relationships during the entire research process. Thus, it is a form of "ethics-in-practice" as opposed to a procedural, contract-based ethics which puts forward universal moral precepts rooted in Kantian, Enlightenment thinking (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

In what is sometimes called "post qualitative inquiry", concepts of "methods", "methodologies", "data" and "analysis" are eschewed in order to mark a radical break with conventional understandings of "research", "knowledge" and "representation" (e.g. St. Pierre, 2021a, b). This often entails a commitment to situated, activist world-making in the interface between art, activism and research. Accordingly, arts-based research methods

are routinely used to cultivate multiple forms of knowledge and, in particular, open up for experience-based, embodied, affective and aesthetic forms of being and knowing.

Within the feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist current, there is a distinctive development that, as well as the collaborative turn, is a manifestation of another turn – the material turn; this is where new materialism and posthumanism come in! I deliberated about making new materialism and posthumanism into a separate current but decided against it to stress the continuity with feminist and poststructuralist approaches (Davies, 2018, 2021). New materialism(s) and posthumanism build on and rethink post-structuralism to emphasise the importance of the body and things in relational processes of becoming (e.g. Davies, 2018, 2021; Lather and St. Pierre, 2013). New materialist and posthumanist strands decentre humans as "knowers" and work on the assumption that non-human beings and objects are capable of producing knowledge. The assumption rests on an onto-epistemology positing that the world and everything in it is in a constant process of becoming through entanglements of meaning and matter. As Ulmer (2017: 6) pithily puts it, "everything is connected with everyone, always". To point at the form a posthuman approach to co-creation can take in research practice, here's a brief example. Renold and Ivinson (2022) have carried out research with children and young people in the policy and practice field of relationships and sexuality education in Wales through what they call an "expansive, postqualitative praxis of slow co-production" (2022: 108). Their research places matter at the centre by concentrating on the co-creation of artful, creative research artefacts – "dartaphacts" – which enact change over time. One set of dartaphacts was produced in a participatory project in a secondary school on feelings of safety and experiences of sexual violence. For instance, on the basis of their collective analysis of interview transcripts with other pupils at the school, a group of six girls co-created a paper heart containing hurtful words. Later on, this paper heart inspired valentine cards which a wider group of pupils delivered by hand to all 60 members of the National Assembly for Wales (since 2020 officially known as the Welsh Parliament/ Senedd Cymru) as a form of political activism. The aim was to influence amendments to the draft Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Bill which was under consideration in the Assembly at the time (2022: 115). Renold and Ivinson (2022: 115) describe the reaction of the assembly members (AM) with a focus on the evocative power of the cards as "matter that moves":

> The AMs were touched by the creative delivery and although we cannot know how or why the dartaphacts moved them, a passage was created, something was indirectly evoked that put them in touch with what mattered. We can speculate that the dartaphacts opened out the usual parliamentary processes and supported AMs to take a stand on a difficult subject.

Bookshelves, online journals and conference rooms are currently bulging with accounts of collaborative research in which academics, sometimes together with artists, follow new materialist, posthumanist and post-qualitative thinking in collaborative writing and art-making as inquiry. Here, they cultivate the artful, creative, evocative and poetic. Sometimes this is participatory work with co-researchers outside academia as in Renold and Ivinson's case, but very often it is with colleagues in academia. This chapter and the rest of the book is about participatory work with co-researchers outside academia although, across the other chapters, I also engage in dialogue with new materialist scholarship more broadly, especially in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. My aim is to build bridges between the knowledge interests of participatory research with its critical focus on power in the service of justice and social and practice transformation *and* new materialist and posthumanist qualitative inquiry with its preoccupation with relational becoming through world-making hinging on artful, creative evocation of the "not-yet-thought".

The current of citizen science

"***Citizen science***" as a "thing" was coined in the 1990's to describe research furthering public engagement in science and technology and dialogue in the science-society interface. Most of the projects that are organised as "citizen science" are in the natural sciences (see e.g. Tauginienė et al., 2020). As citizen science has developed as a current of participatory research through the years, it has come to encompass three main strands on a spectrum from top-down to more bottom-up, according to descriptions of the field (Clark and Cornes, 2023). One is "contributory" involvement in which professional scientists define and design the project from start to finish and the only part of the research to which citizens contribute is data collection, for example, by gathering information about bird sightings as "volunteer scientists". Another is "collaborative" involvement in which scientists formulate the research design but citizens contribute to refining research questions, methods, data collection and/or analyses. And the third is "co-creation" in which professional and citizen scientists engage in the co-creation of the research process (including formulation of research questions, research design and analysis) (Clark and Cornes, 2023: 94). Van Oudheusden et al. (2024: 1) argue that the contributory strand, in which the role of citizens is restricted to that of data gatherer, dominates the current.

The current of co-design

Co-design represents another well-established set of approaches followed in a myriad of research and development projects going back to the 1970's when designers began to take account of the needs and experiences of users in developing designs. A key tradition of co-design is participatory design which emerged in Scandinavia in relation to the development of technology

(see, for example, Simonsen et al., 2014). Another key tradition is dubbed "co-creative design" and is associated with the development of "co-creation" in the private sector in which consumers of products and services are invited by businesses to develop innovations; the first use of the concept of co-creation is often attributed to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). The co-creation of products and services spread to the public sector in many countries during the 1990's and 2000's, and as part of this wave, the concept of user-driven or user-led innovation entered the vocabulary across the public and private sectors (e.g. Bason, 2010). Common to all approaches to co-design is an adherence to methods based on "design thinking": that is, creative methods for gaining inspiration, generating ideas and making them tangible, and creating prototypes (Zamenopoulos and Alexiou, 2018: 18).

The currents flow into, and overlap with, each other

Delineating these different currents in participatory research makes it sound like they are clearly delimited from one another like neat, well-demarcated furrows in a meticulously weeded, clearly bounded field. But, when we delve more deeply, it turns into a vast, wild and overgrown terrain with different varieties of plants spread out all over the place. While the range of currents are diverse, there are many overlaps when it comes to theories, concepts and methods; thus, the boundaries between the currents are blurred (which is why I've chosen the term current – despite the irritating mix of nautical and terrestrial metaphors when I also use the terms "terrain" and "field"). Banks et al. (2019: 7) point out, for example, that "choice of name may be linked more to home discipline, practice arena, journal title or funding call than to differences in philosophy, methodology or methods".

