



THICK Description

Thick description was first defined by anthropologist Gilbert Ryle and later revamped by Clifford Geertz in his work *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. This practice and methodology is defined as, in simple terms, a 'thick' (i.e. highly-detailed) descriptive account of something being observed. This provides a rich repository of context and detail to what is being observed and gives it a basis for interpretation, rather than simply observation. While Geertz has notoriously elaborated on this concept to include explorations of semiotics, philosophy, ethnography, and anthropology, the term stems from a simple basis: having a lot of detail about an observed scenario to be able to analyze it in a number of ways.

In applying this same practice to the photographs in this collection, one can learn to 'see', describe, and interpret specific environmental traces in new ways. Why are there these curved white lines on a sidewalk? How did one manage to get colorful chalk on this shoes, when it appears the sidewalk was preceded by dirt? What might the worn edges of the cliff, and a general tendency to go towards it, indicate about our sentimentality towards this specific environmental feature, or what this environmental feature might provide us in other regards? Answering such interpretive and analytical questions stems from a practice of 'thick description' of the photographs, and being able to take that attention-to-detail and put it in context to understand our environment in new and unique ways.

Works Cited

Clifford Geertz in Geertz, C. (1973). Chapter 1/Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture.'. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books.