03

Trialogue / Tryalogue

03

Trialogue / Tryalogue

Anne Storch, Nick Shepherd, Ana Deumert

[in order of appearance]

This has no beginning and no end. A trialogue, which is a conversation among three people, preferably across continents, schedules, and climate zones, is typically not started but continued. It has no first word and no last, and therefore is also not concluded but rather interrupted. One pops in and out. Another feature of the trialogue is its tentativeness: one does not *have* a trialogue, one *tries* a trialogue. And finally, trialogues typically involve the use of special terminology and particular language – not the language normally found in academic papers, but language that transcends it, then comes back to it, only to transcend it again. In other words, the trialogue is a genre that is not disciplinary, or only a bit.

[ANNE] Let me try to explain this a bit better: what strikes me about the collection of papers that are brought together in this volume that we co-edited[1] is that I often found their authors very brave. Look at Bettina Migge's chapter (in our book), to give just one example. She carefully and transparently discusses a particular field of linguistics that really is at the core of the discipline, very much a leading paradigm, "mainstream" if you want, as a field that lacks open, critical, and self-reflexive debates. Such a thing is not at all done in the discipline, especially by those who situate themselves in it – like her, like me, for example. One does not do this. One does not critique the discipline. I think this is also how the discipline is made – conservative, hostile towards self-critique … Hence, writing about it in this new and different way is somehow "dangerous". And this is really interesting, if you consider the potential replies. For example, whenever I am at a conference that has this disciplinary, mainstream setting, which is the case most of the time, I am faced with reactions like, "What do we do with this? How do you make this critique useful? What does this mean to linguistics?" And I was told by colleagues how they experienced a real exclusion after criticizing the discipline. Social death. Such hostile reactions are unproductive. They are the opposite of what the discussion around colonial linguistics wants and needs. Often, these reactions target a person directly: "You are speaking from a very privileged position, with a safe contract at a rich university." And this is largely true. Very difficult. What I therefore find so brave about Bettina's chapter (to remain with the example) is that she includes herself in it – this is not about other people who have long since died, or who live marginalized lives elsewhere, but about her, us, ourselves. And the usual perspective is actually an egocentric one: look at others, write about others. Write about theory. Use proper terminology. And where do we come in then? I think we need to appear somewhere in the text, in order to provide a more complete picture – and we want to remain whole, too, right? One does not want to be easily done away with as a kind of boudoir Marxist, simply because the debates led in that book are important debates. It would be a pity if this remained without reply. So where do I stand, for example? Certainly not in a marginalized position. I have never really been marginalized, but I have, working for many years in a discipline that is based on the marginalization of some (well, many) and the privileging of others (including myself), come to an understanding of what a professional deformation might be – like a violinist who, over the years, develops a little brown spot on the neck. The professional deformations acquired in our disciplines are different from those of violinists, and often not so visible. They concern the ways in which we tend to fail in listening, because we get so busy being right. I find myself overestimating texts – what is this book and trialogue, for example, but a diagnosis? And I find language hard work: language not as something that brings me and others together, but as something that is brought under control, that I am supposed to own, to be an expert in, et cetera. This is very alienating, as is my inability to properly own and possess and control. Language, like the body, is so fundamentally a part of the Self, and yet, within this

[1] Deumert, Storch, Shepherd (eds.), *Colonial and Decolonial Linguistics: Knowledges and Epistemes.* Oxford University Press, 2020.

discipline, it is made into something that is located almost completely outside it. I assume that these three make linguistics-as-a-discipline quite deforming: an egocentric perspective on language (and humanity, perhaps), alienation, and hostility towards self-critique. But once I reflect on it, it becomes an interesting journey (to where I don't know), and I play some more music, louder than before.

