Refl exive Research and the (Re)Turn to the Baroque
Or, how I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the University

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Refl exive research and the (re)turn to the baroque. (Or, How I learned to stop worrying and love the university) seeks an answer to the question posed by Gilles Deleuze, ‘Why do we desire what oppresses us?’

The book presents a narrative conceived within a baroque framework which attempts, with a proper sense of irony, to reveal the truth about the academy, and the way in which, as institution, it constructs our desires. The book also sets out a methodology for exploring questions related to identity and discourses and discusses how a sense of baroque, characterised as belonging to the epistemology of the Wunderkammer (the baroque cabinet of curiosities) and the ontology of the fold (as elaborated by Deleuze), challenges current assumptions about the nature of research and our understanding of the world.

Refl exive research and the (re)turn to the baroque is a contribution to the growing body of research located within the baroque, conceptualised not as a discrete historical period, but as a recurring cultural phenomenon, which presents as counter to the prevailing orthodoxy:

To the baroque mind the world is not conceived in logical Cartesian terms. To the contrary, it is full of contradictions. The baroque mind, moreover is acutely aware of the conflict between illusion and reality, and paradox and complexity are accepted as almost natural phenomena. (Leo Forkey)

It is essential reading (writes the author) for qualitative researchers and students concerned to develop innovative approaches in their work, as well as for those with an interest in identities and processes of identification.
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INTRODUCTION

REFLEXIVE RESEARCH AND THE (RE)TURN TO THE BAROQUE (OR, HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE UNIVERSITY)

To talk, as Timothy Hampton (1991, p.2) does, of the ‘ubiquity and meaninglessness’ of the term baroque is to produce affinities with that other overused and omnipresent sign of our times, postmodernism. Indeed, parallels between the baroque and the postmodern are hard to resist. As an historical era the baroque is sometimes characterised as either a continuation of the Renaissance, its apotheosis, ‘the paradise of the High Renaissance regained’ as Erwin Panofsky (1997, p.45) eulogises in his essay ‘What is baroque?’. Or its nemesis, the turn from classicism, from reason to unreason, an age characterised by a *discordia concors*. Postmodernism occupies a similar position in relation to modernism: its triumphant climax, or its decline to decadence and a relativistic meaninglessness summed up by that ultimate sound bite for a sound bite age ‘anything goes’. The paradox of the baroque and the postmodern is that both these positions are simultaneously, aporetically and gloriously true. As Rousset (1954, p.242) says, ‘*On dit: ordre, mesure, raison, règle, et c’est le classicisme. On dira donc: désordre, outrance, fantaisie, liberté et ce sera le baroque. Cosmos et chaos: équilibre et jaillisement vital. C’est vrai et c’est faux*’¹. Not an either/or but a both/and, and perhaps these parallels are not coincidental, as Hampton goes on:

> One need only point out the importance for poststructuralist criticism, theory and historiography of analyses concerned with historical structures and texts traditionally labelled baroque [which] suggests the importance of the baroque in both the genesis of modernity and the critical vocabulary of what has come to be called postmodernism.

Indeed, Maggie MacLure (2006a, p.225) conceives of the baroque as a recurrent event, a phenomenon that has returned throughout history. ‘Perhaps then’ she says, ‘postmodernism is just one manifestation of the spectre that has stalked modernity as its *impensé*: the trace of its ineffable, uncanny, dark Other’.

The historical baroque and our current postmodern age are both periods characterised by ontological uncertainty, ages of transition questioning that master trope of humanism, the belief in progress, and following on from periods in which this belief has been paraded in almost triumphalist fashion. While the confident assertions of modernism may have been undermined in the midst of what appears from some perspectives to be the imminent decline of Western culture, much research in the social sciences is still predicated on what MacLure (2006a, p.224-5)

¹ Not an either/or but a both/and.
describes as ‘Enlightenment values… faith in progress, rationality, access to truth and the agency of the centred self’. Why, she asks, should we not continue to profess these values and conduct research in accord with them - ‘seeking to dispel illusion and illuminate the dark places of ignorance with the light of reason’? The answer she suggests lies in the need to disrupt the metaphysics of closure so prevalent in modernist policy discourses, to antagonise these discourses ‘intent on the suppression of dissent, diversity, complexity and unpredictability’, ‘to address the strange and fascinating ways in which that true real is produced’ and represented. The production of this ‘true real’ is the paradoxical triumph of dominant socio-cultural discourses, a sleight of hand giving rise to linguistic and material practices which appear to us to be utterly natural. In a topsy-turvy world what seems to be solidly real is illusion, while what attempts to unveil this is dismissed as unreason.

This book presents a research narrative conceived within a baroque framework which attempts, with a proper sense of irony, to unveil the ‘true real’. It presents a reflexive examination of self as subject constituted within and by the institution called ‘the academy’, while recognising, as Adams (2000, p.227) says, that ‘every self portrait, even the simplest and least staged is the portrait of another’. In fact, any representation of presence always highlights its opposite, absence. Representation is ‘never there where it is represented, in those words, in those letters which restore only a simulacrum, a fiction of it’ (Mathieu-Castellani & Lydon, 1991, p.32). In this way, the research acknowledges the ultimate impossibility of representation - as a critique of research itself and as an antidote to the modernist assumptions underlying the reflexive examination of self as a being fully rational and cognisant to itself.

Initially though, my research was intended to be an exploration of processes of professional identification in teachers. Having been a schoolteacher myself before entering the academy (a term which still manages to evoke, though not without some irony, an agreeable monastic removal) I was naturally interested in teachers since ‘what we pursue, through understanding of the other’ is ourselves (Ricoeur, 1974, p.6), but a number of things happened to change the focus of the research from other teachers to myself. One reason was the opportunity I now had, as I saw it, to research the processes by which I was being inducted into a new discourse, by which I was becoming both complicit with and resistant to this discourse, and the way in which this developing institutional identity intersected with my personal identity. There was a revelatory moment when I recognised that I too was actually implicated in a discourse – an understanding of myself I arrived at as a result of the research I was doing with others. I wrote in my (simulacrum) reflective journal (Watson, 2006a, p.877):

...as my teaching career receded further my identity changed. But by this time I was ready for it - waiting to be interpellated into the managerialist discourse of the University at the time of the RAE² (I had, of course, become familiar with the work of Althusser), I became aware that I was being taken over, consumed, subject to internal surveillance, the most powerful kind of panoptic vigilance, that nonetheless was increasing my usefulness, my
productivity, my own power (I had of course, become familiar with the work of Foucault). My goals became the goals of the university – to do research, write papers, present at conferences – even while I saw in the larger scale of things that these goals were part of the game, and not even a very serious game at that -that is to say, that at the same time as rejecting the managerialist discourse as not what education/scholarship/learning should be about (clinging to a vestige of humanist thought perhaps), I nonetheless immersed myself within it and sacrificed myself to it. Identifying with the subject position of lecturer as constituted within the discourse (and so turning away from an interest in identity-as-teacher to identity-as-researcher) while at the same time retaining a sense of resistance to it as ‘Other’ to this excluding, masculine discourse, (I had become familiar with Luce Irigaray), I cast myself as protagonist within a narrative of research conceived as emerging from the pendular tension between the expected and the unexpected in which my nemesis was … but that would be telling.

The research therefore makes use of my experiences of becoming a researcher in an institution of higher education. In order to do this I drew on the metaphors of position and focus in situating self-as-subject within the university and in a wider sense the academy. The approach is located within Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) twin concepts of ‘subject position’ and ‘political subjectivity’, involving an examination of the way in which subjects are constituted within and by discourses, and an exploration of the agentic positioning of self respectively. (Agency here referring to the ability to act ‘intentionally’ without any assumptions being made about the degree of control exerted over these actions [Torfing, 1999, p.137]). These two positions may be regarded as incommensurable, however what is required is a recognition of the aporia inherent in notions of self and subject in which, to borrow from Derrida (1993, p.20) , each ‘instals the haunting of the one in the other’. An examination of political subjectivity involves a consideration of the intersection of the personal and the institutional within the discursive space which gives rise to agency. Subject positioning requires an analysis of discourses and a conceptualisation of the processes of identification within these discourses. Both aspects draw on a reflective/reflexive examination of self-as-subject located within the socio-cultural moment. The metaphor of position also draws attention to space and its relation to place. While de Certeau (1988, p.117) defines a place as a distribution of elements in coexistence within a distinct location ‘a space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables’. A space is therefore an actualisation of a place, ‘a practiced place’. Focusing back and forth between the different levels present within this practiced place reveals a patchy, partial evocation of self. I called my approach ‘participant self observation’, situating this within what Ellis and Bochner (2003) refer to as the broad rubric which constitutes autoethnography.

