

Professional Experience and The Investigative Imagination

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CHAPTER SEVEN

**ARTISTRY, 'FICTION' AND REFLECTION :
THE STRANGE ABSENCE OF THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION
IN PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In some respects our argument is straightforward: we emphasise the possibility and the value of exploring the meanings of our experience through writing and sharing fiction; we argue that, as professional workers (and indeed as human beings), we possess a general capacity for effectively representing our experience in artistic form; we suggest that in order to realise our capacity for 'reflection' we can (and should) draw upon our intuitive grasp of aesthetic processes as well as our capacity for conceptual and logical analysis. So far we have presented the argument largely through examples and concrete reports of participants' experience, because unless the argument is convincing at that level, no amount of 'theoretical rationale' is of any avail. But the time has come to present a fuller account of the 'theoretical' considerations underlying the argument.

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, this chapter is particularly (though not exclusively) addressed to staff responsible for professional education and training, in universities and elsewhere, who will wish to be reassured, before they decide to spend precious time and resources engaging in the sort of work described in the previous chapters, that there is a soundly based theoretical framework within which they can work. After all, there are reasons why writing fiction is not usually included in courses of professional education. Secondly, our argument concerning the parallel between imaginative creation and reflection on experience also has something important to say to staff engaged in teaching 'literature' in higher and adult education, concerning the sorts of activities they might include in their courses. For both of these groups of readers this chapter tries to present a novel yet coherent synthesis of key arguments in education and aesthetic theory, to show how each can support and illuminate each other in ways which have not so far been recognised. Thirdly, practitioners about to engage in writing fiction as a method of exploring their practice may wish to appreciate fully the theoretical reasoning underlying the approach. Finally, the argument challenges a number of basic assumptions: about what we mean by 'reflection' and literary 'art', about the relationship between artistic expression and the general processes of understanding, about the various ways in which our understanding of experience can be represented, and (even more generally) about the role of imagination and artistic creativity in the learning process -- in professional work and in a democratic society. And to re-think assumptions involves revisiting the theoretical traditions and the historical contexts where those assumptions were created.

For these reasons, then, this final chapter attempts to trace the arguments presented so far back to their philosophical starting points and to make sure that each

stage of the argument is grounded both in its historical context and in an analysis of its key concepts. The first section is a brief reminder of the ideas conventionally associated with the notion of the 'reflective' practitioner, and the second section goes on to examine the historical, philosophical and political context of those ideas, with particular reference to the themes of individual creativity, 'artistry' and participatory democracy. This is followed by an examination of the parallels between the processes of professional reflection and artistic (specifically literary) creation, taking 'imagination' as the key linking concept. This is conducted in two stages, firstly focusing on the writing of 'stories' and secondly on the conception of the patchwork text. Finally, it is suggested that writing fiction is a way of ordering experience which we can all engage in, and that sharing fictions involves writers and readers in a collaborative relationship, embodying key educational and democratic values of crucial relevance in a society where 'work' is increasingly concerned with the development of innovatory understanding.

2. THE REFLECTIVE PARADIGM (I) A SUMMARY

When a phrase 'catches on' in the way that 'The Reflective Practitioner' has done, in the years since Donald Schon first published his book with that title in 1983, we can be sure that it has connected with something historically significant. For example, just yesterday (as I write this) at the end of a day conference with the title 'Developing and Evaluating Practice Through Inquiry' when we were considering how to develop the work further, one participant said, 'Maybe the title of the conference isn't very clear; maybe a lot of staff don't know what it means; why don't we call it, 'Reflective Practice', then everyone would understand'. It felt, at that moment as though 'reflective practice' had become the one indispensable phrase with which to define and sum up all the positive meanings that we attach to the experience of professional work.

So, what is Reflection, and why has it become such an attractive term that nothing else, it seems, will really do? To say that it has become 'a cliché' explains nothing and has itself become a cliché. To say that it has come to identify a 'paradigm' (Kuhn, 1962) may also be a cliché, but it does begin to point towards an explanation. It suggests that we are concerned with a set of methods which imply not only a conception of technique but also an overarching 'philosophy' and a set of social and political values (see Kuhn, op. cit., chapter X; Shapin, 1994). The concept of 'paradigm' also opens up the argument that the 'Reflective Practitioner' paradigm (of the relationship between experience and understanding) ignores the central role of imaginative writing as a method because imaginative writing is supposed to belong to a different paradigm, a different way of conceiving of the relationship between experience and understanding, namely 'Art', or, more precisely, 'Literature'. So the argument will be in part about paradigms as expressing political and cultural 'movements' but also about paradigms as expressing cultural barriers between traditions and roles. The 'Reflective Writing' course and the story-writing workshops described in earlier chapters are, precisely, attempts to remove the traditional cultural barrier between the activity of 'writing fiction' and the activity of professional reflection.

As a starting point, then, let us review the general ideas embodied in the paradigm of the Reflective Practitioner (which from now on will be abbreviated to 'the reflective paradigm'). Schon begins his book with an account of what he calls a

'crisis of confidence in professional knowledge' (Schon, 1983, chapter 1), a loss of faith in the conventional model of knowledge as 'technical rationality' (p. 29), where professional practice was conceived as posing technical problems that could be 'solved' by the 'application' of 'scientific knowledge' (p.22). What had caused this loss of faith was a realisation that professional events are characterised by 'complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict' (p.18). The model of technical rationality, therefore, does not account for the actual experience of effective professional work, which typically includes making sense of uncertainty, setting problems (as well as solving them), and - generally - performing in a way which is not so much scientific as 'artistic' (p.20). Thus, instead of simply applying pre-defined theories, professionals must 'reflect-in action' (p.69): 'the unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and changed through the attempt to understand it' (p.132). But if the situation is unique, how does the practitioner make use of previous experience; and if understanding a situation involves changing it, how is 'understanding' to be evaluated? The scientific logic of controlled experiment clearly will not fit (p.132); instead Schon refers, repeatedly, to reflection-in-action as embodying 'the artistry' of practice (p.162 and a further eleven lines of references in the index under 'artistry'), and presents what he later calls a 'constructivist' model of the relationship between knowledge and experience:

'In the constructivist view, our preceptions, appreciations and beliefs are rooted in worlds of our own making that we come to *accept* as reality.'
(Schon, 1987, p.36)

The 'epistemological' crisis of confidence in professional knowledge thus arises because we no longer have a simple belief in an 'objective' world of facts which could resolve disagreements of opinion and interpretation: as professional workers we have to recognise our fundamental underlying subjectivity. Our expertise is not directly guaranteed by our mastery of a body of scientific knowledge and we do not make decisions on the basis of simply following rules; instead we have to rely on 'appreciating and reframing' the details of experience in order to invoke the relevance of previous 'cases' (p. 132; p. 138).

In arguing against the scientific model of rationality, Schon emphasises the tacit, intuitive basis to expert knowledge. The general argument is quite familiar: in order to follow any given rule or instruction we always need further understandings which the rule itself doesn't give (Wittgenstein, 1967, pp. 39-42). We are reminded of this, often with some annoyance, every time we try to assemble a piece of furniture from a kit, using the manufacturer's instruction sheet: it always seems as though some crucial piece of information has been omitted - until we 'suddenly see how to do it', at which point, in retrospect, the meaning of the instruction becomes clear! As Polanyi says:

'The practical interpretation of a definition must rely all the time on its undefined understanding by the person relying on it.'
Polanyi, 1962, p. 250)

Applying knowledge in a particular case, therefore, is always an act of interpretation.

However, the reflective paradigm not only emphasises that understanding relies on personal, intuitive awareness, but that this awareness needs to be 'made

explicit' in order that we may go beyond it, following Vygotsky's familiar contention that verbalisation is part of the creative development of understanding (Vygotsky, 1962). This aspect is announced at the beginning of the other seminal text of the reflective paradigm, conceived at the same time as, but independently of, Schon's work: Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning, (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985):

'Reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations.'
(p.19)

'Experience' here refers to 'the total response of a person to a situation', and 'reflection' includes 'affective' activity in attempting to recapture that experience and thus to evaluate and learn from it (pp. 18-19). In other words, the conception of reflection in Boud's work includes an important emphasis on the whole person, including the affective domain.

The reflective paradigm of adult learning, then, announces a renewed emphasis on the individual as a maker of meanings, on the individual's capacity to construct new patterns of significance in response to the complexities of experience. In thus evoking the creative and critical autonomy of the individual it clearly carries political implications as well as a set of suggestions for effective learning. This political dimension is explicit from the outset in Schon's account of how the reflective paradigm transforms the client-professional relationship (and the relationship between colleagues in work organisations) from one in which expertise is projected and accepted (a model of authority and compliance) to a negotiated relationship, in which trust is earned through public discussion of available choices and responsibility is accepted on both sides of the transaction. More generally, the demystification of technical rationality and the recognition of reflection as the basis for understanding are necessary for the secure establishment of the democratic process (Schon, 1983, pp. 226-231 and chapter 10 ['Conclusion'], esp. p.342).

It is this aspect of the reflective paradigm which receives particular emphasis in the influential work of Jack Mezirow and his colleagues, whose book Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood is subtitled. 'A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning' (1990). In his introductory chapter, Mezirow distinguishes between 'instrumental learning' (characteristic of the natural sciences) where the purpose is to 'control and manipulate the environment or other people' (p.8), and 'communicative learning' - i.e. 'understanding the meaning of what other people communicate concerning values, ideas, moral decisions and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labour, autonomy, commitment and democracy' (p. 8). Thus, whereas in instrumental learning we attempt to encompass the object of our learning within our own categories and experimental procedures, communicative learning entails the exchange of ideas and reasons between autonomous beings, each with a different scheme of meanings:

'In communicative learning . . . the learner attempts to understand what is meant by another person, through speech, writing, drama, art or dance.'
(p.9)

And if we succeed in communicating effectively, we can learn from each other's different, unfamiliar interpretations of reality (p.9), allowing our perspectives to be transformed by discussion, so that we become more 'inclusive' and more 'integrative' with respect to others' ideas (p.14). 'Nonreflective learning', Mezirow suggests, involves accepting or rejecting claims that something or other is valid, 'without discursive consideration' (p.10). 'Critical reflection', in contrast, is an 'emancipatory', 'transformative' process whereby we overcome the limitations of our thoughts and attitudes by subjecting our underlying presuppositions to challenge and reassessment in the light of alternatives derived from critical dialogue with others, (p.18). In this way we can correct the 'distortions' in our meaning schemes derived from social ideologies (e.g. prejudice, rigid categorizations) and from unconscious psychic processes (pp. 15-17).

To sum up: this brief review of the key texts suggests that the reflective paradigm can be understood in terms of the following themes:-

- 1) The reflective paradigm asserts the origins of understanding in the totality of personal experience rather than in the specialised bodies of knowledge institutionalised as 'disciplines'.
- 2) It emphasises that the development of understanding involves emotional and unconscious psychic processes - not merely the cognitive and logical processing of factual information.
- 3) It emphasises that theoretical understanding is derived from a response to the complexities of experience - rather than prescribing in advance the interpretation we are to place upon experience.
- 4) It emphasises that understanding is never final, but always in process of development, through introspection and through interaction with others.
- 5) It emphasises that the proper exercise of authority based on professional expertise involves recognising the contribution to one's professional understanding made by clients (students, patients, service users, organisational subordinates, etc). The necessary partner of the Reflective Practitioner is the Reflective Client; both are to be conceived as Reflective Citizens in a participatory democracy.

The next section will elaborate the origins of these themes, partly by considering some of the theoretical writings frequently cited in the reflective paradigm texts and partly by considering the social and political context in which these themes have recently and currently achieved a coherent historical relevance. Meanwhile, we have also noted a number of fleeting references and suggestions which imply that developmental reflection on experience not only requires the objective, cognitive and analytical procedures of 'science' but also the subjective, creative and appreciative processes characteristic of 'art'.

