SUBJECTIVITY, CREATIVITY, AND THE INSTITUTION

SUBJECTIVITY, CREATIVITY, AND THE INSTITUTION

Edited by
CHRISTOPHER CROUCH

Subjectivity, Creativity, and the Institution

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This collection of refereed essays and reports of research has emerged from the *Subjectivity, creativity and the institution* conference held in Perth, Australia in 2009. The conference was convened by the The Chinese Australian Studies Research Centre at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China. The conference endeavoured to gather together as many international speakers from as many disciplines as possible to discuss the central issue of individual creative subjectivity in the modern institution. The intention was to try and make links across the disciplines and to erode, no matter in how small a way, the specialist spheres of knowledges that stop us from thinking in terms of the wider social implications of what we do. Any kind of gathering that has such a broad collection of voices has the potential to become meaningless, a kind of white noise in which one picks out only what one agrees with, but at its best such an environment can create a dialogue through the conjunction of ideas that might not necessarily be brought together otherwise.

As convenor of the conference and editor of these essays I have to declare an interest in the ways in which the self can be articulated (creatively or otherwise) so it may contribute substantively to the wider social realm, rather than be limited to the self circulatory narcissism that commodity culture encourages. My background is the culture of 1950s industrial England, and because of that conditioning I am most relaxed with other Habermasian's view of the world. Despite this particularising nature of my own circumstances however, I am also keen to acknowledge that Habermas' ideas about rationality - as 'reason giving' manifested performatively through statements - privilege cognitive rather than affective understandings of the self, and these affective understandings are the raw material for much valuable creative work. Equally, Habermas' pan-European voice, one that has emerged through the disciplining of minds and bodies by a century and a half of industrialisation, cannot speak for a Chinese or a Nigerian, or indeed any other, world that has taken a different cultural path to meet here in the present. So whilst the conference had the declared intent of placing the individual within the framework of what Ulrich Beck calls *second modernity* and what Zymunt Bauman calls *liquid modernity*, the reader will be hard pressed to find a consistent viewpoint in the collection of essays presented here, other than

that of the attempt of the individual to make sense of a globalised world (that still retains valuable reservoirs of traditional knowledge) and how institutional life may aid and abet those attempts to understand. This struggle for autonomy within systems of gender, school, media, history and custom act as a conceptual glue for the collection of essays, turning it into a reflexive critique of the condition of modernity itself.

If any conclusions can be drawn from the observations of the educationalists, sociologists, anthropologists, critics and practitioners that are writing in this collection it is that the formation of the individual and their navigation of the processes of globalised instutionalisation can be liberating for that individual and that a sharing of the individual's empancipation contributes to all our empowerment.

The collection has been loosely divided into three parts. The first includes those papers which primarily address the nature of the institution and its impact upon the individual. Raewyn Connell's recapitulation and development of her ideas laid out in widely respected book *Southern Theory* gives the broad context of the conference discussion, where she emphasises the need for collective agency and frames the dilemma of us all 'condemned to weave the future' without having a pattern to work from, freed as we are from the certainties of Modernity's past universalising rhetoric. Dirk Michel also frames the bigger picture, distinguishing between individual and institutionalised creative practices, drawing heavily on Adorno, and arguing that ultimately the individual is constituted via mutual, social, creative acts. Emmanuel Aito discusses the impact upon the individual of institutional language and David Prescott-Steed returns to the dérive as a way of shattering the habituated routine imposed upon us by the institution's physical nature. Nicola Kaye examines the role that the internet has in constructing an emancipatory social space, reaffirming that the individual may be constituted socially through creative acts by resisting the colonisation of the lifeworld by the institution; and Anne-Gaël Bilhaut examines in detail the circumstances of the Zapara Indians' solution to the colonisation of their history by creating a relationship with their past through dreams, creating agency through their relationship with the crafted objects of their ancestors. To close this grouping, Huilin Sun looks at the way in which the graphic designer in China has been framed by institutional ideology and grand narratives.

