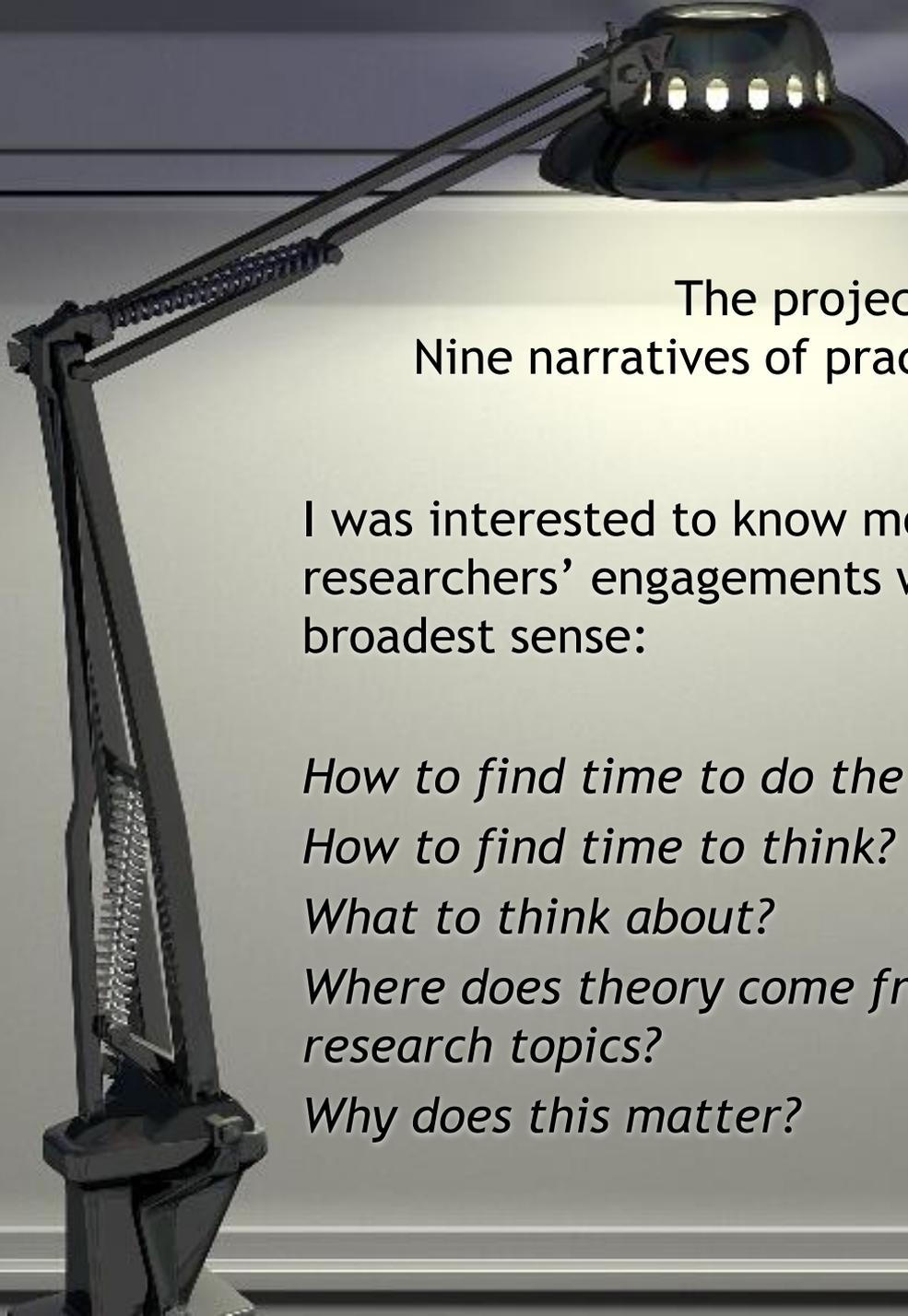


*Theory, theorising and pedagogies of change  
in an era of (theory) austerity:*

*Some themes and issues regarding doctoral  
researchers' identities and practices*

Victoria Perselli  
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The project:  
Nine narratives of practice, 2013-15

I was interested to know more about practitioner researchers' engagements with 'theory' in its broadest sense:

*How to find time to do the study?*

*How to find time to think?*

*What to think about?*

*Where does theory come from in relation to our research topics?*

*Why does this matter?*



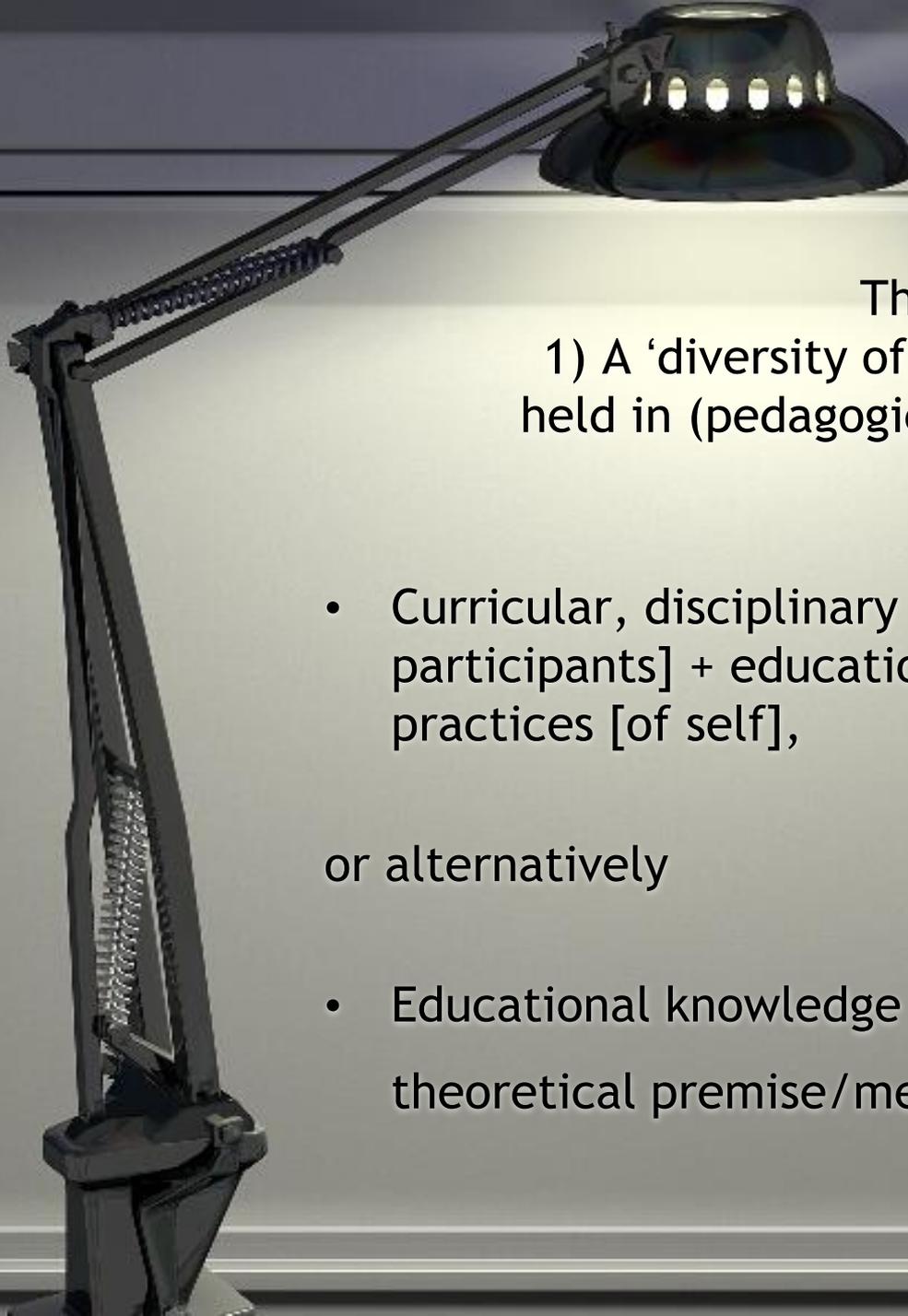
## The respondents:

- UK and overseas
- EdD and PhD
- Graduate students and postdocs.
- Lecturers (HE) and teachers (statutory schooling, early childhood education)
- Diverse professional fields and disciplinary areas



The data:  
Distinct theme of 'transmigrations' (Perselli, ibid.)  
of discipline / theory/ location

- *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 [New Zealand/UK]*
- *Foundations of education + Foucault [USA]*
- *Women in academia + Luz Irigaray [Malta]*
- *Autobiography + Bricolage [China/N. America]*
- *English in Education + Policy sociology / Stephen Ball [UK]*