3. THE REFLECTIVE PARADIGM (II) THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Reflection and the Construction of Meaning

In order to get the concept of a 'paradigm' into perspective, and also for other reasons which should become clear shortly, it is important to remember that for Kuhn the Mother-and-Father-Of-All-Paradigm-Shifts was Copernicus' proposal that the earth revolves round the sun, and not vice-versa. The critical response of the church to his work showed that radically new ideas in astronomy, like radically new ideas

concerning anything else, can turn out to be full of political implications, because any existing definition of 'how things are', once it comes to be taken for granted as a background assumption, also comes to embody part of the overall structure of power relations in society. To question definitions and assumptions may thus be interpreted as a questioning of general aspects of cultural authority. Hence, there are political implications both in the Reflective Paradigm (as we have seen) and also (as we shall see) in the argument that the 'artistic paradigm' of knowledge and understanding should play a part in professional reflection.

Copernicus's paradigm shift involved rejecting the basis for what had previously been accepted as an external religious authority regulating human affairs and substituting instead the anxieties and the opportunities of individual human responsibility. (If the earth goes round the sun, rather than vice versa, then God may not, after all, be watching closely over us with any clearly prescribed purpose, and humanity must accept the painful responsibilities of freedom.) All this has a direct link with the themes of the reflective paradigm in general (e.g. the creativity and autonomy of learning) and, in particular, with the rise of the concept of the artistic imagination, to be considered later. At the end of the eighteenth century Kant drew a specific analogy between his own philosophical proposals, and the implications of Copernican astronomy. Kant's claim was that our ideas cannot be directly derived from objective facts of nature (because we can never have any evidence which is independent of those very same ideas) and so our ideas about the world can never have the direct authority of claiming to mirror the structure of Nature itself (Kant, 1966 [1781-7], p. xxxiii). Like Copernicus's revolution in astronomy, Kant's argument frees our thinking from being directly determined by an objective world, at the cost of undermining the authority of our concepts and interpretations. Hence, Mary Warnock refers to:

'The Kantian Copernican revolution, according to which we must regulate the world by our own concepts before we can learn the regularities of the world, and according to which we could not even perceive the world of objects unless we constituted it first by our own schematism of the imagination.'

(Warnock, 1976, p. 126)

This Kantian / Copernican revolution is an important element in the reflective paradigm, as we have already seen: the individual as a creative 'meaning maker' is asserted against a model of learning which suggests that the structures of thought are already 'there' - to be acquired and used. To begin with, therefore, the reflective paradigm rejects 'behaviourist' psychology, with its implicit suggestion that human beings can in principle be understood as predictable objects, using similar methods to those of natural science. Instead, the reflective paradigm emphasises the creativity of human subjectivity: experience is not simply a succession of 'actions' or 'behaviours' which can be directly 'observed', but a complex process including unconscious residues from long forgotten events. 'Understanding' therefore requires more than observation; it requires us to engage in a process of introspection leading to self-clarification. Hence the frequent references, in the reflective paradigm texts, to Kelly's 'Personal Construct' psychology (Kelly, 1955) focusing on 'the whole person' as a source of categories for interpreting individual experience. Hence, also, the influence within the reflective paradigm of the ideas of Carl Rogers, who suggests that, in order to be 'effective', education needs to be redefined in terms of 'becoming an authentic autonomous person' and overcoming one's defensive fears in order to engage in exploring the meanings of one's experience (Rogers, 1983, pp. 279-88).

In some respects, these ideas go back a long way, at least as far as the work of John Dewey, one of the most widely acknowledged precursors of the reflective paradigm. Dewey is generally associated with the movement for 'progressive' school education in the United States in the 1920's and 30's, which opposed a 'traditional' pedagogy in which 'what is taught is thought of as essentially static . . . a finished product . . . [as] imposed from above and from outside' (Dewey, 1963 [1938], pp. 18-19). Instead, Dewey proposes an educational process in which the individual's experience undergoes 'progressive' enrichment and developmental organisation (1963, Chapter 3; Chapter 7). The reflective paradigm is, of course, a model for adult education, and its emphasis on the role of experience in learning specifically invokes not only Dewey but Kolb's universally quoted 'experiential learning cycle':

Concrete experience

Testing implications of
concepts in new situations

Observations and
reflections

Formation of abstract
concepts and generalisations

(quoted in Boud, et. al. 1985, p.12; see Kolb, 1984, p. 42)

Kolb also emphasises that learning is a 'holistic' process (p.31) involving 'transformation of experience' (p.38) and 'creation of knowledge' (p.36). However, there is an ambiguity here which has an important bearing on the overall argument, and thus needs clarification. In spite of the emphasis on an 'open', creative, developmental dialectic involving the whole of personal experience, including unconscious affective dimensions, there remains an apparent emphasis on a 'rationalistic', cognitive model of reflection based on the experimental testing of concepts (see the wording in the Kolb model, above). This ambiguity is there in Schon's original book. Schon makes frequent references to the 'artistry' of practice, and most of his references to 'science' are made in order to stress that scientific method does not provide an adequate understanding of professional reflection, but when he describes in detail the reflective process he uses terms derived precisely from the vocabulary of scientific inquiry: 'experimentation', 'exploratory experiment', 'hypothesis testing', and the testing of 'moves' (as in 'game theory'), to see whether the move is 'affirmed or 'negated' by the 'outcome' (Schon, 1983, pp. 140 -156). In this sense, Schon's argument does not seem to move much beyond a purely cognitive, analytical conception of 'reflection'. It is therefore much narrower in its scope than the work of Boud et. al., whose collection includes several chapters emphasising that reflection may also involve an interactive process and is thus dependent on factors such as trust and freedom in dialogue (see, for example, Knights, 1985). (In Schon's own later collection of examples (Schon, 1991) he includes chapters on 'organising feelings' (Hirschhorn, 1991) and on the use of stories (Mattingly, 1991).

Let us, then examine the place of 'experimental' thinking in the reflective paradigm. Like so much else in the reflective paradigm it has its roots in the work of John Dewey; but Dewey's basic argument is not so much about an opposition between , on the one hand 'science' (as a purely cognitive mode of knowing) and 'art'

(as including 'the whole person'), but about elitism and empowerment, i.e. about the politics of knowledge. Dewey's thinking about educational processes and about the methods of science was always inseparable from his thinking about democracy. On the one hand he saw the free interchange of ideas characteristic of the experimental method in the natural sciences as inherently 'democratic' (Dewey, 1966 [1916], p.v) because it means that beliefs are not accepted as 'fixed by authority' (p. 339) but as always open to revision (p.219). On the other hand he emphasised that 'scientific method' (i.e. hypothesis testing and experiment) is embodied in the problem-solving and interpretation of experience carried out by ordinary citizens in the course of their every day lives (Dewey, 1960 [1933], pp. 166-8). In other words, he presents 'experience as experimentation' (1966, p. 271). 'Thinking' is precipitated by an experience which makes us aware of a 'problem' - of ambiguities, dilemmas and alternatives- and thereby forces us through 'perplexity' into 'reflection'. (1960, p.14). So Dewey anticipates the 'empowerment' theme in the reflective paradigm by attempting to 'demystify' the potentially exclusive notion of 'scientific method': he treats it not as the rare prerogative and mysterious expertise of an elite ('scientists') but as describing a mental activity in which we all, simply as human beings, already participate, especially if we are given the right support, stimulation and encouragement. This is a particularly important argument, since, as we shall see later, it is equally relevant to another potentially exclusive and elitist notion - 'Art' - and Dewey himself proposes the same argument in that context also (see below, section five).

The Politics of Reflection

This brings us to the specifically 'political' dimension of the reflective paradigm, namely its concern for what Mezirow (1990) calls 'emancipatory' learning. The two writers most frequently cited in support of this theme are Habermas and Freire. Habermas stresses the importance of the distinction between the different 'cognitive interests' served by the pursuit of different forms of knowledge. Thus, he distinguishes between the 'practical' interest of simply 'understanding' the variety of our fellow human beings' interpretations of experience and the 'emancipatory . . . interest which aims at the pursuit of reflection' in the search for 'autonomy and responsibility' (1978, p. 176; p. 198). For this we need to engage 'critically' with those aspects of our understanding which preserve our dependency on power relations, ideologies and neuroses (1974, p.9). 'Reflection' thus requires forms of communication which embody the democratic ideals shared by philosophy, politics and education, namely that they must be freed from the distorting effects of power relations:

'Only in an emancipated society, which had realised the autonomy of its members, would communication have developed into that free dialogue of all with all which we always hold up as the very paradigm of a mutually formed self-identity as well as the ideal conditions of true consensus. To this extent the truth of statements is based on the anticipation of a life without repression.'
(Habermas, 1970, p.50)

In the absence of this ideal, we live within various forms of power relationship which are oppressive precisely because they limit the freedom of dialogue and thereby distort and undermine 'the truth of statements'.

The attraction of Freire's work is that he claims to provide a practical realisation of Habermas's ideal. He describes in detail how an adult literacy programme for Brazilian peasants was effective as a broadly conceived educational process even under conditions of severe political oppression; and the enduring and widespread appeal of his work for writers within the reflective paradigm suggests that, in an important sense, the educational and political plight of Freire's Brazilian peasants touches a chord in all of us. For Freire, a passive model of learning is one of the key aspects of an oppressive social order which prevents the development of the 'creative powers' and 'critical awareness' needed to transform a world which deeply requires transformation (Freire, 1972a, pp. 46-7). What is needed, says Freire, is a model of learning which is 'problem-posing' (p.57), and 'authentic' (p.66) precisely because it is 'dialogical' (p.59) and involves non-hierarchical 'co-operation' (p.135 ff.). Thus, teaching adults to read and write is not merely a matter of transmitting technical skills but a process of working with them to 'reflect critically' on their experience (1972b, p.33), through the negotiation of its key 'contradictions' and 'generative themes' (1972a, p. 68; p. 69):

'The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education is for men [sic] to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades.'

(Freire, 1972a, p. 95)

The Current Historical Relevance of the Reflective Paradigm

This brief review of the theoretical origins of the reflective paradigm shows that its underlying themes were already quite familiar by the early 1980's. Indeed Schon himself had already published his ideas in 1971. So we need to ask, what it is about the recent political and historical context of adult and professional education which has fostered so readily and so intensely a sense of the renewed relevance of these themes - the assertion of creativity and autonomy against compliance, the assertion of experiential holism (including the emotions) against purely conceptual analysis, and the assertion of empowerment and dialogue against the hierarchical exercise of cultural power. A tentative answer may be given which, although certainly incomplete and highly simplified, at least brings into view the beginnings of an important parallel between the historical position of the professional worker in the 1980's and the position of the artist in modern society, namely a stance of defensiveness (of what are felt to be crucial values) in response to a sense that in society at large those values have been rejected or lost.

In general terms, then, the reflective paradigm represents the response of certain key professions to finding themselves, quite suddenly, in the 1980's, in an embattled position. For Talcott Parsons, in the 1950's, professional work embodied the general application to social affairs both of scientific rationality and of altruism, giving professional work a substantial sense of cognitive and moral authority (Parsons, 1954). There were, of course, critical voices questioning this authority, and this is indeed the starting point for Schon's work (see Schon, 1983, chapter 1). But, overall, the rise of a 'welfare state' (in Europe) and the adoption of various social policies which combined to form what has been called a 'semi-welfare state' in the USA (see Roche, 1992, p.82) institutionalised a number of professions in a position which provided for its members a very clear sense of cultural authority. As teachers,

nurses, doctors, social workers, local government officials, etc. our social role was expressed in terms of general values (concerning care and the promotion of welfare), and individual responsibility for interpreting how these values were to be realised (justly and equitably) in particular cases. But the 1980's saw a powerful political attack upon the welfare state as the key to social justice. Instead of a Welfare State staffed by 'caring' professionals representing 'values', there was to be a Market in the Provision of Services, where the key task was the efficient management of resources. And if professional work was to be 'managed' the lessons of Frederick Taylor's advice to industrial managers seventy years earlier (see Braverman, 1974, chapter 4) needed to be applied: professional knowledge needed to be 'codified' (in terms of 'competences' and official 'codes of practice') so that individual workers could be held accountable to corporately defined goals and procedures. Thus, the late 1980's saw professional staff beginning to experience a sense of having their autonomy reduced, their decision-making mechanised, their expertise fragmented and their 'artistry' abolished (see Field, 1991; Norris, 1991; Avis et al., 1996).