The second section is a collection of papers that critique creative work, and the processes by which the individual is given space to be

creative, or to have that creativity constrained. Simon Blond looks at the way in which creativity has been framed by the Western art school and comes to the conclusion that individual creativity is best framed by supportive social environments of freedom and safety. Shakarami Ali Reza and Mardziah Hayati Abdulah's study of two children 'liberated' from colonisation by the TV, re-enforces Simon Blond's point that a framework for creativity has to be constructed, and in an echo of Nicola Kaye's paper, it lays out clearly how the individual life world is systemically colonised, in this particular instance by violent cartoons. Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Zakeri's study of architectural students finding a voice by transitionally adopting the voices of other architects reminds us not only of the importance of framing creative practices, but also how notions of the value of free flowing information cannot be taken for granted, even in a globalised world. Siriporn Peters' work with a disabled Thai community demonstrates once again how enabling individual creativity is so often bound up with healthy social cultures and Estêvão da Fontoura Haeser and Dürdane Lafcı's papers report back on the circumstances facing educationalists in creating spaces for creative action. The section closes with two essays on literature. Discussing the work of Ben Okri and Zakes Mda, Sola Ogunbayo suggests that myths cross cultural boundaries and that there are transferable human concepts that writers can use to unite us creatively. Bennett Fu uses the work of Andy Quan to encourage us to reflect on the way in which literature can be used to challenge cultural hegemony, and expose the "frictions and fluidity of identity formation or nationalism".

The final section concentrates on the work of creative practitioners who articulate their individual standpoint in relation to their practice. It starts with the conference address by the distinguished Qiu Sha, an artist who has used his study of Lu Xun, and his books of illustrations for Lu Xun's work, to raise points about the debilitating effects that constraints on individuality have. The paper that follows by XuningWang puts Qiu Sha's life and practice into perspective and in doing so reminds us of the differences that still exist in the possibilities available to the creative practitioner in different parts of the world. Jacqui Monks along with Jane Donlin, Matthew Jackson, Murat German, Margit Brünner and Nicolle Desmarchelier all frame their practices within the philosophical and material contexts that they find themselves. Jane Donlin positions her practice as a maker within a reading of Adorno that whilst austere, leaves her space to propose the liberating potential of reflexively resisting the

culture industries. Nicolle Desmarchelier positions her craft in a space that allows her to find a space for her identity to flourish as does Matthew Jackson in his explication of the gap in representation that exists in the depiction of gender fluid individuals. It is the mediation of imagery on our behalf that often excludes us that Murat Germen examines, suggesting a reflexive hybridity of creative identity that both absorbs the global and preserves the culturally specific. Jacqui Monks analyses her debt to Zizek in giving her the language by which to articulate the intangible in her work, and Margit Brünner uses Spinoza to try and articulate the problems of justifying an immaterial and affective experience as art.

In his *A reply to my critics* Habermas made the point that both revolutionary self-confidence and theoretical self-certainly are gone (Thompson, 1982, p. 222). Given this it is perhaps incumbent upon those of us who frame ourselves as public intellectuals to ensure that the complex, tangled and often ragged discussions that interdisciplinary debates instigate, continue and develop. Only in this piecemeal, hybrid and negotiated way can we make space to share our thoughts and in so doing empower one another.

Christopher Crouch
SunYat-sen University, Guangzhou, China

Reference
Thompson, J. & Held, D. (1982). *Habermas: Critical Debates.* Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.

WEAVING HISTORY:
AN ESSAY ON CREATIVITY, STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Raewyn Connell
University of Sydney, Australia

Introduction

This conference[1] is a bold attempt at synthesis. It brings together very diverse people and topics: from the Arctic to Australia, Nepal and Malabar; from museums to indigenous knowledge, calligraphy, and children watching television. The contributors look for creativity in unlikely places and activities. We explore multiple, and sometimes fragile, subjectivities.

The conference to which this is a sequel was concerned with tradition. This conference is concerned with modernity, but modernity in a specific moment, when it is possible for a crisis of working-class housing in the United States to trigger a worldwide financial meltdown. Global connection is a condition of our lives, and becoming a citizen of the world, in a new sense, is a favoured response to it.