[NICK] Anne, I like your image of the disciplinary process as a kind of deformation of the thinking and embodied self. This is how I think of it … For seven or ten years we put ourselves through the arduous process of becoming disciplinary subjects of a particular kind, acquiring the right vocabulary, mastering the key terms (I think of this as a gendered process), reading the approved texts, learning the appropriate methods, learning what we can and cannot say, ask, and do, and so on. In the case of archaeology, this induction into a disciplinary habitus is far-reaching and extends to matters of dress, taste, how we style ourselves; a deeply embodied and affective relationship (archaeological style is often a version of colonial "safari" style). This is never a "total" process, of course, but it takes us a long way down the road in our sense of ourselves and our relation to the discipline, as a relation of identification. Like reformed alcoholics we stand up in public meetings to introduce ourselves and say: "Hello, I'm Nick, I'm an archaeologist …" This broad conception of the disciplinary process draws from the work of Foucault, and as with Foucault's conception of discipline it is double edged, in the sense that it has both a productive and an unproductive side. On the one hand, it creates (interpolates, brings into being) a community of scholars who share a common basis of understanding and can move rapidly to address a set of questions. We've read the same texts, we share the same key words and understandings, we share core assumptions, and so on. On the other hand, it has the effect of closing off certain avenues of investigation, and delimiting what is say-able, do-able, and think-able. Archaeology, for example, is full of no-go areas for archaeologists: questions of imagination and desire in archaeological interpretations, questions of affect in response to archaeological sites and materials, deeper reflections on histories of disciplinary practice, reflections on contemporary entanglements with transnational mining capital, and so on. Where, historically, disciplines have been shaped by colonial worlds of practice, as in the case of linguistics and archaeology, these no-go areas become quite pointed: disciplinary entanglements with questions of race, the recapitulation of colonial relations between practitioners in the global north and the global south / east, deeply rooted notions of "the field" and "fieldwork", and so on.

Opening the decolonial option in disciplines like archaeology and linguistics involves, in part, a work of undisciplining or undisciplinarity, which I think of as a kind of work on the self. Again, of course, this is never a "total" process, but something continuous, provisional, unfinished, and ongoing. Adopting an embodied image, I think of this as trying to achieve a shift in perspective of the thinking and doing self, so that one stands with one foot inside the discipline and one foot outside it – or perhaps one hops between different subject positions? – so that one can think and practice as a certain kind of disciplinary subject but at the same time one can see oneself doing so, so that one asks the next question (the meta-ques-

tion): Why I am doing this? Who benefits? How could I think/ do this differently? This is one iteration of what the decolonial thinkers mean by "border thinking".

Anne, the other crucial point that you make is about the costs involved in staging this kind of break, and what this means for scholars at different points in their careers. In my experience, the discipline of archaeology is quite ruthless about policing its boundaries and its core investments in a certain conception of knowledge and the disciplinary process. Disciplines exist as far more than structures of ideas and practices, they exist as transnational institutions, deeply vested in university structures, professional bodies, the publication industry, and in public and popular culture. For established scholars like the three of us, there is probably less at stake, apart from the discomfort of, as you say, a certain kind of "social death". Perhaps we even earn kudos in certain circles for staging this kind of critique, bearing in mind that we are doing so in a very conservative and recognizable format, obeying all of the rules of the form. For younger scholars there is more at stake in that they risk running up against the institutional power of the discipline, expressed in myriad ways: failure to get a job, failure to get tenure, difficulty in finding publication, shunning by colleagues, the terrible gossipy sense in which someone gets identified as being a problem. What I would say, though, is that we have reached a certain historical juncture where it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to blindly follow the strictures of the disciplines, and where so much has been thrown into question: the role of universities as institutions, what counts as knowledge, the historical sources of knowledge. Such a moment encourages "epistemic disobedience" as Walter

Mignolo puts it, and perhaps we can all draw courage from that?

[ANA] I want to start by reflecting back on something Anne mentioned, that language is hard work. It very much is. Words – to quote from F.R. David's song – "don't come easy to me". Writing is struggle and achievement, and often so is speaking or signing – a dialogue that falters and turns into conflict. There is a wish to reach out and establish relations, but often we remain surrounded by invisible walls, caught up in insularity. Yet, sometimes, miraculously, a word that we utter, write, or sign is heard or seen, appreciated, taken up, a dialogue – or trialogue – emerges that is not only intellectually rewarding but also sociable and emotionally nourishing. What fascinates me about language is not its structure, but the ability of words – understood as ill-defined sequences of sounds, gestures, or inscriptions – to enter into and transform relationships. And here, questions of imagination, desire, and affect, which are – as Nick observes – kept outside of the borders of "mainstream linguistics" or "mainstream archaeology", are essential, not marginal. They cannot be no-go areas.