Autoethnography, (mis)understood as the ethnographic study of oneself, is often dismissed as narcissism, a seductive indulgence in which the researcher fiddles with themselves while the Other burns. But participant self observation, as critical autoethnography, concerns more than a fascination with one’s own navel. Rather
it has to do with a somewhat different and less comfortable point of insertion which seeks to illuminate the dark places alluded to by Gilles Deleuze (1995) when he asks, ‘Why do we desire what oppresses us?’. Participant self observation is concerned with the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse, its focus ‘the point at which the voluntary servitude of individuals comes into contact with objective power’ (Agamben, 1998, p.6). It examines the intersection between subjective technologies and political techniques through which identities and selves are constituted.

Participant self observation is about opening up to scrutiny the discursively actualised spaces of the university-as-institution as these are practiced both in and for itself and in relation to the wider academy. In this way it aims to go beyond the purely personal to provide a critical account of subjectivisation. But you will not find any mention of the term ‘baroque’ in the doctoral thesis in which this research was originally conceived. Only as it reached completion did I discover where it was I had been ‘getting lost’ to as I struggled to ‘produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently in working toward more Deleuzian stumbling practices’ (Lather, 2007, p.13). Only when I read ‘The bone in the throat: some uncertain thoughts on baroque method’ (MacLure, 2006b), which talks about the Wunderkammer, the baroque cabinet of curiosities, and suggests that ‘qualitative method could risk working with the lively disappointments of wonder, and for a while at least, play with the cabinet of curiosities as a figure for analysis and representation’ (p.737); only then was I able to reconceptualise my work and draw on it in order to develop a reflexive methodology located within the baroque as an ontological and epistemological framework. This book then, is a response to the call to play, offering a methodology for a form of research located within the Wunderkammer, ‘where our constant task is to struggle against the very rules of reason and practice inscribed in the effects of power of the social sciences’ (Lather, 2007, p.73).
CHAPTER ONE

BAROQUE
AN ODDLY-SHAPED PEARL

The derivation of the word ‘baroque’ is, according to Rene Wellek (1946, p.77), mistakenly given in the New English Dictionary as the Spanish barrueco, an oddly-shaped pearl. Instead, Wellek says, drawing on Benedetto Croce (1946), baroque is derived from ‘baroco’ - ‘the name for the fourth mode of the second figure in the scholastic nomenclature of syllogisms’ - widely regarded, Wellek says, as a ‘sophistical and far-fetched argument’. He gives the example:

Every fool is stubborn
Some people are not stubborn
Hence some people are not fools

Croce (1946, p.21), however, does not appear to single out the ‘baroco’ as more ‘strano’ (strange) than any of the other syllogistic figures. What he says is that two of these entered into Italian proverbial usage, the barbara - because it was the first - and the baroco, ‘chi sa perché?’ (who knows why?). Perhaps, he suggests, because it was alliterative with barbara. The upshot of all this was that a ‘un cattivo ragionamento’ (a bad argument) became known as an ‘argomento in baroco’, giving rise to the traditional seventeenth century Italian insult, ‘Signore, ha ragioni barrochi’ (followed, one imagines, by the traditional seventeenth century Italian stiletto).

Baroque argument

He [Kelly] turned to me with a facetious wry expression and showed me a penny and sixpence in his rough hand. I’m thirsty, he said. I have sevenpence. Therefore I buy a pint. I immediately recognised this as an intimation that I should pay for my own porter. The syllogism of your argument, I said lightly, is fallacious, being based on licensed premises. Licensed premises is right, he replied, spitting heavily. I saw that my witticism was unperceived and quietly replaced it in the treasury of my mind. (Flann O’Brien, At Swim Two Birds, 1967 [1939], p.20).

Croce has something to say on the pearl thing too. He dismisses this argument on the grounds that in Italian, such a pearl is called a ‘scaramazza’, while in Spain, the baroque is called barroco, and not barrueco. Strangely, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, an oddly-shaped pearl is referred to as a baroque pearl, a pearl that instead of growing to a perfectly spherical shape in the caress of soft tissue instead succumbs to the embrace of

...
tough muscular fibres that constrain its development. If Croce’s argument is accepted, the etymology of ‘baroque pearl’ provides a nice paradox, entirely in keeping with the baroque itself.

Whatever the derivation of the term, and Menashe (1965, p.336) makes the interesting if somewhat enigmatic point that ‘in either case the notion of irregularity is central’, the baroque has been described as:

- restless
- artistic ugliness
- derivative and frigid
- formless and sprawling
- asymmetrical, elliptical
- late, florid, decadent
- grotesque, perverse
- excessive, irrational
- confused, tasteless
- tawdry, unequal
- sensual, bizarre
- emotional
- morbid
- oval

Over the top, blowsy, hysterical – let’s face it, distinctly feminine.

### Baroque plotline:

Star Trek®, Episode 79, Series 3. ‘Turnabout intruder’.
Through a series of circumstances too involved to go into here, Captain Kirk’s body has been swapped, against his will, with that of Dr Janet Lester, an embittered woman whose ambitions to become a Star Ship captain have been thwarted. ‘She’ proves to be incapable of command, hysterical and autocratic, provoking a mutiny and ordering the death penalty for Scotty, Bones and Dr Lester (who is, of course, now really Captain Kirk). When all has been sorted out satisfactorily and Lester, back in her own weak and feeble body, has been carted off to the lunatic asylum, Kirk turns to Bones and says, (something like, though this is from memory), ‘she could have lived as fulfilled a life as any woman’.

A notoriously lubricious term, the baroque refuses to comply with the entirely rational demand to be conquered, to lie still. Wellek (1946, P.86) presents a detailed and increasingly exasperated account, evoking Rex Harrison as Professor Higgins inveighing against woman in My Fair Lady (Cukor, 1964), which attempts to understand what the baroque is and to what it can be applied – is it a historical period pertaining only to the visual arts, or does it encompass the arts more generally – music, literature, philosophy? Does it include science? Is it then, a general term for the culture and civilisation of the seventeenth century? Or is it rather, a typology ‘a term for a recurrent phenomenon in all history... a synonym
for the florid, precious, decorative style' that comes 'always at the end of a period' (p.86). Is it a style or an ideology? An emotional attitude towards the world? Does its essence lie in conflict - an opposition between asceticism and worldliness, spiritualism and sensualism, naturalism and illusionism? In every case the term eludes him until finally, having exhausted himself, along with all possible meanings, definitions and explanations, he concludes, ‘it is a term which prepares for synthesis, draws our minds away from the mere accumulation of observations and facts’. The baroque resists any simple taxonomic characterisation and the classical imposition of symmetry and closure.

Oppenheimer (1951) suggests that an irreducible tension lies within the term, arguing that the passions and disagreements it arouses centre on ‘two opposing interpretations. One derogatory, mainly concerned with style, the other laudatory and emphasising the intellectual basis on which the style rests’ (p.260). Oppenheimer clearly finds the baroque stylistically vulgar, hopelessly mannered even, while at the same time intellectually quite interesting. This interesting intellectual basis, within the historical period of the baroque, draws on two enormously disconcerting events that shattered the certainty of the age and gave rise to a period of ontological doubt. First of all the Reformation and the spread of Calvinist theology with its proscription of plays, pictures and pleasure in general; the baroque is closely associated with the Counter-Reformation and a turn towards the sensual and erotic in religious painting. Then Galileo’s support for theories concerning the movement of the earth in relation to the sun was having enormous ramifications:

baroque man lived torn between logically irreconcilable world pictures: on the one hand, the old Ptolemaic, geocentric one which had for centuries given man a sense of order and dignity, which was now increasingly called in doubt; and on the other hand, the new Copernican, heliocentric one which, though it proved empirically convincing, resulted in a deep sense of physical and moral displacement and ontological disorientation. (Lessenich, 1999, unpaginated)

The resulting emotional shock of no longer finding his world at the centre of things seems to have occasioned a kind of emotional detachment or distance from it - a kind of pan-European Lacanian mirror stage - from which, Elias (1978) says, a greater capacity for self control emerged. In this way, anagrammatically, geocentricity became egocentricity, the sun becoming internalised so that it now emerges from within. Parallels with our own age of ontological uncertainty are not hard to find. Postmodernity is characterised by a simultaneous globalisation and fragmentation and with it a loss of a sense of solidity of self. This is the thesis of Kenneth Gergen’s (2000) classic text, *The saturated self*, in which he says, ‘as we enter the postmodern era all previous beliefs about the self are placed in jeopardy and with them the patterns of action they sustain’ (p.7). Gergen goes on:

Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center fails to hold.
(And all this because on his return from a conference in Washington he found he had an urgent fax, a student who wanted to see him, a tax demand and a few telephone messages. Later, someone called him on the phone. He didn’t even have email or text-messaging in those days, for heaven’s sake. Is Kenneth Gergen a fragmented self, detached from his social exchanges, or is he just rather busy?)