The contested meanings of "co"

Across many of the currents, the concepts of co-creation, co-design and co-production are in ubiquitous use to describe the research and development process. It is not always easy to make a distinction between co-design and the others, but the distinction between co-creation and co-production is even trickier to make. Several reviews of the literature indicate that "co-creation" and "co-production" are generally used interchangeably, rendering it impossible to distinguish between them definitively (e.g. Bandola-Gill et al., 2023; Flinders et al., 2016; Howard and Thomas-Hughes, 2020; Messiha et al., 2023; Voorberg et al., 2015). This is viewed as a problem by researchers who have carried out systematic reviews of the terms (e.g. Grindell et al., 2022; Masterton et al., 2022; Messiha et al., 2023; Vargas et al., 2022). You may remember, back in the day, a parallel confusion about how to distinguish between "social constructionism" and "social constructivism"! What the "co" means – and therefore what it does – is highly contested.

Because they are frustrated about the lack of consistency, several researchers put forward distinct definitions. Some researchers define "co-production" relatively narrowly as a process in which, along rather autocratic, less democratic lines, stakeholders implement a pre-set solution to a pre-defined problem, whereas they define "co-creation", along freer lines, as an overarching principle of collaboration and innovative problem-solving among various stakeholders across all phases from problem definition to evaluation (Messiha et al., 2023; Vargas et al., 2022). Along quite similar lines, Ansell and Torfing (2021) argue that, in co-production, public agencies arrange and facilitate collaboration with relevant social actors, whereas, in co-creation, multiple actors, be they public, private or non-profit, initiate and organise collaboration. For Ansell and Torfing (2021), then, co-creation is a radicalisation of co-production whereby processes of creative problem-solving transcend the bounds of public agency mandates (2021: 56). On this basis, they advocate for a paradigmatic development of collaborative governance, revolving around the term "co-creation" rather than "co-production" (2021: 54).

In contrast, an attempt by other researchers to identify, through systematic literature reviews, the most common definitions within health care and research goes as follows: it's the *co-production* of a research project by researchers, practitioners and the public; the *co-creation* of knowledge by academic researchers and stakeholders; and the *co-design* of complex interventions (Grindell et al., 2022; O'Cathain et al., 2019). Along these lines, within health care in the UK, co-production is defined as a further development of "Patient and Public Involvement" (PPI) which is more collaborative and egalitarian than PPI. The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), UK (under the auspices of the NIHR's national advisory group, INVOLVE, until April 2020) defines this form of co-production in terms of five principles: sharing power; including all perspectives and skills; respecting and valuing all knowledge; reciprocity; and building and maintaining relationships (e.g. NIHR, 2021). According to this definition, co-production subscribes to democratic, egalitarian goals of furthering the rights of people with lived experience – and in particular, marginalised and disadvantaged groups – and, in so doing, social justice. The idea is that citizens, patients or service users engage in the co-production of knowledge and practice change on the basis of their experiential knowledge of the topic under study – not least lived experience in marginalised positions. This is the second feature on my earlier list of shared main principles of participatory research.

Following this definition of co-production as a more egalitarian development of patient and public involvement (PPI) in health care in the UK, Williams et al. (2020) critique the proliferation of a very broad and imprecise definition of "co-production" – what they dub "cobiquity", that is, the ubiquity of the "co". They argue that "co-production" has been misappropriated through a "conflation of meanings and practices from different collaborative traditions". This conflation has diverted attention from differences between the collaborative traditions with respect to "who is involved,

how they are involved, the experiences people bring, and to what extent such processes address structural and interpersonal inequalities in power" (2020: 2). Crucially, in the misappropriation process, the egalitarian, democratic rationale for co-production has been watered down or squeezed out, according to Williams et al. (2020). In particular, Williams et al. (2020) criticise Oliver et al.'s analysis of the "dark side of co-production" (2019) for understanding co-production as primarily being about inter-organisational partnerships between researchers and practitioners and ignoring "the egalitarian imperative" underpinning partnerships between citizens, patients or service users, researchers and practitioners. They also question Oliver et al.'s evaluation of co-production exclusively on the basis of technocratic criteria.

Bandola-Gill et al. (2023: 176) suggest that the "flexibility and definitional ambiguity" of the term "co-production" may be at the root of its ubiquity across multiple domains of practice. As I noted earlier, Bandola-Gill et al. (2023) identify five main approaches to co-production that each ascribe a distinctive meaning to the term. I align myself with Bandola-Gill in attending to the multiple meanings of "the co" and how those meanings inform its enactment in practice.

In my view, the political nature of the contestation taking place over the meaning of the "co" is particularly clear in Williams et al.'s text, out of all the texts I've cited, since it is written as a direct critique of the ubiquitous usage of the term "co-production" and of what that usage *does* in terms of supporting particular ways of evaluating and enacting co-production and ignoring and excluding others. The clash between Williams et al. and Oliver et al. can be understood as a manifestation of the conflict between neoliberal, technocratic *and* democratic, dialogic discourses of co-production. In Williams et al.'s text, the democratic discourse is articulated in opposition to the technocratic discourse; each of the discourses constructs a conflicting understanding of processes of "co", knowledge and outcomes.

I will now sketch out the main discursive patterns in the contested terrain of co-creation, construing differences between currents as manifestations of different discourses which ascribe different meanings to "co-production/co-creation". I do this because, according to my theoretical approach, co-creation is ascribed meaning and enacted in specific projects in a contested discursive terrain where tensions arise in struggles for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts.

PART 3: Mapping the contested discursive terrain

Lines of contestation

My lens for reading the terrain of co-creation is the IFADIA mindset on which this whole book is based, and in particular, IFADIA's post-structuralist, discourse analytical understanding of the policy, research and

practice domain as a discursive terrain in which collaborative research projects have to navigate. And I construe this terrain as a contested one in which, within and across currents, different discourses compete to pin down the meaning of "co-creation", the positioning of researchers and co-researchers, the status of experiential knowledge and the desired outcomes. All research projects have to navigate within and across currents in the contested discursive terrain; in each individual project, "co-creation" comes into being within and across different discourses which each construct specific understandings of the research aims, processes, knowledge, participant positions and relationships. The co-articulation of discourses in individual projects creates tensions, as I show in two of the project examples in Part 4; in the third example, there is only one discourse in play in the researchers' account.

