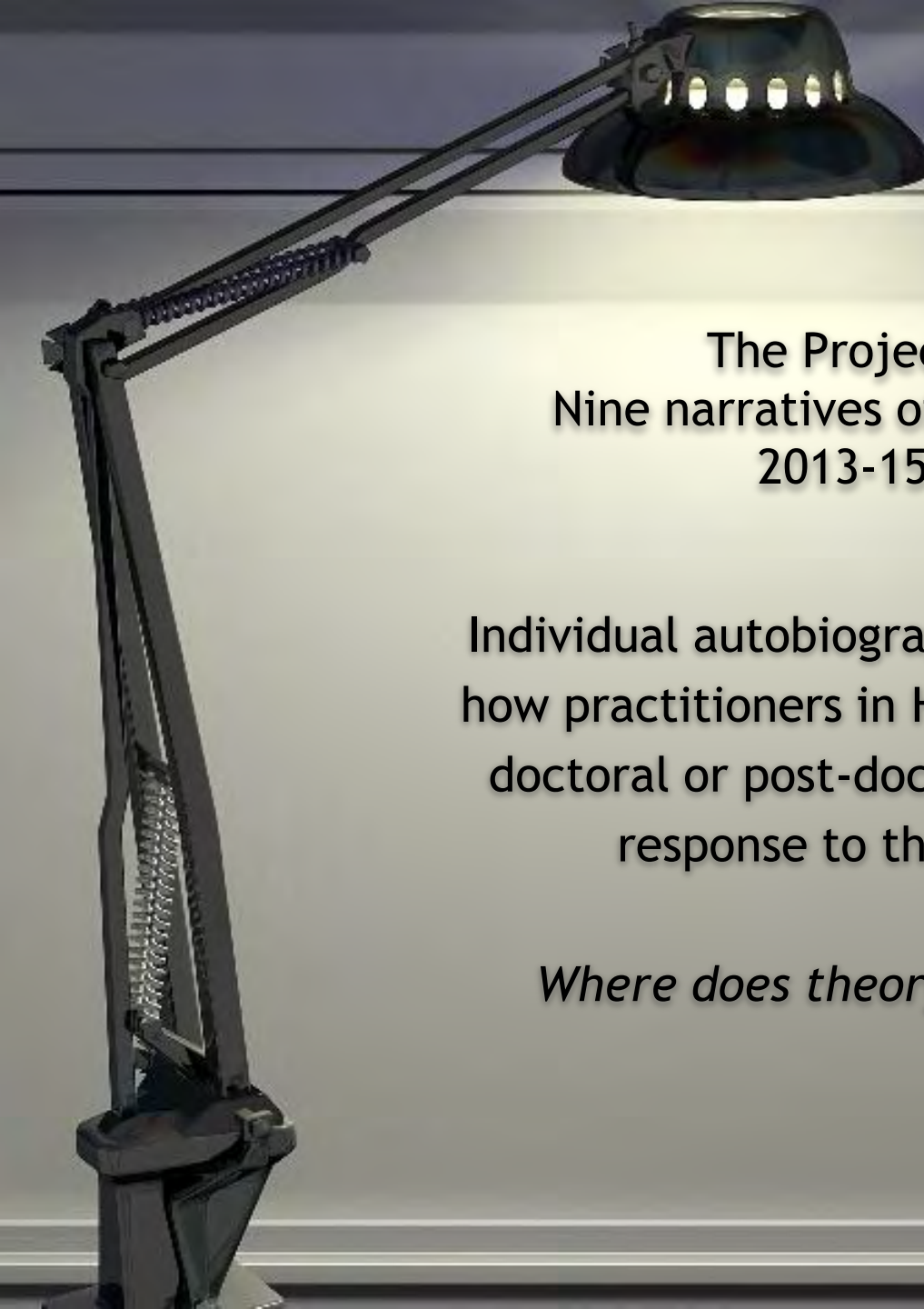




*Where does theory come from in HE?*

*Drawing inspiration about theory from its practice in  
doctoral and post-doctoral projects.*