This conference invites us to think about the changing realities of modernity. It particularly invites us to think about subjectivities and institutions, and how both are related to creativity. The making of subjectivities does not occur in a personal realm walled off from the social. Rather, creativity and the social are interwoven, and that weaving is what we are exploring here.

I am a sociologist by profession, and therefore my way of thinking about these issues starts with social process. Sociologists have a terrible reputation as creators of mysterious and threatening concepts - I've invented one or two myself - yielding dark predictions of coming crises.

There certainly are social crises, and we will talk about some. But there need be no mystery about the social, if we are prepared to do the hard yards of research and fresh thinking. Nor are social trends inevitable; society is not a machine. The kind of sociology in which I have been involved is certainly interested in the structures that shape subjectivity. But it is equally interested in the moment when subjectivity becomes practice, and has consequences in the world.

Globalisation re-thought

The connections between different regions of the world are now commonly discussed under the rubric of "globalisation". This term came from business and business journalism in the 1980s, when it described the strategies of what were then called multinational companies - international financing, buying components from low-wage economies, and running global marketing campaigns.

Since the 1990s, however, the term has been used much more widely, referring to culture, politics and the whole economy. Globalisation is now commonly understood on the model of a gigantic inkblot. Modernity, or sometimes post-modernity, seeps out of Europe and North America and drips all over the world, staining everything it touches.

This inkblot is also a powerful solvent, in which subsistence economies and local traditions are dissolved, or at least corroded. Social structure and culture become soft, even fluid, and flow into new shapes and endless hybridisations, as seen in the seat pocket magazines published by international airlines.

In the darker versions of this picture, the flowing together produces massive social inequalities on a world scale. Worse, the inkblot is now out of control: economic and cultural globalisation is irreversible. Though no-one in particular is intending it or directing it, no-one is able to stop it, either.

To many of the intellectuals who painted this picture of the globalised world, it has seemed that though globalisation can't be stopped, it can be debated, moderated, and perhaps steered in more benign directions. The social agent who will do this is a new kind of citizen, filled with a consciousness of world rather than national responsibility, the harbinger of a new politics marked by "performative citizenship" and global "norm formation". The well-known German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1999) has even written a "cosmopolitan manifesto" to serve as a banner for this movement.

I saw an example of this in Sydney a few months ago when I went to a new production of Euripides' harrowing play *The Trojan Women*, about the aftermath of the fall of Troy. The director set the play in contemporary Iraq, indeed in the Abu Ghraib prison, and tried to engage our cosmopolitan feelings of sympathy and responsibility for the fate of Iraqi women. The reviewers loved it, and it recently won a director's award.

I thought it was rubbish. Not because I think all classical drama should be performed in masks and robes, avert the omen! It was because in pushing *The Trojan Women* into the shape of a Human Rights Watch report, the director eliminated all the depth in Euripides' script. What was lost included the uncertainties on the side of the triumphant Greeks, the resources for survival on the part of the Trojan women, and the dialogue of the gods that makes the whole play take place under the shadow of looming disaster for the conquerors.

Something of this sort happens in most discussions of globalisation. Modernity is presented in a wafer-thin historical perspective. The ideas and the responses of the inkblot-ised are neglected, and the drama is interpreted only from the perspective of the conquering global North. Therefore the cosmopolitan response is also constructed from the perspective of the global North. (For a fuller account of this argument see Connell, 2007).

To gain a deeper understanding of "globalisation", we must start by recognising that modernity did not sprout in isolation in western Europe and north America and *then* spread across the world. The regions that were to become the metropole of a global economy were already part of a network of trade, culture and science that embraced Africa and Asia as well as Europe; indeed Europe was marginal to the main story of technological and economic development until the last two or three hundred years. (For a splendid polemical summary of the new scholarship on this, see Hobson's *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, 2004.) The industrial-capitalist transformation of the European economy occurred in a context of long-distance trade and the construction of political empire. "Western" modernity was always bound up with imperialism.

