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The Epistemology and Ethics of “Long Conversations” about Academic Writing for Publication: Staying with the Troubles

La epistemología y la ética de las «largas conversaciones» sobre la escritura académica para la publicación: seguir con los troubles / problemas / líos / perturbaciones*

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Abstract / Resumen

My aim in this chapter is to offer reflections on what I see as the epistemological value, as well as the ethical troubling, of engaging in talk around texts (Lillis, 2008, 2024) as part of “long conversations” (Maybin, 1996), as a key way of coming to understand the nature and consequences of academic writing for publication. My reflections draw from my experience of working on the PAW longitudinal study exploring the academic writing practices of 50 scholars from Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal (carried out with Mary Jane Curry), here focusing in particular on a long conversation of twenty years with one scholar. I illustrate the methodological and epistemological value of cyclical talk around texts, as well as the ethical “troubling”

that long conversations necessarily involve. I argue for the value of “staying with” (Haraway, 2016) rather than avoiding “the troubles” as a way of deepening understandings around the politics and practices of academic knowledge making and of working towards a more socially just academic world.

Mi objetivo en este capítulo es ofrecer reflexiones sobre lo que considero el valor epistemológico, así como el problema ético, de participar en conversaciones sobre textos (Lillis, 2008, 2024) como parte de «largas conversaciones» (Maybin, 1996), como una forma clave de llegar a comprender la naturaleza y las consecuencias de la escritura académica para la publicación. Mis reflexiones se basan en mi experiencia de trabajo en el estudio longitudinal PAW que explora las prácticas de escritura académica de 50 académicos de Hungría, Eslovaquia, España y Portugal (llevado a cabo con Mary Jane Curry), centrándome aquí en particular en una larga conversación de veinte años con un académico. Ilustro el valor metodológico y epistemológico de la conversación cíclica en torno a los textos, así como los problemas éticos que implican necesariamente las conversaciones largas. Defiendo el valor de «seguir con» (Haraway, 2016) en lugar de evitar «los troubles, problemas, líos, perturbaciones» como una forma de profundizar en la comprensión de las políticas y prácticas de la creación de conocimiento académico y de trabajar hacia un mundo académico socialmente más justo.

* *trouble(s)* en inglés señala una gama de significados que no corresponde fácilmente a una palabra en español y por eso utilizo un grupo de palabras: *problema* porque es lo que se utiliza en comentarios del libro de Haraway ej., <https://arquitecturacontable.wordpress.com/2020/05/28/comentarios-sobre-staying-with-the-trouble-donna-haraway/>; *líos* porque indica el uso cotidiano de *trouble* en inglés; *perturbaciones* porque corresponde a una glosa teórica sobre *troubling* que utiliza Vilar i Roca (2015).

The use of talk around texts as a methodology for exploring academic writing has grown in recent years, as a way of extending the researcher’s gaze beyond the text, drawing into focus the perspectives of writers and others involved in academic text production. Talk around texts builds on a number of inter-related traditions, from the discourse-based interview (Odell et al., 1983) to academic writing and literacy history interviews (e.g., Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2001) and threads of the different emphases within these traditions are carried through into the specific ways in which researchers of academic writing

adopt this methodology. Un modo de caracterizar las diferencias entre los distintos usos de las conversaciones en torno al texto es a lo largo de un continuum *texto-escritor@*^r: en un polo del continuum están los estudios donde el principal objeto de investigación sigue siendo el texto, y la conversación/ entrevista se analiza como dato adicional o suplementario, a menudo constituida por una sola entrevista; en otro extremo del continuum están los estudios donde el foco principal es el escritor, en reconocimiento (a veces implícito) de la necesidad de ir más allá no solo del texto sino de la propia agenda de investigación o marco de referencia de l@s investigador@s. Examples of the use of emically-oriented talk around text in different geolinguistic contexts include: Argentina (e.g., Atorresi & Eisner, 2021; Eisner, 2021), Brazil (e.g., Paris et al., 2022), Brazil and Colombia (e.g., Sito & Kleiman, 2016), Canada (e.g., Gentil, 2005), Chile (e.g., Ávila Reyes, 2021), England (e.g., Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998; Scott & Turner, 2005), Peru (e.g., Zavala, 2011), Japan (e.g., Muller, 2016), South Africa (e.g., Angelil-Carter, 2000; Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006), USA (e.g., Angelova & Riazantsteva, 1999; Lu, 1987; Price, 2007).

In the field of academic writing for publication, an early example of talk around text is in work by Flowerdew (2000) who tracked the publishing experiences of a Hong Kong-based scholar, and its extended use is foregrounded in the PAW study involving 50 scholars in four national contexts—Slovakia, Hungary, Spain and Portugal—carried out by Mary Jane Curry and me (e.g., Lillis & Curry, 2010). The methodology of talk around texts as a way of exploring the history of texts, text histories, has continued to be used and further developed (e.g., Muller, 2016; Khuder & Petrić, 2022; Shaw, 2022; Smirnova & Lillis, 2022) indicating its growing significance in the field of academic writing for publication.

I situate my own use of talk around texts, exploring students' writing (e.g., Lillis, 2001, 2008, 2024) and academics' writing for publication (Lillis, 2008; Lillis & Curry, 2010), towards the writer-end of the continuum, with a specific interest in talk around texts as building “long conversations”, drawing on the notion developed by Maybin (1996) to characterise the nature of everyday talk between children:

These ‘long conversations’ are carried on in different contexts across days and weeks as children return again and again to the themes which are important to them, revisiting the issues in different stories and exchanges of stories, from different perspectives (Maybin, 1996, p.47).

1 There is ongoing debate about masculine marking of nouns as ‘gender neutral’ (o/os). Here I adopt the practice of @ to signal this debate.

I have adopted Maybin's notion of "long conversations" which underlines the importance of iterativity and recursivity, to distinguish between talk around texts as a methodology involving one-off or limited conversations around texts, and talk around texts which is premised on the goal of forging research-based conversations over extended periods of time, to actively create opportunities to revisit issues raised and discussed, and to allow for the exploration of changing or nuancing of perspectives (Lillis, 2008, 2024). Such long conversations are central to an ethnographic approach exploring academic writing for publication, involving sustained researcher engagement and multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, observation, collection of documentation) valuable for exploring academic text production practices which typically take place over considerable lengths of time.