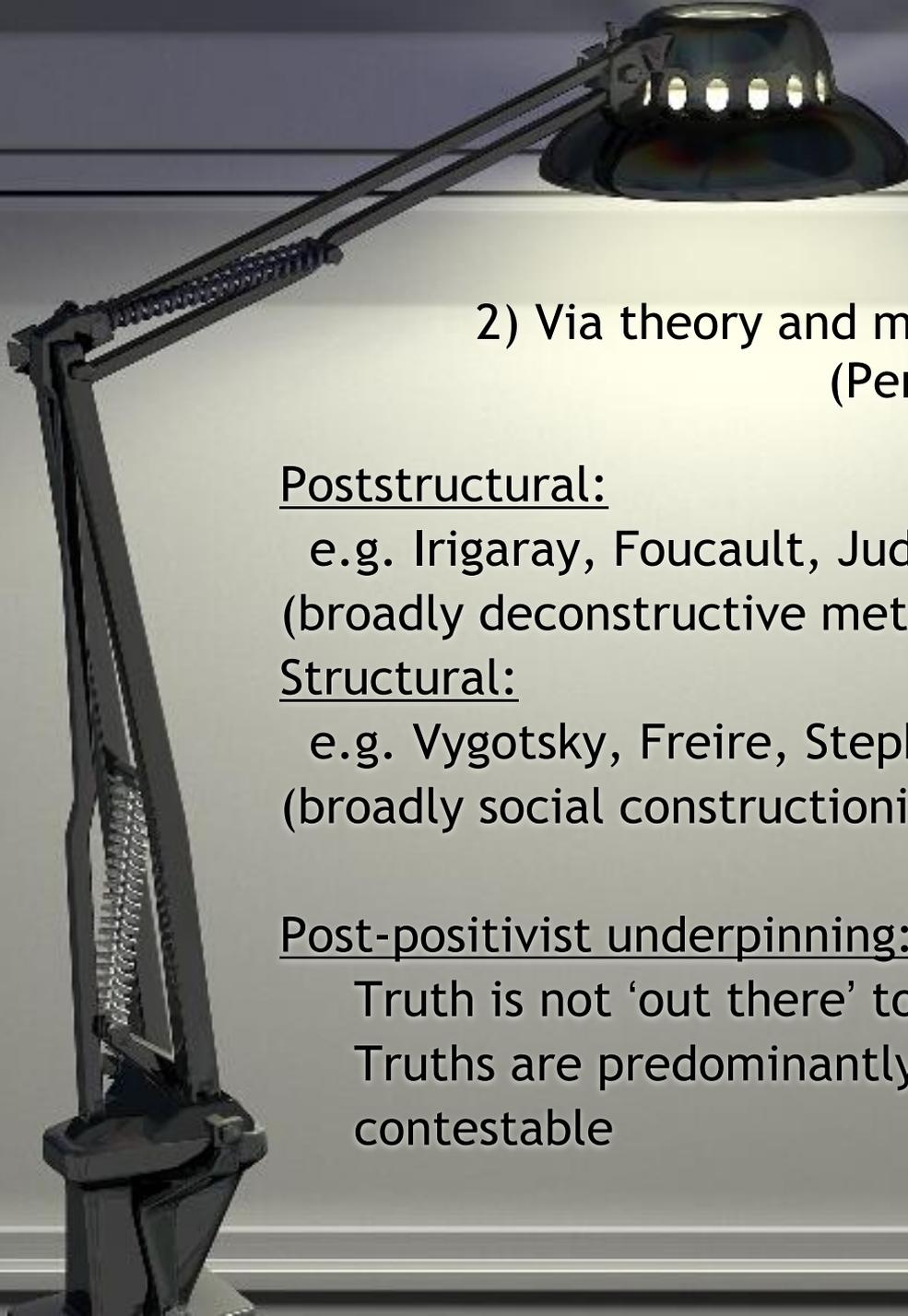
The analysis:

1) A 'diversity of domains' (Perselli, ibid.)  
held in (pedagogic) 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]



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

Poststructural:

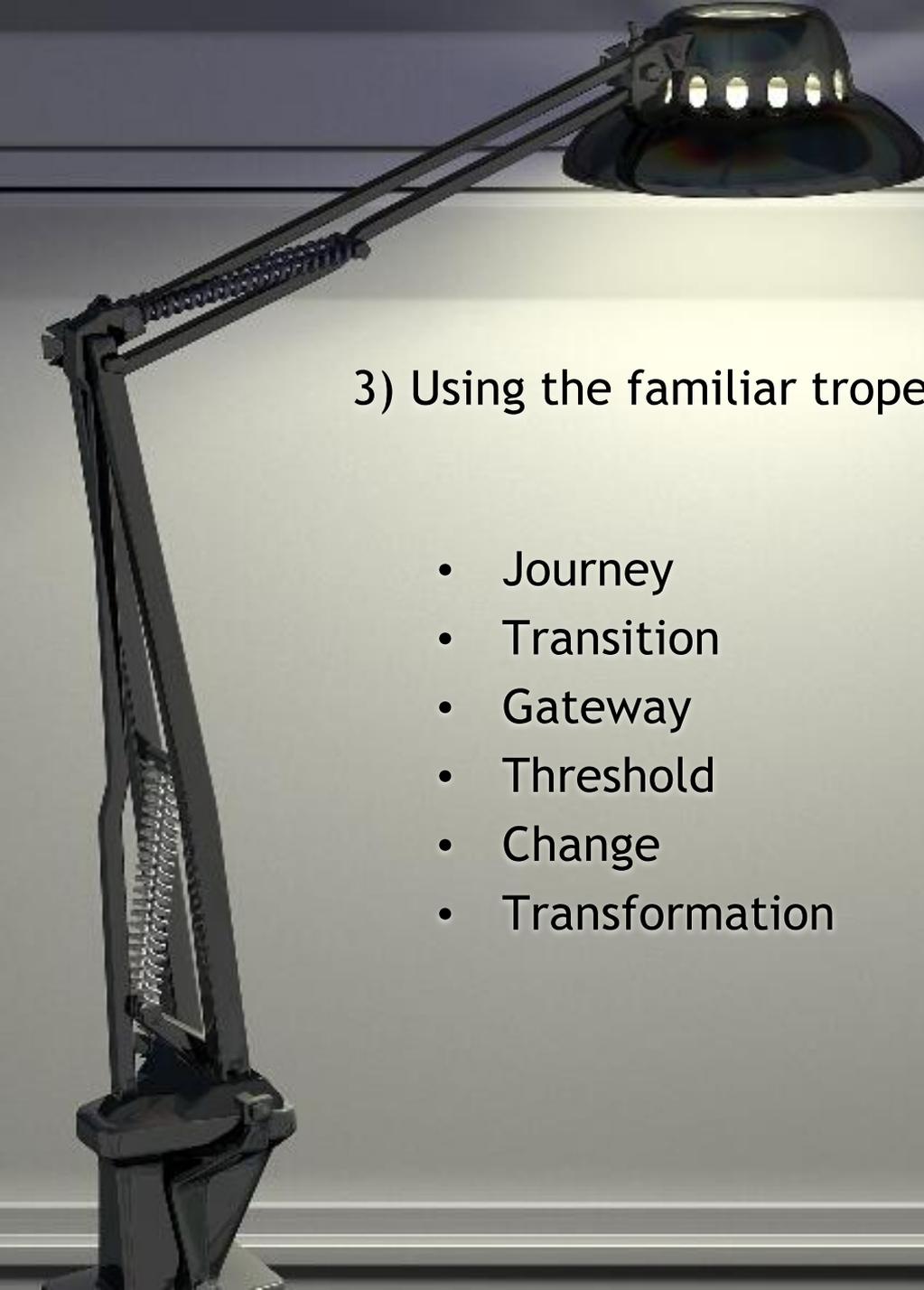
e.g. Irigaray, Foucault, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha  
(broadly deconstructive methods)

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



3) Using the familiar tropes of the doctorate:

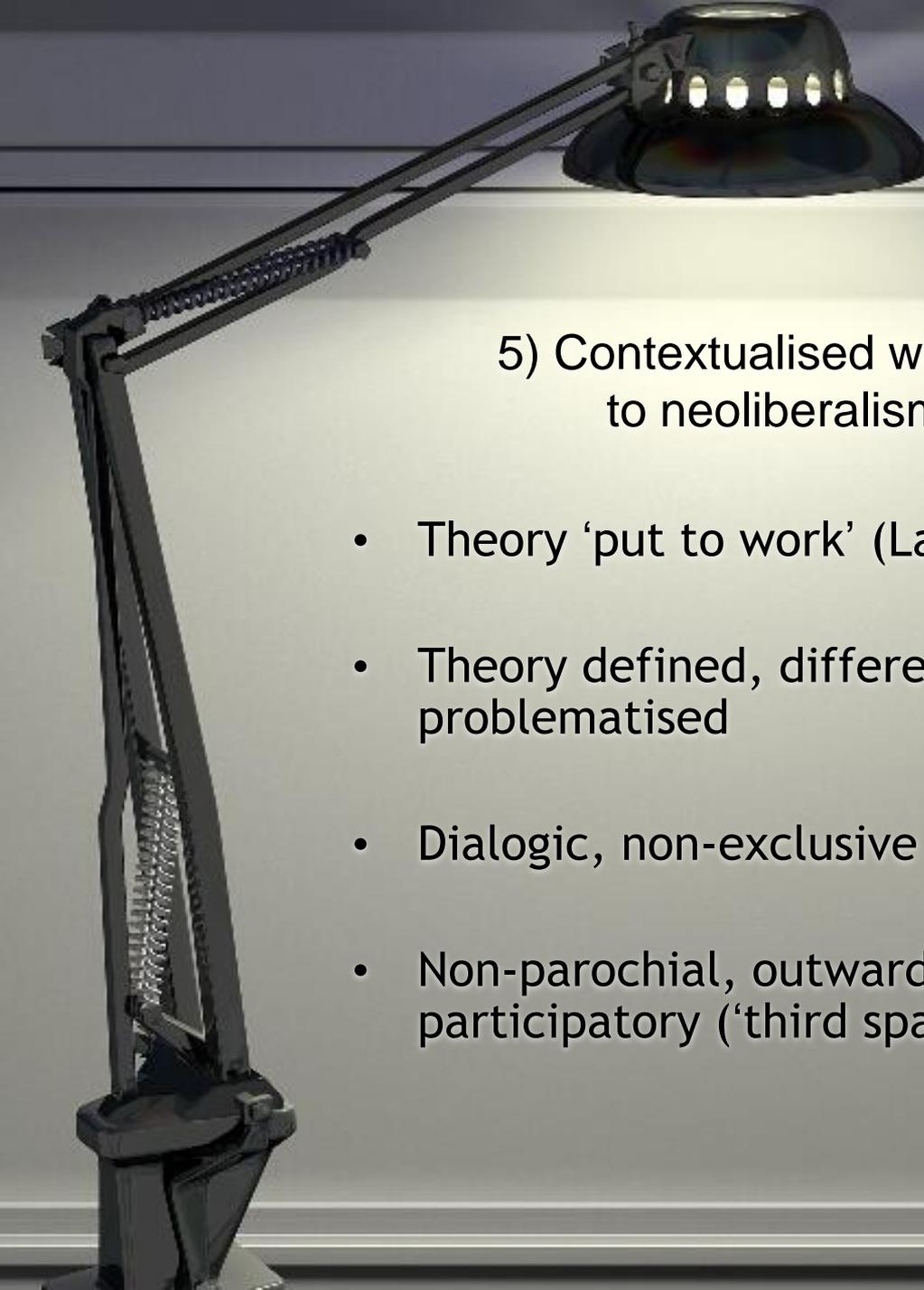
- Journey
- Transition
- Gateway
- Threshold
- Change
- Transformation



