

Linda Candy

ROUTLEDGE

# The Creative Reflective Practitioner



This book makes an important contribution to the literature of creative studies. Drawing on contemporary research in the field with particular insight into the value of recent digitally based practice, Linda Candy introduces a rigorous and illuminating analysis of the often enigmatic nature of the creative process, grounded in lively interviews with practising artists, scientists and technologists, providing a deeper understanding of the ways in which artworks, and indeed any other creative outcomes, evolve in all their complexity.

– **Siân Ede**, *author of Art & Science*

Linda Candy shows us how the powerful paradigm of reflective practice can be used to understand creative thought in such diverse fields as science, engineering, art, design and music. Her interviews with distinguished practitioners provide a privileged glimpse into especially creative minds and her analysis reveals fascinatingly generic aspects of cognition. This book deserves to become a standard text in the field; there is every chance that it will.

– **Bryan Lawson**, *Emeritus Professor: Dip Arch (Dist) (Oxford), MSc (Dist), PhD (Aston), RIBA, Registered Architect*

Linda Candy has created an incredible book on creativity. Her deep reflections on the nature of creativity will be of vital importance to anyone engaging with reflective creative practice. Through the voice of many significant artists and practitioners from a broad range of fields and disciplines, she weaves together a framework with which to understand their reflective practices, but more importantly how we, the readers, can benefit and enhance our own creativity.

– **Craig Vear**, *Professor of Digital Performance (Music), De Montfort University, Leicester, UK*



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# THE CREATIVE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

*The Creative Reflective Practitioner* explores research and practice through the eyes of people with a wholehearted commitment to creative work. It reveals what it means to be a reflective creative practitioner, whether working alone, in collaboration with others, with digital technology or doing research, and what we can learn from listening and observing closely. It gives the reader new insights into the fascinating challenge that having a reflective creative mindset can bring.

Creative reflective practice is seen through practitioner ideas and works which have informed the writing at every level, supported by research studies and historical accounts. The practitioners featured in this book represent a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary creative activities producing works in film, music, drama, dance and interactive installations. Their work is innovative, full of new ideas and exciting to experience, offering engagement and challenge for audiences and participants alike. Practitioner interviews give a direct sense of how they see creative practice from the inside. The ways in which these different situations of practice stimulate and facilitate reflection in practice and how we can learn from this are described. Variations of reflective practice are discussed that extend the original concepts proposed by Donald Schön, and a contemporary dimension is added through the role of the digital in creative reflective practice as a tool, mediator, medium and partner.

This book is relevant to people who wish to understand creativity and reflection in practice and how to learn from the practitioners themselves. This includes researchers in any discipline as well as students, arts professionals and practitioners such as artists, curators, designers, musicians, performers, producers and technologists.

**Dr Linda Candy** lives in the Peak District of England. She was born in County Durham, England and grew up near Richmond, North Yorkshire and Adelaide, South Australia. She is a writer and researcher and is active in promoting awareness about interdisciplinary creative practice in art, technology and science. She has a BA (University of Adelaide), a Masters by Research (De Montfort University) and a PhD in Computer Science (Loughborough University). After working in academic research for many years, she now works freelance and is a co-director of ArtworksActive (ArA) an independent consultancy in art and technology. She has written over 100 articles and edited several books about the creative process and the role of digital technology in interdisciplinary creative practice.



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# THE CREATIVE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Research Through Making  
and Practice

*Linda Candy*

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*For Emma, Catriona, Lulu and Eric*



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George Poonkhin Khut. Photograph: Max Doyle, courtesy of *The Australian Way*  
magazine

Andrew Bluff. Photograph: Danielle Bluff

Ben Carey. Photograph: Benjamin Carey

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# PREFACE

When I first began to explore the world of the creative practitioner, I thought that to be able to understand how it all worked you needed to observe, record and analyse what was going on with a cool objective eye. Naturally, these observations would be informed and framed by theory. I was a practitioner myself at the time, but like so many, I was not aware of how much everyday practice was a significant source for my professional knowledge. My understanding began to change once I became a practitioner researcher and discovered the writings of Donald Schön. The experience of finding value in research through practice was only the beginning of what became an enduring pursuit.