As I noted in the intro to this chapter, I suggest that there are three main discourses in play. The discourses cut across the six currents outlined above, blurring the boundaries. At the same time, the discursive configurations within each current are still distinctive, with one discourse or a combination of two discourses dominating within each current. Consequently, the currents have different centres of gravity, which means that aims, the research process, collaborative relationships and outcomes are understood and enacted in different ways. And multiple forms of knowledge, including experience-based knowledge, are negotiated to varying degrees. In the account I'm going to give of the three discourses and their interrelations in the contested discursive terrain of co-creation, I point out which discourse or combination of discourses is strongest within each current.

The democratic, dialogic discourse

My outline of this discourse is brief because the main shared principles of participatory research are ideals (not necessarily practices) belonging to this discourse (outlined on pages 27-34). In the democratic, dialogic discourse, "co-creation" is enacted as emergent, relational practices of mutual learning building on personal relationships of mutual care (e.g. Abma et al., 2019; Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019; Banks et al., 2019). The discourse emphasises the quality of relations established through an ethics of mutual care and the intrinsic worth of the *process* of mutual learning. Nurturing meaningful relationships of mutual care in the process itself is given priority to fit with principles of relational ethics and provide a foundation for dialogic learning across difference (e.g. Groot et al., 2022; Nicholas et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2022b). Mutuality extends to the sharing of vulnerability.

In relation to the goals of social and practice change, the democratic, dialogic discourse takes an activist form, following an agenda for social change and social justice: espoused goals are to challenge marginalisation, stigmatisation and societal and health inequalities and further *individual empowerment* – where the individual gains increased power and control over her life – and *community empowerment* – the expansion of the group's scope

for action with respect to shaping their future. The democratic, dialogic discourse adheres to a constructionist epistemological understanding which construes all forms of knowledge – including scientific and experiential knowledge – as the product of situated, relational practices rather than a neutral foundation. “Dialogue” is understood as a process in which knowledge and participant-identities are co-constructed. Democratisation takes place in dialogue as the discursive space is expanded to encompass the negotiation of meanings across multiple voices, articulating multiple forms of knowledge and identities. This understanding is in line with an agonistic understanding of democracy in which democracy is construed as sites of constant contestation across difference (Mouffe, 2000). The discourse is particularly strong in the current of action research and in feminist, post-structuralist approaches.

The romanticisation of co-creation which I’ve mentioned a couple of times in this chapter takes place within the terms of this discourse. “Co-creation” and other key signs in the discourse, such as “(equal) partnership”, “participation”, “dialogue”, “empowerment” and “community” have gained the status of buzzwords with a taken-for-granted positive value. The “co” in “co-creation” – and in “co-production” and “co-researcher” too – suggests a “withness” implying equality between the academic researchers and collaborative partners from outside the university, blurring differences of status and power in, and over, the research process. Similarly, “partner” also signals equality. Another co-word, “community” does something similar. As Bell et al. (2019: 106) suggest, when academic researchers construct participatory research as a space in which they “give ‘voice’” to communities who have not been heard, they divert attention from difference and conflict: the academic researchers are positioned as sovereign agents bestowing the power to speak on the community which is positioned as a harmonious unity (see also Facer and Enright, 2016). The promise of co-creation to democratise knowledge and further social change is invoked within this discourse. According to the theoretical approach I follow in this book, when the promise is invoked, it *inevitably* involves romanticising co-creation and shaping relations among co-researchers and academic researchers in ways that not only destabilise but also reproduce knowledge hierarchies.

The technocratic, neoliberal discourse

The technocratic, neoliberal discourse is the central discourse in the *current of co-production* and is especially closely tied to the political model of collaborative governance (Bennett and Brunner, 2022a, b) which supports co-production across public institutions, private and third sector organisations and civil society to produce innovative welfare solutions and economic growth. A recent bibliometric study of the literature from 1900 to 2021 on participatory action research points at the pervasiveness of the technocratic discourse in the current of action research as the concepts of inequality,

power and domination did not figure amongst the most frequently used keywords (Delgado-Baena et al., 2022).

The technocratic, neoliberal discourse entails an instrumentalisation and individualisation of collaborative practices. The discourse tends to define social and practice change in terms of social and technological innovation and construe co-creation as an instrumental means to generate social and technological innovation. The instrumentalisation of the process hangs together with the technocratic discourse's distinctive take on the ideal of democratising knowledge production which stems from its distinctive theorisation of democracy and experiential knowledge. In the technocratic discourse, the democratic process of producing knowledge is understood, in line with the model of deliberative democracy, as a process whereby participants contribute with their knowledge on an equal footing in processes oriented towards consensus (Benhabib, 1994; Steffensen et al., 2022). Central elements are an orientation towards consensus and an assumption that participants contribute with their existing knowledge and from fixed participant-positions reflecting stable identities.

Along economistic neoliberal lines, research in the technocratic, neoliberal discourse is predominantly understood as a commodity in the form of an instrument for furthering social and technological innovation. Within the terms of the discourse, research results are assessed in terms of efficiency and impact measurements (e.g. Beresford, 2020; Paylor and McKevitt, 2019). "Co-creation" is construed along instrumental lines as a means to solve predefined problems and obtain results furthering pre-set outcomes of innovation and economic growth (e.g. Metz et al., 2019).

With an economistic emphasis on efficiency, the political model of new public management is articulated together with collaborative governance causing tensions as the goal of efficiency clashes with democratic goals of empowerment and involvement (e.g. Beresford, 2020; Karlsson et al., 2024; Tortzen, 2019). According to critics, the technocratic, neoliberal discourse entails the "'narrow technocratic co-option' of co-creation and its depoliticisation as a source of information about personal experiences supplementing individual consumer choice" (Madden and Speed, 2017: 5).

The positivist, scientific discourse

When research is judged in terms of individual outputs on the basis of traditional quality criteria, it is within the terms of the third main discourse in the contested discursive terrain of co-creation – namely, a positivist, scientific discourse. This discourse adheres to the objectivist epistemological belief in a neutral foundation for truth-claims and the possibility of arriving at objective truth through the application of scientific research methods. According to this perspective, there is a knowledge hierarchy in which scientific knowledge has the status of expert knowledge and is often classified as "evidence"

whereas experiential knowledge is subjective and hence not a form of expert knowledge (e.g. Karlsson et al., 2024; Steffensen et al., 2022).