We should find that easy to recognise in Australia, a country whose modern reality was created by settler colonialism. We don't find it easy to recognise, because of the deep-seated denial by white Australians of the massive violence that created the Australian colonies. The apology delivered by the new Prime Minister in early 2008 to the "sto-

len generations" of Aboriginal children is a significant step in overcoming that denial, because the forcible disruption of Aboriginal society continued long after the first wave of white settlement passed.

It's not just the legacy of colonialism that is part of our social reality. Practices of colonialism continue, including conquest. I am writing this paper during the Israeli invasion of Gaza, launched in the dying days of the Bush presidency. We see in front of our eyes how colonial conquest works: an attack justified by claims about the barbarism of the natives and their threat to the settlers; overwhelming military violence and lopsided casualties; imbalance of force guaranteed by backing from what we now call a superpower and used to call an empire.

The Israelis will probably withdraw after their punitive expedition, just as the British did across the North-West Frontier. However the Chinese aren't planning to withdraw from Tibet, and the Javanese are not withdrawing from Irian Jaya. Nor are the Americans withdrawing from the nuclear landscapes of Nevada and Utah, nor the Australians from Kakadu and the Pilbara.

Institutions on a world scale

Imperialism and neo-imperialism involve cultural change and the construction of new subjectivities. But these shifts don't happen in a social void. They are connected with the creation of new institutional orders.

The process of conquest involves organised military forces. White settlement in Australia, for instance, began with a naval expedition commanded by a serving officer of the Royal Navy, which was replaced in time by units of the British Army, and *all* the early governors were officers of the armed forces. So much for the pretence of *terra nullius*. The British government expected to use force, against the natives as well as the convicts, as it was accustomed to do in other parts of the growing empire.

Behind the screen of force, colonialism created state structures, plantation and pastoral economies, and eventually domestic institutions among the colonisers - as well as restructuring power, production and domestic life among the colonised. On the basis of African experience, Mudimbe (1994) speaks of the apparatus of rule as the "colonising structure", which undertakes to dominate space, integrate local economies, and re-form the natives' minds.

In the last half-century of world history, formal empire has been replaced by new institutional apparatuses that carry forward many

features of the old. The modernising post-colonial state, as Nandy (2003) has emphasised for India, in the name of development continues the interventions that destroy cultures and local economies. Neo-colonial dictatorships such as the Suharto regime in Indonesia and the Lee regime in Singapore have suppressed dissent as vigorously as the Dutch and British did, in the name of stability and making a happy home for foreign investment.

Foreign investment, in turn, flows through new institutions: the transnational corporation, global commodity markets, and the intricate apparatus of finance capital that has met its first global crisis in the current "meltdown". The new corporate structure sustains mass media with global reach, making Latin America and even Europe, as García Canclini (2001) wittily put it, suburbs of Hollywood.

It is almost impossible to live in contemporary Australia without being caught up in this institutional apparatus. I wear clothes with tags saying "made in China", I write on a computer designed and built by a multinational, I work in a university that pressures me with a "performance management" system from the USA. We can all do this kind of riff on cultural hybridisation, and books on globalisation rarely resist the temptation.

The institutional apparatus of global modernity does change. It went through one dramatic change in the mid twentieth century, with catastrophic war in Europe and the north Pacific, followed by decolonisation in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. It has gone through another mutation with the end of the post-WWII settlement and the creation of a neoliberal world order. This change included the "structural adjustment programmes" and the end of autonomous industrialisation in Latin America (and Australia); the end of the USSR, the crisis of welfare states, and the ramping up of international trade to its present, environmentally devastating, levels.

A market-based institutional order defines, and calls out, market-based subjectivities. For instance, Australian universities in the last two decades have been massively affected by neoliberal agendas (Cooper, Hinkson & Sharp, 2002). Researchers from the University of Western Sydney have interviewed academics and have shown how some embrace the new order, constructing themselves as competitive, outcome-oriented and entrepreneurial - though others resist, or try to find some shelter from the neoliberal storm (Davies & Bansel, 2005). Researchers on masculinity have also begun to study the construction of gender in commodity and capital markets, and in transnational corporations. We are beginning to understand how the high-

stakes market environment calls out particular versions of aggressive masculinity - not as an immovable pattern, but as practices that are sensitive to time and circumstance (Levin, 2001).

