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Crooked paths to insight: the pragmatics of loose and tight construing

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CROOKED PATHS TO INSIGHT: THE PRAGMATICS OF LOOSE AND TIGHT CONSTRUING

(Volume One)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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B.A. (Hons.). M.A. (Prelim.). Dip. Ed.

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

1999

SOURCES STATEMENT

I certify that the thesis entitled *Crooked Paths To Insight: The Pragmatics Of Loose And Tight Construing*, and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this thesis was to develop a constructivist theoretical understanding of insight, including how people come to it, what the experience is like and what meaning it has for its 'recipients'. In addition, this work aims to reveal something of the nature of the human being capable of insight. The main findings of the predominantly 'cognitive' insight literature reviewed here are that insight involves high levels of abstraction, that both tacit and explicit mental processes are involved, that 'emotion' has a very important role in this, and that there are important social and pragmatic processes within insight. It is argued that within this literature there is a clear trend towards constructivism. Accordingly, Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) is shown to most fruitfully integrate these findings, providing a coherent and comprehensive account of insight and of the proactive, anticipatory person capable of it. It is argued that Kelly's Creativity Cycle, involving skilled alternations between loose and tight construing, is central in understanding insight. Related to loose and tight construing, a unifying theme is Suzanne Langer's distinction between presentational and representational thought. The PCP account is elaborated and placed within the broader view of mind (including its emotional, 'unconscious', enactive, embodied and metaphorical nature) which, arguably, PCP was in the forefront of developing. It was concluded that essential to insight is a 'third mode' of construing, a type of 'meditative thinking' which does not head directly to insight, but which waits patiently and non-selfconsciously upon it. This playful, exploratory and receptive attitude reveals something of the affective and relational nature of mind and person. The joy of insight is characterised as a 'return' to one's anticipatory 'fit' with one's world, perhaps with one's cosmos. A study involving semi-structured interviews with seven successful Australian fiction writers about their insights augmented the theoretical discussion and provided strong support for the theoretical understanding presented. Implications for future research into both insight and PCP are explored. It is concluded that our potential for insight is a restorative, an antidote to both the sterility of objectivism and to the despair of relativism. Insight, it is proposed, reunites us with the world we seek to understand, a world which includes yet always transcends us.

SECTION 1:

ILLUMINATING THE DOMAIN OF INSIGHT

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO INSIGHT

We can pursue scientific discovery without knowing what we are looking for, because the gradient of deepening coherence tells us where to start and which way to turn, and eventually brings us to the point where we may stop and claim a discovery. (Polanyi, 1969, p. 60)

1.1 MENO'S PARADOX

At the heart of this inquiry into insight is a paradox dating back to at least the fifth century BC and attributed to Meno. It seems to contradict our experiences of inquiry, of searching for new understandings, and of the dawning of insights. Plato paraphrased it thus:

Meno: And how will you investigate, Socrates, that of which you know nothing at all? Where can you find a starting point in the region of the unknown? And even if you happen to come full upon what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?

Socrates: I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that a man cannot inquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to inquire; if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to inquire. (Jowett, 1953, pp. 277-278)

The problem seems to be straightforward: if one already knows what one inquires into, the inquiry is unnecessary, and if one does not know, one's task is impossible. How then do we create genuinely new ideas and understandings? Are all new ideas merely extensions of past ideas? Is the experience of insight — loosely at this stage, the subjective feeling of certainty that one knows something new — necessarily an illusion? Plato's response was that all knowledge, and insight is an instance of knowledge,¹ is based on recollection, on knowledge drawn from the soul's existence

¹ More precisely, insight is an instance of understanding. Although all knowings are not cases of understanding, all understandings must include knowings. For example, one might know Newton's laws, yet have no understanding of them (Scheffler, 1965). In any case, when we understand something for the first time, we add something to our repertoire of knowings. See also Warren (1998) for a discussion of the various aspects and styles of knowing.

in the realm of ideal forms. Strangely enough, echoes of this idea are discernible in some current cognitive science accounts which conclude that insight is fundamentally an instance of knowledge retrieval (though, as far as one can tell, not from the realm of the forms!). In such accounts, mnemonically coded prior knowledge suddenly becomes available when activated above a threshold level. So, as in Ecclesiastics (1:18), is it really the case that ‘there is no new thing under the sun’?

The paradox relies, however, on a particular objectivist view of knowing.² For example, it requires that knowing is an all-or-nothing, objective affair. Either we know something, or we do not. Knowing, however, does not always fit neatly into this either-or mould. In some ways it seems to. For example, one either knows your name, or does not. But what if he or she had forgotten it, temporarily, and then recalled it later? Was it the case that he or she did not know your name before, but does now? Furthermore, knowing is usually partial. For instance, one may know how to operate a formula or mathematical procedure, but may not know what it means, or when to use it. One may not construe it as having aesthetic beauty, as being elegant. One may not know how to combine it with other operations or apply it in other situations. Accordingly, knowing always has the possibility of growing and adapting, of being extended or challenged.

At this point it is important to distinguish between the philosophical and the psychological sense of knowing. The former is more strictly concerned with epistemological, logical or metaphysical questions (What can be known? What are the grounds for knowledge? What is the nature of Truth? What is the place of logic

² By *objectivist* is meant the philosophical assumption of some ahistorical, foundational framework to which we can appeal in deciding upon what is objectively rational, true, good and so on (Warren, 1994). Mind is thereby conceived of as a mirror to nature (Rorty, 1980) and objectivity is achieved by directly perceiving (receiving) the correspondence of one’s thoughts or beliefs with the rational structure of the world. Thus we can know for sure, and be sure we know. *Objectivism* corresponds, therefore, to a fixedness of outlook, or pre-emptive construing. On the other hand, *objectivity* is here taken as a striving for, or openness to, the way the world may be (Deutscher’s, 1983, ‘objecting’). An *objective outlook* is an egalitarian frame of mind, an important feature of which is being willing to put oneself in an other’s place or manner of construing and to be open to the effects of bias and ‘emotion’ in one’s own opinions. The term ‘knowing’ is here preferred to the noun ‘knowledge’. In so doing it is hoped to emphasise the active, constructive nature of construing rather than suggesting a static entity as may be implied by the use of the word ‘knowledge’. Knowing, then, can be taken as interchangeable with ‘construing’.

and of the relations between propositions in knowing?). The latter, however, is concerned with how people actually go about making sense of their world (their psycho-logic, the meaning events have for them, the judgements they make). In these terms the current work is concerned with the psychology, or the psycho-logic, of insight. As such it will focus on how we come to insight, what the experience is like, what meaning it has for the 'recipients' and so on. The primary interest is in how people come to new understandings, to judgements and beliefs held with the particular, felt conviction that accompanies insight. In addition, insofar as this investigation will try to place insight within the context of a broad view of mind, it may shed some light on issues relevant to what Warren (1997) calls 'Philosophical Anthropology'. That is, it may tell us something of the nature of the human being who has such insights.

This question of knowing can be looked at from another angle. From a philosophical and logical point of view 'knowledge' is an achievement and is to be distinguished from believing or accepting something (Scheffler, 1965). One cannot half-know something or know something mistakenly and so on. One either knows or does not. Yet, at the psychological level one may be certain that one knows, but be quite mistaken. The fallacy involved in objectivism is the move from "the certainty of an *object of knowledge* to the certainty of a *cognitive faculty or performance* taken to be constitutive of knowing" (Scheffler, 1965, p. 30). For example, knowing that two plus two equals four is true by definition, but is in no way dependent on the infallibility of one's mental processes. It is a logical, not a psychological matter. The objectivist move inherent in Meno's paradox comes from a mixing of categories, in this case a philosophical or logical sense of knowledge (as an all-or-nothing affair) and a personal, psychological sense of knowing, which is more properly considered an activity or process: a striving for knowledge. Thus, the 'knowing' to be discussed in relation to the psychology of insight is to be understood as an interpretation, judgement, or construal. It is a measure of one's personal understanding of the phenomenon at hand, the (coherent) meaning it holds for us. Therefore, a distinction is here drawn between knowing-about and a more subjective

and intersubjective understanding: knowledge by participation (Orange, 1995) or 'personal knowing' (Mair, 1980). At the psychological level, insight, as a type of new understanding, is measured against the (ever-growing) complexity of the person's socially-immersed purposes, motives and history of understanding.

In this growing complexity can be seen other features of knowing, its dimensional and layered nature. By this is meant that knowing is both located within a system of hierarchically structured implications (its dimensional nature), and that each act of knowing or construction is a manifold of mental aspects, including feelings and thoughts at various levels of awareness (its layered nature). Rather than considering that knowing is 'purely cognitive', it is here assumed that all knowings are constituted by 'cognitive', 'affective' and 'conative' aspects. It is further assumed that aspects of this manifold are variably available to conscious reflection. Consequently, we never know something in isolation. When we come to know something it comes enmeshed in a network of other related knowings without which it makes little or no sense. Imagine trying to understand the sentence 'Two plus two equals four' without also knowing the English language, having command of its grammar, knowing the rudiments of arithmetic and so on. In addition, one may have an aversion to mathematics such that even this seemingly neutral knowing may come tinged with feeling, or may imply a history of some classroom profundities. It may seem strange to think of knowing as indeterminate and multifaceted in this way. Yet it is obvious that even our appreciation of 'two plus two is four' may change over time from a mechanical, rote-learnt formula, to a glowing admiration for the power of abstraction that it could come to represent for us.

Meno's paradox also fits certain styles or modes of thought better than others. If all thought were logical, propositional, and at a high level of awareness, then perhaps the paradox would signal the futility of inquiry. For we would indeed be aware of the clear boundaries between what we know and what we do not. We may thereby be confined to quantitative extensions of what we already know. But, it

will be contended, not all thought is easily available for reflection and with such clear boundaries. Firstly, there is the common distinction made between unconscious and conscious thought processes. Without attempting to define ‘unconscious’ here, suffice it to say that it is widely held that we ‘know more than we can say’ (Polanyi, 1967). So it may be the case that although we do not ‘know’ something (in the sense of being able to report on it), we may not necessarily be without the guidance of more implicit or tacit knowings. Thought appears to utilise both verbal and non-verbal modalities (the latter including visual, kinaesthetic and cross-modal imagery). In fact, tacit structures of knowing may determine what we *can* know at a high level of awareness.

Finally, thought can be anticipatory or hypothetical. It is frequently metaphorical, imaginative and creative. That is, because our thinking can be reflexive (we can reflect on our thinking) and, because we can imagine objects and events that are not present, we have the possibility to invent new combinations of ideas and to play with mental images and concepts. We have a certain independence from immediate circumstances. Much as an artist may experiment with new combinations of textures, colours, patterns and so on, so can the mind be understood as a type of canvas on which thought continually experiments. As such, thought can be *predicational* (Rychlak, 1990, 1991) in that it does not only *mediate* the various sensory experiences it is subject to (associationism), but actively projects meaning onto circumstances. We anticipate reality as well as react to it. In moments of anticipation we grasp a pattern or meaning in circumstances, we bridge some gap in understanding. This moment of insight or new understanding allows a new engagement with the world. It may be experienced as an ‘inner’ thought experiment, but it both stems from and leads to an empirical engagement with the world to discover if outcomes meet anticipations.

So what differences do the above, ‘non-objectivist’ views of knowing make to Meno’s paradox? Well firstly, as knowing is always partial and layered, knowing something does not render further inquiry redundant. There is always more to know

to deepen and add dimensionality to what we already know. It follows, there will be degrees of knowing from vaguely felt penumbras of understanding to highly explicit, formulated knowings. There will also be degrees of ignorance. It is rare, probably impossible, to inquire into something of which we know nothing. Thus our knowing may be limited and an imperfect guide in our search for new understanding.

Nonetheless, it usually has us in the 'right ball park', as it were. We do not normally ask the dentist for solutions to our financial problems, nor the accountant for advice on dental hygiene. Although, as we will see, often the greatest insights, the most creative breakthroughs, come in circumstances or from domains ostensibly unrelated to the subject of inquiry.

Secondly, we commonly know that we have areas of ignorance. We may know that we cannot speak Chinese, or know we cannot repair computers, or know we do not know who will win the next Melbourne Cup. Note here there is typically a blurring of knowing and ignorance. We know that we could learn Chinese by taking classes, that repairing a TV could involve re-soldering broken connections and so on, and that, at the very least, it will be a horse that triumphs in the big race on the first Tuesday in November in Melbourne! This makes sense if indeed knowing only arises within a network of implications and other knowings. Thus one may be aware that one's knowing in some area is insufficient. One may even know certain aspects, dimensions and features of the new knowing required. Frequently we know the 'shape' of the answer, the criteria it must satisfy, the type of terrain we must traverse to reach it. Puzzle-solving is an example of this. We frequently know much about the desired 'end-state', we have relevant information and we have some idea of how to interrelate and apply such information. Thus, although we do not yet know the solution, we know something of the path to that solution.

It probably is true that if one knows nothing of the matter into which one inquires, one's endeavour is hopeless. But, as has been suggested, it is unlikely that we *could* be aware of something in the first place unless it was embedded within a framework of prior knowings, beliefs and experiences. That is, to know something

is to be aware of it *within some context*. Nonetheless, we may be confronted with ill-defined problems (which, arguably, constitute most of life's important questions). Sometimes we are not quite sure what it is we wish to know and we have no idea how to proceed. We just know that there is something we need to know, or that something is not working. In these circumstances, finding the right question to ask (problem finding) constitutes the main insight – perhaps turning the ill-defined problem into a puzzle to be solved (see Heidegger, 1977, for a similar contention). So Meno alerts us to an important feature of insight: the sense of being stymied in inquiry, of knowing that aspects of what we know already block our inquiry, but also being aware that we do not know which new avenue we should take.

Meno's paradox is relevant to this present inquiry *not* because it highlights the impossibility of genuinely new knowing, but because it reveals the subjective dilemma that confronts us whenever our search for new insight is frustrated. We may have reached an impasse in our efforts to solve some problem, or to complete some project. Our previous knowings, strategies and experiences, so valuable up to this point, may have failed us and we are driven to acknowledge their inadequacy. Furthermore, we may have some intimation that it is our previously useful concepts and ideas themselves which are leading us astray. One difficulty is we do not know *which* of them blocks further progress. So where is the way forward? It seems not to be implied in what we know already. Yet we fear that we will be both lost and rudderless without our established structures of understanding. The dilemma, we realise, is that we nonetheless need to enter uncharted waters if we are to succeed. How are we to proceed?

But we are not entirely without bearings, nor are we entirely rudderless. We may have been in this type of dilemma before and have experienced a sudden, possibly joyous, certainty that the problem has dissolved. How did we do it? We may have backed up and examined the general lineaments of the problem. Perhaps we abstracted its general features, and the lie of the land. We may have experimented with the fanciful, the seemingly absurd. We did not reject our

previous strategies and concepts all at once. We may have loosened up one, then another, of our ideas. Possibly we made strange combinations between previously unrelated conceptions. We probably adopted different styles of thought, becoming more sensitive to intuitive and tacit intimations. In short, we most likely adopted a more playful, experimental attitude to the question at hand. We sought new experience, new feelings, new events in the world. We cast hypotheses and tested them in behaviour. We conducted thought experiments, allowing in imagination what had been denied by habits of thought. We made our way towards the unknown by continued and gradual reformulations of the problem, eventually following a ‘gradient of deepening coherence’ as Polanyi (1969) put it. And it is this well-documented capacity to create new understandings that undermines the validity of the paradox.

Faced with the seemingly undeniable existence of new understandings,³ either in ourselves or as evidenced throughout history, Meno’s paradox strikes us as counter-intuitive, as discordant. It challenges us to examine closely what it is to search for, and find, new understandings. Thereby, it may inspire us to transcend the objectivist view of knowing it embodies. We notice something important here: the paradox temporarily confounds us. We reach an impasse in our understanding. We experience a certain tension, even discomfort. Through inquiry and reflection gradually a new coherence grows, or perhaps emerges after setting the conundrum aside. We may suddenly experience an insight which can accommodate what we previously knew with this novel, seemingly contradictory, information. In this case, the insight that ‘we need to expand our notion of knowing’ may lead us to a series of implications and potential avenues of inquiry which may or may not verify the insight. In short, a paradox which questioned the possibility of insight has, ironically, led us to insight.

³ The reader’s attention is drawn to the distinction Anderson (1963) highlighted between knowing (vague knowledge) and understanding (real knowledge). Understanding is ‘being able to give an account of things’ or ‘knowing the reason for’ something as distinct from mere opinion. It will be taken that insight is more akin to understanding in this sense. Despite this, the word ‘knowing’ will also be used in this work and is not to be taken as meaning ‘opinion’ or ‘vague knowing’.

The following inquiry is an attempt to verify the idea that the existence of insight itself points to the necessity of a view of mind and of knowing freed from objectivist strictures. As such, insight is not here considered to be the grasping of an immutable, capital ‘t’ Truth. The history of its occurrence makes it clear that today’s accepted truths become tomorrow’s quaint beliefs. Neither is insight considered to be inconsistent with efforts to come to a more ‘objective’ position in the sense that it must move beyond ‘mere subjectivity’ (what we would *like* to be the case). The inquiry will lead us to incorporate levels of knowing, as well as social, emotional and motivational aspects into the fabric of thought — not merely as additional factors influencing the progress of thought. Accordingly, as you progress through this work, it may be helpful to reflect upon your own mental life. Draw upon your own experiences of insight. Test within your own experience the claims and hypotheses found herein. Locate instances where you were committed to some inquiry in which you bogged down, where you experienced frustration and impasse, and no-one could help you. Perhaps you set the problem aside in discomfiture, only for it to pervade your idle moments. Perhaps too you recall the sudden thrill, the strong conviction, the Aha!, that your bafflement was over, and the subsequent desire to communicate the breakthrough. And maybe you will regain some of the sense that this process involved more tacit, affective and figurative styles of thought, and that you ‘felt’ the insight as much as you ‘thought’ it. But I am getting ahead of myself, and putting too many suggestions to the reader. So, first, let us familiarise ourselves with the phenomenon of insight. When we talk of ‘insight’, what it we are referring to?

1.2 DESCRIPTIONS OF INSIGHT

1.2.1 Hutchinson: The Creative Cycle

Hutchinson (1949a, 1949b, 1949c) produced a series of papers on insight exploring in detail the antecedents and phenomenology of insight. His comprehensive

collection of first-hand accounts and his own summaries will form the basis for this descriptive section. Following Wallas (1926), Hutchinson characterised insight as being divided into four stages. These stages he called “The Creative Cycle”.⁴ The cycle consists of:

1. “A period of preparation often ending in trial-and-error activity.
2. A period of renunciation of the problem during which effort is temporarily abandoned.
3. A period (or moment) of insight.
4. A period of verification, elaboration, or evaluation”. (1949a, p. 422)

Insight, thus described, appears to be a general phenomenon, common to all domains of inquiry and to all peoples. What seems to be required is that the person has before him or her some problem or project requiring solution or production. But for some period of time, perhaps months or even years, this problem remains unsolved. Attempts at solution or production have ended only in frustration. But suddenly, often when the project has been temporarily abandoned and/or one’s attention is taken up by other matters, one experiences *insight* into the solution. One suddenly ‘feels’ as though one understands the whole of the matter, that one has achieved a real integration of previous experience and knowledge. Usually one feels a degree of elation and satisfaction, the degree of which depends on the prior level of frustration and the importance of the insight. Importantly, the contents of this moment must be grasped and articulated, or they may be lost. Thus follows a period of elaboration and verification whereby the contents of this usually short period of intellectual excitement are judged under the critical light of articulation and experimentation. Bertrand Russell described a typical cycle:

In all the creative work that I have done, what has come first is a *problem, a puzzle involving discomfort*. Then comes concentrated voluntary application entailing great effort. After this a *period without conscious thought*, and finally a solution bringing with it the *complete plan of a book*. This last stage *is usually sudden*, and seems to be the important moment for subsequent achievement. (cited in Hutchinson, 1949a, p. 388, italics in original)

⁴ There does not appear to be any direct link between Hutchinson’s phrase and Kelly’s (1955) exposition of what he called “The Creativity Cycle”. The latter will be discussed in some detail in later chapters.

Hutchinson (1949a) contended that the most instructive insights are those which follow a high degree of difficulty and frustration, and where there is a strong and persistent drive toward accomplishment. This thesis will, in part, focus on such notable creative insights as a window onto more everyday insight processes. Of course all insight is, by its nature, creative. Nonetheless, I will examine larger scale instances to see what light is shed on more everyday creative insights. Judging by the extensive literature on insight and creativity, such notable breakthroughs are by no means rare. According to a survey by the American Chemical Society regarding the frequency of insight in scientific problems, 83 per cent of 232 directors of research laboratories — chemists, mathematicians, physicists and biologists — reported that insight experiences were important in their work (Hutchinson, 1939). Hutchinson's own research (1949a) also found that about 80% of artists, writers, musicians and others reported the same. More recently, a study by Marton, Fensham and Chaiklin (1994) has revealed that 72 out of 83 Nobel laureates interviewed strongly implicated intuitive breakthroughs in their successes.

1.2.1.1 Preparation

This stage may be short or can extend to years, even a lifetime's effort, as the person struggles with his or her problem or purpose. This includes ongoing systematic, constructive work towards solution. The person immerses himself or herself in the relevant domain, learning all he or she can about the topic at hand. The person searches through and utilises past experience, strategies and knowledge. Often, however, one's repertoire of technical abilities and domain-specific knowledge proves to be futile. The resulting tension and frustration frequently results in many false starts, trial-and-error attempts, even desperate random efforts in the face of a seemingly insoluble task. The greater the frustration, the greater the need for more intuitive methods of solution.

1.2.1.2 Incubation Or Renunciation

If no solution is forthcoming eventually a period of renunciation (Hutchinson, 1949a), where the person puts the problem aside, is entered into. Hutchinson (1949b) presented a compendium of common reactions or ‘adjustments’ to the frustration. These adjustments may include repression, regression or compensation (Hutchinson’s adjustments are analogous to ‘defense mechanisms’ drawn more-or-less directly from psychoanalytic theory). The person may ‘dissociate’ from the problem, removing it from consciousness. Alternatively, he or she might revert to a type of childishness or compensatory excess in other areas — a phenomenon frequently observed in the highly creative in their ‘bad’ periods. Hutchinson (1949b) made two important points here. Firstly, that these forms of ‘neurosis’ are caused by creative frustration and are not the causes of one’s creativity. Indeed, he gave examples of creative figures suffering from prolonged or extreme repression, regression and compensatory reactions and concluded that they are mostly inimical to creative insight.

Since Hutchinson believed that mental suffering is not conducive of insight, his second point was that there are more effective, more healthy ways of adjusting to strong creative frustration:

I suggest as the most effective way [to adjust is via] an acceptance of a period of renunciation or recession, a turning to unrelated interests, a purposive rejection of the problem from consciousness. (1949b, p. 415)

This voluntary suppression is a deliberate attempt to systematise the creative process and anticipates the important role of ‘metacognitions’ discussed in contemporary cognitive science accounts of insight. The person may consciously decide to relieve herself of the emotional strain, often taking up some recreational pursuit or activity. The duration of the break may be planned with definite intentions of resuming the activity at a specified time in the future. In this ‘recession’, of course, the project comes into one’s mind from time to time, or even quite frequently. But, as the time is given over to more desultory mental activity, perhaps day-dreaming or some diversion, the intrusion of the problem is not rejected, but is balanced against the

alternative concerns one has taken up. One is on ‘holiday’, as it were, from conventional, socially-prescribed work practices. Yet in this state one is available to both the problem and to incidental events or details, whether in the world or in one’s thoughts, which may grab one’s attention and occasion insight.

The nature of one’s diversionary activities is an important factor in preparing the ground for insight. Hutchinson (1949b) made it clear that unconventionality for its own sake is not the answer. Rather, one’s diversions need to be tailored to the individual and the type of strain he or she has been under:

For anyone looking forward to the advent of insight, the diversion must be regulated according to the symptoms of frustration — voracious reading, organized selection of materials, excursions into secondary fields, invigorating contact with objective life, quiet recreation, rest — anything to balance the possible introversion, regression, inferiority and continuous preoccupation with the self. (1949b, p. 417)

What is required is a balance between creative discipline and leisure. Attaining the freedom to step back from one’s efforts in order to replenish one’s emotional, physical and intellectual stocks is an important means of managing one’s creative endeavours. As one scientist put it:

The half drowsy moments of a lazy Sunday morning are as good a time as any in which to do real creative thinking. It is surprising how fertile the mind becomes when not interrupted, or restricted by criticism in the free and often fantastic expression of its ideas. The best moments are those, I find, in which I let the imaginative thought *become a game*. (Hutchinson, 1949c, p. 423, emphasis in original)

1.2.1.3 Intuition Or Intimation Of Insight

Hutchinson (1949c, p. 430) believed that often before the actual insight there is a “tenuous and fleeting intimation that insight is about to appear”. Mostly such intuitions appear soon before the actual moment of insight and the reasons for its appearance are usually not obvious to the person. The key symptom is an emotional quickening, a feeling of satisfaction or even excitement. Hutchinson interpreted this as a type of half-way house between deeply unconscious or implicit thinking and the

eventual articulated expression that emerges in an insight. Wallas (1926, reported in Hutchinson, 1949c, pp. 431-432), whose four stages of insight Hutchinson adopted, reported on these intuitive premonitions in his own work experience. He spoke of a 'vague feeling' that he should stop reading and begin working, of 'becoming rather closely absorbed' preceding the arrival of a key word or phrase. And he said of this that "I must let them come, and that the process of letting them come, begins before the point is clear enough to set down" (p. 432).

Often such intuitions or intimations emerge in periods of relaxation and reverie, or come as images immediately preceding or immediately following sleep (hypnogogic and hypnopompic imagery respectively). They emerge in a state of mild dissociation and often occur amidst or following physical, repetitive or automatic activities. These activities include quiet meditation, walking, shaving, ironing, driving a car, pacing up and down, having a bath, and so on. When one is in such a state and happens upon a propitious stimulus, the mind, being only partly occupied, is able to seize upon the hint and apply it to the unsolved problem. Hutchinson distinguished between two types of accidental stimuli:

1. Those in which the stimulus is directly related to the insight or solution.
2. Those where the stimulus is merely a catalyst, and is not a part of the final product.

Examples abound in the insight literature, so one of each will suffice here. Archimedes' famous Eureka! experience in the bathhouse on Syracuse is an example of the first type. King Hiero wanted Archimedes to determine whether his crown was pure gold or was mixed with more base metals. The rise in the water level following his immersion was a direct analogue of Archimedes' solution in terms of specific gravity (a pure gold crown would displace more water when weighed in water). An example of the second type of accidental stimulus to insight is given in Hutchinson. He described how Jacob Boehme, struggling with his inability to find peace within the church, was one day distracted and then absorbed by a pewter dish

shining in the sun. It was while in this state of almost hypnotic abstraction that the essence of his philosophy came to him.⁵

1.2.1.4 The Insight Experience

The experience of insight can be vivid, surprising and seemingly automatic in nature. The following account by Dr. Banesh Hoffmann, Oxford mathematician and physicist, captures these features well:

I had been attempting to work upon a problem *that had puzzled me for at least two years*. I made some sporadic, half-hearted calculations on odd bits of paper; but nothing came of them. In the evening *I had to go to a lecture upon an entirely different subject*. After the lecture, and an argument with a friend about the lecture, I went to my room and decided that I would read for the rest of the evening (a book by Trotsky on Lenin), and go to bed early. But somehow this idea of reading did not appeal to me. I picked up some scraps of paper, and straightway, *without realizing that there was any difficulty in the problem, I wrote out the solution with hardly a pause*. I knew somehow or other that something had solved itself at the back of my mind, but had no idea of the solution until my pencil *almost automatically wrote it out*. I can't remember my feeling during the hours in which I worked [amnesia], being, I suppose, too absorbed in production to notice actual surroundings. But after I had the solution down in front of me, *I remember that I was elated*, and though the hour was late, I had no longer any desire to go to bed. I went over to the auditorium and practised singing. There had been no conscious results until this moment. (cited in Hutchinson, 1949a, p. 389, italics in Hutchinson)

We see in this account many of the features we have observed thus far. Hoffmann had reached impasse in relation to this problem after extensive work and had placed it in abeyance, attending a stimulating lecture on an entirely different topic. We see that when the insight came it flowed suddenly and easily. He was totally absorbed in his task, losing awareness of the passage of time and of his surroundings.

Importantly, he was elated by the experience. Most accounts of major insights share these qualities, particularly of the affective components. Hutchinson summarised these typical features:

⁵ In the Theravadan tradition of Buddhism, a meditative practice called 'Vipassana' (from the Sanscrit *Vispashyana* meaning 'insight') deliberately cultivates just this stilling and calming of the mind in order that the person may have insight into the nature of mind and of Being.

the energy, plenitude and exuberance of it; the renewed sense of purpose to be fulfilled, and of the power to accomplish it; the abolition of a narrow-ranged consciousness and the substitution of a more integrated personality; the surge of self-confidence; the comprehension of the significance of the dreary periods of earlier effort; the occasional sense of impersonality, automatism and detachment; the tragedy of interference with the process. (1949c, p. 333)

Insights are also expressed and experienced in a wide variety of forms. Often they come in succinct verbal form, such as Wallas's 'striking phrases', which then seem to be self-expanding. But just as frequently they take non-verbal forms. Composers may 'hear' melodies and harmonies. Novelists and playwrights 'hear' dialogues or 'see' important scenes. A musician's insight may 'play itself' on the instrument, his or her fingers seeming to have a kinaesthetic intelligence of their own. Einstein's famous thought experiments and Kekulé's vivid visual imagery are well-known examples of non-verbal, frequently cross-modal insights (see Gruber, 1995; and Sternberg & Davidson, 1995 for accounts of their insights). Writers frequently report insights in which they experience a type of 'emotional tone' associated with a particular character or scene in their mind, which forms the expanding core of the developing work (Epel, 1993).

1.2.1.5 Elaboration And Verification

Hutchinson (1949a) referred to insight as a state of "intermediate awareness" which is only "temporarily self-sustaining" (p. 403). The creative act of insight is not completed until it is captured in some form, be it in writing, speech, dance, paint and so on. Moreover, in so doing, the insight is then available for elaboration and verification. The more technical, more standard 'logical' processes, held in abeyance after impasse, are once again employed to express and test the insight. Hutchinson (1949c) drew a contrast between such logical, progressive, steadily integrating processes of thought and the more a-logical, intuitive and suddenly-integrating modes of thought he associated with insight itself. The two modes of thought are considered as extremes working in dynamic interplay:

Logical minds advance their problems deliberately, progressively with a minimum of trial and error activity, and with full awareness of the meaning of each step taken. But the person who relies on insight, having employed every known technical and dialectical device of the science involved *and being yet fundamentally baffled*, is forced in sheer desperation and defense of emotional balance, to relax his efforts for a time. The problem meanwhile is not forgotten, but seems to sink back upon more profound levels of mind for gestation (support this with whatever theory you will). When it reappears again as insight, or solution, it more fully represents the whole range of mental experience, the entire intellectual and emotional background, than the less generalized products of the logical method. (Hutchinson, 1949a, p. 393, italics in original)

The present thesis will indeed try to support the notion of insight as an expanded, more flexible mental state given depth by its inherently intellectual *and* emotional⁶ nature. Thus, the insightful person will be characterised as being capable of alternating between, and combining, different styles of thought in more-or-less continuous cycles. But for now, courtesy of Hutchinson, we are reasonably familiar with the phenomenology of insight. It is to the Gestalt psychologists that I next turn to become familiar with the ‘language of insight’, a language still utilised in contemporary research into insight.

1.3 GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY AND THE LANGUAGE OF INSIGHT

Early psychological explanations of insight were mostly put forward by Gestalt psychologists (Dunker, 1945; Köhler, 1925, 1929; Maier, 1931; Scheerer, 1963; Wertheimer, 1945) who considered insight in the light of their work on perceptual restructuring. Insight was explored primarily in the context of problem-solving. A classic example of this approach can be seen in Köhler’s refutation of Thorndike’s (1911) associationist view that problem-solving is merely the result of trial-and-error leading to repeated (accidental) success. According to Thorndike, this success then

⁶ Few terms have caused as much confusion and disagreement within psychology as the term ‘emotion’ and its frequent synonym, ‘affect’. For now, I will conform to common language usage by merely pointing to the commonly-experienced states such as love, anger, fear, anxiety, and so on, as examples of emotions. A later chapter will analyse in some depth the nature of emotion and affective experience and their role in insight.

becomes a learned response to be reproduced given similar stimulus situations. To illustrate this, Thorndike placed hungry cats in cages so designed that hitting a pole inside the cage would open the door allowing the cat access to a bowl of food outside the cage. At first the cats would rush around the cage occasionally colliding with the pole. After repeated trials the cats seemed to learn to knock the pole, eventually doing so immediately on re-introduction to the cage. For Thorndike, the trial-and-error successes became a learned response automatically associated with being placed in this situation.

Köhler (1925, 1929), on the other hand, believed that we, and certain animals, can solve problems by having insight into the problem's structure. Solution is often, thereby, a matter of suddenly *restructuring* the problem. For example, Köhler (1929) observed an ape tying together two poles to reach a bunch of bananas outside its cage. After some trial-and-error efforts with a stick, this ape sat quietly for a while, suddenly jumped up, joined two sticks and retrieved the bananas. This example demonstrates the Gestalt distinction between *reproductive* and *productive* problem-solving. Reproductive problem-solving, in this instance, may involve reaching with a single stick, a skill likely learned by the ape in the past, whereas the ape's solution was interpreted as productive because it implies insight into the situation which produced new behavioural possibilities. The ape was reported to have *suddenly* jumped up and set about retrieving the bananas, suggesting the insight came to him all at once. Finally, the ape's behaviour, in its novelty and appropriateness, appeared to be *goal-directed* rather than being directed by mechanical associations.

Another key Gestalt notion relevant to our inquiry is *functional fixedness*. According to this idea we become 'fixated' on some aspect of the problem. Duncker (1945) illustrated this concept in his well-known experiment involving a candle, a box of tacks, some matches and several other objects. The task was to attach the candle to a wall near a table such that the lit candle did not drip on the table. The solution is to empty the tack-box, tack it to the wall and thereby use it as a base for

the candle. Most people tried to stick the candle directly to the wall using the tacks or by using melted wax. Duncker argued that people could not see past their fixated view of the tack-box's function as a container to restructure its function as a base.⁷ The same sort of fixation was also shown to apply to strategies people use to solve problems (Luchins & Luchins, 1959). The important theoretical implication of fixation is that, contrary to associationist claims, past learning can actually impede the person's progress to a solution. In summary, Gestalt psychology provided a lexicon for insight that is still very much in use. Constructs such as 'restructuring', 'functional-fixedness', 'fixation', 'reproductive thinking' and 'productive thinking', and 'goal-directed behaviour' have been revived in contemporary research. They, along with the four stages of insight (Wallas, 1926; Hutchinson, 1949a), inform many current discussions of insight.

1.4 WHY IS UNDERSTANDING INSIGHT IMPORTANT?

This may seem an obvious question. Insight itself is clearly important. The chronicles of famous creators, the biographies of geniuses, revolutionary insights which have changed the course of history and of culture; all these seem irresistible reasons for embracing the value of insight. Moreover, insight is ubiquitous. It is found in all people, and stands behind the creativity of human thought. For some it occurs frequently and for others less frequently, but to all of us it is familiar. Some insights are momentous, others may pass by barely noticed. Despite its ubiquity, we know little about this act of transcending understanding (Lonergan, 1978). Insight is an act which places the evidence and clues available to us within a unique, explanatory framework and marks the progression from one's seeming cognitive incapacity to an awareness of the startling obviousness of the solution to one's inquiry. Assumedly, we have all had this experience, yet still we understand it dimly.

⁷ See next chapter for Maier's (1931) two string problem and Scheerer's (1963) nine-dot problem for more examples of functional fixedness.

Why is it important to understand this capacity? The first answer is that by so doing we may hope to increase its occurrence. We may learn how generate insights to more frequently, as it is obvious that some people have developed just this ability. Secondly, we may improve in our capacity to avoid ‘oversights’, the continual inadvertence to the insight we ‘should’ be having. We may gain some familiarity with the factors within human life that predispose us to *not* have certain insights. It may, moreover, be the case that some insights are unwelcome or cannot be incorporated and so *should* be avoided for the time-being.⁸ At the very least, it is clear that learning how to manage insight is potentially very useful.

From a different perspective, attending to the nature of insight may guide us to a richer understanding of mental life. The stages of insight, characterised as they are by a person’s enduring purposes, emotional fluctuations, and social encounters and meanings, signal a psychic life more passionate and multi-dimensional than is suggested in models of the mind as a deductive and inductive processor. We may have been beguiled by the allure and promise of cognitivism, by the belief that mind can be, eventually, definitively modelled as a special type of computational device. Or else, we may have lost touch with the lived psychological experience of a person struggling for understanding, believing instead that mind can be adequately re-described at the quasi-psychological level represented by connectionist neural-like networks. Neither of these explanatory systems regards our emotional, physical and social experience as integral to, and constitutive of, understanding. At best we read of emotions as responses to or precursors of (cognitive) insights (Kitchener, 1983; Smith, Ward & Finke, 1995). Social processes are considered as important ‘external’ factors in some approaches (Dunbar, 1995; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1981, 1995), but they are rarely theoretically implicated within the structure of thought or of insight itself.

⁸ This indicates, of course, that insights can be upsetting. Yet it seems that human beings are frequently driven to replace uncertainty with understanding, even if the implications of that understanding are painful.

At times one could be forgiven for forgetting that we are embodied creatures whose feelings, emotions, purposes and circumstances occupy us moment-to-moment and form the seed-bed from which all our mental life grows. We all struggle with understanding and anticipating the vast complexity around and within us. This universal predicament is neither passionless nor purposeless. On the contrary, insight reveals the emotionally-nuanced, anticipatory commitment we bring to most thought. Relatively ‘passionless’ thought is arguably a developmental achievement, a derived capacity (Langer, 1972; Shanon, 1993; Zajonc, 1980) and one with an important, but limited, applicability. In general, emotion is a crucial part of effective thought (Bechara, Damasio, Tranel & Damasio, 1997; Damasio; 1994; Goleman, 1995; Peters, 1974; Spinoza, 1967; Warren, 1987) and such thought is channelled by what is important to us, including our socially-derived projects in life. These ideas will be revisited by way of a later, more thorough discussion of the relationships between emotion, insight and mind.

1.5 DEFINING INSIGHT

1.5.1 The Focus Of This Work

There is a family of phenomena and experiences which over time has been labelled ‘insight’. I will attempt not to stray too far from the common language usage of the term. That is, what is meant by *insight* is the sudden, usually pleasant experience of understanding that comes as a relief to a period of inquiry, effort and impasse in understanding. The descriptions of insight given earlier (see 1.2) constitute a starting point. The assumption in this work is that insight is an inherently important and a characteristically human act. Because it has many expressions, aspects and manifestations, the goal is not to produce a single and final definition of the ‘essence’ of insight. Rather, care will be taken to build a multi-dimensional, integrative picture of insight, and to understand insight by summarising the research literature, by drawing from theories of mind and consciousness relevant to insight,

and by presenting this in the context of some accounts of insights experienced by a particular illustrative group of insightful people: Australian fiction writers.

The present study will be confined to insight within the context of a creative solution to an impasse, whether in problem solving or in creative endeavour, which leads to breakthroughs in expression and understanding. Primarily, the focus will be on the phenomenology and experience of insight (aha! experiences) and what practices and strategies people employ to maximise their occurrence. Neither of these is centrally concerned with an imputed 'essence' of insight. To link these to the research literature a theoretical — as in the sense of a coherent — account of insight will be attempted. This will necessitate a move beyond the 'insight' literature drawing from broader psychological and philosophical thought. But first it will be necessary to deal with some methodological issues in defining 'insight'.

1.5.2 Essentialist Versus Nominalist Definitions.

In order to form constructs and concepts (such as 'intelligence' or 'depression') we notice in the flux of events certain replicable features (and simultaneously features different in some relevant way). For the construct to remain viable (useful, explanatory, predictive and, above all, meaningful) we assume it is an approximation to some aspects of reality. In attempting to explore the *nature* of insight we may run up against the problem of 'essentialism'. For example, the Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines 'nature' as: "the essential qualities of a thing; the inherent and inescapable combination of properties essentially pertaining to anything and giving it its fundamental character." Note the accent on 'thinghood'. Our subject predicate language, especially its 'indicative mood' (Kelly, 1955; McWilliams, 1996), often predisposes us to reify or hypostatise our concepts (McWilliams, 1993). That is, when we think of the nature of insight we may be tempted to look for the 'essence' of insight, its essential and necessary properties, its 'thinghood'. What I mean by exploring the 'nature' of insight, however, has little to do with a necessary and sufficient 'essence' that somehow lurks behind instances of insight. Rather, what I

hope to do is to examine the ways in which the concept of ‘insight’ can help us grasp what it is to suddenly understand that which eluded understanding a moment before.

The use of the concept ‘insight’ allows us to operate in the world, not necessarily to objectively know the essence of insight. It helps us deal with events, subsuming specific activities and experiences. Thus, we observe behaviours of others or ourselves and the concept provides for us more meaning and anticipatory leverage. We notice that there is a difference between suddenly remembering something forgotten and suddenly having the sense that we have overcome an impasse in our understanding. We know that one is a memory, but there is a distinct strangeness to a new insight — somehow familiar, somehow mysterious, especially when the ‘solution’ is not yet explicit or fully shaped. Yet we are confident that the solution has somehow been attained in advance.

1.5.2.1 Essentialist Or ‘Real’ Definition

An essentialist, often called a ‘real’, definition (Miles, 1967; Popper, 1945) of insight would say that if we know something (directly, intuitively), we can then define it (provide a defining formula). A proper definition would provide an exhaustive description of, for instance, insight. As Popper (1945) said, we read from ‘left to right’: ‘puppy’ \Rightarrow is a young dog; ‘insight’ \Rightarrow is the sudden experience of understanding. We keep comparing our intuitive grasp of the left hand term with exemplars and defining formulas (the ‘right hand’ side) until we are satisfied that the right hand side fully corresponds to the left. Aristotle (see Miles, 1967) reasoned that all demonstrative proofs derive from accepted premises or intuitive graspings. He argued there was an inevitable problem of an infinite regress unless we begin with some intuition of basic premises or essences — what Lonergan (1978) called ‘primitive terms’.

Given such a ‘real’ definition we can compare an exemplar with the intuitive grasp of the essence of the term defined in order to say ‘Yes, this is an insight’ or ‘No, this is not’. The problem, of course, is that such self-evident, intuitive

knowings often prove to be wrong or insufficient. Such a definition also assumes that a word or term has one settled and precise meaning and, often, that such classification is done for us by nature. The essence is assumed to be there in nature waiting to be discovered (Rorty, 1980). Defining ‘insight’ itself in this essentialist way leads to a curious irony. Essentialist or ‘real’ definitions rely on an unmediated insight into, or intuition of, the essence of something. So an essentialist or ‘real’ definition of insight has a circular, tautological character: an insight is defined as an insight into the truth. Of course there is a ‘definitional’ regress here which is at least as problematic as Aristotle’s regress mentioned above. Defining ‘insight’ requires an unexamined notion of insight, which itself requires defining, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Essentialist definitions are sometimes called ‘real’ definitions because they attempt to tell us about the essential or objective nature of *things*. Apart from the problems of objectivism implied here, it is not at all clear that insight is a ‘thing’ in the common sense of the word. This is not to say that insight is not real or is not suitably related to the real. Insight is a concept that refers to a unifying *act* of human understanding which is characterised by a cluster of elements and features (such as described by Hutchinson). Further, it may be better understood as a *family* of activities (Popper, 1964) related to an overcoming of impasse in understanding. It is not an essence that stands behind these acts of understanding. It is a *term* we use to describe such activities.

The ‘essentialist’ tends to forget that it is *we* who have created labels and terms and who have abstracted and generalised from the flux of experience. The ‘essences’ we are trying to define are themselves creations dependent on our ability to focus on aspects of reality. Thus any imputed essence can only be a limited aspect of reality and can only be set apart from other things (as ‘essential’) in terms of the limited dimensions we have managed to apply to events. That is, the ‘essence’ is a construction which we use to anticipate and understand reality, it is not the reality which we are trying to anticipate.

1.5.2.2 Nominalist Definitions

On the other hand, to form a nominalist or lexical definition one begins with events and behaviours expressed in defining formulas and then one decides on a label or term to fit. Such definitions derive from how people tend to use the term in question (Miles, 1967). We read from right to left: ‘what shall we call a young dog?’, and the answer might be a ‘puppy’; ‘what shall we call the sudden, enlivening experience of new knowledge etc.?’, and we might call it ‘insight’. The term ‘puppy’ or ‘insight’ becomes useful shorthand for the longer formula. It is not the case that an examination of historical usage will reveal the essence of insight (Popper, 1964). Rather, one might say that the notion of ‘insight’ (itself an arbitrary term) becomes more and more useful and meaningful as it is enriched and made to symbolise more comprehensively events and experiences in the world. The events, or exemplars, define the term ‘insight’ and not vice versa. That is, the question shifts from ‘What is insight?’ to ‘What is the family of activities and experiences by which we know an insight?’, or ‘What is the value or role of insight?’ or ‘How does one develop insight?’ ‘How might we explain its development and experiential features?’ In short, ‘insight’ is a term that can be applied to a family of events, activities and experiences.

1.6 THE PRESENT APPROACH TO INSIGHT

When using the term ‘insight’ in this work I will be referring to the sudden experience of understanding which follows upon a period of impasse or frustration. That is, it will be a psychological approach to insight. In attempting to understand insight the classic stages of Wallas (1926; Hutchinson, 1949a, 1949b, 1949c) will be adhered to. That is, it is assumed that insight does not occur in isolation, but in concert with a person’s full involvement in some enduring purpose or project. It begins in a preparation stage where the person pursues the solution to some problem or project, but reaches an impasse in his or her efforts. The problem is set aside, or direct attention to it is relaxed. The end of this period of ‘incubation’ is marked by

the insight experience itself, usually emerging spontaneously. A final stage of verification and elaboration follows wherein the value of the new understanding is tested and, frequently, shared.⁹ The sudden experience of insight often includes a profound certainty that a struggled-for solution to a problem has been found. It can be marked by excitement and unusual psychic activation. Positive emotions, feelings of well-being, a strong desire to communicate the insight, flurries of ideas and implications, not to mention occasional major contributions to humankind: these are some of the sequelae of insight.

Of particular interest are the factors which lead to such experiences.

Questions which clamour for investigation include: What sort of people have frequent insights? Why do some have more frequent and/or more profound insights than others? How does one nurture insight? What activities and conditions seem to be conducive to ongoing insights? What are the respective roles of the so-called emotive, cognitive and volitional aspects of such an experience? In what ways are insights expressions of the pragmatic, social immersion and embodiment of the person? What role does unconscious mental activity play in insight?

There is much overlap in discussions and theories of insight, inspiration, creativity and intuition. For current purposes, they will be distinguished as follows: *Creativity* is seen as a more embracing, longer-term combination of purposes, activities and products (Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1981, 1995). An important, arguably crucial, element within this larger creative process is the experience of *insight*. Thus a 'creative' person may be expected to be someone who has the relatively frequent experience of insight. In similar fashion, *intuition* is here considered to be an important aspect or stage within the movement towards insight. Thus, the ability for intuitive mental activities should be a part of the ability to experience insight. Finally, *inspiration* is distinguished from insight. *Insight* is considered as proactive understanding, while *inspiration* is characterised as a more

⁹ It is worth pointing out that an insight is 'creative' or 'insightful' by reason of its being new or novel for the experiencing individual. Whether or not it is considered to be creative, insightful, useful, artistic, and so on by the social group is another question.

passive ‘reception’ of ideas. This latter is derived from the ancient belief that insights into (spiritual) truths were ‘breathed’ into the soul or mind by ‘spirits’.

As a generalisation, the more mechanistic cognitive theories have tended to rely on essentialist definitions, while broader accounts have moved in the direction of nominalist (lexical) definitions. Because insight is here considered to be a multifaceted phenomenon, requiring multiple metaphors for its explication (Schooler, Fallshore & Fiore, 1995; Sternberg & Davidson, 1995), it will be the nominalist approach that will be important in this work. What this thesis will attempt to do is provide an integrative, theoretical understanding of insight which can accommodate these various metaphors. To do so, this understanding will necessarily be at a high level of abstraction, but attempts will be made to ensure it is consistent with empirical findings within cognitive science generally, and with various contemporary accounts of mind.

‘Intelligent’ is a “disposition word” (Miles, 1967, p. 163). That is, it indicates a certain disposition to act in certain ways given certain circumstances (to score highly on IQ tests; to think before one leaps; and so on). In the same way, ‘insightful’ and ‘insight’ are disposition words which indicate a mode of being and behaving given, for example, the difficulties of impasse. Insight will be defined in a combined way: nominally (lexically), in terms of how people have used the term; and descriptively, in terms of possible manifestations or exemplars. This represents a move beyond just ‘correct usage’ of the term ‘insight’, to link it with independently discoverable events. Such events could be, for example, the frequency with which a person has breakthroughs in understanding, or sequences of behaviour which may reliably precede and follow insight experiences.

Thus the interviews with Australian fiction writers will form a very important part of defining and understanding insight. In one way the interviews will be quasi-hypothesis testing. Given the factors to be identified in this research, and the theoretical understanding of insight to be proposed, it will be interesting to see if it reflects the experience of successful creators. But it will only be quasi-hypothesis

testing because the interviews will be exploratory and it is expected the writers will reveal many things not included or adequately dealt with in this developing theoretical understanding of insight.

What seems to be missing in the literature is an account which can reconcile the full, reported phenomenology of insight with the empirical findings from experimental psychology. In particular, two aspects of insight are poorly dealt with in the insight literature. Feelings and emotions have been mostly considered as effects of insight rather than as active, constitutive components. This shortcoming will be herein addressed. In particular, an attempt will be made to clarify some of the complex relationships between emotion, intuition, feelings of knowing, and propositional thought.

Secondly, the research literature, with notable exceptions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1995, 1996; Gruber, 1981, 1995; Simonton, 1995), has tended to ignore our physical and social embodiment. Generally speaking, research into insight has been presented from an intra-psychic or individualist perspective (Waterman, 1981) dominated as it by an image of the person (or at least of the ‘mind’) as a discrete computational device. Contact with the world is limited to inputs from outside resulting in outputs (insights and behaviours). Much of the modelling, relying as it does on terminology derived from the computer and biological sciences (even from solid state physics and spin glass dynamics, as with connectionism, for example), is impersonal. In contrast, the present work will present a view of insight that avoids this Cartesian-derived separation of the person from world, of the mind from the body. In this view, mind is considered to be structured interpersonally and as reflective of the structure of the social, as well as the physical, world. It is also considered that our embodiment is ‘built into’ the personal nature of our insights. We do not merely ‘think’ insights, they are personally experienced.

Given the earlier reservations about an often objectivist cognitive literature, the question may be asked ‘Why include it’? One answer is simply that the findings are very interesting and useful. The present concern is not so much with

methodology nor with the reliability of the results within this literature, it is with their interpretation. It will be attempted to show that a broader, constructivist metatheory can happily incorporate them. More generally, there are two rationales for covering such wide territory in this integrative project.

The first is that cognitive psychology and cognitive science tend to concentrate on everyday, mundane insight, as a part of normal ‘cognition’ and this is an area largely ignored in the earlier Gestalt-inspired research into insight. On the other hand, experimental cognitive research into insight is relatively negligent when it comes to exceptional creativity and insightfulness, a topic covered better in broader approaches. For example, Weisberg (1995, 1986) thinks exceptional creativity and insightfulness is just an extension of mundane cognitive processing, so an approach from ‘below’ is all that is necessary. In contrast, Simonton (1997) thinks it unlikely there would be no ‘quantum jumps’ along the quantitative dimension between everyday and extraordinary creativity; that new cognitive processes would ‘kick in’ representing different combinations of ‘lower’ processes, thereby producing emergent qualities. And of course, occasional experiences of exceptional insight are likely within any ‘ordinary’ life: we all have our moments. For these reasons a dual approach from ‘below’ and from ‘above’ offers the most promise for a comprehensive theoretical understanding.

The second rationale is that the research within experimental cognitive psychology and cognitive science is, understandably, insufficient to account for the full phenomenology of insight in terms of its experiential, embodied and social-pragmatic facets. Even so, the current trend in this literature shows a much stronger emphasis on the subjective and interpretative features of mind. In this regard I wish to draw a basic distinction between a distinctly *psychological* level of analysis where the processes studied are laden with meaning and intentionality, and ‘below’ this a sub-semantic, *quasi-psychological* modelling of brain processes (be that in either ‘standard’ information processing or connectionist accounts). The latter processes have no inherent ‘aboutness’ or intentionality, and are subdiscursive (Harré &

Gillett, 1994). This distinction entails a reinterpretation of cognitive psychology's talk of memory, mind, insight, recognition and so on, as appropriations from a meaning-laden, properly psychological level. The current work will be pitched at this psychological level, but every effort will be made to ensure it is consistent with what we know of the biological and quasi-psychological levels.

This parallels the distinction between essentialist and nominalist definitions. Mainstream cognitive psychology has been predominantly objectivist (Costall & Still, 1987; Stevens, 1998; Still & Costall, 1991), based as it is on a Cartesian-inspired view of mind in which somewhere between our actions and our biology a 'mind' intervenes. Within the 'Cognitive Revolution', such a mind has been characterised in computational terms, the basic units being objective, discrete entities, namely, symbolic representations (Shanon, 1991, 1993). As such, essentialist definitions predominate in cognitive psychology where the essences sought are discoverable, fundamental, presumably neural, entities which form the basis of thought.

From a pragmatic, constructivist point of view (Butt, 1996; Kelly, 1955; Stevens, 1998), the 'mind' is a description of our functioning within a world of meaningful action. The concepts reified within cognitive psychology (such as memories, representations, retrieval) are, properly, nominalisations applied to people in the acts of remembering, representing, retrieving and so on. There is no inner mind causing our action. Our action itself is inherently 'minded' (Butt, 1996; Harré & Gillett, 1994; Johnson, 1987; Radley, 1977; Shanon, 1993). Mind, from this perspective, is also considered a wider concept incorporating emotion, feeling, and thinking as well as being embodied in action. In this sense it cannot be reduced to information processing, itself presumably a model of brain processes. Brain processes are the media underlying thought, feeling and action. Such processes are its essential substrate, but neurones and patterns of activation do not think, feel or act. These latter are predicates properly applied to the person.

1.7 A MAP OF THE THESIS

A distinction made by Kelly (1955) between ‘loose’ and ‘tight’ construing will be central to this current work. Kelly called the skilled alternation between these two modes of anticipation the Creativity Cycle. Within such creativity cycles one ‘provisionally’ tightens one’s loose thinking to find if something promising is emerging. In such cycles, the person attempts to keep his or her thinking relatively loose and creative, not too-hastily closing off speculation, experimentation, toying with absurdity and so on. Not coincidentally, though admittedly not purposely, the structure of the following work has emulated this alternating pattern.

The work is divided into four sections (see Figure 1). The first three are divided by two ‘interregnums’ which summarise ‘what we have so far’ and ‘what we still need’ for an adequate account of insight. These intermediary chapters can be considered to be provisional tightenings making sense of what has been presented thus far and mapping out a rough sketch of the journey ahead. Of course, towards the end of the thesis, in Chapter 11, Section 4, I will attempt to tighten up and present a coherent account of insight and will expect to see it reflected in the interviews with creative fiction writers. But true to the creative subject of this work, it is most important that this work also attempts to map out new territory and provides the reader with expanded horizons, with a sense of new, unanswered questions, and with a certain impatience to explore and to test the speculations and implications of this work. If that is achieved, the thesis will have done justice to its subject matter. More specifically, the contents of the current work are as follows.

The aim of Section 1, ‘Illuminating the Domain of Insight’, is to review the psychological research into insight. The present chapter has illustrated and defined what I mean by ‘insight’ and suggested why it may be an important process to study. The type of philosophical and theoretical approach that will be utilised in this work has also been indicated. The second chapter, ‘Mechanistic Cognitive Approaches to Insight’, will summarise the mainstream information-processing accounts of insight, while Chapter 3, ‘Broader Cognitive, Experiential and Contextual Approaches’, will

indicate that in order to do justice to the complexity and multifaceted nature of insight, there needs to be a move beyond the metatheoretical assumptions and implications of mainstream cognitive approaches. Accordingly, in Chapter 4 ('Interregnum') it will be argued that while I have gathered reliable and consistent findings in relation to insight, there is much of the phenomenology and reported experience of insight that is either ignored or insufficiently treated within these largely descriptive accounts. It is proposed that the theoretical difficulties in accounting for such features of insight within these mainstream cognitive accounts have led to an increasingly constructivist outlook in the literature.

Chapter 5, 'Constructivism and Personal Construct Psychology', will outline a pragmatic constructivist position which will help in the explication and integration of the findings of Section 1. Chapter 6, 'Personal Construct Psychology and Insight', will present a particular constructivist account of insight which will form the basis for the developing theoretical account of insight. Again, Chapter 7, 'Interregnum', will outline how Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) has helped in this inquiry and what remains to be explored. More specifically, it will be asserted that while PCP provides an excellent general framework in which to understand insight, there are important aspects of mind highlighted by insight experiences which Kelly's account under-specifies. These include a broadened understanding of rationality, supplementing the 'normal' conscious representational mode of thought with a looser 'presentational' mode. More specifically, the link between emotion and abstraction needs to be expanded, Kelly's account of loosening and tightening needs to be developed, and the ways in which PCP accounts for intuition and tacit intentionality require elaboration. Insight also reveals the 'enactive' and embodied nature of mind and frequently leads to an experience of a different sense of self and of 'connectedness'. Finally, a metaphoric and 'imagistic' mode of thought centrally implicated in insight needs to be accounted for.

Consequently, Chapter 8 will explore the relationship between 'Emotion and Mind' and how this is related to insight. Chapter 9, 'Matte-Blanco, Kelly and

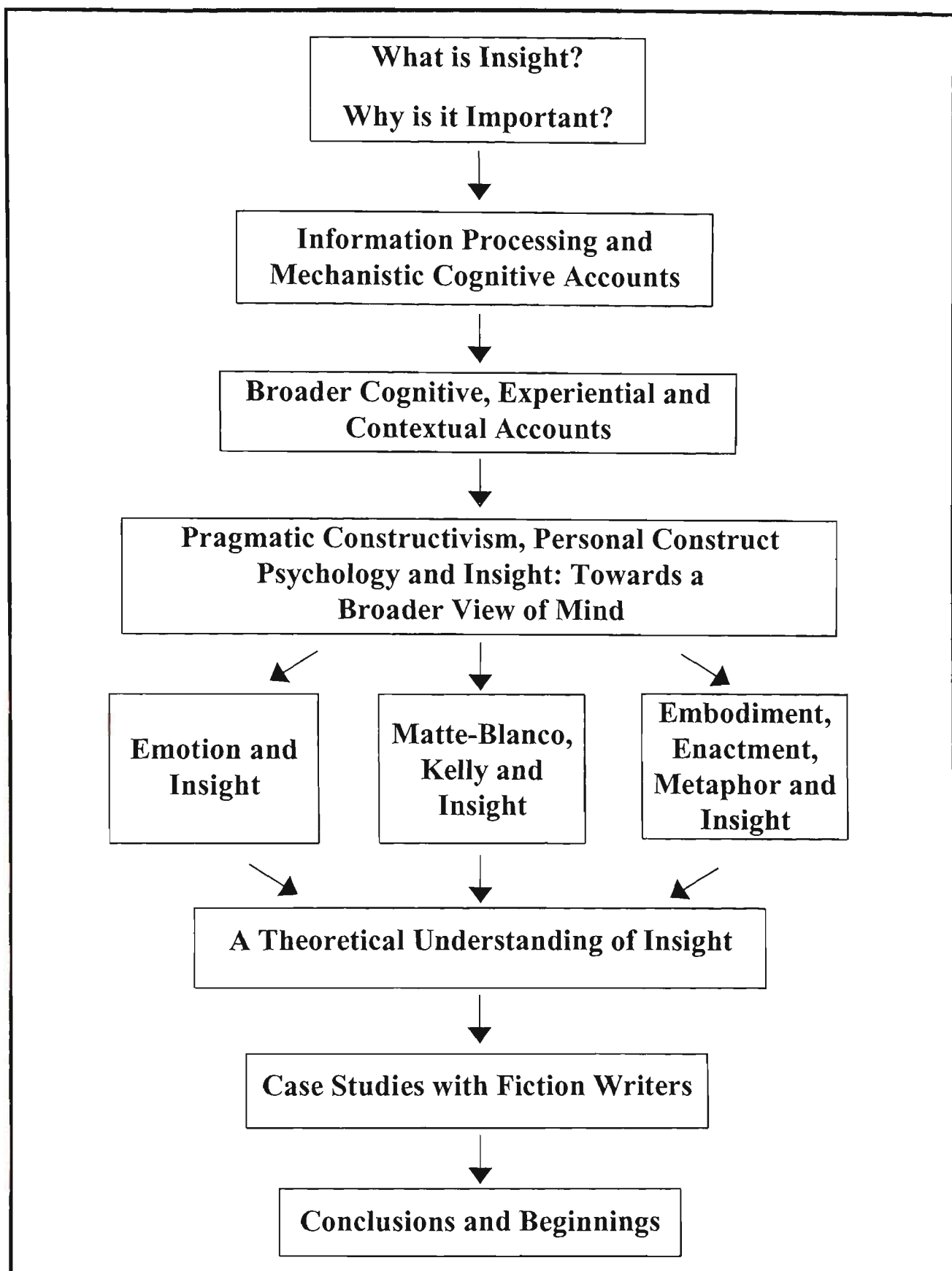


Figure 1. An overview of this inquiry into insight.

Insight', will elaborate the PCP notions of loose and tight construing in terms of Matte-Blanco's account of the system unconscious. The final chapter of Section 3, 'Embodiment, Enactment and Metaphor: Paths to Insight', will link these ubiquitous features of insight to the work of Merleau-Ponty and to contemporary theories of imagination and mind. These approaches will be shown to be compatible with my reading of PCP as a pragmatic constructivism. This chapter will conclude that insight emerges within a type of 'meditative thought'.

The final section, 'Viewing Insight as a Whole', will begin with a 'Theoretical Understanding of Insight' (Chapter 11) which will integrate the findings and ideas of the previous chapters within a constructivist framework. This will be followed in Chapter 12, by a discussion of methodological issues and a summary of the types of features expected to emerge in the interviews with eminent Australian fiction writers. This is in preparation for the discussion of the interviews reported in Chapter 13 ('Insight in Action: Talking to Fiction Writers'). The themes and theoretical understandings of Chapter 11, and the proposed features and factors of Chapter 12, will be discussed in the light of these writers' reported experiences of insight.

Chapter 14, 'Conclusions and Beginnings' will summarise this investigation into insight, propose its meanings and significance and point to the ways in which it represents an opening to further inquiries. In particular, it will be proposed that the constructivist understanding of insight is supported strongly by the interviews with the writers. The Creativity Cycle of Kelly (1955) provides a solid theoretical foundation for an understanding of insight and is compatible with a view of mind and understanding that moves beyond the strict dualism of reason versus emotion, of inner mind versus outer world and of conscious versus unconscious mental processes. It will be concluded that insight represents a 'return' to one's anticipatory fit with one's world, an experiential refutation of dualism or of separateness. The selective capacity to let go of knowing and to dwell in uncertainty, it will be argued, provides the platform for genuinely new understandings.

CHAPTER 2: MECHANISTIC COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO INSIGHT

2.1 INFORMATION PROCESSING ACCOUNTS: GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY REPHRASED.

Most of the current information-processing or cognitive-representational research into insight uses concepts drawn from early research, particularly utilising language drawn from Gestalt psychology (Duncker, 1945; Köhler, 1925, 1929; Maier, 1931; Mayer, 1995). Typically, theorists use concepts and terms such as *Preparation*, *Impasse* and *Fixation*, *Incubation*, sudden perceptual-like *Restructuring* leading to *Illumination* or *Insight*, and *Verification* and *Elaboration* — all drawn from the Gestalt lexicon.

In contrast to Gestalt psychology, the common metatheoretical assumption uniting such approaches (as well as Connectionism or Parallel Distributed Processing [PDP]) is *associationism*, and it is this assumption that lends these approaches their mechanistic feel. That is, drawing on an ancient tradition from the Greeks, through Hobbes and Locke in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the mind is viewed as a container of ideas and is constituted by the mechanical associations between them.¹⁰ Thinking is mechanistically determined¹¹ by links between sensations and ideas in terms of the strongest associations between them (Thorndike's Law of Effect). This leads naturally to the view that insight is merely a special case of stimulus-response association; that it is caused by a more-or-less continuous process of associations being activated until a fortuitous encounter with the appropriate stimulus triggers the correct response (see Weisberg, 1986, 1995) — which of course begs the question as to how the person knows it is the right 'response'. As will be seen, a major problem these approaches encounter is how genuinely new understandings, based on new

¹⁰ Though it is noted that Locke did acknowledge the mind's power of *reflection* which was creative.

¹¹ That is, 'efficiently' determined. See the later discussion of determination (the 'four causes') in 4.2.1 for an alternative theoretical approach.

representations, are formed from these largely ‘unconscious’, subdiscursive, associative processes.

2.1.1 Insight As A Special Vs. Ordinary Cognitive Process

There are differences of opinion as to whether the insight experience expresses a special or distinct cognitive process or whether it is continuous with ‘normal’ cognition.¹² This is perhaps best captured in the debate between Weisberg and Metcalfe (Metcalfe, 1986; Metcalfe & Wiebe, 1987; Weisberg, 1986, 1995; Weisberg & Alba, 1981). Metcalfe represents the ‘special process’ view of insight. She has shown that people differ in their subjective ‘metacognitions’ when attempting to solve so-called ‘insight’ versus ‘non-insight’ problems.¹³ Using participant ‘warmth ratings’ (which reflect how confident the problem-solver is that he or she is approaching the solution), Metcalfe and Wiebe (1987) found that subjective confidence in an impending solution increases incrementally for non-insight problems, but in insight solution there is a sudden jump in warmth ratings immediately prior to solution. That is, subjective metacognitions are predictive of non-insight problem solution, but not of insight problem solution. Indeed, incrementally increasing confidence while attempting insight problems negatively predicts solution. The researchers concluded: “Thus we propose insight be defined in terms of antecedent phenomenology” (p. 243). They argued that the warmth protocols themselves can be used to differentiate insight and non-insight problems, thus overcoming problems of definition by looking at the experiential phenomenology of insight.

Weisberg and others (Perkins, 1981, 1995; Weisberg, 1986, 1995; Weisberg & Alba, 1981) rejected many of the Gestalt notions of insight as a special cognitive

¹² This of course reflects earlier debates in the creativity literature about the distinction between creativity (divergent thought) and intelligence (convergent thought).

¹³ So-called ‘insight’ problems are those that require a non-incremental solution resulting in an ‘insight’ experience. Solving a long multiplication would be a good example of a non-insight problem (as long as the person had the requisite arithmetical knowledge). The problem with such terminology is of course that the ‘insight’ does not reside in the ‘problem’, but in the person. So what may be an ‘insight’ problem for me, may not be one for you. This constitutes a serious methodological problem in a good deal of this type of research (as Weisberg has pointed out).

process. As Weisberg (1995) argued, the occurrence of an ‘Aha!’ experience in itself is insufficient evidence that an insight has occurred. He proposed instead a limited definition of insight where there must be some discontinuity of thinking with the past and where there is restructuring or “a change in the thinker’s representation of the problem” (1995, p. 163). He pointed out (1995) that even in ‘insight’ problems, if the person has encountered analogous problems, there is continuity with the past and therefore not a restructuring. Generally speaking, Weisberg and colleagues emphasised that past experience and the information available in the current situation are sufficient to explain most problem-solving: that insight, when it does occur, is merely an extension of perceiving, learning and conceiving. Taking a type of ‘default’ position, Weisberg (1986, 1995) asserted that until the essence of insight is tied down and demonstrated empirically, the term should be avoided.

Davidson and Sternberg (1984; Davidson, 1995) disagreed with this default position, arguing instead that there are three insight process: Selective Encoding — knowing which data are relevant to the problem or task (thereby avoiding an exhaustive search); Selective Combination — knowing how to combine information into a unified whole; and Selective Comparison — relating newly acquired information to past relevant information. The mere occurrence of these processes is insufficient for an activity to be termed ‘insightful’. If the solution to some problem does not occur immediately, if the solution occurs abruptly when it does occur, and if the solution reflects a new representation of the problem, then Davidson (1995) concluded the use of these three processes is *insightful*.

There are theoretical problems here, however. Smedslund (1984) defined common sense as “... a system of implications shared by competent users of a language” (p. 242). He further observed that, frequently, valid propositions in psychology are explications of common sense and so are true by definition, thus tautological. An implication of this is that they are not empirical propositions at all. Smedslund (1984) has demonstrated this with reference to a wide sample of psychological theories, including Bandura’s (1977, 1978) Social Learning Theory.

Following Smedslund, Kline's (1991) critique of Sternberg's (1985) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence is directly applicable to Davidson and Sternberg's (1984) triarchic theory of insight — because it is the *same* as Sternberg's (1985) theory of intelligence! Kline (1991) demonstrated that Sternberg's components (selective encoding, combination and comparison) are true by definition, and hence non-empirical, and that it is pointless to support such statements empirically (as Sternberg and Davidson have claimed to have done). For example, in insightful learning one must be attending to relevant information (how could we not be if we are being insightful?). Or again, could it be possible to have an insight where information was not combined 'selectively'? Davidson (1995) himself seemed to be somewhat aware of the problem, characterising the theory as "descriptive" (p. 133). What we seem to find here, and in many of the information-processing accounts of insight, is a *redescription* of everyday, discursively-informed understanding, but now located at an inner 'representational' level. Explaining insight has not progressed. Indeed, the problematic relationship of 'inner representation' and 'outer world' is now an additional explanatory burden.

Be that as it may, there is substantial support for the special process view within the experimental cognitive literature. For example, Mayer (1995) believed it is not so much the strength of associations between ideas which determines successful versus unsuccessful attempts at solution of non-routine problems, but whether the solution attempt better fits with the person's schematic *anticipation* of the operation to be executed. Mayer pointed out that people are information interpreters as much as information processors and that insight follows both suggestions from *above* and from *below*.

To illustrate, Mayer (1995) discussed Maier's famous (1931) two-string problem. In this problem participants are confronted with two strings hanging from the ceiling in a room with various objects on the floor, including a pair of pliers. The task is to grab hold of both strings, one in each hand. The problem is that the strings are too wide apart. Very few people solved the problem initially. However, when Maier 'accidentally' brushed against one string, thus setting it in motion, a sizeable proportion

of the participants then solved the puzzle (by tying the pliers to one string, setting it in motion, grabbing the other string and catching the ‘pendulum’). Most interestingly, very few participants reported being aware of the experimenter’s ‘hint’.

Mayer saw this as evidence for two complementary processes within insight:

1. The reformulation of the givens (a suggestion from ‘below’ where the brushing of the string enabling the person to ‘see’ the inert string as a pendulum); and
2. The reformulation of the goal (a suggestion from ‘above’, perhaps enabling the person to understand the problem now in terms of trajectories rather than distances).

There is no doubt that these processes are not independent of past experience, but what counts is not what one’s specific past experiences were, but what one has gained from those experiences. What made insight processes special, for Mayer, is that expert problem-solvers tend to reason at a more abstract qualitative level before focusing on specific solutions (see also Seifert, Davidson, Patalano & Yaniv, 1995). As with Metcalfe (1986), Mayer considered these metacognitive skills as important avenues for research.

Schooler, Fallshore and Fiore (1995) proposed a two-process model of insight, simply defining it operatively as the experience of a problem solver suddenly moving from a state of not knowing how to solve a problem to a state of knowing how to solve it; that is, as a transitional event. Consequently, impasse is an important part of their definition, differentiating it from routine cognition. In theorising about how people overcome impasses, they combined the Gestalt visual metaphor of sudden illumination or perceptual gap-filling with a problem space metaphor (which we will encounter again below). One process involves pattern-recognition comparable to visual perception in which one ‘sees’ possible ‘directions’ in which to move. The complementary process selects one of these directions and executes the ‘movement’. Schooler and Melcher (1995) and Schooler et al. (1995) linked the suddenness of insight to such perceptual-like pattern-recognition processes and drew on previous research showing that recognition of out-of-focus pictures was the best predictor of solving ‘insight’ problems

resulting in similar, sudden shifts of comprehensibility. Once again this indicates that insight processes are distinctive.

Such examples of contemporary research considering insight to be ‘special’ could be multiplied. For example, most of the analogous discussions of what distinguishes ‘mundane’ from ‘exceptional’ creativity (Ward, Smith & Vaid, 1997) concluded that more creative and more insightful thinking, at some point, manifests qualitatively distinct cognitive processes. In any case, the distinctiveness of insight from more routine thought will also be evident in the discussions that follow. Indeed, the ‘specialness’ of insight is also implicit in the distinction, found frequently in the literature, between problem-solving and problem-finding.

2.1.2 Problem-Solving And Problem-Finding

Many discussants of insight within the cognitive tradition have made reference to the distinction between problem-solving and problem-finding (Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 1995; Davidson and Sternberg, 1984; Kitchener, 1983; Perkins, 1995, 1997; Simonton, 1995, 1997). In cases of exceptional creativity and insight, for example, it may well be that the discovery of important new questions or problems constitutes the biggest breakthroughs and insights (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1981, 1995). Kitchener (1983), for example, expressed this in terms of ‘puzzles’ as against ‘ill-structured problems’, the latter constituting most of life’s challenges (see Heidegger, 1968, for a similar distinction taken up later in this work).

As for Metcalfe and Wiebe (1987), Kitchener considered that for ill-structured problems *metacognitions* (where a person monitors his or her own progress in the task at hand) are crucial. In puzzles, all elements for solution are available and can be solved by the application of an appropriate algorithm.¹⁴ In ill-structured problems, on the other hand, the person must actively search for clues and information which will help to

¹⁴ Many of the ‘insight’ problems used in cognitive research are puzzles in these terms. Usually such problems ‘garden-path’ the solver by leading them towards more stereotyped associates or procedures, whereas the solution takes an unexpected, yet available path. Many jokes have this structure.

define the problem. This requires reflection on the nature of the problem, on the strategies one should use, about the success or failure of one's strategies, and so on. Importantly, one's automatic, routine mental processes have proved inadequate to the task, and other modes of approach need to be utilised.

2.1.3 The Importance Of Fixation And Prior Knowledge

The preceding issue concerning problem-solving versus problem-finding overlaps with the issues of fixation and prior knowledge. Fixation is defined as “the counterproductive use or undesirable effect of prior knowledge” (Smith, 1995, p. 234). The Gestalt attack (Duncker, 1945; Köhler, 1929; Maier, 1931) on the then-contemporary behaviourist and associationist theories (Hull, 1930; Thorndike, 1911) took two forms. Firstly, the sudden, perceptual-like experience of insight was seen as evidence of a discontinuous, qualitatively different form of thought. Secondly, the demonstration that the direct use of past experience often led to problem-solving failure (due to functional fixedness or fixation on a method of solution) was argued to show that mere associations with past learning were not only inadequate, but had to be overcome. It was asserted, therefore, that thinking was not merely *reproductive*, but was also *productive*, where the latter is characterised by a departure from a mere re-use of past knowledge and by a restructuring of the problem leading to insight.

But it has been found (Weisberg & Alba, 1981) that removing mental blocks does not automatically lead to insight. For example, in the famous nine-dot problem (Scheerer, 1963, see Figure 2) participants have to join all the dots using four straight lines, not taking pen from paper. Most people fail to solve this, presumably because they are fixated on solutions *within* the space defined by the dots. The solution is to move *outside* the nine dots as shown below. But many, when told they can go outside the dots, still fail to solve the problem. Nonetheless, breaking fixation (*impasse*) greatly increases the chances of solution.

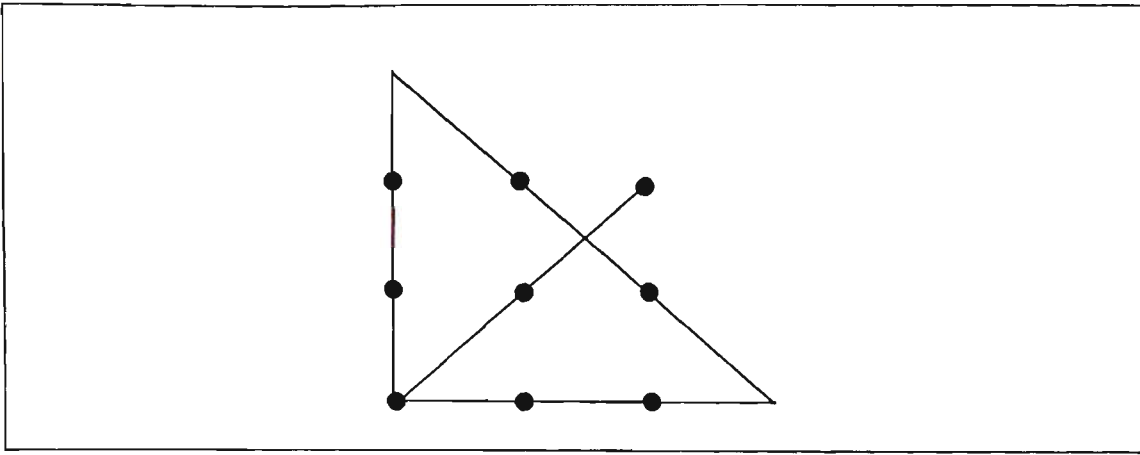


Figure 2. The solution to the 'nine-dot' puzzle: going outside the dots.

In experimental situations it has been shown that fixation can be induced in a number of ways. For example, Smith (1995a, 1995b) reported on his research where engineers were asked to design disposable, spillproof coffee cups. They were given examples with design faults but told to ignore them. The majority of the engineers included the design faults in their creations, despite the explicit instructions to the contrary. Smith (1995b) has shown both retroactive and proactive interference effects leading to fixation. This is typically achieved by priming competitors in memory tasks, making it more difficult to retrieve the target. These attempts are often accompanied by tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) experiences where subjects feel (mostly incorrectly) that success is imminent. Similar effects are achieved in Remote Associates Tests (RAT) where subjects are primed with words which 'garden-path' them. Such effects recall Duncker's (1945) notion of 'functional fixedness' where context induces a mental set. This can be seen in the two-string problem described earlier: where the pliers are not 'seen' as a pendulum-like weight but as something with which one grasps objects.

Of course prior information does not only have a retrograde influence on insight and problem-solving. In earlier related problem-solving and novice-expert literature, existing knowledge, usually conceptualised as the direct application of schematic knowledge to the problem at hand, is the most important feature of theoretical accounts. For example, in the Problem-Space Theory of Newell and Simon (1972), problems are solved using initial state knowledge, goal state knowledge and various stored strategies called heuristics (non-algorithmic 'rules of thumb'). Solution is conceptualised as a search through a space of possible alternative moves guided by these stored structures.

This use of heuristics and the general notion of goal-directed, non-associationistic thinking, is derived directly from the Gestalt distinction between reproductive and productive thinking mentioned above. The limitation of this research, and of research into the differences between experts and novices, is that it is largely confined to well-defined puzzles where all the information for solution is available, and the goal is also clearly defined (Eysenck & Keane, 1990). As discussed earlier, it is probably in relation to ill-defined problems (the majority of real-world events we confront), however, that insight becomes most relevant and necessary.

Another major area of research emphasising the role of prior knowledge in insight, beginning with Koestler's work on creativity (1964), is that concerned with the use of analogy in problem-solving. In response to ill-defined problems, this research has focused on the alternative ways by which knowledge is accessed and used. An ill-defined problem is defined in terms of the knowledge that a person brings to bear upon a problem. The less knowledge, the more ill-defined the problem. In this situation the person may use *analogical mapping* (Gentner, 1983) where the characteristics of a base domain (often involving a 'remote' analogy) are mapped onto a target domain (compare to Davidson and Sternberg's 1995 notion of 'selective comparison').

A classic example was Gick and Holyoak's (1983) use of Duncker's (1945) 'radiation problem'. The radiation problem is as follows: a doctor wishes to use radiation to destroy a malignant tumour. The problem is that the high intensity required will kill the healthy tissue around the cancer, while a lower intensity ray will not kill the tumour. The solution is one of 'convergence' where the doctor uses low intensity rays, but uses a number of them simultaneously from a variety of angles thus adding up to the right intensity only at the tumour. Gick and Holyoak (1983) gave subjects an analogous story about a General not being able to storm a fortress because the roads leading to it were mined to explode if large numbers of soldiers were to use any one of them. Of course the solution was to send smaller groups of soldiers by various roads leading to the fortress. By giving the problem-solvers this analogous problem and solution, and asking them to use it in solving their target problem, solution rates jumped from 10% to

80%. However, if subjects are not told to use the analogous scenario, they often fail to notice its relevance. Keane (1987) concluded that what seems to distinguish significant acts of creativity is the creator's ability to retrieve and use such remote analogies.

More recently, numerous theorists (Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Smith, Ward & Finke, 1995; Ward, 1995; Weisberg, 1986, 1995) have also considered that insight can be best understood in terms of retrieval and in terms of the novel use of stored information. Indeed a cursory inspection of recent collections of work on insight (Sternberg and Davidson, 1995) and on creative cognition (Smith et al., 1995; Ward et al., 1997) reveals general agreement on this. It is at this point, particularly in terms of *how* we restructure the problem and overcome fixation and impasse, that recent accounts begin to diversify.

2.2 THE CRUX OF INSIGHT: OVERCOMING FIXATION AND RESTRUCTURING THE PROBLEM.

We have seen how important prior knowledge is, but the point is how we *use* our prior knowledge, how we combine it and apply it and how we selectively search for and open ourselves to new information. It is here we enter into the heart of the matter. No matter what theoretical language is used, the crux of the problem of insight is how do we form a new view of the problem at hand, a genuinely new construction? How do we overcome fixation? How do we restructure our representations? It is also here that boundaries begin to blur and there are found interesting mixes, for example, of standard representationism and connectionism (Schooler & Melcher, 1995; Schooler et al., 1995; Seifert et al., 1995). Connectionism, the more recent evolution of cognitive science is, however, by no means in complete metatheoretical harmony with the idea of discrete symbolic representations (Shanon, 1991, 1993; Harré & Gillett, 1994). In addition, current theorising on insight often utilises analogies with evolution and adaptation (Perkins, 1981, 1995, 1997; Simonton, 1993, 1997). Accordingly, some connectionist accounts of insight, then several neo-Darwinian approaches will now be summarised, followed by a return to some information processing theories.

2.2.1 Martindale: Connectionism And Insight

Martindale's (1995) connectionist account of creativity and insight is both elegant and thought-provoking. As a model, it is consistent with much of the phenomenology of insight, including its stages, and will be referred to later in this work as a plausible description of the neural network, subdiscursive substrate of what we experience at the personal, psychological level as insight (Harré & Gillett, 1994). Accordingly, some time will be spent here outlining his proposed theory. I will begin with a brief summary of Connectionist or Parallel Distributed Processing (PDP) models.

Rather than conceptualising thinking in terms of computational processes applied to discrete representations, PDP (Rumelhart, Hinton & McClelland, 1986) proposes that cognition has no discrete location but is radically distributed across neurone-like networks, called Hopfield Nets (Hopfield, 1982). Modelling of cognition is in terms of processing units or nodes (which are not as complex as actual neurones). It is assumed that there is a limited amount of energy available to the system of networks and that consciousness depends on certain nodes being activated beyond a minimum threshold. Accordingly, a small number of highly activated nodes would correspond to focused attention while spread patterns of less activated nodes would represent less focused attention. Long term memory is conceptualised as the excitatory and inhibitory patterns of connectivity established between nodes. These 'learned' patterns are usually conceived of in terms of Hebb's law (Martindale, 1995), according to which if two nodes are activated simultaneously then the connection between them is strengthened. Finally, the networks of connections are divided into modules, similar to the modularity of the brain. Each module is further divided into several layers with vertical connections being excitatory and lateral connections being inhibitory (Martindale, 1995).

Martindale (1995) summarised the stages given by Wallas (1926) and emphasised that while insights are always combinations of old ideas, what provides the insight is not usually the ideas consciously considered in the preparation stage, but ideas

previously not thought to be relevant. In the language of cognitive psychology, these are ideas that are distant associates or analogues. Furthermore, he agreed that insights are rarely a product of purely conscious calculation. Martindale then summarised three approaches to creativity, each of which is worthy of comment here:

1. Common Sense and Some Facts.
2. Blind Variation and Selective Retention.
3. Defocused Attention.

1. Since insights are combinations of old ideas, it would seem to be common sense that the more mental elements one had, especially in one's domain of expertise, the higher the chances for a creative idea. Martindale pointed out, however, that this is not exactly so. Very often creative ideas come from people who are not quite experts within a domain (Simonton, 1995). Experts solve problems because they know what is relevant, and "... the disastrous part — what is irrelevant. A creative solution is one involving ideas that were previously thought to be irrelevant" (Martindale, 1995, p. 252). Thus, creative insights are often produced by people with expertise across domains, often with the use of analogy (Martindale gave the example of neural network theory itself being derived analogously from Hopfield's knowledge of spin-glass dynamics).

2. According to Campbell's (1960) Blind Variation and Selective Retention model of creativity, our thoughts are quasi random. This neo-Darwinian theory (see below for other such approaches) considered creativity to be a matter of chance. This is a 'business-as-usual' approach to insight and creativity whereby a random event may suggest the solution to one's problem. Martindale re-interpreted it in connectionist terms suggesting that when connections between nodes are strong, thought is routine and unsurprising. When no connections exist, no thoughts can link them, and when weak or indirect connections exist, say between planetary orbits and the structure of atoms (as for Rutherford prior to his famous theory of the structure of the atom), the "arousal system bombards the cortex with *non-specific activation*; the latter multiplies the activation of already activated nodes" (Martindale, 1995, p. 253-254, italics added).

This further activates the already partly activated ‘distant’ nodes and the relationship between them is retained (‘selective retention’). It is important that, following a weak connection between nodes, the system undergoes a broad, non-specific activation. This fits well with anecdotal reports of vague associative mental play preceding insight — and, it will be argued, this gives a plausible neural-net analogue for the ‘loosening’ and ‘tightening’ of construing that, for Kelly (1955), constituted creativity.

Nonetheless, Martindale (1995) believed this approach is limited. Because of the sheer number of combinatorial possibilities, an individual should have, at most, one creative idea in his or her lifetime. The problem is that people frequently generate many more than this. It may be the case that a monkey randomly hitting keys on a typewriter would eventually type out all of Hamlet (Campbell, 1960), but Martindale estimated it would take trillions of years! Although Campbell’s (1960) theory may give some idea of how creative ideas arise, it is also silent on the psychological processes involved. Martindale argued that since it is necessary to be conscious of creative combinations when they arise, differences in attentional capacity may explain differences in creativity; thus he turned to a theory of defocused attention.

3. Mendelshon (1976, cited in Martindale, 1995) argued that the greater the attentional capacity of the person, the more likely were creative, combinatorial leaps. In highly focused attention, few elements are activated, while in relatively unfocussed attention, more nodes are activated, each with less ‘energy’. With more elements available for combination, creativity is more likely. The idea that creative people can utilise this type of ‘loosened’ thinking was supported, for example, by findings that ‘creatives’ show less cortical arousal on creativity tests than ‘uncreative’ subjects, actually averaging *below* their resting or baseline measures — yet they show similar levels of arousal as ‘uncreative’ subjects on conventional intelligence tests (Martindale, 1995). ‘Creatives’ also showed less cortical arousal than ‘uncreatives’ on concentration tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), suggesting they are less fixated and can more easily enter into absorptive states (Hunt, 1995). Of importance here is the contention that people with a record of significant creative insights can probably hold more ideas or

elements in mind (be that in Short Term Memory or focal attention), with less effort, than most other people.

2.2.2 Martindale's Theory Of Insight

2.2.2.1 The Stages Of Insight

So how does this map onto the stages of insight? The preparation stage would be marked by highly focused attention with only a few nodes 'encoding' ideas relevant to the problem at hand. For problems that reach impasse, because the critical 'irrelevant' idea has been ignored, the incubation stage is entered. In this stage, for the incipient 'insightful' person, the nodes associated with the problem remain partly activated and thus the problem is still in the 'back of the mind'. As the person goes about his or her daily affairs, countless other nodes will be activated, and if one of these is related to the problem the latter will be further activated and cross the threshold of focal awareness. This constitutes the experience of insight, the person having discovered a creative analogy. This parallels Thagard's (1997) distinction between coherence-driven and incoherence-driven conceptual combination.

Coherence-driven combination is algorithmic and relates to my earlier definition of puzzle-solving. On the other hand, incoherence-driven combination involves "... the potentially more creative cognitive processes of analogy and abduction" (1997, p. 140), where abduction involves the generation and acceptance of explanatory hypotheses following surprising or unexpected results. It will be later seen how this alternation between highly focused attention, defocused attention amid action in the world, and a return to focused attention to verify the insight, fits very well with Kelly's (1955) notion of alternating stages of loosening and tightening embedded within a larger cycle of experience. In similar fashion, abduction can be seen as the principle that Kelly used to explain the basic creative capacities of people as they construe their world (Warren, 1989). That is, abduction marks the dialectical process between the person's

anticipations and the world which both constrains and transcends those anticipations. Events always provides surprises to the person open to the unexpected.

2.2.2.2 **Associative Hierarchies**

Since within PDP accounts it is assumed that the total activation in layers of nodes is relatively constant, when there is strong focal attention there is more lateral inhibition of other nodes. As attention defocuses, there is a more equitable spread of the activation among a larger number of nodes. In the latter case, there are relatively more nodes held within short term memory and a wider associative hierarchy is activated. For example, in a steep associative hierarchy, in response to a word-association task one would expect more stereotyped responses. So in response to the word ‘table’, the associates ‘chair’ or ‘food’ may almost always be given (see Figure 3).

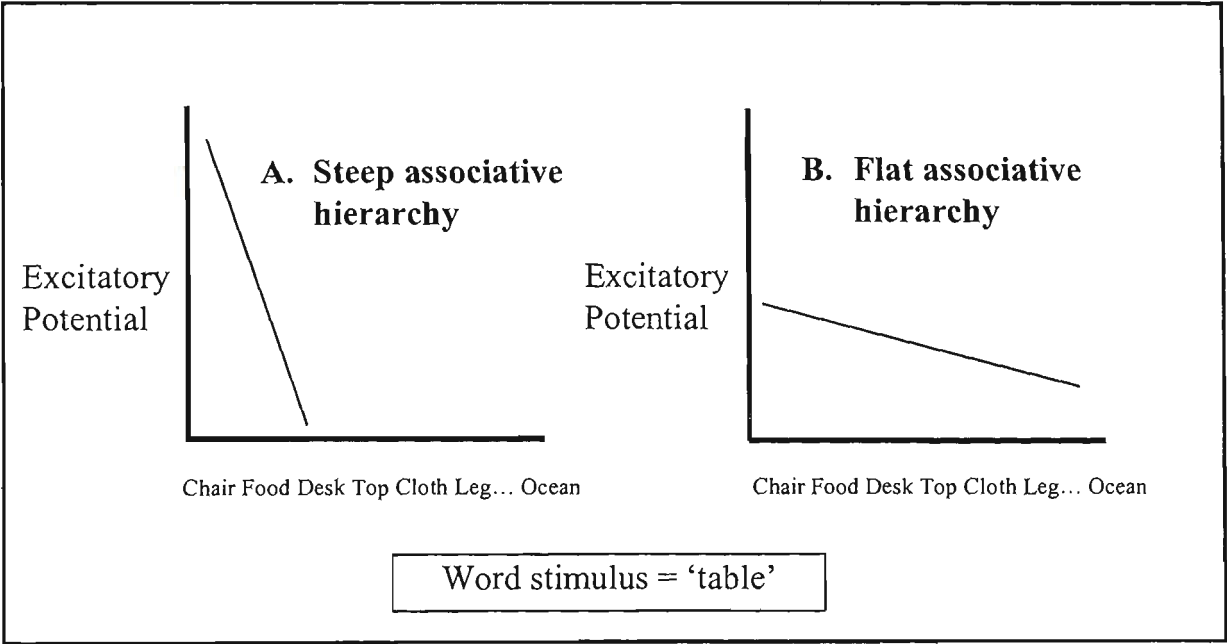


Figure 3. Steep and flat association hierarchies (from Martindale, 1995).

In contrast, a person with a flat associative hierarchy may respond in variable fashion, being more likely to come up with more idiosyncratic, remote associates such as ‘ocean’. Two people, (as represented by ‘A’ and ‘B’ in Figure 3) may have the same relative ordering of associates, but differ in the steepness of their associative hierarchies.

‘Uncreative’ people would be expected to produce fewer associates faster than ‘creatives’ who may be expected to respond more slowly with a wider variety of associates. This fits well with research on the matter. Subjects who correctly solve insight problems tend to take longer than non-solvers who typically move more quickly into solution attempts (Metcalf, 1986) and make more stereotypical responses (Smith 1995a, 1995b).

2.2.2.3 Creativity, Insight, And Primary And Secondary Process Thinking

Many accounts of creativity, both theoretical and anecdotal, utilise language and concepts drawn from the psychoanalytic tradition. Frequently, creators will talk about ‘unconscious processes’, or of the work of the ‘subconscious’, and of ‘primary processes’, as feeding into their creative insights (Epel, 1993). Martindale (1995) also drew explicitly from this tradition. In particular, he stressed the role of ‘primary process thinking’ within insight. Before discussing his views, however, we need to familiarise ourselves with the general features of the Freudian ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’, and the types of thinking which characterises each of them.

The Freudian Conscious and Unconscious

Generally speaking, Freud characterised conscious thinking as that aspect of mind that encompasses all that one is momentarily aware of. It is usually defined in contrast to unconscious mental processes. The type of thinking that characterises conscious processes is *secondary process thinking* which is thinking attuned to the demands of reality, and which is rational and logical (Freud, 1911). It is typified by an ability to delay gratification and by an absence of emotional influences on the thinking process. As Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, p. 340) put it, secondary process thinking “must concern itself with the connecting paths between ideas, without being led astray by the *intensities* of those ideas” [emphasis added]. These ‘connecting paths’ are the logical relations between ideas. Such inferential relations are typically transitive and asymmetrical (not reversible) in that ideas are arranged hierarchically in patterns of

inference. An example of an asymmetrical relation is ‘A is bigger than B’ — which cannot be reversed without changing the meaning radically (‘B is bigger than A’).¹⁵

On the other hand, Freud distinguished three senses of the term ‘unconscious’ throughout his writing (Reber, 1985). The *descriptive* sense denotes any thought that is not in consciousness at the present moment (which includes repressed contents as well as the easily accessible *preconscious*). The *dynamic* sense is more specific, explaining *the reasons* many thoughts are unconscious. The most important mechanism for producing and maintaining unconscious contents is repression. The third sense of ‘unconscious’ is the *systematic* sense which describes the rules and processes operative in the unconscious conceptualised as a semi-independent system of thought. It is this ‘system unconscious’ that will form the focus of our attention.

Rayner and Tuckett (1988) summarised Freud’s definitions of the (system) unconscious. The five principal features of the unconscious given in 1900 (and elaborated by eight further characteristics in 1915) were: The absence of mutual contradiction; Condensation; Timelessness; Displacement; Replacement of external by internal reality. For the purposes here, it will suffice to indicate that these five features are typical of *primary process thinking* which is often irrational and tends to be free-associative, ‘autistic’, analogical and emotive. It is governed by the pleasure-pain principle and is not cognisant of the constraints of space and time. Most importantly, the system unconscious *selectively* treats the converse of any relation as identical to it. It frequently treats logically asymmetrical relations as if they were symmetrical (Matte-Blanco, 1988). In terms of my example above, ‘A is bigger than B’ may be considered to be equivalent to ‘B is bigger than A’! Thus, primary process thinking tends to find similarity and sameness where secondary process thinking finds distinction and difference.

¹⁵ These matters will be given a more detailed treatment in the later section on the psychoanalyst and mathematician, Matte-Blanco. In particular, the depiction of primary process thinking as being largely composed of *symmetrical* relations and secondary process thinking by *asymmetrical* relations will be pivotal in elaborating George Kelly’s Creativity Cycle and building a theoretical framework for understanding insight.

Martindale (1995) discussed the assertion (Kris, 1952) that creative people are more adept at alternating between primary process and secondary process thinking. Kris (1952) believed that creative people can use primary process thinking to apply to abstract and to more emotionally-neutral ideas, whereas non-creative people can only use it to deal with emotive, personally-relevant material. As such, creative thinking is enriched by some of the features of primary process thinking, particularly being more analogical, free-associative and figurative, without necessarily implying an ‘autistic’, pathological separation from reality.

Martindale’s use of the terms ‘primary process’ and ‘secondary process’ to refer to thinking was, however, purely descriptive.¹⁶ He used them to merely distinguish between the type of thought present in reverie or fantasy (primary process) from more rational and intellectual styles of thought (secondary process). This is supported by the fact that, for example, ‘creative’ people report more fantasy and reverie and are more easily hypnotised (Hunt, 1995). Furthermore, Martindale echoed Shallice’s (1978) assertion that primary process thinking “corresponds to a state in which large numbers of nodes are equally or about evenly activated” (1995, p. 259). Clearly, this represents a flat associative hierarchy, the use of which makes analogical and free-associative thinking more likely. This mirrors my accent on primary process thinking as being more sensitive to ‘sameness’ or ‘symmetry’ because — from a secondary process point of view — it allows ‘remote’ associates to be activated roughly equally to ‘near’ associates. Such equivalencies between distant associates may appear absurd or completely illogical to conscious, rational thought (secondary process) based as it is on asymmetrical logic.

Symmetrical and Asymmetrical Relationships

Importantly, Martindale (1995) pointed out one constraint on Hopfield networks. Unlike the brain, they are predicated on *symmetrical* relationships between nodes and *complete* interconnectedness between network nodes. Apart from the astronomical combinatorial possibilities this would imply, such interconnectedness would correspond

¹⁶ Freud’s more expansive treatment of unconscious thinking will be returned to later when considering the role of combinations of symmetrical and asymmetrical thinking in generating insights.

to a mind operating exclusively in primary process fashion, with limited inferential and (classical) logical capacity. The connections between neurones are, however, largely *asymmetric*. They are not simply being either on (+1) or off (-1) (Hunt, 1995).

Furthermore, the brain is of modular character as not all neurones are connected to all other neurones (Damasio, 1994). That is, the neurological evidence clearly supports the notion that thinking also needs to be conceptualised in asymmetrical terms. Such asymmetricality, as I have suggested, should support our capacity for secondary process thinking.

As it turns out, making the weights asymmetric in modelling equations based on Hopfield nets does not affect performance of these models. In fact, allowing nodes to take a continuum of values gives better modelling results (Martindale, 1995) — supporting the intuitively satisfying idea that thought involves both symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. Again, I will return to these notions in my later discussion of the psychoanalyst Matte-Blanco (Matte-Blanco, 1988; Rayner, 1995), linking them to both his distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical thought, and to Kelly's (1955) distinction between loose and tight construing.

2.2.2.4 A Summary And Some Speculations

Martindale (1995) summarised his connectionist account of insight as follows:

To build a neural network capable of creative insights, first we need to fill the nodes with a wide diversity of knowledge. Second we need to present the network with a problem that it cannot solve. If the problem can be solved at first glance, the solution will most likely be algorithmic or uncreative... Next, we want the nodes representing the problem to remain partially activated so they can 'filter' other nodes corresponding to perception and thoughts. If these other nodes give a hint at the solution, connections will be strengthened, and the solution will pop into mind. (p. 261)

We have seen that a crucial element in the above process of coming to insight is the alternation between different modes of thought corresponding to differing levels of cortical arousal. To increase the likelihood of a creative link, a state of low arousal or defocused attention, is entered into. Such a state, for example, is found in particular meditative and/or hypnotic states (Hunt, 1995). This state will increase the chances that

all the relevant nodes will be simultaneously, partially activated. Take for example, Rutherford's analogy between planetary orbits and the structure of the atom. After preparatory efforts at solution, and the setting aside of the problem, the various relevant nodes needed to remain simultaneously activated (in this case perhaps representing the ideas of a larger body orbited by smaller ones, of 'gravitational' forces between elements, of dynamic trajectories, as well of the crucial notion of a planet being orbited). How can the structure of the atom be conceptualised to include these characteristics? And then the insight: 'by conceiving of it in terms of a planet being orbited by moons'. Chance plays some role here too. We do not know in advance how to forge the link. Perhaps it depends on a fortuitous phrase in conversation, on something seen in the environment, or on an 'irrelevant' memory being allowed to be held within the same context as our problem. But of course, this can only happen to a prepared mind. Finally, the insight must be verified, signalling a return to high arousal with more steep associative hierarchies and 'secondary process', asymmetrical thinking. Again, it is seen that insight is a part of a wider sequence of alternating styles of thought and of styles of cortical arousal.

The question is, do we have a brain that is designed to operate in this alternating fashion? The answer appears to be yes. Martindale (1995, p. 266) mentioned three such biological cycles characterised by alternating cortical arousal: the arousal system (which stimulates the cortex about ten times per second), the ultradian cycle of 90 minutes duration, and the diurnal cycle. Verifiable in our subjective experience is the alternation between periods of more-or-less intense concentration (high arousal) and taking a break or musing quietly about the problem at hand (low arousal). This latter alternation is widely reported by creative people in all fields (Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1981, 1995).

Martindale speculated that there is yet another fruitful analogy with solid state physics. Hopfield (1982) assumed that all physical systems evolve so as to minimise energy or settle into a global energy minimum. Neural systems should be no exception and should in practice settle into both global and local energy minima. He used the example of annealing — the heating of a flawed crystal (a local energy minimum) until

it is fluid, followed by slow cooling to allow it to form a perfect crystal (a global energy minimum). He then described *simulated* annealing on a Hopfield net: high temperatures would correspond to *low* arousal or primary process thinking. At very high temperatures nodes would be going on and off in a near random fashion, while “nodes receiving moderate inputs [moderately low arousal] do not yet have to commit themselves to being on or off and thus are not trapped in the system as a whole in a local minimum” (p. 265). Slowly the temperature drops (arousal *increases*) and thought becomes more crystalline. Thus, impasses in thought can be likened to flaws in a crystal or a local minimum. To overcome this local minimum (in favour of a more global energy minimum) the thinking process needs to return to a more ‘primary’ state to allow the basic ‘atoms’ of thought to most efficiently align themselves. On cooling (returning to secondary process thinking), the insight would become manifest and open to verification and elaboration.

2.2.3 Neo-Darwinian Accounts: The Evolution Of Insights

Simonton (1993) lamented the paucity within cognitive science of theories of creativity which take account of the role of personality or social context, and indeed the absence of any general incorporative theory of creative insight. Accordingly, Simonton’s historico-metric methodology placed insight and creativity within the context of creators’ creative outputs throughout their lives. Following large scale empirical investigations Simonton concluded that, overall, it is the *number* of creative variations creators produce that determines the occurrence of durable insights. It is a question of statistical probability that fluctuates with individual differences in productivity. An eminently creative person must spend about 10 years (see also Gardner, 1993) building up a huge reservoir of discipline-relevant knowledge and understanding. The person often turns out to be a ‘maverick’, frequently from a very stimulating or chaotic household. Notable creators are also often early voracious readers. Simonton (1995) pointed out that creativity, like evolution’s variations, is a very wasteful business. Most insights are ultimately unsuccessful, not surviving the harsh light of subsequent testing,

either by the creator, or by the field. Accordingly, “... the odds of producing a successful work in any one period of a creator’s life are simply a probabilistic function of the total number of insights offered” (1995, p. 487).

Mention has been made earlier of searching a problem-space — in computing terms, often called a possibility space (Newell & Simon, 1972) — and of Campbell’s (1960) ‘Blind Variation and Selective Retention’ evolutionary theory. Simonton’s (1993) ‘Blind Variations, Chance Configurations, and Creative Genius’ follows in this tradition. His view was that as problems become more novel and complex, one’s repertoire of heuristics and algorithms are inadequate to solve them. The person must make his or her mind “accessible to chaotic combinatory play” (1995, p. 470) which is analogous to random genetic mutations in evolution. He said that cognitive psychology (Newell & Simon, 1972) tends to reject the notion of chance configurations, concerned as it is with defining a space of givens, goals and operations, and with determining a path through these given some heuristic. He contended (1993, 1995), moreover, that the free-associative ‘search’ so necessary for genuine novelty is even *less* ordered than trial and error and likened it to primary process thinking. This latter point about the unstructured nature of primary process thinking will be countered, however, in my discussion of Matte-Blanco and the logic of the unconscious, particularly in relation to what Matte-Blanco (1988) called ‘bi-modal’ thought.

The ‘search’¹⁷ that Simonton referred to is not ‘blind’ in the sense of completely random trial and error (which leads to an inefficient, often hopeless, ‘combinatorial explosion’), but was ‘blind’ in that its results are unpredictable. The latter type of searches require more luck or ‘chance’ as the number of alternative representations of the problem and of alternative heuristics to solve it expand, and importantly, become equiprobable. That is, the problem solver cannot, a priori, decide which associative path is most likely to lead to success. Frequently, it is a fortuitous event in a person’s life which ‘primes’ one string of associations over another.

¹⁷ Simonton, true to his Darwinian metatheory, was careful to remove any connotation of conscious intention or any teleology from this notion of ‘search’.

For Simonton (1993), the only requirement for creative insight was that in this impasse situation one's associative processes take place within broad horizons. This more free-associative mental play does not take place in core consciousness, but "... can occur on the periphery of awareness, deflected this way and that by the random intrusion of subliminal events" (1993, p. 228). Incubation, in his scheme of things, is described as waiting for external priming (which does seem to underplay the role of 'internal' mental phenomena such as imaginative reverie or dreams). Insight, when it arrives, is not deliberate and is not achieved with foresight:

Nevertheless, when the succession of subconscious images chances upon a bona fide insight, core consciousness will suddenly change focus and spotlight the discovery. The upshot is the dramatic subjective experience of illumination or inspiration. (Simonton, 1995, p. 477)

Notice the insight is somehow 'chanced upon' by the subconscious images themselves, surely a problematic, homuncular, notion. In my view, insight is an act of understanding properly understood as occurring at the level of the person, whatever unconscious processes may precede it.

Perkins (1995, 1997) was another neo-Darwinian contributor to the research on creativity and insight. Perkins (1995) compared Generative Breakthrough Events (GBEs) within evolution to insights. GBEs have three characteristics. Firstly, they involve long 'searches' through spaces of possibility — particularly 'Klondike Spaces'. These latter are possibility spaces with vast, relatively clueless regions in the midst of which occur rich 'veins' of clues. Secondly, they require a precipitating event. Finally, they are marked by a rapid culmination whose rapidity is a function of the topography of Klondike spaces. Once again, 'searches' are to be understood in terms of adaptations to the perturbations and demands of the environment, rather than as involving conscious intentionality. Although Perkins (1995) distinguished human intelligence and cognition from the mindlessness of evolution's creativity, the parallels are suggestive: human insight often follows a long search, often discloses the hidden, is generative of change, begins with a precipitating event and is achieved rapidly. Perkins (1995) noted that humans are peculiarly well-adapted to operate within Klondike Spaces, as well as within

the more common, clue-rich ‘homing’ spaces such as are predominantly dealt with by cognitive science (Newell & Simon, 1972; Chi, Glaser & Rees, 1983).

The distinction between Klondike Spaces and Homing Spaces parallels the distinction made earlier between ill and well-defined problems, as well as between problem-finding and problem-solving. A person within a Klondike Space needs not only conventional clue-oriented expertise, but also requires a more divergent style of search which looks for mini homing spaces within the wider clueless expanse: “casting a wide net, avoiding redundant coverage of the same regions, searching for new regions altogether...” (Perkins, 1995, p. 515). In life in general we rely on an enormous knowledge base to negotiate smoothly most situations (using general and specialised knowledge to turn potential Klondike Spaces into Homing Spaces).

Despite this, many situations pose problems which outstrip our heuristics and knowledge base. But it is our ability to cope with this, our insightfulness, that distinguishes us from “the blind search processes of natural selection” (Perkins, 1995, p. 521). Natural selection has no memory, whereas we begin with options in our searches. We can brainstorm when impasse is evident. In fact, we look for generativity itself on purpose, and finally, because we accumulate experiences, we also operate with ‘planning spaces’ which are possibility spaces of goals and plans. The best illustration of the latter is the existence of ‘metacognition’ (our reflexive ability to think about our thinking). Finally, Perkins rejected the notion of incubation as unconscious reasoning, preferring to characterise it in terms of forgetting entrapping assumptions and noticing clues in the environment.

2.2.4 Information Processing Mechanisms Of Insight

2.2.4.1 Unconscious Processes

Koestler (1964) considered that the unconscious played the major role in insight. He discussed the insights of Poincaré, and considered incubation to be characterised by unconscious combining and recombining of previously unrelated ideas until an

occasional combination is ‘appreciated by the unconscious’ and is ‘delivered’ to the conscious mind. As we saw in relation to Simonton, (1995), this raises the spectre of a ‘mind-within-a-mind’ or a homunculus. We now have an ‘insight’ at an unconscious level which is in just as much need of explanation as the conscious level insight which first inspired this inquiry.

This notion that ideas combine unconsciously has been given a new form within information processing psychology (Ohlsson, 1993; Schooler & Melcher, 1995; Schooler et al. 1995). According to this interpretation, impasse and fixation are caused by the excessive activation of inappropriate ‘operators’ (knowledge and actions one uses to solve a problem). The incubation period allows this activation to dampen, which increases the likelihood that more appropriate operators will be activated on subsequent attempts. Eclectically drawing from the PDP metaphor of neural nets and theories of semantic activation (Ohlsson, 1993; Yaniv & Meyer, 1987), the authors argued that this alteration in activation allows a wider spreading activation which eventually reaches the relevant concepts which are activated sufficiently to be suddenly ‘recognised’ as the solution. But note that these theorists (Schooler & Melcher, 1995; Schooler et al., 1995) have not specified at what *level* the insight takes place. Sufficient activation of nodes is, properly, a *correlate* of conscious awareness, and therefore of insight. Do we ‘see’ or ‘recognise’ at the level of neural nets and nodes, or are they terms best reserved for a person seeing and recognising?

These are difficult matters which the authors acknowledged: “While this analytical approach has allowed us to make real progress on the topic, we must concede that there is little in this chapter that can be characterized as a true insight about insight” (Schooler & Melcher, 1995, p. 128). In the same chapter they summarised the (convincing) evidence that non-reportable processes play their part in insight. Thus, concurrent verbalisations impair insight problem solving, but have no effect on equally difficult analytical problems. Further, they found that in insight problems there are more metacognitions and less logical arguments used in solution. The two measures found to be most correlated with insight were pattern recognition and avoidance of

context-induced mental set (fixation), which they took as more support for earlier Gestalt-like views of insight as quasi perceptual, as akin to visual recognition.

Perhaps at this point a distinction could be suggested: non-reportable processes may still be ‘logical’ and be available to awareness, but simply are not verbal. Thus what Schooler and Melcher (1995) call the ‘ineffability of insight’ may merely be a different style or mode of awareness or thought. It may in fact be quite ‘palpable’, though difficult to report on. This type of distinction was suggested by Langer (1957, 1972) who distinguished between *representational* and *presentational* modes of thought, the latter being a non-discursive (non-linguistic) symbolic mode highly sensitive to the medium of expression, to mood and to aesthetic appreciation. Representational consciousness, on the other hand, is best characterised as being expressible in propositions and is somewhat context and medium insensitive.¹⁸ Indeed, Schooler and Melcher (1995) were aware that other modes of cognition are important. They made passing reference (p. 128) to subliminal perception, implicit learning, implicit memory and to hemispheric specialisation. They pointed out that the right hemisphere is associated with non-verbal cognition, visual-spatial processing, and appreciating metaphor and humour, all of which are related to insight. In particular, the right hemisphere shows broader patterns of spreading activation in priming tasks, perhaps providing a physical substrate of the retrieval of remote associates so important in the generation of insight. In fact, Schooler and Melcher’s (1995) own findings that verbalisation interferes with insight processes lends support to both the notion that presentational modes of thought are a necessary, non-reportable stage within insight, and to the important role of non-verbal (right hemisphere-dominant) cognition.

2.2.4.2 Causes Of Impasse

As mentioned earlier, Schooler et al (1995) considered that insight is best understood in terms of two metaphors: insight as ‘perceptual’, and as a search in a ‘problem space’. But here the ‘search’ is not carried out by an unconscious mentality, but is a non-

¹⁸ Representational and presentational consciousness will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

intentional, spreading activation. Thus, impasse is caused by failures in *recognition* and in terms of *searching the wrong problem spaces*. Recognition failures can result from overemphasis of irrelevant cues and under-emphasis of relevant cues. In the former case, for example, Smith (1995a, 1995b) and Finke (1995) found that inventors can be ‘garden-pathed’ by experimenter-provided suggestions. The other side of this coin is that available relevant knowledge is ignored, or put another way, ‘selective comparison’ (Davidson, 1995) is not achieved. Alternatively, impasse can be considered as a search being conducted in the wrong problem space. The person does not have the potential solution in front of them and must move to a new vantage point, that is, construct a new representation of the problem.

Of course this talk of ‘recognition’ and of ‘search’ raises a fundamental philosophical problem for spreading activation theories and connectionism in general. That is, while authors have been careful to *not* anthropomorphise their concepts, especially within PDP, at some point consciousness, intentionality, and self-awareness are assumed to *emerge from these networks*. At what point? Who or what ‘recognises’ the sufficiently activated remote associate? It is salutary to consider the process, however, in the reverse direction (Harré & Gillett, 1994). For example, playing a good shot is best understood in terms of the full context of the game being played, and is less well understood in terms of biological and kinaesthetic processes. That is, the meaning and understanding of the shot is only possible in full lived context (see Chapter 10 for a development of this idea).

2.2.4.3 Overcoming Impasse

Given their view of the causes of impasse, Schooler et al. (1995) outlined the ways to overcome impasse. Problem-solvers must: Reduce the salience of inappropriate cues; increase the salience of appropriate cues; effectively search for a new problem representation. To reduce fixation on irrelevant cues they suggested a person consciously de-emphasises those cues,¹⁹ that they allow the passage of time to reduce

¹⁹ This suggestion seems illogical: if the person knew what was inappropriate, they would not be fixated on it. But matters are not usually so clear-cut. The person does know that repeated attempts using the

their salience, and that they consider the problem in a different physical or psychological context. It is significant that none of these suggestions are specifically ‘information processing’ solutions, but really can be derived from both anecdotal reports and from a common sense understanding of the term ‘insight’ (Kline, 1991; Smedslund, 1984). More salient cues can be recognised by the “simple encounter of a cue in the environment, or the spontaneous surfacing into consciousness of some relevant bit of information” (Schooler et al., 1995, p. 571). Again, it could be said that this is commonsense ‘dressed up’ in scientific-sounding language.

However, other researchers (Seifert et al., 1995) have proposed two mechanisms drawn from cognitive science which advance commonsense. Firstly, they referred to ‘failure indices’ and secondly to a fairly standard account of spreading activation (or ‘unconscious retrieval’). The latter notion has been dealt with above, while the idea of failure indices was also picked up by Schooler and colleagues (1995): “mental markers or indices that keep the mind ever-vigilant for relevant information” (p. 571). Because the concept of failure indices is drawn from the ‘Prepared Mind’ perspective of Seifert et al. (1995) to be discussed below, the present treatment will be brief.

In the ‘memory-for-problems’ paradigm (Seifert et al., 1995) subjects show superior memory for unsolved problems *only when allowed to reach an impasse*. This phenomenon is known as the ‘Zeigarnik effect’, after the Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik who found that when participants were subjectively dissatisfied with their attempt at a task they were much more likely to remember the details of the task (Reber, 1985). Evidence for this idea of some special ‘marker’ for unsolved problems is found when, in tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) studies, subjects benefit from prior exposure to target items only when those items correspond to definitions that they had already failed to produce in earlier TOT tests (Seifert et al., 1995). Schooler and colleagues (1995) did not mention the emotional aspects of this effect, the subject’s personal disappointment,

same approach has been ineffective and may be encouraged to experiment and play with ideas, rejecting the ‘obvious’ and trying on the seemingly ‘irrelevant’. The problem with this suggestion is it is made from the perspective of the known solution and not from the perspective of the bewildered problem-solver. Furthermore, it implies clear-cut judgements of the relevance of cues are possible, whereas it may be that we operate more in terms of family resemblances and prototypes rather than formal, well-defined concepts.

and this is an aspect arguably of the utmost importance, and one which will be discussed in a later chapter. But for now, the notion of ‘failure indices’ — which mark information in memory associated with the original impasse — is an important one. The question may be asked, ‘why do we bother to overcome impasses, or what is our motivation for setting up these markers’? But an attempted answer to that will be made within the context of a later discussion of a more complete psychology of the person.

In order to form a new representation of the problem, to enter a new problem space, Schooler et al., (1995) suggested we must first recognise we are lost. This metacognition leads to conscious efforts to redefine the problem (Gick & Lockhart, 1995) such as noticing invariants of one’s previous solution attempts. The authors listed attributes associated with this ability to find alternative approaches:

- Perseverance, which recalls Simonton’s (1995, 1997) observation that it is the most (quantitatively) productive who are most likely to succeed.
- Risk-Taking, which is necessary given that unconventional discoveries are ‘long shots’.
- Playfulness, which recalls the importance of indulging in imaginary combinatory play (Koestler, 1964).
- Broad Knowledge, which all theorists emphasise.
- Ability to Recognise Analogies, which may be merely another way of describing insight.

Again, it can be seen that this list could mostly be derived from commonsense and is not explicitly derived from particular theoretical considerations. The suddenness of insight, however, was argued to be a function of its perception-like nature, was compared to Gestalt perceptual gap-filling, and was tied to a type of inner recognition of a coherence analogous with visual recognition:

... our cognitive information processing system may be structured to recognize coherent patterns of information in the environment in a manner comparable to that by which the visual system determines invariances in the visual world. (p. 579)

In fact, the authors reported on previous research in which they showed that the best predictor of insight problem solution was an ability to recognise out-of-focus pictures. It was argued that there may be some shared resources here involved in perceptual gap-filling and in one's capacity for insight.

Another information-processing theory of how we overcome impasse is Ward's (1995) 'path-of-least-resistance' model. For Ward, creative ideas are structured in predictable ways, based on the properties of existing categories and concepts. When Ward asked people to draw imaginary animals they typically produce animals with fairly standard sense organs and appendages arranged into symmetrical wholes. As he put it: "These default tendencies determine the paths along which imaginative ideas are most likely to be guided" (1995, p. 162). This 'predictive encoding' does not, however, represent absolute constraints. New imagined entities can be innovative if the person begins by considering a 'highly abstract characterization' of what the desired product should contain. This high level abstraction is a superordinate structure which channels what is possible, yet is permeable enough to allow for creativity. For Ward, it provides a starting point which is not fully specified, thus requiring additional information before commitment to an 'answer' is required.

Ward (1995) also believed that such abstract levels of thought help overcome 'retrieval blocking'. When thinking of a specific exemplar, activation is heightened, making retrieval of alternatives less likely. But "... by going back up a hierarchy, one may be able to go back down a different path toward an alternative solution" (1995, p. 172). In terminology resonant with Martindale's 'associative hierarchies', Ward talked about 'steep' and 'shallow' 'generalization gradients'. The more abstract (superordinate) the activation, the more shallow the gradient, allowing many more specific-level items to become available. Such abstractions can help the person restructure the problem representation by clarifying the broad requirements or higher-order relations needed for the problem. Good analogies, when realised, maintain these guiding relations. Finally, Ward called this the 'path-of-least-resistance model' because people are assumed to only use this high abstraction path when they are highly

motivated or under special constraints. The path to insight is often one of sustained struggle, and it remains to be seen why it is important to us to undertake this struggle.

2.2.4.4 The Prepared Mind Perspective And The Stages Of Insight

We have already introduced Seifert et al.'s (1995) idea of failure indices — 'marked' information in memory associated with the problem. It will be obvious that it shares features with Ward's 'highly abstract' ideas. It formed a part of their 'opportunistic assimilation and prepared mind' perspective whereby "... insight may emerge from a combination of information processing phases whose joint interactions enable subconscious quantum leaps during the generation of new mental products" (1995, p. 75). This theory saw insight as impasse-driven learning. Our attempts at solution 'prime' our mind (predictive encoding) to be sensitive to potentially useful conceptual or physical elements that the answer should have. It is 'fortuitous contact' with stimuli relevant to the problem which then activates the failure indices and allows impasse to be overcome. Ward (1995) added, somewhat vaguely, that suddenness is explained by the automatic nature of normal perception and comprehension processes.

Ward's account of the stages of insight was roughly as follows. In *Preparation*, the person constructs a representation of the problem which fails. He or she construes this failure (*Impasse*) and failure indices are stored, marking episodic information associated with the problem. When new relevant information is encountered, the indices 'guide' the person back to the problem. In the interim, information processing on the problem is suspended. In *Incubation*, the sheer passage of time is irrelevant, the main purpose being to allow the person to be incidentally exposed to stimuli. When the new relevant information is encountered, the failure indices are retrieved and "the final step to insight may be subconscious, as linked with normal perception and comprehension processes" (p. 116).

But I return to a now-familiar problem within mechanistic accounts of insight. Stimuli are said to activate an inner representational structure, much like an alarm bell ringing to wake up some dozing inner executive mind. But there is a slippage, very common in this literature, between the usage of the terms 'stimulus' and 'information'.

The former term is appropriate for subdiscursive, probably biological, processes. The latter denotes a person-level interpretation or understanding of some ‘inner’ or ‘outer’ event. Is it the failure indices which ‘recognise’ the ‘relevance’ of the ‘information’ and which then ‘guides’ the person back to the problem? And what of the “subconscious quantum leaps” which (somehow) emerge from a combination of information processing phases (p. 75)? Is it not these quantum leaps in understanding we are trying to explain? To anthropomorphise these hypothetical inner processes, or to slip in some new inner understanding which is delivered to the conscious mind, does not advance one’s understanding of insight. But the account of Seifert and colleagues (Seifert et al., 1995) is intuitively plausible and I think this is so because the authors have attempted to stick closely to the phenomenology of the insight experience.

The stretching of theoretical boundaries in order to accommodate the phenomenology of insight (for example, its suddenness, its seeming spontaneity, its unexpectedness and the immediate satisfaction it provides) is probably necessary in information processing accounts wedded to mechanistic associationism. For where is the shift from biological processes, or networks modelled on them, to intentional, proactive mentality? How do representations and patterns of activation achieve their reference, their meaning? At some point a switch to the personal level, and to the language appropriate to that level, is required. This pattern will be more in evidence in the following chapter which will explore broader cognitive approaches which take into account more definitively psychological phenomena such as intuition, tacit knowing, emotion, and social interaction.

CHAPTER 3: BROADER COGNITIVE, EXPERIENTIAL AND CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It is often the case that theorists over-reach themselves in attempting to be faithful to the subject of their inquiry, where a type of a-theoretical, even ad hoc, eclectic turn is evidenced. In this regard, fairly standard information processing (representationist) and connectionist accounts is found to be supplemented by a new language: of ‘feelings of knowing’ (Ippolito and Tweney, 1995), of ‘inceptions’ (Ippolito & Tweney, 1995), of ‘the ineffability of insight’ (Schooler & Melcher, 1995), of ‘themata’ and ‘feeling tones’ (Briggs, 1990) and of ‘intuition’ (Bowers, Regehr, Balthazard, & Parker, 1990). Such concepts sit uneasily within the usual lexicon of ‘retrieval’, ‘priming’, ‘activation thresholds’ and so on. This is not meant to be a harsh criticism. As mentioned earlier, such extra-theoretical excursions are more-or-less obligatory given the elusive nature of the antecedents of insight and its multidimensional, complex nature. These theorists were, I believe, obliged by the reported phenomenology of insight to make these moves. In any case, it is arguable that cognitive psychology is moving away from its associationistic past towards a more constructivist and pro-active rendering of the person (Mahoney, 1988, 1993; Neimeyer, 1993; Stevens, 1998).

In this vein, recent cognitive psychology volumes, including *Creative Thought* (Ward, Smith & Vaid, 1997) and *Frontiers of Cognitive Therapy* (Salkovskis, 1996), reflect this diversity, mixing functionalist, information processing accounts of insight with broader, more eclectic cognitive approaches.²⁰ This chapter will deal with some such broader approaches to insight which nonetheless still fall under the ‘cognitive’ banner. Such approaches understand insight as emerging within the dynamism of wider social, motivational and affective systems. The present treatment will be selective,

²⁰ Indeed, contemporary cognitive theorising about therapy (Salkovskis, 1996) has moved very much in a ‘constructivist’ direction emphasising dynamic subsystems of emotions and motivations as very much a part of ‘thought’ rather than as resulting from purely cognitive processing. Even Beck (1996), in his chapter with the telling title ‘Beyond belief: a theory of modes, personality and psychopathology’, now talks of ‘modes’ which are networks of “cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioural components” (p, 2).

examining only those approaches that point towards the constructivist model of insight presented later in this work. Some of the approaches discussed in Chapter 10 (Gibbs, 1997; Glucksberg; Johnson, 1987; Kittay, 1997; Lakoff, 1987; Thagard, 1997), particularly those related to ‘Cognitive Linguistics’, could be held to be a part of this ‘broader’ cognitive approach. This is true, but they are placed in the later chapter because they endorse more constructivist assumptions than traditional cognitive approaches.