Behind this experience of devaluation, deskilling and alienation lay a massive economic shift. Whereas previously Keynesian welfare economics had emphasised the positive economic benefits of public expenditure, 'monetarist' economic policies defined public expenditure as never anything but a regrettable distortion of idealised market forces. At the same time, advances in information technology and the removal of national restraints on the movement of capital led to a global 'vicious circle of competitive austerity' (Albo, 1994, p. 147) as all economies were forced to try to match the lowest cost levels achieved anywhere in the world, even where profitability was being achieved at the expense of workers' health and human rights. For professional workers, this meant (and means) that professional artistry and value commitments are further threatened by the simple fact that staffing levels and all other resources for meeting the needs of clients are continually being reduced, creating an ever widening gap between what budgets make available and what professional judgment would propose as desirable. Thus Palmer, introducing his collection Reflective Practice in Nursing, writes:

"Reflective practice" [is] a means for addressing the alienation [brought about by] the high speed manner in which nurses are expected to care for their patients. . . . Today's nurses, more than at any other time, are faced with an increasing obligation to evaluate and improve their practice [and yet] nursing in our present climate often does not appear to foster professional self-evaluation. . . . The drive for efficiency and cost effectiveness . . . often leaves little time for an individual nurse or group of nurses to reflect on their clinical practice.'

(Palmer, 1994, p. 1)

The reflective paradigm, then, is not merely about methods for effective professional education, but also about re-claiming and rescuing the professional values which are implicit in the structure of professional knowledge and in the methods of professional thinking. The reflective paradigm assembles its theoretical resources in order to defend professional values, creativity and autonomy in a context where they are generally felt to be under attack from political and economic forces which threaten to transform the professional from an artist into an operative. The notion of the 'reflective practitioner' thus contains aspects of a 'heroic' stance for the professional worker: the professional as an embattled fighter for the values of practice and for the rights of vulnerable clients (students, patients, ect.) against 'un-

caring' bureaucracy and discriminatory cultural attitudes, and thus, implicitly, against the distorted values and priorities of an unjust society. Such themes, of course, fit perfectly into the structures of fictional narrative, and indeed we see myths of the professional-as-hero enacted every evening on our TV screens - countless episodes in which compassion is rescued from red-tape and truth from corruption and concealment, by doctors, nurses, journalists, pathologists, lawyers, vets, even ambassadors, and - above all, of course - by police officers.

Reflection, Postmodernism and the Crisis of 'Truth'

But all this, although appealing and entertaining, is of course very one-sided and somewhat suspicious. 'Pity the land where heroes are needed', says Brecht's Galileo (The Life of Galileo, Scene 13), and myths are the expression of a cultural problem -- the fantasy resolution of some sort of contradiction (Levi-Strauss, 1981, p. 603). So what is the contradiction inherent in this profoundly appealing image of the reflective practitioner as mythic cultural hero, struggling against external circumstances and social authority for authenticity, rationality, artistry, autonomy and truth? Basically the contradiction is that, as professional workers we are ourselves authority figures. There is thus an irony in celebrating our struggle against external authority (bureaucratic procedures, managerial imposition, routinised theoretical curricula, 'science', 'technical rationality') in order to assert our own individualised, personal authority for making decisions affecting others' lives. Because the same arguments which undermine the basis for external prescriptive authority also question the conceptions of 'authentic' personhood, 'free' experimentation and 'undistorted' modes of communication which the reflective paradigm proposes: for example, where shall we seek the criteria for judging that this communication here, now is 'free', 'undistorted', 'authentic'? For our clients and our students, and even for ourselves, we, as practitioners, also represent a cultural authority whose basis has become unclear. The crisis of legitimate authority thus runs deeper than we have so far admitted, involving a lack of certainty concerning the basis of 'valid' knowledge in general and thus the basis for professional work itself.

The term which has been used over the last few years to refer to this very general level of philosophical and cultural uncertainty is 'postmodernism', and its particular relevance for our argument is that it emphasises, among other things, the limitations of purely rational, analytical knowledge and focuses instead on the significance of aesthetic, artistic modes of understanding. The 'postmodernist' thesis explicitly denies that we can, any longer, have faith in the 'Grand Historical Narratives' of 'modernism', i.e. the narratives which proclaim progress, through history, towards the realisation of Emancipation, Truth, Justice or Reason (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernists argue that meaning is determined within the overall terms of a 'discourse' or a 'language game' (Lyotard, p.15) and, consequently, that all these key ideas (Truth, Justice, Freedom, etc.) merely have different meanings within different cultural contexts. There can be no simple 'progress towards' Truth, Justice etc, because there can be no universal discourse which can prescribe a general consensus about their meaning. Instead, any agreements (about the meaning of Truth, Justice etc.) must be negotiated pragmatically and for the time being, on the basis of perceived interests and localised norms (Lyotard, pp. 60-1; p. 66). Conceptions of justice are thus limited both in time and space (p.66), what is acceptable as 'truth' depends on the distribution of wealth and power (p.45), and we cannot even have confidence that we can 'represent' reality but must be content with what we know to be mere tentative 'allusions' (p.81).

Although such arguments are currently influential (see Jameson, 1998), many would argue that they go too far, pushing legitimate doubt over the edge, into incoherence and self-contradiction (see Eagleton, 1996). But for professional workers wishing to assert the values inherent in their role the postmodernist argument certainly raises a crucial question: how can we seriously exercise our responsibilities if we cannot even be sure how to frame our questions, our goals or our interpretive categories? Indeed it is exactly this form of radical self-questioning which is at the centre of several of the papers in two recent volumes on reflective practice and reflective learning in the social work profession (Yelloly and Henkel, 1995; Gould and Taylor, 1996) and the concluding chapter in one of them uses 'postmodernism' as its organising theme:

'Reflective learning may be conceptualised as a response to postmodernism, as a positive and creative approach to the prospect of living with contingency . . . variety, relativism and ambivalence'

(Taylor, 1996, p. 159; p. 156)

As Taylor suggests, arguments which question the universal basis of rationality, should not lead us to mere scepticism, but they do return us to what we have already seen as one of the central ambiguities in the reflective paradigm: on the one hand reflection has been presented as a process of emancipatory Reason -- liberating the intellect of the learner to reconstruct for her/himself the meaning of experience through hypothesis-testing, mental experimentation and conceptualisation; on the other hand reflection is seen as involving the whole person, including emotional awareness, unconscious dynamics, the narrative of experiential growth, and the search for 'artistry'. The postmodernist rejection of a universal rationality brings these two aspects of the reflective paradigm together, suggesting that artistic and pragmatic criteria are not simply the 'enemy' of Reason, but helpful collaborators in the processes of Reason itself: Reason is only undone if it places all its faith in the authority of facts and concepts, attempting to exclude emotion, context and motive, and ignoring artistic modes of understanding. Hence, Lyotard conducts much of his argument against Habermas's proposal that democratic emancipation can have the form of a consensus guided only by 'the force of the better argument' (Habermas, 1976, p.108). And in his 'postscript' he presents the 'concept' of postmodernism largely in terms of the work of painters and novelists (pp. 79-81). In other words, Lyotard concludes his 'Report on Knowledge' in terms of a theory of art.

Exactly how theories of art can contribute to our understanding of 'reflection' is the theme of the remainder of this chapter, but, by way of preparation it is interesting to see just how clearly and directly the basis of our argument is expressed by one of the most generally influential of contemporary philosophers, Richard Rorty. In Contingency, Irony, Solidarity (Rorty 1989), he argues that the social 'solidarity' of democratic values is encapsulated in one key principle: avoiding cruelty to others. But this commitment cannot be justified through a purely philosophical analysis, since all analysis is 'contingent', i.e. dependent on the norms and values of particular cultures and the languages which embody them. One can (and should) make moral and political commitments, but this must be combined with an 'ironic' sense that our commitments are always 'contingent', and are thus always open to question from within other systems of meaning. Hence, the suggestion that one should avoid cruelty to others can only be represented in a persuasive form - e.g. through evocative descriptions which promote empathy with others' suffering. Any attempt to present it

in a form which claimed absolute validity (based on 'philosophical' analysis or 'scientific' evidence) would be prescriptive, and would thus carry, in itself, the risk of political oppression and, consequently, a further round of 'cruelty' (Rorty, 1989, p. xv; p. 46, p. 61, p. 196). And the form of representation which combines commitment, irony and empathy is 'poetry' (p. 61) and fiction:

'Human solidarity . . . is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. This process of coming to see others human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like. This is a task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist's report . . . and especially the novel. . . . The novel, the movie and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress. In my liberal utopia this replacement . . . would be part of a general turn against theory and toward narrative.'

Rorty, 1989, p. xvi)

Rorty thus makes explicit and central a theme which is exemplified in the work presented in the earlier chapters of this book but which is, as we have seen, only implicit and peripheral in most writings of the reflective paradigm. And this is the theme to which we now turn directly: the development of understanding by means of an analytical process grounded in an 'aesthetic' shaping of experience; empathy, sensitivity and ironic self-awareness achieved through the imagination and embodied in 'fictions'.

4. REFLECTION AND THE 'SHAPING SPIRIT OF IMAGINATION'

The General Significance of the Artistic Imagination and of 'Aesthetic' Judgments

It takes no great effort of mental agility to see the links between the key elements of the reflective paradigm, as described so far, and what we know as 'imagination'. 'Imagination' is a pivotal term here, because it has both a very general meaning (which can easily be located in the process of reflecting on experience) and a much more specific one (which takes us straight to the heart of artistic creativity).

In its general meaning it refers to the ability - characteristic of all human minds, and probably the minds of other mammals too - to 'go beyond', in some sense, what is directly present to our senses. What we experience in our minds is always an interpretation of what we see and hear, which thus creates a space of freedom: our thoughts are not mechanically determined by the immediate inputs of our senses. Neither are we determined by past experiences. The term 'imagination' is linked with the idea that our memories are stocked with images of remembered events, but we can manipulate these images almost at will: we can conjure them up in sequences and combinations quite different from how they originally occurred, and we can create images of events that never happened. It is the imagination which enables us to generalise from immediate fragments of experience by reviewing the relationship between this, here and now, and other experiences with which it might in some way be linked. It is thus the imagination which allows us to classify experiences in the first place as well as to explore alternative ways of classifying them (Warnock, 1976, p.28). Hence, Gareth Morgan, writing about 'creative organisational management'

uses the term 'imaginization' to describe the process of improving 'our ability to see and understand situations in new ways' and of 'finding new images' with which to interpret events and situations (Morgan, 1993, pp. 2-10).

But the imagination is more than an ability to make links and associations; it refers to a creative capacity (Coleridge, 1960 [1817], p. 167). There are two typical activities of the imagination which provide its creative power. Firstly, 'it reconciles opposites or discordant qualities'; i.e. it plays with the question of what is 'the same' and what is 'different' (Coleridge, op. cit., p. 174). Hence the imagination creates 'metaphorical' links between things and situations (Morgan, 1993, p. 1). For example, a school or a hospital or a social services agency can be seen as, in interesting ways, 'the same as' a culture, or an organism, or a mechanism, or a political system or even a hologram (in which each component part embodies the structure of the whole (Morgan, op. cit., p. 5; p. 9). Koestler (1964) uses the term 'bisociation' (bringing disparate frames of reference to bear on a single phenomenon) to describe the acts of creative imagination involved not only in scientific discovery and artistic production but in the everyday activity of telling and understanding jokes (p. 35, ff.). Secondly, the imagination finds general significance in particular concrete experiences (Coleridge, op. cit., p. 174). The imagination is 'something working actively from within, to enable us to perceive the general in the particular, to make us treat the particular . . . as symbolic, as meaning something beyond itself' (Warnock, op. cit., pp. 53-4). In these various ways, the imagination can be thought of as lying at the root of human beings' existential freedom. We are always free, ultimately, in the sense that every act of perception involves the capacity to imagine the world as possibly different (Sartre, 1972 [1940, pp. 213-5). Alan White puts it the other way round: 'To imagine something is to think of it as possibly being so' (White, 1990, p.184). But for both writers the imagination, so to speak, intervenes between the inputs of our experience and our mental processes, ensuring that our thoughts are not simply determined and predictable, and giving us the capacity for autonomous judgment.