I stand in an odd and strange relationship to linguistics, the discipline. Even though I work in a linguistics department and teach a curriculum that is called "linguistics", most of my academic training was outside of linguistics. It was in literature and philosophy, philology and history. My PhD was in Linguistics, but only because a highly unconventional and slightly maverick professor decided to take me on as a student, even though I had no real training in the discipline. I still marvel at why he agreed and how all this was possible, why the gates of the discipline were not closed into

my face. It is because of this that I have always felt a bit of a stranger; I have never, not for one moment, had a sense of actual belonging, of being inside the discipline. I was always waiting for someone who would look at me and say "but you aren't really a linguist, you aren't one of us, you are just dabbling in it". Imposter syndrome, maybe, but a particular version of it, grounded in my personal history and my positionality. Biography matters; as Anne says, we need to appear somewhere in the text. Another aspect of my own positionality is a deep and fundamental sense of being unmoored, not only in the discipline, but also in terms of my everyday living, my life. I always felt a stranger in Germany, where I was born, was a stranger in Australia, where I worked for a short while, and I remain in some ways a stranger still in South Africa, even after twenty odd years. Stranger. It is a good word. It stops one from ever feeling too comfortable, it reminds one that we survive because of the hospitality and kindness of others, it is an identity that allows one to dwell on the border, to inhabit the border, and, indeed, to build a make-shift house at the border. So perhaps I feel differently about the discipline of linguistics because I never belonged – I was always outside looking in. As I am writing this, I am reading the work of José Esteban Muñoz (*Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 2013), who suggests that we should focus less on our desire to identify with something ("I am a linguist/archeologist/academic/mathematician/…"), and instead reflect on the productive possibilities of disidentification, on its transformative potential. Disidentification is, in the words of Muñoz, the practice of "cracking open the code of the majority" (and we might add "the code of the discipline"), and using this code as material for presenting, and reflecting on, the unthinkable and the unsayable. For me this captures the project of this volume.

[ANNE] I think this is a very inspiring perspective. Disidentification and undisciplining are wonderful to consider – and they belong together in a way, I suppose. But they are also complicated, because they are so ambiguous. For, to say what is not supposed to be said, to tread on mined ground, to feel one's own strangeness, are very personal actions and reflections, even though they have a public effect on where we are placed professionally and how we might be seen by others. As you say, Nick, this is social death that can earn one some nods of respect. And of course, the safari dress that you mention was once, I assume, part of a performance of academic disobedience (not a suit and tie but survival gear) as well. Pants with a zip at knee height. Have you thought about their symbolism? Fascinating: this is about having just one pair of pants, which can turn into shorts when it gets hot. Suffering, always all this suffering: almost sacrificing oneself for all this research, this search for wisdom. The field is a mystical place, where we claim to be remade, are shown secrets, and so on. This is where we can also become strangers. The expert as divine fool is located somewhere there. I like your idea about the academic stranger though, Ana, as a different stranger, more human, not defined as a remote expert. This different strangeness can be productive, liberating, and creative. This also is something that I felt was present in the various chapters of our volume: Ingo Warnke's reading of Paul, for example. If one looks at it a bit closer, it has much to do with the courage to say what is not to be said.

[ANA] I am also thinking about the difference of that which is "not to be said" (a kind of a normative prohibition), but which is "sayable" (even though saying it is a transgression), and that which is truly "unsayable" because the forces of repression have been so successful in suppressing thoughts and ideas, so that we cannot even think it. How can we articulate the "unsayable"?

[ANNE] Somewhere in her work on southern theory, Raewyn Connell writes "But the truth will out". I remember it well, because it impressed me in its unequivocal clarity, in the way it suddenly appears in her text. I am thinking about repression in knowledge production and its link with secrecy. Walter Benjamin's ideas about the public secret, and Michael Taussig's almost shamanist approach to it emphasize – in different ways – that the stronger repression gets (and the more powerful the forces of repression are), the more needs to be revealed: even though secrecy is the base of power, the instruments and fetishes of power can be shown. Only by *knowing* that there is this terror lurking underneath the apocalyptic blanket does one understand the overwhelming power of the secret. Repression has much to do with this ambiguous secrecy which reveals what it hides. But these glimpses at what is hidden are at the same time revealing: there is possibly nothing at all. And this is where silliness comes in, where laughing at the empty space underneath happens. Out of a sudden, for a short moment: *The unsayable is laughable*.