Gendered subjectivities

Modern organisational research has traced many connections between institutions, practice and consciousness. For instance it has become commonplace to speak of "gendered organisations" (Acker 1990), because research persistently finds that organisations, whether public or private, have gender regimes that include divisions of labour and power hierarchies, as well as supporting specific cultural models of femininity and masculinity. Indeed there is now a whole journal (*Gender, Work & Organization*) devoted to exploring this phenomenon.

One of the fruitful sites of masculinity construction is military organisations, both official and unofficial - i.e. armies, secret police, guerrilla forces, terrorist groups, security forces, death squads and so forth. The conflict of Israelis and Palestinians has been studied on both sides with this in mind. It is clear that the *Intifada* became the setting for the construction of a combative protest masculinity among Palestinian male youth. On the other side, service in Israel's armed forces created, and to some extent overcame, dilemmas rooted in older versions of Jewish identity that thematised cooperation and nonviolence. (See for instance the studies in Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2000.) It has been distressing to watch, in the last generation, a hardening militarisation of Israeli society, to the point where the current political leaders seem to be locked in a competition of toughness in confronting Hamas. Their possession of overwhelmingly superior weapons has turned that confrontation into the massacre of recent weeks.

The modern study of gender patterns among men is a classic example of social research that takes an apparently natural, singular, fixed entity (as "masculinity" is still pictured in pop psychology and most mass media) and shows that it is actually plural, situational, and historically variable (Connell, 2005). It has therefore become customary among researchers to speak of "masculinities" in the plural, whether speaking of personal identity, patterns of interpersonal conduct, or cultural images.

The relations among masculinities, within a given social setting, seem to be among the most important influences on specific subjectivities. Whether a given pattern of masculinity holds a hegemonic

position or not, whether it is marginalised, subordinated or otherwise under social censure, is important to boys and youth as they form life projects. For instance, research with Lebanese-background youth in western Sydney finds a collective construction of protest masculinity - shaped not only by the sharp gender divisions of Arab culture but also by confrontations with anglo-Australian youth, school teachers and police (Poynting, Scott and Tabar 2003).

Gender research in the English-speaking world has been strongly influenced by post-structuralist thought, to the point where some analyses of gendered subjectivity recognise nothing but post-structuralist ideas. Subjectivity, in this approach, is an effect of discourse; gender is constructed performatively, is brought into being by repetitive enactment. (For a survey of this approach see Alsop et al, 2002.)

This turn in gender research has been helpful in contesting both essentialist ideas about gender dichotomy, and rigid pictures of patriarchal power. Often associated with queer theory, post-structuralism has led masculinity research to pay attention to the construction of masculinity by women, as well as by men; and has highlighted heterosexuality as a system of norms, which are open to contestation and subversion (Halberstam, 1998). Post-structuralist approaches have led many to the idea that gender is "fluid", that it is somehow always in flux, that gendered subjectivities are fragile or ephemeral.

It is this implication that I have always found hard to swallow; and that has made me wary of the post-structuralist approach generally. There is a lot of evidence that gender patterns, though unquestionably social, are by no means fluid and easy to change.

Let me give two examples from research. One is from organisational studies, and concerns the arrival of women in management circles which in the past have been heavily masculinised and monopolised by men. Gherardi and Poggio (2001), in an Italian case study, describe the organisational "dance" that follows the advent of women in a male-dominated organisation. Both men and women work to de-fuse the new situation, restoring the symbolic dichotomy of gender despite the many practical compromises that have to be made. The other is from research on transsexuality, which to some post-structuralists has seemed the most striking proof of the fluidity of gender. Life-history research, such as Rubin's (2003) superb study with transsexual men, shows on the contrary a powerful continuity of gender identity, even when it is in stark conflict with the evidence of the body. This reaches the point

where Rubin's interviewees, almost to a man, took a biological-essentialist view of their masculinity.