4) But highly differentiated and problematised:

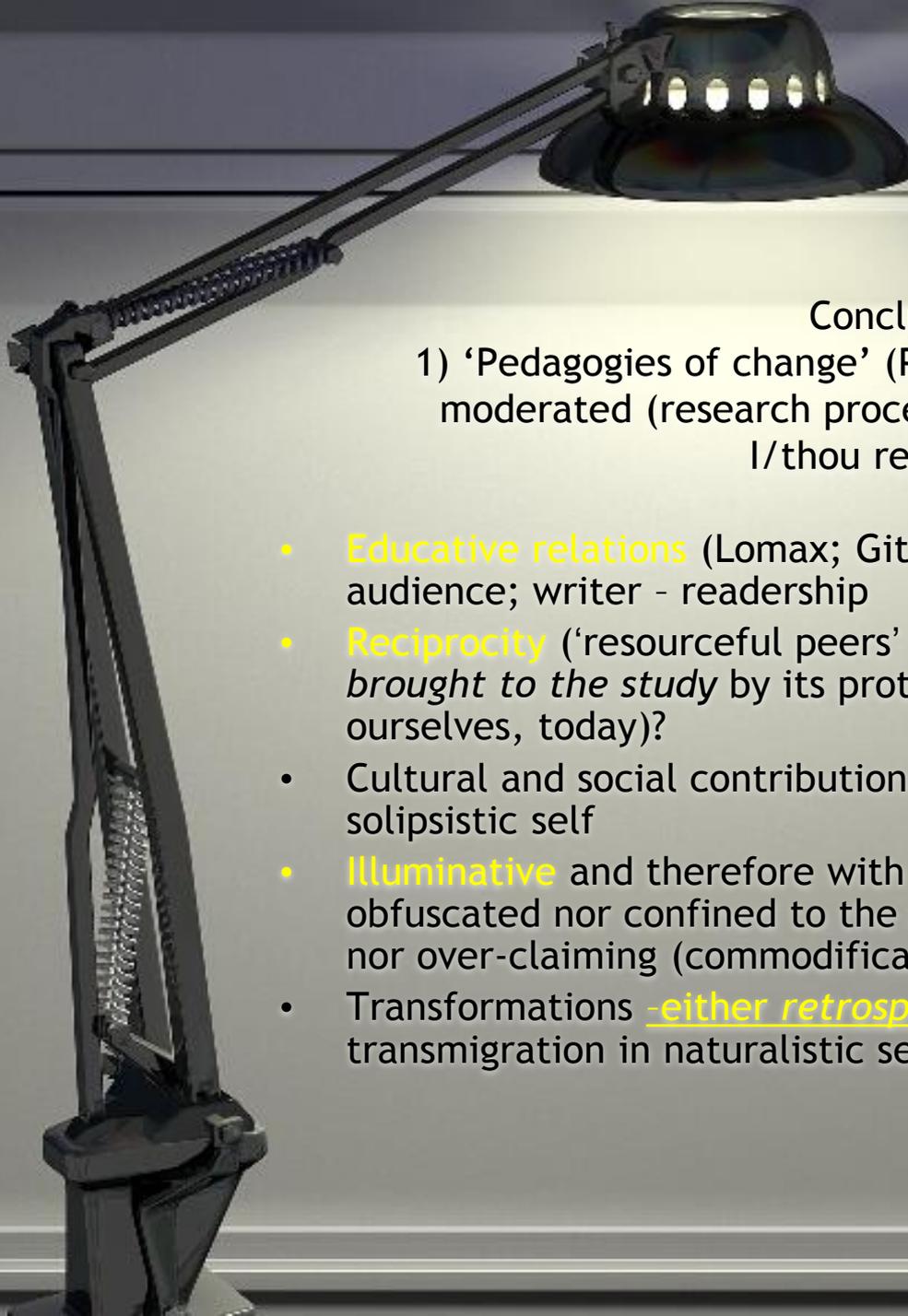
‘The moment **doors are open**, a practice becomes amenable to commodification’ (Camillieri 2009 p.32) ‘when a new technique is discovered, it is only a question of time before it is incorporated within the ideological circle of educational institutions, publishing industries and funding agencies. The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