[ANA] I think often that the unsayable is not laughable but frightening; it affects us at the core of our being, it shakes us. I write this just a week after the Kavenaugh hearings in the United States, the testimony of Christine Ford, and the haunting memory of the testimony of Anita Hill. There is no laughter there, only horror – and anger – at the violence of human-against-human. This violence shapes so much of our history and being; symbolic violence and physical violence. Maybe we need to think more about anger – as a healthy response to violence and trauma, to the unsayable.

[ANNE] Ana, I couldn't agree with you more. I'm writing this a few days after these women have been publicly mocked by their head of state at a press conference. As I was watching the news, I thought, why don't they (reporters, public servants, security people) all simply leave the room, with a shrug. When all this anger doesn't reach those concerned, what remains? And this is what I mean: the unsayable cannot be said, maybe because it remains unconscious, and even if it is said, the words might not reach anybody who will hear. In my previous work, I have been interested in the unspeakable and the secret, and the ways in which people who were made to suffer from oppression, terror, and violence might express themselves. There is noise, yelling, speech-as-unintelligible-speech, and a bitter laugh. In other words, I think the unsayable will out, and even if it might remain unspeakable, it can be made noisy, yellable, laughable, movable. Laughter as a trickster's laughter, maybe, not as an expression of happiness. Surely not. I think the distinction between the unsayable and what one is not permitted to say is clear. So what I meant is that if we are working with strategies of decolonization, un-disciplining, unruliness, etc., we have this option: make the unsayable laughable (or yellable, whatever), so that it somehow comes into

the open, instead of remaining internalized. I am thinking about knowledge production and academic disciplining as I write this, but I believe one cannot stop there – you are right – because how does one draw a line between the politics of power in politics, in academia, and elsewhere?

[NICK] I like the line of Connell's – "But the truth will out" – partly because it seems optimistic, and even nostalgic, looking back to a time when we could rally around such an idea, confident that the truth would be heard and recognized as such. I wonder whether that is still the case? As you both say, there is something obscene about contemporary public / political discourse, as embodied by Trump and others. The truth is mocked and derided, and public figures revel in their ignorance and their untruth and are rewarded for it by their followers. I guess this is germane to the business of our volume, in that Trump's obscenity is partly about the obscenity of a certain kind of rhetoric: bullying, carping, name-calling, ranting. Excessive speech acts … the performance of rage … and such a woman-hater, so misogynistic.

I wanted to pose a different set of questions by asking you both how you interpret (or live, or understand) your own positionality, and how this is mediated through your work and writing? What I mean is, do you think of yourselves as a certain kind of writing (reading, thinking) subject, and how does this appear (or disappear) in your work? What kinds of terms would you use to describe your positionality? Is race important? Gender? Class? Nationality? Other things?

I'm asking partly because I find that I am always interested in reading or hearing some-

one having an understanding of the place from which they are writing. Also, position, perspective, and experience seem like such important terms. At the same time, I really don't like it when someone assumes that they can sum me up based on ideas of race, gender, etc., which happens all the time in South Africa. For me, a really salient descriptor of position is global north / global south, which is close to what the decolonial thinkers call the "colonial difference", a kind of ratio inserted into history. Do you find the same thing? Or perhaps you think of your position differently, using other descriptors and locators? I recently made the professional journey from South Africa to Denmark, when I relocated from the University of Cape Town to Aarhus University, so these questions are on my mind at present. My friend Alejandro Haber talks about the "home address of theory", meaning what is the site from which this theory / set of ideas addresses itself? What is its stated (or unstated) home? At the back of my mind is the idea that working together as an editorial team is quite tricky, and one of the tricky things for the three of us has been to work out our different home addresses, and then to be respectful of this difference.