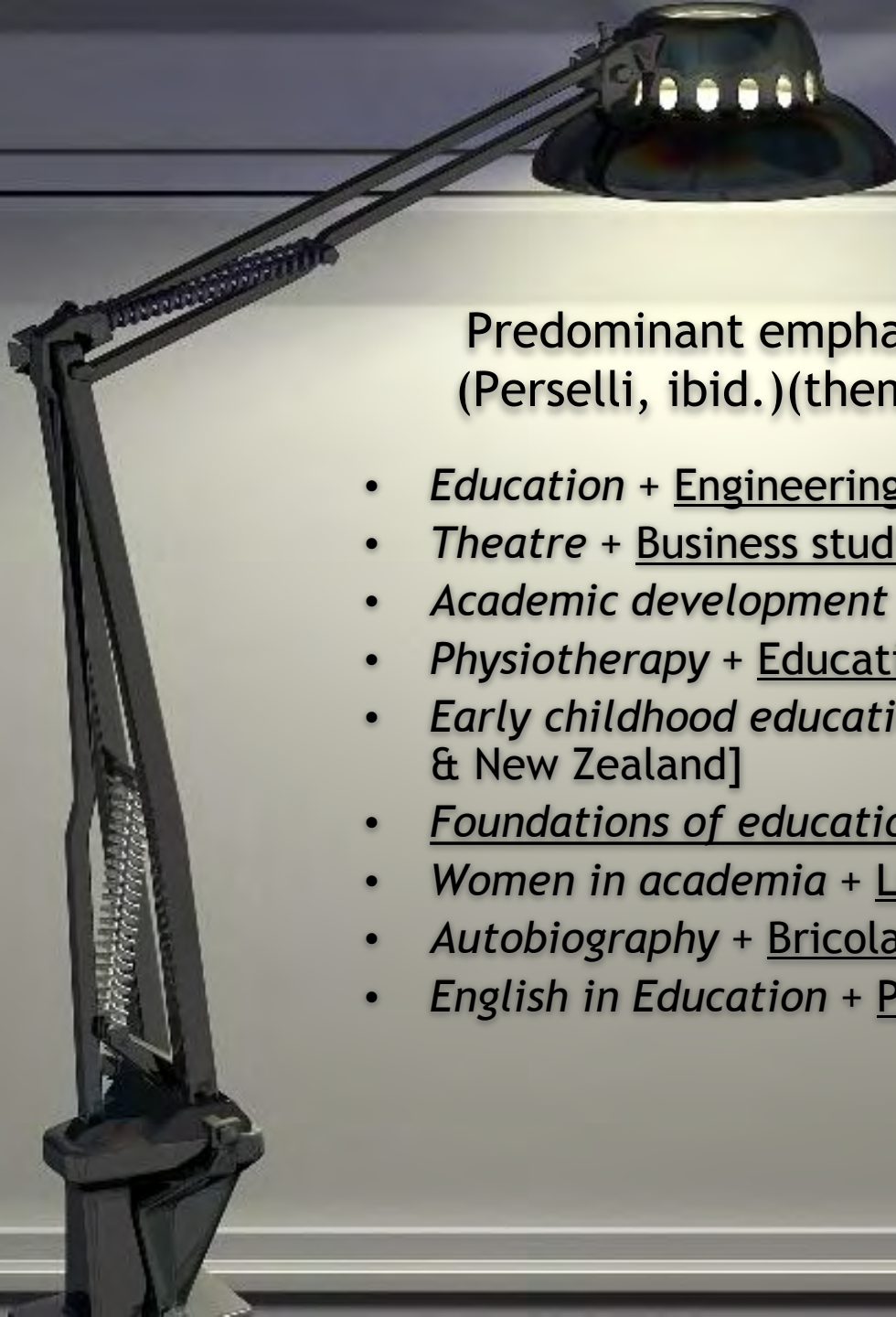
Victoria Perselli  
Kingston University UK