THE SPELL OF FORMLESSNESS

One can speculate that the subversion of order occasioned by this ontological doubt was productive of a desire to transgress, ‘longing for the security and comfort of order, yet denied a protective presence they... turn to the disruptive impulses and fears of the unconscious’, Margitić (1985, p.110) writes in a review of Mitchell Greenberg’s Detours of desire: Readings in the French Baroque. Bad children! This desire to transgress, to produce ‘formlessness’, a ‘freedom of line’ (Wölfflin, 1964 [1888], p.29), is associated in artistic terms with the fold. Baroque architecture is characterised by a complicated enfolding of space, baroque art by sensuous curves and drapery, billowing clouds breaking out of the frame, giving rise, Wölfflin says, to an illusion of movement. Folds create compartments and secrecy but also, paradoxically, represent a continuous surface, producing in this ceaseless movement juxtaposition and contiguity. In analysing the transition from the renaissance to the baroque Wölfflin develops a theory of art phases going from: linear to painterly; plane to recession; closed to open; multiplicity to unity; and absolute to relative clarity. Menashe (1965) says that the ‘second set of symptoms in each category’ belongs to the baroque. He goes on, ‘similarly, baroque characteristics (whatever they are assumed to be) may also be extended to philosophies, political institutions, economic systems, intellectual trends, emotions and entire nations’ (p.337).

Wölfflin extended his ideas at least to literature and drama. Forkey (1959, p.83) discusses these in relation to the theatre in which, he says, the painterly, the creation of the illusion of movement, translates into the complicatedness of subplots which ‘constantly weave back and forth’, ‘the most lyrical passages relieved by the sharp contrast of farcical elements until the integrated conception of the play becomes apparent at the close.’ Recession in space, in terms of the drama, becomes convergence in time – there is an ‘apparent disorder’ while ‘in reality an underlying order...moves relentlessly on to its goal’. An open form allows the drama to encompass a vast canvas in space and time. ‘Incongruous and fantastic elements are introduced... the classical concept of reason has been thrust aside for the baroque is more concerned with the infinite, the unlimited and the indefinable than the finite, the limited and the definable’ (p.84). Wölfflin’s fourth principle, unity, translates into the single theme in which all the disparate elements are finally united, and the recurrent use of certain emblems providing unifying themes throughout. His final principle, relative unclearness, stands in contrast to the ‘logical development such as one would hope to find in a classical drama’. Forkey (p.85) sums this all up:
To the baroque mind the world is not conceived in logical Cartesian terms. To the contrary, it is full of contradictions. The baroque mind, moreover is acutely aware of the conflict between illusion and reality, and paradox and complexity are accepted as almost natural phenomena.

The ontology of the baroque is caught up in the fold, this complicated enfolding of space and time which entails a rejection of linearity and the embrace of complexity. In his book ‘The fold’, Deleuze (2006 [1993]) draws complexly on the ideas of seventeenth century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, discussing the nature of the fold and its ontological relation to the baroque. The book is not, it has to be said, an easy read but Deleuze’s writing is performative in the sense that in writing about the fold and the baroque he develops a complexly non-linear style in which there are, as Forkey says in relation to the baroque aesthetic, ‘masses in movement rather than clear and well-defined lines’ (1959, p.83). This for example, on Tintoretto’s Last Judgement:

The lower level shows bodies tormented by their own weight, then souls stumbling, bending and falling into the meander of matter; the upper half acts like a powerful magnet that attracts them, makes them ride astride this yellow fold of light, folds of fire bringing their bodies alive, dizzying them but with a ‘dizziness on high’; thus are the two halves of the Last Judgement. (Deleuze, 2006 [1993], p.33)

(This passage uses – at least comes close to using - the asyndeton, ‘a rhetorical figure of speech which builds up a series of words, usually without a conjunction, with a net result of an imposing mass’, a characteristically baroque device which ‘serves the same purpose as the masses of decorative detail in baroque art’ [Forkey, 1959, p.86]).

For me, the pleasure of Deleuze’s text lies in the sensuous surrender to this folding and unfolding wave, being steeped in the irregular beauty and astonishing singularity of the writing – and hoping that in the process some kind of meaning will emerge, while accepting that this meaning may not be fully amenable to reason but instead resonates as an emotional response. Deleuze is a baroquely enigmatic writer, producing in the unifying theme of the fold a unification that nonetheless resists closure, spilling out and unfolding in all directions, while inserting, almost as emblematic devices epigrams such as the delightful ‘not everything is fish, but fish are teeming everywhere’ (p.10).

The fold concerns Leibniz’ Monadology (first published 1714), a brief work, bearing the wrong title, or at least one which ‘is not the title of the text that goes by that name’ (Ferves, 1990, p.433), and is written in French which was not his native language and which he handled poorly, all in all making it bien mûr (well ripe) for a poststructural exegesis. According to Leibniz, the universe is filled with ‘simple substances’ called Monads – each one different and indestructible, but continuously changing. ‘Incorporeal automata’ or souls, Leibniz calls them, Deleuze (p.25) uses the term ‘subject as metaphysical point’. Monads exist in a state of perception, and each is connected to every other Monad so that each mirrors the universe from its own unique perspective or point of view. Although incorporeal, Monads are able to
aggregate in such a way as to produce matter (Savile [2000] gives a reasonably convincing account of Leibniz’ philosophical moves here, more especially given that Leibniz himself is not particularly forthcoming on this point), ‘whence it appears that in the smallest particle of matter there is a world of creatures, living beings, animals, entelechies, souls’ (Paragraph 66), so that each portion of matter is like a ‘garden full of plants and like a pond full of fishes’ and each of these gardens and ponds is also full of plants and fishes. Each living body is composed of these smaller bodies but each has a dominant soul, though the soul does not ‘own’ the body but rather is ‘devoted for ever to its services’ (Paragraph 74). Body and soul are distinct and act independently but each acts ‘as if they influenced the other’ (Paragraph 81). This two-fold organisation gives rise to the famous ‘Leibnizian subject-as-building’. Below, the body as base, formed by infinitely pleated matter, pierced by windows to represent the inflow of information gathered by the five senses. Above, the soul in its windowless chamber, unfolding infinitely to embrace the whole universe - a structure ingeniously represented in Johannes Zahn’s (1702) device of the ‘conclave catoptricum’, described by Georges Teyssot (2000). (See Figure 1).

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Figure 1. The Conclave Catoptricum. (After Johannes Zahn, in Teyssot, 2000).
The upper chamber consisted of a mirror-lined room, its ceiling painted with clouds. When viewed through a peephole the whole space was seen to be filled with an infinity of reflections representing ‘the mind or soul totally enclosed and internalized but providing a gateway to the infinite beyond...Through multiple reflections [the mind as Monad] had the capacity to represent and imagine the whole world’ (p.79). Between the upper and the lower chamber of the Leibnizian subject-as-building is another fold, ‘the actualization of the difference between body and soul’ (Teyssot again). ‘A fold between the two folds’, says Deleuze (with evident glee, so that I feel that there should be an exclamation mark), this fold mediating between the two chambers, each enfolded in different ways as the pleats of matter and the folds of the soul.