Inquiring into insight is much like the mythical dilemma of mariners attempting to navigate the straits of Messina, avoiding both the monster Scylla in her cave and, opposite her, the whirlpool of Charybdis. On the one hand, we may miss the creative, generative, characteristics of insight in their entirety (which inspired this inquiry in the first place) by scrupulously avoiding the dimly lit cave of new creation. On the other hand, we risk being sucked into the whirlpool of mysticism and romantic speculation — a type of vague, Nietzschean ‘some things cannot be known’ approach. The present quest to understand such shadowy phenomena as ‘intuition’, ‘imagination’ and ‘feelings of knowing’ threatens to remove insight from the realm of rigorous, scientific inquiry. But the evidence of our own experience, and that reported by so many others, seems to require that I should attempt to include these features in a comprehensive account of insight.

3.2 INTUITION

Intuition has been earlier distinguished from insight as being an important antecedent of insight. I will use ‘intuition’ as a general rubric for a variety of conceptions, including ‘tacit knowing’ (Polanyi, 1967) and ‘feelings of knowing’ (Ippolito and Tweney, 1995). Bowers, Farvolden and Mermigis (1995) defined intuition as follows: “... the perception of clues to coherence that tacitly activates and guides thought toward an insight or hunch about the nature of the coherence in question” (p. 31). For Bowers and colleagues (Bowers et al., 1990; Bowers et al., 1995) this preliminary perception of coherence, or intuition, depends on mnemonically encoded prior knowledge. Insight, according to this analysis, has two distinct phases:

- 1) A guiding stage of insight: an initial intuitive phase marked by a graded process of activating responses stimulated by, and increasingly appropriate to, the clues available.
- 2) An integrative stage of insight: an insight phase defined in terms of a conscious recognition that one of these responses is the solution to the problem at hand.

There are two features of this approach worth emphasising. The first is that the insight experience is a consciously mediated process. It is not something that is delivered complete to the conscious mind from an unconscious mind:

Appreciating the biphasic nature of the model helps to underline that it is not the case that a hypothesis or fully fledged solution occurs unconsciously and is then simply transferred to consciousness. Rather, the very notion of hypothesis or solution implies conscious appreciation of how a particular thought or idea organises or fits the pattern of clues (Bowers et al., 1995, p. 31).

Secondly, the suddenness can be understood in terms of suddenly recognising the solution within the (unconsciously generated) arrangement of elements — rather than in terms of a sudden gestalt-like restructuring of the problem itself. That is, the process of generating the potential solution by graded semantic activation (Yaniv & Meyer, 1987; Anderson, 1983) is assumed to occur without conscious awareness, is not sudden, and is distinct from the insight experience itself. Cognition, as such, is considered to be inherently intuitive because it depends on the activation of mnemonic networks, and such processes are not conscious. Eventually, clues and problem-relevant information cause the activation to reach the threshold of consciousness, and the person ‘sees’ the solution. It is as if the ‘intuitive’ *sub rosa* activities continuously re-arrange the elements of the solution and ‘plausible’ arrangements (those that activate representations of the problem due to semantic connections) are presented to consciousness for recognition as the solution (or not). So we feel or ‘know’ that certain paths or ideas are relevant, that there is some coherence holding them together. But we have not achieved an overarching understanding (yet) as to what that coherence is. Achieving the latter understanding is to experience insight.

Intuition may not always be reliable (Bowers, 1981, Claxton, 1998), but there is strong evidence for its existence. People regularly respond with discrimination to coherences they cannot identify (Harré & Gillett, 1994). In the Waterloo Gestalt Closure Task (Bowers et al., 1990; Bowers et al., 1995), participants were asked to identify which of a variety of drawings are gestalt closure stimuli, and which are meaningless stimuli. Subjects chose the incomplete drawings derived from coherent shapes more often than those derived from incoherent shapes — even though they did not know what the completed shape might be. Given a four-word choice, one of which is the correct name for the coherent drawing, subjects chose the correct word 52% of the time (where chance equals 25%). In a variety of word-association tasks (Dyads of Triads Task, Partial Word Task and Accumulated Clues Task) Bowers and colleagues have shown that people can identify coherences at above chance levels even though they cannot state what the particular coherences are.

These authors concluded that the processes underlying insight are graded and continuous. It should be pointed out that the types of language-based task they have used are more likely to lead to this conclusion than real-world, ill-defined problems. The tasks used do not necessarily require restructuring of the problem for their solution, being basically well-defined puzzles with clear answers. For example, the Accumulated Clues Task (ACT) predisposes subjects to a graded approach to the solution as relevant evidence is added one piece at a time. The subject is given, one at a time, up to fifteen clue words which are semantic associates of the target word. Their task is to guess the target as soon as possible. This corresponds to a clue-rich ‘homing space’ (Perkins, 1995) rather than a ‘Klondike space’ requiring problem-finding strategies. Nonetheless, it is clear that we are implicitly or intuitively informed in our efforts towards coherent understandings, regardless of whether the approach to insight is continuous or discontinuous.

But there is a theoretical slippage in this account of insight. Firstly, to say that the conscious mind ‘recognises’ the imputed, previously unconscious, arrangement of

the elements as the solution begs the question,²¹ for I have defined insight as just this grasping of an intelligible, conceptual meaning that previously eluded us. Quite rightly, Bowers et al. (1990, 1995) remind us that this integrative act of understanding is defined by being conscious. But, this conscious ‘recognition’ is another way of describing the act we wish to explain. Secondly, the authors’ account depends on a more-or-less clear separation of unconscious and conscious levels of awareness. Indeed, it is this separation that they use to explain the perception-like suddenness of conscious recognition. We have here two levels of mind: the subdiscursive, *quasi-psychological* level of automatic associations which is unconscious, and the conscious insight experience which is definably *psychological*. Most of the ‘work’ towards insight is done at the mechanical level of automatic associations or responses. Yet the authors acknowledged that it takes a person’s capacity for insight (which is what we are trying to explain) to turn these sub-intentional associations into insightful understanding.

An important question is, therefore, ‘how do the intuitions enter into our awareness such that they can guide our understanding’? It seems commonplace for people to become aware of intuitive preferences or leanings towards certain ideas or strategies before they understand the coherences that may unite those preferences (as we have seen above). The conscious ‘mind’, in ongoing efforts to solve some problem, must be in *ongoing* interaction with this difficult-to-articulate level of thought. As such, conscious awareness may not be defined in terms of the ‘on/off’ threshold which Bowers and colleagues used to explain suddenness. That is, there must be ‘communication’ between these levels in an ongoing fashion for our thought to be ‘guided’ by our intuitions.

What is useful about this account is that it tried to account for the experimental re-arranging of the elements, the playing with the data of experience, which may well occur at a low level of awareness before the actual insight. It also drew attention to the intimations of knowing, to a type of knowing which one is not immediately capable of verbalising and which is nonetheless pervasive. At the very least, it signals a need for a

²¹ It also raises again the spectre of the mind-within-a-mind. In what way can one’s conscious mind ‘see’ something presented or arranged by another part of mind?

more complex layering to our knowing — that there are layers within knowing which simultaneously inform each other, mutually providing context and depth. Bowers and colleagues have suggested we are ‘guided’ in our efforts to understand before we consciously appropriate the coherence underlying that guidance. If it is granted that intuition is the process whereby we are guided by a level of knowing that is difficult to articulate, what is still needed is an account of how this guidance may take place. ‘Inceptions’ are an intermediary-type mental process that Ippolito and Tweney (1995) suggested may assist in this account.

3.3 INCEPTIONS

Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads
without Improvement are roads of Genius.

(William Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)

Ippolito and Tweney’s (1995) account of insight focused on the preparation phase. They reasoned that it is here, as with expert problem-solvers, that the more insightful person differs from most other people in terms of strategies and skills. The authors identified the following characteristics as predicting insightfulness: superior memory, the capacity to recognise complex patterns, having a ‘deep’ representation of the problem, having a ‘qualitative’ analysis of the problem, persistent self-monitoring (metacognitions), and being specialists in that domain. Clearly, possessing a superior memory would be an advantage in both accessing remote analogies and being able to draw upon the wealth of knowledge a specialist might be expected to have in his or her field. However, the capacities to recognise complex patterns and to have a ‘deep’ representation of the problem seem, once again, to merely ‘re-describe’ the features of insight (Kline, 1991; Smedslund, 1984). More positively, persistent self-monitoring suggests a goal-directed purposefulness that recalls the Gestalt emphasis on intentional restructuring of the problem. It also suggests a constant interplay between conscious awareness and one’s more tacit or intuitive modes of thought — suggested as being required in the previous discussion of intuition. Being able to form a qualitative analysis of the problem recalls the above-reported findings within the cognitive

literature that it is an advantage to be able to draw back from the problem and see it in more abstract terms (Gick & Lockhart, 1995; Schooler et al., 1995; Ward, 1995).

Together with periodic re-examinations and re-arrangements of the elements of the problem, this latter characteristic led to Ippolito and Tweney's (1995) twin concepts of 'perceptual rehearsal' and 'inceptions'.

A ubiquitous practice among artists is to immerse themselves in the media of their artform. Writers may simply write words to stimulate their creative energies, painters may experiment with lines, colours and textures, and musicians or composers may simply extemporise on their instrument, listening as much as 'directing' the flow of notes (Epel, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1995). Ippolito and Tweney (1995) referred to this saturation of the senses with aspects of the phenomena of interest to the discoverer as 'perceptual rehearsal'.

In a manner which recalls Martindale's (1995) 'defocused attention' (causing shallow association gradients), this type of domain-specific reverie was theorised to perturb "the typical process of automatic selection that yields perceptions, thereby expanding the ability of the problem solver to contemplate the unexpected" (Ippolito & Tweney, 1995, p. 439). Consistent with William Blake's observation above, rather than taking a more obvious 'improved' and 'strait' road, a relatively creative, circuitous ('crooked') route is preferred. It was theorised that this perceptual rehearsal absorbs the capacity of short term memory thus preventing premature closure, entrenchment and functional fixedness. Frequently it takes the form of a deliberate delaying of one's commitment to a hypothesis, a type of circumspection which is capable of learning from failures. The authors likened it to Keats' 'negative capability':

... that is, when a man [sic] is capable of being in uncertainties,
mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.
[letter to G. and T. Keats, 21 Dec. 1817]. (Page, 1965, p. 53)

I note here for the first time, but certainly not for the last, an indication of an emotional capacity that may be tied to the potential for creative insight. This is a type of transcending state of calm which allays the anxieties 'normally' attendant upon confusion and the inability to anticipate events. A question arises: 'why do we continue

searching and struggling for understanding if it is upsetting'? An answer to such a question is not forthcoming in Ippolito and Tweney but will later be argued to be connected to a transcending affective calm which engenders confidence in one's capacity to negotiate successfully periods of uncertainty and suffering. This will be a key issue in the later discussion of the role of 'emotion' in insight.

Perceptual rehearsal eventually gives way to what Ippolito and Tweney (1995) called 'inceptions'. The authors considered these inceptions critical to insight. From the Latin 'to take in', inceptions are "the ability to recreate the workings of selected aspects of the world, independent of sensory receptor input" (p. 442). They are a type of half-way house between the perceptual and symbolic levels and are abstract enough to generate novelty, yet concrete enough to map onto practical events. Inceptions recall the types of playing with images so characteristic of anecdotal reports of creative breakthroughs. A good example of this is Einstein's report of his own creative processes:

(A) The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined... .

... (B) The above mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some of muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will. (cited in Hadamard, 1945, p. 142)

We will later see various parallels to this idea of combinatory play and looser, perhaps cross-modal, 'imageable' thought. For now, Einstein seems to be describing something very close to inceptions which arise from perceptual rehearsal (associative play with mental imagery²²). These selected sensory reconstructions are, in terms of one's intended purpose, motivated by a desire to achieve logically connected concepts, but they are initially chosen intuitively. Note in addition that, when established, they can be

²² 'Mental imagery' is meant to include all types including visual, olfactory, kinesthetic and 'somesthetic', auditory, and gustatory imagery.

manipulated ‘at will’ — again confirming the view that there is a continuing dialectic between rational consciousness and less reportable forms of thought. Ippolito and Tweney (1995) considered that ‘feelings of knowing’ guide the selection of inceptions. They called this the ‘selection touchstone’:

... an individual’s belief, unsubstantiated by factual information, that he or she is capable of proceeding in a way that will lead to a successful solution to the problem at hand, the sense that the right answer is within the reach of the problem-solver. (1995, p. 447)

What forms this selection touchstone is both domain-specific knowledge and one’s past problem-solving experience and, probably, “high generality heuristics” (1995, p. 448) — the latter recalling the importance of abstracting the problem and of ‘failure indices’ (Seifert et al., 1995). This is the ‘gradient of deepening coherence’ that Polanyi referred to and these authors related this to the emotive aspects of the insight experience. The joy of the Aha! experience, according to Ippolito and Tweney (1995), is a function of self-validation. To discover something is to confirm that one’s anticipatory, interpretative ability is intact and working well, especially considering the impasse-induced anxiety experienced in earlier attempts at solution.

3.4 WIDENING THE NET: INTERACTIONS OF KNOWING, PURPOSE AND AFFECT WITHIN A SOCIAL CONTEXT.

The creativity literature places insight within a more panoramic landscape. To understand insight more fully it is helpful to locate it within a wider motivational, emotional and social context (rather than the relatively narrow, intrapersonal cognitive emphasis we have examined thus far). For example, we have seen that experimental psychology has tended to define insight in terms of problem solving. Gruber (1995), however, broadened the definition of insight. He reminded us that Köhler (1929) hardly mentioned problem solving in the context of insight. Rather, the latter emphasised insight as a subjective sense of understanding, a feeling that things make sense. As Köhler put it, insight reveals a *verständlicher zusammenhang* or ‘understandable relationship’ which emerges when one experiences a sense of insight. This feeling of

understanding is not confined to words or propositions, but includes affective and aesthetic feelings of ‘rightness’ as much as perceptual or ‘cognitive’ shifts in understanding. The traditional stages of insight can still be maintained, only now with a more inclusive phenomenology of insight, moving beyond a ‘cognitive’-only content for insights.

3.4.1 Insight: A Multifaceted Phenomenon

Consistent with this multifaceted approach to insight, Wallace (1991), in her study of sudden insight in the creation of literature, believed that insight pertains to a ‘family’ of phenomena. “The family includes problem finding, ... problem resolution, synthesis, discovering similarities, analogies, increase in certainty, recognising error, the *mot juste*...” (1991, pp. 41-42). Moreover, each insight has various facets:

1. Firstly, it has a *developmental* facet. Although insight may be experienced as a sudden discontinuity from previous efforts, “it is actually an intricate, microgenetic process” (1991, p. 48) embedded within a larger purpose or project.
2. The second is a *modality* facet. Insight may be unimodal or crossmodal.
3. Thirdly, the *organisational* facet refers to the integration of previously unrelated elements into an harmonious whole — often in literature a work is structured around a central or seminal image or insight.

Insights can also be classified in terms of combinations of the precipitating conditions and the person’s state at the time. Thus, the precipitating conditions may involve observations of an external event, conversation or dialogue with others, apparent passive ‘reception’ while alone, or direct work on the problem or task. In relation to psychological and mental states, the person may be consciously focusing on the task, may be fully awake but not focusing on the task, or may be in a state of reverie.

1. The Developmental Facet

Insight, according to Wallace (1991), is a ‘microgenetic’ process or rapid sequence of developmental change which is embedded in a larger developmental sequence or

‘macrogenetic’ process. She described Dorothy Richardson’s invention of the ‘stream of consciousness’ genre in novel-writing, as evidenced in her thirteen volume *Pilgrimage*. Wallace showed how the ‘sudden’ insight that made this invention possible was deeply rooted in years of extended searching and struggle with the conventional narrative form. Moreover, Richardson’s breakthrough was twofold: she first identified a problem in literary form (the first major insight). She then solved that problem with her subsequent insight into a revolutionary narrative form, the stream of consciousness.

2. The Modality Facet

Richardson’s first insight included a visual, and probably kinaesthetic, image which was the kernel for her massive work. This was in the form of a mental image of the central character, Miriam, walking up some stairs. This provoked Richardson’s question “But who was there to describe her?” [when she disappeared from view up the stairs]. The solution to this question was to do away with the all-seeing author, to be replaced by a ‘stream of consciousness’ from the character herself.

Another classic example of cross-modal, insightful thinking is given in Kekulé’s famous account of his insight into his *Strukturtheorie*. In 1890 Kekulé described his (1854) reverie while on an omnibus:

... and lo, the atoms were gambolling before my eyes! Whenever hitherto, these diminutive beings appeared to me, they had always been in motion; but up to that time I had never been able to discern the nature of their motion. Now, however, I saw how, frequently, two smaller atoms united to form a pair; how a larger one embraced two smaller ones; how still larger ones kept hold of three or even four of the smaller; whilst the whole kept whirling in a giddy dance. I saw how the larger ones formed a chain, dragging the smaller ones after them, but only at the end of the chain... . I spent part of the night in putting on paper at least sketches of these dream forms. (cited in Gruber, 1995, p. 408)

We see here, not mere imagery, but a mode of ‘visual thought’ that Kekulé (a trained architect) habitually practised. In a manner similar to Einstein’s account given earlier of ‘muscular images’ (images with a kinaesthetic, perhaps visceral or ‘somaesthetic’ feel), the images are thoroughly informed by abstract and domain-specific chemical knowledge. The images are consolidated by utilising another mode of thought

(sketching them later) and eventually are re-expressed in words and equations. Indeed, as Gruber points out, the structures that remain invariant across these modal transformations *are* the author's ideas. It should also be noted that here again is seen the spontaneity and exteriority of the imagery: the atoms 'gambol' before his eyes as if they have a life of their own. Finally, it will be left to a later discussion of cross-modal synesthesia (Hunt, 1995), to prepare the ground for this feature of insight to be incorporated into a theoretical understanding of insight.

3. The Organisational Facet:

Following much struggle and 'preparation' Richardson's approach to novel-writing was suddenly reorganised as was her method for this particular work. Wallace (1991) went on to report how novelists frequently describe "a grain, a seed, an image from which a whole novel evolves" (1991, p. 45). Novelists also often describe an image or dream which stimulates and 'organises' the subsequent story (Epel, 1993). Usually these accounts reflect the sense of being 'given' the insight or of a 'listening' to dialogue which seems to come from 'outside'. Thus a common feature of insight is its *spontaneity* and its concomitant feeling of *exteriority* or *objectification* (Gruber, 1995). Importantly, however, Wallace (1991) emphasised the active anticipation and preparation, the readiness, that precedes and makes possible the 'receipt' of insights. In fact, when one examines a creative life closely, as Gruber (1981, 1995) has done, insights come in the context of episodes within episodes of inquiry, one sequence overlapping the other. The inquiring person covers the 'same' ground many times, from different angles, using different modalities of thought and different transformations of images, 'feeling' the significance of elements as much as 'thinking' them. Gruber (1981, p. 58) concluded: "The multiplicity of perspectives grows slowly through hard work and sets the stage for the *re*-cognition we experience as new insight." This latter point should not be mis-interpreted. As I understand Gruber here, 're-cognition' is not a matter of recalling or retrieving a previous cognition, but is more a matter of a fresh understanding of the elements and events one has explored.

3.4.2 Evolving Systems Approach To Insight

What is seen emerging in Gruber's (1981, 1995) and Wallace's (1991) approaches to insight is the need to move beyond understanding insight only in terms of the organisation of knowledge, but to also see it in terms of the organisation of the person's purposes and affects. Gruber's (1995) 'Evolving Systems Approach' understands insight as a part of a coherent, purposeful life. His approach was to examine the diverse psychological and psycho-social dynamics that constitute our lives. Thus he used a detailed case-study methodology, a type of biographical 'sleuthing', to fully place accounts of insight in personal, historical and cultural context. With his detailed accounts of famous creators, Gruber (1981, 1995) argued convincingly that insight, a definably 'private' experience, nonetheless always reflects social history and the context of the time and the field. Accordingly, an insight is not considered solely an intrapersonal phenomenon.

For Gruber (1995), creative insights are regulated by the thinker's conscious and enduring purposes. Summarising the views of Poincaré and of Einstein on the genesis of their insights, Gruber concluded that the great creators set up a mental situation with specific constraints, "all promoting the likelihood that thinking will go in a certain direction" (p. 418). Having an enduring purpose does not mean the path to fruition is pre-determined. Rather, as we have seen in the experimental cognitive literature, creative people work from first principles (abstract frameworks and heuristics) and have only a very general sense of the shape the final product may manifest, the process being at times intuitive, or 'unconscious' in its progression.

Gruber (1995) criticised the image presented in some contemporary accounts of insight of the person as being in an 'affect-less state' until some event triggers an emotion. In contrast, he considered that people simultaneously manifest a stream of thought, a stream of purpose and a stream of affect, all of which are in constant interaction. In his descriptions of the period leading up to and following Darwin's 'Malthusian' moment (when he reputedly had his big insight into natural selection), Gruber (1995) highlighted the air of excitement that led up to, and followed, this

discovery. Of central importance here is that Darwin did not immediately take up the implications of his discovery while reading Malthus. Gruber demonstrated that Darwin was, at this time, generally intellectually stimulated and excited (as evidenced by his notebooks and letters) wherein he was working long hours with insights coming thick and fast.

There is little doubt that Darwin was experiencing a ‘gradient of deepening coherence’ fed and maintained by the intrinsic rewards (Amabile, 1990) of his efforts. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1995, 1996) would express it, he was in ‘flow’. And it may be that this general state of passionate absorption, emotional satisfaction, even joy, marks the emotional dimensions of Martindale’s (1995) ‘defocused attention’, an emotionality not discussed in his account. This altered state of consciousness — where creative tasks require less cortical activation than normal, and where the person has the capacity to attend to many more aspects at once than he or she usually can — is widely reported in both the insight and creativity literature.

For people in this state, attention is not distracted, nor is it narrowly focused. Normally we think of effective mental work resulting from a person ‘concentrating hard’ or ‘working hard’, but here the relevant description is more likely to be ‘concentrating easily’ or ‘working easily’. Furthermore, creative people report an absence of self-doubt, self-judgement and self-concern while in this state (Epel, 1993). In fact, this state is often experienced as a type of liberation from ‘self’ (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1996) in which nothing but the field of awareness is felt to exist. Many creators in the single-minded pursuit of this experience forsake other areas of their lives, often sacrificing both relationships and health. Gardner (1993), in his study of famous twentieth century creators, called this their ‘Faustian bargain’ — a type of “semi-magical, semi-mystical arrangement” (p. 386) whereby the creator believes they are special or called to higher duties. This creative mode, even if it is not commonplace, promises to highlight features of creative insight. Accordingly, I will now explore the psychology of ‘flow’.

3.4.3 Insight And ‘Flow’

3.4.3.1 The Flow Experience

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defined the flow experience as:

... the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it. (p. 4)

This occurs when a person’s capacities are stretched to their limits in efforts towards a project both difficult and (to them) worthwhile. It is reminiscent of Kelly’s (1955, 1980) Experience Cycle (see Chapter 6), an optimal mode of being for human beings as experience is enthusiastically sought in the service of one’s anticipations. The phenomenology of flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is characterised by the following eight interconnected features:

1. Flow occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing.
2. We are able to concentrate on what we are doing.
3. This concentration is made possible partly by clear goals.
4. One also must have immediate feedback.
5. Immediate feedback allows one to act with deep and effortless involvement “that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life” (p. 49).
6. Enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their lives.
7. As concern for self disappears, paradoxically, a sense of self grows stronger.
8. One’s sense of time is altered.

This list of aspects both recalls features of insight we are familiar with and helps clarify new avenues of inquiry. Firstly, however, it is necessary to point out that ‘flow’ and insight are not the same thing. Insight may or may not occur within this powerfully absorbing experience. Nonetheless, it would seem that the experience of flow would be highly conducive to insight — or may even be stimulated by the experience of an

insight — and there is much overlap between the two experiences. For example, the literature examined so far has accustomed us to the idea that the search for insight is a goal-directed activity [3], that insight occurs within an ongoing immersion in a project and draws upon available but ‘un-grasped’ relationships between the elements of solution [1]. Further, we have seen that particular modes of attention or concentration, for example defocused attention (Martindale, 1995), are associated with creative insight [2, 3]. Finally, the emphasis on immediate feedback [4] is reflected in the importance granted to metacognitions (Metcalfe & Wiebe, 1987; Perkins, 1995; Seifert et al., 1995) within the insight literature.

Aspects 5-8, on the other hand, suggest additional avenues of investigation and stimulate questions only occasionally referred to in the mainstream literature. I have made passing reference to the importance of emotion in the insight process (Gruber, 1981, 1995), but here emotion is seen as a defining condition, a constituent of flow. An important question arises: ‘Is emotion also a defining condition or constituent of insight rather than a mere precursor or response to insight?’ In addition, the lack of self-concern and self-awareness is presented by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as leading to both a sense of control and, perhaps surprisingly, to a stronger sense of self [5, 6, 7]. Consequently, another question presents itself: ‘What relationship is there between the capacity for insight and a capacity to be (relatively) free of self-concern?’

In particular, assuming that identity or core aspects of self are involved in people’s creative pursuits, how do people deal with the inevitable frustrations and potential personal invalidations implicit in the notion of impasse? Impasse and frustration clearly play a role in *generating* thought and creativity, but they also threaten to de-rail it. To what extent is the task perceived as a ‘test’ of one’s ability or identity within a field, and to what extent is it pursued for its own sake? We are reminded here of the role of intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1990). If the task is inherently enjoyable [6], then presumably impasse and frustration is less likely to threaten one’s self-image and less likely to cause deep-seated anxiety. Therefore, the capacity not to have one’s efforts be driven by performance criteria (either bringing

material or ‘reputational’ rewards) may well be related to the capacity for creative insight.²³ Finally, reference is made to an altered mode of consciousness in which one’s sense of time is changed [8]. Is insight, therefore, characterised by an altered mode of consciousness? These questions will be taken up in the passages and chapters that follow.

3.4.3.2 An Altered Sense Of Self

As we have seen, much of the phenomenology of flow resembles the experience of insight itself. Both resemble aspects of meditative and presentational states (Hutchinson, 1949c; Hunt, 1995; Langer, 1957, 1972; Varela et al, 1996). As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) put it: “Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward” (p. 64).²⁴ This experience is reported as being intrinsically rewarding. In fact, substituting extrinsic rewards for these inner ones usually results in less creativity (Amabile, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi called this flow experience an ‘autotelic’ experience, from the Greek *auto* = self, and *telos* = goal. The ‘autotelic’ nature of insight is reflected in anecdotal reports describing the insight experience as self-generating, as if it had a life and goal of its own (Epel, 1993; Hutchinson, 1949c). We will see later that this aspect of insight corresponds to what Rychlak (1977) calls our innate capacity to *telospond* (as distinct from respond).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) considered that flow experiences lead to further differentiation and integration of consciousness — although he was not very explicit about what this entails. He argued there is an optimal balance between anxiety and boredom wherein we either increase our skills or attempt to decrease the challenges which confront us. Too much avoidance leads to boredom and psychological decline,

²³ The case is not being made here that this relative freedom from self-concern or self-judgement evidenced in flow or in creative insight experiences should necessarily extend beyond the domain of those experiences. That is, there is no reason to believe that creative artists, insightful scientists and so on should evidence more than average insight into their personal relationships, for example, or would show less personal doubts and worries than other people outside their speciality. On the contrary, Gardner’s (1993) account seems to suggest the opposite.

²⁴ See also Matte-Blanco (1988) and the experience of being absorbed into the infinite ‘other’, of feeling absorbed into the media around us.

while challenges beyond our skill levels lead to anxiety. In addition, two processes, anomie and alienation, are considered antithetical to flow (Czikszenmihalyi, 1990). Both of these experiences were considered by Czikszenmihalyi to be socially mediated and are represented by the extremes of anxiety and boredom respectively.

Anomie is literally a lack of rules: one's behaviour, values and beliefs become erratic and meaningless. It is akin to a type of attentional disorder. What prevents flow is a fragmentation of attentional processes reflecting inner anxiety. Given that one determinant of insight is what Czikszenmihalyi called the 'Domain' (a symbolic system of rules and procedures defining permissible behaviour in one's 'Field'), failures to internalise the rules of the domain, or indeed a lack of rules within the domain itself, can lead to an inability to anticipate and function in that field. When there is too much challenge, and not enough clues to guide inquiry, the person's efforts are hampered by anxiety. Alienation, on the other hand, occurs where people feel constrained to act in ways that go against their goals and values and beliefs. It leads to excessive rigidity and boredom. Creativity and insightfulness, for example, can be inhibited within organisations where employees feel their goals, and skills and ideas are being ignored in favour of imposed standard procedures. At a personal level, a type of 'psychic entropy' can extinguish insightfulness.

The psychic entropy peculiar to the human condition involves seeing more than one can actually accomplish and feeling able to accomplish more than what conditions allow. But this becomes possible only if one keeps in mind more than one goal at a time, being aware at the same time of competing desires. It can only happen when the mind knows not only what it *is*, but also what it *could be*. The more complex any system, the more room it leaves open for alternatives, and the more things that can go wrong with it. (1990, p. 228)

Inner conflict is the result of competing claims on attention. Too many desires, too many incompatible goals struggle to marshal the available psychic energy towards their own ends. It follows that the only way to reduce conflict is by sorting out the essential claims from those that are not, and by arbitrating priorities among those that remain. Otherwise the person either suffers the anxiety of increasingly distracted attention, or

endures the stultifying effects of narrowing one's thinking, of suppressing the complexity one feels threatened by.

3.4.3.3 The Pragmatics Of Creating Insights

Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) presented illuminating accounts of the working regimes and of the subjective experiences of eminently creative people. Their respondents were people who had made creative contributions to the arts, social sciences, natural sciences, politics or business, most of whom were over sixty and who were still actively involved in their specialist domain. Keeping to their distinction between presented problem-solving (puzzles) and ill-defined problem-solving ('real-life' problems), they discussed everyday insight and larger, more ground-breaking insights.

For day-to-day insights a relatively short preparation stage of a day or two, with incubation periods measuring in the hours, are followed by small 'working' insights, often daily, and often in the mornings. Talking to colleagues is important to most respondents and structuring the day to include a period of solitary idle time to follow a period of hard work is almost universal: "Many of [the respondents] told us that without this solitary, quiet time, they would never have their most important ideas. ... Several respondents keep their mind idle by engaging in repetitive physical activity on a daily basis" (pp. 347-348). Almost invariably the insights come in this idle time where they may be evaluated straightaway or later shared with colleagues.

Large-scale insights to 'discovered problems' followed the same pattern, but over extended timescales and usually involved extensive knowledge across domains. For example, a physicist described a groundbreaking discovery in quantum electrodynamics:

You have six months of very hard work first and get all the components bumping around in your head, and then you have to be idle for a couple of weeks, and then — ping — it suddenly falls into place. Then I had to spend another six months afterward working out the details and writing it up and so forth. (p. 350)

The *preparation* phase can take years while one is in apprenticeship to a field: learning the basics, keeping current with others' work, internalising the social norms and so on. Gardner (1993), in his study of eminently creative people, concluded it takes about ten years to master a domain. Most respondents described a period on vacation or sabbatical (*incubation*) as leading up to major insights. Indeed, "most respondents had rich, well-developed metacognitive theories of the importance of 'off-time'" (Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 1995, p. 352). This 'incubation' period was often described in terms of unconscious ideas or half-conscious, dreamlike knowledge:

Somewhere in your mind, there is a great variety of things, disconnected fragments of ideas and thoughts and symbols and so forth. The creative process is somehow just shaking and sorting these until somehow a combination fits together and makes sense. (p. 353)

All respondents in this research (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 1995) had richly elaborated narratives about their insights (all of which occurred following periods of incubation). Nonetheless, most also in hindsight recognised how much a part of the 'field' and of their times their insights were. Again, respondents emphasised the social dimension following an insight: the need to develop insights into complete solutions and to communicate it to colleagues or to publish it (*elaboration and verification*).

3.4.3.4 Insight: A Social Phenomenon

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1996) and Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) saw insight as a social phenomenon. According to their 'systems model', all creative insights emerge from the interactions of three elements: the Domain, the Individual, and the Field. The Domain is a symbolic system of rules and procedures defining permissible behaviour, while the Field is a group of gatekeepers who select what is worthwhile. All insights occur within the constraints of the symbolic system in which the individual is working (physics, musical composition, fiction-writing and so on), are dependent on the skills and capacities of the individual (including his or her capacity to interact with and learn from others), and are either accepted or rejected by those who hold power within the

‘field’ (the ‘gatekeepers’). Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) argued that the social dimensions of insight have been largely ignored: “.. the moment of insight appears as but one short flash in a complex, time-consuming, fundamentally social process” (1995, p. 331). It is the periods of hard work preceding and following the flash of insight that are deeply rooted in interactions with colleagues and marks the insight itself as a largely social process. They found in their interviews that creative individuals, when describing a moment of creative insight, provided:

... extended narratives that described not just a single moment but a complex, multi-stage process, with frequent discussions of interpersonal contact, strategic or political considerations, and awareness of the paradigm, of what questions were interesting as defined by the discipline”. (1995, p. 334)

They concluded that insight would be meaningless outside that social context. More radically, they considered that insight is structured socially. With explicit references to the pragmatism of Dewey, Mead, Vygotsky and James, they suggested that the ‘mental’ is internalised social activity. As will be seen in the next section, in attempting to explain insight, they also presented an explanation for how the social ‘enters into’ the individual’s mind

3.4.3.5 Explaining Flow And Insight

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) asked ‘what happens during mysterious idle time’? He cited neurophysiological evidence that those who report regularly experiencing flow, when concentrating their attention on brief light flashes, showed decreased cortical activation, while subjects who rarely experienced flow showed increased activation. For people adept at flow, concentration seems to require less effort. It may be that irrelevant cortical activity is somewhat suspended allowing the person a more sustained, non-distracted attention. To help explain this phenomenon, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) made reference to a distinction between serial and parallel processing. He speculated that conscious thinking is serial or linear and thereby more familiar or predictable. In the non-linear ‘subconscious’, however:

... ideas can combine and pursue each other each and every which way. Because of this freedom, original connections that would at first be rejected by the rational mind have a chance to become established. (1996, p. 102)

Csikszentmihalyi theorised that the unconscious is an internalisation of previously conscious learning which still, thereby, reflects social constraints and structures (see also Hunt, 1995; Polanyi, 1967 for similar arguments). It should be noted that ideas would not, therefore, ‘combine and pursue each other each and every which way’ (note the anthropomorphism) as he suggested, but are likely to be quite structured in terms of the relevant domain — as my earlier foray into the cognitive literature suggested. In fact, inconsistent with this ‘every which way’ portrayal of unconscious processes, he went on to implicate social ordering of the mind: “We internalise the knowledge of the domain, the concerns of the field, and they become part of the way our minds are organized” (1966. p. 102).

For Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the key component of insight was the ‘filtering mechanism’ by which socially-mediated, conscious material is passed into the subconscious. Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) claimed that it is the social influences of the Domain and the Field which, through acculturation, mentoring, reading and apprenticeship, build the ‘subconscious filtering network’. A three level model of the preparation and incubation stages was given:

1. Conscious attention (serial processing) in the preparation stage.
2. Semiconscious filters formed as an internal mental image of the Domain and Field.
3. Subconscious processing entities or the Society of the Mind position (Minsky, 1985).

Sustained conscious work allows the person to master the domain and to attempt solutions to problems and challenges. The authors argued that the unconscious filtering process is structured by the Field and by the Domain, particularly by discourse:

Although the subconscious network cannot be manipulated directly by consciousness, the conscious creation and development of this filter (through education, mentoring or apprenticeship, through reading

books) can influence the subconscious network indirectly.
(Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 1995, p. 341)²⁵

The third level above is based on PDP and a spreading activation metaphor. This subconscious network comprises distributed and parallel ‘processing entities’ which ‘view’ multiple pieces of information simultaneously. Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer (1995) speculated that the links between such pieces of information are treated in a “subconscious generate-and-test fashion ... [whereby] many smaller entities are interacting randomly and perhaps collectively working on many problems” (1995, p. 342).

It should be obvious by my use of ‘scare quotes’ in the above that Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer have arguably slipped into anthropomorphizing and reifying these hypothetical processes. Thus patterns of activation are said to be *entities* that can *view* information, can *test* it, can *interact* and can *work on* problems. Again, found here is a projection of the types of properties, skills and capacities normally attributable to a person onto hypothetical inner processes. This is reminiscent of Dennett’s (1983) explanation of the genesis of consciousness in terms of an ‘army of idiots’, and it shares the shortcomings of that explanation. According to Dennett, at each descending level of processing complexity, the processing units (‘idiots’) are more ‘stupid’ than the last, eventually descending to mindless physiological processes. As Dennett himself conceded, however, this is just pushing the problem to a vague explanatory remove. The problems are obvious: who is doing the viewing, testing, interacting and working? And where does the insight occur?

These questions are apparently answered by Csikszentmihalyi (1996): “The insight presumably occurs when a subconscious connection between ideas fits so well that it is forced to pop out into awareness” (p. 104). Thus, the insight occurs at the conscious level where the person recognises something about this ‘subconscious connection’. This account, however, shares a major flaw with standard representational computational theories of cognition (Shanon, 1993). That is ‘somebody’ in the

²⁵ See later (in particular in discussion of Harré & Gillett, 1993 and Shanon, 1991, 1993) for more detailed treatment of how, it is argued, that discourse structures the mind.

unconscious must have decided the idea ‘fitted’ (had the insight that it was an insight) and thereby the unconscious is endowed with the sorts of (conscious) properties it was invoked to explain. This, for example, parallels the ‘standard’ account of memory as retrieval. In remembering, the unconscious processing must ‘know’ 1) what it is looking for in order to retrieve it, in which case there is no memory task, and 2) whether what it finds matches or not, which again presupposes the memory issue.

Quite rightly, Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer recognised that the “paradox for the creative individual is somehow to direct this un-directable unconscious process so that useful insights result” (1995, p. 339). The authors revealed that insight is, after all, “a type of information retrieval, the reverse of the information storage flow in the preparation stage” (p. 343). How this can be is not clear. For what defines insight is the ‘seeing’ of a *new* pattern of relationships or *new* connections between previously known information. This new act of understanding was not ‘stored’ in the preparation stage. The elements of the solution may have been placed in memory, but not the solution itself.

Further, Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) went on to suggest that a ‘constructive’ process is in operation whereby the subconscious ‘recognises’ similarities between ideas and configurations in different domains and combines them in novel ways. Clearly this novelty was not stored and then retrieved. In the end the insight process is shrouded in mystery, placing human skills and abilities in the dark recesses of the ‘subconscious’. It is not to deny a role for ‘unconscious’ processes in the generation of insight, but it is to suggest that such processes need to be placed within a framework which does not merely redescribe the process it professes to explain.

3.4.4 ‘Emotional’ Themata And Thinking

We have seen that Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) believed that negative emotional processes such as anomie and alienation are inimical to insight and to the experience of flow. In contrast, positive emotional experiences such as lacking self concern, feeling in control, and enjoying intrinsically motivating activities are felt to be

conducive to insight. Accordingly, I will now begin to link ‘emotional’ processes and insight by way of a discussion of Briggs’ (1990) concept of ‘themata’.

In his evocatively titled *Fire in the Crucible* Briggs (1990) considered that clusters of presuppositions or ‘gut’ assumptions are the guiding, visionary elements leading to creativity. Borrowing from Holton (1978), Briggs called these presuppositions ‘themata’. They are emotionally important, enduring ideas or themes which have aesthetic and emotional qualities. He gave as examples the assumptions that the universe is basically symmetrical (or asymmetrical), or that the true order of things is hierarchical, or that the structure of reality is in constant flux, and so on. Although these are highly abstract ideas, Briggs emphasised they are more like a ‘concrete feel for the world’ which often have a visual component and which are often tacit or unconscious. Such themata ‘attune’ us to certain features of the world, predisposing one to ‘see’ or ‘feel’ the world in certain fundamental ways. Importantly, themata are characterised by an emotional ‘nuance’, an “aura or nimbus that surrounds a thema or several themata, the energy that infuses thematic convictions” (Briggs, 1990, p. 26).

This emotional nuance is characterised as a ‘feeling tone’ whereby thoughts and memories may be coded or ‘logged’ into the brain. Briggs (1990) utilised the work of systems scientists LaViolette (1980) and Gray (1979) who emphasised the neurophysiological connections between the ‘limbic system’, particularly the amygdala (largely implicated in our emotional experience), and the neocortex (associated with reasoning and ‘higher’ systems of thought). In particular, he discussed the role of the ‘PCDT loop’ (prefrontal-cortex-dorsomedial-thalamic) which complements the ‘Papez circuit’, linking the limbic system to the rest of the brain. Complex streams of relatively ‘raw’ or unprocessed impulses first pass through the thalamus into the limbic system and subsequent thoughts are abstracted from this emotionally-nuanced complex. As LaViolette put it: “Thoughts are stereotypes or simplifications of emotional themes” (1980, cited in Briggs, 1990, p. 50). It is not only that these ‘feeling tones’ are prior to conscious thought, but also that a sensitivity to such feelings *before* they are abstracted

into a thought puts the person in touch with “data of far greater complexity. Such sensitivity fosters creativity and the ability to see things in new ways” (Briggs, 1990, p. 56, based on an interview with LaViolette). Not wanting to move too far away from the thrust of Briggs’ discussion here, I will discuss contemporary research into emotion and thought, and how these ideas of Briggs may find support there, in a later chapter. It is enough to indicate here that Briggs was enmeshing emotion with thought and linking such ‘emotional thought’ with creative insight. Significant too was his conviction that emotional thought may be more, rather than less, complex than conscious thought.

Briggs (1990) believed thought that is fundamentally polarised. That is, in everyday thought we assert one pole of a discrimination over another. He considered, however, that creative people differ from others in that they can better tolerate ambivalence (Keats’ ‘negative capability’, see above 3.3). When one is no longer asserting one opposite or another of the basic polarities of thought, but undergoes a momentary “suspension of thought” (p. 115), one experiences what Briggs calls ‘omnivalence’.²⁶ Briggs called this capacity for omnivalence ‘Janusian thinking’, an ability to conceive of multiple opposites or antitheses simultaneously. Such omnivalence leads to a need to transcend the level of contrasts, and in so doing to create images of ‘wide scope’. This recalls Ward’s (1995) notion of a ‘highly abstract characterization’ which allows one to move up one implicative chain and to descend a different one opening up new solution possibilities. It also is compatible with Ippolito and Tweney’s (1995) notion of ‘inceptions’ as a type of bridge between tacit, quasi-perceptual imagery and more conscious awareness. Such images, for Briggs, “... seem often to mark the first surfacing into a concrete form of the inchoate, emotional, and sensory qualities of a creator’s vision” (1990, p. 194). In this way Briggs’ more figurative theoretical language finds support in the cognitive literature generally.

Finally, Briggs (1990) summarised the features that a creative person develops. The person must be able to turn deficits into talents, to make “maps of maps in the brain to enrich synaesthesia” (1990, p. 265), to develop the capacity for absorption, to form

²⁶ This anticipates the experience of non-distinction or infinity that Matte-Blanco (1988) attributed to ‘symmetrical’ thinking, a thinking he said is characteristic of the unconscious (see Chapter 9).

images of wide scope and to practice Janusian thinking. This leads to what Briggs called the “creative self-organising structure” (1990, p. 266) which feeds on self-criticism, constant feedback (metacognitions) and a playful absorption in the activities of the domain. Such an ‘autocatalytic’ process is thereby more resistant and enduring in the face of failure and frustration (impasse) because contraries are seen as clues feeding into the ‘gradient of deepening coherence’ as the person moves towards insight. The ‘lightning flash’ of insight must, therefore, be seen in context of a dynamic, dialectical system involved in a larger self-organising process.

It is now time to stop and to gather up what we know about insight, and to consider what we further require to build an adequate theoretical understanding of insight. To pre-empt somewhat, it will be noted that a trend is discernible in the insight and creativity literature. This trend has been away from a purely associationistic metatheory towards more ‘constructivist’ themes. Such themes include an emphasis of the proactive, ‘feedforward’ role of the individual projecting schema and ‘themata’ onto the data of experience, of a teleological or anticipatory basis to insight, of the inclusion of tacit and emotional dimensions within thought, of larger units of analysis including enduring life purposes and commitments, of the socially-inscribed nature of insight, of the person conceived of as a self-organising system, and as insights being socially-embedded and socially-inscribed. But now to assess what we have so far and what we yet require in this pursuit of insight into insight.

CHAPTER 4: INTERREGNUM AND PROSPECTUS

*A really intelligent man feels what other men only know.*²⁷

4.1 WHAT DO WE HAVE SO FAR?

In the previous three chapters we have found a consistent and generally accepted sequence of events identified with the occurrence of insights. Following the early terminology of Wallas (1926) and Hutchinson (1949a, 1949b, 1949c), most researchers have characterised insight in terms of four stages: Preparation, Impasse leading to ‘Incubation’, a moment or period of Insight itself, and the Verification and Elaboration of the insight. The literature freely utilises the Gestalt notions of ‘fixation’ leading to impasse, and of ‘productive thinking’ which ‘restructures’ the problem culminating in a sudden, perception-like ‘seeing’ of a solution. Generally speaking, there is a consensus that insight involves special processes or modes of thought and, given this, that it involves a distinct mode of mental activity. Consistent with the view that insight is a multifaceted phenomenon, this distinct mode of thought or awareness is characterised by a family of often-correlated features.

Generally, the phenomenology of insight is taken to include sustained work on a problem until impasse is reached and the problem is set aside. This marks the ‘incubation’ stage, the resolution of which is variously explained by:

1. The forgetting of misleading assumptions and approaches.
2. The accidental encounter with the appropriate ‘solution’ stimulus.
3. The effects of a slow spreading activation which finally nudges the partly activated ‘solution’ above the threshold for consciousness.
4. The broadening of the number of elements and approaches which can be simultaneously activated allowing for remote associations, analogies and metaphors.

²⁷ Montesquieu, *Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits et les caractères*, 1736. Cited in Gross (1983, p. 248)

The impending culmination of the ‘incubation’ period is frequently marked by an intuitive, highly abstract ‘feel’ that one is on the way to solution (Metcalf, 1986; Metcalf & Wiebe, 1987). This intuitive stage is often characterised by a general mental ‘playfulness’ and frequently by a tolerance of the ‘absurd’ or the seemingly contradictory. Negative emotion is inimical to insight, especially at this stage, probably because insight requires a sustained ‘defocussed’ attention characterised by a non-selfconscious, emotional calm (Martindale, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This calm or reverie is often achieved by the person engaging in trivial or recreational tasks, frequently just daydreaming. The occurrence of the ‘Aha!’ experience is universally reported as enjoyable, even rapturous, and the experiencing person may lose awareness of the passage of time and of his or her immediate circumstances. Finally, a return to a more ‘rational’, ‘logical’ and less ‘emotional’ self-consciousness marks the testing and elaboration of the insight. Let us now summarise those features of insight that underlie this general phenomenology.

4.1.1 High Levels Of Abstraction

Whether in terms of the use of metacognitions (Metcalf & Wiebe, 1987), of high generality heuristics (Perkins; 1995, 1997; Ward, 1995), of schematic anticipation (Mayer, 1995), of the use of analogy and metaphor (Gentner, 1983; Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Weisberg, 1995) of themata (Briggs, 1990), of failure indices (Seifert et al., 1995), or of inceptions (Ippolito & Tweney, 1995), the path to insight entails the use of high levels of abstraction. The defining feature of these abstractive styles of thought is that they are permeable structures allowing the person to entertain a wide array of elements, ideas and images. They are conducive of a looser style of imaginary associative play and the entertaining of unusual, even absurd, combinations of ideas and elements. As we saw in relation to the flat associative hierarchies of Martindale (1995) and the shallow generalisation gradients of Ward (1995), remote analogies are rendered much more likely given the greater number of possibilities entertained. New chains of implication become possible as broad levels of abstraction entrain a much wider

network of subordinate categories and ideas. Given the mastery of one's domain, or even better, given expertise in more than one domain (Simonton, 1993; Gardner, 1993), at this higher level of generality connections may be grasped between otherwise 'irrelevant' or 'remote' conceptions. In such cases domain-altering insights can be the result of this cross-fertilisation.

4.1.2 Two Types Of Mental Process: Tacit Versus Explicit

Alongside higher levels of abstraction, and consistent with the idea of insight as a special process, a recurring feature of the insight literature is that insight reveals an alternation between different styles or modes of thought. There is a near-universal emphasis of the role of intuition. This sensitivity to tacit knowings is variously described as 'feelings of knowing', as 'primary process thinking', as combinations in the 'subconscious', as quasi-perceptual and 'imageable' thinking, as 'defocused attention' marked by lower levels of cortical arousal, as the ability for 'absorption' or reverie, as an ability for entering 'flow', as 'perceptual rehearsal', and as playful cross-modal imaginings. All of these modes of knowing represent a type of 'loosening' of the more familiar conscious processes of thought.

When confronted with challenges of understanding and anticipation that our habitual and well-worn patterns of knowing cannot overcome (such ill-defined problems being characterised earlier as 'Klondike spaces'), insight is needed to overcome the impasse. Metacognitions such as 'there is nothing going on in my mind that's really of a verbal fashion', or 'I don't know what I'm thinking', are positively correlated with insight problem solution (Schooler & Engstler-Schooler, 1990). Verbalisation and 'thinking too much' is frequently counterproductive in such cases and a more divergent 'productive' (as against reproductive) style of thought is required. And the road to insight is somewhat 'crooked', requiring less direct and predictable mental operations leading to larger numbers of equiprobable solutions. Here is found the widely-reported profligacy of insight processes, with many possibilities entertained only to be later rejected. A capacity for 'omnivalence' is required in which 'normal' thought processes

are suspended and contradictories can be held in mind simultaneously. Such a capacity for ‘Janusian thinking’ (Briggs, 1990) recalls the ‘negative capability’ that Keats prized so highly and recalls the flouting of the law of contradiction characteristic of ‘primary process thinking’.

Although the evidence points strongly in the direction of another, somewhat elusive mode of knowing, care must be taken to not conceive of this in terms of two distinct ‘minds’. There must be the constant possibility of these modes of thought to intermingle and to ‘in-form’ each other — or how else can we become self-consciously aware of our intuitions? Perhaps it is better to consider mind in terms of a ‘layered’ consciousness with varying levels of awareness simultaneously constituting our thought. What we normally think of as ‘rational mind’ is represented by those contents of mind we can easily reflect upon and express in words. This level of mind is at a high level of cognitive awareness, to paraphrase Kelly (1955). But much, if not most, of mind may not be so easily grasped and expressed. Of course it has been commonplace, especially since Freud, to conceive of levels of mind in terms of unconscious, subconscious and preconscious processes (see the earlier discussion of Freud’s system unconscious in 2.2.2.3). The possible role of these levels of awareness within a more complete psychology of insight will be treated in some detail in the chapters that follow.

As well as the speculation that there are levels or layers within thought, the reported phenomenology of insight suggests a thorough ‘dimensionality’ of thought. Most anecdotal accounts of insight reveal that when insight is experienced it brings with it a plethora of implications and relationships which seem to reveal themselves in a flurry to the person concerned (Gruber, 1981, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996). Artists, for example, often report that a whole work was ‘seen’ in one flash of insight (Epel, 1993; Gardner, 1993). Whatever the validity of such retrospective accounts, there seems to be consistent evidence that conscious, propositional thought is more like a spotlight which brightly illuminates one idea at a time, while insightful breakthroughs are more akin to viewing city lights from a lookout high above. In the latter case, there

is a subjective sense of beauty, of wholeness and of relationship between the many elements, and it is frequently grasped at once.

If thought is simultaneously multi-dimensional, as PDP accounts and patterns of cortical activation seem to suggest (Damasio, 1994; Harré & Gillett, 1994), then conscious understanding (that at a high level of reflexive awareness) may ‘summarise’ or ‘symbolise’ many different aspects and dimensions of meaning, including affective and aesthetic ‘feels’ for that which is understood. Rather than conscious thought being the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of unconscious urges and processes, thought might be characterised as being holographic in that each dimension of understanding is reflexive of the whole in a dynamic unity. This is consistent with anecdotal reports of the phenomenology of the moment[s] of insight whereby the affective and aesthetic qualities of the experience, as well as its ‘intellectual’ import, are experienced as a dynamic whole. More precisely, however, such reports are retrospective and it seems that the absorption required (perhaps in the form of ‘defocussed attention’) does not allow for much simultaneous conscious reflection of this sort. Indeed such reflection is reported as destructive of the experience. It would seem that the person is too busy ‘enacting’ or ‘being’ the insight — almost as if the person is the location or space in which the insight occurs rather than the conscious director of the process.

In any case, this layered and dimensioned awareness needs structures of considerable permeability and generality to ‘hold’ all these aspects together. Ordinarily we are not aware of the presence of such structures, but perhaps moments of creative insight reveal the fuller complexity of our processes of understanding. Ippolito and Tweney (1995), for example, proposed ‘inceptions’ as a mode of guidance which underlies intuitive knowing. These are ‘sensory reconstructions’ or high generality imagery described as being somewhere between perceptions and symbolic thought. This parallels Wallace’s (1991) view that insights are in various ‘modalities’ and can be unimodal or multi-modal. I will later discuss Langer’s (1957, 1972) idea of a ‘presentational’ mode of thought as a collective term for all these types of looser but more aesthetically rich and personally ‘felt’ modes of mental awareness.

One result of this ‘presentational’ modality may be to bring about an unusual experience of self. It is widely reported that insight is experienced as both spontaneous (as having a life of its own) and as exhibiting a quality of ‘exteriority’, as if coming from outside oneself (Gruber, 1981, 1995). The person commonly experiences a lack of self-awareness and self-concern and may lose track of time and space. Ironically, this self-forgetting appears to renew one’s sense of self and of one’s capacities and personal well-being. There also seems to be a sense in which the experiencer is loathe to be distracted from the role as ‘spectator’ or to critically reflect on what is occurring. Typically, there is a suspension of one’s usual judgement and evaluation processes. Indeed, attempting to articulate the process in words while in this stage seems to be counterproductive and disrupts the ‘flow’. Again, we are reminded of Langer’s (1957, 1972) distinction between presentational and representational consciousness, the latter being structured ‘discursively’ (by which she means in terms of conventional language)²⁸ and being more or less inimical to artistic expression.

Although I discussed Martindale’s (1995) connectionist theory of insight at some length, it is not here considered a comprehensive psychological framework. It is, for example, a strangely ‘passionless’ account of insight, a limitation characteristic of connectionism. But we know from the review of the literature that it is widely accepted that emotion plays a central role in the genesis and experience of insight. Nonetheless, Martindale’s creative and thought-provoking theorising may help us show that the psychological processes that define the experience of insight ‘map’ onto the neural-like model he proposes. In so doing this will hopefully lend some ‘ecological validity’ to my account for, as a basic principle, such an account must be consistent with what we know about cortical function. I will later link what Martindale has said to both Matte-Blanco’s (1988) notion of symmetrical and asymmetrical thought and to Kelly’s (1955)

²⁸ We will, however, use ‘discursive’ in a broader sense to include any symbolic mode of expression and communication. This is done because non-propositional modes of expression and communication can be obviously semantic (as in the visual symbolism of art, for example). Thus the symbolic, but non-language-based, presentational modes of consciousness (which Langer called ‘non-discursive symbolism’) are here considered to be ‘discursive’. It is hoped that this is still in keeping with Langer’s general project of distinguishing between a more linear propositional thought which is not medium-sensitive and a more figurative and emotionally-nuanced mode of thought wherein the medium is part of the message.

concepts of loose and tight construing. Meaning and understanding always arise within networks of related meanings and this multi-dimensionality sits easily with what we know about the experience of insight and with connectionist conceptions of thought as being massively parallel.

4.1.3 The Role Of Emotion

We have seen in the above literature that the role of ‘emotional thinking’ in insight is of cardinal importance. I will later distinguish between emotion and affect following Rychlak (1977). For now it is enough to say that the term ‘affect’ always implies some judgement or assessment process, whereas emotion may be differentiated in terms of the degree of conceptualisation involved from relatively instinctive, pre-conceptual reactions and action tendencies to highly refined, affective nuances (see also Spinoza, 1967, for a distinction between passive and active emotions). In these terms, animals clearly experience primitive (passive) emotions (fear, anxiety, satiation and so on), but it is by no means clear as to whether they generate affective experience (for example, confidence, dread or amusement). To jump ahead a bit, what may be pivotal in the production of insight is the capacity to become aware of one’s implicit, affective pre-judgements *as* judgements which determine networks of sequacious (logically subsequent) meanings (Rychlak, 1977). This may then allow for alternative meanings to be predicated.

In examining the role of emotion I hope to shed some light on the aphorism by Montesquieu which opened this chapter. What does it mean that a really intelligent person ‘feels’ what other people only know? Presumably, Montesquieu is here distinguishing between some form of ‘deeper’ or wiser knowing as against a purely intellectual grasp of something. Clearly he is pointing to a fuller, more ‘feeling’ expression of our rationality and intelligence. And because such ‘feelings’ reportedly accompany insight, it may be that insight brings about an alignment of our psychological capacities somewhat akin to Montesquieu’s understanding of a ‘feeling’ intelligence.

This ‘feeling’ intelligence implies a type of understanding which includes and goes beyond ‘mere’ calculative thinking towards a more ‘meditative’ thinking (Heidegger, 1959/1966). Significantly this ‘going beyond’, this meditative thinking, is marked by an affective awareness and sensitivity. According to Heidegger (1959/1966), calculative thinking is akin to puzzle-solving in that the person has the elements of solution at hand. It is typified in the types of tasks required in IQ tests: where answers need to be fast, are often required under pressure, are in response to impersonal, abstract questions which are clearly defined and have a single correct answer. Meditative thinking (for Heidegger, ‘real thinking’) responds to ill-defined problems, those we have little idea of how to approach. Such a style of thought is more receptive, attentive and absorbed in the task at hand. It involves the whole being of the person in a patient, receptive attitude, or what Heidegger (1959/1966) called ‘releasement’. It is also significant that from this fuller, affective stance prudent action follows. What I find here is ‘cognition’, ‘affect’ and ‘behaviour’ in tight harmony. This reminds us that the derivation of ‘e-motion’ (‘e’ = out of; ‘motion’ = movement) also implies a dynamic, enactive process and this fits perfectly with my emerging conviction of the complexly embodied nature of mind. As we will see later, it also sits comfortably with Kelly’s (1955) image of the person as ‘a form of motion’ (see also Butt, 1995, 1997, 1998a; Radley, 1977) in which distinctions between emotion, motivation and cognition are eschewed in favour of a more complex incorporative notion of construing.

There is a simple sense in which emotion is involved in the overall insight process in terms of the frustration and despair of impasse, in the often stubborn determination that pervades a person pressing for resolution, and in the excitement of finally ‘cracking’ the problem. This seems obvious enough: the role of emotion might in this way be understood as a *response* to various ‘cognitive’ processes. But if we have learned one thing thus far it is that frequently lurking behind an ‘obvious’ fact is a far more interesting possibility. The possibility in this case is that we think emotionally, or to say it the other way around, we ‘emote’ cognitively (and desirously and purposefully for that matter). That is, the moods and affective qualities so characteristic, for example, of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996) are *constitutive* of insight processes,

not merely consequent upon them. In the same way ‘themata’ (Briggs, 1990) are emotionally-nuanced ‘cognitions’, not cognitions which lead to emotions. In short, as Briggs would say, there is indeed ‘fire in the [mental] crucible’.

Briggs (1990) summarised neurophysiological evidence that thoughts and memories may be coded or logged in the brain according to their ‘emotional nuances or feeling tones’. In line with this, insight may represent an awareness and utilisation of this orderly, affective ‘coding’. Events and elements of understanding (including moods, thoughts, patterns of colour and so on) are grasped as comprehensible or as being within some orderly relationship, and this comprehensibility is affectively informed. In my later discussion of Le Doux’s (1991, 1995, 1998) neurophysiological accounts of emotion, of Goleman’s (1995) theory of emotional intelligence, of Damasio’s (1994) ‘somatic marker hypothesis’ and of Rychlak’s (1977) notion of ‘affective assessment’, I will attempt to sketch an account of emotion which is compatible with the phenomenology of insight and contemporary neuropsychology. In particular, I will note that emotionally-laden ‘feelings’ or intuitions, which may determine decisions about advantageous courses of action, are experienced and acted upon before there is any conscious justification for such action (Claxton, 1997, 1998; Bechara et al., 1997).

Not disconnected to the role of emotion in insight is the question of failure and disappointment. We have seen that when people are disappointed in their stymied attempts to solve a problem they are much more likely to remember its elements (the Zeigarnik Effect). This phenomenon is probably ecologically advantageous, for our survival depends on our ability to anticipate and deal with the ‘problems’ that life poses. It would be an advantage, therefore, to recognise similar, perturbing situations quickly. Alternatively, as we have seen, stray events or thoughts may subsequently provide the clue to the still-available ‘representation’ of the problem, and insight may soon follow. Thus Schooler and his colleagues proposed we store ‘failure indices’ which are reactivated and which ‘guide’ us to insight. But they have not elaborated the emotional and personal dimensions of this phenomenon.

An assertion to be developed in the chapters to follow is that identity, particularly those aspects concerned with our survival, is also likely to be enmeshed with our ability to anticipate events successfully (Kelly, 1955; Leitner & Faidley, 1993). That is, in terms of Kelly's PCP (1955), core construing (construing concerned with self and one's maintenance processes) is superordinate and is tied into our capacity to anticipate and thereby to survive. Thus, failures to anticipate events would lead to anxiety. Doubts about our general *ability* to anticipate would be even more threatening. Consequently, it is 'natural' for us to avoid situations of continuing uncertainty or impasse. Under conditions of considerable threat and anxiety, thinking and behaviour may become predictable and stereotyped and, thereby, unlikely to lead to insight. In contrast, we have seen that these situations where we cannot assimilate the situation at hand are also potentially those situations which may provide for breakthroughs in our understanding. Such baffling circumstances may aid us in expanding and refining our capacity to anticipate, or as Piaget (1952) would have expressed it, to *accommodate* our mental structures to the world. These musings bring us again to Keats and 'Negative Capability'. Given the confusing complexity of our post-modern times, where notions of Objectivity and Truth are in serious question, such an ability to tolerate uncertainty is perhaps even more urgently required. As Bertrand Russell expressed it:

To teach how to live without certainty, and without being paralysed with hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it. (1946, cited in Page, 1996, p. 103)

The capacity for insight, and the flow of ideas and actions it entails, may well be tied to our capacity to deal with the 'normal' anxiety or threat one may experience when one becomes frustrated by impasse. If the matter is one of importance to the self and all one's efforts are in vain, then one may begin to question one's overall capacity to anticipate — one may feel considerable threat. Conversely, the joy of insight may be tied to the renewed confidence in our capacity to anticipate that validation brings (Ippolito & Tweney, 1995). Again, this points to a type of emotional intelligence or ability which affords us a certain serenity, mental playfulness, and 'looseness' in the face of failure.

4.1.4 The Social And Pragmatic Dimensions Of Insight

Generally speaking, the cognitive literature underspecifies the social dimension of insight (Simonton, 1993, 1997), emphasising instead its hypothesised intrapsychic mechanics. Wallace (1991) has argued that insight has a developmental facet — the ‘microgenetic’ flash of insight being only one aspect of a larger and ongoing ‘macrogenetic’, largely social, process. We have also seen broader, more ‘sociological’ investigations (Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 1995; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1981, 1995) which placed insight within historical, cultural, professional and interpersonal milieus. There is still a yawning gap, however, between the person’s ‘inner’ (mental) processes and the ‘outer’ (social) forces acting upon them and a paucity of explanation for how that gap is breached.

For example, Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995), with explicit reference to the American pragmatist tradition, argued that insight reflects social processes and discourses. I have already analysed this account (see 3.3.3.4) but it is worth revisiting several aspects. It will be recalled that the key component of insight is the ‘filtering mechanism’ whereby the unconscious is structured by socially-informed conscious learning. The person through processes of acculturation, mentoring, reading, apprenticeship and so on, builds a ‘subconscious filtering network’ which ‘pre-judges’ incoming information. Drawing on Minsky’s (1985) notion of the ‘Society of Mind’ and on the spreading activation metaphor, many subconscious processing entities are described as acting simultaneously on incoming data, testing hypotheses and generating hunches. But as was pointed out earlier, this merely pushes the problem of explaining insight to vague inner reaches — effectively attributing these inner ‘minds’ with the properties of insight we wish to explain. All this points to dualism between inner and outer, the intrapsychic and the social, the cognitive and the emotional, the mental and the physical. And these explanatory problems are deeply rooted within a representational view of mind, a view I will shortly critique.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1996) is illuminating, however, in his detailed attention to the pragmatics of generating insight. He described in some detail the working lives of eminently insightful people. What emerges is an ongoing alternation between solitude and social interaction and between hard work and idle time. In accounting for their insights, all his respondents recognised how much a part of their field and the current *zeitgeist* their contributions were. All were keenly aware of the state of the current paradigm, the political considerations within their field/s and of the importance of conversations with respected colleagues. All also stressed how important to them was the communication and elaboration of their insights, especially to trusted peers. It is important to them that their insights ‘work’ and are accepted. This pragmatic ‘test’, the viability of insights, emerges within cycles of creativity and within larger cycles of experience in which these insights are socially embedded.

4.2 WHAT DO WE STILL NEED?

The cognitive literature has been very useful in this inquiry into the nature of insight. In particular it has revealed more-or-less universal themes and empirically-observed features of the stages of insight. The following sections will propose, however, that these approaches are limited and will indicate a trend towards more ‘constructivist’ approaches to insight. Given the limits of cognitivism, it will be argued that a more thoroughgoing constructivism is needed to account for what we now know about insight.

4.2.1 Problems With The Representationist Accounts

The reader will have noticed along the way certain criticisms of the cognitive accounts of insight. A major explanatory flaw has been the tendency to merely re-describe insight at a supposed ‘inner’ representational level. This flows directly from the representationist metatheory which underlies these accounts. Within cognitive

psychology and cognitive science, cognition is usually defined in terms of processes involving internal rules (procedures) and representations — or what I will call representationism. According to a representational philosophy of perception, the basic, direct object of perception is taken to be sense datum, not the object itself. The mind is modelled in terms of abstract symbolic structures that are manipulated according to innate, law-like procedures which ‘rebuild’ the sensory data into veridical representations of the world.

As with computers, however, the ‘representational’ status of representations — their reference or intensionality²⁹ — is derivative. That is, it derives from the meanings *we* attribute to them. But if representations are our mode of thought, how do they ever point past themselves? How do they gain semantic content? Moreover, how is solipsism avoided? Either there is a slide to dualism and idealism, or a need for some form of direct access to reality to confirm a match with one’s representation (which immediately undermines the need for representations). Consequently, in its reaction against behaviourism, cognitive representationism has reasserted the cognitive dimension of psychology at the cost of meaning or intensionality.

Within cognitive psychology, for example, Fodor (1980) reluctantly accepted what he called ‘methodological solipsism’ whereby it is acknowledged that representations cannot account for their semantic relation to the things cognised. In similar fashion, we have seen that Dennett (1981) has proposed smaller and smaller sub-components of representations handled by stupid homunculi — an army of idiots making simpler and simpler decisions — to account for our intensional understandings. This is not the place to undertake a thorough critique of cognitive representationism. For such critiques see Costall and Still (1987), Hacker (1986, 1991), Harré and Gillett

²⁹ ‘Intensionality’ with an ‘s’ will be used throughout following Shanon (1991) and Husain (1983). This is meant to preserve some of the meanings normally attributed to intentionality with a ‘t’ but to add a strong sense of ‘meaningfulness’ to our mental processes. That is, intensionality is meant here to suggest not only the ‘aboutness’ of our mental processes, that they are directed at things, but, as a contrast to ‘extensional’, it is also meant to emphasise that our mental processes are constitutionally *meaningful*, they are intrinsically semantic. That is, they are not content-less, formal structures which ‘represent’ their objects by their syntactic (computational) patterns of arrangement (representationism). Rather, the qualities of thoughts, feelings and behaviours are intrinsically meaningful. In this way of understanding human awareness, the medium of expression is highly semantically relevant and semantics is by no means limited to the domain of language.

(1994), Hyman (1991), Johnson (1987), Rychlak (1968, 1977), Searle (1980), Shanon (1991, 1993), Still and Costall (1991) and Varela et al. (1996). For now, it is enough to say that the types of explanatory problems identified generally in relation to representationism, emerge once again in the cognitive insight literature.

These problems include the difficulties formal representations would have in keeping up with contextual complexity. With respect to language, Shanon (1991, 1993) has argued convincingly that the ‘representational computational view of mind’ (RCVM) cannot account for the meaning of words largely because a set of given terms or definitions could never keep up with contextual variations including polysemy, mis-usages, context and translation. Given the emphasis of the role of figurative thought, metaphor and analogy in the insight literature, this is a serious shortcoming for a representational account of insight. These contextual problems also appear in the insight literature as an underspecification of our fully-embodied immersion in our complex social and physical world. It will be seen that it is precisely our ability to navigate and ‘resonate’ to such complexity that allows for the possibility of insight and which contributes to its dynamic, ‘flow-like’ nature.

In addition, we have seen that information-processing or RCVM approaches underplay the role of emotion and larger motivational purposes in the generation and experience of insight. Accordingly, emotion is generally seen as an effect of insight (Gick and Lockhart, 1995; Smith Ward & Finke, 1995) rather than as a constituent element within the process. We have also seen that the account of intuition and of ‘primary process’ has been shackled by theoretical vagueness when it comes to specifying ‘where’ and by ‘whom’ insightful solutions are recognised. The RCVM, derived as it is from the computational metaphor, falls easily into a brain-mind equation. Thus the body, when mentioned at all, is pictured as a type of prosthesis under the brain’s direction. Feelings and passions, the qualia of everyday existence, become epiphenomena merely consequent upon the mind’s (brain’s) activity. Again, this image of the person is strikingly foreign to the image we have seen of the insightful person as a

purposeful, passionate actor engaging in day-to-day efforts, immersed in the media of his or her pursuit, bringing his or her whole being to bear on the pursuit at hand.

Generally speaking, as mind is to be derived from fundamental representational (ultimately neural) structures, a reductionist imperative underlies these accounts. Thus, such accounts are drawn ineluctably towards essentialism as they attempt to locate the basic atoms of mind, or the essence of understanding, which is usually identified exclusively as patterns of association or (neural) activation. These tendencies themselves derive from objectivist assumptions about the foundations of knowledge and are usually expressed in terms of the accuracy or truth of representations in their reference to the world (the ‘correspondence’ theory of truth). Following naturally from this is the assumption that the experience of ‘insight’ must refer to the discovery of something self-evidently true (in an objectivist, ‘essential’ sense). The problem, of course, is by what ‘extra-cognitive’ standard can we ever know something is true in this way? This tack merely recapitulates the dualist ‘inner-outer’ and ‘mind-within-minds’ problems I have discussed in previous chapters.

This essentialist explanatory bias also derives from a widespread rejection of teleological considerations (‘final’ causes ³⁰) in psychological explanation as being unscientific. Aristotle (1975) considered there to be four natural causes, or explanatory factors — Material, Efficient, Formal and Final — any combination of which could be invoked to explain phenomena. Modelled on the natural sciences, however, psychology has heavily relied on material and efficient (‘billiard ball’) causation, and to a lesser extent on formal causation. That is, psychological phenomena (behaviours, thoughts) are theorised to be caused by the combined effects of the physical properties and potentialities of substances being pushed along or given impetus by antecedent events. For example, neurones (material cause) are triggered by the action of sensory

³⁰ This material is derived largely from Rychlak’s (1977) discussion of the four causes, as given by Aristotle, in relation to psychological explanation. In 1977 Rychlak pointed out that the then-contemporary cognitive psychology could be characterised as ‘mechanistic’ and ‘mediational’ in that it relied exclusively on material-efficient explanation and cognitions merely mediated between antecedent causes and subsequent effects or behaviours. On the other hand, humanistic psychology was characterised by formal-final explanations in which purpose or teleological considerations were given priority. So, rather than attempting to *account* for purpose in efficient and material terms, the humanist attempts to *demonstrate* purpose scientifically.

stimulation operating across time (efficient causation) acting to bring about psychological effects. Formal cause refers to the recognisable pattern or organisation in the way some thing or event is constituted (formed) which thereby determines the possible manifestations and interactions for that thing or event. Thus, the patterns of mental construction a person has achieved will co-determine (along with the other causes) possible future constructions. Final causation, on the other hand, is the ‘that for the sake of which’, the purpose for which, something occurs or comes about (Rychlak, 1977). Applied to inanimate objects, it makes little sense to say, for example, that a rock falls to the ground because it *desires* to be joined with the earth. But teleological explanation (from the Greek word ‘telos’ meaning ‘end’) is most relevant to this inquiry into insight as it speaks to the reasons, intentions, the premising meanings, the direction in which we envisage outcomes, that in-forms our mental life and behaviour generally. It is irrelevant, teleologically, whether or not the end actually comes to pass. What is important is the predication capacity, the self-reflexive intelligence of the human being (as distinct from machines and inanimate substances generally) which can conceptualise unformed possibilities and thereby potentially bring them into existence:

The crux of the issue remains that *initial* capacity, ability, potential, of the organism to contribute something to the knowledge it acquires by way of experience without having ‘learned’ to do so. (Rychlak, 1977, pp. 214-215, italics in original)

Thus we come again to the distinction between mediational and predication models of the person (Rychlak, 1977, 1990, 1991; and see earlier, 1.1). A mediational model describes psychological processes as mediators or conveyors of information taken in, as given, from the environment. The meanings are always taken in as a given meaningful unit “that exists in its original form even before it is taken in by the mediational process from environmental experience” (Rychlak, 1990, p. 9). Facts are imprinted on the mind, in Lockean fashion, according to principles such as contiguity and frequency, as exemplified by the information-processing models I have discussed. Predication models, on the other hand, are based on a view of the meaning-making process as an active projection of meaning and categories onto the objects of experience.

Rychlak (1990) viewed such processes as based on dialectical reasoning and hence “bounded by *oppositonality*” (p. 9, emphasis in original). That is, meaning is not established as an unipolar given, but is rather chosen or predicated by the person within the complex of contrasting or contrary possibilities. And these possibilities are not an either-or, binary logic (of the classical form of A and Not-A). Rather, as will be discussed in later chapters, they are affirmations of precedent meaning within *personally-relevant contrasts*.

The difficulties and shortcomings of the cognitive and mechanistic approaches to insight reduce to this point. We have seen that there is a explanatory tendency to account for insight in terms of increasingly ‘inner’ and more non-intensional units, such that the act of insight is equated with a threshold being exceeded, or with a chance encounter setting off chains of associations which then present consciousness with a new possibility (it ‘pops’ into awareness). Meaning is ‘taken in’ and rearranged in mostly unconscious processes so it can be presented to the conscious mind for recognition in the insight experience. Formal causes (the shape or organisation of, for example, mental phenomena) are seen as the result of the combination of efficient and material causation and final causes are rejected as a type of impossible, reversed efficient causation: as if somehow ‘effects’ in the future reach backwards through time to bring about their own causes: the ‘teleological fallacy’ (Reber, 1985).³¹ But, as has been argued, these mediational accounts take as unproblematic the capacity to affirm new meaning, to ‘see’ the point, as it were, when insights pop into mind, whereas this is precisely the capacity which I am attempting to explain. In contrast, I will argue that the capacity for insight depends on an innate capacity for the predication of meaning, not merely on associationistic processes (which undoubtedly are important) which ‘teach’ us how to know and understand. This *initial* capacity to create meaning, or

³¹ But as Rychlak (1977) makes very clear, final causation operates independently of time. That is, as he put it, “Future goals, like present sightings of doorways, *both* come into play at the point of the premise — that is, encompassed in the meaning taken on. The process, ‘for the sake of this, that follows’, stamps a mentality as telic, *not* the fact that it has future goals or expectations in mind toward which it works” (1977, p. 287). In other words, a precedent meaning is asserted and the meanings that follow ‘sequaciously’, or are determined by it, are not determined efficiently, but logically or necessarily.

telosponsivity, as opposed to responsivity (Rychlak, 1977), is what is required to fill the explanatory gap left within mechanistic accounts.

4.2.2 What We Need from An Account Of Insight

Given the above findings and shortcomings, what is needed is a psychological framework for insight that can accommodate a view of mental processes as being simultaneously personal and social, as being abstractive yet affectively embodied, and as being defined by intensionally-laden cognitions, emotions and behaviours. We need an account of insight that can locate the complex social and physical facts of existence *within* the intrapersonal structure of awareness, and that can place individual insights within a larger context of a person's enduring purposes and meanings and thereby can incorporate teleological explanation as being uniquely appropriate for higher human mental life. An adequate theoretical understanding of insight must also conceive of an interplay of unconscious (tacit or low levels of reflexive awareness) and conscious processes constantly working in tandem to produce our characteristic psychological experience. We need to understand how it is that our largest mental breakthroughs can seemingly come unbidden and can be beyond our conscious direction and awareness. How can meaningful behaviour be both an expression of our personal system of meanings, yet be mostly too elusive to articulate? Indeed, the effort to articulate or reflect on such mental processes as they happen seems to inhibit their full realisation and expression. We also need to be able to account for the not-infrequent reports of the person having a sense of somehow ceasing to be as a separate 'cogniser', the latter experience being a type of first-hand refutation of dualism and of the hard-and-fast separation of person and world.

Implicit in the above is the requirement to break down the strict duality of inner versus outer, of cognition versus emotion, of action versus thought, and of conscious versus unconscious processes. As revealed in the literature reviewed thus far, the insightful person may have a superior capacity for holding contradictories together in mind and coming to transcend those contradictories — for dialectical thought. This

capacity to create new meaning from contradiction³² may reveal the ‘heart’ of insight. In this fashion, insight appears to be preceded by a type of ‘undoing’ of thought, where a mode of observant acceptance, a ‘negative capability’, may become evident following impasse. And in my efforts to build an integrative, theoretical understanding of insight we too may need to develop this capacity for ‘omnivalence’, for tolerating, even dwelling in, apparent illogicality with equanimity. In so doing we may loosen the tight polarities and the obvious contrasts of our thought and we may move closer to our hoped-for insights into insight.

4.2.2.1 Some Specific Questions

The following questions stem from the findings about insight so far and from the wide theoretical requirements outlined above. They will anticipate and point to discussions in the chapters which follow. Although it is expected that answers to these questions will overlap somewhat, overall they should lead towards a broad enough theoretical understanding capable of subsuming the diverse features of insight.

- **How is the proclivity for metaphor and figurative thought, which is highlighted in insight, connected to our mentality in general?**

We have seen that much of insight involves the creative use of analogies and cross-domain fertilisation. A very important manifestation of this shifting in abstractive domains is the oft-reported use of metaphor and figurative thought. The latter processes seem to play such a ubiquitous role in insight that they too will need to be accounted for in more detail. The ability to think in a metaphorical way indicates not only the important role of language, but, to presage later discussions somewhat (Johnson, 1987; Kittay, 1997; Lakoff, 1987; Shanon, 1991, 1993), it may tell us something about our basic symbolic and mental capacities.

³² It will later be argued that this is brought about by an affective shift or awareness which becomes predominant at the breakdown of demonstrative, propositional thought.

- **How is our mental life tied into our embodiment?**

Linked to the above discussion of the figurative dimensions of thought is the question of how our embodiment may ‘in-form’ our structures of understanding. It will be later argued, following Hunt (1995), that cross-modal, ‘presentational’ synesthesia may provide the template for later more ‘representational’ mental structures. This will be compared to theories which find in language evidence of the embodied nature of thought (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Shanon, 1993) and to the ‘enactive’ approaches of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), Butt (1996, 1998a, 1998b), Shanon (1991, 1993) and Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1996).

- **How is the social inscribed in our thought?**

It is ironic that although insight appears to be a paradigmatically ‘personal’ or subjective experience, it is by no means merely an ‘individual’ or ‘inner’ one. No insights occur outside a cultural, social and physical milieus. It will be argued that the ‘social’ is not an added external influence, but is an intrinsic feature of thought (Harré & Gillett, 1994; Johnson, 1987; Shanon, 1993). Rejecting the dualism of inner and outer, it is more appropriate to say that we are socially ‘in-formed’. Just as we are immersed in an ecosystem which pervades our very physical being, we swim within social currents and we can never ‘get out’ (should we ever want to). How we resonate to and influence the social ‘affordances’ (Gibson, 1979; Noble, 1991, 1993) or ‘perturbances’ (Varela, et al., 1996) we are subject to will form an important part of my theoretical understanding of insight.

- **What are the types of psychological processes which reflect defocussed attention, ‘loose’ thinking and tacit knowing?**

We need a more detailed account of how remote analogies and ‘looser’ thinking are accomplished. That is, what happens at the psychological level to generate these new, intuitively felt possibilities? To answer this question an attempt will be made to

interweave the contributions of, among others, Martindale (1995), Matte-Blanco (1988) and Kelly (1955). It is clear that a theoretical understanding of insight must include a coherent account of such shifts in modes of abstraction and states of awareness.

- **How is emotion a part of high level abstraction and of thought generally?**

The pivotal role of emotion in the genesis and experience of insight requires that a way is found of marrying abstraction with emotion. Again Matte-Blanco (1988) and Kelly (1955) will be called upon, as will other contemporary research into the relationship between emotion and thought (Bechara et al., 1997; Claxton, 1997, 1998; Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1995; LeDoux, 1998; Mair, 1980; Rychlak, 1977). To anticipate the later discussion somewhat, if ‘representational’ thought is derived from emotional and ‘presentational’ symbolism (Langer, 1957, 1972; Rychlak, 1997; Shanon, 1993), then such emotional-symbolic structures may well be quite superordinate in the person’s systems of understanding. As such, although not necessarily propositional in form and available to conscious verbal reflection, such affective dimensions may well be quite abstract and thereby would influence substantial subsystems of thought. Thus, a recurrent theme in this investigation is the idea of various modes and levels of thought and consciousness. There also seems to be a more meditative style of thought (Heidegger, 1959/1966) implicated in insight which relinquishes algorithmic, means-end-type mental processes in favour of a more contemplative, receptive attitude. In the transitions represented by new insights a type of transcending affectivity, or even hovering equanimity, commonly characterises the period before insightful breakthrough.

4.3 CONCLUDING COMMENT

We have found that the phenomenology of insight is reliably described in terms of the stages of preparation, impasse, incubation, insight, and elaboration. It is clear that high levels of abstraction are always involved, as is a subtle interplay between tacit and explicitly conscious mental processes. Emotion and affective judgements are integral in

the process of coming to insight. In addition, insight was found to be always in-formed by social and pragmatic considerations. It was concluded that an adequate theoretical understanding of insight needs to be able to surmount dualism generally. It needs to provide an account of our intensional capacities and our ability to deal with contextual complexity. A more detailed portrayal of the relation between emotion and abstract thought is required as well as an understanding of how embodiment in-forms our structures of understanding. The capacities to predicate meaning, to deal with contradictories and to come at the world teleologically were argued to be necessary. Finally, a different sense of self, frequently experienced in insight, needs to be accounted for. In psychological constructivism we appear to have a metatheoretical approach towards insight that is promising. Accordingly, the coming chapter will begin with a discussion of psychological constructivism and, more specifically, I will present a 'reading' of George Kelly's PCP (1955), a theory which in broad terms covers the sort of ground a theory of insight must cover. This will prepare the ground for a more explicit presentation of Kelly's views on insight in Chapter 6.

SECTION 2:

INCREASING THE ILLUMINATION

CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTIVISM AND PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY

5.1 GATHERING THE THREADS CONSTRUCTIVELY

Having summarised the features of insight, and outlined the requirements for an adequate theoretical understanding of it, how can these be combined within one broad theoretical approach? For this complex task constructivist psychology shows considerable promise. It shows this promise particularly because of its metatheoretical commitments and its attendant emphases. This is so because constructivism is at home with an approach to knowledge processes as hypothetical, multi-valent and uncertain, as pertaining to personal meaning rather than to objective access to ‘facts’. Just as fundamentally, psychological constructivism avoids hard-and-fast distinctions between emotion and thinking, and between mind and body, preferring to see such distinctions as constructions — not ‘God’s eye’ descriptions of an extra-conceptual reality. As such, a constructivist approach should be at home with the relative absence of such distinctions between emotional, cognitive, embodied and behavioural experiences so commonly reported as part of the phenomenology of insight.

I have in passing referred to a trend towards constructivism within cognitive psychology generally (Mahoney, 1995), as well as within the insight literature. Accordingly, I will first present a brief account of psychological constructivism and then attempt to map this onto the research findings so far, and then onto the requirements for an adequate theoretical understanding of insight. That done, I will present a reading of one psychological constructivism, George Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), in preparation for the following chapter’s analysis of insight within PCP.

5.1.2 Psychological Constructivism

It is difficult to simply describe ‘psychological constructivism’ because it represents such a diversity of theoretical, and sometimes metatheoretical, positions (see Botella, 1995; Chiari and Nuzzo, 1996; Lyddon, 1995; Mahoney, 1988 for attempts to distinguish the various types of constructivism). There are, however, some common and identifiable epistemological and ontological commitments (Mahoney, 1988, 1993; Neimeyer, 1993). Psychological constructivism expresses some of the aspects of the larger contemporary revolt against the ideals of the Enlightenment³³ and more recently of logical positivism and empiricism, particularly against the belief in foundational truths and unchallengeable belief systems. Thus it celebrates multiplicity and ‘local’ or ‘situated’ knowledge. Constructivism, as an alternative to rationalist views of mind, generally endorses an anti-objectivist, anti-foundationalist view of knowledge. That is, knowledge of reality is not seen to be simply a matter of ‘taking a look’ at the ‘facts’ of the world in order to detect the degree of correspondence of those facts with our thoughts or beliefs (whether this be by direct perception or via accurate representation). Rather, what we take to be a ‘fact’ is assumed to be at least partly a function of our proactive outlook or predication framework of understanding (Kelly, 1955; Rychlak, 1990). Consequently, ‘insight’ is not understood as a normative term delineating the agreed-upon, objective essence of some imputed mental process, it is understood as a personal experience. What may be an insight for me may not necessarily be one for you. But its ‘acceptance’ might require intersubjective agreement.

Psychologies drawing on constructivist metatheories take knowledge to be a proactive achievement. It is both hypothetical and anticipatory (Botella, 1995; Mahoney, 1988, 1993; Neimeyer, 1993) in that it is underdetermined by the sensory stimulation we receive from the world. That is, understanding and knowledge derive

³³ This eighteenth century project was to free the mind from ignorance and (religious) superstition and, by the power of reason, to come to a deeper understanding of the person’s place in his or her social, psychological and material world. It championed science and technology and held an optimism in contrast to the stagnation and despair of the ‘dark ages’. The postmodern critics of the enlightenment oppose what is seen as the ‘rationalist’ and ‘modernist’ excesses that allegedly have flowed from this, replacing faith in religion with an unwarranted faith in reason and technology.

from both ‘feedback’ and ‘feedforward’ mechanisms. As such, psychological constructivisms are primarily concerned with meaning and ‘personal epistemologies’ based in personal experience, rather than with objective propositions about reality.

Insofar as we build our struggles for objectivity on the basis of our ‘personal epistemologies’, constructivism has relevant things to say about ‘objectivity’. Thus, to the extent that we strive for anticipatory leverage on the future, we also strive for a more objective outlook. That is, not just any construction will do precisely because the world will not have it so. Nor will we have it so: in addition to the ‘pragmatic’ test of our constructions, we want some reassurance of understanding, not being satisfied with mere opinion. More speculatively, although constructivism holds that any particular construal is always partial, never the absolute truth, this implies an objective world which stands as an inexhaustible ground or source of our anticipatory efforts. This source is prior to, beyond, yet within, our constructions. It transcends yet inheres in us. It is always the occasion for our constructions, but is never entirely encapsulated by them. In short, in its totality it is the Truth that anchors all our understandings and misunderstandings. Thus, even if all my construals of the world are systematically mistaken, this still implies that there is a world about which I am systematically wrong. I am right, wrong, viable, coherent, and so on, *about something other than those construals* (see Anderson, 1962, for a similar argument in favour of the existence of the mind).

Given this anticipatory view of knowledge or truth, constructivists tend to endorse *viability* and *coherence* as appropriate ‘epistemic values’ (Botella, 1995; Stevens, 1998; see also Noaparast, 1995). Such values are quite distinct from traditional realist values such as *naïve correspondence* or *accurate representation*. Because successful construction is shaped by its anticipatory viability and by its coherence, knowledge is viewed as evolutionary, as that which ‘survives’ or is ‘selected’ via the processes of validation and invalidation.

The ontological assumptions of constructivism reflect the above epistemological commitments. It is assumed that the type of world we live in does not ‘tell’ us what to

think or believe (Chiari and Nuzzo; 1995; Soffer, 1993)³⁴. Objects, to paraphrase Kelly (1955), do not come with their names stamped on their backs. The type of person who inhabits such an ontologically non-directive world needs to be proactive. Meaning is created by action in the world and thereby constructivist psychologies focus on the ‘psycho-logic’ (Warren, 1997) of the person, or of the social collective, rather than on the proposed inherent ‘logic’ of the world and its imputed properties and relations. Reality is assumed to have an ‘error tolerance’ (Rescher, 1987, cited in Noaparast, 1995) which, while not all-forgiving, allows for a variety of competing hypotheses and constructions. It could only be in a world which allowed such degrees of epistemological freedom that viability and coherence could themselves be viable and coherent epistemic values. However, where this error tolerance is exceeded, where the world says ‘no’ to our constructions, we appear to experience our most direct epistemological contact with the world: it seems we are not so much told *what* to think, as *what not* to think. Put another way, rather than directly *prescribing* what we should think or believe, the world merely *proscribes* some of our attempted constructions and behaviours.

Mahoney (1995) considered that there are three principles of human experience which underlie constructivism generally:

1. That humans produce their own experience (perception, memory and knowing is proactive or predication).
2. That most of the organising processes active in people’s lives are at tacit levels of awareness.

³⁴ This raises the difficult question of whether constructivism is antithetical to realism. Opinions vary greatly on this but it can be argued that a more useful way to understand constructivism is as a half-way house between objectivism and relativism and between traditional realism and idealism (Stevens and Walker, 1997). Thus constructivist approaches may be considered to assume a ‘minimum realism’ (Stevens, 1998). That is, while our constructions are always fallible and are always partial, they are also always approximations to a constraining world which frequently says ‘no!’ to our attempts to anticipate (see Orange, 1995 and her use of the term ‘perspectival realism’ for a similar argument in relation to her version of self psychology).

3. That human experience and psychological development reflect “individualized, self-organising processes that tend to favor the maintenance (over the modification) of experiential patterns” (pp. 44-45).

While these very general features of constructivism may not be held exclusively by constructivists (Botella, 1995), they do mirror the facets of insight highlighted by the current inquiry. Firstly, we have come to acknowledge that there is an active, ‘predicational’ quality to insight. There is an active comprehension at the heart of insight which is unsatisfactorily described in relatively passive, associationist terms. Rather, we have seen that there is purpose or intent underlying insight, and this introduces teleology into insight. Such a forward-looking intentionality need not be at a high level of cognitive awareness but it is saturated in meaning, as a part of the person’s ongoing, largely implicit ‘project’ in the world. Secondly, insight is always characterised by unpredictable processes of tacit awareness and such processes seem to hold the clue to breakthroughs in understanding. In this way insight fits in well with a constructivist approach which is at home with meaning processes other than well-ordered cognitions. Thirdly, impasse in efforts to understand not infrequently can be experienced as an affront or perturbation to one’s capacity to anticipate one’s world, to one’s ‘core ordering processes’ (Mahoney, 1991). Such perturbations are frequently pushed aside or out of awareness as they threaten one’s experiential stability, one’s self-organising integrity. Upon insight, it may be argued, one’s experiential relationship with the world, one’s capacity to anticipate, is restored.

To satisfactorily explain human insight processes it may have to be considered that a move beyond material and efficient causation will be useful. Although much of cognitive science draws also on formal causes (for example, in terms of the architectures of connectionism, or in systems of schema and cognitive structures), such architectures and structures are usually understood as mere products of material and efficient causes and not as causes in themselves. In contrast, a defining feature of many constructivist approaches, whether explicitly stated or not, is a commitment to formal and final (teleological) causation. The predominant image of the person is as a self-organising

system whose knowledge/understanding processes reflect his or her structure (formal causation).

The person is also understood as a meaning-maker whose grasp of the world is hypothetical and anticipatory, that is, teleological. This latter includes our capacity for reflexive consciousness, our capacity not merely to react to stimuli (efficient causation) according to our physical makeup (material causation), but to also be able to conceive of the purposes, outcomes and directions of our behaviour, and, in so doing, alter their possible manifestations. Such ‘conceiving’ need not be verbalised and may only be ‘vegetatively sensed’ (Kelly, 1955), but it involves anticipatory commitment and action in the world. Such action contributes to the unfolding reality which it seeks to anticipate. This is not to deny the utility of material and efficient cause explanations, but only to say that an exclusive reliance on them is insufficient to capture the full experience of insight. In this regard insight is the example, par excellence, of predication: the affirmation of a premise or anticipation for the sake of which meaning is created. In these general terms, therefore, psychological constructivism appears to fit well the phenomenology of insight.

5.2 PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY (PCP)

Kelly (1955), in his two volume *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, delivered to the world a comprehensive and radically forward-looking theory of personality. It has been commented that Kelly anticipated much of the ‘cognitive’ revolution in psychology (Bruner, 1956; Mahoney, 1988) as well, of course, of later more post-modern constructivist psychologies (Botella, 1995; Chiari and Nuzzo, 1996; Kalekin-Fishman & Walker, 1996). The purpose here is to present the reader with a very brief summary of the theory (for more detailed secondary source introductions to PCP see Bannister & Fransella, 1986; Dalton & Dunnett, 1990).

5.2.1 Constructive Alternativism

We assume that all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement. ... We take the stand that there are always some alternative constructions available to choose among in dealing with the world. No-one needs to paint himself³⁵ into a corner; no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances; no one needs to be the victim of his biography. (1955, p. 15, italics in original)

This statement of Constructive Alternativism establishes the philosophical base from which all of Kelly's theorising arises. He painted an image of the universe which is vastly, dynamically complex. It is independently real, fits together lawfully, is ever-changing but is beyond our individual capacities to encompass. Although we can only grasp aspects of that universe, or perhaps because of that, there is always an infinite variety of alternative, useful ways to construe things (and these, Kelly said, are discriminable from an infinite variety of less useful ways).

Our construals are assumed to be partial relative to the vast processes of reality and such anticipatory successes and limitations are encountered as personal experiences of validation and invalidation. As such, we are urged by Kelly to constantly use our subjectivity in search of the objective. In such circumstances Kelly's metaphor of 'man-the-scientist' can be considered as both description and as prescription (Walker, 1992). That is, Kelly felt it was useful to consider people *as if* they were scientists, building theories, making predictions, implementing behavioural experiments, taking note of validation and invalidation, adjusting hypotheses, and ultimately theories, as appropriate. This is an ideal in a world so open to interpretation, so characterised by uncertainty and change. And of course we are not all good scientists in this sense. We frequently hold onto invalidated constructions (Kelly's definition of hostility) or limit ourselves to what we 'know' already, failing to 'aggressively'³⁶ chase after new understanding. Given the type of world we inhabit and the limits on our constructive processes, Kelly's metaphor also provides a therapeutic ideal to aim for — one conducive to the generation of new insights as I have been defining them. And this

³⁵ Kelly exclusively used the masculine pronoun. We will not apply the parenthetical 'sic' to each subsequent usage, but we do not thereby endorse this now-inappropriate practice.

³⁶ Kelly defined 'aggression' as the active elaboration of one's perceptual field.

ideal applies reflexively just as much to therapist as to client, to ‘scientist’ as to ‘lay person’.

5.2.2 The Fundamental Postulate And Its 11 Corollaries

A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events. (Kelly, 1955, p. 46)

Kelly’s Fundamental Postulate forms the foundation for his theory. His eleven corollaries, while not derived logically from the postulate, flesh out and clarify its meaning. The theory is idiographic in emphasis, focusing on the person construed not as a fixed entity, but as an ongoing process. The personal processes the theory mostly pertains to are psychological (as against neurological or sociological and so on). There is a suggestion of order or structure in the postulate as psychological processes are ‘channelized’ in particular, idiosyncratic ways. And these ways are teleological or anticipatory. The person, as a form of motion, directs his or her action according to his or her anticipations. This is no armchair speculation, but anticipation as committed involvement in the events of one’s life. Finally, it is not things or ‘rewards’ that pull or push us forward, but the person’s anticipation of life itself in terms of the personal meaning of events one has managed to distinguish from the temporally-ordered flow.

By anticipating events Kelly meant we look for ways in which some event will occur again or be replicated in terms of some feature/s (The Construction Corollary). The event which is replicated is always defined idiosyncratically (Individuality Corollary) in terms of personally relevant bi-polar contrasts (Dichotomy Corollary). Construing is a way of simultaneously dividing the elements or objects of attention into like and unlike ‘poles’. Embodied in this contrast is the construct’s discrimination. That is, we understand the world relationally and contextually. For example, the discrimination inherent in a construct of ‘size’ might, for an individual, be inherent in the contrast between ‘large’ and ‘small’. Because we each have our unique histories and natural endowments, and because we grasp the world in terms of idiosyncratic contrasts, we each experience unique constructive trajectories throughout life.

Kelly proposed that construing can be usefully understood as being organised in systems of constructs arranged hierarchically (Organisation Corollary). That is, in any one act of construing some constructs will be relatively superordinate, some subordinate. Superordinate constructs determine subordinate implications (in a logical or semantic sense). This allows for logical, transitive relationships between constructs. For example, a superordinate construct may be 'happy' (versus 'sad'), and a subordinate construct to 'happy' could be 'confident' (versus 'nervous'). If we know someone is happy we can predict that they may be confident rather than nervous. This hierarchic implicatory structure also implies that understanding and meaning emerges from patterns of relationships between constructs. Constructs rarely exist in conceptual isolation as they are embedded within chains of implications (Hinkle, 1965).

Because construing is bi-polar it always provides choice. Kelly considered that such choices are in the service of the extension or definition of one's construction processes (Choice Corollary). Thus, when applying an element (person, event, and so on) to a construct we must choose which pole of the construct best applies to it. The choice will hopefully either expand the anticipatory range of the construct system or will make its structure and anticipations tighter or more defined. If neither pole applies, the element is considered to be outside the range of convenience of that construct (Range Corollary).

Kelly seems to have assumed that time is a fundamental given, a 'categorical a priori' (Husain, 1983). Thus, the idea of 'motion' and of successive acts of construing pervades his work. It would be a mistake to conceive of a construct system as a static arrangement of permanent discriminations. Rather, we are always changing, forever in motion, yet like a river we somehow maintain identity over time. We change our system of understanding by successive anticipations (Experience Corollary), not all at once. Indeed the changes to one's system are limited by the permeability, or openness to new experience, of the particular construct/s being applied (Modulation Corollary). Some constructs are relatively closed to new elements, others are quite accommodating. These successive processes of system change can frequently lead to construct

subsystems which are ‘inferentially incompatible’ (Fragmentation Corollary). That is, our idiosyncratic chains of implications are not ‘logic tight’ (Kelly, 1955), but are ‘psycho-logically’ pragmatic. Therefore, in one particular situation we may construe and behave in one way, then in another set of circumstances we may understand and behave in an antithetical way. If we become aware of this inconsistency we may experience anxiety and feel the need to reconstrue.

Although construing is personal and largely idiosyncratic, it is also inherently social. If every person’s construing was entirely idiosyncratic then we could never communicate with one-another. Apart from universal species-based features, we frequently share language and cultural experience, and we may inhabit the same town, suburb, street or house. The validational resources open to us, therefore, exhibit varying degrees of commonality, and to the extent that we construe events in similar ways we will experience such events (emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally) in similar ways (Commonality Corollary). Kelly also considered we have a fundamental empathic capacity. We can construe the constructive processes of another and, depending on the degree of this empathic understanding, our interactions with that other person will be genuinely social (Sociality Corollary). Kelly made here an important distinction between treating others as if they were ‘objects moving on the horizon’, as against entering into the experience of the other. Acting towards the other on this latter empathic basis enables ‘social processes’.

5.2.3 Types Of Constructs And The Development Of Construing

Kelly’s theory is by no means fully summarised in his Fundamental Postulate and 11 Corollaries. There are many more theoretical distinctions Kelly made concerning types of constructs and modes of construing (for example, core versus peripheral, permeable versus impermeable, and comprehensive versus incidental constructs; propositional, pre-emptive and constellatory modes of construing, and so on). Rather than trying to explain all these here, some of these distinctions and conceptualisations will be

introduced as they are relevant in the sections and chapters to follow. It is enough here to stress that construing is complex and dynamic. For example, it operates at various levels of ‘cognitive awareness’ from being highly conscious to being ‘vegetatively sensed’. In addition one can dilate or constrict one’s perceptual field. Kelly (1955) also suggested that the construct system is best conceived of as operating in multi-dimensional space. These features will be relevant in the later discussion of PCP and insight.

Not only is there this type of structural and dimensional complexity, Kelly characterised construing as ever-changing over time. The earliest construing is mostly dependency construing (largely ‘preverbal’ construing relating one’s maintenance or survival processes to other people). Such construing is based on sociality or interpersonal empathy. Arguably, this basic empathic capacity or sociality implies that we are primarily interpersonal creatures. Kelly’s idea of sociality has implications for both how we experience our self, and also for how we conceptualise the influence of the social within construing. In addition, this empathic capacity may extend to experiences of a more general ecological connectedness, a speculation I will take up later in the piece.

Movement or change within the construct system was also characterised by Kelly as operating within cycles over time. The three cycles he proposed were the Circumspection, Pre-Emption and Control Cycle (CPC), the Creativity Cycle, and the Experience Cycle. The CPC cycle concerns decision making. It begins with the surveying of one’s repertoire of constructs relevant to the current circumstances (circumspection), followed by the selection of one construct (pre-emption) and ends with the choice of which pole best elaborates one’s system of anticipation (Control). The CPC cycle is not, therefore, about the creation of new constructs (it is, however, relevant to the ‘preparation’ stage of insight leading up to impasse). It is the Creativity Cycle embedded in ongoing Experience Cycles, however, that will occupy our time in the later discussion of PCP and insight.

5.3 A PERSONAL READING OF PCP

Given these (very) ‘bare bones’ of Kelly’s formal theory, and before we see what Kelly had to say about insight, it is important to clarify what type of reading of Kelly I will use. This is by no means straightforward. Reactions to Kelly’s earliest writings within a PCP framework have linked his views with diverse, seemingly contradictory psychological positions ranging from behaviourism to existentialism, with others in-between. Even within constructivism, disagreement exists concerning its nature and alignment with other constructivisms (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996; Mahoney, 1995; Neimeyer, 1995; Stam 1998; Warren, 1998). Furthermore, Kelly’s therapeutic practice was avowedly eclectic and while this may be a major strength clinically, it can lead to confusion theoretically.

At least part of the explanation for this lack of agreement arises because of the development of Kelly’s theory between the early 1950s and his last papers in 1966. As Mair (1989) put it, ‘his is a psychology itself in motion’. The contrast between the first volume of the *Psychology of Personal Constructs* (1955) and Kelly’s numerous papers, which were in many cases subsequently published (most notably Kelly 1969), has been remarked on by a variety of writers.

To illustrate, Mair (1989) contrasted the relative conventionality of Kelly’s earlier theorising and its focus on how experience is structured, with the more radical perspective of his later work in which the mode of his presentation modelled the kind of psychology he seemed to be reaching towards. That latter psychology gave “invitations for participation in psychological realities shaped by the manner and style of his telling, by a rhetoric of humor and disrespect, tradition and innovation, that he employs to speak a frame of mind into life” (Mair, 1989, p. 4).

But the characterisation of the earlier Kelly that is most relevant here concerns its relatively individualistic focus, a focus more amenable to a cognitive reading (Butt, 1995, 1998a; Radley, 1977). By this I mean that ‘cognitive’ interpretations tend to reify constructs as something people ‘have’ rather than as something they ‘do’ and hence use a mechanistic metaphor for the person (Kirkland & Anderson, 1990). Thus constructs

are often treated as internal processes that are ‘efficient’ causes of (subsequent) behaviour. When we opt for extension or definition of our system (the Choice Corollary), the cognitive interpretation would consider this choice as a type of prediction based on introspective knowledge of the (internal) construct system. This ‘cognitive’, individualist approach to PCP also reveals a relative neglect of the interpersonal or social dimensions of construing, leaving a dualism between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ that is difficult to transcend. Either this leads to a fairly mechanistic rendering of social ‘inputs’, or to an idealist position that sees construing as exclusively a projection of the person’s ‘inner outlook’ and regardless of the nature of the world construed.

An alternate reading would emphasise construing as anticipation within situated action (Radley, 1977; Butt, 1998b). This alternate view would tend to see the ‘elaborative choice’ (Choice Corollary) as a post hoc judgement, as a way of understanding people’s choices, made (mostly) un-selfconsciously amid the flurry of life’s events. It is this approach which is more consistent with Kelly’s later writings. Choice is then understood as pragmatically co-determined by the exigencies of the social situation, its discourses and resources, and by the position and nature of the person within that situation. From such a viewpoint, most construing emerges within action, without conscious prediction or forethought (Butt, 1995).

This reading sits more comfortably with Kelly’s insistence that PCP was not a cognitive theory and with his repeated rejection of the assumed necessity to distinguish cognition, affect and behaviour in certain philosophical and psychological traditions. It is also consistent with his proposal that behaviour be considered as if it were an independent, not a dependent, variable. The later Kelly (1966b, 1966c, 1977), and even the Kelly of the second volume (1955), tended to write about behaviour as a question, rather than as a test of a construction. Notably one of his last papers was a re-working of his 1963 paper “Autobiography of a Theory”, entitled “Behavior is a Question” (1966a).

Arguably, this later approach is much more compatible with the emphasis in the insight literature on tacit and unconscious awareness and on the attendant uncertainty and emotionality of insight processes. I agree with Butt (1996) and Radley (1977), who rejected the dualist image of the person who construes *then* behaves, or who predicts and *then* finds out. While important dimensions of our construing may fit this pattern, most is more tacit and more affectively charged in terms of our pressing interests and actions. I believe that understanding PCP as a pragmatic constructivism will be more amenable to an understanding of the genesis of insight.

5.3.1 PCP As A Pragmatic Constructivism

I began in Chapter 1 by delineating a type of approach to insight distinguished as ‘non-essentialist’ and as leading to a view of mind and understanding freed from objectivist strictures. The present reading of Kelly’s theorising is consistent with that approach. That is, Kelly is here considered to take a non-essentialist view of all construing, including insight processes. Being a reflexive theorist, Kelly (1955) explicitly extolled the virtues of an ‘as if’ approach not only to construing reality, but also to his own theory, asking the reader to temporarily try on the theory’s assumptive structure to see if it proved useful and meaningful. In this non-essentialist way a construct’s meaning is created by the contrast of elements within its context rather than by an application of an a priori distinction to independent objects in the world.³⁷ Constructs are not descriptions of the world, but are tools for approaching it.

But if Kelly’s approach to reality was always an ‘as if’ one, does this mean that his brand of constructivism was antithetical to realism? In the following it will be argued that while Kelly was uninterested in answers or final ‘insights’ into reality, he was very much concerned with the search for truth (Stevens & Walker, 1997). In proposing that Kelly’s pragmatic constructivism was a form of realism (Stevens, 1998), it is important to make several distinctions. Firstly, Kelly’s was a modest realism

³⁷ See 1.5.2.2 for the analogous role of ‘exemplars’ within nominalist definitions.

asserting only that the world exists or develops in ways that, at least sometimes, are independent of our desires or opinions concerning that world. In this ‘minimum’ realism there is assumed to be an ontological counterpart to our constructions, but our knowledge of it is partial and fallible. An appreciation of this will help us understand Kelly’s seeming ambivalence concerning the value of insight. To pre-empt the discussion in the following chapter somewhat, Kelly was opposed to an objectivist sense of ‘insight’³⁸ (mis)understood as the Truth. But he was passionate about the ongoing generation of insights understood as prompts to further inquiry into the truth presumed to stand behind, yet transcending, our anticipations.

5.3.1.1 Not Objectivism: Objectivity

Frequently, psychological constructivism is accused of propounding radically anti-realist, relativist and subjectivist positions. As far as PCP is concerned, I consider all three of these accusations are unwarranted.

As we have seen, Kelly was opposed to an objectivist understanding of ‘insight’ which would conceive of it as sure-and-certain knowledge. By *Objectivism* I mean that family of philosophical positions that assumes the existence of some ahistorical framework to which we can appeal in deciding upon what is objectively rational, true, good and so on (Warren, 1992). More particularly, Objectivism assumes there are truths which exist independently of human wishes and beliefs, and that there are ways of establishing these truths. In opposition to such notions Kelly frequently derided what he called “accumulative fragmentalism” (1955)³⁹ and examples of Kelly’s anti-objectivist stance are commonplace: “... no firm points of departure immediately accessible to us, ‘no givens’, nothing that we start out by saying we know for sure” (1977, p. 5). Thus insights were not to be uncritically collected as permanent ‘nuggets of truth’, but rather were to be seen as propaedeutic to further inquiry. As such, ideally, they lead to an ‘objective attitude’ on the part of the inquirer in his or her commitment to ‘objectivity’

³⁸ He always used ‘scare’ quotation marks when he intended this sense of insight.

³⁹ The objectivist notion that foundational ‘nuggets’ of truth can be accumulated to form sure-and-certain knowledge.

(Warren, 1988). The latter represents the willingness of the person to move beyond how he or she might conceive or wish the world to be (subjectivism), towards an openness to the ways in which it continually transcends our understandings.

5.3.1.2 Not Subjectivism: Subjectivity

The uncritical acceptance of ‘insight’ may also lead to *subjectivism*. This latter term implies that it is subjective experience (of individuals or of humanity generally) that is the sole foundation of factual knowledge. An extreme position sometimes associated with subjectivism is idealism (the claim that only mind or mental states exist). At times, Kelly sounded very much like a strong subjectivist: “... everything we think we know is anchored only in our own assumptions” (1977, p. 6). Nonetheless, he explicitly rejected idealism, opposing it with his version of realism: “it is a real world we shall be talking about, not a world composed solely of the flitting shadows of people’s thoughts” (Kelly, 1955, p. 5). Constructs, including insights, are ‘inventions’, but just as importantly they are open to validation or invalidation in the context of discovery. Kelly described this interplay between invention and discovery as follows:

We validate our constructions, not by memorizing them, but by discovering whether or not the events they lead us to expect actually turn up. Ideas are not discovered, they are invented. It is events that one discovers. (1959, p. 7)

Clearly the world too has its objective role in relation to our constructs. We saw in the discussion above that it was important for Kelly that we use our subjectivity in the service of our objectivity. In the interplay between invention and discovery our subjectivity can be understood as a process of commitment to the world not only as it conceivably may be, but to how it may become. As we will see, ‘genuine’ insights for Kelly had both these properties of creativity and invention in understanding and of discovery and viability in experience.

5.3.1.3 Not Relativism: Pragmatic Constructivism

The objective attitude described above is also not compatible with an endorsement of relativism. *Relativism* denies the possibility of any objectivist, ahistorical framework

and asserts instead that we cannot get beyond conceptual frameworks, language games, theoretical assumptions and so on (that our *relation* to things is included in the properties of those things). Objectivity is endlessly deferred and a thoroughgoing relativism asserts that, in the absence of any coherent notion of objective truth, any view — or in this case, *any insight* — is arguably as ‘justified’ as any other. Again, textual evidence abounds that Kelly was not satisfied with an ‘anything goes’ type of relativism. For example:

[a construct] must conform to events in order to predict them. The number of alternative ways of conforming are, as far as we know, infinite, but discriminable from the infinite number of ways which do not conform. (1955, p. 19)

Thus ‘insights’ derived from an ‘overdilated perceptual field’, for example, should not be uncritically accepted. Kelly was committed to a degree of relativity, but certainly not to complete relativism, and, ultimately, he believed the world constrains our construals. All construing, including insights, must be verified and elaborated.

I have mentioned that this view of PCP as a pragmatic constructivism is one that views construing as being manifest in action rather than as the activation of ‘inner’ cognitive entities. That is, I interpret literally what Kelly said when he called behaviour an experiment or an ‘independent variable’. Considering construing as ‘enactment’ means our embodiment is central to anticipation (Butt 1998b). Conceiving of a construct system as standing ‘behind the action’ is merely a heuristic device, a way of abstracting from the complex of feeling, acting and thinking. According to this interpretation of PCP, there is no collection of ‘things’ called ‘constructs’ inside the person waiting to be retrieved or set into motion. This pragmatic approach conceptualises construing as activities, as the ways we appreciate or find ourselves engaged in the different courses of action available to us. Kelly (1958) once said “Man lives in anticipation; we mean it literally — *he lives in anticipation!*” (p. 88, italics in original). In similar fashion insight can be understood largely as a form of enactment, sometimes occurring in the absence of obvious physical behaviour, but much more frequently evident in the person’s engagement in some act of anticipation. And Butt

(1998a, p. 108) further considered that “Anticipation refers to one’s bodily stance toward the world, one’s attitude toward it which embodies silent questions and the sorts of questions one is open to.” Such an embodied interpretation of psychological life will be useful in accounting for the phenomenology of insight and so will be further elaborated in Chapter 10.

5.4 CONCLUDING COMMENT

Psychological constructivism is well-suited to the reported phenomenology of the insight experience. In particular, its anticipatory view of understanding, seeing it as multi-valent and uncertain, as proactive rather than mechanistic, as emotional and behavioural as well as ‘cognitive’, and always as an ongoing process — all this fits in well with the active and complex processes we have encountered in this inquiry into insight. The philosophical assumptions of constructivism seem to be particularly apt to deal with the range of features associated with insight processes. For example, I have proposed that PCP is a type of pragmatic realism and constructivism that encourages continued inquiry, verification and elaboration of construing. This fits perfectly with the idea that insight processes are often profligate, with many ‘insights’ not living up to the initial hopes held for them. Insight is also an anticipatory and teleological business. It is defined by a search for solutions and ways out of impasse. And this process is coloured with uncertainty and varying levels of awareness. It is also an emotional process, continued impasse threatening as it does one’s experiential stability. Insightful breakthroughs are frequently preceded by a looser, more relaxed mental mode and are just as frequently followed by satisfaction, even joy.

I have proposed that ill-defined problems are in day-to-day life the norm rather than the exception. As such, we implicitly search for insight much of the time. This anticipatory attitude is caught well in PCP. Kelly’s theory presents an image of a world radically open to interpretation, requiring constant proactive inquiry — inquiry defined by action and commitment-in-living as much as by ‘inner’ thought. Finally, it has been proposed that an interpretation of construing as embodied inquiry, socially and pragmatically imbued, will allow us to encompass some of the aspects of the insight

experience not so well dealt with by the cognitive literature. Thus, I am now in a position to discuss what Kelly said about insight and then to elaborate this somewhat in later chapters as I build a theoretical account of insight.

CHAPTER 6: PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY AND INSIGHT

I am not saying that the nature of man is the nature of the extraordinary man. What I am saying is that the nature of man is revealed in his extraordinary moments... (Kelly, 1963, p. 214)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Kelly's references to insight were mostly 'negative' in tone. They were made exclusively in the context of therapy and, as such, he was reacting to the types of therapy in which he considered therapist and client were more committed to understanding the past than to changing the person's present and future. Such 'insights' he considered prevented change, either because the client was required to wait for sufficient understanding, or because it tied the person to the past without sufficient implications for future change. So, overall, one could be forgiven for thinking that Kelly's theory is the last place one should look for an account of insight. But Kelly was only criticising a particular attitude and use of 'insight':

... the key to therapy might be in getting the client to get on with a new way of life without waiting to acquire 'insight'. After all, is not that the way man has been treating himself for thousands of years? Rarely does one know where he is going when he launches out into a new way of life, and even less often does he know what is wrong with the pathway he abandons. (Kelly, 1969, p. 59)

Seen here is Kelly's rejection of merely cognitive or 'intellectual' insight, an insight as an answer or *end* to a person's struggles. He urged instead that the person be helped to experiment with his or her day-to-day activities and social roles in order to generate therapeutic change. The 'insight' he rejected is one at a high level of cognitive awareness and one that does not necessarily imply improved psychological and social functioning. What Kelly said is interesting: 'Do not wait for insight, involve yourself, commit yourself to some new project.' As he pointed out — and as we have seen in

relation to the insight literature — when confronted with genuine impasse in response to ill-defined problems one does not know where the solution lies or even where one is going wrong. Ironically, Kelly's enactive solution is, of course, suggestive of the playful, creative experimentation we have seen reported again and again in the research into insight. It also recalls last chapter's reading of construing as embodied and experimental. In other words, this recommendation for experimental action, rather than waiting upon 'insight', reflects the types of creative approach consistently reported by insightful people.

Kelly was simply telling us not to sit around waiting for 'insight' as if that in itself would solve our problems. Note the 'scare quotes' he used for 'insight'. Kelly was not opposed to insight in the terms that the current research has been developing. As will be seen, when he used the term 'insight' (with inverted commas) he seems to have in mind only the Aha! experience (mis)conceived by the 'recipient' as objective access to Truth, and not the full sequence of insight processes with which we have become familiar. Indeed, what he has described here is the best way he knew of generating what he did call 'genuine' insight. This is, of course, entirely consistent with his therapeutic strategies of enactment and fixed role therapy.⁴⁰ Although Kelly's treatment of insight may appear to be at the very least ambivalent, it is subtly nuanced, and a close analysis promises a further illumination of how it is we come to genuinely new understandings following impasse.

6.2 THE 'NEGATIVE' POLE

Most of Kelly's references to insight are negative in tone. Indeed, the majority of his uses of the term 'insight' are in 'scare quotes', sometimes expressing scepticism, at other times outright disdain. His strongest disapproval is reserved for (presumably psychodynamic) therapists who may see their job as providing insights for the client to internalise: "*Insight*, as we see it, is too often applied by clinicians only to those clients

⁴⁰ Where the client and therapist develop a new role for the client as a preferred alternative to the client's current self-characterisation. After considerable co-operative development of this role in the therapy room, the client then tries on the new way of living over a period of several weeks.

who adopt the clinician's pet constructs" (Kelly, 1955, p. 359, italics in original). Clearly, therapist-centred 'insight' of this type was to have no place in PCP. But of course clients will not be bereft of their own insights. For Kelly, however, there are problems here too. These 'insights' may be the result of an overdilated perceptual field — where the client believes his or her every thought is a wonderful insight. Kelly (1955) lampooned this as the "I-see-it-all-now type of reconstruction" (p. 842).

Kelly's concern was not only that an 'insight' may be trivial. If it is indeed a "comprehensive construction of one's behavior" (1955, p. 917) — Kelly's definition of a 'new insight' — then he warned that it "... can be extremely threatening. It may throw a client into a state of panic" (p. 917). When discussing the *Generalization of Insight* in the context of a 'hostile' client,⁴¹ Kelly sounded a dire warning to overzealous therapists:

If therapy is 'deep', there will come a time when the therapist will expect the client to see that his hostility is more widely diffused than he realized during the early weeks of treatment. If the therapist is impatient to pass this landmark, he may wake up some morning to find that his prize therapy case has ended up in suicide or in a psychotic break. (1955, p. 891)

More generally, Kelly believed that brilliant therapy room insights may actually block future movement by locking the client into the past or into fatalist constructions. "The client finally has a satisfactory formulation of 'how he got that way', but his 'insights' are not sufficiently permeable to carry implications as to 'what he can do about it'" (1955, p. 1091).⁴²

6.3 THE 'POSITIVE' POLE

That insight was not a goal of psychotherapy, however, did not mean it was unimportant in the therapeutic process. Indeed, Kelly discussed favourably the nature of "new insight" (1955, p. 917) and his entire therapeutic project could be characterised as an

⁴¹ In Kelly's terms 'hostility' refers to the non-acceptance of invalidation and to the distortion of the evidence to fit one's anticipations.

⁴² "A construct is permeable if it admits newly perceived elements into its context" (Kelly, 1955, p. 563).

attempt to assist the client to come to just such insights. Considering his theory's philosophical basis in 'constructive alternativism', whereby it is assumed that "all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement" (Kelly, 1955, p. 15), it could reasonably be expected that reconstruing and seeing matters in a fresh light would receive Kelly's unambiguous approval. In fact, there is support for this expectation: "Only when new events are unexpectedly brought into the display is it likely that *genuinely new insights* can be instigated" (1959, p. 24, italics added). So here it is seen that 'genuine' insight is possible. Compare the positive tone of the following passage to those presented earlier:

... a genuinely new insight does what all experienced therapists have long known that it does; it changes not only the way a particular problematic event is seen, but also the way many others are seen. It changes them so that the client often refers to them as if they all had somewhat different identities now. (Kelly, 1959, p. 24)

Kelly obviously had in mind here the positive potential of genuine insight. He went on to say that such a burst of insight must be tested against future events; that it may fail to "point as sharply to subsequent events as it should" (1955, p. 44). Nonetheless, the context also makes it clear that there is no thoroughgoing therapeutic movement without this type of insight. When one considers PCP, the capacity to build new constructs and to change with a changing world (Creativity Cycle), to extend and define one's system of constructs (Choice Corollary), to never be boxed in by circumstances but always to have the relative freedom of reconstrual (Constructive Alternativism) — in fact nearly everywhere one looks — there is room for the fresh outlooks that insight implies.

6.4 INSIGHT AND RECONSTRUCTION IN PCP

Because insight marks a change in a person's understanding, the ways in which Kelly conceptualised reconstruction promise to be a useful place to start. The purpose of Personal Construct Therapy is reconstruction, that is, to assist clients in changing their active anticipations of themselves and of their world. Kelly, on a number of occasions (1955, p. 941 and p. 945), described three types of reconstruction. Where the client

1) reconstrues without altering constructs or the existing construct system, 2) reconstrues by reorganising the construct system, and 3) reconstrues by developing new constructs.

6.4.1 ‘Non-Insight’ Reconstructions

The first two reconstructions above are ‘non-insight’ reconstructions. For example, each construct, being bi-polar, offers the possibility of contrast reconstruction or ‘slot rattling’ as Kelly (1955) called it. That is, the person reconstrues by shifting one of the elements in the construct context from one pole to the other. For example, in a construct ‘safe—dangerous’ the client may construe the therapist as ‘safe’ one day, and as ‘dangerous’ the next. As such, there is no new dimension of understanding formed. Alternatively, the person can reconstrue by surveying his or her repertoire of relevant constructs (Circumspection), by choosing one (Pre-emption), and choosing the most ‘elaborative’ pole of the construct (Control). This CPC cycle (Circumspection - Pre-Emption - Control) does not create new constructs or new insights.

In similar fashion, Controlled Elaboration (1955, pp. 938-939) is reconstruction in which the hierarchies of the system are reorganised (often superordinate constructs are tightened) in order to better integrate constructs. This internal consistency leads to more certainty and this experience may be (rashly) labelled ‘insight’. Kelly warned that controlled elaboration may be over-valued by those who believed therapy should aim for verbal consistency, which often entails a sort of false ‘insight’ where the client merely agrees with the therapist. Finally, the reduction of constructs to impermeability may limit the use of a problematic construct by tying it tightly to specific elements, or by tying it to the past. While there is no substantial change to the conceptual basis of the construct, this process often leads to the development of a new construct that better deals with the elements now excluded from the original construct.

6.4.2 Reconstruction Involving Insight

It is the third type of reconstruction, the development of new constructs, that repeatedly earned Kelly's highest praise (e.g. 1955, pp. 134-135, 187, 586, 941) and that is most relevant to our interest in insight. Kelly (1955) considered the development of new constructs as central to Personal Construct therapy:

In addition to producing superficial movement, or seesaw movement, in some instances, and using the method of controlled elaboration in others, the psychoclinician's role is most fundamentally one of helping the client to *revise constructs*. (p. 586)

The development of new constructs allows for new understandings, for understandings not possible within the existing construct system. There are two main avenues to new insight: 1) new elements applied to old constructs, and 2) new constructs applied to existing elements.

6.4.2.1 New Elements Applied To Old Constructs

Developing new constructs may be achieved by increasing the range of convenience⁴³ of a construct, making it more permeable. This makes it applicable to more events and may thereby lead to a need *to alter the construct's conceptual basis* and thus, to experiencing new insights. Take, for example, a person who may, somewhat simplistically, consider that people who are religiously active are either 'dogmatic' or 'spiritual'. If this construct is causing the person problems, the therapist may introduce new, challenging elements for the client in an effort to encourage more differentiated construing in this regard.

The therapist may help the client to see, for example, that what he or she has been labelling 'dogmatic' might also include an experience-based, thoughtful conviction in the wisdom of central doctrines of one's faith. On the other hand, some behaviour that has been seen as 'spiritual' may be understood to include a person who practices a non-reflective, pre-emptive (that is, dogmatic) rejection of all religious dogma! To

⁴³ All those events to which a construct may be usefully applied.

incorporate these new elements Kelly (1955) speculated that the construct axes must be ‘rotated’ which would have the effect of bringing the construct into a new relation with the rest of the person’s system of constructs. The label of the construct (‘religious people’) may remain the same, but the discrimination at the heart of the construct may be quite different and it may come under the regnancy of different (perhaps more permeable) superordinate structures.

In the above case, the ‘dogmatic’ pole may be replaced by a notion of ‘unthinking inflexibility’, while the ‘spiritual’ pole may now reflect ‘genuine religious experience’ (independent of whether any particular dogma is professed). The reigning superordinate construct may now be a more permeable (perhaps more abstract) one from the person’s repertoire, something like ‘close-mindedness’—‘openness’, for example. Because these new elements have brought about a ‘rotation’ of the construct, further new elements, once not relevant, are also now within the range of convenience of the revised construct and allow for further new insights. This revised construct will embody new behavioural implications, some welcome, some problematic. In other words, new insight emerges progressively from series of Creativity Cycles as the person ‘fine-tunes’ the developing construct dimension/s.