Since those early days, my fascination with creative practice and its practitioners has not diminished. In this book, my interest in how people think and produce works is taken forward into a deeper examination of living creative practice reflectively. My aim is to convey something of the rich and varied ways in which practitioners engage in their creative lives and produce imaginative, stimulating and challenging works. These works take different forms in music, art, movement and performance and come in many combinations of those elements and materials. They have the power to make us think again and again and sometimes to transform our experience of ourselves and how we see the world in which we live. As individuals, when we practice bringing awareness to our present state of thinking and feelings, we learn through that experience. Focusing our attention in a deliberate way enhances our capacity to break out of habitual patterns of thought. In doing so, we are better able to reveal what we have known only tacitly until then. Practising awareness benefits the individual and, indirectly, those with whom we come into contact. It is something that enriches our understanding of ourselves through self-reflection. Through sharing the experience of their creative works with others, practitioners contribute to reflective thinking more broadly.

The creative practitioner takes something that emerges within themselves out into the external world through making artefacts or taking action in order to make things happen. The results of these activities then become part of a shared experience that enables creative practitioners to reflect on what ever preoccupations they have at the time, a pattern of thinking that continues throughout their creative lives. Equally it offers opportunities for others to share the experience of the works. The making in the present moment stimulates awareness and also lends itself to contemplation beyond the present. In this way the search for understanding that underlies so much of creative practice has impact beyond the individual. Creative practice is a path towards revealing and reflecting on what it is to be human. Practice and creative practice seen this way are conscious reflective processes.

The approach I have taken in writing this book is to try to represent how creative practice is seen from the inside. It is a view that is hard to get at from the outside alone, by which I mean by classical studies based on the observations of researchers, theorists and historians. In my conversations with practitioners, I am an empathetic listener who records and responds to what I have learnt. I am also a researcher whose challenge is to present a wider perspective without sacrificing the practitioner's individual voice. I have tried to give space to those voices as my primary sources of inspiration and guidance and, at the same time, to offer some general insights. I want to emphasise the central place and value of the practitioners speaking for themselves and urge readers to give their words the attention they deserve. I hope in this way to offer the reader a window into reflective creative practice that is firmly grounded in practitioner experience.

Linda Candy  
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# 1

## REFLECTION, PRACTICE AND THE CREATIVE PRACTITIONER

In this first chapter, the main themes, the approach and methods are introduced. Creative reflective practice is seen through the perspective of practitioners whose ideas and works have informed the writing at every level. The approach offers a view ‘from the inside’ of practice itself that is both valuable and distinctive. Practitioner interviews are the primary sources of inspiration and guidance for the insights into creative practice and the role of reflection. These are supported by narratives and diaries, research studies and historical accounts. The challenge has been to present a more general perspective of creative reflective practice at the same time as giving space to the individual practitioner voices.

The book explores reflective practice in different contexts: professional, creative, collaborative, digital and research. Professional practice is differentiated from creative practice in terms of the purpose and manner in which the practice is undertaken. Whilst professional and creative practitioners can be both professional and creative, there are differences to be explored and revealed. As will become clear, it is the context – the situation of practice – that influences the nature of reflection in practice, whether working alone or collaboratively.

### ***Creative practice, creative works***

People engage in creative acts by simply doing what is natural to them. Activities like drawing, singing, dancing and thinking, are the essentials of creativity that express who we are as human beings. Creative works on the other hand, in the sense of art, take those activities further. For there to be art, a process that explores, reveals and exhibits creative acts and works is necessary. This is a process that creates experiences that may ultimately lead to a change in how we see ourselves as human beings whether as artists or audiences. Viewed this way, the practitioners who have contributed to this book can be seen as ‘artists’ whose ‘works’ pose

## 2 Reflection and the creative practitioner

searching questions and challenge assumptions that reframe existing activities in a potentially transformational way for themselves and for all of us.<sup>1</sup> However, rather than getting tied up in making distinctions between what is creative and what is art, in the discussion throughout this book, creativity is framed within ‘creative practice’ and art is encompassed within ‘creative works’.

Creative practitioners in different fields and disciplines produce ‘works’ that exhibit ‘artistry’, a feature that is found in creative practice more generally and is characterised in a variety of ways. The motivational forces, the private goals and public service demands drive, shape and constrain creative activities and how practitioners respond to new and unexpected situations. There are distinct elements within a life of practice in which the creation of works is central, be they sculptures, images, compositions, films, installations, performances, exhibitions or events.

