

## Western and Contemporary Global Conceptions of Creativity in Relief Against Approaches from So-Called "Traditional" Cultures<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** For the past few centuries, many in the West have defined their culture as "modern," "dynamic," and "creative," in opposition to other cultures which they have called "traditional" of the 20th century, however, this distinction has revealed itself as misleading. This article attempts to determine what distinctions might legitimately be made about conceptions of creativity. It seeks to illuminate how creativity (as the West has commonly defined the term) is expressed in "traditional" cultures, and how some traditional activities might cause us to modify the concept.

"CREATIVITY" and its derivatives are words which fill today's newspapers, advertisements, books, college course catalogs, business reports, and "innovation," and "discovery," with which it is frequently synonymous, "creativity" is rarely defined, but it is almost always used in a very positive way that most people are surprised to learn that it was coined little more than a century ago (Ward, 1875) and became common only in the past fifty years. The concept of creativity was being formulated in the West from the Renaissance onward, the term itself was finally invented when European scientific discovery revealed some parallels with creation in literature and the arts: in each case, something *new* seemed to be brought into being. Since World War II, the concept of creativity has become even more explicitly interdisciplinary, and today we might discuss creative parenting, music, and the creative arts. Our definition of creativity has also become extremely democratic: one need not be a genius—anyone can "release" his or her creative potential in a weekend workshop in "creativity training." And many forces in our society encourage us to pursue creativity; as the philosopher Charles Hartshorn that "to be called 'creative' is a special form of praise" (p. 3).

While exceptions and distinctions regarding the definition are frequently made, and arguments over the quality and appropriateness of different Western views of creativity have become increasingly global, as Westerners recognize "creativity" in other cultures and as people around the world begin to see it as good and that people from all walks of life may be "creative." Indeed, sharing this perspective is an important part of participating in a global culture.

Thus, New York museums display Yoruba master carvings near Dutch master paintings; meanwhile, Kuwaiti businesspeople talk about American innovation with their Indonesian counterparts; and artists, scientists, and musicians move from country to country with relative ease, frequently at the same time, ethnic, national, and religious rivalries are widespread and acute, and that the "global culture" we believe exists is itself largely the product of the last few centuries. In fact, because our Western culture is so dominant globally, we have the power to propagate false or at least distorted images of other cultures. For example, rural Pakistanis might encounter images of Brazilian creativity filtered through the prism of American advertising. And when people speak of "creativity" in this English word, because the concept is not a normal part of their languages, and because the West has succeeded in influencing these people's conceptions of a global culture tends to overwhelm all unique group identities.

Group cultural identity may be based on many factors, but having a certain degree of common belief and customs persisting over time is fundamental. Members and following generations have to the customs and beliefs they've inherited, the more the group may be called "traditional." While the group itself has created and have evolved, their originators are often given great reverence, and new traditions inevitably arise, virtually every society seems incompatible with their most important inherited beliefs and customs. It is easy to see, therefore, how more "traditional" cultures are threatened by the dominant Western culture: our economic, military, and technological power produces direct social-material changes in the lives of the people, and they question the past and one's identity and to celebrate the "new."

In fact, the myriad ways in which creativity relates to culture, identity, tradition, and change call for more thoughtful examination in today's multidisciplinary approach. A discipline could do such an examination justice; the attempt to understand how different societies have defined and valued what we call "creativity" is a complex analysis.

### The Western World's Perception of "Traditional" Cultures

For most of us, "the West" is both a geographical term and a cultural-political-economic one. Critics and admirers alike, "Westerners" and others pertaining to Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, though some people in these countries may not seem "typically Western," while Africa, Brazil, and elsewhere may seem very "Western." We can say this because the assumed cultural identity of the West includes relative common "modern" science and technology, democracy, individualism, and the Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian-European heritage (GoGwilt, 1995, p. 15). Values like Japan and Taiwan might be included in the group, and then the "West" dissolves into "Global Culture."