En este artículo quiero reiterar el valor de las conversaciones en torno al texto como parte de largas conversaciones, poniendo en primer plano tanto el valor **epistemológico**—lo que nos permite (a cualquiera de nosotr@s involucrad@s en el mundo académico) llegar a entender la escritura académica como práctica social—como los **problemas éticos** que tales conversaciones implican necesariamente. En relación con lo ético, me apropio de la noción de Haraway (2016) de "staying with the trouble" como «quedarse con el problema»—acodando una pluralidad a tal(es) troubles/problemas/líos/perturbaciones—para argumentar que los problemas/perturbaciones/los líos son una dimensión fundamental en cualquier investigación que involucre a sujetos humanos (ej., las bien documentadas diferencias de poder entre investigador@s-investigad@s, Lather, 2007; Goikoetxea, 2014). Estos *troubles/problemas/líos* se acentúan en contextos, como el que nos ocupa aquí, en los que el propio enfoque de la investigación—el inglés en la producción de la escritura académica—y el posicionamiento de l@s investigador@s-investigad@s están imbuidos desde el principio de diferencias de poder históricas y contemporáneas: desigualdad estructural sistémica, evidente en los regímenes de evaluación (Lillis, 2018); prejuicios contra la investigación llevada a cabo en contextos fuera del centro anglófono, típicamente enmarcada como «local» en lugar de «internacional» (Lillis & Curry, 2010, 2015); e ideologías discriminatorias sobre un supuesto espacio académico global "English only" (Curry & Lillis, 2022). La relación sociohistórica entre la lengua inglesa y el capital cultural académico entraña necesariamente complejidades particulares en cualquier intento de entablar un debate abierto sobre las prácticas y políticas de la escritura académica para la publicación. No obstante, creo que es posible trabajar para construir conversaciones éticamente validas, tal y como lo reflejo en este artículo. Quiero enfatizar que aquí estoy escribiendo desde mi perspectiva, como

investigadora basada en el centro anglófono de Inglaterra, ofreciendo unas reflexiones acerca de una larga conversación de unos veinte años con una académica localizada en Hungría. No estoy intentando representar su perspectiva aquí—eso requiere un espacio propio.

¿Por qué utilizo inglés y español en este artículo? Why am I using English and Spanish in this article? Varias razones. 1) Spanish was one of the main languages of the PRISEAL conference held in Tenerife and which inspired the publication of the present volume. In formal conference presentations, multiple modalities are possible simultaneously, enabling bi/multi/translingual practices which are difficult to replicate in one verbal/written text for a publication. But it's important we make visible the multilinguality at work in sharing knowledge, in formal presentations and informal talk, and pull through these threads to written texts in order to challenge claims repeatedly made about academic knowledge making being an “English-only space” (not true, Curry & Lillis, 2022). In small ways, we can disrupt what Thesen calls the “status of the formal archive” by making visible the “trace archive”—“the ephemeral, discarded, sensed but not seen aspects of knowledge-making” (Thesen, 2024, p.5). It is in this spirit of the trace archive that I also include some images of the power point slides used in the ‘Research Conversation’ that Mary Jane Curry and I presented at PRISEAL 2023. The focus of the talk differs from the specific discussion in this paper, but I have drawn on our presentation in drafting this article. 2) Using multiple languages in published texts is an obvious way of disrupting the normativity of English-only academic writing/knowledge making, reconfiguring the textual/epistemological experience for both writers and readers. One simple example of such reconfiguration is that the knowledge base is immediately extended, with both writers and readers engaging in, in this case, Spanish-medium publications rather than being restricted to English-medium only publications (see Lillis et al., 2010). More generally, multi/translingual text production is a simple yet potentially powerful way of disrupting any assumed English only academic space (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Jasor, 2026; Lillis & Curry 2022; Odeniyi & Lazar, 2023; Waigandt, 2026).

My decisions around which language to use for which content are exploratory but have been governed by considerations such as: 1) I have written about a particular topic previously more in English, so it might be useful to use Spanish here; 2) Anglophone readers may be unfamiliar with Spanish-medium works, so it might be useful to use English here; 3) I want to make sure any “new” conceptual work that I’m doing is articulated in both Spanish and English to work at epistemic equality, so I need to build in some overlap across the languages; readers may pick up some ideas in one language but get a chance to (re)visit aspects of them in the other. The decision to use parallel text in the Conclusion is based on the assumption

that reading academic texts across more than one language is still relatively uncommon—so in case some readers feel uncomfortable with this practice, as indicated by some reviewer comments—I decided to include the summary points in both languages.^{2 3}

Justificación metodológica y valor epistemológico

Ya he tratado anteriormente la justificación metodológica del valor de la conversación en torno a textos como parte de conversaciones largas (Lillis, 2008, 2024; Lillis & Curry, 2010). Aquí reitero brevemente los puntos clave sobre la metodología con el fin de destacar su valor epistemológico.

Metodológicamente, el uso de la conversación en torno a los textos implica un intercambio cíclico entre el investigador y l@s participantes (Figura 4.1) que permite a l@s investigador@s hacer lo siguiente:

- explorar las perspectivas (a veces) cambiantes de l@s académic@s sobre la escritura académica
- escuchar los relatos de l@s académic@s sobre la producción de textos específicos
- documentar aspectos del historial lingüístico y de literacidad de l@s académic@s
- formular preguntas: ej., ¿quién participó, por qué, cuándo, en qué lenguas y registros?
- abrir espacios para que l@s académic@s planteen cuestiones de su interés
- analizar y volver a analizar los textos a la luz de los comentarios de l@s académic@s
- elaborar historias de los textos (Lillis & Curry, 2010)
- escuchar cómo los regímenes de evaluación (Lillis, 2018) en diferentes contextos institucionales, nacionales y transnacionales influyen en las prácticas y perspectivas de l@s académicos.

2 I hope most readers will be able to follow the arguments made in this paper using Spanish and English but free automatic translation tools will help if needed, e.g., DeepL <https://www.deepl.com/en/translator>, ChatGPT.

3 In drafting this text, I have benefitted from discussions about form and content with Laura Eisner, Fabiana Castagno, Diana Waigandt, Catalina Neculai and Bojana Petrić. For reasons of space, I cannot include all details, but we debated the use of some terms across languages e.g., “academico”, “problema”, “writing”, and also some content—see extract of conversation between Theresa and Laura.