I've summarised the main features of the discourses in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 The contested discursive terrain of co-creation

	Discourses		
Key features	*Positivist, scientific discourse*	*Technocratic, neo-liberal discourse*	*Democratic, dialo-gic discourse*
Understanding of research process	Standardised pro-cedure based on researchers' full control of data, subjects and contexts	"Co-creation" con-strued instrumen-tally as means to solve pre-defined problems and arrive at pre-set outcomes	"Co-creation" construed as emergent, rela-tional practices of mutual learning based on research-er's relinquishment of full control
Status of experi-ential knowledge	Not recognised as expert knowledge that can form the basis for evidence	Distinct from sci-entific knowledge; often actively culti-vated in consensus-oriented dialogue in line with ideals of deliberative democracy	Situated product of relational prac-tices (like all other knowledge forms); cultivated in dia-logue across dif-ference in line with agonistic democratic ideals
Intended outcomes (re research and practice)	Measurable, quan-tified research results which live up to scientific standards of rigour; evidence-based effects	Socially robust and useful research results; practice innovation, eco-nomic growth and impact	New knowledge which destabilises knowledge hier-archy; transforma-tive social and practice change, social justice and empowerment

What happens when the discourses are co-articulated

The three discourses are co-articulated in myriads of ways. Here are two common co-articulations and their consequences: one is the co-articulation of the positivist, scientific discourse and the technocratic, neoliberal discourse; the other is the co-articulation of the democratic, dialogic discourse and the technocratic, neoliberal discourse.

When the positivist, scientific and technocratic, neoliberal discourses are co-articulated, experiential knowledge is recognised as a form of expert knowledge but also as distinct from scientific expert knowledge. Thus, the

sharp divide between lay and expert knowledge that is in play in the technocratic discourse is maintained; and along the lines of the scientific discourse, experiential knowledge is ranked lower on the knowledge hierarchy. Within health care, for instance, the biomedical evidence provided through scientific methods – not least randomised controlled trials – is given priority as a basis for better treatment. For instance, in a study of patient and public involvement in the field of health care (PPI), Steffensen et al. (2022) show that, despite participatory policy principles which recognise the value of experiential knowledge and stipulate the inclusion of experts by experience in the setting of research agendas or priorities, "patient participants" often face exclusion on the grounds that their knowledge does not meet scientific criteria for "evidence". Steffensen et al. (2022: 6) describe, for instance, how patient participants take on the role of "compliant keepers of experiential knowledge" when they ask clarifying questions or describe their experiences on request or, alternatively, take an active role in the production of evidence by gathering a wide range of patient experiences through their networks. Steffensen et al. (2022: 6) suggest that the first role follows a tactic of compliance while the second follows a tactic of evidence production, and ***both*** reproduce a divide between "lay experience and scientific expertise".

When the two discourses are co-articulated in policy contexts, research based on positivist criteria for generating "evidence" is often favoured since it is assumed that research which measures effects, effectivity and productivity can deliver results which further social innovation and economic growth (Paylor and McKevitt, 2019: 3). For instance, from within the terms of the positivist and technocratic discourses, Oliver et al. (2019) critique co-production on the basis of a lack of evidence about its outcomes and its inefficacy in meeting the needs of research and science, including the individual career needs of researchers. Along technocratic lines, they argue that co-production is a risky business for researchers as it involves practices that are not "traditionally taught, adopted, recognised or rewarded by the academy" (2019: 3). Placing the spotlight on the measurement of individual outputs along the lines of traditional "quality" criteria within the terms of the positivist scientific discourse renders invisible the processes of co-creation, including the considerable relational efforts that are part and parcel of co-creation.

When the democratic, dialogic discourse and the technocratic, neoliberal discourse are co-articulated, principles of egalitarianism and empowerment become attached to the technocratic, neoliberal discourse. As Williams et al. (2020: 2) put it, for example, the "language of radical power sharing" is used to promote entrepreneurial government. Davies and Bansel (2007: 258) use the metaphor of cannibalism to describe this process: "neoliberalism both competes with other discourses and also cannibalises them in such a way that neoliberalism itself appears more desirable or more innocent than it is". Several authors construe this as a co-optation process that curtails the utopian potential of co-production (e.g. Howard and Thomas-Hughes, 2020;

Bell and Pahl, 2018; Williams et al., 2020). These authors call for critical scrutiny of co-optation.

Because neoliberalism has seeped surreptitiously into myriads of practices, it has, I think, become a rather blunt concept for analysis; when neoliberalism becomes part of everything, it's difficult to pinpoint what is ***not*** neoliberal and it can be difficult to home in on discursive struggles where neoliberalism is resisted and co-optation is incomplete. So, to generate insights into the specific ways in which neoliberalism permeates practices and subjectivities *and* is negotiated and resisted, my view is that careful analysis is required of its co-articulation with other discourses in a contested discursive terrain. For instance, Bell and Pahl (2018) and Bell et al. (2019) point out that there is a tensional relationship between the turn to co-production and the neoliberalisation of academia. The turn to co-production, Bell et al. (2019: 107) argue, "speaks the language of social movements and struggles ('research *with* not *on*') but often defangs them by channelling them through apolitical forms". Many scholars identify conflicts between universities' claimed allegiance to community-oriented research, flagging their support for citizen science or community-based research, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, universities' institutional logics that further the individualisation of research, along the lines of the neoliberal discourse (Bennett and Brunner, 2022a, b). In my own work, I have analysed how neoliberal discourse and the democratic, dialogic discourse are co-articulated in complex ways. For instance, in a study of a social work course in a higher educational institution in Aotearoa New Zealand, Ksenija Napan and I show the tensions arising in the entanglement of the neoliberal and the democratic, dialogic discourses in the enactment of an approach to co-creation, "Academic Co-Creative Inquiry" (ACCI), on the course (Phillips and Napan, 2016). Our analysis of tensions arising in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics on the course attends to the ways in which practices and subjectivities in everyday teaching were permeated with neoliberal discourse. Here, the neoliberal, technocratic discourse and the democratic discourse of dialogue were co-articulated in a symbiotic fashion. We draw attention to how the democratic, dialogic discourse is implicated in the reproduction of neoliberal knowing and subjectivities through its co-articulation with neoliberal discourse: both neoliberal discourse and the discourse of dialogue value "co-creation", both position the student as self-directed, responsibilised agent in learning processes and the teacher as facilitator of that learning, and both advocate the creation of socially relevant, practice-oriented knowledge as a purpose of education. We conclude that "the overlap or congruence between the discourses of neoliberalism and dialogue may underpin the ease with which neoliberalism colonises, and co-inhabits, collaborative practices – in some cases, devouring them from within" (2016: 840). At the same time, in the terms of Lepecki (2016: 3), "neoliberalism's permeation of subjectivity" is itself permeable; our study points at how the democratic, dialogic discourse

can mount a challenge to neoliberalism in struggles for legitimacy with respect to what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts.