And the same image, that of veins in marble, is applied to the two under different conditions. Sometimes the veins are the pleats of matter that surround living beings held in the mass, such that the marble tile resembles a rippling lake that teems with fish. Sometimes the veins are innate ideas in the soul, like twisted figures or powerful statues caught in the block of marble. (Deleuze 2006 [1993], p.4)

It is this ontological notion of the fold that is taken up in Deleuze’s text and which he draws on to develop ideas embracing art, architecture, literature, music, mathematics and science, designating the baroque fold as a trope of ‘the fragility of infinitely varied patterns of movement’ as Conley says in the Translator’s Foreword to the book (p.xi). For Deleuze, the baroque extends outwards in folds or waves in space and time ‘stretched beyond its precise historical limits’, the baroque line moving ‘exactly according to the fold’ (p.38). Deleuze asks whether Leibniz is the baroque philosopher par excellence, that is, is he a philosopher of the baroque, or whether his influence extends (unfolds) further, ‘his work forming a concept capable of making the baroque exist in itself’ (p.37). So, he poses a number of questions about the baroque fold and what sets it apart, after all, folds are to be found in all artistic periods. What is it, he asks, about the baroque fold that frees it from constraint, giving it the unlimited freedom that Leibnizian Monadology supposes? First there is the fold itself which must ‘go through the ceiling’ and extend to infinity, resisting the frame and filling the void in an endless process of folding and unfolding. Then there is the question of what the fold separates: ‘the infinite fold separates or moves between matter and soul, the façade and the closed room, the outside and the inside’, high and low, body and soul. Matter represented below while above the soul sings, but always the fold as mediator between the two. Finally, there is the texture of the fold, producing light and shade, depth and surface, the representation of the materiality of the fold as illusion: ‘The essence of the baroque entails never falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather realizing something in illusion itself’ (p.143). The movement of the fold creates a continually shifting centre, a restless ontology that draws attention to the illusory nature of reality.

Monadology gives rise to the idea of perspective and this is a form of relativism but, as Deleuze says, ‘not the relativism we take for granted. It is not a variation of
true according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject' (p.21). The idea of point of view and perspectivalism, the shifting nature of the intersubjective understanding of reality which for the Monad entails no overview, constitutes the realm of reflexive research.

**TO KNOW THE PEACOCK: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE BAROQUE**

The historical baroque is a pansemiotic world of signs – a figurative world view that sets it in direct conflict with the rational Enlightenment. In the baroque period there is no compartmentalisation of knowledge into disciplines. Westerhoff (2001, p.641) quotes Ashworth (1991):

> To know the peacock...one must know not only what the peacock looks like, but what its name means in every language; what kind of proverbial associations it has; what it symbolizes to both pagans and Christians; what other animals it has sympathies or affinities with; and any other possible connection it may have with stars, plants, minerals, coins or whatever.

This world view gives rise to the polyhistor, the scholar well versed in all the disciplines who can divine the hidden meaning and connections in this world of enfolded, connected, secrecy. The polyhistor is much derided in the age of the Enlightenment as the possessor of an ill-disciplined and chaotic mind but in the baroque period his wide-ranging erudition is esteemed. As Leibniz says, for the Monad, ‘whose nature is to represent, nothing can confine it to the representing of only one thing’ (*Monadology*, paragraph 60). Westerhoff argues that the world view that gives rise to the polyhistor also produces the *Wunderkammer*, the cabinet of curiosities, a fantastical collection of objects, juxtaposed (to the Enlightenment mind) in an apparently chaotic manner. In the *Wunderkammer*, Westerhoff says (p.643), ‘works of art find a place next to precious stones, unicorn horns, clocks and automata, antique statues next to renaissance medals, stuffed crocodiles, coconut shells and monstrous births’. If the ontology of the baroque is the fold, then its epistemology is the *Wunderkammer* in which knowledge arises in the juxtaposition and connection of things, and is intimately connected to wonder. As MacLure (2006b, p.737) says:

> The juxtapositional syntax of the cabinet of curiosities is designed to spark connections in the viewer/user. Operating by seduction rather than argument, it invites them in to handle the ‘exhibits’ rather than just to look at them – to forge their own connections.

The historical baroque was an age of astonishment and curiosity. Law (2003) describes it as ‘an imagination that looks down rather than up’. It was a time in which lenses were revealing the undreamt of intricacies of the invisible, Leibniz’ ponds within ponds and gardens within gardens, swarms of fish everywhere. This fascination with natural wonders was mirrored in the production of artefacts. Connors (1990) writes about the obsession in the seventeenth century with turning,
the ‘ars tornandi’. ‘Like the bagpipes, the lathe showed immense social mobility, rising from the ranks of craftsmen into the uppermost reaches of society, where its use became the pastime of noblemen and sovereigns, scientists and men of letters’ (p.219). The lathe produced the twisting spirals so characteristic of the baroque age but it also produced objects of wonder, ‘ivory hollowed out in fantastic spirals or
reduced to elfin thinness, or shaped into concentric hollow globes’, ‘inside of which one might find a well-turned urn, a fleur-de-lys, or a many-pointed star’ (p.223), pieces which, carved from a single block, baffle in their astonishing construction. The apotheosis of these *pieces excentriques* arrived at in the *Contrefaitkugel*. The baroque turner, says Bernini, ‘wants to hollow out one thing inside another, and that inside another, without ever coming to an end’ (quoted in Connors, 1990, p.232).

In *The Third Policeman*, by Flann O’Brien (1993 [1967], p.76), Constable MacCruiskeen passes the time carving intricate and wonderful boxes nested one inside the other, ‘each one resembling its mother chest in every particular of appearance and dimension’. The last five so small that no-one has ever seen them ‘because no glass is strong enough to make them big enough to be regarded as truly the smallest things ever made’. As MacCruiskeen works using invisible tools on these infinitely small objects the narrator observes that what he was doing, ‘was no longer wonderful but terrible’.

The master turner worked without plans, drawing on an instinctive ‘*bon gout*’ difficult to codify into simple rules. *L’idée* and *génie* counted for more than rules of thumb, freedom from inherited convention enabled inventiveness in which the imagination was what mattered. Connors says that according to Charles Plumier, seventeenth century botanist and lathe enthusiast, the great baroque architect Borromini owned a manuscript written by Michelangelo (unknown from any source other than Plumier’s account) which ‘confronted the paradox of teaching originality. Even after its leçons had been worked through, the student was still told to follow his own génie’ (Connors, 1990, p.229).

DENOUEMENT – PARTICIPANT SELF OBSERVATION

The baroque, as postmodern qualitative research methodology, draws on Oppenheimer’s (1951) ‘irreducible tension’, being concerned both with intellectual content (the ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with the idea of baroque) and style (the strategies used in the representation of research in both visual and textual terms). This apparent tension between style and intellectual content can be resolved in a neatly baroque way through recourse to Wölflin’s fourth principle – unity. Rather than discord between an apparently overblown style and an interesting intellectual basis, the two can be brought together to create a unique approach to reflexive research which, in terms of representation, encompasses Wölflin’s five principles and unites them within the ontology of the fold and the epistemology of the *Wunderkammer*. This is what this book aims to do, to illustrate and exemplify a baroque form of representation in a reflexive research methodology I call participant self observation, a methodology underpinned by contiguity and connection. The resulting methodology produces a non-linear, non-Cartesian view of the world in an attempt to move away from the closures that limit research. The baroque is often regarded as being in bad taste, but
taste in itself is a form of restraint, or control. Leibniz argues that of all possible worlds God chooses the best, but a different point of view would suggest that what gets realised is, instead, ideological, produced by dominant discourses within specific socio-cultural and historical epistemes. All intellectual activity is representation and the disciplines are the traditions associated with particular systems of representation – the way we order the world. This book is about ways to disrupt these ways of knowing through the activity known as research. Research in the baroque moment, as a recurrent and ahistorical concept of which the postmodern is its contemporary spectral manifestation, is about producing irregularity as a mirror to reason.
CHAPTER TWO

REFLEXIVITY

THE LOCATION OF PARTICIPANT SELF OBSERVATION

As outlined in the Introduction, participant self observation is a critical form of autoethnography which requires the researcher to locate themselves within discourses and to analyse identifications and the selves these identifications give rise to in relation to these discourses. As the name suggests, participant self observation involves the observation of self as subject and object of research. In this chapter I set out some of the concepts on which participant self observation depends, and situate it within a continuum of reflective/reflexive research.