[ANNE] Hm. Hmhmhm. These questions call for some kind of ambiguous reply; it depends on where we are asked and by whom. Gender, class, and race identify me and they don't. Positionality is such a relational word, and yet the current debates about gender, class, and race often reduce these three to totalitarian concepts. I find it hard to take part in many of them, and I find it hard to see people that way: nobody is simply a woman, white, middle-class, and German

(these would be terms used by others characterizing me). One is also a particular body that one is used to and that has no color, no gender (being a woman at nineteen is totally different from being a woman at fifty; what does "woman" mean anyway?), and no class (consider middle class as a social parameter: when I grew up, we were middle class, and now, I still am middle class – but such a change of values, practices, appearances). In short, I do not want to describe myself (my positionality) using these totalitarian terms. I am that I am and I try my best to see persons in others too. I try to stay away from bubbled academia. I like it to be open. And the word "open" is also about place. To me, it means to actually accept the ways in which place scripts us. We are positioned and placed, and to me it is through traveling or wandering or searching that we can encounter different possibilities.

[ANA] Obviously, in the world in which we live race, class, and gender matter, as do sexuality and age – the list can go on. But as Anne says, these concepts are also totalitarian – and we have been conditioned to give certain answers to them, to read them in particular ways. Yet we also challenge them at every moment: we acknowledge their discursive nature, while we also recognize the very real effects they have on people's lives. But do they describe my positionality? Can they capture the "me" that sits here writing? And is this "me" even a stable entity, something that I can – in this moment – describe to you, my colleagues, and an unknown reader out there? Won't this description be out-dated by the time the book is in print and so much about me has changed again? So maybe I will stay with the idea of the stranger, the one who is inside and outside, visible and invisible, familiar and unknown.

A SHORT INTERRUPTION MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE AT THIS MOMENT.

At the beginning of this trialogue, there were four themes, questions, actually, brought up by Nick, after we had already had a discussion that took place largely in the margins of papers. The first two of these questions have inspired our previous trialogue quite a bit:

I. Contexts of professional practice in linguistics: there has been lots of discussion around how linguistics works as a discipline, how it disciplines its agents, the particular race and gender dynamics at work, how women in particular are penalized and policed as they navigate professional worlds, what it means to speak out or adopt a dissenting position. Also about the relative lack of reflexivity or debate within the discipline, particularly around colonial / imperi-

al histories. So, how does one navigate these professional contexts of practice, and how does one do so at different career stages: as a junior scholar, as a senior scholar, as a woman, as a scholar in the global north etc.? And the bigger question, how does the apparatus of discipline shut down debate, or police its own limits?

[ANA] I am wondering whether we should broaden the debate, beyond scholarship and research, and focus, equally, on the undergraduate curriculum, which introduces thousands of students to the so-called "discipline"? What are we teaching and why? When we change our scholarly practice, are we also changing our curricula, our pedagogies, our criteria for assessment? What would a decolonial linguistics first year course look like? What would a decolonial university look like? Or maybe it is an oxymoron, maybe the university is always colonial, and we would need what Buaventura de Sousa Santos calls a "pluriversity"? And what is the role of relation in all this — I am thinking of Edouard Glissant's work here, of Sylvia Wynter's work on "being human as praxis". How do work and study relate to play and experience?

[ANNE] And where would we do all this teaching? Still in the white cube, or away from it all? Will students visit me at home? I could buy stackable chairs for the occasion. Could we please stop giving grades then? Do away with the competition and the measuring, and concentrate on humanity and hospitality? Or is this foolish? What do I know. I think, here, the effects of both prohibition and repression are saliently obvious. The instruments of knowledge production and transmission are so closely connected to the state (in the sense of the modern state, the nation state, the colonial state) that they always also have something to do with control, exerting power over others, transforming the subject: making workers / monolinguals / public servants / permanent populations. Therefore, a decolonized curriculum might be a curriculum that encourages heteroglossic practices, alternative literacies, and personal interaction in a much wider space than that of the seminar room.

II. Questions of positionality: a related set of questions ... What does it mean to practise in the global north / south / east, as a gendered and raced being, as a being bearing a particular nationality or subscribing to a particular religion? Linguistics as a discipline seems to have a peculiar white / protestant ethos or habitus (is this fair?) and certainly has a sense of itself as proceeding from the

global north / west and treating the rest of the world as a field site (is this fair?). Maybe these geographical imaginaries are some of the most lingeringly colonial aspects of the discipline? So what does it mean to navigate these different worlds? And how does it affect the opportunities or possibilities for dissent and critique? How is linguistics underdeveloped in particular ways in some locations, and what does this mean for scholars and students?