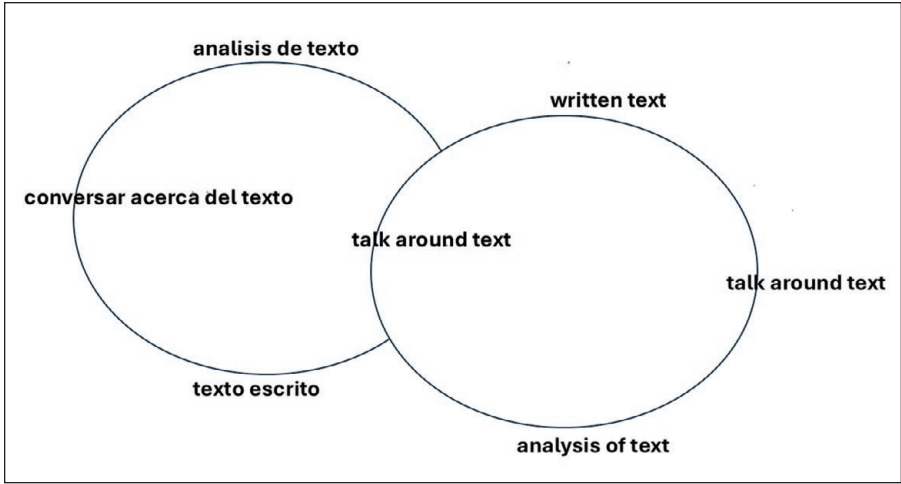


Figure 4.1. Conversaciones cíclicas acerca del texto (Lillis, 2024)

In practical terms, talk around texts as part of long conversations involves considerable research time and labour on the part of the researcher (and time and generosity on the part of the participants, an aspect I am not discussing in this paper) including establishing and maintaining contact with scholars, carrying out formal (transcribed) and informal interviews and talk, collecting and analysing related documents, e.g., reviewer comments, journal information, editorial policies, university policies. Figure 4.2 gives some idea of the amount of data generated in the course of long conversations with one scholar, Krista, and Table 4.1 the amount of data for building a text history.

- 14 entrevistas formales 2001–2019
- Conversaciones informales cara a cara (10 visitas), muchos emails y varias discusiones por Skype 2001–2019
- Reseñas, comentarios y emails entre Krista y evaluadores
- 120 textos
- 16 historias de texto (re)construidas
- Diagramas de las redes en que investiga/escribe
- Documentos institucionales de la universidad relacionados con la publicación y de la enseñanza superior en Hungría

Figure 4.2. Data shared by Krista about her writing for publication (PowerPoint slide from conference presentation)

Table 4.1. Five Different Types of Data for Building and Analysing One Text History

Drafts of a paper	Reviewers' comments and emails	Talk around text interviews	Researcher notes (example extract)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textd buda kl, ab (cd, ef) PE D1 • Textd buda kl, ab (cd, ef) PE D2 • Textd buda kl, ab (ce, ef) PE D3 • Textd buda kl, ab (cd, ef) PE D4 	20 documents	4 interviews	<i>Isn't the key claim different in each paper? I thought Krista et al were arguing that their findings were difft from X et al whereas pub says findings same... in two contexts. The Hungarian paper is constructed as confirmatory rather than new knowledge--its newness tends to be located in its cultural specificity- ironically TL given the universalist paradigm Krista team operating within. TL potentially looks like another example of flattening. Discuss with Krista.</i>

Los datos que figuran en la Figura 4.2 permitieron documentar y explorar las prácticas de Krista, abrieron cierto espacio para hablar de cuestiones de importancia específica para Krista y facilitaron una reflexión más profunda por mi parte. Se vislumbra este proceso en la Figura 4.3, que incluye extractos de la charla con Krista para ilustrar algunos de los temas clave que se pusieron en primer plano y luego se revisaron y replantearon a lo largo de los muchos años de nuestra larga conversación. Así, por ejemplo, su pasión por la investigación colaborativa se mantuvo a lo largo de los años, pero el énfasis cambió de una alegría por aprender con académic@s veteran@s a convertirse en una académica veterana ella misma y comprometerse a apoyar a colegas con menos experiencia. Su preocupación por la problemática de la traducción y la representación en inglés estándar de voces húngaras vernáculas pasó a incluir una preocupación por la problemática de dicha representación en español estándar, cuando Krista empezó a escribir en español. Su compromiso con escribir para múltiples audiencias pasó a un compromiso con escribir en varios idiomas específicamente para audiencias profesionales.

El punto epistemológico que hay que subrayar es que el «caso individual»—ya sea interpretado en términos de una persona específica o de la historia de un texto específico—se valora en sus propios términos. Al mismo tiempo, el valor epistemológico del caso va más allá de un individuo o una única historia de texto (Mitchell, 1983), iluminando un fenómeno social más general: aquí es la práctica de la escritura académica para la publicación.

Pasión por su tema de investigación y la importancia de escribir desde el principio junto a una investigadora igualmente apasionada y bien reconocida. *Creamos las oraciones juntos. Fue un 90% de su parte y un 10% de la mía. Pero supongo que es algo así como ... ya sabes, como cuando enseñamos a un niño a caminar---Supongo que habría sido mucho más fácil para ella hacerlo sola, pero de esta manera pude sentir que hice algo.*

Problemas al representar datos primarios en inglés. *Por supuesto, los sujetos y el terapeuta registran sus sentimientos en húngaro. Y es muy importante la forma en que se expresan, y cuando cito estas experiencias, es bastante difícil traducirlas al inglés manteniendo la misma atmósfera o la misma melodía--- No es lo mismo.*

Escribir para múltiples audiencias en múltiples idiomas. *Con los años, estoy cada vez más orientada hacia el campo práctico. O, si es investigación, entonces debería tener algunas consecuencias o algunas partes de técnicas aplicables; de lo contrario, ¿por qué hacer la investigación?*

Figura 4.3. Temas clave explorados en las conversaciones sobre textos: extractos ilustrativos de la charla de Krista

Cada situación, persona, historia de texto es única pero al mismo tiempo estructurada: cada instante indexicaliza “patterns and developments of wider scope and significance” (Blommaert, 2006, p.6). Así pues, el caso individual provee datos empíricos acerca de prácticas sociales, pero además impulsa el desarrollo de marcos teóricos a través de los cuales pueden articularse dichas prácticas, es decir, pueden nombrarse, explorarse y comprenderse. Así, por ejemplo, las historias de texto de Krista nos impulsaron a:

- trabajar con la noción de **historias de textos** y así cambiar el énfasis sobre el texto como *único, acabado, completo*
- enfocarnos en **historias**, ¿qué pasa a través del tiempo? y **trayectorias** ¿qué pasa a través de espacios geo lingüísticos?, utilizando nociones problemáticas como *local, nacional, internacional, centro, periferia*
- enfocarnos en **las prácticas de l@s “brokers”**, incluidas sus ideologías acerca del «ingles» como parte de las historias de texto.

