

**abstract**

*This paper addresses alternative models for a reflexive methodology and examines the ways in which doctoral students have appropriated these texts in their theses. It then considers the indeterminate qualities of those appropriations. The paper offers a new account of reflexivity as 'picturing', drawing analogies from the interpretation of two very different pictures, by Velázquez and Tshibumba. It concludes with a more open and fluid account of reflexivity, offering the notion of 'signature', and drawing on the work of Gell and also Deleuze and Guattari in relation to the inherently specific nature of 'concepts' situated in space and time.*

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## REFLEXIVITY, THE PICTURING OF SELVES, THE FORGING OF METHOD

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*'The apparatus of reason would not be complete unless it swept itself into its own analysis of the field of experience' (G.H. Mead 1934/1962: 138).*

*'There are two styles of philosophers: eg and ie philosophers – illustrators and explicators. Illustrators trust, first and foremost, striking examples, in contrast with explicators, who trust, first and foremost, definitions and general principles' (Margalit 2002: ix).*

### introduction

The histories of reflexivity are many and various. There is a ghostly 'positivist' account that seeks origins in scientific warrants, analogically derived (eg Heisenberg). If the scientific observer has to be regarded as part of the experiment, then all the more complicit will be the observer bent on social inquiry. Then there is the reflexivity which would seek to locate itself within a community of researchers, including scientists. In this account, promoted by the SSK group (eg Woolgar 1988, Ashmore 1989, Latour 1988), the socially constructed nature of all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, requires that we introduce a reflexive dimension to accounts of its 'discovery', and indeed that we regard metaphors of 'discovery' as themselves the epistemological deceptions of a correspondence theory. Again, we might turn to Macbeth's analytic notion of 'positional reflexivity' (Macbeth 2001: 37) wherein attempts are made – often confessionally – to align 'methodological rigor with a critically disciplined subjectivity' (ibid: 39). Macbeth also considers a contrasting 'textual reflexivity' that reflects the well-known 'linguistic turn' in anthropology (eg Marcus & Cushman 1982, Clifford & Marcus 1986, Rosaldo 1987). A fourth alternative is offered by Macbeth in relation to an ethnomethodological return to 'essential indexicality' (Macbeth 2001: 49), whereby reflexivity is identified as the everyday resource of individuals in society. Foley, indeed, offers a typology of various reflexive approaches even though such an analytical strategy is itself a way of taking sides, epistemologically speaking (Foley 2002). Denzin opts for a more decidedly performative reflexivity (Denzin 2003). All of these approaches differ, but as both Macbeth and Foley concede, are not always distinct. Our approach in this article will be eclectic, combining aspects of textualist and performative approaches, and avoiding static labelling. We envisage reflexivity

as dynamic, a Deleuzian 'concept', or signature as we eventually argue it. More practically, we will be looking at the 'ambivalent practices of reflexivity' (Davies et al. 2004: 360-389). Unlike Davies et al, however, we will draw not on ourselves as evidence of reflexive practice but on the reflexive practices of doctoral candidates whose theses reflect the ways in which they chose to appropriate reflexive methodological texts. To our knowledge, reflexivity has not been studied 'empirically' in this way. Finally, we will return to the problem of reflexive 'modality': if there cannot be a model, or models for reflexivity, then what can be said about the enterprise in terms of 'sensitizing' rather than 'prescribing' (Guillemin & Gillam 2004: 278)? Can reflexivity be made to *perform* in heuristic ways, even if it cannot be de- or pre-scribed? In the fluid metaphors of Deleuze, '[t]he only question is how anything works, with its intensities, flows, processes, partial objects..' (Deleuze 1995: 22).

### constructing reflexive selves

We begin by offering a brief sketch of three different 'models' of reflexivity, offered to educational researchers at MMU as methodological warrants and methodical guides. These are somewhat encapsulated and no doubt parodic, but we are interested here in how these reflexive positions were appropriated by doctoral 'users' rather than in the detail of the original arguments<sup>1</sup>. The progenitor of the reflexive series for present purposes was Peshkin, who in 1988 offered an account of the reflexive researcher as comprising, in his case, six segments. These 'multiple I's offered access to founding prejudices or dispositions that could be addressed by the researcher in ongoing self-scrutiny. An obvious criticism was that they also depended on an unexplicated transcendental position that allowed him to look down on these selves from nowhere, as it were. Arguably this was a rather masculinist and mechanistic management of reflexivity, based on a realist option. In doctoral workshop, it was dubbed the Clockwork Orange. Heshusius (1994:18) later criticised this model. Instead of segments, she proposed a fusion of I and Thou, the 'selfother' (sic) of a 'participatory consciousness'. To workshop participants this often seemed a better mnemonic than it was a heuristic. Clearly it

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<sup>1</sup> The first of the MMU doctoral training sessions, 'Reflexivity Workshop', June 1996, featured the following readings, some of which were articles, some single chapters or excerpts: McRobbie (1993), Meyerhoff and Ruby (1992), Peshkin (1988), Heshusius (1994), Frankel (1991) Ashmore (1989), Cassell (1991), Lenzo (1994), Escobar (1993), Calvino (1965/1993), Lather (1993), Plummer (extract of unpublished PhD, 1996), Allan (extract of unpublished PhD 1995), Ball (1993). Participants were asked to select and read beforehand one or two texts; small group sessions shared knowledge of, and insight into, the texts; plenary sessions developed overall themes and possible 'positions'. The sample of users comprised completed doctoral dissertations from those attending such seminars since 1996. The account here represents the divergence of responses rather than any typicality. It does so because we are interested in how the chosen methodological texts were deployed, in a range of appropriations.

was more of a phenomenological option, and one we nicknamed the Ontological Omelette. The final commentator was Lenzo (1994). She offered neither a segmentary self nor a self-other fusion. Instead, she invoked a kind of anti-model, talking the language of transgression and incompleteness by citing Lather. This was certainly a poststructuralist option with some version of a 'fractured-I' (Deleuze 1994: 145) - we called it Humpty Dumpty. Arguably there are many other 'reflexive' papers we could have referred to, but we are concerned with those which most strongly resonated with, and were appropriated by, our PhD students. How were these various methodological texts taken up? If we are to be reflexive about reflexivity, and there seems no choice, then we need to ask 'what does reflexivity *do*, as well as *mean*?' (an illocutionary concern in Austin's terms, 1962/1989), and 'what would be a reflexive approach to such enactments?' (a prescriptive rather than descriptive ambition). A neglected way of getting into these issues is empirical (compare Young 2001) – to look at the ways in which doctoral students, exposed to texts such as Peshkin, Heshusius and Lenzo, have responded.