The Project:  
Nine narratives of practice  
2013-15

Individual autobiographical accounts of  
how practitioners in HE developed their  
doctoral or post-doctoral projects, in  
response to the question:

*Where does theory come from...?*



Predominant emphasis on 'transmigration'  
(Perselli, ibid.)(themes / people / places):

- *Education* + Engineering / Jamison [Denmark]
- *Theatre* + Business studies [UK]
- *Academic development* + Visual arts / Foucault [UK]
- *Physiotherapy* + Education / Judith Butler [UK]
- *Early childhood education* + Te Whariki / Barbara Rogoff [UK & New Zealand]
- Foundations of education + Foucault [USA]
- *Women in academia* + Luz Irigaray [Malta]
- *Autobiography* + Bricolage [China/N. America]
- *English in Education* + Policy sociology / Stephen Ball [UK]



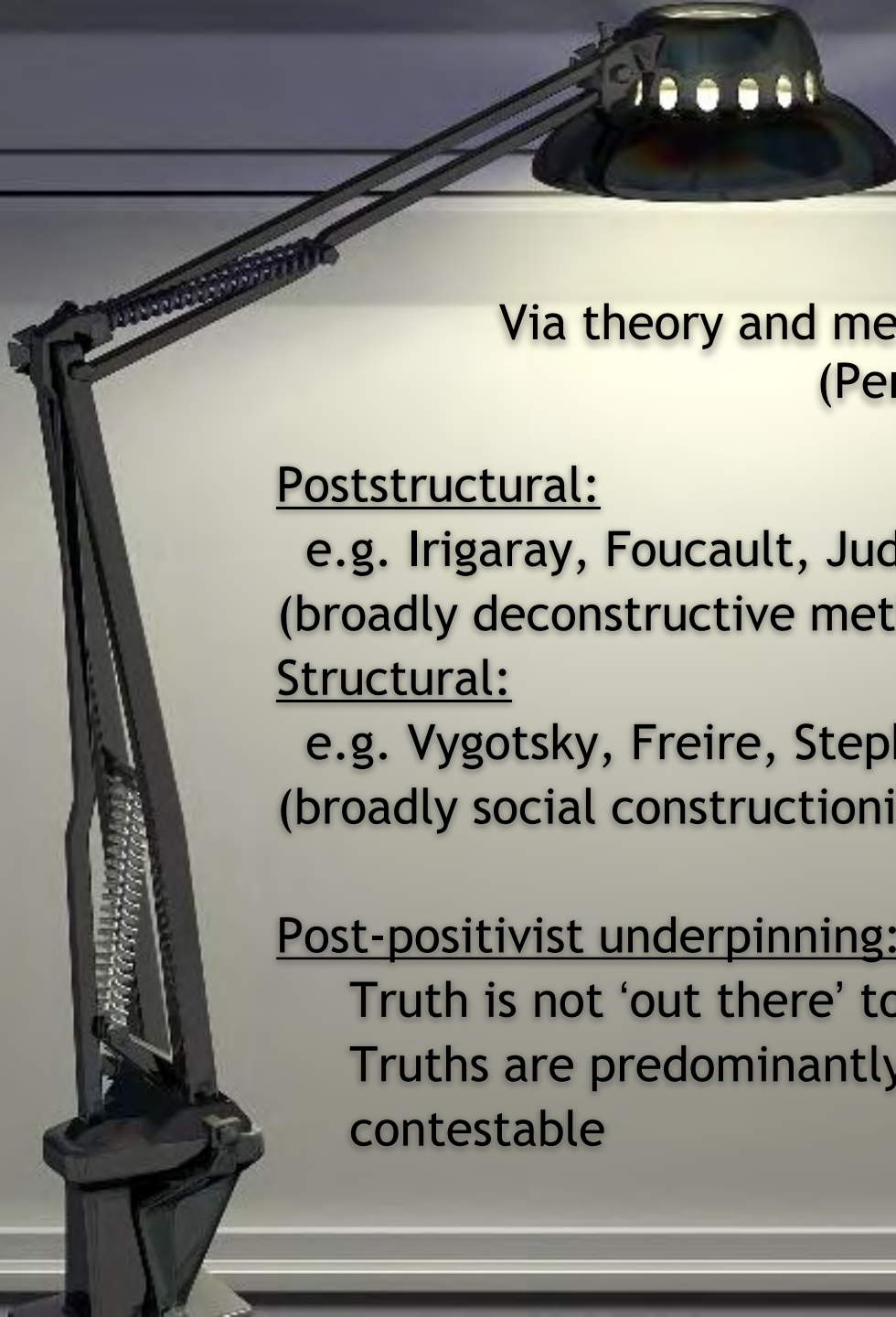
A 'diversity of domains' (Perselli, ibid.)