6.3.2.2 New Constructs For Old Elements

Another strategy the therapist may use in developing construct revision is helping the client “impose new constructs upon old elements” (1955, p. 939). Normally, constructs introduced by the therapist in this way are relatively incidental.⁴⁴ That is, they apply non-comprehensively to elements and people not central to the person’s identity and core experience. In terms of the above ‘religious person’ construct, a new construct of ‘close-mindedness’ — ‘openness’ may be ‘provided’ by the therapist and applied to specific people quite removed from the person’s day-to-day life (perhaps by way of an analogy, fable or story). Gradually, as the construct allows the person to better

⁴⁴ This is to minimise the likelihood of threat. As the person finds the new construct useful and meaningful, it can be allowed to subsume more and more events, eventually becoming more comprehensive without being too threatening.

anticipate reality, it may be applied to more and more familiar people and perhaps finally to the client's self. As this happens, the old construct of 'dogmatic'—'spiritual' can be reduced to relative impermeability and confined to the particular people and incidents that occasioned its formation. The new construct 'takes over' many of the old elements, and the 'same' events are now seen in an entirely different light.

6.5 THE CREATIVITY CYCLE: PRODUCING NEW INSIGHTS

Construct revision and replacement is facilitated by successive Creativity Cycles. These cycles are characterised by alternating sequences of *loose* and *tight* construing:

Loosening is defined as characteristic of those constructs leading to varying predictions, while a tight construct holds its elements firmly in their prescribed contexts. Under loose construction, an element classified at one pole of a construct on one occasion is envisioned at the contrast pole on another. (1955, pp. 1029-30)

Such a loosened construct is elastic, shifting the allegiance of elements to its poles (as in dreams) and also allowing new elements to become relevant as the discrimination at the heart of the construct becomes less precise. Thus in a dream a person may appear, for example, to be a man. Then, without any apparent subjective sense of contradiction, the person changes into a woman. Kelly considered such loosening "a necessary stage of creative thinking" (1955, p. 1030). Loosening can lead to more construct *permeability*. That is, it can develop constructs that more easily admit newly perceived elements into their contexts. If such (permeable) constructs are superordinate enough, they open up a whole field of further, subordinate construct variations, including an openness to new experiences. When the tightening phase of the creativity cycle is reached one may experience new insight, as the newly-formed construct allows one to 'see' things in ways not possible before. This is why large scale insights can alternatively be so liberating, or so threatening: being superordinate, they can carry great implications for the person.

Kelly (1955) described loosened construction as a type of rubber template cast over events. Because the person allows for approximate results, or non-exactitude,

previously rejected elements may now be subsumed by constructs, or existing elements may even be placed at the opposite ends of the construct concerned. This can only mean that the discriminative function or contrast implied by the construct is weakened making the poles less ‘different’. Bi-polar constructs were defined by Kelly as embodying the ways in which some elements are similar yet different from another group of elements. Under the loosening of a construct elements that were previously contrasted may now be viewed as relatively the ‘same’ (belonging to the same pole). I will return to this idea in my speculations linking symmetrical and asymmetrical thought (Matte-Blanco, 1988; Rayner, 1995) with Kelly’s Creativity Cycle.

An example of this exploratory use of loose construing may help. Using a bipolarity ‘gentle—violent’, one might may understand one’s friend as a gentle person today and as violent tomorrow, and perhaps gentle again the next day — even given relatively similar contextual conditions.⁴⁵ Shifts in the meaning of ‘gentle—violent’ account for this inconsistency in construction and the allegiance of elements to ‘their’ poles becomes tenuous. Loosening, therefore, is a description applied to construing which operates amid this type of ‘polar’ shifting of elements. Such a style of construing may also reduce anxiety by not exposing prediction to exact test. An awareness that one’s friend ‘really’ is violent may be quite threatening or guilt-provoking, so loosening-up the meaning of ‘gentle—violent’ may help one avoid these discomforts. The difference between ‘gentle’ and ‘violent’ is allowed to blur. In quite loose construing almost any experience can fit one’s anticipation because the differences between elements are downplayed in favour of their similarities (with respect to the construct). Even if predictions appear to be disconfirmed (to an onlooker), the loosely construing person may say: “... that is practically what I said” (Kelly, 1955, p. 854). But even in the loosest of construing Kelly maintained there is always some discriminative structure.

⁴⁵ This differs from ‘slot rattling’ because in slot rattling the discrimination inherent in, for example ‘gentle—violent’, stays the same, but in loosening the construct meaning must change to accommodate the shifting of elements within its range. It is also significant to note that this shifting of discrimination may not be disturbing to the construing person, but may be quite alarming for those around him or her (particularly for one’s ‘friend’!).

A construct does not exist in isolation. It is a summary term for an act of discrimination, an awareness operating within a system of associated meanings. The particular rules of association Kelly defined were ordinal, operating in terms of superordinate structures determining subordinate ones. Loosening, therefore, is simultaneously a description of the altered relations within a (subordinate) construct *and* of the hierarchies which subsume that construct. Loosening involves an act of construing in which superordinate hierarchies do not highlight what in tighter modes of construing we might have considered 'illogicalities'. In short, intransitivities of thought, or fragmentation, is ignored. Indeed, Kelly (1955) considered that loosened construction was relatively un-bound by superordinate structures. Rather than operating within strict ordinal relations, loose construing may involve more 'lateral' associations, either invoking more than one chain of construct implications at a time, or in succession. Such lateral associations and linking may involve constructs which share elements, whose range of convenience is similar (Chiari, Mancini, Nicolò & Nuzzo, 1990). This possibility will be taken up in the later discussion of Matte-Blanco's (1975, 1988) notion of 'symmetrical thought'. This lateral 'logic' may also help account for the expanded range of convenience of loose constructs because the weakening of a construct's contrast function may allow for additional 'similar' events to be incorporated within the construct.

One effect of loosening is to help us tolerate ambiguity while we experiment with ideas. On initial tightening, or what Kelly called 'provisional tightening', this experimentation is often rejected in the face of relevant evidence. This provisional tightening clearly parallels the metacognitive strategies outlined in the insight literature. It suggests a superordinating point of view which is playful and experimental, ready to relinquish tight 'logical' control over thought. If the new construct proves anticipatory, however, it may enable the person to understand or 'fit' with events in new, perhaps improved ways. That is, tightening sometimes leads to new insights. Nonetheless, for Kelly, these new insights must be tested and integrated into the construct system before they earn the title of 'genuine new insights'.

Kelly seemed to mostly use a narrow definition of ‘insight’, one that was restricted to the ‘Aha!’ experience where loosened construction is provisionally tightened. Thus he viewed the “new constructs which arise out of loosened construction, not as the ‘true thoughts’ or ‘insights’ of the person, but as new hypotheses which still must be tightened up and tested before they are to accepted as useful” (1955, p. 530). Of course this view fits neatly with the insight literature’s emphasis on the profligacy of insight (Perkins, 1995; Simonton, 1997) and of the universal need to verify and elaborate the ‘Aha!’ experience (for it to be integrated within the person’s broader matrix of meanings). That is, this type of Kellian emphasis on pragmatic criteria is found in most contemporary accounts of insight. A PCP understanding of the integration of new constructs should, therefore, contribute to an understanding of the nature and experience of insight.

6.6 THE EXPERIENCE CYCLE: THE PATH TO GENUINE NEW INSIGHTS

The Experience Cycle represents the pathway to optimal psychological functioning in PCP, and is where insight, for Kelly, finds its proper home. Roughly, the cycle is as follows: construal within a situation, imaginative involvement or commitment, affirmative anticipation in action, assessment of outcomes, and finally, reconstrual. Or, as Kelly put it:

... imagination, once stirred, often leads to initiative, and initiative to action, and action produces something unexpected for men to contemplate and experience, and, finally, the newest experience throws the recollections of prior experiences into fresh perspective. (1977, p. 8)

A direct parallel between the traditional stages of insight and Kelly’s Experience Cycle (1955) can be made. With the exception of an incubation period, these stages of experience match closely the classic stages of insight put forward by Wallas (1926):

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Preparation | ⇒ construal, involvement, commitment. |
| 2. Impasse | ⇒ unexpected events, invalidation, perhaps hostility. |
| Incubation | ⇒ no clear match. |
| 3. Insight | ⇒ stirred imagination; affirmative participation |
| 4. Elaboration and Verification | ⇒ assessment and reconstrual. |

This process of experience exemplifies Kelly's definition of a 'genuine new insight' as a "comprehensive construction of one's behavior" found to be permeable enough to anticipate or fit with new events. Our invented constructs must be supported by discovery, by pragmatic results. New constructs need to be devised and revised, not because any construct is as good as another, but because of their relative efficacy. Indeed, the world and the person are co-specified in our construals and, within validated (viable) construing, person and world merge. Within invalidated (non-viable) construing the person 'bumps' into the world, experiencing this as a perturbation to the smooth flow of living or anticipation. When one no longer anticipates or fits with one's world, separateness (anxiety⁴⁶) is born. Reconstrual will likely follow in an attempt to restore our sense of connection with our world, especially with others, even if it be via 'hostility' or denial.

We have seen that insight is frequently reported as a largely tacit, physically and socially embedded process. It is developed within sequences of hard work and idleness, conscious thought and dreamlike reverie, social interaction and deliberate solitude, relatively detached calculation and affective sensitivity. In similar fashion, we see here that Kelly urged us to enter into cycles of loosening and tightening (creativity) embedded within cycles of experience. In this way insight may be understood as a prompt to engage in more experiential or embodied inquiry rather than as an intellectual full stop. In the terminology of the cognitive literature, life presents itself much more as an infinite series of 'ill-defined problems' rather than as well-defined 'puzzles' for us to

⁴⁶ Kelly (1955, p. 565) defined anxiety as the "awareness that the events with which one is confronted lie mostly outside the range of convenience of his construct system"

solve. Such an existential plight requires more than disembodied, calculating reason. It requires the fully affective, frequently tacit, engagement of the person's anticipatory processes.

Significantly, it seems to be in the 'incubation' period that crucial work towards an experience of insight is undertaken. It is probably here that construct axes are (somewhat vaguely) 'rotated' as cycles of loosening and tightening are undertaken. The term 'incubation', suggesting as it does 'sleep', betrays our cultural biases towards that which can be verbalised and towards conscious experience, but this 'incubatory' period is unlikely to be a period of mental inactivity — whatever that might mean for a living person. Kelly's account of insight is under-specified in exactly this phase of awareness. One will look in vain in Kelly's writings for an account of loosening (and tightening) beyond descriptions of its effects or of methods for its manipulation.

This theoretical deficit is extraordinary given the importance of these processes within his therapy. For example, in a recent PCP-list discussion on the Internet (1998) Fay Fransella, a prominent PCP practitioner and author, recalled that Kelly repeatedly said that 'loosening—tightening' was his most important theoretical construct. Yet these processes are not built into the assumptive structure of his theory. As Bell (1996) has indicated, apart from the detailed treatment of loosening and tightening as *practical strategies* in therapy, they seem to fulfil an *ad hoc theoretical role* of accounting for psychological phenomena, such as fragmentation and perhaps construct revision, that are poorly accounted for by his formal fundamental postulate and corollaries. I will attempt to make good this deficit in Kelly's theorising in the following chapters.

6.7 INSIGHT AS A MEANS TO THERAPEUTIC ENDS.

The contents of insights were secondary for Kelly to the person's overall psychological adjustment and to the requirements of the construct system as a whole. Mastery of the Creativity Cycle, while an essential skill to be learned in therapy, is not sufficient for therapeutic success. The client must, in addition, learn to 'sort the wheat from the chaff', as it were, in relation to his or her insights.

The therapist seeks only to have the client work through a series of stages of ‘insight’, partly so that he will attain a particular better mode of adjustment, partly so that he will learn *a way* to develop better and better modes of adjustment. The therapist teaches the client how to be creative in reconstruing his life. (1955, p. 1085, italics added)

It is evident that Kelly was interested, not in producing particular insights, but in engendering *a way* of dealing creatively with the world, of generating and enacting insights in an ongoing fashion. Each client was to be trained as a ‘constructive alternativist’. Arriving at ever-fresh visions of what is worthwhile (Kelly, 1980) is a goal that one never quite attains; it extends beyond the therapy room into the person’s future ventures. Developing the skill to generate and to integrate selected insights is a major goal of Personal Construct therapy. One has to learn how to become open to new elements in the context of one’s constructs and how to ‘try on’ new constructs and weave them into one’s system of constructs.

While therapy is not the focus here, Kelly’s emphasis on enabling clients to develop their ability for creativity and insight is most relevant. In this regard, important questions remain. By what specific processes do we produce these new insights? How does a construct become more permeable or accommodate new elements within its purview? How do we assimilate a new construct, adjusting it and weaving it into the fabric of our system? I will try to answer these questions by analysing Kelly’s descriptions of loose and tight construing and by moving into a more speculative (loose) phase of this inquiry.

6.8 GENERATING INSIGHTS: ELABORATING KELLY’S SCHEME

6.8.1 Loosening Construing

There were four therapeutic strategies for inducing loosening in a client described by Kelly (1955, pp. 1033-1050). Loosening can be brought about by relaxation, by chain association, by recounting dreams, and by the therapist’s uncritical acceptance of the

client. Kelly (1955) did not explain how and why such processes lead to loosening, except to simply say that relaxation produces loosening and “because the [loose] structure is more resilient, [it is] often less likely to be shattered into anxiety” (p. 1034). More will be said in a later chapter about why such strategies might be conducive of loosening, but to indicate the path I wish to tread, being relaxed or feeling accepted and unthreatened will be characterised *as a form of construing*, as a type of ‘transcending affective awareness’. It will be characterised as a capacity to dwell in a non-anxious way within multiplicity, openness and uncertainty. It may be that the ‘normal’ implicative links to self-maintenance and core constructs are suspended for a time to facilitate this.⁴⁷

The effects of therapeutic loosening are varied. Because certain elements are no longer ‘logically’ ruled out, ‘forgotten’ events might now be recalled. In addition, preverbal constructs may now be allowed to have approximate form in words or in figurative and non-verbal expression. Ideas can be combined in novel, experimental ways and, finally, the loosening of a pre-emptive construct by the inclusion of new elements may lead to the application or fashioning of other constructs relevant to the elements at hand.

But what happens during loosening apart from the (vague) ‘rotating’ of the construct axis? Kelly suggested new elements come into one’s field of attention, not now being ‘ruled out by logic-tight construction’ and new experiences are thereby generated including different responses from one’s associates. The looseness generally extends the range of convenience of the construct and can make it more permeable to new experience. In addition, a loosened construct, when it starts to tighten, “begins to fall into place under some new forms of superordinate construction” (1955, p. 1050). This allows for new patterns of implication, for new possibilities in meaning as the new superordinate structure takes over, or subsumes, the remaining old elements in the changed construct while introducing its own range of elements. But Kelly did not

⁴⁷ This may require the relative abeyance of dependency construing in insight processes (see 6.8.5 below).

explain *how* or *why* loosening leads to these effects, content as he was to describe its general features and therapeutic manipulation.

The new connections with other subsystems of meanings frequently lead to a flurry of new ideas, changing far more than the discrimination inherent in just one changing construct. This is consistent with findings in the literature that when experiencing insight the person may feel he or she is a witness or audience to the unfolding of a network of associated meanings experienced as a whole. For example, writers frequently report that their sudden insights are experienced as exterior and spontaneous and may come as narrative wholes to which they ‘listen’ (Epel, 1994). In therapy, Kelly (1955) was cautious about just this feature of insight because of the unpredictable and comprehensive chains of implication that genuine insights may occasion.

Kelly identified in loosening part of what he referred to as ‘schizoid’ thinking. There is ample evidence that excessive loosening, that is loosening not subsumed within adequately permeable and comprehensive superordinate structures, can lead to considerable anxiety, even to a diagnosis of schizophrenia and thought disorder (Kelly, 1955, p. 497, see also Bannister & Fransella, 1966; Bell, 1996; Winter, 1992). Nonetheless, it is clear that loosening is neither inherently adaptive or maladaptive:

... ‘schizoid’ thinking takes place, on occasion, in almost everyone; that it is characteristic of transitional stages in one’s mental development; that it is even characteristic of the transitional stages in solving an ordinary problem; that it appears in the course of creative production; and that it may appear in some degree in any far-reaching adjustment. (1955, p. 866)

Seen here is the positive potential for creativity and insight that loosening provides. A crucial feature is that loose construction (‘schizoid thinking’) is a characteristic of *transition* within the construct system, and this introduces the topic of emotion in PCP.

6.8.2 Loosening And Emotion

If you consider your own experience of moving from tight to loose and back again to tight, do you regard this experience as best designated by the notion of ‘feeling’ or best designated by the notion of ‘thinking’ or is it not adequately designated by the construct at all? (Bannister, 1977, p. 32)

One of Kelly’s many original theoretical contributions was to characterise what normally goes under the title ‘emotion’ in transitional terms. Bannister (see above) neatly captures this sense of the blurring of the distinction between thought and emotion in the movements between loose and tight construing. For Kelly (1955) emotion was characterised as an awareness of the imminence of change in one’s anticipatory structures, in one’s being. Kelly was not claiming this was *all* emotion was, but his way of characterising it was explanatory and it carried with it implications for therapeutic intervention. For example, ‘anxiety’ was re-conceptualised as an awareness that events were somewhat outside one’s capacity to anticipate. ‘Threat’ was defined as an awareness of imminent comprehensive change to one’s core structures. ‘Emotion’, in Kelly’s terms, *is* a type of construing (Crittenden, 1991) and this is consistent with his rejection of the tripartite division of mental life into cognition, affect and conation. It is construing characterised by an awareness of the vicissitudes of construction and reconstruction and, because it frequently involves changes in constructs, it is intimately intertwined with cycles of loose and tight construction.

One may fall into the error of considering that Kelly’s is a very ‘cognitive’ rendering of emotion, that feeling follows thought. This would be to misunderstand in a most fundamental way what Kelly was trying to say. That is, our experience of emotion is not typically preceded by conscious evaluation and consciously considered assessment. Rather, we usually experience emotion as spontaneous, as rapid or even as uncontrolled. In this way the nature of emotional experience reflects the nature of all construing. Most construing is largely implicit, tacit, emergent-in-action. It is more akin to walking, returning a tennis shot or holding a conversation, than as a result of premeditation. Some emotional experience may result from construing at a high level

of awareness, but most seems to precede such clear verbally-mediated distinction making. A later discussion of contemporary research into the nature of emotion (see Chapter 8) will help us better understand this point and its relation to insight processes.

McCoy (1977, 1981), in elaborating Kelly's 'emotional' scheme, reasoned that positive emotion is generally related to awareness of the success of one's anticipations, while negative emotions are related to an awareness of one's unsuccessful attempts to anticipate. It is noteworthy that the content of a 'positive' emotion need not be 'pleasurable', only that anticipation was successful. As construct systems are dynamic processes always in transition, emotionality is potentially always present within construing — its intensity varying with the implications judged to flow from the incipient changes. Construing may be 'non-emotional' to the extent that its content does not include awareness of the validation fortunes and incipient changes within our construct system.

Of particular interest here, in our inquiry into insight, is what occurs during and after impasse. I have noted that impasse is frequently characterised by denial or the transitional emotion, 'hostility', as Kelly defined it. That is, the problem-solver cannot see beyond previously invalidated solutions because these ways of being have worked in 'similar' situations in the past and/or because the implied changes to constructs are too threatening. But what occurs when or if hostility is abandoned? Perhaps the person will constrict his or her 'perceptual field', thus cutting off potential reconstruction as well as the awareness of any need for change. Or if the person is confident in these matters of impasse and insight, loosening may be a deliberate 'metacognitive' and 'aggressive' strategy, one learned from previous triumphs over the frustrations of impasse. Alternatively, anxiety may lead to a defensive loosening of construing as the person attempts to defocus his or her 'inadequate' construing. Importantly, this latter strategy implies that within quite loose construing we may experience *less* 'emotion'.⁴⁸ When

⁴⁸ Though, as we will see this depends on how loose. The parallel we will draw later is between loose construing and symmetrical thought (Matte-Blanco, 1988). Matte-Blanco said that the more symmetrical (loose) our awareness processes are, the less conscious we will be of them. The inferential incompatibilities and intransitivities in thought that may normally give rise to anxiety and threat will not be recognised. That is, negative emotion may not be experienced in quite loose construing as such constructions are relatively unbound by superordinate structures.

one attempts to be aware of, to validate the implications of the now-tightening construct, ‘emotional’ experience may occur. And this brings us to the question of tightening.

6.8.3 Tightening Construing

Tighter construing is brought about by a wide variety of techniques. These include time, place, person and word binding, judging or evaluating one’s constructions, the client or therapist verbally summarising the constructions concerned, using historical explanation, relating one’s thinking to others, the therapist asking for explanation or clarification, the therapist challenging the client construction, enacting one’s constructions, forming clear concepts, and asking for validating evidence. The effects of tightening include defining or making explicit what the person is predicting or anticipating, stabilising construction so that the person’s behaviour is less capricious, facilitating the organisation of ordinal relationships within the construct system, reducing some constructs to impermeability, and encouraging specific experimentation based on clear hypotheses. And I might add to these that it is often when we provisionally tighten up loose construing we may experience ‘emotion’. That is, when we become aware, at some level, of the implications for our construct system of the construing that is being tightened up, we can be said to be construing ‘emotionally’.

The basic operation within tightening is placing the construct more firmly within a structure of ordinal (hierarchical) relationships and implications. As Kelly said: “When one construes loosely and his constructs are not bound by superordinate structures, he may be ‘experiencing’ only. When one construes tightly, it becomes possible, though not inevitable, for his constructs to be fitted into a system” (1955, p. 1068). The more explicit the placement of elements within a construct, the more ‘tightly’ it can be subsumed within a hierarchical structure allowing for consistent implication and more explicit anticipation. This implies that loosening corresponds to the relative undoing of this hierarchic, implicative structure — a loss of structure normally associated with anxiety. But perhaps deliberate loosening within superordinate ‘emotional assessments’ of non-threat, or of one’s overall anticipatory competence, allays potential anxiety. This

reflects the role given to ‘metacognitions’ in the cognitive insight literature which frame what is happening, making difficulties and frustration meaningful, even subjectively ‘positive’. In these terms, ‘provisional tightening’ may be an important metacognitive strategy representing a type of relative security or serenity in the face of changing understandings.

6.8.4 Tightening And Emotion

At an ‘emotional’ level of description (in terms of an awareness of the anticipatory fortunes of our construing), such a ‘fitting into a system’ of a newly-formed construct would be experienced as ‘positive’ (McCoy, 1977, 1981), even if further down the track the implications prove threatening or anxiety-provoking in other areas of the system. And, not infrequently we may wish we did not come to certain insights, as we quickly realise the new comprehensive sense we make of our world is quite disturbing.⁴⁹ For this latter reason Kelly was cautious about pre-emptively embracing moments of insight in therapy. Nonetheless, here is seen a plausibly simple account of the joy and positive affect associated with the moment of insight. In particular, the type and degree of positive affect is related to whether core or peripheral constructs are involved, and whether comprehensive or incidental change is at stake. For example, comprehensive validation of core structures can lead to an experience of ‘love’ (McCoy, 1977), while similar partial validation is related to ‘happiness’ and ‘joy’. Or ‘contentment’ is related to an awareness of the adequate anticipatory functioning of one’s system, and so on. Such emotional states seem to be ubiquitous in insight experiences.

Alternatively, when loose construing is tightened and does not fit into a system of implications (leads to confusion or contradiction), anxiety may be experienced due to the perceived lack of anticipatory structure. This can lead to further loosening and to distortions of thought and perception (Bell, 1996) and to an inability to predict and make sense of events. On the other hand, if the person is open to creativity, ambiguity

⁴⁹ In this sense ‘threat’ may sometimes be an example of an insight we wish we had not come to.

and experimentation, then his or her superordinate processes of understanding may be relatively comprehensive and permeable. With such processes in sway, initial anticipatory failures may be taken in the person's reconstructive stride. Further 'aggressive' Creativity Cycles may then be undertaken until a satisfactory new constructive solution is reached.

6.8.5 Dependency Construing, Emotion And Insight

Dependency construing is concerned with our self-maintenance (biological and psychological), primarily in relation to others. Kelly (1955, 1962) considered that as we grow older we do not become less dependent, but rather we tend to distribute our dependencies more widely as our construing becomes more differentiated. Mostly we depend on others to help us meet our needs, but we also depend on ourselves, on activities, animals and even objects to maintain our psychological balance. As Kelly's Fundamental Postulate suggests, all our psychological processes are governed by the ways we anticipate. Our very survival is tied to this capacity to anticipate and to find novel ways in which to fit our environment. This question of survival or self-maintenance introduces dependency construing into this inquiry into insight. Although dependency construing is not concerned directly with creativity and insight, an absence of self-concern and self-monitoring does seem to be a necessary condition for the looser style of construction preliminary to insight. In other words, when we feel safe and not concerned about our needs and survival, it is likely that dependency construing and core construing are not predominant. And, as we have seen, these are conditions propitious to insight.

Because dependency construing is so fundamental, it is likely to be very superordinate in our systems of anticipation and probably has potential implicative links to almost all our construing. At the same time, dependency construing — being substantially established in the early years of life — is largely preverbal. This reveals a very interesting feature of construing: that level in the ordinal structure is not necessarily commensurate with level of cognitive awareness. In other words, patterns of

construing may be at a low level of awareness, may even be entirely implicit or tacit, yet be very superordinate. Thus, ‘unconscious’ construing may be simultaneously tied into, including subsuming many chains of ‘conscious’ construing, yet we may be only vaguely aware of that fact, and may not be able to verbalise such influential anticipatory processes. This means that relatively undifferentiated and inchoate emotionally-laden themes may at times determine or subsume extensive networks of construing which may be more consciously available. It will be seen in Chapter 8 that contemporary research into the neuropsychology of emotion supports this hypothesis. The significance of this in terms of insight is that the initial frustration, even despair, entailed by continued impasse in understanding may implicate broad networks of meaning. If the person can maintain this broad pattern of meaning without an urgency to predict a solution to one’s problem; and without anxiety and self-concern dictating the constructive outcome, then an insightful resolution may come to pass.

Because Kelly defined various emotions in terms of a subjective awareness of the anticipatory state of the construct system, dependency construing would tend to be experienced as relatively ‘emotional.’⁵⁰ We have seen, for example, that the effective functioning of our anticipatory system is fundamental to survival, and that awareness of imminent comprehensive changes in core processes is experienced as threat. Generally, the perceived inability to anticipate is experienced as anxiety. Kelly (1962), in discussing the inchoate nature of much dependency construing, speaks of a “nameless craving only, a massive loneliness, or a desperate urgency to find something or to be with someone” (p. 199). Such ‘monolithic’, superordinate construing subsumes our

⁵⁰ Kelly pointedly and repeatedly refused to distinguish between cognitive and affective processes (1955, 1962). While the present work is basically in agreement with the spirit of this refusal, there may be grounds to distinguish more ‘emotional’ and ‘cognitive’ construing (Crittenden, 1991). Contemporary neuro-psychological advances have identified quite distinct brain pathways that are involved in and which mediate ‘emotional’ responses and those involved in more linguistically representable cognitive consciousness. However, as a generalisation, Kelly’s theorising shows considerable foresight. Although ‘emotional’ pathways show some independence of higher cortical patterns of activity (LeDoux, 1998), it is clear that our affective experience, our (slower) awareness of our emotional responses — the way we infuse them with meaning — means that ‘cognition’ and ‘affect’ are always mixed (LeDoux, 1998). It may be the case that emotional responses (as in animals) are possible without reflexive cognitive awareness (without ‘knowing’ one is undergoing an emotional reaction), but all reflexive awareness will have some sort of affective ‘tone’ (Goleman, 1995). These matters will be given more detailed treatment in Chapter 8.

anticipatory resources in service of our survival. Generally, Kelly believed we needed to develop more and more differentiated dependency construing so all our anticipatory ‘eggs’ were not all in the one basket. With undifferentiated dependency construing, changes in a person’s social circumstances are more likely to be perceived as threatening — since the person depends on one or two people exclusively for his or her needs.

Dependency construing can be quite abstract in the sense that it is highly superordinate, and like Briggs’ (1990) ‘themata’ (highly abstract and emotionally-tinged basic assumptions about the world), such construing is probably of high generality, is affectively-charged and is no doubt very permeable with a very wide range of convenience. As such, dependency construing is likely to be active much of the time and likely consumes, as it were, much of our anticipatory resources. A suggestion to be taken up at a later juncture is that in a state of subjective calm and lack of self-concern, dependency and core construing may be in relative abeyance allowing for a more playful and experimental approach to anticipation, freed up from the usual concerns with self-maintenance and self-monitoring.

6.9 CONCLUDING COMMENT: TRANSCENDING THE OBVIOUS

My examination of Kelly’s philosophical commitments in the previous chapter may provide a further perspective on Kelly’s understanding of insight. Coming to a genuine new insight, or ‘transcending the obvious’, is not about an objectivist grasp of Truth and not about accumulating nuggets of that Truth. It is very much the result of full commitment and involvement in the world in which we recognise the relativity of our understanding and are willing to use our subjectivity in pursuit of the objective. Genuine insight is open to all, and the vehicle is experience sought in full cycle:

That is to say, if you go ahead and involve yourself, rather than remaining alienated from the human struggle, if you strike out and implement your anticipations, if you dare to commit yourself, if you prepare to assess the outcomes as systematically as you can, and if you master the courage to abandon your favorite psychologisms and intellectualisms and reconstrue life altogether; well you may not find

that you guessed right, but you will stand a chance of transcending more freely those 'obvious' facts that now appear to determine your affairs, and you may just get a little closer to the truth that lies somewhere over the horizon. (1977, p. 19)

Genuine insight requires courage and commitment in action. In addition, Kelly defined insight not so much in terms of its 'essential' qualities or properties, but in terms of its pragmatic fate. It may be argued that an insight is an insight — regardless of its later success or usefulness. In this sense, Kelly's definition of the term 'insight' is ambiguous. Kelly's definition of insight, however, as a comprehensive construction of one's behaviour, clearly emphasised it as a process that: 1) gives an elaborative breadth of vision, as against isolated cognitive moments; and 2) is an active phenomenon finding its apogee in behavioural experiments. 'Transcending the obvious' would probably come close to the person-in-the-street's definition of insight and, given Kelly's egalitarian instincts, this is most likely a definition of insight he would have endorsed.

So now we have a theoretical language in which to talk about insight. Insight can be described as a process that emerges within sequences of the loosening and tightening of construing. The Aha! phenomenon, however, was not enough for Kelly. He was adamant that genuine insights only emerged when the cycle of experience was completed. In short, he measured insight by pragmatic criteria. 'Does it allow for more options and more useful anticipations of the future?' 'Does it allow the person to breast the onrush of events with more flexibility and resourcefulness?' We have also seen that insight processes involve a breaking down and re-assembling of bi-polar and hierarchical structure. Both in terms of the introduction of increased permeability (allowing for the consideration of new elements) and in terms of introducing new implicative chains of meaning, insightful construing implies there may be a more multi-dimensional, less linear or transitive logic that underpins creative thought.

As with the insight literature, the PCP account has also placed affective processes in the 'heart' of insight. In order to encourage insight, one needs to tolerate uncertainty and frustration, to free oneself from self-concern and to playfully and actively experiment with possibilities. Perceived changes in our constructive processes

are affectively experienced and how we construe these changes is crucial. Finally, in relation to this transcending affective resilience, are issues related to core construing (construing related to self) and to dependency construing (related to self-maintenance). It has been indicated that these ideas will be elaborated in the chapters to follow. But more immediately, it will be left to the next chapter to evaluate the contribution of PCP to understanding insight and to indicate what is still required for an adequate integrative understanding.

CHAPTER 7: INTERREGNUM AND PROSPECTUS

7.1 WHAT DO WE HAVE SO FAR? PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY AND THE INSIGHT LITERATURE

It is now time to see what concordances and differences exist between my reading of insight in PCP terms, and the four general findings of the insight literature reported earlier. We found that centrally implicated in the production of insight were the use of high levels of abstraction, the alternation between tacit and explicit levels of consciousness, the social and pragmatic dimensions of insight and the role of ‘emotional’ thought. All four of these features were shown to fit well within psychological constructivism and, more specifically, within PCP. As a generalisation, Kelly’s constructivist approach has provided us with a framework comprehensive enough to incorporate most of the features and reported phenomenology of insight. Not only this, PCP goes a substantial way towards helping us understand the process and genesis of insight. As such, it constitutes an ‘advance’ on more contemporary theories of insight all of which give relatively partial or non-comprehensive accounts and most of which tend to be descriptive rather than explanatory.

In particular, PCP captures the proactive intentionality, the teleological spirit of inquiry which seems to be so important in, and so characteristic of, insight. This passion for understanding requires a view of constructive processes which mix the ‘emotional’ and the ‘cognitive’ and see such layered understanding as a form of action, not merely as an ‘inner’ process which leads to action. Although Kelly’s approach to insight is, by itself, not sufficient, in PCP we have a framework that can be elaborated and built upon. So now to a summary of the contributions of PCP to an understanding of insight and then to an outline of what is still required.

7.1.1 High Levels Of Abstraction

Kelly's account of loosening and tightening required that more permeable, superordinate structures 'take over' the loosened construct and allow new elements and new implications to be related to it as it takes new form. This movement to alternative superordinate (abstract) structures begins with the weakening of the discriminative power of the relevant construct/s. This looseness parallels the typical insight literature finding of a tolerance for ambiguity, a capacity to entertain 'contradictories' (omnivalence) and the sort of 'metacognitive' processes (construing one's construing) that Kelly's 'provisional tightening' may well represent. This shift to other construct subsystems builds a bridge across which creative analogies and metaphors may be found which, being at a higher level of abstraction, may reconcile the seeming contradictions.

As we have seen, Kelly explicitly considered that quite loose constructs are relatively unbound by superordinate constructs. This temporary severing of implicative structure, of previously-held meaning patterns, allows for provisional tightenings in which the newly-forming construct is experimentally bound or subsumed by alternative superordinate systems. These playful moves to other meaning systems allow for the reported multidimensionality of new insight where not just one new idea is seized, but far more typically, flurries of new ideas and connections are grasped. In PCP terms this can be interpreted as gaining access to alternative hierarchies and subsystems of the person's construing system. Unlike the CPC cycle and controlled elaboration (see 6.4.1), not only is an alternative existing subsystem used to understand the events at hand, but this alternative subsystem is newly linked to the currently engaged subsystem, changing both in the process. This is why Kelly (1959, p. 24) could say that "... a genuinely new insight does what all experienced therapists have long known it does; it changes not only the way a particular problematic event is seen, but also the way many others are seen." As suggested earlier, however, Kelly provided little explicit description of how or why this shifting between systems comes about — a matter I will return to in the following chapters.

7.1.2 Two Types Of Mental Processes: Tacit Versus Explicit

Kelly (1955) proposed that construing be considered not exclusively, or even primarily, a conscious experience. Rather, he invited his readers to imagine it taking place at various levels of cognitive awareness, tacitly and intuitively as well as via highly conscious, verbalised constructions. Kelly (1955) gave a number of reasons for construing to be tacit. There may be a lack of viable structure in which the discrimination can be presented for conscious reflection (submergence, suspension, extreme looseness), or it may simply be ‘preverbal’ — a catch-all term Kelly (1955) used to describe construing not symbolised in words. Generally speaking, verbalising construing tends to make it tighter (though not all tight construing need be verbalised or capable of being verbalised). Thus, as reported in the general insight literature, verbalising tends to be destructive of more fluid, tacit and looser constructive processes.

Parallels can be drawn between loose construction and tacit understanding (understanding at a low level of cognitive awareness), and between tight construction and more explicit, conscious understanding. Loose construction need not be tacit or ‘unconscious’, though it has this tendency because of its characteristic, fluid discriminative structure. The looser the construing, the less likely it will be at a high level of cognitive awareness.⁵¹ Tight construing, on the other hand, being well integrated within ordinal structures of implication, is more often available to conscious reflection. The alternation between loose and tight construing is directly comparable to the typical, ongoing alternation between tacit and explicit mental processes so frequently discussed in the insight literature as being predictive of insight. The techniques Kelly devised to elicit loose and tight construction mirror those working activities reported by eminently creative people (Epel, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1995). In addition, the understanding of construing as being implicit in action, as a way

⁵¹ It will be noted, however, that one may become aware of the implications and apparent ‘illogicalities’ of preverbal or tacit construing. But this is a successive or subsequent phenomenon and it is an important awareness to develop in the production of insight. Such an awareness is likely to be experienced emotionally as the intransitivities or the ‘fragmentation’ in thought are recognised. Later we will relate this to what Matte-Blanco (1988) has called ‘bi-logic’.

of being and doing, is important in relation to the subjective uncertainty and fallibility of the processes leading to insight. What needs to be done to come to insight is to experiment, to be playful, to follow one's 'intuition' or feelings. And, as I will discuss in the next section, this pragmatic reading of construing allows one to consider insights that emerge from immersion in one's projects not as revealed truths, but as approximations to truth, as an ongoing 'conversation' with one's world.

7.1.3 Social And Pragmatic Dimensions Of Insight

Kelly entreated his readers to immerse themselves in the world, to embrace the pragmatic nature of their anticipations. Pragmatism emphasises the inter-relatedness of mind and world — especially our social world. We are constrained by, and are a part of, the enviroing 'other'. The personal, social and the pragmatic are inextricably intertwined as our psychological world is, arguably, firstly interpersonal and only later apparently 'private'. For example, Walker (1996) has written of the misleading implications drawn from the word "Personal" in the title Kelly gave his theory, proposing instead that the 'personal' suggests only the location of construing, not its circumscribed origin or its individualist nature. Indeed Kelly (1955, p. 179) admits to entertaining the term "Role Theory" for his entire theoretical approach, thereby positioning sociality in particular as central to his whole theory. Both the pragmatic (Stevens, 1998; Warren, 1998) and social (Butt, 1998a, 1988b; Kalekin-Fishman & Walker, 1996; Stam, 1998) implications of PCP are of current research interest. There is still, however, much to be done in elaborating these.

Although Kelly (1955) did not spell out the social and pragmatic dimensions of insight, his approach is thoroughly concordant with the insight literature findings in this regard. What is clear is the parallel already drawn between the stages of insight and the stages of the Experience Cycle. The person goes through characteristic alternations: between abstract processes and concrete action; between solitude and social interaction, between silence and conversation; between tighter, well-practised understandings and looser, more fluid processes. Thus Kelly set out in some detail how to manage loose

and tight construing, especially in Volume 2 of his grand opus (1955), and this is in close concordance with the reported day-to-day practical engagement of eminently creative people. Moreover, the whole thrust of his therapy is to integrate new understandings within the person's life, to test and validate, to reconsider, to test again, to reconstrue and so on. At a deeper level, the PCP approach to insight views it as something one does, as a type of situated action. Insight processes are a pragmatic coupling with one's environing 'other' — be that people, the physical world, discourses and so on. In the chapters that follow I will elaborate this view of our embodied intentionality and will also suggest how this is experienced as an altered sense of 'self' within insight processes.

7.1.4 The Role Of 'Emotional Thought' In Insight

We have seen that insight is constituted as much by 'emotional' as 'cognitive' processes and we have also seen that Kelly (1955) characterised construing in similar terms. He did not so much banish emotional experience from his theory (cf. Bruner, 1956; Rogers, 1956) as offer a new way of conceiving of it. Emotions were presented as forms of awareness and gone is the ancient opposition of irrational emotion and logical reason (Bannister, 1977; Warren, 1998). Our 'rational' being is not separate from the 'lived equivalence-difference patterns' (Radley, 1977) that define us including, for example, the facial expressions, racing heartbeat, sweaty palms and short sharp breaths of panic.

My elaboration of insight in PCP terms has posited a central role for affective experience in coming to insight. Affect frequently arises as we become aware, at some level, of the implications of newly-emerging constructs. Kelly (1955) under-specified this affective role in his explicit account of insight. Generally, he considered that the construct system was designed to be 'anxiety-tight', but in insight I see the possibility for another motivational vector, the contrasting positive emotional experiences. Fortunately, McCoy (1977, 1981) has elaborated Kelly's 'emotional' scheme, supplementing his definitions with complementary 'positive' emotions. To explain the phenomenology of insight this is absolutely essential. As we have seen, negative

emotions are inimical to insight, while a state of evenly hovering, equanimous attention is conducive of creative thought. This recalls McCoy's (1977) definitions of 'contentment' and 'satisfaction' as reflecting a subjective faith and security in one's anticipatory abilities. Creative practitioners of all kinds have reported their deliberate cultivation of this attitude in pursuit of insight (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Herein is a paradox at the heart of creativity: we are born to anticipate events (Kelly's Fundamental Postulate), yet Kelly (1977) encourages us to abandon even our 'favorite' understandings, muster up daring, and expose ourselves to uncertainty — even to 'reconstrue life altogether'.

Within PCP, as with the insight literature, emotional experiences and challenges are constitutive of insight. Calmness and relaxation, which I have conceived of as styles of superordinate construing or as transcending affective stances, allow for subordinate loosening. Self-consciousness (related to core construing) and concerns about self-maintenance (dependency construing) are backgrounded and there is a slowing down of 'logical' thought, replaced by a flow of construction guided by subjective 'feel' rather than by critical judgement. This is typical of a more 'meditative thought' (Heidegger, 1959) which allows for the suspension of judgement so widely reported in insight research as a prelude to breakthrough. In Kelly's (1955) terms we need to put on hold 'pre-emptive' and 'constellatory ways of construing'.⁵² This exploratory mode of construing may then give way to a provisional tightening of loose construing, an 'affective assessment' which either concludes that impasse has not been overcome, or grows into the realisation and joy of insight.

7.2 WHAT DO WE STILL NEED?

Insight reveals the need for a broader, more diverse view of rationality and mind. The strategy for the remainder of this work will be to gather converging lines of evidence, bringing together quite disparate theory and research, in order to work towards such a

⁵² Pre-emptive construing is 'nothing but' construing. Kelly's example (1955, p. 563) is "If this is a ball it is nothing but a ball". Constellatory construing is stereotypical or typological thinking.

view of mind. It will be an attempt to demonstrate both the plausibility and the far-reaching implications of the integrative understanding being proposed. It is acknowledged that in attempting to present such a wide purview full justice cannot be done to these theorists or approaches. Be that as it may, the positive intent is to provide an integrative framework in which we can avoid the relative narrowness of most research into insight. Kelly (1955) suggested that the value of a theory was not only in its plausibility in accounting for observations, but in its generativity. It is in this spirit, therefore, that the remainder of this work aims to not only provide a plausible account of the features and characteristics of insight, but to generate questions, to stimulate future research and to speculate about the implications flowing from the theoretical understanding developed. But I will first need to indicate the shortcomings revealed in PCP by my account thus far.

It was argued that Kelly's account of insight illuminates four major findings of the insight literature: the importance of shifts in levels of abstraction, the alternation between explicit and tacit levels of awareness, the social and pragmatic dimensions of insight and the role of 'emotional' thought. But along the way we have noticed certain gaps in Kelly's discussion. While these gaps demand elaboration of the PCP approach to insight, as well as excursions into other fields and theoretical approaches, I believe these elaborations and additions can be coherently incorporated within a constructivist framework.

More specifically in relation to Kelly's treatment of insight, there are two types of theoretical deficits in the account:

1. Features and experiences reported in the insight literature which are absent or hardly accounted for in PCP.
2. Insufficiently elaborated and developed theoretical detail within the accounts which are given by Kelly.

Section 7.2.2 below will deal with those features Kelly missed, while 7.2.3 will discuss those that Kelly discussed in insufficient detail. While these two types of deficits will be treated separately in the following, it should be borne in mind that they overlap

considerably. As well as describing these deficits, suggestions will then be made as to their solution — suggestions which will be taken up in the remainder of this work.

7.2.2 Altered Experiences Of Self And Feelings of ‘Connectedness’

People commonly report an altered sense of self while experiencing insight. This question of ‘self’ is a slippery one,⁵³ and one that will be returned to below (see 10.4.2). Nonetheless, insight is frequently experienced as if it were exterior to the person and as if it had its own spontaneous expressiveness to which the beneficiary is witness.

Paradoxically, this sense of exteriority also increases the person’s sense of ‘connectedness’ or unity with the world, yet the person also somehow knows that she or he is personally ‘responsible’ for the insight. It is as if in these breakthroughs people are witnesses to a sharing of the world with themselves and this is often an euphoric experience. I will return to this sense of ‘oneness’ in my discussion of symmetrical thought (Chapter 9), as well in my integrative understanding of insight (Chapter 11). As with Archimedes running from the baths in Syracuse shouting ‘Eureka!’, people also often seem to need to include others in their breakthrough, excitedly sharing it with those they think may understand. And there is great joy in being understood (Epel, 1993; Gruber, 1995).

This experience of connectedness (interpersonal and ‘transpersonal’), commonly felt while one enjoys a genuine new insight, was not discussed by Kelly. I have suggested, however, that he considered sociality as if it were a fundamental empathic capacity. This idea needs to be developed, especially in relation to two aspects of construing. The first aspect is construing connecting others with one’s self-maintenance, that is, ‘dependency construing’.⁵⁴ The second is ‘core construing’, which

⁵³ Within PCP it is a much-discussed topic. For classic discussions see Mair (1977) Bannister (1983). For a more recent analysis see Butt, Burr and Bell (1997).

⁵⁴ Kelly (1955, 1962) argued that people were always ‘dependent’. Rather than believing a person ideally develops from a state of ‘dependence’ towards increasing ‘independence’, Kelly considered the person ideally learns how to distribute his or her dependency needs more widely and appropriately. This

is construing concerned with one's maintenance processes ('self' or identity are very important aspects of this). The argument to be presented later is that dependency construing is based on an innate capacity for sociality, a capacity that is preverbal, affectively-toned and foundational for subsequently more explicit and reflexive thought. Much core construing, on this reading, is derived from dependency construing — where the latter is understood as the ways in which 'self' is linked to the 'other'. Core construing is constituted by an expanding repertoire of 'solutions' or ways of understanding various situations and events in relation to one's self. Increasingly, such core-related construing becomes habitual and is drawn on, as a part of dependency construing, when the person is aware, at some level, of some unmet need, some very real problem in living.

The argument in brief (see Chapter 11) is that following the frustration consequent upon the anticipatory failure of one's repertoire of dependency and core-related construing, the more 'primitive', empathic mode of construction which underlies dependency construing *may* be called upon to help generate new life-enhancing solutions, thereby generating new insight. In more general fashion, I will argue that in *any* frustration or impasse of construing, where use of our available constructive resources continues to fail us, this looser more inchoate mode of anticipation may be utilised. Yet, as we have seen, the breakthrough to insight is encouraged by the *absence* of core-related construing such as may be associated with anxiety or self-concern. Thus, a transcending use of our 'sympathetic'⁵⁵ style of anticipation — at least for a while removed from its usual association with self-interest and awareness of anticipatory failure (anxiety) — seems to be requisite for insight.

7.2.2.2 Sense Of Reverie And Flow

A part of this feeling of connectedness no doubt is related to the reported 'flow' experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) that often accompanies insight. This different

important aspect of his theory has been best elaborated by Walker, Ramsey and Bell (1988) and by Walker (1993).

⁵⁵ 'Sympathetic' as in sympathetic motion; feeling as the 'other' does (Mixon, 1999).

sense of self includes entering a type of reverie. The closest Kelly (1955) gets to describing this is where he referred to the very loosely construing person as ‘experiencing only’ (1955, p. 1068). Kelly suggested this loose ‘experiencing’ stands in contrast to the person being able to make ‘judgements’ wherein his or her construing is bound by superordinate constructs. Related to this is the insight literature’s emphasis of the importance of intuition and of feelings of knowing. Although Kelly’s idea of looser construing goes some of the way in explaining more vague and tacit feelings of knowing, I will elaborate his ideas in the context of contemporary research into intuition, the unconscious and emotion (Chapters 8 and 9). I will also develop some ideas implicit in Kelly’s thought concerning the embodied and tacit features of insight (Chapter 10). This latter discussion will emphasise the ways in which we think *with* the people and ‘things’ of the world.

7.2.2.3 Why Embodied Happiness During Insight?

In general terms an ‘embodied’ reading of insight can be accommodated within PCP as Kelly was careful to define construing in terms that incorporated feeling, thought and action. Kelly (1955) suggested that construing might also be a way of describing what normally we may call ‘physical’ processes, as types of lived equivalence-difference patterns.⁵⁶ But why do people often experience a physical sense of joy or rapture upon insight? Maybe this is not so surprising when we accept that the conceptual habit of separating mind and body, reason and emotion, might be misplaced. Such an acceptance may remove the temptation to think of insight as an essentially ‘intellectual’ or non-physical process.

The degree of happiness experienced in insight is probably in proportion with the implications tied into both the impasse and the breakthrough. The more superordinate and comprehensive the implications, the more significant the emotional experience may be. Returning to my discussion of ‘connectedness’ with one’s world, the positive emotion and awareness of the expansion in one’s being-at-one with the

⁵⁶ Though Kelly (1955) considered that the ‘focus of convenience’ for his concept of construing was at the ‘psychological’ level.

world may be felt as a type of validation of one's most central core processes — which is McCoy's (1981) PCP definition of an experience of love. A frequently expressed sentiment concerning (interpersonal) love is that one has a profound sense of the other, that one 'enters into' the other's being. This perhaps is less strange sounding when one conceives of a person's being as not being exclusively skin-bound, but rather as a process of 'coupling' with one's world. There is, it seems, a 'space-of-between' where, in moments of non-self-consciousness, the person and the 'other' can merge. In fully giving oneself over to another, or to one's project, ironically, there appears to be no loss of self, but a feeling of great happiness and connectedness. I will later expand on such ideas, developing a more pragmatic and 'phenomenological' view of PCP (see Chapter 10).

7.2.2.4 The Role Of Metaphor And Associative Thought In Insight

There is certainly more to be said concerning Kelly's account of the linking of previously unconnected subsystems of construing. As discussed earlier, this involves finding types of sameness or similarity in what previously were 'obviously' different elements. This requires a superordinating point of view that reconciles or can at least enable us to tolerate this seeming contradiction ('omnivalence' as Briggs, 1990, put it). This will be discussed in Chapter 9 in the context of a creative harmony between two modes of consciousness (asymmetrical and symmetrical) proposed by Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988).

In addition, understanding such 'bi-modal' thought may even allow us to conceive of the act of construing as itself being fundamentally metaphorical. That is, bi-polar construing describes how we simultaneously entertain the ways in which certain 'elements' (events, people, things) share features, yet are distinct. When one considers the nature of metaphor — where the properties of one 'thing' are mapped onto another 'thing', yet the distinctness of the two domains is maintained — then a substantial overlap between construing and metaphorical thinking can be seen. Kelly's (1955, p. 563) definition of a symbol ("An element in the context of a construct which represents

not only itself but also the construct by which it is abstracted by the user”) may help in this regard. That is, an element may at times come to stand for the whole construct, including the ‘opposite’ elements. These ideas will be explored further in Chapter 10.

Metaphorical thinking may be related to an ability to think in images. The insight and creativity literature consistently refer to a type of non-verbal construing which is nonetheless very abstract and highly developed. Probably such thinking is multidimensional, operating with ideas of great complexity but within an economy of form. Think, for example, of the aural imagery of a melody. There is substantial evidence that melodies are recalled as a whole having to be ‘run through’ rather than by adding up parts — it is difficult, for example, to think of the third note of the tune “Happy Birthday” without singing the preceding notes (Shanon, 1993). In similar fashion, we usually remember the whole of a person’s face rather than its individual features. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then thinking in images may indeed be highly efficient for complex, ill-defined tasks such as those that involve insight.

I do not find in Kelly’s writings, however, the insight literature’s emphasis on abstract imagery. Again, however, the broad definition of construing allows us to elaborate PCP in this regard (see Chapter 10). As a part of the pragmatic reading of construing as a form of enactment, the basis of judgements of ‘similarity’ (and difference) may be ‘sensorial’ or modal — that is aural, visual or perceptual (Barsalou and Prinz, 1997) rather than propositional. Thus, for example, a smell can simultaneously bring to mind various situations which may otherwise appear to be logically (propositionally) unrelated. This is reminiscent of the findings concerning state-dependent memory (Eysenck & Keane, 1990) where a sensorial ‘trigger’ or current mood brings back a memory and or emotion. In similar fashion, homophones and rhyme can help us unite quite (‘logically’ or propositionally) distinct domains by virtue of the similarity in sound of the words (Shanon, 1993). This type of thinking will also be taken up in the next chapter under the heading of ‘presentational’ symbolism.

Such thinking is consistent with a view of construing as ‘enactment’ (Butt, 1998a; Shanon, 1993) and provides for a type of ‘ecological’ continuity where

developmentally earlier ‘presentational’ (see Chapter 8) and non-verbal modes of consciousness are seen to be intimately intertwined with later more propositional or ‘representational’ modes of understanding. Such enactive knowing engages events as complex wholes. It is usually tacit and typically emerges in embodied action rather than in conscious thought and may be experienced as fleeting non-verbal imagery. Current research into the embodied nature of such imagery and thought will be summarised in Chapter 10. This ‘imagistic’ consciousness is described within contemporary research under a variety of names (image schemata, cross-modal synesthesias, presentational consciousness). Generally speaking, it is presented as being of very high generality, setting the parameters of much subsequent thought. It is highly dimensional, being difficult to articulate and to grasp consciously, and containing within its own economy of expression, rich repositories of meaning. Such a mode of thought is likely to be useful in creating genuinely new constructs.

One implication of this is that there may be a continuum in modes of construing with perhaps more prototypical judgements based on ‘sameness’ at one extreme, and tighter bi-polar judgements, based on ‘difference’ at the other. If one were to think of constructs as sets of elements in relation (Bell, 1996; Caputi, 1986), more prototypical construing would be represented as elements clustered around a prototype or exemplar. Such a view of a construct emphasises the sameness of the elements with regard to the prototype and would correspond to a ‘loose’ construct, one in which the differences between elements is backgrounded.⁵⁷ The prototype may also connect or ‘symbolise’ a subset of constructs sharing these elements. In this way, such constructs may be related to each other ‘symmetrically’ (in terms of sameness) rather than hierarchically (based on difference). In this way symmetry may operate within as well as between constructs (Bell, 1996). ‘Thinking in images’ may be one expression of such symmetrical logic and would overlap with loose construing. On the other hand, constructs may be more

⁵⁷ An important reminder may be in order here. Construing is here conceived of as a dynamic ‘happening’ rather than as the activation of already-formed ‘things’ called constructs. What is being suggested here is not that a construct has an ‘essential’, fixed nature which is then distorted by loosening, but rather that the way we construe may be variable, sometimes clearly contrasting elements within constructs, other times emphasising the similarities of elements.

clearly divided into distinct categories on the basis of clear differences between the elements within the set (bi-polarity). Such bi-polar constructs would be related asymmetrically (hierarchically) in terms of differences in 'level' in the hierarchy. These ideas will be explored in my discussion of Matte-Blanco and Kelly (Chapter, 9).

7.2.3 Insufficient Elaboration In Kelly's Account Of Insight

7.2.3.1 How Does Loosening And Tightening Work?

Related to the above discussion of the possibility of symmetrical (non-hierarchic, and not strictly bi-polar) construing is Kelly's account of loosening and tightening. It has been noted above that, although Kelly gave no account for how cycles of loosening and tightening allow us to shift between apparently 'unrelated' constructs systems, such cycles of construing show great promise in explaining the quantum jump from impasse into insight. It will be argued (Chapter 9) that the breakdown of the contrast function, and the concomitant accentuation of the similarity function within looser construing, opens the possibility of new insight. Loose and tight construing will be compared to symmetrical and asymmetrical thought respectively (Matte-Blanco, 1975, 1988). While loose or symmetrical construing 'opens new doors' for insights, it is more tight or asymmetrical construing which allows us to recognise the possibilities thus revealed.

Within loosening, relationships *between* constructs may also be symmetrical, that is based more heavily on sameness or similarity. I mentioned earlier that a more 'lateral' (as against ordinal) association of constructs is possible. The more loose the construing, the broader the basis for such active, 'same level' associations. From a tighter, more asymmetrical point of view, such a style of construing leads to quite unrelated or distinct elements and constructs being equated. But this may merely imply that there may be benefits in conceiving of construing not only in terms of tight bi-polarities (based on similarity and difference), but as also potentially based on a looser or 'fuzzier' clustering of elements around prototypes or exemplars without clear contrasts being implied. Of course, these are relative matters as extremes of looseness

or tightness would both be disastrous in terms of our ability to anticipate and to deal with life's ever-changing processes.

In any case, this looser, lateral association of construct subsystems can lead to a broader or more multidimensional mode of construction. As in the architectures postulated in Parallel Distributed Processing (PDP) accounts of cognition, it may be possible within more predominantly associative and loose construing that, in parallel, there are multiple transitive chains of implication active (Martindale, 1995). It will be suggested that this potential for multidimensional construing is implicit in Kelly's theory, but is not elaborated. Again Matte-Blanco will be called upon to elaborate this idea. This sudden availability of alternative chains of implications may help to explain the oft-reported phenomenon whereby whole narratives or solutions seem to reveal themselves to the person in the throes of insight.

7.2.3.2 Emotion And Abstraction

Contemporary research into emotion (Chapter 8) is consistent with my view that intelligent understanding is as much a 'feeling' process as it is an 'intellectual' or 'cognitive' one. The multidimensionality I have pointed to in relation to looser construing also seems to be reflected in the structure of the emotional 'pathways' and hormonal processes operative in the brain and body. The idea to be developed is that much, if not all, thinking has an affective nuance or quality. The 'emotional' centres of the brain seem to have active and influential connections to most of the rest of the brain, and also appear to have earliest access to incoming sensory stimulation. Summarising research by Claxton (1997), Damasio (1994), Goleman (1995) and LeDoux (1998), it will be suggested that contemporary findings fit perfectly with Susanne Langer's (1972) view that reflexive consciousness emerged from human emotionality. This also accords with Rychlak's (1977) contention that all construing is based on 'affective assessments'. Langer's distinction between a more 'emotional' and non-verbal 'presentational' mode of thought and a tighter 'representational' mode of thought will be an important unifying theme running through the remainder of this work.

This ‘new’ view of emotion means that any absolute distinction between emotion and reason is blurred as emotion is arguably implicated in, and crucial to decision making, subtle inferential processes and reasoning generally. Emotion has often been considered to be the antithesis of rationality, as being less complex, less dimensioned, as necessarily inimical to ‘higher’ mental processes, as primitive and in need of reduction. While emotion can at times run away with itself, cascading and hijacking viable construction, anticipatory efforts devoid of affective processes are equally maladaptive. It will be argued that an optimal balance or harmony between ‘feeling’ and tighter propositional thought is conducive to creativity and insight.

It has been argued earlier that understanding emotion as intrinsic to transition in the construct system links affective processes to the occurrence of insight. It has also been suggested that ‘emotion’, being considered an assessment of the vicissitudes of construing, and often being related to self-maintenance, is relatively superordinate or ‘abstract’. This link between affect and abstraction is well worth elaborating. Once again, Matte-Blanco’s account of emotion (Chapter 9) will be of assistance in redefining the relationship between ‘affect’ and ‘thought’, particularly in relation to the relatively high ‘dimensionality’ of emotional understanding. The suggestion has also been made that positive emotion, or at the very least, freedom from self-consciousness and self-concern is associated with insight. This implicates dependency and core construing in insight processes — which are quite superordinate processes.

It has already been suggested that a different sense of self and of one’s relationship to one’s world, often accompanied by euphoria, may be related to both the validation of anticipatory breakthroughs as well as to a freedom from worry and self-concern that predict those breakthroughs. This leads to a type of being-with-the-world, a ‘flow’, that is intrinsically enjoyable. At the heart of insight may be a transcending affective stance which enables such creativity. Finally, emotional construing highlights the embodied nature of our anticipatory processes. We think with our bodies in interaction in the world. We ‘know’ with our bodies and emotionally-laden body signals ‘warn’ us of impending danger, for example, long before our discursive thinking can

reflect on the situation. Developing one's emotional sensitivities, one's 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1995), may offer us, therefore, access to more intuitive, and perhaps more insightful ways of anticipating reality.

7.2.3.3 Intuition And Tacit Intentionality

It has been suggested above that the later Kelly was moving towards an understanding of construing as predominantly a more embodied, tacit and intuitive process. This thesis began with Meno's paradox which asked how can we intend towards that which we do not know? The paradox, it was argued, can only arise if knowing is considered to reflect a pre-ordered world waiting to be registered as knowledge in the mind of the observer. In such an objectivist model, knowledge can be complete and is an all-or-nothing affair. In contrast, I have proposed a model of knowing processes in which knowing is not only always partial, but is one way (among many) of carving a viable path in one's environment, such paths being a function of our successful 'coupling' with our world. There are many ways of being viable and so (capital T) Truth is always displaced in favour of personal truth or local knowing or understanding.

In addition, construing is, arguably, mostly implicit 'knowing from' rather than 'knowing that', and thereby describes a means of inquiry, only aspects of which are at a high level of reflexive awareness. Knowing in this sense is a part of one's bodily stance to the world. Such tacit knowing develops within cycles of experience, not the least of which are our formative social and empathic experiences. Even so-called 'inner' and 'private' mental processes can be considered as a type of derived enactive, ecologically-immersed skill. This phenomenological and pragmatic understanding of construing will be further developed in Chapter 10.

Intuition has been thoroughly implicated in insight. A certain intuitive 'guidedness', a 'feeling of knowing', is consistently reported in relation to creativity and insight experiences. Again drawing together conclusions from a variety of researchers, it will be argued (Chapters 8 and 10) that a predominantly tacit mode of consciousness, a presentational mode of knowing, always underlies more conscious, representational

thought. To be ‘intuitive’ is to make oneself more sensitive to this ‘undermind’ (Claxton, 1998). I have already mentioned the distinction between tacit and explicit knowing and, just as a (good) sportsperson plays ‘instinctively’, eliminating too much conscious assessment from his or her actual playing, so the insightful person allows his or her more subtle, knowing processes more free rein. Such subtle knowing processes have been described variously, implicating image schema, cross-modal synesthesias, ‘imagistic’ thought, meditative thought, felt senses and so on. I propose that my pragmatic reading of construing may help unite these various conceptualisations, particularly in terms of the complex relationships between looser presentational and tighter representational modes of thought.

7.3 CONCLUDING COMMENT

Overall, we have seen that Kelly’s version of constructivism is an ideal framework within which to understand insight. The four major findings of the insight literature — the use of high levels of abstraction, the alternation between tacit and explicit levels of consciousness, the social and pragmatic dimensions of insight and the role of ‘emotional’ thought — all fit well within this one approach. Accordingly, the contribution of PCP to an understanding of insight will be threaded through the next three chapters, building towards an integrative understanding in Chapter 11.

Kelly’s theorising about insight, however, needs considerable elaboration. This elaboration will have implications not only for our deeper understanding of insight, but for aspects of Kelly’s theoretical position itself. By drawing on disparate theorists and research the PCP approach will be considerably extended, elaborated and at times challenged. The chapters that follow will gather converging evidence for the idea of a broadened understanding of rationality, supplementing the ‘normal’ conscious representational mode of thought with a looser ‘presentational’ mode. More specifically, Kelly’s account of loosening and tightening needs to be developed, the link between emotion and abstraction expanded, and the way in which PCP accounts for intuition and tacit intentionality elaborated. Beyond this, important findings implicated

in insight need to be added to the Kellian account. These include the role of metaphor and of associative thinking, the experience of a different sense of self and of 'connectedness', and the embodied joy which is often reported to accompany states of reverie or 'flow'. As these features of insight overlap and intersect with each other, they will not be dealt with in discrete order, but will be explored and revisited throughout the remainder of this work.

More specifically, in the next chapter I will undertake an analysis of current findings concerning emotion because the research concerning insight and emotion points to their intimate and complex relationship. What is needed is a way in which to combine this broadened understanding of emotional thought with other features of insight, including apparently illogical or quantum jumps in understanding as well as the oft-reported altered sense of being and of self. It will be proposed in Chapter 9 that the analysis and re-description of the (Freudian) unconscious by Chilean psychoanalyst and mathematician, Ignacio Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988), will help us in this integrative task as well as in understanding in more depth the processes of loose and tight construing. Other features of insight not sufficiently accounted for up to this point include the enactive, embodied and social nature of insight, and the ubiquitous role of metaphor in its production. Accordingly, Chapter 10 will attempt to gather up these loose ends of this inquiry and complete a broad enough survey of the characteristics of mind to allow for an incorporation of these features into an integrative understanding of insight.

SECTION 3.

DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING

CHAPTER 8: EMOTION AND MIND

*The quality of understanding is personally endured*⁵⁸

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Psychological research into emotion has been influenced strongly by a rationalist intellectual tradition which considers reason and emotion as distinct, mostly antagonistic processes. This is reflected in the typically assumed contrasts of reason versus emotion, thought versus feeling, science versus art, objectivity versus subjectivity, and so on. In their excellent review of contemporary research into emotion Cacioppo and Gardner (1999) express the traditional theoretical opposition in this way:

An assumption by rationalists dating back to the ancient Greeks has been that higher forms of human existence — mentation, rationality, foresight, and decision-making — can be hijacked by the pirates of emotion. (p. 194)

Within psychological research into emotion *and* cognition the central debates have therefore been not so much about whether cognition and emotion are really distinct entities, but what roles each play, their relationship with each other and their relative sequencing. Thus the ‘emotion’ literature has, to a considerable degree, been about the relative influence of these two allegedly distinct systems, or the order in which they occur.

The James-Lange theory of emotion (James, 1884), for example, placed bodily feeling first, followed by cognitive interpretations which then constituted the full experience of emotion. Or the Cannon-Bard theory (Bard, 1934; Cannon, 1927) proposed that separate physical feelings and consciously experienced emotion arose simultaneously following an emotion-arousing stimulus. Later cognitive views of emotion emphasised the role of cognitive interpretations mediating physiological arousal and subsequent emotional experience (Schacter & Singer, 1962), or of

⁵⁸ Dina Vallino Maccio, “Surviving, Existing, Living: Reflections on the Analyst’s Anxiety” (Cited in Orange, 1998, p. 125).

appraisals preceding and determining the experience of emotion (Lazarus, 1991, 1993). But, essentially, emotion and thought were held to be quite different things.

The picture became more complex, however, when theorists such as Zajonc (1980) showed that subjective likes and dislikes frequently precede conscious appraisals, that is, independently of the person's conscious appraisals. The latter findings (consistent with the psychodynamic claims that unconscious emotional states affect conscious experience, thought and behaviour) began to blur the boundaries between emotion and cognition. As we will see, some affective states have been described as fast, tacit evaluations, as a different style of cognitive appraisal. Furthermore, distinct modes of emotion itself have been proposed: some are argued to be mediated by conscious explicit thought, largely implicating the hippocampus; some are tacitly or unconsciously mediated, principally by the amygdala (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Le Doux, 1995).

Generally, this idea of the distinction or opposition between rationality and emotion is changing and increasingly the important role of emotions in higher forms of human experience is being recognised (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1995). This trend may force a reconsideration of the nature of 'cognition' itself, expanding the definition to include tacit and affective appraisal processes. As such, the utility of the distinction between 'cognition' and 'emotions' is called into question — a conclusion that Kelly (1955) came to over forty years ago. Having said this, it may be more parsimonious to say simply that there are different modes of mental activity. For example, while there is evidence that the neural circuitry thought to underlie affective evaluations diverges in part from that underlying non-evaluative identification and discrimination, "affective and non-affective appraisal are not entirely different but rather rely on a number of common information processing operations" (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999, p. 199).

Recent research is also questioning the earlier assumption that 'cognitive appraisals' give rise to, or cause in linear fashion, emotion. For example, Frijda (1993) has contended that reciprocal causation takes place, with 'emotion' instigating

‘cognition’ as much as the other way round. Lewis (1996), using non-linear, dynamic systems theory went further, arguing that appraisals have no beginning or end. That is, there is just an “ongoing trajectory of cognitive-emotional activity” (p. 21) from which emerges our characteristically complex mental life.

Fortunately, there is another intellectual tradition in which there has not been this absolute separation of reason and feeling, of cognition and affect, and which may provide more appropriate ways to deal with the complexity of mental activity involved in insight. Warren (1998) traced this tradition from Spinoza, through Hegel up to the present time. For example, Anderson’s (1962) and Langer’s (1957, 1972) philosophical positions were influenced strongly by the psychodynamic view of ‘mind as feeling’, that emotion is a part of mind. An example of this would be the Freudian assertion that there is a ‘libidinal’ base to creativity, that it has to be sublimated to emerge in socially-acceptable, creative products and ideas. Whatever the variants on this idea, it suffices to say here that this assumption that ‘emotional’ processes may not be clearly distinct from ‘cognitive’ processes informs the present work and, in particular, it will be suggested that Spinoza’s approach to emotional life contributes to our understanding of insight. This approach is felt to be important because the heuristic benefits of conceptually distinguishing ‘cognition’ and ‘emotion’ have not spread to the more complex, characteristically human mental activities such as insight. Things have not changed that much since Bannister (1977) remarked:

It is significant that it is precisely in those areas in which the distinction [between cognition and emotion] makes least sense that psychologists have spoken to least purpose. *Invention, humour, art, religion, meaning, infancy, art*: all seem areas of particular mystery to psychologists and it may be that they puzzle us because it makes no sense to see them as clearly ‘cognitive’ or clearly ‘affective’. (p. 23)

Our investigation thus far has revealed that ‘emotion’ is thoroughly implicated in the changes in construing which insight represents. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to elaborate this link between ‘emotional’ modes of thought and insight. This elaboration will begin by defining ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ and by indicating that ‘rationality’ or ‘reason’ may be a broader term which can incorporate both ‘cognition’

and ‘affect’ (in much the same way that Kelly considered ‘construing’ to be an inclusive term). The chapter is divided into three sections: firstly, it will be argued that feeling and ‘emotion’ form the basis of mind. Langer’s (1957, 1972) distinction between representational and presentational thought and Rychlak’s (1968, 1977) notion of ‘affective assessments’ will be discussed and linked to contemporary research into the neuropsychology of emotion. The distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ emotion, and between various ‘modes’ of thought will be introduced, leading onto a discussion of the relevance of this to our everyday decision-making and to Spinoza’s (1967) important distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ emotions.

The second section introduces some developmental aspects of emotion and, in particular, of emotional understanding. The term ‘participatory knowing’ is proposed and such knowing is argued to be important in the development of the ‘self’. Aspects of self-consciousness and non-selfconsciousness are discussed and linked to the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and frustration and to the typical phenomenology of insight. The final section represents a ‘provisional tightening’ of this material. It suggests that the view of mind as organised in terms of presentational and representational symbolic modes is reflected in contemporary neuropsychological research into emotion. The utility of these different modes of anticipation is discussed in terms of the capacity to develop a type of emotional sensitivity, to develop ‘active’ emotions and to alternate between tighter focused and looser defocused attentional modes. Related to this is the development of certain emotional skills, such as the capacity to maintain a transcending affective calm amid uncertainty, to be able to loosen, to engage in reverie and to engage in less inhibited mental explorations. These more presentational modes of knowing are linked to altered experiences of self — principally to knowing in a participatory way which, as with insight, is frequently accompanied by feelings of connectedness and integration. In passing, this more affectively-tuned contemplative stance is compared to Heidegger’s (1959) ‘meditative thinking’, a theme to be taken up in later chapters.

8.2 DEFINING EMOTION AND AFFECT

In trying to distinguish the terms ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ one soon feels the disagreeable pull of theoretical quicksand — quicksand that has claimed many intrepid theorists in the past. This is partly so because people have searched for the ‘essence’ behind these terms, but it is also so because the field uses the terms so inconsistently, and in such a variety of ways, that even a nominal definition cannot be agreed upon. Finally, LeDoux (1998) made the pertinent observation that emotion probably does not represent one general process, but rather that different emotions may have quite distinct characteristics and neuro-endocrine substrates (see also Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999).

The expedient to be used here is to merely stipulate the ways in which these terms will be used in this work. In ordinary language ‘emotion’ is an all-encapsulating term, covering the physical, psychological, ‘cognitive’ and behavioural elements of a ‘feeling’ experience. Mostly I will follow that broad usage. But I would also like on occasion to maintain the distinction given by Rychlak (1977, see footnote 3, Chapter 4) between emotion and affect, whereby “emotion, *qua* emotion is not a mental phenomenon; it is physical” (p. 318). Affect, on the other hand, is always a type of judgement or sense-making that may accompany the physiological feelings associated with an emotion. As Rychlak further clarified his view: “emotions are given meaning by the telesponding intellect that conceptualises them and names them” (1977, p. 319).

Since most authors use the terms ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ interchangeably, reporting on their research can create conceptual confusion. The ‘solution’ applied herein is to suggest that as long as the reader bears in mind the above distinction, the context provided should enable the reader to distinguish the sense meant. At times I will place the word *emotion* in inverted commas to indicate that affect or some predication awareness is required — as distinct from a relatively unconstrued physiological reaction. In any case, the distinction to be drawn in this chapter (8.4.4) between passive and active emotion may help in this regard. Rather than considering there to be an absolute distinction between emotion and affect, a continuum can be envisaged wherein ‘emotion’ represents a relatively unconstrued, ‘passive’ undergoing

of a physical response (such as the startle reflex), whereas ‘affect’ implies a more ‘active’ awareness of the meaning and value for the person of such sensations and of events generally.

8.3 EMOTION AND REASON

A growing chorus of contemporary researchers considers emotion (incorporating both senses) to be essential to rationality (Briggs, 1990; Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Claxton, 1997; Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1995; LeDoux, 1995, 1998; Lewis, 1996; Oatley, 1990; Shanon, 1993; Zajonc, 1980). Rather than considering that there is a hard-and-fast division between thought and emotion, emotion itself is increasingly being considered as if it were also a form of thought. Indeed, emotion and propositional reason can usefully be considered as complementary modes of rationality. More than this, it may be that ‘emotional thinking’ is primary:

There is no need of looking to animals for the specialized human functions of concept formation and symbolic expression, not even to the apes. What does distinguish the ‘higher’ animals is a great increase in emotionality, which entails a corresponding increase of perceptive functions, not necessarily by virtue of better receptor organs, but of increasing values imposed on what anciently developed senses convey. Without a true appreciation of the richness and completeness of life built upon instinctive action, and of the heights to which discriminative sensibility and emotional reaction can rise on that foundation, one cannot recognize the critical point where an overcharged system of mental operations breaks over into imagery and symbolic conception, and the great shift from animal mentality to mind begins. (Langer, 1972, p. 140)

With stridently memorable turn of phrase Langer (1972) imagined the breakthrough into human mentality. *Homo sapiens*, the thinking ‘person’, could just as well be named *homo patiens* (from the Latin *pati* to suffer), the emotional ‘person’. This developmental order is not merely of historical interest, if it be accurate, but brings about a re-ordering of our understanding of what it means to speak of mind. This ‘overcharged system of mental operations’ provides the impetus, the felt significance, the ‘increasing values’ cast upon the perceived world such that the ‘trick’ of symbolism

becomes possible.⁵⁹ Regardless of how this step took place, an increasing body of evidence places emotionality and feeling at the centre of mind;⁶⁰ as that upon which our reflexive, propositional capacities depend and to which we return to replenish and re-invigorate our tighter, less flexible logic.

One effect of this shift in conceptualising emotion is a rethinking of what constitutes reason or rationality. Oatley (1990) argued that the rationality or irrationality of emotion can only be judged in terms of whether it has a *function* or role in cognition. He concluded that emotions have such a function: “They are concerned in managing cognitive organization where there are multiple goals and where our models of the world are imperfect” (1990, p. 122). Of course the vast majority of living fits this definition because the world is largely unknowable in any final sense, and because goals often conflict and are incommensurable.

Much of thought is not strictly ‘rational’ either (in terms of valid conclusions flowing from solid premises). By way of illustration, Oatley (1990) considered people’s difficulties with probability judgements, and people’s relative (in)ability to generate potentially refuting hypotheses, as evidence of the ‘irrationality’ of some conscious thinking processes. He suggested that when we are thinking relatively ‘unemotionally’, we can draw upon cultural experience, practised skills, and a range of mental aids suitable for well-defined problems. But when problems are new to us, our ‘emotional thinking’ seems ‘irrational’ because we do not have well-worn mental paths to utilise and because such problems may well have no solutions. In Kellian (1955) terms we become aware of the vicissitudes and implications of our construing. Generally, Oatley (1990) argued that emotion and thought are different processes, yet both can move towards rationality — a process of converging on solutions.

This chapter will examine the ways in which emotion and mind are, arguably, inseparable, and the ways in which a more ‘presentational’ and affectively-sensitive

⁵⁹ See Noble & Davidson (1996) for a remarkably similar speculation. As we will see this is also highly compatible with Damasio’s (1994) ‘somatic marker hypothesis’.

⁶⁰ For a philosophical account of mind as ‘feeling’ see Anderson (1962).

mode of mind can help explain the ubiquitous role of emotion in insight processes.

Accordingly, the following discussion will have three foci:

- 1 Emotional modes of understanding as the basis of mind:- I will provide evidence and argument that support the connection between ‘emotion’ and mind that I have claimed is so fundamentally important.
- 2 Developmental aspects of emotion and mind:- It will be proposed that early emotional communication, built on an innate, tacit capacity for sociality, provides the basis for the emergence of a sense of self, and thereby of reflexive consciousness. It has been seen that such tacit, affective ways of knowing and shifts in self-experience are important components of the insight experience. This connection will be elaborated.
- 3 Emotion and insight:- A provisional account of the relationship between emotion and insight will be presented, gathering together the evidence and arguments put forward thus far.

8.4 FEELING AND EMOTION AS THE BASIS OF MIND

8.4.1 Presentational And Representational Thought

Philosopher Susanne Langer (1957, 1972) developed the idea of a ‘presentational’ mode of thought as a collective term for a looser but more aesthetically rich and affectively ‘felt’ mode of mental awareness. As the extended quotation in the preceding section suggested, such emotionally-nuanced symbolism may form the beginning and continuing basis of mind. The key idea is that presentations to one’s senses are “abstractable and combinatory” (1957, p. 94), and they include the felt mood and affective ambience of one’s experience of events. For the person immersed in the dynamic events of the world, the simultaneous, integral presentations to one’s senses are combined into a personal presentational symbolism. The concept of presentational consciousness thus widens our conception of rationality:

It brings within the compass of reason much that has traditionally been relegated to 'emotion', or to that crepuscular depth of the mind where 'intuitions' are supposed to be born, without any midwifery of symbols, without due process of thought, to fill the gaps in the edifice of discursive, or 'rational' judgement. (Langer, 1957, pp. 97-8)

According to Langer, intuition involves the use of a non-verbal presentational symbolism. It is a form of thought, not the absence of thought. Presentational symbolic thought incorporates what in common parlance we call 'emotion' and 'intuition'. It is primary both in terms of the evolutionary development of the mind and in each person's mental development. It is seen obviously at work, for example, in our aesthetic and artistic activities and sensibilities. Accordingly, Langer (1957) discussed in some detail its role in our creation, and appreciation of, music. She saw music as a type of non-verbal semantic easily recognisable in everyday life.

In addition, visual forms (indeed all sensory information) can be articulated, not propositionally or 'representationally', but presentationally. Langer argued that this 'material mode' is abstractive, just as discursive reason is, but there are differences.⁶¹ The relations determining a visual structure, for example, are grasped in one act of vision (not in sequential linear fashion as with propositional or discursive thought). In this way presentational understandings are multidimensional, in contrast with a more linear, representational symbolism evidenced in language and best exemplified in mathematics. Being multidimensional, the presentational mode of thought imparts a rich depth of meaning. It brings about what Langer (1957) called 'aesthetic emotion', an 'adventure in implicit understanding'. She defined it as the: "emotion that springs ... from the comprehension of an unspoken idea... overcoming obstacles of word-bound thought and achieving insight into literally 'unspeakable realities'" (Langer, 1957, p. 260). Seen here again is the argument that one needs to suspend habitual, 'verbal' thought, to enable one to break through to new understandings. And again, intuition and emotion seem to go hand-in-hand in the production of insight.

⁶¹ Shanon (1993) discussed the extensive empirical support for Langer's idea of a presentational mode of thought. Apart from agreeing that emotion is primary in the development of such thought, he also emphasised that such a presentational mode of understanding is absolutely necessary to deal with everyday contextual complexity. Later on (Chapter 10) I will discuss his view that an innate capacity for metaphorical thinking stands at the centre of mind and is necessary to cope with such complexities.

Langer considered that representational thought is secondary, both in terms of development and in terms of its prevalence in our daily mental processes. Subsequent research, particularly into subliminal perception, (Shanon, 1993; Zajonc, 1980) suggests that while feeling pervades all conscious thought, the converse is not the case. That is, affect is primary relative to cognition and is non-dependent on it (Zajonc, 1980). This recalls the earlier James-Lange theory of emotion which also considered bodily feeling as primary and cognition as secondary in relation to emotion. If ‘representational’ (conscious propositional) thought is derived from ‘presentational’ symbolism, then such emotional-presentational structures may be expected to be quite superordinate in the person’s systems of understanding. As such, although not necessarily propositional in form, nor available to conscious verbal reflection, such affectively-toned dimensions may well be quite abstract and thereby would subsume substantial subsystems of thought. Once again, intuitive, non-verbal structures are considered to be highly abstract or superordinate. And this time they are explicitly associated with affect. Implied in Langer’s work is the creative importance of the more meditative style of thought (Heidegger, 1959) implicated in insight. Such a style of thought relinquishes tightly controlled algorithmic, means-end-type mental processes in favour of a more contemplative, looser and receptive attitude. In the transitions represented by new insights a type of transcending affect, or evenly hovering equanimity, commonly characterises the period before and during insightful breakthrough.

There is one more aspect of Langer’s (1957, 1972) discussion that warrants our attention with regard to insight. That is, in representational thought the medium of thought tends to be irrelevant. For example, the actual words used in verbal thought or communication are usually arbitrary symbols and whether written, spoken, or sung, for the representational mind their meanings are unchanged. Representational consciousness is somewhat ‘removed’ or separate from that which it ‘depicts’ or ‘represents’. In contrast, in presentational symbolism the ‘medium is the message’. Thus a portrait of someone affects us differently than a photograph might, or a biography and so on. Or again, the sound of an instrument cannot be replaced by a description of that sound.

Within representational structures meaning is simplified and tightened in the service of clarity and agreed-upon signification. We use representational symbolism as a tool, frequently not noticing this fact at all as its use is habitual, even appearing to be objective or neutral. Overall, it is more akin to a computational or mathematical procedure as opposed to a personal expression. At times this is an advantage as it allows for a liberation from the constraints of this or that medium. It has a type of independence and ‘portability’ that transcends time and place. Nonetheless, it may be the case that representational thought is always under the sway of more presentational structures. Representational structures alone could never capture or account for the complexity of context and medium (Shanon, 1993). Even the most analytical reason is framed within determining purposes, moods, and feelings or ‘affective assessments’ (Rychlak, 1968, 1977) and is meaningful within an assumed context. In these terms, ‘detached’ calculation is not an absence of emotion, but a particular affective style of thought in the service of some overarching felt purpose or desire.

These issues of sensitivity to the media of expression and experience are directly related to the occurrence of insight. In earlier chapters it was seen that immersion in the textures, language, sounds, emotional feels and so on of one’s pursuits is predictive of insightful breakthrough. Thus, for example, we saw how ‘perceptual rehearsal’ (Ippolito & Tweney, 1995), a type of saturation in the media of one’s pursuits, can side-step or short-circuit one’s more habitual, representational perceptions and understandings. This return to presentational modes of awareness is a skill that can be practised and improved upon. This more contemplative and ‘aesthetic’ stance — Langer’s 1957 ‘aesthetic emotion’ — is ubiquitous in accounts of the antecedents of insight.

Of course thought is never exclusively representational or presentational, but these concepts describe a continuum along which thinking may vary. Thus speech acts include presentational components such as tone of voice, rhythm, assonance, visual expressive movements and so on. Indeed, all thought arguably has a presentational context and background, no matter how ‘neutrally’ it may be presented. In much the

same way, construing can be understood as varying in terms of tightness and looseness. With regard to tight and loose construing, a parallel can be drawn with representational and presentational thought, respectively. Being less amenable to verbalisation and being more metaphoric and multidimensional, presentational awareness tends to be ‘looser’. The more inflexible and controlled nature of representational thought, on the other hand, aligns itself fairly neatly with tight construing as Kelly (1955) defined it.

8.4.2 Affective Assessments

These ideas about the infusion of feeling and affect in all thought find theoretical and empirical support in Rychlak’s (1968, 1977) ‘Logical Learning Theory’, in particular in his notion of ‘affective assessments’.⁶² I have already outlined Rychlak’s notion of a ‘predicational’, versus purely ‘mediational’, view of human intelligence (see 1.1 and 4.2.1), and his telic concept of the ‘telosponding’ versus ‘responding’ person (see 3.3.3.2 and 4.2.1). In addition, Rychlak (1977) argued that all predications or construals are based on ‘affective assessments’ which arise from our innate capacity to “judge the meanings of one’s concepts, premises and even telosponses characterising them as either positive or negative in meaningfulness” (1977, p. 318). He considered that all ‘implicit connotative meaningfulness’ is informed by affection:

... meanings and meaningfulness ‘always devolve from above’ in mental acts... the positiveness or negativeness of meanings being affirmed in telosponsivity are themselves sequaciously determined by the *even more abstract* precedents of affective assessments. (Rychlak, 1977, p. 318)

There is a logic in affection, a judgement rendered which is superordinate to the process being judged. For Rychlak (1977) affective assessments are “the most abstract of mental telosponsivity possible” (p. 317). Indeed, recent research seems to support this notion of the mind being primarily an ‘evaluative’ system generally, and also one that divides events into ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ valences (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999). This exactly parallels Kelly’s view of hierarchical construct systems and of ‘emotion’ as

⁶² It is worth pointing out here that Rychlak’s position is elaborated out of Kelly’s (1955) PCP.

a superordinate awareness of the implications of one's processes. It is proposed that all experience is weighed in terms of its positive or negative value to the person. Kelly did not, however, explicitly suggest that affective processes were this superordinate within one's system (though as I have suggested, this is consistent with the probable affective quality of superordinate processes such as dependency and core construing).

In terms of the origin of mind, Rychlak (1977) also believed that the early mind is based on 'raw affective assessments'. He argued that emotions move the child (more-or-less unidirectionally) and over time she or he learns to assess emotions and bases her or his predications or construals on these assessments. An important capacity that emerges in this process is the ability to think intuitively. For Rychlak (1977) intuition, or feeling that one is on the right path without being able to justify such a feeling, is based not on emotion, but on 'affection': "... there is no literal feeling emanating from the body" (p. 331). This tacit knowing process is analogous to the way we 'feel' our way down a darkened corridor, not seeing the destination, but having confidence we are heading the right way. Because affective assessments are 'the most abstract of mental telosponsivity possible' they are often implicit, tacit, or held in the background, framing or determining what meanings and understandings we pursue.

Rychlak (1977) summarised empirical evidence for the primacy of these affective processes in thought and learning. For example, he showed that people learn materials better if they liked them (versus disliking them) and that this is independent of contiguity and frequency effects. He coined the term 'reinforcement value' (RV) as an operational definition of affective assessments, seeing such RVs as an index of what is significant to the person's self-structure or personality. To illustrate, he showed that for people who like themselves there are positive RV effects, while for schizophrenics and chronic clinical patients there is a reversal of this pattern — the latter learning better using the implications of a negative assessment. For example, the latter group learned trigrams better if they disliked them, this effect increasing if these people were tested a week later.

Rychlak also showed the same effects for school children divided into low and high self-esteem categories. More precisely, he pointed out that positive or negative learning styles depend on the likeability of the task, which in turn depends on the particular premise under affirmation. Crucially, for our concern with insight, these effects are only shown if the person is ‘put on the spot’ “and brought into the situation as a self-identity” (Rychlak, 1977, p. 425). Otherwise, such self-evaluations do not intrude on the meaning extension. That is, as we have seen, not ‘being on the spot’ or not involving self-construing in one’s endeavours, may encourage creativity and insight.

More recent findings by Amabile (1990) and Claxton (1997, 1998) reinforce Rychlak’s point. For example, Claxton (1997) summarised the evidence that anything that makes a person try too hard in solving a problem, or involves public performance, tends to suppress creativity and intuition. For example, people have a superior capacity to correctly identify previously exposed nonsense hieroglyphics if they are not ‘tested’ on recall, but are merely asked which ones they ‘prefer’. Apparently, even asking participants to ‘guess’ rather than to ‘try’, or to blink in response rather than to vocalise, increases recognition of flashed stimuli. Or again, ‘perceptual defence’ (Bruner & Postman, 1947), where threatening or vulgar words take longer to recognise if flashed tachistoscopically, reflects the relative disadvantage of negative RVs. It also implies that there is an emotional access to such anxiety-provoking stimuli which is faster than our more familiar representational thought. As Claxton concluded: “The more the self is involved, the more cautious consciousness has to be, for fear of getting it wrong” (1997, p. 120). In Kellian terms, superordinate core constructions are implicated and one’s construing becomes tighter, more predictable and stereotyped, and consequently less insightful and creative.

It is important to point out, as Kaufmann and Vosburg (1997) did, that there is not a simple relationship between affect, creativity and insight. Whether positive or negative emotion impacts on insight may be contingent on the different stages and components of the creative problem-solving. Positive affect does not always lead to more creativity nor does negative affect always lead to less. Indeed, as we have seen,

periods of frustration and anxiety seem to be necessary to evoke the type of transcending affective strategies I have argued help bring about insight. Perhaps most important is the type of arousal or attention (Martindale, 1995) that is utilised, and this can be set by a superordinating calm presiding over local (subordinate) anxieties and concerns, for example. As Kaufmann and Vosburg (1997, p. 154) conclude: "... there may be no singular, unconditional relationship between mood and creative problem-solving." Given that creativity requires both loose and tight construing, then shifts in mood are probably also important. Though what may be crucial is a superordinating sense of direction and capability.

Finally, Rychlak considered that creativity and the capacity for genuine conceptual change (insight) is gained by people who have grasped that such things flow from the openness of more propositional⁶³ and loose construing. They accept a type of superordinate openness and adopt a metacognitive confidence that new understandings are created by pushing the boundaries of one's current outlook:

Those individuals who change more have probably *already* affirmed premises which sequaciously imply that adaptation, innovation, and creative alternatives are natural in life. This kind of individual moves through life ready to use an analogue, draw a parallel, make the dialectical reversal from affirming what is certainly true to affirming what is not true but might be possible, and so on. (Rychlak, 1977, p. 482).

Such people are what Claxton (1997) called 'successful intuitives' — people who are more willing to make judgements or decisions based on inadequate information and who are more likely to be successful in such decisions. Such people tend to be able to live with doubts and uncertainties with less fear and anxiety. They draw on what he called the 'undermind' or 'intelligent unconscious', the background of implicit knowing and understanding that undergirds our conscious mental life. I will give more detail below of Claxton's (1997) speculations and about the neuropsychology of how such a transcending state of relaxation and calmness, a relative abeyance of self-concern, may

⁶³ Kelly (1955, p. 564) defined propositional construing as that in which "a construct ... carries no implications regarding the other realm memberships of its elements... This is uncontaminated construction".

be reflected in certain brain states and may enable looser, more creative knowing processes to occur.

8.4.3 The Neuropsychology Of Emotion

... it is apparent that emotion is carried out under the control of both subcortical and cortical structures. ...feelings are just as cognitive as any other perceptual image. (Damasio, 1994, p. 158)

Neurophysiological evidence provides support for the idea that emotionality is involved in our thinking (Bechera et al., 1997; Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1995; LeDoux, 1995). I have mentioned above a distinction between emotion and affect borrowed from Rychlak's (1968, 1977) Logical Learning Theory. Essentially, this is that while 'emotion' is a general term — which may include more-or-less instinctive or innate responses — 'affect' implies a psychological 'assessment'. An affective assessment affirms one possibility, one meaning in an event, aware at the same time that 'it could have gone another way'. But what of pan-cultural, presumably 'wired-in' emotional responses, the evidence for which is substantial (LeDoux, 1995; McCoy, 1977; Tomkins, 1962)? The fear response and its accompanying physiological changes, for example, do not seem to depend upon personal constructions. It is unlikely we all happened to construct the same basic emotional patterns. Rather, it seems we begin with a basic sub-constructive, body-based repertoire that is endlessly elaborated and refined. But the basis appears to be given.

8.4.3.1 Primary And Secondary Emotions And Brain Pathways

This distinction between innate and 'constructed' emotions may be paralleled in the physiology of two proposed 'emotion' pathways in the brain (LeDoux, 1995).

Activation of these pathways have been observed to be 'correlates' of emotional experience. This is not to suggest that emotion *is* the activation of neural pathways.

According to this view, the first is a very fast 'instinctive' path utilising the 'old brain' (via a single synapse from the thalamus to the amygdala — the latter operating as a type

of emotional ‘sentinel’ for experience (Goleman, 1995). The second slower and more ‘reflective’ path (the ‘standard route’) runs from the thalamus via a much larger projection of nerves to the prefrontal lobes (implicated with ‘working memory’) and thence to the neocortex generally (Goleman, 1995; LeDoux, 1995). In this secondary ‘emotional’ pathway much more sensory ‘information’ is argued to be available and, crucially, the prefrontal area appears to be able to enhance or inhibit the response of the amygdala. That is, the prefrontal cortices have “links to every avenue of motor and chemical response available to the brain” (Damasio, 1994, p. 181). In short, secondary affective constructions are proposed to have a certain capacity to inhibit and activate innately-provided, ‘primary’ emotional pathways and are likely to significantly involve the prefrontal cortices.

Most of the brain’s activity is concerned with intra-brain ‘communication’. Arguably, the psychological correlate of this is that memories and thoughts can also stimulate activity in the amygdala and the ‘limbic system’, engendering affective experience independently of sensory ‘input’. In this way the basic emotional range is hypothetically added to, refined, expanded exponentially and thoroughly interlaced with thought. This leads some to draw a distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ emotions (Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1995) whereby constructed, emotionally-coded ‘pathways’ are thought to be ‘hooked into’ the amygdala-related emotional complex leading to the well-documented findings that decision-making and intuitive preferences are often ‘faster than thought’ (Claxton, 1997, 1998; Zajonc, 1980).

To this extent emotions can be divided theoretically into relatively involuntary and voluntary processes, each correlated with activation of different neurological networks but both of which emanate from the amygdala (LeDoux, 1995). At least in relation to fear, some fascinating implications follow from this. People demonstrate individual differences in their capacity to have insight into their emotions. LeDoux (1995) concluded that, for whatever reason (genetic and/or experiential), people may vary in the degree to which ‘lower-order’ pathways or ‘higher-order’ pathways are capable of triggering emotional experience. He also argued that memories associated

with the observed processes of the amygdala appear to be indelible. This reflects the well-known therapeutic experience that, for example, traumatic emotional memories seem to transcend time and never seem to be completely erased. One implication of this view is that extinction of such memories involves inhibition — ‘submergence’ or ‘suspension’ in Kelly’s (1955) terms — not erasure, and “the role of therapy may be to allow the cortex to establish more effective and efficient synaptic links with the amygdala” (LeDoux, 1995, p. 229). This implies not only that we may be able to inhibit indelible emotional responses, but we may also be able to modulate and utilise emotional pathways generally — a conclusion that may help in explaining the particular affective qualities of insight.

It is possible that very fast, non-consciously mediated emotional responses are forms of ‘primitive’ construing (Katz, 1984). Such ecologically-programmed survival responses would be highly superordinate, constraining large-scale networks of subordinate construction when they are regnant. This is possibly paralleled in the neural pathways connecting the amygdala-‘emotional’ complex to most parts of the brain and to various central nervous system and endocrine systems of the body. These proposed ‘primitive’ or basic emotional processes may form the basis for an ever-expanding affective repertoire informed by our experience and understanding. For example, Damasio’s (1994) ‘somatic markers’ are special feelings generated from ‘secondary’ emotions. According to this theory, through constructive experience primary feelings and emotions become connected to anticipated events, highlighting various options and eliminating others. In these terms ‘intuition’ would be an example of the operation of covert somatic markers in which there is a very fast pre-selection of options carried out according to biologically-informed preferences or ‘values’. Connected to primary emotional systems, the ‘feelings’ of intuition (‘I feel it in my bones’ etc.) are a type of virtual emotion, one that is re-membered, re-constituted. This fast preselection is based on one’s anticipatory successes and failures in the past. Contemporary theorists (Claxton, 1997; Goleman, 1995; LeDoux, 1995) have suggested that such emotional processes are ‘quick and dirty’ appraisals that pre-dispose us towards certain actions and decisions, and away from others.

Neuroanatomical development also seems to suggest that very early memories may be ‘emotional’ ones because the networks thought to subserve declarative conscious memories do not mature sufficiently till the second or third year (LeDoux, 1995). The development of early constructs, especially dependency constructs (those linking other people to one’s survival or ‘maintenance processes), could be built on the basis of an innate predisposition to divide experience into positive and negative affective construals (Cacioppo and Gardner, 1999). It is not that we have direct, ‘objective’ access to these proposed body-based emotional patterns, or that they directly determine our thinking. Rather, there appears to be converging evidence for the idea that there are universal, innate, survival-related emotional processes that constrain and abide in our constructions. They are in just as much need of construal as anything else in the world. Indeed, being able to ‘place them within a system’, to tighten them up as it were, may be one of our most pressing life tasks and linked to our highest achievements.

These ideas about emotions being predisposing devices, or ‘quick-and-dirty’ appraisals have been given extensive treatment by Damasio (1994). His non-dualist account of mind gives an embodied, yet non-reductionist basis to our mental processes. At the ‘heart’ of his account of mind are emotional feelings and moods:

Feelings let us mind the body, attentively, as during an emotional state, or faintly, as during a background state. They let us mind the body ‘live’, when they give us perceptual images of the body, or by rebroadcast, when they give us recalled images of the body state appropriate to certain circumstances, in ‘as if’ feelings. (p. 159)

According to this account, one’s world is primarily experienced through perturbations to one’s body. The basis for this ‘mindful body’ is emotional awareness. One’s primary emotional patterns come first and form a frame of reference for the development of all later thought, including emotional memories and ‘secondary’ emotions. These body images give a quality of ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ (note Rychlak’s ‘affective assessments’), to objects, situations and experiences. All construing, he argued, is based on this affective template. Damasio gave powerful expression to these ideas with his ‘somatic marker hypothesis’. Somatic markers are:

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emotionally pragmatic and relational way, then valid construing is a way of being-with, of participating-with the world (especially others). It is not a separate, inner cognitive act 'representing' that world 'out there', but is a way of being-in-the-world, a participatory knowing.

Our growing conscious propositional (representational) understanding may well operate in a parallel and similar fashion to emotional understanding. For Plato, knowledge was generated by Eros. Ideally, in his view of philosophical thought, one approaches and 'consorts' with reality in a type of participatory, loving 'knowing-with'. But, of course, our grasp of the world is always incomplete. Yet in Plato's suggestion lies the psychological insight that we yearn for a sense of integration, of connectedness. Just as the child bends all to establish emotional bonds with those around him or her, in the human search for meaning and understanding we may endure failure and disappointment, great frustration and extended effort — especially if we have already had experiences of this kind of breaking through into insight. We search for meaning not as an intellectual exercise but as a fully-embodied, passionate effort to be 'as one' with the world. Even if the insight is mistaken, we initially feel the sudden coherence and 'sense' of connectedness as emblematic of that greater coherence we seek.

Assuming that the nature of the person is one whose being is to 'take' the world to him or herself, to 'anticipate' it, then all understanding can be considered as an emotionally-nuanced type of action. We are vitally *interested* in others and our world, and when we are not clouded and prodded by the urgencies of anxiety and fear (which for most of us is much of the time), we may 'wait upon' the world in wide-eyed openness. This is a venture in participation, a personal conversation with reality. We may disperse our dependency requirements more and more widely onto other people and activities, but our dependency and our need for intimate relations is not thereby reduced. Our survival (and our growth) is connected with our successful 'coupling' with the 'other', by empathic understanding and by 'fitting' with our lived-world. To do this we must be open to the unknown, to let go of what we know. In this sense the word 'understanding' refers to both person and process, to both oneself and one's

relations. When we understand we ‘stand under’ or ‘undergo’ the situation, we open ourselves to its influence. Implicit in this is self-abnegation, a humility or willingness to be influenced by our circumstances. This is subjectivity in the service of objectivity (Warren, 1998).

8.5.3 Emotional Understanding And The Formation Of Self

Primary selfobject⁶⁵ relatedness is the person’s experience, at any age, of a connection with a significant human other or attachment figure as support for the establishment, development, and maintenance of continuous, cohesive, positive self-experience. Such relatedness is crucial for learning to recognize, differentiate, and express a range of emotional experience. (Orange, 1995, p. 179)

It can be seen from Orange’s relational self-psychology perspective that a person may not be born with a sense of self, but develops it via ongoing, largely emotional, communication with significant others. Indeed, it has been suggested that this sense of self is continuously changing and developing, though perhaps its emotional characteristics are relatively stable over the life-span. Daniel Stern (1985, discussed in Orange, 1998) concluded that a ‘self’ emerges in the first year of life and is based on ‘affective attunements’ between the child and caretaker. These attunements involve “the infant’s recognition of the other’s recognition of the infant’s emotional experience” (p. 101). In this way the child is theorised to ‘notice’ his or her ‘reflection’ in the face and reactions of the other. Later on this image of self becomes stabilised even without the presence of the other.

With optimal responsiveness our emotional relational experience can be incorporated within a positive core of self. Given a positive, more stable sense of self, frustration or uncertainty can be better accepted as a normal, but non-permanent, non-threatening part of self-experience. Constant validation is not required to maintain a stable, positive sense of self. There is an emotional security, a confidence that in time it will be resolved. Just as securely-attached children may wander out of sight or at some

⁶⁵ Orange defines the term ‘selfobject’ as the “mirroring of a child’s natural grandiosity or expansiveness as an essential ingredient of healthy development” (1995, p. 179). This definition emphasises the literal identification of self and the objects (people mostly) which afford the person a mirrored sense of self.

distance from their mothers and not immediately feel anxious or 'lost' (Bowlby, 1988), so people in creative pursuits, solving problems, and so on, may 'forget themselves', may engage so fully in their tasks that they are freed of self-consciousness. As noted in earlier chapters, such a state of absorption or reverie increases the likelihood of insight. This is an emotional skill, a way of managing oneself 'as if' one were so closely connected-with, and participating-with, one's immediate circumstances such that self-referencing thought is superfluous.

A growing child takes frequent 'risks' in the expansion of his or her capacities. As the activities and capacities change, so does the self. Each new understanding and new achievement is at first a loss of the old self. Over time, however, we operate more and more out of established and stabilised constructions of self and of events generally. We construct a dynamic system of understanding that shows considerable stability over time. This is essential as we gain more mastery and control in our lives. It is also why frustration and impasse may threaten us. Our hard-won gains may be in question. Genuine new insight, involving as it does the undoing of certain constructions, is akin to a loss of parts of oneself. To invite new insight we must risk our organising principles. If we are not to merely repeat forever what we already know, this process of undoing and remaking is essential.

An important point here is that Meno's Paradox, with which I began this work, assumes we are isolated cognitive atoms, as if our ideas and knowing are separate from the world and those around us. But if understanding and self begins by participating in the world, especially with others, then the more stabilised (tight) ways we have come to anticipate events may need to be set aside in times of impasse. We may need to return to the participatory knowing (Barfield, 1988) that is neither internal or external, private or public but is created in its own act of participatory unfolding. We need to loosen our identification with our present understandings and venture further away from the safe and the known. Our core construing needs to be permeable enough to take uncertainty and frustration in its stride. The inclination is to tighten construing, to return to what we

know. But if our present understandings are to no avail, then they must be loosened if we are to develop new ways of understanding and to better cope with our circumstances.

In Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) a developmental theory of the person consistent with that sketched above is present, if only implicitly, and is most clearly seen in the concept of dependency construing.⁶⁶ Such construing (connecting important caregivers to one's needs) allows the person to develop 'roles' which reflect the person's growing sense of themselves as a person-in-relation (Walker, 1990). This earliest construing is designed to link the child to those around him or herself; to encourage those people to commune with the child; for them to be willing to, and to learn how to, meet his or her needs; to inculcate in the child a sense of connectedness and, thereby, security. This may well be the basis of the sense of connectedness that insight restores to the person whose failure to anticipate has separated him or her from his or her anticipatory 'fit' with the world.

Our core construing (construing governing the our maintenance processes) may become so intimately linked to our self-perceived ability to anticipate, that failures to make sense of things and continued frustration in understanding may well threaten our core meanings. That is, impasse, if it be in an area of personal importance to the person, may be experienced as literally implying comprehensive changes to, or even loss of, self. The frequently-reported loss of self-concern and a mildly euphoric sense of self-transcendence in insight may well reflect this shift from self-referencing frustration and awareness of personal invalidation, to a more primary and relational participatory knowing (Barfield, 1988; McWilliams, 1993), a return to a mode of understanding more presentational and 'emotional' in character.

⁶⁶ As indicated previously, Kelly considered calling his approach 'Role Theory'. This is important in the present context because roles are established by the person 'in order to distribute one's dependencies'. The preverbal processes by which the child anticipates the satisfaction of his or her dependency needs are probably superordinate throughout life. With the advent of reflexive and propositional thought we do not cease to construe in preverbal and 'presentational' ways. Rather, there develops a depth to construction, the verbal 'labels' often attached to construing processes frequently being shorthand for deeper processes of meaning-making. Given the person's initial, empathic, wordless anticipatory capacities, the rest of Kelly's theory provides well for an understanding of the ongoing development and growth of the person.

8.6 EMOTION AND INSIGHT: A PROVISIONAL TIGHTENING

8.6.1 A Summary

This chapter began by asserting that emotion, in the broad sense, is very much a part of reasoning and of mind. The findings in the insight literature indicated that this was so and my discussion of Personal Construct Psychology indicated that emotion was likely to be pivotal in changes in the construct system such as insight may represent. I outlined Langer's distinction between representational and presentational thought, the latter containing the affective and intuitive qualities of thought that we have seen are related to insight. That is, presentational thought is looser, more emotional and intuitive than more propositional, conscious thought. We saw that a growing number of researchers consider that emotional thought is primary both in evolution and in individual development. I then examined various features of presentational thought, including its relative multidimensionality, its media-sensitivity and the likelihood that it is quite superordinate and influential in the person's system of understanding. These ideas were then compared to Rychlak's concept of 'affective assessments' as the source of, or abstracting base for, our constructive and anticipatory endeavours.

This discussion was then echoed in my examination of current neuropsychology and neuroscience. In looking at the hypothesised physical substrate of 'emotional' thinking processes, support was found for a distinction between a tighter representational mode of thought versus a more affective, intuitive thought. These distinctions were discussed in relation to both the ideas of active versus passive emotions and secondary versus primary emotions. These parallels and comparisons of disparate approaches to emotion and thought allowed us to see that there was a great deal in common between theorists postulating a more creative, affective and intuitive mode of thought, and researchers who have correlated more creative and absorptive states with distinct patterns of brain activation and pathways of activation. We saw, for example, how a more meditative or relaxed state of being may utilise the physiology of the brain to generate a wider more diffuse activation which has been associated with creativity and insight experiences.

Finally, I looked at how emotional thought may form the basis of consciousness and of a sense of self. I used the phrase ‘participatory knowing’ to emphasise the relational quality of affective thought. Beginning in emotional empathy and compelled by a desire for connectedness, such thought is preverbal and largely tacit. An examination of how a sense of self might emerge from emotional ‘mirroring’ followed and it was concluded that the more secure this sense of self, the more likely the person was to be adventurous and experimental amid uncertainty. This challenge to be creative requires a type of emotional skill, a way of regulating our affect so that frustration and impasse do not cause us to tighten up our thought and retreat to what we already know. Broadly speaking, some of the phenomenology of insight was related to these developmental issues, for example, the sense of being at-one with the world, of connectedness, and the relief and joy of once again being able to anticipate. It now remains for me to suggest how this discussion has advanced us in this inquiry into insight and to indicate the questions I still need to pursue.

8.6.2 Some Concluding Comments

Emotion is the key to whether attention is concentrated or diffuse and unpredictable. For example, there appears to be more tension for participants doing tracking tasks if they are offered incentives — as evidenced by their resulting loss of peripheral vision within the task as they focus ‘harder’ in order to earn ‘reward’ (Claxton, 1997). There is also evidence that incentive-giving can cut down on creativity generally (Amabile, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This tighter, more focused attention can lead to more predictable mental processes and, as we have seen, in some circumstances is inimical to insight. Claxton (1997) argued that broad diffuse attention is what is required for ill-defined, non-routine problems where data is inadequate or impoverished and where small incidental detail may provide the clue needed for insight (see also Perkins 1995 and his ‘Klondike spaces’). Again, this is the type of mental style that is associated with insightful thinking. Though, as we noted earlier, insight probably requires both a period

of early frustration followed by some way of transcending the tightening effects of the resulting anxiety.

The person's superordinating intention is what drives the style of attention and the mental stance adopted. Given Western culture's emphasis of control and the analytic mind, we often feel pressurised for results. We habitually engage in a tighter 'looking for' rather than a looser 'waiting upon' (Heidegger, 1959). Thereby, we limit our contact with the 'undermind' (Claxton, 1997) and intuitive thinking. In responding to the pressures of invalidation and impasse, extremes of loosening or tightening are both counterproductive. To encourage insight there needs to be a particular use of looser processes such that they do not overwhelm us, or run away in purely associationist fashion. We must be able to contain them with 'adequate ideas' (Spinoza's 'active emotions') and they must be subsumed by permeable superordinate structures.

I have posited a type of transcending affect that, depending on its permeability and degree of comprehensiveness, can modulate primary emotional processes. In this type of construing the person can utilise some of the features of 'primary' emotions. One such feature is the making of broad, quick-and-dirty 'appraisals', viewing multiple possibilities very quickly, screening out many, predisposing us to others. In the face of ill-defined problems, such a skill is essential given the vast combinatorial possibilities that may confront the problem-solver (Oatley, 1990; Perkins, 1997). Such a transcending affective stance also allows for a slowing down of 'normal', highly practised, propositional thought (Claxton, 1997). This superordinate affective stance is a relatively loose form of construing which 'allows' subordinate discontinuities, even absurdities (that is, from a tightly-construed vantage point).

We may also be able to modulate and utilise emotional pathways generally — a conclusion that may help in explaining the particular affective qualities of insight. This is because affective thought is considered to have a wide purview, to be multidimensional and to operate associatively. It is not precise, but it can be creative. A useful 'emotional' skill may be to capitalise on the brain's biochemistry and structure.

Daydreaming, brainstorming, reverie and so on bring about changes to the direction, speed, depth and patterns of neural inhibition and disinhibition allowing shifts in the style or mode of thought. Specifically, such a transcending affective stance can make for creativity and insight.

This makes ecological sense in that the person who feels relatively little threat or pressing needs can experiment and create. Such a mood and approach allows for “... widespread, low intensity activation [which arguably] incorporates into the representation of a situation more of its personal resonances and connotations” (Claxton, 1997, p. 155). This is experienced more as a ‘felt meaning’ which is embodied and which makes more personal sense to us. For Claxton (1997), the ‘undermind’ is the repository of emotion and feeling. It is tapped when attention is more diffuse and the person adopts a “contemplative perceptual stance in which the world is allowed to speak more fully for itself” (p. 165). Again, this is subjectivity in the service of objectivity. The emerging ‘felt sense’ (Gendlin, 1978) is clearly a presentational mode of knowing. It is a type of capacity for non-selfconscious absorption, a capacity to wait and not grasp or seek for something in particular. Essentially, the type of mindfulness Claxton discussed is one in which thinking slows to the point where one can begin to see one’s assumptions as assumptions. This is of course the meditative thinking which Heidegger praised so highly and which I am pursuing in this inquiry.

The neuropsychological findings distinguishing ‘emotional’ pathways from other cortical processes may help us understand why strategies conducive of loosening may work towards insight. When, for example, the fear system described by LeDoux (1998) is not activated in the course of frustration and impasse, this leaves resources open for experimentation. More positively, relaxation lessens mutual neural inhibition allowing for more defocused attention, more lateral associations, and a more receptive, playful stance. Such an affective stance may allow us to tap into meaning processes which operate faster than representational thought. Yet the person is in no hurry to

make this looser thinking coalesce into conclusions, but is content to ‘mull over’ interesting possibilities.

It may well be that one’s ‘original’ affective and presentational consciousness is utilised to maintain ourselves in relationship with our caregivers and to develop a sustainable sense of self. In attempting to overcome impasse and failures to anticipate, however, we may need to use this preverbal, presentational mode of construing *in the service of* a disinterested, openness to understand. This may help to explain why insight is frequently felt as if it is ‘dictated to us’ or as exterior and spontaneous, as coming from ‘without’. This may occur because we are using our archetypically interpersonal and empathic mode of understanding in relation to our impasse. This places us in an ‘I -thou’ frame of mind in which self-consciousness is backgrounded and one enters into a more participatory mode of knowing. Just as Kelly asked us to abandon our knowing in pursuit of new understandings, to launch us into uncertainty in the service of new anticipations, so we must create in ourselves a sense of security, of calm and confidence precisely at those times when our attempts to anticipate are frustrated. Just as the securely-attached child does not need to anxiously check that ‘mother’ is nearby, we must learn not to observe self-consciously our constructive progress, but rather ‘lose ourselves’ in participatory anticipation.

It still remains, however, to explain how emotional and presentational modes of awareness have the capacity to open up possibilities, to engender creativity and make for quantum jumps in understanding. How can one conceptualise the complexity and multidimensionality of thought that emotional thought can open up? We are in need of other conceptual dimensions that can carry us further in this quest for insight into insight. It is to Matte-Blanco’s (1975, 1988) distinction between *asymmetrical* and *symmetrical* thinking that I will next turn. I will look at how these complementary processes may deepen our understanding of loose and tight construing. A theme I will also pursue in the next chapter is this higher complexity and richness of tacit and unconscious mental processes. I will attempt to link what I have been saying about the alternation between more affectively-sensitive thought and more structured conscious

thought to Kelly's Creativity Cycle. To do this I will compare and contrast the contributions of Kelly and Matte-Blanco coming in the end to a more detailed understanding of how loosening and tightening of construing works.

In relinquishing representational thought when confronted by impasse there is a trade-off. A more presentational and affective construing may have a higher dimensionality and so can encompass more of our system of understanding at once. We can grab a type of aesthetic feel for things. We can garner a felt sense of whether our anticipations gel or fit with events and whether the emerging structure coheres. However, the price is a lack of precision and the difficulty of making such felt convictions conscious. What is frequently needed are figurative and metaphorical devices to 'contain' and give form to such thinking. Interpretations based on presentational thought can and do vary — and this is due to its open-ended and multidimensional nature. This is precisely what happens in loose construction which, by definition, also leads to varying predictions. In the next 2 chapters I will elaborate, in turn, the structural and dimensional features of presentational thought, and in the chapter following that, its pragmatic, embodied and metaphorical nature.

CHAPTER 9: MATTE-BLANCO, KELLY AND INSIGHT

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The above lines of inquiry into insight point to the importance of tacit and ‘unconscious’ mental processes. More precisely, what appears to be essential for insight to occur is an optimal alternation between tacit, looser and more presentational awareness on the one hand, and relatively conscious, tighter representational thought on the other. While some authors (Briggs, 1990; Martindale, 1995) have made direct reference to ‘primary process thinking’, most others have referred more generally to unconscious or tacit processes. In particular, Claxton (1997, 1998) has emphasised the need to maintain contact with, and to utilise, one’s ‘intelligent unconscious’ or ‘undermind’. There is a shift in thinking about the nature of unconscious processes, moving away from the image of there being an unconscious which is a type of ‘sump’ for repressed and suppressed contents, towards a view that processes outside conscious awareness play a creative and positive role in our mental economy (Orange, 1998; Rayner, 1995). The idea that there are theoretically distinct and complementary mental modes has been a major theme in this present work and will be given more a thorough treatment in this chapter.

We have seen how important emotional processes are in insight. But it is not just any emotion that aids in creative thought. Spinoza’s distinction between active and passive emotions allowed us to see that it was a transcending affective stance towards one’s impasse that operates as a type of ‘pivot’ between looseness and tightness; between the undoing of construct structure and the provisional tightening of structure that then allows more conscious awareness to take place. Much as Freud suggested that therapists adopt an evenly hovering attention in order to be attuned to their patients’ unconscious processes, so we all have the creative capacity to adopt an accepting openness to our own tacit and looser mental processes. Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988; see also Rayner, 1995), a Chilean mathematician and psychoanalyst, developed a most

informative and thought-provoking account of the system unconscious.⁶⁷ There is much in what he has said that accords with our growing understanding of insight, including a striking consonance between his twin concepts of symmetrical and asymmetrical thought and Kelly's loose and tight construing, respectively.⁶⁸

Bell (1996) was the first to see the link between Matte-Blanco and Kelly. He argued that loose construing best matches the five main features of Freud's (1911) unconscious and of primary process thinking. These features are (a) the absence of mutual contradiction, (b) condensation, (c) timelessness, (d) displacement, and (e) replacement of external by internal reality. Bell was interested in how cognitive-perceptual disorders are related to loose construing and thus turned to Matte-Blanco's (1975, 1988) account of the system unconscious to help explicate loosening and tightening. Bell considered that this neo-Freudian account of the unconscious was more detailed and sophisticated than Kelly's relatively unelaborated account of loose construing. I too consider that Matte-Blanco's account may help us, but this time to provide an understanding of insight beyond Kelly's explanation of the creativity cycle. So it is with the promise of this deeper understanding that I now turn to Matte-Blanco's redescription of Freud's system unconscious.

9.2 MATTE-BLANCO AND THE SYSTEM UNCONSCIOUS

9.2.1 Asymmetrical And Symmetrical Processes

Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988) proposed that conceptualisation can be thought of in terms of sets⁶⁹ that can be related in two ways: asymmetrically and symmetrically.

⁶⁷ No allegiance to Freud's theory of the dynamic unconscious or to his topographical view of the mind is implied here. We are interested principally in the (empirically observed) features of psychic life which led to the postulation of a system unconscious.

⁶⁸ While considering concordances with theorists influential in this present work, it is significant to note that Matte-Blanco was also strongly influenced by Susanne Langer. Indeed he adopted her formal logic in his theorising and was clearly cognisant of her concept of two contrasting mental modes, that is, representational and presentational thought.

⁶⁹ Personal constructs can also be usefully represented as sets (Caputi, 1986; Chiari, Mancini, Nicolò & Nuzzo, 1990) and Bell (1996) has proposed that, given this, Matte-Blanco's ideas can also be usefully applied to personal construing.

Asymmetrical relationships are based in difference, are ‘rational’ and are hierarchic, while symmetrical relationships are based on sameness, are ‘irrational’ and equivalent. Applying this to the framework of PCP, as Bell (1996) did, asymmetrical relationships function as do ordinal relationships between constructs, as set out in the Organization Corollary. That is, they operate in terms of transitive ‘If... Then’ implications allowing for prediction of the following kind:

If A, ... then B. If B, ... then C. Given A, ... therefore C

It follows that the converse of an asymmetrical relation is not equivalent. Thus ‘John is taller than Mary’ does not equal ‘Mary is taller than John’. If ‘Mary is taller than Anne’, it also follows that ‘John is taller than Anne’, and so on. Symmetrical relationships, on the other hand, demonstrate relations of sameness and of reversibility. This appears quite illogical to highly conscious asymmetrical thinking. According to Matte-Blanco (1988), for example, ‘Mary is taller than John’ can, under deep ‘symmetrisation’ of thought, be held to be loosely equivalent to ‘John is taller than Mary’! Such ‘illogicality’ and reversibility is frequently encountered in dreams.

Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988) suggested that symmetrical thought shares some of the properties of infinite sets. A (mathematical) property of infinite sets is that each element can stand in one-to-one relation with a part or subset of its set. An example of this is given in Rayner & Tuckett (1988) concerning the relationship between the set of natural numbers and a subset, the set of even numbers. It appears there will be twice as many natural numbers as even numbers. But since every natural number is exactly one half of its corresponding even number, then *each* element (natural number) can be related to a subset of its elements (even numbers). A subset can, in some loose fashion, be *identified* or equated with the whole set.

Set of Natural Numbers: {1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ...}
 Set of Even Numbers : {2, 4, 6, 8, 10, ...}

Although notions of size and equality are problematic within infinite sets, it is clear that the ‘normal’ rules and comparisons of sets break down under the appearance of infinity. Matte-Blanco believed that conceptualisation in the unconscious operates in

analogous, symmetrical fashion. Thus, symmetrical thought flouts classical laws of (asymmetrical) logic and elements can be identified with the whole set and thereby, in deeper levels of symmetry, to all the elements within the set. Thus the features of primary process thinking, as summarised above, are all expressions of symmetrical thought in which distinctions in time, space and relations are broken down. Moreover, Matte-Blanco (1988) considered the ‘indivisible mode’ (symmetry) to be the ground or basis of all consciousness.⁷⁰ He also argued that symmetrical thought, where only sameness is recognised, is pervasive in the unconscious and influential in emotional states.

According to Matte-Blanco (1988) emotionality largely gives us the framework within which to analyse and think. Rayner (1995) summarised Matte-Blanco’s view of emotional states as:

instantaneous awareness and integration of vast networks of perceptible relations [which] are vital since they enable the location and evaluation of the significance of internal and external objects and conditions. This is the function of emotionality. (p. 20)

Matte-Blanco (1988) considered emotion as an instantaneous appraisal and evaluation of internal events (physical and psychological) and of the external world. Visceral feelings, the relation of self to others and to the world, anticipations, memories and exteroceptions are all combined in one gestalt as “a wholistic experience of multiplicity” (Rayner, 1995, p. 18). This clearly parallels much of the research into emotion discussed in the previous chapter. This multiplicity of emotionality leads to the related question of the dimensionality of symmetrical and asymmetrical thought.

9.2.2 Dimensions Of Awareness

Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988) also argued that asymmetrical and symmetrical thought differed in terms of their ‘dimensionality’. Asymmetrical thought is confined to the three spatial dimensions plus time, while symmetrical thought (including emotion)

⁷⁰ The echoes of Langer’s (1957) view — that presentational consciousness was the basis of human mentality — are strong here.

operates within a higher dimensionality. It is this characteristic of symmetrical thought that keeps it relatively ‘unconscious’, only entering full consciousness (in less dimensions) indirectly by way of figurative, metaphorical and non-verbal expression.

Matte-Blanco (1988) compared the types of mathematical distortions that occur when we try to represent something of higher dimension in terms of fewer dimensions with attempts to translate unconscious contents into conscious thoughts. Typically, distortions appear where elements are repeated. For example, in dreams a single element can stand for one thing, then another, then back to the first again. I may dream that a person is say, my brother, then I become that figure, then I realise the figure is both brother and myself, and so on. The more the dimensional reduction, the greater the repetitions and distortions (see Bell, 1996, and Rayner, 1995 for discussions). Such (consciously recognised) distortions and contradictions are ideally ‘contained’ within asymmetrical thought flexible enough to accommodate the ‘contradictories’. This would be an example of bi-modal thought.

9.2.3 Bi-Modal Thought

Symmetry tends to reign in less conscious modes of thinking and understanding, while asymmetry is characteristic of (though not confined to) conscious, ‘rational’ thought. Matte-Blanco (1988) made it clear that optimal mental functioning involves *both* logics (symmetry and asymmetry) working in harmony. In such *bi-modal* thought all levels of consciousness are felt. The symmetrical aspects create a felt depth and dimensionality to one’s awareness, but do not over-ride consistent, asymmetrical inference. The registration of sameness or symmetry is a necessary component of ‘rational’ thought:

... when abstraction occurs in logical thought, and identity (symmetry) is discovered; but it is immediately circumscribed by awareness that there are a great many properties that *distinguish* from each other the items under scrutiny. (Rayner, 1995, p. 78)

This is bi-modality. The symmetrical is bounded by asymmetry and consistent inference is maintained. In rich and emotionally evocative imagination, the two logics

work in harmony. This is entirely consistent with the Spinozan idea of active emotions being those feelings which are bound by adequate ideas. Insight may reflect this harmony between symmetry and asymmetry as a bringing into awareness of a dimensionality and a sense of infinity unavailable by asymmetrical means alone.

9.2.4 Bi-Logic

Of course not all thinking operates so ideally. It is when asymmetrical and symmetrical processes alternate or occur simultaneously, but not in concert, that cognitive-perceptual distortions appear. This is called *bi-logical* thought. Within bi-logic we may become aware of the intransitivity and illogicalities of our awareness and this can be anxiety or threat-provoking. Since symmetrisation is the process of ignoring asymmetrical relationships and implications, in this state object and subject may not be discriminated and it can be close to an experience of ‘experiencing only’ — where construing is so loose that experiences are not placed securely within a system of anticipation and understanding. Abstracted conceptions, attributes or intuitions (‘loveliness’, ‘evil’, ‘niceness’) float relatively free of specific elements and relations and this state represents the intrusion of ‘infinities’ or boundlessness into thought.

Rayner (1995) referred to bi-logical structures as manifesting ‘looseness’. Within quite loose symmetrical awareness we may not be aware of any inconsistencies and intransitivities — which of course parallels the suggestion made earlier that we may loosen construing to avoid awareness of anticipatory failures and impasses. Awareness of inconsistencies, and often negative affect, may occur upon the return to asymmetrical thought. In a way, with excursions into the deeper levels of symmetry we are playing with fire. If we lack a sufficiently permeable and comprehensive superordinate structure capable of subsuming the infinities and multiplicity of symmetry, then, as Bell’s (1996) work indicated, quite serious anticipatory problems, such as hallucinations, schizoid thought disturbances, and so on, can emerge.