SELF AND SUBJECT

Self and subject are terms that are often used interchangeably, but there is some value in holding in mind a distinction between them, even if this boundary inevitably becomes blurred on occasion. The notion of selfhood relates to what we think of as the conscious ego or 'I', giving rise to that pinnacle of humanist achievement, the autonomous self with free will and self-determination, 'possessed of self knowledge and an irreducible core of “humanity”, a “human essence” in which we all partake, an essence which strives over history progressively to perfect and realize itself’ (Hutcheon, 1988, p.7). It is a narrative lesson deeply ingrained in our culture, but it is also a project that has aroused some scepticism. 'It is autonomous! That’s a good one!' chuckles Jacques Lacan (2001 [1977], p.145).

Aside:

Balloon-headed Being of Superior Inteligence, or maybe an entity of ‘pure energy’ jealous of our corporeality, trying to figure out why Captain Kirk is hell-bent on escape from his gilded cage: ‘But Captain Kirk, why do you try to leave? You have everything you need here?’ Camera pans to B-List 1970s negligéed lovely, bearing decanter of wine and puzzled, lamb-like expression.

(Fictionalised, though fairly standard plot in Star Trek, see note 4).

Indeed, in the current milieu the self is a concept that must be placed, as they say in poststructuralist circles, ‘under erasure’, meaning that while a ‘correct’ poststructuralist use of language cannot erase the humanist self from the text by
replacing it with an ‘anti-humanist’ one – a feat which in any case, if achieved, would completely undermine poststructuralism’s foundations - it is necessary to keep it at a distance and treat it in deeply ironic terms. The subject, on the other hand, can be thought of as the self which has come to see itself as constituted in discourse as a consequence of which the concepts of agency and autonomy become problematic. As Bennett and Royle (2004, p.125) say,

the term ‘subject’ is useful then, in that it encourages a more critical attentiveness to the ways in which the ‘I’ is not autonomous. Rather an ‘I’ or ‘me’ is always subject to forces and effects both ‘outside’ itself and ‘within’ itself.

The distinction between self and subject can be useful in thinking about those other distinctly slippery terms, reflection and reflexivity, though again, there is no point in attempting a rigorous separation of the two. But if the self is related to what we think of as the autonomous ‘I’, while the subject is the self situated within discourse, then reflection can be thought of as pertaining to the self, while reflexivity concerns the subject. Reflexivity always involves the quality of referring back, of trying to see ‘what frames our seeing’ as Patti Lather puts it (1993, p.675). So, reflexive language refers back to language, reflexive research refers back to research and the reflexive self refers back to itself as the self located within discourse. In research terms, reflexivity becomes the attempt to ‘reflect on, examine critically and explore analytically the nature of the research process’ (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p.2218) - and inevitably, this involves the researcher positioned within discourses of ‘research’.

**Locating the self: reflection and reflexivity**

Daniel Dennett says, ‘the unexamined life may not be worth living, but the over-examined life is nothing to write home about either’ (1984, p.87). There is an assumption that self-reflection, is inherently ‘a good thing’, an idea that rests on a Cartesian foundation of the possibility of rational self-knowledge. Further, that this leads inexorably to moral improvement and greater human perfection (though as Dennett’s remark suggests, you can have too much of a good thing). While there are few in academia, even those not of a postmodern/ poststructural/ postpost persuasion who would unreservedly support the notion of a self fully cognisant to itself through a process of rational reflection, this idea still lurks at the back of much of our thinking about the self. It is, for example, what drives the reflective practitioner movement, which, in its Schönian guise (Schön, 1982) is predicated on the idea that tacit knowledge can be surfaced enabling self-directed change to occur. Poststructuralism strips away this cozy veneer of comforting self illusion. Instead, a notion of **différance**, Derrida’s (1982) elegant conflation of difference and deferral, inserted at the level of the self results in an endless round of undecidability. Indeed, the self is not free to take up positions within discourses at will but is, to a certain extent at least, subjected, rendering the notion of critical self reflection problematic. This problematisation produces tensions in the practice of
reflexive research. There are, as Patti Lather says, ‘few guidelines for how one goes about the doing of it, especially in a way that both is reflexive and, yet, notes the limit of reflexivity’ (1993, p.685). None of this means, however, that we should abandon reflection and reflexivity, but research in the postmodern and what I refer to as the baroque, stands in opposition to the humanist Weltanschauung, the grand narrative which as its nemesis is responsible for the various crises, moments and turns in qualitative research. Instead, reflexive research in the baroque offers only a restless refraction of self, and the uncanny return of the double in the text.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000, p.5) suggest that while there are different uses of the terms reflection and reflexivity they all ‘draw attention to the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer’. Further, they suggest that reflexivity should be regarded as a ‘particular, specified version of reflective research, involving reflection on several levels or directed at several themes’; and they criticise researchers who put the emphasis ‘so firmly on one particular type of self-reflection that little energy is left over for anything else’ – singling out for special contempt the kind of reflection that leads to what they call ‘narcissistic self-centredness’. This charge of navel gazing is a common criticism of autoethnography, the ire generated forming part of the ‘polemics about reflexivity’ referred to by Marcus (1994, p.393) in which it is argued ‘knowledge claims shrink in ever-decreasing circles, leading to authors telling us only about themselves, for they feel unable to tell us about anything else’ (Maton, 2003, p.55). But, while Foley (2002) accepts that such ‘confessional reflexivity’ can descend into mawkishness, he argues that nonetheless this type of reflexivity can be important for positioning the researcher: ‘First, being a dialogic knower or witness to a cultural scene positions the ethnographer as a much less imperial, authoritative learner. Second, it obligates the researcher to embrace her/his personal indebtedness and responsibility towards other individuals’ (p.475).

Like Alvesson and Sköldberg, Pierre Bourdieu emphasises the importance of different levels of reflexivity which differ markedly from the confessional reflexivity associated with some forms of feminist research, instead preferring a ‘more objective’ (for which read ‘manly’?) epistemic reflexivity. For Bourdieu, reflexivity is never optional but a necessary part of sociological research to counteract the ‘three types of biases’ that ‘may blur the sociological gaze’ (Bourdieu, quoted in Wacquant, 1992, p.46). He goes on:

Far from encouraging narcissism and solipsism epistemic reflexivity invites intellectuals to recognize and to work to neutralize the specific determinisms to which their innermost thoughts are subjected and it informs a conception of the craft of research designed to strengthen its epistemological moorings.

These three ‘biases’ Bourdieu enumerates as: the individual researcher; the position occupied by the researcher within the academic field and the field of power; and the intellectualist bias ‘which entices us to construe the world as a spectacle’ to be interpreted using ‘presuppositions inscribed in the fact of thinking the world’ (quoted in Wacquant, 1992, p.39). In this way, Bourdieu distances
himself from confessional reflexivity, instead being concerned with the development of a ‘sociology of sociology’ which analyses the knower in relation to the known and the discourses that produce this as objective knowledge. In other words to provide a properly respectable form of reflexivity rescued from the depravity of narcissism and raised to the status of an ology.

Individual bias is, Wacquant suggests, the most easily recognised and controlled and is to be countered with self-criticism. The second source of bias arises from the self conception of intellectuals who like to think of themselves as undetermined “free floating” and endowed with a form of symbolic grace (p.44) as if they were not, themselves, implicated within discourse. The third source, intellectualist bias, relates to the organising principles of what Currie (1998) refers to as narratives at large. For example, to take my own case, I narrate myself as researcher and I narrate my research according to the narratives I draw on. As a researcher I am currently interpellated into the hegemonic discourse of poststructuralism and the effects of reading Foucault, Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida, Laclau, Mouffe and their descendents and interpreters means I interpret the world in these terms. A s a result of this I see intertextuality everywhere and everything as discourses to be interpellated into. The effect of this then becomes an aspect of my research I have to reflexively examine. The whole project starts to take on the appearance of a hall of mirrors, or in less delicate terms, something that threatens to disappear reflexively up its own arse. However, Bourdieu’s typology forms a useful conceptual framework for thinking about reflexivity in research as well as, reflexively, serving as a prophylactic against this eventuality, even if his desire to ‘neutralise bias’ is to me (biased as I am through interpellation into a poststructuralist discourse) problematic. Bourdieus reflexivity seems to rest on a modernist perspective centred on the possibility of objective knowledge which assumes that bias can be observed in a non-biased way and reversed, like an astigmatism, by looking through a corrective lens. But ‘bias’ is a term that is (always?) already ideologically biased. It is a textile metaphor, and to tease the threads a little more, the responsibility the researcher bears is to show their slant, demonstrate how they cut their cloth.