Creating ‘things’ (in the broadest sense of the word) is the core activity around which many others take place. The creative process also includes reading inspiring books and exploring the potential of new materials and tools, as well as talking with other people who are directly or indirectly involved in the work either in a formal collaboration or in casual encounters. A single focus on the making of artworks can change over time and other kinds of activity take place in parallel. Many practitioners also work in areas that appear, on the face of it, tangential to the creative practice but provide paid employment and space to create. Others work in organisations that afford opportunities to be creative: for example, as project managers or exhibition curators or teachers. Deciding to live on the proceeds of a creative life is not a practical choice for most, however, and there are many different routes to survival without the established career paths available to the professional practitioner. It is the life-long commitment to creative practice that distinguishes the practitioners in this book. That commitment involves pursuing original ideas relentlessly until they reach tangible form as finished works.

Living creative practice usually begins in early years with a natural facility to draw and paint, compose and perform music, dance and sing, and often this leads to encouragement into formal training. The creative practitioners in this book are all characterised by living creatively throughout their lives. Some mentioned being recognised in childhood as having a talent for some kind of artistic pursuit. It raised the question for me when considering how important living a creative life was to them, whether that early talent had raised expectations in themselves and their families that influenced the direction they took later on. Can we recognise an artist by early signs in childhood proficiency? It seems that the quick answer to this is ‘not necessarily’. Many children are very skilled at drawing and painting, but that does not necessarily mean they will be outstanding artists in adulthood, and in any case, proficiency in drawing strikingly accurate portraits or beautiful landscapes does not always presage a life-long pursuit.<sup>2</sup> Just ‘being good’ at doing something creative is for some practitioners never quite enough. For many, there is a constant search for deeper understanding that generates personal challenges.

The essence of the creative process is in the minutiae of creating, when lines are drawn, sounds are composed, movements performed and tentative ideas emerge.

The ideas spring from multiple sources, all of which are widely available to anyone. However, it is being highly alert to the potential of this material and working closely to exploit its properties in a novel way that sets the creative practitioner apart. When trying to understand the creative process as an observer, it soon becomes clear that this is the nub of it all. And yet, it is the hardest part to convey from the practitioner's perspective – beyond the obvious mechanics. Sometimes during the creative process, the thinking becomes reflective: these moments can happen as a result of external factors such as interruptions or more frequently, deliberate pauses imposed by uncertainty of what to do next. Sometimes, conscious reflection is seen as undesirable because the practitioner is striving for a different state of mind when brain and body work in unison, as in the case of improvisation discussed in Chapter 3 on reflective creative practice. To achieve this, practitioners devise ways of setting aside conscious reflection using techniques devised for that purpose such as rules for drawing. In other cases, creative actions can seem to come almost automatically from deep within, perhaps from emotional or aesthetically charged forces. This condition is very familiar to creative practitioners.

Placing a value on the outcomes of creative practice is often assumed to be the business of the viewer, the buyer, the critic or historian: the creator's own perspective is less frequently considered. And yet it is on them we depend for achieving originality and quality. They are the first in line to appraise and evaluate the works, although their voices are somewhat muted when it comes to how they go about doing that.

There are many questions that come to mind in trying to understand creative practice from a practitioner point of view including: What frames of reference do artists use to think about the works they make? What do they say to themselves about whether they like what they see once the making process is done? What kind of things are they looking for? Do they have explicit criteria or standards to judge their works? When appraisal takes place, does it involve asking questions about whether the work has qualities that are pleasing or satisfying or challenging? Over time do they establish criteria for appraising all works or is each work judged by a different set of values? For some practitioners developing a way of judging whether a work is good or not arises from the making process itself. If the intention is to create works that express particular ideas or moods, this will mean using particular criteria that will in themselves determine what the work is like. This assumes that the principal judge is the creator but what happens when there is an explicit intention to involve the viewer or audience? If the aim is to make the audience respond in a particular way, what is the effect of unexpected behaviour?

These are some of the questions that are considered throughout this book in the exploration of reflective practice seen through the eyes of creative practitioners and informed by studies of historical and contemporary practices. My aim is to reveal the diverse ways in which practitioners engage in their creative practices and produce extraordinarily imaginative, stimulating and challenging works of many different forms.