held in tension with each other:

- Curricular, disciplinary or professional knowledge [from participants] + educational (or other) theories and practices [of self],

or alternatively

- Educational knowledge and practice [from self] + new theoretical premise/methodology [to participants]



Via theory and method 'creatively conjoined'  
(Perselli, ibid.):

Poststructural:

e.g. Irigaray, Foucault, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha  
(broadly deconstructive methods)

Structural:

e.g. Vygotsky, Freire, Stephen Ball, Steinberg  
(broadly social constructionist methods)

Post-positivist underpinning:

Truth is not 'out there' to be discovered;  
Truths are predominantly tentative, provisional and  
contestable



Using the familiar tropes of the doctorate:

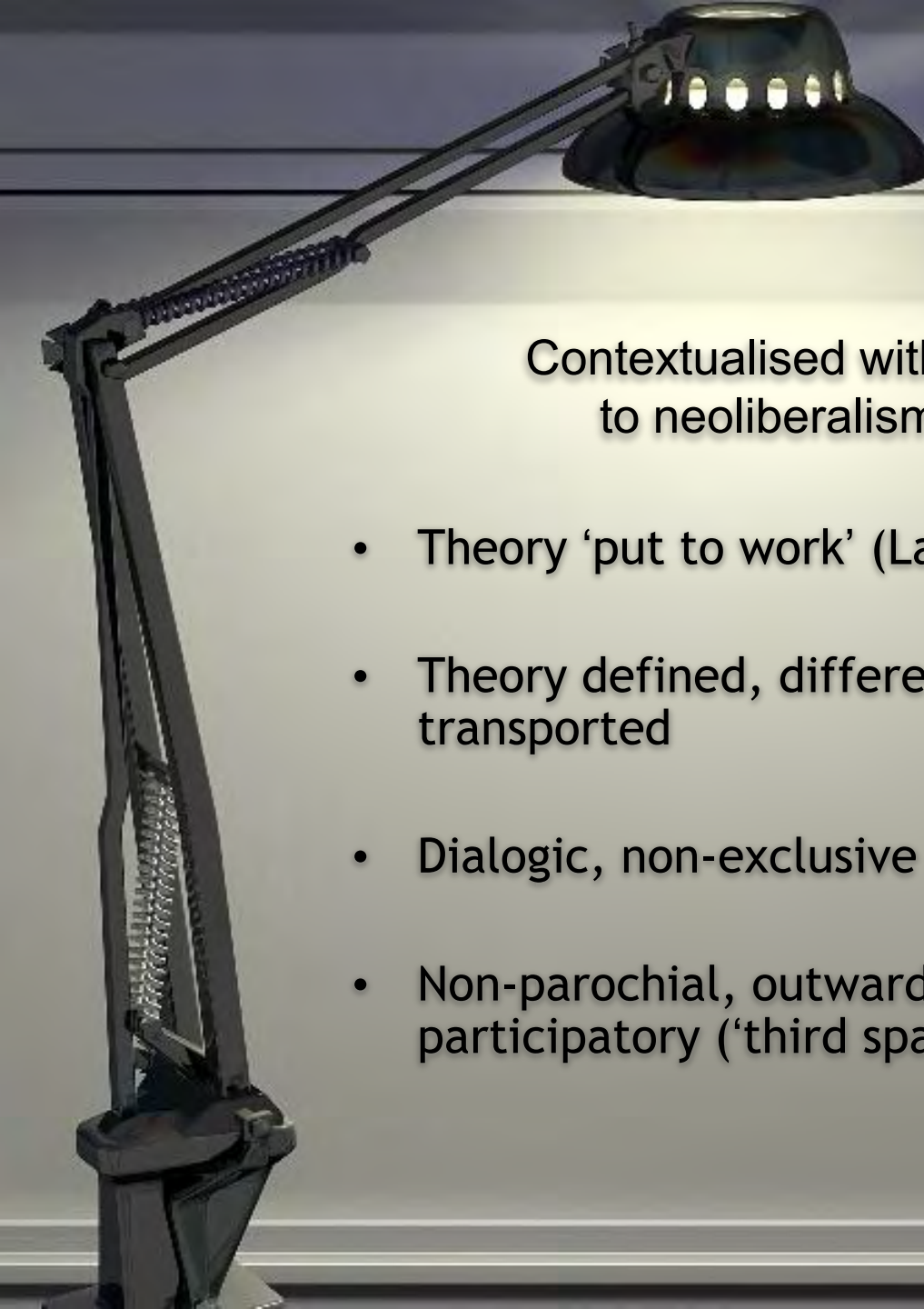
- Journey
- Transition
- Gateway
- Threshold
- Change
- Transformation