[ANNE] I once more think of silliness, as something that can crack open the code of the majority. Silliness, in a very interesting twist, helps to lay open the ways in which linguistics creates particular silences and shuts out those who do not say the appropriate things, use appropriate terminologies, are appropriately positioned, dressed, combed, qualified. To me, there is a form of silencing that reaches beyond those powers of exclusion that have been addressed in debates on racism and gender inequalities. Colonial ruination is an ongoing process that affects all our good intentions, a deeply unhuman condition in which the annihilation of speech (the creation of a non-discursive environment) and the exoticization (exorcism, almost) of the "deep" in language, the power of the word, take place. Therefore, I think it might make sense to address both earnestness and fear as things that keep disciplinary power formations and imperial geographies of silence firmly in place. A "decolonial linguistics", which is an odd term, would be concerned with hospitality — towards strangers, mostly.

[ANA] I think Nick asks us here to be upfront about the place of enunciation that we occupy and live — and as I was reflecting on it, I was wondering about feminist and queer theory and its relation to the decolonial. As Isis Giraldo (2016) noted: "The core concepts of the decolonial option have all been developed by men, and none of these men is directly concerned with feminist theory". Linguistics too has long been a very "male" and indeed a very heteronormative discipline. In other words, to whom should we be hospitable?

The other two questions brought up by Nick seem to lead to a kind of solution, a way forward, healing, perhaps:

  III. What would a decolonial linguistics look like? It's really important to address this question or at least offer some discussion. There are hints here and there in the papers. What are the implications of a project

of identifying, codifying, and fixing "languages", and how might this project be differently imagined? There has been some fascinating discussion around the inbuilt resistance of languages, the potentialities of poetry, especially when unintended, around creolisation and hybridisation, around the mobility of language practices and new technologies etc. So is it possible to offer something a little more direct and definitive? Or is this too prescriptive, and is it better to leave things open ended?

[ANNE] I assume that all the alternatives of a fixing, codifying linguistics — a death-seeking science — have never been fully erased. It is our task to take them seriously as equally important ways of looking at language. I also think that this implies that there is no HERE or THERE, no NORTHERN or SOUTHERN which does not already form part of its imagined antagonistic counterpart. There is complexity and messiness that pervades all this fixing and counting (consider Ingo Warnke's contribution to our book). One of Luigi Nono's last compositions, dedicated to Andrej Tarkovskij, was inspired by an inscription the composer read on the wall of an old monastery in Toledo: *Caminante, no hay caminos. Hay que caminar.* 'Wayfarer, there is no path. Yet you must walk.' I think the music is beautiful beyond words, and its title has been in my thoughts and thinking since a long time. It is my reply to Nick's question.

[ANA] I like this: 'There is no path, yet you must walk.' Or as the Zapatistas say, *pregundando caminamos*, 'asking we walk'. We need this openness as we walk, the wide open sky above us, clouds and winds, the sound of birds, because even as "academics" — what a strange word — we still walk in this world, not up and down the steps in some imagined ivory tower. Walking is physical, not merely cognitive, it is linked to experience, to movement, and it is, as De Certeau reminds us, a tactic.

IV. The politics of theory: there has been some interesting discussion around the kind of strategic politics of theory, how different theoretical projects come into vogue, how they position themselves, how they intervene in different ways in different settings, etc. So maybe we want to think about decolonial thinking in this vein, and about southern theory and postcolonial theory. One way of reading the decolonial critique is as the end of linguistics (or archaeology, or anthropology), or at least as requiring a comprehensive remaking / reimagining of the discipline, a kind of undisciplining,

or a linguistics after linguistics — yet many scholars treat it as just another new "theory", part of the pick-and-mix of theoretical options available to the well-read academic. Also, what does it mean when decolonial thinkers join the celebrity circuit? Does this not imply that they see themselves as part of the apparatus, or at least that they enjoy the celebrity exposure and access as they ritually castigate the disciplines from within the high ceremonial spaces of the disciplines?