*How can we better understand the nature of reflective creative practice through the eyes of the practitioner?*

Let us consider different ways of viewing the practitioner's perspective on their practices and works. We can listen to what they say and write about their work in journals and narratives. We can also read accounts carried out by sensitive facilitators: Katharine Kuh and David Sylvester, for example, show us how to tease out the practitioner's perspective through conversations around the works themselves.<sup>3</sup> These are avenues open to anyone who is curious to learn what lies behind the enormously diverse repertoire of creative works that comprise our cultural wealth. Examples of these approaches are described next. This is followed by an introduction to my general approach in writing this book.

\*\*\*

***Intentions, accidents and meaning***

From music people accept pure emotion but from art they expect explanation.

These words by Agnes Martin, the great North American painter, are a challenge to the way that some forms of creative works are presented to the public and what is expected of their experience.<sup>4</sup> I hear what she says every time I enter an exhibition or attend a performance. They remind me to allow myself to look with open eyes and mind so that I can dwell in the experience of the moment instead of rushing to wonder how to interpret it in the manner I learnt through training and teaching. Too often, when we visit exhibitions we are offered audio guides to provide commentary on the works as we move through the show, encouraging us to listen first rather than look at the visual images. By contrast, when we go to a music or dance performance, we embrace the experience directly and feel the sensations of sound and movement and how they evoke emotion within us. Experiencing the art and 'explaining' it, are both important, of course, and once the creators give their work to the world to experience, it becomes open to interpretation by all. Some people focus on the works and their meaning, others want to know more about why and how they came to be.

For an artist of pure abstraction like Agnes Martin, the general desire for 'explanation' is problematic. Her beautifully executed paintings, the ultimate expression in surface simple form and colour, are designed using complicated mathematics as their organising structure and painted by hand – an exacting and immersive method. The absence of representation in her painting leaves little room for a narrative to be constructed about its meaning. This opens the door to explanation by analysis of how the work is made – a film of Martin painting is there to help.<sup>5</sup> But knowing what it is made of and how the material was used does not necessarily offer the viewer a better way of experiencing it, nor does jumping to conclusions about what it 'means'. If, instead, we resist the urge to find an explanation and see

the art work as a path to our inner responses, something that can unlock our senses and spirits, we have made a crucial step towards achieving an understanding of the deeper wells of the art experience. In viewing creative work in this way, we can begin to see that our experience does not have to be shaped by symbolic significance, historical and cultural narratives, at least in the first instance. Our immediate 'understanding' can reside principally within our capacity to experience the art directly.

For the writer about creative practice, this first step to understanding by way of experiencing the works does not take you far enough, however. There is a need to find another avenue that reveals the nature of creative practice beyond 'explaining' its outcomes. One approach is to change the main focus from the artefact to the artist in a quest to come closer to the thinking and making process. An alternative to interrogating the artwork is to listen to conversations between artists talking or writing about their works or responding to questions from adroit observers like Katharine Kuh and David Sylvester.

Kuh's approach to understanding the nature of art and art making in her 1960 book *The Artist Voice*, is to give more space to the words of the practitioners than she allows herself. In the short commentary she provides, she highlights some differences in the way critics have interpreted the work of the celebrated modern artists she interviews. She draws attention to a disparity between those interpretations of artistic intention made by commentators and what artists themselves say regarding intention recollected well after the art has been made. For example, there are those who say that Edward Hopper's art is related to loneliness and nostalgia: in response Hopper says: 'If they are, it isn't at all conscious'.<sup>6</sup>

From Kuh's account, we learn that the artists come to their work from inside themselves and when audiences see the results 'from the outside' so to speak, there is no reason to assume that these realities coincide. Few artists articulate their intentions prior to making works but, when time has allowed for observers to make claims about the work, faced with these viewpoints, they sometimes feel obliged to respond by providing an 'intention' of their own. Many artists will say they expect their artworks to speak for themselves and prefer to avoid talking about their intentions. Those who write about their work do so in ways that are important to them but to others can seem tangential to the art itself. Piet Mondrian was deeply interested in theosophy and wrote about that subject.<sup>7</sup> Paul Klee left a more practical legacy by developing a theory of colours that was intended to help other artists. He wrote about using complementary colours to balance each other out, and how integrating the bold tones of yellow and violet together into an artwork was difficult, a source of valuable advice that is now available online.<sup>8</sup>