Each single case of the 50 participating scholars in the PAW study and their many text histories, contributed to generating both empirical findings and theoretical contributions (Figure 4.4).

Empirical Contributions	Theoretical Contributions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of scholars’ perspectives- interests, concerns, desires, strategies • Exploration of situated practices—home, office, institutions • The (re)construction of how texts-as-knowledge is produced • The analysis of the impact of multiple people- “brokers” on the texts-as-knowledge produced • The tracking of the uses of multiple languages in the production of texts-as-knowledge/ • The tracking of networks in which scholars produce texts • The tracking scholars’ publication practices over their lifetimes • Exploration of women scholars’ gendered experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History- “Text histories” (time) • Trajectory- Text trajectories (directionalities across spaces- places, institutions, organizations/ businesses), scholars’ knowledge-making trajectories and interests • Networks- as people, resources • Evaluation and reward systems- codified systems at different scalar levels measuring and rewarding academic publications • “Brokers” and capital- Different brokers acting in different ways at different scalar levels • Scale- national, internal, local • Locality/universality- unmarked locality (Lillis and Curry 2010)/ <i>hybris del punto cero</i> (Castro Gomez 2007) • Ideology and geolinguistics –English(es), language(s) de knowledgede(s) ej. exoticisation and colonialist frameworks • Chronotopes- different ways of living/analysing time-space in relation to entextualised knowledge

Figure 4.4. Empirical and theoretical contributions from the PAW study drawing on talk around text (PowerPoint slide from conference presentation)

In short, the long conversations as part of the ethnographic orientation adopted in PAW, including a central focus on text histories, have generated findings and insights that we think/hope are contributing to understanding about the politics and practices of academic writing for publications.

AND/BUT Y/PERO...

El resumen del método de la conversación en torno a los textos como parte de largas conversaciones que he presentado hasta aquí es válido pero también es parcial, en el sentido de que reduce la actividad de la investigación a una descripción contemporánea y racionalista de la metodología y la epistemología que excluye muchas dimensiones, incluida la historia, por ejemplo, el hecho de que la investigación académica, incluidas las prácticas retóricas y de evaluación asociadas a la investigación, se ven influidas por relaciones de poder, incluido el colonialismo/desigualdad (ej., Hernández-Zamora, 2019), la ética en la práctica, la manera en que los participantes, tanto investigadores como investigados, participan en innumerables decisiones éticas más pequeñas y más grandes en los momentos en que conviven en la investigación (Lillis et al., 2023), y la subjetividad de la investigadora, la forma en que el ser y el becoming/stanovienie (Bakhtin, 1981) de la investigadora repercuten en la investigación. Los marcos

racionalistas-positivistas de las metodologías de investigación han sido criticados teóricamente desde hace mucho tiempo y, sin embargo, todavía se espera que pensemos y escribamos dentro de dichos marcos (IMRD), y que las dimensiones éticas se reduzcan a cuestiones de procedimiento. La historia, la ética y la subjetividad de la investigadora quedan literalmente al margen por el énfasis racionalista-positivista en la provisión de detalles de metodologías legitimadas (como he hecho en la sección anterior), que sigue siendo la forma dominante de legitimar la investigación, incluso en los enfoques (inter y transnacionales) que tratan de problematizar tales orientaciones.

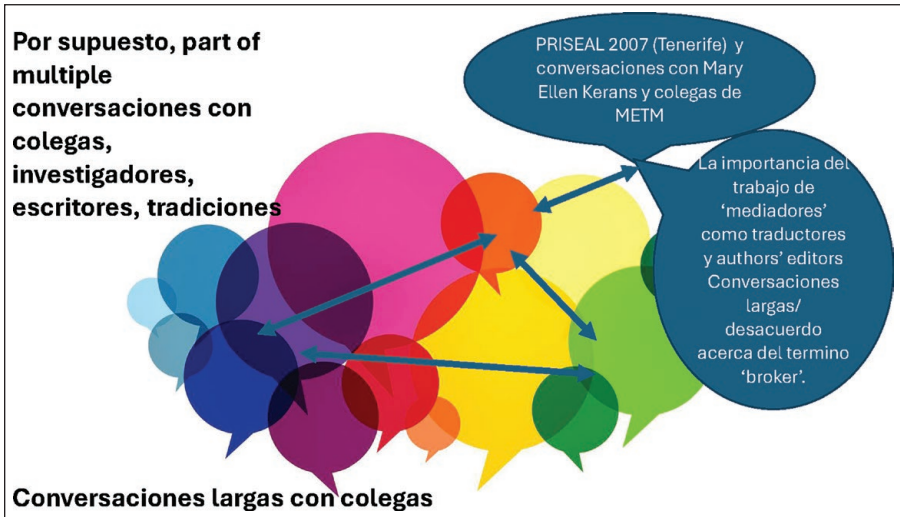


Figure 4.5. Long Conversations with Colleagues (PowerPoint slide from conference presentation)

Lo que sigue en el resto de este artículo son mis reflexiones, formadas a partir de mi experiencia en investigación y, por supuesto, en conversaciones con otras muchas personas - conversaciones con Mary Jane, con participantes en los proyectos, con colegas a lo largo de los años...

Getting off the veranda: ethical trouble(ing) and ethical ambiguity

I have argued that talk around text as part of long conversations is part of an ethnographic orientation. Ethnography has come some way from Malinowski's call to anthropologists to "get off the veranda":

the anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the veranda of the missionary compound,

Government station, or planter's bungalow, where armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda he [sic] has been accustomed to collect statements from informants, write down stories, and fill out sheets of paper with savage texts (Malinowski, 1926; discussed in Harrison, 2014, p. 232).