But differentiated and problematised:

‘The moment doors are open, a practice becomes amenable to Commodification’ (Camillieri 2009 p.32) ‘when a new technique is discovered, it is only a question of time before it is incorporated within the ideological circle of educational institutions, publishing industries and funding agencies. The challenge is to find a way of working within the institution that acknowledges the esoteric dimension of exoteric practice’ (ibid. p.34).(B.A. in Perselli, ibid.)

‘The other term for culture in the Chinese language is *hua*. The most important connotation of this word is to change, and to be more accurate, to transform. *Hua* always comes in the form of *jiao hua*. *Jiao* means to teach, to persuade, and the term *jiao hua* has three layers of implications’ (L.X. in Perselli, ibid.)



Contextualised within a counter-discourse  
to neoliberalism and consumerism:

- Theory 'put to work' (Lather)
- Theory defined, differentiated, problematised, transported
- Dialogic, non-exclusive and non-hierarchical approach
- Non-parochial, outward looking, forward thinking, participatory ('third space')





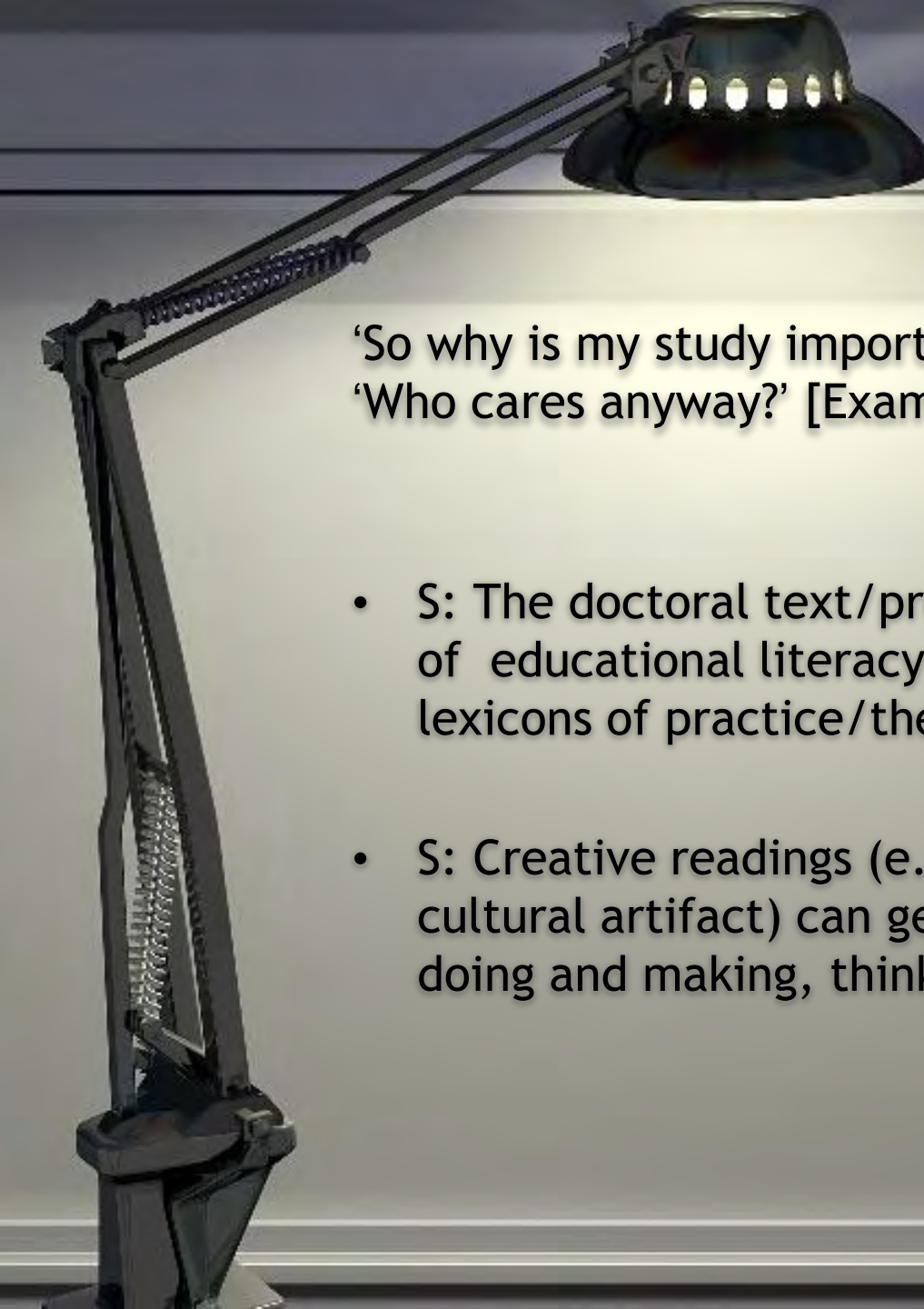
## Towards pedagogies of change (Perselli, ibid.):

- Educative relations (Lomax; Gitlin): self - participants; presenter - audience; writer - readership
- Reciprocity ('resourceful peers' in Perselli & Moehrke-Rasul, 2013): what is *brought to the study* by its participants/observers?
- The greater good; cultural and social contribution
- 'Emancipatory' i.e. theory neither obfuscated nor confined within the academy (exclusivity); neither simplified nor over-claiming (commodification)
- Transformation through transmigration in naturalistic settings.