The first surprise is the great range of legitimating strategies engendered by these founding texts, given that each aims to prescribe and proscribe 'approaches' to reflexive educational inquiry. Starting from Peshkin's 'multiple-I', which posited a segmented self, managing its various manifestations within the research process; several launched a retrospective and ongoing search for the self engaged in the creation of data and text. In some cases, the researcher was seen as an 'emerging' self (Plummer, 1996: 1), the youngest of the 'voices' (ibid: 3). Accordingly, she also learned from overlapping selves, such as the 'counsellor' and the 'teacher', or the 'mother' and 'principal' in Ārculj's case (2003). It was a self, therefore, 'still being created and re-created' in the research process (ibid. 2003: 97). There was also a dutiful scrutiny of segmented selves whose 'thwarting biases' (Plummer 1996: 9) were subject to retrospective analysis, such as Koren's (2002) self-diagnosis of a 'professional-I' making assumptions about interpretation ahead of the data. The latter expressed the disabling ghosts of familiarity in relation to the subject of the inquiry, while the former amounted to the sorts of 'enabling' selves that Peshkin largely had in mind. Others interpreted Peshkin rather differently by identifying the conscious generation of a series of research selves *within* the acts of research itself, rather than as accompanying selves to that process. For Allan (1995: 52) 'the marginal/subversive' role was an ongoing Garfinkel-like subterfuge, a style of research

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<sup>2</sup> Peshkin reported the experience of 'stumbling' upon his subjectivity – then deciding this was something he wanted to avoid.

engagement necessary for the generation of a Foucauldian perspective on inclusion while simultaneously conducting government-funded empirical evaluation. The perspective dictated a certain *ethical* duplicity, or so she intended. This self was generative, strategically both open and closed to its interlocutors, and eventually in the thesis a self-confessed 'undercover agent'.

So segmented selves were all subject to some kind of inventory, constructed by authors looking over their shoulders via research diaries, data, and theoretical excursions. Such 'selving' could provoke more ontological sorts of tension in the authors' inquiries. Selves offered a simultaneously dangerous and productive contamination of each other, as in Trunk Širca's case. Director of a tertiary college, and researching her own institution, her balancing of a managing self and a research self was always a precarious 'question of power exercised for and against itself' (2002: 72). Her selves inhabited a cuckoo's nest of Truth and Power. She was part of the 'power' that the 'truth' of her inquiry tried to interrogate. In such inherently conflicted accounts there was always an obvious risk: that Truth into Power Won't Go.

Still others shifted the debate more firmly away from roles and selves to standpoints, translating Peshkin's pluralities into such things as a 'multiple centred standpoint epistemology' (Jones 1997: 131) while claiming a 'mutually dependent' relationship between teacher and researcher selves. In this account Peshkin is chewed over, but not swallowed: 'It is interesting that Peshkin did not acknowledge a seventh self, the "academic – I" that constructed the entire account' (Jones 1997: 100). Others sought to undermine the notion of selves in an attempt to tell a 'journey' of a self that aimed for a 'wily versatility that will allow me to think and speak both "as if" the lesbian self does exist and "as if" it does not' (Riding 2002: 47, 79). Riding inserted selves not as retrospective 'discoveries', but as tactics to produce a divided political epistemology where perspectives might productively conflict – a crossroads where Poststructuralism encountered Standpoint Epistemology or Critical Realism (Lewis 2000; Roberts, 2004).

Thus selves could be engendered in the real as 'discovered' past roles at work in the inquiry or transformed into personated epistemologies, as a dialogue of ideas generative of a 'research self' – such as the 'black researcher', the 'lesbian researcher'. Ārculj (2003) added another mobility by casting doubt on the permanence of any of these divisions, opting for a more occasional, emergent and situated sense of research consciousnesses, drawing particular attention to a 'theory-laden – I' whose emergence re-contoured the configurations of

management and organisational issues in contra-distinction to a 'tradition-laden-' steeped in a Slovenian professional and national culture. This was an ongoing reframing of the research self as an emerging but unrealizable synthesis, an 'unsettled hybrid' as another doctoral author put it (Hanley 2001: 170). For several, there was a partly unresolved problem in telling, as it were, realist stories about their poststructuralist selves. Finally, Jones offered an iconoclastic attack on all such selves and selving. Starting from Lenzo's Lather-based notion of a 'transgressive self' (1997: 130) he attacked the telling of methodological stories (in the style of Ashmore, 1989) and reported such narratives as plotlines, mocking the solemnity of methodological narrative within a Mickey Spillane genre in which academic credentials were interrogated and despatched:

*'His high-pitched pleading annoyed me but I let him whine, "There are many teachers" voices, not just one" (1997: 13). I stubbed my cigarette out on the collar and helped him towards the broken window. What the hell was that supposed to mean? [...] "There are other voices worth articulating, hearing, and sponsoring as well as those of teachers". I let him drop' (Jones 1997: 208).*

This perspectival, ironic approach culminated in supervisors, subjects, and author being required to enact in his thesis a triple 'play' of reflexive meaning (play as drama, as fun, as looseness), a play with a possible sting in the tale for articles such as this. There is '... little point in outlining a handbook of reflexivity because as soon as it was created its processes would need to be subverted by the truly reflexive researcher' (ibid: 1997: 87). Selves, in his account, are eventually realized as fiction – within a play that addresses issues of performativity rather than claiming to represent any 'real' situation in itself, or 'real' selves, whether segmented or participatory in nature.

