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**THE EMERGENCE OF SELF  
THROUGH REFLECTION**

by

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Except where acknowledged within the  
text, all parts of this thesis  
represent my own original work.

*Petra Campbell.*

**Petra Campbell**

*For my children*

*Danny*

*and*

*Ursula*

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# THE EMERGENCE OF SELF THROUGH REFLECTION

Petra Campbell

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is structured in the form of an historical investigation of the dialectic between two different ideas of the self - that it is given, and that it is fashioned in a process of self-making. It will be argued that both ways of viewing the self are inadequate, generating problems that can only be overcome by an alternative view of the self, which is presented in the final chapter. At the same time, the dialectic between the two ideas in question itself can be shown to move within the context of notions about the being of the self, and the belief in a special relation between thought and the self. Over time, this belief begins to crystallise into an acceptance that there is a relation between reflection and the self. As a result of exploring this relation, it will be argued that reflection has a structure involving three significant elements, namely, introspective mirroring, the retrospective movement of re-appropriation and expressive force. Once this structure of reflection is taken fully into account, it becomes possible to clarify how it functions as the source of the self, a self that is finally defined in terms of a reflexive activity of consciousness, made determinate by its content.

The construction of the context, within which the dialectic between the ideas that the self is given and that it is self-constituted moves, has

its beginnings in the Humanism of the Italian Renaissance, and is captured tellingly in the controversial case of Pico della Mirandola. For some commentators, Pico held an idea of self-making; others, however, reject such an interpretation. But what emerges as important for this thesis is that Pico can be shown to connect ideas about the being of the self with creation *ex nihilo* through the word, thus forging a relation between self-making and thought which has survived and is still operative in contemporary views of self-fashioning. However, almost from the start the connection Pico had made became obscured by the influence of Descartes, for whom the being of the self is that of a given substance. Whilst Locke and Hume discredited Descartes' conclusion, the idea that the self is an entity of some sort continued to exert a powerful influence on later philosophers of reflection, like Leibniz and Kant. As a result, the subject-object dichotomy became entrenched in Kant, who, it is argued, sees reflection in terms of introspection.

But the role of reflection in relation to a self that is somehow given, leads to the idea of the divided self, a division Hegel attempted to heal, but at the expense of a significant characteristic of reflection: that of mirroring. Fichte, equally dissatisfied with the Kantian view of the self, highlights reflection as the means for creating self, in a manner that recalls the efforts of Pico. But as a result of his analyses, self comes to be seen as the interplay of the finite and the infinite, a notion which is carried on in Kierkegaard, yielding contradictions which they never resolve.

Hegel's solution - the destruction of reflection by reflection itself - brings about the demise of the individual self. Nevertheless, this

demise rests on the traditional assumption - grounded in the metaphysics of being - that the self is an original, primordial unity. It is Nietzsche who challenges this notion by positing a contradiction at the heart of the world, a contradiction which results in the idea that being is imposed as a fiction upon what is essentially an indeterminate and inchoate process of becoming. Within this framework self is seen as an invention.

In the course of this historical development the inadequacy of the notion of the self as given becomes ever more evident. That is because reflection inevitably, and always, splits such a self into subject and object. The problems generated as a result can only be overcome by accepting the idea that it is reflection which brings the self into being. Exploring how this comes about is the topic of the final chapter, which introduces the idea of the reflexive self, and distinguishes this latter idea from notions of self-constitution put forward by Habermas and Foucault.