There are many calls from researchers situated in both the global South and North to challenge ethnography's colonialist history, including the call to Northern scholars to "bring ethnography home"/ «traer a la etnografía a casa» (Rampton, 2007, p. 298, basada en Hymes, 1996) para indicar que l@s investigador@s del norte deberían/mos redirigir su/nuestra mirada del estudio de «otr@s», supuestamente lejan@s (y a menudo exotizad@s) hacia sí/nosotr@s mism@s, ya sea a nivel de país, estado, institución, o en nuestras prácticas cotidianas (Lillis, 2024). Y Blommaert ha argumentado that, at least within the tradition of studies of *language*, ethnography is fundamentally counter hegemonic (Blommaert, 2006).

However, we need to acknowledge the colonialist roots of ethnography, evident in Malinowski's comments above (Ogone, 2017; Quijano, 2000; Sena Martins, 2016). Whilst the picture drawn of the researcher by Malinowski is very alien to me—reeking as it does of white, male, upper class privilege, and *very far from the working class council estate in England where I grew up LOL 😊*—I, as a researcher working from the global north, can't pretend that the colonialist roots of anthropology do not cast a sombre shadow over ethnography as a research tradition. All research approaches, centering on the experiences of another person(s), throw up issues of power. But ethnography, with its roots in colonialist anthropology and its goal of "writing cultures", including a critical debate of such a goal by Clifford and Marcus (1986), has a particularly problematic history. Exactly how we engage reflexively with the weight of ethnographic history whilst valuing dimensions of its theory and methodologies will depend on the specific research foci and contexts. In the case of talk around text as part of long conversations about academic publishing, our conversations are/have been/will necessarily be coloured by the fact that we are talking at a moment when English (in large part because of its colonialist history) is the privileged language of academic production globally, when (in this case) I as the researcher am based in the privileged Anglophone centre, and when the research focuses on, and is implicated in, this privileged positioning.

Of epistemological and ethical importance here is whether this colonialist shadow of ethnography implicit within the research relationship can be disrupted (*I hope/believe so, otherwise why would I engage in this work?—and much*

discussed in academic literature, e.g., Mignolo, 1998). In the PAW project, I think we were lucky in the very early stages of research conversations to be directly confronted by the question of positioning, interest and value by some participating scholars and thus some core problematics within our researching relationship made explicit. The question posed, and some of the more obvious feelings and questions it generated for me, are illustrated in Figure 4.6.

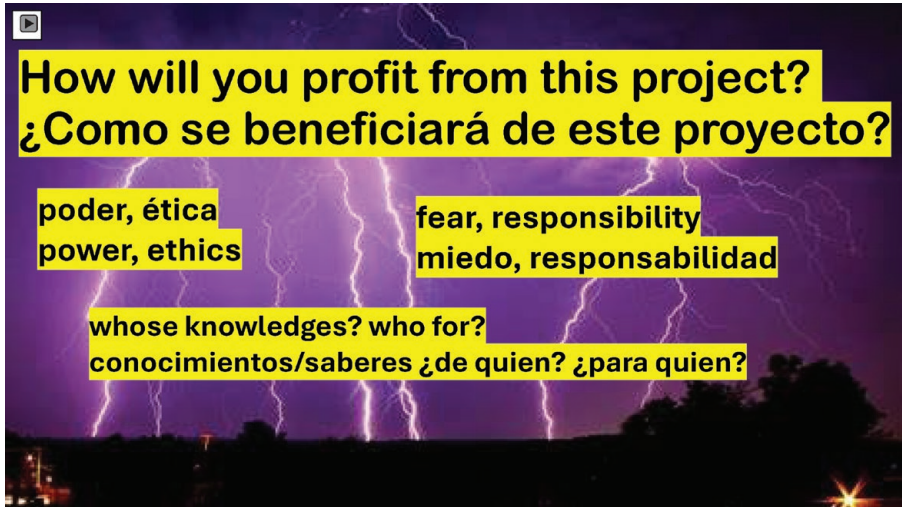


Figure 4.6. How will you profit from this research? (PowerPoint slide from conference presentation—imagine the sound of thunder as used in conference presentation)

Some disruption to privileged positioning in the PAW study—modulating issues of power—resulted from the higher status of some participating scholars. Whilst the status of English within evaluation reward systems globally positioned/s scholars in less powerful ways than us (Mary Jane and I) as Anglophone-based researchers, some participants were in more powerful positions in terms of institutional status, publishing experiences, academic hierarchies, gender and social class. This higher academic status of some scholars—alongside the critical and creative questioning of some junior scholars—meant that participants did not shy away from asking many questions about the research and led us to think harder (I think) about what we were doing, why and, at a more immediate level, how we might offer something in return at a more immediate, practical level (reciprocity took different forms, and is an aspect of the methodology that is beyond the scope of this paper) and at an epistemological-ethical level, in discussions with participants around the representation of findings (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Of specific interest to me in this paper is whether disruption to differential positioning is also (potentially) enabled by the very methodology of talk around texts as part of long conversations. I think it is (can be) because it is a space which is necessarily troublesome/ing for all participating. Whilst “talk around texts” sounds friendly, cosy, even easy, in fact engaging through cyclical talk over long periods of time with an other opens up spaces which are often difficult and uncomfortable. From my perspective, some of the more obvious troubling aspects of inhabiting this particular research space—with Krista and other scholars—are listed below:

- Intruding on someone’s space
- Imposing my self as a researcher, on their lives
- Imposing my person/being on another person/being
- Being from a privileged space
- Being from a non-privileged space
- Speaking English
- Being a woman researcher
- Being too directive in conversations
- Being not directive enough
- Talking too much
- Talking too little
- Offering comments on texts
- Not offering comments on texts
- Representing an other’s perspectives
- Theorising from another’s perspective
- Representing actual practices fairly (limited word space in publications)
- Adopting specific discourses (expert, informal, Anglophone...)
- Adopting specific disciplinary discourse/frames
- Not knowing enough
- “Knowing”/assuming too much
- People’s generosity
- People’s kindness
- What I can (cannot) offer

The list signals significant emotionality and ambiguity at the heart of my researcher experience which are necessarily bound up with attempts to engage authentically with an “other”, and enacted in a multiplicity of ways in actual talk (content, tone, empathy, sadness, laughter, visceral responses). “Other” here is not used to construe a negative positioning towards an other person—as in critical accounts and theorisations of “othering” (typically

involving stereotyping, discrimination, racialisation)—but rather, as advocated by Creese (2025, p. 631):

Other stands for a timeless moral relationship (Butler, 2005) in whose difference we have the potential to become a better self.