There are many other ways in which these doctoral authors drew on their 'founding' methodologies in order to construct research selves. In the first section of this paper, we have attended most closely to the tightest of the three prescriptions, the managed research selves of Peshkin. Yet that text was appropriated in a great variety of ways. Its indeterminations are more impressive than its determinations. It was 'provocative' when it intended to be 'realist', 'transgressive' when it sought fidelity. And the translations seemed most interesting and creative the more unfaithful they were to the original text. They introduced a range of realist, hermeneutic, poststructuralist and postmodernist deployments. But perhaps we have said enough about their diverse strategies to encourage us to think in more interesting ways about *what is going on when one reading enters another, and then re-emerges with a claim to*

*methodological warrant*. We came to call such 'translations' and 'appropriations' *revisionary*, in order to point to the creative infidelities and apparent inversions involved. What questions can we cull from this brief review of the way three ER texts were so differently read and re-written in their journey – 'trip' might be better<sup>2</sup> - from academic reading to enacted methodological text? What can we say of this 'doctoring' of the text? Of the picturing of selves that went on in each author's encounter with the Methodologists of Reflexivity?

### picturing selves

Each 'reflexive' author sought to figure herself from the ground of research practice, as well as the 'air' of reflexive theory. That double extraction involves of course, crucial metaphorical decisions. The perceptual play of figure/ground? The punning 'mine' of extraction? The ways in which we relate such articulations of self 'systematically' to the practices of inquiry are crucial. In the light of our preliminary empirical study of such (dis)articulations we propose here the notion of 'grounded metaphor'. We seek to explore precisely those indeterminations in methodological texts that appear to undermine their grounds for legitimacy and the possibility of systematicity. Such *indeterminations* seem both important and neglected. Methodology seeks to contain indeterminacies, whereas we prefer to explore and mobilise them as far as possible.

In deciding which metaphors to deploy in order to develop a sense of - *for is better* - reflexivity, we intend accordingly to avoid those metaphors that carry a realist or positivist implication, such as the 'mirror'<sup>3</sup>. As we have shown, the reflexive picturing of our authors was much more performative than that, and suggested a more loosely coupled articulation of one text upon the other, a kind of fruitful miscegenation. Their methodologies were not 'applied' instances of the

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<sup>3</sup> The 'mirror' has a long and distinguished history as a metaphor of self-regard, from Narcissus through to the work of Gasché (1986) on the 'tain' of the mirror. We do not wish to imply that such a metaphor takes us nowhere, but we suspect that it will not take us anywhere new, and therefore seek to cast around the reflexive stories in order to provoke new possibilities. 'The "matrix" produces the matrix and nothing else' (Letiche and Maier 2001: 5) - or perhaps the mirror all too easily becomes metonymic rather than metaphoric.

<sup>4</sup> 'Acts' are a misnomer in so far as they imply conscious and intentional implementation. We would rather regard reflexivity as an event in which we somewhat intentionally participate, but nevertheless acknowledge inescapable remainders of the unconscious and the unintended.

general so much as singular variations on an underlying theme. A necessary improvisation? Further, their idiosyncrasy underpinned claims to originality. Where doctoral candidates stuck most closely to the prescriptions of the methodology, creativity was least. The least conceivable metaphors for this sort of process were 'application' and 'representation'. In Peshkin's terms, it was the 'untamed' self that seemed to be the necessary precondition for good thinking, and we need to consider what it was about that indiscipline that made thinking the 'self' creative.

Such serial infidelity reminded us of the ways in which art-works (themselves inquiries into meaning's meaning) sometimes give birth to a series of re-interpretations, as in the visual commentaries on Velázquez's *Las Meñinas* by Picasso, Manet, Degas and so on. These were not of course replications so much as they were responses, which raised interesting questions about what qualities in the 'original' called forth subsequent evocations, and in what ways these 'exceeded' the former. Were these 'representations', 'dialogues', 'transformations', 'developments'? What tropes did we need to deploy here, and with what justification? And what meanings could be given to such processes? In addition there was formidable academic and literary commentary on the meaning of such 'picturing' that might provoke new thinking on reflexive matters in educational research. Such commentary offered us a double entry into visual and textual registers concerning acts<sup>4</sup> of reflexive performance. A review of indetermination in relation both to accounts of theory and narrative suggested some provocative possibilities. For example, we asked what was the composition of such 'picturing'? There were elements of narrative, logic, figure, 'scene' (Rosaldo 1978), emotional tone, and philosophy. In all these aspects there are good reasons for expecting imprecision. Just to illustrate, Primo Levi, discusses the 'secrets of the trade, indeed, the non-trade' of the narrative writing that expresses and contains all these aspects:

'They exist, I cannot deny it, but luckily they have no general validity; I say "luckily" because, if they did, all writers would write in the same way, thus generating such an enormous mass of boredom' (Levi 1991: 207).

Research accounts, then, in so far as they are narratives, demand 'novel selves'. Such a view would inform the sorts of research selves envisaged by Denzin in terms of a 'reflexive poetic' (Denzin 1997: 223). Kamuf takes the argument further, arguing that the impossibility of a self present to itself (foreground and background always being hidden from each other) is in itself productive, '... it is these very limits, demarcating intention, that produce it, and allow it to function as such' (Kamuf 1991: 81). Elsewhere: 'The difference is inscribed at the limit; it is the



difference, or *différance* of that limit – its division – that holds I-we apart together and thus opens each to the other' (1997: 122). Accordingly Kamuf denies the possibility of reproduction, fidelity and stability, arguing instead for 'the graphic of iterability rather than the logic of repetition' (1991: 86). It is, then, reflexivity's impossibility that makes it work, as 'impossibility' is part of the creative process. This is a familiar Derridean kind of thinking, but Polanyi earlier made a similar point in relation to 'tacit knowing', concerning the impossibility of formalizing such knowledge:

'If such formalization of tacit knowing were possible, it would convert all arts into mathematically prescribed operations, and thus destroy them as works of art' (Polanyi 1962, in Grene 1969: 164).

That seems to recall Calvino's suspicion of 'trade secrets'. Finally, we might acknowledge Heidegger:

'The more genuinely a methodological concept is worked out and the more comprehensively it determines the principles on which a science is conducted, all the more primordially is it rooted in the way we come to terms with the things themselves, and the farther is it removed from what we call 'technical devices', though there are many such devices in the theoretical disciplines' (1962: 50).