9.2.5 Levels Of Consciousness

Matte-Blanco outlined five levels or strata of consciousness. At the fifth level symmetrisation reaches a logical limit where everything is identified with everything else. In contrast, at the first stratum analytical, rational distinction-making (asymmetrical thought) reigns. Within the ‘lower’ (third to fifth) strata, anxiety and threat may not be experienced since there is little access to invalidation in the form of a more asymmetrical awareness of contradictions and inconsistencies. The unconscious is unconscious because its higher dimensionality cannot be grasped within conscious thought. For example, emotion (which is found in relatively asymmetrical form at the second stratum and in more ‘unconscious’ symmetrical form in the third stratum) is characterised by “a greater number of dimensions than that which our self-awareness is capable of dealing” (Matte-Blanco, 1988, p. 91).

9.3 MATTE-BLANCO, PCP AND INSIGHT: SOME IMPLICATIONS

9.3.1 Tight And Loose Construing And Bi-Polarity

Bi-modal thought can be seen as ‘textbook’ or ideal bi-polar construing where a construct is defined as a simultaneous awareness of sameness-yet-difference relations. Take, for example, the following definition of bi-modal thought:

When classification works with a two-valued logicity, different members of a class remain distinct individuals but are seen as similar though different; they have some class-defining quality or attribute in common. (Rayner, 1995, p. 47)

Kelly’s contribution was to specify that the *way* in which members (elements) were different was also important. That is, elements are contrasted to others not in every respect, but in some particular aspect: the bi-polar construct was defined by *relevant contrast*.

Take, for example, a construct labelled 'happiness'. The contrast it expresses may be 'happy—moody', with 'happy' being its emergent pole. The elements identified with 'moody' are not merely, for this person, equivalent to 'non-happy'. Further, let us say, that this construct is used loosely, that the distinction between 'happy' and 'moody' is blurred and that polar membership of its elements is unstable. In order to use such a construct productively it must be subsumed by a less loose superordinate construct, say 'satisfaction—despair', which is nonetheless permeable and comprehensive enough to allow, for example, that one may be 'satisfied' when one is moody as well as when one is happy — in the special sense that one is not despairing.

In this way asymmetrical inference is still intact, but it is enriched by the subtlety required to subsume a construct which expresses the type of ill-defined complexity and non-simple contrast that is so necessary to cope with our ill-defined, complex and non-simple world. In short, bi-modality reveals the way in which bi-polarity in personal construct terms is not only a function of an act of construing in isolation, but also of the way in which such bi-polarity works within a system of meanings. When loose construing cannot be fitted into a system, we have what Matte-Blanco (1988) called bi-logic. Just as I have asserted that it is not just any emotion that is conducive of insight, looseness per se is not in itself 'creative' (or 'non-creative'). As Kelly's (1955) Creativity Cycle reveals, it is the skilled alternations between looser and tighter modes of construing that leads to creativity.

Tight construing tends towards asymmetry as it is characterised by both consistency of inference and is based on making clear distinctions between contrasting elements. Loose construing is akin to symmetry or sameness where the basis for the bi-polar distinction of the elements within a construct's range begins to dissolve and contradictories (to the tightly-construing mind) can be held in mind simultaneously. Loosening reveals that construct membership may at times be fuzzy. That is, elements may no longer clearly belong at one pole or another, or even inside or outside the construct's range of convenience. This is contrary to a strict interpretation of Kelly's

(1955) Dichotomy Corollary and Range corollaries whereby elements are viewed as either at one pole or another of a construct (or not within the construct at all).

Bell (1996) has in fact shown that many construct relations are symmetrical. About 20% of construct relations in standard grids and 30% in implications grids are mutually implicative, rather than ordered hierarchically. As such, they stand outside the formal assumptive structure of the theory (the Organization and Modulation Corollaries, for example). In similar fashion, Butt (1995) has found that construct hierarchies often loop back again. Interestingly, this symmetry helps to illustrate one of Kelly's (1955) corollaries, the Fragmentation Corollary, which allows for inferential incompatibility (intransitivity) between constructs. That is, some of the relations between constructs are more strongly based on similarities or sameness rather than on ordinal differences and so one may find oneself endorsing seemingly 'incompatible' beliefs or outlooks.

9.3.2 Symbolisation And Ordinal Relations

Kelly (1955, pp. 297-299) gave an example of symbolisation where 'mother' can be both an element in a construct (sets of elements arranged in sameness-difference relations) and may also, for the construing person, stand as the name or symbol for the entire construct. This opens the possibility for the identification of 'mother' with all elements in the construct — including the elements of the contrast pole! This is directly analogous to the relations observable in infinite sets where elements of subsets can come to stand for the whole set (a symmetrical relationship). This 'raising' of an element to a symbolic status opens up unusual implicative possibilities, especially with other constructs sharing a number of similar elements. Specifically, this can help us account for the 'lateral' (associative or based on sameness) shifting to other trains of implications so ubiquitous in accounts of insight. It begins with an abstractive move 'up' the ordinal ladder as it were, but progresses by a 'descent' utilising other 'non-related' or 'illogical' trains of implication. That is, there is a distinct symmetrical logic

that alternates with asymmetrical construing. The former makes what appears (to one's 'conscious', asymmetrical awareness) to be 'quantum jumps' in understanding.

This of course has implications for Kelly's Organization Corollary. I propose that in loose construing shifts between ordinal levels can occur 'illogically' or 'laterally' (not in terms of superordinate and subordinate relationships). This is so because various constructs sharing similar elements can be activated simultaneously, thus mutually implying one-another. This multidimensionality, or simultaneous activation of multiple trains of implication, could reflect the massively parallel nature of brain activation, most of which does not reach consciousness. Perhaps loosening construing allows for a more widely spread, simultaneous, activation of multiple constructs containing similar elements — making for more fluctuating, 'fuzzy' anticipations. This may reflect the relative reduction in neural inhibition I discussed in the last chapter (brought about by relaxed, diffuse attention or reverie). In such a state the normal bi-polarities of thought may be suspended allowing for 'omnivalence' (Briggs, 1990), where 'contradictories' can be held in mind together.

Martindale's (1995) connectionist theory of insight suggests just this. In 'normal' focused attention only the most practised neural networks would be sufficiently activated to push them above the threshold for consciousness. Such a 'steep association gradient' leads to fewer, more stereotypical responses. In a defocused 'symmetrical' mode, however, the activation is spread widely, activating many more networks — a 'shallow association gradient' which maximises the possibility for remote associates and creative analogies. In this regard, as we saw earlier, EEG measures indicate that 'creatives' show the same increases in cortical activation in solving well-defined problems as 'normals'. In contrast to 'normals', however, they show *less than their baseline* cortical activation when involved in ill-defined creative tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), thus suggesting an empirical measure for focused and defocused attention, and perhaps asymmetrical and symmetrical thought.

9.3.3 Emotion: A Pivot To Insight

Emotion is the mother of all invention. (Matte-Blanco, 1988, p. 98)

Again the central role of emotion in creative insight is highlighted. Matte-Blanco felt emotion occupied a kind of creative hinterland between symmetry and asymmetry and here I find echoes of Kelly's (1955, p. 866) claim that 'schizoid' thinking, or the loosening of construing, is always present in 'creative productions'. In this regard, Rayner (1995, p. 123) described "... a level of optimal emotionality that will allow infinite and finite to meet for those mysterious and fruitful moments of a quantum leap". This represents an optimal balance between looseness and tightness playing the 'edges' of emotionality. Too little asymmetry and loosening may run away with itself into distortions of thinking and perception. Too much asymmetry and our thinking is shallow and brittle, without recognition of generalisations or regularities, and vulnerable to new experience. Here I find further grounds for a useful cross-fertilisation between Matte-Blanco and Kelly.

Emotional awareness, as defined by Kelly, can be seen as belonging mostly to Matte-Blanco's second stratum or level of consciousness — where emotional experience is still accessible to consciousness and where there are still distinguishable and separate elements within a class or 'construct'. This more-or-less corresponds to Kelly's definition of loose construing in that there is still identifiable structure within a (weakened) bi-polarity. That is, although there is a tendency to operate in terms of the similarities between elements, there is still an awareness that these 'contrasting' elements are not identical.

Why should emotional construing be akin to looser construing? Recall the recent research into emotion. Emotions are described frequently as 'quick and dirty', holistic appraisals of inner and outer reality in the service of one's maintenance processes. Emotional awareness may operate in terms of organismically-based values: does this impede my coupling with my world or enhance it? Such an awareness has system-wide access both neurologically and psychologically. When we appraise emotionally, we are not interested in small detail or fine distinctions. We take a global

perspective, a panoramic multidimensional view, discounting local contradictions and incompatibilities in favour of the big picture. And our emotional appraisals are not always consistent. They can change from day to day, even from hour to hour. In Kellian terms, they operate as superordinate, permeable and comprehensive structures, and they are relatively loose. Consider 'threat', the awareness of imminent comprehensive changes to one's core construing. Such an awareness must take a 'overview' of some of the person's most superordinate and comprehensive constructive processes.⁷¹

What characterises such transcending affective processes of awareness is that they allow for the operation of many systems of meaning at the same time. Rather than narrowing (tightening) awareness to develop one specific idea or dimension of awareness, 'emotional' construing is interested in the 'big picture', in seeing what unites a field or panorama of meanings. Granting this, emotions are often moves towards a 'higher' complexity of awareness because they express a grasp of multiple dimensions at once. This makes them more difficult to capture in consciousness and frequently quite difficult to articulate. Using Martindale's (1995) metaphor of defocused attention and shallow association gradients again (see above), 'emotional' thought can be regarded as a style of construing that activates many concepts and meaning structures in parallel. And this perfectly matches Matte-Blanco's definitions of symmetrical thought, involving high dimensionality and many simultaneous chains of implication that can be expressed often only symbolically and figuratively (presentationally).

Finally, a comparison can be made between presentational symbolisms and looser, symmetrical thought. Presentational thought is more metaphorical and figurative because the complexity of the context and media (its multidimensionality) cannot be 'translated' into representational structures without distortion. At best they can have the multivalent reference of symbols and metaphor, hinting at a complex unity standing above or behind the words or images used to symbolise them.

⁷¹ But such multidimensional, 'negative' emotional appraisals may lead to quite tight, predictable construing as the person anxiously tries to ward off the perceived 'threat'.

In support of Matte-Blanco's thinking about the relative multidimensionality of emotional awareness (as against asymmetrical thought), there is emerging evidence (Gilhooly, Keane, Logie & Erdos, 1990) that 'representational' concepts and 'emotional schema' tend to be 'processed' differently. This is not to say that 'emotion' and 'cognition' are entirely different or opposed entities. Rather, it is to say that they represent different styles of reason, different modes of thought.

For example, there is a reported lack of 'differentiation' in the processing of phobic stimuli in favour of the fast activation of highly cohesive prototypes (Watts, 1990). This means that 'phobic' reasoning tends to be 'associative', working 'laterally', not being interested in differences and fine distinctions (as would tighter, more conscious reasoning processes). This is a more 'passive' emotional awareness (Spinoza, 1967) where clusters of implications are rapidly 'pre-empted' as the person tends not to distinguish or differentiate the elements at hand, but instead makes a quick global assessment. The judgement might be 'This looks like something dangerous' and clusters of relatively cohesive associations are 'set off' simultaneously. The 'passions' take over as, in this case, superordinate systems 'defend' the person against perceived danger. The construing that results from this rapid multidimensional activation may tighten up and become quite rigid and stereotypical as the person tries to predict and control events. But the initial 'emotional' appraisal is rapid and multidimensional. In this case, being a 'passive' awareness (not being contained by adequate ideas, as Spinoza would have put it), it is an example of construing which works more in terms of similarity judgements or resemblances (symmetry) binding together a cohesive clustering of concepts, as against a hierarchy of concepts built on distinctions and ordinal judgements of difference (asymmetry).

More speculatively, loose construing generally may also function as a type of prototypical clustering. Elements may 'cluster' around a personally idiosyncratic exemplar or prototype rather than be ordered in terms of superordinate determinations and implications. In 'figure-ground' terms, the prototype or 'symbol' for the construing is the 'figure', while the clusters of elements, some quite close to the exemplar, others

trailing away to the horizon of awareness, represent the ‘ground’. In these terms there is a less-defined contrast function to the prototype or exemplar. In such a way of understanding loose or symmetrical construing, those construing processes (constructs) sharing elements may be related to each other ‘laterally’. That is, constructs sharing a number of elements may be considered to be ‘the same’ given their closeness to the ‘exemplar’. This would constitute a symmetrical or non-ordinal logic — ‘lateral thinking’. Element membership in constructs, and relationships between constructs, in this way of thinking about loose construing, would be fuzzy.

Such an approach is also compatible with a Parallel Distributed Processing view of multiple, simultaneous activation of conceptual pathways. Meaning and understanding always arise within networks of related meanings and this multidimensionality sits easily with what we know about the experience of insight and with connectionist conceptions of thought as being massively parallel. It may be that this multidimensionality underlies a good deal of thinking, but that in this looser contemplative style of attention we can become aware of this depth and complexity of our thought. By slowing down the tendency to tighten awareness into representational, conscious structures, we do not always slow down thought itself (Claxton, 1997). Rather, we shift to a flow of wider proportions, sometimes filled with rushes of implications, at other times experienced as a broad panorama, and only very rarely as an emptiness or void. What does slow down is the urgent tendency to close off this radical openness, to revert to habitual understandings. Perhaps, by utilising a calm and contemplative stance, this mental shift is brought about by the removal of lateral inhibition with a concomitant reduction in excitatory, ‘vertical’ connections between neural groups, a process which Martindale (1995) proposed as a mechanism underlying insight.

9.3.4 Bi-Logic, Negative Emotion And Invalidation

If negative emotion occurs following unsuccessful anticipation, usually the construct system will tighten up. The person will constrict his or her perceptual field and may

construe in 'hostile' fashion and become angry or defensive if challenged. Or if this no longer seems possible, he or she may continue loosening, moving into more and more symmetrical realms, avoiding provisional tightening and the testing of anticipations. Distortions of perception and cognition can result. The person may re-enter asymmetrical or tighter construing and thereby experience very strong negative emotion, becoming aware of the expanding intransitivities and illogicalities in his or her thinking. This is the experience of bi-logic.

In Spinozan terms, such a person is in the grip of passive emotion, where one's ideas cannot 'capture' or 'channel' one's experience, where one's psychic processes are not in the service of one's 'conatus'. One's anticipatory capacity is in tatters. In deepening symmetrisation, each time one tries to tighten construction, *everything* is seen as outside one's capacity to construe because symmetrical logic works in terms of infinities. This was Kelly's (1955) concern about over-zealous therapists who were impatient for their clients to realise how widespread their 'hostilities' were. Such clients can end up in a psychotic state as they do not have sufficiently permeable and comprehensive superordinate structures to accommodate the burgeoning implications and fragmentations of their 'insight' into themselves.

9.3.5 Positive Emotion And Bi-Modal Thought

Positive emotion is the likely concomitant of bi-modal thought — where symmetrical awareness is in harmony with one's asymmetrical awareness. Being in a more meditative or defocussed state of attention, such as that induced by dream reporting, relaxation, word association, uncritical acceptance and meditation, may encourage one to stay within looser construing long enough for non-habitual patterns of inference to be explored. In a way it is using one's innate emotional capacities voluntarily, deliberately (active emotion). Herein lies the possibility for new insight. One has to learn to trust one's intuitions and feelings when tighter construing fails and this is a superordinating affective stance.

Within the Creativity Cycle provisional tightening is the crucial moment, the affective pivot on which insight may turn. The person remains in an optimal level of looseness or symmetry, and does not tighten too much. One may undergo gentle modulations between associative then discriminative processes, rocking back and forth between symmetry and asymmetry until something looks promising. This is a transcending affective state in which there is a balance between open possibility and structured distinction-making. This ongoing (affective) appraisal of the anticipatory implications of the now-tightening construct may be what is meant by the word 'intuition'. It is a type of 'feeling' sensitivity to our viability or anticipatory fit in our world. Incipient invalidation 'feels bad' and is avoided. Incipient validation is felt before it is consciously understood.

9.3.6 A Different Sense Of Self

One of the intriguing findings in the insight literature is the oft-reported experience that one's sense of self is altered within the process of insight. People report a loss of the sense of time and of place, as well as of the distinction between self and others, self and world. They frequently sense that the insight is flowing spontaneously but not being directed by themselves (Epel, 1993). The positive emotion intrinsic to insight casts everything in its hues. All is united and connected within this positive symmetrical experience,⁷² and this sets the person at peace allowing for sustained defocussed attention and mental playfulness. Matte-Blanco (1988) has suggested that in deeper levels of symmetrical thought the distinction between the subject and object blurs. In positive symmetrisation this would be experienced as a transpersonal state of oneness, or non-separateness. This accords perfectly with a substantial number of reported insight experiences where the feeling is not so much of the self, or of non-self, but of a type of merging of self with the world, including others. In contrast, self-consciousness, performance anxiety or even just offering people rewards (Amabile, 1990) can inhibit

⁷² In negative symmetrical experiences (where the experience cannot be subsumed in sufficiently permeable and comprehensive superordinate structures) this could be a terrifying, perhaps leading to delusional or psychotic experiences (Bell, 1996).

creativity and insight. The distinction of 'self' (as distinct and separate) is a characteristically asymmetrical conceptualisation and, by itself, this self-orientation is inimical to spontaneity and creativity generally.

In the terminology of the last chapter, this altered experience of self is also a return to the primacy of an empathic 'I-thou' mode of emotional understanding. But now it is a transcending use of it, a presentational awareness in service of an openness to whatever comes. It is also a mode of awareness where we get to 'watch' some of the unfolding of aspects of consciousness normally veiled. The person experiences that it is not 'me' who is directing the thinking: it is a dynamic unfolding, more akin to a sportsperson non-selfconsciously participating in a game, who finds herself taking the right action moment-by-moment. This is participatory knowing (Barfield, 1988) where there is no separate 'me' observing what happens 'out there', but rather a mutual, dynamic coupling. Certainly the elements and structures of understanding may have been consciously, painstakingly built up by the person, but the 'conversation' that unfolds, like any worthwhile conversation, cannot be known in advance, cannot be known without undergoing it.

This is reminiscent of Heidegger's (1959) 'meditative thought' which 'waits upon' rather than 'waits for' something. Martindale's (1995) notion of shallow association gradients suggests that there may be many trains of thought and implication operating simultaneously, all somewhat evenly activated. In states of superordinate emotional calm and security, the normally highly superordinate and self-oriented, survival-based construing may be in relative quiescence. The 'self' is normally a focus for much of our psychic life and consciousness is intimately tied to self-consciousness. The world is filtered through our affective assessments: is this good or bad for *me*? But when we feel safe and secure the self may move out of the focus of attention and one may entertain less censored processes. The system's resources are freed up. There is little distraction, little background static, and an evenly hovering, receptive attention can allow first one train of implication then another to gently rise into conscious awareness (provisional tightening). And just as gently this awareness can allow that discrimination

to fade until the next comes of its own accord. This would correspond to a profoundly different sense of self in which the characteristic superordinancy of self-oriented anticipation is in relative abeyance. It may also account for the overall lower than usual levels of cortical activation found when thinking creatively (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Martindale, 1995).

Implicit here is a distinction between prediction and anticipation which is important (see Chapter 5). Prediction has more a connotation of ‘looking-for’ something, where one knows roughly what one is looking for. Anticipation, however, particularly in its tacit dimensions, represents more of an openness to ‘wait upon’ what arrives, for what, one knows not. It recalls Warren’s (1994, 1998) ‘objective attitude’; an attitude which allows the world to be as it is, not how we want or even expect it to be. Such meditative thought and ‘releasement’ allows for a sense of space and openness, a slowing down of the grasping mind (Claxton, 1998, Varela et al., 1996). If tightening is kept in abeyance long enough a type of psychic ‘vacuum’ is created which attracts a flurry of new possibilities. If ‘nature abhors a vacuum’, then it seems the asymmetric mind ‘abhors openness’.

It is usually retrospectively that people realise their insight experiences were enjoyable. That is, upon tightening or a return to asymmetry, self-awareness returns. This is possibly so because during insight we are less concerned about maintenance and core processes and the anticipatory fortunes of our construing. We are ‘lost’ in our thoughts. This seems to be a qualitatively different state of being, symmetrically infused and shepherded in by looser, abstract superordinate structures of greater flexibility and permeability.

This is not irrelevant to the terrors of the mystic who, it seems, must pass through the ‘dark night of the soul’, must ‘lose’ himself or herself first, in order to experience one-ness with existence — a sense of indivisibility and unity redolent of Matte-Blanco’s (1988) deeper levels of the unconscious. There are common themes here of connectedness and non-self-consciousness. Somewhat paradoxically, when one’s core or identity-related anticipatory structures are validated, McCoy’s (1977)

definition of 'love', one becomes less self-conscious. In the deeper transpersonal and altered states of consciousness, such experiences of absorption and being one with the universe are ubiquitous (Hunt, 1995). Ironically, the freedom from self-consciousness flows from comprehensive validation of one's self.

This paradoxical experience of exteriority yet unity and oneness fits well with Matte-Blanco's understanding of emotion as a multidimensional 'gestalt' simultaneously relating one's physical feelings, thoughts, anticipations, and exteroceptions. It is a fully embodied experience, a type of participatory knowing (Barfield, 1988) which can only occur by one being immersed in active anticipation. A presentational 'being-in-the-world', I will return to it in the next chapter's discussion of pragmatism and embodiment.

9.3.7 Bi-Modal Thought And Metaphor

Although I will also discuss metaphor in more detail in the following chapter, it is relevant here to indicate how the idea of metaphorical thinking fits into Matte-Blanco's ideas. For Matte-Blanco bi-modal thought was an ideal to aspire to, an optimal balance between looseness and tightness. As we have seen, it represented the use of symmetry for asymmetrical purposes. Just as we saw that Langer (1957) considered presentational and emotional awareness to be intrinsically metaphorical, so Matte-Blanco thought primary process thinking and emotionality was more figurative and metaphorical. Why? Because it represents the intrusion of symmetry into our thinking processes. Metaphor works by seeing sameness where before ('logically' or asymmetrically) there was only difference. It is in fact a creative harmony between asymmetrical and symmetrical modes of thought. Bi-modal thought, then, is likely to be somewhat metaphorical.

More radically, given the overlap of bi-modality with Kelly's definitions of bipolarity, construing itself may be considered to be fundamentally metaphorical.⁷³ It is

⁷³ Though, see Mair's (1976) comments in this regard in the next chapter.

the way in which we see ‘things’ as being simultaneously the same yet, obviously, different. Perhaps when thought becomes tighter, more habitual, the awareness of the metaphorical ‘freshness’ wanes. Perhaps when we say that a style of thought is more ‘metaphorical’ we are talking about new or ‘unusual’ similarity-difference judgements being expressed. The point of metaphor is to break up an habitual understanding by proposing a ‘sameness’ which is ‘not the same’; to invite the hearer or reader to simultaneously consider two elements ‘as if’ they are the same with respect to some quality, yet clearly are not the same overall. Figurative language generally is a way of loosening thought and, as Langer and Matte-Blanco agreed, is the prime verbal means of communicating affective meaning.

9.4 A SUMMARY AND SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I have described Matte-Blanco’s account of the system unconscious, in particular his twin principles of asymmetrical and symmetrical consciousness. This was done because we have seen that ‘unconscious’ and tacit levels of awareness were clearly implicated in insight. In Matte-Blanco’s account consciousness-unconsciousness is arranged in strata according to the relative balance of these two principles. We have seen that one way of understanding the difference between symmetrical and unconscious processes is in terms of some of the properties of infinite sets and in terms of a higher dimensionality in more symmetrical, unconscious thought than is the case in more conscious asymmetrical thought.

Most important in Matte-Blanco’s account is the relationship and relative balance between asymmetrical and symmetrical thought. If they merely alternate, or are not in harmony, then bi-logic, and its attendant distortions and disturbances of thought, results. In contrast, in bi-modal thought there is a more optimal, harmonious balance wherein symmetry is in the service of asymmetry. In this marriage of mental modes the properties of the infinite are contained within ordinal, asymmetrical relations. The finite certainties of asymmetrical logic are thereby enriched. In Spinozan terms, this is the equivalent of active emotion. In Kellian terms, this describes the creativity cycle.

An explanation was given for the ‘lateral’ associations and apparent ‘quantum jumps’ in understanding associated with insight. An important part of this explanation was the multidimensional operation of ‘same-level’ or symmetrically equivalent constructs. Such multidimensionality was also related to emotionality, but, to be of any use, this looser, emotional mode of thought must be held within adequately permeable and comprehensive structures. This capacity for unusual associations was also argued to be at the heart of the metaphorical nature of this style of thought. The parallels with presentational thought were highlighted.

Within this type of creative thought, there is an awareness of openness, of wider possibilities. This was related to the altered sense of self seen repeatedly in relation to insight. As the distinction of ‘self’ is an asymmetrical awareness, the lack of such a sense of self was related directly to symmetrical thought in which subject-object distinctions may blur. Furthermore, because this more affective ‘I-thou’ mode of thought was conceived by Matte-Blanco as simultaneously incorporating inner and outer perceptions, feelings, anticipations and thoughts within one ‘gestalt’, there is less of a separate ‘me’ and more of a participatory ‘we’ emergent in one’s being-in-the-world.

This last comment anticipates the next chapter in which I will present a more explicitly phenomenological-pragmatic account of insight. I will characterise understanding as a type of embodied intentionality, a coupling with the ‘environing other’. Rather than considering construing as mainly internal conscious thoughts, I consider them as largely tacit, intuitive, ‘lived equivalence-difference patterns’ (Radley, 1977). The main themes to be picked up include how our embodiment is tied into insight, how this allows us to understand construing as ‘enactment’ and how this helps us understand the ubiquity of metaphor in accounts of new insights.

CHAPTER 10: EMBODIMENT, ENACTMENT AND METAPHOR — PATHS TO INSIGHT

The person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him. (Gadamer, 1991, p. 288).

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Only in passing have I broached the subject of a more enactive and embodied view of understanding and knowing. In addition I have, here and there, stressed the important role of metaphorical thinking within insight processes. I also earlier rendered a pragmatist reading of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP). This pragmatist approach underlies the framework for understanding insight which I am building. It is now time to draw these strands together into a more detailed, converging description of a pragmatist-phenomenological account which will help capture the tacit, embodied, enactive and metaphorical aspects of insight. This will culminate in a discussion of what Heidegger (1959) called ‘meditative thinking’.

I earlier drew a social-relational sketch of the beginnings of emotional understanding and consciousness which is consistent with Gadamer’s relational view given in the quotation above. In this chapter I will extend this idea of understanding as ‘being-with’ another person to, more generally, the experience of insight as a type of ‘being-with-the-world’. In this latter case it will be suggested that we do indeed ‘think with the other’, but here the ‘other’ includes our coupling with our world, our sense of connectedness and of the merging of the knower with the known.

This inquiry has repeatedly revealed that at the heart of insight lies an experience which, in the terms I have outlined, is *presentational* rather than *representational*. Much of the process of insight is ‘lived-through’ rather than ‘thought-through’. It is intuitive, an emergent process which involves a shift in self-experience such that one feels that one ‘participates-with’ or ‘knows-with’ the known. The developmental

achievement of a separate, cognisant self is backgrounded and insight reveals a ‘return’ to what, in Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) existential phenomenology, was called the ‘body-subject’. The latter term emphasises the pre-reflective, experiential dimensions of our embodiment, particularly in relation to the ‘primacy of perception’ in all our ‘higher’ mental processes. It is in terms of a return to such primary experiencing that I will attempt to understand the frequently reported importance of the body and of feeling in insight, and more particularly of how this informs the phenomenology and metaphorical nature of the insight experience. Along the way, the account given earlier of PCP as a pragmatic constructivism will be argued to be compatible with this existential-phenomenology, particularly with respect to an interpretation of construing as ‘enactment’. I will conclude that a type of meditative thought, a radically observational attitude, reveals and thereby undoes our habitually instrumental engagement with the world. And, if the preparation, situation and timing are right, new insights may emerge.

10.2 EMBODIMENT, ENACTMENT AND KNOWING-WITH

10.2.1 The Embodied Mind

A pivotal concept in Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) philosophy was the centrality of the *body subject* in anticipating or negotiating life. The body subject is the ‘phenomenal body’ as experienced by the person — as distinct from the ‘objective body’ considered as physiology from an external perspective. Essentially, it is the person’s experienced world which is active before reflexive consciousness is born and which is the vehicle for all our object-directed experiences. In Radley’s (1977) terms it is the ‘from which’ that characterises anticipation and which tacitly forms the basis for later, more predictive modes of understanding. Anticipation, in these terms, is one’s bodily stance towards one’s world: “one’s attitude to it which embodies silent questions and the sort of answers one is open to” (Butt, 1998a, p. 108). This notion is essentially a relational one in which one is a body-subject enmeshed in activity and context, not a separate subject who happens to be in a body.

It is through such experiential interactions with others and our world that our self and our knowing are born. This experienced world is what Merleau-Ponty (1962) called the *lived-through world*. Such lived phenomenological experience is multi-dimensional and implicit, infused with intentionality (the meaning our conduct is informed by). We can easily observe this mode of understanding, for example, in a (good) game of cricket, say when a batsman is facing a bowler. In such a situation there is not enough time to consciously think and predict. We act first and reflect later. Such actions are, however, anticipatory and therefore rational. We always choose in terms of what we are capable of ‘seeing’ in the situation, in terms of how we ‘fit’. Such actions are always a product of the context, in particular a product of the ‘affordances’ (Gibson, 1979) *real-ised* by the person in any given situation (Noble, 1993). Our whole perceiving body ‘decides’ to go on the front foot, to attempt a drive, and so on, as the context unfolds. This reflects the primary way meaning is reached through co-existing with the world, as distinct from intellectual meaning via analysis. In this way we see with the world, and think with the world, in exactly the way an artist thinks with his or her materials (Haworth, 1990).

Translated into PCP terms, construing can be considered as mostly an embodied, tacit and enactive process as opposed to highly conscious, predictive thinking. Knowing in this enactive view is always partial and is largely defined in terms of viability, as ‘coupling’ with one’s world. Most knowing then is ‘knowing from’ and a ‘participatory knowing’ (McWilliams, 1993). It is a bodily stance in iterative cycles of social, participatory experience. This presentational mode of consciousness implies a relational, immersed knowing. (Harré, 1983). It emerges especially when attention is diffused and “the state of the viscera and musculature, any bodily emotions, needs or threats, are incorporated within the representation as a whole” (Claxton, 1997, p. 155). Such a bodily mode of knowing is evidenced in the way, for example, that physical acts are tied into remembering, the way we mouth words to aid recall, or the way a smell may flood the mind with a vivid memory. It is a holistic, experiential dimension incorporating gesture, posture and mood. Memory is frequently a re-enactment and, likewise, thought is a simulated conversation in a simulated internal domain.

10.2.2 Enactment

Merleau-Ponty's idea of the body-subject dovetails with a mode of knowing that is *doing* or *enacting* as against some imputed, inner 'cognitive' process standing behind and prior to action. Again, returning to Radley's distinction between prediction and anticipation:

Prediction is the specification of particulars which we know (attend towards) through actions channelized by the ways in which we anticipate events. These two ways of approaching the future are, indeed, different, but inter-dependent. (1977, p. 227)

In terms of problem-solving and insight, we are always attending to the problem through tacit ways of organising it. We anticipate via actions which enshrine this particular 'knowing-from' and, upon invalidation, a 'new' problem emerges from our adjusted outlook. We work in iterative fashion gradually reformulating our tacit assumptions — which nonetheless usually remain unspecified — and eventually, hopefully, insight arrives. But crucial to this process is that it is action which gives us 'feedback' which enable us to question our 'already-knowing'.

Another useful concept Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposed was that of *sedimentation*. This refers to the strong tendency to maintain one's self-definition and tacit assumptive structures rather than change them. Just as sediments laid down in a river become hardened (may even turn into rock), one's assumptions resist contradiction. This is because things become murky and upsetting when sediments are disturbed. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty was less optimistic than Kelly about our imputed capacity to identify with our tacit, superordinating system and thereby overcome sedimentation (Butt, 1998b). Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that the way to overcome sedimentation is to create new projects. As Butt (1998b) put it: "we 'find' that we have changed in the living of a new project" (p. 278). We change superordinating structures primarily by doing, not by intellectualising (even in 'intellectual' pursuits!). Frequently, the existential project precedes the conscious one.

Therefore, reconstruction follows the path of behavioural changes. In Kellian terms, this can be seen in the dynamic and more active approach to problem solving emphasised in Vol. 2 (1955), especially in terms of enactment procedures, fixed role therapy, and of course the experience cycle.

It has been suggested that the later Kelly was moving towards an understanding of construing as predominantly a more embodied, tacit and enactive process. But this tendency was, arguably, there from the beginning in Kelly's (1955) vision of the person as a 'form of motion'. Moreover, for Kelly (1955), "Knowing things is a way of allowing them to happen to us" (p. 171). Construing was never separated from doing for Kelly, and thus enactment *is* construing. Further, enactment is an expression of the embodiment of construing.

For this reason, Radley, making reference to a later Kellian paper (1966c), could include in his definition of construing 'living visual and postural schema'. In addition, construing, for Radley, described a means of inquiry, only aspects of which are at a high level of reflexive awareness. Knowing in this sense is a part of one's bodily stance to the world. More emphatically, construing is a person's way of being, of living: "He lives in anticipation; we mean this literally; *he lives in anticipation*" (Kelly, 1958, p. 86, italics in original). Such embodied, enactive construing develops within cycles of experience, not the least of which are our formative social and empathic experiences. Even so-called 'inner' and 'private' mental processes can be considered as a type of derived enactive, ecologically-immersed skill. In summary, we 'know' or 'think' about the world mostly by acting in it. Afterwards we may learn how to re-present it to ourselves, but usually not while we are being within it. Indeed, verbalising tends to destroy the process — as we saw in relation to insight. As we have seen, this sense of non-self-conscious engagement is highly characteristic of the insight experience.

10.2.3 The Primacy Of Context-Dependent Knowing

‘Enactment’ implies a world, a situation or context in which we act and understand. To continue my cricket example, playing a good shot is best understood in terms of the full context of the game being played, and is much less well understood, for example, in terms of biological and kinaesthetic analyses. That is, the most complete meaning and understanding of the shot is only possible within a full, lived context. Explicitly drawing on the work of Langer (1957, 1972), Shanon (1991, 1993) outlined a theory of mind in which enactment and a more presentational consciousness are fundamental to understanding. Again, thinking was here conceived as action within one’s world, where meaning is found in our relationship with the world, not manufactured exclusively in the privacy of one’s mind.

... the principles of operation underlying paradigmatic cognitive activities — language, memory, perception, reasoning and problem-solving — are akin to those met in executing action in the external world, in moving about the world, in the manipulation of objects, and in interaction with other human beings. (Shanon, 1993, p. 268)

Shanon believed that meaning and understanding in our early years is holistic and affectively charged, a global, relatively unanalysed unity.⁷⁴ In elaborating Searle’s (1995) notion of the ‘background’⁷⁵ — Shanon (1993) argued that what stands behind and supports human consciousness is context, the world itself. Presentational awareness draws directly on this ever-present, multidimensional substrate for mind. This substrate Shanon defined as the sum total of the meeting of internal and external bodies. This includes the physical and social environment, the histories of one’s coupling with that environment and one’s systems of beliefs, all in a dynamic flux. This fits with his general interpretation of Gibsonian (1979) ‘affordances’ (patterns of action made possible by the coupling of an organism with its environment) as providing evidence that “higher order relations are psychologically more basic than things” (Shanon, 1993, p. 82). In particular, he drew attention to the assertion in Gibson’s work that we find

⁷⁴ In Matte-Blanco’s (1988) terms it is a largely symmetrical mode of being.

⁷⁵ “... the set of non-representational mental capacities that enable representing to take place” (Shanon, 1993, p. 43).

meaning, not from stimulation from individual static ‘things’, but by finding complex *patterns* of invariance across time. This of course recalls the primary nature of symmetrical consciousness which is also defined in terms of its higher dimensionality. I will return to this idea in my later discussion of the metaphorical mind.

Representational thought, when it does develop, can also be used presentationally. As such, a pervasive aspect of reflexive awareness is the playing through of scenes in one’s mind: a type of ‘inner’, contextualised enactment. Imagined scripts, narratives, scenes and social interactions are modelled on lived interactions. A further recursion can make such representational forms themselves the object of thought via a sensitivity to the medium of thought itself:

In reflecting upon itself, the mind can turn forms in which mentation is expressed into objects of thought in their own right. With this, any formal characteristic of cognition can itself become a content that one entertains, so the medium too may become relevant. (1993, p. 76)

By this type of recursion on the ‘presentations’ and ‘representations’ of consciousness, the person creates thoughts which are object-like, which, like objects, can be manipulated. And Shanon (1993) said that in even the most high level reasoning the best way to perform in abstract is to make one’s thought meaningful and concrete: “to embed it in a context and endow it with a medium” (p. 77). In this sense writers play with the look and sounds of words, they hear characters speaking and see them embedded in scenes (Epel, 1993). This is a type of aesthetic or feeling intelligence which responds to the open-ended nature of context and medium and reminds us of the importance of ‘perceptual rehearsal’ (Ippolito and Tweney, 1995) in insight.

Context and media are not, however, structure-less or chaotic. Indeed, without the world’s environing constraints, Shanon (1993) argued that the mind will run its purely associative course, being no longer fixated or ‘fixed’ by the world. He suggested dreams and hallucinations are examples of such loose mental processes relatively unconstrained by perceptual engagement with the world. Herein, of course, there is scope both for creativity and chaos — depending, as we have seen, on the superordinating framework within which such loose processes occur. The great

advantage of representational thought lies in its relative autonomy with respect to time and space, with respect to context. Objects can be created which are not present in the environment and which can be operated on in the ‘workbench’ of the mind. But such propositional thought lacks the multidimensional richness and openness of context and medium. Shanon believed that attending to the medium of thought provides “a richness of non-fixed, sensory-like characteristics which allows flexibility of use and interpretation” (1993, p. 299) beyond the formal logic of representational thought.

Such a view is echoed in the work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1996) who set out to integrate an understanding of the experiential level of mind with contemporary cognitive science accounts of the representational mind. In so doing they attempted to rehabilitate the common sense view that consciousness is important in the operations of mind generally and argued that any account of mind which excludes it (such as many traditional representationist and computational accounts) is impoverished. They did this by drawing parallels between the Buddhist Madhyamika or ‘Middle Way’ philosophy and findings in the contemporary cognitive science accounts. In particular, Vipassina or insight meditation was presented as a thoroughgoing method for exploring moment-to-moment experience. Again a pivotal contrast is between a relatively removed representational mode of thought and a more immediate lived-understanding, a felt sense pervading our day-to-day existence:

... if we wish to recover common sense, then we must invert the representationist attitude by treating context-dependent know-how not as a residual artefact that can be progressively eliminated by the discovery of more sophisticated rules but as, in fact, the very essence of creative cognition. (Varela et al. 1996, p. 148)

Seen once again here is an assertion of the indissoluble link between mind and context. It is a return to the world, an ‘objective attitude’ based in one’s subjective openness. As the authors went on to say: “... knower and known, mind and world, stand in relation to each other through mutual specification or dependent coorigination” (Varela et al., 1996, p. 150). Just as for Gibson (1979), environment and organism are here seen to be mutually defining and dependent on each ‘other’ for their existence. At a physical level, the line between ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ blurs considerably when dealing with a highly

co-operative, self-organising system such as the brain — where feedforward mechanisms are at least as important as feedback processes (Geschwind, 1983). In like fashion, a ‘neutral’, completely open view of the world is continually precluded by our habitual, and pragmatically necessary, pre-judgements and ‘projections’. Yet it is by loosening this automaticised process, by a committed recursion on the process itself, that other ‘affordances’ of the wider context may be enacted and a more direct experience of our connection with the world becomes possible.

10.2.4 Participatory Knowing

We are normally not aware of the degree to which we ‘participate’ in the known. Not only do we ‘interact’ (a word which nonetheless suggests two separate entities) with the world, but there is a sense revealed in insight experiences that we can be more directly aware of our participation in the known, that boundaries between self and non-self may blur and there is an experience of being a part of something larger than self. There is the seemingly paradoxical experience that people becomes more ‘themselves’ or come to more appreciate their own individuality by opening to that which includes, yet transcends them (Heidegger, 1978).

Merleau-Ponty’s (1962, 1964) ‘existential phenomenology’ refuted the dichotomy of naïve realism—idealism. It is not ideas (idealism) or the mere event (naïve realism) which is primary, but a larger process incorporating both. Our body synthesises perception via its interests and, principally, this is an interpersonal venture. Merleau-Ponty assumed we begin with the interconnectedness of human behaviour. We do not have to learn it, or infer it. We directly perceive the other’s intentions in behaviour. We do not see inside someone to see their consciousness: it is there in their actions. We feel others’ feelings because we live in their expression. As Butt (1998a) put it: “I am a participant in it; it involves me” (p. 111). Butt (1988a) further considered that two people together are not ‘interacting’ but act as an “indivisible system” where “the relationship between them in some sense precedes their individual psychologies” (p. 115). This sense of participatory knowing is what Shotter (1995)

called ‘joint action’. In this sense, the dialogue between self and other is bigger than either participant — it includes them. Participants are both responsive and creative simultaneously. They are influenced by the other and by the situation into which they act. The intentionality or meaningfulness both includes them and transcends them.

This participatory knowing recalls the relational self psychology of Orange (see 8.3.1) discussed earlier. It involves a type of knowledge born in conversation that goes beyond what we can do individually. This implies something more than a separate, individual self. It suggests that change and flexibility are derived from this type of dialogistic immersion. This is the ‘objective attitude’ that Warren (1988) argued underlies Kellian theory. That is, an openness to the ‘other’, to the unexpected (as distinct from predicting certain replications). This stance allows the world (including the other) to ‘say’ something different to us and is consistent with an interpretation of ‘affordances’ as a relational function that specifies ‘joint action’ of person and world. It is the polar opposite of hostility and pre-emption, in Kelly’s (1955) terms. It is a deliberate loosening of construing encouraging both permeability and propositionality as the person lets go and trusts in the situation. For Gadamer, it is best exemplified in ‘genuine’ conversation:

We say we ‘conduct’ a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less leaders of it than led. No one knows in advance what will ‘come out’ of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. (Gadamer, 1991, p. 383)

Insight too reveals this type of ‘participatory epistemology’ (Efran and Heffner, 1998) in action, one not confined to the social sphere, but incorporating one’s ecological immersion. What this leads to is the notion that how one feels and acts and thinks becomes the property of the relationship rather than ‘mine’ alone. One’s environment generally (as distinct from a presumed, pre-human ‘world’) takes shape as we live it. Thus, Noble and Davidson (1991) can say that “objects are collapsed acts” (p. 215).

They take form as a part of our capacity to construe them. In genuine insight, as in Gadamer's genuine conversation, the self and the world are altered by the interaction. As we saw repeatedly, insight arrives with a certain event-like quality. It is seemingly external and spontaneous, like a conversation, yet we hold an important personal responsibility for its existence.

The image of the person this makes possible is as a type of enabling space in which the life around it is transfigured and displayed. A person is like a 'magic lantern' in holographic motion, giving the world voice, light, smell, taste and feel. The person, as Merleau-Ponty (1964) said, is a project of the world just as, at the same time, the world is a project of the person. The body-subject is simultaneously a physical structure and an experiential structure, biological and phenomenological. In searching for an understanding of insight I am also searching for evidence of this indissoluble nexus, this mixing of self and world that seems to be so much a part of the phenomenology of insight. One of the principal characteristics of the insight experience is that it also appears to the person to be unitary or whole. As was seen earlier, it seems that we grasp the whole thing first, and only later can we analyse it and break it down into parts. In contemporary research there appears to be support for this, which not only reflects these ideas about enactment and embodiment, but which also may indicate why metaphor and figurative thinking seem to be so important in insight.

10.3 METAPHORIC MIND: THE WHOLE PRECEDES THE PARTS

But the greatest thing, by far, is to be master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of similarity of dissimilars. Through resemblance, metaphor makes things clearer.
(Aristotle, *Poetics*)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Cited in Kittay (1997, p. 399).

10.3.1 Metaphor And Mind

It was proposed (see Chapter 8) that emotional thinking is characterised by a ‘quick and dirty appraisal’ of one’s situation that is prior to a representational or propositional awareness. Presentational consciousness works in this way generally. It tends to take things in broad perspective by uniting things in a type of holistic, tacit grasp. That is, whole, unitary experience is always prior to its abstraction into parts (Mills, 1996). This fast, intuitive ‘undermind’ (Claxton, 1997) appears not to work via any atomistic process where a ‘picture’ is built up by combining many smaller parts. Rather, we form a type of ‘gestalt’ whole which may or may not later be reflected upon at a higher level of conscious awareness.

Hunt (1995) summarised the extensive evidence for this type of cognitive unconscious. For example, he described the research of cognitive psychologist, Anthony Marcel (1983a, 1983b) in which people tend to pick semantically-related words to tachistoscope flashes of words presented too fast for conscious recognition. Such a holistic semantic synthesis seems to precede a recognition of constituent parts. For example, if the flashed word was ‘acquaintance’, subjects are more likely to choose ‘friend’ than the much more graphically similar ‘acquiescence’. This ‘protoconsciousness’ or immediately sensed consciousness “first provides us with the maximally intuitive synthesis and sensed meaning of our situation at its most abstract level” (Hunt, 1995, p. 31). The role of consciousness, Hunt concluded, may be to organise and direct “largely unconscious parallel processes through successive moments of ‘figurative unity’” (p. 30).

This figurative unity Hunt saw as the basis of symbolic consciousness. Without going into too much detail here, Hunt (1995) outlined a theory of the origin of mind in cross-modal synesthesia whereby the various perceptual modalities are combined and fused in one, unified presentational awareness. He considered this to be a fundamental analogical or metaphorical⁷⁷ capacity whereby we ‘turn around’ on basic perceptual

⁷⁷ We will follow Johnson’s (1987) definition of metaphor as a “process by which we understand and structure one domain of experience in terms of another domain *of a different kind*” (p. 14).

schemata, thereby making this type of symbolic awareness qualitative, embodied and medium-sensitive.

Hunt's (1995) argument was that all symbolic cognition is based on the ability for cross-modal translation between different perceptual modalities (Geschwind, 1965). He referred to accounts, for example, by Mead (1934) and Winnicott (1971) which suggested that reflexive consciousness is grounded in the early mirroring games, for example, between a neonate and its mother. This is where we see, for example, a cross-modal translation between visual and kinaesthetic modes: where the child *sees* with delight that the mother responds with her facial expressions to the child's *felt* movements of his or her own face. The child sees (reflected in mother's face) what a smile looks like. Smiling becomes a kinaesthetic/visual phenomenon for the child. Thus a non-linguistic dialogue is established and reflexive consciousness, including the emergence of a sense of self, arguably begins in this sociality. Here is a pre-linguistic 'metaphor' where the attributes of one domain (i.e., the kinesthetic of a smile) are mapped onto another (the visual appearance of a responding face) and are simultaneously seen as the same, yet distinct.

This is then linked to Lakoff's (1987) and Johnson's (1987) metaphoric-
'imagistic' theories of symbolic cognition whereby image schema provide the templates allowing for propositional thought via metaphorical extension. This implies an openness and source of novelty in symbolic expressions because perceptual structures, characterised by openness and flow, cannot be reduced to basic components or propositions. In this way all knowledge is, at root, argued to be metaphoric: it is always a 'seeing as' because one situation is always 'seen' through, and by means of, another. Such a position is mirrored in Kelly's (1955) assertion that we can only construe something new in terms of our current constructs. Metaphor is here used in a 'weak', non-'literal' sense (Shanon, 1993). That is, rather than metaphor relying on a projection of meaning *through the lens or vehicle* of a literal or well-defined domain *onto* another less-known domain, the original domain or 'vehicle' is treated *as if* it were literally known. As Hunt (1995) said, "... when we say 'man is a wolf' or 'anger is explosive',

it is absolutely not the case that we really know more about wolves or explosives” (p. 176). The trick of metaphor is to remain aware that it is not a literal comparison, but an open-ended invitation to pursue possible meanings and comparisons. In this way metaphorical thinking is a way of exploring new situations (Mair, 1976). In terms that Kelly (1964) used, this is an expression of the ‘invitational mood’ as against the indicative mood (see also McWilliams, 1993).

As the dominant characteristics of our immediate environment are the non-linear flow dynamics of air and water, Hunt (1995) concluded that some metaphoric products of presentational transformations are privileged: specifically, that a sense of a temporal flowing from an unknown source, of luminosity or glow and of horizontal openness are direct reflections of the ambient array (Gibson, 1979). Hunt (1995) believed that such transformations are highly suggestive of reports of advanced meditative states (see also Varela et al., 1996), and also of reports of the experience of insight. Such reports of openness and of flow, of a forward-looking anticipation, of the play of mental imagery with a reportedly spontaneous and seemingly ‘external’ perceptual character, are, as we have seen, commonplace in the insight literature.

As we will see in the next section on categories and mind, other researchers have argued for certain privileged metaphorical extensions based on human embodiment and perception (Gibbs, 1997; Johnson, 1987; Kittay, 1997; Lakoff, 1987; Varela et al., 1996). All these theorists have in common the placing of our embodiment and enactive immersion in a dynamic environment at the centre of mind. I find here mounting evidence for the importance of metaphorical thinking for the development of mind.

For example, Shanon (1993) argued cogently that metaphor is primary and ubiquitous in language and in thought. The meaning of the metaphor, for Shanon, is always created on the spot by the particular contextual array of elements constructed by the person (not by mapping onto a stable, literal ‘vehicle’). As with Hunt (1995), he argued that the non-verbal phenomenon akin to metaphor is “cross-modal perception and association” (1993, p. 63). Thus people may ‘see’ colours in their mind’s eye when listening to music, or may kinaesthetically ‘feel’ the textures of a painting. Although

such dramatic cross-modal perceptions are relatively rare, appreciating them is not. Most people, Shanon pointed out, would say a sneeze is ‘brighter’ than a cough, for example. He also suggested that infants seem to experience this type of non-verbal metaphor more readily and gives as evidence that babies prefer to attend to a dotted rather than a continuous line after they hear a pulsing tone. Presumably this reflects a cross-modal translation from the intermittent sound to the intermittent dots.

Or again, Shanon (1993) summarised the evidence that metaphors take no extra time to be classified or processed for meaning relative to literal statements — provided the context is given. In similar fashion, he presented research showing that very young children produce and comprehend metaphor. In fact, the metaphorical, fuzzy aspects of meaning may well be appreciated *before* the literal fixed meaning, just as the overall affective and evaluative characteristics of stimuli are perceived before the recognition of the stimuli itself (Zajonc, 1980). With respect to language, Shanon (1991, 1993) argued convincingly that the ‘representational computational view of mind’ (RCVM) cannot account for the meaning of words largely because a set of given terms or definitions could never keep up with contextual variations including polysemy, mis-usages, context and translation. All this suggests that not only is metaphor not derived from the literal, but that it may be primary:

... patterns of synaesthesia ... suggest that the association between two domains which the observer may deem distinct is a basic feature of the human cognitive system. Thus, the association is not by virtue of the detection of similarity or resemblance between two given entities, aspects or features, but rather the manifestation of a functional equivalence which defines some basic qualities of human phenomenological experience. In other words, the cognitive system is so built as to make us experience sensory information from different modalities as similar or equivalent. Thus the association is more basic than the entities between which it seems to be defined. (Shanon, 1993, p. 63)

For Shanon, therefore, a fundamental given is this propensity, in the language of Matte-Blanco (1988), to find ‘symmetrical relationships’ in the world. Symmetry and presentational awareness is considered primary. Following Langer (1957, 1972), Hunt called such spontaneous transformations of consciousness ‘presentational states’. In

these presentational states the basic principles of perception are re-used as the abstract structures of symbolic cognition and they underlay, and form the basis for, representational symbolism. Generally speaking, Hunt (1995) considered that the incipient portents of presentational consciousness are moving towards being more conscious, representational thought (in much the same way that Matte-Blanco saw bi-modal thought as ideal: symmetry in the service of asymmetry). Insight, too, is involved in such a progression from a felt meaning within presentational awareness (a looser construction), to a consciously held representational or propositional meaning (a tightening construction at a higher level of awareness). Rather than seeing the reports of creative/insightful people as *exceptional*, one can see them as providing a clue to the dimensions (usually not experienced as such) of symbolic thought.

An example of synesthetic metaphor leading to conscious insight may be of assistance in clarifying these ideas. Briggs (1994) described how inventor Nikola Tesla's idea for the self-starting motor came as he was reciting a poem by Goethe while watching a sunset. He imagined a magnetic field rapidly rotating inside a circle of electromagnets, apparently suggested by the disk of the sun and the pulse of rotation by the poetic rhythm. A type of synesthetic merging, or cross-modal synthesis, is evident here where the presentational awareness of rhythm and the visual image of the sun merge within the highly representational thought structures involved in his understanding of the theories of electromagnetics. In PCP terms, we see here a loosening process where various constructs sharing certain elements are allowed to coalesce and merge, a symmetrical and metaphorical process which allows formerly remote modes of knowing to be held together in a presentational (aesthetic and non-verbal) state long enough for new insight to emerge.

It was suggested earlier (see Chapter 7) that personal construing in many ways resembles metaphorical thinking. The most detailed discussion of this is in Mair (1976) who also pointed out similarities between the two processes. For example, he indicated that both Kelly's notion of construing and metaphorical thought ideally take an 'invitational' approach to meaning and reality, they are both 'hypothetical' approaches

to our world, they both include feeling, desire and thought in one process, and they both represent channels or avenues of thought which provide both freedom and constraints to understanding. Accordingly, Mair concluded that no sharp contrasts can be drawn between the two concepts.

On the other hand, Mair (1976) did not consider they were the same thing. For example, metaphor was seen as “sort-crossings” rather than “sortings” (p. 260), the latter being more applicable to constructs. That is, sortings (construing) may be understood as the way we try to form dimensions by which we can establish conventions or some stability of understanding. Thus we find stable ways in which two things are similar while being different to a third. Sort-crossings (metaphorical understanding), however, are aimed at breaking conventions, of making such a distinction or difference invalid. Furthermore, Mair felt that constructs were “a more abstracted notion than metaphor” being more clearly delineated than metaphor which is “more multifaceted, less directional, and more ambiguous” (p. 260).

While in general agreement with Mair’s discussion, particularly with his concluding suggestion (1976, p. 261) that “It could almost be argued that personal construct psychology is a psychology of man as a maker and user of metaphor.”, I also believe that the earlier discussion of loosening and tightening can contribute to this train of thought. Specifically, looser construing seems to embody most, if not all, of the characteristics of metaphorical thought that Mair outlined. In contrast, when metaphor fades, when the similarity function is treated literally (perhaps when the contrast pole is submerged or remains implicit), then we find the person is construing tightly. So, construing may vary in its modes from ‘metaphorical’ to ‘literal’ and, what may be required for insight to occur may be an optimal balance between these two modes.

10.3.2 Categories Of Mind And Figurative Thought

The field of cognitive linguistics has developed a significant body of evidence supporting the centrality of embodiment in our mental structures. The basic categories

of thought are argued to reflect this embodied immersion in action-in-the-world and their rise to representational thought is argued to be via metaphorical extension (Gibbs, 1997; Lakoff, 1987; Johnson, 1987). These researchers have proposed that reason is inherently imaginative, particularly evidenced in its use of metaphor, metonymy and imagery. This leads to a different view of mental categories, rejecting the traditional objectivist view that categories are independent of the bodily nature of the beings holding those categories.

Traditional concepts were, in some way, considered to be transcendent or ‘out there’, waiting to be discovered. In contrast, Lakoff (1987) considered that, apart from more traditional, propositional categories, there are also ‘basic level’ categories which are ‘image schematic’, metaphorical, and metonymical. These basic level categories reflect the bodily nature of people and depend on gestalt perception and motor movements. One such category Lakoff has called ‘radial’ in that many models or concepts are organised around a centre. These models are related to each other by similarity or symmetry, but non-central or peripheral models while ‘motivated’ by the centre, are not predictable from there. There are strong echoes here of my earlier discussion of prototypes and loose (symmetrical) construing, and of possible inferential incompatibility arising from such construction.

In related fashion, Johnson (1987) considered very general kinaesthetic image schema (e.g., the ‘part-whole’ or ‘source-path-goal’ schema) to be basic level categories which provide commonality and structure to otherwise richly creative and figurative extensions of the basic model. Varela et al (1996, pp. 177-8) gave as an example the ‘container’ schema which includes such elements as ‘interior’, ‘boundary’ and ‘exterior’. Its metaphorical projections help structure our thought about the visual world (things go in and out of sight), about personal relationships (one gets in and out of a relationship), and the logic of sets (sets contain and exclude elements).

Thus, image schema begin in bodily experience, can be defined in structural units, embody a type of logic and can be projected to other domains. Johnson’s (1987) close attention to such basic level concepts enabled him to assert that image schema

emerge from basic sensorimotor activities and thereby provide a preconceptual structure to our experience. Concepts which arise on this basis are not arbitrary but are based on metaphoric and metonymical 'mapping procedures'. For example, emotional concepts, such as the metaphorical association of anger with heat or pressure, are related to the preconceptual physiological experience of anger.

To say that image schemata 'constrain' our meaning and understanding and that metaphorical systems 'constrain' our reasoning is to say that they establish a range of possible patterns of understanding and reasoning. They are like channels in which something can move with a certain, limited freedom. Some movements (inferences) are not possible at all. They are ruled out by the image schemata and metaphors. But within these limits, there is a measure of freedom or variability that is heavily context-dependent. (Johnson, 1987, p. 137)

Johnson sees understanding as a way we create our 'lived-world', involving our whole being, body, culture, history and so on. It is not so much that image schematic metaphors are grounded in an embodiment that is universally understood and objectively available. Rather, they represent an embodiment that takes on myriad cultural, psychological and situational interpretations. Further, Kittay (1997) cautions us against taking body-based image schema too far, reducing all imagination and creative thought to them. It is enough to say, as she does, that they are very important and that what is basic, and essential, is the irreducible human capacity to make analogical leaps across domains, as well as the 'normal' inference processes of induction and deduction. Again, I see the need for both loose and tight construing, for both symmetry and asymmetry to adequately encompass human understanding. This view, consistent with Shanon's (1993) contextual view, is that metaphor creates ad hoc categories:

... the sort of stretching and warping of our conceptual schemes that metaphor engenders, a happy 'de-forming' of fixed modes of thought that allow us to think new thoughts, devise new articulations, and find new concepts by which to understand the world. (Kittay, 1997, p. 400).

The parallels to Kelly's creativity cycle, of alternating loose and then provisional tightenings of construing, are evident in the above. The creative process of metaphorical thinking is also akin to the perception-like phenomenology of insight

experiences. Metaphorical awareness seems to have sensory-like, imaginative qualities with the freshness of perception (Shanon, 1993). New metaphors create new contexts with a plurality and openness of meaning which is more like the world itself, which is always dynamically changing, always open to multiple interpretation. Frequently people, in reporting insight experience, suggest it is as if they are watching a scene unfold, or hearing a musical composition unfold, or observing characters engaging in a dialogue, and so on. Shanon (1993) thought this style of thought, being close to the basic operations of the psyche, is particularly well-suited to affective expression, but also that such “expressions are not committing: they invoke various interpretations but do not fix any of them as *the* single and correct one” (1993, p. 91, italics in original). Metaphorical thought is highly dimensional, being difficult to articulate and to grasp, and containing within its own economy of expression, rich repositories of meaning. The question to be addressed next is ‘how to we encourage and access such processes?’

10.4 MEDITATIVE THOUGHT

10.4.1 Valuing Experience

In order to harness these metaphoric, embodied and enactive features of mind in the service of insight, a crucial step is to value one’s psychic experience for its own sake and in its own terms. The phobic avoidance of personal experience and consciousness in a psychology obsessed with an outdated version of scientific respectability seems increasingly, thankfully, to be a thing of the past (Harré, 1983). And, with Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1996), I believe that it is a pressing task in contemporary psychology to integrate our day-to-day, even moment-to-moment, phenomenological experience with what we are learning from the mainstream sciences of mind.

Psychology needs to be able to shed light on personal experience and be open to its potential for transformation. In like fashion, the person needs to be able to shed light and be open to his or her own experiential processes, including their transformation.

Thus, what is important is:

... that conscious awareness can be progressively developed beyond its everyday form...[and] that such development can be used to provide direct insight into the structure and the constitution of experience. (Varela et al., 1996, p. 54)

We have seen that a playful, relaxed and experimental attitude is almost always implicated in creative and insightful experiences. This represents a type of seeing ‘with one’s eyes half closed’ (Ravenette, 1996). A crucial part of one’s experiential world is one’s own, ongoing processes. A contemplative attitude, or transcending affective openness, may allow one to see one’s own perceptual assumptions or interpretations *as* assumptions or interpretations. All methods enabling this seem to involve the slowing down of automatic mental activity and focusing broadly on the world of sensations, allowing interpretations, feelings and emotions to come and go. This brings about a development, an altered mode of being or meditative thought. Such indwelling thought is affectively and aesthetically sensitive and ‘waits upon’ what will come.

Meditative thinking is a type of ‘personal knowing’ which Mair (1980) considered is intimately involved with feeling: “Feeling is a fundamental means of knowing in the realm of the personal” (p. 113). Whether personally knowing someone else or oneself, this type of knowing is one in which human experiencing is valued for its own sake:

To invite someone else to be personal is to ask them to take their own experience seriously. It is to encourage them to trust and be moved by what they feel as a vehicle of articulated knowing. To be personal means not only taking your own and other people’s experiencing seriously. It also means taking a stand and enduring. (Mair, 1980, p. 121)

One of the important things this inquiry seems to be revealing is that for insight to occur one needs to be involved and committed to the matter in hand. More than that, one must value one’s own processes, have faith in one’s intuitions, be willing to cast oneself into uncertainties. To enter into a new understanding in this fully embodied, personal way means one will change in the process, that there are not-yet-imagined dimensions and aspects of one’s own being and self that one can create. Thus, genuine new insight does not only change *what* we know, or even *how* we know, but *who we are*. This inquiry

into insight, therefore, again turns to the issue of ‘self’, on this occasion to its non-unitary, non-essential nature.

10.4.2 Altering The Experience Of Self

An emerging theme in the contemporary science of mind, and an age-old theme in Buddhist philosophy, is the assertion that there is no inner, stable and unitary self, but rather it is a constantly re-constructed awareness (Hinnells, 1984; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Miller, 1983; Varela et al., 1996). Also a commonplace in post-modern thought, the ‘fragmented’ or non-unified self is variously suggested to be an emergent property of the radically distributed processes of the brain, or in cognitive terms, a subset of schema which provide some stability and a point of reference over time, a ‘society of mind’ (Minsky, 1985) or a ‘community of self’ (Mair, 1977), and so on.

A relevant and much-used distinction drawn by William James (1890) was between what he called ‘me’ or the known self, and ‘I’ as the knowing self. A similar distinction was made by Mead (1964) whereby ‘self’ referred to a known self, and ‘I’ referred to the experiencing centre of a person, the tacit basis for action. In Kelly’s theory, ‘core constructs’ are those that relate to this ‘known self’ or ‘me’. But, arguably, it is the awareness processes themselves that Kelly considered to be most important. These represent the ‘I’, the experiencing self, the locus for construing — the ‘personal’ part of personal constructs. Although the contents of core construing are extremely important in negotiating one’s living, being able to alter and transform the construing process itself is of far more importance, and is much more emphasised in Kelly’s writings. I agree with Mair (1995) who said:

My impression is that *awareness* is much more central to Kelly’s perspective than ‘self’. ‘Self’ is seen as part of a strategy of anticipating events, sometimes being helpful and sometimes becoming a pattern of rigidity and a hindrance to understanding or change. Kelly poked fun at people (psychologists among them) who claimed that they could only ‘be themselves’. This notion of an ‘essential nature’ was not what he had in mind. By acting in faith, he saw it both possible and necessary to transcend any particular way of identifying ‘self’. (p. 18)

To be more alive, to be more present to events, it is necessary to bring more of the ‘self-as-construer’ (I) into one’s experience. Self-consciousness and grasping for some desired outcome is lessened by absorption in the moment, by not ‘end-gaining’ (Mixon, 1999) or knowing what we seek in advance. Such an attitude leads to the spontaneity of the unexpected.

A central feature of Mahayana Buddhism is the experience of ‘emptiness’, particularly within the practice of insight meditation (Vipassina). The aim of the various practices is to dissolve rigid views (*ditthi*) and to break down beliefs in the (apparent) permanence of things (Hinnells, 1984). Apparent entities such as the ‘mind’ or the ‘self’ are proposed to be merely changing collections of evanescent events, and meditation practices can lead to a direct insight into this, moment by moment. A defining aspect of this is the inter-relatedness of everything. One may come to realise one’s ‘self’ is empty, yet simultaneously that one is a part of everything else, and so ‘self’ is also infinitely ‘full’. The terrors and the excitements associated with impasse and insight may relate to the fragmentation, yet infinite expansion, of self. The aha! experience resonates with this type of radical connectedness and I propose it constitutes an experiential refutation of dualism or separateness. It may be a relatively common example of what the Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, called ‘interbeing’ (cited in Mair, 1995, p. 19). The latter term represents the ways in which the being of all things is a part of the being of all other things — that all phenomena are both empty without independent identity, being non-distinct, and yet are full, being a part of everything else. Direct awareness of this would constitute a ‘symmetrical’ consciousness ‘contained’ within a very comprehensive and permeable superordinate understanding.

In this context the ‘self’-control necessary to come to insight takes on a new meaning. Within meditative thought the self as construer (‘I’), or the construing one lives through, cannot be known without objectifying it, without changing the ‘I’ into a ‘me’, a static content. It is not a matter of controlling self, or defining it more clearly, or ‘realising one’s self’, but rather of releasing or letting go of the various self formations.

This paradoxical situation is duplicated in the quest for insight. One cannot will oneself to an insight or achieve it merely by working harder or by attempting to control one's thinking. Insight rarely seems to arrive while we are trying to figure things out directly. Indeed, the concern with trying to attain the insight, or end-gaining, is counterproductive. So a radically different mode of awareness is required, one that the Buddhists call 'mindfulness' and which represents a progressive development of our capacity for awareness.

10.4.4 **Developing Awareness And Insight**

In discussing transpersonal states, or altered states of awareness, Hunt (1995) claimed that the path to such states of awareness — and the insights which commonly accompany them — requires a sustained attention to the medium of one's symbolic processes. Rather than focusing on the content or meaning of one's thoughts or circumstances, for example, one attends to the ways in which they are experienced in the body, in feeling and in emotion. One attends to the flow of things and continuously lets go of interpretation and 'knowing'. One is left with the medium itself, be it the sound of notes, the rising of thoughts or images in consciousness, the kinaesthetic feel for a movement in dance, and so on. From such a radically observational attitude:

... meaning emerges as a result of experiential immersion in the expressive patterns of the symbolic medium. It appears as spontaneous, preemptory imagery and is fully developed in the expressive media of the arts. Here, felt meanings emerge from the medium in the form of potential semblances that are 'sensed', polysemic and open-ended, and so unpredictable and novel. It is the receptive, observing attitude common to aesthetics, meditation, and classical introspection that allows such meanings to emerge. (Hunt, 1995, p. 42)

Given a deep immersion in the domain of interest, the medium of the domain becomes a 'language' for the person which is automaticised or habitual and which seems to gain a life of its own. Writers 'hear' their characters talking to each other, or 'see' them in scenes, mathematicians 'see' mathematical symbols or formulas arranging and re-arranging themselves, composers 'hear' music as they compose, painters 'find' the

painting they have in mind as it emerges on the canvas. Such reports are commonplace (Epel, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Gruber, 1995).

Hunt (1995) considered that in this meditative mode of thought we may become aware of a normally subliminal, broad synthesis of disparate modalities of perception. But, beheld in the broad perspective of this type of unwavering yet diffused attention, it is transformed:

Rather than reflecting building blocks or microgenetic stages, contemplation of experience for its own sake induces a *transformation* of consciousness, in another sense, its *completion*. (1995, p. 41, italics in original)

Just as Matte-Blanco (1988) saw that bi-modal thought was an ideal balance between looser, symmetrical processes emerging into consciousness within the constraints of tighter asymmetrical understanding, so this contemplative attitude opens up the frontiers of one's capacity to understand and to generate new insight. As Claxton (1997, 1998) suggested, this represents a slowing down of mental processes, a delay of one's normally dominant semantic organisation long enough to allow into awareness the expressive perceptual dimensions basic to presentational symbolisms. These presentational states, Hunt (1995) believed, are the re-using of basic spatial and perceptual structures and are probably the basis for image schema. What can emerge is not self-referential awareness, but a sense of unclouded clarity and presence often associated with long-term meditative practice and with 'peak experiences'. Hunt (1995) pointed out that such states are correlated with unusually coherent alpha and theta patterns across the entire cortex.

Such an awareness is enabled by a transcending affective state in which we examine our meaning processes for their own sake. This delay in the pragmatics of construction is likely to be what occurs within Kelly's creativity cycle (Kenny & Delmonte, 1986; Srinivasan & McIver, 1992). In loosening and provisional tightenings emerging understandings take shape and fall into line with the meaning structures formed by the person's assiduous, preparatory efforts. These efforts have, in iterative fashion, developed the tacit, 'from-which' anticipatory 'spectacles' through which the

world takes shape for us. For this reason, insight is no accident, but neither is it 'directable' or predictable, dependent as it is on letting go and on the undoing of previous knowings. It can be prepared for, but has to be waited-upon.

The reflexive awareness of our immediate subjective state follows from the fundamental ability to take the role of the other towards ourselves. This allows for a radically detached and observational attitude, a stepping back from pragmatic involvement which both reveals and transforms awareness. The key element in this process appears to be the capacity to *inhibit* habitual processes:

Meditation is based on a deliberate suspension of our more practically oriented cognitive activity, especially verbally organized thought. This inhibition of capacities associated with left-hemisphere predominance would allow the potential synthesizing capacity of self-awareness more time to complete itself to the greatest degree possible. (Hunt, 1995, p. 34)

Whether Hunt is right about the differing functions of left and right hemispheres and their relations to differing modes of thought, the point of relevance for us here is that the development of meditative thought is derived by the inhibition of 'normal' thought which looks for closure, which tightens in order to predict. Discussing the Alexander technique⁷⁸ (Alexander, 1932), Mixon (1999) considered that the breaking of habit allows for spontaneity and for 'the right thing to do itself' (one of Alexander's favourite sayings). These habits are the 'from which' by which we attend to things, the tacit understandings that silently frame our questions. By altering their automatic 'channelling' of our anticipations, change becomes possible:

The chief means of change became stopping (inhibiting) the original habit momentarily so that new directions could take effect. The ability to be aware of something and momentarily stop it can become a skill which can generalize to any sort of habit. (Mixon, 1999, p. 182)

Clearly, 'mental' habits can be at least as intransigent as 'physical' ones such as our posture. In developing this capacity for change in an ongoing way the trick is to make one's habits, including one's fixed understandings, more tentative. In order to take

⁷⁸ Alexander developed a system and practice of restoring bodily alignment and balance based on a conviction of the psycho-physical unity of the person.

conscious shape, incipient understandings can be ‘provisionally’ tightened. By keeping the forms of thought relatively loose the contents of thought remain flexible. What is important here is not what we do, or what we think, but *how* we do it. Mills (1996) pointed out that any genuinely new action ‘feels wrong’, or threatening. Even if the new action or new thought is more balanced or ‘appropriate’, it feels alien. Indeed, it can feel disabling:

To even consider not doing things in our usual way in order to leave ourselves free to discover as yet unknown new ways feels like giving up any action whatever. (Mills, 1996, p. 68)

The practice of inhibition, in the Alexander system, is an insistence on the continuing openness to unknown alternative responses. It is a way of refusing the obvious. In this process we become aware that something that we are not normally aware of is now felt as missing, a vague state of unease. This is fertile ground for insight.

10.5 SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Following the broadening of the focus in my discussion of emotion and mind (Chapter 8) and of the links between Matte-Blanco and Kelly (Chapter 9), the present chapter has enabled us to see how the pragmatist-phenomenological approach to mind can encompass the distinctive features and phenomenology of insight. I have attempted to show that the feelings of connectedness, of transcending a narrow sense of self, of an embodied and participatory knowing, and of a characteristically metaphorical mode of thinking all sit comfortably within a pragmatist-phenomenological account.

This account was drawn in large part from the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and stressed the way in which the ‘body-subject’ allowed for a relational account of the person, one in which the person co-created the ‘affordances’ of his or her world. This embodied view of mind stressed ‘enactment’ rather than inner, separate thought processes. According to this account we exist in a ‘lived-through’ world and most of our knowing is tacit, a ‘knowing-from’ rather than a ‘knowing-that. Such knowing is highly context-dependent where the world supports and constrains our understandings. This leads to the importance of the medium of thought in creative

enterprises. By attending to the processes and medium of thought itself it was argued that a distinctly metaphorical and transcending stance is possible wherein the habits of understanding can be slowed or inhibited. This inhibition then allows something new to emerge on the basis of one's preparations and immersion in the domain in question.

Evidence of the embodied and metaphorical nature of mind was presented and discussed, including its connection to insight. The transcending affective awareness characteristic of meditative thought was then linked to the distinct experiences of 'connectedness' and of 'self' which are so frequently commented on in the literature. It was concluded that a capacity for insight is something that one can prepare for and get better at, but that coming to insight itself cannot be hurried nor predicted.

Insight is not easy to come to because it always represents an undoing of what we already know, of what we depend on in order to negotiate our world. Preparation is crucial, as is the invalidation of what we know already. This process can be threatening unless we have in place a superordinate structure that is capable of containing our attempts at loosening and opening-up our construing. Insightful thinking is about a different style or mode of thought in which we derail predictive or representational thought in favour of a more diffuse, anticipatory 'waiting-upon'. In this mode people undertake behavioural experiments: writers write; scientists experiment, either in reality or in imagination; musicians extemporise, and so on. It is in such 'projects' that new ways of being and insights emerge. We do not merely 'think' an insight; it is personally endured. We set the conditions for its occurrence and we enact it, we experience it as it happens. We see or feel the answer as if it comes from 'outside' because we relinquish a controlling, predictive structure and open up to the world in a receptive, anticipatory mode based on the openness of perceptual-like, presentational images. Insight represents a 'personal knowing', a knowing made possible by intimate involvement and commitment and, somewhat paradoxically, by the letting go of the urgency to know.

SECTION 4.

VIEWING INSIGHT AS A WHOLE

CHAPTER 11: A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF INSIGHT

11.1 THE INQUIRY INTO INSIGHT THUS FAR

11.1.1 Introduction

It is now time to integrate the various themes and elements of this inquiry and to present a theoretical description of insight (see Figure 1, Chapter 1 for an overview of this entire work). The approach taken has had as its focus the psychology of insight, as against, for example, the philosophy of insight. The importance of this distinction was highlighted by Meno's paradox which, it was argued, relies on an objectivist, philosophical assumptions for its unsettling conclusion that inquiry into new knowledge is futile. This led to my focus on the psycho-logic, as distinct from the logic, of insight. Such a psycho-logic is based on personal understanding and meaning rather than on certainty and objective access to Truth.⁷⁹ Compatible with this focus was a non-essentialist, 'nominal' definition of insight which has allowed us to assemble an understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon by discussing examples, descriptions and theories of insight. The aim has been to develop an expanding acquaintance with insight such that we might learn more, not only about insight itself, but also of the nature of the person capable of such creative feats.

The above aim implies that the study of insight is important for a number of reasons. Obviously, history demonstrates the contributions and benefits of significant creative insights. Accordingly, any contribution this inquiry can make to an understanding of how such insights occur would be worthwhile. Any means of avoiding the 'oversight' of insights we may wish to have would be similarly welcome. It has also been suggested that not all insights may be beneficial, and that awareness of

⁷⁹ Although 'psycho-logic' (Warren, 1998) works at the idiographic or individual level, I also intend a more nomothetic understanding of this term. That is, it is assumed that *all* people utilise their own personal systems of judgement and understanding, their psycho-logic, in furtherance of their anticipatory ventures. In terms of insight, I am saying is that there are generalisations that can be made (one is that people use psycho-logic) about how people come to insight.

the implications of insights must be prepared for carefully. In wider terms, a deeper understanding of insight may lead to a richer understanding of mental life and human beings in general.

With these reminders of our objectives and style of approach in place, it may be useful to summarise what we have achieved thus far, presented in broad terms. I began by describing insight and found that the language of early gestalt-inspired research has been largely maintained in contemporary research. Thus, for example, it was found that the four stages of insight — preparation, impasse-incubation, the insight experience, and verification-elaboration — are viewed as still adequately covering the phenomenology of this complex process. Having reviewed the mostly-cognitive research literature, four reliable and consistently-present features of insight were found. These were the use of high levels of abstraction, the alternation between tacit and explicit mental processes, the role of emotion in insight and the social and pragmatic dimensions of insight.

It was argued that the cognitive literature, in attempting to be true to the full phenomenology of insight, showed a definite trend towards psychological constructivism and it was further argued that an explicit constructivist account would make good some of the explanatory deficits in the traditional approaches. In particular, a problem found within many of the cognitive accounts of insight was that in attempting to base insight on non-intentional, associative processes, the ‘insightful’ person only entered the theoretical picture when the solution ‘popped’ into his or her consciousness. That is, much of the work of novelty and creativity was achieved by mindless, presumably neural, processes, leaving the person more a receptacle for insight, rather than its agent. The trouble is, however, that ‘mindless’ spreading networks of ‘semantic’ activation are thereby quietly endowed with many of the insightful properties we have been trying to account for. In any case, such accounts explicitly require the person to recognise that such and such *is* an insight — which is really much of the point in insight, to *see* that something is a breakthrough. It was argued, therefore, that one must assume from the outset that people are insightful, meaning-generating creatures,

and our task is to understand the ways in which this is manifested, rather than to search for the hidden (ultimately neural) essence of insight.

Subsequently, a pragmatist reading of PCP was given and then Kelly's treatment of insight was outlined and critiqued. Although PCP was found to be an excellent theoretical framework within which to discuss insight, it was also suggested that there were areas identified in the literature which Kelly had either missed or had dealt with in too little detail. In addition, it was felt that the reported phenomenology of insight, and the various explanations applied to it, were pointing to a broader conception of mind. A recurring and integrative idea which emerged in these discussions has been Langer's distinction between presentational and representational thought. Bearing this distinction in mind, an elaboration of the relationship of emotion and mind, of symmetrical and asymmetrical consciousness and Kelly's creativity cycle, and of the embodied, enactive and metaphorical features of mind were given. This led to a discussion of a more 'personal knowing' or 'meditative thinking' in which the person does not stand apart and judge from a distance, but participates in the known. This latter discussion was illuminated, in part, by parallels with Buddhist thought.

11.1.2 Elements And Features Of Insight

Before outlining my theoretical understanding of insight it will be helpful to bring back to mind the diverse elements and features of insight we have encountered in our inquiry. One way of usefully uniting many of these elements and features is to think of them in terms of two modes of thought. That is, insight reveals an alternation and harmony between 'normal', reasoning consciousness and another less verbal, more tacit and affective mode of understanding. If we consider human understanding in terms of Langer's (1957, 1972) two modes of mental awareness, representational and presentational symbolisms (see Table 1), then we find family resemblances amongst the conceptualisations we have examined.

Table 1. Contrasts between presentational and representational thinking,
variously conceived.

Presentational Thinking	Representational Thinking
symmetrical awareness	asymmetrical awareness
primary process thinking	secondary process thinking
medium sensitivity	medium insensitivity
loose construing	tight construing
figurative/metaphorical thinking	literal thinking
participatory/personal knowing	knowing ‘that’
intuitive/tacit knowing	conscious reasoning
meditative thinking	calculative thinking
enactment	‘inner’ conscious reasoning
multidimensional thinking	linear thinking

The various theorists I have discussed do seem all to be pointing in a similar direction. For example, Kelly’s contrast between loose and tight construing shares many of the contrasting features of presentational and representational thinking, respectively. Therefore, loose construing tends to share features with ‘symmetrical’ awareness, tends to be more multidimensional and figurative, and so on. This is not to say that these conceptualisations are all the same on every dimension, but it is to suggest that this presentational—representational continuum of mental life is a useful conceptual division. What emerges is the convergent validity of the idea that an adequate understanding of human mentality in general, and of optimal mental functioning in particular, must include the harmonious interplay of these complementary styles of anticipation.

A key skill seems to involve the capacity to utilise presentational modes of mental symbolism in the service of our more articulate, consciously-held projects; to be able to harness the unpredictable, fertile and changeable openness of our looser modes

of anticipation. Dwelling in and managing this alternative mode of thought requires particular strategies and a certain superordinating attitude which I have characterised as a transcending affective calm or security which can tolerate, even welcome, uncertainty. The person typically is immersed deeply in an ongoing project, ‘living’ the question as it were (for example, creating ‘failure indices’), paying attention to the medium of interest (‘perceptual rehearsal’) and being sensitive to highly abstract, affectively nuanced images relevant to the problem at hand (such as ‘themata’ or ‘inceptions’). Features of this looser, more protean state include the experience of ‘flow’, a lessening of self-awareness and self-concern, a loosening-up of the habits and ‘fixations’ of thought, and the capacity to entertain absurdity and contradictories (the capacity for ‘omnivalence’ or one’s ‘negative capability’).

11.2 WAITING UPON INSIGHT: BRINGING THE ELEMENTS TOGETHER

My theoretical understanding of insight will be presented in the context of answers to several questions. Firstly, in answering ‘What might enable a person to have an insight?’, the factors that seem to be correlated with, and conducive of, insight will be summarised. In responding to ‘What might happen within the insight process?’, I will propose an account of the ‘logic’ of insightful thinking and also of the experience itself. That is, I will try to account for the ‘quantum jump’ of insight and why it is personally experienced in the ways people report it to be. These explanations will lead to further questions: ‘What does insight tell us about the nature of mental life generally, of the nature of the person having the insight, and of the relationship of that person with his or her world?’. In responding to such complex questions, the larger-scale speculations and theoretical images that have characterised the middle two sections of this work will be brought together. The intention is to present a theoretical picture which is plausible, coherent and suggestive of a larger unity that integrates the diverse findings presented.

11.2.1. What Might Enable A Person To Have An Insight?

By definition, for one to come to insight one must be committed to some project or problem and must have come to some impasse or frustration in relation to it. Whether this be a large or small matter, an artistic endeavour, an intellectual labour, or a struggle for personal meaning and satisfaction in one's life, for insight to occur there must be something at stake for the person. In these terms, insight is thoroughly intensional,⁸⁰ or saturated with personal meaning. One must care about the matter at hand and be genuinely stymied in one's attempts to understand. It may be that the 'problem' itself is difficult to articulate, even fleeting, but there must be a personally-held sense that *something* needs to change within one's understanding, that *something* is wrong, causing one to feel unease or disquiet.

Under such circumstances a person will normally apply her or his energies, current understandings and trusted strategies to solve the problem (or to circumvent it). This is appropriate since adequate preparation appears to be essential for insight to occur. The person must have the materials at hand to work with, the elements that may later be joined creatively in new patterns that constitute the insight. But if the person perseveres with approaches and understandings that keep leading to failure, eventually the person might renounce such determined 'hostility' (in Kelly's sense) in favour of reconstrual. Whether the person leaves the problem aside, or deliberately adopts a radically different approach and attitude to the problem, what seems necessary is an indeterminate period of 'incubation'. The duration of this renunciation cannot be known in advance. One must wait-upon insight. It may take only seconds, or it may take years, or one may never experience a resolution of that particular lack of understanding.

But it should not be assumed that the person is thereby powerless or entirely passive in the matter. What we have seen in the insight literature, and at the heart of Kelly's creativity cycle, is that we can deliberately adopt a different mode of understanding and thinking which increases the likelihood of genuinely new insight.

⁸⁰ Again, intensional — with an 's' — is used to include the usual philosophical meaning of intentional (with a 't'), but to add a sense of the inherent meaningfulness of our mental processes.

What seems to be required is the setting aside or altering of some of our previous ways of understanding the issues at hand. Whether described in terms of restructuring the problem, or overcoming fixation, some habits of thought need somehow to be altered. An apparent paradox emerges here in that we can only make sense of events using our structures of understanding, yet we must set them aside if we are to come to new understanding. This seeming paradox is overcome, however, because we do not dismantle all our ways of anticipating and understanding all at once. We can never set aside all our prejudices (literally, pre-judgements), nor should we desire to, as they have provided us with our anticipatory gains thus far. Thus we loosen up only those parts of our thinking related to the problem at hand. Of course, we do not usually know exactly where we are going wrong, so a general loosening in this particular 'problem' domain may be required. What is needed is a stepping-back to gain a new perspective.

Sometimes just a break from the efforts to solve something is enough. This may involve going for a walk, taking a vacation and so on. Indeed, creative people generally emphasise the importance of idle time interspersed with periods of sustained work. Taking time to relax, to exercise and to talk to friends and colleagues is frequently deemed to be an essential part of creativity. In addition, there are more intentional, proactive means people can utilise in order to transcend the obvious. Primarily, these involve the person's willingness to surrender what she or he knows already, not begrudgingly or in anxious fashion, but as an acknowledged part of the process of creativity. Impasse is taken not so much as evidence of one's incapacity, but as an invitation to discovery. This positive evaluation of the letting go of knowing is crucial as it allows the person to experiment, to play with ideas, to entertain the absurd and the seemingly contradictory.

In this latter regard we have seen that various activities have been linked to insight. Frequently people will simply immerse themselves in the medium of their inquiry. They may experiment with words, images, sounds and so on. This represents a return to basics, a type of 'perceptual rehearsal' and is an act of anticipation via a presentational mode of awareness. This is a more open, receptive and 'objective' stance

to the world in which one is willing for the world to speak relatively un-tainted by our preconceptions. This creates the subjective experience of loosening where certainties and hard-edged distinctions are relaxed allowing the person to play with ideas, images, and feelings.

Since one way of understanding ‘emotion’ is in terms of an awareness of the subtly shifting implications of our construing, frequently emotion is the key to what is tacit in our construing. Emotions may be considered to be talismans, to contain revelations about our construing processes. Purposeful attention to our emotional states themselves may, therefore, reveal the up-to-now tacit lineaments and assumptions of our construing. As with ‘inceptions’, ‘themata’ and ‘failure indices’, a sensitive attunement to our emotional ‘compass’ may direct us towards insight. As with the child’s ‘warm-cold’ game of hide and seek — where the invalidation of someone responding with ‘cold’ to our attempts to locate what is hidden can be considered informative — our invalidated attempts towards insight, from a superordinating point of view, can be considered not a failure, but an ‘advance’ which rules out one method of approach and opens up the possibility of others.

The game metaphor is well-suited to any account of the development of insight. In relation to the project at impasse, the person needs a type of transcending confidence or security in his or her ability to anticipate and tolerate local inconsistencies. This allows for a playful letting go of knowing, a general loosening. This relative lack of self-consciousness and self concern allows for a more relaxed defocused attention, for perceptual rehearsal, immersion in the medium, and for the characteristic experimentation with metaphor and analogies which I have discussed earlier. When the person develops a superordinating awareness which can accommodate such constructive fluidity, the problem can be abstracted, pulled apart as it were, and the person can open him or herself to feelings of knowing, inceptions, intuitions, themata and feeling tones, to the full array of emotionally-tinged subtleties that I have argued are so important in insight.

Ultimately, for insight to occur, what is necessary is for the person to be able to ‘see’ (or feel, taste, smell, and so on) a previously ‘unseeable’ link or connection between various elements, images, ideas and so on. What is also necessary, indeed fundamental, is that people are inveterate meaning-makers. We are anticipatory beings and we are ‘designed’ to find patterns and to anticipate events. But there are limits. What we can see is, in combination with the constraints inherent in the events we are confronted by, determined by our present understandings. If we alter our ‘spectacles’ we may come to see new things in these events. But how might we conceptualise what happens in this shifting of view that constitutes the insight process? This will be the topic of the next subsection.

11.2.2 What Might Happen Within The Insight Process?

11.2.2.1 The Logic Of Insight

Insight is frequently described as a ‘quantum jump’ in understanding, or as an instance of ‘lateral thinking’. This is because it frequently expresses the person’s psycho-logic (Warren, 1998), rather than a predictable, classical (deductive, inductive) logic. We have seen, for example, that under looser, symmetrical construing associations may be made ‘laterally’ rather than hierarchically or ordinally. The resulting process is not illogical, it is psycho-logical. This more associative logic is home to figurative and metaphorical thought, to loosening and symmetry.

If we assume that more associative, symmetrical thinking puts us in touch with understandings of a higher dimensionality and complexity, it may be understood how such ‘inarticulate’ ways of knowing grasp ‘wholes’, where normal rational inference and deduction only grasp relatively limited aspects of the phenomenon at hand. Just as we might, in one sweep, presentationally grasp the ‘ambience’ of a dinner party, but have great difficulty in verbally imparting this to another, so in loose construing we may unite many things but not be immediately able to justify such linkages. Frequently, such multidimensional grasping is centred around some highly abstract image or feeling

(‘inceptions’, ‘themata’, ‘failure indices’) which the person then tries to articulate. In terms of Ward’s (1995) ‘least resistance model’, such ‘imagistic’ thinking occurs by moving up one abstractive chain and down another. In PCP terms, this is where a loosened construct comes under the regnancy of an alternative superordinate structure, and, as I have argued, this may be via mutually-implicative constructs. This creative subsumption of looser, symmetrical modes of understanding is what Matte-Blanco called bi-modal thought.

The experience of insight emerges within such bi-modal thought and represents a return to tighter implicative and asymmetrical thinking. Insight reveals a mode of knowing and a logic which may not be easily verbalised and, therefore, needs to be ‘translated’ into a more representational or asymmetrical mode of thought to be grasped, especially by others. The appropriation of an insight may lie in this, often metaphorical, transformation. However, if a person is highly skilled in presentational modes of thought and expression the transformation may not be required for that person’s full experience of insight — because he or she has a highly elaborated and practised presentational ‘language’ in which to grasp it. Nonetheless, such a ‘presentational insight’ usually needs to be translated or placed within a relatively normative framework for others to share in it.

William Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* wrote that “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite” (1977, p. 188). This is the realm of symmetrical awareness. It is not that by ‘cleaning’ our mental spectacles, as it were, that we see reality ‘objectively’, finally. Rather, by trying to wipe them clean of pre-judgements, of what we know already, the infinite possibilities for knowing can be glimpsed. A simultaneous awareness of the partial and constructed nature of our outlook, and of the omnipresence and unbounded nature of the world that ‘stands over’ us, that includes and transcends us, can be achieved. Our knowing in this state, however, is not unstructured, nor purely relativist. The lenses are never completely cleansed. They always reflect the constraints of the natural and cultural worlds. In addition, they will always magnify and distort, include and occlude.

Nonetheless, we can, within broad constraints, catch glimpses of the openness of reality and grab hold of new possibilities made visible by our loosening efforts.

One way of understanding the psycho-logical processes involved in insight is in terms of Martindale's (1995) model of insight, couched in PCP terms. The advantage of this 'translation' of Martindale is that the PCP account is thoroughly intensional and definitively psychological, and thereby substantially avoids the dualist difficulties to which connectionism and spreading activation models are susceptible. It will be recalled that for Martindale the key to insight processes lay in alterations in the focus of attention. Highly focused attention yielded tight, logical and predictable thought processes based on a 'steep association gradient'. On the other hand, defocused attention yielded idiosyncratic and analogical thinking based on a wider-spread, 'shallow association gradient'. The greater the attentional capacity of the person, the greater the likelihood of creativity because more 'nodes' representing information can be simultaneously activated. The insightful person is less fixated and can hold more elements in mind. In some fashion, the nodes relevant to the problem remain partially activated waiting to be pushed over the threshold of consciousness by some chance encounter with the correct 'stimulus'. Under such conditions the solution will 'pop into mind' (p. 261) of the suitably prepared person. The logic of this insight process is, according to Martindale, abductive: something surprising is 'seen' and then the person develops hypotheses to make sense of it.⁸¹

The parallels between this account of alternating stages of defocused and focused attention and Kelly's notions of loose and tight construing are illuminating. The Creativity Cycle can be understood as a shifting in the type of focus the person adopts. Under loose construing perceived differences between elements are reduced and elements may be associated with each other on a number of dimensions, none of which are fully crystallised. I suggested earlier that the view of construing as exclusively bipolar could be relaxed or 'loosened'. Constructs may also be considered as clusters of

⁸¹ Kelly also felt that the basis of construing was an abductive process. Such a logic implies an immersion in the world of events first, rather than abstract and inner mental processes preceding hypothesis-making. As such, construing is always embedded within cycles of experience.

elements with a tendency to bi-polar groupings. The tighter the construing, the more ‘energy’ is poured into distinguishing bi-polarity. But when the attention is spread or defocused, then the clustering of elements may not be now neatly divided into two. As I have suggested, a more adequate model for this looser style of understanding may be in terms of prototypes or exemplars around which elements cluster. Loose construing would also have the effect of simultaneously activating other ‘constructs’ sharing the relevant elements. This non-specific, spread attention would mean that neat bi-polarities are less likely to form. If the person can maintain this associative process, extending it over time, then, as the person experiments with provisional tightenings, new insights may take shape.

Tightly bi-polar constructs may function something like measures of central tendency in statistics. Means, medians and modes all offer very useful, but simplified pictures of the data under observation. Or again, a regression line drawn to simplify a scattering of ‘points’ finds a ‘best fit’ approximation. In the process, the richness and idiosyncratic features of the data are usually sacrificed. In similar fashion, strict bi-polarity may be considered as a summary of the ‘data’ of experience — but one in which we lose much of the richness and multidimensionality of that experience.⁸² Looser, less defined construing may retain this dimensionality at the expense of precision and predictive power. A loose construct may be akin to clusterings of elements which potentially embody more than one distinction as the person provisionally groups and regroups the elements. What may occur here is an underlying associative logic that leads to simultaneous and parallel links between elements. To be verbalised and ‘contained’ such symmetrical thinking usually has to be subsequently distinguished in terms of more clearly bi-polar ‘asymmetrical’ distinctions.

‘Normal’, asymmetrical and clearly bi-polar construing is hierarchical and predictive, while looser, symmetrical construing tends to be more ‘lateral’ and

⁸² However, the arrangement of (bi-polar) constructs in dynamically changing hierarchic systems and conceived of as arranged in multidimensional space (Kelly, 1955) captures some of the kaleidoscopic complexity of our lived world. The main point here is that looser construing is necessary for the creation and re-creation of such ordinal systems. Also, it may be that looser construing represents a simultaneous multidimensional appraisal, whereas tighter, more ordinally structured construing may work in more sequential fashion.

associative. Such loose, associative thinking is ‘normally’ inhibited or discouraged as being inconsistent, but in complex and ill-defined circumstances it is essential for creativity. There is an irony here, however. In earlier chapters I argued that associationistic and mechanistic theories of insight could not account for our intentionality and creativity, yet here I am saying that relatively unpredictable association stands at the heart of insight. But what we find here is a ‘top-down’, predication use of, and allowance for, an associative logic in the service of understanding. By itself, pure associative thought represents an impossibly complex chaos, a mindlessness with no distinctions between anything (the extremes of symmetrical awareness). What I am alluding to is what Matte-Blanco called bi-modal thought, or symmetrical awareness in the service of a tighter, asymmetrical understanding.

Even so, the insight cannot be made to order. It must be waited-upon. The person must be patient, not too hastily tightening up and testing emergent ideas. This waiting-upon is not entirely passive either, and the person is no mere conduit for automatic associative processes. Although the subjective experience may be that insight ‘pops’ into consciousness, or is a ‘quantum jump’, the pathways and semantic associations have all been established by the person’s preparatory efforts. The person’s intelligent, rational processes set up the semantic patterns and pathways that determine tacit semantic awareness. As we have seen, a major problem with mechanistic models is that they take for granted the semantic nature of these networks, but such semantic pathways always imply a meaning-generating person who set them up in the first place. In addition, the meditative, defocused stance is not a passive ‘giving up’, but can be deliberately cultivated and people can improve in their capacity to increase this type of attentive, yet diffuse, awareness (Hunt, 1995; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

11.2.2.2 The Experience Of Insight

The creator ... has to give up holding onto himself [sic] as a thing and begin to experience himself only in the process of creative response; paradoxically enough, if he can experience himself in this process, he loses himself. He transcends the boundaries of his own person, and at

the very moment when he feels 'I am' he also feels 'I am you', I am one with the whole world. (Fromm, 1959, p. 51)

What happens during insight also has experiential or subjective dimensions. Since much of the insight experience is described in the next section, I will confine this discussion to the general phenomenology of the process. We have seen that there are different experiences across the different stages of insight. In preparation it would be expected that there is generally one's 'normal' sense of self and of self-consciousness, and various fluctuations of mood that may characterise one's life generally. At impasse, of course, there is confusion and uncertainty, with at least some sense of frustration, ranging from mere irritation to absolute despair. Upon renunciation of the problem, there may well be relief or at least resignation. But it is in the period surrounding the insight itself, where one's experience becomes distinctively 'insightful'.

People who have experienced insight typically report that they were in a type of reverie or abstracted state of mind. This experiential mode frequently includes an altered sense of self in which self is both diminished, yet enhanced. There is both a self-forgetting and a deep sense of self-validation. The operations of one's psyche are distinctive: ideas are 'imaged', music plays itself, characters conduct conversations among themselves, formulas re-arrange themselves, and so on. Somehow, it is now inadequate to say that there is a separate self or a separate creation. This state is usually described as playful and more 'childlike', characterised as it is by openness to the world, to the unexpected. It represents a relinquishing of control or 'knowing', a relinquishing that must be done with a sense of trust. One looks as if through half-closed eyes. It is exploratory, guided by intuitive feelings of knowing, by the emotional sensitivities that I have described in the previous section.

Above all, this type of knowing is a personal knowing, a 'knowing-with', or 'participatory knowing'. It involves the whole person and is an emotionally-charged experience. I have argued that it represents an expanded way of being that is ushered in by a transcending affective state. It hinges on the relationship between unconscious and conscious mental modes. As Claxton (1997, p. 80) put it:

How mental gestation turns out depends on the ability to turn on to the borderlands between consciousness and the unconscious a kind of awareness that is welcoming without being predatory, and perceptive without being blinding.

This awareness does not grasp the first idea to emerge, or immediately attempt to fix things into words. It provisionally tightens and is content to wait-upon something important. Clearly, this is the meditative thinking that Heidegger urged and celebrated and about which more will be said later. But for now, I will try to give a sense of these processes and experiences of insight by using an extended metaphor: that of the ‘domino room of the mind’.

11.2.2.3 The Domino Room Of The Mind

As a child I attended the Royal Easter Show, an agricultural show held each year over several weeks around Easter in Sydney. On this particular visit to one of the pavilions there was an exhibit that I remember vividly. Thousands upon thousands of dominoes had been stood on end, lined up, and built into a very large sculpture. It was a landscape with geometric shapes, roads, castles and bridges. A single stream of dominoes would divide into multiple streams, perhaps coalescing again into a single chain. Structures stood precariously balanced, testament to painstaking, time-consuming and probably frustrating preparation. A time was set for the domino room to be ‘set off’. All it would take would be to tip just one special domino and the whole sculpture would come alive.

When it was set off a cavalcade of multiple chains of dominoes began falling and cascading in all directions. It went off with a type of drumming sound like heavy rain on a metal roof. At times it roared as larger structures rippled and crashed, at other times only a few linking dominoes would trip over each other with a light rhythmic sound. What struck me most about it was that it seemed to have a life of its own. Once the first domino fell, there was no stopping it. It lasted barely a minute but made a lasting impression on me.

In many ways this domino room phenomenon captures many of the features involved in the production and experience of insight, but there are some caveats. Firstly, the people setting up this room had a clear end-state in mind. Their sculpture

was carefully planned in advance. In contrast, insight is somewhat like doing a jigsaw without the finished image to go by, or even very clearly imagined. Worse, we do not know how many pieces we need nor the shapes they need to be. So if we can imagine that preparing for insight is like setting up the domino room — without a clearly defined end product established — then how would we go about it?

We would have some very general ideas about the shape of a solution. Culture, experience, personal capacities, immersion in one's field and assiduous preparation would provide 'pieces of the puzzle' of various types. We would spend ages walking around placing dominoes, here and there, moving some, seeing local patterns and building on that. Next day we would start again. Maybe we will work on another local pattern and occasionally we might bump up against another sub-pattern and we would work our way towards combining them. Importantly we would periodically step back, perhaps overseeing the emerging structure from a viewing platform above the assembled array. Like gazing absent-mindedly at clouds, we would look for patterns in the dominoes.

Occasionally sub-patterns are accidentally bumped and 'set off', but this premature 'insight' does not manage to engage the domino room of the mind as a whole. In fact, this may happen many times. Such false starts may happen by accident or by design as we might believe a coherent system has been achieved. We see something interesting, a larger pattern, and enter the fray again guided by that coherence and so on. This process goes on and on, iteratively, developing a mixture of local and global coherences, until the patterns are so intermingled and inter-associated that it becomes only a matter of time before we have built a thoroughly interconnected system.

Either by accident, or by a 'seeing' of the last gap in the pattern, the 'final' piece is placed and let fall. Even here there may be the frustration when only half the room is set off and has to be re-built! It was not the complete system we thought. But the person keeps up this process until everything comes together. The domino room mind 'does' an insight, it becomes one. It runs off by itself, a simultaneous multi-expression of the 'prepared mind'. It seems to be spontaneous and exterior, but only to an observer

watching the proceedings from a distance. The reality of this ‘domino-room’ insight is that it is a process, a happening which comes into being and we open ourselves to it.

After the fact we may recall the event as spontaneous and ‘external’, but at the time we were ‘in’ the insight, down among the dominoes as it were. To take an observational attitude at this time would mean to change the room-mind and thereby stop the cavalcade of dominoes. How upsetting in mid-flight! So we cannot be working as a part of the room and be watching it at the same time. We lose self-awareness when we are playing around with the dominoes and we become self-aware when we reflect on the growing sculpture from ‘above’ as it were. The experience of the dynamic whole is always retrospective. We ‘wake up’, so to speak, after the event. It seems the absorption required, or defocused attention, does not allow for verbal reflection (at a high level of cognitive awareness). We are too busy doing or being the insight, enacting it. We are the location or space in which insights occur.

Although this metaphor (as with any metaphor) does not capture all the elements characteristic of insight, it does reveal many of them. These include: the suddenness of insight set off by the critical ‘clue’, the multidimensionality and complexity of the structures necessary for insight, the necessity for immersing oneself within the medium of one’s project, the sensitivity to subtle patterns and local coherences, the profligacy of insight with a high probability of ‘false starts’, the need to alternate between loose construction and tighter conceptualisations, the need to back off occasionally and ‘abstract’ the problem, and the alternation between being ‘in’ the project and being a separate observer.

Analogies can also be drawn between this domino room phenomenon and the subjective experience of insight. These include: the careful and often tedious and unrewarding preparation, the intuitive, feeling intelligence required for sustained work ‘in the dark’, the (aptly) ambiguous subjective sense whether one’s self is in the insight or separate and observing it (the seeming exteriority and spontaneity of the insight itself), and the sense of drama and excitement as it unfolds. The metaphor may not capture, however, the social, emotional and embodied aspects of insight as well as it

might. However, I can imagine that the team of workers who created this domino sculpture would have felt much as a person experiencing insight would as they watched their creation spontaneously express itself and ‘communicate’ with the spellbound audience.

11.2.3 What Does Insight Tell Us About Mind, About Persons And About Our Relationship With The World?

11.2.3.1 Insight and Mind

Mind or consciousness comes into existence when an intelligent organism has its ongoing activity interrupted by a problem. It is a special kind of instrument for the intelligent organism to deal with its problem and find the appropriate solution in order to resume its ongoing activity. (Mead, 1964, p. xviii)

In the last three chapters I took a step back from insight, as it were, to examine wider and more fundamental questions such as the nature of emotion and mind, of the possible structure of unconscious processes and their relation to insight, and of the embodied, enactive and metaphorical nature of mind. I proposed that our predicational, meaning-generating capacity is irreducible in discussions of mind. Without predication there would be no meaning or assertion, no ‘for-the-sake-of-which’, underlying our acts of anticipation. In short, there would be no mind. In Mead’s terms above, there would be no awareness of any ‘problem’ for the sake of which mind would be needed. What emerges from this view of mental life is that mind is inherently *relational* in that it is a term describing how humans manifest, and fit in with, their world. In particular, insight, as the subjective experience of overcoming some problem or inability to anticipate or fit in with one’s world, can be understood as a defining feature of the relational mind.

Each time we understand something in a way that suddenly dawns upon us, we re-create the relationship, the conversational engagement of us and our world. The phenomenology of insight reveals the nature of this relationship, and thereby something of the being of human beings. To understand we must, in some way, submit to the

world. We must ‘under-stand’ or stand under it, open to it, merge with it. This experience does not speak of a separate knower and known, or of an uninvolved, intellectual observation. The nature of mind, in this way, is relational. It is a mind that marks people as embodied and situated. Such a mind stands as the ways in which people relate to their world.

An essential, perhaps primary characteristic of such a relational mind is its presentational quality. I have discussed mind as a continuum, as a dynamic balance between representational and presentational processes. Not only is presentational awareness a necessary complement to our traditional view of the mind as a conscious, rational process, we have also seen that a diverse range of researchers have considered the basis of human mentality to be located in a looser, medium-sensitive, affective mode of awareness, that is, in presentational consciousness (Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1995; Katz, 1984; Langer, 1957, 1972; Matte-Blanco, 1988; Orange, 1995; Rychlak, 1977; Shanon, 1993). The insight literature reveals not only the alternation between these two modes of mind, but also considerable detail about the presentational features of mind.

When our more familiar, conscious reasoning and understanding (representational awareness) finds itself at impasse, the processes that reportedly lead to insightful breakthrough typically are, in the terms I have been using, more loose, affective, metaphorical and ‘imagistic’, intuitive and tacit, medium-sensitive, embodied and enactive. Insight processes are not exclusively presentational, however. But they do represent the escape from an excessive reliance on either automatic, habitual understandings or deliberate, conscious reasoning. I think what stamps the experience of insight as distinctive and difficult to achieve (perhaps especially so in technology-driven Western cultures) is the required renunciation of prediction and control and the concomitant openness to unpredictable, looser ways of being and understanding.

Nonetheless, the processes of insight exemplify the complex, complementary nature of mind. That is, the conceptual division of the mind into representational and presentational modes of understanding reveals that the mind typically alternates between different modes or styles of thought. Kelly described this in terms of the creativity

cycle,⁸³ as skilled alternations between loose and tighter construing. It seems to me, however, that standing above such creative cycles, and displayed in insightful construing, is a superordinating stance and style of operation which reveals a *third* mental mode. This is the *creative use of both representational and presentational thinking*, a meditative mode in which conscious awareness and tacit, non-verbal modes are allowed to experimentally interact. This is a transcending affective stance and points to the fundamentally ‘emotional’ nature of mind. This third mode of mode will be discussed further under the heading ‘Meditative Thinking and Waiting Upon Insight’.

This expanded view of mind can be understood using Claxton’s (1997) terminology. Claxton gave the name ‘undermind’ to the automatic, tacit and habitual ways in which we anticipate our world. This undermind forms the basis for intuition and is the basis for the embodied and enactive view of anticipation discussed in the previous chapter. Thus mind emerges within action, it does not precede or underlie behaviour. These automatic,⁸⁴ embodied processes include the taken-for-granted, tacit assumptions which are potentially revealed when the person strikes problems or reaches impasse. Such tacit assumptions are usually only noticed when something is wrong, when we do not effortlessly fit with, or anticipate, the events around us. This is where Claxton argued that ‘deliberative thinking’ or the ‘d-mode’ (what I have been calling representational thinking) is called upon to try to solve the problem, quickly scanning the situation, focusing attention on it, implementing its repertoire of likely ‘solutions’. This is a tighter, asymmetrical awareness, slower than the undermind and it is presumably what Mead meant by ‘mind’. When this does not work Claxton claimed that what is required is a slower, contemplative process of mind.

This third process of mind for Claxton was the ‘tortoise mind’, the ‘contemplative’ slowing down of thought which is akin to meditative thinking in which distinctions are eased apart and there is more play and reverie, less precision. But the

⁸³ Kelly also described various styles of construing: propositional versus pre-emptive, constricted versus dilated (narrow versus broadened ‘perceptual field’), permeable versus impermeable, as well as the CPC and Experience Cycles.

⁸⁴ Both ‘automatic’ in terms of instinctive response patterns and as ‘automaticised’ or habitual practices.

key to insight is to transcend the tacit, automaticised processes, to restructure the habitual mind, the undermind. Deliberative thought is backgrounded and the undermind is let run, but now in wider channels, as it were, under a wider, more diffuse attention or awareness. The criteria for thinking is looser, less strict. Slowly, iteratively, the undermind is 'rejigged' and occasionally it runs off very fast, multidimensionally, like the 'domino room of the mind' I discussed earlier. This is not chaos, however, as the multiple channels of thought are, for example, structured metaphorically, or in terms of highly abstract imagery, allowing for novelty and unusual associations. Under such figurative constraints, ideas and elements can be related by aspects of the medium of expression. They may, for example, be linked by sound, feel, smell, rhyme and so on, rather than by logical or direct semantic similarities.

Such contemplative and meditative thinking is preparing the general ground or space within which the openness of loose construing can be 'contained'. For Kelly, this meant provisionally tightening and submitting the results to the world of experience. For Matte-Blanco, this meant creative 'bi-modality', a type of 'contained' openness. Provisional tightening is necessary to keep things within pragmatic bounds. It is a balancing act between experiencing sameness and difference, between symmetry and asymmetry. Cutting up the world in terms of tight distinctions is enormously powerful. It is the basis of predictable, applied science, for example. Validated, tight constructions are repeatable and verifiable and we mostly 'see' what we always 'see'. We normally only abandon such constructs when they fail us repeatedly. But new aspects of the world are potentially revealed in these failures. At this point, loosening our thinking facilitates the entry of new elements and nascent understandings. In momentarily doing 'nothing' (holding off predication) at the point of suspending habitual thought, to paraphrase Alexander, 'the right thing may do itself' (Mixon, 1999). This 'right thing' is not an objectivist (capital R) Reality revealing itself to us, but a type of spontaneity instantly recognisable in a person in unselfconscious flow. Such spontaneity is, of course, characteristic, of insight.

A major feature of mind, I have argued, is its metaphorical nature. Possibly emergent from cross-modal synesthesias (Hunt, 1995; Shanon, 1993), analogical and metaphorical thinking is also highly characteristic of insight experiences. Instances of insight are often reported as a return to this type of medium-sensitive, frequently affective awareness. Almost universally, creative people report that insight flowed from some central analogy or metaphor often inspired by immersion in some physical or perceptual activity. Metaphor, while open-ended, is not unstructured. As with presentational thought generally, a metaphor cannot be translated into new medium without substantial loss of meaning and coherence. And this may be why people may struggle for quite some time to articulate and elaborate their insights.

Another very important conceptual issue relevant to the nature of mind, and one to be discussed more in the following sections, is the distinction between 'I' and 'Me'. As we have seen, in experiencing insight people report changing perceptions of self and shifts in self-awareness. These alterations in the experience of self can be understood in terms of this distinction between different aspects of self. In short, when people are in the midst of insight or in flow, or in a meditative state, there is more of 'I', as an undistracted awareness, and less of 'Me', as a self-conscious deliberative process. In the looser, more symmetrical stages of insight there is frequently a loss of a sense of time and of space that accompanies the loss of self-consciousness. This removal of self-concern and self-referencing seems to facilitate a defocused, yet undistracted awareness that precedes and leads to insightful breakthrough. Upon tightening, self-perception returns, and along with it awareness of time and surroundings. This marks a return to asymmetrical awareness where such distinctions prevail. Again, mind or consciousness appears to be complex, being at times concerned with self, with self-reference as an important component of its content. At other times this self-consciousness recedes to reveal an underlying and ever-present awareness that allows for this self-consciousness in the first place.

11.2.3.2 Insight And Some Characteristics Of People And Their Relationships With Their World

The type of mind I have described above, naturally enough, is a reflection of the whole person and of his or her relationship with the world. ‘Mind’, in the way I am using the term, describes the intelligent ways a person relates to, or ‘couples’ with, his or her world. I have suggested that underlying all mind is the ‘I’, the subjective ground of awareness, of experiencing. This awareness is embodied, impassioned, and is ‘interested’ in the sense that its province is the person’s ‘conatus’ (Spinoza, 1967), the drive to self-maintenance, to self-definition and to self-transcendence. What insight reveals is a fundamental irony of the living, developing person: if the basis of mind and of the human being is this interested, self-referencing orientation, then a high expression of that mind in insight is one that forgets self, in order to develop self, that merges with the known yet brings forth the uniqueness of the person.

Kelly (1955) scoffed at the idea that one could realise one’s potential or could become ‘self-actualised’ — as if there were somehow an inner, final model of the person waiting to be manifested, to be completed. Rather he saw development as open-ended, as open to who-knows-what, as largely bounded by one’s imagination and creativity. Insight, as we have seen, not only changes the way we understand things, how we anticipate, it also changes who we are. I have also suggested that insight is a ‘primary’ or defining characteristic of human beings. The processes of insight are, therefore, suggestive of the nature and development of the person. The particular phenomenology of insight — its enactive qualities, the emotional modulations, the varying experience of self, the metaphorical nature of thought — implies a distinctive type of creature. I will, therefore, put forward an account of the type of person who is capable of such experiences and the ways such a person may be related to his or her world. The image is certainly not of an homunculus waiting to be realised, but of a person who comes into being within ongoing projects in the world.

I suggested earlier (7.2.2.1) that dependency construing is probably crucial in developing a sense of self (a central aspect of core construing) as we learn to differentiate our needs and differentiate the people and resources capable of (and willing

to) meet those needs. A sense of interpersonal connectedness seems to be primary and defining of human beings. If we cannot ‘couple-with’ or empathise with others (and our world), we would not survive. Failures of anticipation in this regard would be likely to be experienced as threatening, while the eventual return to empathic anticipation would likely then be experienced as pleasurable. In addition, within a subjective sense that one’s needs are currently being met and that one is safe and secure, it is more likely that a non-selfconscious mode of construing would prevail. We have seen that such a mode of awareness *en-courages* insight and this leads us to the complex relationship between core construing, insight and this sense of connectedness.

‘Core constructs’ (Kelly, 1955) are “those by which [a person] maintains his identity and existence” (p. 482). They include the ways in which we distinguish ourselves as separate people, as the same in some respects, yet different from others. When we say we are ‘self-conscious’, we refer to an awareness of our ‘core’ (‘me’ in Mead’s terms). Kelly did not really discuss how or when this sense of personal identity originally develops, though it is clear that core construing is usually quite superordinate and subsumes multiple chains of implications. They are also, ideally, comprehensive structures which allow “the person to see a wide variety of events as consistent with his own personality” (p. 482). We have already suggested in passing that this sense of a separate self may have developed from a prior and more fundamentally social and empathic constructive process (Mead, 1956; Vygotsky, 1978; Winnicott, 1971). It may be that from a basic empathic ‘resonance’ or ‘sympathy’ with others (Mixon, 1999) we eventually derive a sense of self such that we can even empathise with ourselves, as it were, as an object or person to ourselves (Orange, 1995).

This confers on human beings an enormous adaptive advantage because we can carry this sense of self around with a relative independence of our surrounds and of our social context. This in turn allows for the development of imagination and of a probably uniquely human ‘theatre in the mind’, which may be conceived of as a type of symbolic workbench on which, at times, we can experiment, play and create in a virtual mental world (Shanon, 1993). Thus, the reflexive or conscious reasoning mind may be

derived from an essentially interpersonal, affectively-toned mode of construing linked to our self-maintenance. In this way a relatively 'private' mind has pragmatically-immersed, social origins.

But when our practised, reflexive processes of thought are frustrated we are inclined to feel 'cut off' from our world, as separate and anxious. We may need to once again loosen our anticipatory processes and to search in more inchoate fashion for a felt resonance with our social and physical environs. The 'trick' of reflexive consciousness, where we may notice we are 'out of synch' with our world, may also have given birth to the possibility of dualist thinking and, as Damasio (1995) put it, the resulting 'Cartesian anxiety' — the sense of separation of mind and body, person and world. The experience of insight, however, with its powerful sense of oneness and connectedness, is perhaps dualism's best rebuttal. This experience of 'anomie' or separation calls out for a less self-mediated, more fully present awareness, one which brings more of 'I' into one's anticipations.

Where our basic need to anticipate is blocked we have to 'remember' a state of being in which we non-selfconsciously empathise with and open ourselves to our environment. It is a return to a 'childlike' form of construing, an open-eyed stance often explicitly referred to by creative people (Gardner, 1993). It represents a relinquishing of prediction and control, of knowing, and it must be done with a sense of trust, like a securely attached child who is willing to explore and transcend the boundaries of his or her world (Bowlby, 1988).

A way of understanding this type of wordless, empathic 'being-with' or 'participatory knowing', is in terms of Gibson's (1979) notion of an 'affordance'. According to Gibson, the basic idea of an affordance is that we 'fit' with the world in terms of the mutually-defined structures and properties of the organism and its environment. Thus a tree may be *realised* (made real for that organism) by interactions with it as 'climbable', or an apple may be realised as edible.⁸⁵ Gibson said that 'environment', in these terms, was a 'relational term', being the sum total of such

⁸⁵ Note the enactive nature of the knowing implied by this understanding of affordances.

affording relationships. It is important to note here that, despite his relational definition of affordances, Gibson located affordances solidly *in* the external environment as objective facts which the organism discovers. It should be evident that I am not using affordances in this objectivist way, but see them as co-creations, as arising *between* person and environment and as distinct from unconstrued ‘things’ and ‘world’ which may be argued to logically pre-exist the person.

Relevant here in this discussion of affordances is a typically human, transcendent activity. When we move to the (human) world of symbolic or reflexive consciousness we begin to move to a transcendent world of humanly-created affordances. Thus Noble (1993) talked about the socially-mediated affordances of a post box which could never be derived directly from an ‘ambient array’ (Gibson, 1979) stimulating our nervous systems. For example, while a post box might be argued to have ‘natural’ affordances of ‘containership’ and ‘solidity’ and so on, its fully socially-prescribed function in terms of a system of communication, of institutional organisation and so on mark it as a linguistically and discursively created affordance.

In a similar way, we symbolically invest all sorts of ecologically ‘neutral’ events with life-sustaining significance (money, occupation, our memories of past performance). Even our assessments of our own capacity to anticipate become associated with survival — *our view of ourselves can be considered a type of affordance*. Thus, for example, negative self-efficacy may become a self-fulfilling prophecy as we tend to only utilise the ‘affordances’ inherent in this core construal. But when we can suspend such limited and limiting affective self-assessments, and utilise the radical capacity to open to the wider possibilities inherent in the complexities of the events we are perplexed by, then new ‘affordances’ may be found. Insight is a process in which just this sort of realisation of new affordances occurs.

This is directly analogous to the creature that moves around in its environment gathering more and more ‘information’ about some ambiguous situation at hand. At first, for example, we may react in fright at some unexpected sudden movement above us and then as we focus on the moving object, look at it from different angles seeing it

as a colourful bird, listen to its bird song and so on, the 'affordance' may change from 'fight or flight' to aesthetic pleasure. To overcome impasse we need to return to the world again and again by loosening our construing, by adopting an 'objective attitude'. That is, we may open ourselves to realise affordances we have been blind to, which we have not made possible by our tightly construed predictive outlook. By 'standing under' the world in this way we may come to 'under-stand' it in a new way.

This is strange language so I'll try to express it in more everyday terms. As a very young child one's needs for sustenance, warmth and body contact are construed in relation to our care-givers. We cry when hungry and a parent meets our need. The appearance of the parent may in itself calm us since we come to construe he or she as related to our self-maintenance. Indeed, it seems that very young babies do not distinguish ourselves very clearly from their primary caregivers (a separate 'me' is not clearly construed), or indeed from features of their environment generally. Nonetheless, over time we learn to relate our own anticipatory capacities to our self-maintenance. Most likely, the better we have anticipated people and events in the past, the better our fortunes and the more positive our self assessments (self efficacy).

The assessment that events are beyond our capacities to anticipate is likely to be an anxious experience. We feel 'disconnected' or 'alone', not fit for the world. We try out our formerly successful strategies and solutions to whatever our problem is, but they do not help us. Their 'affordances' (what they allow us to do) do not fit the current circumstances. We may keep 'tightly' to what we already 'know' (and avoid negative self-assessments this way). Or, we may loosen our approach. We may consider we have been uncertain or anxious in the past and have come up with some pretty good solutions. Maybe this is an opportunity for even more facilitative solutions. Maybe this invalidation is not saying something bad about my anticipatory capacity after all? These types of 'metacognitions' or affective assessments themselves have behavioural implications and possibilities (affordances). Maybe the experience of confusion and impasse can be given profound meaning. Given an awareness that our self-maintenance generally is in hand, perhaps we can experiment and play, we can loosen and create. In

this way, such a transcending affective awareness is a type of created affordance, one which finds in circumstances previously discovered to be ‘bad’, possibilities which are decidedly ‘good’.

Our relationship with our world is analogous to participating in a conversation. Frequently, understandings emerge in the ‘doing’ of it and cannot be predicted in advance. Conversations are awkward and stilted if we think about them too much, or try to predict too much in the midst of them. In spontaneous, insightful ‘conversations’ with our world we anticipate with our whole being. Just as we transform the air we breathe in the act of breathing it, insight processes are transformative acts, transforming both knower and known. Even ‘pure’ thought — the sort of thought experiments and playing with mental imagery so frequently reported in the insight literature — is performed in an ecologically-framed way, ‘as if’ it were being enacted in a possible world. And, as Kelly and the neopragmatic constructivist approach I endorse suggest, ‘pure insight’ in itself is insufficient. Its true worth is realised within completed experience cycles. In any case, ‘virtual’ action in the shape of ‘inner’ mental processes is a derived capacity and it gathers its unique, creative power from its relative remove from the constraints of our physical surround. Nonetheless, all those who have examined insight have commented on its profligate nature and on the crucial role of elaboration and verification.

My main interest here is that in the process of insight our ‘normal’ self-referential consciousness may, at important stages, give way to this more empathic ‘being-with’ mode of awareness — a mode of awareness that may have been ‘designed’ for circumstances of uncertainty and ill-definition, such as confronts the young child before reflexive consciousness, language and memory aid in making the world more predictable. As I have suggested, this primary ‘sympathetic’ mode of construing would allow for the development of a more reflexive consciousness, one which in turn allows for the building up of knowledge of the world and for making the world more manageable, less uncertain, more predictable — an enormous ecological advantage.

But when such trusted knowing fails us, or leads to impasse, we need to return to this primary, less tightly structured and more ‘radical’ knowing (in the sense of ‘at root’ — from the Latin ‘radix’). This original wordless sociality may be considered as if it were the nourishing source of our growing ‘tree’ of knowing. This idea is consistent with the argument that ‘presentational’ modes of consciousness form the foundations on which reason and propositional thought are based. This latter style of construing is typically preverbal and difficult, if not impossible, to capture in words. Part of the appeal of this idea is that this would also be a fundamentally ‘emotional’ or ‘feeling’ awareness. This, of course fits the peculiar phenomenology of insight that we are trying to capture theoretically. The feeling of connectedness would then be a feature of a non-selfconscious mode of construing. This sense of connectedness perhaps can even be extended to apply in an ‘ecological’ sense to one’s world in general. This would be a transpersonal sense of one-ness or symmetry characterised by a lack of self-consciousness and of self-concern.

What I am describing is a transcending, affective ability to be able to suspend anxiety and self-concern even though one is at impasse. Whereas the incapacity to anticipate would often invoke core construing⁸⁶ — especially when there is a high level of commitment to the project at hand — what is required for insight is a transcendent use of this capacity for ‘sympathy’ or ‘empathy’, a way of being perfectly designed for the clue-poor ‘Klondike’ world into which we are thrust, but from which ‘gold’ may be gathered. Thus we may at times use this ‘primitive’ mode of construing in a way that transcends, in the sense of taking it to another level, the meeting of personal needs and concerns for self-maintenance. This is a way of being that inspired Kelly to encourage us to ‘transcend the obvious’, to dare to alter even our fundamental assumptions. Significantly, this requires pragmatic commitment, daring and courage, not an intellectual detachment from the world.

⁸⁶ Not all cases of impasse would be expected to invoke core construing or significant self-concern. We may be stuck on matters which are relatively non-core (‘peripheral’ in Kelly’s terms), or which are quite incidental to our concerns. But for important impasses, especially in domains which the person values, we frequently ‘identify’ with our efforts to anticipate. The incapacity to understand in areas important to us can be a threatening experience. In this sense, ‘maintenance processes’ are frequently just as much a matter of ‘psychological survival’ as actual physical survival.

11.3 WAITING UPON INSIGHT

11.3.1 Meditative Thinking

I began with Meno's paradox about the difficulty of inquiry into that which we do not yet know. And now I have come full circle and produced a new paradox. I have rejected the unwarranted certainties of objectivist worldviews, based as they are on naïve correspondence views of truth which drastically underspecify the role of the knower in the knowing. Yet the world has a voice in our constructions of its nature, it interrupts our soliloquy, it constrains what we think and do with its demand for the coherence and viability of our constructions. And what is to be done when our understanding is confounded, frustrated at every turn and confronted with the contradictory implications of our own patterns of meaning and understanding? The answer I have given is that we must adopt an 'objective outlook'. We must give up knowing in order to know.