As Creese argues (after Gershon, 2011), the neoliberal university (globally), and the demands it makes, positions researchers as *subjects-for-themselves* (e.g., work is measured in terms of individual success in the securing of grants, the production of articles in indexed journals) rather than as subjects enacting a moral relationship *with* and through others. In the same way, I think, the neoliberal university constructs a particular positioning for the researched-as-Other, that is, as research object in the service of securing of capital in/for/by the university.

Nevertheless.

Much@s investigador@s (del norte y del sur global y/o posicionad@s como el sur en el norte y el norte en el sur) se resisten al posicionamiento del sujeto institucional e intentan más bien oponerse en su práctica de investigación (Creese, 2025). Para mí, esta resistencia conecta fuertemente con el potencial valor moral de la conversación en torno a los textos, incluyendo el énfasis de Bajtin en el imperativo dialógico del lenguaje, como un ideal por el que luchar (Lillis, 2011), como un proceso del *becoming/stanovienie* de cada persona y fuertemente antihegemónico (por ejemplo, a través de su noción de carnaval, Bajtin (Bakhtin, 1981[orig 1934-1941]).

Dentro de este marco, el trabajo de forjar largas conversaciones implica que l@s investigador@s—en este caso yo—no sólo llegan a aprender acerca del otro, sino que también participan en su propio *becoming/stanovienie*. En este sentido, considero que la conversación tiene un imperativo tanto moral como epistemológico, y aquí tomo el uso que hace Hall de «conversación» de forma bastante literal:

I come to the present, to who I am, by a different route from yours; and therefore, our conversation has to recognise that different histories have produced us, different histories have made this conversation possible. I can't pretend to be you. I don't know your experience. I can't live life from inside your head. So, **our living together must depend on a trade-off, a conversation**, a process of translation. (Hall, 2007, p. 151; my bolding).

Talk around text with Krista enabled me to learn about her experiences and practices.

But it also enabled me to experience many different ways of being a researcher /scholar/teacher and in some ways to learn to live a little like her: calmness (in midst of institutional crises, and family demands and concerns), joy (particularly of the woods—we went on several family bike rides before or after our formal discussions), creativity and openness (in her orientation to every aspect of her work, both fully committed to her work and its uses whilst at the same time open to considering every possibility), generosity (she invited undergraduate and postgraduate students to work with her on different projects) control over time and pacing (she might work 16 hours a day but within this made slow time to listen to her children). These aspects are part of me learning about her but also part of my own learning and being, and of attempting to become a “better (researcher) self”.

The above paragraph is troublesome in a number of ways, sitting as it does outside of conventional empirically-based commentary. Laura Eisner who offered critical comments on both the form and the content of this paper highlighted this paragraph as problematic epistemologically:

Laura: *Por estar centrada en aspectos que no necesariamente eran el foco de la investigación, me resultó difícil articular este fragmento con el resto de la argumentación – e incluso me generaba un efecto de “romantizar” a la entrevistada, por la mirada totalmente positiva sobre ella, como fuente de inspiración.*

Theresa: *¿Te suena a romantizada, idealizada, demasiado positiva? No creo que solo por hablar de cosas positivas sea una idealización. A nivel puramente descriptivo, este resumen de sus prácticas y atribuciones se queda corto 😊. Además, creo que se podría argumentar que la descripción objetivista y/o sin emoción convencional (como escribo también a menudo y creo que tiene su valor propio) es una idealización retórica. Hay mucho que hablar aquí, pero lo que estoy intentando señalar es que la co-presencia en la etnografía va más allá de «metodologías de investigación» supuestamente puramente racionalistas.*

So Laura’s comment made me wonder whether I was in fact romanticizing/idealizing a particular scholar but I felt on reflection that I was not. Of course I feel her discomfort in reading comments that are not within the specified parameters of the research focus and questions. And for sure to even write of these aspects feels embarrassing even though I know they are real and need further attention.

And I certainly don’t want me to be the main focus of research.

But neither do I want to theorise lived experience—mine, or that of others—out of existence.

So, for the moment, I'm staying still here, pausing, sitting with my PAW notebooks which include many descriptions of people and places, details about draft papers people are writing, lists of facts and figures and impressions, all of which also conjure up moments of being, being with an other, and, sometimes, being with one's (my) better self. This better self involves listening and ideologically pushing back against institutional imperatives—evaluation regimes, the premises on which “English”, and within that a certain type of “English only”, is privileged—and pushing back against the imperative to do fast research. And instead finding and creating spaces, for slow time, for being with an other with different rhythms. And pushing back against only a certain type of person being privileged in academia as a knower, and the pressure to feel as only a transitory, marginal guest in academia. By the way, “thank you for having me” (see playwright Graham's, 2024 MacTaggart lecture <https://www.televisual.com/news/james-grahams-mactaggart-the-full-lecture/the>).

Seguir con los troubles/problemas/ /lios/ perturbaciones

Al usar la frase *seguir con los troubles / problemas / lios / perturbaciones*, estoy utilizando parte de un título del libro de Haraway (2016) donde explica la importancia de «quedarse con el trouble» como una forma fundamental de llegar a entender y trabajar por el cambio social y ambiental global:

In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present. (Haraway, 2016, p.1)

El enfoque de Haraway es amplio: cultura, medio ambiente, ciencia, arte, humanidad, supervivencia del planeta. Pero su concepto de quedarse con el trouble tiene relevancia, creo yo, para aspectos específicos del trabajo académico: con respecto al trabajo conceptual, se ha retomado, por ejemplo, en debates sobre raza/cismo y la necesidad de trabajar con el concepto de «raza» para quedarse con las realidades materiales e ideológicas de la raza (M'charek, 2022). Con respecto a lo que me interesa aquí, la ética de la metodología de la conversación en torno a los textos, el llamamiento de Haraway

a permanecer/seguir con el trouble significa hacer visibles los problemas/perturbaciones/líos con esta metodología—al mismo tiempo que ver su utilidad—que contrasta con el tipo de ordenación/eliminación del «desorden» (y los problemas) exigido por las orientaciones dominantes de la investigación e inscritas en el género dominante del artículo de investigación IMRD (Lillis & Turner, 2001).