The primary cultural traits we usually associate with the West began to form in the Renaissance when feudal structures started to break down and authorities, questioned traditional assumptions, and attempted to distinguish between the "traditional" and the "new." These challenges were stimulated by 14th-16th century European travellers and explorers who marvelled at the sights and customs of Mesoamerica, China, India, and Africa. But the conquistadors' realization that European military technology gave them the power to dominate and pillage those other cultures. The long-standing power has been based until then mainly on national and ethnic chauvinism and a religious doctrine distinguishing between the "saved" and the "pagans,"<sup>2</sup> with the power.

This power helped legitimize the relatively new cultural traits, and Europeans subsequently distinguished themselves from other peoples in the world. Cultures (such as the Chinese) have viewed themselves as "civilized" and others as "barbaric," the imperialistic "successes" of the West throughout history. "Advanced" and others were "backward" or "primitive." While some Western thinkers, like Rousseau, de las Casas, Montaigne, and Swift critique the Western/non-Western opposition to the extreme of truly human vs. animalistic.

A certain degree of respect achieved toward the end of the 19th century substituted the terms "modern" and "traditional," but the West has continued to view others as "static." Today, we still commonly think of a culture as "traditional" when we believe its social roles, customs, and beliefs are "fixed" and are not easily transferable to other peoples or other regions—as opposed to what we think of as our diverse, continually changing, ever-evolving structures of traditional societies determine what people can do and say, while in our "modern" society, what individuals do and say supposedly expresses their individuality (p. 287; Babcock, 1993, p. 90). In other words, a "traditional society" determines the conditions of creativity, while a "modern society" is determined by its own internal dynamics.

in the West generally consider their society superior for this reason.

In line with this sense of superiority, Western thinkers of the Enlightenment era, such as Herder, formulated theories of history in which people stages, starting with nature and primitivism and progressing until they reach the heights of advanced, modern civilization. Europeans sought their language, folklore, archeology, as well as history. Through ethnography and comparative religions, they also explored the peoples they had colonized and development. And what they found fascinated them. Centuries earlier, Europeans had been filled with curiosity when the explorers brought back "New World;" by the end of the 18th century, "orientalism" had swept European and American art and fashion, and the "noble savage" ideal was created. Emerson, Müller, and Schopenhauer found inspiration in Asian philosophy and religion. By the end of the 19th century, the ethnographic museums soon thereafter, Western artists began to adopt ideas from "primitive cultures." In the twentieth century, the end of direct, political colonialism, the civil rights movements in the United States, and the rise of global media, trade, and tourism, have allowed for a new level of appreciation for so-called because the West's great dominance has led to the virtual disappearance of many of these cultures, and we are concerned about losing all the excellence of certain individuals, traditional customs, and creations of traditional peoples.<sup>3</sup>

Surely, one of the ironic results of the West's desire for novelty is that, today, we are intrigued by the countless "traditional" artifacts we find around us because they seem new to us, many of us also believe, as Freud did, that the "primitive" expresses our innermost or original selves. Like Gauguin, we cannot reach exotica abroad, we look at the objects in our museums or buy them in our galleries and boutiques.<sup>4</sup> Intrigued by the ancient "creations" incorporate them as novel and mysterious elements in their works, and our teachers review them in the classroom as "multicultural" supplements advertising, too, play upon the exotic and adventurous dimensions of these "primitive" cultures.

Because we're often unknowledgeable about these other cultures, creations of theirs that appear novel to us may actually be mass-produced for people who are very naive; but serious Western scholars and art collectors visit these cultures and make a point of determining what are unique and culturally significant. They are, the Western focus on the objects as individually valuable artifacts isolates and abstracts them from the much larger cultural fabric of which they are. They might value these works as artistic masterpieces or as "expressions of culture," most people in the West also value them as commodities, and this is the culture from which we seek to acquire these things.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, peoples around the world have always engaged in commerce, and they are quite pleased when outsiders buy their works and appreciate them as art—whether or not the outsiders understand the contexts of the creations.<sup>6</sup>