But when Coleridge laments that he is losing his 'shaping spirit of imagination' (Coleridge: 'Dejection: An Ode', line 86) he is not, of course, complaining that he is losing his autonomy as a human being but that he is losing his ability to write poetry. This brings us back to the second, more restricted meaning of 'imagination', namely the 'creative' capacity of 'the artist'. This in turn introduces our main argument: that artistic creativity and aesthetic modes of judgment are not the preserve of a rare and special type of person ('artists') but a universal capacity, and that they need to be included as a central component of 'reflection' on experience.

In order to begin this argument we need, first of all, to pause on the term 'aesthetic'. According to the dictionary, 'aesthetic' has two quite different meanings, which offer a significant parallel to the two meanings of 'imagination'. The word 'aesthetic' is derived from the Greek word for 'things perceptible to the senses' and so it originally referred to 'the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarified domain of conceptual thought' (Eagleton, 1990, p. 13). To focus on 'the realm of the aesthetic' is thus to focus on lived experience (feelings, desires, aversions, etc.) a rejection of 'the tyranny of the theoretical' (Eagleton, *ibid.*). However, in the currently more familiar sense of the term, 'the aesthetic' means 'pertaining to the appreciation or criticism of the beautiful; having or showing . . . good taste' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Why on earth, one feels like exclaiming, should one word refer both to the whole of our sensuous experience in

such an apparently general and inclusive way and yet also to the making of certain types of rather specialised discriminatory judgments ('beautiful', 'tasteful')?

To answer this question, we will need to consider in detail the link between 'experience', 'judgment', 'taste' and 'the beautiful', and we will discover that it is not such a strange assortment of terms as one might initially presume. The link between them is precisely the general issue addressed by Kant in his Critique of Judgment (Kant, 1987 [1790]). Kant's fundamental concern in The Critique of Judgment is what we have already seen to be one of the central themes of the reflective paradigm: how do we make and explain our decisions when the one thing we know is that our knowledge has no guarantee of certainty? 'Judgment', says Kant, 'is the ability to think the particular under the universal' (p.18). If our judgments start from universals in order to deduce particulars (as in solving a mathematical problem for example) then our judgements are 'determinative', i.e. determined, prescribed in advance, by a system of axioms and logical operations. 'But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then [judgment] is merely reflective' ['reflektierend'] (pp. 18-19). (He says 'merely' because reflective judgments lack the absolute certainty of judgments deduced from universal rules.) 'Reflective judgement', then, is the process of finding general reasons / explanations / interpretations for the particularities of human experience in those situations for which there are no pre-given universal rules. Such situations, clearly, include most of those we meet in our everyday and professional lives. (The general argument anticipates Schon's distinction between 'technical rationality' and 'reflection'.)

This basic human activity of reflective judgment has close parallels with the general cognitive role of the imagination (Kant, op. cit., p.182): it represents our ability to find an objective orderliness in our experience by projecting onto the natural world the cognitive structure of our own minds (p. 19). And since this orderliness is indeed a projection of our own minds on to the world (rather than a set of objective facts about the world) we experience a specific sense of satisfaction and pleasure when we find apparent empirical confirmation for our thinking, i.e. when an experience or a group of experiences suddenly 'falls into place' as forming an ordered unity (pp. 23-7). Mary Warnock ends her analysis of imagination by echoing Kant in celebrating the importance of such moments of 'insight': it is at such moments, she says, that we feel, intensely, the value of our experience through our power to understand it in ways which go beyond our merely subjective impressions (Warnock, 1976, pp. 206-7). Our sense of elation at such moments, one might suggest, also following Kant, comes from a sudden, creative sense of being 'at one with' the universe. At such moments, says James Joyce, an experience takes on a sort of radiant clarity, as we grasp a sense of its underlying structure and integratedness (Joyce, 1956 [1916], pp.216-7).

But back to Kant. Having asserted, at the outset, this general argument about the nature of reflective judgment, Kant then devotes nearly three quarters of his main text to considering the nature of 'taste' and 'the beautiful'. So why does Kant (whose concern, as a philosopher, is the conceptual structure of human knowledge) see questions of taste and beauty as playing such a key role in the operation of reflective judgment in general? But, again, it is not so surprising after all. Checking once more with the dictionary, 'beautiful' simply means 'giving pleasure to the senses or the intellect'. So, one could quite properly describe those pleasurable moments of reflective 'insight' just described as moments when we appreciate something (any object or experience) as 'beautiful'. And this does indeed correspond with our usage.

There can be beautiful sounds, beautiful aromas, beautiful views; beautiful faces, beautiful arguments in philosophy and beautiful proofs in mathematics, beautiful passes and goals in football and beautiful phrases spoken at moments of interpersonal tension by lovers or by nurses, teachers and social workers; beautiful prayers, poems, stories, paintings, churches, songs and string quartets; beautiful pebbles, beautiful wallpaper and beautiful spots for a picnic. Beauty, then, is a general 'mode' of judgment in which we can (potentially) appreciate the quality of almost any experience.

But what, specifically, does the judgment of beauty mean? First, it is important to note that to say something is beautiful is more than saying, 'I like it'. To say that something is beautiful is to make a claim for it which I could try to justify. It is a judgment to which I make a commitment and would try to elaborate in order to convince others if they disagreed (Kant, op. cit., p. 54). There can be an interesting discussion about whether something is or is not beautiful, albeit probably an inconclusive one. In contrast, I happen to like peanut butter sandwiches and corduroy jackets but I wouldn't wish to claim that they are 'beautiful' since I recognise that they are purely a personal preference and I therefore have not the slightest reason for engaging in a discussion to try to persuade anyone to agree with me. Second, to say that something is beautiful is not to make a practical judgment or a judgment based on our own personal interests or desires. It would seem like a total misuse of words or a misunderstanding if I were to explain why I think a particular house is 'beautiful' by saying that it looks as though it would be nice and warm in winter and well ventilated in the summer, or that it is very conveniently situated for where I work. Judgments of beauty transcend the merely practical and the merely personal (Kant, op. cit., p. 53; p. 58) and for that reason they are judgments which could be agreed by anyone (p. 54), i.e. even if they were interested in different practical issues and had different personal motives.

Similarly with questions of 'taste', Kant's other main focus. Because, again, matters of taste are more than merely personal inclinations but, rather, judgments with which we hope others will agree. And, moreover, they are social judgments, invoking cultural norms which claim general support for individual decisions. To say that something is 'in poor taste' is to say more than, 'I don't like it'; it is to make a judgment that we think others 'ought' to agree with. Indeed it even feels quite close to a moral judgment.

The terms, 'beautiful' and 'tasteful', then, are a way of referring to a fundamentally significant feature of reflective judgments -- their 'indeterminate' quality. The reflective paradigm, as we have seen, specifically rejects the idea that professional judgment is the direct application of given rules. On the contrary, 'reflection' is open-ended, explorative, seeking possible and tentative generalities rather than prescriptions; it is responsive to the unpredictability of individual experience, seeking some sort of justifiable grounds while recognising that no final proofs are possible; it seeks objective reference points and principles while accepting that these are ultimately subjective and relative to a particular culture; it recognises that no judgment is ever purely technical or conceptual but always involves a combination of intellect, emotion, value commitment and politics. And it is precisely this vague but powerful combination of factors which is evoked when we engage in what Kant calls 'aesthetic' judgment. 'The aesthetic' is thus symptomatic of reflective judgment in general.

In some respects there is nothing new about the link between the realm of the aesthetic and the realm of professional reflection. We have already seen how Schon frequently argues against the technical model of professional thinking by evoking its 'artistry', and he quotes Coleridge's description of the act of reading a poem ('the willing suspension of disbelief') to evoke his conception of the professional-client relationship (Schon, 1983, p. 296; p. 363). Elliot Eisner argues that the work of school teachers needs to be understood in the same way as one appreciates paintings, through a form of 'connoisseurship' or 'art criticism' (Eisner, 1985) and Hugh England responds to the recognition that social work practice cannot be grasped through the methods of social science by describing how the criteria for the evaluation of works of literature can be applied to the evaluation of social work (England, 1986, pp. 119-123). However, the emphasis here is on artistic and literary criticism: instead of the authoritative institutions and disciplines of 'science', Eisner and England substitute the equally authoritative institutions of Art and Literature, from which criteria for the evaluation of professional experience are to be derived. Their arguments therefore miss the emphasis -- so crucial within the reflective paradigm -- that the basis for reflection is in the experience of the individual rather than in authoritative criteria provided by institutionalised knowledge. And although Maxine Greene's article 'Realising Literature's Emancipatory Potential' (included as one of the 'key approaches' to critical reflection in the volume by Mezirow et. al.) emphasises the creative aspect of reading, she does not propose to involve practitioners in writing and sharing their own fictions but merely to encourage the careful and committed reading of Great Literature (Greene, 1990).

We have to return, then, to our earlier problem. One of the key meanings of 'imagination' conventionally focuses on the typical activities of 'the poet' (Coleridge, op. cit., p. 173) or even 'the genius' (Schopenhauer, 1995 [1819], p.110), and one of the meanings of 'the aesthetic' ('pertaining to the beautiful, to the criticism of taste') conventionally has distinct overtones of cultural elitism; and both of these run counter to the basic argument of this book, which seeks to define the imagination and the aesthetic in terms of a universal capacity for the creative interpretation and representation of human experience.

So far, in tracing this argument, we have largely followed Kant, but at this point it is important to distance ourselves from one aspect of his thinking. Kant's overall project (two hundred years ago) was to elucidate the structure of Reason and of Ethics in terms of universal and finally established concepts. But this is precisely what many recent philosophers have abandoned as in theory unsustainable (see references to 'postmodernism' above). Thus, where Kant attempted to provide universal grounds for judgments of taste (e.g. Kant, 1987, pp. 89-90; p. 188), we would want to emphasise, now, that there are different 'sub-cultures', each of which would have different notions of what was 'taste-ful' and what was 'over-the-top'. So, even though we still follow Kant in thinking that our judgments of taste and beauty are more than merely personal opinions, we now make them, as Rorty says, 'ironically', i.e. in full recognition that other social groups have different norms, concerns, and reasons. Our century has experienced (and continues to demonstrate) all too painfully the political dangers associated with attempts to enforce a total and unified conception of Truth and Justice, and we therefore emphasise a conception of moral and political order based on negotiated strategies for accepting and valuing cultural and political plurality (Mouffe, 1993, p. 40).

Hence, we tend to use the term 'style' alongside 'taste', as part of a recognition of differing 'lifestyles' within which a given choice may or may not be seen as 'tasteful' (i.e. 'styl-ish') or - alternatively as 'naff'. Hence, also, the rapidly changing terms in which everyday judgments of 'beauty' are made. Yes, there are 'beautiful' spots for a picnic, 'beautiful' jumpers and 'beautiful' stories, but although we may perhaps hear the term 'beautiful' used in such contexts, we are equally (or more) likely to hear (at different times and in different places) 'super', 'brilliant', 'neat', 'absolutely fabulous' 'cool', or 'wicked'. The reason for such a plethora of terms and the speed with which they slip in and out of fashion may be not only a simple matter of cultural diversity but also linked with Kant's point that such judgments are, at the same time, highly significant, very indeterminate (i.e. 'vague'), and extremely common. Words lose their precision with frequent usage, which is why language is constantly changing. Thus, the rapid turn-over in our vocabularies of aesthetic appreciation is in itself a testimony to their importance and their widespread use.

Literary Creation as a Process of 'Reflection'

So far, I have tried to establish a 'non-elitist' conception of the function of aesthetic judgments. Let us now take the argument a stage further and consider specifically the activity of artistic creation and see how some of the characteristic processes of the literary imagination can be understood in relation to professional reflection.