We do not wish to present these arguments against technical reduction and rule-bound specification as refutations of Peshkin or Heshusius, or recommendations for Lenzo, so much as reasons why methodological writers have had their texts appropriated in ways they did not prescribe and presumably would not approve. Nor do we wish to instigate a different paradigm with new slogans: 'iterability not repetition!' 'indetermination (mis)rules!' etc. Instead, we want to experiment with the concept of reflexivity in a different way, suspending any notion of further definition and looking instead for 'striking examples' of performative reflexivity, forged in the sort of philosophizing that Deleuze and Guattari recommend, one dedicated to 'fabricating concepts' (1994: 2). Such a hybrid fabrication offers a dynamic that links the visual, textual and performative in a hybridity whose *becoming* is its only possibility of coherence.

In this thought experiment we intend to explore 'picturing' as a grounded metaphor which addresses (though never exhaustively) the business of reflexivity. First we need to remember that we mean this metaphor to be *for* reflexivity (as a project) rather than a metaphor *of* reflexivity (as a definition). This is important in that the metaphor should exhaust itself in relation to its end, and not its means. Second, it is clear from the reflexive accounts we have

examined that methodological application, procedural specification and so on, rather mistake the appropriations that doctoral authors made from the founding texts. Instead, we wanted to explore empirically how authors ‘pictured themselves’ in their accounts, bringing in theory, method, biography, introspection, retrospection, witness and so on. But at the same time we don’t want to create a kind of negative theology, or a kind of anything-goes relativism. We need to be able to say, somehow, what will count as good ‘picturing’ rather than inadequate ‘picturing’<sup>5</sup>, while at the same time refusing a contextual specification or universal criterial judgement. We say more about this later, but meanwhile invoke Margalit’s distinction between ‘eg’ and ‘ie’ approaches to philosophical inquiry. The former is founded on illustration, the latter on explication<sup>6</sup>. Our claim is that our doctoral colleagues invoked the latter and performed the former in relation to their methodological ‘extractions’. Such a distinction overlaps with ‘inside-out’ and ‘outside-in’ ethical claims (Dawson 1994)<sup>7</sup>. We later explore that overlap as a potential political space – relating indetermination (etc) to notions of trust and freedom (etc). First, however, it is to a more detailed study of how such illustration, such picturing, *works*, that we now turn.

### figuring pictures

Our strategy in this section is to proceed by example rather than rule (see Margalit at the beginning of the paper). Our examples are two very different artists. One is a Zairean street artist, Tshibumba, whose pictorial history of Zaire has been studied by the anthropologist Fabian (1996). The second is Velázquez and in particular, the ways in which his painting *Las Meñinas* has been analyzed by Foucault, Searle and Snyder, as well as reiterated by later

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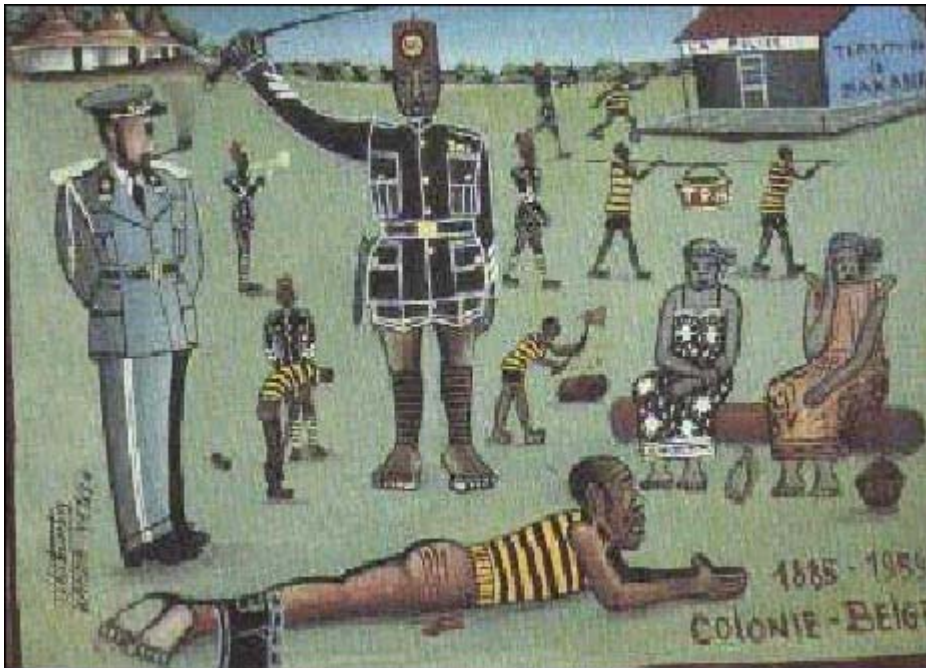
<sup>5</sup> Maybe taking comfort from Bourdieu (1992: 244) who claimed ‘methodology is like spelling ... “it is the science of the jack-asses”. It consists of a compendium of errors of which one can say that you must be dumb to commit most of them’.

<sup>6</sup> Tarde put this slightly differently ‘So far all the philosophy has been founded on the verb to be ... one may say that, if only philosophy had been founded on the verb to have, many ... slowdown of the mind, would have been avoided’ (Tarde quoted in Latour 2001: 17). Tambiah makes a similar point in distinguishing between ‘denotation’ and ‘exemplification’ (Tambiah 1990: 104).

<sup>7</sup> Dawson argues for a distinction between Aristotelian ‘inside-out’ professionalism as opposed to the externally regulated version – ‘outside-in’ professionalism, as encouraged, for example, by the audit culture. An exemplary rather than a definitive ethics is proposed. See also Stronach et al 2002.

<sup>8</sup> This appeal to excess parallels Lather’s (1993) notion of voluptuous validity or a validity of excess.

painters, from Degas to Picasso. However, both Velázquez and Tshibumba comment reflexively on the relation of artist to society, the business of representation, and the nature of sovereignty.