What is meant by the word 'intention' in relation to creative work can be difficult to pin down and few artists use that word, although they may talk about 'my idea', or 'desire' or indeed 'vision' (this last usually with a self-conscious smile at allowing such a seemingly pompous word to pass their lips). In creative practice, it is perhaps more accurate to think of 'intention' as an initial, often vague or loosely conceived aim, goal or objective that evolves as a result of unplanned changes of

## 6 Reflection and the creative practitioner

direction. Intention may in that way actually reside in the thoughts, perceptions and feelings that emerge unanticipated from the process itself almost as if by accident. Experiencing art as the artist intended is possibly the least likely expectation that most people have. Because our ways of seeing art have been mediated by education and cultural expectations, many people are nervous about their capacity to handle the simple question, 'What did you think of that?' This often leads to a search for understanding based upon the commentaries of experts in the field whose views do not necessarily arise from talking with the artists and trying to understand their intentions. This path to understanding is hampered by a lack of direct access to the voices of past generations and for the most part, we have the artworks alone to provide us with insights into the artist's thinking. Fortunately, in the more recent past, there are notable exceptions: for example, the conversations between artist Francis Bacon and historian David Sylvester are the product of a strong relationship and a singular ability to articulate on both sides.

Sylvester's conversations with Bacon give many insights into the way the artist thinks about intention and his artistic process. We learn not only how artworks emerge from the creative process, but also how the very attempt to draw reveals the unexpected: as he tries to draw a bird, suddenly something else emerges that becomes a different picture, one that he had no intention of doing when he started:

I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field . . . but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture, I never thought of it that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another.<sup>9</sup>

In Bacon's case (and I don't think this is at all uncommon), a work emerges as if by accident. However, this is not to say that accidental production is an accurate description of the way all artists generate new works. Although Bacon uses the word 'accident' repeatedly, he questions whether it is so and whether it is rather more about selecting what to keep when surprising things happen:

I don't in fact know very often what the paint will do and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do. Is that an accident? Perhaps one could say it's not an accident because it becomes a selective process which part of this accident one chooses to preserve. One is attempting, of course to keep the vitality of the accident and yet preserve a continuity.<sup>10</sup>

What is interesting in this statement is that it suggests that Bacon, faced with a so-called 'accident', first decides whether to preserve or reject it. The second thing he reveals is that in making the decision to keep an 'accident', he bases that decision on two related things – we might call them criteria, which are that the work should exhibit vitality without compromising continuity. What he appears to be saying is that achieving vitality in his works is a high-level goal – we might say his artistic intentions are revealed. In this way, Bacon's process of making a work leads

to transformations in his initial intentions by way of so-called ‘accident’. These accidents act as triggers for creating new works: ‘suggestions’ he says not ‘ambiguities’ as Sylvester proposes. He muses on why his particular way of painting leads to accidents, a kind of unconscious working: ‘So that the artist may be able to open up, or rather unlock the values of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently’.<sup>11</sup> Here Bacon’s thinking about his intentions for emotional effect on the viewer are revealed. Sylvester then asks him about when something ‘clicks’ and he replies: ‘there is a possibility that you get through this accidental thing something much more profound than what you really wanted’.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the accidents that arise whilst working with material (oil paint) and tools (paint brushes) can lead to something much more than your original expectation.

It becomes clear from this exchange that for an artist, setting out with well-defined fixed intentions is not the most rewarding or fruitful way to proceed. Instead, being open to the creation of forms that emerge unexpectedly, combined with an ability to select from those forms and going on to make a work, seems to represent the essence of the creative process as it happened in this case and, to my knowledge, that of many other artists. The practitioner’s response to surprise and the unexpected, as a defining characteristic of creative practice, will be explored later in this book.