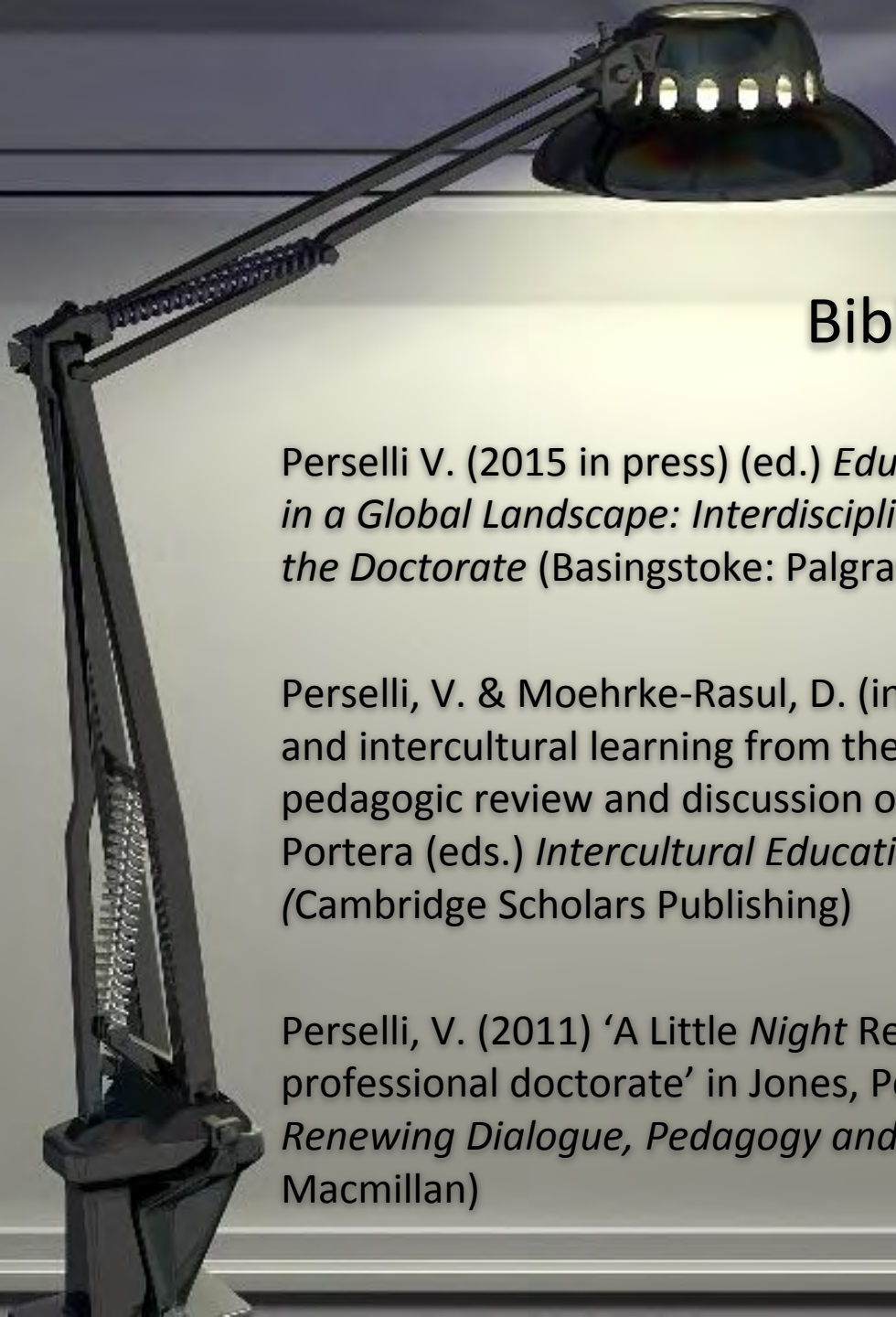
Notwithstanding the issue of representation:

- P1: The doctoral text is a representation of the project, not 'the thing itself'
- P2: The 'thing itself' cannot be known; project (and teaching act) is transient, ephemeral, elusive and possibly enigmatic ('reserved knowledge(s)'?)
- S/P3: All texts may be deconstructed; but doctoral texts demand high levels of educational literacy in order to do this.



‘So why is my study important?’ [Candidate, participants]  
‘Who cares anyway?’ [Examiner, wider readership]

- S: The doctoral text/project can facilitate higher levels of educational literacy, expanding our vocabularies and lexicons of practice/theory/method
- S: Creative readings (e.g. project/thesis as a ‘prismatic’ cultural artifact) can generate multiple new ways of doing and making, thinking and being...



## Bibliography

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