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At first sight Tshibumba offers a series of naive realist representations of major political events in the history of the Congo/Zaire, from the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, through colonial rule, independence and the dictatorship of Mobutu. But a closer reading suggests a more transgressive self. Tshibumba lived in an ethnically fraught despotic regime, and so the themes of his painting pay tribute to rulers while subtly presenting national heroes like Lumumba as crucified oppositional figures who continue to stand for lost ideals of government, unity, civilisation, friendship and collective identity. The themes of his paintings (this one and others) are simultaneously the record of a bloody past and a mnemonics of an ideal and therefore point forwards just as much as they point backwards. In creating this allegorical political space, his paintings indicate things which cannot safely be named<sup>8</sup>. Fabian refers to this as a 'vociferous silence' (1996: 306). We might also note that there is an interesting similarity between Tshibumba's tactics of representation and those employed by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, another Congolese commentary that had to be careful of its readership (in this case Victorian, middle-class, and British) and yet which succeeded in offering a multi-layered account 'in order to question the reader's positioning of themselves in relation to the

narrative' (Hampson, in Conrad, 1910/1980: xxvi). Both conclude, or offer the possible conclusion, that 'darkness is located at the heart of the "civilising" mission' (ibid: xxxvi). According to Fabian, these paintings are also '[p]erformative acts that create or intensify co-presence' (1994: 253). We would rather express that co-presence in terms of an 'I-We' relation that underlies his paintings as communications. The collective 'We' is black, colonised, oppressed and Congolese, and the paintings are 'weapons of the weak' (1994: 279), 'articulating popular memory' (ibid: 276) by way of allegorical critique.

Fabian's account is entitled '*Remembering the Present*' but we could just as easily see Tshibumba opening up a space where past and future can also be contemplated from the perspective of the collective 'we'. That 'we' is national rather than ethnic, and clearly articulated to communal values such as peace, community and order. The subversive need to remember is suggestive of Kundera's early writing, and is carried by much the same covert politics of resistance<sup>9</sup>. What seems immovable in Tshibumba's work is the determined nature of the relation between artist and viewers, the 'I-We' relation. It emplots a story of collective loss, and of friendship betrayed. Features like these frame his series of paintings, and fix readings within certain limits.

Other features of his picturing, however, open up more plural possibilities. First, there is the multi-layered nature of the paintings. They can be read as 'realist' paintings of 'real' historical events – and criticised on both grounds (eg faulty chronology, wrong birthplaces, illogical or impossible representations). But as Fabian argues: 'His (Tshibumba's) paintings are thoughts (...) that constitute his history, not illustrations of a pre-existing text' (1996: 295). He is picturing a certain kind of political thinking, and knows it, as 'an artist who paints history' (1996: 261). The allegorical nature of the paintings allows Tshibumba to foreshorten chronology so that Portuguese and Belgian stand side by side, and *Colonie Belge* stands for the Mobutu regime and its covert indictment. This is strategic compression rather than error. Tshibumba paints in order to say something with 'We the people', and as Lee and LiPuma point out in another context, such a combination prioritizes the performative 'We' over the constative 'the people'

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<sup>9</sup> We have in mind Kundera's 'The Joke' (1970) and 'The Book of Laughter and Forgetting' (1982). A further parallel is that Kundera's stories are also the deliberate and sardonic emplotment of political thought within a totalitarian regime.

<sup>10</sup> A clandestine copying and distribution of literature especially in the formerly communist countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

(2002: 193). The story is mainly told in terms of Blacks/Whites, although again it is implied that white oppression can be made to stand as a disguise for postcolonial oppressions as well. In such a telling, Tshibumba's 'I-Me' relation is rather like that envisaged by Mead. The 'me' is fixed, historical, relatively unmoving and for Tshibumba much subordinate to the 'we', while the 'I' is, as Mead indicates, 'uncertain', shifting, somewhat ambivalent, and in Tshibumba's case tactically mobile (Mead 1934/1962: 176). Finally, these paintings belong within an oral culture of story-telling, and cannot therefore be read entirely as political acts on their own: a context of tradition is involved which informs local readings of the series.

If we return to the picture with a 'methodological' frame in mind, we can see how a surface naive realism works as a cover for a more transgressive politics (cf Allan above). Allan's text has its own 'vociferous silences'. In another doctoral text a standpoint epistemology recurrently works a 'civilisation – oppression' polarity, inverting the many-sided claims of the former, and implying that oppression is a constant of the current context (cf doctorates of Rider and Lewis above). In a further instance, the doctoral 'painter' deploys indeterminacy in order to open up a political and defensible space for thinking, inviting a kind of solidarity from his audience through strategic indirection rather than representation (cf Jones in his 'abuse' of methodological genre). The aim is a transgressive validity (Lather 1993) rather than any direct representation, either in terms of chronology, or strict historical 'fact'. The appeal is to an oppressed 'we' relation which can be inferred but may not be directly referred to. In the more reflexively radical of the theses such 'oppression' is also a marker of the 'doctoral regime'. If not resistance to the spirit of Mobutu, this time, then perhaps Papa Doc? The act of resistance is an act of remembering, of condensing and visualizing the less public and more traditional genres of story-telling. It is a re-membering of the past as a political resource for a possible future. And as such it operates as a kind of public *samizdat*<sup>10</sup>.

'Picturing', then, may be a performative metaphor for reflexivity. But in each case reflexivity may require a different 'picturing' of the agentic self in acts of (self)-creation. Velázquez's *Las Meñinas* will also help us explore how different such picturing can be, and therefore how contingent and malleable reflexive practices can be, and have to be. We then try to work out what features of picturing may translate back across to research

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<sup>11</sup> The 'I-me' relation is literal to the painting, if we take the figure illuminated in the doorway - another Velasquez - to be a further signature by the artist (Stoichita 1997). Velasquez thereby 'triangulates' himself in his representation and his commentary on representation.

methodology.