Struggles for legitimacy across discourses

To meet the standards of rigour set by evidence-based policy within the terms of the neoliberal and positivist discourses, co-production must demonstrate "a strict internal validity represented by the ability researchers have to control data, subjects and context" (Smith-Merry, 2020: 308). In contrast, *the relinquishment of full control* is a cornerstone of co-creation in the democratic, dialogic discourse, based as it is on an expanded, democratic understanding of knowledge: university researchers can never fully control the processes since "co-production" is construed in the democratic, dialogic discourse as emergent, relational practices. Moreover, the use of arts-based methodologies to create openings for embodied affective and aesthetic knowing is obviously always an emergent, open-ended process. As one of the artists interviewed by Boydell et al. (2016: 688) stated, "work in the arts allows an unfolding, so you end up in places you never thought". Therefore, in co-articulations of the positivist and technocratic discourses, co-creation within the terms of the democratic, dialogic discourse lacks rigour and, consequently, the results lack legitimacy.

However, in the struggle for legitimacy, research combining the technocratic and the positivist discourses is subject to counter-attack: from within the terms of the democratic, dialogic discourse, critics of technocratic and positivist scientific methods of co-creation point out that such methods often lead to the treatment of service users' experiential knowledge as a tokenistic "add-on" and hence to the reproduction of existing knowledge hierarchies (Gillard et al., 2012; Metz et al., 2019). And they argue that technocratic uses of, and evaluation criteria for, co-creation downplay the egalitarian imperative, not least when co-creation is construed broadly in terms of inter-organisational partnerships between researchers and practitioners, as I noted earlier (Williams et al., 2020). In an editorial for a journal special issue on co-creative approaches to knowledge production and implementation, Metz et al. (2019: 336) point out that many of the contributions tend to frame co-creative approaches, along technocratic, managerial lines, as a means through which *new* participants can take part in *existing* processes as opposed to as a platform for social and practice transformation.

In research projects in the current of participatory research dubbed "co-production", the technocratic and scientific discourses tend to be articulated the most and the democratic, dialogic discourse the least. In the current of participatory research dubbed action research (with its different branches), the democratic, dialogic discourse tends to be articulated the most. At the same time, I want to repeat that the boundaries between the currents are fluid; all the discourses circulate across the currents in the broad, contested discursive terrain of participatory research, and theories and methods are

also overlapping. To give an example, while the current of co-production contains the most projects that articulate the scientific discourse through the use of conventional methods, this is far from always the case. Bennett and Brunner (2022a, b), for instance, engage in collaborative action research (CAR), drawing on creative, arts-based methods, within a context in which co-production is harnessed, along technocratic lines, to further social innovation. They do this in reflexive opposition to the technocratic and scientific logics that make it difficult to radically destabilise the knowledge hierarchy; at the same time, they cannot avoid reproducing technocratic structures, to some extent, for example, in compact time-frames that take into account the short term contracts of project participants; and they cannot avoid drawing partly on the scientific discourse, for instance, in funding applications that require a detailed research design that implies that the academic researcher is in full control of the research process.

Within a single research project, depending on which discourses are articulated, research processes, relationships and aims and desired outcomes are ascribed meaning and enacted in different ways and multiple forms of knowledge, including experience-based knowledge, are negotiated to varying degrees. Tensions arise in struggles for legitimacy across different enactments of co-creation in the contested discursive terrain in which *all* participatory projects navigate. In this final part of the chapter – I imagine your sigh of relief, it's coming to an end… – I'm going to illustrate the performativity of particular meanings of co-creation – that is, what the meanings *do* in enacting co-creation in particular ways – *and* also how to work critically and reflexively within the terms of these particular enactments within and across the currents. I'm going to do this with three examples. The examples illustrate how to work with power within and across the currents of *co-production, action research, Indigenous/decolonising methodologies* and *feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist research*. In each case, I make clear the affinities with the other currents and highlight how those affinities are connected to the articulation of the discourses across currents. I pinpoint how different discourses are articulated in each project, and, how "co-creation" is given meaning in different ways as a function of the discourses articulated.

PART 4: Examples of critical-reflexive work within currents

Working in the current of co-production using conventional methods

My first example is Gillard et al.'s project (2012). I have chosen it because it illustrates how to work critically and reflexively with power dynamics in the "co-production" current. Here, the neoliberal, technocratic and democratic, dialogic discourses challenge the positivist, scientific discourse through an extended epistemology that revises what counts as "good science" and "valid knowledge" and whose knowledge counts as relevant. Projects are problem-oriented and transdisciplinary; knowledge is co-created in collaboration

between researchers and co-researchers with lived experience of the topic under study, and they show reflexivity about the research project's social accountability (2012: 1132). Also, the co-researchers with personal experience are sometimes employed at the university as paid colleagues in research teams together with academic researchers (see e.g. MacFarlane and Roche, 2019: 69–71). At the same time, in line with academic conventions, knowledge is sometimes the end-goal in co-production, in contrast to the current of action research in which action and change are always integrated into the ongoing research process (Gillard et al., 2012). Additionally, the positivist, scientific discourse is often in play through the use of conventional research methods. Academic researchers train the co-researchers in conventional qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and focus groups and conventional qualitative data analysis methods such as "grounded theory" and related methods for thematic analysis. So, there's a tendency for the participant position to be characterised by a deficit understanding of co-researchers whereby they are found lacking in research skills and, therefore, in need of training in order to be able to use pre-set methods stringently. When this tendency prevails, relations between the university researchers, professionals and co-researchers with experiential knowledge are hierarchical, with the university researchers positioned as the best qualified. As Wilson et al. (2018) point out, this means that, in conflict with the expanded understanding of what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts, the traditional knowledge hierarchy is reproduced.

Gillard et al.'s project was designed to investigate how mental health organisations support people's self-care and involve mental health service users and family carers as co-researchers. They show how, in working with interviews and analysis, the team of academic researchers and co-researchers created space for co-production. They did this, first, by holding weekly team meetings where the team together developed and refined coding categories and themes for analysis that captured all team members' interpretative perspectives. Second, they presented their preliminary joint analysis to users, relatives, clinical staff and managers (the stakeholders) from the case study sites.