We are left with the undoing of thought and, if we are 'en-couraged' enough, are immersed in a higher activity of mind. Our customary predication outlook — our 'looking-for' based on the fundamental intensionality of our being — is temporarily abandoned. To use Heidegger's (1959) distinction between 'waiting for' and 'waiting upon', we wait upon we know not what, but adopt an openness to what may come. In this we relinquish our driving subjectivity and open ourselves to objectivity. We catch ourselves in the act of constructing meaning, of construing objects and events, and in so doing we discern the horizons or range of convenience of our constructions. We attend now to the *process*, as against the *content* of construing itself, to the implicit affective preferences which determine our conceptualisations. Now our assertions of meaning are seen *as* assertions and are thereby undercut as unipolar designations of the way things are. There emerges an opening of meaning possibilities.

So to gain new insight, new understanding, we must give up some understanding, especially the desire to immediately understand. Paradoxically, this

renunciation must be contained within our abiding resolve for truth. Truth, in this sense, is something that happens always and everywhere, but, for us, is necessarily clothed in our psycho-logic, our subjectivity. This ‘inner’ movement of releasing or relinquishing represents a willingness to embrace the finitude of our understanding in relation to the infinity and the totality of the world that includes, yet transcends, us. It requires an epistemic humility.

This also corresponds to the movement from asymmetrical-to-symmetrical-to bi-modal thought that I have compared to Kelly’s Creativity Cycle. Some experience of the fragmentation of one’s thought is necessary in this process. The implicative incompatibility of one’s efforts at understanding must be experienced, accepted and reconstituted within a higher reconciliation or synthesis. This is where our transcending affective awareness allows the openness of symmetrical thinking to merge with the asymmetrical, to inform it, to enrich it, to lend it depth and to allow for the multi-dimensionality that ‘logical’ (asymmetrical) thought by itself cannot reach. In this way feeling is “a vehicle for articulate knowing”, as Mair (1980, p. 121) put it. When we become aware of our emotional processes, we can become aware of our state of our construing which may give us a measure of transcendence of our outlook. This allows us to see our construing *as* construction and thereby presents the possibility for loosening it up.

This equanimous awareness is a type of affective stance of principled non-grasping; of affectionate curiosity and receptivity that transcends objectivism and our subjectivity because it neither cares for certainty nor is willing to impose its own structures on what is given. Rather, it relinquishes judgement and releases expectation for some thing in particular, content to wait upon whatever comes. It is neither active nor passive because it reveals the interpenetration of person and world for which willing or not-willing is less relevant. As Heidegger put it: “Man’s true nature may relate directly to what transcends him” [sic] (1959, p. 23). This is entirely consistent with the sense of exteriority and spontaneity so typical of insight experiences. On the other hand, Heidegger’s contrast to meditative thinking, ‘calculative thinking’, deals with

things in our terms, for our more immediate advantage, representing what is already known of things. This is tight construing which is primarily concerned with prediction and control. When such calculative processes are inhibited, creativity and insight become possible.

11.3.2 Beyond Self As Content To Self As Process

As we have seen, a very special dimension of the insight experience is a shift in our sense of self. I have argued that such a shift away from self-concern enables a creative or productive loosening of construing. Exactly the same process occurs within meditative thinking. By ‘meditative thinking’, Heidegger was not thinking about formal meditational practices or some exotic, rarely achieved state. Such a (relative) liberation from self-concern does not have to involve a formal practice or even intent. In our everyday lives we may have this experience of spontaneity and self-forgetting in the context of our social engagements. In fact, the experience of a non-unified self (Gergen, 1991) can be a common, liberating experience. Take for instance some research relevant to this by Butt, Burr and Bell (1997) where participants were asked to complete ‘social self grids’:

It was found that while subjects all recognized a dispersion of themselves through various relationships, they also made spontaneous use of a ‘being myself’ construct. This ... was not identified with occupying particular construct poles, but with allowing themselves to be drawn pre-reflectively into social contexts. (p. 12)

As the authors noted, these findings do not mark the death of the ‘self’ or diminish its importance. There is still a “personal constructor” (p. 12), as they put it, even though self is dispersed and fragmentary. What was crucial for participants in this research was not that a particular self, or *content* was validated, but that one felt free to ‘be myself’ — in *whatever* spontaneous or pre-reflective form that took. What needed to be validated was the person as *process*, not so much any particular results of that process. In this way, ‘self’ is a process with a pre-reflective ‘I’ as the author and the ‘me’ as its context-

specific production. It is important that we go on producing selves, as the world changes, as we face different circumstances.

Coming to insight provides an interesting twist to this. In our role of taking the position of the ‘other’ towards ourselves, we must learn *to apply to ourselves* the unconditional acceptance and trust that we appreciate so much from other people. This is a part of the meditative, affective, welcoming openness to oneself that enables constructive freedom. The more we loosen our construing, the more we may come into touch with ourselves as process. As I said in the last chapter, changing awareness processes themselves is arguably more important in Kellian theory than the particular contents of core construing. Being able to alter one’s construing process is liberating and validating. Thereby we can come to transcend any particular way of identifying self. Such a conclusion is consistent with the findings of Butt, Burr and Bell (1997) who described this easy sense of acceptance:

There was a consensus that being oneself referred to the absence of self-consciousness and the relaxing of self-monitoring. Being oneself meant allowing oneself to be carried along in a social flow unreflectively and without exercising effort. (p. 25)

These ideas fit well the experience of insight. The reverie, loosening and meditative thought bring about a freedom to be whoever, and to think whatever, comes along. Critical self-judgement is relaxed even though attention may be directed, broadly, at one’s self processes. A feature of meditative thinking is that one cannot will, push or extort insight. One must value one’s experience, outlooks and intuitions, but in a non-grasping way. What is required is an affectionate, patient curiosity about one’s anticipatory processes. John Anderson’s introduction to Heidegger’s (1959) *Discourse on Thinking* captured this well:

There is a sense in which we wait without knowing for what we wait. We may wait, in this sense, without waiting for anything; for anything, that is, which could be grasped and expressed in subjective human terms. In this sense we simply wait, and waiting may come to have a reference beyond ourselves. (1959, p. 57)

This 'reference beyond ourselves' recalls the 'interbeing' that Thich Nhat Hanh (cited in Mair, 1995, p. 19) described. It is very much an aspect of a symmetrical awareness wherein distinctions between 'self' and other begin to blur. This helps explain the frequent reports that, within insight experiences, it was not 'me' that was solely responsible for the insight; that rather 'I' flowed with the insight as much as 'I' directed it. Again, this constitutes an experiential refutation of dualism and represents a type of knowing that can be considered more 'objective' in the sense that it is less 'subjective'. The 'price' one has to pay, however, is that such an insight into that which transcends our present understandings is not predictable and may indeed not be 'translatable'. One may have to struggle to express it, to give it some communicable form within the confines of a metaphor or image which captures some of its dimensions, leaving others inarticulate.

11.4 SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In summary, reflexive representational consciousness is important and necessary within one's mental economy. It is one of the things that gives us our distinct ecological advantage. But perhaps an even more distinctive human capacity is our meditative, contemplative consciousness, the 'third' mode of mind which returns to our tacit presentational 'knowing from', but this time to observe it, to allow it to unfold (Hunt, 1995; Varela et al., 1996). First the assumptions of deliberative thought are put aside. Then one's 'automatic' or very fast affective assessments and habits of thought may themselves come into view. In deep levels of reverie we reach the symmetry so richly and eloquently discussed in Matte-Blanco. But now this symmetrical awareness is not in a context of pathology, of the unwilling distortion and lack of control over conscious thought (bi-logic). Now it is via a transcending affective awareness which is calm and broadly attentive.

The ways to this are many: meditation, relaxing, perceptual rehearsal, flowing associative activity, alternation between intense periods of work and idle time, and so on. Rather than symmetry itself being the objective, there is a movement into bi-

modality, a style of thought which has the emotional and aesthetic layers of thought, with their attendant multidimensionality, held within a permeable and comprehensive superordinate understanding. This movement into a tighter structure of understanding constitutes the immediate experience of insight. The path to such a state seems always to involve a letting-go, a renunciation of prediction and control. It represents the deliberate holding off from validational 'testing', from tightening up structures in order to commit to involvement. This is a deliberate cultivation of nonvalidation within cycles of loosening and tightening.

CHAPTER 12: INTERVIEWING FICTION WRITERS

ABOUT INSIGHT

The idea of going straight to the essence of things is an inconsistent idea if one thinks about it. What is given is a route, an experience which gradually clarifies itself, which gradually rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and with others. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 21)

12.1 THE INSIGHTS OF WRITERS: SOME EXPECTATIONS

12.1.1 Introduction

It is now time to see if the theoretical understanding of the processes of insight outlined in the previous chapter can enable us to anticipate the insight experiences of Australian fiction writers. Throughout the pages and chapters of this work I have tried, as Merleau-Ponty suggests above, to not go directly to the ‘essence’ of insight, but to develop a gradually clarifying route, an inquiry converging on insight. Having completed the main task of this thesis, developing a theoretical understanding of insight processes, it is now time to expose that understanding to others, to discover in dialogue with the writers whether this understanding is promising, and whether it can be further clarified and expanded. This empirical engagement represents only a first step in validating the theoretical structure developed thus far.

The specific features of writer insights that I expect to find (see below) have all been drawn from the theoretical understanding developed in the preceding chapters. For heuristic purposes they have been grouped, with some overlap, into five factors. Again, these factors have all been prominent in the theoretical understanding I have been developing. Not all writers are expected to mention all features, but all are expected to describe some features belonging to each ‘factor’. There is no sequence or order of importance implied in the setting out of these factors. In addition, and more generally, the interviews are expected to reveal that the writers’ insights reflect the classic stages given in the literature. Overall, it is also predicted that the writers will evidence a general ‘constructivist’ approach to their art-form.

12.1.2 Five Factors Expected To Relate To Writers' Insights

12.1.2.1 Metaphoric And 'Imagistic' Awareness

This factor picks up a number of major themes in this work. Clearly metaphorical and 'imagistic' processes have been implicated in insight. In Kellian terms we have seen that metaphorical extensions of current ways of understanding may work by linking previously unassociated subsystems of construing. This is likely to occur during Creativity Cycles (loosening and then tightening) which potentially open up flurries of new meanings. Such processes are comparable to Matte-Blanco's notion of bi-modal thought (wherein looser associative processes are 'contained' within tighter judgements of distinction or difference). Perception-like imagery associated with insight may indicate a more presentational mode of thought — a special form of which may be cross-modal synesthesia. Some specific expectations which flow from these general observations are that:

- Writers should shift into more metaphorical and 'imagistic' modes of thinking leading up to their insightful breakthroughs.
- There should be evidence of a central metaphor or image which seems to 'inform' their work.
- Writers should report a flurry of ideas united by some image or metaphor and this experience may exhibit a world-like contextual 'wholeness'.
- This latter feature should be consistent with the idea of accessing alternative superordinate structures and thereby multiple systems of implications and meaning.
- Writers should report playing through scenes in the mind. This may take the form of a presentational imagery or symbolism and result in imagery with sensory-like qualities and something of the 'freshness' of perception.
- There may be evidence of cross-modal synesthesia leading to conscious insight.

12.1.2.2 Two Modes Of Awareness

Throughout this work a central theme has been the connection between alternating modes of awareness and insight — whether expressed in terms of representational versus presentational symbolism, tight versus loose construing, asymmetrical versus symmetrical logic, focused versus defocused attention, or fast means-end thinking versus slower contemplative thought. A crucial part of all the ‘looser’ modes of thought (to the tighter ‘representational’ way of thinking) is a playful tolerance of uncertainty or absurdity.

- Writers should report that deliberate, focused attention gives way to periods characterised by a looser, defocused attention.
- Writers should describe purposeful alternations between loose (more symmetrical) and tight (more asymmetrical) construing processes (Creativity Cycles) which are embedded in larger Experience Cycles. These cycles should be characterised by looser associative processes being provisionally tightened then loosened again.
- These alternations should also represent what Matte-Blanco called ‘bi-modal’ thinking — the harmonious experience of both symmetrical and asymmetrical awareness.
- A common feature is expected to be the reported capacity to tolerate playfully, even encourage, ambiguity, uncertainties, even contradictories in thinking. This ‘negative capability’ will alternate with periods of anxiety and frustration.
- An identifying feature of writer experiences should be the recurring capacity to give up the immediate desire to understand, to wait-upon insight rather than to look-for a predictable solution.
- Writers should report alternations between a type of ‘slower’ meditative thinking and a faster, means-end thinking.

12.1.2.3 Emotional Thinking And Embodiment

Earlier chapters were dedicated to the links between ‘emotion’, embodiment and insight. Instead of a hard-and-fast distinction between thought and feeling it has been argued that understanding and anticipation are always ‘emotional’ in that thought is imbued

with affective themes and qualities. In particular, it was proposed that ‘emotional’ construing is implicated in changes in understanding such as insight represents. A distinction was drawn between more active and more passive emotional styles of anticipation. As a part of this active feeling intelligence, mental life is considered to be a fully physical, embodied phenomenon. The type of knowing that would represent such embodied anticipation would be personal and participatory. Such a style of knowing is, in periods of insight, expected to engender feelings of ‘connectedness’ with one’s work and one’s world generally.

- Writers are expected to describe their processes surrounding insights as ‘emotional’ or affectively nuanced and they should be adept at using their affective sensitivities to insightful advantage. That is, their emotional awareness will be more ‘active’ than ‘passive’.
- Affective self-management: I would expect that writers utilise a number of ‘tricks’ and strategies to avoid self invalidation and anxiety; that they keep going despite impasse and that they can delay the pragmatics of construction and can lessen the immediate desire to know.
- Affective ‘feelings of knowing’ should represent quite superordinate structures with multiple chains of implication imbuing one’s construing with a sense of direction and purpose. This transcending ‘aesthetic’ emotion should mark the subjective experience of an active ‘feeling’ intelligence moving towards insight.
- Writers are expected to report insight as an embodied and physical experience, as well as a ‘purely intellectual’ one.
- Insight processes are expected to be enactive. Writers should ‘perceptually rehearse’, immersing themselves in the medium of their work for its own sake. This is expected to be experienced at times as ‘concrete’ images with a perception-like phenomenology. For example, writers are expected to play with words in presentational ways: being sensitive to tone, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, context, imagining scenes, hearing voices and so on.
- Writers should talk about insights emerging within an overarching context of purpose, commitment and impassioned involvement in a project. This should lead to

personal or participatory knowing, an indicator of which may be strong feelings of ‘connectedness’ and integration.

12.1.2.4 Intuitive Awareness

As we have seen, there is a considerable amount of research implicating intuitive understanding within insight. Looser, more associative mental modes of thinking have been found to precede important insights, frequently within periods of reverie and absorption. It has been suggested that such states reflect a type of what Heidegger called ‘meditative thinking’ in which the person receptively, but not passively, waits upon insight rather than ‘end-gaining’ or pre-empting what is to come. Such states of anticipation are quite often accompanied by a sense that the insight is being ‘dictated’ to the person and that the person is thereby being ‘guided’ by intuitive or ‘unconscious’ structures of understanding.

- Generally speaking, writers are expected to describe tacit and ‘unconscious’ knowing processes as being crucial to their insights.
- Such intuitive processes are expected to be relatively loose and to be characterised by associative thinking and by periods of absorption, fantasy and reverie.
- Writers’ accounts should include descriptions of ‘meditative thinking’ characterised by a personal or participatory knowing — a sense of knowing with the ‘other’, of participating with the known. This is expected to be a slower style of thinking which does not try to jump to solutions or ‘end-gain’.
- Reports of a type of a steady defocussed attention should be common, as should reports of solutions suddenly ‘popping’ into awareness following a period of loose, intuitive contemplation. This would coincide with the tightening up loosened construing and accessing alternative superordinate structures of implication.
- I expect writers to mention unconscious or tacit mental processes as ‘guiding’ and ‘providing’ them with their insights. They should describe themselves as ‘recipients’ of insights, the latter manifesting a type of exteriority and spontaneity.
- Overall it is expected that writers will report ‘feelings of knowing’ which they may not be able to justify or articulate. That is, they are expected to spend a good deal of

their ‘creative’ time in a state of conscious ‘not-knowing’, yet have an overarching feeling that they are heading ‘somewhere’.

12.1.2.5 Experience Of Self And Social Factors

If the pragmatist-phenomenological elements of my account of insight are appropriate, then the writers’ accounts of their insights should include descriptions of shifts in self-experience as well as an awareness of the social/ecological ‘embeddedness’ of their insight processes. For example, we have seen that emotional self-management enables a release from self-consciousness and self-concern. Such a state seems to be predictive of insight. There are more positive aspects to this shift in self-experience, however.

Relevant here is the already-mentioned expectation of a deep sense of ‘connectedness’ and integration in relation to insight. Such an experience is expected to be deeply self-validating and to give the person a sense of his or her place within a social and ‘ecological’, even perhaps ‘cosmic’, context. The participatory knowing involves more of the self-as-construer (the ‘I’) and less of the self-as-construed (the ‘me’), and there is likely to be the sense in which the experience transcends, yet includes, the person. In related fashion, we have seen that insight is often reported as an intensely personal experience, which nonetheless has an ‘exterior’, event-like character.

- The writers should report shifts in their experience of self, especially a periodic release from frustration, self-concern and self-absorption.
- Writers may describe a deep sense of integration and validation of their selves amid significant (for them) insight processes.
- Writers may report that they experience more of the ‘I’ as construer and less of the ‘me’ as self-consciousness. The joy of insight may be tied to experiencing more of ‘self-as-process’ in this way. It may also be revealed as a type of trust and faith in oneself, a type of transcending self-confidence and security.
- The accounts should include experiences of a fully embodied immersion and connectedness, a type of ‘resonance’ with their world and a sense of being a part of the material and spiritual world that transcends them. Again, this participatory

knowing may be distinguished by a blurring of the distinctions between inner and outer, self and world.

- The writers are expected to describe insight experiences as socially-inscribed processes, as very much a part of a larger socially-imbued ‘conversation’. They are expected to be aware of the discursive, normative constraints which inform their work, which nonetheless they are trying to transcend.
- In the interviews there should be evident a reported sense of the ‘event-like’ quality of insight for which the writers nonetheless feel peculiarly responsible and proud. There may also be a sense that the insight transcends them, that it is ‘wiser’ than them.

12.1.3 Expected General Features: The Classic Stages Of Insight And A Constructivist Outlook

In addition to the specific features suggested above, I would also expect that writers’ reports will, overall, reflect the classic stages of insight as well as a general constructivist outlook in relation to their work. Firstly, writers will be expected to describe processes of preparation, incubation, insight, and elaboration. Furthermore, it should be the case that writers will eschew objectivist views of knowing and understanding. Rather, it is expected that they will endorse a more constructivist approach to meaning and understanding processes. That is, they are expected to describe a more participatory and hypothetical approach to the world in which meaning is created by immersion and action in the world.

Such an outlook is expected to be predication, teleological and (forward looking but not necessarily predictive) and purposive. It would be non-rationalist in the sense that ‘mind’ is characterised as much by affective awareness, by tacit feel and by looser associative processes as it is by conscious logical inference and deduction. A constructivist view of mind emphasises meaning and understanding (not just ‘knowing that’) and conceptualises this in the context of the person’s pragmatic engagement with the world and in terms of perturbations to this engagement. One’s understanding is

characterised in terms of its viability and coherence rather than by any direct correspondence with a presumed extra-conceptual reality.

12.2 METHOD AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

12.2.1 Participants

Seven highly successful Australian fiction writers,⁸⁷ of both sexes (four female, three male) and all over forty years of age, were chosen for interview. Other target groups could have been used (academics, scientists, and so on), but well-known and well-published fiction writers were chosen because it was felt that:

1. It was reasonable to assume that they had experienced significant insights in the course of their creative lives.
2. Creative writers frequently think and write about creativity and often teach creative writing. It was felt, therefore, that they should have well-developed theories of insight (being a crucial part of creativity). With their facility with words writers should also be able to articulate their experiences and theories well.

12.2.2 Materials

Writers signed consent forms (Appendix 1) which guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview protocols. They were also supplied with an information form (Appendix 2) which specified the three main areas of interest to be covered in the interview as:

1. A discussion of significant experiences of insight related to your work as a writer.
2. A discussion of the ways in which you organise your creative life, both on a day-to-day basis, and in terms of longer time-frames.
3. Your own views on the nature and genesis of creative insight.

The interviewer had a checklist of thematic areas which he consulted from time to time to make sure the main areas of interest were covered. These themes basically reflected

⁸⁷ Several of the participants are also well-published non-fiction writers.

the expected features to emerge in writer interviews given above. Interviews were tape-recorded for transcription purposes.

12.2.3 Procedure

Writer confidentiality was assured because it was felt this would allow the writers to speak more freely about their personal experiences which were expected to be quite emotional and at times intimate or personal. In all but one case interviews were conducted in the writers' homes or workplaces. The interviews were lengthy, ranging from forty-five minutes to one and a half hours. The first interview was the longest, and was used as a pilot. At the conclusion of the formal interview feedback from the writer confirmed that the content, format and procedure used were meaningful and appropriate. Subsequent interviews were carried out with an unchanged format. In all, seven interviews were completed. With only one exception, all writers approached consented to be interviewed — the one exception being for personal reasons. Indeed, the writers were enthusiastic about the project and, in particular, were keen to discuss their creative processes — as against the meaning and content of their work (which they normally are asked about). All writers are well published and in productive stages of their careers. Most participants write novels, though one participant writes primarily for the stage, and another largely, though not exclusively, a type of 'creative' non-fiction.

12.2.4 The Interview Process

Because of the elusive, emotional and complexly rich nature of insight experiences, the mode of inquiry most suited to exploring such a subtle and nuanced phenomenon was considered to be qualitative⁸⁸ (Neimeyer, 1993; Viney, 1988). Such an approach is consistent with Kelly's (1955) idiographic, non-questionnaire focus (Oades, 1999; Viney, 1988) and with his later emphasis on personal involvement and attending to

⁸⁸ I do not intend to suggest an absolute distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Clearly the transcripts could be coded and turned into quantitative data of many kinds. But in this work the emphasis will be on the overall qualitative meaningfulness of the interview accounts and conversations as given.

process (Butt, 1996). A relatively unstructured and conversational interview was used in order to get as close as possible to the writers' fully contextualised experiences and to enable them to re-experience imaginatively their important insights as fully as possible (Smith, J. A., 1995). Such a mode of inquiry is, arguably, more likely to get closer to the *processes* of a person's construing, as against structure or content (Butt, 1996; Mair, 1989; Oades, 1999; Oades & Viney, 1999) and this accords with the theoretical emphasis I have been proposing.

Gathering narrative accounts in the context of a semi-structured interview was considered appropriate to this end because the main task was to understand how these writers operate in an as fully holistic and contextualised fashion as possible (Brenner, 1985; Mishler, 1995; Smith, J. A., 1995). In addition, the data can then be integrated into subsequent, more quantitative research (Jick, 1979; Lamiell, 1995). One function of the interviews was to test the hypotheses or expectations outlined above. As suggested earlier in this work, however, the interviews were also expected to reveal the unexpected and so were also exploratory in nature. Generally speaking, the approach to interviewing and analysis followed the procedures for semi-structured interviews as given in Smith (Smith, J. A., 1995).

The structure of the interviews were as follows. All writers were first asked how they organised their creative lives (from hour-to-hour up to project-length time frames). Typically, they were then asked to recall and describe significant insights in their creative, working lives. The writers had little trouble with these phases of the interview, speaking fluently and lucidly. Writers were then asked for their own theories of insight. Finally, the researcher shared something of his emerging views of insight in response to issues arising from what the interviewee had said and a more free-flowing dialogue was entered into with each writer.

It was hoped that conversational interviewing, with its flexibility and sensitivity to nuance, would provide both depth and complexity (Mair, 1979; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Four procedural priorities within semi-structured interviewing (Smith, J. A., 1995, p. 12) were followed: 1) rapport with interviewees was of prime importance; 2)

the order of questions was secondary to maintaining such rapport; 3) the interviewer posed interesting questions as they arose in response to interviewee suggestions; 4) if interviewees spontaneously ‘jumped ahead’ in the interview schedule, then the interviewer followed the writer’s lead, as long as the main areas of inquiry were covered throughout the interviews. This is in keeping with an ‘objective attitude’ (Warren, 1998) which allows for events to occur in unanticipated ways.

As it turned out, writers typically did pre-empt the order of the interview. The researcher had a checklist of major themes which were consulted from time to time in order to ensure coverage of the main thematic areas proposed in the previous chapter. Broadly speaking, in the first half to two thirds of the interviews the researcher took care to not reveal his own views and tended to be non-directive, while the latter stages of the interviews tended to be more interactive. This latter ‘mutual orientation’ (Viney, 1987) is consistent with the constructivist contention and acknowledgement that both parties are participants in, and are affected by, the research process (see also Reason & Heron, 1995, for their similar notion of ‘Co-operative Inquiry’).

Another type of ‘objectivity’ is preserved in such a qualitative approach. That is, a type of ‘ecological validity’ was retained by encouraging writers to describe in detail their insight experiences in terms of their original contexts. Accounts of their insights were always in the context of their writing, and each writer was assisted to reconstruct imaginatively the experience by describing it in detail: when it was, where they were exactly, who they were with, what the bodily experience was, what they said or did (if anything) and so on. Such ‘thick’, highly contextualised description led some of the writers (for example, writers 1, 2, 5 and 7) to become quite animated and to comment on re-feeling something of how they felt during the original experience. While not quite a role re-enactment, this approach is consonant with a constructivist approach to research as ‘dynamic interaction’ (Yardley, 1995).

An important consideration was that the participants themselves would find the procedure illuminating, enjoyable and beneficial (Viney & Bousfield, 1991). Considering I wanted them to re-visit moments of insight, the tone of the interviews was

to be comfortable and enjoyable, to enable the writers to relax and to occasionally engage in looser, ‘presentational’ thinking. Therefore, interviews were to be conducted in surroundings they felt ‘at home’ in. There is also an ethical and theoretical point here that flows from a general constructivist orientation. The writers were considered to be the ‘experts’ in this situation and our relationship was to be as co-inquirers, rather than as ‘experimenter and subjects’. Given the assumed dialectical nature of construing (Viney & Bousfield, 1991), a dialogue was considered appropriate to develop understanding beyond our individual, prior understandings. This is entirely consistent with the growing contemporary view of self as constructed and constantly re-constructed over time (Guidano, 1991; Harré & Gillett, 1994).

Another important distinction here is between the ‘telling’ and the ‘told’. The interviews were not expected to produce ‘objective’ reports of essentially ‘retrievable’ past events, but to enable present approximations to past events, reconstructions of experiences. They were considered to be as much exploration as recounting, enabling participants to place order on the often subtle and elusive experiences of insights. In many respects writers may express understandings of their insights that they have not expressed or thought of before. In this way, the interview was to be an enabling space in which new understandings can emerge in dialogue. This may, however, raise the question of the independence of the data and it is important to respond to this question.

By way of response, it is acknowledged that there is no doubt that interviewers influence interviewee accounts — if only by the selection of topic areas to be covered, by the format of the interview and so on. Yet, in most psychological research there are these issues of the reliability and validity of the data due to ‘subject’ expectancies, and confounding ‘variables’ — usually unwittingly introduced by ‘experimenters’. Further, in deciding on research approach there is often a trade-off between qualitative richness and meaningfulness (closeness to people’s idiographic experience) and control and quantitative ‘purity’ of the data (by standardising questions and procedures or working more ‘nomothetically’). In this work, as I have suggested, the decision was to opt for maximum meaningfulness and closeness to participant experiences. Thus, interviewer-

interviewee influences are here acknowledged ‘up-front’. Given this acknowledgement, however, attempts were made to limit the possibilities of leading or biasing the participants’ responses.

Specifically, the writers were assured that there was no particular answer being looked for, and that what was really wanted was their views, their understandings and the uniqueness of their experiences. It was made clear that I was interested in differences between writers as well as similarities. As mentioned earlier, in attempting to maintain the ‘ecological validity’ of their accounts, all efforts were made to let the writers tell their own stories, particularly in the first half of the interviews, with interruptions only to clarify meaning or to assist the writer if stuck or to move things along if themes were sufficiently covered.

12.2.5 The Thematic Analysis

The primary contribution of this thesis has been the development of a constructivist theoretical account of insight. It is here augmented by a qualitative empirical study undertaken to enable a judgement as to whether this constructivist account of insight appears to be useful. The expected features, and the factors under which they nestle, have been drawn directly from the insight literature and from the framework developed in the present work. The transcripts (see Appendix 3) will be analysed for the features and the more general factors they represent.

There are obvious shortcomings to this approach and, accordingly, the data needs to be treated with caution, the analysis done with appropriate tentativeness. Principally, there is the problem of researcher subjectivity in determining whether writer statements conform to the expected features outlined above. Attempts to overcome this potential bias will take several forms. Firstly, following the procedure used by Warren and Rees (1975) and known as the 66/33 or ‘opinion poll rationale’, each writer’s account will be judged to have validated a factor only if the writer has clearly implicated two thirds or more of that factor’s features. This has been adopted because a simple

50% of features may not be rigorous enough, especially considering the dynamic or interactive nature of the interviews.

Secondly, page and paragraph references will be given for specific excerpts from each transcript judged to represent each feature. The reader will then be able to judge for himself or herself, in full context, the proposed match between the narrative excerpts and the expected features — giving a provisional type of inter-rater reliability. Given my primarily theory-building focus here, it is beyond the scope of this current work to engage in a thoroughgoing empirical analysis.

It may also be that the form of data gathering used here is inherently ‘conservative’ in that it relies mostly on the participants volunteering the concepts and features of their experiences in which the researcher may be interested. That is, it may lead to underestimating the relevance of the features to the writers’ insight experiences. The mere fact that a writer does not describe an expected feature of the experience of insight does not mean s/he does not endorse it. Finally, if the interviewer had in the course of the interview explicitly prompted the writer in terms of a feature, only the most emphatic agreement or endorsement by the writer was counted in the thematic analysis.

It would undoubtedly be more rigorous to have several judges undertake the thematic analysis and, using a measure of inter-rater reliability, thereby determine with more confidence the relevance of the suggested features within writers’ accounts of their insights (Perreault & Leigh, 1989; Viney, 1988). Indeed, in a future empirical study with more thoroughgoing aims, such an approach would be warranted. In the present circumstances, however, such an approach is not required.

This thesis has been dedicated primarily to developing a theoretical position in relation to insight. This constructivist account is new and its subject matter is complex and elusive. In order to understand the type of multidimensional account of insight I have been building, it is arguably necessary to have worked through this text, gradually developing an understanding of the factors I am expecting will be reflected in writers’ accounts. Consequently, the number of features predicted and the above-mentioned

complexity would make the training of judges and the negotiation of mutual understanding a too-lengthy process for current purposes.

In any case, before such a tightening process took place, it might be better to return to the writers with the preliminary analyses (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to validate the coding process. At this stage what would suffice is a general indication that the writers' accounts reflect the main emphases of the theoretical framework put forward. The approach is, as far as possible, to 'find' the proposed features of insight in their accounts of their creative processing, rather than to 'impose' them on those accounts; a Galileian rather than an Aristotelian approach (Warren, 1990). In the final chapter, more detailed suggestions will be made concerning future empirical investigations.

CHAPTER 13: INSIGHT IN ACTION:- WHAT THE WRITERS HAD TO SAY

13.1 THE RESULTS IN GENERAL TERMS

The writers’ accounts of their insights were highly concordant with the theoretical understanding developed in the Chapter 11. In broad terms, these accounts confirmed the five factors given in the preceding chapter with all five factors being implicated by a majority of writers (see Table 3 for a summary). Each transcript was coded for the presence of the anticipated features. If a writer’s transcript included examples of two thirds of a factor’s features, then that writer was said to have endorsed that factor (Warren and Rees, 1975).

Table 2. Presence of expected factors within writer accounts of insight processes.

5 FACTORS	WRITER INTERVIEWS							
	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	Total /7
METAPHORIC & ‘IMAGISTIC’ AWARENESS	Yes*	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	5/7
TWO MODES OF THINKING	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	4/7
EMOTIONAL THINKING & EMBODIMENT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	6/7
INTUITIVE AWARENESS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	6/7
EXPERIENCE OF SELF & SOCIAL FACTORS	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	5/7

* ‘Yes’ represents at least 66% of each factor’s features being expressed within an interview.

A thematic analysis of the expected features will be given in the next section (see Table 4), but it suffices to say here that all these features were given expression by at least one writer. Overall, the accounts reflected the classic stages of insight as given

in the insight literature and there is strong evidence that the writers approach their art-form in a constructivist fashion. Finally, there were un-anticipated findings as well, but none of these directly contradicted the understanding of insight I have been developing.

First some caveats are in order about the nature of the ‘data’ gathered. There is a tendency in retrospective reporting for participants to ‘telescope’ events (events that occurred over an extended period being seen as simpler and as occurring closer together than was originally the case). Respondents also tend to build a causal story from patterns of events which only happened to be arranged in a temporal sequence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There is often a tendency to make the processes described more integrated and cohesive than they may in fact have been.

In defence of the validity of the interview data in these respects, however, all the writers were insistent on the complexity and relative lack of order they observed in their own processes. They explicitly rejected notions that their insights and creative processes were simply logical, ordered processes and were, as a rule, happy enough to admit they did not fully understand how they came to insight. In general, the writers were not backward in disagreeing with me when they felt I had misrepresented their meaning or missed the point. Another general characteristic of the writers’ accounts — which reduces possible concerns about the writers being led or trying to please the interviewer — was their emphatic, often impassioned, nature. The writers were at times fervently insistent about their views and there was a high degree of consistency across their accounts.

13.2 ILLUSTRATING THE EXPECTED FEATURES OF WRITER INSIGHTS

13.2.1 Introduction

Illustrative excerpts will now be given for the specific features predicted in Chapter 12 to be involved in writer insight experiences. All seven writer interview transcripts are contained in Appendix 3 with paragraphs numbered consecutively. Specific paragraph

references will be given for each writer who says something relevant about each feature. Overall, the expected features were well-represented in writer accounts (see Table 4 for a summary).

Table 3. Presence of expected features within writer accounts of insight processes.

Metaphoric and Imagistic Awareness		Two Modes of Thinking		Emotional Thinking and Embodiment		Intuitive Awareness		Experience of Self and Social Factors	
FEATURE & no. of writers who described it		FEATURE & no. of writers who described it		FEATURE & no. of writers who described it		FEATURE & no. of writers who described it		FEATURE & no. of writers who described it	
Metaphoric & Imagistic as crucial	6	Tight focused vs. defocused attention	4	Insight & emotional sensitivity	7	Tacit & unconscious processes as crucial	5	Less self-conscious. Less self-concern	7
Central image or metaphor	5	Loose vs. Tight. Creativity Cycle	6	Affective self-managing	6	Reverie, associative, absorption, fantasy	7	Deep integration & self-validation	5
Flurry of ideas contextual wholeness	7	Symmetry & Asymmetry	3	Transcending aesthetic emotion	3	Meditative thought. Waiting-upon	4	More of 'I' as process. Joy	4
Alternative structures. Multi dimensions	4	Negative capability. Play with absurd	5	Insight as physical & embodied	5	Defocused & 'pop' into awareness	0	Inner & outer blur. Embodied immersion	5
Scenes in mind. Sensory-like	5	Give up knowing. Wait-upon	4	Enactive, immersed, participatory knowing	7	Intuitive 'guiding'. Exterior spontaneity	7	Socially inscribed. Discursive constraints	5
Crossmodal synesthesia & insight	2	Slower meditative vs. faster means-end	3	Feeling connected. Strong purpose	5	Feeling of knowing. Can't articulate	6	Insight transcends, is wiser & event-like	6

As can be seen above, the large majority of expected features were expressed by the writers. Only five of the thirty features were included in three or less of the interview

accounts. Only one received no support. These data give us cause for optimism that the theoretical framework from which they were drawn was predictive. As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, these data are provisional. Further work needs to be carried out, for example, to check the inter-item correlations as it seems intuitively plausible that there may be overlap between the meanings of various features for writers. But for the purposes of this present inquiry, rather than collapsing several features into one (thereby losing some of the distinctness of each feature), a larger number of slightly different features will do more justice to the subtlety and complexity of insight experiences.

Even when no-one specifically described a processes — for instance, ‘defocused attention being followed by insight popping into mind’ — it would be hasty to conclude such processes are not involved in writer insights. In this case, for example, both looser defocused attention and the sudden intrusion of insight as a ‘gift’ from without (a common motif) have been found in separate statements from the writers — but not linked in one statement. It may simply be that they did not happen to volunteer this information. Suggestions for further research in the next chapter will include ‘triangulation’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Jick, 1979) — returning to the writers and checking findings and conclusions with them as an intermediary step in theory development. In this case, writers could be asked directly if they could describe any experiences they have had in their work of defocused attention being suddenly displaced by insight popping into mind.

Nonetheless, for our purposes, the interviews provide solid support for the theoretical framework developed in this work. It is now time, therefore, to see how the features of insight were expressed and how they can be given expanded meaning in terms of the pragmatic constructivist understanding of insight I have proposed. The selection of excerpts given below have, therefore, been chosen in terms of their capacity to illuminate and clarify this theoretical perspective.

13.2.2 Metaphoric And ‘Imagistic’ Awareness

- *Writers should shift into more metaphorical and ‘imagistic’ modes of thinking leading up to their insightful breakthroughs.*

Writer 1, when asked what role metaphor, analogy, figurative thinking and imagery played in her insightful breakthroughs, replied:

W1: Oh huge! And the impact of a metaphor is something that is very hard to spell out. It’s ah, I really enjoy the sensation of a metaphor rather than actually figuring out what it means. (188)⁸⁹

There is more than a hint of a presentational, affective and non-literal awareness in play here. Note she points out that such a process is hard to articulate or ‘spell out’ and that she purposely keeps her figurative understanding provisional. She does not tighten it up, or close it off. She went on to say that “I saw the metaphor as that [the title of the book] constantly. It was like it helped write the book” (190). This latter observation illustrates the potential multidimensionality, the openness of the meaning of a metaphor. By keeping the metaphor open she has allowed it to inform the complex multidimensional structure of her novel. Most writers suggested emphatically that metaphor and mental imagery were central to their insights with six out of seven writers including this feature in their accounts (188; 342; 518, 520; 608; 816; 902-903).

- *Writers should report a flurry of ideas united by some image or metaphor and this experience may exhibit a world-like contextual wholeness.*

All the writers spoke about the way images and metaphors come as contextually-defined wholes. For example, Writer 1 spoke about images and insight coming as a gift and she expressed the richness and contextual wholeness in this fashion: “It’s more coherent than me and there’s a feeling that it’s already attached to itself. It’s pre-formed” (54). And further:

I was on the bus and it’s as if it flew in the window, the very first line of the novel, and I wrote it down on a bit of paper from my handbag.

⁸⁹⁸⁹ All quotations are referenced according to interview paragraph number. For example, ‘220’ in parentheses (220) will represent paragraph 220 in Appendix 3.

The sense was that everything in my mind was lining up behind that sentence as if it was the leader in a procession, but I wasn't consciously thinking of any of those bits. (54)

This strange sense that an important image or metaphor is whole, coherent and rich in meaning reflects the multidimensionality of metaphor discussed in Chapter 10 and is consistent with the accounts of symmetry, presentational consciousness and loose construing presented in this work. One way of understanding this is to imagine having to describe thoroughly a scene in a room. The full ambience that one may grasp may in fact take a 'novel' to adequately express. It may be symbolised in some image or metaphor, but takes the fully-developed context of a narrative, play, or novel to give it full multi-dimensional expression:

W2: So, all the way through, and I can give you many examples throughout the play, and it just startled me how everything I thought of had this kind of resonance without my realising it. ... and now looking at it there isn't a wasted image. Every image in the play, and I didn't do it consciously, feeds the whole theme. And whether the audience knows it or not, I don't know, but I think it must subliminally work to pull, to unify the themes of the play. (364)

This sense of flurries of ideas contextually united by a metaphor was an ubiquitous feature of the interviews with all seven writers including it in their accounts of insight (54; 128, 364; 528; 620; 836; 906; 1062).

- *There should be evidence of a central metaphor or image which seems to 'inform' the writers' work.*

Closely related to this idea of contextual richness and fecundity is the idea that an image or metaphor may form some sort of centre or structural inspiration for a whole work.

With this idea is the feeling that the metaphor 'writes' the writer. Writer 2 gave a good example of this, describing a birthing metaphor in which a person engaged in 'caving' (a 'speliologist') emerged from a narrow cave:

W2: ... he emerged from the cave and I found myself watching him come up. 'Cos a cave, I used to think, was just like a big opening and you walk in. And in fact it can be a little hole in the ground and you just lower yourself into it in a grassy hill or field or hillside. And ...so I had him coming out, his hair coming out through the grass...so only,

his face coming up into the light. And only afterwards did I actually see it as a very powerful birth metaphor [image]. Yes, image. Now that kind of symbolism you just can't think of intellectually. It has to emerge from the work. And the work then speaks back to you and if you can pick it up. (352)

This writer went on to explain how this birthing metaphor informed the whole work.

We can see other features of insight here. Clearly her writing process evidences a tacit, intuitive guidedness and the writer may not be fully aware of the meaning being developed. In this case the writer claimed that she did not see it until after the book was published. Again, she understood 'presentationally' that this was a powerful scene, and only much later did she grasp its wider significance 'representationally'. Writer 7 also talked about discovering an idea or image that was at the very centre of her work without her realising it.

W7: And suddenly, seemingly out of the blue was the idea that one of her husbands had committed suicide, in a very horrible way. And that this... and she feels responsible, basically. Now I don't know where that came from. So it was that same sense of... and as soon as I thought of it, it was CLEARLY right, and, this was the thing about it, it was as if it had always been there. It was as if for four years I had been working knowing that, writing about it. And I hadn't just actually bothered to put it into the text. It had that sense about it. I don't know what that means. (1088)

Realising this particular meaning constituted a sudden insight for her and she spent the next four days 'painting' in the details to her book now that she understood the deep structure of the book. Five out of seven writers included this feature in their accounts of insight (192; 352; 628, 900; 1088).

- *This notion of a central image or metaphor producing flurries of ideas should be consistent with the idea of accessing alternative superordinate structures and thereby multiple systems of implications and meaning.*

The flurries of images and ideas following insight is probably made possible by a shifting of construct hierarchies allowing access to alternative networks of implications. This looser multidimensionality can be handled, even enjoyed, because of the thorough, often prolonged preparation that writers undertake. Writer 7 described how she works

through more than twenty drafts of her novels, frequently not seeing the significance of the early material until the very last drafts. In her current novel, for example, she had just about ‘finished’ the book before she saw how it fitted together. This was the insight that she described above (1088) and she then spent a few days integrating it into the novel. Often the unifying insight is so implicit, perhaps so superordinate, that it is difficult to grasp. Or it may be full of implications, not all of them necessarily welcome:

W7: Now I’ve forgotten what great writer said this. But some great writer said ‘every novel is written in order to conceal one sentence in it’, or words to that effect. And as soon as I read that I thought ‘Yes’. ‘That’s absolutely true’. And maybe that’s why, it’s like, you, it’s such a concealed thought that you can’t let yourself, for whatever reason, you can’t allow yourself to think it and yet the whole work has to be written to try to understand it. (1090)

This sense of a whole work being needed to express and communicate one idea is reminiscent of the insight literature’s emphasis on elaboration. An insight unifies and connects domains of understanding and can therefore require much detail to communicate it. This superordinate connection between domains may be very hard to grasp and it takes the multidimensionality of the whole novel to reveal it, to elaborate it. The structures are patiently constructed for the central insight to be contained by, to be anchored in. The insight is then ‘set off’, as I have suggested, like a complex structure built of dominoes. Or in Martindale’s (1995) terms, we ‘fill’ the mind with knowledge and provide it with a problem it cannot solve. By keeping one’s attention open to the problem, not clutching prematurely for an answer, and by letting our thoughts wander to ever wider connections, there is more chance that some remote associate or some clue from the world will push such ‘activated’ ‘lateral’ ideas over the threshold of consciousness and the resulting connections will pop into the mind as an insight. The key is to find metaphorical and analogical links with other meaning structures:

W6: ... it’s got to find partners or it’s got to become a link in a chain somehow or other to acquire it’s full meaning, or a new meaning... I’ve taken it in as a gripping image, but I want to reinforce and somehow alter and amplify that meaning. And I have to do it with other connectives, other associated images. But I’ve got to find those and

I've got to give it a new life somehow or other. It's a new and an enhanced life if you think of it in those terms. (913)

Such experiential processes seem to reveal the highly superordinate, implicit structures of mind. The writers do not experience normal, conscious, reflexive 'control' over their writing processes, and it is largely their tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1967) that guides and allows them to 'know more than they can say'. In the case of the writers interviewed, they discover 'more than they can say' in the words they write, in the *act* of writing. Generally the writers expressed the need to 'transform' an image or metaphor such that it can carry this multidimensionally 'enhanced life'; so that it can express something of their original inspiration. Four out of seven writers explicitly included this feature in their accounts of insight (555; 632; 907, 913; 1088, 1094)

- *Writers should report playing through scenes in the mind. This may take the form of a presentational imagery or symbolism and result in imagery with sensory-like qualities and something of the 'freshness' of perception.*

It is commonplace in the insight literature that vividly experienced imagery often precedes and/or constitutes insightful breakthroughs. In this experience there develops a type of freedom and autonomy of the imagery itself. The imagery is frequently 'concrete' where the recipient hears voices, smells odours, sees people and so on. Being predominantly within a looser, presentational mode, there can be a blurring of the 'reality-imagination' distinction. It becomes a metaphorical thought with an embodied, perceptual-like phenomenology:

W7: Driving along... and I suddenly felt this weight lift off my shoulders as it suddenly occurred to me: 'I don't have to write this book'. 'I can write something else'. And it was like somebody coming along and saying 'you don't have to do that exam. It's OK, I'll give you a degree anyway.' And it was *such* a relief! It was a *glorious* feeling, and I immediately started to think about some other projects that I might do, and the world looked different. I mean I looked around at Rozelle and it just, it was alive, it was, there was full colour in everything. I [had been] crowded by this terrible anxiety. So I turned into the park at Callan Park [psychiatric hospital] and sat on one of those seats... And as I was sitting there a voice came to me, not quite like Joan of Arc, but it was very vivid. And it said to me 'You don't have to understand. You only have to write it. You don't have to

understand it'. It was that phrase 'You don't have to understand'. And it really was like a voice. I could virtually hear a human voice saying it. (1035)

This is a classic example of insight in many ways, especially its suddenness and joyfulness following a very long period of frustration, assiduous preparation and eventually a resolve to renounce the project entirely. There was much work required after the insight whereby, ironically in this case, some understanding of the instigating problem did develop. This is also a clear example of what Lonergan (1978) called an 'inverse' insight — the realisation that there is no value in the question, or possibly there is no answer to it; where the point is there is no point. In this case she realised that she did not need to understand in order to progress and to write, as it turns out, a very successful novel. It reveals a clear presentational quality where there is a blurring of imagination and perception. This imagery seemed to develop autonomously and the writer felt she had been given permission not to understand. Note also the strange ambiguity wherein it was as if she was being visited by a higher power, where the insight came from 'without', yet she still had some sense that it was only 'virtually' that she heard a human voice.

The vivid, almost physical quality of this mental imagery is well captured by most of the writers. For example, Writer 5, in talking about a good idea or sudden insight, reported that it ... "sort of stands out as an idea or a thought or something I've just seen ... and then things quickly, um, it sort of absorbs all the air around it and things come into it" (815). Or again, Writer 6 captures well the sense of images having a sort of autonomy and playing themselves out in one's mind — in this case linking two 'distant' associates creating a new insight:

W6: But I think the image had enough... it played on my imagination long enough to kind of resonate there for a while and probably, yes, setting some sort of resonances which [clicked fingers] brought the other back to mind as well. (911)

Overall, five out of seven writers specifically mentioned this feature in their accounts of insight (233; 344; 815; 911; 1035)

- *There may be evidence of cross-modal synesthesia leading to conscious insight.*

In keeping with the above findings of a type of ‘sensate’ experience of imagery and insight, it was expected that there may be a type of sensate, almost physically experienced, ‘metaphor’: where one idea or image is experienced in terms of another mode of experience. Clear experiences of such cross-modal synesthesia are relatively rare, but given the creative nature of writers’ practices, it was felt they may be present in their experience. In this regard only two authors linked experiences akin to cross-modal synesthesia to their insights (107-112; 1082). Writer 7 reported a type of cross modal ‘vision’ where insights come as if written in the sky for her:

W7: It was also as if written. I’ve had that experience several times, as if written. I say in interviews you know, ‘written on the sky in letters of fire’. The title of one of my books came in like that. (1082)

Or more specifically, Writer 1 experiences some of her insights, not as an intellectual understanding or as a solution to some puzzle, but as a physical experience with a cross-modal nature. When asked how her sudden insight felt physically, she answered:

W1: Oh it’s a rush! It’s a rush. It’s almost a coloured rush.

CS: Yes. Where does it strike you?

W1: Ah here [places hand on chest].

CS: Yes because your hand immediately went to your chest didn’t it?

W1: Yes it’s sort of gold [laughs]. (107-112)

Hunt (1995) and Shanon (1993) locate the beginnings of reflexive consciousness in this distinctively creative and metaphorical ability to reconstitute one mode of experience in terms of another. Whether or not their theories of the origins of mind are correct, we can at least say here that this type of ‘primitive’ metaphorical transfer is found in some degree in the creative insights of our writers.

13.2.3 Two Modes Of Awareness

- *Writers should report that deliberate, focused attention gives way to periods characterised by a looser, defocused attention.*

It was expected that writers would describe looser, more dreamlike states which would alternate with more focused deliberative attention in their creative work. In general terms, writers did talk about the importance of daydreaming and of reverie and of looser modes of construing. Indeed, it seems to be a sort of assumed background state for them, implicit in their descriptions of how they work. They did not, however, tend to talk about how focused or defocused their attention was. In hindsight, this feature may well overlap with the next feature (alternating loose and tight construing) as well as with the first feature under “Intuitive Awareness” — a slower style of thinking characterised by free association and reverie, and so on (see 13.2.5). Nonetheless, four writers explicitly mentioned this type of defocused attention in contrast to more deliberative thinking (164, 180; 373; 602; 759). Writer 1 expresses it most clearly:

W1: It’s very personal and there are no rules. Um, no-one is expecting anything of you, and you can just let the mind wander. And I guess I feel that umm, it’s very precious to be able to have times like that in adult life. And a lot of people aren’t given that gift too. They really must keep on top of things. It’s anti getting things done and it means that you are sort of unsafe. I’ve got to be very careful not to go into those states. It’s one of the reasons I can’t drive a car — because I get into those states without realising it very easily. (170)

Implicit here is that the writer is in a tighter more focused frame of mind when not in this looser defocused state (as would be the case with people generally). There was also evidence in the interviews that writers were aware of the value of such a defocused state. Writer 5 suggested that certain hangovers bring about this alternative attentional posture (759), or more mundanely, Writer 4 has found that first thing in the morning before fully waking up, is a particularly creative time:

W4: Except this is kind of pushed up to another plane... and some of our best work has been done here over this table — breakfast meetings where the consciousness is still very open... . (602)

- *Writers should describe purposeful alternations between loose (more symmetrical) and tight (more asymmetrical) construing processes (Creativity Cycles) embedded in larger Experience Cycles. This should be characterised by looser associative processes being provisionally tightened and then loosened again.*

This feature was repeatedly represented in all but one of the writers' accounts of insight (62, 68; 371; 631; 807; 984, 1105) and was one of the features most emphasised by the writers. As Writer 1 put it: "I keep on explaining to people this when I teach them. I say you can't both invent the clay and mould it at the same time. It's too much to ask" (68). This reveals that looser processes are necessary to invent the 'clay' which tighter processes can then 'mould'. It also parallels my earlier discussion of Kelly's Creativity Cycle in which new constructs are allowed to take shape under loose construing and are then, ideally, threaded into the existing implicatory networks of the person's construing. The loose parts of the process may operate at a low level of cognitive awareness, but the writer is aware that something important (frequently joyous and scary) is happening:

W1: But I didn't see the significance of it. And I maybe even threw it aside. But when I get to that point where I see what it is, then it seems as if there's a clamp happens. It stops. The free-flowing nature stops. And that's quite a grieving process for me, a grievous process, because that wonderful but terrifying fluidity has to stop. And at that stage I will start to control it. Little things still come and I start to see connections more and more. (66)

What is clear in the above is that, as the construing tightens, the person begins to consciously see the connection that the looser processes have 'invented'. Writer 1 clarified this distinction between two styles of awareness: "One is this exploration, this meandering exploration. And at a very much later stage I start controlling it. There's a point at which I know what it is about" (62). The recognition of two modes of awareness was common in the interviews. Writer 2 put it this way:

W2: I think that's what you learn, and I'm sure everyone, all writers speak about the difference between the composer and the editor; the composer and the shaper. Nabokov calls it rapture and recapture, which is nice. It's a little, it's quite grandiose. But yes, he can say that. The rapture is, I guess, the composing and all that; so that dichotomy and how you learn to handle both because you can't just have one or the other. (371)

When I suggested that the 'tightening' allows one to see the connections one has been establishing tacitly, Writer 1 revealed another important aspect of moving towards insight. That is, preventing oneself from tightening prematurely: "And part of the trick is to delay that. If you saw it immediately then a lot of fluidity would stop" (78).

Writer 2 also suggested (before our formal interview) that the trick is akin to walking down a corridor with many doors. One looks through the doors to see what is there, but takes pains to not close them, to leave them all open as long as possible. These writers are giving expression to Kelly's (1955) concern that people should not try to prematurely grasp for insight. It seems to me that the crucial stage in the creativity cycle is what Kelly called 'provisional tightening', where one is able to look through newly opened doors, but one does not enter that new room fully, closing the door behind oneself, and therefore to other possibilities taking shape. Writer 7 suggested that such premature tightening slows down one's creative progress overall:

W7: I allow myself to start, start structuring it at about, well... I suppose by the end of the first draft. Somewhere half-way through the first draft I'll have some idea. And then I'll start something that's called draft two because I'll then have a sort of structure. The danger, though, and that's been particularly so with this last book, is that I will try to arrive at that structure too quickly. Now that I know that's how it works, I am impatient to get onto that bit of the process. And of course the lack of time is another thing that distorts the process because the quicker you can get it structured, and that's a real problem because it, it just takes twice as long, basically... if you truncate those, that exploratory part of the process. (986)

- *These alternations should also represent what Matte-Blanco called 'bi-modal thinking': the harmonious experience of both symmetrical and asymmetrical awareness.*

It was expected that writers would describe symmetrical experiences as well as a more day-to-day asymmetrical awareness. That is, it was felt they would have experienced states in which they felt distinctions between things were breaking down, which were quite 'emotional' and felt somewhat anarchic or 'loose'. In the case of Writer 5, this state was set off by what he referred to as the 'nervous breakdown' of a person close to him:

W5: ...so there's a general freeing up process in all sorts of ways I think at this time. And, I guess in speaking I haven't actually tried to link the two, but someone close to me had a breakdown just before then and, all of a sudden, there was chaos. What had been previously serene was chaos. I mean it was a general fugue state that flowed over everyone else. And then that ended. And then this heightened

sensitivity and creativity period occurred. Just looking at it I would imagine that would have had a great deal to do with it. (807)

Yet, such symmetrical experiences would also somehow be ‘unifying’ and coherent for the person in ways which are perhaps impossible to fully articulate. Symmetrical states can be scary, but also exciting:

W2: Well yes. It’s...unifying in that way. ...I think it’s very different from, it’s not therapy. It’s very different. And it’s not. I don’t know if it’s on a continuum with schizophrenia. But when I’ve seen, read books you know, of art works that schizophrenics ... that seems quite different to me. It’s not transformed or... although you can get [it’s not contained within meaning structures I think]. Yeah, mmm. And it’s not... it doesn’t work to heal. (441)

I have already alluded to the various ways of reaching very loose symmetrical understandings, and again, Writer 2 spoke of writers “resisting the excitement” (336) of such relatively formless and unpredictable states. Once the writer opens herself to such openness, however, there is the equally important task of transforming or moulding the ‘clay’:

W7:...the generating of it in the first place, is somehow just opening the channel to the unconscious and letting it out. But, there’s a thing about... altering it. (1112)

What follows these excursions into symmetrical realms are the long struggles to contain and structure, to transform that openness into something new, a new coherence, a deep communication that somehow conveys something of the feeling as well as the ‘thought’. Writers 6 and 2 mentioned this specifically in terms of ‘transforming’ the original image. Overall, three of the seven writers described processes explicitly identifiable as bi-modal (441; 807, 811; 1112).

- *A common feature is expected to be the reported capacity to playfully tolerate, even encourage, ambiguity, uncertainties and contradictories in thinking. This ‘negative capability’ will alternate with periods of anxiety and frustration.*

W7: Keats talked about negative capability, and I’m sure that’s exactly what he meant. The greatest experience I had with that was writing, was when I was writing [name of novel] which is... a book about an incestuous father. And the problem that I set myself was, well, Why?

Why did he do it? Not what did he do, but what's going through these men's minds when they do this?...Or anything like that? And I had been writing it for about three years and I kept coming up against this barrier that I couldn't work out why they do it. Really and truly I just couldn't understand it. And I decided to give it up, basically. I decided to abandon the book. In fact I didn't decide to, I did abandon the book. (1033)

The interesting point here about Writer 7 was that this was the turning point. In this case, her insight was that she did not need to understand 'why' in order to write about this incestuous man. By abandoning this desire to understand she had the breakthrough (see above, 1035) and it turned out to be a very successful novel.. It was a very definite letting go of the need to know, of allowing seeming contradictories to exist side-by-side. She had come to actually manifest the 'negative capability' she had so admired for some time.

The same sort of tolerance of ambiguity and of uncertainty is encouraged by Writer 4 who, as a dramaturg, asks his client, the playwright, to:

W4: ...in a way abandon the standard technical and classical techniques and ways of naming the script, to kind of flurry around in the mud of their creative thought... See what else is there to draw on it, constantly. And then worry about the kind of structural things a bit later once they've fleshed out the vision more. (636)

It is not as if, however, successful fiction writers are a different species who do not experience anxiety in the midst of uncertainty and the inability to understand. But they do seem to learn that if they give up the immediate desire to know then, paradoxically, they are more likely to come to know. This is well-expressed by Writer 5:

W5: There's always a degree of anxiety and it's not that it becomes easier, but you just know that you've done it before and you felt like that then, and so it will happen again. So there's a sort of confidence in yourself, really. The process doesn't become, you don't become any more facile, or, you know, there's no sort of easy way through just because you have done it. The only thing is I think the increased confidence really. (769)

Writers must learn patience and develop a certain overarching faith, not only in themselves, but in the process wherein opening up ambiguities and contradictories is in

itself a potentially enlightening thing to do. Five writers referred to this ‘negative capability’ in the interviews (281; 394-395; 636; 769, 811, 813; 1033).

- *An identifying feature of writer experiences should be the recurring capacity to give up the immediate desire to understand, to ‘wait-upon’ insight rather than to ‘look-for’ a predictable solution.*

Associated with the negative capability discussed above is a more general capacity to hold off knowing. Here the emphasis is not so much on dealing with contradictories and ambiguities, but in inhibiting the tendency to tighten construing, of ‘waiting-upon’ rather than ‘waiting-for’ understanding, as Heidegger put it. Indeed, writers frequently expressed the need to simply wait, rather than to look for something important:

W7: Flannery O’Connor had this theory that you just bored yourself into writing. She set herself, she, I mean she had another restriction because she was ill, but she had to sit at her desk, say for three hours every day, and it didn’t matter what she did there but she wasn’t allowed to do anything else. And out of sheer boredom she’s start to write and I sometimes find that quite useful — not to allow yourself. I never read or research or anything like that in that incredibly precious working time. (971)

The inhibition of the desire to understand tends to go against the culturally-endorsed expectation that one must move in the direction of ever-increasing certainty:

W2: I think we are also taught to think that you start with something disorganised and chaotic and you progressively move toward order... and I’m saying that it’s not that at all. You’re actually moving toward more and more uncertainty from that first draft, that first whatever. You’re actually getting bigger and more unknown and more... complex. So you are not going from here to the final product, you are really going from here [motioning outwards/expanding] and ending up with something that stands. (403)

This picks up on the earlier discussion of the multidimensionality that seems to spread from a central image or metaphor. As we will see below, the writers frequently expressed their conviction that the growing book is much larger, much smarter, than them. As with the ‘Domino Room’ metaphor I proposed in an earlier chapter, the whole is built largely by ‘feel’, down amongst the pieces, as it were. Attempts to step back too much and understand the whole actually takes the person away from where the whole is

being built up. Four of the seven writers directly addressed this issue (66; 377, 403; 895; 971, 984).

- *Writers should report alternations between a 'slower' meditative thinking and a 'faster' means-end thinking.*

Most writers reported a speeding up of their work near the very end of their projects 'as it all came together'. But for most of the time, it seems, they must discipline themselves to allow the process to emerge slowly. This is not to say they would not like it to go faster (W5: 852). The important thing here is not jumping into solutions, but being willing to take one's time. Asked whether she thinks in longer time-scales, in terms of outcomes, Writer 1 responded:

W1: No. It's very present moment. And I say no adamantly because that also seems a betrayal. For example, on a very practical matter, I would never sign up for a book ... by a date. That would mean A, that I was betraying it, saying 'I'm going to go public with it whether you want me to or not' to it; and B, it would mean that I'd start to figure out, I'd jump the very complex and intricate process of getting this slowly.

CS: You'd feel like it had become a type of means-ends operation [mm] rather than one that has its own sort of pace and authenticity?

W1: Oh Absolutely! I must go with it; I must not try to direct it. It has it's own life. It's like trying to speed up a flower growing. I must let it go with its own pace and take... It leads me. I don't lead it. (56-58)

This intricate process of getting it slowly allows for the multidimensional complexity of the work to 'grow' from the intuitive centre of the work. What seems to be crucial to this is a more meditative style of thinking which does not seek for an end, but opens itself to what may come:

W7: I know that my work suffers from a lack of daydreaming time. Because I have a restricted period of time I feel I should be actually writing during that time. And I think that's actually a big problem. Because I think the most important part of writing probably happens when you are not actually writing ... Um so that has that unfortunate effect that you want to rush in and you feel 'oh panic. I've only got two hours. I must put something down on paper'. And I think that that's very counterproductive for creativity. (965)

Three writers directly described this feature in their accounts (56-58; 565; 965-6).

13.2.4 Emotional Thinking And Embodiment

- *Writers are expected to describe their processes surrounding insights as 'emotional' or affectively nuanced and they should be adept at using their emotional sensitivities to insightful advantage. That is, their emotional awareness will be more 'active' than 'passive'.*

This feature refers to the overall affective nature of the processes around insight. These are certainly not neutral, intellectual labours, but are usually quite emotional:

W1: Yes . It's very emotional, a very emotional time. Yes the sense, the felt experience is that it's coming into existence and to be revealed only to me. So if I go blabbing about it, you see I'm choosing again emotional words, that it may not come again.(40)

We have already seen Writer 1's comments about losing the flow as a 'grieving process' (p. 332, [66]). Here we see her concern about keeping in touch with the 'felt experience' of it. This emotional sensitivity is a skill which (at least these) writers possess to be able to tune into subtle affective processes. Writer 3 calls it 'intuition' and identifies it immediately with being in touch with one's feelings:

W3: Well when you say gut feeling, that's exactly what I think it is. I mean I think that's the intuition. People who are in touch with their intuition are generally reasonably in touch with their feelings, I think, and um, intuition is not thinking. And it's very hard to describe what it is, but it's not logic and it's not thinking and it's not going in a straight line. (563)

What is also necessary is a type of superordinate emotional security, a confidence that even when things are not going well, that one can remain optimistic.

W5: I have, I have got a general faith. Even when I'm, even when I'm at a low point I do have a general faith that I'll overcome it. Now having said that I also feel that the initial, the initial idea I have is never quite fulfilled. The book is never quite as good as I thought it was going to be. It's different, and interestingly different, it's always a bit different. But the general idea that gave me the huge sort of burst of enthusiasm and excitement is never quite fulfilled. (709)

The process began with a huge burst of positive emotion. Moreover, the successful writer had ‘adequate ideas’, as Spinoza might have put it, to frame and contain the initial flurry of possibilities that the person glimpsed. All writers reported something akin to the definitively emotional nature of insight (40, 66; 336; 563; 609; 709; 888; 1076).

- *Affective self-management: I would expect that writers utilise a number of tricks & strategies to avoid self invalidation and anxiety; that they keep going despite impasse and that they can delay the pragmatics of construction and can lessen the immediate desire to know.*

Given the writer unanimity that the processes surrounding their insights are characterised by ‘emotion’, skills at managing one’s affective states would appear to be requisite for success. As it turned out, six out of the seven writers confirmed this (12, 30-32; 445; 578; 672; 713; 979-980). There was general agreement that one needed to have a number of tricks, strategies or ‘ruses’ (Writer 5) in order to manage one’s emotional equilibrium through the difficult passage of a manuscript. A common theme was the pretence that what one was writing would never be viewed by anyone. To the suggestion that this was merely a sleight of hand, Writer 7 seven replied:

W7: I’ve called it exactly that. I call it that to my students. You have to invent a sleight of hand that works for you, that what you are writing will never be read by anybody but you. And you yourself may never read it again. It’s just for here and now, and whatever trick works. The fountain pen... exercise books work very well for me — the smaller the better actually, the ‘squidgier’ the better [chuckling], because it’s um, it’s like you are just taking notes, it doesn’t matter. It’s got that feel about it. (979-980)

This is one way the writers ‘keep loose’, or keep the doors of inspiration open. There is a purposeful delaying of the pragmatics of construction. In particular, there is the backgrounding or suppressing of the knowledge that people will in fact some day read and make judgements about one’s work. Writer 1 also pretends to herself that she will never show anyone and she does “various things to make the paper my confidant” (30). In particular she promises herself that:

W1: I will never show anyone. I promise myself I won't publish, and ...I promise myself that it will be a long time. I have this luxury of time. I think it is actually one of the joys of writing a novel. You can actually make that happen. You don't have to show, you don't have to come clean about it. And I try not to talk about it to anybody. (32)

At later stages in the work, of course, writers feel more confident that their work is holding together, or that they have 'covered their tracks' somewhat in 'concealing' reflections of themselves in their work (Writer 7). There is also the question of writers keeping themselves going, keeping their spirits up:

W5: I have to tell myself that I know what I'm doing even when it is patently obvious to all, to me more than anyone, that I mightn't yet, that I don't know what it is yet. So I set out sort of headings and chapter headings, and you know I might pin things up on the wall, index cards or whatever. I mean, I sort of tell myself I'm busy and I know what I'm doing. Even though I don't. With ... the latest novel, I put up all these, a whole wall full of index cards of what was going to happen at every stage like a story board, like a film story board. And then never looked at any of them! (713)

What seems to be important is that writers do not generally ask people for opinions or show their work to people too early. It makes them feel anxious — and with these writers there is the extra pressure that people expect great things of them. So they protect themselves from a too close examination, by themselves or by others, of their lack of understanding and sense of control over what they are doing.

- *Affective 'feelings of knowing' should represent quite superordinate structures with multiple chains of implication imbuing one's construing with a sense of direction and purpose. This transcending 'aesthetic' emotion should mark the subjective experience of an active 'feeling' intelligence moving towards insight.*

Three writers (643, 698; 709; 890) gave direct expression to this sense of a transcending aesthetic emotion. We have already seen that moments of insight can set off chains of implications and possibilities for writers. For example, after Writer 7's insight (1035) — about the non-necessity that she understand her character before she writes about him — there was a flood of creative possibilities that came to her mind (see 13.2.2 above).

But first came an indistinct sense that something had changed. This seems to be what allows for the writer to move into ‘flow’ in his or her work:

CS: So there’s an overarching sense of progress that allows you to deal with the emerging problems with more of a sense of confidence or something like that?

W6: Yes. Yes exactly. I mean it’s both going together. It’s because I’m, I’m actually writing, the words are going down. I’m quite pleased with what I’m getting down and at the same time I am seeing the problems as I go, but because there is a sort of surge, I am confident about the ultimate outcome. I am pleased in fact that the problems are arising because I know that that’s the book is getting more complex and interesting and more a challenge both to me and for the eventual reader. Yeah, yes all those sorts of things. (879- 890)

We can see here evidence of a superordinate sense of direction and confidence. But it is marked by a complex balance of certainty and uncertainty at different levels. ‘Local’ problems and uncertainties are welcomed within an overarching feeling of understanding, or at least of direction and confidence. I have already quoted Writer 5 (p. 338, paragraph 709 above) who considers he always has an overall sense of optimism or faith that his writing will work out well in the end. So, frequently insight is characterised by a transcending aesthetic emotion, a type of superordinating, affective awareness that one is heading in an exciting or promising direction:

W4: So I think the important thing about it is the moment, is the buzz of the moment. When everything, you are suddenly in tune, everything is vibrating. It’s a physical and intellectual experience all at once because you have to recognise it. So not off with the fairies...uhh...it’s difficult. Even with visual artists I think they know it’s happening. It’s a knowledge, conscious knowledge it’s happening. (698)

We can see in the description above that when insight arrives it is marked by a strong affective experience of which the writer is aware. This same writer gives good expression to the probable superordinancies involved with multiple chains of implication seemingly coming of their own accord:

W4: It’s like you are on a roll. I know that myself sitting there writing and thinking: ‘Yes! this is it!... keep going, keep that, the next sentence is already in your head, keep it going.’ And it’s terrible thing if you are interrupted or something to get it down in the moment. (669)

- *Writers are expected to report insight as an embodied and physical experience, as well as a 'purely intellectual' one.*

Insight was reported to be experienced in physical ways by five of the seven writers interviewed (108, 202-204; 439; 530; 698; 1035, 1045). The point to be made here is not so much that insight *causes* a physical response but, as I argued in Chapter 10, that it reveals the embodied nature of our mental life. First hand accounts of the experience are unequivocal. It is worth repeating what some of writers said in this regard:

W1: Oh it's a rush! It's a rush. It's almost a coloured rush.

CS: Yes. Where does it strike you?

W1 Ah here [places hand on chest]. (108-110)

Again, as we saw above, Writer 4 described insight as “a physical and intellectual experience all at once” (698). This should not be too surprising since all the writers considered insight to be an emotional process — one in which feeling and thinking are inseparable. It is noteworthy that, far from the intellectual understanding preceding the physical awareness of an insight, that frequently it is the physical awareness that presages a later conscious and reflexive understanding:

W7: ... when the thing struck. Well it was like a physical, yeah. That's why I turned off the road. Because it was like a physical um 'lightness' is the only word — I felt as if I was actually in danger of floating off the car seat! I was aware that I was actually not driving very well. It's like... it was elation. It was ah, almost like a drug-induced, um, euphoria. (1045)

It was after this dramatic physical awareness that the writer settled herself on a park bench to 'receive' the 'intellectual' components of her insight. There seems to be something very physically involving about this state — recall that Writer 1 does not drive because she frequently enters this mode of being (p. 331, paragraph 170). Or Writer 2 (p. 346, paragraph 383) tells how she is often 'spinning' after being inspired by insight, often being really energised by the experience, while for Writer 3, the situation is often reversed:

W3: It's not bad when you're in it but it's really, for me anyway, it's really intense. I always feels afterwards almost as if I've had a vein drained. I mean that's almost how I think of it: like there's this vein in

me and it fills up and it gets drained. And at the end of it that's how I feel. (530)

- *Insight processes are expected to be enactive and writers should 'perceptually rehearse', immersing themselves in the medium of their work for its own sake. This is expected to be experienced at times as 'concrete' images with a perception-like phenomenology. For example, writers are expected to use words in presentational ways: being sensitive to tone, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, context, imagining scenes, hearing voices and so on.*

There is plenty of evidence within all the writers' accounts that their insights stem from enactive, presentational modes of working (46; 339-340, 330-332; 536; 657; 707; 925, 943; 1010). Their own words best express this claim. Firstly, most writers described their immersion in the medium of their work. For example:

W7: Basically I think that that [time] restriction has forced on me a stream of consciousness thing where I just make myself just start writing um and in a way I suppose I am trying to daydream as I write... by that stream of consciousness thing. So a lot of my first drafts have no punctuation. It just goes on, page after page of stuff. And in the course of doing that I generally, eventually, find the thing that I want to follow. (966)

Moreover, Writer 1 described how she takes books off her shelf at random or opens the pages of a thesaurus until something sparks her imagination. Writer 5 experimented with sonnets, some of them quite 'surreal', for one of his books as a loosening exercise. Writer 7 flipped through Shakespeare for one of her novels:

W7: I used to flip through Shakespeare till I got to a phrase that I liked. And when I just got to a phrase that caught my eye, without asking myself why, I would just start writing. And sometimes I'd have several goes at the same phrase, and nearly always, I mean they are all in the book. (1010)

All these practices indicate how important a presentational sensitivity to tone, rhyme, assonance, alliteration and the craft of other writers is to help generate writers' insights. It was Writer 6 who explicitly identified his insights as enactive: "And it only happens, at least to me, in the course of writing it" (943). There is another aspect to this enactive approach. And that is that writers strive not to merely transcribe some experience but to set the conditions for the reader to share in it. Just as we described the enactive,

relational nature of genuine conversation, creative writers try to develop the context within which the reader may participate in the type of feeling that inspired the writer:

W6: What you are trying to do is to get that other human soul, your reader and the rest of it, to find him, herself in all these other forms, all the time, experiencing reality in it, you know. It's a protean thing. Get them into this new, new form, new way of being in the world, new way of living. (925)

The other aspect this quotation reveals is the perception-like phenomenology often involved in insight. It is not about a representational understanding, but developing a way of being, of experiencing. We have already seen that Writer 7 'heard' the voice of a woman telling her she need not understand, and that she 'saw' the title of one of her books written in the sky. Insight, for these writers, involves 'concrete' images and understandings which are fully embodied.

- *Writers should talk about insights emerging within an overarching context of purpose, commitment and impassioned involvement in a project. This should lead to personal or participatory knowing, an indicator of which may be strong feelings of 'connectedness' and integration.*

Five writers clearly described processes akin to 'participatory knowing' during their insights (148; 435, 498; 700; 795; 1049). Writer 7 was quite explicit:

W7: ... instead of saying, instead of identifying myself as *a* woman who is writing *a* book about an incestuous father, and that had become a role I could no longer do, instead of that I was now just part of this world, and it was all open to me. If I never wanted to write again I didn't have to. It was a sense that, instead of being off in this awful little ghetto, the 'writer' writing about this thing, I was a part of the world and I could choose to be part of it in whatever way I wanted. (1049)

This profound sense of connectedness and integration was echoed by Writer 1: "Yes. It's a wonderful feeling. The way of seeing it suddenly you feel like you're looking at the way the universe is put together. You could get very carried away by your own powers" (148). Here we see very clearly this sense of complete immersion, not only in one's project, but in one's world. This capacity for merging also applies to other people. In this regard, Writer 2 was emphatic: "Yes, you do merge into other people"

(498). She earlier clarified this deep sense of connectedness. Note also the strange way in which characters gather a life of their own to which the writer is witness and in which she can participate:

W2: So once they get going on their own, they can do what they like. So, it doesn't, it's not like writing from life... yes. You become them rather than they are you. (435)

13.2.5 Intuitive Awareness

- *Generally speaking, writers are expected to describe tacit and 'unconscious' knowing processes as being crucial to their insights.*

Most writers explicitly referred to intuitive and 'unconscious' processes in relation to their work and their insights. All, it could be argued, implicated such processes in their overall accounts. All spoke about the ways in which their emerging manuscripts would have a form and layers of meaning of which they were only vaguely aware — often only 'discovering' the pattern and meaning of it much later. As we saw above (p. 333), Writer 2 referred to the process as being akin keeping the 'doors' of perception open for as long as possible. Generally the writers recognised that not knowing where they are going was a 'normal' part of the creative writing process. Writers 6 and 7, for example, purposely hold off reading their early drafts so as not to pre-empt this creative process. The crucial role of these tacit understandings within creative writing was well expressed by Writer 7:

W7: It's almost as if there's a protective mechanism ...that your unconscious is sending up these messages, but your unconscious doesn't want them to be hijacked too quickly, because they won't do you any good. It's got to be not fully understood for it to produce change... having had the experience of having a few dreams that were totally life-changing without me understanding them... their therapeutic aspect ... is not compatible with them being understood. (1004)

Kelly (1955) would have been happy with Writer 7's suggestion that one should not grasp after insight; that insight must be patiently woven into one's system of understanding even though one does not fully understand it. Only in this way can it 'produce change'. This fits well with the theoretical proposition that insights are

multidimensional; they have implications that are often too much to grasp in one go — and that too early closure or ‘understanding’ ‘won’t do you any good’. In short, they must be incorporated with full cycles of experience. This aspect of slowness or the gradual implicit development of an insight was captured by Writer 6:

W6: It’s as though I don’t recognise the insight for some time after I have had it. Or it has eased itself out rather than come in this sudden flash way that quite reflexively I notice happening at the time... It’s a double pleasure of having the insight and realising you have the insight. It’s not like that when I’m writing. (895)

For Kelly the test of a ‘genuine’ therapeutic insight was in the in day-to-day advantages that accrued from it. There is something quite similar occurring here for the writers. They often did not fully realise an insight had occurred — beyond an emotional ‘feeling’ of rightness or the attraction to some image or metaphor. It is not until they have reaped the rewards of it in subsequent writing that they fully ‘realise’ (make real) the insight. Five of the seven writers made specific mention of tacit and unconscious processes in their accounts (64; 358; 512; 895; 1004).

- *Such intuitive processes are expected to be relatively loose and to be characterised by associative thinking and by periods of absorption, fantasy and reverie.*

All writers directly implicated intuitive, ‘loose’ construing characterised by associative thought, absorption, fantasy and reverie in their insights (14; 383; 550; 651; 755; 882; 966). For example, Writer 1 reported regularly getting into trance-like states in order to write: “I have to get into a trance and that trance can be so profound that when the phone goes I wonder what the object is that’s making the noise” (14). The state of often excited, loosely associative thinking and reverie intrudes on the writers’ lives generally and begins to affect their day-to-day awareness.

W2: ...you can certainly get it and you have to find ways to come down. I mean I can come out from writing really spinning and hyper and I’m ready to... Sometimes I don’t want to see anyone, and sometimes, sometimes I want to spin around talking and uhh... ’cos I’ve still got a lot of energy. (383)

In this regard most writers talked about the way they would carry this ‘heightened state of awareness’ into their everyday encounters. Writers frequently described how ordinary day-to-day experiences are transformed while in this state — walking about in public spaces, driving, travelling in buses, picking up the mail, arriving at work and so on. It is as if everything becomes relevant and ‘designed’ for their current book. Writer 5 described (as did Writer 2, paragraph 339) how it even intruded on his dreams:

W5: I’m getting more absorbed into it and I’m getting close to deadlines. But I know there is a state when I’m totally absorbed in it and it’s usually about two thirds in, when I start to dream, when I dream of the characters as if they are real people. (755)

- *Writers’ accounts should include descriptions of ‘meditative thinking’ characterised by a personal or participatory knowing — a sense of knowing with the ‘other’, of participating with the known. This is expected to be a slower style of thinking which does not try to jump to solutions or ‘end-gain’.*

Four of the seven writers reported states akin to meditative thinking (58, 180; 512; 641; 1000) as being directly involved in their creative work. Writer 1 captures this sense of slowing down and waiting-upon, rather than trying to figure out what to do:

W1: I guess I think there’s a sifting process that takes place. On a very profound level you’re... doing something like the sifting process that happens in dreams I suppose. The feeling is not of utter stillness. The feeling is of a sort of very gentle turbulence... I mean sometimes I say to people ‘Look. Most of the time I’m like a dog asleep in front of the fire.’ But I don’t think that that is quite true. (180)

Consistent with Kelly’s idea of ‘provisional tightening’, this writer recognises that there is a type of ‘sifting’ that is going on, a type of calm waiting. The person is not ‘off with the fairies’ as Writer 5 put it (698), but is feeling his or her way through the possibilities as they arise. This activity is often accompanied by a type of ‘knowing-with’, a curious sense that writers (for example, Writers 1 and 5) described of being true to their creation as if it were an other person:

W7: It’s a longing because it’s almost as if the book is, I mean this is a bit corny, but it’s almost as if it is a living creature, and you are frightened of doing the wrong thing by it. (1000)

An important aspect of this approach to insight is that the person tries to inhibit the normal desire to find the answer, to ‘end-gain’ as Alexander (1932) put it. As we have seen, writers are very aware that trying to reactivate the more common means-end thinking is destructive of creative insight.

- *Reports of a type of a steady defocused attention should be common, as should reports of solutions suddenly ‘popping’ into awareness following a period of loose, intuitive contemplation. This would coincide with the tightening up of loosened construing and accessing alternative superordinate structures of implication.*

None of the writers specifically described periods of defocused attention being interrupted by the sudden intrusion of insight ‘popping’ into mind. As has been already said, writers mentioned these two elements often enough separately, but not clearly in conjunction. The failure of anyone to describe this feature may be because it is not relevant, or it may be that they simply did not happen to mention it. Two of the insights described above, however, may have been instances which embodied this feature.

Writer 1 (where the insight ‘flew in the window of a bus) and Writer 7 (where the writer was driving and needed to pull over to ‘receive’ the insight) both reported being prone to this type of defocused attention and daydreaming. Although they did not say so, these dramatic insights were likely to have been preceded by periods of defocused attention.

- *I expect writers to mention unconscious or tacit mental processes as ‘guiding’ and ‘providing’ them with their insights. They should describe themselves as ‘recipients’ of insights, the latter manifesting a type of exteriority and spontaneity.*

Every writer described this feature, usually on multiple occasions (37-38, 58, 60; 339, 344; 552; 651; 757; 945, 948; 996, 1088). Their words speak for themselves:

W7: And suddenly, seemingly out of the blue was the idea that one of her husbands had committed suicide, in a very horrible way. And that this... and she feels responsible, basically. Now I don’t know where that came from. So it was that same sense of... and as soon as I thought of it, it was *clearly* right, (1088)

This already-quoted excerpt expresses nicely the sense of spontaneity and ‘rightness’ of the insight. She goes on to describe how it is as if she has been guided by this insight all along and had merely forgotten to actually write it into her text. Two more examples will suffice to capture this sense of being given insights. Writer 2 makes it clear that she receives her insights like ‘gifts’ from outside:

W2: But I think even when you are not, you are at work. All the time. And I can cite instances of this...just ah, things just come into your presence that you need. Little newspaper articles, something someone says. They are like little gifts. They’re coming at you all the time, especially when you are working on something. Now, so you say ‘Yes’! I can use that. Or of course!’ Yes. It comes. (339)

Writer 3 is even more explicit about being a recipient of insight, of being intuitively guided and she emphasises strongly the exterior nature of the insight process:

W3: When I feel that I’m doing my very very best writing I feel it’s being beamed into me. And these days that there’s almost, again perhaps because I have to say ‘I must work, I must work now’, that there’s almost no pause. It’s like ‘chhooo’ [guttural noise] and it’s straight out. And if I stop and I listen I can hear it. The words come and I type. (552)

- *Overall it is expected that writers will report ‘feelings of knowing’ which they may not be able to justify or articulate. That is, they are expected to spend a good deal of their ‘creative’ time in a state of conscious ‘not-knowing’, yet have an overarching feeling that they are heading ‘somewhere’.*

Writer 1 described an insight to her partner. She explained to me that it was not important for him to understand her insight at that time, and that was not why she told him. What was important for her was to communicate that it held significance for her — yet she herself did not know what that significance was or where it was heading:

CS: ... but for you it has an entirely different significance.

W1: Oh absolutely, which I don’t know at that moment.

CS: No ... except that you have a certainty that it does have significance

W1: Yes Absolutely. (125-128)

We see here clearly expressed this overarching sense that this inarticulate insight is heading somewhere, that something important had happened, yet the ‘recipient’ was not ‘representationally’ able to communicate the significance, even to herself. It is worth examining the continuing excerpt in full:

W1: I had no idea of how the story, what the story was. I knew that it was about a few things, love and relationship and someone who was beautiful, and there seemed to be two mathematicians — just things like that. A hell of a lot of material, a hell of a lot of thinking. I was on the bus and it’s as if it flew in the window the very first line of the novel and I wrote it down on a bit of paper from my handbag. The sense was that everything in my mind was lining up behind that sentence as if it was the leader in a procession, but I wasn’t consciously thinking of any of those bits. In fact, at that stage I didn’t really, I think I might have, yes I had typed out all those bits, those fourteen kilos [of manuscript], but I didn’t have any idea how they fitted together. And I didn’t really have a good idea of what they were about.

CS: But did you have a sense in which you had a sort of, at some level a confidence that they were connected?

W1: No. I was desperately terrified they weren’t. It was purely on spec. In fact after that sentence we got to Greece I got out this huge pile of paper and I started colour-coding in six or eight categories that I knew — the ones I just mentioned — to try and find if I knew how I could put it all together, or what the story was, or who it was about, or anything.

CS: But this sentence came in as a sort of key.

W1: Yes, before that. (128-132)

This extended excerpt brings out the complexity and paradoxical nature of this type of ‘insight’. The chronology is important here. She typed up all the elements without knowing how or whether they fitted together. The emotions experienced were mixed. For a good deal of time she was anxious (in Kelly’s sense of not being able to anticipate), ‘terrified’ that they would not fit together, in a profound state of ‘not knowing’ where she was going. As she put it, ‘it was purely on spec’. Immediately after the insight in the bus she was excited and inspired. Everything seemed to be lining up behind the sentence she ‘received’. And even in Greece after the insight it was imperative for her to attempt to elaborate and verify the breakthrough, to test for herself

whether her feeling of direction and purpose were warranted. This profound sense of knowing yet not knowing was common among the writers:

W7: ... because I know that it could become something. I know that in there there is some kind of interesting thing going on, and I have a vague sense that it's about the idea of perfection which in fact I'm thinking of calling the book. Whether we have to be perfect or whether it's enough to just simply be human. But what I'm frightened of is that I will miss the opportunity. Right now I have a chance to change it, but you know, two months down the track will be too late. And what I fear is that I will see it too late. (998)

Again, we can see here a strong 'feeling of knowing' which keeps the writer going, but which nonetheless leaves her 'in the dark' or clutching at indistinct ideas. Yet she feels there is an 'essential' insight which has been guiding her writing which she must patiently pursue or otherwise risk missing. In all, six of the seven writers referred to this type of process in relation to their insights (125-128; 352; 520; 647; 895; 998).

13.2.6 Experience Of Self And Social Factors

- *The writers should report shifts in their experience of self, especially a periodic release from frustration and self-concern.*

It was not expected that the writers would be always calm, anxiety-free, nor paragons of patience and self-control. What was expected was, given their deep immersion in uncertainty within a project (sometimes for years), that they would need to have ways of dealing with the inevitable frustrations and anxieties that such extensive, often personal, doubts would occasion. As we just saw with Writer 1 in the previous section, there is expected to be both frustration and release, both a sense of being trapped by, and freed of, self-concern. What is expected to be distinctive is that these people in coming to insight have found ways to transcend such invalidations and to allow themselves a looser, freer, non-censored sense of self and being in the context of which not-knowing can be backgrounded. It is also expected that such a way of being would be much sought-after, much enjoyed:

W1: It's like a childhood thinking. It's, it's allowing yourself in a way to be a child, those lovely states in childhood where you didn't have anything to do, um, there was no pressure, uhh, no-one cared a damn

what you did because they were busy doing whatever they were doing.
And so you could just poke a leaf through the floorboards. (164)

To remain in such a state of self-forgetting and ‘childlikeness’ the writer must not allow himself or herself to overly dwell on getting the project done, or on questions of how well it is going and so on.

CS: It’s a very delicate process in terms of self-validation and self-concern.

W5: Oh absolutely! Yeah. This is one of the ruses and um generally sort of bullshitting yourself that you know what you are doing and you’ll do it. (865-866)

Writer 5 described his ‘ruse’ of putting cards in the form of a storyline on a noticeboard (which he then never consulted). What was important for him was to have some loose sense, not to be immediately tested, that he was going somewhere definite. This device of nonvalidation — avoiding in/validational evidence for the time being (Walker, Oades, Caputi, Stevens & Crittenden, 1999) — allows the writer to develop a different state of mind: exploratory, loose, not testing out. As with Kelly’s (1955) loose construer who avoids invalidation by saying ‘that is practically what I said’, this writer can say ‘I really do know what I am doing’. Importantly here, as this writer pointed out earlier, this is within a superordinating confidence and faith in his capacity to bring it all together eventually.

In the somewhat different process of collaborative work a dramaturg (Writer 4) acts as guide and mentor, and he recognises the most important thing is to ‘keep the writer’s sense of self coherent’. That is, playwrights frequently experience a loss of self, a negative emotional experience of fragmentation and disorientation. An emergent theme, somewhat unexpected, is this tendency towards the (post-modern) loss of a unitary self (Colapietro, 1990; Gergen, 1991; Shotter, 1995): the dividing of self into a multiplicity of selves or a ‘community of selves’ (Mair, 1977). This will be taken up further in 13.4 below. Writer 4 emphasises this self-belief and attempt to hold self together:

W4: Or if I’m working with a writer as dramaturg, I mean, there is every month some times when things are really hot and heading towards

production three or four times a week. Yeah so it's intensely social. What you have to do is keep the writer's sense of self coherent. And in the big collaborative processes for ourselves, you have to really believe in what you are doing. (680)

Another theme that emerged with the writers was the capacity not to self-censor. Again, there is a strong sense that different aspects of self are given permission to come into being — often 'dark' sides of self. The writer must find a way not to be concerned about what is socially acceptable or what aspects of his or her self are being revealed:

W7: It's more like you are allowing a self to speak that is normally censored. That's what it feels like to me. Which is why the more conscious you are of the audience, of course the more disastrous it is. So it's very like, I mean when I was in analysis, when that worked it felt exactly the same as when writing was working. And when it wasn't working it felt the same... self-conscious, watching myself. But above all, policing in case something slipped out, that I didn't want to slip out. (1014)

This is a clear statement about the necessity of relinquishing self-consciousness and self-concern if the writer is to break through creatively in her work. All the writers gave expression to this feature of their insights (164, 170; 352; 578; 646-647, 680; 865-866; 890; 1014).

- *Writers may describe a deep sense of integration and validation of their selves amid significant (for them) insight processes.*

There is also a more 'positive' side to this altered experience of 'self'. Asked what her insights feel like Writer 2 responded enthusiastically:

W2: Oh it's great. It's neat. Yes ! That's great! It's a wonderful feeling to see it working there. And quite humbling in a way because it's as if you didn't do it [chuckles]. It's been given to you. And yet I know that it is my intelligence [that] is presiding over the whole thing. It's, it's... I'm not just a blank medium. (421)

Inherent in this statement is an important distinction about self-validation: about what or who is being validated. There is one sense in which it is not one's self at all that is responsible, yet paradoxically it *is* the writer who is responsible. This can be understood in terms of the distinction we have stressed between self as content or beliefs

about self ('me'), and self as process ('I'). What is being primarily validated is the person as process, the person as non-selfconscious creator freed to be non-reflexively and spontaneously responsive to circumstances as they arise (Butt et al., 1997). There is a growth in self as old aspects of the 'me' can be relinquished and replaced by a broader sense of the self as one who can be a type of conduit, a way of being that allows the world to speak. This may represent a higher form of the 'objective outlook' that I have suggested is conducive of insight. This represents one's capacity to flow with the insight, to be as one with the world. Writer 2 elaborated this experience:

W2: It's humbling and... what's the word, validating, yes. It's both. But they are not necessarily um... in opposition are they? Because humbling doesn't mean that you don't take pride in your work. You claim it as your own. You can't just say 'Oh shucks, I don't know how this happened!' [laughs]. Because I made it happen. (433)

What seems to be important is that the writer is 'humbled' in the sense that she feels that the insight transcends her in some way (a feature we will discuss below). So it is not a particular aspect of self, or self-belief, but something about the relationship between the person and the world about which they write. That is, there can be a profound sense of integration both 'within' the writer and 'between' the writer and her world:

W7: It was as if I had been dissociated and just, suddenly things were integrated. That's why the world suddenly looked as if it were in full colour [it was vibrant]. Yeah. Things were in three dimensions. That was a house. That was a fence, you know. That kind of slightly 'trippy' clarity of things where you feel the sense of cohesion and integration. (1047)

Seen here is a succinct description of the deep integration and validation of self possible amidst important insights. Five of the seven writers made clear mention of this feature of their insights (305; 421, 432-433; 661; 791; 1047).

- *Writers may report that they experience more of the 'I' as construer and less of the 'me' as self-consciousness. The joy of insight may be tied to experiencing more of 'self-as-process' in this way. It may also be revealed as a type of trust and faith in oneself, a type of transcending self-confidence and security.*

Intimately connected to the sense of integration and validation is the joyful experience of the self more as 'I' than as 'me', more as active, flowing 'construer' rather than as deliberative, self-aware planner. This is of course linked to the absorbed, meditative thinking we have already discussed in which the 'normal', tighter representational mode of anticipation is held in abeyance:

W1: He, [her father] ah, taught me when I was a very, very little child to, to silence my mind. So that a rose we were looking at in the evening with a particular curl of petals would ah, take up all the space in my mind. Um, so I guess I was lucky in having that influence and I suppose I think that other people haven't had such a lucky influence and maybe their lives/minds are full of, you know, arrangements and bus timetables. (160)

The carefree childlikeness is crucial. There is here a powerful sense of being in the moment, not straining after some result. Such a state can lead to a wonderful sense of connectedness, of optimism. Writer 7 talked about the transcending sense of faith and confidence that can emerge from such an experience. No longer did this writer feel cut off and incapacitated. Following her insight she felt free to be many different selves:

W7: ... instead of saying, instead of identifying myself as *a* woman who is writing *a* book about an incestuous father, and that had become a role I could no longer do, instead of that I was now just part of this world, and it was all open to me. If I never wanted to write again I didn't have to. It was a sense that, instead of being off in this awful little ghetto, the 'writer' writing about this thing, I was a part of the world and I could choose to be part of it in whatever way I wanted. (1049)

We will see in the discussion of the next feature the way in which the joy of more spontaneous being brings about this sense of 'being 'a part of the world'. I wouldn't want to exaggerate the case however. Writers move in and out of this experience within their creative 'cycle':

W4: But it is, it is I think for me, it's an in-and-out state at once. I don't go into a total type of [exclaims] whooo! It is definitely, it's dialectical. You spin in and out of it. You lose it for a little while, or you relax and then it goes back in. You think 'I'm going to finish this thing'. You know it's quite a state. (669)

Apart from the alternations between looser and tighter construing evident here, there is also a strong sense of the writer moving in and out of more directly experiencing his self as 'I' (self as process). This seems to be inherently enjoyable and is experienced as a state of heightened awareness. Four of the seven writers reported this experience in relation to their insights (160-164; 669; 807; 1049).

- *The accounts should include experiences of a fully embodied immersion and connectedness, a type of 'resonance' with the social world and a sense of being a part of that which transcends them. Again, this participatory knowing may be distinguished by a blurring of the distinctions between inner and outer, self and world.*

As suggested above, along with a deep sense of integration and of more of the sense of self as 'I', there should be evidence the writers are aware of a blurring of boundaries between self and others. Indeed five of the seven writers suggested just that (84; 344, 435; 789, 803; 980; 1006). This is quite evident in the following:

W2: I sometimes think I let the characters borrow my clothes and my apartment in New York, like you are a scout for a film set.... You say 'oh look I've got this apartment, I'll let them live in that one [laughs]. They can have that room, and that view and that position', and then they take it over. So once they get going on their own, they can do what they like. So, it doesn't, it's not like writing from life... yes. You become them rather than they are you. (435)

The writer begins to embody the book. Everyday life becomes populated by the writer's characters and there is a deep immersion in the ongoing project. It 'invades' the writer's psyche:

W5: Well the book becomes real to the extent that I am sort of in it. I am on the same journey, if you like. Momentarily, or the characters are on, you know, in my, whatever I'm doing. Walking down Pitt Street or something — they've joined me in doing that. You know, buying a loaf of bread or something mundane, as most of my dreams tend to be. (789)

What emerges is a deep sense of connectedness and immersion in the textures and feel of everyday life and everyday things. Insight processes, in this sense, are embodied phenomena. In this case, the writer became fascinated by the physical textures of gravel, rocks, ants and so on. There is a strong 'aesthetic emotion' in play here:

W5: It's also, it's very pantheistic, I mean in my case, I feel like I'm exceptionally connected and that book was a breakthrough in that way too. And I was writing it, I wrote a lot of it up on the Central Coast in a bushy sort of atmosphere and I noticed things. As I was putting myself in his situation, or putting him in my situation, I was looking at things, I mean, I looked and examined and wrote about philosophically, gravel! [laughs]. I mean I'll get right down to, you know, right down to it. And I found gravel, this shows you how nutty I was about it, I mean I got to like different sorts of gravel and rocks and ants and, you know, I did think 'let's get right down to Australian-ness'. You know right at its literal level. (803)

Insights may occasionally come from 'pure' thought experiments, but mostly the writers seemed to experience them, and describe them, as being quite physically embedded processes. It is more accurate to say that insights were 'enacted' than they were 'thought'. Writer 7 put this succinctly:

W7: It is something about being actually embedded in it though [yeah]. You are enacting a problem in some way... you are not outside looking in. (1006)

- *The writers are expected to describe insight experiences as socially-inscribed processes, as very much a part of a larger socially-imbued 'conversation'. They are expected to be aware of the discursive, normative constraints which inform their work, which nonetheless they are trying to transcend.*

Five of the seven writers spoke about the social and discursive constraints within which they write (26; 385; 595; 771; 970, 980). Overall, the writers presented a complex picture in which they both avoided yet sought social influences. Novelists are reputed to be solitary types of people and this seemed to be borne out in the interviews. Nonetheless, they were aware of their social immersion and their social function. For example, Writer 7 writes in a room in a university English department and finds this a helpful balance of isolation and social interaction:

W7: If I feel the need for a distraction I have only to walk outside or go to the mailroom or up to get a coffee and I almost certainly bump into someone I know, so it's actually perfect. 'The breathing heart, the living heart, the beating heart at the end of the corridor'. I don't know who coined that phrase, but some writer coined it for exactly that thing. You want to be alone but you also want to know that people are

available when you need them, basically. Bit of a ruthless attitude.
Um... so no, it's a great feeling. (970)

This need to be alone speaks loudly of the influences of normal social discourse on creative processes. All the writers mentioned that they do not like telling people about their work, that this seems to stultify the process. It is as if they are trying to escape discursive (moral, intellectual) constraints and that by talking to people they will be pulled back into normative patterns of understanding, into habitual narrative structures. One aspect of this would be that they do not wish to tighten prematurely their understandings by attempting to communicate them. The writers were also aware that they themselves internalise these social constraints, but that by patiently, laboriously pulling them apart they may transcend their habits of thought and feeling.

W2: ... perhaps there is a censor at work that stops you, that stops you when you are actually filling that blank page. The censor can stop you. It's always there. We have always got the voice of our culture sitting on our shoulders all the time. So that's not... I don't think of [the initial stages of writing] as necessarily the free-est stage at all. I think that there can be inhibitions there. But once you've got something down you are then free. (385)

Of course the material that writers explore is definitively social. They write about, and seek to shed new light upon, the human condition, on relationships and on important issues of the day. To do this, however, they need a certain remove, where the normal interpersonal constraints are relaxed. They strive to make their characters live and breathe as if they are real. In many respects they are trying to re-capture moments of profound social interaction and experience. Writer 5, for example, described several personally-experienced incidents from his life which found their way into his books — a young immigrant boy on a city street with a beatific smile upon receiving cheap runners; the bizarre, mutated inhabitants of a crocodile park in the same bay that Darwin's *Beagle* dropped anchor. And this reinvigoration, this 'transformation' of socially experienced events was commonplace among the writers.

Finally, it was somewhat surprising to find that almost all the writers were quite self-consciously ‘outsiders’ in the sense that they deliberately avoided thinking about their writing as an act of communication. Writer 1 put it most stridently:

W1: ... it’s in fact anti-audience. I have no sense of writing as communicating . Um I only have a sense of writing as speaking to myself. In fact if I thought there was going to be an audience I wouldn’t begin. ... So in fact my way of working is anti-audience, and I try to trigger, trigger a way of writing which I consider quite dangerous.

CS: Dangerous for whom?

W1: Um, for me. Dangerous in that it voices things that I scarcely dare not say.

CS: Ahh. I see. Yes it would therefore be a payoff, it would be very helpful, to not be thinking in terms of other people immediately reading it.

W1: Oh absolutely. I have to do various things to make the paper my confidant. (26-30)

Rather than being evidence for the lack of social ‘inscription’ in writers’ works, however, we can see here that writers are very much aware of the social constraints within which they work. The writers try to establish special psychological conditions for themselves in order to give themselves permission to express things in ways that normally they would feel ashamed of, embarrassed by, threatened by and so on. This unexpected ‘anti-social’ feature will be discussed more below.

- *In the interviews there should be evident a reported sense of the ‘event-like’ quality of insight for which the writers nonetheless feel peculiarly responsible and proud. There may also be a sense that the insight transcends them, that it is ‘wiser’ than them.*

Once again, the words of the writers themselves best evoke this sense of the event-like character of their insights. Take for example the already-quoted insight of Writer 7 who, when driving, was overcome by a ‘glorious feeling’ (1035) and had to stop, sit down and ‘receive’ the insight. As she put it:

W7: And it really was like a voice. I could virtually hear a human voice saying it.

CS: Was it the voice of the character?

W7: No. It was not the voice of the character. At the time I wasn't in analysis, but it was a bit actually like my analyst's voice. It was a woman's voice. An older woman. Very tolerant and you know, wise. Un-judgmental. Understood why it was so difficult. But just: 'It's all right. You don't have to understand. I know you don't understand. I understand that'. (1035-1037)

This sense of the 'external' reality of the insight was quite common. The writers did not seem perturbed by this, but often felt it was a profoundly enriching experience. There is also a sort of glee or sense of luck in being included in such moments:

W6: But um...yeah guided is true. Something that has always struck me. I've always an overwhelming feeling of ...um... 'I didn't realise I had that idea in me anywhere'. 'It's amazing where that came from', and that kind of thing. The whole notion of inspiration and the rest of it as something that is pumped into you. But sort of surprise, a kind of genuine surprise after the event that that was there. (948)

It was quite common for the writers to describe their insights as transcending them.

That, relative to their insights, they were small, insignificant, or less intelligent. Writer 2 was quite unambiguous about this:

W2: We are much punier. I mean I see the writer as about this big [motions about 2 cms and laughs]. Quite puny or ... yes I quite like that word. Compared with the world that the writer has access to.

CS: Yes and it seems to me it's almost it's, if not personified, it's, there's a certain vitality to the world that informs you, rather than vice versa.

W2: Yes absolutely. You don't preside over it in any way . It comes and you're small. That's why you have to leave these doors open because if you don't you just get this small... (354-356)

There is no doubt writers endorsed this feature of their insights. Not only did six of the seven writers describe it (54, 233; 354-356; 552; 791; 948; 1035), but they referred to it in quite emotive and emphatic terms.

13.3 WRITERS AS CONSTRUCTIVISTS

Do the writers express or demonstrate 'constructive alternativism' (Kelly, 1955) — the view that all present constructions are open to revision and replacement — in relation to

their art-form? The interviews provide strong evidence that they do. But what is meant by this? I have earlier defined psychological constructivism (see 5.1 and 5.2.1) as an approach which takes knowing to be hypothetical, multi-valent and uncertain, as pertaining to personal meaning rather than to objective access to 'facts'. Just as fundamentally, psychological constructivism avoids hard-and-fast distinctions between emotion and thinking, and between mind and body, preferring to see such distinctions as constructions — not 'God's eye' descriptions of an extra-conceptual reality. As such, a constructivist outlook is anti-objectivist, anti-foundationalist and views our understandings in terms of viability, allowing for the possibility of multiple, constructed 'realities', for a degree of pragmatic relativity. These knowing processes are held to often be unpredictable, tacit, fluid, and self-organising — telling us as much about the knower as the known. The image is very much of people being immersed in their world, enacting their understanding as much as 'thinking' them. Further, constructivism does not assume a unified, 'essential' self, but rather views people in the light of ongoing 'ontological' development as the person continuously elaborates new aspects of self.

Signs of a constructivist outlook would include a more playful and experimental approach, marked by an openness to reconstrual. Such an outlook is evident in all the writers interviewed. Again there would be evidence that the person opens him or herself to tacit, unpredictable knowing processes and is skilled at alternating between looser exploratory states and tighter elaborations of meaning. It is fairly obvious that the writers interviewed embody this type of flexibility and fluidity in construing. The outlooks of the writers could also be characterised as non-rationalist in the sense that their creative thought is marked by a type of 'crooked logic', by tacit feel and looser associative processes. Their knowing is as much affectively-guided as it is by 'logical' inference and deduction. They also report feeling themselves to be, not separate 'cognisers', but 'participants' who are fundamentally connected to the 'known'. This accords with the view of knowing processes as representing the viability of construing, the 'fit' between person and world. Finally, the writers explicitly recognised that their

experience of self was not unitary, that frequently they were confronted with the 'constructed', changing nature of self, and drew creative inspiration from this.

Overall, the ways in which the expected features of insight captured the writers' experiences of their creative life lends strength to the claim that they display constructivist outlooks. This view of successful fiction writers as constructivists accords with the argument put forward by Botella and Gallifa (1995). Drawing on Pepper's (1942) taxonomy of world hypotheses, they proposed that as people become more 'expert' in their specialist domain, their thinking becomes more complex and, thereby, they tend to move away from positivist assumptions towards more constructivist ones; away from more mechanistic to more contextualist and organicist worldviews. Indeed, at times the writers directly confronted these type of epistemological issues:

W2: And you have to be able to turn, ... I think some... so there are writers who don't transform, who are just transcribing exactly what happened to them, and I've heard people say 'It really happened like this'. Well the truth is no excuse [laughter] is what I think Ellery Queen said that... 'The truth is no excuse'... and it isn't. We are dealing in a different kind of truth. (451)

This recognition of a 'different kind of truth' explicitly positions this writer as being opposed to naïve realist views of truth and knowing. She recognised that she is not merely representing the world, or trying to form correspondences of it. Rather there is a recognition, across the writers, of the transformative nature of what they are doing:

W6: I do want to insist on it's being something... that you are not just passing on. It's something that you are creating, yeah. It's a new entity. Which is why I... I think it's a new element that you are looking for, or you are adding elements together all the time so that. I had one sort of experience with the Ross Campbell and another sort of experience with this aerodrome...um. Although each of them were images personally arresting for me, in their own right, what I eventually wanted to create was not just to transmit those two feelings, but something new as well. (923)

Indeed, the writers quite often used language reminiscent of Kelly (1955). For example, when I described Kelly's Creativity Cycle to Writer 7, in particular emphasising provisional tightening as the possible moment of insight, she instantly agreed: "Yep.

That's just the word I use to my students: 'provisional'" (1106). Furthermore, in terms remarkably close to Kellian theory, she then described the creative writing process in terms of a scientist metaphor: "To me it's like a scientist saying 'Oh. OK. Let us hypothesise that this is the way it works'. As if. 'We'll go on and we'll see what happens'" (1110). Walker (1992) has proposed that Kelly's 'person as scientist' metaphor is best understood as a prescription for how we *should* approach the world, rather than as a description of how all people *do* actually approach reality. From the evidence we have reviewed above, it may also be proposed that to be a successful, creative fiction writer a constructivist, 'as if' (Vaihinger, 1924, Mahoney, 1988) worldview may not be a bad starting point.

13.4 UN-ANTICIPATED FINDINGS

As indicated in the beginning of this chapter, there were a number of un-anticipated findings in the interviews with the writers, but they do not contradict the theoretical understanding of insight proposed in Chapter 11. These can be summarised as follows: 1) the prevalence of quasi-mystical and 'religious' experiences in writer insight experiences; 2) the sense in which writers worked 'from' an instigating insight — frequently not even being sure if they have had an insight at all; 3) that creative writers (mostly novelists) may be a special group in that they are extremely guarded about sharing their work-in-progress with others, even respected peers; 4) that writer insights often involve an awareness and sharing of the writer's multiplicity of selves; and 5) that the joy of insight may not only be found in the moment of realisation, the 'aha!' experience, but may also be linked to the preceding, looser symmetrical awareness. These can now be taken in turn.

- *The prevalence of quasi-mystical and 'religious' experiences in writer insight experiences.*

It was expected that writers might experience the blurring of the 'self-other' distinction, but there was no specific anticipation of quasi-mystical and religious type experiences

connected to their insight experiences. These accounts were non-doctrinaire and based in felt experience. For Writer 3 they were commonplace:

W3: Well I don't mind saying what I feel connected to. I believe in angels and fairies and um, devils and god and the universe and the creative spirit and spirits, and um. You know I frequently have conversations with dead people you know. It's not uncommon for me at all. I speak to them as if they were alive. (587)

While not mentioned by the majority of writers, this sense of the mystical and the religious was endorsed (as we have seen) in more limited fashion in terms of a mystery that transcended yet included the writer. As Writer 7 pointed out, she sensed a commonality between her insight experiences, deeper states of meditation, psychedelic drug experience and her religious experiences. She described it in this way:

I mean I had a classic religious experience walking along a beach which was very like that. A physical, physical sense of you know, God being right there beside me. ... And when walking along the beach I can still see it so vividly. And I just knew that Jesus was right there beside me. I mean I couldn't actually see him, but that was irrelevant. It was the physical presence. It was, yeah, very, very strong. And very like, very like being on acid. I mean there is a similarity across all those things. And the few times I've meditated successfully, um, it's a similar kind of feeling, but it's very difficult, isn't it, to actually describe exactly what it is. (1070)

- *The sense in which writers worked 'from' an instigating insight — frequently not even being sure if they have had an insight at all.*

The classic accounts of insight leave the 'recipient' in no doubt that he or she had just had an insight. The predominantly cognitive insight literature also largely uses 'insight' problems which have clearly 'correct' solutions. A very common theme among the writers was a strange sense that the writing itself revealed things to them which they did not realise at the time of the 'insight'. For example, Writer 2's central 'birthing' metaphor was not evident to the author till after the work was published. It may be that the initial insight was only partial, but it seems that frequently writers contact tacit knowing and write 'it' down without much in the way of a conscious grasp of their 'insight'.

W6: So that although in retrospect when I'm writing I — particularly in retrospect I think — I say 'Yes'. I had a certain insight there. Um, ... It's as though I don't recognise the insight to some time after I have had it. Or it has eased itself out rather than come in this sudden flash way that quite reflexively I notice happening at the time... It's a double pleasure of having the insight and realising you have the insight. It's not like that when I'm writing. (895)

There is also a frequently reported sense that the work does not quite live up to the insight. If Schopenhauer can say that 'Thoughts die the moment they are embodied in words' (or words to that effect), then writers are often aware that they are not quite capturing their insightful 'thoughts' (see Writer 3, 528; Writer 5, 709). We see here a type of instigating insight which the novel or story is an attempt to 'capture'. Thus writers seem not to so much work *towards* a well-grasped insight as to work *from* an insight. Writer 2 brings this idea out well:

W2: Yeah. I think it's a very important point because from the outside you might think oh that first stage is all, you know, you're floating up there and you are creating this and that... and then you get very methodical as you, as you rework it. But it's almost the opposite. And it's real important that first stage — it's just the beginning of something... and all its possibilities come over the months and all those wonderful insights and additions and whatever paths to go down come out of that. (397)

Insights may differ in complexity and type according to domain. Generally writer insights are not answers to well-defined puzzles. Therefore, it may be the case that one can be working 'from' an insight without fully realising it. This would be a more 'feeling', perhaps 'presentational' insight. In fact, frequently writers expressed the need to not so much 'explain' something to their readers, but to evoke in their readers a response, a presentational understanding perhaps akin to that which moved or inspired the writer in the first place.

- *That creative writers (mostly novelists) may be a special group in that they are extremely guarded about sharing their work-in-progress with others, even respected peers.*

The writers interviewed tended not to show or share their work socially, even to respected peers and friends. This was a bit surprising, but on reflection it fits the

theoretical framework I have proposed quite well. This is for two reasons. Firstly such fear and anxiety about other's opinions and ideas about their work reveals a type of 'inverse' social influence. They were certainly not indifferent to social influences. Nonetheless, although writers reported being very aware of the social constraints and discursive influences within which they write, it was not expected that the writers would be so careful and emphatic about distancing themselves from others with respect to their work. With the wisdom of hindsight this makes a good deal of sense within the theoretical position I have put forward. Just as the writer is trying to escape the tighter, habitual and more predictable structures of his or her own thought, he or she needs to create a social 'vacuum', to not be drawn into conventional discursive channels which may inhibit the novelty of what is being reached after.

The second point is that this disinclination to share may reveal how personal and 'private' the task of writing fiction is. This would stand in contrast to other fields in which insight has been studied, science or business for example, in which the insights may not be so personally revealing. As Writer 7 said, perhaps writers have to assiduously disguise or 'conceal' their autobiographical or personal relation to the text, thus holding off till they feel relatively secure about this. It is significant, however, that at some (usually quite late) point, all writers have special people whose opinion about their work is highly valued.

- *That writer insights often involve an awareness and sharing of the writer's multiplicity of selves.*

A common feature in psychological constructivism, but one not much encountered in the insight literature, is the non-unitary nature of self. The writers were expected to describe processes where their sense of self was altered, where there was a 'decentering' of self (Colapietro, 1990). This expectation was met in the writers' accounts, but there was a consistent, added dimension to this. Writers seemed to be aware of the multiplicity of selves within themselves and in their writing. As writer 4 expressed it:

W4: ... you can't afford, in my line of work, you can't afford to have a single notion of consciousness or of absolute privacy. You have to

have a notion that one's psyche is made up of parallel and conflicting elements. That's not madness. It's a healthy way of being. (680)

In Kellian vein he discussed the way in which creative fiction plays around with various aspects of the author's self: "Of course it's a distillation, of course it's been censored. These are *what if* versions of ourselves" (613). Again, this concern with the 'community of self' may be an artefact of the fact that creative fiction is often principally about core aspects of self. They may be concealed (Writer 7) but as Writer 2 emphasised (352, 421), most novel writing is at base autobiographical. The writers appeared to find something inherently liberating about it, some sense of freedom and experimentation to 'be themselves' in new ways in their works without self-consciousness and inhibition (see Butt et al., 1997 for a similar conclusion).

- *That the joy of insight may not only be found in the moment of realisation, the 'aha!' experience, but may also be linked to the preceding, looser symmetrical awareness.*

A feature found clearly in the interview with Writer 1 was that there was a profound enjoyment of the looser states of reverie and absorption, as a positive experience in itself. She expressed it this way:

W1: But when I get to that point where I see what it is, then it seems as if there's a clamp happens. It stops. The free-flowing nature stops. And that's quite a grieving process for me, a grievous process, because that wonderful but terrifying fluidity has to stop. And at that stage I will start to control it. Little things still come and I start to see connections more and more. (66)

It was expected that the moment of insight, when the writer began to see what the unifying meaning of her explorations was, would be experienced as joyful. Instead it is here described as 'grievous'. It should be noted, however, that she also describes the looser fluidity as 'terrifying'. This is in keeping with Writer 2's expectation that the other writers would have mentioned 'resisting the excitement' of this looser stage: "Resistance to the excitement... a pulling back. Have you heard, has anyone spoken to you about pulling back from the excitement?" (336). There appears to be a paradoxical state here where the writers both want and fear to be in this non-directable,

unpredictable state of being. Perhaps, as in a swimmer procrastinating before diving into water, once one has plunged into the 'water' it is fine, and one does not want to get out again. In any case, both these writers also spoke about great moments of joy in the tightening stages of insight. I suspect that the types of enjoyment at these various stages may differ, a speculation that could be tested in a future investigation.

CHAPTER 14: CONCLUSIONS AND BEGINNINGS

Learning... is not something that happens to a person on occasion, it is what makes him a person in the first place. (Kelly, 1955, p. 75)

14.1 THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

14.1.1 Introduction

This inquiry into insight began with a problem. That was the problem of inquiry into new knowledge. Plato discussed Meno's paradox which asserted that we could not even begin such an inquiry because we would not know what to look for. In addition, if we did come across something new, we would not recognise it: if we did, then it cannot be new to us. The same problem can be phrased in personal construct terms. If we can only make sense of things within our existing construct system, then to create something new is problematic. We cannot imagine something outside our present system of construing, and, if new elements of experience were to come along, we could only see them as 'the same', in some way, as those which we already know.

The existence of insight, however, refutes this paradox. It reveals that this intriguing problem is based on particular objectivist assumptions, principally that knowing is a phenomenon with clear-cut boundaries and is mostly experienced at a high level of reflexive awareness (whereby we either know things or we do not). But a constructivist view of knowing assumes that our attempts at knowing are always approximations of reality, are always partial. It assumes that when we grasp something, we grasp only aspects of it. There is always something more to be discovered in events and what frequently stops us exploring such possibilities are the ways in which we currently 'know' things to be. In this way the existence of insight reveals the importance of a constructivist outlook. Conversely, a constructivist outlook may be argued to be conducive of insight.

As with Kelly's view of learning given at the opening of this chapter, the capacity to make new meaning and to know in genuinely new ways I have taken to be a

defining feature of human beings. The ‘newness’ of insight has been linked to two constructive processes: the capacity to open oneself to, and to integrate, new ‘elements’ which may be relevant to one’s impasse; and the capacity to link seemingly unrelated subsystems of constructs, for example, as metaphoric thinking enables. These abilities are argued to be primary and to reveal a broader view of mind, one linked to our physical and social embodiment and expressed within our pragmatic engagement in the projects we live through. The study of insight is important in its own right, but it is here asserted to be doubly important as it reveals not only the richness of human knowing processes, but also the relational nature of the being that is the locus for such experiences. Insight defines not just some isolated computational procedure, locked within individual heads, but reveals instead the participatory ‘dance’ between person and world defined not as separate and interacting entities, but as somehow united within a larger unity.

14.1.2 Features Of Insight Proposed In This Thesis

The theoretical understanding of insight proposed in Chapter 11 was anticipatory with respect to the interviews with Australian fiction writers. It will be useful here to bring back to mind the main features of insight contained within that understanding. Firstly, the review of the insight literature consistently revealed four broad features of insight: the importance of high levels of abstraction; the role of both tacit and conscious mental processes; the ubiquity of emotion within insight; and the social and pragmatic dimensions of insight.

These features were argued to be relatively non-integrated within contemporary accounts of insight. I suggested that what was missing in these accounts was a theoretical framework in which these features could be cohesively and systematically understood. It was further argued that the reported phenomenology of insight demanded a theoretical orientation which tried to break down the strict duality of self versus world, of thought versus emotion, of physical versus mental experience, and of conscious versus unconscious mental processes. A thoroughgoing account of insight also needed

to accommodate the oft-reported shifts in the experience of self. Insight was characterised as a deeply intensional and ‘predicational’ activity, representative of the person’s involvement and commitment to some project. It was affective, embodied and enactive in nature. It also represented a strange undoing of thought which expressed itself in metaphor, in imagery and emerged within ongoing immersion in one’s field of endeavour.

It was proposed that Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) not only offered its own understanding of insight, but was also set at a sufficiently high level of abstraction to subsume the broad features identified in the literature. Kelly’s theoretical position was shown to be well-suited to explaining the phenomenology of insight, and his Creativity and Experience Cycles in particular provided a means of integrating many of the specific features of insight identified thus far. Nonetheless, Kelly’s theory, as it stood, was shown to be deficient in parts and required elaboration and extension in others. To this end, the next three chapters were dedicated to a broader view of mind such that insight seemed to demand.

Contemporary research into emotion was summarised and linked to the emotional features of insight. The strong distinction between emotion and reason was abandoned and Langer’s distinction between representational and presentational thought was presented as a unifying theme of the thesis. ‘Primary’ versus ‘secondary’ emotion was distinguished and this led to a revival of Spinoza’s concepts of passive and active emotions. These emotive styles were argued to be related to the different modes of thought characteristic of insight processes. The development of emotional understanding was also discussed and speculatively related to the formation of ‘self’. All this was then ‘provisionally tightened’ and an account was given of how a superordinate affective stance can enable the person to enter into a more contemplative style of knowing which I called ‘participatory knowing’. Such a style of knowing is fully embodied, multidimensional and intuitive — all central features of the phenomenology of insight.

Matte-Blanco's distinction between asymmetrical and symmetrical modes of thought was introduced in Chapter 9. This was mapped directly onto Kelly's distinction between tight and loose construing respectively. In these terms, loose construing is more concerned with sameness relations and with multidimensional appraisals, as against tighter and more linear distinction-making. Matte-Blanco's detailed account of the workings of various levels of consciousness was related to tight and loose construing, to bi-polarity and to the hierarchical relations between constructs. In this comparative process some of the corollaries of Kelly's fundamental postulate were 'loosened' (for example, the dichotomy and organisation corollaries). The combination between Matte-Blanco's ideas and Kelly's, particularly the way in which suitably permeable and comprehensive superordinate structures can 'contain' loose (symmetrical) subordinate systems, enabled an account of the 'lateral' logic of insight. It was argued that 'bi-modal' thought was an affectively-nuanced form of construing which was theoretically consistent with accounts of 'connectedness' and of non self-concern amid the processes of insight. It was considered likely that such an anticipatory style would be metaphorical in nature.

Chapter 10 elaborated the phenomenological, enactive, embodied and metaphorical features of insight. Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology was utilised to put forward an account of mind as embodied and enactive. Such a view supported the type of 'participatory' knowing I have argued characterises the experience of insight. In such a style of knowing, context-specific immersion in the medium of one's project allows for a less self-conscious, looser and more spontaneous mode of anticipation. This is a presentational awareness which tends to be tacit, enactive and 'felt' as much as consciously 'thought'. It leads to an experience of 'knowing-with' and constitutes a more 'objective attitude' in which there is a flexible openness to new 'affordances' in one's world. This constitutes a dialogue or 'conversation' with the world in which the person adopts a more 'meditative' stance. Such a stance emerges when the person values his or her ongoing experience and relinquishes somewhat the driving subjectivity which attempts to control and predict events.

In place of this latter attitude is a patient 'waiting-upon', a receptive, looser style of anticipation which modulates between provisional tightenings of construing and looser, playful explorations. The predominance of metaphorical and imagistic thinking characterises such anticipatory processes and allows for the 'quantum jumps' to alternative systems of understanding that are so important in insight. As the person becomes immersed in this style of thought and experience, there can be a progressive development of awareness such that one may become aware of one's interpretations or constructions *as* interpretations or *as* constructions. In similar fashion, one may also become aware of the non-unitary nature of 'self' in favour of a more spontaneous presence to oneself as construer, as an 'I' at the centre of one's anticipatory endeavours. Such an awareness may enable the person to suspend the 'normal' pragmatic engagement with the world, to suspend the habits of thought, to hold off knowing for long enough for new possibilities to emerge.

Nothing in these broader discussions of mind was inconsistent with the Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) perspective presented earlier. Indeed, these diverse approaches of mental life were drawn together largely in personal construct terms into a comprehensive account of insight in Chapter 11. Three main questions concerning insight were proposed. These were: 'What might enable a person to have an insight?'; 'What might happen within the insight process?'; and 'What does insight tell us about mind, about persons and about our relationship with the world?'. For insight to occur the person must be committed to some problem or project. Despite sustained efforts and 'preparation', the person reaches impasse, his or her usual heuristics and solutions being to no avail. At some point there must be a renunciation of the problem, some letting-go of the desire to immediately know. This may take the form of abandoning the problem, taking a break, or may include deliberate strategies of loosening one's construing. The latter approach enables the person, under the sway of a transcending affective calm or sense of self-security, to experiment and to be playful. Within such conditions, insight becomes more likely, but still it must be waited-upon, not actively sought-for.

The response to the second of these questions took the form of discussions of the logic and experience of insight, and included an extended ‘Domino Room’ metaphor to illustrate the understanding being developed. The experience of insight is one characterised by fluctuations and alternations in styles of thought (loose versus tight) and corresponding shifts in affective experience. To allow oneself to dwell within uncertainty is not easy. The person must ‘stand under’ the flux of events in order to personally ‘understand’ them. This ‘third mode’, the use of looser symmetrical processes within the constraining structures of asymmetrical thought, allows us to transcend our habitual, automaticised understandings, to transcend the obvious. By suspending our immediate desire to know, the horizons of our understanding may themselves come into view. The assumptions we take for granted may be revealed to us as such, and the haste to jump to a ready interpretation may be inhibited.

The more multidimensional and open-ended nature of loose construing was frequently experienced by the writers as a spontaneity and lack of self-concern, as an experience of freedom accompanied by a strong sense of connectedness. This pervasive feature of the experience of insight prompted a characterisation of people as relational beings. I extended Gibson’s idea of (physical) affordances to one’s wider ‘conversation’ with one’s phenomenological world. New possibilities are ‘real-ised’ or made real by a type of open engagement with the ‘other’. The joy of insight is a type of reunion with one’s sense of anticipatory ‘fit’ or ‘coupling’ with one’s world. Within such meditative thinking, it is ‘self-as process’ that predominates and allows one to relinquish one’s habitual ‘looking-for’ an answer, and to instead be content to ‘wait-upon’ insight.

This theoretical understanding of insight, it was contended, provided an integrative and coherent account. It was then conceptualised in terms of thirty predicted features, grouped into five main factors, concerning writer accounts of their insight experiences. A large majority of these predictions were confirmed — lending empirical support to the framework proposed. Not all the features were endorsed, however, and there were some unanticipated findings. Having summarised my theoretical account

and the ideas developed in this thesis, it is now time to draw some conclusions stemming from them and from the empirical support provided by the writers' accounts of their processes.

14.2 SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT INSIGHT

14.2.1 General Conclusions

Insight, representing as it does the human capacity for the creative transcendence of impasse, is inherently important as a field of study. It is complex, however, and the development of a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework that can encompass its full phenomenology, and make sense of the diverse findings regarding it, represents the main task, and hopefully, contribution of this thesis. I have argued that my constructivist approach to insight has been both explanatory and predictive. PCP, moreover, has much to say about insight in therapy, but is also flexible and theoretically comprehensive enough to extend to the wider findings presented.