One important set of ideas has already been mentioned: the literary artist (like the reflective practitioner) brings together apparently disparate ideas, images and events, so as to create a generally significant structure of 'order' from the flux and fragmentation of personal experience. This basic starting point -- the artist as a constructor of individualised-but-generalisable meaning -- is derived, as we have seen, from Kant and Coleridge, and it is historically specific in the sense that it expresses ideas characteristic of the European Romantic movement. But these ideas also continue to set the terms for contemporary understandings of the role and significance art, since it was at that time, the beginning of the nineteenth century that the notions of 'art' and 'the artist' first achieved a degree of self-consciousness and popular currency. The aesthetic', says Eagleton, was 'the secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society' (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9) and we continue to live in a society structured by capitalism, with its overwhelming emphasis on subjective experience, individuality and individual choice. This is expressed at one level in the general principle of competition, but, more importantly for our argument, by the sense that only individual experience can directly express ethical and spiritual values, since the broader social and political pattern of events is essentially driven by financial forces and principles from which values are excluded. This contrasts (in both respects) with 'traditional' society, where (i) the social order as a whole was divinely ordained and thus in itself was supposed to express spiritual and moral values, and (ii) individual identities were relatively non-problematic, being also divinely ordained and fixed at birth. Hence, Giddens refers to 'the reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent yet continuously revised biographical narratives' as the key characteristic of life in 'the post-traditional order of modernity' (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). So, the combined implication of these two quotations (from Eagleton and Giddens) is as follows: the creative subjectivity of the artist, as formulated at the turn of the nineteenth century (often quite explicitly from Kantian theories of knowledge and reflection), continues to represent the nature of modern subjectivity in

general: the individual as a creator - constructing meaning from the raw material of experience.

What was relatively new in the early nineteenth century conception of the artist may be summed up in two contrasting metaphors. On the one hand, the work of art as a mirror -- on which light impinges to produce a reflection of nature -- i.e. as an imitation of reality (the traditional model, ultimately derived from Aristotle's Poetics); on the other hand, the work of art as a lamp -- an internal source of light, which by shining out upon the world produces a new image of reality which otherwise would not exist (Abrams, 1953; Kearney, 1988, p. 17). Clearly, the two images are not entirely incompatible, but at the end of the eighteenth century there was an important shift of emphasis: the artist no longer simply represents or imitates reality, but produces an original and personal interpretation. Here is an entry from Coleridge's Notebooks:

'In looking at the objects of nature while I am thinking . . . I seem to be seeking . . . a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists . . . as if that new phenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature.'

(Quoted in Warnock, 1976, p. 83)

The creative process, then, is in part an act of self-exploration. As an example, we might think of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina as an apology or an atonement for the 'sins' of his own earlier life, where Vronsky (the seducer) is the self he now wishes to banish and Levin (contented husband, father, farmer) is the self he wishes to be, as Tolstoy makes explicit in his Confession, published two years later. Similarly, Jeannette Yems' commentary on her story 'Mary' in Chapter Two makes it clear that in writing about her fictionalised client she is also writing about herself. There is thus a sense in which creating an artistic structure for experience can be 'therapeutic' - which is indeed, as we have seen, how many of the participants in our Reflective Writing courses refer to their writing (see chapter five, pp. XX, p. X).

The idea that artistic production is a process of personal creation and exploration also follows closely from the idea that what is satisfying in a work of art is that it 'produces a balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities' (Coleridge, 1960 [1817, p. 174]). This is partly a matter of seeing links between apparently unconnected matters or weaving varied events into an integrated pattern so that individual elements are illuminated from different points of view. As examples of this, see the summary of Naomi Ball's story 'Ignorance' in chapter one and Julia Plunkett's story 'If Only She Knew' in chapter two. On a grander scale the point is illustrated by George Eliot's Middlemarch, which combines two main stories originally conceived quite separately (Ashton, 1996, pp. 301-12).

This leads on to another important point. When a number of different situations are juxtaposed and set into a closely worked relationship within the unifying artistic structure, then the unity which emerges has a sort of generality, which is partly what the disparate elements share and partly the 'train of thought' started by the relationship between them. There are two sources for this sense that the product of artistic imagination has a general significance beyond the context it immediately refers to (unlike, say, a 'report' or a 'description'). First, it 'taps into' a background mythology of universal themes: patterns of 'comedy' or 'tragedy'; heroes, villains, journeys of discovery, growing up, finding the right partner to 'fall in love'

with, solving a mystery, seeking justice, the relationship between dream and reality, sudden catastrophe, reversals of fate, the significance of death, and so on (Frye, 1957; Propp, 1968). Second, by embedding a concrete experience into an artistic structure, the imagination, as it were, converts it into a pattern of general significance, by revealing it as 'symbolic', making it seem representative of a whole category of experiences (Warnock, pp. 68-9). The operation of this symbolic or mythological process is clearly illustrated by Jane Arnett's ghost story in chapter two and even more clearly by the discussion of Muriel Lace's 'The Journey' by her colleagues (also in chapter two).

In this way, the 'shaping spirit' of artistic imagination re-creates the individual experience as a potentially general experience, even though its 'meaning' can never be finally or completely formulated (Eagleton, 1990, p. 94). The work of literature is at the same time 'theoretical' (in the generality of its meaning) and ambiguous (inviting a variety of interpretations). Thus, there is no doubt that Shakespeare's portrayal of the sequence of events leading up to the death of a medieval Danish Prince, Hamlet, creates a sense of their general significance; otherwise it would be difficult to understand its continuing appeal to people quite remote in culture and experience from both the author and the events described. But is it a story of youthful idealistic rebellion against a corrupt social order? Or an example of the Oedipus complex in action (Freud's interpretation)? Or about the paralysis of effective action when it is preceded by too much speculation about possibilities? (And if it is about the latter, is the play sympathetic towards the hero, or critical?) Is it about sex, or about politics, or about knowledge? Its artistic structure enables it to be about all of these at once and about the relationship between them. Returning to fictions with no pretension to being Great Literature, is Pamela Henderson's story 'Cakes and Ale' (chapter two) optimistic or pessimistic about the social role of community theatre? And is it, indeed about the social role of theatre or about gender roles?

This 'symbolic' quality which the artistic structure gives to particular events is both a sort of general 'truth' and at the same time a sort of open-ness and undecidability. It gives a sense that these events have indeed been 'understood' (by being placed within a generalisable pattern of meanings) and at the same time it gives a sense that any attempt at a final and complete interpretation of them is bound to be inadequate, because, in the end, actual events, people and situations are too complex, too multi-faceted to be wholly contained within any formula. All of which, of course, echoes many of the key themes of the reflective paradigm for understanding the events of professional practice.

But all this is very intellectual. It misses out the emotional dimension of creating and appreciating artistic structures of meaning. In Coleridge's poem Dejection: An Ode, written in 1802, about his sense that he has lost his 'shaping spirit of imagination' he laments that he can see the beauties of nature, but he cannot feel them. The artistic imagination links the operation of the intellect with the operation of powerful feelings; indeed it is the powerful feelings which provide the force which enables us to 'see' the 'symbolic' significance of the particular (Warnock, 1976, p. 81). By the same token, it is because a work of art creates a sense of general significance that we can identify emotionally with the characters and situations portrayed in films, novels and stories and frequently do so, responding with tears, horror or jubilation. (Various readers have reported being moved to tears by some of the stories in chapter two.) And Coleridge suggests that for the original creator it is the same: the power of

the imagination comes from our ability to feel the 'symbolic' significance of an experience.

On the other hand, the artwork does not simply express powerful emotions. It requires them to be present, but it goes beyond them. It 'transforms' expressions of feeling 'into' art. This transformative effect is particularly noticeable when the emotions are 'negative' - pain, fear, anger, horror. How can such feelings be incorporated into a work which aspires, insofar as it is 'art', to be 'beautiful'? (We are especially familiar with this question as it applies to 'violent' films.) Schopenhauer approaches the issue by asking how it is that we can find beauty in a wild and threatening landscape (Schopenhauer, 1995 [1819], pp. 124-9), and his answer is illuminating: a sense of 'exaltation' is experienced when we manage to triumph over immediate feelings of fear or horror aroused by specific objects and appreciate the 'Ideas' which underly them (p.125). This argument of Schopenhauer's allows us to see more clearly the significance of the notion (mentioned earlier) that the aesthetic response is 'disinterested: in responding aesthetically to a phenomenon we find a pattern of meaning which transcends crude feelings of desire or hostility and crude practical motives and attain a mode of 'contemplation', which is thus a sort of objectivity, a sort of 'truth' (Schopenhauer, pp. 131-2). And nearly 200 years later, Adorno, concerned with 'modern' rather than 'Romantic' art, specifically accepts Schopenhauer's view: 'Aesthetic experience - and this thought was already familiar to Schopenhauer - transcends the spell of mindless self-preservation, becoming the paradigm for a new stage of consciousness.' (Adorno, 1984, p. 475).

The 'detachment' of a work of art, then, is not just a process of intellectual abstraction but a form of emotional 'discipline'. Schopenhauer calls it 'exaltation', Coleridge calls it 'Joy' (Dejection: An Ode, lines 64-75), and J. S. Mill calls it 'the imaginative emotion' which arises when we suddenly feel the 'intrinsic value' of our capacity to create meaning from our experience (Warnock, 1976, pp. 206-7). One of the sources of this 'joy' in the imaginative creation of meaning lies in the sense that it is an achievement, because it is the outcome of a struggle -- a struggle to extend our sympathies and our understanding to experiences from which we may initially feel inclined to recoil. For example, the playwright Bertholt Brecht emphasises his aim is to prevent the audience feeling an 'easy' empathy with his characters; he wants to force the audience to weep at what appears at first to be comic and to laugh at what seems at first to be tragic (Brecht, 1974, p. 71). From this point of view, the artistic success of Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting (1993) is that he enables us to appreciate the humour, insight and residual human dignity of the drug addicts whose lives seem at first merely repellent. Similarly, Gary Oldman's film Nil By Mouth is carefully structured so that, reluctantly, we find ourselves feeling sympathy with the suffering which lies behind the horrendously destructive violence of the central character. The imaginative shaping of experience, then, is not only an intellectual structuring but a response to an emotional challenge -- a sort of emotional discipline.

The relevance of this process of consciously extending our sympathies, for a model of professional reflection, hardly needs spelling out. It corresponds exactly to the argument put forward by Rorty (see p. XX) and is perfectly illustrated by Matt Capener's portrayal of 'Frank' in chapter three (p. XX). It also leads directly to the general point that the imaginative structuring of experience constitutes a critique of experience, i.e. a 'critical reflection upon' experience, an examination of experience. It brings together disparate feelings, disparate ideas, disparate situations and events, and constructs for them a tentative, ambiguous unity which escapes any simple

summary because its fundamental implications have the form of a question, rather than a statement. Consider, for example, Steven Childs' story 'The Judgment' in chapter two: does it simply portray the pathos of a failure to understand or the enactment of a real injustice? Artworks leave us with a sense of something understood but never fully or finally. It always leaves us with further questions and often with confused emotions. The artistic structuring of experience brings us up against the realisation that we cannot construct the final or total significance of our experience. Hence, Brecht explicitly presents the basic process of artistic representation as making familiar experiences seem strange or 'alien' (Brecht, 1964, p. 71). And in the ancient Tibetan portrayal of The Wheel of Life, the Buddha is depicted as using the power of art (in this case, music) to arouse humankind from complacency (Sangharakshita, 1993, p. 77).

But art is 'critique' in a more direct sense as well. Kearney argues that the artistic imagination does (and must) have a specifically ethical dimension. The 'ethical imagination', he says, is the essential response of moral and political commitment, of humanitarian empathy, required by contemporary history (Kearney, 1988, pp. 3621-6). And Kearney is doing no more than echo Shelley's assertion nearly 200 years earlier: 'Poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man (sic)' by enabling him to 'put himself in the place of another and of many others'. In this way 'the great instrument of moral good is the imagination.' (Shelley, 1988 [1821], pp. 483-4). However, a work of art does not critique experience from an external standpoint or in terms of established moral or cognitive rules. Artistic judgments are more open, more ambiguous than moral judgments (Kant, 1987 [1790], p. 56; Goldman, 1995, p. 146). Insofar as the structure of a work of art coincides point-for-point with a specifiable set of moral or political concepts it is 'propaganda' rather than art, and propaganda becomes more 'artistic' insofar as it creates ambiguities which transcend its moral or political programme. For example, one of the ways in which TV series about the police and detectives retain their appeal is that they avoid being simple 'law-and-order' propaganda by often encouraging us to sympathise to some extent with the 'villains', so that at one level we may even half want them to 'get away with it' -- another example of the challenge posed by the artwork's ambiguity.