Along the lines of the technocratic and scientific discourses, Gillard's project made use of conventional research methods and did not have a goal of direct social change; at the same time, along the lines of the dialogic, democratic discourse, the traditional knowledge hierarchy was disrupted as people with lived experience took part as co-researchers. In their account of their research project within the current of co-production, Gillard et al. (2012) point out how one can challenge the knowledge hierarchy and promote the democratisation of knowledge by reflexively analysing the research process itself with a focus on when, and to what extent, knowledge is co-created.

In their analysis, they paid critical, reflexive attention to the extent to which the research was co-produced and concluded that the knowledge the project provided was a product of joint decision-making in co-production processes rather than being "a more simplistic production of an academic

monologue" (Gillard et al., 2012: 1132). At the same time, through their critical-reflexive gaze, they saw how a tension arose in the joint analysis process in the team of university researchers and co-researchers because data on the relationship between psychotropic drugs and self-care in the co-produced qualitative study *and* the non-co-produced quantitative study pointed in different directions. While the project's qualitative analysis – carried out by the team of university and co-researchers – did not point to medication as a central theme for the interviewees, the parallel quantitative analysis – carried out exclusively by the university researchers – showed a number of statistically significant relationships between medication (whether the participants took their medication as prescribed or not) and changes in outcome. The co-researchers insisted that the results of the quantitative analysis were solely a product of the structured, quantifiable questions that the university researchers made a decision to ask at an early stage of the project when the co-researchers had not yet joined the project. Gillard et al. experienced "finding a way through this tension" as "very uncomfortable at times" (2012: 1133). The team chose to re-analyse the qualitative data, finding a higher degree of complexity in relation to experiences with, and attitudes to, medicine than in the first analysis.

Gillard et al. (2012: 1134) point out that the tension enabled them to relate critically and reflexively to the question of the social accountability of the research and the question of what "good science" is – something that was not challenged in the early stages of the project when the project was not based on co-production. They conclude that their approach to co-production was a complex and creative process, where new knowledge was created "through exploration and articulation of what different voices mean in relation to each other" (2012: 1135).

Against this background, Gillard et al. (2012) propose that a reflexive analysis of the complexity of co-production ought to be an integral part of the research process itself. They point out that the negotiations on how the data from the two studies should be understood were not simply about refuting the scientific knowledge that emerged on the basis of the quantitative study; rather, the negotiations formed a space for reflexivity about how scientific and other forms of knowledge were socially situated and the consequences of this for the knowledge generated. Through reflexivity, the quantitatively produced scientific knowledge about medication was exposed as a situated knowledge that reproduced the dominant biomedical discourse about medication and quality of life. This paved the way for critique of the dominant discourse and the role of science in the maintenance of the discourse. At the same time, as a direct result of the tension that arose between different types of knowledge in the project, more nuances were added to the qualitative analyses of the users' attitudes and experiences (2012: 1135).

With respect to dissemination via academic journals, Gillard et al. (2012) experienced difficulties in giving voice to the different interpretative perspectives within the team. This was partly because the journals they were

institutionally required to publish in followed traditional criteria regarding "good science", partly because the co-researchers did not have the opportunity to participate as their short-term contracts had been terminated by that time.

I hope that this example gave an idea of how to work with a critical-reflexive focus on power across the technocratic, positivist and democratic, dialogic discourses within the current of co-production. More specifically, I hope that it indicates how such a focus draws attention to which epistemology, participant positions and relationships are in play and shape the knowledge that is co-created – and in so doing, points at ways of breaking with knowledge hierarchies.

Working across co-production and action research with a reflexive take on "context"

I've chosen Bennett and Brunner because they illustrate a way of working reflexively with the complexities of the multi-agency environment for collaboration that has emerged in the current conjuncture shaped by collaborative governance; they point at how to take the context of collaborative governance into account as a constitutive force in shaping the ongoing research. Like Gillard et al., Bennett and Brunner locate their work within the current of co-production but, unlike Gillard et al., they explicitly place themselves in the current of action research, using the approach of collaborative action research (CAR). They argue for their choice on the grounds that participatory action research tends not to address the intricacies of establishing and maintaining collaborative relations whereas collaborative action research places the spotlight on the relational dimensions of doing action research (Bennett and Brunner, 2022a: 77).

They focus reflexively on how their research inhabits a multi-agency environment typical of the webs of collaborative practices burgeoning under conditions shaped by the political model of collaborative governance. What Bennett and Brunner (2022a: 88) do is analyse the ways in which the context plays out in the research process as "a central shaping component requiring persistent and skilled labour". Working with multiple actors across unstable public service contexts in their research project, they had to take the specific policy topic, organisational structure and culture into account to cultivate ongoing collaborative relationships (2022a: 80). As they put it (2022a: 82), "building relationships with multiple professions involved learning about multiple worlds of work, exploring professional values and skills and understanding innumerable personal interests and organisational pressures".

In their case, the practices belong to a set of What Works research centres set up by the UK government in 2011 and onwards to improve "evidence-based decision-making" in areas such as crime and economic development on the grounds that "'when finances are tight it is even more important to ensure that we invest public resources wisely' (HM Government, 2013)"

(Bennett and Brunner, 2022a: 75). Bennett and Brunner's research project was part of the research centre in Scotland, What Works Scotland (WWS), which was funded by the Scottish government and the ESRC (British research council). Whilst other UK What Works centres follow a conventional scientific approach to knowledge production based on a positivist concept of evidence, WWS takes a collaborative, participatory approach; Bennett and Brunner's research project was integrated into WWS to develop and support the implementation of the collaborative, participatory approach (2022b: 388). WWS, then, is firmly embedded in a terrain populated by both the technocratic, instrumentalist discourse and the discourse of democratic dialogue; Bennett and Brunner locate WWS research practices within the latter discourse in opposition to the co-articulation of the technocratic and positivist, scientific discourses. They offer a critical, reflexive approach to the complexities of multi-agency interactions in the environment emerging through collaborative governance.

Bennett and Brunner focus on the relational complexities emanating from the dynamic, highly unstable nature of the environment, spanning as it does multiple public institutions, private and third sector organisations, professional bodies, politicians, citizens and community groups. They highlight how collaborative research in this environment entails complex relational work revolving around establishing and maintaining spaces for research collaborations across the different social, professional and organisational contexts.