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A first thought would be that Velázquez takes Mead's advice at the beginning of this article – he sweeps himself into the picture in an act of apparently perfect reflexivity. There he is, looking out at us, brush in hand, the back of the canvas facing us, painting what we take to be the King and Queen who seem to stand where we also view the picture. This is where Velázquez himself must 'really' have stood in order to paint himself painting *not* the King and Queen (though *they* are in the mirror), but some of the rest of the royal family and court, in particular the Infanta and her entourage. The paradox is that 'the viewer *cannot* be there where logically he must be' (Bal, in Pollock, 1996: 30) - 'he is painting the picture we see, but he can't be because he is in the picture' Megill (1985: 486). It is the *instability* of these perspectives that animates the picture by forcing onlookers into reflective and reflexive action. They have to

work out what is going on. That working out reveals that Velázquez, like Tshibumba but in different ways, offers pictures that *exceed* the real. Indeed, we might claim that Tshibumba's 'excess' lies behind the picture in their coded and contextual nuances, whereas Velázquez's 'excess' lies in front of the picture.

Like Tshibumba's, this reflexive painting also addresses issues of sovereignty, but simultaneously pictures the role of the artist, and indeed the whole business of 'classical' representation. Unlike Tshibumba, it is dominated by an astonishing 'I – me' relation. It's as if Velázquez was saying, 'I, the Painter of Kings, am also the King of Painters'. But the self-portrayal cannot be dismissed as narcissistic because it is the painterly nature of its production that is being emphasized. The 'original' 'I-me' relation passes (in both directions), through the brush of the painter and in turn the pen of the critics in its doubled journey from 'scene' to 'emplotment', also with each movement the scene changes and is re-written. 'I', 'thou', 'we', 'them', 'us' are all caught up in an instantaneous circulation of reflexive meaning (Stronach 2002)<sup>11</sup>. These figures enact and picture something like Kamuf's earlier cited 'I/we apart together' (1997: 122) or perhaps a more sophisticated version of Peshkin's 'I's.

What is also framed in *Las Meninas* is the act of framing. Velázquez empties Painter, the philosophy of Royalty, the technology of painting, the paradoxes of representation, as well as the impossibility of a settled perspective, across the canvas. Just as Tshibumba invoked an 'I-We' relation in his spectators, so too does this painting insist on the participation of the spectator, an 'I-Thou' instability of relation that provokes later painters to rework its reflexive magic in their own, very different ways. Velázquez draw us towards the spectacle that is *observation itself*. That is the fecundity of its reflexive ambition.

This time we can relate our reflexive theses to a double educative axis in the painting.<sup>12</sup> The double sovereignty of painterly technique, and royal education, run orthogonal axes across the picture from left to right, and also from back (mirror) to front (the invisible ideal of a royal education for the *Infanta* located in the centre of the picture). In this doubling, Velázquez is a match for the king. So too in the reflexive theses: each in its own way works out an education of the researching self, while displaying (in some form or another) the tools of its trade whereby such selves are constructed, displayed, and left 'open' to interpretation and criticism.

### picturing figures

*'One cannot see God from the back, because if he is not watching us, he is not God'*  
(Gell 1998: 192).

There are a number of emergent themes in relation to reflexivity that we now wish to make more explicit and develop further. They comprise singularity, comprehensiveness, articulation, mobilisation and fecundity. Together they point to a version, a constellation, of reflexivity not as a prescription or model capable of typologisation and prioritisation in the ways Macbeth or Foley undertake, but more as a kind of Derridean or Deleuzian exemplarity whereby exactness and replication constitute 'transcendental illusion' (Deleuze 1994: 265).

The first cluster imbricates singularity, comprehensiveness and articulation. Between the artists' pictures there are significant differences – one is more solidary than the other. It addresses 'We' more than it addresses 'Thou'. Each establishes a different 'I-me' relation, the one self-effacing, the other egocentric yet perhaps playfully so. Velázquez shows his face yet hides his work, while Tshibumba hides his face in showing his work allegorically – as our doctoral authors variously emplotted themselves in their own narratives. Yet both artists look at the world in order to picture it, paint the world in order to see it, and in doing so 'draw in' the observer as participant - a *Thou* - rather than leaving them merely to gaze. Both suggest a form for reflexivity that denies the closure of a 'model'. These relations have parallels in the

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<sup>12</sup> Gill, after Polanyi, argues that the notion of the 'axis' is a useful one: 'For the image of an axis suggests anchoring that is not fixed and in need of further support' (Gill 2000: 57). This too, then, can be part of a certain constellation of metaphors with which we attempt to mobilise the notion of reflexivity and connect it to the nature of contemporary educational knowledge – in that 'patchwork of metaphors' that Sfard recommends (1998: 12).



literature on reflexivity. Marcus imagines the contemporary Other as ‘counterparts’ – an interactive, agonistic version of the I-Thou relation (Marcus 2001: 453) dependent on ‘renegotiations and reboundings’ (ibid. 523) – a kind of ‘drawing in’ of the Thou. Others formulate an I-Me relation in terms of ‘positionality (ies)’ or ‘assignment’ (Dixson et al 2005: 20; Macbeth 2001; Alexander 2003: 418, citing Butler), rather as Velasquez does in drawing himself, in punning with the figure in the doorway at the back of the picture<sup>13</sup>. In Macbeth’s terms, this is an act of ‘positional reflexivity’. Still others work at the I-We relation in terms of ‘collective biography’ (Davies et al 2004: 360-389), just as Tshibumba does. We might agree with Marcus, therefore, that in order to *read*, we need to acknowledge a ‘theater of complicit reflexivities’, variously emplotted (Marcus 2001: 524).

That ‘theater’ does not comprise a universal set for reflexivity. Indeed we might return here to Margalit’s distinction between ‘ie’ and ‘eg’ thinking by pointing out that each ‘reflexion’ combines depiction and exemplification in different proportions and ways. Embarking on this kind of ‘picturing’ venture, then, is always taking a *singular* leap into the unknown. The disjunction of the substantive and the methodological is different in each case – because it has to be crafted both by the individual who writes/paints, and the reader who interprets the necessary incompletions of the project. It involves the risk of the new, not merely the promise of the incremental. It follows that a methodology determined in advance – the absolute convention of our times – is self-defeating for any research that wishes to chance this kind of radical educational move.<sup>14</sup> Reflexivity *becomes* through the processes of performing, exemplifying, deconstructing, and so on.

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<sup>13</sup> The figure in the doorway is also a ‘Velasquez’; his crooked elbow signs the ‘V’; his role as Chamberlain is the role to which the artist aspires. Or the figure can be read as unveiling the scene – ambivalence and indeterminacy are inevitable.