Activists in reform efforts, for instance campaigns to reduce sexual or domestic violence by men, have every reason to recognise the difficulty of change in gender patterns. It is even difficult, despite widespread acceptance of the principle of gender equality, to persuade men in any numbers to increase their housework or their involvement in caring for babies. Change does happen, and reform movements, such as the impressive gender equality efforts among men as well as women in India (Chopra, 2008), do experience some victories. But victories are won by struggle, and against resistance; they do not fall into anyone's lap. Gender patterns are often very intractable, once they get established; witness the "hard" masculinities of the Arab/Israeli conflict.

One of the fundamental problems with a performative concept of gender, and with post-structuralist approaches to subjectivity in general, is that they offer brilliant insights into the way actions are, so to speak, sculpted in the moment, but give little grip on the downstream consequences of those actions. Post-structuralism therefore has difficulty understanding the building of institutions, the shape of a social order, or the large-scale dynamics of social change.

If I can put this now in a positive form, rather than as criticism: we need to recognise, and have theoretical tools that illuminate, the fundamental *historicity* of social process. There is neither open-ended fluidity, nor cyclical reproduction, in history; there are *consequences*.

Subjectivities, institutions and the other elements of social life come into existence through practice in time, and have continuity because of the consequences of practice in time. Where these consequences are contradictory, or some other reason for indeterminacy is present, a dynamic of change is set up in which social relations (such as gender relations) may mutate.

Trying to steer that dynamic of change - including trying to resist change - is what politics is about. Because our actions - including resisting change - have downstream consequences, we have responsibility. That was what Euripides was saying, in *Trojan Women*.

Escapes and agency

Can we escape from the relentless pressure of institutions? Is creativity able to fly out, so to speak, between the bars?

Yes, in one obvious sense. Here I appeal to the evidence of someone who was literally imprisoned by one of the most repressive

institutions in the world, the security police of an authoritarian state. The writer and painter Breyten Breytenbach's *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984) tells the story of his arrest, interrogation, trial, second trial, and seven years' imprisonment as an opponent of the Apartheid regime in South Africa in the bitter days of the 1970s. He came out of it still creative, indeed able to turn the experience into compelling literature. But he also came out of it damaged. He said this himself:

> How does one survive? I did not survive. This is important to point out... It is important that you consciously (I'd be apt to say 'personally') assist at the putting down of the I. That is if you wish to parry destruction, to unsurvive. (As if 'survival' is going to enquire after your wishes!) Not only the I as a concept of (para) physicality, as a screen of illusions, as hole-ness - but in its most mundane manifestations. (Breytenbach, 1984, p. 280)

I'm sure that kind of damage is the usual consequence of imprisoning people, whether between the four walls of a cell or in a repressive social order. There is some research on masculinities in prisons (Sabo et al., 2001). The patterns are related to gender hierarchy outside, but are also shaped by the toxic institution. For instance, a recent study in South Africa traces a stark gender polarisation among the men of the well-developed prison gangs. Not one but two gender hierarchies are produced, one among the violent power-holders among the prisoners, the other among the "wyfies", their feminised sexual partners (Gear, 2005).

As Gilbert Murray once wrote, concerning another play by Euripides, the *Medea*: "when these oppressed women strike back, he seems to say, when these despised and enslaved barbarians can endure no longer, it will not be justice that comes but the revenge of madmen" (Murray, 1946, p. 53). Murray's words have some relevance today.

We might walk out of the institution, then, but the institution stays in us. I think this is very broadly true. Think of the family, for instance, one of the most important of all social institutions. Who among us hasn't thought at some moment, or been told, that they were channelling their mother or their father? I don't doubt the reality of my own identifications, with both my parents (though in different ways). Classical psychoanalysis is out of fashion in the social

sciences today and perhaps rightly so, for its rigidity, class and gender biases and cultural limitations. Yet one of Freud's basic insights, that the dynamics of family relationships create the emotional equipment we take into later life, seems as valid as ever. And that emotional equipment is surely involved in most forms of cultural creation.