One conclusion stemming from this theoretical approach is that attempts to reduce insight to imputed, inner, ultimately neural, processes should be avoided. Insight will remain intractable as a theoretical 'object' of study as long as attempts are made to reduce it to something else, especially something else that is not insightful. This is not to say that it does not have, for example, a neural substrate, or that cognitive architectures are not useful heuristics in understanding the mechanisms by which insight operates. Indeed, I have endeavoured to show that the account given is consistent with contemporary research in these regards. It is to say that there are different levels of explanation and I have tried in this work to give an account of insight which maintains the inherently teleological meaningfulness (intensionality) of the experience. Insight has to do with anticipatory understanding, and it is at this level of meaning that it is best understood.

A major finding, reinforced by the writers interviewed, is the priority of presentational modes of awareness in coming to insightful understandings. Such a

mode of awareness tends to be non-verbal and tacit, personal and metaphorical. It is more multidimensional and holistic, not drawing a hard distinction between values and facts, between art and logic. It is a part of broader view of mind that emphasises the experiential and immediate subjective quality of understanding. Such a mode of awareness is more affectively attuned and 'looser' in its implications. It is 'felt' as much as 'thought' (indeed such distinctions break down under its sway) and it is very much an embodied and contextually-immersed phenomenon.

For example, a somewhat unanticipated, but not incompatible finding, is the prevalence for the writers of what I will call 'instigating' insights. Such insights were often 'felt' by writers well before they were consciously understood. They had to be 're-cognised', often over extended time-frames. Such powerfully tacit breakthroughs then determine subsequent 'representational' chains of implication. These are examples of 'aesthetic emotion': "... emotion that springs from the comprehension of an unspoken idea...[enabling the person to] overcome obstacles of word-bound thought and achieve insight into literally unspeakable realities (Langer, 1957, p. 260). Such 'inarticulate' insights recall Gendlin's (1978) concepts of a 'felt sense' and of a 'body shift' which were experienced within his therapeutic 'focusing' technique. Although the boundary blurs somewhat here between intuition and insight as previously differentiated (see 1.6), it still appears to be an insight we are talking about, as the writers reported feeling a strong sense of breakthrough even though they could not articulate it.

Another major theme, and one of great importance in relation to the broader image of mind that I have been emphasising, is the infusion of thought with affective qualities (and vice versa). This is in keeping with Kelly's (1955) view of construing as including affective, cognitive and conative processes. The return to Spinoza's ideas of active and passive emotions, conceptualised as styles of thought, was important in this regard. Consistent with much contemporary research, emotion is not now considered to be necessarily antagonistic to reason, but is very much a part of the mental processes which either enable a person to anticipate well (active emotion as containing 'adequate ideas'), or of mental processes which are not so flexible and effective (passive emotion

characterised by ‘inadequate ideas’). In particular, I have highlighted a certain ‘transcending affective state’ which enables the person to think experimentally, to be in the presence of uncertainty without undue discomfort. An implication of this is that creative thought is to be encouraged, not by adopting a type of ‘cold’ or ‘neutral’ intellectualism, but by developing an emotional sensitivity which can ‘pick up’ the subtle implications of construct change.

It was expected that a constructivist framework would help us anticipate the insight experiences of the writers interviewed. It seems, in addition, that at least in relation to their writing, these writers adopt a constructivist outlook. All of them viewed their knowing and understanding processes as hypothetical and as open to revision. They knew they were interested in a ‘different kind of truth’. For them, insight is a transformation of images and ideas, not just their representation (‘The truth is no excuse’, as Writer 2 put it). This leads to the conclusion that adopting a constructivist outlook may be related to the capacity for insight. Just as the PCP approach to therapy could be considered as the concerted effort to empower the client to complete full Creativity and Experience cycles and thus to embody the ideals of ‘constructive alternativism’ (Kelly, 1955; see 5.2.1), so creative insights generally may be related to the assumptions and views typical of constructivism.

An overall analogy can be drawn between one’s path to insight and one’s path through life. Life may be conceived of as a passage from innocence, through experience and, ideally, to some kind of higher level synthesis in which both innocence and experience may be ‘married’. In parallel terms, in approaching a problem in life we may embody a certain childish innocence or ‘naiveté’ that our current understandings are the Truth and constitute the solution to our impasse. Then there is frustration and disillusionment that our habitual understandings cannot help us. We fall from ‘grace’. To be able to reconcile innocence and experience, we require faith in ourselves and commitment to the task at hand. New experience must not be denied. It must be accommodated if a higher level synthesis is to be achieved. This is the experience of insight.

The nineteenth century poet William Blake in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, struggled with just this conundrum: how do we maintain the wide-eyed, playful wonder of childhood given the ‘realistic’ outlook of experience? How do we remain open and accepting given the ongoing invalidations of life and the suffering and frustrations of impasse? The answer I have tried to give is to adopt a ‘third mode’ of awareness, a ‘bi-modal’ and meditative thought in which not-knowing, a playful and experimental attitude, a tolerance of absurdity, and a willingness to be guided by intuitive feeling is contained within an overarching, permeable awareness that such an approach is, in the long run, the best way out of our predicament. These latter processes represent the ‘crooked’ paths to insight.

Heidegger (1959) thought that meditative thinking was centrally important for humankind. There appears to be something inherently ‘good’ about entering this mode, yet it is not immediately useful, it is not an ‘answer’. Heidegger thought “Man’s true nature may relate directly to what transcends him” [sic] (1959, p. 23). and insight is often experienced ‘as if’ we are its recipients, yet somehow are *included* in a larger reality that it points to. Insight highlights the value to the person of spontaneity and self-forgetting, of absorption in the present moment and of the concomitant absence of self-concern and self-consciousness so frequently mentioned by those who have experienced insight. Again, this freedom and spontaneity seems to be a constitutive part of anticipatory processes centred in ‘self’-as-process, as ‘I’, rather than in ‘self’-as-content, or ‘me’.

This style of awareness is the opposite of ‘calculative’ or means-end thinking. The writers interviewed emphasised that trying to find solutions too quickly slowed down the whole process of coming to insight. A major implication of this is that as teachers, therapists, employers and so on, we must respect the idiosyncrasies of people’s processes if we are to encourage creativity and insight. Such processes, as with Blake’s ‘roads’, are ‘crooked’ and we must respect this in ourselves and in others. While there is no substitute for hard work and adequate ‘preparation’, there comes a point where we must have faith (in ourselves and in others) and must patiently wait-upon whatever may

come. This may, for example, help creative writing teachers understand more clearly what they are doing with their students and may validate and help structure their approach. This approach is, of course, diametrically opposed to the ruling *zeitgeist* of economic rationalism — the ‘logical’ extension of the calculative thinking of the technological age in which we live. In order to think our way out of the global problems that beset us, there was never any greater need for genuine insight.

At the personal level, this involves giving oneself permission to be ‘indulgent’, to play and to entertain absurdity. All the writers interviewed employed various strategies aimed at emotional self-management and at maintaining ‘looseness’. Finding ways to allay anxiety somewhat, to let go, to try to remain open, to even confront unwelcome aspects of self, were pivotal in their creative lives. One way is not to betray the ‘confidence’ of one’s ‘muse’ or, in this case, one’s characters. Another was to disguise aspects of one’s self and to enjoy a type of ‘vicarious spontaneity’ — living in the experience of one’s characters. This seemed to allow for experimentation, for an expansion of self and for deep feelings of integration and connectedness.

An interesting finding was that the writers considered their books to be ‘wiser’ than them. No doubt this is linked to the felt ‘externality’ and spontaneity of their insights. There may be a tendency for writers to misattribute the sources of their insights and to miss the actual real clues and antecedents of their breakthroughs (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Nonetheless, their reports should be taken seriously. The experienced flow of narrative and the occurrence of ‘life-like’ imagery and scenes such as they reported does suggest the enactive character of consciousness (Hunt, 1995; Shanon, 1993) and is also wholly consistent with the social constructionist hypothesis (Gergen, 1991; Shotter, 1995) that much ‘thought’ is internalised social discourse.

14.2.2 Conclusions Related To Personal Construct Psychology

Apart from the more general conclusions drawn from this thesis, there are implications and conclusions that can be more specifically discussed in terms of PCP. It seems, for

instance, that writers deliberately play around with validation and nonvalidation.⁹⁰ In the terms developed in this thesis, validation or invalidation is difficult within loose construing. The writers appear to play within looseness, only provisionally tightening and trying to stay as much as possible within an exploratory and ‘open’ mode of anticipation. That is, rather than expose themselves too early in the piece to the (imagined) possibility of invalidation, or even to the ‘positive’, but possibly normative and constraining effects of validation, the writers tell themselves that no-one will read their work. In addition, they tend not to show others their work-in-progress, even to respected peers. They thereby avoid both potential validation and invalidation, preferring the ‘openness’ of nonvalidation, of holding off premature tightening. When the writers pretend that no-one would read their work, they are quite conscious that this is highly unlikely, or straightforwardly untrue. It seems to be deliberate utilisation of nonvalidation, an intentional side-stepping of cultural and social constraints. It probably represents a subtle move within the creativity cycle allowing them to wait-upon insight in a fashion relatively free of pre-judgements. In these terms, knowing when not to know, and being able to sustain it, is something that may be a master skill in coming to insight.

Another finding emerging from this research into insight is that not all construing may be neatly bi-polar. For example, I have suggested that loose construing can be conceptualised as construing less dominated by bi-polar contrast and as more characterised by ‘sameness’ judgements. In similar fashion, the relationships between constructs under loose construing may be less strictly hierarchical, more ‘lateral’, thus relaxing the demands of the Organisation Corollary (Kelly, 1955). In sum, constructs and their relations can be fuzzy.

There are practical implications stemming from these suggestions. Using the familiar repertory grids in personal construct therapy to assist dialogue and elaboration, for example, may have the effect of prematurely tightening people’s construing, making it more ‘bi-polar’ in the process. One wonders what it means, for example, when

⁹⁰ See Walker, Oades, Caputi, Stevens & Crittenden (1999) for a more detailed discussion of these terms.

constructs are elicited for grids but the underlying construing is loose? Does the person form a tighter, bi-polar construct, on the spot, as it were, in response to the request for contrasts (Canter, Brown & Groat, 1985)? Do the constructs thereby elicited truly represent an underlying structure or do they merely reflect the mode of elicitation?

Such speculations about the problems associated with eliciting contrasts for repertory grids are not new (see Mair, 1967). Nor are questions about the essentially bi-polar nature of construct (Bell, 1999; Bonarius, 1988; Riemann, 1996. See also Millis & Neimeyer, 1990, for a reply). There have been two views about the nature of non-bi-polar construing. One sees it as mono-polar, where it is constructs, not poles within a construct, which are contrasted (Bonarius, 1988; Reimann, 1996). Another approach is to view it as multi-polar, where multiple contrast can exist within one 'act' of construing (Canter, 1985; Cantor, Brown and Groat, 1985). Some research possibilities flowing from these issues will be pursued in the next section.

The analysis of loosening and tightening in terms of Matte-Blanco's ideas introduced the notion of a looser, more associative and multidimensional style of thought which can, ideally, operate in tandem with tighter ordinal construing. Available to us is the possibility of entering into a more adventurous mode of construing — the awareness of which may help us understand and value our more tacit or unconscious anticipatory processes. Kelly's (1955) own high valuation of preverbal construing and of the art of loose and tight construing needs to be taken more seriously than perhaps has been the case in practice among users of PCP. It is unlikely, for example, that practitioners not mindful of these processes within themselves will be able to help clients orchestrate them productively within therapy and beyond.

Another implication related to loosening and tightening concerns the 'metaphoric' nature of construing. Tighter construing appears to be less 'metaphorical' and more 'literal' in nature. On the other hand, looser construing, held within suitably comprehensive and permeable superordinate structures, seems to embody most, if not all, of the characteristics of metaphorical thought that Mair (1976) outlined. It is also akin to holding ideas lightly — treating some temporarily 'as if' they were true in order

to see others ‘through them’ or in contrast to them. In contrast, when metaphor fades, when the similarity function is treated literally (perhaps when the contrast pole is submerged or remains implicit), then we find the person is construing tightly. So, construing may vary in its modes from ‘metaphorical’ to ‘literal’ and, what may be required for insight to occur may be an optimal balance between these two modes.

A more specific parallel can be drawn between Gendlin’s (1978) psychotherapeutic ‘focusing’ technique and Kelly’s Creativity Cycle. The various ‘movements’ within ‘focusing’ rely on alterations between processes which are identifiable as looser and tighter modes of construing. I have already mentioned that Gendlin’s concepts of a ‘felt sense’ and of a ‘body shift’ make sense in terms of the ‘instigating’ insights described by the writers. This is so because they reflect the presentational and embodied view of construing that I have put forward. Kelly’s (1955) Creativity Cycle can help us to understand how focusing works and PCP generally provides a theoretical framework that can encompass this type of implicit, ‘emotional’ knowing.

More generally, as we have seen, the writers revealed themselves as ‘constructivists’ in relation to their art-form. When one’s anticipatory process embody ‘constructive alternativism’ (see 5.2.1), this may be a equivalent to opening oneself to insight. An important caveat here is that one may be a ‘constructivist’ in one or a number of domains, yet quite tightly ‘objectivist’, ‘hostile’ or impermeable in others. We all have areas of experience in which we hold onto ‘certainties’ beyond the (invalidating) evidence and beyond the viability of our present construing, where we avoid evidence generally. This again raises the issue of nonvalidation, but this time as a ‘defense’ mechanism, as an attempt to suppress, or avoid invalidation. But within bi-modal thought, or the ‘third mode’ of construing I have described, there may be a quite different processes shepherded in by an overarching sense of purpose and faith.

The constructivist outlooks expressed by the writers recall the research findings by Botella and Gallifa (1995) discussed earlier (13.3). That is, there is a discernible move away from a naïve realist, mechanistic outlook towards more constructivist,

organicist and contextualist assumptions. Related findings were summarised by Kramer, Kahlbaugh and Goldston (1992) who concluded that there is a general path of cognitive development in adulthood. Typically in young adulthood thinking is hypothesised to be more 'absolutist'. As thought matures it becomes 'relativistic' and as it becomes more integrative and further differentiated it becomes more 'dialectical'.

In terms of these worldviews, absolutist thought views the world as stable and fixed and tends to be dualist and dogmatic. Relativistic thought is described as 'contextualist' where change and novelty rule, where there is deep fragmentation and often an inability to act. The person is confronted by the subjectivity and relativism of ideas and values. Dialectical thought represents the capacity to integrate continuity and discontinuity, to incorporate change and relativism within a dialectical whole. Contradictions are seen as part of a greater whole and there is an emphasis on growth and emergence, on the process of dialectical unity.

Both of these streams of research may be reflected in my findings concerning the development of a 'third mode' of anticipation — whether phrased in terms of bi-modal thought, of meditative thinking or of creativity cycles. A very important point here is that although there may be a general developmental path across the lifespan, it may also be domain and context specific. It may even be state specific. Thus, for example, writers may be more constructivist in their approach to their writing than in other aspects of their life. Or their day-to-day anticipatory postures may be influenced by changing contextual and personal conditions. When under threat, thinking may become more rigid, more stereotypical. These last observations highlight the value of an approach such as that provided by PCP which can focus on both the nomothetic and idiographic levels. That is, while we can make generalisations using the terminology of PCP about insight, or about constructivist outlooks, it makes just as much sense, using the same terminology, to discuss the ways individuals do not fit these generalisations.

Finally, the writers interviewed exemplified the type of anticipatory, 'scientific' attitude that Kelly (1955) proposed as a model for the person. A not new observation, but one worth emphasising, is that the (ideal) scientist is a creative person passionately

immersed in his or her projects. This is counter to a common view of the scientist as a coolly calculating, neutral and ‘objective’ inquirer (Fransella, 1980, 1983). Kelly’s *prescription* (not description) for the ‘scientist’ is to be a person who becomes deeply committed and who takes the presence of some degree of absurdity or fragmentation as evidence for creative potential, who allows himself or herself to luxuriate in the textures and sounds of the object of study, and who feels she or he *ought* to be open to the world (Walker, 1992). Such a person engages in what McWilliams (1993) called ‘postobjective participation’: dwelling within one’s constructive processes, accepting responsibility for one’s outlook and engaging in a moment-to-moment sense of participation with one’s world. As such this prescription expresses a nomothetic, moral imperative that this is an inherently *good* (adaptive, useful, healthy etc.) way to be.

14.3 BEGINNINGS: FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has provided a theoretical account of insight which is suggestive of future research not only in relation to insight, but also in relation to PCP itself. The purpose of the thematic analyses of the writer interviews was to see whether the theoretical understanding was coherent and suggestive. Given the encouraging findings in this regard, it is now time to suggest some specific future research directions. The analyses presented thus far have not exhausted the rich interview data. The five factors predicted of insight experiences, and the features comprising them, have been provisionally validated by the thematic analysis. In order to further this validation process, however, there are a number of research possibilities.

Perhaps the first step would be to code the features more systematically using an iterative coding approach (Smith, J. A., 1995). For the thematic analysis used, for example, only one or two examples of each feature was typically coded. But it may help to illustrate how strongly each feature is endorsed, not just by what the writers say, but how many times they say it (though, clearly, frequency is secondary in importance to the emphasis and the meaning intended by the writer). Each ‘sweep’ through the transcripts could fine-tune the analysis and provide features more consistently and

reliably representative of the writers' experiences. In similar fashion, a finer-grained content analysis based on a 'dynamic approach' to the transcripts might be used to build a model of insight (Mostyn, 1985). Such information can be turned into quantitative data allowing for easier comparison between various populations — something to be taken up below. In order to do this, independent judges would need to be trained to code the themes and features, thereby allowing for checks of inter-rater reliability. For example, a written protocol could be devised including examples of inclusion and exclusion in each feature to provide a guide for the independent raters (Cohen, 1960; Perreault & Leigh, 1989).

In many respects the best judges, of course, would be the writers interviewed. As befits this type of qualitative inquiry, these provisional results should be taken back to the participants (the 'co-inquirers'). This is a part of the process of 'triangulation' (Jick, 1979; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as an intermediary or second step towards the formulation of a theoretical model of insight. This would take the form of showing the writers the factors and features proposed and seeing if they think they fit their understanding of their insight processes. A number of ways of doing this comes to mind.

One way would be to show them the factors and features, including the exemplars I have drawn from their transcripts, to see if they agree on the features, and on the codings. The writers could then choose a subsample of features that they most strongly endorse. Of course writers may wish to add features they think I have missed. These could then serve as elements in a repertory grid. Constructs would then be elicited from each writer and the emerging factors from each grid, and from the combined grids, could be compared to the factors I have abstracted from these features.

An interesting comparison arising from this would be the various subsets of elements chosen by the writers. It may be that each writer has an idiosyncratic way of conceptualising his or her insight processes. On the other hand, common patterns across writers could be revealed. In this way the thematic analysis could not only be validated, but could be represented 'idiographically' and 'nomothetically' in terms of factor

loadings and spatial diagrams (Adams-Webber, 1994; Bell, 1990; Shaw & Gaines, 1981) for both individual and combined grids. Using multidimensional scaling techniques, a visual representation of each writer's psychological space representing insight could be produced. Or again, the data could be collected as a group to show shared patterns of understanding insight processes. Perhaps with a larger sample of creators and 'insightful' people, core elements and patterns of relationships between them would emerge. Such a set of features could then be used to develop an 'insight scale' for the purposes of future research. A constructivist model for this type of research process is Viney's (1987) 'mutual orientation' approach whereby one takes findings and interpretations back to participants to confirm, disconfirm or elaborate. An important element of such a research process is to enrich the writers' own understandings of their insight processes.

Another question arising from the present research concerns the issue of nonvalidation. That is, it seems that the writers have learned it is useful to stay in a state of 'not-knowing', to not prematurely tighten-up their construing. They seem to have an overarching confidence that allows them to keep their exploratory processes 'open' or 'nonvalidated' — not allowing them to come into contact with (in)validation evidence. Within an overall superordinating confidence does the person know that she or he is deliberately not attending to validation evidence? In keeping with Kelly's (1955) dictum that if we do not know something about clients, we should ask them, participants could be asked to comment on this particular finding. If they are deliberately entering into periods of relative nonvalidation, as I suspect, how do they know this is needed? When is it needed? Have they always been able to do it? Such a finding promises to provide a deeper understanding not only of insight processes, but of the particular moves within the creativity cycle. Perhaps it is a part of 'provisional tightening' which prevents the premature closing off of exploration and experimentation.

An obvious next study would look at creative insight in other fields, with varying ages of participants (all participants in the current research were over 40), and

perhaps cross culturally, to see where there are generalities and where there are unique features. The present results may be confined to exceptional people or to this particular domain of fiction writing and may not tell us about the insight processes of mind generally. It may help to involve other participants from various fields, not necessarily 'exceptional' people (as it is assumed that all people have insights). Armed with the expected features of insight and perhaps a scale derived from these, potential problems in people articulating these subtle and often implicit processes may be reduced.

Features of insight experience that may be specific to the population represented in this thesis include the quite conscious 'anti-social' strategies employed by the writers and their reports of the 'multiplicity of self'. It may be that both of these are artefacts of the craft they are involved in — whereby writers try to 'get outside' social processes in order to comment on them and create multiple characters to embody their narratives. In the first case, future research could attempt to verify or validate this 'anti-social' stance by measures of, for example, 'conformity', or of 'inner' or 'outer' locus of control. In terms of the 'multiplicity' of self, comparisons to the insight experiences of non-writer populations would help to reveal whether this finding is specific to creative writers. In relation to culture, it may also be, for example, that Western society tends to reward and encourage a more representational and calculative thought, a style of rationality with a high value on prediction and control. Cross-cultural studies could help to clarify this.

Another issue emerging from this work is the finding that a constructivist outlook may be correlated with insight. Perhaps, for example, by comparing a sample of acclaimed creative writers with first-time participants in writing courses, some differences in outlook in relation to insight could be discovered. There may be a shift from novices having a more mechanistic or 'naïve realist' outlook while 'experts' may be more constructivist. Botella's and Gallifa's (1995) research on cognitive complexity and expertise would suggest this, and, using similar grid methodology, results could be correlated with participants' views on their insight experiences.

In any such study a complicating factor might be that the capacity for insight is influenced by developmental considerations. Therefore age would have to be controlled

as a variable. Perhaps more directly, a scale on paradigm beliefs (Kramer et al., 1992) could indicate whether, generally, participants hold a more 'constructivist ('dialectical') outlook and whether this is reflected in their areas of expertise. It is likely that novices and younger participants would not have had sufficient immersion in the domain to develop the background knowledge, complexity and differentiation of construing to enable such dialectical processes relative to more experienced and older practitioners.

It was concluded earlier that there were implications stemming from this thesis concerning some fundamental theoretical issues in PCP itself. In particular, the universality of bi-polarity was questioned, as was the strict hierarchical organisation of construing. It was argued that construing can be fuzzy and it may be that this reflects multiple contrasts within a given set of elements. The question is, how can this be tested? It may be possible to address both questions at once. That is, it may be possible to develop a methodology which is both more appropriate to the complexity and multidimensionality of insight processes and which may help us clarify these fundamental theoretical matters.

For example, I have concluded that important stages in the movement towards insight are characterised by construing which is frequently loose, multidimensional and somewhat 'fuzzy'. It may be that such construing represents a tendency away from bi-polar contrasts towards multiple contrasts. This may enable a reconciliation between those theorists who question the universality of bi-polarity (Bonarius, 1988; Reiman, 1990, 1996) and those who maintain it (Millis & Neimeyer, 1990). Future research could, for example, utilise the methodology employed by Mair (1967) and Reimann (1990) which typically reports only about 22-24% of constructs showing perfect dichotomy, although about two thirds of constructs did show a substantial negative correlation between construct poles. But this time, crucially, analyses of the bi-polarity of construing could be made under contrasting conditions of loose and tight construing. For example, some of Kelly's detailed instructions for promoting tight and loose construing could be followed and grids administered immediately. It would be expected

that ‘loose construing’ grids would show significantly less bi-polarity than ‘tight construing’ grids.

Another strategy would be to have, for example, the writers complete ‘standard’ grids based on the features of insight I have found, given as supplied elements. To see whether these same elements fall into bi-polar groupings the multiple sorting methodology of Canter and colleagues (Canter, 1985; Canter et al., 1985) could be used on the same elements — perhaps with ‘counterbalanced’ presentation to remove task order effects. The resulting ‘sorts’ could then be compared with the repertory grid findings — perhaps returning to the participants to find which represents the ‘best fit’ for them. It could be argued that such ‘multidimensional’ sortings are more appropriate to the reported complexity and multidimensionality of insight processes, especially as a confounding factor in repertory grid research may indeed be that the triadic elicitation process itself is a tightening procedure thus leading to artificially high contrasts between poles (Canter et al., 1985). In addition, using non-metric multidimensional scaling techniques Canter and colleagues can derive visual representations of the construing presented by participants. Such research may enable us to determine “... the conditions under which people use [bi-polar] constructs as opposed to multi-polar category schemes and the possibility of converting one system of classification into the other” (Canter et al., 1985, p. 109). Given the finding that insights may be related to just such alternations in construing processes, such knowledge would indeed be valuable.

14.4 SOME FINAL COMMENTS

It has been hoped in this work that insight might be understood as a relational process in which mere subjectivity is overcome and issues in a higher-level synthesis. If it were not for insight we might all suffer endemically from ‘epistemological loneliness’ (Kramer et al., 1992): a despairing sense, not uncommon in our post-modern age, that all is relative, that one cannot escape one’s subjectivity. Yet, in moments of new understanding, we are re-united with the ‘other’, with an objective reality that includes our subjectivity:

In reading a text, in wishing to understand it, what we always expect is that it will *inform* us of something. A consciousness formed by the authentic hermeneutical attitude will be receptive to the origins and entirely foreign features of that which comes to it from outside its horizons. Yet this receptivity is not acquired with an objectivist ‘neutrality’: it is neither possible, necessary, nor desirable that we put ourselves within brackets. The hermeneutical attitude supposes only that we self-consciously designate our opinions and prejudices and qualify them as such, and in so doing strip them of their extreme character. In keeping to this attitude we grant the text the opportunity to appear as an authentically different being and to manifest its own truth, over and against our own preconceived notions. (Gadamer, 1979, *italics in original*)

In this inquiry the ‘text’ I have been attempting to understand has been the experience of insight. Insight is not a final answer, a once-and-for-all solution. But in the terms of the ‘problem’ as we have posed it, insight releases us from impasse, from anticipatory isolation. The hermeneutical attitude that Gadamer endorses is one of involvement and openness. This is an ongoing stance, a mode of being which enables one, as Kelly (1955) put it, to develop ‘successive approximations’ to reality. This thesis has been, in these terms, an ongoing commitment to ‘wait-upon’ insight into insight.

PCP is a reflexive theory: it can account for its own origins in its own theoretical terms. In this spirit, I kept a journal for much of my journey towards insight into insight. As with the writers interviewed, on re-reading early speculations and ideas it is remarkable how hunches and feelings with little or no obvious evidence or reading to support them at that time have indeed flowed through the whole work and have been endorsed both theoretically and empirically. Throughout the process, most of the interesting ideas (to me) occurred not at the computer, but in showers, on walks, driving the car, lying in bed, during domestic chores and so on. At least in my own experience, I have felt there to be a ‘gradient of deepening coherence’ as the work has progressed — one in which underlying themes, perhaps ‘instigating insights’, have been progressively fleshed out and given form.

In struggling with frustration and lack of understanding I have, on the other hand, been constantly aware of how far short I have fallen of the ideals and findings regarding ‘meditative thinking’ and of the capacity to loosen and to ‘wait-upon’ insight.

Painfully aware of deadlines, and of a presumed audience, I have pushed for results, tightened prematurely, frequently pretending and kidding myself that this is how to do a piece of work at this level. It was at those times that I had to back off, to remind myself that there is time, that everything will be all right in the end. At other times, I trusted to intuitions and to more expressive, perhaps less 'academic' expression. It has been an 'emotional' process in the terms developed in this thesis. Frustration has alternated with flow. Not frequently enough, for one or two hours in an eight hour working day, I managed to quieten down, to write without too much thought, to watch the words appear on the screen, as it were. It seems to me that such passages and sections represent the more 'insightful' portions of the above and were certainly those I enjoyed more and 'participated with'. At these times metaphors, images and analogies were most prevalent. Of course the reader can only guess at which passages these are! Nonetheless, in producing this work I have partly verified, at least within my own experience, many of the assertions and speculations above. It is hoped that others have also recognised themselves and their insights processes herein.

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CROOKED PATHS TO INSIGHT: THE PRAGMATICS OF LOOSE AND TIGHT CONSTRUING

(Volume Two: Appendices)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

CHRISTOPHER DAVID STEVENS,

B.A. (Hons.). M.A. (Prelim.). Dip. Ed.

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

1999

SOURCES STATEMENT

I certify that the thesis entitled *Crooked Paths To Insight: The Pragmatics Of Loose And Tight Construing*, and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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APPENDIX 1: WRITER CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

CONSENT FORM

The Nature and Experience of Insight (Chris Stevens)

This project is being conducted as part of a Ph.D. by Research and is being supervised by Assoc. Prof. Beverly Walker in the Department of Psychology at the University of Wollongong. The aim of this research project is to develop a theoretical framework for understanding insight. **Your participation in this research is voluntary: you are free to refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time.**

Please feel welcome to discuss this research further with me or with my supervisor:

Chris Stevens: 02 96641519

Dr. Beverly Walker: 02 42213653

If you have any inquiries regarding the conduct of the research, please contact the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee on (042) 214457.

I,..... consent to participate in the research conducted by Chris Stevens as it has been described to me in the information sheet. I understand that the interview data collected will be used for the purposes of his Ph.D. thesis in psychology and I consent for the data to be used in that manner.

Signed

Date

.....

...../...../.....

APPENDIX 2: WRITER INFORMATION SHEETS.



UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

INFORMATION FORM

The Nature and Experience of Insight

Chris Stevens (02) 96641519

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Beverly Walker

Department: Psychology

Degree being undertaken: Ph.D. Psychology

The aim of this research project is to develop a theoretical framework for understanding insight. I am interested in the full phenomenology of the insight experience, including

its cognitive, emotional, motivational, social and behavioural aspects. I want to know what conditions and personal states are conducive of the occurrence of insight, what its patterns of occurrence are, and how it is experienced.

To this end, the interviews with Australian fiction writers will be pivotal. The format will be qualitative with a semi-structured interview. It is expected that interviews will last for 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be audio-taped for transcription purposes. The three main areas of interest will be:

1. A discussion of significant experiences of insight related to your work as a writer.
2. A discussion of the ways in which you organise your creative life, both on a day-to-day basis, and in terms of longer time-frames.
3. Your own views on the nature and genesis of creative insight.

Individual participants will *not* be identified with any transcripts appearing in the Ph.D. thesis and all efforts will be made to protect participant anonymity. Tapes and transcripts of the interviews will be stored at the university and will only be accessed by the principal researcher, the principal researcher's supervisor and possibly a research assistant (who will be bound by an agreement to the confidentiality of the material).

You are free to discontinue your participation at any time and should you have any inquiries about the conduct of the research please contact the University of Wollongong, Human Research Ethics Committee on (02) 42214457

APPENDIX 3: WRITER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

The seven writers will be identified as W1, W2 and so on, up to W7. The use of brackets [] has several functions: to indicate a simultaneous utterance by the listener while the other person is speaking, or quick interchanges while a person is ‘holding the floor’. Occasionally they also contain my direct authorial comments and directions for the reader. The expression ‘mmm’ should be taken as agreement or assent to what has just been said. Names of close friends and relatives and titles of works have been removed.

Writer 1

1. **CS:** ...how you manage your creative life generally. I’m interested in the day-to-day stuff, but also how you think about longer terms, the week, the month, the project, or even the decade. But I’ll leave it up to you how you describe that sort of management. I’m interested in how you consciously prepare yourself consciously for insight or creative breakthroughs.
2. **W1:** I’d like to talk about how I *should* manage my creative life. At the moment things are a bit of a muddle because a lot of things are happening, overseas. Which has to do with non-creative things like publishers...but at best when I’m really sort of working and totally focused, what I do is write, work, sit at my desk, deliberately sit down at a standard time every day and don’t leave it until I have to go and get my child...so I have bookends as I call them [bookends! They are things you do before and after?]. I sit down at 8.30 and I get up at two o’clock.
3. **CS:** Right. Is that literally? I mean basically you don’t move?
4. **W1:** I come down for lunch [yeah, OK] and if I feel that making a pot of tea will shift something I’ll do that.
5. **CS:** Why do you do that?
6. **W1:** Do that very rigorous thing? [yes]. Because otherwise I would muck around. I’d do the washing instead.
7. **CS:** And what happens when you are doing that and nothing happens as it were?
8. **W1:** It’s terrible. But I believe I have to sit through it. It seems to be working quite well now. If I have a time away from writing it’s hard to come to come back because there will be many days like this and I make myself stay there. I’ll use various strategies.
9. **CS:** What are they?

- 10.**W1**: There's quite a few of them. One of them for example is to read something that tugs at my imagination so I have certain writers who I think will get that imagination tugging and that's one I do quite a lot. And it's very odd the way that one can think of something totally disconnected from that writer but still be triggered by that writer.
- 11.**CS**: What do you think is happening there?
- 12.**W1**: Well I call it a tug. I don't know. I mean I could say literary things like its voice is somehow parallel to my voice or has resonances with my voice. But I don't really know. It gives me a sense of bravery. There are certain writers whose courage I sense, in that they have broken down a lot of conventions in order to create that sentence and you feel it there in the sentence [yeah, you can sort of experience it as you read it]. Yes, and I think well, if she dared to do that then I can do it too.
- 13.**CS**: It's interesting. The first thing that occurs to me is what's happening is you're shifting your mental mode. You're using someone else [yes]. You're slipping into a different way of thinking and being on purpose, and this is just one of your strategies for doing it.
- 14.**W1**: It is true that to write you get into, I have to get into a trance and that trance can be so profound that when the phone goes I wonder what the object is that's making the noise.
- 15.**CS**: I think we will be talking about this a great deal in our one and a half hours together, because it is certainly one of the central pillars of my research is that we have to be able to look at a different mode of mental operation, we have to be able to understand it [mmm, mmm]. Not that it's that rare, but that we don't normally think of ourselves in that way [mmm]. I think it operates all the time in fact.
- 16.**W1**: Yes. And it actually feels as if that part of the brain is much smarter.
- 17.**CS**: That's right, but in a different way.
- 18.**W1**: Yeah I mean I don't know if I could go up and buy a lump of meat from the butcher's from that part of the brain.
- 19.**CS**: Yes exactly. Or you wouldn't exactly be happy having an airline pilot who is operating with that *modus operandi*. But certainly to do the sorts of things that you want to do it would be necessary. So that's one of the strategies...so you're reading people's work that you really admire, particularly in a sense ones who are taking risks. I might just ask you about that now rather than trying to remember it later. Why do you think it is particularly useful that you feel they are taking risks?
- 20.**W1**: I guess I feel that I'm pretty cowardly...And I think 'Oh! There's a permission'.

- 21.**CS:** Which is interesting because, not to psychologise too much! [laughs] but what it does it say to you — because one of the things that I'm interested in is the relationship between notions of self and how that can get in the way of people loosening themselves to insight if you like. What is the fear there or what is the concern that needs to be pushed aside and that you get inspired to push aside?
- 22.**W1:** A prohibition, taboos. One of the things that comes to me is 'oh you are allowed to say that'. It might just be a very small thing that might not be a taboo to anybody else but I sense the taboo for that writer and perhaps I have the same taboo or a resonating taboo myself.
- 23.**CS:** Yes. Or your own collection.
- 24.**W1:** Or my own collection. So that's one thing that gives me courage. The other is that I admire boldness, artistic boldness. And it's wonderful to feel that somebody has been bold before me...and that gives me courage to be bold.
- 25.**CS:** I get a strong sense of a sort of audience even though it's well before...
- 26.**W1:** Yes it's funny you should say that because it's in fact anti-audience. I have no sense of writing as communicating. Um I only have a sense of writing as speaking to myself. In fact if I thought there was going to be an audience I wouldn't begin. I think it is one of the reasons I can only do stage adaptations of my work, not actually write a play, because as soon as you write a play you assume an audience because you write a character's name and that has to be done by an actor and so you have actors as an audience. So in fact my way of working is anti-audience, and I try to trigger, trigger a way of writing which I consider quite dangerous.
- 27.**CS:** Dangerous for whom?
- 28.**W1:** Um, for me. Dangerous in that it voices things that I scarcely dare not say.
- 29.**CS:** Ahh...I see. Yes it would therefore be a payoff, it would be very helpful, to not be thinking in terms of other people immediately reading it.
- 30.**W1:** Oh absolutely. I have to do various things to make the paper my confidant.
- 31.**CS:** What do you have to do?
- 32.**W1:** Well I promise myself I will never show anyone. I promise myself I won't publish, and...I promise myself that it will be a long time. I have this luxury of time. I think it is actually one of the joys of writing a novel. You can actually make that happen. You don't have to show, you don't have to come clean about it. And I try not to talk about it to anybody.

- 33.**CS:** Yes I think this is a very very common theme that creative people don't generally talk about things in progress...are happy enough to talk about things that were in the past.
- 34.**W1:** I mean I keep making mistakes. Someone will trick me on a radio program and say 'what are you writing now?' and I try not to say anything and then...
- 35.**CS:** Because it's so much a part of your consciousness?
- 36.**W1:** Yes, that's right, and I feel like I've betrayed it, if I speak about...There's a sense of telling gossip about a very close friend.
- 37.**CS:** One of the themes that I want to visit is there seems to me to be a strange sense of which is paradoxical I think, a strange sense of when people move into a type of insight state, or just a looser mentality, and insight comes or just the flow of work, that sort of immersion and absorption you were talking about earlier, it's almost like it's separate from them, it has a life of its own that one listens to rather than directs, but in the other side it seems to be very hyper-personal [yes] and spontaneous and exterior at the same time or something like that.
- 38.**W1:** Yes absolutely!. All of those things.
- 39.**CS:** So you don't want to...you chose your words very carefully there about...the word was 'betrayal' I think.
- 40.**W1:** Yes. It's very emotional, a very emotional time. Yes the sense, the felt experience is that it's coming into existence and to be revealed only to me. So if I go blabbing about it, you see I'm choosing again emotional words, that it may not come again.
- 41.**CS:** There's a guy called Howard Gardner, he's pretty well known in psych. circles. He wrote multiple intelligences and things like this. But he's written a book on creativity and he talks about — he looks at some of the great creative figures of the time, you know Picasso, Martha Graham and so on, but he says that something that is almost universal is what he calls the creator's Faustian Bargain. It just reminds me of what you are saying. There's a sense in which there's a deal being made and there are big trade-offs too [mmm]. There are great costs in people's lives [mmmm] from this way of operating and it is very much selling their soul and then they have to keep to the deal.
- 42.**W1:** Absolutely, absolutely. And it means that, e.g., [novel]took seven years. And most of the time the deal was that I didn't tell anyone. It's a long time to remain silent about your work when you're asking people to bear with you in all sorts of ways.

- 43.**CS**: Yes, exactly. It's a bit like doing a Ph.D.! [laughter]. Later on I'd also like to talk to you about this notion of infinity because it is something, perhaps in the later stage of the interview when we are...having more of a dialogue...But if you could remind me to do that.
- 44.**W1**: I may not remind you.
- 45.**CS**: Well if we don't get to it, we don't get to it! I'll run through my checklist. So we've got this ritual of sitting at the desk and keeping to the hours. What other strategies do you use?
- 46.**W1**: They tend to be verbal strategies. I mean I know of writers who listen to music and look at paintings. Sometimes I've looked at photographs of my family. They're very emotional my family and therefore all sorts of stuff is in the photos that no-one else would see but me...But usually it's verbal. Another time-honoured method is to just take a book down from a shelf, open it up and find a sentence...that um triggers something in me and just keep on writing from that sentence. It's amazing how many sentences that are about something totally different are amazingly related to my mind.
- 47.**CS**: It's a bit like a Rorschach inkblot isn't it [mm].
- 48.**W1**: Exactly, and even to the extent that I find a thesaurus a very useful starting off point.
- 49.**CS**: I read a book by Naomi Epel on writers' dreamings and a lot of writers just write words on pages [yes, yes] and this sort of thing ...they begin that way, and it sounds like they are all very similar.
- 50.**W1**: Yes I've never used that. Somehow getting it from other source...
- 51.**CS**: moves you outside you own [yes] routines [yes] or limitations [yes].
- 52.**W1**: That's right. I think I'm a fairly obsessional sort of person and if I use my own words I wouldn't get that exteriority.
- 53.**CS**: Yes I was interested in what you said in relation to that earlier...you said something like ...if you tell other people about it you'll lose the sort of the gift of it or the...[mmm]. It's almost like it's smarter than you are or more provident or...
- 54.**W1**: It's more coherent than me [OK] and there's a feeling that it's already attached to itself. It's pre-formed.
- 55.**CS**: OK I think you mentioned on the phone about someone was talking to you about Plato and Platonic forms. One of the possibilities is that there is...actually there are so many things we talk about flowing from that, but two of them that I could think of that would be interesting: One is the notion of cultural discourses, the way in which

they come as whole units and they speak us in many respects...and they're infinite in their number and their complexity. The other thing that I think flows from that is also the notion that we need to somehow step outside our well-worn mental [mmmm] and emotional routines and that these are limitations on us and that this is a very important part of the process [mmm]. More of that later I think. Do you think in larger time-scales as well as shorter ones?

56.W1: No. It's very present moment. And I say no adamantly because that also seems a betrayal. For example, on a very practical matter, I would never sign up for a book, [by a date or something] by a date. That would mean (a) that I was betraying it, saying 'I'm going to go public with it whether you want me to or not' to it; and (b) it would mean that I'd start to figure out, I'd jump the very complex and intricate process of getting this slowly.

57.CS: You'd feel like it had become a type of means-ends operation [mm] rather than one that has its own sort of pace and authenticity.

58.W1: Oh absolutely! I must go with it; I must not try to direct it. It has its own life. It's like trying to speed up a flower growing. I must let it go with its own pace and take, it leads me. I don't lead it.

59.CS: Yeah I get a very strong sense of that with you that your creativity is not so much about you.

60.W1: No. It feels very exterior...It really does feel like there is this submerged cathedral and a bit is sticking up here and a bit is sticking up there.

61.CS: Though presumably you have a role, but it's a later role, it's sort of...

62.W1 There seems to be two parts to it. One is this exploration, this meandering exploration. And at a very much later stage I start controlling it. There's a point at which I know what it is about.

63.CS: You see the patterns in it.

64.W1: I see the patterns. Quite often I'm astonished at what it has become. What the patterns are. Sometimes I go back and see that I knew the pattern all along. It was in the very first ten pages.

65.CS: Yes, but you didn't see the significance of it.

66.W1: But I didn't see the significance of it. And I maybe even threw it aside. But when I get to that point where I see what it is, then it seems as if there's a clamp happens. It stops. The free-flowing nature stops. And that's quite a grieving process for me, a grievous process, because that wonderful but terrifying fluidity has to stop. And at that stage I will start to control it. Little things still come and I start to see connections more and more.

- 67.**CS:** Yes that's fascinating. In terms of what we were talking about before about the stages of insight, the verification and elaboration is very much the end of the process. It's not that we can't cycle through many [yes] of the processes but at least there's a device for breaking it up. We have this sense in which you can't do both at the same time.
- 68.**W1:** I keep on explaining to people this when I teach them. I say you can't both invent the clay and mould it at the same time [yes]. It's too much to ask.
- 69.**CS:** Yes, one of the authors I'm very interested in, a psychoanalyst and mathematician... And he talks about symmetrical thought which is very associative and leads to infinity because of the notion that everything is one and unified. And our more day-to-day thinking is what he called asymmetrical, which is based on difference and distinction and which is much more tied up with implications and logicity [mmm].
- 70.**W1:** And I guess that's the second stage.
- 71.**CS:** But he does talk about what he calls bi-modal thought...by which he means use of symmetry and associationist-type thinking in the service of more logical thinking.
- 72.**W1:** Yes. Well that comes under the second stage too.
- 73.**CS:** It does doesn't it?. Where it's like it's enriched by...
- 74.**W1:** But you couldn't have it without the first stage.
- 75.**CS:** Absolutely not. This is the fountainhead, as it were [mmm].
- 76.**W1:** For example, in [novel], there were all sorts of things that had been discovered in the first stage, umbrellas and sandwiches and paintings on the insides of cupboards and things. And suddenly in the second stage I saw what they were about. But by that stage I could attach a lot of other things to them that I hadn't previously thought of.
- 77.**CS:** Yes, again it reminds me of...it would seem to me that at the moment of insight is a sort of tightening up of our mental processes.
- 78.**W1:** Yes. And part of the trick is to delay that. If you saw it immediately then a lot of fluidity would stop.
- 79.**CS:** In the words of one psychologist, you would pre-empt.
- 80.**W1:** Yes! Absolutely. And Jessica Anderson said to me, oh perhaps I better not say that because it was in confidence [yes] ...[laughter] but all I can say is that I don't think that this is unusual.
- 81.**CS:** No I'm sure it's not and I'm sure I am going to encounter it many times. OK. So, you talked a little bit about managing yourself. I'm interested too because I was

hoping that writers would do what you did. And that is, you didn't just talk about concrete things. You did about sitting at the desk, but largely what you've talked about is self-management [mmm]. A type of emotional and social management too. Presumably the people around you know very clearly your routine and...are there rules about that...when you are writing?

82.**W1**: Well I guess yes. [partner] wouldn't, who's often, or who's sometimes at home when I'm doing it, wouldn't interrupt me and he knows that. He's a writer. [daughter] of course doesn't accept any of these rules so it's totally different.

83.**CS**: [daughter] is [my child] and she's? [she's eleven].

84.**W1**: But I try and teach her to write like this too and her writing when she does it is very focused and amazingly mature. I was going to also add that I write by hand [ah!]. Now this is part of it, because it's also a promise that I won't show because ... typing it makes it very much like print, it feels public [yes]. So there's a secrecy about writing by hand and a physicality too which seems to me to be terribly much part of it.

85.**CS**: Yes, I think there's more of an individuality too isn't there in terms of...when you type on a word processor the structure and layout and everything is determined by the machine [mmm]. You can't doodle very well on a ...

86.**W1**: No. And handwriting, there's some wonderful wonderfully forgiving thing about it. When you type it looks like you've got to have your spelling right. With handwriting there's a sense, particularly with some um pens [laughter], or particular shade of pencil, that you can just go on and on. I tell my students to do this, to imagine themselves, you know like those posters you used to see of communist China where you see a very strong-faced young man and a beautiful young mother and happy children and the man would be saying ONWARD! That's what I feel. Handwriting allows me to go on, not to censor.

87.**CS**: Yes Because it's more like writing in a diary or a journal...it's more private do, you think?

88.**W1**: I've never done journals or diaries, despite being determined to...but I think it's privacy and again it comes into that area of being tolerated, forgiven. You don't have to stick to anybody else's rules.

89.**CS**: Yes. That's very interesting . You do talk about 'it' a lot. You use the word 'it' [yes]. Is it like a person or is it like...

90.**W1**: It's a bit like a nudging, a bit like you've got a warm potato nudging you from the inside.

91.**CS:** Something's nudging you. It's very much like you have a relationship with...

92.**W1:** Oh, very much. Absolutely. I mean it's a relationship in all sorts of ways. You carry it around with you so that in ordinary everyday life there's you and 'it [yes fascinating isn't it]. Yes and you go up the street and there'll be someone arguing about a car and so you'll think 'oh, Owen would be interested in this'. So you let Owen have, get attached to some bits and pieces of that could be interesting for Owen who is a character in 'it'. It's a bit like the way little girls carry around dolls. I mean they are starting that process because they are saying to their doll 'look at this' and 'look at that'.

93.**CS:** Or indeed invisible friends...[yes, laughing] 'well Johnny doesn't like that' [laughing]...

94.[change of direction in interview]

95.**So** let's talk about a time that you had, it doesn't have to be the biggest or greatest, but a time that first comes to mind really when you had a big breakthrough. When you had been struggling with something and you just, you were frustrated you couldn't get it and you actually did put it aside or you did something else and then... [clicks fingers]. Can you think of one of those?

96.**W1:** Yes.

97.**CS:** And how long ago was it?

98.**W1:** How long? Oh I'm thinking of this because it was quite recent...[how long?] maybe a month ago. [Oh OK and was it in the house here?] Where did I think of it? I think I was in the house...I'm afraid I can't remember. I certainly had a sense of...it was a new character that suddenly changed everything — certainly had a sense of him in this house. Perhaps this is not a good example because I cannot even remember what country I was in.

99.**CS:** Try another one, it doesn't matter which one.

100.**W1:** OK. All right, I've got one Yes. OK. Yes [how long ago was it?] Now this is for [novel]so it would have been some years back. [Great and where was it?] Where did I have the realisation?. In a balcony in Greece...[IN a balcony in Greece?] yes overlooking the square [what time of day was it?]. Lunchtime [It was lunchtime. And were you by yourself?]. No I was with [partner] and I was actually telling him about the story and we were drinking wine and having lunch and I suddenly said: 'I know what happens'.

101.**CS:** Now can I get you to actually close your eyes and place yourself on the balcony [mm hmm] so presumably I can be [partner] as it were, and were you half way through lunch or were you all the way through it?

102.W1: I'd say half way.

103.CS: And you'd been telling him about the development of the story [mmm]. What was [partner] saying? What style of things was he saying? Was he...

104.W1: He's a very monosyllabic sort of person so he probably was saying mmmm mmmm.

105.CS: Which probably would have been perfect for you [perfect].

106.W1: I don't need other people to say anything back but it's lovely when somebody just listens.

107.CS: And you have the sense he was listening and was understanding. But, this thing came surprisingly [mmm absolutely]. Can you tell me how that felt in any way? How it felt physically?

108.W1: Oh it's a rush! It's a rush. It's almost a coloured rush.

109.CS: Yes Where does it strike you?

110.W1: Ah here [places hand on chest].

111.CS: Yes because your hand immediately went to your chest didn't it?

112.W1 Yes its sort of gold [laughs].

113.CS: And were you silent when it first came or did you blurt out?

114.W1 Oh, I blurted [what did you say?]. Oh I would have said 'I know what it is.'...I know and then I would have described it...I guess in a sort of raw and embryonic way but...

115.CS: Can you remember the style in which you were talking? Was it, did you, a whole flurry of things come out?

116.W1 Yes. A flurry.

117.CS: And poor old [partner] was there being quiet I hope!

118.W1 Yes. I guess I would have said something to him when I had finished like 'What do you think, what do you think?'. And he would have said 'Well, maybe it's good'. I've learned, because I do say these things to him occasionally, that even if he sounds a little bit negative that actually excites me, because I think I can show them, I can get it right. I can...yes, a very fundamental thing for me — this is...I'm afraid I'll have to tell you a bit of my background — is that I was regarded as a dopey child by my family [ah!...OK]. I have a child like this myself so I can understand my family. And I always felt a bit short-changed by everybody, in the sense not so much that people would tell me I was stupid, but they would be very condescending and paternalistic. Like 'you wouldn't understand this'. So I always had the sense of 'I'll show the bastards'. So if someone like [partner] says 'mmmm...don't know if that

would work', I have to say then 'Oh well! I can show the bastards' [laughs]. It's quite confirming, 'affirming'.

119.**CS**: Yes, and it's interesting because there's whole gamuts from this but...One of the things that strikes me is that you, when you were talking before about not telling people and about betraying it, and it's something between you and 'it'...I just lost my train of thought a little bit...

120.**W1** Then how can I say this to someone like [partner] [yes]? He's in a very special position. Yeah. It doesn't feel like a betrayal with him.

121.**CS**: Because of trust is it?

122.**W1** It's also that, and also he prompts a certain, by his very presence he prompts a certain um...I don't tell him what it's about. He's not asking for the big picture. I might be saying 'look this character is a real con-man and he thinks of...' and I'm actually thinking as I'm going and I'm not...it's not as if I'm on a radio program where I would be formalising it, I guess [that's right]. I'm trying to see the concept.

123.**CS**: Well [partner] is in a hopeless position isn't he? [oh yes!] because he...

124.**W1**: He's sitting, this train is rushing towards him and, in the dark, and he's just seeing you know the front windows which are alight. He's not seeing that it is a train.

125.**CS**: So really what he's acknowledging more is your process [yes] rather than the particular content [yes, yes]. And he might pick up from whatever his system of understandings is, he must think 'I don't see how that's going to work', but for you it has an entirely different significance.

126.**W1**: Oh absolutely, which I don't know at that moment.

127.**CS**: No...except that you have a certainty that it does have significance [yes].

128.**W1**: Yes, absolutely. Can I tell you another one time [yes!] when something like this happened which was wonderful? And might actually talk about the process better. I had been writing [novel] for about four years and it was in, it was just before we left for Greece, and I was going to Greece to try and get the story, and there were about fourteen kilos of separate bits and pieces [right!] um and this was about a week before we left and I was on a bus. I had no idea of how the story, what the story was. I knew that it was about a few things, love and relationship and someone who was beautiful, and there seemed to be two mathematicians — just things like that. A hell of a lot of material, a hell of a lot of thinking. I was on the bus and it's as if it flew in the window the very first line of the novel and I wrote it down on a bit of paper from my handbag. The sense was that everything in my mind was lining up behind that sentence as if it was the leader in a procession, but I wasn't consciously thinking of

any of those bits [no, no, no]. In fact, at that stage I didn't really, I think I might have, yes I had typed out all those bits, those fourteen kilos, but I didn't have any idea how they fitted together. And I didn't really have a good idea of what they were about.

129.**CS:** But did you have a sense in which you had a sort of, at some level a confidence that they were connected?

130.**W1:** No. I was desperately terrified they weren't. It was purely on spec. In fact after that sentence we got to Greece I got out this huge pile of paper and I started colour-coding in six or eight categories that I knew — the ones I just mentioned — to try and find if I knew how I could put it all together, or what the story was, or who it was about, or anything.

131.**CS:** But this sentence came in as a sort of key.

132.**W1:** Yes, before that.

133.**CS:** You probably are aware that in the creativity literature generally, but also very strongly in the insight literature, most of the big insights seem to come in idle moments. You know [mmm] Archimedes in his bath; you get Poincare on a bus ..

134.**W1:** Was that the one who stepped [stepped...yes] I've read this, yes.

135.**CS:** That's right. They were some mathematical functions he invented, discovered. What do you think it is? And it's a very frequent experience for people, for academics, for all sorts of people. They work very hard on something, so incubation doesn't have to be a long period of time, it can be, you push at something for a while. I often say to students if you push with your essay too much it's counterproductive. Go to the fridge or walk around the block, then come back to it, and often in the walk or as they hit the desk as they sit...What do you think is happening there?

136.**W1:** You get a bit of objectivity just by time. You get into another time mind-frame and I also think it has something to do with intuition. Now, what that intuition reaches to I don't know. The sense is that it's the thing you get is already written and it's sort of inscribed on the air [yes]. Occasionally I've tried to see if I had any psychic abilities and I've sat down and let my mind go just into neutral, and something has happened that turned out to be psychic. So I'm wondering what that connects to too.

137.**CS:** The possibility that there are, at the very least, modes of knowing which we are not very sensitive to.

138.**W1:** Yes. I tried to write about this in fact in [novel]. I'm just thinking about it because I saw the play [of the novel] the other day. There's a character who says that there are ways of knowing that aren't discussed.

139.**CS:** It's frequently in times of extreme stress...people have these experiences. For example, you know great trauma or crisis. And they have a sense when people die and so on. It seems to be fairly well documented.

140.**W1:** Yes, so there is a sense which I suspect is connected to that, but I have no way of thinking about it.

141.**CS:** No, it strikes me that one of the things about it is that it is non-verbal, in a strange way, even though for instance, it may express itself in the first sentence of a novel or in a mathematical function. I don't think it in itself is verbal like that. I think it seems to be more holistic [mmmm] and then we clothe it as it were [mmm], we need to do a lot of work before we can clothe it.

142.**W1:** Oh yes. I mean this is the mad thing that people popularly think of as inspiration that it's, you know, you don't need to work beforehand, but it seems very much to me that [99% perspiration]. Yeah, and it's as if it comes as a gift.

143.**CS:** Yes well certainly I think we'll have a fruitful conversation when we move into the dialogue phase because my mind is sort of buzzing with analogies from the psychological literature. Something I wanted to go back to which I thought was intriguing, and I thank you for being so generous about yourself. You talked about growing up and felt patronised and so on, and it struck me that often people don't... there are different types of intelligence...and the type of intelligence that's often valued in our culture is what Heidegger called calculative thinking...which is very means-end and it's quick...[mmmm] and it's very reliable and its very predictable and its obviously an important mode of thought [mmm]. And he contrasts that with what he calls meditative thinking [mm] which he considers to be the essence of the person [mmm]. And this is slower, and what he, he uses strange words, if you've read any Heidegger you'd know he uses words that he coins...and he calls it 'releasement'. That the person has to come to releasement [mmm], a sort of listening attitude or a receptivity, not quite a passivity but moving in that direction [mmm, mmm] and it struck me that it's also a patience thing, about cultivating your capacity for patience [mmm]. And it struck me that when you were talking about that, that what people hadn't seen was that type of intelligence in you.

144.**W1:** Well I guess so, thank you. I find that sort of thinking that you are talking about is a way that I eventually learned to slot my mind into but it's very cumbersome and it's step by step...It...that can be very frustrating. I remember as a child trying to do that with mathematics whereas I'd much prefer to just grasp it suddenly.

145.**CS**: Though, I don't understand it, though from what I understand that when people are very very good at mathematics they move very much into this sort of mind-state.

146.**W1**: Yes, I've been told that by mathematicians, whereas I thought it was prohibited as a child. So I tried to do it the 'right' way.

147.**CS**: Yes, they talk about it in very aesthetic terms.

148.**W1**: Yes. It's a wonderful feeling. The way of seeing it suddenly you feel like you're looking at the way the universe is put together. You could get very carried away by your own powers.

149.**CS**: I think so. Einstein would probably be a good example, you know. He talks about [its very joyful]...muscular images is his phrase.

150.**W1**: I wouldn't have said muscular, but then he was a bloke. But it is full of joy.

151.**CS**: Again there are a number of authors that I think of that talk about this type of distinction. I don't know if you are familiar with the philosopher Susanne Langer [no]. She makes the distinction between what she calls 'presentational' consciousness and 'representational' consciousness, and the presentational is much more about what we have been talking about...in terms of the medium is very important. I was thinking that before when you were talking about writing by hand, and the type of pen or pencil [mm]. It's the medium is the message in the presentational mode...[mmm] — that we are not just representing things. The thing is the thing, you know [yes]. The words don't just refer to or represent something [yes], and that these two modes were always within us but our culture mostly values the representational mode [yes]. And the presentational is much more emotional, much more figurative, metaphoric [mmm] and certainly medium-sensitive, to tone, [mmm] texture and so on [mmm].

152.[We reflected on the interview so far and I explained what I'm trying to do in the thesis]

153.I'd like to ask you now about your theory of insight. You know, especially as I've just said I wouldn't even call what I'm doing a theory. So just, you know your hunches or your feelings about what generates insight. How does it work? Why does it happen or why doesn't it happen? Why are some people insightful and other people not insightful? Whatever! You start wherever.

154.**W1**: I'm a very egalitarian person. I guess I think that everybody would be insightful if they just gave themselves half a chance.

155.**CS**: Yes. So do you think that often people don't give themselves half a chance?

156.**W1**: Yes. I think so [how come? What's going on?]. I think, I mean I was lucky in that I was taught by my father to do something

157.[Turn tape over]

158.W1: I had a father who was an artist and...

159.CS: A visual artist?

160.W1: Yes. In fact most of these paintings are by him. Um and ah he taught me when I was a very, very little child to, to silence my mind. So that a rose we were looking at in the evening with a particular curl of petals would ah, take up all the space in my mind. Um, so I guess I was lucky in having that influence and I suppose I think that other people haven't had such a lucky influence and maybe their lives/minds are full of, you know, arrangements and bus timetables.

161.CS: Yes that sort of calculative thinking that we mentioned.

162.W1: Yes.

163.CS: Um.

164.W1: It's like a childhood thinking. It's, it's allowing yourself in a way to be a child, those lovely states in childhood where you didn't have anything to do, um, there was no pressure, uhh, no-one cared a damn what you did because they were busy doing whatever they were doing. And so you could just poke a leaf through the floorboards.

165.CS: Mmmm. Yes that's right. I remember having a stone, I found a rock, just an ordinary little rock about an inch long. And I remember looking at it in my hand and feeling like it had a personality, you know like it was sort of luminous [mmm]. Um, and I remember thinking at the time that I better not tell anyone about this...
[laughter].

166.W1: [laughter]

167.CS: Uhh, but I can still remember to this day the sort of...that sort of, um, full embodied type of experience it was [mmm]. Do you know what I mean?

168.W1: Yes.

169.CS: It was very personal.

170.W1: It's very personal and there are no rules...Um, no-one is expecting anything of you, and you can just let the mind wander. And I guess I feel that umm, it's very precious to be able to have times like that in adult life. And a lot of people aren't given that gift too. They really must keep on top of things. It's anti getting things done and it means that you are sort of unsafe. I've got to be very careful not to go into those states. It's one of the reasons I can't drive a car — because I get into those states without realising it very easily.

171.CS: Yes, well you've been practising it for a long time.

172.**W1**: I've been practising it for a long time and I haven't been practising um, nearly as much the other way. I mean when I had a child I suddenly had to learn to be alert.

173.**CS**: Yes because you had that responsibility.

174.**W1**: Yes...I had to remember I was crossing a road.

175.**CS**: Yes. I'm interested in the connection you see between this mode of operation and the occurrence of insight...Um, what do you think is the connection?

176.**W1**: Mmm. Do you mean why does it happen in those modes?

177.**CS**: Yuh, and not in the other mode for example.

178.**W1**: Oh, it would never happen in the other mode!

179.**CS**: I probably agree, but I'm not sure how come.

180.**W1**: Mmm how come. I guess I think there's a sifting process that takes part/place. You're not really poking a leaf, you're not only poking a leaf through the crack in the floorboards. Um, on a very profound level you're, ah, doing something like the sifting process that happens in dreams I suppose. The feeling is not of utter stillness. The feeling is of a sort of very gentle turbulence...um...like...yeah...mmm. I mean sometimes I say to people 'Look. Most of the time I'm like a dog asleep in front of the fire'. But I don't think that that is quite true.

181.**CS**: No because, for example, um, when you described that moment, those moments on the balcony in Greece, I didn't get an image of a person who was unanimated or...there was like an active intelligence that SAW the possibilities [yes] in whatever came up — not that you directed what came up. But once it came up...

182.**W1**: Oh yes, there's very much that feeling that you capture the fleeting thought. There's ...

183.**CS**: And it took you to capture it [at same time]. If someone else had that...because of all the work you had done...[yes] and all the masses of information [yes] which you've been sifting through [yes] and juggling and piecing together like a jigsaw [yes]. Um it was only having done that that you...

184.**W1**: Well maybe [said at same time]...Yes...yes...yes that's probably true. I've been in therapy and there's a time after a lot of talk where you're sitting there and you're not saying anything and the therapist isn't saying anything and then an image runs across your mind like a star whooshing across the dark. And the trick I've found is to catch it and see what it is. And it looks at first as if it's absolutely nothing at all. But it turns out to be. And I think that also happens with writing. I've trained myself to catch those runaway silly images [innocuous] and see what they [same time] signify.

185.**CS**: [same time] what they signify.

186.**W1**: Yeah.

187.**CS**: Do you feel as though — this probably leads to another more direct question— do you feel as though metaphor and analogy, figurative thinking, imagery and so on...what role do you see that, how important is that do you think in these sorts of insight processes and creative breakthroughs?

188.**W1**: Oh HUGE! And the impact of a metaphor is something that is very hard to spell out. It's ah, I really enjoy the sensation of a metaphor rather than actually figuring out what it means.

189.**CS**: Yeah, sort of decoding it into some sort of literal meaning.

190.**W1**: Mmm. This equals that; this equals that...

191.**CS**: that...Therefore I can see the relation.

192.**W1**: Yes that's...you lose it then. But a metaphor that allows you to...in fact that seems to me to be a part of writing. For example, the title [novel]I got quite early and I saw the metaphor as that constantly. It was like it helped to write the book.

193.**CS**: Yes. Well frequently um, I've read that that writers and other creators will talk about an image...Um, I think it was Henry Handel Richardson, about a person walking upstairs. I can't remember the details, but that this then, that everything then seems to be fed from that.

194.**W1**: Attaches itself. Yes. Absolutely. And the really odd thing is that at the end, for example there was an image that got me going with [novel]of a woman sitting in a hotel room alone and she didn't know why she was there and she didn't care. And that kept me going for years but the image isn't in the book. I threw it away. So it's as if you feed on it but it isn't essential in the end to the final thing.

195.**CS**: [laughs] I think again it was Heidegger who talks about ideas being metaphysical ladders we climb to get somewhere and then throw away.

196.**W1**: Yep. A writing friend of mine, Alex Miller, talks about...There was a method of construction in the Middle Ages where a fake building was built outside the building and then you built the building and take the fake building away.

197.**CS**: And the real one stands...[mmm] it's a bit like the way they build an arch.

198.**W1**: Yes! Yes that's right.

199.**CS**: It's a miracle. You pull away the supports and it holds itself up. Not a bad metaphor for doing a novel I suppose [yes!]. In the sense that it takes the last brick.

200.**W1**: [agreeing] Yes.

- 201.**CS**: Now, what is it about figurative language do you think? You said something like you like the sensation of it [mmm]. Could you elaborate that a bit?
- 202.**W1**: mmm. Well it's pure pleasure! It's pleasure! It's like we were talking about before. We talked about that sort of thinking, being full of joy. A metaphor that evokes things in me is pure joy! It's that sort of joy I get. It's ah...
- 203.**CS**: Is it something that you feel it physically?
- 204.**W1**: Yes! You feel it reaching out long gentle fingers stroking things, bringing them to life.
- 205.**CS**: Yeah. I get an image myself of somehow...it makes you feel connected to things around you or something — this idea of fingers.
- 206.**W1**: [same time] Ah yes. Yes stroking things. Yes connecting. Yes. That's probably true. Certainly an awakening. I don't know maybe they are possibilities. But I'm straining to explain it.
- 207.**CS**: Well of course. Most of the things in the presentational mode elude language [W1 laughs] because they are in the presentational mode, if you know what I mean [yes] and so we need metaphor I think to translate or at least to grab some of the sense of it.
- 208.**W1**: [laughs agreeing]. I mean I'm fascinated with metaphor particularly when I read critical theory that says that writing is a trick, that it seems to suggest other things some deeper underneath, subterranean thing but it's just a surface, just a trick, but I think well that isn't a trick. That's a silly thing to say because that's what metaphor does and it doesn't, it isn't important that the meaning it has for the writer is different than the meaning it has for the reader. The time when writing works is when the metaphor can resonate for the reader.
- 209.**CS**: Whatever the resonance is.
- 210.**W1**: In a different way than it does for the writer. And music does the same. I mean nobody accuses music of being a trick. We all know that a beautiful passage... will bring, each person will bring to it a different thing, but that seems to me to be the power of metaphor and if I can describe, no, if I can enter a metaphor as fully as I can, though it may mean nothing to anybody else in the world, it might mean that their metaphors get triggered by mine.
- 211.**CS**: Yes, it's something I'm struggling with theoretically. But I'm sure it has something to do with...because the nature of figurative language, analogy, metaphor and synecdoche part for whole stuff and all that...Um, it seems to me that one of the things it does is that it draws an identity between things that obviously, strictly speaking, aren't identical [mm, yes] and seems to help us pull apart our narrow way

of seeing things. In other words we see something as a pen, but then we make a metaphor that alludes to a pen, all of a sudden it has possibilities it didn't have before.

212.W1: Mmmm and that's terribly exciting. There's a great deal of emotion attached to it.

213.CS: [Change of Topic]

214. When you finish your books, because you talked a lot about you not communicating them [mmm] while they are being generated, you don't want to betray the process, betray 'it', but then you publish them and you talk to people about them. What's the difference then?

215.W1: [long pause] I make sure that I never talk about what I meant. And when people ask me what the meaning is I say: 'this is not my area, that's for a literary critic. I can't tell you what the meaning is'. What I can tell them since it is now safely over, is the process. And so whenever I do an interview I usually say to people beforehand, 'Don't ask me about meaning, I can't say anything. Ask me about process.'. In fact, the very first radio interview I ever did someone just kept on saying 'Why does this happen? Why does that happen?'. I was totally boxed because I had no idea why things happen. And I guess I justify it. I say the novelist's job is to tell a story. So I think that's part of it. That I'm not actually betraying it, because I'm just recounting a historical set of circumstances.

216.CS: And to connect with what we were saying before about metaphor what it means for you, you are not betraying, because the book is going to mean different things for every reader anyway.

217.W1: Yes. Absolutely. I believe that. For me as a reader reading works when things are being triggered all the time. And I suppose as a reader I couldn't care less what was happening in the writer's life as they are writing it. What I care is what its triggering for me.

218.CS: What about when you have completed a novel or you are at some stage near completion. You're away from that period when you desperately don't want to tell anybody (I don't know whether desperate is the right word but you know what I mean)...[mmm]. Are there people that it's very important for you to share with? About, we've mentioned [partner] [partner] of course through the process, he sounds like a perfect sounding board that doesn't distort too much what you're saying, but just listens. And how important is it to have this? Is there a social dimension as well? Obviously solitude is important. What about the other side of that?

219.**W1**: I have a couple of friends that I would really like to understand and appreciate what I was trying to do. Not what I was trying to say, but what I was trying to do, and if they do then I'm probably OK. With [novel]there's been a lot of affirmation of another sort altogether in that it continues to sell extremely well and it seems to contact people and that was a life-changing experience for me when I first realised that.

220.**CS**: How come? What was the...?

221.**W1**: Well I never expected to communicate with people . That was entirely exterior to the whole project. And the thought that I might be somebody that communicates with other people just knocked me for six.

222.**CS**: But obviously in a positive way.

223.**W1**: In a positive way, although I was thinking about this morning. It actually angered me at first.

224.**CS**: Because?

225.**W1**: I don't know. I might have actually gone through a bit of a grief process of an old identity who never actually got through to people and was misunderstood [laughs].

226.**CS**: And to a certain extent had built your world of compensations in terms of your work practice and the joys that you have in the flow of writing and so on [Yes, yes etc.] which you hadn't really conceived of as a sharing.

227.**W1**: No. well. [Have some soup].

228.[break for lunch... my stomach was rumbling!]

229.**CS**: Now what I'd like to talk about — together I'd like us to talk about is more-or-less an open-ended dialogue. About building on the themes we have talked on and using my research as well and just to see where we arrive. It might be useful if we both look at some of the themes that have come up in my research [passing them over to W1]. Just glancing through them, a lot of them we've already spoken about. I think one of the most strongly recurrent themes in the generation of insight has to do with the role of emotionality [mmm] in the process [mmm]. If I can, I'd like to tell you about one theorist and see how you react to what this theorist is saying. This is a man called Matte-Blanco who was a psychoanalyst and mathematician and he has developed a way of describing the Freudian unconscious. Nothing to do with the contents of Freud's theory about sexual impulses, but it is a way of describing the dynamics of the unconscious and the conscious and basically he does it in terms of layers. The highly conscious level of awareness is dominated by what he calls 'asymmetrical' thought where things are defined in terms of differences and there are

clear distinctions between things, and the relations between things are hierarchical and therefore you can form chains of implication. You know, if A and if B then C [mm] this sort of logical thing [mmm] and induction and deduction.

230. On the other hand he says that the unconscious is dominated by what he calls 'symmetrical' understanding. What reigns in the unconscious is sameness and non-distinction, non-difference... what he calls 'indivisibility'. And one of the primary expressions of the unconscious is emotion. So some of the typical Freudian components of the unconscious were things like condensation, timelessness, lack of contradiction and all of these things can, of course, be seen in dreams. We can be in two places at once, can be and not be, and so on. Now Matte-Blanco was talking in terms of pathology, saying that when a person slips too much into symmetrical consciousness they will lose reality control and reality contact [mmm]. And indeed can become psychotic and so on. And that what comprises health is what he calls 'bi-modal' thought where we can entrain a symmetrical openness and indivisibility within some structures, within some asymmetrical structures. It strikes me that insight and creativity can use this sort of scheme to help us explain what happens in creative flow and absorption and then the movement into more asymmetrical or tighter thought [mm]. I'm not sure what to say now, but it was very inspiring when I first read this stuff. I thought 'This is saying something very important as giving us a way of understanding people's felt experience' [yes]. Uhh... what should I say to you now? [laughs].

231. **W1:** I was just thinking that when I teach people, which might be useful to you because I teach them very much my method, which is a sort of non-method, I thought it might be relevant to you. What I feel I'm doing is teaching them to push the boundaries and they get very exhilarated by this. So I suppose in the structure that you've just set up, they would be learning this mode of thinking which maybe they would have done to some extent, but not had it encouraged or made to feel legitimate. And they also haven't probably allowed themselves to have done too much of it. So they are suddenly struggling up this mountain onto this beautiful vista of plains.

232. **CS:** One of the interesting things that Matte-Blanco says is that the unconscious has more dimensions, literally more dimensions simultaneously than the conscious, and then when we translate something from the unconscious we lose the dimensions and we distort it.

233. **W1:** Ah. You see that's one of the wonderful things that Marion Milner says. She talks, by the way, about wholeness and she puts it down to a preconscious time when

we have memories of wholeness as babies. But it's a very common feeling I think amongst writers that the book that results is actually smarter than you are. And it seems to me that maybe one of the things that makes that happen is that when you are writing you don't try to see the whole thing at once. You see a whole lot of fragments and eventually you put all those fragments together. And those fragments of themselves may not be bigger than your mind, they probably aren't, but...or bigger than you feel your mind to be, but by the time you get them all together it feels like the sum of them is far smarter than your actual mind. So people think that you're very smart...but you're not. It's just that you are compiling these fragments when your mind has roved in all sorts of ways. I mean I think it is one of the terrifying things that writers feel...the sense that they might be found out.

234.**CS**: Mmm That I'm not that smart.

235.**W1**: That I'm not that smart [laughs] and in a way it's true.

236.**CS**: Yes. No I can see that. And that makes perfect sense in Matte-Blanco's scheme of things...that we can't get our conscious mind to comprehend all the dimensions of the unconscious, otherwise they wouldn't be [unconscious][mmm]. And being a mathematician he demonstrates it in terms of what happens when you try to represent a triangle in a line. He says what happens is that if you imagine having a triangle ABC that when you unfold it you end up with a repeating of one of the points...you have to have an A to a B, A B to a C, and a C to an A. [mmm] and he says you get these distortions with psychotic patients where you get these repeating of dimensions in ways that don't make any sense [mmm] because they are coming from the unconscious where there is a much higher dimensionality [mmmm]. Where it does make sense and that people are living in that way, in that space, it makes sense to them [mmmm]. It appears as totally mad to us, just as often our dreams often appear to us to be nonsensical or illogical. So he actually spoke about symmetrical logic and asymmetrical logic and not just preserving the term logic for our normal conscious awareness.

237.**W1**: I had a very interesting experience when I was writing [novel], and I'm having it again with this new book. I'd be reading mathematics and it would act like a metaphor and prompt all sorts of images which I would then write down. Now I'm reading microbiology and the same thing is happening. And it's as if the extreme logicity of it, you know in that conventional sense, is prompting extreme illogicality.

238.**CS**: Or a different form of logic.

239.**W1**: Yeah...but you're actually stimulating it.

240.**CS**: And this is very difficult to talk about because the only evidence we have of this domain is in the conscious realm. But there seems to be lots of indicators of it. Like there's things we need to be able to explain, like the power of metaphor, [mm] or the way in which we can have the felt sense of something, the way in which we can know something with absolute certainty in all our being but not be able to justify it. Ah the way in which, for example, we may love somebody, but we can't explain it [mmm]. But we would not accept someone telling us we are wrong.

241.**W1**: Mmm. Yes...I have friend who is from America, a philosopher, he's over here studying the paranormal. There's a lot of stuff he says about the paranormal that makes enormous sense. So it seems to me that the paranormal by which — he's particularly interested in Aboriginal ways of thought — it seems to me that that's terribly related to creativity. And it often makes me think that why has psychology not studied it...I guess because the psychologists have not been interested in creativity because they're traditionally people who are very good at the other ways of thought.

242.**CS**: Yes. I think that there's lots of political [yes] and sociological considerations. You know, psychology presenting itself as a profession and being able to predict and control [yes] and project themselves as scientists.

243.**W1** ...And it's also a gender thing I guess.

244.**CS**: Yep.

245.**W1**: I mean, it's probably easier for me as a woman to talk about this sort of stuff than for some of the men writers you'll talk to.

246.**CS**: Yes. It'll be interesting to see. And I don't know the answer to that.

247.**W1**: I don't know either and I'm generalising hugely and writers may be in a different category anyway.

248.**CS**: I suspect they might be 'cos they are a self-selecting group...[yes]. But there might be styles or stylistic differences or predispositional differences.

249.**W1**: It also means you have to start talking about your own fallibility.

250.**CS**: Yes. This seems to me to be something that's on the edge of my understanding. It has to do with — even though I feel emotions are highly implicated, it's not just any old emotions. It's a type of rarefied emotion in a way, a type of transcending affective way of operating wherein, if you can conceive of an emotion as a type of stillness or calmness...[mmm]. It's certainly not a neutral — I don't think it's possible to have a neutral emotional state anyway [mmm] — but you

know when we were talking before about lowered, about more spread, diffuse levels of activation, cortical activation, it seems to me that's correlated with your, what you are describing as what your father taught you, you know...how to be still and...

251.**W1**: Yes. He also taught me something else that's very interesting. He used to say, he taught me to sift, what are rippled through thoughts, he used to say: 'Don't say the thing', — this is totally against— 'he'd say 'Don't say the thing that occurs to you first. Put a skew on it. See what else you can come up with.'. Now that's very much against the idea of associative stuff.

252.**CS**: Well, not necessarily.

253.**W1**: It's actually directing the associations

254.**CS**: Sort of. What it's doing is it's short-circuiting the strongest association and allowing more remote association to come in.

255.**W1**: Yes. It's short-circuiting the clichés isn't it?

256.**CS**: Yes, your habitual modes of thought.

257.**W1**: Mmm, but normally in the idea of stream of consciousness is to go to the one which presents itself immediately.

258.**CS**: Exactly, whereas the effect that has is a loosening one, eventually [yes] I think remote associations can be brought in. So what your father is telling you to do is to discard the habitual thoughts [mm, mm] which is a loosening technique.

259.**W1**: Yes as you say it is a short-cut.

260.**CS**: Short circuit.

261.**W1**: Yes, short circuit.

262.**CS**: But maybe a shortcut too.

263.**W1**: It often felt to me a bit of a cheat. So I guess I was bringing moral agendas to it. But it is still something I still do.

264.**CS**: And I like the idea of sifting. It's like the opposite to pre-empting. It's allowing...Some of the cognitive psychologists talk about with artists generally, they talk about perceptual rehearsal and that's for example, where a painter just experiments with colour [mmm], or as you were describing a reader [writer] just reads things and they saturate their senses or their mind with the medium of what they are working. I think this also short-circuits immediate habitual channels.

265.**W1**: Yes, yes. [partner] defines writing entirely as sifting.

266.**CS**: Yeah. But it's like you have a sensitivity to strike upon the thing that you'll settle on. So it's not...[yes] You must have some sort of...what's the word I'm looking for? It's almost like a magnet, or...

267.**W1**: YEAH! The thing that I'll settle on is got a light around it, and a light in it...That's...I mean, the word 'joy' keeps on coming up. And there's a sense of fun about it.

268.**CS**: I've been working on a metaphor in my thesis work and that is of the creative mind as — you know when you sometimes have those public exhibitions of...where they have a huge room where they set up millions, or probably thousands of dominoes...have you ever seen one of those?

269.**W1**: No.

270.**CS**: And they fill up a whole room with dominoes all lined up standing on their ends and they make castles and big shapes and patterns and that, and then they have a public, all the public come in and they set it off [mmm]. And then the whole room becomes alive as often fifty or sixty chains of this are spreading out and collapsing and so on [mm, mmm]. It seems to me that sort of what happens when a creative person is....The preparation is intense [mmm] and often over long duration [mmm], and they may accidentally knock over a subsection [mmm] of their domino room and it doesn't do the whole room and they have to rebuild it [mmm]. The only difference is they don't know what they are building [no]. They don't have a template to begin with. So they have to keep going up to a viewing platform to see if they can see a shape in it because they can't see it when they are in it, when they are doing it [mm, mm]. They can feel this might go with this, and this might go with that. But then they need to back off and view it. But when they are viewing they can't do it [mm] and so they have to go on back in, and so on and so on [mm, mmm]. This process may take many times. But it seems to me to capture that, eventually when it goes off, it has its own life.

271.**W1**: Yes, absolutely. And that's what you do it for. I mean it seems such a very odd thing to do because it's so difficult, and in this country so poorly rewarded. Even if you sell well you live as a pauper. Um...it's for that joy.

272.**CS**: Which brings me to the question of self. It seems to me that a different experience of self is something that emerges in the period of insight.

273.**W1**: Yes, very much. It's very, it can be quite nightmarish doing these things [because?]. Well I guess you stir up a lot of things. You dream heavily, you dream scary things...um...ah and all the time you don't know if you are doing anything worthwhile. You don't know if anything's going to work out. You feel you are a bit like invoking a chaos method where they will be a pattern but it might not be in this lifetime. I've lost your question.

274.**CS:** Well it's OK. I think what...well there's a positive side to it. Like when you were talking before you often mentioned the word 'joy' and also you talk about being really absorbed in it and I know that for many people their most joyous times are when in retrospect they realise they were not aware of themselves at all [mmm]. Retrospectively they were completely unselfconscious.

275.**W1:** Yes. Time does something very strange when you are in that state. It seems to fold. It collapses in.

276.**CS:** It's hard to keep track of.

277.**W1:** Mmm, a bit like when you are sleeping and you don't know you are asleep and you awake and you say 'oh I lay down for half an hour and six hours have gone by'. It's the same sort of thing, quite often in my 'bookends' I, it's two o'clock before I...

278.**CS:** Wake up.

279.**W1:** Yeah. Wake up.

280.**CS:** And I think there's something very interesting happening here in people's sense of self [yeah]. You see what I was talking before about Theresa Amibile and this stuff about self-consciousness — and when people become self conscious they don't perform as well [yes]. You know they are checking on how they are going and so on[mm], and it seems to me that to the extent that people, what they are doing is a reflection of themselves, they're in trouble [mmm] because then they are always measuring how they are going [mmm]. But it is when they can forget themselves and just be doing the task [mmm], where it is not a measure of themselves [mmm absolutely] that then the flow begins.

281.**W1:** Which is why you must go onward and not edit, 'you are not measuring yourself by any standard if you just go on with it.

282.**CS:** Yes. a type of freedom from self-concern, for example.

283.**W1:** Yes! I mean there's a sense in which I feel like being able to do this...that life has given me [a privilege] I couldn't...unless I'm really struggling to pay the mortgage, I'm thinking that I'm actually better off than any millionaire, because, yes, you are released from petty concerns. It must be good for the body! [I'm sure it is]. I've heard that artists, painters, are among the longest survivors. I'm not sure if that is true of writers.

284.**CS:** No I think there are all sorts of other sociological and psychological factors that come into play as well. I think that very often this state of being is not frequent enough to impact enough...you know like it's addictive [mmm] because it's so pleasant but I think a lot of writers get stuck as well.

- 285.**W1**: Yes. When it happens in a group of people its amazing. It feels like you know that the spirit is moving when it happens in a class...quite often I do six sessions, and about session four, one or two, or maybe half a dozen people *get it* and it's almost as if the air changes.
- 286.**CS**: It's palpable in some way.
- 287.**W1**: Yes. And everybody feels it and feeds off it even if they are not there themselves.
- 288.**CS**: Frequently psychologists in the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic fields will talk about the way a client's unconscious can speak directly to you and work on you [wow] and I think they are talking about a type of capacity for empathy [right] — that we tend to think of ourselves as sort of being skin-bound separate creatures, but really we are relational creatures and in the conversations such as we are having there's a mingling of our beings in our conversation. And I think that this symmetrical mode — this idea of unity and wholeness and non-judgement — [mmm] is a bit allergic when people get it, and releases [mmm, mmmm] them from some of the self-concerns.
- 289.**W1**: Mmmm. You know a very important part of writing, of this process starting to happen — and nearly every novelist will tell you this — is when, is getting the voice [yes], And people will say 'Well what is the voice', and my current explanation of it is that it's a personality that you assume in order to write that particular piece. Um, which is connected to your personality but has things dropped out of it.
- 290.**CS**: That's right. It gives you the possibility, it's a sort of fairly evolved role-playing in the sense that you are pretending but you are becoming something. It's play.
- 291.**W1**: Oh yes, absolutely.
- 292.**CS**: And what about the being absurd and tolerating absurdity? Are you conscious at times that you allow yourself to do that? That you think if people really knew what I was thinking they'd think I was nuts?
- 293.**W1**: Oh yes! Yes I mean it's, and often you can give it to your character and so you can have both pleasures. You actually have the fun of being the character saying the absurd thing and getting away with it and then you come out of it. In fact I wrote a line for a character yesterday that I thought was so wonderful that I hurtled down the stairs because I heard [partner] down here and said 'You know what you just said then!'

- 294.**CS**: Can I cut across? I know you want to desperately tell me — that's what I meant before about the social thing. That when you get the insight you have to tell somebody.
- 295.**W1**: Yes...but if I didn't have somebody around who was very empathetic and didn't say something...
- 296.**CS**: Stupid.
- 297.**W1**: Stupid.
- 298.**CS**: Insensitive.
- 299.**W1**: Insensitive...or even something admiring would be dreadful [yes]. It has to be someone who understands this process so they take it in a certain way.
- 300.**CS**: In exactly the right way.
- 301.**W1**: Yes.
- 302.**CS**: So it's not just telling anyone [no], but it's important having someone.
- 303.**W1**: No, though a lot of people could ruin it, or actually make me feel I was betraying that character.
- 304.**CS**: Yes your process and the characters. You know it strikes me that another paradox that is within this all the time. And that is that in losing oneself somehow it validates oneself.
- 305.**W1**: Oh ABSOLUTELY! There are many paradoxes and that's true. It's the...it's when you are most yourself and least yourself at the same time. So those ideas that, those ideas are totally inappropriate in a way because they are not...if you could think of it another way it wouldn't be a contradiction.
- 306.**CS**: That's right. If we could get to a more abstract or a higher level we could reconcile them. But it's the narrowness of, again it's the question of dimensionality...we are looking at it with three or four dimensions when we should be looking at it with five or six.
- 307.[talked about what we hadn't covered. And what time we had left]
- 308.**W1**: I'm not sure I can talk about intuition. I'm not sure that I intuit.
- 309.**CS**: Personally I think you do. You know when you talk about sifting and it's almost like...

310. WRITER 2

- 311.**CS**: So the first thing I'd really like you to talk about is how you organise your writing; how you manage yourself? More or less consciously, the things that you do, or even the things you find yourself doing. And you can start wherever you like.

- 312.**W2**: Well there's no set routine. I always read with envy these writers who say 'I get up at such and such, I walk the dog. I come back and begin writing at 9.00am, break for lunch at 12', because I fit in whenever I can.
- 313.**CS**: Yes. [W1] calls them, she has set starting time and finishing time and she calls them her 'bookends'.
- 314.**W2**: Really. Well, she's very lucky [laughter]. She's very lucky. Of course a lot of it depends on whether you have to do other things, have children and so on...you have to make a living also [exactly]. So it depends what stage, you know. If you've got income from your writing, or a grant you can give more time.
- 315.**CS**: You can be more structured, yes.
- 316.**W2**: When you don't have that you just fit it in when you can. Certainly when I began writing, short stories, I would do it in the evenings. I had a little baby so you just fit in an hour or two here and there, which is very conducive to short story writing, not to novel writing, and I think that novel writing comes from any of us when we have the time...you know longer stretches of time. At least for me that's certainly an element. When I am...I found once when I transferred to a computer strangely enough, I would, certainly in the beginning, if I had half an hour to spare I would run in and do it...I'd do something with it. It didn't seem such a big deal as sitting down at the typewriter and starting [that's interesting]. I felt more flexible on a computer.
- 317.**CS**: On a computer rather than on a typewriter. Why do you think that?
- 318.**W2**: I have no idea! [laughter]. It was easier to switch on and off. It's quite an intense experience with the computer. You can get into it and out of it. It's not so much that any more, but certainly in the beginning I noticed that. Maybe it was the novelty of it.
- 319.**CS**: Maybe when you type as well it's more permanent because, you know it's closer to being published.
- 320.**W2**: That's right....or it's more...you think more about typing because you've got to retype. I think the computer does allow for a certain freedom in that way, you're not getting the backstrain.
- 321.**CS**: A bit like we were saying before that if you're using pencil you can rub it out.
- 322.**W2**: Yes I do use pencil and computer. So I do a lot of notes or some writing in pencil with shorthand bits in it so I can go fast. That's a leftover from my student days when I used to do shorthand typing for my part-time jobs. So that's been very useful. Um, if I'm writing something I can just go; if I'm in the middle of something I can go for a long time, you know, hours and hours and hours and hours...ah. Other

times there seems to be a force pushing you away from your desk — a strong wind [laughs] that's blowing you in the opposite direction. So that it's very hard to get in to start, so I don't have a routine.

323.**CS**: Yes. Are there any...we'll talk about those times when you can write for hours and hours and hours because there'll be important things within that I think. But are there any tricks or strategies that you use?

324.**W2**: Tricks and strategies? To get myself started or to get myself going? [yes]. I used to...um...I found myself doing a lot of little things on the way and certainly... running down to make a cup of tea or suddenly wiping down the window sill in the bathroom which suddenly seems urgently in need of...[it needs cleaning],yes it needs cleaning right now.

325.**CS**: I used to find in my student days that the inside of the refrigerator became fascinating.

326.**W2**: That's very very important! [laughter]. I found myself wiping the tops of shampoo bottles in the bathroom...[oh it really needs doing you know] [chuckling] ...so there are those little steps towards it. Once I'm sitting down certainly I seem to want to balance my chequebook or something, do a little task.

327.**CS**: What do you think that's about actually. Have you thought about all those things about tidying up around the place?

328.**W2**: Well, it's a bit like, it seems to me when you write, it's a bit like jumping into the swimming pool. And, it's, you know, you are ready to go, or to get into the surf; swimming pool is better, a better image. Once you're in it's great but it's that transition from one state to the next [so you're putting on your sunscreen and], that's right. I'll go in a minute [making sure your goggles are all right... you put your foot in and it's a bit cold [in unison], all of that. And certainly with my experience with... so you think you are finished with something and you know, and you then know that you have to go back and do it again. It's very much like you've got out and you've got warm [yes]. Not that the writing's cold , 'cos it's good once you're swimming, but you've got to get back into your wet suit [laughs]. Jump in again but once you're in it's great. In fact, revision and reworking is something I enjoy enormously.

329.**CS**: Why is that do you think? Particularly the revision and the reworking?

330.**W2**: I just love it. Just love seeing the, a page like this, a white page all cleanly printed up and then going at it with the pencil...and then making it a mess.

331.**CS**: Do you sometimes...I know from my experience when you write something and print it out and you sort of come back to it and you think 'Oh that's not too bad'

or there's something magical almost or surprising — the fact that it wasn't there before and now it is. Is that...?

332.**W2**: Well the printed page hallows the work doesn't it? [yes]. It gives it a certain legitimacy just because it's been written and printed up. And with computers it looks like a finished work long before it is and I think this is one of the big dangers with computers. You're looking at something that looks immaculate on the page and in fact the language is bad, you know, it's not working. But it looks good. Something I certainly think is a danger for students. So to mess it up again...to really work on the language and then to pencil the arrows to go up to here. You know the kinds of deletions that you can't actually do on the screen. It's a different process. There's a real need for a physical touch; a physical connection with your work.

333.**CS**: It sounds to me that the first stage...your face lit up when you described the reworking and the editing and it didn't really light up as much when you...

334.**W2**: For the composing...getting into the cold swimming pool. Well it's making that transition into that other world and can be so intense that you want to back away from it you know? [yes but when you're in there it's OK], but even the thought of the intensity, and sometimes in the middle of it it's almost too much. You might have to run out of the room. It's...but that's not always. You get...there are different kinds of composing. If we are talking about the first composing...ah, sometimes it's intense and sometimes it's very plodding...it's not just a breeze. And you're plodding and you know you've got to write this scene because you need it and so on so you plod your way through it and you learn how to make it better if it's plodding. If it, the actual stuff you are writing feels plodding.

335.**CS**: So it seems to me that one of the things you are talking about is there's a sense of uncertainty or being in the dark, as it were.

336.**W2**: Resistance to the excitement [that's interesting]...a pulling back. Have you heard, has anyone spoken to you about pulling back from the excitement? [no, they haven't used the phrase]...[laughing] it sounds silly [no, no. So pulling back from the excitement?]. There's something to pull back and you also want to go forward [so there's a sort of ambivalence]. Mmmm, and sometimes it's, I mean, you could um, yeah you could explode sometimes with how it's going. But mostly it's just, just working away isn't it? [yes, exactly].

337.**CS**: There's no pattern that I can see so far. But there is this alternation, of course, between composing and then reworking. When you're reworking, is it more...

338.Let me just back up. In the insight literature they talk about stages. And they are very broad stages. You go through periods of preparation. Now probably for

writers that means all their prior life. You know all their knowledge and experiences and things like that. And for an insight to occur there has to be an impasse, there has to be frustration and and we try all the things we know and nothing works. And then we have to find another way. And often it's setting it aside [that's right]. Or going and making the tea [a detour]. Or a detour [yes] or some other thing or people exercise or they...[absolutely yeah], and there's this moment, and often it extends over time, where it flows and there's this sort of flurry of ideas and so on, and so on. And then a very important last stage is the verification and elaboration of whatever came [when you commit it to the page]. Yes, and I wonder if that last part corresponds to what you're talking about in terms of...

339.**W2:** Yeah. Well, there's a big difference between thinking about writing and writing [chuckling. I'm sure!]. And the thinking goes on around the clock, especially when you are working on something. But I think even when you are not, you are at work. All the time. And I can cite instances of this... just, ah, things just come into your presence that you need. Little newspaper articles, something someone says. They are like little gifts. They're coming at you all the time, especially when you are working on something. Now, so you say 'Yes! I can use that.'. Or 'Of course!' [thank you very much], yes. It comes.

340.**But** thinking about it, thinking about the writing or the work is very different than actually doing the work — a very different kind of thought process or whatever process it is that takes place when you are actually physically writing. You are thinking in a much, ah, all kinds of possibilities come up during the writing, or at least that 's what it is for me.[do you mean it's kind of organic as well?], yeah, yeah, yeah. So things — even when you are committing, say, these ideas that you get while you are out doing the dishes or walking in the park — when you come down to putting it on the page other things start to happen. All kinds of possibilities present themselves. So you have to actually write, and I know that, that even if you don't have an idea or feel you are blocked, it's not so much going away from it, but to actually write...and see what...It's like thought coming out through your fingers [unison 'fingers']. And you've got to follow it.

341.**CS:** Yes, and is there a sense in that as it's 'coming out' — and you also, you said the sense that other things come from it — is that part of what you think gets you immersed in that process when you are in it [mmm, mmmm], that you have to keep up with it almost?

342.**W2:** Yes...yes, you're running after it...a little bit like you are a reporter sometimes...ah. With your pencil and paper just writing down. I think for most, I

don't know if it's the case for most writers, but it's extremely visual. You are seeing a lot [yes so you see images?] and so sometimes you report, you're just writing them down [yes].

343.**CS**: And do the images also come — what will happen in this interview, by the way, is we'll keep cutting across these categories anyway [mmm] — when those images come do they also have a sort of, um, mood attached to them frequently, or a sort of ambience or something like that?

344.**W2**: Well you are in there doing it. An example for me is in my novel [novel] I've got a caving sequence where he's under the ground crawling through a cave with a bunch of 'spelios' [what's a spelio?] speliologists [laughter]. Spelios are the ones that go caving for fun, which I did as a student. So I had him going caving, but I was actually there, so I actually recreated the experience right down to the little grit when you are on your stomach...the scratching on your hands and it was so easy to write. I think it was a very good little sequence actually. I can see it's a strong sequence when I look at it, but it was just a matter of reporting this, you know, rock on my shoulder. Absolutely re-envisaging the caves, but it's a different character, it's not me. So, I have let him borrow my caving experience and then he takes it as his own. But I'm experiencing it, I'm writing it down. I guess I'm at one with him. He's not me, I'm him.

345.**CS**: Yes. Well, a very important theme that has emerged in my work, and I think one of the most interesting, and perhaps the most important, is that in these experiences of entering imaginatively [mmmm] into what some people call the flow experience (or whatever you want to call it)... that within insight itself, and sometimes it is an extended process over time, is a very strong sense that people have a very different experience of themselves. Often it's qualitatively [mmm] different from the day-to-day experience they have of themselves and that seems to be what you're describing.

346.**W2**: You feel different. I mean it's quite heady. It's just another state really.

347.**CS**: And often it's retrospective, in the sense that it's afterwards that they report that they realise that they had lost track of time and place and surroundings [mmmm] and it's almost like they 'come to' and realise retrospectively 'I was right in there.'. But being right in there you can't be aware of that immediately at the time.

348.**W2**: No, I suppose not but you also know that you are doing it.

349.**CS**: Yes It's not 100% but there's some sense in which...and I'm interested in that in relation to where you began because you talked about the resistance to going in

and it seems to me there is some kind of process of surrender almost [yes, you've got to yield, surrender. Absolutely].

350.W2: So there's a little resistance to doing that.

351.CS: Yes. Which brings me to something that interests me in relation to anxiety and threat. Or, people trying to perform, or thinking about the end product. Again, there is a lot of evidence, and I think it is incontrovertible, that if people are writing, for example, or really trying to achieve anything, and they are thinking about the results, then creativity takes a nose-dive [mmm]. And it seems to me that it relates to self, this notion of self-concern and self-awareness [mmm]. And when that's surrendered, it's both the attractive thing and the thing we fear.

352.W2: Mmmm, mmm. Yes, it's wonderful to surrender, but it's quite difficult to do.

I just wanted to finish that thought about caving [of course]. I remember it then didn't become an exact cave passage. The passage adjusted itself to what I needed, to what the story needed. This is why the question: 'Is your writing autobiographical or not?' is just meaningless to most writers [yes. Where's the boundary?]. Yes, so I went caving, ah yes. He's going caving. I'm lending him some of that experience. Then the cave takes shape as I need it, as he needs it, or whatever. It just takes shape before you and he emerged from the cave and I found myself watching him come up. 'Cos a cave, I used to think, was just like a big opening and you walk in. And in fact it can be a little hole in the ground and you just lower yourself into it in a grassy hill or field or hillside. And that's...so I had him coming out, his hair coming out through the grass...so only, his face coming up into the light. And only afterwards did I actually see it as a very powerful birth metaphor [image] yes image. Now that kind of symbolism you just can't think of intellectually, it has to emerge from the work. And the work then speaks back to you and if you can pick up. So, in other words, that was a gift to me. And I had to recognise it — much later after writing it. I didn't think while writing it 'Oh, birth image'. But much later I saw it and I thought 'Oh OK, maybe I can use that idea of his growth.

353.CS: Yes, often this idea has come up that the process is much more intelligent than the writer.

354.W2: YES. We are much punier. I mean, I see the writer as about this big [motions about 2 cms and laughs]. Quite puny or...yes I quite like that word. Compared with the world that the writer has access to.

355.CS: Yes, and it seems to me its almost...it's...if not personified, it's...there's a certain vitality to the world that informs you rather than vice versa.

356.W2: Yes, absolutely. You don't preside over it in any way. It comes and you're small. That's why you have to leave these doors open because if you don't you just get this small...

357.CS: But you do have an important role. I mean it's a bit like as a medium. But it's more than just a medium, a neutral medium. As you say, you had to recognise that metaphor[mmmm]. Which probably speaks to the preparation, which represents, you know, your life to this point. Because not everyone would see the significance of that head popping up through the grass.

358.W2: No. And I didn't after I'd written it. I knew it was a good scene [you weren't quite sure why]. I wasn't sure why. I knew it was very vivid. But later reading all the drafts and bits and pieces I could see it. And then fiddled with it a bit. [so this is a moment of insight of course]. Yes. Yes. Yes. And that's those images and symbols and ideas that the...I suppose it's the unconscious, turn up. You have to listen to it...you have to be [can you remember when you actually realised that this was a metaphor, a birthing metaphor?]. Oh, much later. Before...almost almost after I had written the whole lot [yeah...do you remember where you were and all those sorts of details?]. No...

359.CS: OK.

360.W2: I even wonder. It was at a reading and I was reading it out loud at , um, Harold Park maybe, maybe it was about, I'm not sure...was it published then? I'm sure it happened much further along and it just helped me jostle some of the bits, adjust some of the structure. To recognise that. So yes. I think that's the kind of insight that I can talk about quite a lot...responding to what [well ,why don't we talk about that now then?]....[laughs].

361.Yeah. So we talked about process. Well, you see this most recent, the play. Yeah it was really fun. I can talk about the play much more easily in a way than I can about a novel because it's beyond me. It doesn't feel like talking about myself just because there's a director, and actors and musicians, you know a composer. There's so many other people have made it what it is so I can talk about it with great enthusiasm in a way that it's hard to talk about your own book. Also, as a writer you always know your writing has flaws in it and you're uneasy about...it's the best you can do. Any piece of work is the best you can do at the moment. 'This is as good as I can get it right now'. And you hope that people can go for the strengths rather than the...[and forgive] and forgive the flaws. And it must be flawed. And any writer that doesn't know that I think is, um ,kidding himself or herself.

362.**CS:** That's one reason I think that writers are often very sensitive to the critics, you know [yah]. Because, not only are there the flaws that you see , but there's the flaws you don't see and the flaws that people see that you don't consider to be flaws.

363.**W2:** Yes, and they can be just plain wrong , I mean, really wrong. But you can understand that sometimes. There's a way that, um, you can bring up a criticism without umm [attacking] demolishing [what do they say in Rugby League? 'playing the man rather than the ball']. Yes, yes exactly. A lot of critics are making their careers on that [on playing the person], yeah. However, but with the play, for instance, so I can talk about that. I would have to keep rewriting...what I learned from playwriting is that the solutions are often elegantly simple...um...just a line or two changed and then we'd go through it and a scene wasn't working. I didn't have to, rewrite didn't necessarily mean, oh! starting from scratch. It meant just changing an element here and there, or a character needs more motivation, needs to reveal more of what's going on inside him or her, ah...I had to come up with...you have to make the internal visible, external, so that the audience can see it. You have to come up with things for them to say or do that reveal what they are like and I found examples just coming to me. For instance in the play — here's a nice example I think — yes...uhh...you don't mind how long this takes to tell you! [laughter and banter].

364.It's a play about...I've got twin boys of 50, twin brothers whose mother is about 70. They think they are twin brothers . It turns, the secret of the play, the family secret is that in fact one of them is the son of the schoolteacher who lived nearby and the father had an affair and they were both had the baby, and the mother took both babies... But they've grown up thinking they're twins . So they discover at the end...the path of this play is that they are not...ah...so each character has to have a story line. There are five of them. Now the wife of one of the sons is writing her memoirs, she's calling it, she calls it [title of play], she's remembering everything that ever happens to her. It's a play about memory and each...the mother, the old mother who is about 70, is losing her memory and Cath is writing down everything she remembers uhh...[and these two brothers remember] the two brothers [remember being brothers], they go back to their school days which leads them to their discovery. But Cath the mother is actually typing on stage. She begins every sentence with 'I remember'. And she had to say something. And the instance that came to me...and I'd heard an instance of this, uhh...there was a boy, when he was about 6, wanted to stay up till midnight, it was his birthday, and his parents said 'Yes you may', and then suddenly it was midnight and they said 'No, go to bed'. And he

only learned much later that the mother had moved the hands of the clock forward and it was really only 9 o'clock...and when I heard this story and I thought 'OH! That's terrible'. And I thought 'What a terrible thing...it's a trick.'. This boy didn't feel that. Anyway, I gave this memory to Cath and she says 'I remember I was turning 6'...la la lum...'and then I found out the next day, my brother told me my mother had tricked me...and I'd gone to bed at 9 o'clock'. Now it's just a little throw-away line and people laugh but the whole... I realised later that's just an example that cropped up for me that the whole story is about tricking; mothers tricking their children; and also about birthdays...you know, who's born when...'cos they talk about this sibling stuff, you know first born, second born. This Sullaway, Frank Sulloway study, you know, who rebels and who conforms. So, all the way through, and I can give you many examples throughout the play, and it just startled me how everything I thought of had this kind of resonance without my realising it. So that...and now looking at it there isn't a wasted image. Every image in the play, and I didn't do it consciously, feeds the whole theme. And whether the audience knows it or not, I don't know, but I think it must subliminally work to pull, to unify the themes of the play.

365.**CS:** I think so. I think that so many things spring to mind from what you've said [that's such a small example. I mean that's just a little tiny...]. That's right. I think it's very apt. Because what you're talking about is the way in which something operates metaphorically [yeah] and the interesting thing for me about it is there are things that can be done figuratively and with metaphor that can't be done literally [that's right]. And one of the things that it can do is that it can work multidimensionally. It operates in more than one domain simultaneously by relating things that are ostensibly unrelated, but are...in a deeper sense are related [YES, yes], and that people then resonate to that [yes] at a more feeling level [yes] have a sort of feeling type of intelligence [yes] ...

366.**W2:** But we'd be lost without that. I mean, I believe we learnt to trust those kinds of ...Again, they seem to just come into your hands...why I could've given her any...I just needed to give her a memory to show that she was remembering And this was the particular one [but, which memory was absolutely crucial]. Yes, and again only afterwards did I see how important that particular memory was for the whole theme of the play and...many...there's something else...uhh...And then I realised there's not a line in the play that doesn't, that doesn't, ah feed [yeah, doesn't resonate with] this theme, the whole theme. She says in the, oh she's at odds with her husband because this family has been, has got this big secret; it's affected them

all. So her husband has actually been preoccupied with this unknown secret, which has affected their marriage, of course. And she is very irritable with him, just rote, by automatically. And uhh...what's that she says 'men are'...oh, it's too complex to explain to you this play...ah...Behind it all I've got the theme of *Il Trovatore* which is about babies getting mixed up and it's the extravagant operatic...I think it gives permission for the story to be extravagant. But other little...the daughter; there's a little daughter who is playing out the first lines of the arias from *Il Trovatore* and she says to her mother — and they're at odds with one another — 'It's rare in opera for the villain to be given such a beautiful love song.', and the mother says 'In my experience villains always sing beautiful songs.'. And then the last scene is actually her husband speaking a very beautiful love song to her. It's a very nice love scene that they've arrived at, so it's been...and I didn't foresee the connection until later.

367.**CS**: See, this raises the question of...There are terms that are often unfortunately used interchangeably. And these terms are, for example, creativity, intuition and insight [mm]. And just to quickly...the way I distinguish them is that creativity is the umbrella term that incorporates all of them. That this is a process, and it utilises intuition, which eventually leads to insight. So you're working intuitively all through the process there [mmmm] going with 'this feels right', 'this feels right'[mmm], 'This is good. I'm not sure why.'.

368.[break]

369.**W2**: And certainly the insight comes after [after]. Yes [the intuitive stuff].

370.**CS**: So there's a certain trusting process [yes] to this sort of feeling intelligence, this intuition.

371.**W2**: I think that's what you learn, and I'm sure everyone, all writers speak about the difference between the composer and the editor; the composer and the shaper. Nabokov calls it rapture and recapture, which is nice [poetic isn't it]. It's a little, it's quite grandiose...But yes he can say that, that the rapture is I guess the composing and all that; so that dichotomy and how you learn to handle both because you can't just have one or the other.

372.**CS**: And there's this alteration [yes] that is always there between these two modes of thinking [yes] and they're quite distinct modes.

373.**W2**: Yes. You put one on hold; one is called the censor...and...The censor is when it comes in too early to prevent, I guess, the spilling out. And yet creativity is not just the spilling out. Otherwise you've got that [formlessness] formlessness, dustbowl empiricism whatever, just everything, and you hope it has some meaning. So it is a very elegant dance that the two sides do and you can't function.

374.**CS**: There's a psychologist I'm very keen on, George Kelly, an American. And he has processes which he calls loosening. And loosening will largely correspond to what you are talking about. And he talks about what he calls provisional tightening where — it's what he calls the Creativity Cycle — where you loosen up things, you make connections between things that normally wouldn't connect, and you don't tighten right up, you just provisionally tighten [that's right, that's right] and then you let it go again [that's right]. You know it's almost like...

375.**W2**: That might coincide to what, again I can't see the difference between drafts, you know how many drafts; I have no idea. Where does one begin and one end? But perhaps I've started to think of a draft as being when I've printed it up and it's all perfect like that [points to printed interview sheet] and that's one draft. And then, when I get another printout, and I don't know when that will be, then that's another draft...but it's been...so that might be a provisional tightening, isn't it? [yes, that's right]. Just for now [let's see how it's starting to look] and then you go through it once again...yeah.

376.**CS**: And then you go back into the composing [that's right] having done that and this forms a type of scaffolding [that's right] within which you can loosen.

377.**W2**: Mmmm, but you can't get the scaffolding first [no] or rarely [that's right]. Although I think that each work has its own necessities...its never, it's not the same thing twice. Just because you've written one novel doesn't mean that you know how to write the next one. In fact the whole process as I've said to you is discovering how to write it. And when you know how to write it you've got your [the novel's done] it's the final...stage.

378.**CS**: Except there would be some sort of metaskills that you carry from one novel to another.

379.**W2**: Oh certainly [in personal management]. Oh you learn...certainly, certainly. And it becomes your, your work. There's a professionalism about it that you sit down and write. And you have to, there's always a doubt: 'Maybe I can't do it again.'

380.**CS**: Though it seems to me, that one of the things I'm interested in is the way writers and creative people generally manage themselves emotionally [yeah]. You've talked about the doubts, you know, 'Can I do it again?', and the fear [mmm] of entering into the composing stage, the fear of the excitement.

381.**W2**: Yes of just boundless excitement. You know you could explode [yes] and then what? [laughs].

- 382.**CS:** You see most people avoid that like the plague [yeah, yeah]. What's the difference do you think with creative people? How come?
- 383.**W2:** I don't know [laughter]. Does it say, ah, you can certainly get it and you have to find ways to come down. I mean I can come out from writing really spinning and hyper and I'm ready to... Sometimes I don't want to see anyone, and sometimes times I want to spin around talking and uhh... 'cos I've still got a lot of energy. It, it varies. I really have a most erratic writing life. I can write very quickly when I'm writing. And when I talk about reworking going through it with the pencil, that's creative work, it's not edit, it's not a line edit [yes]' putting a comma in [no I think] or changing a word... it's a real, a real re-looking at. It's composing again... [yes it's a different style of composing], yeah [it's not as loose]. I think it's very loose. I think you can do almost anything [oh OK, I'm sorry yeah] with that. You can cross out whole sections, you can tuck in pages and pages of other stuff that come to mind. It's extremely, I think, very flexible. Once you know you are not bound to what's on... it gives you a springboard, but you're not bound [I'm wondering] to it.
- 384.**CS:** I'm wondering though [I find it extremely flexible] yes ... I guess I didn't mean it. I was thinking I suppose of that idea of provisional tightening... [mmm], and then letting go. It seems to that the process before it is very loose in that there is almost no censor, almost [mmm]... and that's the worrying part, it's the diving into the pool.
- 385.**W2:** Yeah. Or perhaps there is a censor at work that stops you, that stops you when you are actually filling that blank page. The censor can stop you. It's always there. We have always [I guess it's relative isn't it?] got the voice of our culture is sitting on our shoulders all the time [yes]. So that's not... I don't think that as necessarily the free-est stage at all [oh OK]. I think that there can be inhibitions there [mmmm]. But once you've got something down... you are then free [that's interesting].
- 386.**CS:** I'm still... I must say I'm a bit perplexed... about the distinction then. Ah, I can relate to and understand what you are talking about with the reworking and that being quite free [free and very creative], yes [because you can reject what you've written... you know you've got something you can work]. That's right. And it forms lots of little springboards [mmm!, mmm] as you go through them.
- 387.**W2:** ... Ideas and images and solutions present themselves to you.
- 388.**CS:** You see it's interesting. Some writers talk about the way they get springboards... [mmm] and it may be picking up a writer they really admire and just reading a passage [mm] music, paintings, photographs. So it sounds a little bit like you use your initial drafting as the stimulus material almost. I don't know.

- 389.**W2**: Well it's just continuous. It's a continuous process. It stimulates yet more thought. I mean you can't have them all in the first, in the first creating. You can't ever...You're getting something down, but everything isn't there yet...[so it's almost]. You're still adding to it and its getting deeper...[so the first stage]. You're not cutting back, you're getting deeper and deeper with each draft.
- 390.**CS**: Yeah, I understand. So the first stage is more like breaking the drought
- 391.**W2**: That's right. Getting something down [forging something] and then you can explore it [it's almost like breaking down a wall, and 'Oh. Now I can see all these things']. Yes but that's not more genuine than the rest, and in fact it can be less. It's just an essential beginning.
- 392.**CS**: No, I think I understand that and it's less exciting or less interesting in a way in that...
- 393.**W2**: The early stage less interesting? Yes, yes. Yes, in a way [because]. Because you haven't yet found the possibilities [yeah yeah].
- 394.**CS**: So there's more faith involved in that first stage?
- 395.**W2**: Yes. Yes. It's very hard. It's very hard and um...to create something...it's quite hard work I think.
- 396.**CS**: I'm happier now! [you understand that], yeah I think I do.
- 397.**W2**: Yeah. I think it's a very important point [yes] because from the outside you might think oh that first stage is all, you know, you're floating up there and you are creating this and that...and then you get very methodical as you, as you rework it. But it's almost the opposite [yes, I understand that and I think]. And it's real important that first stage — its just the beginning of something...and all its possibilities come over the months and all those wonderful insights and additions and whatever paths to go down come out of that.
- 398.**CS**: Yep. Because we are so conditioned aren't we to feel like we have to know things in advance.
- 399.**W2**: That's right. That's right.
- 400.**CS**: And it's very distressing to sit down and have no structure, or what appears to be no structure.
- 401.**W2**: My daughter is doing Medieval, a Master's in Medieval Studies in New York and her, she has a very wonderful medievalist that's her seminar teacher...she's sending them into original sources. She says 'Don't formulate your questions first' (they have to make, do a paper) and she wants them to, because you never know, if you formulate your questions the answers you want [will be determined] before you

go to the material. You are going to be missing everything out. And I thought what wonderful advice...go to the material, read it, and then certain questions will emerge from your personal, your own individual, unique relationship with this material. And that's exactly what you're talking about, isn't it?

402.**CS:** Exactly, and it can be upsetting and that's why I guess I was asking about how writers manage their emotional lives, you see.

403.**W2:** But just to go with that image, I think we are also taught to think that you start with something disorganised and chaotic and you progressively move toward order...and I'm saying that it's not that at all [no]. You're actually moving toward more and more uncertainty from that first draft, that first whatever [yep]. You're actually getting bigger and more unknown and more, um, complex. So you are not going from here to the final product, you are really going from here [motioning outwards/expanding] and ending up with something that stands.

404.**CS:** And it's much later [yeah] that you can really abstract, uhh look from a very abstract level, like you [that's right] talked about before with the metaphor [that's right], and then you can comprehend the whole [that's right] and it takes a lot of structuring.

405.**W2:** That's right, so it's a lot of writing, writing, writing; paring back. This is your loosening and tightening...writing more, paring back. But you can't get to that final thing without having written all around it [yes which is all preparation], yes [you know, to use the stages of insight]. I suppose...preparation.

406.**CS:** Well, what they mean by preparation is complete immersion in the relevant domain.

407.**W2:** Yeah, that's right. And so what you learn, you're saying these meta-elements, is this is how you work. You learn how you work. You learn to trust it. So that I think comes with experience with writing.

408.**CS:** I agree. I don't think this is, um...although it draws on innate capacities [yeah], I think this process is a learning process [yes you are always learning] that you have to get better and better at [mm]. It's not like returning to some sort of pristine state.

409.**W2:** The pristine state. I think first novels have an energy to them that is glorious. That's why so many succeed, yeah, and you just have a spirit and energy and the more you write, I think, the more you understand or give yourself over to it. You have to find ways to retrieve that energy, which is quite hard. I don't like distinctions between established writers and new writers. You know it's, we are all in there messing about together [yes that's right]. And you don't know just because

you have written several novels. You are still at the beginning always. It's truly...that's not a fake modesty, you really feel that you are the beginning.

410.[break]

411.**W2**: You must discover what everyone before you has discovered...[chuckles] and it goes on forever [yes]. You know there is no how to. And I think that the best counsellors are, and psychologists, therapists, are the ones who know that. MY PARTNER often talked when he was teaching in the clinical [psychology] program that students really wanted overheads that said this is what you do...1 2 3 4. And they found it very difficult to allow themselves to go with, I guess to improvise, and certainly experience would help you there too wouldn't it?...To get a confidence and yet you have to be inventive and responsive.

412.**CS**: Yes, and it's an enormous responsibility when you operate in that fashion...[yes much more for you than for me...a book isn't going to harm any body]. But still it's the same process I think where you need to draw upon your own resources and it's scary. You think, you know there's a tendency to want to be able to lean on [yes!, yes] what you have done already [that's right, yes ...you're out on the front line there].

413.[side one finished]

414.**W2**: Favourite writer?...And really a more sensible question is what is your favourite book? At the moment because not all writers whose books I like, do I like all their books [yes that's right]. Some books are just wonderful and others not. And you'd expect some variation wouldn't you? As we explore...

415.**CS**: Yeah some days I think I'm atrocious in the counselling room [yeah, yeah]. And it's usually because I've not been sort of flowing with the client and open and so on [probably just a bad day], just tired or something.

416.**W2**: And you can see afterwards, I bet you can see afterwards what you maybe should have said [oh yeah] right, and you get that insight later. Well you can pick it up the next session [that's right]. Yes and that's good. They can see your process too [that's right]. They want answers from you, I'm sure.

417.**CS**: [CS suggests the structure of the remainder of the interview...reviewed the insights we had discussed: the caving and play examples.]

418.I do want to ask you in particular, I think you have sort of covered it [have I given you good examples that you can use?]. Yes [the caving one?]. Yeah I think that's fine and the play one as well.

- 419.**W2**: They seem like tiny little, I mean they're big, I guess when you are figuring out structure or 'what's this novel really about? Should I divide it into?...Oh it can fall into these three parts.' I mean there are these great big questions.
- 420.**CS**: But you know when you realise that, like for example when you started to realise the metaphoric structure of the play [yeah, yeah]. What's that experience like for you? You know...
- 421.**W2**: Oh it's great. It's neat. Yes ! That's great! It's a wonderful feeling to see it working there. And quite humbling in a way because it's as if you didn't do it [chuckles]. It's been given to you. And yet I know that it is my intelligence that's presiding over the whole thing [exactly]. It's, it's...I'm not just a blank medium [mm, neutral sort of] yes. But we don't have works, it has to go through. That's the other...whether something is autobiographical or not, you know, it has to be passed through the writer or else it doesn't have any spirit [yes that's right] of any sort. It doesn't have any life if it hasn't um...been given. I think of it as being passed through somehow [yes]. It's got to have that presence there.
- 422.**CS**: And this sort of feeling that, is sort of, you know, sometimes people describe it almost as a euphoria [mmm] you know...up.
- 423.**W2**: Oh yes. It's very pleasing.
- 424.**CS**: And it lasts for a long time?
- 425.**W2**: Yes. I'm having such a good time remembering the play! [laughs].
- 426.**CS**: Yes. And so this is even a long time afterwards [yes. Well it closed two weeks ago]. Yeah, but a long time after you finished writing [after I finished writing] yes. You see, one of the things that intrigues me is that, you know, we talked briefly about the different sense of self. And uhh...it seems to me that there's an interesting paradox that happens. And that is there is an emptying out of self [mmm] you know where you surrender and you enter into it [mm] and the recognition that, the sort of humbling recognition that it's not *me*, some sort of ego that's driving it. Yet out of it there is a sort of profound self-validation.
- 427.**W2**: And you know that you are the one [who's responsible] that it's yours, yeah. Yes, yes. So yes, there's a tremendous self-validation, I mean a confidence as well as acknowledging the flaws [chuckles] that must exist.
- 428.**CS**: Yes. But it is a curious process isn't it?
- 429.**W2**: It is. It is indeed.
- 430.**CS**: You know, because there is on the one hand it's the emptying out of any sense of self, even experience of self as you...like in the moment when you saw that

metaphoric structure [mmm], I'm sure you were *IN* the realisation of it, not thinking about yourself [mmmm] or anything else [mmmm].

431.**W2**: Then I started seeing it everywhere. Oh I could...there were maybe ten very specific instances that I didn't realise at the time I was writing were handing, were informing [yep], giving texture and meaning to the overall story [yes]...and that's thrilling. How does that happen?

432.**CS**: Does this make sense to you? Um...is part of the good feeling about it a sensing somehow that you are connected to this, to this larger process? You know you said it is humbling, and it's not you directing it, but it's very self-validating.

433.**W2**: It's humbling and...what's the word, validating, yes. It's both. But they are not necessarily um...[contradictories] in opposition are they [no]. Because humbling doesn't mean that you don't take pride in your work. You claim it as your own. You can't just say 'Oh shucks, I don't know how this happened!' [laughs]. Because I made it happen.

434.**CS**: You see, I guess what I am heading towards is that it's almost like the opposite of alienation [mmm, mm]...in the sense in which it seems to me anyway from what people say, it's like having an experience of being connected with their work, you know with the work, and with almost the things the work are talking about [mmm mmm]. You know when you were talking before about the guy caving, there's very much a sense that guy was you and was not you [that's right].

435.**W2**: That's right. I've sometimes think I let the characters borrow my clothes and my apartment in New York, like you are a scout for a film set...You say "Oh look I've got this apartment, I'll let them live in that one [laughs]. They can have that room, and that view and that position.', and then they take it over. So once they get going on their own, they can do what they like. So, it doesn't, it's not like writing from life...yes. You become them rather than they are you.

436.**CS**: But there's a bit of both isn't there? [I suppose so...laughs]. I mean there is certainly, at the very least there is this mixing and confusing of self and others, isn't there [mmm. Mmm].

437.**W2**: And that's exciting. It's, it's exciting ah...I know writers who say they can't write in the first person because it feels as if it is them and it is inhibiting. And others say the first person, I find first person quite freeing, because it is not me...I become that [it's a pretend first person], it's like I'm acting. Like I think of, you know those little baby suits, you put their feet [laughs] and their little arms [yes] and then you zip them up [laughter]. I feel like I've done that. I've kind of stepped into this person. I'm zipped up and then I can go! [laughs]. 'Where are we going? Are

we going up now?” [chuckles] [exactly]. So that first person frees me whereas for another writer I know it’s just absolutely ‘Ohhh ‘I, I, I can’t do it.’ He then writes in the third person and it’s still about him...he doesn’t realise.

438.**CS**: That’s right. It seems to me that writers play tricks on themselves

439.**W2**: Yeah. Yes. You make tricks, you find what devices, you have a mnemonic, you know certain pictures. I put maps on the wall, sometimes I have music playing...for one...I couldn’t use music while I was doing the play ‘cos I was hearing too much, it interfered with the dialogue [dialogue]. Um, I don’t mind if I find a piece of music that suits me, and I just play that. Some people, I know that Helen [Garner] can’t have any music when she writes, it just interferes too much. And yet, I mean I think we all have to hear what we are writing, it’s also [an auditory experience] yeah it’s aural. You hear your phrasing and your rhythms which for every sentence are important.

440.**CS**: See, one of the things that also interests me is, this, again, our normal conscious processes are very linear and not very dimensional. So that what seems to inspire and lead to insight for writers, you know, but for other people, is a, it’s almost like a fully-embodied experience. It has all the dimensions, you know, the visual, they can hear it. Sometimes it’s quite, it’s even olfactory, you know.

441.**W2**: Well yes. It’s, it’s...it’s unifying in that way. And I think, when I see, I think it’s very different from, it’s not therapy. It’s very different...And it’s not. I don’t know if it’s on a continuum with schizophrenia. But when I’ve seen, read books you know, of art works that schizophrenics...that seems quite different [yes] to me. It’s not transformed or...although you can get [it’s not contained within meaning structures I think] yeah, mmm. And it’s not...it doesn’t work to heal.

442.**CS**: Yeah...I think...see I guess we are in stage four [of the interview] and I can start telling you a bit about what I think.

443.**W2**: I think there is a healing, even though it is not therapy...there’s a...[oh yes. It’s good for you]. It’s good for you, yes.

444.**CS**: I think so, and one of the things I...

445.**W2**: Even when you are writing painful stuff, and most people are drawn to the painful [yes] when they write, I would say. It is certainly my experience with students [mmm]. They are not writing about the happy picnics with their parents. They are writing about the pain [that’s right]. And it’s, there’s some that, I think there is a mechanism in us that, uhh, takes us as far as we can go at the moment. So sometimes you are right on the area and you think ‘I can’t bear this’ because it’s not just euphoria, it can be terrifying, very painful. Though I am convinced for the writer

there is a mechanism that takes you right to the cliff edge. 'This is as...it's OK. You can go this far, today,' [chuckles]. And you are protected, there's a protective presence [yep...it's like...]. It stops you falling over into, you know to death, or whatever. Maybe another day you can go even further.