[ANNE] I think that this is a crucial question. The ways in which southern theory is produced and presented are currently becoming deeply inhospitable. A lot of exclusion takes place here, of those who lead academic discourse in languages other than the colonial ones (and yet have a lot to say), who have no funds to visit the important (and therefore costly) conferences, and who are not part of this new "discipline". This speaks in favour of Nick's assumption — ritual castigation of the disciplines, but not opening them up.

Therefore, can we think about hospitality here once more? And form a more open community?
But this is more difficult than it might seem: we will need to understand that when we speak of the Other colleague, the thinker "outside", the stranger, the southern theorist, we always also mean ourselves (unconsciously or on purpose, depending on the context), us-as-Other, as strangers in a difficult (often hostile) professional environment. Speaking about the (disadvantaged) Other is very much a discourse on the (alienated) Self. How do we bring this into southern theory debates to make them intellectually more responsible?

[ANA] As I am thinking about the term "decolonial thinkers" I am struck by its euphemistic nature — thinkers, free spirits. But most "decolonial thinkers", whether celebrated or not, are, in the end, wage labourers in an increasingly capitalist system, the so-called "neoliberal" (another euphemism) university. But what about others? May a spoken-word poet not also be a decolonial thinker? A farmer, a worker in a mine? Do we even need the academy? Maybe we are celebrating the wrong people.

Back to where we were.

[NICK] Ana, you mentioned earlier the idea of disidentification, and the kinds of freedom that it implies. When I was a student at the University of Cape Town, Edward Said came to give a talk. This was shortly after 1994, and it felt like the whole world was passing through, to pay their respects, as it were, and to celebrate the changes that had taken place in South African society. Said drew on his recent publication, *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), to talk about his understanding of what it meant to be an academic and an intellectual, and he had some beautiful things to say, which I have always held onto. At one point he talked about the difference between the professional and the amateur, and he spoke in favor of a kind of amateurism of approach, understanding how too much "professionalization" can be a trap. He also used the image of "the traveler and the potentate" (Ana, you write about the power of words: I really like his use of this slightly arcane word, "potentate"). Some colleagues – we all have them – set themselves up as mini-potentates. They delineate their little patch, and then lord over it, attacking all of those who have the temerity to stray into their domain. I imagine them strutting about and thrusting out their chests. Said spoke in favor of a notion of the intellectual as a kind of traveler, humble, restless, curious, not afraid to stray, dependent on the hospitality of others, a giver and receiver of kindness. Anne, this puts me in mind of what you say about the importance of being hospitable, which I like very much. I was at UCT for a long time, both as a student and

as an academic, and for much of my time there it was a curiously inhospitable environment. I was fortunate in having a few close colleagues with whom I could talk about ideas, but for the most part it was a matter of "How do I survive in this environment?" This also puts me in mind of a passage by Walter Mignolo, where he writes about the costs of "epistemic disobedience". He says: "Decolonial thinking can be done within existing academic structures but is not a way of thinking that will have enthusiastic support of the administration or accumulate grants and fellowships. It can be done however within the academia through courses, seminars, workshops, mentoring students and working with colleagues who have the same conviction" (2013: 137–8). I like this idea of "colleagues who have the same conviction". I think of them as "interlocutors", and I am always on the look-out for such people. Most disciplinary colleagues do not fill this role – for this reason I seldom attend the big professional conferences on archaeology – but working around the edges of the discipline, or subversively inhabiting its interior, are some fabulously interesting and original people.

Anne, you introduce the notion of silliness, which I really like. In my current work, I have grown increasingly interested in playfulness as a method and a register. I think of playfulness not as the opposite of seriousness, but rather as an index or measure of seriousness. Some subjects are so serious (or painful or unsettling) that they are best approached through playful means, obliquely. This reminds me of Ana's comments about the importance of poetry, and about the playful potentials that you both find in language. I would be interested to hear more about this. There are so many moments in this line of work which just seem silly, and then

there are moments when things turn deadly serious. I think of this as a particular state of affairs – silly/ serious – which increasingly comes to define my understanding of what I do. I find that I care too much, or I don't care at all, and I quite enjoy both sides of this response.