Thus, the artist's critique is conducted not as an outside observer but as a fellow sufferer. An artistic structuring of experience is an attempt by an individual to create meaning by picking a way through the various ideological structures which always threaten to pre-determine the meanings of our lives. It expresses, at the same time, commitment and detachment, freedom and constraint. Art, says Eagleton, is 'a critique of alienation', offering a 'glimpse' of our freedom to offer resistance to the rationality of markets, commodities and bureaucratic administration (Eagleton, 1990, p. 369). It expresses this all the more plausibly because it presents it as a possibility rather than as a fact or a programme. The work of art is 'enigmatic', says Adorno (1984, p. 186). On the one hand, it is fundamentally concerned with 'political authenticity' (p. 351) with 'truth' (p. 186), and indeed with 'truth of the kind also associated . . . with philosophy and social theory' (Bowie, 1997, p. 117). Yet, on the other hand, the work of art cannot escape 'complicity with untruth -- the untruth of the world outside' (Adorno, op. cit. p. 475). And, we might add, complicity with the world inside our heads: the culturally formed limitations of our concepts and desires. Much the same might be said for the reflective practitioner, enmeshed in the struggle to preserve the ethical values embodied in her / his professional responsibilities, within an always ambiguous organisational and cultural context.

To sum up. In this section I have tried to establish that the realm of the aesthetic is not merely a narrow specialist concern but is closely linked with the structure of reflective judgments in general. I have also tried to indicate how the basic processes of creative fiction correspond to many of the themes of the reflective paradigm: the subjective construction of meaning from experience, self-exploration, playing with new possibilities, reconciling contradictions, generalising from the particular, coming to terms with complex and difficult emotions, extending one's sympathies into the lives of others in order to 'understand'. And in tracing the link between professional reflection and the imaginative process of writing fiction I have referred frequently to examples from the work of practitioners exploring their professional practice, in order to challenge the assumption that writing effective and interesting fiction is necessarily the exclusive prerogative of those who define themselves as 'artists' or 'authors'. However, this assumption, which limits the cultural role of imaginative fiction to the institutions of 'Literature', is so deeply embedded in contemporary culture that a systematic theoretical dismantling of this assumption seems important, and this is the task of the next section of the argument.

5. NOT 'LITERATURE' BUT 'STORYING EXPERIENCE'

At the beginning of the last section I argued that one of the meanings of 'imagination' refers to a universal mental process and that one meaning of 'aesthetic' refers to the totality of our sense experience. So how did the realm of artistic creation get so separated off as the prerogative of a tiny minority? The basic assumption dates back to the Romantics, who thought that the artist, by creating another world from the resources of her / his imagination, re-enacted the original act of Creation on the part of a deity (Coleridge, 1960 [1917], p. 167). And it was Kant's 'Copernican revolution' which precipitated this conception, by making human beings the creators of the world we perceive: suddenly there was an absence, a void, where previously we could intuitively the presence of God by observing directly His Works in Nature. In this way, therefore, the conception of the artistic genius was invented to fill a newly created philosophical and religious vacuum, by affirming the richness of the human spirit. But this was an aesthetic ideology, which combined the assertion of individualism with an acceptance of social hierarchy, an individualism for the few in an age when opportunities for education were limited and when capitalism was beginning to construct a mass work-force destined for obedient drudgery (Eagleton, 1990, p. 28). Now, we might be tempted to say that not much has changed. But this would be too simple. We have had a century of universal suffrage, and we currently think of society as poised to enter an age of mass higher education, of 'lifelong learning'. The reflective paradigm is above all about the extension of the individual capacity for creative selfhood, it evokes a world in which work is not mere obedience to rules but an opportunity for exercising precisely those reflective judgments which Kant himself sees as exemplified typically in art. We are entitled to ask, therefore, why our conceptions of 'the artist' still seem to 'lag behind' (in their implicit elitism) the broad advances in our thinking about democracy, education and self-fulfilment.

Part of an explanation may be that our conception of 'the artist' is a phenomenon of an increasingly specialised society: the artist has a sort of profession or craft, and is thus 'special' in the same way as the doctor, the lawyer, the nurse, the teacher or the carpenter. But although professional workers possess techniques, experience and knowledge which enable them to carry out certain tasks more expertly than the average citizen, we don't feel that there is anything fundamentally mysterious

about their abilities. As lay persons, we can read medical and law books from the library, make our own wills, conduct our own conveyancing, treat our own 'flu symptoms, study by correspondence, and buy tools and materials from a DIY store. We don't feel that one has to be a 'genius' to be a teacher or a lawyer, but that you just need to have had some specialist training and a little more of a certain aptitude which to some degree is shared by everyone. Thus many people might feel that, for example, if they possessed just a little more 'patience' they could have been be a teacher. Now, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that 'patience' is quite widely distributed in the general population: most people can exercise some restraint in the face of others' irritating behaviour. But imaginative verbal ability is also widely distributed: large numbers of people entertain their friends and colleagues with skilfully recounted anecdotes, invent bedtime stories for their children, get the timing and words just right in telling jokes, and rapidly solve ingeniously complicated cross-word puzzles . Yet such people do not think of themselves as having 'almost enough' imagination and verbal skill to be a professional writer of fiction.

A point of clarification at this stage: the purpose of the argument is not to suggest that no valid judgment of relative skill or value may be made as between a novel written by Jane Austen and a story written by a member of a Professional Development Reflective Writing course. (I write as a lifelong devotee of Jane Austen!) What I do wish to argue, however, is that in many very important respects what they have in common is just as significant as how they differ. An understanding of what they have in common is crucial for an understanding of the role of writing and sharing fiction in courses of professional reflection; whereas how they differ might be an important consideration for a course on literary appreciation.

This last comment brings us to the cultural barriers raised by the usual presentation of 'Literature' in educational curricula, especially their tendency to emphasise 'the classics'. The presentation of a text and its author as 'classic' serves to remove them from the familiar scenario of people writing about their experience, and places them instead in a timeless realm, as people whom we have a duty to appreciate but cannot hope to emulate. Originally, of course, their apartness was indicated by the fact that they were written in Latin or Greek; in England, for the last hundred years or so, books written in English have become acceptable for 'serious study' but only on condition that their 'classic' status is held in mind. Hence the emphasis on the literature of the past and on analysing texts in such a way as to bring out their 'greatness'; so that 'potentially universal significance' is not seen to be a general quality inherent in all imaginative fiction (see previous section) but as part of the superiority of a very few texts, which mark them off from 'minor' or 'popular' work. Only The Classics are for education; popular texts are merely for 'entertainment'.

But 'entertainment' also is organised to preserve a strong sense of a literary hierarchy. The operation of the culture industry, like any other commercial operation, tends to provide those services which look as though they will yield a profit. Thus, a small number of Great Works of the past and a small selection of contemporary works are heavily promoted and universally presented to our attention. Classic novels are serialised on TV and a handful of each year's published fiction become newsworthy as the 'shortlist' for literary prizes. As in the world of sport, the twin processes of competition and marketing serve to emphasise the activities of a relatively few 'stars'. A further point is that the Great Works of the past are out of copyright and thus very cheap to reproduce: imagine what money Vivaldi would currently be making if he earned a royalty everytime a telephone answering system forces hapless callers to

listen to the first few bars of The Four Seasons while they are shunted around an organisational switchboard!

Of course, one should not overstate the case. The media hype of super sports leagues and a handful of musical performers does not prevent widespread involvement in amateur music and amateur sport. And, by the same token, there is community theatre, and there are small-circulation magazines publishing poems and stories by people who do not make a living from it. But on the whole, the economic forces which shape the culture of modern societies tend to construct 'art' as something provided by 'big names', to be consumed -- not as something we all do, for ourselves, with others, for conviviality and mutual enlightenment.

Let us, then, try to argue that the capacity for artistic creation is something we all possess, that professional reflection can therefore draw not only on our ability to appreciate established works of fiction, but on our ability to create fictional structures which are intricate, complex, and successful, as a way of developing our understanding of our experience. Fortunately, the argument is already made, in John Dewey's book Art and Experience (1958) [1934] -- which is nicely appropriate in view of Dewey's general influence on the reflective paradigm. Originally published in the nineteen-thirties, Dewey's ideas have recently been endorsed at length in Shusterman (1992), and even Adorno, who finds little comfort anywhere in his survey of modern culture and modern aesthetic theory, refers with respect to 'the one and only John Dewey, a truly emancipated thinker' (Adorno, 1984, p. 450; see also p. 484). Dewey's main concern is, precisely, to argue that artistic creativity is an aspect of common human experience, in opposition to the 'museum concept of art' (Dewey, op. cit., p.6), in which art works are separated off as remote and 'esoteric' (p. 10). Dewey is seeking 'the factors and forces which favor the normal development of common human activities into matters of artistic value' (p. 11). He thus describes the aesthetic structuring of experience in terms which emphasise its continuity with the general mental processes of 'making sense'. For example, it involves constructing out of the ceaseless and seamless flux of 'experience' an experience -- with a beginning and an end (p. 40), grasping the unity of the different elements of an experience while retaining the distinct character of each element separately (p. 36), seeing the relationship between the different parts of an experience and how this relationship is developing (p. 40). It involves giving a form to experience which expresses its integration, its 'organisation, . . . growth, . . . development and fulfilment' (p. 55). Hence, the aesthetic awareness of experience is no more than 'the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience' (p. 46).

What Dewey is doing here is bringing together the two somewhat opposed aspects of 'imagination' and 'aesthetic' which we originally noted. He has been criticised for not distinguishing clearly enough how 'art' is specific and 'different' (Shusterman, p. 55), but that is not the direction or purpose of Dewey's argument. On the contrary. Earlier, in section three of this chapter we noted the significance for the reflective paradigm of his argument that the basic methods of scientific inquiry are reproduced in the processes of 'careful thought' in everyday life (Dewey, How We Think, pp. 166-8); in Art and Experience he conducts a parallel argument: that the basic processes we familiarly think of as 'artistic creation' also describe the construction and communication of human experience in general. In both cases he is concerned with political education in its broadest sense, i.e. education for citizenship:

a democratic society needs its citizens to solve their practical problems like scientists and to grasp the meaning of their experience like artists.

One form of support for Dewey may be drawn from the argument of Terry Eagleton's book Literary Theory (1983). Eagleton begins and ends his examination of the various philosophical explanations which have been given of the nature of 'Literature' by saying quite bluntly that 'literature' (in itself) cannot be defined in terms of a special body of texts which are distinguishable from 'writing' in general (p. 11; p. 210). Literature is simply 'highly valued writing'; and what is highly valued varies according to the values of the person doing the valuing (p. 11), so that all attempts at defining the scope and limits of 'literature' as a body of writing must end inconclusively. The sociological form of the argument is presented by Bourdieu: 'Questions of the meaning and value of the work of art . . . can only find solutions in a social history of the field' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 290). In psychological terms, corroboration for the general line of Dewey's argument comes from a number of writers who emphasise the narrative structure of human consciousness. Barbara Hardy (1974) for example, writes of narrative as 'a primary act of mind'. 'Narrative . . . is not to be regarded as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate, and order experience, but as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life' (p. 12). She describes 'the qualities which fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives', and continues:

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others.'

(Hardy, 1974, p. 13)

Or, in the words of Anthony Paul Kerby:

'The self is generated and is given unity in and through its own narratives, in its own recounting and hence understanding of itself. The self . . . is essentially a being of reflexivity, coming to itself in its own narrative acts.'

(Kerby, 1991, p. 41)

Natalie Zemon Davies applies this approach to the writing of history in Fiction in the Archives (Zemon Davis, 1987), as does Kathryn Hunter's account of medical practice and training, Doctors' Stories (1991).

So, if - along with Kerby - we can consider that our being has 'essentially' the structure of an author permanently weaving experience into a narrative pattern, then we ought be able to accept that we all (and not only geniuses or Bestselling Authors) have the capacity for writing fiction:

'The brain is a story-seeking, story-creating instrument'

(Smith, 1992, p. 63)

In other words, we don't store experience (as thought it were 'information' or 'data'); we story it. Creating stories is, simply, one of the modes in which we comprehend our lives.