And here I'm using the plural, “troubles”, as I'm also wanting to signal other kinds of troubles that have been signalled—within this positive-negative frame—for those of us inhabiting (bits of) academia and concerned with knowledge-making: for example the value of troubling research /investigación perturbadora in artistic research, investigación artística, defined by the philosopher Vilar i Roca as:

La práctica de producción de conocimiento que cuestiona de modo perturbador todos los modos de conocimiento y producción del mismo (Vilar, 2015, p. 1; see also Vilar, 2021).

Of particular interest to me are social class troubles in academia, often (and quite right too) framed negatively (as documented for example by Reay, 2016; and reflective posts such as O'Neill https://medium.com/@deirdreoneill_40170/on-being-a-working-class-academic-c57772392e62). But I'm also interested in how we (working class women academics) can pull through to our academic knowledge-making some of the excitement, danger, risk and power from the positive-negative phenomenon of troubles experienced in daily lives (see Evans, 2006, for working class girls multiple and positive-negative experiences of “trouble”; see Lees, 2024, for the value of continuing to be an “outsider”).

In sum, multilayered troubles/lings are a core and potentially creative dimension to understanding and knowledge making, fundamental in our attempts to explore a phenomenon in which we are all implicated in academia. And here—echoing the quote by Vilar i Roca above—we could use the notion of *autopoiesis* to signal that the phenomenon that is of concern here, academic research writing, is both praxis and production: academic research writing is a core action in the (re)production of the very system it seeks to contribute to (“the product of the autopoietic organization of a system is that very system itself”, Maturana, 2004, p. 97)

A small example of such autopoiesis is the practice of citation. In the practice of academic signalling through citations in the above paragraphs, I am flagging up a common trouble in academia—that is, what gets mentioned? (social class is hugely invisible)—and perhaps more obviously, who gets cited?—and the contested and unequal nature of global academic production and distribution. Such practices are

shaped by the privileged position of English nested within the politics of location. In this instance, for example, the very interesting and widely cited work of Haraway involves a central use of the notion of “autopoiesis” but the foundational work of two Chilean biologists and philosophers Maturana and Varela (1984, 1998) on autopoiesis is not acknowledged, a failure noted by some (see Undurraga & Wyatt, 2024, and their discussion of the disruption of coloniality). But this particular trouble—the politics of citation—is something we cannot “resolve” in a one-step way, but is something to be engaged with, not dismissed or ignored, a potentially exciting, disruptive, creative aspect of transnational knowledge making and of our own reflexive trajectories in coming to know....

Conclusion

A modo de conclusión: ¿con qué tipo de problemas / perturbaciones / líos tenemos que quedarnos cuando investigamos la escritura académica para publicación?

En lo que respecta a la conversación en torno a los textos como parte de largas conversaciones, me siento (bastante) segura de que se trata de una metodología epistemológicamente productiva para el estudio de la escritura académica para publicación, como he intentado ilustrar en la primera sección de este artículo. Pero es importante señalar que tal conversación es también un espacio éticamente problemático, tanto metodológicamente como epistemológicamente, y que tenemos que quedarnos con los diferentes problemas con el fin de continuar nuestra comprensión de lo que está involucrado y en juego en las prácticas y políticas de la escritura académica para su publicación.

By way of conclusion: What kinds of troubles/problems/perturbations should we stay with when researching academic writing for publication?

With regard to the conversation around texts as part of long-running conversations, I feel (fairly) confident that this is an epistemologically productive methodology for studying academic writing for publication, as I have tried to illustrate in the first section of this article. But it is important to point out that such conversation is also an ethically problematic space—both methodologically and epistemologically—and that we must stay with the different troubles/problems/perturbations in order to continue developing our understanding of what is involved and at stake in the practices and politics of academic writing for publication.

A modo de conclusión (por ahora), he aquí algunos *troubles / problemas / lios / perturbaciones* fundamentales con los que creo que debemos comprometernos activamente:

El problema / lío de la escritura académica para la publicación en todo el mundo

Lejos de ser un espacio neutral, una posición muy evidente—en los regímenes dominantes de evaluación de las publicaciones académicas, y en la comercialización del inglés con fines académicos a nivel mundial (a menudo en contradicción con las perspectivas y experiencias de los profesores que trabajan en EAP)—la escritura académica para la publicación es un espacio problemático y preocupante. Tenemos que reconocer y explorar la naturaleza de esta problemática, trabajar para hacer visibles las múltiples dimensiones perturbadoras y explorar creativamente formas en las que nos gustaría participar de manera diferente.

El problema / lío del legado colonial de la etnografía

La etnografía dentro de la antropología tiene una historia colonialista que arroja sombras sobre las metodologías que intentamos utilizar. Al mismo tiempo, podemos reconocer una tradición específica de la etnografía en el estudio de la lengua como «contra hegemonía» (Blommaert, 2006):

By way of conclusion (for now), here are some fundamental *troubles/problems/perturbations* that I believe we must actively engage with:

The trouble/problem of academic writing for publication worldwide
Far from being a neutral space, and given its very obvious position within dominant regimes of academic publication assessment—and in the commercialisation of English for academic purposes worldwide (often at odds with the perspectives and experiences of those working in EAP)—academic writing for publication is a problematic and troubling space. We need to acknowledge and explore the nature of this problematic, work to make its multiple disruptive dimensions visible, and creatively explore ways we might wish to participate differently.

The trouble/problem of the colonial legacy of ethnography
Ethnography within anthropology has a colonialist history that casts shadows over the methodologies we try to use. At the same time, we can recognise a specific tradition of ethnography in the study of language as “counter-hegemonic” (Blommaert, 2006): for example, the rigidity of ideas around bounded notions of “language” and “functions” of language found in many traditions within linguistics has been fundamentally challenged

por ejemplo, la rigidez de las ideas en torno a las nociones delimitadas de «lenguaje» y «funciones» del lenguaje que se encuentran en muchas tradiciones dentro de la lingüística han sido fundamentalmente cuestionadas por la sociolingüística etnográficamente informada (Lillis, 2013) y puede contribuir a la glotopolítica (de Arnoux y Del Valle, 2010; Zavala, 2020). Podemos trabajar de forma creativa con las herramientas conceptuales etnográficas (por ejemplo, *emic / etic* como interrelacionadas y no contrapuestas, ver Kell, 2010).