If poststructuralism troubles the modernist assumptions underlying the appeal to reflexivity, what would a poststructural reflexive approach look like and what would it do? Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, Laws, Mueller-Rockstroh and Bendix Peterson (2004) went on retreat and wrote about their childhoods in order to examine the subject inscribed in language, turning language ‘back on itself to see the work it does in constituting the world.’ In this way they became ‘simultaneously the objects/subjects of their gaze’ (p.361). For Davies et al (2004) (phew!) reflexivity is the means by which the subject examines itself as an effect of discourse. However, this is not to presuppose that the subject can situate itself outside discourse to see how it might look. Rather, it is a messy process in which the subject twists and turns to see the means by which it is caught up. Since the only means of examining this subject is through the same language by which the subject becomes an effect of discourse, reflexive writing places the subject under erasure, ‘subjecting it to the kind of critique that constitutes the subject as
REFLEXIVITY

something other than it thinks itself to be when it constitutes itself as the unified, rational subject' (Davies et al., 2004, p.367). (Have you got that?). This kind of reflexivity requires the ability to hold simultaneously conflicting positions which ‘thwart language’s desire to trap us into binary forms of thought’ (Davies, 1997, p.272). A position Davies claims to be comfortable adopting. She writes, ‘as a poststructuralist I do not find that problematic. Linear forms of logic are too constraining for those of us who wish to embrace the rich complexity of life lived through multiple and contradictory discourses’. While there are, as noted earlier, deep tensions in the practice of reflexivity, it need not be predicated on the notion of a rational self fully cognisant to itself. Reflexivity can be understood as différence, with resistance to closure. There are no guarantees, ‘a certain identity is never possible; the ethnographer must always ask “Not who I am?” but “when, where, how am I (so and so)”’ (Minh-Ha, quoted in Denzin, 1997, p.xiv).

REFLEXIVE RESEARCH

Participant self observation is a reflective and reflexive methodology which requires the researcher to locate themselves within discourses and to analyse identities and the selves these identifications give rise to in relation to these discourses. It requires an approach that situates itself, eclectically, within a continuum of reflexive and self-observation methods, in particular, drawing on elements of participant observation (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Kawulich., 2005); autoethnography (see, for example Ellis & Bochner, 1996; 2003); systematic self-observation (Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002); teacher self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Loughran, 2005; Russell & Loughran, 2005); writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2001; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; St Pierre, 1997a,b); and probably much else besides. These approaches constitute what might be thought of in Deleuzian terms as a family rhizome of reflexive methods and so, before going on to discuss participant self observation in detail in the next chapter, I give a quick sketch of some of the relatives.

Participant observation

Participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p.1)

Davies (1999, p.67) describes it as the ‘archetypal form of research employed by ethnographers’. The term has an antique quaintness about it somehow, as if it really belonged to an earlier anthropological era. It brings to mind romantic visions of Malinowski (1922) wandering among the Trobriand villagers, in his wonderfully Othering account, Argonauts of the Western Pacific, replete with photographs of bare breasted native women à la National Geographic magazine (because you could do that in those days). For all his value-laden writing: ‘the better-featured have also a markedly lighter skin’ (p.51); ‘Chastity is an unknown virtue’ (p.53)
(in my library copy this has been underlined by an unknown hand with the word ‘BIAS’ written above it and ‘MCP’ - presumably, ‘male chauvinist pig’ - in the margin); and his masculine talk of ‘penetrating cultures’ (p.517), there is much that is evocative in his account. And his concern is not with reciting tales of funny foreigners, he wants to ‘grasp the essential outlook of others; with the reverence due even to savages’ (p.518). (However, Kirk and Miller [1986, p.37], suggest that in his posthumously published diaries it is apparent that ‘he did not respect (or even like) the Trobrianders’ – or any one else, much. Raising the interesting question, does this matter?).

If Malinowski’s participant observation conjures images of exotic lands and unknown peoples, then the other side of the ethnographic coin is the rather more gritty realism carried out by the Chicago School under Robert Park, and in Whyte’s (1993 [1943]) Street Corner Society, which though not strictly speaking Chicago School was ‘a model for all of us of what a Chicago style field study ought to look like’ (Becker, 1999, p.7). It starts with the customary setting trope (‘In the heart of Eastern City there is a slum district known as Cornerville’, p.xv), and is written in a fast-moving and spare style somewhere between Hemingway and Hammett: ‘The Norton’s were Doc’s gang’ (p.3). Whyte’s justification for carrying out participant observation is to ‘put people’ into the statistics of poverty. Through observation, Whyte wants to ‘get to know the people intimately’ and ‘understand the relations between the little guy and little guy, big shot and little guy, and big shot and big shot’ in order to explain Cornerville society. And far more than Malinowski, in Whyte’s account the voice of his ‘informants’, especially Doc, comes across vividly.

These approaches and accounts, fascinating as they are, share a rather positivist orientation towards research. ‘All assumed that there were social facts to be discovered and a major concern was to reduce any distortion that might be introduced by the presence of the ethnographer’ (Davies, 1999, p.70). Maintaining an objective distance was all important and fieldworkers were warned of the dangers of ‘going native’. A postpositivist slant is still evident in some participant observation, indeed Dewalt and Dewalt (2002, p.92) state that the aim of participant observation is the development of a comparative social science:

The goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method. In the terms of science, the researcher will try to maximise the validity of the data that are collected and present a fair and objective analysis and interpretation of them.

While earlier ethnographic accounts based on participant observation wrote the researcher out of the script, relegating this aspect to titbits to be found in acknowledgements and other paratextual elements of published work (Ben-Ari, 1987); or publishing a separate account as Nigel Barley (1983) does in his book The innocent anthropologist. Notes from a mud hut, (which a national daily newspaper suggests somewhat ambiguously on the cover, ‘Does for anthropology
what Gerald Durrell did for animal collecting’), a trend towards professional reflexivity in the 1970s saw a developing interest in the ethnographer located within the research and the constructed nature of the text. An example of this is provided by Kondo’s (1990) ethnographic research into Japanese identities in the workplace which reflexively locates herself within the process. Taking as her theoretical problem the identity and crafting of selves within relations of power she sought to deconstruct the personal/political binary. Personal experience became the theoretical framework in this process:

Experience, and the specificity of my experience...is not opposed to theory; it enacts and embodies theory. That is to say, the so-called personal details of the encounters, and of the concrete processes through which research problems emerged, are constitutive of theory, one cannot be separated from the other (p.24).

Specifying the theoretical problem creates the framework within which personal experience can be analysed and from which theory can be constructed. Kondo also argues that ‘style and theory are inseparable in the process of writing’ (p.48). Writing becomes a theoretical choice and Kondo adopts strategies that ‘are deployed as an oppositional discourse to other insidiously persistent tropes’ concerning the Japanese in the US while recognising that, ‘like all oppositional discourse, the opposition can never be pristine or transcendent, but is always already situated within other discourses, reproducing conventions even as it problematises them’ (p.302). Kondo’s account deconstructs the insider/outside binary so evident in Malinowski’s work, blurring the distinction between ethnography and autoethnography.

**Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is, Ellis and Bochner (2003) tell us, a ‘broad rubric’. Indeed, they list 42 different approaches which they regard as falling within its domain including personal narrative, reflexive ethnography, ethnographic memoir, critical autobiography and so on. What unites these approaches is that ‘we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data’ (Jackson, 1989, p.4, quoted in Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 80). Analytical approaches therefore differ and there is no single methodological or theoretical orientation though Tedlock (2005) suggests that it is an area that has interested feminist researchers working in a poststructural and/or critical idiom. What links the different approaches is the claim for personal experience as a legitimate area of research.

The term autoethnography Ellis and Bochner attribute to David Hayano (1979) (though he says he first heard it from Sir Raymond Firth’ at a seminar in 1966 held at the London School of Economics. Sadly, there is no reference cited for this, so the trail goes cold at that point). Autoethnography, Hayano writes (1979, p.99), is concerned with ‘how anthropologists conduct and write ethnographies of their “own people”’, not solely or even necessarily, ethnography of the self then. He goes on ‘many auto-ethnographers comment on the need to make a clear
distinction between scientist-ethnographer and native group member in order to maintain a sense of emotional and social detachment and value neutrality’ (p.102).