446.**CS:** That's right. It's like, uhh, I think pretending and make-believe is important in that sense because there is always a sense in which you are, even though it can be very authentic, and the best writing is, there's still a sense in which you are playing and you are pretending, and you are making up. And you know the difference between the two [yes you do]. The schizophrenic [doesn't] doesn't know that he's living in a castle in the air [that's right]. We still know it's a make-believe castle. What was I saying before?...Oh yes. So it's almost like there's a sort of transcending emotional or affective stance that the person takes that protects them through the process [mmmm], do you know what I mean? It's all done in the context of that. And if you don't, then you are in trouble I think.

447.**W2:** Yes. Yes, and that also has to do with transforming experience. There are writers who transform nothing. It really is a transcript of their lives and it's not processed in any way, or understood. It's a transcription. Whereas I think that transforming is the mark of a fiction writer.

448.**CS:** It's about meaning of course, isn't it? [yeah]. I mean it's about creating something and making it meaningful without simplifying it.

449.**W2:** Because we can only use our own experience really. I mean it is crucial to use it. To reject it...where else can you know about jealousy and treachery and anger and love unless it is from what you've experienced and what you see experienced? So you have to, otherwise where do you get it from. Books? Literature can't get itself from literature.

450.**CS:** There's a strange interplay, it's something Bill Warren, — he's my co-supervisor, a very interesting man — he talks about using our subjectivity in service of objectivity [mmm, mmm]. He doesn't mean the sort of objectivism of, you know, modernism. He really means we have to utilise our subjectivity, we have no other resource. But it has to be to move beyond our subjectivity to open to what IS, not to how we want things to be, or something like that [mmm]. That's his definition of objectivity, of allowing things to be how they are, not how we want them to be. And I think that really is what you are taking about in many respects [mmm].

451.**W2:** And you have to be able to turn...I think some...so there are writers who don't transform, who are just transcribing exactly what happened to them, and I've heard people say 'It really happened like this.' Well the truth is no excuse [laughter] is

what I think Ellery Queen said that... 'the truth is no excuse' ...and it isn't. We are dealing in a different kind of truth, and there are the ones — oh what was the other kind? — oh! who are very good at seeing the folly in others. And you can certainly take almost anyone and show their...they have veiled it and it's exhilarating to execute on the page, especially someone who you are not keen on, who you are angry with. You can do a nice job on the page, but you have to, in a way, go beyond that. And you have to certainly be able to turn that searchlight on yourself. A lot of, I can think of...I won't name names, but I can think of a lot of writers whose own persona is just perfect, and everyone else is a just a bit...

452.CS: Whereas the great works really are the ones where we find ourselves identifying with really [yes] truly horrible people [yes].

453.W2: Or there's a, there's an ability, as I say, to turn that scathing or that examination on...it's not just them; it's also us. You know, rather than I have the answers and those people are full of folly. Uhh, and a writer who does it beautifully I think is Jessica Anderson who has a compassion beyond...She can see the folly, say in an easy target, say an Eastern Suburbs wealthy wife. We could all poke fun at, but she can go beyond that and show the compassion. Show that person as a person [exactly]. And she can turn that searchlight on herself and I admire that very much.

454.CS: [CS checks for any other issues needing coverage in interview] Oh...we're doing pretty well here I think. [laughter].

455.W2: Why won't you play a film actor by going up and doing something! [laughter]. I think I'll tidy my desk! For a while.

456.CS: You'll clean some lids and things!

457.I wanted to ask you about the social aspects of writing. And that is, with insight generally, there are stages where people in the creative process don't want to talk to people about their creative process. And pretty universally once they've had a major breakthrough there is *somebody* they really want to tell [mmmm] or there are people in their life that it's important they talk to about it. Does that ring any bells for you?

458.W2: ...Yes...When I started writing I wanted to certainly show things very quickly...This isn't an exact answer to your question but I'll say it anyway [it'll do]. I'd write a story and run out and show it [laughter] and 'Here...what do you think, what do you think?'...to my husband. I now tell students 'Look, don't show your work to your nearest and dearest.'. Because that's a kind of censor as well, at work. 'What'll he think?'. But then I'd go to a group and we would share stories. Now I don't feel a need to show it to anyone until...I don't want to, until I'm finished. And then I would have two or three people, I have two people in New York who...my

writer friends there, 'cos that's where I started [writing] writing, and you know I lived there for a long time [no, but]. Yeah I lived there for 26 years [oh, OK. You were born?] here. I went there in my early 20s and then started writing there. So that's where my writing life was until I came back, so that's where they happen to be. We will read one another's manuscripts when we think it is more-or-less finished, before I show it to an agent, my agent. So now I have no need to show anyone. I don't particularly like talking about it, anything, now either. Ahhh ...except like this, talking about, it's fun for me to talk about the play or to talk about [certainly in retrospect]. People don't actually want to hear [chuckles]. It's like your dreams. You say 'Guess what I dreamt last night?' 'Oh, yeah' [mock yawning].

459.**CS**: Exactly...My wife's not interested in my writing at all you know [laughter]
It's terrible.

460.**W2**: When you are in therapy and you are in analysis and here's someone who actually wants to hear your dreams! [exactly] whoa!

461.**CS**: I frequently say to my clients you know who worry about being inept in social situations. I say: 'shut-up' [yeah]. Just listen to people and they'll find you endlessly fascinating

462.**W2**: That's right [laughter]. They'll all want to please you.

463.**CS**: Well they'll just feel so appreciated that someone is actually listening.

464.**W2**: That's right...look at someone and really listen.

465.**CS**: I say "Listen to where they are coming from. Ignore the words and enter.'...and of course what they find anyway is that they spontaneously enter the conversation because they have forgotten themselves. Anyway. But so...

466.**W2**: So...this is fun to talk about as I'm sure you are getting really wonderful responses from writers [yes] because who ever asks us how we work? You know. We may not let you go [laughing]. We'll hold you by the lapels [laughing].

467.**CS**: Well this is one of the problems you know I'm really thinking 'How can I cut this shorter?' You know, to transcribe it. I'll just do less interviews!

468.**W2**: You haven't heard anything. We have more to tell you. You want to know how I work? Well of course! So it's very flattering and quite pleasant to talk about in this situation. I never talk about it otherwise.

469.**CS**: Yes, I think that...Well that's what I was interested in because you see one of the things that seems to me about creativity and genuine new insights into things, is that there needs to be a certain remove from conventional social trains of thinking and restraints [mmm]. You talked about the censor, and you don't want to add other people's censors to yours. Um...but it is a communicative process [mmmm] and

when we do have a breakthrough with something, normally, in whichever domain, whether it's writing or not, there is an instinct or...

470.**W2**: Well I would say I had a terrific day, or I just figured this out.

471.**CS**: Oh, OK. So it may not be about the content that you are sharing [no] but it's about your experience [yes, yes...I would say]. But then when you do find someone, for example [my group] like this interview [oh yeah] or the group, it's very important to share and to have the process validated, isn't it?

472.**W2**: Mmmm! Well it is very, it is actually interesting to think about, but I don't think it interests that many people [ah]. Although people come to those writers' festivals and listen to writers speaking [they're packed out aren't they?] and I think 'Why do they want to hear this?' you know. You just want to, maybe you just want to look at the person. It's a very...That's a mystery to me why people do turn up to listen to a writer...who...the writer is often so ordinary compared with the work [laughter]. The writer is no more interesting really than anyone else.

473.**CS**: But people find that interesting, I think that can be validating for them.

474.**W2**: Wanting see how someone looks, I guess and the voice...Uhh...If you like the voice just like you like seeing the jacket photo in the book.

475.**CS**: Yeah, but you see I found talking to the writers very interesting. you know I mean...And I think I've been careful to choose my writers, if I may be complimentary [yeah] in the sense that I'm not interested in the sort of, if I can say, the Bryce Courteney type writers [no]...because I think he's largely using a more conventional intelligence and, masterfully, but not necessarily breaking any new ground.

476.**W2**: Yes and maybe not all that aware. He knows exactly what he wants to do. He says he's a storyteller and he wants to tell stories and he's not...What's he say, I heard him speak. He said. 'People say: how do you write? How do you write?' in one of these festivals. 'Well' he said, 'you need a lot of bum glue.'. I think 'Oh! What a horrible image, a horrible image'. But what he means is you have to sit in your chair and work...And so I found...I guess I'm actually an extremely visual person and whenever I hear people with these metaphors I get a picture of it and it's so distasteful! [exactly]. Certainly when I went to the US as a young woman, somehow American speech — maybe I hadn't noticed it here — it's extremely vigorous in its metaphoric language [it's sort of muscular or something isn't it?]. Yeah. the shit hits the fan, it's a crock. And I had great trouble at first every time I heard it I would visualise it you know and I'd think 'Oh please! I don't want to see

that!'. But anyway, I found that jarring, but that kind of advice is what he...and people really want that, the people who come to festivals.

477.CS: Yes, but um...

478.W2: ...And he knows he's telling a story and...

479.CS: You see, there's a social aspect too, isn't there, though. When you read a book that you really love, there's something that happens [mmm] in that isn't there where you are entering into a [yes] social domain [yep] and you know. And presumably you'd be thrilled when you occasionally come across readers who have lost themselves in your work.

480.W2: It's lovely!...and it's, it's this power, it's a mystery really. And the critical theorists, the literary critics, theorists, ah...can't take this into account. They almost want to deny it, particularly contemporary criticism [yes]. There's no talk about the power of literature, uh-hh that mystery. It's a glorious mystery because I feel it when I read.

481.CS: Yes because there is a tendency I think where they relativise everything, don't they. You know, these are all just discourses.

482.W2: Mmm the word 'discourse' just 'chooo' [and we're written by discourses and determined] that's right. And I suppose it's a study of its own and it's a useful language, but it's a very...I think one has to struggle to find the language. I think one has to struggle to find the words to describe a book as the reader...not to have a series of phrases at your disposal. I mean I think it is quite limiting. But anyway, I am not talking about my work as a writer, but as a reader I think there is no accounting for the power and that glorious mystery that's just wonderful. And if someone does happen to get it from your work [yep] you know I'm thinking of Tolstoy [laughs, yes exactly]. Nabokov or something.

483.CS: I remember reading Dostoyevski, you know, and just you know strange sense of being transported to this country [yes] that's so foreign to me, you know the Brothers Nabakov and the Idiot...what was it?...the brothers [the idiot and the Possessed and the Brothers Kamarazov] yeah...and all of a sudden feeling a kinship with this person's insights into human nature [that's right, that's right] that otherwise were so foreign.

484.W2: And that is with us today, whereas the um...theorists of the time are not with us are they? [that's right]. There's an enduring, I don't know what. I'm sure it would be interesting, a history of literary criticism on what is being said when, and certainly we know about twentieth century...Anyway, what they were saying in the

nineteenth century is no longer with us, but the works are, aren't they? [exactly] so there is something that we really need.

485.**CS:** And there is another social dimension too that it seems to me one, and one that is difficult, um...but...and it relates to the sort of critical theory I guess...And that is the sense in which writers are written by the multitude and layers of discourse in which we are immersed. You know there is a sense in which we are written. I don't think it is the whole story [mmm], but often you know when people report the flow of [mmm] of creativity, it's they are hearing discourses, you know they're hearing whole dialogues.

486.**W2:** But you're right. We are written...but it's a mysterious, wonderful [yes] thing [laughs] and uhh...and fun. And then there is the whole politics of writing and the whole politics of publishing.

487.**CS:** It's very troublesome [yeah] isn't it? I mean I guess I have a perspective on that via mum's work in the Arts Council, and the viciousness of the attacks between people.

488.**W2:** Yeah, I feel kind of free from that in a way, but it's been changing in front of my eyes, and I've always thought that if you write something that's good and [chuckles] worthwhile, it will be recognised...but um...the marketing side of things becomes so powerful [that's right]. And I don't know how that in turn is influencing writers.

489.**CS:** The other, of course, interesting aspect of that is, perhaps a less negative aspect, is a sense that there is a community of writers...in the sense that you have books and writers that have been very influential [yeah]. I mean all writers do, and particularly as you said, books, particular books that influence you. So we are always a part of a field [that nourish you in some way] and an ongoing sort of [mmm, mm] conversation.

490.**W2:** And I don't think a writer has much choice about how he or she writes. You might think 'I'll write...' because people say, again say to you 'Why don't you write a best seller?'. I would say [laughing] 'Oh, yes why don't I?' [good idea]. Good idea. You don't have much control over how you write. You write the way you write. You write the best you can. It may not...It may or may not sell. Now I do think you can analyse some of those genre pieces and perhaps [turn them out] produce one. But that's quite hard too.

491.**CS:** Yeah I would think at peril too to your normal writing [mmmm] unless you can make some sort of very clean distinction.

- 492.**W2**: You'd have to do it with your full, I think you'd have to give it your full passion, and your full attention. Not just say 'I'm just doing this for money. This is what I'm doing now.'. In fact my whole experience, when I was in New York and trying to find ways to make money, um I tried writing for comics, love comics... 'cos I'd heard you get \$15 a page. This was back in the 70s and um, \$15 a page of [just the bubbles] script, yeah, just the bubbles. 'Oh! I can do that!'. And I did it...I said 'Oh this is not my real work.'. And as a result I wrote very bad copy and I mean I kept having captions that took up the whole frame, you know too much writing [yes yeah]. It's a skill that. But I did it with condescension and they didn't turn out well at all and I took then into the Warner comics building, I saw how dedicated they were to their work and an artist had come in with a new cover. It was a woman kissing her lover, and they said 'Oh Vinnie! That's great! Look how you've done that kiss. Look how her hair (her hair was coming down) look how you've done her hair.'. I mean they were giving everything to this. They weren't saying this was beneath them, me, which is what I was saying. So, if you take up any of these tasks you really do have to give it your full, full passion [yup] and even then it might not work. But we can't um...we may...I feel some writers are choosing subjects now because they seem commercial possibilities. Particularly at the moment, um, 19th century stuff seems to [be appealing] be appealing yeah...convict days and exploration...
- 493.**CS**: Certain subject matter — a bit like the film industry went through.
- 494.**W2**: Aboriginal, convict...yes in the past...Confirming some of our, I guess some of our ideas about ourselves in the past. John Forrest, isn't it?
- 495.**CS**: Yeah That's right. And the other aspect too that we have I think touched on is, when you for example showed me that quote from Gadamar [yeah], about conversation, that I think this is a very definite social aspect.
- 496.**W2**: Is it pronounced Gadamar? I'd like to know if I'm saying it wrong. Have you heard it?
- 497.**CS**: That's how I've heard it [oh, good, OK] but I don't know what the correct one is [yeah]. When you were saying Gadamar, I was thinking 'Maybe that was the correct pronunciation', so I don't know [laughter] either [OK, what was I saying earlier?]. The thing about the conversation as being something that is bigger than us, that we don't plan and we don't institute...and it takes, we get to go along for the ride as it were [yeah]. It seems to me that's also what happens in creativity and writing: there is a relinquishment in individualist control, some sort of ego, you know, structured direction-making, which implicates us in our surrounds [mmmm] um much more. So this is at the deeper level, the social level I think . Almost the

social level that includes, you know, all the reality [mmmm]. I felt that very strongly when you were talking about the caving experience, you know the sense in which you merge into landscapes [mmm, mmm!] as well as into other people...you know, a sort of pragmatic dimension.

498.**W2:** It's...yeah...in that is... Yes you do merge into other people. It's visual and it's more in the language. We haven't really talked about actual language which is, I think, you have to love...that love for words [words and the cadences]. Yes...All of that is terribly, is wonderfully gratifying. So that's an exploration too, what you are doing with words.

499.**CS:** But you know I can still remember, I remember, I felt what you were saying about the grains of sand [yes, yes yes] do you know what I mean?

500.**W2:** There was something quite frightening about going into a little hole in the ground [yes absolutely...and squeezing between]. Oh yes and you can get caught [caught exactly] in the passage. So it's wonderful that they turn up for us aren't they? Those images [amazing] [laughing].

501.**CS:** [On leaving, W2 also talked about how important it was that she received writing grants...not only for the practical matter of being able to write, but for the sense that one's respected peers had valued her work...It gave her great confidence.]

502. WRITER 3

503.**CS:** I'd like to know anything about the way in which you organise your work, any strategies you use, any tricks. How you organise the household. Just anything that comes to mind.

504.**W3:** Right. It's very simple for me these days because since I became a mother and am working full-time, it's a question of creating an empty house or an empty office. So I have to be quite...I can no longer afford the luxury of the procrastinatory processes that I used to go through. I have to really kind of hit the ground running and I have to put in quite a lot of effort. In a way it is kind of both spontaneous and planning ahead. It's kind of thinking to myself I'll try to get [partner] to get [son] out of the house for two hours on Sunday morning...and then of course there's all sorts of other things that are likely to come into play.

505.**CS:** How old is [son]?

506.**W3:** He's six and you know he's likely to be sick or [partner] might not want to do it or whatever it may be. I have this plan in my head. I'll get this two hours and then the second that front door shuts...boom...[laughs].

507.**CS:** How is that different to how it used to be?

508.**W3:** Well. I've always worked as a journalist as well as writing but, until the last three years, it wasn't full-time and it was mostly in the preceding 15 or 16 years home-based. I worked for the [newspaper] for seven years from home and so I could go with my creative flow much more easily.

509.**CS:** Has that changed the nature of what you write in any ways...are you tending to write short stories?

510.**W3:** Yes. The fiction is shorter and the novel I'm working on is quite episodic [laughing]. So in some ways it's kind of...yeah in some ways I find that quite frustrating. But in other ways what I've learnt is that I've always had quite a short attention span. Every writer — that is one thing I learned from the [writers' interviews books] series — is that every single writer worked differently. I tend to be someone who can concentrate at an incredible intense level for about an hour, and that's it. So to do the work that I do and to do fiction actually in some ways, as long as I can get a bit of time to do the fiction, actually quite suits me. I quite like going from one thing to another...whereas, um...

511.**CS:** Well this would be a perfect job for you then [editor of newspaper magazine].

512.**W3:** Yeah it is. Yes, particularly here you know where it's kind of ten minutes on one thing and ten minutes on another. The down side of that is that you get a bit too scattered so that when you want to come, where you've got to go to is down there [points to her stomach] into the deep recesses of yourself you are actually dangly and to get there, you can't go there instantly.

513.**CS:** That's right and by the time you get down there your time might be up.

514.**W3:** Yeah. That's right. So you have to be quite....So I tend to work a little bit at the weekend, at night. If I have a deadline for something I'll take a morning off work and work from home. Sometimes I'll come in here [work] early. I just have to be quite creative about how I find the time to do it.

515.**CS:** So let's say we take that day or morning you take off to work at home. How do you get down to those deep dark recesses? What do you do?

516.**W3:** Well, I find them quite easy to go down to. It's a question of just being still for a minute...for me. And for some reason, which I can't quite fathom being by nature outwardly a reasonably cheerful and optimistic person, my short stories are usually rather black. And it doesn't take me long to get there.

517.**CS:** So do you begin with a mood or something like that? Do you feel the mood of what you 're writing? How does that work for you?

518.**W3:** Well, what usually happens is that whatever it is that I'm writing is usually sparked by something visual. I've worked out that that's what it usually is for me.

519.**CS:** You mean you've had a mental image of some sort or you've seen something in the real world?

520.**W3:** Well sometimes it will be in the real world...but sometimes...but it's an image created by something, either by reality or by something that somebody [has said] has said, you know. I mean the other day a friend of mine and I were laughing about — she has to go and spend Christmas with her very extended family — and she really, really, really doesn't want to. And we were talking about the things she could do that would really shock them and I said you could hire a black male model and arrive with him and just not explain him, like, just not explain him for a week. And I just suddenly got this line in my head... 'It was the black male model that did it'. Now I don't yet know what that story is but that's a great beginning to a story.

521.**CS:** It's interesting you know because although, as you say, every writer seems to have a different method, every writer that I've spoken to and the ones I've read about all talk about the importance of getting a central image [mm]. Now sometimes it has different sort of sensate qualities. For some people it can be even auditory or you know smells. But they all seem to talk about, they get this metaphor or image and they don't know where it is going to go but they have a feeling like this is worth following. I'm very pleased that that's the case (later in the interview we can talk about why that might be the case). So here you are at home and everything's been tidied up, your world has been tidied up, or at least the doors have been closed [both chuckling]. And so mentally you just still yourself? [Yes. Yes I still myself]. And what do you do? I mean physically, literally. Do you just sit in your chair?

522.**W3:** Well I just sit in my chair and I turn on the computer and I usually...these days the procrastinatory method is much less than it used to be, but I'll still usually make myself a cup of tea. And you know I might pick a Tarot card. Sometimes I'll pick a Tarot card and um just kind of look at it for a minute or, you know, just kind of approach the computer sideways, you know. I'll give it a few sideways glances before I actually go in there headfirst.

523.**CS:** That's interesting because...because you had more time before, you actually spent more time procrastinating. This is not an unusual experience for people who have busy lives to notice in retrospect [yes], but most writers have talked about these little rituals they have. Some talk about...I think it was W1 talked about what she

called the bookends of her day. She's in a very different circumstance, but she has a time when she starts and a time when she finishes and she can fit that in fairly well. Other writers talked about finding themselves going to the bathroom and just cleaning things, cleaning lids on shampoo bottles [yes]. Are any of your rituals that sort of mindless?

524.**W3:** Well I can certainly do cleaning. Cleaning is a very good procrastinatory thing for me. I can do any amount of cleaning and persuade myself quite easily that the house must be clean before I can write. But I really have to try and force myself over that at the moment [because of the time constraints], time constraints.

525.**CS:** But what do you think that's about, this sort of...it's not just about procrastination is it?

526.**W3:** Umm...well I think it is. I think it is. I think it is a type of fundamental procrastination because you know as a writer this thing that you do, you both love and hate.

527.**CS:** Well that was going to be my next question. Why procrastinate? And what is it you hate about it?

528.**W3:** Well it's the tussling and the fact that you get this image in your mind and that it is never the same. The words are never as good as the image. So the realised product, it's constantly frustrating because the product is never as good as the thing you have in your head...and...so that's always frustrating. And also you hate it because it consumes you, you know [No. You better explain that. I mean I might have some idea but...]. Well, you, you know you are going to go plunging down there and then you're with whatever mayhem and murder, and incest and greed and chaos, and whatever it is that you've created you're kind of in it. So that's quite exhausting.

529.**CS:** Is it bad when you're in it? Or is it more the thought about it?

530.**W3:** It's not bad when you're in it but it's really, for me anyway, it's really intense. I always feels afterwards almost as if I've had a vein drained. I mean that's almost how I think of it: like there's this vein in me and it fills up and it gets drained. And at the end of it that's how I feel.

531.**CS:** And do you notice going into and coming out?

532.**W3:** Well again I used to more because the going in and the going out took longer, but now really the going out stops. Like I mean I'll look at my watch and I think 'Oh my God they'll be home in ten minutes I better stop'...you know, or I'll type furiously until the last second when I hear that doorbell go, 'MUM'! and the dog comes racing in [and that's it] and that's it. It has to stop.

- 533.**CS:** This is probably not necessarily directly related but sometimes questions come into mind, given that you are so busy...[why do I keep trying to write?...laughs].
Yeah.
- 534.**W3:** I knew you were going to ask that. Well for me that's a really important question. Why do I? I don't know why I do. Anybody would say, and in fact several people have said to me 'Why don't you just stop. You've done, you've written, you know, three non-fiction books, you've written two kids' books, you've written two works of fiction.'. But for me this is what I have...this [points to office] is what for various reasons I do to make money and because I'm good at it. I know I'm good at journalism, but I also find it quite easy to be good at it. Now, it's taken me a long time to realise that not all people do and that's actually something that I can be proud of rather than constantly thinking 'OH my God I'm a journalist and that's next worse to being a used car salesman.', and that perhaps that is a way I can actually do something that is worthwhile. But at the same time it doesn't satisfy my innermost being and so I HAVE to keep writing and even if all I do is I continue to produce little bits until, you know I retire on the superannuation from [her employer] or life moves on. You know, I will keep on writing.
- 535.**CS:** Although you feel drained immediately after...it sounds like from what you were just saying that it's also an enlivening practice for you [Oh it is. Yeah.], so when do you get enlivened?
- 536.**W3:** Well, you get enlivened. Well I suppose, because for me anyway, I always have this storyline mulling over. So when I finish my work and I do feel a bit tired, I mean I don't feel utterly exhausted but I feel like, you know...[draws in deep breath] you know, and I come back to normal everyday life but then quite soon after [you're back into the novel]...in my head I'm back in it [the novel] and I'm thinking 'I wonder if that really worked or maybe it would have been better this way, and what's going to happen next.' and, you know, then I'm waiting for that next bit of information that will come to me about what it is I'm working on that will tell me how I'm going.
- 537.**CS:** We'll jump back a second now. Let's say you're back in this day you've taken a morning off work...[some chit chat about owner of paper]. So you're there and you are writing away and so then things go wrong and it's not quite working. You're not happy. What do you do?
- 538.**W3:** I just stop. And since I'm usually working on a number of things I can either move onto something else or I'll just give up and that's when I'll go and clean the house. I'll do it a different way around.

539.**CS:** Have you sort of found that generally speaking there's no point in pushing?

540.**W3:** I think there's a point when you get to a certain stage of the book or the story where you are heading towards the end and for me anyway you must push through, and then even if you know it's not working you kind of have to keep on going and it kind of consumes you. And you persuade yourself into thinking sometimes that what you're doing is working and then it's only a little bit later or a few months later - it may be a day later or it may be six months later - that you realise that no it hasn't worked. But um, for me that's when the real speed tends to build up towards the end.

541.**CS:** And some of the writers I have talked to have talked about the importance of reworking and that it's not a secondary process [no]. It's in some ways even more creative. Is that the way you feel about it?

542.**W3:** I think that's absolutely true. And also in many ways it's more enjoyable though, because if you can give yourself over to it because you've got your structure hopefully and you've got your main idea and you've done your scaffolding. And now you are really doing, making adjustments to the building.

543.**CS:** So the part prior to that was more like going into the deep end and not knowing what was what. Is that right? [yes, yes]. That's the bit that is a bit forbidding and...

544.**W3:** Yeah, well. Very forbidding. And then you, you know, again like with this novel that I'm writing, working on at the moment, I was actually convinced it was finished, you know. I was convinced it was finished. And it's taken a bit of convincing me otherwise. But I now know and I actually...and what very often happens for me is dreams. Dreams will tell me. And quite recently I had a dream that actually even said to me. I just dreamt that I was starting, that I was working on the novel, but instead of working on the novel on the disk that I had, I was working on my new, on that laptop [pointing to desk] which in fact is a fairly new one, and I was starting again, and I had a blank screen in front of me. And I just knew that that meant that I have to stop, I have to, even if I use some of the material that I've got — which I will, but I have to actually go through the physical process of retyping it in. [whispers]. Which is very frustrating! [chuckles].

545.**CS:** It is. And you say that the dream, this is something that happens a lot.

546.**W3:** Yes. I've dreamt whole short stories...

547.**CS:** Not every writer talks about that. I mean most people talk about...There's an interesting book called *Writers Dreaming* by Naomi Epel. And so most writers will talk about dreams but they vary enormously on how important they are to them. How does it work for you? You wake up and the dream is fresh and you know straight away? Do you write it down? What do you do? How does that work?

548.W3: I don't write my dreams down. I used to, there was a period when I used to. I find that just a complete waste of time...if I'm going to be writing anything I'd rather be writing my fiction. So that's that really. But what happens is, well I either get woken up in the night with it because it'll be some blinding thing, or in the morning I'll think 'Oh, that's a funny thing that I dreamt. I wonder what that was about?' Then I lie there and think about it. Usually it will come to me.

549.CS: Yes it's interesting because right throughout the insight literature there's this sort of notion that people are working on some sort of project — not necessarily writing or any sort of major project — and they work on it and they inhabit it, you know [mmm]. They live inside it and dream about it and so on. And they'd be walking around in their day-to-day life and they'll see something that will spark off things [mm]. I'm wondering whether...it doesn't seem to be necessary to be a dream. It can be anything. Do you also get this experience you know? Do you see characters wandering around? And you think 'Ah that's what I need or some aspect of the person'. Is that how it works?

550.W3: I think that's right because you get to a point where again that tends to happen when you are actually working on something and it's almost like, but again, I would see it in quite psychological terms, like in Jungian terms that it's...it suddenly seems that synchronicity begins to happen. Now which comes first? The chicken or the egg? I absolutely don't know. All I know is that you get into perhaps a slightly heightened state of awareness. Do you *create* those things that are useful to you? On another day when you weren't thinking about this particular story, would you pass these things and they would have no effect on you? Or, are they sent to you? I don't know. But I kind of think about that because I mean if I was working on a short story, you know, that maybe touched on offices, I could go through months and months and months here and...you know I'll go home and say something funny that happened or something terrible or whatever, but it doesn't stay with me. But if I was, I bet you anything you like that something would happen. I would think 'Right, OK I am going to use that.' and something else would happen and I would think 'I'll use that.'.

551.CS: Well in the horrible cognitive literature they'll say that, they would say that you have primed yourself, you know, and you have raised the threshold for things to come into awareness and there's all sorts of things...it's not appropriate to go into now, but there are a number of ways of making sense of that. But something that is very interesting about that I'd like to ask you about is that — and it hinges on this question of whether you caused it or whether it was given to you — and that is that

writers tend to talk about, especially when they are really flowing with their work and you know they are sitting and it's great...um...There's two things that seem to happen that seem to always happen together. There's a different sense of self ...[mmm] you know you talked about some sort of transcending and also the work has a sort of quality of exteriority or as if it's coming from without. Does that reflect your experience?

552.W3: When I feel that I'm doing my very very best writing I feel it's being beamed into me. And these days that there's almost, again perhaps because I have to say 'I must work, I must work now.', that there's almost no pause. It's like 'chhooh' [guttural noise] and it's straight out. And if I stop and I listen I can hear it. The words come and I type.

553.CS: Yeah, I mean this seems to be very, very common, you know, [yes] in creative writers at least. But not only in writers. You know in the sciences and in most intellectual endeavours [well, Einstein, Newton] yeah, that's right. You know this sort of idea of, particularly a very high sort of abstract imagery and things like this[mmm], and very pregnant metaphors [mmm] that just seem to keep emptying themselves [yes].

554.Why don't we have a look at one of the times when you recall that sort of experience? Or a breakthrough when you were stuck. Have you got anything that you...is a favourite?

555.W3: Well my clearest one because it is quite simple...was with [novel] when I had finished the first draft and it had, at that point, kind of two layers. It had a contemporary relationship and it had a parental relationship and a child relationship in the past. So there were two things going on together. And I knew that it needed something else, but I just, I didn't know what. I didn't know where to go with it. I had been sort of, kind of thinking about it and I'd been wondering all sorts of things. I'd been looking at writers that I admired, like Margaret Atwood was one who was dealing in a similar kind of territory, to see what she had done and the things she made her characters do. And I was trying to think of a way of putting an exterior story line that would just lift it up above just relationships — which is basically what it was about. And then I went as a journalist to the Blue Mountains for a weekend do to a Medieval, to write about — I saw it in...see there again now...how did this happen? I was sent the Sydney University Continuing Education thing which I am always sent and every year I've read it and I've always thought 'Oh that would be interesting to do' and have never got around to it...and there was this thing on Medieval Literature, particularly on King Arthur and Guenivere, and it was a

weekend being convened by Stephen Knight in the Blue Mountains. And I rang up *The Age* and said 'Look um...' — and there were a few others as well that I'd picked out — and I said 'Listen one of these weekends sounds fun'. 'Cos you have to go in there and you have to really get into it, and you have to get dressed up on the last night. 'Which one do you reckon?' and they said 'Go for the King Arthur and Guinevere because it will be fun to write about. And anyway we wanted a picture of you in a wimple.' so [laughter]. I did this weekend up there with Stephen and he started talking about Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere and about the nature of myth and you know how they probably hadn't even really existed despite everybody wishing them to exist, they probably hadn't existed, and then how Merlin had actually been a late introduction, in fact even so had Guinevere. And I was sort of saying, and then there was something he said about Lancelot and I said 'They can't do that because that's not what Lancelot was like!' and he looked at me and said '[W3] they can do anything they like because it's myth.'. And it was like: 'Of course!... You can do anything you like.. And so, suddenly it was aha!...'cos I thought Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere — because the book had been dealing with triangular relationships, and here you had this kind of classic one, and I chose to explore it mostly from Guinevere's side, but really from all three of them. And suddenly that gave me a way into a whole different story line.

556.CS: And when you had the aha! feeling was it immediately then that you knew, not so much exactly but you knew you could project what was going to happen. Or was it more precisely that you just had a subjective sense of confidence you saw it? You know what I mean? Was it later that the pieces really started to click together or was it all there and then?

557.W3: Oh at the time it was so extreme that I thought 'If I had a typewriter or a computer (I can't even remember if I was on computers by then... I think I was) if I had a computer here I could write it now.'. But of course then, ah so I was euphoric — but then of course reality does actually hit in and then you start working on it and you think is this, was this really such a great idea [exactly, yeah], you know. And then gradually, you know, Guinevere became somebody who got terribly bad PMT and Arthur was not terribly sympathetic. Lancelot was much more sympathetic. You know Merlin kept busily trying to tell everyone there was disaster portending and nobody taking any notice [chuckles] and I began to really enjoy that [chuckles].

558.CS: Yes. Now you see that fits in perfectly. I mean the standard stuff in the literature is about, you know, that we do all this preparation, in whatever form, research, writing, anything you know. And then we get to a point where we just get

stuck [mm], which they call impasse, and then supposedly the problem enters a period they, they call incubation [mmm]. You know, which is a stupid term but we'll just use it because they do. I don't like incubation because it suggests nothing much is happening [yes] and I don't think that's the case, I think there's a lot going on. Ah, maybe not consciously. Anyway, then comes the insight. Now often insights are wrong, they can't really be wrong in literature, but you know what I mean [yes]. They don't work [No, but they give you a way through that impasse to begin with], that's right, and then you get to another impasse [yes] and there are cycles of creativity. And then there's this period of elaboration and verification, you know, and then presumably more and more problems and ongoing things. Now that one is interesting because you got stopped, didn't you? You were there and you had the euphoria, and as you said if you had the laptop you would have been straight on it. Can you recall ones where you did have the availability or you were by yourself or you could jump?

559.W3: Um, I think well something very strange again and it goes back to the end of the story, something very strange happens to me at the end of stories. Because I'll get stuck three or four paragraphs before the end of a story and I won't know how it's going to end [it's always a problem isn't it, ending?] and somehow it's almost like they get finished for me.

560.CS: So you write something and you see in what you have written that that's the way it should be or...

561.W3: Yes. Usually the ending are absolutely right. But if anybody had said to me 'What do you think the ending to this story will be?', it wouldn't be what has been chosen for it by whoever! Me or them [chuckles].

562.CS: You see I'm very interested in (the stages of this interview are now starting to merge)...I'm very interested in what in common language we call intuition as a sort of precursor to insight [yes]. And, ah, see what do you think intuition is, for example? You know what's your gut feeling about it?

563.W3: Well when you say gut feeling that's exactly what I think it is. I mean I think that's the intuition, um. People who are in touch with their intuition are generally reasonably in touch with their feelings, I think, and um, intuition is not thinking. And it's very hard to describe what it is, but it's not logic and it's not thinking and it's not going in a straight line.

564.CS: But it's not illogic either, I mean it has a logic of its own.

565.W3: Oh! it has a logic of its own but sometimes it's completely illogical and the only thing. I mean I've found that working here in journalism where I have to make

very instantaneous decisions has actually heightened my intuition which I hope one day will benefit my writing when I ever get time to do it because I'll be presented with what appears to be an insurmountable problem...and what I've actually had to learn to do is to instantly find that still place and just go in there and sometimes I'll say to them all 'Just shut-up and let me think.', you know, 'Stop telling me this and this and this and this and let me think.'. And I'll just literally go in and come out with the answer.

566.CS: And you'd be very hard-pressed to explain how or why [very hard-pressed].

Maybe subsequently you could trace the paths.

567.W3: Yes but at the time you can't, um...

568.CS: There's actually some encouraging research on this sort of stuff at the moment about slowing the mind down [yes]. There's a guy called Claxton who's written a couple of books. One's called — it's a great name too — *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind* [oh right...that's very good, I like that]. And the idea is that when we really need to...when we are stuck with something or when we are confronted with a very ill-defined problem, something that does not necessarily have *an* answer — it may not even have *any* answer — that we have to enter what Heidegger calls a more meditative state which is most like a...instead of, he says, rather than we are waiting for something to happen [mmm] (in the sense that we are projecting some sort of outcome), he calls it a waiting upon [mmm] and so it's like, um, he uses the word 'releasement', for example, whatever turns up we'll be happy with sort of thing [yes], rather than trying to know in advance I suppose. And it seems to me that this has been common across all the writers that I have spoken to and it's very strongly a part of the work that I'm interested in.

569.You mentioned feelings before. When you're right into the writing process — this is going to be a sort of trick question really, because I reckon you are probably fairly non-selfconscious when you are in that [mmmmm], yet at the same time there's some part of you that knows, is still keeping the sense of self together and is working through your feelings. Can you sort of? Does that give you enough of a ramp to run up there to say something about that?

570.W3: Ahh, it's a bit hard [it is]. It's very hard to describe it, you know, it's very hard to describe it. It's the same thing as writing. It's the same feeling I get if I'm writing a good piece of journalism. I mean they are not that far removed.

Um...[yeah I don't think it matters what you are doing in creativity]. Yeah. It's definitely harder and more complex when you are doing the fiction. Journalism has a different set of rules and things [that's right it has a tighter structure] and a tighter

structure and it's not as long and all of that sort of stuff and it has certain rules that it follows. But, um...I suppose...I don't know, that's a very, really really hard question to ask [I know]. It's almost impossible to define it and that's why again is that thing that it does actually finally come down to which I hope scientists never find a reason for...is *why* people have to write and why they have to paint. And I think it would be a terrible thing to know that...[because??] because there must be some things in this universe that we don't know about. And I think how the creative spirit worked should be one of them [chuckles].

571.**CS:** Well I guess my view on that, 'cos I came to psychology fairly late from a humanistic sort of background, but it seems to me that one of the things is we know bugger all really. You know, either as scientists or as people generally. You know we are confronted with impossible complexities. And I think one of the — oh God this has opened up a can of worms hasn't it! — I think originally human beings operated in terms of feelings, and there's a lot of evidence from all sorts of quarters that the mind began in our emotional [mmm] ways of fitting in with the world around us and then later language developed. And then we developed what we call thinking [mmm], but it's not like we weren't thinking before [no], it's just a very different style of thinking. What were we just saying? [reminds me about not wanting to define the creative spirit too much]. Oh yeah. I'm not worried about that because it seems to me that things are so complex, you see it's the very complexity of things that requires this way of operating. Do you know what I mean? I think it is enough for us to say that, for me it would be enough to say, for example, that if we didn't operate in that way, we'd be up shit creek. The other mode of operation is very important [you're talking about logic...yes], logic and control and day-to-day stuff. It's very important. You don't want as they say creative airline pilots...[but the best airline pilots will be creative, though you see] only when things go wrong.

572.**W3:** Yes but that's what's been borne out in business study after business study, is that the really good CEOs the really good managing directors, they are all highly creative [exactly] and they all rate intuition as their number one asset [exactly] and they make, they talk about their dealing with millions and millions of dollars — I mean I've been reading about them because suddenly my reading has become about, you know, shares and *Business Review Weekly* and things, but you read about some of these guys and the ones that are really interesting to read about are the ones who say 'Well yeah, OK it was a 50 million dollar decision but I had to go on my gut feeling. That's the only thing I can use.'

573.**CS:** That's right and also this notion that they sort of take a game-like attitude to it [yes] where it is 'Yeah that felt right, you know, I should win nine times out of ten if I keep doing that. I'll lose occasionally.'

574.**W3:** Yes. So I think that that's really, um, I suppose that what I'm saying is that...

575.**CS:** I think I know what you are saying. You don't want, you hope that no-one ever comes and puts creativity into a box.

576.**W3:** No, because you can't. And the other thing is that you actually...and in a sense that is why human beings are wonderful because they defy that. Because you could sit down and you could and you could say to somebody 'Now this is how you write a novel. This is how you do it.'. You could give them, you could be Tolstoy or somebody and you could give them in very direct terms: 'This is what you should do, this is what you should do with your characters, this is how you do.'. And you could even take somebody who is a really good writer and do that, and you won't produce a novelist [that's right]. So these complex things that exist that are, I think one's childhood is very important to whether you become a writer or not, or a creative person, let's say. You know the kind of nurturing or lack of it that you receive. Your own kind of personality, your own talents.

577.**CS:** Just let me jump in there. Not everybody is a writer or not everyone is as creative as everyone else [no]. Not everybody is very comfortable in doing what you are describing, for example, going down within yourself...or quietening right down. Have you got any theories as to why that might be the case? [why they don't], yeah! why doesn't everybody do that?

578.**W3:** laughs] Umm umm...I don't know how to put this without sounding [oh well just say it. No-one else is going to hear this]. Well I was in therapy for 15 years right [in Jungian?], no mostly behavioural. But a bit of Jungian towards the end [oh OK] and um...and I've learnt a lot through all sorts of, I mean I read, or used to read a lot, of psychology and in all its forms and psychotherapy. And I think one of the things that happens, I hope in that process, if you become, I hope, in quotes 'a healthy or healthy-ish' human being is that you learn not to be too defensive and you learn not to be scared of the dark side, and you learn that you are not perfect and that you never will be. And those are probably very big things that you went into therapy in the first place for because you probably were extremely defensive and very frightened of the dark side and thought you ought to be perfect. And when you face those things then you find that you can; you almost replace the nurturing you didn't get with self-nurturing, and then you are able to operate from a basis where — you know one thing I noticed working with these people here, and I mean that they are all

actually terrific, and it's a really nice team, but how hard one of them will find it to say sorry if they've made a mistake. They find it incredibly hard. Whereas for me if I've stuffed up, I'll go right out there and I'll say 'Listen guys I'm really really sorry but I've stuffed up'. Now I'm not saying — that's what I'm saying I don't want to sound arrogant — I'm not saying that this is a, that I'm wonderful and they're not. Quite the reverse in a sense. I'm just saying that sometimes, for whatever reason, some people are more able to, look in there. And for me it's those reasons.

579.CS: Yes I think that sort of touches on it. You see, the thing that's always present when people are in a creative state of mind is the lack of self-concern [yes] and they are not afraid [no]. And it seems that when we take away people's fear that they automatically become more spontaneous and creative, and one of the things that we have been taught to fear from a very early age — young children don't necessarily fear it, they can though — is being confronted by things that we don't understand [mmm]; being in the midst of things of such dimensionality that we can't just, you know. We've been taught, you know our schooling, that what we have to do is to control it [mmm] and fit it into some... And I think this is something we do have to learn as well, even though there is a certain natural spontaneity, a sort of childlikeness. We have to relearn it in lots of ways. It's sort of like paradise regained isn't it? [mmm] where you have to learn to be able to go into that sort of void, that openness [mmm]. There's a contemporary theorist called Matte-Blanco, a psychoanalyst of the sort of later types. But he's also a mathematician. And he's tried to work out what the system unconscious was about. One of the things he says is that emotions belong emotion in the unconscious. And the thing about the unconscious that makes it unconscious is that it works in more than three dimensions plus time. So our normal operating, you know, is height, length, width plus a flow of things over time. And we can handle that consciously. But he says that all — and he has about five strata of consciousness — he says all the lower ones increasingly become more and more dimensional. And he says that metaphor finds its home in the unconscious because it operates simultaneously across dimensions. You know, when you talked about an image before, when you get an image that forms the basis of the work, what I hear is something working multidimensionally [mmm]. But, of course, when we are worried about understanding, we are going to steer away from things that are multidimensional. I think that is the realm of [mmm] intuition. It's not unstructured. In fact in a way it's got more structure than we can handle [mmm].

580.[discuss progress of interview]

581.**W3:** You want to talk about the nature and genesis of creative insight? Because, I do think that, um...I was having a few thoughts about that. I mean I do think maybe in this sense it is only — this is a personal thing [mm, that's what I want], but I think that for me that W2 talked in the (interview) series about, you know, as a writer you come against this outcrop of shale coming up again and again and again, you know, and then it means something. And it's something that has to be sort of looked at. And I think that, you know, for me there's something, and I think a lot of writers would say this too, that as a child you are quite aware of being in some way different [yes] and certainly that is something that I think is very strong. That, um, you know, as a child I felt odd often, and I felt that I was observing things in a very different way to other people, and I often felt quite alienated from the everyday world. So I think that that's often, you know, perhaps creative people are born not made, you know, I don't know. Then it depends probably on what happens after [that's right whether that propensity is given scope, opportunity and encouragement and so on] yeah.

582.**CS:** Encouragement and so on...Yeah W2, no actually W1, talked about the way her father nurtured that in her.

583.**W3:** Mmmm. Well you see I got the reverse. I got a lack of nurturing in a major way, and so for me...and yet somehow I always knew I would be a writer. Somebody asked me when I was five what I was going to do and I said I was going to write books and, um, breed horses and live in the country. That's what I said.

584.**CS:** Well, one out of three isn't bad.

585.**W3:** One out of three...and I ride! [Points to picture] That's me riding etc....[describes riding in wild country in the rain]...But it was really...that was great. I mean I don't yet know even what it will produce, but it will produce something because at the very least I was able to be quiet for five days and for me that was like a miracle.

586.**CS:** [talked about myself and thesis writing and having to push, but knowing you can't push insight] And you have to slow yourself down so you can go fast [yes, that's right]. But going back to what you were saying about whether the creative person is born rather than made and knowing as a child, I remember as a child, I'm not a writer obviously — I mean I can sort of write but — um, picking up a little rock. And it was such a vivid experience I picked it up and put it in my hand, I was about five I think, and it's like it had a certain luminousness to it and I felt like it was a person, you know? That sort of thing. It was a very strong thing and I was sort of looking around to make sure no-one else was watching [mmm], do you know what I

mean because I knew even then that people wouldn't understand this. You know, they'd think this was silly. And so when you talked about knowing you were going to be a writer that struck quite a deep chord with me, I think. That there is a way of knowing, you see, part of what I'm interested in is writers also talk about, and people when they have insights, they talk about feeling connected [you do]. Not only about...

587.W3: ...Well I don't mind saying what I feel connected to. I believe in angels and fairies and, um, devils and God and the universe and the creative spirit and spirits, and, um. You know I frequently have conversations with dead people, you know. It's not uncommon for me at all. I speak to them as if they were alive. So your rock, you probably picked a rock that had some people's spirits in it and, you know, so you didn't deny that... We spend the rest of our lives [yes trying to get back]. And why do we not believe in things just because we cannot see them? You know, I find that really when people say to me 'Oh I don't know how you can believe in that.' and I say 'Well you know, why not? Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't there.'.

588.CS: It's interesting question. I have a private practice that I run in Coogee and, uhh, often the trouble with clients is they don't trust any of this [no]. And they cause great pain, for example, in relationship to each other because they just operate on the words the other person is saying [yes], but they are being driven out of these terrible feelings of hurt and the hurt is operating at this very implicit level [yes], at the level where if they just slowed down a little bit... Luckily for me I think my research is going to be quite some use to me [oh that's good]. Well I really chose writers because I thought they'd be articulate — which they are [W3 laughs]. Well I thought I could ask academics but that would be boring and...

589.W3: And painters are extraordinary because, whilst what they do is brilliant [that's right... I know] um, they have a very weird way of speaking. They've almost got into academic jargonese. It's almost impossible to have a normal conversation with a painter [I know]. They start analysing their work.

590.CS: That's exactly why I didn't interview them [chuckling].

591. WRITER 4

592.CS: ...the ways in which you organise your working life, any tricks of the trade, how you think about it and so on?

593.**W4:** Well I have a bit of a schizoid existence as writer because I spent half of my creative life, as well as editing a magazine that's just my main job, my actual creative life proper is as a writer/performer... So I'll often work through my body rather than just sitting down writing, which has interesting ramifications. And secondly, the other half of my creative life is a dramaturg. So I look after, each year I look after four or five writers assigned to me largely by the [name] Theatre Company and um, or individual performance projects. So they are either plays or performance works. So I inhabit both sides. On the one hand I have to encourage myself to write and work out strategies. On the other hand I have very definite techniques I've developed in recent, over four or five, years with a group of leading Australian playwrights on how to write, get them through blocks and get them thinking. So it's quite interesting. The funny thing is I haven't really applied them to myself [chuckling]. I haven't been writing so much lately.

594.**CS:** [points out parallel in therapist giving but not following one's advice!]

595.**W4:** Anyway. Perhaps first I'll just talk a bit about my writing. Just stop me when you want. Between 1987 and up to about 1993 my partner, [partner name], and I created a large number of big collaborative performance works, largely performed at the Performance Space, but also around Australia and even a slice of one in New York. Um. Now the process there is intensely collaborative. Because I'm not a playwright, though I have written — when I was younger person in Adelaide I wrote several plays - and I didn't take greatly to that process of just sitting down slogging away because I'd been an academic and schoolteacher most of my life and here I was 40 and I just...sitting at a desk, you know, hitting deadlines and all, just felt horrible. It's like more of the same, it didn't feel creative. Whereas, in the early eighties in Australia the whole terrain of performance opened up...different ways of working. So the impetus for a show may not be a playwright's text. But it might be a group of texts or pre-existing text. It might be a slice of the Bible or a scientific text. It could be a designer's idea, that a designer would create a set and then you would respond to that...It's the reverse of the normal process. They were also multi-skill operations. So often the writer would be the performer, or the director would be the performer...would be the writer. The text wasn't always dominant. You'd be working with dancers and stuff and they were never background or secondary kind of elements. They were right in there with you. So the whole idea of writing became radically dispersed in a very post-modern way. In a very influential and creative way which is starting to begin to influence mainstream theatre. So, it changed the burden in a way. It was still a tough process.

596. For example, someone would come up with an idea. It would come from a dream or, you know, it might just be a concept like 'accidents'. And uhh, you'd get together a team of interesting people who you thought might be interested in this. We did a show called the [work title] in '92 I think. And we had a theorist who was very interested in the theory of accidents and we had four performers, we had a set designer, we had a composer, a set designer who basically curated art objects that all looked like accidents either that had happened or they were waiting to happen. And so the whole performance became like a gallery, a [work title], because museums of technology don't celebrate the accidents of technology. And as the great theorist Paul Verilio said: 'You invent the freeway, you invent the pile-up; you invent a ship, you invent the shipwreck', and so we did that.

597. Now within that, instead of having to conceive of a whole work I would write my, my specimens. You know I would write... I would guide people around and introduce them to an art object, and uhh... Or I'd just say 'In this space I am talking about accidents of responsibility. The cup fell off the mantelpiece, the cup was pushed off the mantelpiece, the cup was pushed off the mantelpiece by someone, the cup was pushed off the mantelpiece, perhaps I did it. Yes. Yes, I pushed the cup off the mantelpiece. Yes, I did it. I'm guilty. So!'

598. So there'd be different ways of engaging with the whole idea of accidents, some of which became intensely personal. So in those kind of works everyone is coming up with different ideas and you eventually glue them together and I suppose in a way I'd play dramaturg or overall director, although I'd share that role and we would develop the work together. And now I found that very, very satisfying.

599. **CS:** It's sort of interesting because with the writers I've spoken to there is a very similar process it seems to me. Most writers, no all, have said they don't start off with this sort of grand vision or master plan [mmmm] and they are writing by the seat of their pants, and by gut feel and intuition, and there's just all these fragments [mmm] which they continually revisit, rework [that's right], and occasionally they get a central image that seems to unify them all, or something like that, or even a scene that will... And it's right at the very end, if then, [yeah] they get a sense that this will come together [yes, that's right]. So in that way it doesn't seem to me that it is that entirely different.

600. **W4:** No. It's just that the difference in this is that you are drawing on other people all the time [yep]. It's not that 'private' kind of thing. Now, uhh... So that's an example of a very diverse work. Then there are the more, what I would call the more coherent writing exercises. And I will use this example as we go along today. It's a

work called [*work title*] which we did in 1987 in Sydney. Uhh. And then it was, we brought it back in I think '93, '94, it's been performed around the country, in the National Gallery in Canberra, on the Gold Coast, in the Adelaide Festival in 1994. It's a deeply personal work about the death of my parents who died in 1980 within a few days of each other. And so the whole process of grieving, even if one of them had died it would have been complicated, but it was incredibly complex. And it did take me seven or eight years to actually...it was a kind of exorcism, it was a kind of act of belonging and forgiveness and stuff like that. Now that was a more coherent exercise. I wrote, you know I got funding, you know, for me to write it and I wrote it from A to Z. But in that I was writing at a number of levels. I was writing a text about my relationships with my parents going right back to the arrival of our families in Australia in the 1830s. Going through a lot of family history and the kind of mythology that builds up in a family and...you know, messes it up or whatever, and makes it glorious. But I was also working with a lot of family photographs which were shown to the audience, so it was like a slide night that had become a theatrical experience. Also [partner] played a strong role as well. She wrote her own material and co-wrote the dialogues with me, which came out over discussions over this very table, uhh, in which she was a kind of interrogator, the lover as interrogator quizzing my relationship with my parents...It was a very intimate piece.

601.**CS:** So this certainly reminds me of the sort of things I do with [my wife] in our relationship. We talk about each other's family [yes].

602.**W4:** Except this is kind of pushed up to another plane...and some of our best work has been done here over this table — breakfast meetings where the consciousness is still very open, um...you know just a cup of tea, just talk for a couple of hours, note it down, and then we'll go away and write our own pieces. Then we'll give them to each other. So it's a very vulnerable situation. You have to be...ready for it, and we do see a lot of each other [chuckles], um. But in that process the difficulty in that one in 1987 I was still in a kind of residual stages, I think, of a kind of mid-life crisis. I'd gone through some big changes in the 80s. But also this exorcism was very difficult. So writing it was a bit agonous and I was noticeably grumpy for a lot of the period which I'm not usually a terribly grumpy person...but anyway people noticed...[chuckles]. I grew a big beard [laughter] and even became kind of hermetic a bit. And [partner] would say 'He's down the back typing'. Um...So...In that respect, I mean, we're very project oriented and I always say 'we' in these things rather than 'I' [yes], the works are intensely collaborative and that's very important. We call our business partnership [title indicating their partnership] because we have

this dynamic and it's in our work. All our work is autobiographical. It's about maintaining the good relationship by allowing, you know, being able to be together and apart. So that's really important I think for our own writing clarity, we have to acknowledge each other's writing skills, the integrity of what we are saying, and not being too censorious with the other. On the other hand we have developed a way of performing where we speak very rhythmically, almost musically together in and out of sync...and that's one of our main themes — being in and out of sync. So for the process to work well we do have to be geared as a couple...whether it's a radio show, a performance show, a gallery show, whatever. So that's one important theme is that sharing process.

603.CS: Which is, as you say, very different to most writers who, not only do they work, um, solo and they set it up normally as a private thing, but also they don't share their work until it's finished.

604.W4: That's right, They're often afraid to.

605.CS: Oh most of them don't want to, they don't want to tell it to anybody. Now what's going on there? I mean, 'cos you mentioned this being a very vulnerable process.

606.W4: Well I think the other area I work in, which is as a dramaturg, which is nurturing. I only work on new plays, brand new plays...preferably once they are one or two drafts in and the playwright and the director of the company that's...has purchased this thing are thinking 'Oh dear [laughter]...not sure about this.'. And I see my job...a classic dramaturg is a kind of person who says 'Have you got your characters right, have you got the plot right?'. I don't do that stuff.

607.CS: You come in with a set of precepts or...

608.W4: Yeah. I don't do that sort of stuff. I don't talk about those themes. I talk about...I try to get them back in touch with their vision. Now in play writing, I think...I don't know the difference, but playwrights are much more used to an open process. Now there are some famous playwrights who won't let you touch their work. I won't name names but there are a couple of prominent ones who just brook no interference. And their plays are weaker for it. But, some of the younger and more emerging playwrights under the influence, often of American rules of, you know, creative writing courses and things like that, are much more open and recognise the jewels and gems they can get that other people will throw their way in response to their work. So anyway, I've developed this face-to-face approach with playwrights, and again it happens at this table (they come to me, I never go to them). They visit, and I refuse to call myself a 'script doctor' which is almost a jokey term

in Sydney about dramaturgs. Because I think that always assumes the script is sick or ill or something is wrong with it. Whereas I'm always working from 'This is good. This is what you've done...why doesn't this bit fit with that? What do you see here? Don't tell me what it means. Don't tell me what are the themes. What do you actually see here? What do you see on stage, on an imagined stage. OK forget that. What do you see

609.if you imagine the same characters in the real world?' And so it's a kind of visualising process. And so I work with playwrights who are willing to be open. Who are willing to be vulnerable. I'm not going to give them solutions...Um, but I'll ask them the right questions.

610.CS: See...what's the vulnerability though?

611.W4: The vulnerability is to...classically...the individual western writer as you said is a very private person who comes out with their product at the end, gets all their friends to read it and is deeply insulted if they don't like it and never speaks to them again. Whereas I think with the theatre [publicly dismissive but inwardly wounded]...Whereas the theatre has always had a degree of that openness. I mean Pinter working with, um, what's his name, Ball the director of the National Theatre you know...Very close listening relationship. Pinter was a man of the theatre himself, was an actor, could direct and sit at rehearsals and take notes. Now *Angels in America*, that big play that came out of the States a couple of years ago...a huge success internationally...Seven or eight years in thorough dramaturgical processes. Most of the plays I work on two years, three years, I'll see that person once a month, every now and again it is accelerated...And it's vulnerable because these people have to have such a strong belief in themselves in an incredibly competitive field and yet here they are sitting and listening to someone saying 'You're wrong. You've got it wrong.'. But saying it in the nicest possible way 'Look you know...this is, you're not living up to the image. You've generated this image, you've generated, you've created a conceit. But it's still not an image. It's only a metaphor. It doesn't have any stage life. Where are you going to find that?'. And I try to do it as positively as possible... 'cos they are very...even some of them are very tough nuts, but they're quite fragile.

612.CS: In this domain?

613.W4: In this domain and I think, you know, in literature what's happened I think is the demise of the literary editor. Most of the big publishing houses around the world have less and less editors. So many books you can see...you read new novels and you think 'Good God with an editor this would have been...' [really really good]. So

some of that listening process has been cut out and I think novelists and poets are much more private people and they'd like to finish it. Playwrighting, I think generally, is a more open process. And ah, the vulnerability in my case is that this stuff that [partner] and I write about is about *our* lives. Now early on in the mid 80s a few critics dismissed us saying, 'Oh confessional rubbish.'. And we would say, 'Look, it takes just as much art, maybe more, to construct these things into a meaningful work, even if we are performing.'. 'Of course it's a distillation, of course it's been censored. These are *what if* versions of ourselves.'. But it is, you know, because we are not disguising our selves in our own work with character names and fictional situations and because we are performing it in real time as opposed to the time leaps in a conventional play, there is a feeling of vulnerability. The most vulnerable I did feel was in [work title] recounting the lives of my parents, my family history, and opening it up as an example of a way to look at grieving. And it was a work about grieving and the process of grieving, which I think there is quite a few plays around about that at the moment which I think is really interesting. So that is where the vulnerability comes in.

614.**CS:** Yes it's interesting too. So you are more-or-less self-consciously — I don't want to use, I won't use...chuck it out as soon as I say it — there's sort of a didactic purpose, in the sense that you are not just writing you know something that's entertaining or so on, but you have a really strong sort of social purpose.

615.**W4:** Yeah. I think a lot of playwrights do too. They like to bury it in the body of the work and then it's up to the audience to get it and, of course, a lot of people got upset about David Williamson's increased, for example his increase in didacticism in recent years. His distrust of post-modernity and shifting political allegiances and stuff. Um...With us, sometimes our works are pure reverie, you know. There's one work called the [work title] which is about all of those moments where you think 'Where have I put the car keys? God, who am I? What geez!' Right through to looking...which is a three hour work for the audience to wander in and out of...at any time go to the bar, have a drink, come back in and they'll see something they saw just when they were leaving and go 'Hah!...deja vu.'. And we subjected them, it's a really, a big three hour poetic work which we just do, we perform in cycles... the same pieces over and over again, and different combinations with different people. And the work, always, the work itself is really calm and minimal. But in the brains of the observers and in us! You think 'God. Where am I ? Didn't I just deliver this piece?' [laughter]. And they are very subjective works...that's [work title], you know the role of the moment in our individual lives.

616. But other works, like the [work title] is quite didactic. One we did about the masculine body, one of our most popular works, all but flows. It was a big poetic and didactic work about, um, how men relate in terms of their body. And certainly in our attitude to theatre and performance we are didactic because we are always taking away the props you know. The performers are the writers and they are addressing you directly, and our level of performance is very much like you and I chatting now. We just talk. If we are playing in a big theatre we wear little head mikes so everyone, we don't have to raise our voices, we don't have to project. Very intimate. We've done performances, like we did one two years ago where four of us performed at a big dinner table with a hundred people also in the audience all at their dinner tables, all being fed. And it was all about the manners and customs that go with meals, and the kind of dirty jokes that come out at dessert time [when the wine has started to take effect]. Yeah, and the big speeches over the main course to everyone were very much about, we all decided we wanted to talk about food when we were growing up. And so we all dredged our memories, and it was very emotional. You know people in the audience were weeping while eating [chuckles]. So...

617. **CS:** Can I take you back? [yes]. You were talking about doing the dramaturgy work with new playwrights [yes]. And you talked a little bit about when it's almost like they've lost their vision [mmm]. It reminds me of, I don't know if you are familiar with this philosopher Suzanne Langer [yes]. Yeah, and she talks about the presentational and representational modes of consciousness. It seems to me that you are working almost exclusively, no not, but much more predominantly in the presentational mode [yes]. Could you talk a little bit about that? The way in which what's happening for that young writer for example, when they drift away from their vision and what's happening to them when they get back into it. I know that's a very difficult question, but...

618. **W4:** Well, sometimes I think it is just a question of sustaining the vision. Because you said before that there are writers who, ah, you know they piece together their vision and it arrives at the end. I think what happens in theatre, which is such a different animal, the playwright, I think often they do have the vision first up 'Boom!' 'Jeez!' 'Great idea!' It's either a bit of plot has occurred to them that they don't know how to finish it, or it's a visual image. I work a lot with people who've got an image...they can see a trapeze artist with a broken back and her dead twin who died at 11 years of age is haunting her (it's a play that will be on at the Belvoir Street Theatre this coming year. We just did it in Adelaide and it was very successful). And so in that case you've got, you know, the main actor can't move.

She's in a brace with a broken back, and the dead sister is kind of swinging all around her on this big metal steps and stuff like that. No actual physical, no physical theatre devices but there are enough bars and things to...And she is a demon sister. I mean she was a psychotic kid and they burned the house down together and murdered dad's parrot and ah, it's again, it's an exorcism piece.

619. Now this young writer had written this originally as a radio play which the ABC purchased. Just a reverie. It was an idea. It would sound nice with music on radio, at forty minutes. Then Playworks, the National Women Writers' Organisation, came to me and said 'Well, here's a bundle of plays. Which one grabs you?' And I looked at this one and I thought 'Gee what an image! It's just so powerful, it's terrific, what an idea. I don't know where it goes.'. And I said 'I'll work on this one.'. And two years down the track it went on. And I think for her, the struggle for this young playwright, she had the image, and she knew what it was about, the conflict between the sisters, one is now 30, the other is still 11. And there are issues of guilt and the role of the parents in their relationship. But she had never grappled with narrative really. Now I'm not a great fan of narrative. I think it's there all the time. There are more interesting things to do. What I had to do was gradually help her connect her vision, which was about about interiority and exteriority, about exorcism, about various kinds of guilt...um...and ultimately about grieving, an unresolved grieving process as a fantasy.

620. How to spin that into a narrative which would catch mainstream theatre directors and audiences. And it has. It has taken us two years to do that. Very slowly. Very spare, poetically written play. And it just means that every moment of the unfolding narrative has to be informed by the original vision. That, you know, ultimately the consciousness that guides this play is the woman who's on her back. You can't slip, you've got to be careful how far you go into the consciousness of the demonic, vicious angel you know who's out there, because that's...You know we are not seeing her subjectivity. It's like a...So all the time, and [playwright name], the writer came up with, once she knew what I was on about, came up with some beautiful drawings.

621. So all the time we were pushing forward linearly, and at the same time, and this is what I do *all* the time, I'm always concentrating on the moment. Traditional dramaturgy thinks narrative...forward, forward. Have you got the audience? Have you got them hooked? Whereas my belief is in the moment. So, for me she always was creating two models. One was like the stone in the pond rippling out. That's where the movement was going. Then there was a line going through that. And so all the time, I'd say if she'd invent a new scene where the narrative was going, I'd

say 'It's beautiful, it's terrific but...ah...you've gone into some other space. This character in this bed couldn't experience it. It'd be all right if it was a movie, or you've got split consciousness, you know you'd see three or four people's point of view. The power in this work is its subjectivity.' [and maintaining the line of subjectivity through it]. Absolutely. Right to the bitter end.

622.**CS:** Yes It reminds me, you see one of the things I'm interested in is, um, there's several different lines but they are pointing in the same direction. It's what one psychologist calls loosening and tightening. Another one calls it symmetrical and asymmetrical thought [mm hmm]. And it's basically this idea that —and it links to the Susanne Langer thing — that there's a sort of dynamic interplay, there has to be, between this sort of loosening process (like you talked about before with you and [partner]), being loose after breakfast. And then you go your separate ways and you...[yeah]. So there's a sort of creative cycle [mmm] where you have to embed the vision and the ideas and the stuff in some sort of structure that doesn't do violence to [mmmm] the presentational feel of it [exactly. Yeah].

623.**W4:** Yeah. No, that's good. Yes. Because in traditional dramaturgy and editing often there is a lot of violence done and there are some playwrights in Australia, prominent ones, who won't work with dramaturgs because they've had nasty experiences of being told *what* to do, and *where* to go, *what's wrong* with this play. 'It's sick.' and ...Yeah, it's a punishing kind of thing and there is no, there's not enough loosening or sharing of the...

624.**CS:** And do you find when you are, the other writers allow this process —you know without very consciously thinking about those larger issues of the narrative structure and so on — but in the end when the piece presents itself and then you examine it through those sorts of spectacles, do you find that it does have those sorts of structures anyway? Or...

625.**W4:** Two things. One is it doesn't always — and I've just been through an interesting process, we've been working on a play with [playwright name] who's quite a significant Australian playwright, and um...until he's kind of written the vision through we won't know about the structure. I mean I think what happens, once, once they feel they have followed their vision through and you've nurtured it all the way, you've got a complete work, then it's much easier to talk to them about structure and stuff like that [OK]. 'Cos often that will still be problematic and you say 'OK', and the director's got to say 'When we meet tomorrow...' — I always act as the buffer between the director and the playwright, and I hold the playwright's hand and I basically would see the dramaturg as on the side of the writer. So often

when I go to rehearsals I'm saying 'No, you can't cut that bit out. Yeah, cut that bit out...yeah. Is that all right? That's not a problem. It just means the scene is starting too early. But you can't drop that. This is what the play is about.' So those structural things, the closer you get to production, those structural things, by then I think the playwright is confident enough for you to talk turkey. You know, to say 'OK, structurally it's wobbly here'. You know something was not right. Often it comes back to an issue of vision or metaphor.

626.**CS:** Metaphor is something I want to talk to you about [mmm]. Because it seems to me that the fact that you can get a central image, like that image you were describing of that woman, and it operates as a metaphor throughout the whole work [yeah]. And it seems like it is almost infinite in its possibilities [mmm!] like the things kind of empty out of it. Can you talk a little about that? I know again these are all difficult things.

627.**W4:** Well it's difficult, um. I'll talk about it in a fairly concrete way. I worked on a play called [play title]. It's been around the world. [playwright name] wrote it. He had it in his drawer for five years. You know someone wanted to do it and someone wanted to do it and they gave it to me and I thought 'Oh no, not another famous person play.'. And the director said 'No, no...this is good'. And I looked at it and there are few scenes where Kafka is dreaming and he meets a Yiddish dream theatre. Now in real life Kafka became a Zionist and actually did bump into a Yiddish theatre company. The rest of his family and friends hated it, trashy Eastern Jews, you know, terrible people. He was, he loved the passion and the freedom, the wildness and the 'scumbagginess' of the whole thing. So anyway I get this life of Kafka which is lots of Kafka reading aloud, bits of Kafka to the audience in the time-honoured famous person play model.

628.**But the thing that grabs me is this Yiddish Dream Theatre. Now, if it had been true to Kafka's biography he would have just met them. But in this, [playwright name] has Kafka dreaming this company and so I've said 'Well look, you know, at the moment it's a small part of the play, it's a conceit. It's not a full metaphor yet. It is a not a full way of organising the play. There's no dynamic principle in it. It doesn't have a life. What I want you, what I would work with you on — because the scenes with the lover and the scenes with the family are fantastic — I would work with you on this, making half the play,' (that was the condition), I said 'half the play has to be with the Yiddish Dream Theatre.'. So, he was off, you know. He was running. Because often you only have to say a word or two. And, so a whole play virtually starts. You know Kafka's writing and he goes clunk [head falls down, asleep] and**

there's this Yiddish Dream Theatre and it's a Kafka-ish situation. And that's what I really pushed.

629.I said 'You've got to put Kafka in a Kafka-ish situation.'. And so they say to him: 'OK. Are you ready? You've got the lines down?' and he says 'What?' And it's that nightmare that everyone has where you are suddenly in a play or on the stage and you are supposed to deliver a speech, and you think 'What!'. And they say 'The boy is hopeless!'. Not only that, all the members of the Yiddish Dream Theatre look exactly like his family. They're played by the same actors. So you've got two strands. You've got his real family, you've got the dream family, and as the play goes on they become one [they start to merge], yeah. They gradually throw off their props and things like that as it heads towards Kafka trying to work out whether he can afford as an artist to even actually have a social life.

630.**CS:** So the question is why do we have to operate that way in order to communicate what we want to communicate?

631.**W4:** Well, if I had been a straight dramaturg I would have been talking about themes and er, 'What are you at here?' You know the standard dramaturg line is 'Tell me what your play is about in a few words.'. Well I never do that. That closes it down. But I would talk about the images and uhh...'cos I think that activates the writers' brains more. If they want to talk about themes, they can. But, by and large I hold that off as long as possible 'cos I think the abstracted versions of what the play is about get in the way of what they are trying to think.

632.Whereas the metaphorical approach I think, um, which is still relatively rare in this area, is one of, it's such a loosening thing, and it gives them access to other things. Like I always say 'What are we writing, what's this scene about? Is it the scene you've conceived for the stage, or have you actually imagined it in the real world?'. Too many playwrights, for my money, actually sit there and write as if they are seeing the thing on stage. And I think, 'Well yes...that's good. But how are you going to get access to your deeper levels of vision, if you don't, like a novelist, see this as actually happening in the real world?'. And then I say to them 'Well if that happens in the world, wouldn't that be terrific if it happened on stage?' So you just kind of drag things in. So there's a dialectical thing of in out, in out, which I like. Why we need it? Well, it just seems to me fairly, in these circumstances, a much less artificial way of working. The whole thematic structural approach is like writing the dust jacket, the cover notes before you publish the book.

633.**CS:** Yes. It's sort of interesting, I mean in some ways I'm asking you questions that I'd desperately like answers to myself [yeah]. Within contemporary psychology,

I mean it's sort of gone cognitive over the last...[yeah, absolutely] and it's fairly limiting, you know. But there's some interesting sorts of things happening now where, with postmodernism is having its influence [mmm], and where we are viewing mental life as more an internalisation of our social being [mmm]. So that thinking is much more metaphoric and symbolic and as some people call it, 'enacting' [oh yeah]...like a theatre of the mind but not the old dualist type of idea of a mind in here and a world out there [yeah]. But a world in which it's a derived capacity to be able to...um, a derived capacity to be able to think, first off. But initially thinking is done in interaction with people [yes] with very little babies and so on. And only later do we get the capacity to actually think in the absence of other people [mmm] or even the objects. So...and I think that metaphor is certainly closer to [mm] this more radical, or basic or...way of operating in the world. And again it is only later that we become more literal. So there's a lot of evidence, for example, that young children can appreciate metaphor before they can appreciate literal meaning [now that is interesting...operating by analogy and...] exactly [yeah].

634.W4: It's like Halliday's linguistics [yes] where the child has a limited set of terms with which to describe many things...[that's' right] {indecipherable}.

635.CS: It's almost been a tenet that we begin with literal understanding and then we build, then we work up towards this complex thing called metaphor.

636.W4: Yeah. Well I think ontologically the same sort of thing happens in the construction of a play. The way I work anyway is that I'm asking the writer to, in a way to abandon the standard technical and classical techniques and ways of naming the script, to kind of flurry around in the mud of their creative thought...See what else is there to draw on it, constantly. And then worry about the kind of structural things a bit later once they've fleshed out the vision more.

637.CS: Yes. This thing about metaphor, and analogy and so on is that it begins to unite often quite disparate [mmm] domains, which obviously is the avenue, and all evidence points that way, to creativity [mm]. That we get, when we are thinking more literally, more representationally, we keep getting what we already know [yeah] we just keep going down [that's right] the same channels [yeah]. Now one of the things that does interest me is, a big part of thesis that I'm interested in is, the role of emotionality or emotion [mmm!] in creative thought. 'Cos nobody likes to be confused and uncertain and lost, not knowing where they are going. You know, I think it's a fundamental part of the human being to be able to anticipate things. In a sense what you are saying to the writers, playwrights and yourself is 'Well, let's not know where we are going' [yeah. let's get emotional, chuckles]. Yeah. Can you talk

about the ways in which you manage yourself in that regard and the way in which you think that emotionality links into insight in particular — when people all of a sudden go aha! you know.

638.**W4:** Yeah. Well it's two things. I always insist that the writer sends me their latest draft. One of the funniest things that happened to me was that I worked with [playwright name] for a number of years and established a good relationship. I said I'd never work in theatre again, but you know, I was seduced back into it and I started working with him. And I do that thing where, you know, we start at the start, even if there's a whole draft there. We might spend weeks on the first scene [OK]. Or, if it's scene five, you know, if he said, if I said 'Where did you start this work?' and he said 'Oh it was really this scene.', I'd say 'Well let's work at that for a while.'. One way or another it's starting at some beginning point.

639.**So** I'm going right back to first feelings, strong feelings, about the work, and I insist on working that and working that. Now...and then I got to work with one of the bright young thing female playwrights in Australia who now lives in LA writing film scripts. She was just so impatient. I mean, we had our first meeting and I thought 'This is going well.'. She said 'OK...I'll be in touch in a month.' and I said 'Yeah, that's all right.'. I said 'Just rewrite that first scene and rethink it after what we have been, re-feel it after a day.'. She said 'No I'll write the whole thing, and I'll send it to you.'. And I said 'No. No. You just write [chuckling] the first bit.'. And she got so grumpy ! 'But how? I've got to get this in. and I...' Product, product, product. I said 'Look, you know, if you rewrite it in terms of what we discussed today, I mean it could go in a totally wrong direction, or you won't have anything to draw on.'. Anyway, she eventually slowed down.

640.**CS:** This slowing down is something I'm very interested in...

641.**W4:** Slowing down is absolutely critical. When I say to people, you are in for two years of this, or three years, you know...The established playwrights, they know it. They know what that is. The younger ones get very impatient, and uhh...But then once the weight and the process is revealed to them, and you know they treasure it I think, really treasure it.

642.**CS:** What is it about slowing down?

643.**W4:** It's...I think the pleasure of it eventually comes from reflectiveness. You know that you are not going like this [mimics rushing]. A problem for them, they often have to go and make money. That's increasingly a problem as funding levels drop.

644.CS: But is it about, is reflectiveness about not having to look at the end product all the time.

645.W4: Yes, that's right. Shorter term goals. I do a lot of shorter term goals, but constantly reminding them of [title of play], which we talk about enthusiastically. 'Where is it going?' Because they need both things. The excitement, as I was saying before, you need the excitement of the moment, I concentrate very much much on the moment.

646.CS: Is what is happening...it seems to me a very important part of, the thing about emotionality is that, it seems to me, that the absolute constant is that people forget themselves [mm] when they are in creative moments [mm, oh yeah]. They are sort of liberated from self concern and worry and doubts and so on. [yeah]. And that almost *is* the definition of creativity when we are liberated from self concern.

647.W4: Well yes. There's that, and just as important I think for the playwright, and I don't know about other forms, is the pleasure in crafting, which is also quite inspirational but it doesn't quite involve that forgetting. So in a session, if I'm having a session with a writer, I regard these sessions as creative sessions. So they have their private writing time. I read, they send me the stuff a few days before. I read it VERY closely, might only be two pages, it might be a whole script. I make detailed notes, but I'll always narrow it down to two or three things. I'll never hit them with a million things. Never. I've seen that do enormous damage. They don't know where they are. And I focus on those things, and I focus as an act of discipline for myself. I make sure they, if it's early in the process still, they are reasonably removed from ideas of technique and structure and plot and stuff like that. We are still talking about what it's going to feel like, and I'm always saying to them 'Real world on the stage. What happens on the stage?' And they tell me what happens on the stage. They say 'Was it all right' and I say 'It's fantastic!...where is it? It's not here.'. You're told: 'It is there!' and they said 'There!'. And I say 'It's one word, it's not enough. How are you going to fill it out?' And sometimes we are just on crafting things and I say 'Well you've got a lovely metaphor running in this page, and then it runs out. You know, what if you pushed it? What would happen if you pushed it a bit further?' Um...the sessions get very emotional because often we go into a spin, you know. It's a spin where, you know, things will occur to me that never occurred to me two days before. And I'll say...they'll tell me something and I'll say 'That's It!!'.

648.CS: And what's happening there?

649.**W4:** It's a teamwork...I'm locked into their vision. I'm sharing their vision.

650.**CS:** You see this is one reason I included a dialogue part in these interviews [mm] in the sense that together with the writers we were going to come up with something that neither of us had thought about, or COULD think about. Now what is happening there? Because I'll just say too that this happens with writers even when they are by themselves [yes] with their text.

651.**W4:** Oh yeah, yeah. You have those moments. I think one of the strangest things is that thing where people always think you know your text backward. But often you text becomes alien. I mean people said to me, I was you know in my mid 40s, I was struggling to remember the lines, something that happens to all actors in their mid 40s pretty well. And someone said to me 'But you wrote it.' I said 'This stuff haunts me. This is alien. This is a dark night visitation of...' I gave up writing late nights in my 40s and started writing in the morning you know when all the barriers are down. I start at six and just write for a few hours, which I prefer now. And it just comes out! And you get to reshape it later on and it frightens you what's there, it's close to a dream state.

652.**CS:** There's heaps here that I want to talk about. Talking to [W2] [mmm who I worked with a little bit recently], that's right. She actually said that it was much easier for her to talk about the play than it is for her to talk about [her novels]. She said 'Well there are so many people involved that I feel like...' and so that very much fits what you were saying earlier about a collaborative as against [yes, a dispersal of pressure]. Yes...and especially as she loved it and so she could talk much more positively about it than about her own work.

653.**W4:** I wish I could have, I didn't work, um, the actual director was the dramaturg, so I only got to work with her once or twice. I would have loved to have worked really closely with her because I think the play deserved a better response than it got...But this is just by the by.

654.**CS:** But anyway she was talking about how...she has the sort of, she thinks of writing as two phases...There's a sort of procrastinatory stage [ohh]. You know she talked about diving into the pool. Is it cold? [mmm]. And where you are really going into the unknown. But she feels like the most creative part is the reworking [yeah!]. So you dive into this thing and you get a few things, you draw out a few things to work with...

655.**W4:** Well, when I'm working with playwrights I'm essentially asking them to revise their vision. Not revise the vision, but to go at it again, and to get closer to its core. And also we spend a lot of time speculating where things might go next. They

are just jam sessions. And they have moments of exciting...[playwright name] records all our sessions on tape. Other people just take notes. Some people just absorb. [playwright name], the great poet, uhh, did her first play in many years last year (it was very successful, it's just been on in New Zealand...and I think she had almost left the playwriting scene). And she was the most lateral person I've ever worked with. You know I'm used to people who are just one-to-one. And I'd work out how they work. You know, whether they are literalists, whether they work through image when they talk, whatever, I have to nut that out quickly. [playwright name]...it's long pauses. Her eyes roll up into her forehead [laughter] and she thinks. She's one of those people that, if you suggest a line to take, that'll inspire another line for her...So you always know, and you have to — it would drive some dramaturgs nuts [because you assume she is going this way and she's been inspired by what you've said because of some lateral association]. That's right, so for me it was a relief after a while...you know, because I knew she would come up with something fantastic. But that was a great relationship, a marvellous relationship. In fact, there is a textual account of that, of a talk that we did, which is, which is, might be interesting for you to read.

656.**CS:** So there are several things here. So one is this, the creativity, the really buzzing stuff...I'll just tell you something. I mentioned before the loosening and tightening, but it's not as simple as that. Like, so, if you go really loose there's no structure. And so, more like we are terribly afraid of that very loose stuff, but occasionally we have to visit it [indecipherable...let go, yes]. But we don't normally work in that domain and creativity is, I think, what we do with what comes out of that domain. That's what this psychologist Kelly called provisional tightening. Cycles of loosening [mmm] and then provisional tightening [yeah] and then back into the looseness [that's right] and then provisional tightening. To me that's what you are doing here [yes, as a guide] and it's when we provisionally tighten. And we get the insight, the insight comes when we tighten, not when we are in the loose stuff.

657.**W4:** No. The loosening fuels you. I always say 'Go back, wallow around and you'll come back with something, it might be dreams or whatever, you'll find something.'.

658.**CS:** But it's then that you re-read the draft [mmm] and you are in tighter mode and you think 'Oh shit. That's interesting!'.

659.**W4:** Yeah. Or often, and I think this is really important, a good dramaturg tells the writer what they have achieved. It's like when one is a student at university and you

get the essay back and you get an A plus...it just says 'improved' [yes. 'good structure']. And you think 'What?! What did I really do? People who got Bs and Cs got heaps of comments on their papers. I want to know what I did.'. And as an academic I used to enjoy that...it's like taking your best students and saying 'Well, what do you think you did?' And often finding out they didn't know what they had achieved...because the next essay wouldn't be as good.

660.CS: What I really liked about this essay was...

661.W4: Yes. And with good dramaturgy you have to remind people of their vision. You have to remind people of their authenticity, their right to invest emotionally in this. That it's not going too far. Always pushing them and saying 'Let this scene go! What you are telling me is much more powerful than what is on the page.'. 'Well I don't want to be indulgent.'. I say 'Indulge yourself! We can always cut back. You can craft it back. Let go.'. And with [playwright name] when I did this...we did this dialogue on stage in Griffin after the show one night. I actually titled the dialogue 'Did She Jump, Or Was She Pushed?'...which I think echoes the kind of fears that some people have, you know whether they are about to be murdered or their work sacrificed. Is there someone else's vision intruding? So I'm always cradling them a bit saying 'This is your vision.'...

662.CS: Yes that's right. See again this comes back to emotion doesn't it. I mean there's just, it's dangerous territory isn't it? [mmm]. Because to be creative you have to loosen up [yeah]. You have to not know how its going to end up [um hmm]. And you have to allow yourself to go in deliberately to not understand, deliberately creating conditions [yeah] where you don't understand [yeah]. Now normally that provokes anxiety [mmm]. In our day to day lives [mmm] if we are driving a car and we don't understand what is happening we are terrified [yes, oh yeah]. So what we are doing in a way is deliberately subverting what nature has programmed into us.

663.W4: That's right. Yes and um and it happens in degrees. I mean some playwrights I've worked with I just can't work with. I've said to the director, 'Look this is not going to work, they are too tight'. And it's all craft, it's all get that product out there. I've said 'They are never going to write the great play. They are a good playwright, they'll never write the great play.'.

664.CS: It's the Bryce Courtney school of...[that's right].

665.W4: It's get it out there.

666.[tape end]

667.CS: ...If we can finish up on...[basically indicating that we have covered the topics I wished to cover quite well].

668. There's two things I'd like to finish on. One is that when people report having a breakthrough or insight into something, there's lots of qualities to the way they experience it. Often people talk about really feeling connected [mmm] with the world, the universe [mm]. But it's in funny sorts of ways. For example, the insight seems to be coming from without, sort of almost external to them and they get to spectate it [yeah], to be the vessel almost through which it comes [mmm]. Yet they sort of know it's them [yeah]. So there's a strange sense of self that seems to....

669. **W4:** ...A heightened sense of self. It's like you are on a roll. I know that myself sitting there writing and thinking: 'Yes! this is it!...keep going, keep that, the next sentence is already in your head, keep it going.' And it's terrible thing if you are interrupted or something [yes] classically where you know you've got to get it down in the moment and ah. Some people are good at keeping it in the head. I usually, I do have to be writing it, but I know people who just hold these things in their head and write it all down afterwards, which is amazing [yes it is]. But it is, it is I think for me it's an in-and-out state at once. I don't go into a total type of [exclaims] whooo! [oh no, no!]. It is definitely, it's dialectical. You spin in and out of it. You lose it for a little while, or you relax and then it goes back in. You think 'I'm going to finish this thing.' You know it's quite a state.

670. **CS:** And it involves the body doesn't it? [mmm]. I mean it's like...[a rush], yeah. And I think this is very important [mmm] and there are some neurophysiological studies now on what happens when people are working creatively [oh yeah?]. For example, we know that if we, you get 'creatives', people who are involved in creative fields all the time...you get them to do a standard IQ test and a 'normal' person — a non-creative person [chuckling] to do a standard IQ test and they do EEGs on them, and for both (they've taken a baseline) and they both more-or-less peak at the same sort of thing doing the IQ test. When they do the same with the creativity test, where they give them a creative task, the 'normals' go up to about the same level as for the IQ things, but the creatives go below their baseline! And so what's happening is a much more diffuse [mmm] activation of the neocortex. [right. Yeah]. OK, so this seems to be some sort of physiological counterpart [mmm] to being able to think very laterally and to loosen up thinking where you are working associatively rather than transitively, logically [mmm. Yeah, yeah.]. And to be able to do that it seems to me that, one of the things I'm pushing towards, is that a lot of the mind's activity is about survival. Like when we operate day-to-day a huge proportion, all our senses [yes...all these mechanisms] mechanisms...we care about, you know, 'Does he like me? Doesn't he like me? Am I good enough?'. All aspects of survival. And it

seems to be that in this state a lot of that is quietened down, it is backgrounded. It is a type of meditative type of state [yeah]. The mind is still enough — this is why I was interested in what you said about slowing them down — when the mind is actually still enough, to be able to pick up all these subtle nuances and [mmm]...because they are coming very fast [yes].

671.**W4:** Yes... \times $l \times$ complexity theory. Or whatever, if we are operating in a number of levels in a kind of state which is basically always on the edge, then everything has to be, it's like, you know, people light incense, they've got to write in their favourite position [that's right]. Like in Jungian terms, [partner] is a real feeling type, you know. Everything has to be [motions with hands], you know. I don't worry so much about that. But I still like my conditions to be right. But I don't have a daily writing ritual because our ordinary work governs that. We write from time to time. But when we write, we *really* write. The circumstances *do* have to be right. Just the right amount, not too many cups of tea. The right amount of incense. I like to work with music. As soon as I get onto, if I think I'm on a roll, the music goes off, and then it's really the music of the piece that's sustaining me.

672. So, all those things are important. If there's too much light coming from outside, if there's just too much noise from the street. You only need one factor to upset the equilibrium and the state of equilibrium is lost and you just can't write...you know, the duress kind of thing happens. So it has to be a very stable state. I've never, I'm not one of the school that believes that you have to be in tragic circumstances or depressed or poor to write. I never found that to be true and I don't know any writers who do. I mean, mostly there has to be some basic level of comfort and security. You can't afford to have that, you have to be able to block out those anxious thoughts. Surrender them and so there has to be pleasure in the creativity.

673.**CS:** Yes, which makes it, it is what Theresa Amibile calls, it has to be intrinsically rewarding.

674.**W4:** It does. It has to be...and against enormous odds, but it has to be.

675.**CS:** And if you start offering people extrinsic rewards, it cuts down their creativity [yes that's right]. You say I'll pay you to write a book...and then people have all sorts of trouble.

676.**W4:** Yes. Some do. If they are already established authors and they get it they think 'Thank God. I'm going to get paid at last!' [yes]. You know I've seen so many young authors, people in the last few years who have managed to pick up two year fellowships which have just been liberated... You know it's just the burden of

the kind of working in restaurants and cafes [exactly] is gone. And for others who are too young it's, it hasn't worked out. They just go to pot!

677.**CS:** Exactly, whereas [W2] told me that apart from the practicalities that you just talked about, there was an enormous sort of social validation for [mmm] her when she was given grants [yes...that's another kind of thing. Yes]. So we haven't really talked about that very much too. I mean, obviously the work that you have been talking about is inherently social in its genesis [very collective, collaborative] and its mode of creation [it's shared yes]. Yes. So in lots of senses we didn't need to talk about the social whereas with writers, with writers who write novels, I need to say well 'How does that work? Who do you talk to about your work?'.

678.**W4:** Well, even in the performance area the writer's not the top dog that they are in the novel or the play. And they'll often just write texts which are then used and transmuted in performance. So they are often a different kind of animal. Whereas you are talking very much about the individual creator.

679.**CS:** Well. When I talk about the social I've sort of got two things in mind. One is the idea that all our thinking is socially derived [mmm] in the sense that we learn a trick of reflexivity such that we can think in the absence of even vocalising, or other people — which is pretty extraordinary, you know we take it for granted. The other thing is how important it is to share [mm] what we have been thinking about [mm]. Now what...seeing as you work collaboratively you get to share it in the moment don't you?

680.**W4:** Yeah, constantly and at various stages. Or if I'm working with a writer as dramaturg, I mean, there is every month some times when things are really hot and heading towards production three or four times a week. Yeah so it's intensely social. What you have to do is keep the writer's sense of self coherence. And in the big collaborative processes for ourselves, you have to really believe in what you are doing. Because everyone else is doing what they are doing and it all connects, but um, you have to, it's, but you can't afford, in my line of work, you can't afford to have a single notion of consciousness or of absolute privacy. You have to have a notion that one's psyche is made up of parallel and conflicting elements. That's not madness. It's a healthy way of being.

681.**CS:** However, you just said though that you need to help the writer keep their sense of self coherence?

682.**W4:** Keep *enough* sense of coherence, especially the writer, because they are going to be judged on their own. It might, the review might say 'magnificent production of

a very ordinary play'...[clicks fingers]. Done. Gone. Um, whereas in our work it's not so...critical.

683.**CS:** Yes, you're more background aren't you?

684.**W4:** Yeah, or before. It's interesting since I've been dramaturg, I've been getting kind of review notices 'cos I've had a few successes. You know, four or five plays I've dramaturged have done well, so it's one of those rare things in Sydney in 1994, '95, and '96 that I was getting reviewed as well, and very positively. I only got really slammed once, it was a production at the Enmore Theatre. It said 'Even though they've brought the big guns in like [W4], this production...[indecipherable and laughter]. You know if only they had known I was working with an 'auteur' director who hardly let me say boo. I didn't really get to advise on the thing at all, so I was very grumpy about that [especially getting slammed]. Yes, but by and large it's a background role and a lot of people don't understand what I do. They just think I cut and paste or tell the author what to do. Whereas I see my role as a very creative one, not just a craft.

685.**CS:** I'm very interested in it...it's a counselling role, isn't it, really?

686.**W4:** Well that's it. Someone said to me, someone was wary about working with me and said — they must have talking to someone— said 'Oh, you know, it's a bit too intimate for me'. And I said 'Yeah that's fine if they don't want to.'. I said 'I don't quiz them about their personal life if that's what they are worried about.'. If it connects, I'll think yeah, I can say to them 'I think you should think about this. Is this you?'. [playwright name]'s big block with her play [title of play] was that the central female character was just not that interesting. Everyone around her was good, and I didn't want to talk traditional dramaturgy. And [playwright name] was difficult anyway, she was so lateral. And one Saturday afternoon we were sitting here and she's fagging away [mimics cigarette smoking] [out the window]. Yes. And I said um, you know - I didn't want to use the word 'trouble' or difficulty'. I said um 'What I think you have to look at is the fact that Joy is you.'. And she went 'Ohhh!'... 'cos it's quite unlike her, a tough working class woman who's got kids, separated from her husband, this is the character. Nothing like her, but *really* quite like her! [Yes. Chuckling]. And that was the breakthrough. That was the big breakthrough on that play. Because the director kept saying to me 'Ohhh, it's fantastic but the central character, she's...immobile, not living.', all that kind of thing. Then it just twigged that there were a number of connections with [playwright name] which I won't go into [no, of course]. But I just had to say that and it, the floodgates opened and away we went and she could create that character now, an

independent character, independent of her, yet drawing on her at the same time. So that was good. I forget what your question was now but!

687.**CS:** No, we're sort of swimming around the social dimension [I think that's...] and validating self [oh that's right, yeah] and collapsing the distinction between self and...

688.**W4:** Well, someone said to me dramaturgs should never tell the writer what to do. And I said 'Oh! That's a pity'. And they said 'What? Do you mean you tell them what to do?' I said 'Well, there are different ways.'. I said 'Sometimes I'm conducting a Socratic Dialogue. I know the answers, but I want them to find them, 'cos they are already in the play. I'm not giving them something that's not in the...I would never suggest anything that is not inherent, already in the play. And I'm always guiding them back into their own play. And I said, um, sometimes, I said 'There's no such thing as a dramaturg,' I said 'sometimes I'm confidante', they tell me things they wouldn't tell any one else. They say afterwards 'Oh that was great. That was just like going to a counsellor.'. I say 'Sometimes I'm like a counsellor.'. It's very structured. I'm helping them get back in touch with their play, therefore their life, it's their creative life. Sometimes I'm a personal trainer. I say 'You're not working hard enough [yes that's right]. 'What have you been doing? Yeah, you were going to do this a week ago...Come on [knocks on table three times]. What's happened to your ability with metaphors? You know. you can do this. This is not poetry.'. And I'll be quite tough in a nice way, but I'll really push them. And I say to them...I said to this person 'I have four or five roles. I'll switch. I'll calculatedly switch those if I think I'm not getting somewhere with them. I'll go the other way because it taps into different creative and personal needs of the person.'. And I think that's much better to admit those types of things than to pretend that it is pure clinical, objective and I'm out of it somehow or other, [exactly] and I'm just guiding them through a craft exercise.

689.**CS:** Well, of course the fascinating thing when you read the general insight literature, you are looking at scientists and academics, you know, all sorts of people, people in business and creative people in the arts, is that even in the so-called 'really tight' and logical and rarefied atmosphere of physicists and [oh yeah], you know, they all talk about doing hard work and then goofing off [mmm] and allowing their mind just to wander [yeah], lazy Sunday mornings [mmm] where they get their best ideas. You know the walking the dog and the...

690.**W4:** Well I have walk the dog sessions with writers where I just say...they say 'Are we are going to talk about this?' and I say 'No, let's just talk around it for a bit.'.

And we'll just kind of talk and I know where I am going. They are not quite sure. It becomes a very relaxed talk about everything else BUT this...and it's just a way of getting around. You need to alternate those sessions. They can't all be hard nosed [that's right] and tough.

691.**CS:** I never know, when I work with clients you know, uhh...A client last night is bulimic, you know. And I said 'We need to get a bit more structured here. We need to really plan the stuff you know.'. Of course I knew this was fatal, you know because what we did then we had this loosest session where, it was great [it was good] and right at the end she said 'Well what about those short term and long term goals?' And we scribbled a few things down. But I think this is very important, you know, that the...it's freeing people up from having to be able to figure it all out.

692.**W4:** I think for me the...big, the thing I happened upon as a teacher in my younger years was a sense of teaching people through structure. Now that's different from aiming at achieving structure and all that. I remember reading the art critic Erin Sweig, one of those yarns in a Paladin paperback, and he talked about artists, how he thought artists see. They don't see the detail. They head towards the detail. It's a structural picture. I remember all the cognitive stuff I did as a trainee teacher where people see things and all the time I was teaching I was always trying to...um...and doing my early kind of work in performance, I was always looking for a kind of image, or a picture, then heading in towards the fleshing it out, and that always stayed with me. It stays with me now with playwrights and uhh, there's always a feeling that there's something there and it's being realised as they are working on it. And we're sharing it and the picture is getting bigger and clearer and as soon as you discover this moment 'Chooooo, wow that's great! And that's good!' And 'Oh here's a bit of ponderous stuff.'.

693.Like I'm working on a political thriller play at the moment, so there's a lot of ponderous narrative stuff we have to work out. That's been one of the toughest pieces I've ever worked on to keep the vision alive [whilst you have to work out all those]. Luckily it's about a bank manager who has visions. He has visions and he sees things about Jewish money in Swiss banks and he sees people burning themselves in public places. You know so that poetic dimension is kept alive by that aspect of the script. And a lot of the political stuff, the thriller stuff, is just 'Well if we do that there, then that...no we can't do that... no-one would believe that.'.

694.**CS:** Well let's finish up with one question then [yeah].

695.**W4:** Well anyway just to finish that, the structural thing you know is big for me. And I think that is the way into it for everything. Finding the image, like, easy ones,

the stone hitting the water and rippling out as I was saying with that play earlier and then drawing a line across it. Those things are really important.

696.**CS:** Yes, I mean there's normally a central issue whether we are talking about creativity, with counselling clients, or with writers there is always something central. Now...this is the toughest question of all probably and it relates to what is happening when we are being creative. What happens when we have an insight? Um...we've talked a lot about emotion and about being, letting go of structure, we talked about metaphor, about disparate domains being brought together. What do you think happens when a person has an insight?

697.**W4:** Um...well it's funny. For me it's either of two things. One is you are suddenly in tune with yourself, which I think, that it's like there's almost layers of a complex being all start vibrating together and you have a sense that what you are writing is what you wanted to write. The other thing is the frightening one. You are suddenly writing something you didn't know you were going to write. You didn't know you could write. And I think that's two different things. They are very similar but they are different. And I think sometimes that's the strange one, the one where you are writing it and you are thinking 'This is fantastic but does it fit? What's it about? What am I going to do with it? It's going to take me off on a whole new scary direction.'

698.Sometimes when I'm in the dramaturgical position writers are talking and they say 'Wow! I could do this! And I could do that! But God...Oh I don't know if that fits.' And they are so excited and then I help them. I say 'Well yes. Of course it fits.' And it's more difficult on your own. Um. So I think the important thing about it is that the moment is the buzz of the moment. When everything, you are suddenly in tune, everything is vibrating. It's a physical and intellectual experience all at once because you have to recognise it. So not off with the fairies...uhh...its difficult. Even with visual artists I think they know it's happening. It's a knowledge, conscious knowledge it's happening. I think the critical thing, it only completes itself in the moment after when you think 'What is it? What am I going to do with it?'. So you know it's happening, you know what it's about, because it is in tune, even if it is 'inverse'. It's there, but then it's like...I'd be thinking 'Ohhh...and you know people do throw things out'. So you think 'Well that was an insight. I don't know what kind and I don't know what to do with it.'. They put it into a pile. Or they say 'Yes...right yes.'...[frequently people have insights that subsequently they look at and say 'No it's rubbish']. Yeah, exactly. So it's that knowing it. Now in a collaborative situation where you are helping a writer, you know, there are people to

help you, saying 'It's OK. This is good'. If you are on your own I think it is a much tougher process. I'm amazed at the number of writers who do keep copious notes and keep drawers full of things [yes] and dig around in them and say 'I was right all along!'. I'm a great one for going back to the first draft. You know I'm often pushing people to go back — I ignore the intervening drafts because that gets too muddy [back to the original vision]. I've been in dramaturgical meetings where people say 'Now in the third draft you did such and such, but there was a line from the second one.'. And I'm thinking 'God. This is getting so technical. This is muddying everything'. But I do believe that often in the first draft you find treasures and things that came from naked insight where they didn't feel that inspired or thought they had an insight...but it just came out.

699.**CS:** What comes to mind is the things the writers have told me about central images in their works and how they only later saw how it just resonates through the [yeah] whole work and they had no idea at the time...[yeah mmm]. But it just sort of grew, it grew from that.

700.**W4:** Well, connectivity is an enormous part with this, that feeling of being in tune with the moment. Um and the musical metaphor is actually a very good one. I think one of the things that is...when I'm working with writers on narrative I say, 'Well just forget the narrative at the moment and just think of this musically as theme and variation, theme and variation.'. And then we'll think about it as it's unfolding as a story. So that musical thing is a good one. It's not exactly, it's by analogy, it's not exactly a metaphor. I say to them 'We've got to come back to that image again. It's really powerful. We've got to bring that back in.'. I'm not saying what we have to do with the story. 'Get that image back in.'.

701. WRITER 5

702.**CS:** So the first thing I'd like to talk about is the way you organise yourself. And I don't care what time frame you talk about, whether you're talking about minute to minute or project to project, year to year. Um, preferably the range of things.

703.**W5:** What do I do to organise myself on a day-to-day basis?

704.**CS:** Yeah, day-to-day basis. How you organise your life so that you can work creatively.

705.**W5:** Right. Um.. I've found through experience that I can work, um, when I'm fresh in the morning I can work, say between 9.30 and something. I mean, the thing

that's very hard to understand is how I'd work if I didn't have a family, because I've always done this with a lot of noise and a lot of people around. So the moment they all go out the door is really the moment when I start working, even though I could have been more creative had I started earlier. So when they've gone I begin and that tends to be about 9.30, and I work until about 1.00. Um and then at 1.00, I suddenly run out of steam. And um, you know I have something to eat or go for a swim or do some sort of outdoor...walk the dog or something outdoors. And then at night again when they're in bed I work again. So it'd probably be two, four hour stints, you know, seven or eight hours a day, but broken up.

706.**CS:** When you have a swim or take the dog for a walk do you often get good ideas? At that point?

707.**W5:** Um I tend to, depending on the stage of the project. I do. I've worked out quite a few things um, on walks. Or at the beach or so forth. It's particularly useful when I'm at some sort of point where the...not a writer's block, but a sort of structural block [an impasse?]. Yeah an impasse and that has proved useful, on quite a few occasions. But usually when I come to a block I find that I can write my way through it, anyway. So it's a combination of just sort of writing through it and you know doing draft upon draft upon draft until suddenly a sentence escapes from the other sentences. So it's a combination of that process and the exercise/thought solving.

708.**CS:** So when you say a sentence escapes, you are not thinking 'I must break this block. I must break this block.' But you've got a general sort of faith that if you just keep following a...

709.**W5:** I have, I have got a general faith. Even when I'm, even when I'm at a low point I do have a general faith that I'll overcome it. Now having said that I also feel that the initial, the initial idea I have is never quite fulfilled. The book is never quite as good as I thought it was going to be. It's different, and interestingly different, it's always a bit different. But the general idea that gave me the huge sort of burst of enthusiasm and excitement is never quite fulfilled.

710.**CS:** We'll come back to the organisation, because I'd like to follow that little thread. The huge burst, or...How does that happen? You're living life and then all of a sudden you get an idea?

711.**W5:** Yes. Well it can be something, um something I've read or something just crops up out of the blue. But I have an idea for a story or a book and and I'm almost too thrilled by it to pursue it too far in case it vanishes. So I sort of, you know, think about it, and think around it and think whether someone also has...somebody else

recently done something like this?...In which case, don't bother, you know. Um. But if all things being equal, if it does still seem like a good idea then I, you know, a huge rush of enthusiasm takes over. And I, you know, read about it if it needs some sort of basic research or whatever. You know, I ask about it, I talk about it. I find it hard to stop talking about it, as I was doing out there [laughter — as W5 was enthusiastically telling me about his latest project before the interview!]. So I'm sort of engrossed by it. Then begins the actual work. Then it's the slog like any job to a degree, but you do all sorts of ruses and tricks to keep yourself, to keep yourself interested, basically.

712.**CS:** What are some of the ruses and tricks?

713.**W5:** Well you've got to, you've got to sort of, I have to tell myself that I know what I'm doing even when it is patently obvious to all, to me more than anyone, that I mightn't yet, that I don't know what it is yet. So I set out sort of headings and chapter headings, and you know I might pin things up on the wall, index cards or whatever. I mean, I sort of tell myself I'm busy and I know what I'm doing. Even though I don't; with [novel title] the latest novel, I put up all these, a whole wall full of index cards of what was going to happen at every stage like a story board, like a film story board. And then never looked at any of them!

714.**CS:** But that served some sort of purpose for you, though, didn't it?

715.**W5:** It did serve a purpose, yeah, absolutely.

716.**CS:** And the purpose was?

717.**W5:** Well, it was a fallback position, in a way. I was telling myself it was a fallback position [a security blanket]. And I also knew, I knew, what I wanted to happen. And if I was to read it again — which I didn't after I'd first put them up — I could see there was actually a narrative occurring [yes], you know, along the wall and it'd end somewhere. And things happened along the way that were, um, feasible, and so forth. But that's what happened, they didn't, none of it...via a different route the same end was reached [yep]. But I generally need to know, um, I need to know how I want it to end. And it mightn't always end always like that...

718.**CS:** So what's that little bit about there? So, you say 'I'd like to know how it's going to end.'. It's probably obvious to you, but how come? Why is that important?

719.**W5:** Well it's ...I like to know that it is going somewhere, I think, is probably more accurate. It's not just sort of staying here, there's plenty of...

720.**CS:** How do you feel when you don't know?

721.**W5:** Um...all right. And in fact the ending's never been the same ending yet. But I need to know. I need to think I know how it is going to end.

722.**CS:** That's what I'm trying to dig at, you see [yeah]. And if you...is it anxiety?

Do you have a sense that 'I don't even have any idea where this is going.', then you just can't work or...?

723.**W5:** No, no. That's all right, that's OK. I just plug along. But, um, no, it's not a source of anxiety, but it is a source of security to know that's a very good ending I've got there [OK] you know, and I'll try to keep that as possibly the what's going to happen.

724.**CS:** Yes. So rather than it being an avoidance of a negative...it's the building of possibility or something like that [yes].

725.**W5:** Yep. The whole process is for me, even though it takes me ages and there's always money worries during it and things, it is actually a very optimistic process, and I feel much happier when I have a project going, even if it's one you know that's you know sort of really tip-toeing along, you know, two steps forward, one step back. But I feel better, and I feel more, I like the feeling of every morning sitting down at the wordprocessor.

726.**CS:** This seems to be a real theme, you know. The interview with [W1] comes to mind. Where she was talking about how good it is for you, you know, physically [yeah], you know, to be in the flow of writing and things [yeah] coming together.

727.**W5:** Yeah, and it's interesting that I believe that too. Even though physical evidence shows, I usually get RSI or I've got a bad back at the moment, right on cue, sort of thing...Um the back's really giving me trouble. And other times I've had you know, tennis elbow, or something else that's wrong, structurally. But even that doesn't affect the fact that I think it's good for you [good for you]. Yeah! [chuckles].

728.**CS:** Yeah, that's right. It's sort of a question of the spirit as against the...

729.**W5:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because it is actually sort of bad for you, and you're sort of twisted up and...

730.**CS:** Do you write by hand?

731.**W5:** No, I don't any more. I have in the past. I write on a laptop...but it is obviously very small and it's not, you know ergonomically it's hopeless. But I mean I sort of quite like working on it.

732.**CS:** Do you then print out and then work on the paper?

733.**W5:** Um. I also did that at the beginning because I came out of the tradition of typewriters, having been a reporter. It took me a long while to make the move to computers, and then a long while to make the move to laptops. But now, you see the...you want to talk about creative bursts and things, and one of those things that I

would mention, whenever that...whether now or later [yeah, do it now] is the advent of the computer to it, because that has actually changed the way I operate and the way I think.

734.**CS:** How's that?

735.**W5:** It was very much a freeing, a freeing-up, um, happening. The first one I used was also with a book that freed me up too. So it was a combination. I don't know which...where the machine ended and the thought processes were in it. But certainly the book called [novel], which was based on Ned Kelly's life, it was an imaginary life of Ned Kelly. And it was very much a loosening up process creatively for me. And I think the computer was part of that.

736.**CS:** Because of the way you can word-process with it. Is that it?

737.**W5:** Because I spent so much time, I wasted so much time because I like writing clean copy. I don't like messy copy hanging over and things and that was because I had to have it clean when I was [a journalist], yet again a work habit. But I was just sort of tipexing and stopping and re-writing and there were so many drafts and...

738.**CS:** It was slowing down the flow.

739.**W5:** It slowed down the thought processes. It was just hopeless. Hopeless. So once the computers eliminated that, then I just flew and uhh, the writing of my books is much quicker now than it was, and not, and more, in a way, more, more, you know some people say they can always tell a book written on a computer and I think that's bullshit. Um. I think my book's more thoughtful since I've been using the computer.

740.**CS:** What do people mean when they say that, do you think?

741.**W5:** I don't know. It's think it's just part of the, you know, the exquisite people who think, who talk about fine writing and stuff. I mean I think that sort of self-conscious, um, the sort of things poets say [a sort of preciousness?]. Yeah, it is a preciousness. I think it's precious. And if you, I mean fine if that is what you want to do, but I don't see any advantage whether you write in a neat little crabbed handwriting, or on the best built computer in the world. You know. So what?

742.**CS:** Yeah, and as you know, there seems to be a varying opinion on this. I know that several of the writers really love the advent of wordprocessing, however, they really do like printing it out, and having a piece of paper, to work on [oh yes!] and scribble on and all that.

743.**W5:** Oh, yes. I like that too! Yeah, it's got to be on paper before it's real. But in the thinking stage I think it's fine on the computer. No, it's certainly real to me. I pick up all sorts of errors I've made as soon as I see it on paper.

- 744.**CS:** Yes. And there are things you can do on paper, of course, you can't do on a computer still, sort of [mmm mmm] arrows and all that sort of stuff, very fast stuff.
- 745.**W5:** Yeah. It's been a huge disappointment to libraries. We've all lost a lot of income, not being able to sell our various paper drafts. It amounts to quite a bit of money, on a novel, say.
- 746.**CS:** Yes, of course there's that book by Kate Grenville and Sue Woolfe wasn't there? [yeah]. They used a lot of that, you know, Peter Carey's voluminous drafts and so on. So just taking you back. The kids are out of the house, and things have quietened down. What do you do? Make yourself a coffee?
- 747.**W5:** Yeah, I have a coffee. Um. I read the paper until there's nothing left to do, till I can't procrastinate any more. But I need to really thoroughly read...I read the sport, finance, everything.
- 748.**CS:** What do you read first?
- 749.**W5:** Oh I read the front page. I read the news. I mean I'm interested in the news most...then I go back. At the moment I read the cricket. I might read that first, but normally, if it's not a...
- 750.**CS:** That's pretty well what I do actually [laughter].
- 751.**W5:** If there's no [cricket] tests on and it's not AFL season, I read the news first. Then I go to the desk. And work till one. One-ish. At the last stage — this is at the early stages of the book like I'm at now — at the last stages, you know, everything else just goes and I just, every spare minute, as soon as someone walks out of the room, I, you know, I walk round with the computer.
- 752.**CS:** Through the house?
- 753.**W5:** Yeah...and at night you know I'd take it to the dining room table.
- 754.**CS:** So it sort of inhabits your life at that stage? Is it because, is it that you get more and more absorbed into it, or is it because you are getting close to finishing and there's deadlines? What's happening there?
- 755.**W5:** Um. I'm getting more absorbed into it and I'm getting close to deadlines. But I know there is a state when I'm totally absorbed in it and it's usually about two thirds in, when I start to dream, when I dream of the characters [OK] as if they are real people. Now I don't in the daytime wander around talking to myself or them or anything. You know I'm not that absorbed. But I am, at night time they do become fully-fledged personnel in the dreams.

756.**CS:** And, a lot of writers have talked about how they carry the book around and they're just out in the street or something and they see someone. And almost everything seems to be about the book...

757.**W5:** Oh yes, yes. Um. It's extraordinary. In fact, that's the case and, if you do reach some sort of minor impasse, it's amazing how something you see or do it's as if it's like a sign from heaven! You know it's like the Monty Python finger coming down. And saying 'Try this!'. I mean even to the stage of some, some religious nut will leave a pamphlet in the letter box, and it will say the words! That's happened to me.

758.**CS:** Now this seems to be almost universal. In the...psychology has gone very cognitive. And I'm...there's some very interesting things in that, but I'm not a cognitivist. Anyway, when they talk about insight they use the classic stages, a sort of a preparation stage that arrives at some sort of impasse, where we try everything we already know [mmm] and repeat the same mistakes and eventually put it, either consciously put it aside or give up in frustration. And then it enters incubation (which I think is an admission of failure on the part of, in the imagination of psychologists). But then there's this sort of 'aha!' moment. And frequently in the literature the people talk about this. That the mind is sort of primed, and it's just waiting for some sort of incidental cue [yeah]. But it only happens to the prepared mind. But it does seem extraordinary doesn't it? As you say you even get a pamphlet and there are the words [mmm]. Do you think at that point though, there could have been any one of dozens of things that could have, that would have, you know...in the sense that you are so ready, and so alert, was that THE thing, do you think? Or something else could have happened which would have...

759.**W5:** I think something else possibly could have. I mean...but that was the first thing. So it's hypothetical I guess. Yes and that feeling of openness, even though it's there because you've reached some sort of, well not blockage exactly, some sort of impasse, is actually not a bad feeling though too. You do feel very alert. It's the feeling you get, there's a particular sort of hangover that can give it to you. Where you've sort of got tunnel vision, you know. One without pain, but all the unnecessaries are cut out and only what is vital to your brain is being allowed in — and there's a particular sort of receptive feeling when you are in foreign parts too, when you are travelling. You notice things that you don't, you never notice in Australia [that's right, in your home town or anything]. I mean you don't notice, you don't particularly care about passers-by unless. But you do if you are in Ral Pindi or something, you know, where the passers-by are fascinating [yes and the colour of the

sky] and the habits, you know, are absolutely extraordinary. So there's a sort of a receptive, there's that sort of receptive thing. There's a sort of receptive fatigue though that's a part of that, um, like the hangover, where you do feel like some sort of antenna or something and you know you do soak stuff up.

760.**CS:** Yes that's quite interesting. There's...they've done some studies, some sort of EEG studies you know on brain frequencies and responses, and they're sort of cute some of the studies, but they get people they call 'creatives' [chuckling] versus 'normals' — basically people who are working in creative activities [yeah] and just people off the street. But what they do is they give them standard IQ type tests and they measure their baseline EEGs and as it changes when they are involved in those sorts of, you know, fairly linear type IQ items. Then they give them creativity tasks. An interesting thing they find is that the baseline actually of the creatives, the baseline of the amount of activity going on up here [pointing to head], is actually lower than normals to start with. When they do the IQ test they pretty well come up to about the same level, you know, of activity on the IQ test. When they do the creativity tests the normals go up to about the same level. The creatives actually go below their baseline level [hmm!]. So what they're finding is — one psychologist in particular is calling, what he calls defocused attention — which sounds very similar to what you are talking about...This sort of state of cutting out all the peripheral sort of activity. And...you see one of the things I am very interested in, is the use of metaphor and associations, analogy, that sort of figurative type thinking, and one of the things that might make that possible is having this lower-level, wider spread activation in the brain. Which, instead of having immediate stereotypical responses to things, you know, like you get all sorts of remote associates, it's much looser. Which then allows you to make connections between otherwise dissimilar [mmmm] domains, if you know what I mean [mmm]. It would seem to me that a hangover could quite potentially bring that state about.

761.**W5:** It's not one that you seek for those reasons but [NO! laughter] but it's not a bad little by-product! [that's right...laughter].

762.**CS:** Especially as the by-product is usually so horrible. But that's very interesting.

763.**W5:** It's interesting. I experienced one of those particular hangovers and during the experience when that condition overcame me I wrote that into the novel, into the particular novel [novel], so I had Ned Kelly talking about hangovers. And mentioning all the types of grog, you know, a whisky hangover, a brandy hangover, and the various effects. But I actually wrote that during one of them, so...

764.**CS:** So it was very real [yeah]. Anyway, so here you are, you are in your office and you go to it. What about when things are not really, not really working, not flowing.? What do you do?

765.**W5:** I'm quite easily diverted, I mean I might, um, if the postman comes I might, you know, if I hear him I might go out there and open the mail, and if the mail is interesting I'll read it, and you know all that sort of stuff. Or the dog might be whining and I'll take it for a walk or something. You know what I mean. It's not a hard-and-fast sort thing. I don't have a 'I must write you know 1500 words a day.' or anything like that. I've never ever counted up the number of words I've written in a day. And it always used to amaze me that people sort of...literary journalists were confounded that Graham Green only wrote 200 words a day. Well I mean, that'd be good; I'd be happy with that. 200 quite good words a day would mount up quite quickly to a book [it certainly would, wouldn't it]. Yeah. So I wouldn't get anything like that. I mean, when I, towards the end of a book I might get um, you know, a thousand. In the beginning I'd be lucky to get um, you know, a hundred, probably.

766.**CS:** And that doesn't worry you because you've been through the process a number of times [yeah].

767.**W5:** Yeah. No, it doesn't worry me. I mean I'd prefer to be faster, but I ...So what? Yeah.

768.**CS:** Yeah, I think that's an important thing I mean, one of the central things I'm interested in is the way people handle themselves emotionally. Because I think the whole process is one of emotional self-management [yeah]. Do you know what I mean. Like obviously with new writers there's a lot of anxiety about that sort of issue.

769.**W5:** There's always a degree of anxiety and it's not that it becomes easier, but you just know that you've done it before and you felt like that then, and so it will happen again. So there's a sort of confidence in yourself, really. The process doesn't become, you don't become any more facile, or, you know, there's no sort of easy way through just because you have done it. The only thing is I think the increased confidence really.

770.**CS:** That's right. It's what I call a sort of transcending affective calm [mmm]. Even though while in the process itself it's very difficult, and slow, and clumsy and messy and all that [mmm], but there's a sort of overarching sense that this is all right [mmm, mmm].

771.**W5:** I also think, there's all sorts of other things that can affect this. I mean, I know my first book was quite successful and it was quite, it was well received. But it

didn't have that — those weren't the days when being a young novelist was a big deal. I mean, no-one said 'young novelist'. I mean I was 30 or something. I'd been writing since I was 27. But no-one, the term 'young novelist' was not used by reviewers. Now if you are 38 you are a 'young', you know the age-groups...[indecipherable] has raised the ante a bit, so a 38 year old is a young novelist and fuss is made. But there wasn't any fuss then and so I was able to segue sort of evenly into each book, I think. But now I know writers who've had a huge, extravagant fuss made of their first book, who are virtually, you know, they've been rendered sort of impotent!

772.**CS:** Yes...because their sense of sort of expectation [yeah!].

773.**W5:** Yeah, and the second book, no-one gives a fuck.

774.**CS:** Yeah, 'cos often first books are very, very interesting, aren't they? There is a sort of energy about them.

775.**W5:** But there is also an energy, there is also a marketing energy directed to them which has got nothing at all to do with the contents or anything. It's a media thing and a marketing thing. You just write 'a dog sings' or something, you know, [laughs] it's sort of pretty silly. But, it's a bit of a shame because there's a lot of people who are over-praised, and who now really struggle.

776.**CS:** Hopefully they will work through it [yeah] but it's something they have to overcome. I think that's what I was getting at a little bit before. Theresa Amibile, a person who talks a lot about creativity and motivation, and they do very simple things, but they get people to, you know, create something, design something, and they just do things like if they offer them any motivation it actually cuts back the creativity, you know. I know we touched on this earlier when you said you worked through that one about deadlines and things like that. But it does seem to me that you are playing tricks with yourself, and very useful tricks [mmm], in that you are just not looking at the end product. You are not looking at, in a sense that what rewards you are going to get, or will it be good enough, or...

777.**W5:** Oh you can't. No...You couldn't possibly do that.

778.**CS:** So your thing about putting all the cards on the wall. And you say 'I've got to know where it is going to go.'. It's almost like you're playing little games with yourself [mmm]...You say 'Righto...at the very worst I've got a good ending [mmm]. I'm heading somewhere [mmm]. Now I can forget about that [mmm] and get on with it. Get on with being present [yeah] to where I am now.'. Is that the sort of...?

779.**W5:** That's , no that's exactly right. The whole thing is about tricks with yourself, playing tricks with yourself.

780.**CS:** Any other tricks?

781.**W5:** Umm...I'm probably not conscious of them all even [that's right]. Not really. It sort of helps, I guess it sort of helps and this is sort of, you know part vanity, part everything I suppose, it sort of helps if you've been...a bit of praise coming in from left field doesn't hurt. You know that's a part of the bolstering of self.

782.**CS:** Oh, [W2] told me the incredible effect it had when she got a grant [mmm]. Not just the practical stuff of being able to sit and work on it [mmm], but just this sense of one's peers, peers that one respected [yeah], they said 'You're worth it.'.

783.**W5:** Yeah. Yes, well I'd agree with that. Um...to the same extent, of course, a negative, something negative happening can really throw you for days.

784.**CS:** Yes. Like a bad...

785.**W5:** Well, just a sort of sniping um [comment], something malicious. A malicious thing in print.

786.**CS:** And there's heaps of that isn't there [oh yeah] in the literary world?

787.**W5:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. From people who've never had to put up or shut up themselves. So, that can be very damaging but it can also be, well for me, there's also a sort of 'Well, I'll, up you!' It can work as [add a little spice] like success is the best revenge sort of stuff.

788.**CS:** Yes. But there's a lot of that, isn't there. This sort of inner game, as it were [yeah], sort of you know...like the inner game of tennis [yeah]. This is the inner game of writing. You see I'm very interested in this, in notions of self consciousness. So, for example, you know you are watching a good tennis player, or a good sportsman, cricket of course, and you can see when the cricketer is not being present to, to playing the stroke [mmm]. When there's doubts in their mind, when there's other, when there's self-consciousness going on. Then, of course, they're lost, they're at sea, their feet don't move [they're not sort of in the moment] yeah, exactly. And it seems to me that that's hugely important in whatever endeavour, to bring creativity to any endeavour, it's, it's finding ways in which to not be concerned about self [yeah]. And it seems to me, we've been talking about it being an inherently healthy thing to do, that's the healthy bit about it, is that we forget ourselves [yeah]. Can you talk about that? You mentioned before about, you know, dreaming the characters and so on, and then two-thirds into the book you become the book almost.

789.**W5:** Well the book becomes real to the extent that I am sort of in it. I am on the same journey, if you like. Momentarily, or the characters are on, you know, in my, whatever I'm doing. Walking down Pitt Street or something — they've joined me in doing that. You know, buying a loaf of bread or something mundane, as most of my dreams tend to be. So that's quite, um. I've had a couple of supernatural type feelings, though, that are a bit weird, because I'm not actually into, I'm not particularly a new-ager or anything. But I had a, um...I'd been writing about — this is again with [novel] the Ned Kelly book — I'd been writing about um, Dan, his brother's dog, and how it was behaving during the siege at Glenrowan. Um. You know, it was hit by a bullet and was running around squealing and things, and um, my then, my now 20 year old son, then he was only 10, and I were, he got the tent for Christmas and we pitched it in the backyard of our place in the Central Coast. And during the night he would sleep in there by himself. So I would sleep in there, out there with him. And during the night I had this really very strange experience of this, there was this growling noise woke me, and there was this muzzle of a dog, or a wolf or a something, or a fox, something you know, a canine, very vicious, teeth bared, muzzle, it was coming through the side of the tent. And um...

790.**CS:** This is not a dream, this is, this did happen?

791.**W5:** Well, I'm not sure. I woke up...we had a big torch which he insisted we take with us, I woke up hitting the side of the tent, hitting at it. And then I woke up fully and I am actually awake holding the torch. So the...what obviously happened I would think is that sort of thing was on my mind and a possum or something was growling on a stump nearby, because they can make a hell of a din, and you know the brain did the rest [yes, exactly]. But it was so real, the segue into, from dream into real life was absolutely so subtle and it was like real life itself, the way things happened, progressed. But, it sort of really quite unnerved me, even remembering it now there's [tingles] yes. And I've had a few things like that, a few things where umWell this will sound bizarre, I certainly wouldn't say this publicly, but I had the feeling that what I was doing was being watched by Ned and it was approved [yes]. I had an approving feeling come down or something.

792.**CS:** This doesn't surprise me at all. Some of the conversations I've had with people, like with [W1] for example, she has a very interesting relationship with her characters and with writing. And she talked many times about a sense of not telling people about what she is working on because she will betray it [mmm]. Now, I said to her 'What about when you finally publish it?' and I can't remember the details of that now, but she had a way of making sense of that too. But there was very much

this sense of being true to, and doing justice to, and also this sense — and all the writers have talked about this.

793.W5: To imaginary characters?

794.CS: Yes [mmm]. And all the writers have talked about this sense of exteriority, even though it's your creation, there is some sort of sense in which you're more listening to it, you're...or you're dreaming about it and it's coming to you, and your task is to be as faithful as possible [mmm] to this. Do you have this sense as well? Is that a part of what you are talking about?

795.W5: Yes, I do. Um...it's a different...At the moment because I'm working on this non-fiction book as I said, this causes a different problem to arise. And even when I am dealing with formerly living people who are now dead, I have this feeling of responsibility towards them...um...and I'm not sure whether this is a bit misplaced because the feeling of responsibility that I should have, if I am writing some sort of memoir, and I am the child observer, it should be real to how I felt about them then, at the time. Not how events since have proved things to have been. So there's a real dichotomy in that sort of area — an ethical/creative sort of problem. And also the storyteller thing comes into it too where I want it obviously to, I've got to restrain in a sense, I've got to leash what normally I'm trying to unleash [exactly]. So all this is creating interesting tensions. I hope that they are good, I hope that it ends up being good.

796.CS: Yes, it probably will be useful to both genres in a sense.

797.W5: Yeah. But I'm also, I'm not actually a great believer in sort of genres in a way, and I don't know why. Just because someone has said, you know, 150 years ago: 'Well, we'll call this a novel. It is more than 50000 words long and less than [that's right, laughing] then this is a novel.'