## The practitioner’s voice

Practitioners can speak for themselves through personal diaries that record daily acts, events and thoughts. Those like me who are fascinated by the working practices of artists and scientists learn a great deal from the diaries written as part of a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation programme that was designed to encourage practitioners to give time for open ended exploration of new ideas. The artist diaries are rich in compelling accounts of the vicissitudes of practice and provide a story that ‘shadows and illuminates the act of making art’.<sup>13</sup> The commentary, although brief, gives a way into the raw material that is made possible by taking a broad view of the whole rather than the individual case. We learn that art does not happen by chance, nor is it ‘self-expression’, both ideas that are commonly found in popular perception. The diaries provide evidence of risk taking, insatiable curiosity and unapologetic pragmatism as well as the entrepreneurial spirit that drives many artists today in the search for survival in a competitive world. The scientists’ diaries reveal a world even more competitive but in a very different sense. Whilst the artists are constantly struggling with the problems of how to find the means to make their art, they are ultimately responsible for themselves. For the scientists in these accounts, as well as being original thinkers, they are answerable to others in everything they do.<sup>14</sup>

As the examples described earlier show, gaining insight into the inner life of the creative practitioner can be done in different ways. Interviewers can facilitate the opening up of thoughts that might otherwise remain hidden. Combining commentary with first person accounts gives the reader signposts into creative thinking

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and making that might otherwise be tacit. Diaries that record every day events and ideas provide a sense of immediacy that only such journaling can convey. At the same time, they can be fragmentary and partial in a way that systematic field studies would try to avoid. Taken together, first hand, first person narratives are witness to the everyday thinking and actions of the practitioner. They are the primary sources from which researchers and historians can draw out patterns and events as they attempt to situate their observations in real practitioner experience. They are invaluable inroads into the tacit and private world of the creative practitioner.

My primary sources are interviews and conversations with practitioners working in a wide variety of creative and professional fields. Thirty audio recorded interviews were carried out using a semi-structured method which centred around three broad topics: the history and nature of the practitioner's creative practice and its outcomes, their experience of collaboration and their awareness of reflection in practice. I asked additional questions that followed the drift of the practitioner's narrative and at times, probed further into particular issues that were mentioned. My method was to transcribe each interview myself and put it back to the practitioner so he or she could reflect further and make any changes. Most interviews were conducted face to face with follow up exchanges by email. Two interviews were conducted through questions by email following discussions in person. The result is a very varied set of extensive first-person accounts. I then carried out my own analysis of the complete interview protocols to differentiate features and identify similar ones. The interviews selected for inclusion in the book are of necessity reduced in size but I have tried to retain the essence of the practitioner's perspective. I have made the complete set of interviews available online through my personal website and links are provided in each case.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the interviews, my ideas are grounded in the many encounters I have had with practitioners over thirty years as a researcher. Early studies of bicycle design and collaboration between artists and technologists were foundational.<sup>16</sup> In the exploration of creative reflective practice more generally, I have also referred to research that relies directly on first-hand accounts as well as a variety of historical writings. All these sources have contributed to bringing the material together in the form about to unfold.

Creative reflective practice arises in many contexts, disciplines and domains and is not confined to those traditionally associated with creativity such as artists. Creative work takes many forms whether making artefacts, coming up with novel ideas, facilitating events, mounting exhibitions, or creating dance performances. Through their creations and initiatives, practitioners show us what it means to be both creative and reflective. Some inspire us as role models to emulate or simply admire; others empower us through their actions whilst others facilitate new experiences through events and exhibitions. They are people living creative lives in its fullest sense with all the attendant struggles that are the inevitable consequences of pursuing courses of action that are challenging to accepted norms and not always understood or valued by society at large.

The creative practitioners who appear throughout the book are well known in their respective fields and beyond. They enjoy success in the public realm having

exhibited or performed their works in galleries, museums, exhibition spaces and events across the globe. Their works represent contemporary preoccupations and forms, many of which are digitally enabled: drawings, prints, sculpture, films, interactive installations and performances, as well as interdisciplinary connections and collaborative ventures. Some of the works involve audiences being immersed in visually stunning shapes and lights, or hearing culturally diverse music improvised across the internet, or seeing circling colours and sounds generated by heart beat and breath, or digitally visualised small animal data on screen, not to mention stopping in wonder before slices of the brain of Albert Einstein. Behind the works are the people whose creative practices make it possible. It is through the looking, the listening, the feeling, the responding, that we begin to understand the challenges that the creators of these works are grappling with. For the curious reader wishing to know more, links to the images, sounds, videos, events and texts are provided.

An overview of the main themes follows from which readers are invited to choose their own path.