6. THE MULTI-VOICED TEXT: COLLAGE, MONTAGE, PATCHWORK

The notion of the 'storying imagination', however, has a weakness that we have not yet addressed, because the word 'story' itself contains a crucial ambiguity: on the one hand we say, 'What's the story?' -- meaning, 'Give me your account of what (actually) happened'. On the other hand, we say (especially to children) 'Don't tell stories' -- meaning, 'Don't tell lies'. (There is a similar ambiguity both in the French word 'histoire' and the German 'Geschichte'.) A story, then, being only one person's interpretation of events, is always open to the charge of being, for whatever reason, false. Similarly with the term 'fiction': we have emphasised frequently that 'fictional' means, 'Shaped and fashioned according to aesthetic judgments of value, significance and balance'; but it does, actually, also mean, 'Not true'. And for this reason Plato suggested that since poets and dramatists present only misleading illusions of truth, they should be excluded from his ideal republic (Plato, The Republic, chapter ten, part one). Clearly, in order to be taken seriously as an interpreter of reality, a writer of fiction needs to address the question, 'Why is this not 'misleading', not a personal fantasy masquerading as truth?'

The answer we have stressed so far is that a fiction presents itself as ambiguous, including various contrasting viewpoints and open to various interpretations. This answer corresponds to our current sense that any account of reality must inevitably be incomplete and / or ambiguous, since absolute truth is not available to us. But there is another, more powerful way in which art can answer the charge that it presents subjective interpretations as objective reality, and that is by explicitly showing us the subjective process of interpretation at work, by including in the text an account of its writing. This reflexive, self-analytical aspect of literature is already quite apparent in Romantic poetry (many of the poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats describe the poet 'having the experience' that produces the poem) but it is particularly emphasised by writers concerned with 'modern' literature. 'Modern art does not hide the fact that it is something made and produced' (Adorno, 1984., p. 39). The contemporary work of literature, therefore, often includes a reference to its own 'constructedness' and thereby recognises that it is not so much a 'lamp', shining out boldly and creating illumination, but a labyrinth of mirrors, creating a multitude of conflicting images (Kearney, op. cit., p. 17). Thus, John Fowles plays with the possibility of different endings to his novel The French Lieutenant's Woman: 'The last few pages you have read are not what happened' (Fowles, 1977, p. 295).

Kearney's analogy is particularly helpful in that it suggests one of the most frequent ways in which the modern fictional text makes explicit its constructedness, namely by showing the distinctiveness of the separate 'voices' of which it consists. It is presented not as a single interpretation of events unified by the author's mastery of the totality, but as a 'multi-voiced text' in which the author's voice is but one among many:

The notion of a text which tells a (or the) truth as perceived by an individual subject (the author) whose insights are the source of the text's single authoritative meaning, is . . . untenable.

(Belsey, 1980, p. 3)

To take some recent examples: Louis de Berniere's Captain Corelli's Mandolin (1994) and Rose Tremain's Sacred Country (1992) are both presented through the voices of

many different characters, and Margaret Atwood's novel Alias Grace (1997) is an elaborate compilation of documents illustrating different perceptions of a series of events which remain mysterious to the end even though they have a basis in historical 'fact'. Thus, the modern work of fiction makes it clear that it embodies a 'reflective' process of trying to understand events, and recognises that our means for understanding are such that our attempts can never be wholly successful: Arundhati Roy's novel The God of Small Things (1997) begins with a quotation from John Berger: 'Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one'.

The modern artwork, then, recognises the need to combat the illusion that it is an authoritative representation of a single reality. Although we are concerned with the artistic medium of fiction, it is important to note that this basic worry (that the apparent 'realism' of the artwork is a potentially dangerous illusion) initially regained its current importance in the visual arts, around the beginning of the twentieth century. Awareness of the 'problem' was initiated largely as a response of painting to the new media of photography and cinema. The age-old ambition of painting was to create an illusion of reality, to re-create on canvas the illusion of a 'real' landscape, individual person, flower arrangement, chair, or pair of old boots. But at the end of the nineteenth century, along came photography and threatened to render that ambition irrelevant: achieving an exact illusion of reality suddenly became a trivial, effortless routine, rather than an impressive achievement. Moreover, the photographed image was not only an apparently exact copy of reality but also an image which could be all too easily manipulated to create deception: events and scenes could be 'staged' for a photograph, while the photograph itself appeared to present them as occurring 'naturally'; and the printing process allowed images from quite different sources to be superimposed, creating an entirely illusory but apparently 'real' relationship between them. The camera thus combined the complete appearance of reality with unlimited possibilities for faking, and the traditional ambition of realism, as an artistic aim, was rendered worthless. The solution was to redefine the aim of art: instead of trying to reproduce reality (as though it had been 'objectively observed') it emphasised the explicitly subjective process of constructing new images by assembling and combining elements from a variety of different sources. The new emphasis was on making visible (and drawing attention to) the creative, interpretive process itself (Waldman 1992, pp. 10-11; Ades 1986, chapter four).

This new approach was variously called 'collage', in which a work is composed by sticking together (French: 'coller', to paste) fragments from letters, scraps of newspaper, theatre programmes, wall paper, etc (e.g. the early paintings of Picasso, Braque, Gris -- see Waldeman, 1992, p. 17, p. 40, p. 48); or 'photo-montage' (French: 'monter', to assemble) in which photographic images from different sources are combined into one overall image (e.g. the posters of George Grosz and John Heartfield -- see Ades, pp. 23-23). One important aim of both 'collage' and 'montage' was to create a form which would break down the barrier between the objects or documents of 'real life' and their artistic representation (Waldeman, p. 10). More importantly, from the point of view of the relationship between art and reflection, the new approach provided a form in which the artist could make a critical statement about reality by bringing contrasting images together in new, surprising, even shocking combinations (Ades, chapter two). The term 'montage' is also significant in that the word also refers to the process of 'editing' film (i.e. the basic process whereby a cinematic narrative is constructed), and thus reminds us of the important influence of the cinema on our current ways of presenting and understanding narrative.

The multi-voiced text, then, can be seen as the incorporation into fictional narrative of this revolutionary re-focusing of the visual arts -- painting, photography and cinema -- with its radical implications for our thinking about how to represent our interpretations of 'reality'. Thus, it is significant that Rosalind Krauss introduces her recent book on Picasso with an analysis of Andre Gide's novel The Counterfeiters, published in 1925 (Krauss, 1998, p. 5 ff). Gide's novel combines conventional storytelling, analytical essays, letters, and long extracts from the journal of the central character, a novelist, describing his plans for his next novel, to be called The Counterfeiters! Even more significantly, the whole work focuses on the relationship between the counterfeit and the real, in human relationships, in ideas, and in the representation of events in writing. It thereby exemplifies, both in its form and in its theme, the verbal collage and montage of what we have called the 'patchwork text'.

In this way, modern forms of fiction, emphasising a diversity of voices and the ironic relationship between them, and incorporating explicit reference to the act of producing the text, address the key question posed at the outset of his section: in what sense can a representation of reality be 'true'? No final answer to such a question can be given. On the one hand the multiple / patchwork / montage text does manage to 'disavow. . . unity by stressing the disparity of parts while at the same time reaffirming unity as a principle of form' (Adorno, 1984, p. 222). On the other hand, even the reflexive, obviously fragile and incomplete unity of the patchwork construction may be accused of making, implicitly, an unsustainable claim to 'understand' what it presents (Adorno, p. 223). But at least the form of the patchwork text is a response to the seriousness of the question, even if it only provides the beginnings of an answer: the patchwork text makes explicit its own ambiguity by reflexively recognising its own status as 'not-reality-but-a-construct' and by presenting a disparate collection of viewpoints. In this way, moreover, it is also a highly appropriate format for the process of professional reflection. Professional reflection also needs to be tentative as well as incisive, a critique but never a simple condemnation, committed but aware of alternatives, avoiding both grandiloquent claims to conclusive objectivity and the narrow simplicifications of merely technical problem-solving. Such are the claims which might be made for the examples of patchwork texts presented in chapter three.

7. WRITING AND SHARING FICTION - AN EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL 'PRACTICE' FOR THE STORYING IMAGINATION

So far, we have concentrated mainly on the educational and professional value of writing fiction. This section takes the argument further by focusing on the relationship between the writer and the reader of a work of fiction, as a process of communication which has its own specific educational value in that it requires a particular form of respect for the other. In this section, then, we examine how the literary imagination works, as a social "practice" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 205) and, in particular, how writing and sharing fiction may be thought of as complementary elements of a developmental social and educational process, i.e. as an 'emancipatory' social interaction between writers and readers. In other words, the argument of this section will trace the link between the practice of writing and sharing fiction and the practice of critical reflection as what Mezirow terms 'communicative learning' (Mezirow et. al., 1990, pp. 8-9).

The first point to note here is that any use of language needs to be understood as an act within a situation (Austin, 1962). Even if someone makes what appears to be

a 'statement of fact', we respond to it not only in terms of whether we accept its accuracy but in terms of its relevance and its purpose. If someone comes up and says, 'It's hot today', we understand it as an invitation (to begin a conversation) and our response will depend more on whether or not we wish to accept the invitation than on whether or not we agree with the statement as such. In this sense, all language use can be understood as 'rhetorical' -- as attempted acts of persuasion within an interaction. 'Persuasion' here needs to be interpreted broadly, as an attempt to sustain the negotiation of a shared purpose between speaker and hearer, writer and reader, an attempt to remain in touch with 'the Other' of the interaction. And this is equally true of a greeting on the street, presenting a mathematical proof, putting forward an argument, describing a professional incident, telling a joke, and -- of course -- writing a story or a patchwork text.

So, let us consider a story as an attempt, by a writer, to 'remain in touch with' the imaginary reader, the Other for whom the story is written. Who is this imaginary reader? In part this is a conscious and carefully analysed decision, based on what one has to say, one's purpose (Sartre, 1967, p. 12) and also one's understanding of the historical and cultural circumstances in which both writers and potential readers are situated (p. 50). The author thus constructs what Iser calls an 'implied reader' (Iser, 1978). 'All works of the mind contain within themselves an image of the reader for whom they are intended' (Sartre, 1967, p. 52) in the form of a set of historical allusions which, the author must assume, the reader will be able to 'pick up'; otherwise every text would have to attempt to explain 'everything' which would be not only tedious but impossible (Sartre, op. cit., pp. 49-50). But although a writer starts out with a sense of having something worth saying to, and understandable by, a historically specific set of readers, the readership is never entirely limited in this way. A fiction, as we have seen, always has an implied generality, something worth saying in the light of general values (Sartre, p. 13), so that, beyond the anticipated readers, it also aims to be persuasive for the widest possible readership. Hence, says Sartre, writing involves thinking, 'What would happen if everybody read what I wrote?' (p. 14). Which is another way of suggesting that a fiction aims at including and integrating a diversity of elements (Wellek and Warren, 1963, p. 243), in order to 'draw in' a diversity of readers.

It is this process of drawing the reader into the story which, according to Kenneth Burke, creates its 'form':

'Form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor [audience, readers] and the adequate satisfying of that appetite. This satisfaction . . . at times involves a temporary set of frustrations, but in the end these frustrations prove to be simply a more involved kind of satisfaction.'

(Burke, 1968, p. 31)

We are most familiar with this process as the creation of 'suspense'. For example, at the beginning of a story there may be a sequence of short scenes, apparently unconnected, creating for us an 'appetite' to know how, in the end, their connectedness will become clear. (Most contemporary films begin in this way and so do many novels -- see the opening pages of Ben Elton's Stark (1989) or Michael Ondaatje's The English Patient (1992).) Burke's suggestion is that the form of a story is a structure designed to manage the 'psychology' of its readers, i.e. their desire to know how different elements will be linked, how mysterious events will become clear, and their satisfaction at the final integration or clarification. Simple though it is, Burke's

argument brings out very clearly how writing a story can be understood as a social 'practice' -- a move in an interaction with the reader, an 'act' of persuasion and negotiation.