798.CS: Fortunately with post modernism there has been a decent sort of loosening up of most of...

799.W5: Well there has in some ways, I mean ,and yet this whole new advent — Demidenko sort of stirred it up a bit — I mean the literary journalists are sort of one the 'Is that real? Is that real? Did you make that up?' [that's right!].

800.CS: I love it [laughter]. I mean , I'm not, obviously I'm not as involved in the literary world, so I just thought that whole thing was fantastic, you know it's such a joke anyway [mmm].

801.W5: Well it's that whole Aboriginality thing too. It's extraordinary.

802.CS: Yes...Now just coming back to that approving sense, you had this sense that Ned was approving of the job you had done. The other thing that strikes me with

writers, and this, and also in the research, you know where you are talking about scientists having breakthroughs with things and that, is that when people move into that sort of state, they have this sort of sense of feeling quite connected to the world around them [yes]. You know when you have this sort of breakthrough [yeah]. And it is a bit mystical in that sense .

803.**W5:** Yes it is. I, I...It's also, it's very pantheistic, I mean in my case [yeah, yeah] I feel like I'm exceptionally connected and that book was a breakthrough in that way too. And I was writing it, I wrote a lot of it up on the Central Coast in a bushy sort of atmosphere and I noticed things. As I was putting myself in his situation, or putting him in my situation, I was looking at things, I mean, I looked and examined and wrote about philosophically, gravel! [laughs]. I mean I'll get right down to, you know, right down to it. And I found gravel, this shows you how nutty I was about it, I mean I got to like different sorts of gravel [that's not nutty] and rocks and ants and, you know, I did think 'Let's get right down to Australianess.'. You know right at its literal level.

804.**CS:** Well you know there's Patrick White and gobs of spit isn't there? You know?

805.**W5:** Well I guess so, gobs of something with Patrick. But, um, I found bark on trees interesting. You know I found the dirt fascinating.

806.**CS:** Which is like you said when you travel, you begin to notice features like that [yeah]. But we don't normally travel in our own country in that mind way.

807.**W5:** No...so there's a general freeing up process in all sorts of ways I think at this time. And, I guess in speaking I haven't actually tried to link the two, but someone close to me had a breakdown just before then and, all of a sudden, there was chaos. What had been previously serene was chaos. I mean it was a general fugue state that flowed over everyone else. And then that ended. And then this heightened sensitivity and creativity period occurred. Just looking at it I would imagine that would've had a great deal to do with it.

808.**CS:** I'm sure it would. I mean It's a bit like your hangover too, I mean there are some sorts of perturbances to the, just the normal, running down the normal slots [yeah]. You know some sort of loosening up. In fact, one of the main psychologists who's informed my work is a guy called Kelly and he talks about loosening and tightening [mmm] of construing [mmm]. You know, the way we construe. And that uhh, what he calls a creativity cycle is just alternating between looser and tighter ways of understanding things. Tighter construing is when we pretty well anticipate the world in the same way each time. It's very reliable. So if you are doing a mathematics problem you do it the same every time. But when we think more

loosely, the sort of predictions and anticipations we make are varied [mmm], using the same construct [yeah] do you know what I mean? [sure]. And he talks about what he calls provisional tightening, so you loosen things up and you play with nonsense and absurdity — you don't usually tell people about this because they'll think you're crazy [mmm]. But then you provisionally tighten. You just get a feel for whether that's going to work and then you let it go again.

809.**W5:** Yeah. I use that. I do that.

810.**CS:** Do you?

811.**W5:** Yeah. I mean I have the series of cards I used when I was writing the last novel, which is just basically based around surrealism and things, and I'd make up some sort of piece of verse based on one of these pieces of absolutely, you know in an extreme, surreal art. And I'd just run with it. Each morning before I started. And some of them actually ended up being pieces that I turned into proper sentences and so forth. I had a character who was having typhoid delirium during the disease, and I was able to use that in that.

812.**CS:** Yes, especially because of its looseness and the florid nature of it or something like that. And you know the way — say when you are doing that, and there's probably a predominant sort of emotional feel about the verse or something like that, is that predominantly how it works? Is it, does it have a sort of a...Because it's not literal meaning you are on about there is it?

813.**W5:** Well, I've done it with literal meaning and just absurdities. So I've used both. The absurdity one, the absurdity mode to get me thinking really, just to get things flowing really [a bit stuck, a bit stiff] yes, just sort of to loosen up, like an exercise. The other though, I've — oh I suppose in a way some of the passages that I wanted to carry a fair bit of emotional weight I wrote in verse and then turned them into prose. But they were ones without any extraneous words in them. They weren't the ones with, you know, frogs eating weet-bix or something. These were things actually occurring in the story. But I did them in verse and then put them into prose.

814.**CS:** Yeah, 'cos, see I mentioned before that I'm not really a cognitivist. I probably should tell you what I mean by that now. And that is that, it's sort of useful that psych decided to bring the mind back into respectable study, but it's only quite recently that it's beginning to say that maybe this distinction between emotion and thought is very artificial. And in fact one theorist I'm interested in talks about emotions as just being a different style of thought, uhh, and one that in lots of way is more complex than logical thought, more multidimensional, and certainly invokes the body more directly [mmm]. And in fact seeing emotionality as the basis of mind.

Language and more logical thought drawing from that, being a subsequent development, and always having to go back to it to draw inspiration, ideas, and to get out of the vicious circles or logical solipsisms, you know [mmm]. So that's why I guess I'm sort of asking you about the emotional feel of things. So you see, for example, frequently writers talk about a central image or just a feeling they have, or that 'This is right.' and you don't know where it's going but it's almost like they are checking back with a type of emotional barometer, or emotional 'That feels right. This is right. This is going.' Can you illuminate that in any way?...I know it's a bit vague.

815.**W5:** Um...well what sort of works for me. When something is, seems like a good idea it's, I think, that is sort of quirky that is really for want of a better word. I think of the actual word quirky, I mean that is meaning sort of fascinatingly different I suppose [yes]. Not sort of kinky, necessarily [no, no, no], but sort of stands out as an idea or a thought or something I've just seen, or , and then things quickly, um, it sort of absorbs all the air around it and things come into it [yeah]. Um in fact it can be sort of anything.

816.**We,** um, we were in Broome this time last year. We went to a crocodile farm next door to the hotel — it was something to do with the kids. And it was one of the most fascinating things I've ever seen. Because, um, and the whole novel is building up in the mind...It's run by one of those great white hunter types, who, you know he's got his own television program and everything. But he's genuinely one of those outback sort of guys. He's sort of from central casting, but um, he...these days whenever...this is just some digression! Whenever a crocodile attacks an Aboriginal camp or something, whenever it's seen as a man-eater, you are not allowed to kill them now. So he takes them in. He has to go and get it. He's paid, you know. Also now though, of course, all these crocodiles are breeding in these places and he's got thousands of them. But in the wild, one egg in ten comes to adulthood. And of course in his artificial environment ten out of ten do, and hence all these mutant crocodiles running around [ohh]. Things with no tails and no bottom jaws and he turns on a light and scrubble, scrubble, scrubble in this tin shed, and there's this huge crocodile, with no...just with a bum! You know with buttocks and no tail! And the tail is half their body-length. And it's like something out of the Stars Wars Trilogy, but the second one, where all these sort of mutant space creatures are sitting around a bar [yeah, yeah]. Well, it's like that! And you know the kids are sort of agog and I'm agog and it was very very strange, very strange. And it was like a dream, it was like a surreal painting and immediately a novel occurred to me. And that won't be

the central image of the novel. It will be one little episode [that's right]. But that's enough!

817.**CS:** Yeah, that's right. But it's like a, there's a sort of ...I'd like to explore this, I'm not sure what it is about this but I'm sure it is really crucial [mmm]. As you say the word is quirky, because there is something, it's different enough to mainstream things, like everyday life, the normalcy of everyday life, to some way shed light on a reality about life that's more real than the normal way we understand — I haven't expressed that very well, have I? Do you know what I mean? It is a part of normal life but it has a way of highlighting what we don't normally see...[mmm] or something like that [mmm]. Can you help me with that?

818.**W5:** Well only in the specific instance, in that what stood out for me as representing those things was that immediately, I mean this place is Beagle Bay — Darwin's boat landed nearby [Oh, OK] evolution...[indecipherable]. So instantly, this rather quirky little episode on an afternoon when these late 20th century people, tourists, planning to do something with their kids, suddenly becomes something else with all this other stuff just desperately saying 'Here I am.', you know. 'I'm part of this theme too.'

819.**CS:** It's interesting though, isn't it. It's almost like again you've gone to this place, and not expecting anything, [no, just wanting a holiday] and all of a sudden it sort of shakes you, you know [yeah]. There's something sort of strange happening here, and it's talking to you almost [yeah]...as you say it felt surreal.

820.**W5:** It's those things that interest me, I must say. And then the normal male-female stuff which interests me too, in a general way as a sort of middle-aged heterosexual writer. That will come in; that's a given. It doesn't...but the other things are the sort of focal signposts.

821.**CS:** These sorts of images...and everything can sort of hang off them, can't they? You know [yeah] and they'll go in a thousand directions, and twenty of which you might use [yeah]...and that's what I'm interested in metaphor for: because it seems to have this, you get this, or symbols, you get two or three main symbols and things that recur and writers say 'Well I didn't plan that, but when I look back at the end I can see how that just...' [yeah], eventually they ended up through all the drafts and redrafts aligning themselves with these central metaphors. And sometimes they don't even, they still haven't realised that the book's finished and some critic points it out [yeah] or some friend reads it and says 'Did you realise this?' [yeah].

822.**W5:** Well I'm surprised no-one's pointed out to me — and I'm well aware of it, but I have a lot of lions in things that I write about and I know why, and I deliberately —

I, well, I don't know why — I know that in real life as a small child we lived across the river from the South Perth Zoo and in the morning when they were hungry you could hear the lions and the water of course would carry the sound [yeah]. And I can remember lying in the sleepout...look at that, a delicious thrill as a little kid. Look at the lion! And liking it!

823.**CS:** Yeah and the images in your mind...

824.**W5:** Being scared, being a bit scared, but liking it. Rather that it was happening than not [yeah], even though I knew they would eat me if I was there, in their cage [yeah that's right...laughter]. And I wasn't! And um, I had Ned Kelly and a lion. You know, I've had lions in all sorts of things. And I've used the, I've used the South Perth Zoo about three or four times as people travelling across the water and hearing lions and things. We'd been on a safari where, um, through, in a way having to face up to, not that I initiated it, having to face up to my...I used to dream about lions as a kid, all the time, and they were coming to the house and things. Because as I went to sleep you know there'd often be, roaring!

825.**CS:** Yeah, that's right so you were in that sort of hypnopompic [sic: hypnogogic] state just before you go to sleep and there's this sound comes out.

826.**W5:** And in the dreams I'd always be, they'd see me and they'd come towards me and I'd lie down, this is aged six or something, I'd lie down on the floor — in the dream — and they'd sniff me — you know I'd play possum and they'd sniff me and I'd be OK, and I'd wake up in the bed in the sleep-out. So I mean that lasted for years and years and years and I used to be scared of the MGM lion, you know, in the matinee...

827.**CS:** It's really interesting, I remember when Abe, my son, when he was about five or six. He could pretty well read by then, but he, and he'd sort of read everything and we used to get him, um, you know *Where's Wally?* you know that stuff? [mm, mmm], there's a *Where's Wally* magazine...

828.[tape end...described [my son's fear of stories about space and comets hitting the earth].

829....Something that's childlike, isn't there, about the state that you are describing? [mm]. You know, it is no coincidence that you started talking about yourself as a child and the lions roaring and things like that. I got that sense when you were talking about going to the alligator park, it wasn't just your kid who was [chuckling]...

830.**W5:** Oh no! Oh no! Absolutely not! I still, I mean without sort of boasting, but I enjoy playing with the kids and we have a great time and he likes the fact that I do

things with him that other kids' fathers don't do. I don't mind, you know I like going to his movies with him and I like going to the zoo and that sort of stuff. Just the same as I like going to art galleries too, in a way, to see good paintings, and good... And I'm a film critic as well, but I get something for me out of those things.

831.**CS:** Yeah, exactly. And there is something I think that we lose there in that, and that is this sense of presence to things, and not just the surface of them. I guess what I'm thinking of is, you know the way kids have imaginary friends and [yeah] oh just...when you were describing the gravel. I've ended up telling most of the writers this, but I had a very vivid memory as a kid picking up a little rock. And it was almost like it was — it was an ordinary little stone — but I remember having it in my hand and it was like it was glowing, you know, and it had a personality, and I remember thinking 'I better not tell any adults about this, they'll start to worry.' [yeah]. You know but it was really alive for me, it was like, it was precious [yeah!]. Do you know what I mean? And it was such a strong experience and it seems to me that is exactly what you are talking about [mmm], you know when things strike you, strike your eye as it were [mmm]. And it is very much about feeling though isn't it? I mean it is a body state, of a sort of energy or something like that.

832.**W5:** Yeah, well it's um, its certainly all where it comes together. Um...I'm remembering, well I had an imaginary friend too, called John Gordon, or so I'm told. I can't remember it, but the child I am speaking of the son, the eldest child, a five year gap between you know, siblings. Um...But if I see something slightly harsh or cruel happening to a child — and I don't mean, like everyone would, like being hit, say, by a parent. But if I see a father brow-beating a child, it has a really very strange effect on me, it makes me feel very, very bad. Whether that's projection, or whatever [no, not necessarily]. Part of it's me as the child, part of it's me as the father that wouldn't do it, to his...

833.**CS:** Well it's probably emotional sensitivity. I mean...

834.**W5:** But it makes me feel *very* bad. You know. I think about it, I go home and write it down, you know, I make a note about it, for whatever reason.

835.**CS:** No, I think I know what you mean. I have a friend writing a book on, it's really a book about spontaneity, but his view is that emotions are primarily communicative devices. That we are inherently built, nature has built us to respond, to participate in the being of the other person, to [right]...as in sympathetic motion almost. So when a baby cries, is upset, the normal thing is for us to feel as the baby feels [mmm]. Not to cry, but to feel it, and then to fix it [mmm]. And then over time we're basically taught to inhibit that, you know to suppress it, and so those sorts of

experiences when people are really brow-beating young children, most people don't find that distressing because they've cut off [mmm] their sort of emotional resonance, their emotional sympathy. But you couldn't be writing the sorts of novels and doing the sorts of things you do and not have that openness.

836.**W5:** Mmm. But It's funny, I mean it just, I can remember another case walking past Woolworths in Park Street one day and seeing an obviously recently, newly-arrived migrant family, I don't know from where, but they had, they had sort of middle-European clothes on, and um, they'd gone inside and bought the little boy, they hadn't, I don't know why they wouldn't take him in with them to try them on, but he and the mother waited outside — I mean it was that sort of stuff. He and the mother waited outside in the street while the father went in and bought a pair of shoes, a pair of sneakers, Woolies sneakers for the boy. But the look of delight on the boy's face as the father brought out this thing, it was just extraordinary! I mean it was absolutely extraordinary! And it was a very, it was a very moving moment and I wonder if they fitted or not! [chuckling]. But I just looked as I was going past, but it was extraordinary! It was, and I've thought about it since, I mean it was a pretty mundane sort of moment really, but um, but it really, it was the only thing happening in the street, you know, as far as I was concerned at that time. It was a really, gigantic sort of thing. The look on the boy's face was beatific.

837.**CS:** Yes, it's very interesting, and then again, we come back to this idea then. Like that could become a metaphor for a whole book couldn't it? [mmmmmm]. I mean, this sort of sense of, you know, you then thinking: 'Well why did that move me so much [mmm] and what was it about the boy? What is it about the relationship? [mmm]. What does it say about how we normally are? [mmm]. What does it say about how I raise my son?'. You know [oh sure] what does it say about our culture and the way we are inundated [yeah] with, you know, materialism and so on?

838....[break....]

839. You mentioned about talking a lot about when you get really excited about a project and you are into it and you want to tell everybody.

840.**W5:** Well, I don't want to tell them, I want to NOT tell them; however, when I'm asked I spill the beans. You know, so I'm actually resistant to telling them anything about it.

841.**CS:** How come?

842.**W5:** Well, I don't want it to get out. I want it to, because it would be better, you know the element of surprise will be good.

843.**CS:** Oh, OK. And people will steal it too, of course.

844.**W5:** Yeah, exactly. And also I do think that if you talk something out then everyone says this is a bit of a cop-out, but if you talk it before you've written it, it tends to be lesser in some way. It's all those things. However, if I am actually into it and it's occupying my mind at the time, once I start, then it seems such a good story that I can't help telling it [yes]. You know, I presume. You can tell by people's reaction. If you're talking about, you know, your writing 'My latest sonnet is such and such about...', you know... 'What time is it?' [laughter].

845.**CS:** That's right. It's that old tale where people are telling people their dreams you know [laughter].

846.**W5:** Well if you are actually telling them about somebody you know who killed people, and he was hanged and this is what they found he did, the, you know, it's different.

847.**CS:** That's true. What about this sort of, the social side of things. I mean. There are two dimensions I'm interested in. One is the very obvious dimension. Most people have their important people in their lives that they need, or want to, to talk to about their processes, you know [right]. So that's one level. The other level is to what extent is our creative thinking sort of socially-imbued or socially-structured or socially constituted. Does either of those give you an avenue to say something?

848.**W5:** Umm... Well I guess creativity is for me bound up in what's going on around me. I mean one of the reasons, there's an old, hardy perennial lecture topic at writers' conferences which is 'Why do I write?'. And it's always, you know, it saves me time sort of thing. But it, but if you do actually think about it, if you are a writer and you think about it, and I'm trying to pin it down as accurately as I can for me, it's because I want to understand how things are. And until I see it written down by me I don't know what I think, which until I see myself, written down. And um, it's all a matter for me of trying to make sense of my, in a way, you know without getting too sort of municipal about it [laughs], about my community, and um, you know, Randwick, say then, Sydney, and then Australia and then the world, sort of thing. Um, so it's sort of, I'm educating myself with each book in a way. I mean at one level. You know I'm trying to see how it all fits in, you know, where everything comes together and... by me recording that, even if what I'm recording is totally out of my imagination, it seems to make um, it seems to make the world a skerrick more easy to understand.

849.**CS:** And you said something quite a while ago about it never quite matches the vision you had for it.

850.**W5:** Well because my vision, when I'm in that state of excitement, it carries you over the threshold to do it, then I obviously think the sky's the limit. You know, this is, this is going to be the best book ever written, sort of thing. Which is necessary — this is one of the ruses of course — so it's mainly that I think.

851.**CS:** What about the sense in which narratives seem to come or dialogues seem to come. One of the things I'm interested in as well is that seems that things come as wholes almost, you know, like writers talk about, they get into that sort of creative flow and it's like they've got to keep writing and the narrative just seems to flow and they've got to write to keep up with it, not all the time. I mean, as you say, sometimes 200 words would be wonderful in a day [yeah]. But other times it's almost like they're transcribing. Is that sometimes?

852.**W5:** I'd like it. I must say, I'd really like it to be the case...it's more plugging along for me [OK]. It's plugging along and then making it seem that as if it had come like that [chuckles]. I mean in a way it's making it seem effortless really. That's part of the deal.

853.**CS:** Maybe I've misrepresented it a bit too. I know about the sort of, which I think is likely bullshit [the muse] that's right... 'inspired writing' [chuckling], you know like William Blake and that sort [yeah] of thing. But maybe it does happen to some people but...

854.**W5:** It happens in bursts every now and then [yeah]...not often enough for me.

855.**CS:** Yeah, I think everyone would like that to happen [yeah]. It would make the process a lot easier, wouldn't it? But some sort of sense there though that what one's being faithful to is a sort of, It's almost like an ecological validity to the way something is presented. It's like you're creating life again, or the social matrix, or, you know, trying to get this to be real or something like that.

856.**W5:** Yeah, I mean you're getting into the God areas in a way.

857.**CS:** I wasn't thinking about that, but please explain! [laughing]

858.**W5:** No, but the playing God thing [oh, OK] as the novelist is, I mean, in a way is the, well it's the general overview in a sense, to a degree, and it's also certainly if you use, if you're using the third person you can make, you make people's minds, you can make them distinct, you make them walk. You are not just saying 'He went up to the shops.'; you are saying and he was thinking 'Shit...I need such and such.'. And there's very much, that is a freeing exercise in itself. The choice, of, I mean having chosen that voice. Third person gives you much more range. But it doesn't personalise it obviously like first person does. And second person sounds a bit lectury and you know 'You do this, you do that' sort of thing. But...And I'm using

first person now and it's another restriction I'm finding apart from non-fiction, in that I'm wondering how I'm going to get inside the murderer's head. So I think there's going to have to be a sort of bit of guile and sort of business to get through to get to that. So it's um...I mean the only way, the easiest way to deal with everything, the life around you, the social aspect of things, is the third person which gives you total sort of freedom, but um, and is often easier to read. I've had people say to me — I don't know how restricted they are in their minds — people come along to a talk and they say 'I couldn't read your book.' Well. OK. [thank you very much! Laughter]. 'I loved all of them, but this one was written in the present tense.' ...So do you know what I mean? Why should that restrict them? They'd like to have had it happened already.

859.**CS:** Yes sometimes people are like that, aren't they? I mean reading books is funny anyway, isn't it? I mean you'll be in a mood [yes] and then you pick it up a year later and it's 'Why didn't I read this?' [yeah]. What about telling people? I know that...principally writers have said to me, 'When I'm really in it I don't want to tell people what it is about.' But almost all of those have said that there are points at which there are certain people in their lives that they want to talk to about what they're doing. Do you have people like that?

860.**W5:** Well, the only one really would be my wife [a novelist/short-story writer] who's in the area and knows about that sort of thing. But in a sense um, perhaps because of that I tend to leave it, I tend not to tell anyone until it's really quite late. She's the first person to read it, but it is a completed...she gets the paper, you know she gets the manuscript. And then she comments, before anyone else, before a publisher. But I don't go to her with little sort of problems like 'How will I get them, you know, to Fiji or something when they are in Sweden.'

861.**CS:** I remember [W1] saying that um, I've forgotten her partner's name, but anyway saying that he's perfect because she'll go and talk about something and he'll just grunt [mmm] and that's all she wants [mm] you know. She'll have the sense that he understands or whatever or is sympathetic [mmm], but she doesn't want a comment or a guidance or something like that. But it's more like, it's very important to her to go occasionally and say 'I'm doing this ...what do you think about this image?' and he'll go 'mmm yeah...' [mmm] um, so I sort of wonder. There's something I haven't quite got my head around, with writers anyway. And that is, you see the whole process presumably is about communication, because you are writing words that people are going to read. But in lots of ways that seems to be very background or very...do you know what I mean?

- 862.**W5:** Yeah. I don't...I know I've read interviews all the time with people saying that they, of course without their wife they'd never would have written such and such. And um, they are just people who aren't even in the business. But I mean I couldn't say that because I...I'm just a bit too scared I suppose that if she, that if I got any — and she is the same with me... — that we just need me to pick up a hint of not liking it or disapproval or something and it would wreck it! It would wreck it.
- 863.**CS:** I think that's what [W1]said [yeah]. He's perfect and he's a writer too so he understands...
- 864.**W5:** So I really can't. I need to be totally convinced. It needs to be finished and I need to be totally convinced of it. Then I'll show her. And then if she points something out I'm confident enough to either dismiss it or to take it on. And I do. She has done that. I've said 'That's a good point'. And certainly things like you've got, you know, he went in that door and you've got him somewhere else. You know, all those sorts of structural things...just sort of editing.
- 865.**CS:** Yes that's interesting because I interviewed [W4] yesterday, and even though it's different because he's talking about dramaturgy and things like that [mmm], but his role as a dramaturg with young writers is very similar to that. Like he basically sees his role as saying 'Now what's your vision? Keep it to the vision. Don't worry about all the structural things.', and so on, and it was very much this sense of being very...um, solicitous and very gentle with the writers and saying 'It's all right. Keep to your vision. Trust yourself.'. It's very much a sort of counselling role...[mmm], which I think is exactly what you are saying, you know. Just even one negative comment could be enough to really floor them. It's a very delicate process in terms of self-validation and self-concern.
- 866.**W5:** Oh absolutely! Yeah. This is one of the ruses and um generally sort of bullshitting yourself that you know what you are doing and you'll do it.
- 867.**CS:** So that's where the social comes in too I guess...It's important, it's really important. It's important to the extent that we're so easily deflated if someone else...
- 868.**W5:** Oh yes. It divides into thirds for me. A third of the time, in any project, and it's always about the same proportions, a third of the time I think it's terrific and the vision has held. A third of the time I think it is absolute bullshit, and say I'm looking at a word — if you look at any word long enough, you know, it looks nonsensical, on large-scale...Don't translate that...multiplied by a hundred thousand. And a third of the time I don't know. And it's exactly that. I don't. A third of the time. That's the three thirds, and there's the terrible feeling when you finally hand the manuscript over to the publisher and there's sort of more worries in it than I know, but I don't

have to worry if it's going to get published or not, do you know what I mean? That's not a worry of mine. But, so I know that they, I'm not sure that they'll be dinkum with me. I'm not sure if they'll say...

869.**CS:** It's a bit different because you have been well published and your name is going to sell them and so...

870.**W5:** So I'm never quite sure whether they're um 'Yeah that's really good.', which would mean to anyone else 'That's shithouse.', really. So I've always got to, I mean I'm always on tenterhooks when I've submitted a manuscript.

871.**CS:** And then when do the tenterhooks come out? When are you more at peace?

872.**W5:** When enough people who I...say when the agent says it's really good, the — although you see I don't...I must say I trust my own judgement better than I do theirs. So even if they both were not that enthusiastic, that wouldn't be quite it. That would disappoint me...but um. You know I sort of write the sort of books that I like to read and I know that they read other sorts of books. So I think, I just think my judgement's better. However, I can still be offended and put off if they didn't like it. So I guess when the first positive from someone important...A really positive review from Andrew Reimer, say in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, their main critic, then I'm right then.

873.**CS:** Yes 'cos he's a fairly hard critic too isn't he [yeah].

874.**W5:** So um. Yeah it's sort of pathetic...but um...

875.**CS:** Well that's what I'm interested in. It's not pathetic, I mean...largely what writers do, and I think creative people generally, is they are going against nature. You know, what they are doing is...you see I think human beings are basically wired to anticipate the world. And uhh, now we have an amazing capacity that when we reach impasse of any sort, to sort of , you know, if we are not too threatened by it, to become playful with things [mmm] you know. But really it's quite amazing to me that we then often deliberately put ourselves in situations of deep uncertainty and so on [mmmm], you know what I mean? There's something magnificent and crazy about it at the same time?

876.**W5:** And also very threatening to some other people [oh yes!] because it's just, and this is more a curiosity to me, that when I was a journalist full-time for 10 years, and I've been a novelist for about 20 or something, but when I was a journalist to my knowledge I had no enemies. But I was in a company structure so there were people under me and there were people over me There were people jealous of me, there were people who weren't. But as far as I knew, they, none of them hated me. But people I don't know hate me now! You know what I mean? [yes] because of something I've

written [exactly] or what I represent: Sydney writing rather than Melbourne writing or something. Do you know what I mean?! I mean all these fucking stupid labels. Or that I'm straight and not gay, or that I'm a novelist and not a poet, or, do you know what I mean? They sort of generalise whether they just happen to, or that I'm successful. That'll do it!

877.**CS:** Especially if they've just written their first novel and no-one has accepted it.

878.**W5:** So it's um, I mean all these things are a bit strange and um a bit sort of woolly and silly, so you have to, um...and very provincial and you've really got to look, I've got to constantly look at the sort of big picture. I don't mean in terms of...not in subject matter, necessarily, although there's nothing the matter with that, but I have got to really think beyond the little pool and think of what the absolute creative possibilities that are there and that I might possess, and that are there for my work. Um, and remind myself of that in some way or another.

879. WRITER 6

880.**CS:** So the first thing I want to ask is how do you go about organising your creative life? What do you do? Its a big question! [laughter], you can start anywhere. I mean you can revisit it [laughter].

881.**W6:** Chris. See I'd probably immediately say what do you mean, my writing life or my creative life? I don't think I organise my creative life as such. Um...Organise my writing life and my professional life or, whatever, umm, and...Look! Head me off or stop me if I'm not keeping to the point. I generally work within a context of having a wife who has a business which requires her to be out of the house, and my working at home and having a twelve year child who has to be looked after above all by me, or whose school etc. etc., needs to be taken care of by me. So I have usually a fairly abbreviated day at each end. I, by and large, I work in a separate part of the house...yeah a study up there [points to back garden] which actually was originally designed for, um, [partner] to deal in books in from home, she, it's packed with books as it happens, but it's more where I work and...But because it's a complete dwelling, it's got all the facilities and the rest of it, it's a place where we have friends stay frequently...So, there's a...ah, it's not sacred for me. People come and stay there and I've got to work elsewhere, yeah. But um,...oh God I was reading, re-reading a review of myself by an Irish writer the other day. It's a review I constantly refer to for various reasons because the first book I wrote, and it got published in

1982, it got into the hands of a man who was editor of a thing called *Books Ireland*, which is an Irish, straight book review kind of thing, and he sent it to review, for review, as a favour to me to someone who then did, um, a marvellous hatchet job on the book. But...and he started off by saying um — you knew where the review would lead— his opening line was ‘I have never yet met an Australian I like’ [laughter] umm...[that’s relevant isn’t it!]. So!...but, one of the things he actually accused me of was that there was not a whit of concentration here. And it’s um, that was as near as we got to actually talking about the book, but um, it’s as dismissive as I can be of the review generally because of the animus that obviously fuelled it. That’s worried me a bit, and, um, I think partly, um, perhaps I simply have not been as, well as concentrated as devoted, um, to writing as I, let’s say, imagine some or a lot of other writers are. My day is shorter. I by and large probably write shorter books and I take a long period between getting them out and it’s partly these sort of factors that come into play.

882. Also, though, I sometimes wonder if in fact my actual concentration, that is keeping my mind, or keeping circulating in my mind material that I’m dealing with at the moment...whether I do that as much as perhaps I should or I would like. In fact I know that I feel good about the work that I’m doing if in fact I am partly distracted, um, at any time of the day. You know that I go to bed actually thinking about something I’m trying to write. And, by and large, that’s not that common...Um...And I’d probably like it to be.

883.CS: Does that happen at particular stages of the book?

884.W6: Um...It’s...I’m concentrating more near the end of books, I mean I’ve just finished something at the moment in the last week or two. Finished what I regard as finished for the moment.

885.CS: That’s pretty well what every writer has told me actually. That it’s the same for them.

886.W6: Really? Well um, to some extent I compare it to my Jesuit days when I was in doing philosophy and...I frequently, I would say, well very frequently I would fall asleep actually thinking about matters that we have been discussing in lectures or whatever. But the intellectual content of my life was perhaps more dominating than it is perhaps now. Now, OK, I didn’t have a wife, a child and endless domestic responsibilities and the rest of it. I mean it was all handled in a religious life. It was how Aquinas could write all he wrote because he had nothing else to do, um, he was waited on hand and foot...And I know that’s part of it. But, yeah. It’s ambition. Always to be more concentrated than I am. To be....

- 887.**CS:** Why do you think, in the times when you are more concentrated? What's happening there? Why? Can you see any pattern in that?
- 888.**W6:** Um... Yeah I'd say it's either because things are going well and I'm enjoying what I'm doing and, not so much...I'm enjoying it, yeah, because I feel it's going well, because I can actually see a way ahead [yes] and...because even while I am seeing a way ahead new little problems are springing up so I get that sense of progress.
- 889.**CS:** So there's an overarching sense of progress that allows you to deal with the emerging problems with more of a sense of confidence or something like that?
- 890.**W6:** Yes. Yes exactly. I mean it's both going together. It's because I'm, I'm actually writing, the words are going down. I'm quite pleased with what I'm getting down and at the same time I am seeing the problems as I go, but because there is a sort of surge, I am confident about the ultimate outcome. I am pleased in fact that the problems are arising because I know that that's the book is getting more complex and interesting and more a challenge both to me and for the eventual reader. Yeah, yes, all those sorts of things.
- 891.**CS:** And the contrast between that and the times when it's not...what's happening for you personally, like I say when it's going bad?
- 892.**W6:** It....It...Let's say about three months ago, for example, I'd been working on this book for a couple of years and I, this particular book is another, the last few books I've done have all been autobiographical memoirs sorts of things, rather, they're not fiction really, except they're, perhaps they're...the chapters are individually...semi-short stories, semi-essays. So it's...I can't talk about myself as a fiction writer as such at the moment. But nevertheless that's the way it is. And so the last couple have been in this mode and this current one is about myself — and the way I usually describe it is 'my affair with Ireland'. And, um, Ireland has been a long-standing interest dating back to at least 1973 when I started a postgraduate degree in Irish literature and I have a lot to do with my grandfather who is Irish and all these things came together and I went to Ireland while I was doing the degree and so on and I've gone back many times since to keep up with things Irish. And I read a lot of Irish literature and I review Irish books and so on and so on. Um, and so this...it was...yeah this...this book arose out of...to some extent I've got all this material, all this Irish material. Now I want to do something with it. And...you know I suppose OK...I want to do something with it, but I don't want to do an analytical book × l×, say, Vin Buckley's *Memory Ireland* — which I think is a terrific book but...I... He was an academic, he was an intellectual in a way I don't

consider myself. He had a kind of brimming confidence that he could tell the Irish exactly what was wrong with them and do it in a way that diagnoses what [they must have hated that!]. No, indeed. Yes they certainly did not. But I think it's a very good book. Nevertheless I couldn't do that. Nor did I want it to be a travel book,.. merely nice things to see in County Leecham [?] and how I met x and y and so on. So part of the problem was what is it going to be? Also...There was a, there was an agenda underlying that I suppose which was that I'd started to write about, and I still do in various ways, myself and my son [son], thinking of writing a longer book about fatherhood. The...that became very problematic, partly because writing about a child is fraught in a way that writing about parents is simply not. And such a book would likely enough, therefore, be coming out right in the middle of his adolescence and so on and so on. You know, be careful. And it was even more fraught for me because, while I could be writing about fatherhood in the context of [son], my child...I have in fact another child extra-maritally, who um...So that I can't actually write about the marital child without it being...I wanted to talk about when I came to writing the Irish book. So, perhaps as a result of that I look, you know, I suspect that um, the way I...Ha!...To go back, the distinction I keep coming up against for myself is that while I was quite convinced by (as I was saying to you before) the Lonergonian account of cognitional activity and its, its — more than resemblance really — its more or less identity with what went on in myself, and I don't see any strong reason to reject that. Nevertheless, the insight there was that.

893. In the classic case you know Lonergan's examples are Newton's apple and Archimedes Eureka where it is sharp, sudden. It is clear [like mathematical examples and things like that]. Yes. Yes. Whereas for me as a writer it has never worked in that sort of way. It's...the Lonergonian examples, you know, they work for getting riddles and all those sort of jokes.

894. **CS:** In the cognitive literature they talk about well-defined puzzles and ill-defined problems...and most of life's circumstances are ill-defined problems, are definitely the latter [Right. Yeah, chuckle]. Where there may not even be an answer.

895. **W6:** Yes. Yes. So that although in retrospect when I'm writing I — particularly in retrospect I think — I say 'Yes. I had a certain insight there.', um...It's as though I don't recognise the insight for some time after I have had it. Or it has eased itself out rather than come in this sudden flash way that quite reflexively I notice happening at the time...It's a double pleasure of having the insight and realising you have the insight. It's not like that when I'm writing.

896.**CS:** No, most writers say that. There are sort of occasional occurrences of more direct insight when they realise they are having it. But mostly they talk about, they have a sort of initial surge of feeling that this is, that they are heading in a right direction. Or they discover a metaphor or a scene comes to mind, or an image and they just keep, it seems to be re-occurring or lead to things, and they've got to keep trusting to that and eventually towards the end they begin to see that this in fact was structuring the whole thing [yes]. And sometimes even they've published the book and they haven't realised it [yes, oh yes]. Someone has pointed it out to them [yes yes yes]. They see it with a sudden shock of recognition [yeah].

897.**W6:** Yeah, I mean I agree with that entirely. Oh, I must remember when I was a Jesuit there was a famous case. We used to publish a magazine called *Cognition*. I did my first writing and publishing in *Cognition*, but it was famous for the fact that some young Jesuit years ago, Bernard O'Brien, had written an article about *Four Quartets* or something or other. And God knows how but *Cognition* subsequently published a letter from TS Eliot saying 'I had never thought of this point you've made. It was not my intention. But now that you point it out I see in fact that it is there and you're perfectly right...but it never occurred to me.'. And this is happening all the time.

898.**CS:** What do you think is happening there because I'm very interested in this process where, often it is a metaphor that continues and resonates through a work or some sort sort of major theme. How come this can happen? That we can be spending years on a project, devoting our entire intellectual and emotional and financial resources to it and yet we can't quite see it, yet we follow it? I know that's a very difficult question I'm asking.

899.**W6:** ...[long pause] I better talk around it I suppose because I... Yes. I don't think it would ever be the...oh gee, the major metaphor; the major theme that you remain entirely unconscious of. See what um, in this particular case the book that I eventually decided...Ah...eventually...began to write was — the terms that I use — a book about my affair with Ireland. Now probably, that partly came from the rejected book — the whole notion of some sort of sexual thing that carried over, that kind of metaphor...was still there and had to be coped with and so that drifted across into this. But also...the fact that so traditionally Ireland was seen as a woman. I mean much more than any other country I can think of. But a terribly, well ambivalent or multivalent indeed, woman. And the classic locus for it must be um, Yeats' *The Countess Kathleen* where this old woman has come in and she's incited the young man to go and join the rebels, to join the French in 1778. She goes off and

someone else comes in and they say, the person who has just come in, 'Did you see an old woman going out?'. And he say s 'No. But I saw a young girl and she had the walk of a queen.'

900.And...so that Ireland is both a sort of a, a seductress, and yet a very maternal figure, mother figure: 'My four green fields. My four brave sons' rule this whole tradition'. Um she's ah...the woman who sends Wilde every mother's son and yet he's the mother of them all as well and so on and so on. So, that metaphor, which was a pre-existing metaphor, became a sort of a , yeah a bit of another hook in the way I started to develop this whole thing.

901.CS: It's not so much though that we are completely unconscious of the metaphors. But the significance doesn't...there seems to be that we follow the metaphor rather than we direct it or something like that?

902.W6: Um...ah...geee...[pause]. Yes...I don't know that we...yeah...the actual, the formation of an entirely new metaphor for something or other. I suspect that's rarer...Yes, there's some sort of pre-existing metaphor which we spin out and see many more relevances or meanings for. Yes, I suppose I probably like to do that in this book. For example, I think this is...the way I perhaps have worked, at least as conscious of the way as I have worked as I'm aware of, is a particular incident or a story, a few words will sort of seize my imagination. I can't say any more than that. I like them! I think 'That's nice. That's neat. That's moving. That's affecting. That's interesting.' Or something or other.

903.And , now what I do with it? What I do with that? It requires usually something else to suddenly hook into that and you start to see a connection. And not until the other hook comes along do I feel like I can use it and I...Now I wouldn't even say that I'm always aware: 'Right the other hook has arrived, I can now start.'. It's sometimes, I perhaps, I think 'Look...I've lived with enjoying this particular moment or this scene for a while. I'll start writing about that' and perhaps because I'm in the midst of doing something else the hook, the second hook emerges. I'm not being...when...

904.In this case for example. This book is set entirely in Ireland really, and incidents in Ireland. But, I'd been, a few years ago...I was staying with a brother of mine who lives outside Bungandore. And, he's got a little cottage and a few acres of hillside scrub. And sitting on the veranda and they look down towards Lake George. And I was there with his youngest child who was a baby of about six or seven months or something else. Sitting on the veranda there was [son] my son and his two cousins and they were mowing the lawn down the front and I was having to hold the baby

and the rest of it. Now, quite suddenly, the elder child who was about ten months older than [son] (they were all very close in age these three boys), they...he's mowing in a rectangle in this sort of paddock down the bottom and he sort of did his circuit and then he handed over to the next one and then he suddenly started 'rrrrrr', he started running up towards the veranda and towards us. I didn't know what was going on. He jumped over the veranda, ran on the veranda, bent down, kissed the baby sister, turned around... 'rrr' runs back just in time to...and this...I...wanted to do something with this lovely moment, lovely scene. But, but what was the meaning of it for my literary purposes? I didn't know. I mean, I had to give it a meaning.

905.**CS:** In a way you had to be true to it too, didn't you?

906.**W6:** Indeed! Yes I did. I did. So that went into the, into the sort of cupboard for a while. Now, as it happens, I mean I'll have to get people's reactions to it, I have made the last chapter for this book out of it. But OK, this last chapter is set in Bungadore. Now it's — whereas the rest of the book is set in Ireland — I think part of the connective, why I felt...felt. Why it was, let's say it forced itself into this book and why I felt justified in letting it force itself into this book was that the essentially there was a ritual dance of a kind going on and the dance metaphor has become probably the one of, if the main metaphor of the whole book [unifying], yes it is. And um, and I've used it as an epigraph. In fact I've got four dance things from Irish literature as epigraphs but the first one is that one Yeats says 'I am of Ireland, the holy land of Ireland. Come and dance with me in Ireland.'. And so there's a sort of closure to this because in fact the dance is in fact taking place amongst the family back in Australia and, but it's...[pause]...whether or not it works and the rest of it is [laughs] not relevant for the moment. But I think...yeah there was a moment when I felt, uhh, 'Yes there is reason, there is justification for this particular dance to come here as a sort of coda.'. And it was about, there are other elements that allow that to take place. It was about a new family, the beginnings of a new family, an Australian family, a very Australian family. It's out in the countryside, it's in a paddock and so on and so on — as opposed to the rest of the book.

907.In some ways the clearest moments of insight that I've perhaps been aware of always have been these moments when I can see a connection between two incidents or two of these that have gripped me or have seized me. My first book years and years ago, I mean a simple sort of story, but I always remember the, uhh, two separate experiences. One was that uhh [partner] [wife] and I were travelling in England going and visiting bookshops around the country and we were, we had a place called the Old Tower.

908.[phone message interruption].

909. We had an address, the Old Tower, and it was a bookshop. And we drove around and we could not find it, in the fields, somewhere in southern England. Then eventually we realised we were on, we saw old Nissan huts and the rest of it, and we realised we were on a kind of abandoned World War II RAF aerodrome and, and oh God, you know this is... And then suddenly we come this old control tower. And, of course, I had the image in my mind of the 'old tower' a sort of Yeatsian tower, a Miltonic tower, that sort of thing, something grand and the rest of it. But, no it was an old... and indeed the guy had his books and his bookshop and it was all terribly hideous. It was cold and it was bleak and all the books were affected by damp and so on. It was out in the middle of this flat... just you know weed strewn, bits of Nissan hut and concrete and the rest of it. But it was... it got me. I sort of, perhaps the, yeah... I liked the moment. I liked the incident. Then I... but again I didn't know what to do with that and then I read Ross Campbell — remember Ross Campbell, used to be a *Bulletin* journalist? Mainly famous for those books, books of columns. You know, 'Are you married daddy'? and so on — a thing that just wouldn't be a joke today. I mean nobody would be very interested [laughter] these days. But he did a book of reminiscences near the end of his life which I forget, but he was in, I think he must have been in bomber command, and he talked about how near the end of the war Luftwaffe pilots got very cheeky, daring, foolhardy, courageous, and they used to lurk around English aerodromes, fighter pilots, and wait for the bombers returning. Now the bombers were all, you know they were over their home base and they thought they were home safe at last as they were coming in to land. These Luftwaffe pilots would come out and, you know, just gun them down at the last moment. And um, I found it quite a shocking little story and suddenly I had a short story. I wanted to write a story about somebody who was in air traffic control and had not given pilots sufficient warning and as a result he locked himself in this tower that he committed his sin in, as it were, for the rest of his life and so on and so on. But it was, it required two quite similar experiences. One I read in a book, another something I had actually seen. Then to bring them together, to get a story out of it... But bang, I suddenly...

910. **CS:** Most of the accounts of insight have this quality where it's the bringing together of apparently unassociated [where the genius is, yeah] and bringing them together in such a way that the [telephone interruption] people involved see its rightness... yeah so this bringing together of disparate things. When did you see that link, when you were actually reading the article, the Campbell article?

911.**W6:** [pause...] No I don't think it was. I'm talking about a long while ago, I can't ...But ah, no...I...it wasn't. But I think the image had enough...it played on my imagination long enough to kind of resonate there for a while and probably, yes, setting some sort of resonances which [clicked fingers] brought the other back to mind as well. I think it...yeah I think more that...It was...as I say I found it disturbing, kind of horrific in its way. Now I have got this weakness. I've forced myself the other night — mainly because I wanted to check it out for [son], to go and see *Saving Private Ryan*. I kind of didn't want to, but I just couldn't sleep. Have you seen it? Oh it's, it's...It's kind of...Essentially it's a B-grade American war movie, but the images of the dying! Most hideous and I find that, they just, these sort of visual images do grip me and I can't...

912.**CS:** Well it's interesting. Most of the writers, if not all actually I'm thinking, have talked about this. About the way in which they are in a situation or they see an image and it pervades their consciousness, you know. Like [W5] told me about - I think it was outside Gowings in the city - what seemed like to him to be a newly arrived migrant family, sort of Eastern European. And the mother and the child stayed outside the shop and the father went in to buy these shoes. Oh no. It was Woolworths, that's right, and came out with a pair of Woolworths runners, you know. And he said the look on the child's face was absolute joy. You know like beatific, you know [yes, yes]. Just the way he was retelling the story and obviously it made such an impression on him, comparing it to our kids, you know. You don't give them a good enough Sony game they're disappointed [chuckle] and this kid got a \$5 pair of...[yes, yes, yes]. But this had obviously really made a very profound impact on him. What I'm interested in, and you mentioned it there, it's like it sets up some sort of resonance. But there's a sort of a, it's incomplete, or it hasn't had its full expression yet, or it creates a sort of tension or something like that.

913.**W6:** Yes, yes. It's...it's got to find partners or it's got to become a link in a chain somehow or other to acquire its full meaning, or a new meaning. You...it's as though you...and I've taken it in as a gripping image, but I want to reinforce and somehow alter and amplify that meaning. And I have to do it with other connectives, other associated images. But I've got to find those and I've got to give it a new life somehow or other. And not just the meaning it originally had for Ross Campbell or for me when I read it in Ross Campbell, but um...yeah. It's a new and an enhanced life if you think of it in those terms.

914.**CS:** And in the way that you described it too it's not just a...if such a thing is possible, it's not an emotionally neutral grasp of something. As you say it is a

gripping image. It's something that moves you [yes] quite strongly [yes. yes]. And this seems to be a very very important part of it that it involves the person emotionally, you know, intellectually, sometimes bodily.

915.**W6:** Yes. It can vary. The sort of...the other, an early, again, example I cited was ...a woman came here one night for dinner and she was at the time, she was over 40. Her mother had died a year or two previously. She was a single woman and she lived on a country property in southern Queensland. And she talked about being out in the country and she would occasionally need household items. And she said 'But before I shop I always go and have a look at one of mother's wedding presents.' 'What do you mean mother's wedding presents?'. And she said 'Well...to see if there was any of the things I needed amongst mother's wedding presents.' 'What do you mean? Are they all still there as such?'. 'Oh yes' she said. 'Mother never opened her wedding presents.' And I said, you know, the obvious thing...now the woman's over 40, therefore the mother got her presents 40 years ago. I said 'Why did your mother never open her presents?'. And she looked blankly at me and said 'Oh!...oh the war I suppose?' [laughter]. Now I mean, but there again it was a...it wasn't emotionally gripping. It was just so weird!. But the question was obvious. Why? You've got to say. So to some extent I had...my story was there much more ready-made in a sense. I had to come up with an answer to the question why. So I wanted to write a story and indeed I did. I mean I wrote a story 'Wedding Presents for Breakfast' and it was about not opening one's wedding presents but it was kind of giving it a reason, giving a context. Trying to make up a story that would make sense of that kind of action. That was a fairly much more straightforward kind of thing in a way because I just, I came up with an answer. And you know it's a light-hearted, comicy sort of story.

916.**CS:** That's right. But you see it doesn't have to be pathos, it doesn't have [no, no] to be...I mean that one, there's still an emotional tone there in that isn't there?. It's sort of like 'This is intriguing!'. 'This is surprising.'. 'This is a bit funny.' [yes yes yes]. And its those qualities that then make your creation work [yes, yes]. Like the image would be empty if it was just a formulation, a sort of mathematical formulation [yes, yes, yes]. And it seems to be that that you have to be true to...[yes, yes, yeah].

917.**W6:** Yes...perhaps true to the way I received it to some extent in the first place. Though in fact the teller of the story, if you like the original guardian of the story, wasn't even a story...it was just sort of something that happened to come out in passing, talking about a nice teapot she used recently, or something.

918.**CS:** There's something about what she told you, moved you and then sets up a process whereby you need to articulate that [yes] in some way [yes]. And you're not sure at the time what it is.

919.**W6:** Yes yes. It's...yes I mean it's certainly is, it...The underlying process is the time I suppose, is of finding a new pattern, giving a new meaning, setting up a new structure that doesn't previously exist, even if it is an intelligible structure.

920.**CS:** But it's not as if — you probably are familiar with the philosopher Susanne Langer, and her, she makes a distinction between what she calls representational consciousness and presentational consciousness. Broadly the distinction is that our more, like language, tends to be representational in the sense, not the way a poet would use it, but in the everyday sense in which the medium becomes less important. We can...names of objects are fairly arbitrary [yep]. Things can represent other things. But it seems to me that most of our life is lived within, and she says that presentational consciousness is much more primary. You know, for example, music operates entirely in a presentational mode. It still communicates, it still has messages, but they're not...you can't describe a piece of music without changing it [yeah]. You know, you don't get it. It has to be in that medium [yeah, yeah]. And it seems to me that's what also you are describing, um. You just can't tell somebody in a representational way what happened to you when that woman came into your house and just off the cuff mentioned this thing. So what you had to do was find a way to communicate it, not literally, but figuratively, so that it holds something of the communication, but not in a representational way.

921.**W6:** Yeah, yep, yes. Yes. Yeah I know. I'd agree with that entirely.

922.**CS:** So, to come back to our earlier discussion about Lonergan, it's not about the sort of...necessarily...you have an aha!. But the only way you can communicate it is by giving the person the whole short story or the novel...and even then they may not get it.

923.**W6:** Yes, yes ...Yes...but I wouldn't want to um...I do want to insist on its being something...that you are not just passing on. It's something that you are [creating] creating, yeah. [oh absolutely]. It's a new entity. Which is why I...I think it's a new element that you are looking for, or you are adding elements together all the time so that [oh yes]. I had one sort of experience with the Ross Campbell and another sort of experience with this aerodrome...um. Although each of them were images personally arresting for me, in their own right, what I eventually wanted to create was not just to transmit those two [absolutely not, no] feelings, but something new as well.

924.**CS:** And this raises another question, a sort of philosophical question. And that is that if one takes a more naïve realist, objectivist view, then an insight isn't just an insight, it's an insight into reality the way it is, and it's fairly cut-and-dried. Or, perhaps a less objectivist view would say that insight is a way of creating coherent patterns of meaning. [yes. Yes]. That aren't necessarily unrelated to reality [no, no]. And I think what you are saying obviously is in more accord with the latter. [yeah]. You know it's not like you wanted to capture what happened in this room and then give it to someone [yes, yes].

925.**W6:** No! No...um...But the great phrase to me in the olden days always used to be — must have been Aristotle — 'the mind is as it were all things' and that um, for the mind, or anima you know, human soul, um...that is...What you are trying to do is to get that other human soul, your reader and the rest of it, to find him, herself in all these other forms, all the time, experiencing reality in it, you know. It's a protean thing. Get them into this new, new form, new way of being in the world, new way of living [yep].

926.**CS:** You see, that's what I think is interesting. In my own work I'm looking at the way in which what insight reveals, and I don't necessarily think of insight as just this sort of moment of aha!...It's definitely a process that moves in cycles. You know the classic stages are the preparation period, then an impasse and then the aha!, and then elaboration and the verification. And then, as you say, other problems come up, so then there's a new preparation period, an impasse and it's sort of ongoing and there can be larger ones operating and then smaller ones inside [yeah, yep] it and so on. Um...what were we just saying? I think I just lost my track.

927.**W6:** Ah...um....Talking about insight.

928.**CS:** Oh yes. Involving the reader [yes yes]. You know you talked about the protean nature of it [yep] and so it's like what insight reveals is a different way of being and it's certainly a different mode of, um, of thought. A different mode of being such that...Let me tell you for example. Sometimes there have been experiments done —you'll like this — with people they call 'creatives' versus 'normals' [laughter] by which I think they mean people who are, you know, are actively involved as you are in creative things...And they give them, they take a baseline EEG measure, their brainwaves and so on, and then they give them an IQ test to do, you know, and they measure where they peak, and what the level of activation is. And roughly the creatives tend to have a lower level of EEG generally, but when they do the IQ test they roughly climb to the same levels in activation. When they, sorry in IQ tests, when they give them a creativity test, something very

interesting happens. They find that 'normals' tend to go up the same level as they did for the IQ test, but the 'creatives' have a tendency to go below their baseline!. So what they are finding is they have a much broader spread of activation across the neocortex and the brain generally, but the activations are all not as extreme, not as high [yeah, yeah yeah]. And some of the speculations that come from that is that what happens is, it's more like a meditative state of mind where there are a lot more associates being triggered simultaneously but none of them are sort of being pre-empted, you know [yeah yeah]. Which would allow for a much broader possibility of grabbing analogy and metaphor and so on. But it also is subjectively experienced differently for the person, you know. It is more like a meditative state in which they are calmer and they report a sort of looser mental processes and daydream and reverie and absorption in the task [yes]...and less distraction. You were talking before about less distraction. So, it does seem to me what you are talking about is involving the reader in a similar process. What you want them to do is to recreate that process. Is that the way, for example, you experience it when you read? And something grips you?

929.**W6:** [long pause]. Uhh...[laughs]. Yeah it seems a contradiction, I suppose. But in some ways I'm always very conscious when reading that this is a new intelligence being brought to bear and I am very, I am reading it and I think very intelligently and so on, but I am reading it very partially, at least very partially in comparison to all sorts of other potential readers, and maybe even vis-à-vis the author. Yeah, to what extent is my pleasure at, um, say Wordsworth's *Daffodils*, reproduced in another mind or another intellectual-emotional being? I find that a sort of a strange one. I know my feelings of, feelings I've got of a sort of harmony, symmetry, contained beauty which makes me feel very euphoric. Um...the words, the pictures the words have evoked, have wrought me into a certain state and I kind of, I'm terribly agnostic about whether or not people feel the same sort of way, I suppose. I'm not answering your question directly [no, you are I think]. So that although you know when you are a writer, you're, um...but then again I, I'm probably not [laughs]. I sometimes wonder whether if I were a reader I would be interested in the sorts of things that I write [yes!]. I mean I really do.

930.**CS:** Well, you see, most writers have said to me that they don't really think about their readers too much [No. I think] because if they did, that would dry up the well.

931.**W6:** Yes, yes. You need a certain number of readers who'll come back to you and say 'I really liked that.' [that's right]. But you probably won't press the point and

ask them exactly what they liked or really try to grill them too much. But you know they're there and that's necessary for you.

932.**CS:** And I remember [W1] told me that she was just blown over by the occasional person who said something moved her, or moved him [yes!] when she was reading. It was so important to her to [yes, yes] hear that, and miraculous almost [yes, yes].

933.**W6:** Yeah that's...yeah I agree entirely. Um...but I...um...But there is this gap, as I say, where I don't, um, yeah, I don't know if I was introduced to [W6]'s writing and I was somebody else I would bother reading it. I really don't all the time. I just have that kind of...I don't know what you call it. This is probably diverging a bit but I thought of a distinction I want to make. Uhhh...There is I suppose what you're calling the creative insight as to the way in which I am dealing with metaphors, reworking incidents and so on, and um, then there's also a much more obviously technical kind of insight [yes].

934. For example, I think I started to say a long while ago and, um, deflected myself, um...I'd been writing this book for a couple of, for a long while, and I had...and to some extent it wasn't written in a...strictly chronological way. I was doing pieces and all the time I would be re-thinking 'Well that might go before that. No. I've just written that. That probably comes way back there.'...And so on and so on. But I was withholding the reading of it, um, from A to Z, until about three months ago. And I sat down and 'Right, I'm going to read it today'. And um, I read for day one and I got quite depressed. I thought. 'No this, is not...as a reader I'm not, I don't, I'm not rating this very highly.'. I read day two and I was, I felt much better. But the thing about it was that I think I saw pretty immediately, I mean it was an insight, it was a fairly straightforward insight, why I had been depressed by day one, and why I was not by day two.

935. The first half of the book suffered from a particular....What was, in fact was going on was that part one was far too analytical, semi-sociological. Whereas part two of the book was, you know, much more of this dramatised, personalised experience [touching the feelings] yes, much more. The first part was something I liked doing but shouldn't have done in this context. I mean this was...If I'm going to do an article about contemporary Ireland, well this is the sort of stuff that I write. But this is a book, and not about contemporary Ireland [yes]. So, so it was um, yeah, that was a pretty sharp and immediate insight [that's right] um, as to what was wrong and, of course, that...and initially I just felt sort of depressed and thought 'Oh my God', you know, 'this is not good.'. In contrast to the second day I still felt this is not good, but

I didn't feel so depressed about it because I knew, I had seen also what was wrong and...

936.**CS:** And also it's often a question of just looking at it on another day.

937.**W6:** Yeah. Though...no, no, I knew it was wrong [oh sure!]. I knew it had to be rewritten.

938.**CS:** But you know, sometimes that, there's something about emotion too, like the depression. It's not that you, anyway, this is probably getting a bit off the point, but the second day, often it is just a simple matter of having a sleep [laughing] and [yes] and coming back and thinking 'Yes it's bad...but I don't feel so bad'.

939.**W6:** Yes, Oh no, it is. No I don't um....Yeah... I mean it didn't last. I mean it...If I hadn't been able to see my way, see what was wrong with it [it would have deepened it!]. Yes indeed. But as I did almost immediately, um I felt well that was a useful...

940.**CS:** I guess the only reason I bring that up is that one of the constants of the insight literature is this sense of putting something aside for a bit, and coming back to it later [yes yes]. Um, we do get trapped in assumptions and feelings, and that frequently, almost universally, people talk about well...get frustrated up to a point, and depressed or whatever language they use. And they either just leave it in disgust, or quite consciously put it aside, knowing that when they come back to it later they are much more likely to see, get an insight into what the problem is.

941.**W6:** Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, I mean the time lapse is uhh...it's kind of terribly important. I know I've sent this manuscript off for a few people to look at and I know already, I'm starting to think 'No, chapter such and such [redraft].', yes. But even, um, this was a case of seeing something something I, I did it. This book worked in...I mean I re-read, I re-read...I kept a journal of the first time I went to Ireland and I wrote a lot of letters back to my family. And I had all those, and I re-read all those. And to some extent I made notes on what ones, incidents, moments seemed to be worthwhile thinking about doing something about. Um, and uhh, one particular incident, for example, was that, uhh, I met a girl at a dance who...I met a girl at a dance [smiling], who...um...and I didn't choose that because 'I met a girl at a dance', but obviously, you know the metaphor's playing there and it hooked it in. Ummm and she — I was having a bit of a whinge at the locality I was in which was Carlowe, and saying it was very dreary and culturally dead place and so on and so on — So she said 'Come over to Bagnall's Town', where she lived 'and sometime I'll show you around. I'll show you the real Ireland.'. And I did. I went over and um, she showed me around. She showed me three things. She took me to a forge, which

was still working as a forge. She took me home to her parents for a meal and the father was a great sportsman and had caught a salmon or something or other and we cooked it for dinner and had that. And she took me to visit a very elderly single lady who was the remnant of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in that town, who lived in this grand old crumbling mansion. And...um...now I, I remembered...I suppose I remember that because she was a nice, oh I felt a bit sort of sweet towards her for a day or two, and it was a nice sort of day's gesture and so on and so on.. And I wanted to use it...but only in the writing of it and starting to...and I realised all sorts of other things about it. Such as, that, you know, the THREE, that she gave me three things, you know, hence, you know three wishes. But also, and not until I really had finished a draft of it, did I suddenly see that, and this was...I...that in fact I had had reservations about all three of the things she had offered me, yes. One was that the forge was disappointing. It was kind of small and it wasn't very...terribly noisy and so and so on [laughing]. Secondly, I never did like fish very much [laughing]. And thirdly, the mansion was so crumbling and so on and so on, the high point of it was that she had this collection — upstairs in the bedrooms, she had this, all these trestle tables. I mean it was BARE and it was run down. I mean there was no wallpaper, NOTHING. Nothing at all in all these bedrooms upstairs except trestle tables, trestle tables, and the trestle tables were full of shells, her collection of shells. But kind of, the shells were like you would pick up on any beach in Australia! [laughing]. Any child would get all these shells in any one holiday. So. So I...suddenly realised that ...OK I've talked about being given wishes, and about being thrilled about being given wishes, but being...sort of, somehow or other cold-eyed, ah, about the wishes as well, and finding something not, not nasty at the heart of them, but something sort of slightly lacking for my particular needs, or particular outlook and the rest of it...each of those.

942.CS: See there's something in what you are saying and we talked before about the presentational mode of consciousness and there's another theorist — I won't go into much detail here but — he talks, he's more a psychoanalytic background. But he talks about what he calls two modes of thought, and it sort of can fit a bit onto representational and presentational. He calls it symmetrical and asymmetrical. And it's more in the symmetrical mode, which he says is much much more multidimensional and tends to be unconscious —that we can't hold it all in consciousness — and the way that we get things into consciousness is usually figuratively. So, it seems to me that what you do is that you have an experience of something and like it's really big, and you know it's got all these dimensions. And

then we spend months, even years, unpacking it [yeah], you know, like ‘Oh, there’s this other aspect to it. Yeah, that’s right [yeah] that was there too!’. So in a way we knew it all in the experience, but we didn’t know it all [yes, yeah]. So we have this sort of unconscious way in which we can embrace something multidimensionally, uhh, in one go [yes, yes] and then we can...there’s this amazing task of almost...it’s not, as you say, trying to recreate that, because you are making something new, but even in making it you have to make it multidimensional. It has to have all these nuances and you know working in all the things that come into it [yes yes].

Otherwise it doesn’t live for the reader.

943.**W6:** Yes. That, yeah, yep, yeah...And it only happens, at least to me, in the course of writing it [yes!]. I mean it’s, it’s um...

944.**CS:** That’s something that surprised me a bit because um, I think more naively when I began the interviews with the writers, I’m thinking, ‘Ah yes, there’s going to be these sort of big moments of “aha”!’ and [you write it all down] and you’re almost listening to it and it’s being dictated to you [yep]. But I remember, I think, yes [W2] said to me ‘No, the really creative stuff is in rewriting, in redrafting’ [yes]. That’s when she gets really excited.

945.**W6:** Yes, yes. Yeah. I think I kind of, well that certainly was the case here...um...I mean things that become terribly obvious to me in retrospect, such as the three wishes were all flawed, at least in my view, wasn’t kind of clear to me [no] even after I’d written it down. So that I then went back and say ‘Ah! I realise that is there, and yes that is important in terms of the whole book. Um...gee, aren’t I lucky! Something as important in terms of the whole book I hadn’t actually realised I was writing.’. You know, the story wouldn’t have made nearly so much sense in terms of the whole [that’s right]if that element hadn’t been there, but that...

946.**CS:** We have this sort of intuitive feel like ‘Gee that works.’. And it may not be a long time before we realise why it worked [yeah, yes]. You know, so there seems to be like a guidedness [yes] to it [yeah]. I mean frequently writers have talked to me about this sense in which, uhh, even though it’s their creation, a sense in which it seems to be as if somehow they’ve got to listen to it, or it’s exterior in a way [yes yes], uhh, which is difficult to articulate [yes].

947.**W6:** Um, I ah, yes, I um, yeah. I do that too. I...um...then when you go, and as I did in this, you go ‘Right. I realise that.’. You go back to it. ‘I want to touch it up, to bring out this, the flaw element a bit more, but without overbalancing it.’...ummm [you don’t want to be didactic]. Yes...and so that...to some extent the fragility, the sensitivity of the original experience is retained. I don’t want to point the reader to

seeing the flaw before the reader realises that there was a real gift and the gift was accepted and enjoyed [that's right] ummm. But that's the rewrite stage.

948. But um...yeah guided is true. Something that has always struck me. I've always an overwhelming feeling of...um... 'I didn't realise I had that idea in me anywhere.', 'It's amazing where that came from.', and that kind of thing. The whole notion of inspiration and the rest of it as something that is pumped into you. But sort of surprise, a kind of genuine surprise after the event that that was there.

949. **CS:** So that's one of the sort of things I'm interested in. We seem to have a sort of intuitive...we have to trust in our intuition. And there's a lot of...fortunately the cognitive psych is beginning to — well the word 'cognitive' is starting to lose its meaning because there's a lot more now that we know about the way in which our brain is structured and emotional centres are really built right into the centre of all cognition [yes, yes, yes]. Whereas in the past it was largely treated as a result of cognition, or something like that. It's now more-or-less seen that most of our thinking is filtered through the emotional centres of the brain.[tape off to explain this to W6]...

950. What about?... You mentioned just before about sending drafts off to people. So there's a point where you don't even want to read the whole work yourself, you know like you mentioned you hold off on that for a while. But then it gets to a point where you do and you re-work it and then it gets to some point where you send off some drafts. Now what's that about? We are not talking about publishers yet, or editors? Or are we?

951. **W6:** Umm...We are talking about both [laughter] in this particular case, yes. No, I've sent off a draft to, in fact in this case, to um, my...[name of person at publishers] at UQP because they published the last book and she's, you know, like to see it. But to some extent it's um...well that's both...'are you interested in publishing it? And what do you think about it?'. But also I sent off a copy to Morag Fraser who is the editor of *Eureka Street* and that's because she is a very...I've found her a very tough critic of mine, been a very good editor. The last book went to her and she scribbled and scrawled all over it. She's very tough. It's a bit disheartening really. But I thought better now than when the book's come out. Um...I think...I'd be interested to see what she does with this because, whether it's I have got attuned to her lines of criticism and take steps to avoid her having to make those criticisms, or whether it's just some sort of natural improvement, I don't know. But for example I did a piece recently which she published in *Eureka Street* which I know she, um, well she had a few strong reservations about the first draft of, but before she even had time to get

onto me I had, you know a week or two had gone by, and I had revised it and when it came to her looking at it a second time she found that everything she had wanted to say was more-or-less, I had taken care of myself. And with this particular, this new book...

952.**CS:** There was something I wanted to ask you was who is it, or is there anyone, is it important for you to read your stuff and to approve of it?

953.**W6:** Umm...gee. Uhh...I don't know that there is any individual that is an absolute, that has to...Probably as long as there is some group of people, I think. Even if that group is a changeable group of people who, um, are willing to proof and endorse it.

954.**CS:** But that process is important to you?. That there is somebody, out there [yes].

955.**W6:** Yes it is. Um...Whether it's at the book publish stage or the manuscript stage, yes. Though doing this at the manuscript stage is uhh, it's much more of a prophylactic kind of move. And this particular book, given that there is a lot of...I think Morag thinks that I'm a bit, in matters to do with women, the body, sex, I think she has difficulty with my writing on this as there is a fair bit of all those things in this book. Um...I thought maybe she'd be a good touchstone really. And while I think I've got more and more self-critical of my writing over the years, and tend to revise much more — which is partly a by-blow of computer technology these days which...but it's also just I'm more naturally self-critical. Even allowing for that, I get to a certain stage where [you are too close to it?]. Yeah, yeah usually. I want someone else to have a look as well. And/or, look, it, um, maybe I would see the problems if I put it aside for another three or four months and did nothing. But why not short-circuit that and let somebody else have a look at it straight away and they can get back to me in a couple of weeks and maybe I won't have to spend so much time waiting till I have cleared my mind a bit.

956.**CS:** It is an interesting sort of, there's a sort of...it's confusing isn't it because, as we said, the writers seem to be principally writing for themselves, because they get inspired by an idea and they go with it, and there's the process and so on. And then it may even be damaging to think about readers too much. I mean you think about broader things too, I know, technical matters [yeah, yeah] structure and so on. But as you said, you don't even know whether you would like to read your books [yes]. It's curious isn't it [yes] given it's a communicative process, writing words to be read, [yes].

957.**W6:** Yes, it is curious, I mean...I mean I have, I have a slight uneasiness about the uhh, self-indulgent nature of it and much more so in mine, I think much more so in

my case because it is so autobiographical. Um, I mean, the last...I mean straightforwardly, or nakedly self-confessingly so, um, it's my name and everybody else's real name...um...in a way that, you know, novelists don't have to, to bear [even though with novelists, generally speaking, it's all being funnelled through them]. Yeah, of course, but nevertheless, the public doesn't see it that way... Whereas with my case I'm saying here is a book about W6's twenty-five years having something to do with Ireland. 'Well what the heck! Why should I bother reading that?! I mean who are you? I mean if you were...' and all I can fall back on is the quality of the writing, whatever that means. Um, you know this is going to, you're going to be [well, we touched on it] I don't know, moved.

958.**CS:** Yeah, that's right. We touched on that before. Because one of the things that seems to be almost universal about the insight experience, and you know, a part of that is getting the image that works, being in it or something, is the sort of sense of connectedness — and it is a fairly, I think it often borders on a mystical type experience...where, you talked about it, it can be euphoric. Where all of a sudden you are not alone and you know, you are connected with the world around you, and I think with other people. Um, and when...I know for example when I read something that really inspires me, you know I forget about myself [yeah, yeah]. You live inside the imagery, or you feel it physically...um and so [yes] there does seem to be a development of a different sense of, experience of, self. Predominantly, self-forgetting. So even though it is about you [yes, yes], it's not about you, if you know what I mean? [yes, yes].

959.**W6:** Um...No. That's a whole other issue to some extent that, ah, is probably not relevant, but um...I mean I have this odd sense that, you say it's not about me, um, I mean I would write things down that I wouldn't tell my closest friend. I would write things down and give [it to the public!] it to my publisher [yes]...yes [exactly] yeah, and then again, then I sort of look at this book and I think, you know, 'In 12 months' time I'm going to have to, you know talk to radio interviewers or something another about it.' Um...'I'm going to be a bit bashful.'

960.**CS:** It's interesting, you know. I've got a client, a bulimic client, you see. And a big thing about eating disorders is keeping them secret, you know that's how they work [yeah, yeah]. You know, you keep them secret, and ah, you give people around you absolutely no permission to acknowledge that it exists. Anyway [chuckling] I've got this one and I was talking to her about, you know, about some strategies and I said 'Well. You're going to have to tell four people in your life that you are bulimic. Who do you want to tell? You know, you can start easy if you like.' And of course

she chooses to tell people who are fairly distant from her [ahhh, yes, yes]. You know, relatively you know. She doesn't want to tell the close friends and her intimates. Because if you do it's got implications then [yes]. You live with these people [yes yes] or you come with them a lot [yes, yes] and I'm sure there is something of that in [yes ! yes] what [yes, yes, yes]...We had a great laugh about it [yeah].

961. WRITER 7

962.CS: I want to ask you about just how you organise your creative life and you can use the decade as a time frame or you know, an hour if you want.

963.W7: OK [laughs] Well I've never been a full-time writer. I guess that's the place to start. Perhaps nobody is. But I've always had to either have a job, a part-time job, or look after children. So that the means the time I've had to work is very precious and it's usually been kind of paid for in some way by other activities so it's very, it's very precious and I don't therefore have any problem with getting in the mood or in the way of getting organised. When I have the time, I go to the desk. That's the kind of basic parameter. People always say to me you know, sort of 'Do you work until you get into the mood?'. Well, clearly not, with my distractions. At the moment, for example, I have basically school hours, minus half an hour on each end to kind of get to and from the school to pick up the younger one.

964.CS: Sound like what [W1] called her 'bookends'.

965.W7: Bookends? Yes, yes. That's right. Um. Now within that time I know that my work suffers from a lack of daydreaming time. Because I have a restricted period of time I feel I should be actually writing during that time. And I think that's actually a big problem. Because I think the most important part of writing probably happens when you are not actually writing...Um so that has that unfortunate effect that you want to rush in and you feel 'Oh panic. I've only got two hours. I must put something down on paper.'. And I think that that's very counterproductive for creativity.

966.So what I've learnt to do is not to bother with any of the periphery things. Not to think 'What am I going to write about'. And most certainly not to write nice sentences. Basically I think that that restriction has forced on me a stream of consciousness thing where I just make myself just start writing, um, and in a way I suppose I am trying to daydream as I write...by that stream of consciousness thing. So a lot of my first drafts have no punctuation. It just goes on, page after page of stuff. And in the course of doing that I generally, eventually, find the thing that I want to follow. I'll write a sentence and I'll think 'Ah...that's where it starts.'. And I'm away. Um, in terms of the physical organisation, um, I, I've always written at home, I used to have a back shed at the bottom of the garden. And I now have a workroom upstairs. But for some reason I find it harder now to work at home, and for the last few years I've had the use of a room at Sydney University, and I've used

that more and more. I find that going to a room...for some reason the seductions of housework are more seductive as the years go by! [laughs].

967.**CS**: This has been a recurrent theme.

968.**W7**: [laughing] I don't know why. I used to be able to just blank all that out but somehow I find it harder. And I think it's probably to do with the fact that what I have to write now is less urgent than it was. I feel I've actually written out some of the more pressing things, so I'm on a less desperate level. And therefore those distractions come in more easily. So at the room at the university I have been very careful to have absolutely nothing. There aren't even any pictures of the kids there. There's no phone. It's just a desk, a computer and a chair. So that's terrific. Um it's very important to me.

969.**CS**: Is that difficult when you go into that room sometimes that it doesn't have distractions?

970.**W7**: Um. If I feel the need for a distraction I have only to walk outside or go to the mailroom or up to get a coffee and I almost certainly bump into someone I know, so it's actually perfect. The breathing heart, the living heart, the beating heart at the end of the corridor. I don't know who coined that phrase, but some writer coined it for exactly that thing. You want to be alone but you also want to know that people [are around] are available when you need them, basically. Bit of a ruthless attitude. Um...so, no. It's a great feeling.

971. Flannery O'Connor had this theory that you just bored yourself into writing. She set herself, she, I mean she had another restriction because she was ill, but she had to sit at her desk, say for three hours every day, and it didn't matter what she did there but she wasn't allowed to do anything else. And out of sheer boredom she'd start to write and I sometimes find that quite useful. Not to allow yourself. I never read or research or anything like that in that incredibly precious working time.

972.**CS**: Though you will do research, you would do research but not in that time.

973.**W7**: Not in that time, that's right. [this is writing time] yeah. It's very important to me to have, the only way I can allow myself to submerge into writing is...well let me start it from the other way, I'm terribly afraid of letting time getting away with me and forgetting to go and pick up the kids. There's this incredible anxiety as the afternoon gets on towards two o'clock. I always get very anxious so I always have an alarm clock or something like that. And if I have that I can relax. But if I don't actually have an outside signal, I mean just having a watch on is not enough. So that's a trick that I have learned. It took me a long time to realise that that's why my afternoons for some reason I couldn't concentrate. And you know I'm a bit slow, a

bit slow on the uptake [laughter]. You know it finally occurred to me that if I had an alarm clock I could relax.

974.**Um**...in terms of how I do it, I usually do a first draft by hand. I've always done that. There's something very private about it. There's something physically nice about the pen across the paper. And I'm fairly fussy about my pen, although at a pinch I'll use anything...though I prefer a nice pen and nice paper.

975.**CS**: Ah, when you say private do you mean, if you, because it's sort of not in public form?

976.**W7**: Yes. I think to me that it is very important that it's very...even the actual look of it, is deeply private. As soon as it's on the computer screen, then it has a public look, to me, so it's readable, and it looks much more like a finished thing.

977.**CS**: Well, this relates a bit, doesn't it, to when you're saying you feel the pressure that you have to write, and produce something [mmm] and again this has been a recurrent theme, um, that...what's inimical to creativity, what gets in its way is this focusing on the output end [yeah, that's right] on the product.

978.**W7**: Yeah, that's paralysing.

979.**CS**: So this is a bit of a sleight of hand isn't really [yeah], I mean.

980.**W7**: I've called it exactly that. I call it that to my students [oh, OK]. You have to invent a sleight of hand that works for you, that what you are writing will never be read by anybody but you. And you yourself may never read it again. It's just for here and now, and whatever trick works. The fountain pen...exercise books work very well for me — the smaller the better actually, the 'squidgier' the better [chuckling], because it's um, it's like you are just taking notes, it doesn't matter. It's got that feel about it.

981.**CS**: Yeah, I've been writing some stuff just lately just on the PhD and it's scary because it's a bit — it sounds a bit like you are talking about — and I have to say to myself 'Well...of course I'll rewrite this later' [yes, chuckling].

982.**W7**: Well I have to, um, I always write the draft number on whatever I'm doing and with the current book, for example, which I think might be actually finished, but I'm actually working on draft 27 [oh my God]. So if I'm writing draft three at the top of a new exercise book, I know, I'm quite confident that this is nothing like it's going to be. So that is good.

983.**CS**: And as you get closer to, you know, when you get to draft 26 and draft 27, does it change then? Does it get different? Do you have more confidence to call it...a...is that how it works, if you know what I mean?

984.**W7:** Yes. After I've got about, usually about 100 pages of hand-written, usually just fragments at that stage. I've got really no idea where I'm going. But it then reaches a point where you've got a sort of critical mass, and at that point I type it up. And at that point, usually, I can see that the fragment that I wrote on the first page of the exercise book has something to do with the fragment that's 50 pages in. So as I type I kind of put them together, roughly. And from then on it has a slightly more public look. But whenever I get to a hard bit, even now, if I have a scene that really isn't working, the way to make it work again is to do it by hand again, turn the page over and write on the back in hand.

985.**CS:** OK. So there's a fairly clear demarcation there between the sort of looser creative problem...something generated by a problem or uncertainty or confusion, [hmm hmm] on one side, and that's mucking around with a pen on a piece of paper, [mmm, that's right. Yeah]. And then the other side is where it's starting to get tightened up a bit, um, which is a little bit more logical by the sound of it, or a bit more consciously ordered or something.

986.**W7:** That's right. I allow myself to start, start structuring it...at about, well...I suppose by the end of the first draft...somewhere half-way through the first draft I'll have some idea. And then I'll start something that's called draft two because I'll then have a sort of structure. The danger, though, and that's been particularly so with this last book, is that I will try to arrive at that structure too quickly. Now that I know that's how it works, I am impatient to get on to that bit of the process. And of course the lack of time is another thing that distorts the process because the quicker you can get it structured, and that's a real problem because it, it just takes twice as long, basically...if you truncate those, that exploratory part of the process.

987.**CS:** So that's interesting, so what you're saying is that by not hurrying, and by not having a sense of having to pull this thing together, you actually get it done quicker [much quicker. I would think]. So there's going to be lots of mind games you have to play when you are, you know, a well known author and you are writing to a deadline.

988.**W7:** Yes. That's a huge distortion. I try to resist deadlines. I never sign option clauses so that I don't have a sense of the publisher breathing over my neck for the next one. But there is a kind of, I mean people ask me, you know 'When are you going to write another book?'. And you do have that panicky sense that this is what I do now, so why aren't I doing it, sort of thing. Plus, of course, the financial distortion that we need to produce books all the time to go on making some money. Um...um there was something else I was going to say there about that.

989.**CS:** I mentioned I think about mind games...

990.**W7:** That's right. And the other mind game is knowing that it's probably going to be published. That's the huge difference between me writing now and when I started, oh Christ! And that's a really difficult one because you know that no-one will tell you if it's really crappy, and that's true, you know, more and more.

991.**CS:** But is there literally no-one who will tell that? Will [partner] [husband] tell you?

992.**W7:** Umm...he might make some noises. But he, I think, will be reluctant, probably quite wisely too! [laughing]. There are various people that I have used for this book, but it's pretty difficult, I mean if...It's very difficult to be negative about somebody's work.. Um...publishers certainly can't be trusted because they just want to get it out there. So that's a real problem whereas when I wrote [novel]...that was bliss! Creatively, because I had more time than I've ever had since and above all I had that sense that 'Oh, what the hell? This will never be published'. All the time that I was writing that book the sleight of hand I used was 'One of these days I'll start writing a proper book, a proper novel. But this is just, this is just me having a good time. '[self-entertainment]. Yeah! And that's why it's, that's why it's a good book.

993.**CS:** With [W4], I spoke to him and he talked about the demise of the literary editor [ooh yes...if we ever had them], yeah that's right. And it has struck me that that would be an incredibly useful thing for a person to have. Someone who really would tell you.

994.**W7:** And someone who can do the big picture. Someone who can say 'OK I can see that this book.'...you see when you are writing you don't know what it is about. But somebody else can [yes], a good writing teacher does that. And you can say 'Well OK, I can see that this story is trying to be about a conflict between a father and a daughter. But you've got all this other stuff as well...so, you know, shave that off, and that's what you're really about.'

995.**CS:** Now how come, how come the other person looking on can see and the creator can't.

996.**W7:** I don't know, because the creator can um...a gap of time is enough. You know I can now see what I was doing in [novel]. Well you don't want to think about it too clearly because you know that would stop the creative process. But there's actually more to it than that. Because you see I'm actually at the point now where I've actually finished this book and I would really like to know what it is about so that I can talk about it in public, uhh, clearly, and, you know, and interestingly. So

it's not that I'm still exploring the ideas and yet I'm still longing for other people to tell me what it is about.

997.**CS:** Yeah...why would you use the word 'longing' there, by the way?

998.**W7:** Um...well, because I know that it could become something. I know that in there there is some kind of interesting thing going on, and I have a vague sense that it's about the idea of perfection which in fact I'm thinking of calling the book. Whether we have to be perfect or whether it's enough to just simply be human. But what I'm frightened of is that I will miss the opportunity. Right now I have a chance to change it, but you know, two months down the track will be too late. And what I fear is that I will see it too late.

999.**CS:** And the book's already published [yeah] and you could have polished up and brought out these nuances.

1000.**W7:** Yeah and it's a longing because it's almost as if the book is, I mean this is a bit corny, but it's almost as if it is a living creature, and you are frightened of doing the wrong thing by it. I mean, it's a bit like with your children and you think, you know 'Should I be getting them to learn the piano? Will they be missing out on something? Will be they less than they could be if I don't give them that opportunity?'

1001.**CS:** I think I can relate to that. It strikes me sometimes too that, like when you go into a room where there are people, and you can't be watching yourself if you're going to be having authentic conversations or things like that [mmm]. And so whatever you do with people in that [mmmmm] circumstance is, is you expressing yourself and you, and we don't seem to, we can sort of back off occasionally, but if you back off, then you're not in the conversation.

1002.**W7:** Yeah that's right! You become so self-conscious, you're watching yourself perform, yeah.

1003.**CS:** And then, as you say, it takes you out of the creative end of the stick and it's almost like, as well, I don't know whether the metaphor, it will carry through, but, you need to, while you are creating — and that might be over a long period of time — obviously you oscillate a bit. You move in and out of that.[yeah] so you'd be stepping back and looking at it. And then you'd be coming into the process. But more-or-less, you're more in it than out of it, in the long term [mm mmm] and you can't afford to back up too much. As you say, there is this concern about tightening it up too quickly.

1004.**W7:** And over-simplifying. It's a little bit like, I mean it's interesting when you write down dreams, which are at the time, are often totally opaque. But if you tell

them to somebody else they will immediately see what they are about and so will you if you look at those notes six months down the track. So I don't know what that process is, but it's obviously a, it's almost as if there's a protective mechanism um... that your unconscious is sending up these messages, but your unconscious doesn't want them to be hijacked too quickly, because they won't do you any good. It's got to be not fully understood for it to produce change. I think...having had the experience of having a few dreams that were totally life-changing without me understanding them. It's like their therapeutic aspect...ah...is not compatible with them being understood.

1005.CS: Yeah, I mean, frequently clients you know who come with problems, um, when they've overcome them they find it hard to conceive what their problem was [yeah, yeah, yeah]. The whole thing has changed and they recognise there was a problem [but it's hard to remember what it was], but the panorama has changed so much, and it may be something like that where [mmmm] that the thing is so significant that it has to happen for it to...I'm not being [mmm] very articulate about this process. It's very hard to be.

1006.W7: It is something about being actually embedded in it though [yeah]. You are enacting a problem in some way [that's right], you are not outside looking in.

1007.CS: You see part of the problem I think is that we are the lens through which we look anyway [yes], so that if you change, when the lens is in the process of changing, then when you look through it, everything is obvious. But in the processes of it changing you can't sort of, it's a bad metaphor, but you can't have two lenses at the one time.

1008.W7: Yeah. Well it's the Heisenberg principle isn't it [yeah], basically.

1009.CS: Yes. That's right. You see we are already imperceptibly moving into the thing [laughter] where you are talking about your theory of creativity [yes] and so on. [yes]. Is there anything else that stands out? Like what do you do, for example? I know you said you don't sit there and wait for the mood before you start. But, within your normal work practice there'll be times when everything is cooking and other times when it's not [yeah, yeah]. What do you do when it's not?

1010.W7: Ummm...Basically I go back to free-associating on one thing or another. Sometimes it will be um...well, with [novel] I used to flip through Shakespeare till I got to a phrase that I liked. And when I just got to a phrase that caught my eye, without asking myself why, I would just start writing. And sometimes I'd have several goes at the same phrase, and nearly always, I mean they are all in the book. Sometimes I've just lopped the Shakespeare off the front, but what remains is

something surprising. So that works really well. Different things seem to work for different books, though, and um, that worked for [novel]. It didn't work for [novel]. And it hasn't worked so well for this book. With this book, this book has been more conscious and that's what's been wrong with it, I think. Ah, sometimes I look back over what I've written and out of three pages of what I've written there might just be one phrase that I like. So again, I'll kind of write that at the top of the page, basically, and try and make myself just keep going. And sometimes it drifts into kind of notes to myself. Like, you know 'This is really boring.' and 'What am I doing here?'. Sometimes it drifts into kind of um, um, commentary on the process. But then, something will happen and it'll take that little right-angle turn, and I'll find myself writing a sentence in another voice, which is the voice of the book, as opposed to my own voice [OK],...So those are the sorts of things.

1011.**CS:** This is an interesting contrast that frequently comes up too. You mentioned it then: 'the voice of the book as against my voice'.

1012.**W7:** Yes [laughing].

1013.**CS:** Um, because one of the things I'm very interested in and it's come up a lot, and it's very consonant with the research I've done, is this, um, definite change in one's sense of self [mmm] um...when one is moving into a creative experience. That there is a sense that the self is still there present and observing and making judgements. But there's also a very strong sense that the process somehow is not, one is not self-conscious. That it seems to be coming from without rather than from within, that it seems to have its own spontaneity and my job is to keep up with it [hmm, mm, yep]. Can you talk about that [yeah, yeah] process at all?

1014.**W7:** Yes, I absolutely agree with all of that. It would be easy to say that you are constructing a persona when you...but it is not actually that either. Um...It's more like you are allowing a self to speak that is normally censored [uhh huh]. That's what it feels like to me [right]. Which is why the more conscious you are of the audience, of course the more disastrous it is. So it's very like, I mean when I was in analysis, when that worked it felt exactly the same as when writing was working. And when it wasn't working it felt the same...self-conscious, watching myself. But above all, policing in case something slipped out, that I didn't want to slip out.

1015.**So for me, and that's why it's so important for it to be private. Because you have to be able to um, those words have to lead you from one to the other without you thinking 'Oh I mustn't get into that territory', in both those contexts. The only difference is that whereas with analysis um, well in my experience, the words come up and they are dealt with there and you then move on, but of course with writing**

you then work on them in a very conscious way, and shape them and make them public. And you are using that initial, very unconscious outpouring only as a basis.

1016.**CS:** When you said it gives the chance, I think, for another self to have a voice [mmm], is it only one other self?

1017.**W7:** Oh no! [chuckles]. No, I should have said that. But at the time you are writing, I mean for any project I think perhaps there's one...maybe that's not even true. I mean for [novel] I discovered within myself that misogynist that that book is written in his voice. I...it was very difficult in the beginning for me to discover that that was me. I wasn't making it up or writing *about* it. I was writing *out of it*. Um, and for this book, yeah, this book has been harder, and I'm sure that part of it is that I...oddly enough it was easier for me to write about that obnoxious person and to admit that he was part of myself, than it is for me to admit that these characters are actually parts of my self. I don't know why that is.

1018.**CS:** Well, I think that, uhh, one of the things that reveals is that uhh, to be a moral person you have to understand their evil. I mean [absolutely] it has to be a part of the way you conceive, you perceive the world and conceptualise [yes] and so on [yes]. One of my favourite psychologists, a guy called George Kelly, he talks about the way we understand the world basically being in terms of contrasts [mm, mmm]. That everything, that every way, we can't understand anything unless we have what we call the relevant contrast for it [yes, absolutely]. So you can't understand goodness [yeah] or tolerance...

1019.**W7:** Without actually identifying the opposite within yourself [yeah]. It's like, I did a little bit of reading in Jung, when I was writing [novel], and he, of course, has that Shadow, the theory of the Shadow, which was perfect for what I was doing. [exactly] So I think it's that. It's allowing, as when you lie on the psychiatrist's couch [do you actually have to lie down on the couch?]. Oh I did, yes [oh wow...the traditional analysis]. Oh, it's wonderful, absolutely...Well...in that way it was yeah. And I found that so freeing, so totally freeing. I felt very selfconscious the first time, but within seconds I felt, yes, I don't have to either make eye contact and not make eye contact. I don't have to have that choice. Nobody's looking at me. It was wonderful. Freud was really onto something I think when he...just that one physical action made such a difference to me. Um...but you know you've got to, you find yourself saying things which you would say 'But I didn't mean that!'. Um...and that's wonderful because, you know, you did mean that. But only a part of you meant it. That's right. You don't have to identify yourself with that monstrous

- person who has just said, you know 'I want to kill my mother' or something. That's not who you are, but it's one of the things that's in you [that's right] and it was great.
- 1020.**CS:** And of course you already made the comparison between that process and the process of writing [mmm]. I mean, lots of, it's commonplace isn't it for writers to say that the writing process is therapeutic ? [yes].
- 1021.**W7:** Yes and I mean, that's misunderstood I think in the sense that it's like you're just pouring out this kind of confessional stuff. Kind of getting it off your chest [yeah]. But it's much more sinister than that. 'Cos I think it does mean going into those [novel] [yes] and um, articulating them and kind of owning them.
- 1022.**CS:** And it wouldn't always be sinister I should imagine, either. I mean...
- 1023.**W7:** Oh, in my case it often seems to be! [oh OK]. But no! it probably isn't. Actually in this book, no. I've discovered the other parts as well.
- 1024.**CS:** You know it's more constructive I think in that sense too...[mmm] in that you're, you know, it's a way of evolving yourself, building, you know different voices and uhh...
- 1025.**W7:** It's the sinister, less acceptable ones obviously that are mostly hidden, though, in all this, and so I guess that's the feeling of discovery [yes] to allow those ones out [that's right], to take the policeman away from the door.
- 1026.**CS:** And useful for other people because they can rid the neighbourhood [yes, yes] of those aspects, you know, and 'Oh she's as bad as me!'
- 1027.**W7:** That's right. Maybe it's not so bad after all! [laughing].
- 1028.**CS:** All right. So...we've got, so your practices are fairly straightforward [mm].
- 1029.**W7:** Yes, nothing fetishistic.
- 1030.**CS:** Yeah, I mean a lot of writers are, they have all sorts of tricks [mm yeah] and things. Sleights of hand that you talk about.
- 1031.**W7:** Yeah, I feel I haven't got time to muck around with that. I mean I have done some of my best writing sitting in the car writing on the back of the disprin packet, for example. I remember I wrote a beautiful scene waiting to pick up Alice from a birthday party. I had ten minutes. I was sitting in the van. I had nothing to write on. So I took apart this aspirin box [laughing]...so yeah.
- 1032.**CS:** Now what's happening there do you think? I mean, because the insight literature is pretty clear about this: that most people's insight actually happen, um, by happenchance. You know, [right] on the toilet and [yeah, well] on a walk.
- 1033.**W7:** There's something about, and this leads on to your next thing about, you know, those moments, those epiphanies...um. If we are ready to talk about that, are

you ready to talk about that yet? [yeah, yeah, go into it]. Yeah, um, I mean Keats talked about negative capability, and I'm sure that's exactly what he meant [yes]. Um...the greatest experience I had with that was writing, was when I was writing [novel] which is, I don't know if you have read it, is a book about an incestuous father. And the problem that I set myself was 'Well why? Why did he do it?'. Not what did he do, but what's going through these men's minds when they do this?...Or anything like that? And I had been writing it for about three years and I kept coming up against this barrier that I couldn't work out why they do it. Really and truly I just couldn't understand it. And I decided to give it up, basically. I decided to abandon the book. In fact I didn't decide to, I did abandon the book.

1034.**CS:** Now, let me just say that in the classic accounts of insight, you have a period of preparation that leads to frustration or impasse [oh right], where either voluntarily or involuntarily the problem is put aside [ohhh].

1035.**W7:** Oh well I'm a cliché then [a classic] I'm a classic cliché in this situation. [a classic is better than a cliché]. A classic, yeah. Well I think it's, that, it was a life-changing experience for me because I had always paid lip-service to that idea of, you know, Negative Capability, and you know. But, the thing is you couldn't, you can't fake it. You can't pretend to be abandoning a book. You have to genuinely...And I was driving along, oddly enough, past Callan Park [a psychiatric hospital], the old Callan Park here [oh that's very appropriate]. Driving along...most appropriate and I suddenly felt this weight lift off my shoulders as it suddenly occurred to me 'I don't have to write this book.'. 'I can write something else.'. And it was like somebody coming along and saying 'You don't have to do that exam. It's OK, I'll give you a degree anyway.'. And it was *such* a relief! It was a *glorious* feeling, and I immediately started to think about some other projects that I might do, and the world looked different. I mean I looked around at Rozelle and it just, it was alive, it was, there was full colour in everything. It was crowded by this terrible anxiety. So I turned into the park at Callan Park and sat on one of those seats [laughter. Mad woman.] yes! And as I was sitting there a voice came to me, not quite like Joan of Arc, but it was very vivid. And it said to me 'You don't have to understand. You only have to write it. You don't have to understand it.'. It was that phrase 'You don't have to understand.'. And it really was like a voice. I could virtually hear a human voice saying it.

1036.**CS:** Was it the voice of the character?

1037.**W7:** No. It was not the voice of the character. At the time I wasn't in analysis, but it was a bit actually like my analyst's voice. It was a woman's voice. An older

woman. Very tolerant and you know, wise [CS laughs]. Un-judgmental.

Understood why it was so difficult. But just: 'It's all right. You don't have to understand. I know you don't understand. I understand that.'

1038.**CS**: I have a task I sometimes give my clients. And often I give it to them before they come to see me [oh right]. So they ring up and I say 'Look, I'd like you to write something for me.', you know. And I get them to write a thing where I say "I want you to describe yourself as if you were a character in a play and it needs to be written from the point of view of a friend who knows you very intimately, and very sympathetically, perhaps better than anyone ever could know you [right! An interesting thing to do] and to write it in the third person [mmmm]'. And you see the thing is, like this voice coming to you, it's someone who knows, understands everything you're going through [yes], but understands you sympathetically [yeah, yeah]. And it's so difficult for us to take that perspective on ourselves [yes]. And, of course, when people write this thing down it's all full of self blame and hatred and...

1039.**W7**: Yes, but what a brilliant thing to do. I mean that in itself would be immensely therapeutic.

1040.**CS**: Oh it is. Often people come along and I can tell...I mean I should stop doing it because [it makes you obsolete] yeah, exactly [redundant, right]. Anyway. But...particularly as you experienced that voice as non-judgemental [yep] too I think was important.

1041.**W7**: And not pretending that it didn't matter [yes]. Not denying the problem [that's right]. Simply incorporating it into a larger view in which 'Yes, you don't understand, but it's OK because you don't have to.'

1042.**CS**: Did you come to understanding, by the way, of why men do that?

1043.**W7**: I did! Yes. And that wasn't an epiphany. It was a gradual, very gradual process. But as soon as I, as soon as I thought I didn't have to understand it, of course I did! And I don't know what that passivity is. I mean it feels like passivity. I suppose it's just an opening the unconscious a little bit more. I went and did a bit of reading, and that was very valuable, because I found a couple of books—I was groping my way towards some idea of incest that had to do with um...polarised gender roles, basically. The way that men have to split off the kind, nurturing, uncertain parts of themselves. Um, and therefore their hatred of women is actually envy as much as hatred, because women are allowed to do all those things that they've had to kill in themselves. So when I found books that articulated all that much better than I had, it was a great relief. So the process of understanding

it...yes...I can only say...well you see I went through eighteen drafts of that book.

So you know, it took me a long time to work it out.

1044.**CS:** So anyway. Here you were, you were driving along [yeah] and there were several stages to this one, wasn't there [yes]. So there's in the car, and as you said this great weight seemed to be lifted [mmmm mmmm]. When you...if I had to feel the way you felt when you were driving along, how would I be feeling?

1045.**W7:** Before I...when the thing struck. Well it was like a physical, yeah. That's why I turned off the road. Because it was like a physical um 'lightness' is the only word — I felt as if I was actually in danger of floating off the car seat! I was aware that I was actually not driving very well. It's like...it was elation. It was ah, almost like a drug-induced, um, euphoria.

1046.**CS:** Was it, you know, you are probably familiar with the experience of dissociation. Was it that sort of sense too, with a sense of unreality about things too?

1047.**W7:** Um...no. In a funny way it was the opposite. It was as if I had been dissociated and just, suddenly things were integrated. That's why the world suddenly looked as if it were in full colour [it was vibrant]. Yeah. Things were in three dimensions. That was *a* house. That was *a* fence, you know [ah OK, yeah]. That kind of slightly 'trippy' clarity of things where you feel the sense of cohesion and integration.

1048.**CS:** And did that sense of cohesion and integration include you? I mean when you were looking *at* the house [mm, yes].

1049.**W7:** Yes. Because instead of saying, instead of identifying myself as *a* woman who is writing *a* book about an incestuous father, and that had become a role I could no longer do, instead of that I was now just part of this world, and it was all open to me. If I never wanted to write again, I didn't have to. It was a sense that, instead of being off in this awful little ghetto, the 'writer' writing about this thing, I was a part of the world and I could choose to be part of it in whatever way I wanted.

1050.**CS:** Yeah, 'cos, um, again a part of the...one of the themes that I am trying to sort of articulate is this idea of connectedness [mmmmm] feeling...and it's almost a mystical experience I think in at least the sense that, um, people feel content and these experiences feel very much like a part of the world. You know like they [mmmm] don't feel separate [ahhh!]. Um, this is one of the almost identifying features of a *large* insight. You know we [yeah, sure] have all sorts of insights. But this sense of connectedness, and it's not just to other people, it can be just a profound sense of integration.

- 1051.**W7**: Yes, I mean it's the nearest, non-pharmaceutically induced state I've had to tripping — not quite that great. I didn't see the grass growing [yes], but it was like that marvellous sense that you were simply part of, you know, a great organism [yes, a bigger thing] yeah.
- 1052.**CS**: Well, I'm glad you said that because you know, ah, that's more grist to the mill. But, um...
- 1053.**W7**: Yeah. It's interesting isn't it, if we are all saying, if you know [yes] clearly this is not ...I mean that whole notion of the artist as the special magic person.
- 1054.**CS**: That's right. Well, in a way they are, though. Um...but it's not because it's coming from within the artist [ummm] like there's some sort of special, you know, repository of genius type [yeah] genes or something. But it's more like becoming an instrument, or resonator [yes], ah, letting go, and what you described is a classic letting-go.
- 1055.**W7**: Yeah, but you see, are you going to interview say, physicists? Or mathematicians? [um]. Because that would be really interesting.
- 1056.**CS**: It would be. I mean, maybe in another lifetime! [yeah, sure].
- 1057.**W7**: Because I have a feeling that problem-solving, which to me is all it is really, is probably the same for everybody [yeah], except we happen to do it.
- 1058.**CS**: Yeah, I mean I chose the writers, you know, but I could have just as easily chosen scientists [or even engineers], engineers...but particularly creative ones. I mean you...the good thing about choosing the writers was that I knew that they would be grappling creatively with problems whereas an engineer may be a rule-book engineer.
- 1059.**W7**: Yeah, that's true [I might say the Bryce Courteney of the...laughter...engineering world!]. Yes! That's right [laughing].
- 1060.**CS**: But ah. You know this theme is very strong and...[turned tape off...and CS explained some of the theory of Matte-Blanco to [W7]].
- 1061.**CS**: So when you'd gone off the road and you're sitting on your bench in Callan Park [[W7] laughs], ah, what happened then?
- 1062.**W7**: Well the voice spoke to me. OK. And what happened then? Well, giving me permission not to understand was all I needed. Because I thought 'I can write about this man.'. There was no, there was a huge flood of stuff from my unconscious, scenes that I could write. Voice: I had his voice. No problem. So I just went back home and got on with it basically [oh, OK]. And I stopped trying to understand.

1063.**CS:** Was there sort of a residual state? You know in the sense like...

1064.**W7:** Yes. And there were several things that I had already been using — actually I don't remember. Maybe this was when I started using this? — I used music for this book, to try to remind me of that state. Um, it was partly to, it was partly because it was music that made me...well I don't know how it operated actually, but there was a particular piece of music that I played thousands of times. And it made me feel kind of like that moment of epiphany had made me feel. Um...another trick, I suppose. Uhhh, and I'd get myself into that same corner again of trying to understand it. Um, and I just kept hanging on to those words like a mantra: 'You don't have to understand.'

1065.**CS:** Well, this is your own personal version of Keats' negative capability, isn't it?

1066.**W7:** Yeah. That's right. Yes [chuckling].

1067.**CS:** And you actually had to experience it [yeah] for it to really take root.

1068.**W7:** And I had to genuinely abandon the book [yeah]. I mean genuinely really think 'OK. That's one for the bottom drawer.' which I had never thought before. I'm terribly stingy about using every single thing that I write [yes, because of your time constraints]. Yes, exactly...I don't produce that much, so I've got to use everything. And to think of actually throwing away several years' work and hundreds of pages. And to *genuinely*, I mean you can't, you can't fake it, that's the trouble. I couldn't make myself pretend to give it up [that's right]. I have, with this book, when I get into difficulties, I've thought 'All right, well, I'll abandon it again. It worked last time.' But, you know [oh no. You can't]. You can't fool yourself.

1069.**CS:** Well it's very interesting isn't it? I mean, ah, there are, it seems to me there are parallels with you know classic religious experiences [absolutely, absolutely, yes]. What do you see there?

1070.**W7:** Um, well the classic religious, I mean I had a classic religious experience walking along a beach which was very like that. A physical, physical sense of you know, God being right there beside me [where were you?]. I was on Seven Mile Beach, I'd been at one of those church camps. They have a camp place up at the northern end. And when walking along the beach I can still see it so vividly. And I just knew that Jesus was right there beside me. I mean I couldn't actually see him, but that was irrelevant. It was the physical presence. It was, yeah, very, very strong. And very like, very like being on acid [yes]. I mean there is a similarity across all those things. And the few times I've meditated successfully, um, it's a similar kind of feeling, but it's very difficult, isn't it, to actually describe exactly what it is.

1071.**CS:** Well, one of the things that Matte-Blanco does talk about is that this sort of more symmetrical mode of thinking, ah, is much more multidimensional [mmm]. Um, and he actually demonstrates it mathematically, which is not important now [mmm] in terms of set theory. Like there are things called infinite sets that mathematicians play with. They have very strange properties. Ah, one of the things that infinite sets break down are notions of identity. You see, there is no end [the set actually includes everything]. That's right. And then you have strange anomalies, like, if you have the set of all natural numbers, one to infinity, and then you have, say, the set of all perfect square roots...no, perfect squares...Normal logic would say that there are less perfect squares than there is...[natural numbers], but if it's an infinite set then there's not. So they have a certain equality of number [oh right!, yeah] and so on [yeah] and so on. So it then looks...what happens when you...and then he talks about what happens when you reduce, when you're moving from a realm of higher dimensionality into a realm of lower dimensionality, if you do it in geometry you get distortions. Like, you may, if you have to represent a triangle in one dimension as a line [mmm], then you'll have repeatings of points. So you can imagine if you had ABC [traces a shape of a triangle] [hmm, hmm], to make that into a one dimensional representation you have to have AB, BC, CA [oh right, yeah]. So you're having a repeating of the A point. And he says that's what happens anyway, that when the unconscious enters into consciousness we get these, we often get these strange distortions, what seem to be distortions, or illogicalities [mmmmm], because we get this repeating of dimensions to try to represent it [mmm, mmm] in what he calls three dimensions plus time, which is normal consciousness.

1072.**W7:** Yeah and you can't do it. It's like Mikata's projection of the globe. There's actually no way not to distort it.

1073.**CS:** No, and one of the things that that means is that metaphor, for example, or symbolism more generally, becomes very important because it's a way of borrowing from the realm of higher dimensions and making it [yeah] understandable and graspable [that's right], because they are operating in more than one domain at once [yeah], and so on. So that sort of experience, that sort of classic religious experience [mmm] and the meditative experience is one, though, where we are letting go of our lower dimensionality — which is the normal conscious mode of operation — and moving into a more multidimensional [mmm] experience which naturally means that we feel a part of things around us because we are not making those hard and fast [hmmm] distinctions [yeah, yeah].

1074.**W7:** Yeah...makes sense. We're part of the infinite set.

1075.**CS:** Yeah, and you know, I'm not particularly religious, [yeah, yes], but Jesus would then be a symbol [mmm] for that experience [yeah, yeah]. A very potent one because it's filled with all sorts of metaphoric [yes that's right] and mythical contents [yeah]. But it is interesting [laughing]. I don't know where we go with that.

1076.**W7:** It's very interesting. It's heartbreaking when it stops happening. I mean those people who talk like, you know, poets in particular I suspect, who rely much more on that, they don't have the grid like a novelist does, certain sorts of structures [yes]. Um, the grief when you lose that is like the grief of losing religious faith. In fact, it must be a terr...it is a terrible hole in your life to have lost that dimension [yep]. I can understand why writers take to the booze, because it is a desperate way of trying to recapture that.

1077.**CS:** Well it was interesting that [W5] was talking about uhh, some of his best writing being done in the sort of hangover state the next morning [ahhhh!, ahhh] and I think it's because of this sort of loosening that it does [yeah, mmm] it's sort of, um, slightly unreal [yes] and you know the censor or whatever you want to call it [it's not quite you] yes.

1078.**W7:** This is, oh this I just the hangover speaking [chuckling...yeah that's right]. You can say anything [laughter]. Yes it's never...alcohol has never done it for me, or drugs, but ah, I can understand that.

1079.**CS:** Yeah. All right, so...Um, just back to the bench at [oh the bench. OK] Callan Park. And, ah, the voice! [yes]. Now, who?...you don't know who the voice was?

1080.**W7:** No. It wasn't actually a voice I knew. Just generically.

1081.**CS:** I wonder why it had to be a voice, if you know what I mean? Like a separate voice that came from without?

1082.**W7:** It was also as if written. I've had that experience several times, as if written. I say in interviews you know, 'written on the sky in letters of fire'. The title of one of my books came in like that. Uhh, why a voice?

1083.**CS:** Well why, ah, separate, if you know what I mean?

1084.**W7:** Yeah, yeah. Well I don't know. Maybe it's part of that being given permission. Umm, you have to assign a sort of authority figure [yeah] maybe...I mean maybe that's what I was doing.

1085.**CS:** Maybe, it's hard to...I don't know either, I mean, it's interesting. Because it's not as though you were thinking about it beforehand.

1086.End of side one

1087.**W7:** Which I'm trying to think...It was not as great a one [insight], so perhaps it's not actually very useful [it'll do]. But it was deeply useful for this book. With this latest book I've written for four years about a woman who refuses to fall in love, basically. There's a bloke in the book, I mean she's obviously made, they're made for each other, obviously. She's been fobbing him off. And for four years I haven't known why. And I have occasionally allowed myself to think 'Why might somebody feel like that?' Be quite frightened of getting — frightened of intimacy, basically [yeah]. And I have allowed myself to think 'Well. What's her problem?' But it was as if I...I mean I've answered that question in one way, in other books. OK, you know, if your father was incestuous with you, that would be one reason why. But I didn't want to do that again. Um, and just before Christmas, when it was almost too late to make a change, several people read the book and clearly didn't like it much, basically. And I got slightly panicky. 'I've got to work out, I've got to finally understand this character that I've created.'. I mean to write for four years about somebody and really not understand the most basic thing about them is very odd. [mmm]. And I knew that somewhere there was a key. And I sat at my desk and it was a much more conscious thing, like 'This is a problem that I have to solve.'. Quite a different experience from the Callan Park thing.

1088.And I almost thought 'OK What are the reasons that might make somebody like that? OK...having a child, sexual abuse would be one. OK. What else would would there be?'. And suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, was the idea that one of her husbands had committed suicide, in a very horrible way. And that this...and she feels responsible, basically. Now I don't know where that came from. So it was that same sense of...and as soon as I thought of it, it was CLEARLY right, and, this was the thing about it, it was as if had always been there. It was as if for four years I had been working knowing that, writing about it. And I hadn't just actually bothered to put it into the text. It had that sense about it. I don't know what that means.

1089.**CS:** Oh, that. Look, this comes up all the time. Talking to [W2] about that. Uhh...there was a metaphor in, I can't remember what the work was now, but anyway, talking about it, she has done a lot of caving [oh has she!] yeah [ohh! Gosh. I know [W2] quite well. I didn't know that about her. Ahhh]. And there was an image in one of her books, I think it was a book, um where a guy is caving and there's very close descriptions of the physicality of it [mmm]. You know, the grains of...as he's dragging himself through this very narrow [oh! I couldn't bear it!] this very narrow opening [mmm]. But what he actually is doing is this is the exit from the cave and his head popping up through this grass [ohh!] in a field, you see [right],

and, of course, it was only much later that she realised that it was a sort of metaphor for birthing [mmm, absolutely, yes...obvious to anybody else, anyone else reading] yes! Exactly. And again, and it's come across a lot where there's a sort of central image or theme or metaphor or sometimes just a feeling, that permeates a work [yeah]. Like the whole work flows from it [yes] um... I think we could probably, I could, you know, talking about multidimensionality would go some of the way to explaining it. That we get a symbol or a central image [mmm] and it's like this flood from it. But it is weird how we may not even know what the image is for us yet, while it is informing the work [yes].

1090.**W7**: It may be. Now I've forgotten what great writer said this. But some great writer said 'Every novel is written in order to conceal one sentence in it', or words to that effect [right]. And as soon as I read that I thought 'Yes. That's absolutely true.'. And maybe that's why, it's like, you, it's such a concealed thought that you can't let yourself, for whatever reason, you can't allow yourself to think it [yeah] and yet the whole work has to be written to try to understand it.

1091.**CS**: Yeah. But then you have to unconceal it when, presumably when you realise that a good reason would be [yes, that's right]. You then put it up front for the reader to give [that's right] them scaffolding.

1092.**W7**: But I had...but this was at the stage where the book is virtually finished [yeah] so, but yeah, that's right.

1093.**CS**: You go back and paint it in, presumably.

1094.**W7**: That's right. I frantically spent the last four week just sticking it in [yeah]. And it didn't take much. I mean that's the incredible thing! Just a few sentences, a total of maybe a page of writing and yet the whole book is suddenly...

1095.**CS**: Well it was fascinating talking to [W4]. Uhh, particularly as he's not, you know, a novelist. But he does a lot of dramaturgy work with playwrights. I think he was on the Literature Board for quite a while too, I think. And he talks about keeping the writer in touch with their vision [mmm]. Going back to the moment [oh right]. And he emphasised it over and over again in the interview [yes]. And it's very much, you know 'No...just get in touch with this feeling. This is good. This is where the action is.' [That's right]. 'This is it [yeah]. Just write from there [yeah].'. And constantly bringing them back [mmmmm] and he's saying 'Why is this here? Does that fit with that?' You know? [right]. There is something about it. I can imagine it is a huge advantage for those young writers — though some of them aren't young, they're quite established — because what you're doing is you're trying to do it on your own [yes, that's right]. You know, the loneliness of the...

1096.**W7:** Yeah, and you, there isn't really any way of sharing it with anybody [no].

There could be a problem, though, because sometimes that shifts. I mean you often start a book with one like, little motto like that, but by the end of the book you realise that was only a device to get you going. And to hang onto it too rigidly [so you chuck it out, but it got you somewhere]. It got you somewhere, yeah, but you have to be prepared to...and if perhaps there is an outsider who feels it's their job to keep bringing you back to that it could actually [that's right] short-circuit something.

1097.**CS:** It would depend on the sensitivity of the person then, wouldn't it? [yeah]. So then there's trust and all sorts of issues involved [that's right]. And novelists seem to me to be fairly, um, what's the word?...Monastic or uhh, [yes] almost, not reclusive, but...

1098.**W7:** Well I think a novel is such a big thing. I mean a play is a fairly focused thing.

1099.**CS:** And it's a more shared thing [yeah that's right] and enterprise. The ego is not as tightly tied in, I don't think [chuckles] [yes, that's right]. I mean there's no doubt that your works are you, if you know what I mean? Whereas a play, by the time it gets on stage, [they are a collaborative thing]. Yeah.

1100.**W7:** Yeah...[laughs]

1101.**CS:** So, with this other book you had this realisation [about the suicide, yeah].

1102.**W7:** And I immediately thought of the person that I know, to whom this happened. Not somebody I know very well. So there was obviously a real life thing in my memory [yeah], somebody I haven't seen for 12 years or something [yep]. So there was that, and I almost needed to have that to give myself permission [for it to be authentic]. I thought 'Oh OK, I can base it on what happened to Allen.' so yeah, in that case I needed to feel that.

1103.**CS:** See, then there is a flood of associations, aren't there? [yes]. You see because you've got this, you've got this whole narrative there, or collection of narratives that are associated with this person you knew [that's right, yes, yes]. Until that point you hadn't consciously seen any connection [yes] between that and what you were doing [yes, that's right, exactly]. And then there's this sudden flurry of implications [yes] and so on, arriving.

1104.**W7:** And suddenly it all happens [yes]. That's right, and I phoned somebody... my agent, and told her that I was going to make Harley's husband have committed suicide, and she then told me about a particularly gruesome way in which she had heard of someone killing himself. And that could slot straight in, like, at that point it no longer needed to come from me [yeah]. She's told me that and it's in there and I

think it is probably right. It's sickening, but I think it's probably right. And at that point I could function on quite a mechanical level, anybody could give me what I needed.

1105.**CS:** Yeah, well one of the things we haven't talked about is...which has been a constant theme too with writers, is about reworking [hmm hmm]. You have mentioned doing lots of drafts, uhh, and I mentioned the notion of loosening and tightening. Now what Kelly says what happens is that he had a thing called the Creativity Cycle. Where we loosen the way we construe things and then he talked about provisional tightening. So it wasn't [ah haaa!] tightening right up.

1106.**W7:** Yep. That's just the word I use to my students: 'provisional', mmm.

1107.**CS:** Where there is this sort of process where you....

1108.[interruption]

1109.yes so, provisional tightening [oh yeah, yeah] is where [that's right yes], if we carry on this analogy of bringing disparate domains or disparate realms in together and just playing with them [umm humm] or we are not caring whether they don't fit or not. But then there comes a point where we might, where provisionally see connections [yep]. We don't tighten right up, we just explore the connection.

1110.**W7:** Yes. Exactly. To me it's like a scientist saying 'Oh. OK. Let us hypothesise that this is the way it works.' [as if, sort of]. As if 'We'll go on and we'll see what happens.'.

1111.**CS:** Yep [yeah]. And then what about reworking? When you, you know talked about 27 [chuckling]. I know [W2] [embarrassing isn't it] was saying that she finds, the initial diving into the pool she finds very difficult, but not as creative as the rewriting.

1112.**W7:** That's interesting. Yeah. Ah, yeah, to me they are very different in a way [yeah, well they were for her too]. Yeah. Um, creating in, I suppose, different ways. Yeah, the reworking is a matter of , um...the generating of it in the first place...is somehow just opening the channel to the unconscious and letting it out. But, there's a thing about um, altering, altering it for the...I mean for example, you could have written a scene and you realise that you've actually written it about the wrong character. I mean I had a scene in [novel] where the daughter was playing tennis very badly, [yep] and I thought it was her scene — or was it him playing tennis? — anyway, I , the thing that had to happen was that I had to give it to the other character, the opposite character. Turn it inside out.

1113.**CS:** Now, how do you know that?

- 1114.**W7:** Um, I suppose something is constantly thinking ‘Yes, but what if I? Were to turn it on it’s head? What if I turn it inside out?’. I don’t know.
- 1115.**CS:** There’s probably something there though as well, though, where it just didn’t feel right. I mean [yeah, you wouldn’t].
- 1116.**W7:** You wouldn’t, I suppose, think of doing [yeah] that if you didn’t feel unhappy with it.
- 1117.**CS:** ‘Cos there is a distinct difference between something that sort of lives [mmm] in the text and something that doesn’t [yeah].
- 1118.**W7:** And maybe that’s the difference. Um, beginning writers find that very difficult. Um, the fact that you can have written the right scene, but given it to the wrong person, is, in a way, it doesn’t make sense. And so the fact that you have written a scene which you know to be good. Like ‘OK, the tennis business looks good. Good writing. It’s funny.’ and all the rest of it. ‘What’s wrong with it?’, you might think. So, um, the difficulty is to, is to understand that it can be the right thing in the wrong context. Yeah, I’m not making much sense there.
- 1119.**CS:** No. I know. I mean I’m struggling with this too. I mean because it’s difficult. But, it’s something to do with things, Ahh, all fitting together [yes]. It’s almost like, you know, the Christmas lights coming on. You have one light that doesn’t work [mmmm], that’s the wrong light, and at least the old sets...I think the new sets...[laughter]. Do you remember that with Christmas trees [yes that’s right. One went and...] you have to search [search through them all] and shake them all [yeah, that’s right]. But um, it’s somewhere related in that idea. I was thinking of something else while you were talking too...bad practice!
- 1120.**W7:** Yeah I feel there is something about. You see I’m a great believer in revising, but, under provisional structures.
- 1121.**CS:** Oh I know. Again, in talking to the writers, and even in my own work with the doctorate, most of them talk about the sort of speeding up near the end [mmm], where, I guess this is where the structure starts to become very apparent [yes]. Is that your-experience as well?
- 1122.**W7:** Yes. Certainly. It’s like you have eliminated more and more, gradually, of the extraneous possibilities.
- 1123.**CS:** And do you find you have more energy then as well? Like, do you? Or is it more of a slog?
- 1124.**W7:** Yes?...Oh. Is that true? It’s more confidence. Yeah. It’s a nicer kind of energy, because in the beginning there is a huge amount of energy but it’s terribly anxious. It’s really like my palms get sweaty sometimes thinking ‘This isn’t, you

know, it's not working.' [yep]. So it's a different...It's the 'Oh yeah!. I can do this, I can do that.' at the end, so it's much more confident, happy.

1125.**CS:** Which sort of links to a question of audience, doesn't it [mmmm], because we talked before about...all the tricks you are playing, so that you are pretending like no-one else is [they are not there, yeah] not there, but you are writing for people as well, aren't you? Or are you?

1126.**W7:** No! I'm not [laughs]. [Where does it come in though?]

1127.**Well** yes, I am, that's true.

1128.**CS:** Because I wouldn't believe that it wasn't important to you [laughing] what other people think about your writing [yeah it is].

1129.**W7:** It is. It certainly doesn't begin as that [yeah]. But ah...yes...at what point does it become a...

1130.**CS:** It's like intimacy though, isn't it? I mean is that the point? That...the books reveal who you are [yes] and until you are ready with the product...

1131.**W7:** In fact yes. I think you're right. Because you have to first of all find it for yourself. But then you have to conceal it again [yeah]. You have to hide that sentence again [yeah]. Embed it in the book so that only you know it [yeah]. You have to dig it up and then you have to bury it again [yeah]. That's right, in a way that it will show other people what you have discovered [yeah] without really showing the roots of it [without identifying you], yeah.

1132.**CS:** But you are very interested, I would assume, when people resonate to your books [yes]. I mean that must be a nice experience.

1133.**W7:** It's a wonderful experience, yes. It's um...and it's almost, it almost has that dissociated feeling, because it's almost as if the book has, the book is smarter than I am. The book has somehow done this, rather than I.

1134.**CS:** Well again, that is a very common theme and it carries on this idea that it comes from without, almost [yes, yes]. Or that it's, to use the Matte-Blanco scheme of things, it's of much higher dimensionality than my conscious mind is [yes, yes]. So it's a sort of wisdom that's inherent in us, but we...

1135.**W7:** We are not actually responsible for it.

1136.**CS:** Well, we can't grasp it all at once [yes], and really a novel is an edifice, isn't it? [mmm]. It's very multidimensional. It's a huge thing [yes, yes]. And you patiently build it.

1137.**W7:** Yes. But it's really created by the reader. I mean you create one novel when you write it, but every reader obviously creates their own novel, by reading it in the light of their own life.

1138.**CS:** That's right, but it is interesting that there seem to be more or less universal themes that people can share [yes]. I mean, it's not an entirely different novel. When I read [novel] it's not, you know, entirely the Chris Stevens version.

1139.**W7:** Oh yeah. That's right. There's a big overlap. But then there are some books that, you know, people like very much, and leave others absolutely cold, so it's obviously very... [yeah, and there's timing and that too] yeah.

1140.**CS:** And there was one other thing I was going to ask you, which would probably do it. See, one of the things we're circling now is the social dimension. Uhh, 'cos even though I understand that, you know, most writers sort of write for themselves [mmmm], ah, there are several social dimensions in it. And one is that all their material is socially derived.

1141.**W7:** yes. Usually from fairly close at hand [chuckling].

1142.**CS:** That's right. But also that it has a certain autonomy, ah, frequently writers will talk about hearing voices and narratives, and 'I got the character's voice' [oh yeah, yeah] and they hear the voice or they see a whole scene [yep, yeah] and so on. And it's social in the sense that, you know at least theoretically I think, that what we do is we have all these narratives, including symbolic and visual narratives [mmm] and aural narratives and all the senses that are in this vast neural architecture, and we plug into them, you know? So in a sense it's social in that way, but it's also very personally social, in the way that you are suggesting. Like it is important to communicate, in the end...

1143.**W7:** Yes, that's true. I suppose I am reluctant to look too closely at that. Ummm. I mean when I first started writing and I got a lot of rejections slips I felt very good about that because I knew that I wanted to go on writing, whether or not anybody wanted to publish it. And that somehow made it feel legitimate, the fact, you know, that I was doing it for its own sake. That somehow made it OK in my...

1144.**CS:** Who would read the books though, then? Before you were published.

1145.**W7:** Oh nobody! Nobody [no-one?]. In fact, until this last book I've never shown anything to anybody, until I had absolutely finished with it. This is the first book I've ever shown to readers looking for response.

1146.**CS:** Oh I can understand that aspect of it. But you would have finished books before that had been rejected [oh I see what you mean].

1147.**W7:** Yes. Yes I showed them to one or two people. Yeah.

1148.**CS:** Who were they? Were they family? Were they friends?

1149.**W7:** Oh NO! They were writers in fact. I wanted their professional opinion, yeah.

1150.**CS:** And that was qualitatively different was it to sending it off to be rejected?

You know, the publisher?

1151.**W7:** Ah, how do you mean? You're getting at something I'm not quite...

1152.**CS:** Well ah, you were, ah, sending stuff off to publishers [yes], and it didn't devastate you when it came back [right, yeah].

1153.**W7:** But did it...when I showed it to people?

1154.**CS:** Was it qualitatively different? You had chosen several people.

1155.**W7:** Oh. I see. No I don't think it was. Because there was always some narrative that I could tell myself by which their opinion didn't matter, in some way.

1156.**CS:** But now it's different anyway, isn't it, because, you know, [yes] you are well known [yeah] and also [it's a problem] you've had the experience of people saying 'Oh. I read your book and I loved it.' [yes]. Or even more intimate, they say 'That scene in the...' [chuckling].

1157.**W7:** That's right. 'How did you know?' [chuckling].

1158.**CS:** That's right. Now that complicates matters, doesn't it?

1159.**W7:** Infinitely. Yes.

1160.**CS:** Because here you have this private person [yeah]. Who is toying with being very public with the very private [yeah, yeah]. You see, I'm interested in that. There is, there's a lot that goes on there [yes].

1161.**W7:** And because you are not sure what you are revealing until long after you have revealed it, that's worrying. It's like telling your dreams to somebody [exactly] and later thinking 'Oh my God! I told them that dream and they knew what it was about and I didn't.' [I didn't, exactly] and that's scary, yeah.

1162.**CS:** Well I often say to clients, you know, like, 'cos I think we live in this sort of illusion of privacy [yes]. In some ways it is. I mean we can think thoughts, and we do all the time, that we don't express. The other side of the coin is, other people can see all sorts of things about us that we're not aware that we are doing or that they're aware of [yeah, absolutely]. Our body language [we're reading them all the time] all the time [yeah].

1163.**W7:** But you're right. It's like a little cocoon. It's like being in a car and picking your nose the way people do it at the stoplight [that's right!]. This illusion, or cocoon.

1164.**CS:** That's right So you are toying with that, though [yeah], by putting it out there in the public [yeah] in the public space...which is very interesting.

1165.**W7:** And I suppose that's, it's partly where all the rewrites come in, I think, as a concealing thing. What I think of as, you know, making it, you know, priding myself on its structural beauty and [well, they're important things] they're important things, but in a way I suspect they're just layers of very beautiful camouflage.

1166.**CS:** Yes. It's interesting isn't it?

[Laughter. End of interview]