Where classical psychoanalysis fails us, though other forms of psychotherapy derived from it need not, is in recognising that the emotional structures laid down in childhood are subject to major re-working in later life. The cultural expression of emotional conflict is itself part of that re-working. So the social repeatedly enters the con-struction of subjectivity, not as a cycle of reproduction or an unend-ing performative iteration, but in changing circuits of practices-with-consequences through the life course. Creativity, as we encounter it in arts and design, is not opposed to the social, to the world of insti-tutions; it is inherently a realm of social action.

Therefore I am sceptical also of the "Making History" idea of political change, the model of a world-changing intervention by the heroic actor - whether it is Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Che Guevara or (in his own eyes) George W. Bush. One of the oddest moments of the recent (and welcome) political transformation in Nepal was the im-age of a row of portraits put up by the guerrilla movement after it came into the open: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao... every one a bloke, none of them workers...

Yet politics too requires creativity; and that is popularly recog-nised in the emotions around the election of Barak Obama. In the large literature about intellectuals and politics, the most interesting account of creativity I have found comes from the Shi'ite theologian and postcolonial sociologist Ali Shariati (1986). Shariati distinguishes three groups of intellectuals in Islamic society: the *ulama*, the tradi-tional Islamic scholars who are in touch with the masses but whose religion is fossilised; the technically trained scientific or literary intel-lectuals, in touch with international modernity but not with the masses, whose work undermines local culture; and a group he calls the *rushanfekr*, an untranslatable term that is sometimes awkwardly rendered "enlightened souls".

The role of the *rushanfekr* is to diagnose the state of society and culture, and propose strategies of change - a kind of prophetic func-tion, though Shariati doesn't equate them with prophets. He also distinguishes this from the role of political leadership, and is sharply critical of third world revolutionaries who have either lost touch with popular religion (e.g. Fanon), or substituted themselves for the peo-

ple, as power-holders in the Leninist vein. The *rushanfekr* role is culturally specific: this form of creativity must be based in contact with popular culture. In a Muslim society, Islam must therefore be the basis of reform. Shariati develops an interpretation of Islam as a dynamic social and cultural force, the basis of selfhood, committed to justice, inherently activist and socially transformative. It's a picture of Islam very unlike that conveyed in our mass media.

There is no reason why this role can only be performed in Islamic society, or only through the genre of political writing. A notable example can be found closer to Australia, in the work of Epeli Hau'ofa, now living in Fiji. The essays recently collected in *We Are the Ocean* (2008) offer a sharp analysis of the continuing wreck of Pacific island societies since formal independence: the creation of a dependent regional ruling class, the relegation of local languages and cultures to backwaters inhabited by the poor and uneducated. Hau'ofa's response is a practical and creative one: not political organising, but founding a regional arts centre that provides a practical basis for the expression of indigenous culture in new forms. Hau'ofa has organised this work particularly around the theme of islanders' relationship to the surrounding ocean.

It is relationship to land, of course, that is crucial in the famous art movement based on indigenous culture in central Australia in the last generation. Impacted by the colonising structures for more than a century, central desert societies have been profoundly damaged; but have also found means of survival and in some cases a notable resurgence. In the art movement, designs that were originally made on bodies, rock or sand, based on stories about the land and relationships to specific sites and routes, have been used to create acrylic artworks which in turn circulate through the market institutions of capitalist society - the art business. Vivien Johnson's recent encyclopaedic *Lives of the Papunya Tula Artists* (2008) both traces the individual stories and styles, and shows that this artistic creativity involved a powerful collective agency. Techniques and strategies were shared along the lines of kinship, friendship and location, and shifts in style and approach also had a collective character.

Collective agency is also important when we think about other art forms that have developed among marginalised or working-class people in Australia. The community art movement seems to be at a low ebb at the moment, but it has an interesting history (Binns, 1991). Among the sponsors of community art is the union movement. Unions have also generated their own art forms, notably union