On the basis of their analysis, Bennett and Brunner (2022a, 2022b) propose the concept of "buffer zone" as a heuristic for working reflexively in the meeting point of agencies that the project creates. They define the buffer zone as "a created and nurtured area of critical and relational activity that lies between different ways of working – the established organisational and contextual practices and the new, created spaces for temporary, collaborative and critical research" (2022a: 87). It is a "contested space that researchers need to persistently animate in order to successfully pursue collaborative or participatory research" (2022a: 89).

The buffer zone has three main components – buffering purpose, buffering practices and buffering dynamics (Bennett and Brunner, 2022b: 389). "Buffering purpose" is about staking out, cultivating and protecting the research space for collaborative research against pressure towards "capture" or instrumentalisation. "Buffering practices" is about using relational skills to initiate and maintain collaborative research relations. And "buffering dynamics" is about recognising the need to take part in political work within and outwith the research group in a changing, dynamic environment. As an example of the three components in action, Bennett and Brunner (2022b: 393) present the use of anonymised vignettes as a tool for dialogue in collaborative inquiry across different professional perspectives. The vignettes were about practitioners' experiences of supporting service users at the receiving end of a benefit sanction. In a workshop for the inquiry group, five practitioners from different organisations each wrote about their experience with a

service user subject to a benefit sanction, including the conversation and the services involved. The practitioners presented their vignettes to each other and reflected upon them. Bennett and Brunner used the co-produced vignettes in subsequent events with different professionals across organisations. They say that, in narrating experiences of professionals from different organisations, the vignette tool "buffered purpose" by creating openings for dialogue across difference in which participants critically reflected on their practices across organisational contexts. The vignettes "buffered practices" by providing a framework for inter-professional and inter-organisational conversations that helped professionals to build relationships based on trust across professional and organisational boundaries (2022b: 393, 396). And they "buffered dynamics" by bringing to the fore knowledge based on worklife experiences.

Using the concept, they identify multiple tensions arising in the contested space. For instance, tensions arise as collaborative relationships are difficult to establish and maintain given the unstable, shifting nature of the public service context. For instance, nurturing close relationships based on trust and respect is impeded by the prevalence of temporary contracts and job losses in the public sector (Bennett and Brunner, 2022a: 82–83). And tensions arise between taking a critical, reflexive approach to collaborative research, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, tailoring collaborative research practices to meet policy demands. They note, for example, that responding to a sudden announcement of extra funding for participatory budgeting by the Scottish government carried a risk of instrumentalisation (2022a: 84); you're tempted to write what it takes to get the money without having the time to build solid collaborative relations and involve potential collaborative partners in co-creating the application.

Bennett and Brunner's analytical take on participatory research in terms of the concept of the buffer zone provides a way of reflexively "thinking with" contexts, homing in on how multi-agency settings shape collaboration in ways that call for considerable relational work. This is an approach that attributes the complexity of the settings to the complexity of the network of relations. As I expand on in the next chapter, Chapter 3, IFADIA offers another way of understanding context as *co-constitutive* of relational dynamics. It does so by theorising power as a productive force across multiple voices, drawing, amongst others, on Bakhtin and Foucault, and analysing the embeddedness of participatory research processes in a contested discursive terrain.

Working in the currents of Indigenous/decolonising and feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist approaches

As the third and final example, I will give an example of research addressing issues of power dynamics in the currents of Indigenous/decolonising methodologies *and* feminist, poststructuralist and posthumanist inquiry. The example – Vargas, Marambio and Lykke (2020) – builds on the *poststructuralist* premise that all knowledge originates from positions of power

within discourse; it follows the commitment of *Indigenous/decolonising* and *feminist methodologies* to contest knowledge production based on Western and paternalistic thought; and, along the lines of affirmative critique, it extends poststructuralism to embrace a *new materialist, posthumanist* focus on affective world-making in assemblages of the human and more-than-human. Across all three orientations, Vargas, Marambio and Lykke use a creative, artistic practice – collaborative writing as inquiry through a series of personal letters – to evoke affective responses that expose and challenge power relations and point affirmatively in the direction of an alternative future. The study is firmly planted in the democratic, dialogic discourse with a clear orientation to social change through world-making and represents a break with the positivist, scientific and the technocratic discourses.

I have chosen Vargas et al., (2020) as an example embracing the Indigenous/decolonising current *and* the feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist current. One reason for my choice is that it saves space in a chapter that you are likely to be thinking is already far too long! This is a pragmatic and, therefore, pretty lame reason; but, luckily for me, I have another, more reasonable, reason. There has been relatively little research combining Indigenous/decolonising methodologies and posthumanist inquiry in spite of their shared theorisation of the agency of the non-human including the land. Hence, there is an unrealised potential for the two currents to enrich each other, as Rosiek et al. (2020) and Ulmer (2017) note. So, hopefully helpfully, this example charts a route traversing the two currents which, given the theoretical overlap, seems obvious, but has been rarely travelled.

The inquiry takes the form of seven personal letters to human and non-human, dead and living actors along the lines of pluriversal Indigenous thinking: namely, thinking that posits the interconnected existence of the spiritual, natural and human worlds. Vargas, Marambio and Lykke have chosen the genre of personal letter to evoke personal, affective relations with a view to joint action for change on the basis of a relational, decolonising ethics (2020: 188). They do not elaborate on the collaborative writing process beyond stating that they used "shared creative writing prompts" (2020: 188).

Hema'ny Vargas is an Indigenous activist, scholar and writer and member of the Indigenous, Selk'nam community in Karokynka/Tierra Del Fuego (Karokynka is the island's Selk'nam name; Tierra del Fuego is the colonisers' name). She is an activist in the organisation, Corporación Selk'nam Chile, which is claiming indigenous rights from the Chilean state, and, more widely, she is part of a movement dedicated to revitalising Selk'nam culture and language. Camila Marambio is a Chilean curator, artist and scholar and "white privileged mestisa who honours her indigenous descent" and is dedicated to working with the human geography and ecology of Karokynka (2020: 187). Nina Lykke is a white feminist European professor who, since the death of her partner, has been seeking "spiritual-material ways of mourning beyond the predominant Christian and secular scientific outlooks of Western modernity" (2020: 187).