5) Contextualised within a counter-discourse  
to neoliberalism and consumerism

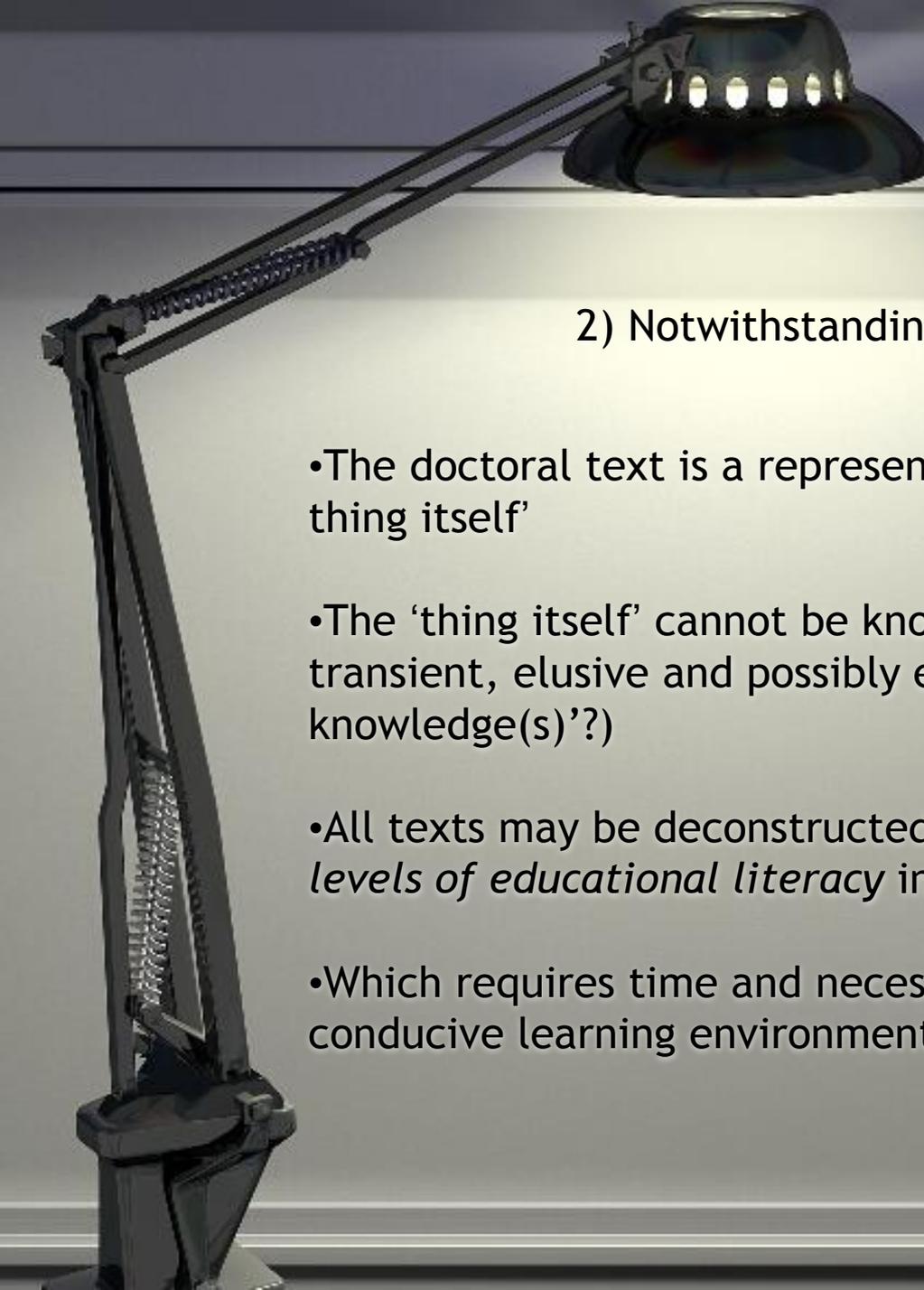
- Theory 'put to work' (Lather)
- Theory defined, differentiated, transported, problematised
- Dialogic, non-exclusive and non-hierarchical approach
- Non-parochial, outward looking, forward thinking, participatory ('third space')