Still, most would agree that our appreciation is almost always enhanced if we do understand the cultural backgrounds of the creations. The problem for someone else's, is no easy task. Just as we implicitly define something by clarifying what it is not, we understand a culture *as* a culture, only by context and relations circumscribed and relatively fixed. We ask of any culture, what are its long-standing customs and beliefs. The idea that a society has traditions is a conceptualization. Thus we somehow often think of ancient Egypt or China as coherent wholes, despite their thousands of years of evolution. Cultures are creative and so dynamic that we ignore the traditions which shape us and have great difficulty perceiving the characteristics of our own culture. Call it "traditional" has long been an important aspect of the West's self-definition. This is especially the case in the United States, where images of "the self-made man," and "the inventive spirit" have filled political rhetoric, are widely believed, and seem to have fostered a tradition of breaking

However, there are primary and secondary tendencies, dominant and minority cultures in every society, and these necessarily shift over time. Most conservatives emphasize the importance of traditions, but many of these same conservatives share with others a strong commitment to innovation as "traditional" may proudly insist that they are, or may vehemently deny the description as a case of European-American self-deception, bigotry, and tribalism. Tribes were described by Westerners as so fixed in their customs that while some tribes were in fact wiped out, others were declared "dead" simply because they seemed to exist—as if the group concerned was incapable of or had no right to evolve (McNickel, 1972, p. 33).<sup>7</sup> "Traditional" societies may value their traditions and behavior, but they would not survive at all if they couldn't change.

In many cases, traditional cultures are strongly tied to nature, and while this trait is now often praised in the West, it was long viewed by Westerners as primitive. These other peoples. That is why, even today, Native American cultural artifacts are sometimes displayed in "natural history" museums—sometimes in a hall from the dinosaur skeletons—as if the people, too, were extinct. It is true that for some peoples, like the Tarajans of Indonesia, social customs, might be so bound to a particular natural environment that when members of the culture move elsewhere, their traditions might not make sense. American Indian nations have experienced forced migration and yet have retained varying degrees of traditional cultural identity; and during a 20th-century period, despite significant differences in the ways Native American and Jewish religions view nature and transcendence.

Hardly any culture on earth has been able to maintain its traditions completely unaffected by outside influences. Trade, war, missionizing, tourism, and the exchange of culture from one group to another, and each group has changed as a result. James Clifford (1988) reminds us that when Margaret Mead studied the Pacific Islands she found them unconcerned about preserving their own cultural integrity and instead collecting and adopting some Western cultural forms; but as Clifford found other cultures to be purists when we are not and never have been (p. 230 ff). Long ago, trade routes crossed the Americas, Asia, and Europe; Rome and the Mediterranean; the Mongols opened up trade between Asia and Europe; the Arabs tied these regions to Africa; people, foods, and animals were traded and customs travelled as well. Native Americans and Europeans traded actively from their first encounters. Images of Portuguese appear in 16th-century European paintings. Inuit (Eskimo) art went through several transitions as a result of climatic changes and contact with the "Inuit plastic art practically disappeared for a few centuries." After James Houston visited the Arctic in 1948 and collected works which sold well, and Inuit carving was reborn (McGhee, 1988, p. 20; Blodgett, 1988, p. 21).

Obviously, the outside influence of modern secular society is not necessary for a "traditional" society to engage in trade or even to mass produce. The fact that they do in themselves mean that the society has ceased to be "traditional"—such a society might still strictly limit what may be created, who is allowed to create (within that society at least). This was certainly true in ancient Teotihuacan, for example, which nonetheless exported luxury ceramics as early as the Mesoamerican period, influencing standards of art and culture throughout the region (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1993, p. 18). This, of course, is a result of the establishment of new traditions which, in turn, were followed for generations and even centuries. Likewise, Athens in 400 B.C. was excepted and actively engaged in commerce around the Mediterranean, but it still had very traditional structures for creativity.