## Overview

The following presents an overview of the main themes considered through the prism of reflective practice as proposed by Donald Schön in his book, *The Reflective Practitioner*, first published in 1983. Reflective practice as a concept and practice is explored and extended in five contexts: professional practice, individual creative practice, collaborative practice, practice amplified with digital technology and the role of research. The final chapter sums up what we can learn from practitioners working in different situations of reflective practice.

We begin, in Chapter 2, with the origins and legacy of the concept of reflective practice and revisit Schön's ideas about the role of reflection *in* and *on* action in the artistry of professional knowledge. His challenge to the prevailing Technical Rationality model of knowledge of the time, whereby professional practice is seen as problem solving expertise using scientifically derived facts, is as relevant today as it was when he first proposed it. Those readers who feel very familiar with Schön's concepts are advised to move quickly to the second half of the chapter. Although reflective practice is now a familiar term in many fields and it has become a byword in professional competency frameworks, our understanding of practitioner knowledge is limited, an issue that is considered before moving to the voices of contemporary professional practitioners. These accounts from medicine, social work, law and architecture give us invaluable insights into the role of reflection in the complex and demanding world of providing professional services to the community. From here, the narrative turns towards situations of reflective practice that have different drivers and circumstances to those of the traditional professional world. We start with individual creative practice before going into what happens in the collaboration situation and the way reflection works in both.

How reflective practice takes place in creative situations is explored and reframed in Chapter 3, drawing on the views and experience of practitioners in art, design,

music and digital work. Creative reflective practice involves many interwoven activities as practitioners search for understanding through making works of various forms. We look at creative practice through the prism of the practitioner process – the activities. The outcomes – the ‘works’ – are considered insofar as they are integral to the process, but they are not the main focus of attention. Variations of reflection *in* and *on* action have been identified within the creative process and five categories are described that extend the original concept. Practitioner observations about personal practice and the way they appraise and learn from making works appear as examples throughout the discussion. The characterisation of reflective creative practice is drawn from interviews with practitioners currently working in a range of fields, a selection of which are included at the end of the chapter and as with all the practitioner interviews available in full online.<sup>17</sup>

Creative practitioners learn to be reflective in practice through individual activities honed over many years. But what happens when their creative work involves collaboration with others? How much does collaboration itself influence the way the practitioner creates new ideas and works and reflects on the process and its outcomes? In Chapter 4, a picture of the world of collaborative creation emerges in which different patterns and structures influence how practitioners generate ideas, realise them in tangible forms and reflect before, during and after the activities. By shifting the context of creative practice from solo to shared concerns, we can see how this extends the concept of reflective practice again. Sources include studies of art, science and journalism and interdisciplinary collaboration. Research on organisations working collaboratively, including artistic collectives, news media operations and design companies have also provided valuable examples of real-world collaborative practice. Above all, interviews with artists, designers, curators, entrepreneurs, musicians and technologists who collaborate extensively have been invaluable. Together these sources represent a broad spectrum of co-creation and provide the foundation for the discussion of co-reflection.

Practitioners throughout the world are amplifying their creative processes with digital technology. Chapter 5 explores how this has had a profound effect on the way practitioners think and make creative works, a process that is continually evolving as the technologies advance at a rapid pace. Digitally amplified practice provides practitioners with new ways of generating fresh insights into their processes and the creative works that emerge. It raises questions like: how do creative practitioners view the technologies they use: as tools for making objects, as mediators between thinking and action, as media for making or as partners with whom to interact and perform? Or perhaps, a combination of one or more of these categories? What do these terms tell us about how creative practitioners think about their relationship to the digital in their practice and the influence on reflection in action? Four kinds of amplification are defined in which the digital role is differentiated as tool, mediator, medium and partner. The discussion is illustrated by the ideas and works of established creative practitioners in the field for whom digital technology is integral to the way they work.

Donald Schön believed that reflective practice made the practitioner into a researcher who was then able to construct new theory from unique cases revealing the true nature of practitioner knowledge. Chapter 6 explores practitioner approaches to making, appraising and documenting their creative work in the context of personal and shared research practices. Reflective practice is undergoing a renaissance driven by new forms of research carried out in conjunction with creative practice. What is more, it is the practitioners themselves who are making that knowledge about practice available to a wider community of expertise by undertaking formal research. We explore the way new research practices are generating practice-based evidence in a quest for greater understanding of the nature of practitioner knowledge in creative practice. Examples of the kinds of knowledge from this research are provided drawing on a range of practitioner PhD research projects.