Conclusion and evaluation:

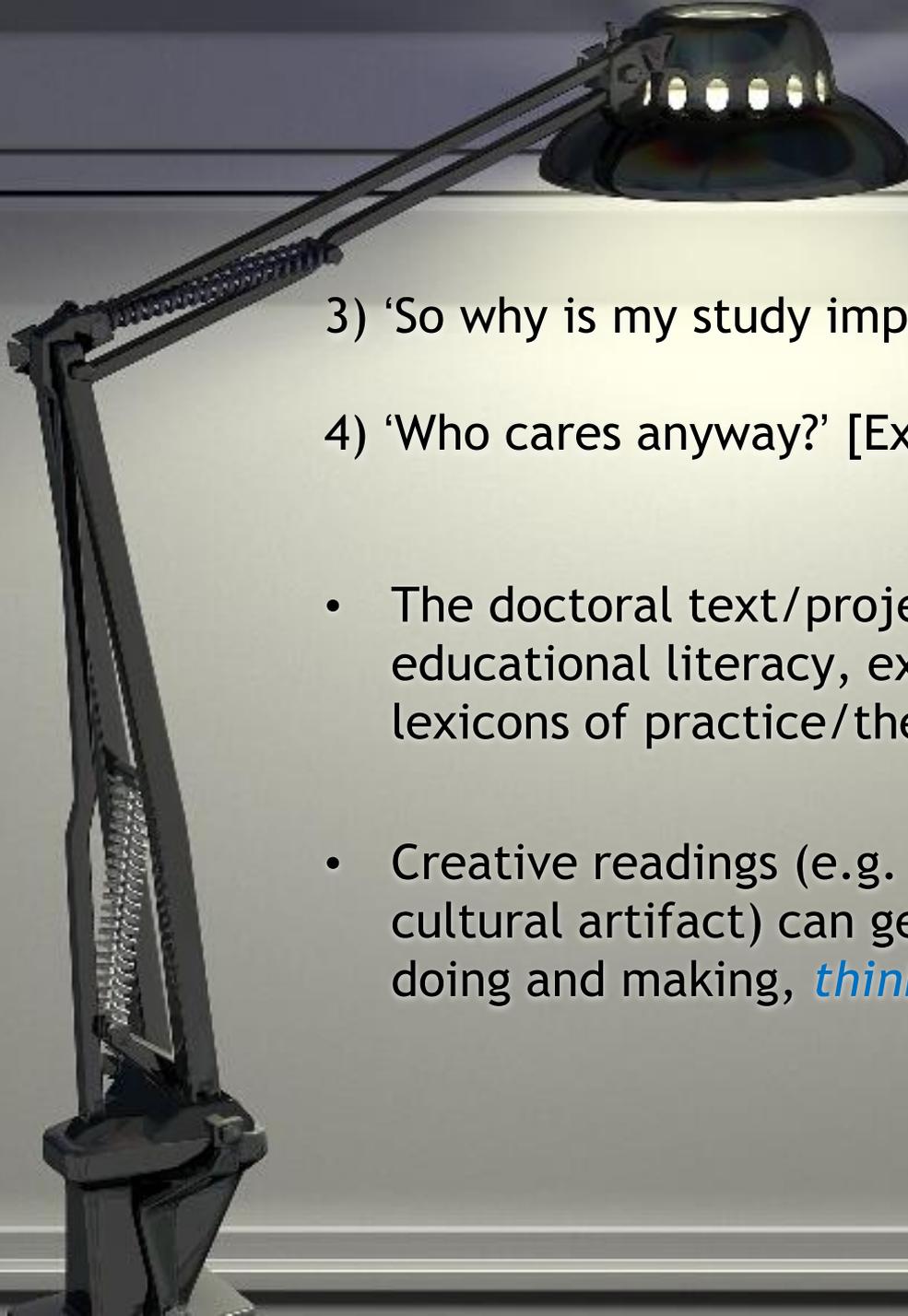
1) 'Pedagogies of change' (Perselli, *ibid.*) through situated (above) and moderated (research process) recognition (over time) of self, other, I/thou relationship, wider society