The term, "traditional," then, is descriptive precisely to the extent that a society manages to circumscribe the realms and manner of creativity by tradition from generation to generation. This happens in part because traditions are sufficiently revered that they serve as models for future work. The tradition of comprehending and integrating all kinds of new developments. Repetition and reinterpretation of inherited practices are therefore hallmarks of successful cultural identity go hand in hand.

These characteristics apply whether we are discussing a contemporary, non-literate, Hmong village of 100 in Southeast Asia, a complex, traditional Amish community in Pennsylvania. There are, of course, tremendous differences between such cultures, but "traditional" does not mean a generalization used to describe a strong degree of commitment to valuing inherited ideas and customs. Hence, we are not so wrong in viewing Culture as coherent wholes: despite their lengthy histories, they seem to have successfully maintained many key beliefs and practices and apparatuses over periods of time. For these and a number of other cultures, then, the word, "traditional," can be applied, so long as we keep in mind its relative meaning.

Certainly, *every* culture has some degree of commitment to its traditions, and for that reason, even the United States might be called "traditional" because the held traditional beliefs of the U.S. are virtually identical to the ideology of Western dominated global culture—and this culture embodies certain i

the scientific questioning of assumptions, the commodification of goods and services, and the admiration of the new and unique, which directly threaten beliefs and therefore the perpetuation of every particular culture. And with the acceleration of global intercourse in the 19th and 20th centuries, these pressures impinge on every society have become overwhelming. "Fundamentalist," "nationalist," and "tribalist" reactions to this onslaught are, as a result, varied; therefore, self-identity are at stake. It is understandable that many traditional societies wish to circumscribe what we call "creativity," for creative activities which alter society.

Even many secular westerners today feel concern that "traditional cultures" are being "threatened with extinction." Throughout our century, various politicians, and others have waxed nostalgic about "tradition," even though, as Edward Shils (1988) has pointed out, "no society was ever as dominated as it appears . . ." (p. 19). Nonetheless, this nostalgia has helped fuel nationalist political movements and has been translated by some anthropologists into a traditional style (McNickel: *Medicine*, 1972).

Many anthropologists play a creative role in explaining other cultures to us and in educating indigenous peoples about how to deal creatively with their environment. Anthropologists help "traditional" cultures organize against corporate exploitation, lobby for protective but non-restrictive government regulations on domestic products so that the culture can maintain its "traditional" livelihood (Deloria, 1992; Ortiz, 1972). The credo of course is that the Westerners want, but the mere fact of his or her presence explaining how the "outside" world operates is a delicate balancing act between interference with an example, the organization, Cultural Survival).<sup>9</sup>

In the past, and even to a considerable extent today, the West has been far more interested in preserving the artifacts than the people and way of life. What James Clifford has aptly called "culture collecting:" we grab hold of the fruits of other cultures' creative efforts and put them in museums or

Conquerors have always lusted after "the spoils of war," and even today, despite the 1907 Hague Convention against this, such pillaging goes on against it, international art theft goes on as well.<sup>10</sup> Aside from individual profiteers from abroad, national governments have often disrespected indigenous National museums of Brazil, Mexico, and the United States display countless works of local tribal cultures that were never freely donated or sold

And of course, mass production from the Industrial Age through today has undercut local, hand-made production by economies of scale and until then, at best, often become folk crafts.<sup>11</sup> To some extent, particularly when traditional works are bought from the creators themselves, this "cultural might" might positively be seen as a type of rear-guard action in which we attempt to "rescue" what we are destroying, even if what we rescue is torn from positive efforts, such as the U.S. *Indian Arts and Crafts Bill of 1990*, are aimed at encouraging contemporary artists to practice traditionally, even though debate rages over the use and misuse of the terms traditional and contemporary" (LaFramboise and Watt, 1993, p. 9).<sup>12</sup> And this debate is one main in.