El problema / lío de la idea de un inglés/lengua franca «estándar», pero también las alegrías del inglés/es, las lenguas, los registros y las voces

El estatus global del inglés, típicamente imaginado como un espacio “English only” refractado a través de regímenes de evaluación, y a menudo anidado en la política de «localidad», conlleva desigualdad, prejuicio y discriminación en la producción e intercambio transnacional de conocimiento, funcionando típicamente como una valla más que como un puente (según Kuteeva, 2023). Al mismo tiempo, el inglés—concebido como registros y voces estilísticamente diversos—constituye un recurso semiótico junto con los múltiples recursos lingüísticos y semióticos globalmente disponibles que juntos facilitan potencialmente la creatividad, el posicionamiento crítico, la alegría y el placer.

by ethnographically informed sociolinguistics (Lillis, 2013) and can contribute to glottopolitics (de Arnoux & Del Valle, 2010; Zavala, 2020). We can work creatively with ethnographic conceptual tools (for example, *emic/etic* as interconnected rather than opposed—see Kell, 2010).

The trouble/problem of the idea of a “standard” English/lengua franca—yet also the joys of English/es, languages, registers, and voices

The global status of English—typically imagined as an “English only” space refracted through evaluation regimes, and often embedded in the politics of “locality”—brings inequality, prejudice, and discrimination into the transnational production and exchange of knowledge, functioning more often as a fence than a bridge (following Kuteeva, 2023). At the same time, English—conceived as stylistically diverse registers and voices—constitutes a semiotic resource alongside the many linguistic and semiotic resources available worldwide, which together can potentially foster creativity, critical positioning, joy, and pleasure.

Podemos trabajar para integrar estos recursos en nuestras propias prácticas de producción y cuestionar las prácticas de evaluación monológicas/monolingüísticas.

El problema / lío que representa la fuerte orientación mononormativa hacia la escritura en general.

Si bien la escritura académica para la publicación sufre de convenciones de producción particularmente rígidas, dicha rigidez está vinculada con orientaciones sociales hacia la escritura en general que la posicionan (histórica y actualmente) como fundamentalmente distinta del lenguaje hablado, como superior a otras modalidades en términos de legitimación del conocimiento, y como un espacio de «prescriptivismo encubierto» (Lillis, 2013, p. 10, adoptando la noción de Cameron, 2012). Incluso en espacios disciplinares que buscan interrumpir la orientación mononormativa hacia el lenguaje y las prácticas semióticas en general—por ejemplo, la sociolingüística—tienden a prevalecer orientaciones rígidas hacia la lengua escrita (Lillis & McKinney, 2013; para «mononormatividad lingüística», véase Blommaert & Horner, 2017; para «anglonormatividad», McKinney, 2017). Podemos trabajar para valorar las modalidades escritas como poderosos recursos epistemológicos para la producción de conocimiento, al mismo tiempo que impulsamos maneras de reimaginar qué cuenta como «escritura» académica.

We can work to integrate these resources into our own production practices and to question monologic/monolingual evaluation practices.

The trouble that is the strongly mononormative orientation towards writing generally

Whilst academic writing for publication suffers from specific rigid conventions of production, such rigidity is bound up with social orientations towards writing more generally which position writing (historically and currently) as fundamentally different from spoken language, as superior to other modalities in terms of legitimising knowledge, and a site of “closet prescriptivism” (Lillis, 2013, p. 10, adopting the notion from Cameron, 2012). Even in disciplinary spaces which seek to disrupt mononormative orientation towards language and semiotic practices more generally, e.g., sociolinguistics, rigid orientations towards written language tend to prevail (Lillis & McKinney, 2013; for “linguistic mononormativity”, see Blommaert & Horner, 2017; for “Anglonormativity”, McKinney, 2017). We can work at valuing written modalities as powerful epistemological resources for knowledge-making whilst at the same time pushing at ways to reimagine what counts as academic “writing”.

El problema/lío que supone creer en la posibilidad de llegar a conocer (sobre) otros y a nosotr@s mism@s

Creo en el valor de realizar investigación empírica—es decir, recopilar una variedad de diferentes tipos de datos para intentar comprender un fenómeno con mayor profundidad. Considero que generar y analizar datos empíricos, como la conversación en torno a textos como parte de diálogos prolongados, es una forma valiosa de evitar la trampa de teorizar la experiencia hasta hacerla desaparecer (algunas de mis inquietudes se recogen en el título de un artículo que leí durante mis estudios doctorales hace muchos años, *Post'Haste: Plodding research and galloping theory*, de McWilliam, 1993, que me ha suscitado todo tipo de preguntas sobre la relación entre «datos» / vidas y teoría, y la necesidad de una «investigación pausada»). Al mismo tiempo, la conversación como diálogo prolongado es un espacio ética y epistemológicamente problemático, cuyas múltiples dimensiones no pueden resolverse simplemente (como ocurre en orientaciones positivistas hacia la producción de conocimiento, donde un relato estrecho de la «metodología» se presenta como la resolución legitimada de todos los problemas).

The trouble that is believing in the possibility of coming to know (about) others and our selves

I believe in the value of doing empirical research—that is, collecting different kinds of data to try and understand a phenomenon more deeply. I think the use of generating and analysing empirical data such as talk around texts as part of long conversations is a valuable way of avoiding the trap of theorising experience out of existence (some of my concerns are captured in the title of an article I read whilst doing doctoral research many years ago, *Post'Haste: Plodding research and galloping theory*, by McWilliam (1993), which has prompted all sorts of questions for me about the relationship between “data”/lives and theory and the need for “plodding research”). At the same time, talk as long conversations is an ethically and epistemologically troublesome space, the many dimensions of which cannot be simply resolved (as in positivistic orientations towards knowledge making where a narrow account of “methodology” is the legitimised resolution of all troubles). We can work at staying with the troubles of who we are and who we are coming to know (geolinguistically, politically, relationally) as a way of reaching some nuanced understanding of an other and ourselves, and of avoiding (over or under) writing their/our experiences, practices and desires.

Podemos trabajar para quedarnos con los problemas / líos de quiénes somos y quiénes estamos llegando a conocer (geolingüísticamente, políticamente, relacionalmente) como una forma de alcanzar cierta comprensión matizada del otro y de nosotr@s mism@s, y de evitar (sobre o infra) representar sus/nuestras experiencias, prácticas y deseos.

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