Being a reflective practitioner means cultivating the many ways we can learn through experience. Reflective practice has benefits in increasing self-awareness, a key element of emotional intelligence and, at the same time, in developing a better understanding of others. Chapter 7 asks whether reflective practice can be learnt and what reflective practitioners offers in professional and creative contexts, in collaboration with others, in digitally amplified practice and through research. The student of reflective practice can draw on print literature and online web resources and some useful starting points are provided. General guidance is useful for students and researchers coming to reflective practice for the first time. In the professions, there is copious advice from professional associations and regulatory codes of practices. This advice is valuable for established practitioners undertaking new regimes for self-assessment as part of a programme of continuous professional development.

Try as we might, writers can take the reader only to the doorstep of first-hand experience of creative work in the different situations of practice that practitioners choose to work in. Creative works stand for themselves of course, but what gives rise to them? Why do creative practitioners do what they do? What can we learn about creative reflective practice from the practitioner? This book asks questions that take us beyond the concerns that Schön addressed in his studies of reflective practice amongst professional practitioners. From the creative practitioner's voice, we can discover the kinds of reflection that are so vital to successful practice. By listening to those on the front line of creative practice, it soon becomes evident that having a reflective mindset is at the heart of creativity whether in professional, individual, collaborative, digital or research situations of practice.

## Notes

- 1 Gombrich said in the introduction to his book *The Story of Art*, 'There really is no such thing as art. There are only artists' (Gombrich, 1950, p. 4).
- 2 Some of the assumptions commonly held about this subject are explored by Drake and Winner, 2013.
- 3 Kuh (1962); Sylvester (1975).

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- 4 Agnes Martin was born in Canada in 1912 and later went to the USA hoping to teach where she became a citizen: [www.moma.org/artists/3787#works](http://www.moma.org/artists/3787#works) and [www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/agnes-martin/who-is-agnes-martin](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/agnes-martin/who-is-agnes-martin)
- 5 An Introduction to Agnes Martin: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=65Sd-L03X84](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65Sd-L03X84)
- 6 Kuh (1962, Da Capo 2000 edition, p. 5).
- 7 Holtzman and James (1986).
- 8 <https://thechromologist.com/3900-pages-colour-notes-paul-klée-now-online/> accessed 13/05/2019.
- 9 Sylvester (1975, p. 11).
- 10 Sylvester (1975, p. 17).
- 11 Sylvester (1975, p. 17, para 3).
- 12 Sylvester (1975, p. 17, para 5).
- 13 Ede, p. 1 in Allen (2001).
- 14 Ede, p. 8 in Turney (2003).
- 15 The interviews in full may be accessed at <http://lindacandy.com/CRPBOOK>
- 16 Candy and Edmonds (1996); Candy et al. (2018)
- 17 Selected interviews are included in the book as a shortened version of the original transcripts. The interviews in full may be accessed at: <http://lindacandy.com/CRPBOOK>

# 2

## REFLECTIVE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Chapter 2 is about the role of reflection in professional practice. The springboard is Donald Schön's contribution to our understanding of the way professional knowledge operates and evolves through reflective practice. Some key foundational concepts are reviewed followed by a recap of his original characterisations of reflection *in* and *on* action and his challenge to 'technical rationality' with the artistry of reflective practice. The legacy of these ideas on a range of professional fields is discussed. The second half presents examples of practitioner perspectives from the front line of contemporary professional practice. The voices of practitioners in medicine, social work, law and architecture provide glimpses into the intimate world of practice and give us invaluable insights into the role of reflection.

### **Situating Schön's reflective practice: context and contribution**

*The Reflective Practitioner*, first published in 1983, is the best known of Donald Schön's writings. It is cited widely in fields as various as education, management, health and arts research.<sup>1</sup> Schön's case for a total reassessment of the state of professional knowledge was made on the grounds that the existing competencies were inadequate to deal with the changing situations that professional practitioners faced with, as he put it: 'the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice'.<sup>2</sup> He refers to a time when post-World War II enthusiasm for increased professionalism was at its height, from his time of writing twenty years later, when those high expectations had been replaced by a loss of faith in professional expertise. Over that period, the professions came under attack because they were deemed to be unable to deliver remedies for the complex, systemic problems that had become prevalent in the Western world. It was an era of rapid change when society was