#### Approaches to Creativity in Diverse "Traditional" Cultures

Of the many contemporary cultures which appear to us or consciously attempt to be "traditional," each will respond in a different, creative way to secular society. Islamic fundamentalism is one visible reaction; the political efforts of the "Moral Majority" movement in the U.S. is another. Some we might think of as extremely chauvinistic, bigoted, even evil and vicious. Sometimes, cultures embrace "modernism" with such gusto that they destroy their own. All around the world, people are faced with the task of finding a balance between tradition and change.

If we look, for example, at the Kaipo tribe in the Amazon or the Karen people in Burma, we see them struggling to maintain their traditions (in the face of change). In doing so, the Karen use modern weapons, and the Kaipo use video cameras and western-style public relations (Seibert and Kepner). "Things" alter their societies, but Karen and Kaipo apparently believe that the alterations that come with these technologies are less threatening than are creatively attempting to preserve their traditional ways of life, and to a certain degree, they are succeeding; for how long, though, we have a race against these groups seem overwhelming.

Reactions in our Western culture to our encounters with "traditional" societies is sometimes peculiar. When such cultures look weak to us, as they try to maintain their "cultural integrity," our anthropologists sometimes go out of their way to aid in those efforts and are concerned, even upset, when they fail from our culture. On the other hand, when a traditional culture appears strong and rejects our influence, as do the Iranians, we are offended; whereas especially our government and corporations—are resentful, even fearful.

That is hardly the case for Western tourists and art collectors heading toward Bali in Indonesia, where several centers for traditional art, dance, and Balinese to preserve their culture and survive economically. Outsiders, struck by the artistic activities of the Balinese (the whole population seems more creative than elsewhere) often describe that society as extremely creative. However, this perception is based on the assumption that art and creativity are so limited in Bali is limited to what we call the fine and performing arts. Furthermore, except for some recent developments in painting in the last few years, Bali seems to have been devoted to following classical patterns. One gets the impression that the same dance with the same costumes and the same music since the middle ages. This is consistent with the fact that in Balinese society,

Actions which are culturally correct (pakel) are acceptable and aesthetically valued. Actions which are permissible (dadi) are more or less culturally not permissible (sing dadi) are to be deprecated and avoided (Bateson, 1972, p. 119).

These generalizations, in their translated form, are true for most or all cultures, ours included, but the encouragement to be culturally correct in the United States, people may not even understand what "culturally correct" means, or, if they claim to, will certainly disagree about what fits under that prominent feature of American society. In Bali, cultural correctness seems to be relatively obvious to virtually all members of society, and it seems recognizable correct structures. Within these structures, creativity certainly flourishes, often in ways that outsiders can barely grasp—as Clifford (1988) of Balinese customs and behaviors, even ones like cockfights, might express and serve as "positive agents in the creation and maintenance" of social calls cockfighting an "artform" (p. 249).

This socially controlled creativity works despite centuries of interactions with other cultures, including Javanese and European domination, depicted by many Balinese of advanced technology. Culturally correct, permissible, and impermissible actions are less a matter of law here and in other traditional societies. Extended families still live in group compounds. Children grow up under the watchful eyes of family, neighbors, and the gods. Even though child labor is common, they are taught at a very early age the traditional, "culturally correct" dances. Often, young people who might be described as delinquents are no longer called "Balinese" by their neighbors, but rather, "Javanese," apparently because the Balinese expect all members of their own culture to follow the norms as not belonging to their culture, and (b) hold other expectations of them. Here, as in many other parts of the world, the watchful eye "evil eye" against those few who wish (or dare) to oppose community norms (Hauschild, 1982).<sup>13</sup> The effect of this type of social structure on creativity

Not to be ignored, either, is that, in any society, the more fixed and obvious class differences and social roles are, the more this circumscribes what creative activities and under what circumstances. Thus, a male warrior and a woman weaver from the same society may be subject to very different rules; they are allowed some degree of latitude within their respective domains. Both the force of these traditional roles and the possibility of altering them without abandoning tradition are displayed in Bali today.