The inquiry takes its starting-point in a challenge to the official Chilean myth that the Indigenous group, the Selk'nam, had become extinct as a result of (post)colonial violence (something that Camila and Nina had taken to be true before meeting Hema'ny). In their inquiry, they work with the method of personal letters to dead and living, human and non-human actors as a decolonising process of mourning that "unlocks the past" and reclaims the future for Selk'nam (2020: 188). Camila addresses her letter directly to Karokynka, the island, as a sentient agent. She writes, for instance, "over the millennia you've seen the world end again and again. I believe this experience has given you infinite ecological wisdom, which you impart to me and others inquiring into your human geography" (2020: 190).

In one of her letters, Hema'ny addresses a letter to the people 'carrying a Chilean identity card', calling them to recognise that the Selk'nam people are not extinct and have a right to exist. In one of her other two letters, she addresses her three-year-old grandson, K'tel, as "a lively Selk'nam presence in the here-and-now, and an embodied promise of futurity" (2020: 188). She ends the letter by declaring that "wherever your steps guide you, [..] all your ancestors will walk beside you" (2020: 194). In the remaining letter, "to unlock the past, and make K'tel's Selk'nam lineage visible" (2020: 188), she addresses her great grandmother whose child, Hema'ny's grandfather, was enslaved by colonisers, beginning the letter with "I do not know what to call you, Great Mother, I do not know what your name was or what your face looked like; when I imagine it, I can only see pain" (2020: 194) but ending it with a positive statement of reconnectedness:

> Today I would like to offer you my tears so that you can mourn your pain but also so that you can cry of joy because, Great Grandmother your son, your grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great grandchildren, we still remember you and we are still standing.
>
> (2020: 195)

In her letter, Nina addresses the anthropologists whose research contributed to constructing the myth of Selk'nam extinction. She writes, among other things,

> I note how you both, from a humanist perspective, mourn Selk'nam deaths and protest against the white colonisers' massacres, destruction, deportation and dispossession. However, seen from a critical decolonial and queer perspective, I cannot ignore how your approaches, despite your outrage, reflect classic anthropology's commitment to the white gaze, complicit with the colonising power.
>
> (2020: 192–193)

Finally, Nina and Camila, too, invoke the dead, in addressing two Selk'nam women who were made into symbols of a lost world by the anthropologists: the shaman Lola Kiep'ja and the translator and informant, Ángela Loij.

Nina ends her letter by asking Kiep'ja for her permission to use her indigenous philosophy: "so, Kiep'ja, is it ok to use your spectral chanting to guide me towards 'learning to unlearn' and relearn, as decolonial thinkers [..]?" (2020: 197). Camila acknowledges that the knowledge that people have today of Selk'nam culture is, in large part, thanks to Ángela Loij's translation services and wonders why the latter was "never made a central character" in the anthropologists' accounts (2020: 198).

It is central to Vargas, Marambio and Lykke's inquiry that it is not just about critiquing colonial power relations but also about creating openings for change by drawing on a relational, decolonising ethics which engages in affirmative world-making ("reworlding"). While the critique of colonial power relations draws on poststructuralist thinking, the relational, decolonising ethics combines Indigenous and posthuman feminist thinking. Common to both Indigenous and posthuman thinking is a pluriversal understanding of the interconnectedness of the human and non-human in which both the human and non-human, dead and living, have agency; this understanding underpins a relational ethics which acknowledges and cultivates this interconnectedness as a basis for joint action towards alternative futures. As Vargas, Marambio and Lykke (2020: 199) put it, "processes of decolonial reworlding [..] are based on the actions of many actors, not all of them human and not all of them living".

Vargas, Marambio and Lykke bring Indigenous and posthuman thinking together without exploring their affinities and distinctive positions in ways that could point at how the one could enrich the other. Moreover, they do not reflect metatheoretically on their study with respect to power. The voice of Lykke recognises that she "as a white, European scholar, cannot opt-out of her structural entanglement in post/colonial power, even though she would like to" (2020: 187) but does not explore the implications of this for their collaboration and the knowledge produced. Thus, their inquiry doesn't include reflexive considerations of how power is at play in exclusionary, as well as inclusionary ways, in their study. Moreover, the inquiry is based on an affirmative orientation towards reworlding and, accordingly, Vargas, Marambio and Lykke (2020: 199) end by "articulating the article's overall hope for change", but nowhere in the article do they mention how that change can be co-created concretely.

In closing

In all the examples I've given, entrenched power relations are construed as an obstacle to successful co-creation, and engagement with power relations is built into the collaborative research process as a platform for change furthering social justice. In all but the final example, instrumentalisation is viewed as antithetical to successful co-production. Across the literature on participatory research, researchers frequently describe ways of redressing power imbalances. One way of redressing power imbalances that researchers

describe is the involvement of community members from the start of the research process (e.g. Abma, 2019; Montoya and Kent, 2011). A key point which researchers stress is that "equal partnerships" can be established if everyone participates in mutual learning from the start. Another key point is that equal partnerships are a prerequisite for producing outcomes that improve the well-being of participants and their communities (e.g. Abma et al., 2009; Mayan and Daum, 2016). A second way described by researchers entails designing the research process to fit the needs of vulnerable, marginalised groups (e.g. Read and Maslin-Prothero, 2011). A third way is based on the understanding that power imbalances are inherent in social relations but nevertheless can be redressed through critical, reflexive analyses of power dynamics (e.g. Abma et al., 2009; Collier and Wyer, 2016; Groot et al., 2019, 2022). In all these ways of redressing power imbalances, power dynamics are treated as obstacles to co-creation. Thus, it is implied that, in its pure form, co-creation is free of power; as I noted above in relation to critical reflexivity in participatory research, this romanticises successful or authentic co-creation as processes of inclusion in which all voices participate on an equal footing.

Researchers working with IFADIA endorse all these ways of redressing power imbalances and try to practise them. I did this most recently together with my fellow researchers in the participatory project on Parkinson's dance which is in focus in the chapters to come. Co-researchers took part in decision-making from the start of the project including in the writing of the research proposal and in tailoring the research design to fit participants' specific needs, and we incorporated critical, reflexive analyses of power dynamics into the research process as a basis for relational ethics. However, as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter and as I will expand on in the next chapter, rather than treating power dynamics as *obstacles* to co-creation, IFADIA conceptualises power dynamics as an *intrinsic, productive force* in *bringing "co-creation" into being.* According to IFADIA, *"co-creation" comes into being and is constituted or enacted in situated, power-imbued negotiations of meaning throughout the research process.* This focus enables us critically and reflexively to embrace the complexities of co-creation.

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