<sup>14</sup> The resurrected positivism of evidence-based practice and effectiveness/improvement studies exemplifies this current convention. David Hargreaves is a leading UK exponent. His most recent writing on ‘capital theory’ (2001: 489) employs the ‘Johari window’ cliché in order to typify teacher ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’, idealising ‘high leverage’ as opposed to other states, such as ‘cynical tokenism’ and ‘short-term effectiveness by burn out’. This style of low-level categorization was popular in the 70s. Indeed Haraway (1992: accessed 2/12/02) has effectively mocked the very same ‘infamous semiotic square’ as ‘this clackety, structuralist meaning-making machine’. See also Shavelson et al (2002) for US examples of ‘scientific’ educational research.

<sup>15</sup> We take the metaphor of mobilisation to indicate different and plural positionalities. It therefore relates to a kind of ‘base’ language based on identities which, sure enough, are redrawn as plural or shifting, or arrived at through ‘tensive negotiation’ of selves, and so on (Alexander 2003: 430). The language of the ‘fluid’ is invoked (Knight et al 2004: 392) yet as Macbeth argues each of these disclaimers still appeals to a more fixed territory of ideas: ‘The move [towards positional or textual reflexivity] promises new ground to stand on, shifting and unstable but, for that reason, possessing a field of view that could delineate the order and structure of first worlds and the conditions of their possibility’ (Macbeth 2001: 48). We take ‘lability’ to imply a turning away from such a register of implicit

The figure of reflexivity, we argue, is singular. Yet it articulates a number of subject perspectives, which may be more or less comprehensive, and sets them off against each other. It can be an achievement, but not a prescription or an application. There is no possible model. It is a working out that contains a productive contradiction in that, working from the actual, exceeds the 'real' just as Tshibumba and Velázquez do in their different ways. Reflexivity, then, is the working out, and in, of a kind of super-representation of actuality(ies). We now turn to the nature of that working out, and to characterise it (gesturally) as a kind of mobilisation, or better, lability<sup>15</sup>, most aptly approached through the metaphor of the signature. This is the reflexive text as a travelling methodology, a kinetic epistemology, instead of the arrested convention (think Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Peshkin 1988) whose 'classic' features resist change precisely as a guarantor of their enduring worth.

First, that productive contradiction we referred to earlier. When Velázquez looks us in the eye, he is of course playing a trick. He's not 'there' in a number of obvious senses. The same might be said of 'models' of reflexivity, all of which presume to enable us to 'look the other/self in the eye'. They play the same trick – Mead's total reflexivity, or God's back, both impossible as an accomplishment of the 'I' as Gasché indicates<sup>16</sup>. So those reflexivities which through alleged method look you in the eye, lie. That is the false closure of the Model. 'Picturing' on the other hand, proceeds *through* the I, Thou and We (etc) as a kind of signature that can be deciphered - and made educative - by the reader. It is a ludic move, but it makes us look ourselves in the 'I', impossibilities notwithstanding. It says: 'You and I, we will never be here, and yet here we are' (Stronach 2002: 294)

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grounding, since it goes beyond arguments about 'boundaries' and 'in-betweens' in order to posit singular fluidities as 'anti-ground' rather than extensions that fail to note that they conspire with their opposites.

<sup>16</sup> It might seem at first that such 'total' reflexivity falls prey to the dilemma that Gasché outlines: 'Thus anyone who sets reflection into motion must already be both the knower and the known. The subject of reflection on its own thereby satisfies the whole equation 'I=I'. Yet reflection alone was supposed to bring about this equation' (1986: 99). We raise a number of arguments against such a dilemma: that the impossibility is productive, that Gasché neglects the 'detour' of the self through the other, as well as the impact of 'I-We' relations on self-knowledge.

This unsettling of the perspectival and the real involves both writer and reader, artist and interpreter, in oscillations that are a necessary condition of indeterminacy. Just as in reflexive novels such as *Tristram Shandy*, '... self-awareness arises out of a background of indeterminacy in the encounter with the other' (Swearingen 1977: 82). The requirement for writer and reader is a kind of ideal movement: 'His ideal [Sterne] requires that both he and his reader abandon themselves and their methods of procedure to the free play of the event in which new meanings unpredictably occur' (Swearingen: 12). Let us call that a kind of signature relationship, invoked, necessary and yet incapable of prescription because subject to the multi-faceted requirement of a situated yet ideal 'play'. It is the necessary forgery of a reflexive thinking that would seek to include readers rather than just perform in front of them.

After all, that is writing's sleight-of-hand. It is also a kind of writing, a signature, that we always know to be a forgery as well as a deception – like Velázquez's 'presence' in the picture. It brings together communal, personal and dialogic possibilities. Each is a possible vantage point, a perspectival difference. They contrast rather than collude, and they contradict productively. That bringing together is an *increase*, an exceeding of the real. In that sort of way, we approve of the allegorical projects of Tshibumba and of R. Jones's thesis: they prohibit explication while nevertheless framing - illustrating - the sorts of creative responses they hope to engender. They avoid despoiling the reflexive project with a modernist intolerance of contradiction; they intend to exemplify. In the reflexive literature such plurality is often portrayed as static – between entities (segments of selves, assignments, others), subject of course to modification and alteration in a language of 'fluidity' and 'shift'. Useful as such local mobilisations are, they can trap us within root metaphors of relations between neighbours – 'negotiation', 'boundary', 'in-between-ness' and so on. These boundaries are specific, dichotomous, and to an extent atomistic. We have in mind movements that *are* locally negotiated in those ways, but also are articulated more comprehensively or globally to each other by the 'signature'. The signature is not so much a matter of boundary as a relation of one-for-all and all-for-one, on a plane of immanence distinct from dualistic boundary negotiation. Such a signature is not a holism, let alone a model-as-precipitate (in terms of a chemical analogy) but an event of lability subject to a mobilisation of singularities, comprehensiveness, and articulation. What does that mobilisation mean?