Latitude regarding traditional structures has always been visible as one is distanced from the geographic, cultural, political, and economic center aside from the vanity of rulers, why some people in ancient Israel, China, and Rome argued for greater centralization of power. The countryside v behavior, but standards of culture imposed by or adopted from the capital might be more loosely adhered to than in the capital itself. Conversely, i in style which have come to be accepted in the capital. Furthermore, the lower classes will not have the material means to imitate the ideals of cre that reason may create in unique ways—we see this in "folk art" around the world. Indeed, the poverty of many traditional societies has often nec inability to buy a new model or even replacement parts often leads to unusual substitutions and imaginative reconstructions.<sup>14</sup>

Other conceptual factors which tend to shake up what might seem to be rigid societal rules are the myth of the "trickster" and celebrations like prevalent in many traditional cultures. The trickster god or spirit, whether in the ancient Germanic religions or in American Indian ones, serves as comic, or anarchic element (Hynes, 1993).<sup>15</sup> In the feast of fools, the usual social hierarchies are set topsy-turvy, and in carneval or mardi gras, ta largely disregarded. The dances, masks, songs, and social interactions associated with the tricksters and carneval interestingly express traditions c creativity is exercised.

Finally, it should be clear that each society, however traditional, will differ as to which domains of activity will be more restricted and which w seem to be given freer reign in Bali than are social relations, commerce seems to have the least traditional limitations imposed upon it (the arts se whole, especially as part of touristic commerce). If we look at a group like the Orthodox Jews, meanwhile, we see that artistic creativity is quite li creative interpretation of the Torah and Talmud is virtually required, particularly of males. Creativity in business has also become characteristic o restrictions and urgings placed upon it by the Catholic Church); even today, however, creativity in this sphere and elsewhere is subject to the relig Sabbath.<sup>16</sup> In the cases of both the Balinese and the Orthodox Jews, there is an interesting and no doubt difficult balancing act between commitm involvement in the global marketplace, which is overwhelmingly secular, modern, and indifferent, if not outright hostile, to the unique difference:

Immersed as our culture has been in modern, secular, capitalistic individualism, we have tended to view societies committed to the preservation Finally, in the late twentieth century, we have begun to acknowledge that works of these other cultures might be "creative," as we define the term. might be operating with somewhat different senses of what it means to be "creative;" our term may not easily translate into their languages. This is dominance of our conception of creativity allows us to forget that there are other notions of it. Indeed, the focus on *newness* in our conception rei recognize the common ground between Western and traditional societies' views.

When we examine traditional societies more carefully, we might recognize that the opposite of creativity is not tradition, but thoughtless habit : repetition of a pattern may or may not be a routine, mechanical process; it could also be an opportunity for personal interpretation of that pattern. repeated "types" in the masks and sculptures of ancient Teotihuacan, the variety of images presented and materials used is extremely diverse. We : many in the west have viewed "tradition" as necessarily "backward," and repetition as necessarily "uncreative."

It is easy, for example, for an outsider to look at a seemingly simplistic and often repeated image of an animal in clay, cloth, or paint, as clear ev However, it could well be that the image expresses a sacred, ceremonial obligation, is intentionally abstract, and is intentionally open to multiple, Marmon Silko (1990), the Southwestern Pueblo people never seek realistic portrayal of a particular elk, for example, but presentation of the genei constellations or elk or antelope draw their magic in part from the process wherein the focus of all prayer and concentration is upon the thing itsel (Silko, pp. 678-9). Each work involves preparatory prayer, and each object portrayed reveals its integration in a whole network of symbolic relati Indian totem poles might regularly display frogs, beaver, eagles, bears, wolves, and human images to honor family ancestry and to tell particular s assume that the images always carry multiple symbolic meanings. Therefore, however repetitive the image may appear to outsiders, the possibilit interpretations would seem to require considerable creativity.