Considering this interaction from the reader's perspective, Iser emphasises that 'reading' is always a complex and individual process of creating a meaning for a text (Iser, 1978, p. 107), by making provisional (never final) selections of what is and what is not important (p. 126) and by 'filling in', for oneself, what seem to be its 'blanks' and 'inconsistencies' (p. 18). Iser's emphasis on the autonomy of the reader as a creative constructor of individualised meaning is a consequence of his and other writers' emphasis on the open, fragmentary quality of 'modern' literary forms and techniques (see previous section). This is partly due to the strong influence of the methods of the cinema, where the creative work of the director consists mainly in editing skilfully between different material (Benjamin, 1973), but it is also a response to our contemporary sense that there can be no finally coherent or authoritative representations of reality (see references to the ideas of Lyotard and Rorty in section three). However, this complexity, ambiguity and discontinuity is not only a feature of contemporary fiction but of story-telling generally, and follows from general theories of sign systems, meanings and texts. Thus, Barthes (1974) conducts a detailed analysis of an early nineteenth century short story to indicate the many different dimensions (Barthes calls them 'codes') in which writers and readers must negotiate the meaning of the text .

This complex, interactive model of interpreting literary texts has been used as the basis for a method of understanding human behaviour in general, namely 'hermeneutics' ('the art or science of interpretation') (Dilthey, 1976 [1900], p. 112). The essence of the hermeneutic method is a process in which:

'The whole of a work must be understood from the individual words and their combinations, and yet the full comprehension of the details presupposes the understanding of the whole'

(Dilthey, op. cit., p. 115)

Hence, as Gadamer (a recent exponent of hermeneutics) says, the structure of understanding 'is disclosed as the dialectic of question and answer' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 340) -- a virtual dialogue between writer and readers in which 'truth' is always sought but, given the 'circularity' of the process (Gadamer, op. cit., p. 258), will never be final:

'The reconstruction of the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer takes place itself within a process of questioning through which we seek the answer to the question that the text asks us.'

(Gadamer, p. 337).

Thus, the 'truth' proposed by a story (or a patchwork text) has always, in the end, the un-certainty of a question: 'What does this sequence of events ultimately "mean"?' And the same is true of the reader's response: 'Here is my interpretation, but I know that there are others; what are they?'

This acceptance that understanding a text is an always incomplete process of interpretation (defined as such by the circularity of the hermeneutic questioning) leads

Sartre to describe the relationship between writer and reader as one in which the writer must recognise the reader's freedom:

'Since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he [sic] has begun, since it is only through the consciousness of the reader that he can regard himself as essential to his work, all literary work is an appeal The writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work. . . . The aesthetic object presents only the appearance of a finality and is limited to soliciting the free and ordered play of [the reader's] imagination.'
(Sartre, 1967, pp. 32-33)

In writing a fiction, therefore, writers do not seek to render their readers 'passive', to 'overwhelm' them by proving a point; the writer writes in such a way as to allow the reader that 'aesthetic withdrawal' in which she / he can re-create the writer's story (Sartre, op. cit., pp. 34-5).

Conversely, the act of reading must recognise the freedom of the writer (Sartre, p. 45). There are two ways in which we can elaborate this point. Firstly, the hermeneutic 'rule' says that we must interpret details in the light of the whole text. So although as an individual reader I may find that a particular phrase or incident 'grabs my attention' by, say, evoking a personal memory, I do not simply recreate the whole significance of the story in the light of that detail and claim it as 'the meaning'. The freedom of the reader to make a personal interpretation is limited by the 'respect' due to the text as a whole, and this requires us to check our initial interpretations against the many other details of the text and to avoid claiming authority or finality for 'our' reading of it. Otherwise we impose ourselves on the author's text and thereby fail to learn from it. Secondly, the text stands separately. If we, the readers contribute so significantly to the meaning of the text, then we cannot claim to find, directly, in the text the experiences (the point of view, the values, the neuroses) of the author (Barthes, 1977). The author's text creates the opportunity for us to exercise what Sartre calls the free and ordered play of our imagination (see above), and for that we are, as it were, grateful. But, thereafter, the author her / himself is free in the sense that she / he cannot be 'held responsible' for what we, the readers, make of the text. Indeed, authors themselves can learn from the variety of readings that their texts provoke. The text is a terrain where interpretations meet, compete and mutually illuminate one another by virtue of the fact that all interpretations are put forward in a spirit of what Sartre calls 'generosity' (Sartre, 1967, p. 44): 'The work of art is an act of confidence in the freedom of [hu]man[ity]' (p. 45).

Thus, in conceiving of the relationship between writer and readers of fiction as an interaction in which each respects the freedom of the other, we bring into view an emancipatory model of the operation of the literary imagination as a 'social practice'. Indeed, perhaps we have here a theoretical perspective on the testimony reported in chapter five, that the sharing of fictions in a regular workshop discussion group can create the very sense of 'trust' which it requires (see chapter five, p.xx). In other words, through writing and sharing fiction and reflecting on the significance of different readers' interpretations of our fictions, we can perhaps take part in a version of that community of free and explorative dialogue envisaged by Habermas and evoked within the reflective paradigm as 'communicative learning' - the developmental understanding of experience as both a personal and a collective endeavour. And it is the ambiguity of the aesthetic structure, the indirectness of the aesthetically shaped message and the elusiveness of the aesthetic judgment (its

evasion of the directly ethical, the directly instrumental) which gives this model of emancipatory dialogue its plausibility and its strength.

8. CONCLUSION: WRITING AND SHARING FICTION AS AN ARTISTIC PRACTICE FOR THE REFLECTIVE CITIZEN

The general contention of this book is that the exercise of the literary imagination, in producing and sharing works of fiction, ought to be included as a key format in which to realise the creative examination of professional experience; it ought, therefore to be one of the methods envisaged within the reflective paradigm. Conversely, reflection on the meanings of work experience ought to be one of the practices in which the literary imagination can find a socially 'useful' function (Eagleton, 1983, p. 208). That this contention is expressed as a series of 'ought's' is symptomatic of the equivocal social status of the arts in modern society. Even though we recognise that the imagination is a basic human capacity, we have inherited from the Romantic movement a notion of 'the artist' as a rare and unusually 'gifted' or 'inspired' individual, and - consequently - a tendency to focus on 'Great Works of Art', representing 'classics' from the past or a tiny proportion of the creative production of the present.

One can explain this state of affairs economically and culturally (see section five) as an ideology which justifies various forms of exclusion and elitism. But we can also follow Dewey in refusing to accept this ideology, and emphasise instead that the concept of artistic creation is a model of the common human ability to express our experience in order to shape and realise its significance. One of the strategies for creating a better society, says Dewey, involves 'conferring aesthetic quality upon all modes of production' (Dewey, 1958 [1934], pp. 80-1).

This does not mean denying that there are 'Great' works of art, with a timeless capacity for inspiration and consolation, but it does mean avoiding the conclusion that most of us are incapable of producing artworks, only of 'consuming' them. Appreciating the brilliance and profundity of George Eliot's Middlemarch should not make us assume that we cannot write a short fiction of interest to our friends, ourselves and our colleagues, any more than the splendour of Salisbury cathedral should make us feel incapable of designing and building a perfectly serviceable greenhouse. Especially where the medium of language is concerned, general human ingenuity and capacity is as much in evidence as in DIY carpentry. We know how to tell anecdotes so that they are 'amusing' - a test of verbal skill in many dimensions - choice of word, rhythm, balance, timing. Most newspapers carry crossword puzzles, appealing to the pleasure taken by an educated public in playing with the punning ambiguities of words and their ability to point simultaneously towards different forms of knowledge ('Awful woman novelist, with blue veins'? - 'Gorgonzola'; 'Place of retirement in France, but poorly illuminated'? - 'Unlit'; 'Stick; don't declare'? - 'Baton'). And we are deeply experienced and sophisticated in our grasp of the structures and methods of fictional narrative, having been immersed in them, from an infancy of fairy stories to an adulthood of novels, feature films and TV drama.

The point about the accessibility of the verbal medium of written fiction is that it is cheap, portable and universally available, as well as infinitely flexible. An argument might well be made for the widespread human capacity to express understanding in terms of improvised theatre or painting; and if possessing a

camcorder ever becomes as widespread as possessing a pen and notepaper, then one might wish to argue strongly that the average educated citizen should not allow the achievements of Stephen Spielberg, Alfred Hitchcock or Orson Welles to undermine their self-confidence as movie-makers, just as I am arguing that amateur fiction writers should not be disempowered by the example of George Eliot. But at the present stage of cultural and economic development, and with regard to the special function of language in developing one's understanding of experience, it is the general human capacity for verbal artistry which seems to present the strongest case for urgent recognition.

In the nineteenth century, when 'work' was very largely to do with the production of physical objects, William Morris argued that at one time all handicrafts, including the production of household goods, had expressed a sense of aesthetic value (Morris, 1993 [1889], p. 342) and, moreover, that all production should be imbued with aesthetic value (Morris, 1994 [1884], p. 18). It was to this belief that we owe his widely influential designs for wallpapers and fabrics. Morris's ideas were consciously derived from John Ruskin, especially Ruskin's vision of 'gothic architecture' (Ruskin, 1985 [1853]) as a mode of production which fostered the imagination of the individual workman, and in which creative variety was more important than the imposition of a perfect regularity of form, which degraded the workman into a machine (Ruskin, op. cit., pp. 83-6). It is an indication that these ideas were perceived at the time to be of significance for the cause of adult education in general that Ruskin was asked to publish his essay separately, so that it could be distributed to all workers attending courses at the newly opened London Working Men's College (see Ruskin, op. cit., p. 75).

However, unlike Ruskin and Morris, we live in a culture and an economy where the relative importance of material production has declined sharply, a culture of mental production and an economy where wealth is created by what management theorists have called 'knowledge workers' (Drucker, 1974, p. 161; 1992, p. 81), whose value to their organisation lies in their capacity to be creative and to innovate (Senge, 1990, p. 4; Peters, 1989, p. 22). This is a new vision of the cultural role of professional work, reformulated for an age of unprecedentedly rapid change (Handy, 1991); an age where the relationship between knowledge and practice is no longer one in which a body of authoritative scientific findings is directly applied to practice but a relationship in which knowledge is always open to question and therefore must continually be re-negotiated for each practice context. Hence the recent rise to prominence of the reflective paradigm, as a model of professional knowledge for a culture of self-conscious change, doubt and uncertainty.

And indeed, Ruskin's emphasis on the aesthetic creativity of the individual worker against the imposition of a 'technical' regularity which left no room for individual interpretation has interesting parallels with the rejection, by the writers of the reflective paradigm, of technical rationality and academically imposed theory in favour of individual interpretation and reflection on experience. We can elaborate the parallel as follows. Where production is predominantly the crafting of materials, the insistence by Ruskin and Morris that work should be artistic and not mechanical leads to the production of handicrafts as artworks. In many respects this argument remains just as relevant for today as for the nineteenth century, but now a further stage to the argument can be added, as follows. Where production is concerned with the crafting of knowledge, the suggestion that understanding professional experience must involve the creative imagination and not merely analytical rationality leads to

the production of professional learning as artwork -- for example, the creation and interpretation of fiction.

The parallel goes all the deeper, in that both Ruskin and Morris were responding to a sense of political disempowerment and spiritual alienation, from which, they argued, humanity could only be redeemed if 'work' could be redefined in such a way as to express the individual's creativity; otherwise we are doomed to permanent despair (Morris, 1993 [1892], p. 367). Exactly the same hope might be said to inspire both the reflective paradigm of professional expertise and, even more explicitly, the argument of this book: that to fulfil its educational and political aspirations, the notion of the reflective practitioner (and indeed the notion of the reflective citizen in a democracy) needs to include the exercise of the artistic imagination.

For it is my general contention that, when it comes to understanding and representing our experience, we can all be artists (perhaps a lot more readily and effectively than we can all be analysts). The realm of art is above all the realm of freedom and exploration, and it is the very elusiveness and ambiguity of art which means that even in a society where most of us experience alienation and oppression of one sort or another, where freedom for direct action is severely constrained, and where limiting ideologies are endlessly thrust upon us, the artwork can continue to express the spirit of independent critical inquiry, through the aesthetic shaping of the possibilities of our lives. Moreover, the power of the artwork (its emotional resonances, its capacity for generalisation, transformation and synthesis) means that in a community where, for example, fictions are widely created, shared and discussed, we may become more conscious of our own possibilities, of new understandings and, even, in a small way, perhaps, of strategies for developmental action.

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