[ANNE] I would say, silliness is not really the opposite of being serious. It is quite serious, for example because it is based on profound knowledge. All these very small traces, short remarks, and single words thrown into the conversation which, in a metonymic way, stand for so much meaning and so much thinking, knowledge, and so on are what makes silliness complex and demanding. It looks playful, but only because it has this enormous performative quality. You were speaking about unlearning and undisciplining before. I think this is one of the things silliness does. We need to know our field really well and obtain considerable standing in it to be able to unlearn. Silliness is a very performative form of unlearning, but it differs from it insofar as it is very particular form of protest – a way of saying that the strategies of control, competition, and oppression are *also known*, and that they are not acceptable. You might want to remark that laughter is always a powerful form of communicating disapproval, but I would say that here it is different; the laughter in performances of silliness is not so much directed at the Other, but at the Self. It is not very vain – look at Jimmie Durham's art, for example. Very simple, just revealing what's behind the curtain, because the truth will out. Silliness is based on the deep knowledge of what is underneath. It is about saying this without fear, and softly smiling at the triumphant arch as it falls down (it might as well remain standing there, why not?). The

play with decontextualization, destruction as a possibility, the absence of fear of *that* public secret – this is what silliness works with. This is crucial. Silliness doesn't even ask us to destroy anything (triumphant arches, statues, capitalism), because in its emergence (or practice) there is already the potential that these things have begun to destroy themselves (the death-seeking system, the crumbling colonial monuments). It is the sign that the paradigm shift is well under way, that there is nothing behind that door, that it is all just a lie. Or a tale. Another interesting aspect of silliness is that it is very hospitable. I'm not laughing at anybody, but at my own (newly achieved) dumbness. All these traces in my silliness, of monumentally important books, intellectual movements, acquired academic knowledge (and so on) also create curiosity. They are inviting others to learn more, or to ask more. And then one might discover something, perhaps place it in a new context, make it meaningful in different ways. All this then is no longer hegemonic knowledge. It is still there (and why not), but no longer as a totalitarian thing; just one possibility among others. Of course, I'm not the only person who has ever thought about this, and perhaps my thinking makes no sense to some anyway. Oh, I could cite books and articles and handbooks to supply the reader with helpful materials on silliness, but I don't know if we have a reference section in the trialogue. Does this genre have references? Are there footnotes? What do I know? Is it fine if I write "trialogue", or should it be "tryalogue"? Perhaps I can insert a picture?

[NICK] My partner is a dancer, and one of the forms that she practices is a form of improvisational dance where there is no set script.

nature of the setting (or perhaps this is a superior kind of institution?). I am a boarding school boy, so I remember those lines of beds, the way of folding the sheets just so, that we called "hospital corners", the two pillows stacked at the head of the bed, as though no human head ever touched them: horrible, inhuman, tyrannical, obsessed. In this image the tyranny is tempered by mystery, leaving open a space for wonder. Here is another word association: "the hall of theory". Such a space invites silliness, irreverence, laughter, and loud voices.

She says that part of the artfulness of this form lies in being able to find an ending, a graceful way to close off the performance. I mention this because it seems to me that part of the purpose of this trialogue lies in helping us to find an ending to a project that has involved each of us with different degrees of intensity for several years. Anne's image prompt is a beautiful way to help us to find an ending, and so, without thinking too much about this, here are my associations and ideas. I think of the phrase "antechamber of the soon-to-be dead". There is something institutional about the image, with its lines of beds: a ward, a space of confinement, a space of recovery (all of these words are loaded, overdetermined, slightly creepy). The radiators in the center of the room (are they radiators?) seem potent and mysterious, functional shrines. The tiles on the walls, the delicate patterning, the vaulted ceiling, and of course the light – the mystery of a doorway that leads into other rooms, other worlds – belie the institutional

[ANA] I looked at the picture for a long time – I never went to boarding school, so maybe this is why it does not move me? Does not resonate? But then I started wondering, what if we were to move the beds outside, create a big open space, dance in it. Or if we put the mattresses on top of one another and build a trampoline? A frivolous end to a serious book? But somehow I like the idea of the three of us and all our contributors jumping on one big trampoline. And once we are tired we walk out of that door, we walk, we travel, we keep asking questions.