## conclusion

The last section of this paper offers an account of the sorts of conceptual movement inherent in the notion of reflexivity we wish to explore. Gell's reading of Marcel Duchamp is instructive here. Drawing on the early work of Husserl, he mobilises the work of art, setting it in motion with concepts of 'retention' and 'protension' (1998: 242). All such works look forward and backward, and are part of a series. Each changes its meaning, is redefined, as time moves on. The work of art is inherently transitional, in a kind of motion that makes each appropriation of it unique, a work of the individual and of the moment<sup>17</sup>. But at the same time part of a style, still a signature, the still of a signed object. Yet nothing stays the same in the 'durée' of time. Redefinition is written into the oeuvre as a necessary aspect of its qualities. Gell relates that motion (which is indeterminate in the way we're reaching towards) to 'lineages' (1998: 253), in relation to a certain kind of reflexivity. His account, based on Husserl's 'law of modification' (ibid: 244), is however too linear. Whatever its rhetorical tolerance for radical change, it is founded diagrammatically and hence epistemologically on the line, the series A, B, C etc, with their prospective and retrospective allegiances as a guarantor of change. This is perspectival knowledge, serially envisaged. But disjunctive change, transformational change, is not envisaged epistemologically in such a model, which remains radically unradical. Nevertheless, Gell does refer in passing to a more labile notion of 'perchings' emanating from a folk belief:

'Everything as it moves, now and then, here and there, makes stops. The bird as it flies stops in one place to make its nest, and in another to rest in its flight. A man when he goes forth stops when he wills. So the god has stopped. The sun, which is so bright and beautiful, is one place where he has stopped. The moon, the stars, the winds, he has been with. The trees, the animals, are all where he has stopped, and the Indian thinks of these places and sends his prayers there to reach the place where the god has stopped and win help and a blessing' (Durkheim, quoted in Levi-Strauss, Totemism, and cited in Gell 1998: 248-49).

This is valuable. It introduces the concept of change as more idiosyncratically motivated, or in the words of Benjamin (1997: 457) 'knowledge comes by way of thinking in images from

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<sup>17</sup> Picasso's *Guernica* is a good example of this. Its positioning in relation to American art is as labile as its relation to US politics. It is shifted around as an icon of European art's supremacy, just as it is rewritten as a 'Communist' statement from its prior status as an anti-Fascist discursive object. It is re-written in a series that then prefaces the transformations of Pollock and Rothko (van Hensbergen 2004).

“lightning flashes” – the text is the long roll of thunder that follows’.<sup>18</sup> Yet, we need still more movement. Gell envisages a kind of historical mobility for concepts. But Deleuze and Guattari see a ‘signature’ as a different kind of mobilisation, as in their discussion of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. Envisaging a concept as a plural thing, made up of zones, bridges and movement, they offer the following definition: ‘The concept is defined by *the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed*’ (1994: 21, their stress). The Cartesian concept has movements like ‘doubting’, ‘thinking’, and ‘being’ and it is the articulation of all of these (the ‘survey’ or ‘survol’ in their terms) that yields the concept. In a similar way, we envisage the ‘survol’ of ‘reflexivity’ as a sweeping through various mobilisations of ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘thou’, ‘we’ and ‘them’ in the singular articulation of a deliberative reflexion that is nevertheless a distributed object.

Reflexivity, in that instance, is a *chance* rather than a model (Garratt 2003), whose serendipity is the paradoxical promise of its achievement. Marcus invokes the ‘rhetoric of serendipity’ as an *expert* preserve (2001: 527) but we wish to extend that preserve. We don’t apply reflexivity: we make it happen in the instance, a task for novice and ‘expert’ alike. The double movement, both serial and looping like the writing of a signature, constitutes not a methodological guarantee<sup>19</sup> (cf Peshkin and Heshusius) so much as a promise, as indeed a signature promises, even as it forges the ‘reality’ that is com-promised. It *is* contradictory, in that it is and it isn’t, it both exceeds and disappoints the reality that it addresses. That is the promise of the signature (Stronach, Piper and Piper, in Piper and Stronach 2004). The reflexive injunction, thus

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<sup>18</sup> The flash? When Sterne (1995) lets Tristram Shandy attempt to tell us the truth about a lady, in three words, which he does not write down.

<sup>19</sup> Calls for a looser ‘methodology’ in qualitative inquiries are now subject to the kinds of analogical scientism that often typifies epistemological rhetoric in quantitative educational inquiry. Such approaches in their reductive, simplistic, and normative approaches to educational events and meanings, automatically short-change the possibilities of new and creative educational options. They are a form of self-regulated discipline that would surely entertain Foucault. They ‘civilise’ educational research through methodological narrowing and pre-specification – that is the darkness at the heart of the UK government’s current mission.

constituted, remains a 'thin' text (in Margalit's terms) engaged in the provocation of 'thick' texts of reflexive practice.<sup>20</sup>

To conclude, we argue that such a notion of reflexivity opens up educational research to creative, non-arbitrary development: and takes us away from the current obsessions (which are more extra-professional than professional) with universalistic prescription and *a priori* methodological specification. They are a kind of educational death that educational research must resist. Current efforts to 'nationalise' educational research (as evidence-based practice, as nationalised research training and universally prescribed methodologies like RCTs) are all educationally backward in that they trail behind similar homogenizations in UK schooling, at least, that are already failing because of the ways in which they destroy creativity, originality, trust, and experimentation. To return for a last time to the generative metaphors of 'art' that inform this account, these approaches can be characterised as 'painting by numbers'. Such movements are recurrent in the West, and a century ago Frazer noted the ideological closure: 'the element of chance and of accident are banished from the course of nature' (in Tambiah 1990: 68). Almost as long ago, Robert Musil, in *The Man without Qualities*, began to mock such modernist and scientific ambitions as 'the utopia of exact living' (Musil 1997: 395). Not only is it wrong to elevate Science as *pharmakon* in this way, it is doubly wrong to characterise 'Science' in such reductive ways, because if Tambiah is right in his definition of Science, it is what we propose – 'a self-conscious, reflexive, open-ended process of knowledge construction' (ibid.).

*'A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: xii).*

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<sup>20</sup> 'Thick descriptions are culturally bound and historically sensitive, whereas thin descriptions are more context-independent' (Margalit 2002: 38).

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