So, although the term may originally be Hayano’s (or Sir Raymond Firth’s), the focus of autoethnography has shifted as a result of the influence of Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner who have invested it with an emotional content far removed from its origins. For example, Carolyn Ellis has written in highly personal terms about the slow death of her partner from emphysema (Ellis, 1995); and Ruth Behar (1996, p.177) quite brazenly says, ‘anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing any more’. This is ‘confessional reflexivity’ with a vengeance. Bourdieu probably wouldn’t approve.

Gubrium and Holstein (1997, p.57) suggest that this move to ‘emotionalism’ does not have a single source but has arisen in response to a perceived ‘cognitive bias’ inherent in a number of approaches, among them ethnomethodology which, they argue, ‘seriously shortchanges the heart and soul of everyday life’. It has also emerged, they suggest, as an outgrowth of symbolic interactionism as for example in the work of Norman Denzin and others. The non-privileging of the rational over the emotional in autoethnography is an attempt to move beyond Cartesian dualism and the ‘unfortunate dichotomies’ that this gives rise to (Foley, 2002, p.475).

An autoethnographic account which has similarities to my own research, at least in terms of the subject area, is provided by Pelias’ (2004) *A methodology of the heart. Evoking academic and daily life*. In this work Pelias uses personal narratives, memoirs, ‘creative non fiction’, and ‘performative writing’ to, as the title says, evoke the academic and its intersection with the personal as a way of ‘being in the world’ (p.2). This is Pelias’ response to what he perceives to be a crisis of faith in academic circles, ‘when growing number of faculty discovered that the university life was not what they expected or bargained for...they felt spiritually and ethically bankrupt’ (p.10). There is a Heideggerian feel to this that evokes the idea of the ‘authentic’ self submerged under the ‘they self’ (Heidegger, 1962). Pelias’ response is to produce an account which places ‘the heart’ - the emotional - at the centre of research in order to reveal the depths of this perceived crisis, through scholarship that is: evocative (‘has language doing its hardest work, finding its most telling voice, and revealing its deepest secrets’), multi-faceted (‘turns and twists...knows that to speak is to always be located in history, to be always positioned and partial’), reflexive (‘points to itself in order to say this is where it stands, at least at this moment’), empathic (connecting ‘person to person in the belief in a shared and complex world’) and useful (‘It works on behalf of social justice’) (p.12).

Emotionalism as an approach to qualitative inquiry places an emphasis on subjective experience and feelings, an area that itself arouses strong feelings - ‘Researchers who write about their own emotions risk being seen by colleagues as emotional exhibitionists’ (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p.3). In turn this evidently creates feelings of defensiveness among emotional researchers. Indeed, many authors of autoethnographic accounts are at pains to justify the legitimacy of this form of research. For example, Ricci (2003, p.595) of his autoethnographic verse says, ‘One could argue my design lacks rigour’ but pleads, ‘surely there is room for
alternative methods of inquiry?’. Autoethnographers want to do things differently, but they still want to be loved. One can readily appreciate though where this defensiveness comes from. Holt (2003) presents an ‘autoethnographic writing story’ about his attempts to get a paper published which centres on the peer review process, and the frustrations this engendered. ‘Much of the feedback’ he complains, ‘provided a universal critique of autoethnography rather than a critique of the particular manuscript’ (p. 16). Holt describes the difficulty of getting past the gatekeepers who judged his autoethnographic narrative of becoming a university teacher to be lacking scientific credibility because it did not conform to traditional criteria for qualitative research, criteria he felt to be inappropriate to the work undertaken: ‘it seems that charges of narcissism and related criticisms function to reinforce ethnographic orthodoxy and resist change. Such criticisms in turn function to preserve the very types of dominant viewpoints that those using autoethnographic approaches may wish to question’ (p. 16). A double bind. One of the main difficulties is, as Sparkes (2000, p. 21) writes, that autoethnography is ‘located at the boundaries of disciplinary practices and raises issues as to what constitutes proper research’. By analysing this process Holt opens up an area of research not normally explicitly considered, viz, the role of reviewers as gatekeepers in patrolling the borders. This kind of reflexivity fosters an examination of the taken-for-granted or hidden aspects of research as a discursively constructed process and which does indeed seem to see itself, in some quarters, as undetermined, free floating and ‘endowed with a form of symbolic grace’.

The danger in autoethnographical accounts is that by laying bare one’s emotions an emotional vulnerability is presented that in some respects demands to be received as truth simply because it is caused by pain. This leads to ‘the talk show dilemma of uncritically rehashing familiar tropes of personal intrigue and bodily scandal as “authentic” experience’ (Saukko, 2002, p. 247). But, as Holman Jones (2005, p. 767) points out, hand-wringing is not enough. She quotes Denzin and Lincoln, who argue that the challenge to autoethnography is to move from rage to ‘progressive political action, to theory and method that connect politics, pedagogy, and ethics to action in the world.’ The challenge is, she argues, to make the personal political. The location of autoethnography within the critical becomes an important legitimising principle for this type of research.

Systematic self observation

A very different take on the observation of self is provided by Rodriguez and Ryave (2002) who have developed the method of ‘systematic self observation’. This is a research strategy that ‘offers researchers access to a virtually unexplored domain’ (p. 1) and involves training participants to observe themselves, as a way to research the ordinary. The theoretical framework is provided, the authors suggest, by traditions such as ethnography and the work of Erving Goffman. Like ethnography it takes as its starting point the everyday concerns of participants, rather than imposing researchers’ pre-determined categories and interests. Using this method Rodriguez and Ryave have researched, amongst other topics, telling
lies in everyday life (Rodriguez & Ryave, 1990); telling secrets (Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992); and withholding compliments (Rodriguez, Ryave & Tracewell, 1998). It is an ‘event contingent’ method in which the participant is instructed to write a narrative account which identifies ‘the situation, the participants, and what occurred, including the words spoken and/or any thoughts and feelings that the informant had’ in response to the trigger event (Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002, p.9). The authors suggest the method ‘strives for scientific rigor. It is a flexible research strategy that is intended to maximise the quality and validity of the descriptions generated through self-observation’ (p.10). The authors do not discuss analysis in great depth, though in Rodriguez et al. (1998) an inductive approach similar to grounded theory is employed. The authors also suggest that the systematic nature of the data collected lends itself to quantitative approaches. What is implicit in the method is a focus on the content of the participants’ responses, accepting a transparency model of language i.e. one in which ‘language is viewed as a resource, not a topic of investigation’ and in which ‘analysts interpret what is said by focusing on the meaning that any competent user of a language would find in a story’ (Reissman, 2005, p.3). This actually, takes it very far from ethnomethodological conversation analytic approaches which focus, minutely, on the interactive construction of dialogue.

Although the method uses ‘informants’ as observers, self observation has also been used by researchers to analyse their own experience. Rodriguez and Ryave (2002) cite two examples of this: David Sudnow’s (1978) account *Ways of the hand*, in which the author observed his own jazz piano playing; and Anthony Wallace’s, *Driving to Work* (1972) in which the author made explicit the tacit decisions underlying his drive to and from work.

Sudnow’s and Wallace’s approaches could hardly be more different in terms of theoretical orientation or analysis. Sudnow’s is a phenomenological exploration with a strongly Heideggerian slant. The research question is: ‘Can the body’s improvisational ways be closely described from the point of view of the actor, not through an introspective consciousness, but by fine examination of concrete problems posed by the task of sustaining an orderly activity?’ (p.xiii). It is ‘phenomenological in motive, ethnographic in origin and definitional in intent’ (p.153). True, Sudnow’s (1978) exploration of his hands tells me a lot more about (his) piano playing than I wanted to know (apologies to Thurber). However, the scope of the project is interesting in terms of the possibilities for the observation of an embodied self, not as an introspection but in Heidegger’s terms a *Dasein*, a ‘being’ engaged in practice (Heidegger, 1962).