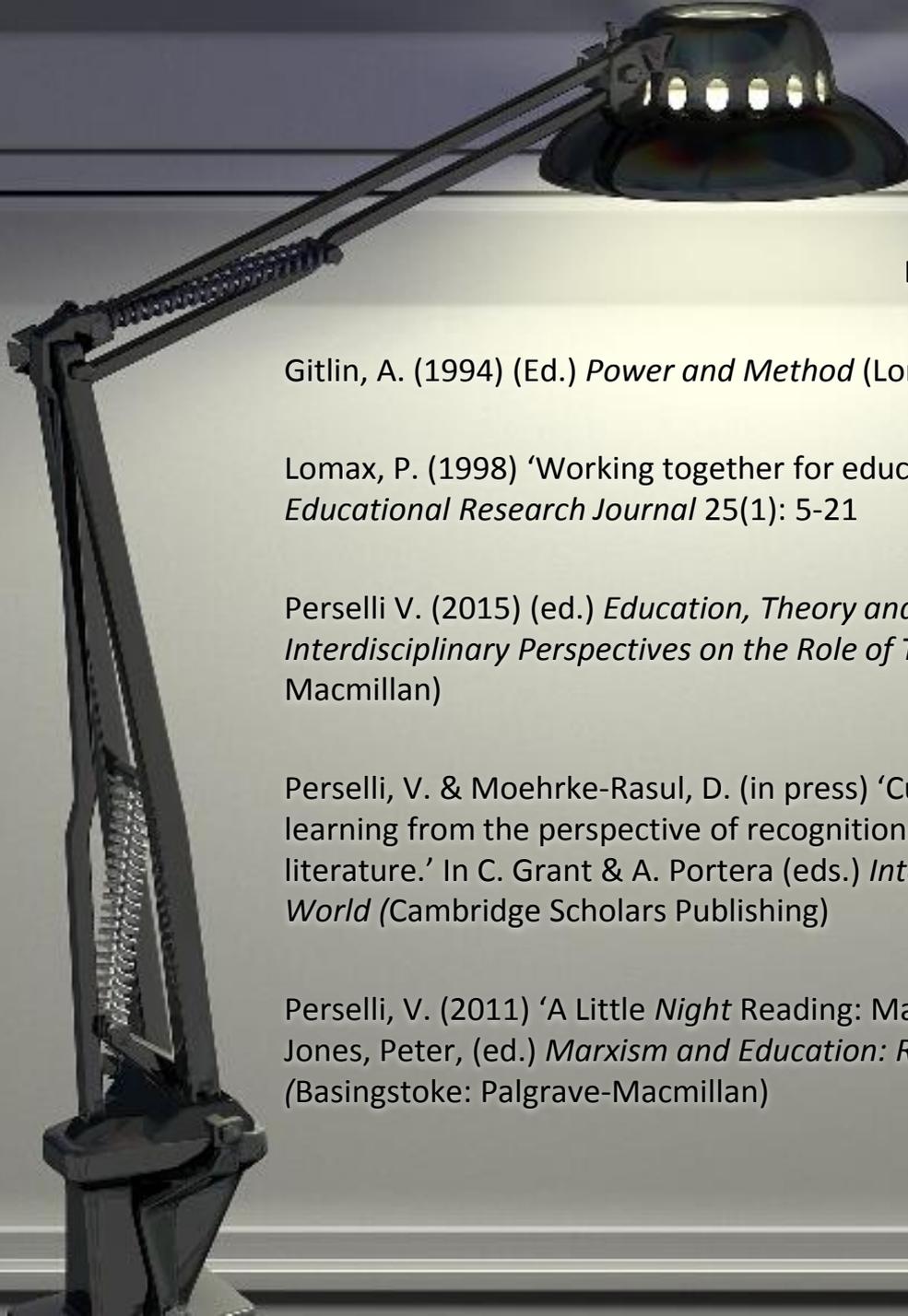
- **Educative relations** (Lomax; Gitlin): self - participants; presenter - audience; writer - readership
- **Reciprocity** ('resourceful peers' in Perselli & Moehrke-Rasul, 2013): what is *brought to the study* by its protagonist /participants /reviewers (e.g. ourselves, today)?
- Cultural and social contribution to '**the greater good**' i.e. not the solipsistic self
- **Illuminative** and therefore with **emancipatory potential** i.e. theory neither obfuscated nor confined to the academy (exclusivity); neither simplified nor over-claiming (commodification)
- Transformations -either retrospective or deferred - through transmigration in naturalistic settings.



## 2) Notwithstanding the issue of representation:

- The doctoral text is a representation of the project, not ‘the thing itself’
- The ‘thing itself’ cannot be known; project (and teaching act) is transient, elusive and possibly enigmatic (‘reserved knowledge(s)’?)
- All texts may be deconstructed; but doctoral texts *demand high levels of educational literacy* in order to do this
- Which requires time and necessitates the creation of a conducive learning environment.

- 
- 3) 'So why is my study important?' [Candidate, participants]
- 4) 'Who cares anyway?' [Examiner, wider audiences]
- The doctoral text/project can facilitate higher levels of educational literacy, expanding our vocabularies and lexicons of practice/theory/method
  - Creative readings (e.g. project/thesis as a 'prismatic' cultural artifact) can generate multiple new ways of doing and making, *thinking, feeling and being...*



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