By contrast, Wallace’s (1972) account of his drive to work takes symbolic interactionism as its theoretical basis and is ‘an introspective account in which the anthropologist used himself as his own informant’ (p.311). The method involved Wallace sitting at his writing table ‘recalling patterns of experience in [a] specific activity which he has personally experienced approximately five hundred times’ (p.312). But this is no exercise in reflexive autoethnography. It aimed to produce ‘cognitive maps’ describing in detail the processes engaged in while undertaking a task that usually, once mastered, remains part of tacit knowledge; making explicit...
the cognitive rules, operations, monitoring and organisation of the procedure, engaged in while undertaking a complex task.

While both these examples make use of self-observation (albeit in very different ways), curiously, neither offers a reflexive or self-referentially aware account of the research undertaken, but they do indicate the range of applications of self-observation and the potential it offers as a research tool. In particular the notion of observing one’s own embodied practice in which ‘event contingency’ can be used as a metaphor in which one catches oneself in the act of ‘being’.

Self-study

Self-study is a relatively new research method employed in a number of disciplines but becoming particularly popular in teacher education. It draws on areas of interest such as reflective practice, action research and practitioner research (Loughran, 2005). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p.13) write that self-study represents a ‘trend away from modernism and its assumptions about legitimate knowledge and knowledge production toward broadening what counts as research’. Self-study involves an eclectic mix of methods and approaches which together create a narrative of the self. This eclecticism, the authors suggest, creates an additional challenge, ‘self-study researchers inevitably face the added burden of establishing the virtuosity of their scholarship within and through the writing itself; lacking established authority each researcher must prove herself as a methodologist and writer’ (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.15).

Bullough and Pinnegar suggest that self-study is ‘Foucault-inspired’, responding to the notion that research ‘has political meaning, utility and effectiveness’ only if ‘one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question’ (Foucault, 1977, quoted in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.14). It is, ‘explicitly interested research’ which ‘does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in’ (p.15) and the tensions between these. Self-study is therefore a form of research which provides a means of going beyond personal reflection: there must be connection, ‘so that the learning about teacher education practices might truly resonate with others’ (Loughran, 2005, p.6). Schulte (2005) also argues for the transformational power of self-study as a means to examine one’s own assumptions ‘with the goal of teaching in a more socially just way’ (p.32), thereby introducing a critical dimension into this form of research. This goes some way towards answering the criticism levelled at some forms of teacher research. For example, Shrofel (quoted in Goodson, 2003, p. 27), criticised the work of Clandinin and Connelly (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1999), which focuses on teachers’ personal and practical knowledge, arguing that their type of inquiry lacks this broader contextualisation:

Teachers will, as did the teachers cited by Connelly and Clandinin, make changes in their own classroom curricula but will not perform the questioning and challenging of theory, structure and ideology that will lead to radical and extensive curriculum reform.
A similar point is raised by Dhunpath (2000, p.545) who argues that conceptualisation of teacher practice, as studied in narrative research, is overly focused on the personal and the practical ‘to the exclusion of issues and experiences that are deeply embedded in a world that is also social, political and historical.’

By contrast in self-study, as elaborated by Bullough and Pinnegar, the critical dimension is clearly important, as is the recognition that the local can only be understood in relation to the global or bigger narratives in which the local is circumscribed.

**Writing as a method of inquiry**

While many of the foregoing are umbrella terms covering a range of theoretical orientations, writing as a method of inquiry (WAMOI) is a reflexive method firmly rooted in poststructuralism. For Richardson and St Pierre (2005, p.967) writing is a process of discovery, ‘writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of inquiry’ (their italics). It is a method that deconstructs method. Writing as a method of inquiry is a reflexive approach which recognises that there is no way to step outside of language to check the Truth of what one writes; and also, reflexively, recognising that as a subject in language, language constructs us in ‘ways that are historically and locally specific’ (p.961). ‘Language does not “reflect” social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality’ (Richardson, 2001, p.36). WAMOI recognises that the self is not a rational being whose use of language is transparent and who is fully knowable to itself, it is therefore a method that resists closure, encourages different readings, understands that the reader brings meaning to a text.

Richardson and St Pierre do WAMOI in different ways. Richardson (2001) focuses on ‘writing-stories’ that serve to locate the self in the different areas in which the self is enacted, ‘these are narratives that situate one’s own writing in other parts of one’s life’ offering ‘critical reflexivity about the writing self in different contexts…They evoke new questions about the self and the subject, remind us that our work is grounded, contextual and rhizomatic’ (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p.965). Writing stories, because they bring together different areas of the self, are posited as a means to connect the personal and the political.

While Richardson’s work often tells you what WAMOI should be or what it should do (and she gives tips for the aspiring writer on developing their craft), St Pierre (1997a) leads by example. She shows you what she does. She draws on evocative images such as Deleuze and Guattari’s nomad who ‘travels while seated’ and plays with this idea as a metaphor for her own armchair ethnography (see Figure 1).

Her writing takes on a three-dimensional aspect as a result of this modelling process through which she examines her research from many perspectives, drawing on the metaphor of crystallisation rather than triangulation. St Pierre’s writing is always exhilarating and edgy. Her approach is nicely encapsulated in a comment she made at a panel session during the First International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry, ‘don’t wait until you can understand Foucault before you use him’ (quoted
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in Watson, 2006a, p.877). Which I take to mean that through using Foucault you will arrive at your own reading of his work, a nicely Heideggerian view which draws on a notion of understanding as being ‘ready to hand’.

It is in this sense that WAMOI becomes a form of discovery, a method of inquiry and a means to generate knowledge. In writing about her ethnographic research with older white women of Essex County (USA), St Pierre says, ‘This was rhizomatic work in which I made accidental and fortuitous connections I could not foresee or control’ (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p.970). The aim not to ‘interpret’ or represent the lives of these women but to examine ‘practices of the self the women have used during their long lives in the construction of their subjectivities’.

‘We Bedouins cannot stay in one place too long, my friend.’

Figure 1. [Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd., www.punch.co.uk]

The theoretical framework is poststructuralist and analysis is carried out in that idiom. As Richardson says (2001, p.36):

Writing our lives, post-structurally, then suggests two important things: first, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times; and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said at once to everyone, a text where the ‘complete’ life is told.

But she is exacting in her standards, ‘mere novelty does not suffice’ (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p.964): writing must make a substantive contribution to under-
standing; it must have aesthetic merit; be reflexive; and have impact. This, she argues is using two lenses, science and the creative arts, ‘The blurring of the humanities and the social sciences should be welcomed, not because it is “trendy” but rather because the blurring coheres more truly with life sense and learning style of so many’ (p.964-5).

SITUATING PARTICIPANT SELF OBSERVATION

Participant self observation as a method draws on many of these reflexive approaches but it also differs from them in some respects. It is a reflexive method which is both ‘confessional’ and ‘theoretical’ - though I eschew the overtly emotional approach of confessional reflexivity. I prefer, like Barthes, ‘to utter interiority without yielding intimacy’ (Barthes, 2000 [1981], p.98); it is a form of ‘self-study’ in which I attempt to narrate a self, while recognising, as Butler (1990, p.331) says, that the workings of the unconscious render ‘all narrative coherence suspect’; it draws on the notion of ‘event contingency’ as a metaphor to try to catch myself in the act of ‘being’; it is a version of writing as a method of inquiry which recognises that as a subject in language, language constructs me in socio-culturally and historically specific ways. Currently, we are situated within a poststructuralist discourse which, as Stavrakakis (1999, p.13) points out, is ‘gradually but steadily hegemonising our theoretical and cultural milieu’. We are also situated within a global discourse concerned with gaming (manifested in the UK academic scene as the ‘research assessment exercise’, or RAE, the means by which UK university departments are ranked and through which they receive research funding ). My writing as a method of inquiry therefore emerges out of these discourses and hence I cannot but make use of hypertextual forms of writing (sensu Genette, 1997b) such as parody, pastiche, travesty and irony as devices for analysing the self, rather than emotionalism as construed in the autoethnography associated with Ellis and Bochner. Mimicry and irony are also well-suited to a discourse of gaming in which actions can be analysed as moves in the game. In participant self observation the self is situated as both the subject and object of research, drawing on the metaphors of position and focus as means to partially illuminate (i.e. partially obscure) relationships between local personal narratives, global institutional discourses and the professional identifications they give rise to. In the next chapter, I set out the theoretical and methodological basis of this approach.