What is more, we are likely to find that traditional cultures utilize their creations in multiple ways. Wooden paddles of the Northwest American because they are often elaborately carved, they may also serve as decorative pieces when not in use; they are given as gifts, usually from a man tr Similarly, in the West today, cutlery may have intricate designs and be given as a special wedding present—but the phoenix or serpent images on symbols once had common, powerful implications, but today, those meanings are most likely to be ignored. Conversely, the images on a bowl or likely carry mythic-religious-cultural signification. In this way, the everyday "use object" is integrated into the whole of the cultural web.

For this reason, many museums go to great lengths to explain the contexts of the objects they display from "traditional cultures." The Metropol presents a 35 minute film of the "Art of the Dogon" of Mali, so that the masks displayed can be visualized as they are used in ritual dances and so the works can begin to be understood. Much less background information is provided to accompany most western art works in the museum's coll familiar with the context—indeed, many works are presented with no information other than title, artist, and date, as if the work stood completely admiration for the new and unique. At the same time, it has led some in the West to take the broader context of individual creations so for granted creator came from nowhere and the work related to nothing.<sup>17</sup>

As Rekha Jhanji (1988) has said, these Western obsessions with "novelty" and "art for art's sake" often blind us to an appreciation of creativity be a form of religious service and expression of divine models in unique forms, rather than novelty per se.

As we can see from medieval Christian icon painting, adherence to traditional subject matter and even to traditional style need not hinder great meaningful works. While thousands of "Madonna and Child" images were painted, the differences between the creations of Cimabue, Fra Angelic those who are familiar with the genre; when the work of these Italian artists is contrasted with that of medieval German, Catalan, or Russian paint

Similarly, in Bali today, the question is not whether the same pattern is constantly repeated, but whether or not the work is infused with a creati presentation of the traditional themes. Paintings and dances produced for the tourists are unlikely to show this passion, but they might. Works pro who has come to understand the culture and its creations—must show such passion, or at the very least, technical refinement. But so too, might "c arrangements created daily for religious ceremonies<sup>18</sup>—if the audience consists of gods, the artist must strive for greatness.

At the same time, works composed for the gods or according to divine wishes also must, in some cases, follow the precise instructions of the g specifications for the construction of Noah's Ark, The Ark of the Covenant, and the Temple. In ancient India as well, religious texts prescribed the colors for depictions of various gods.

Having conventions of creativity and models to follow does not mean that an individual creator cannot be unique or that there are no differences in have standards of excellence. Thus, while the West uses the word "culture" less and less to refer to "high culture" and more and more in the anthropol appears that almost every individual "culture" which anthropologists study maintains some distinction between "high" and "low" culture. This probab between sacred and profane, but it also expresses degrees of appreciation of quality for various creations. Marjorie Shostak (1993) points out that the standards of judgement on creators or their creations: everyone is supposed to be equal. Nonetheless, Shostak imposes her assessments of qualitative how the !Kung themselves subtly but inevitably grant more recognition to certain creators rather than others.

What is more, exact imitation and perfect repetition of another's work is extremely hard to achieve, until mass production is introduced. As art art ever follows a model in its entirety, and as poet-historian Laurence Binyon has said, to approach a theme as masters before have done "tests [t] if he had set out on a road of his own in the deliberate quest for originality" (Layton, 1991, p. 184; Boorstin, 1993, p. 425). Each individual invari

in terms of technical refinement and interpretive nuance; and it is difficult to imagine a society, no matter how traditional, which would completely

Many of the most important creations in traditional societies are the direct result of unique dreams or visions. Artists, musicians, political leaders (and these other roles as well), will often have as their explicit goal the connection of their personal vision with another individual's or the community's unique, personal vision in terms of more traditional, more common, cultural structures, but also, perhaps, modifying those structures to express the creation of a new tradition (Layton, pp. 180ff).<sup>19</sup>

But even in more ordinary circumstances this is true. For example, according to Silko, Pueblo people

... are happy to listen to two or three different versions of the same event or the same humma-hah story | stories from the age when humans  
Even conflicting versions of an incident were welcomed for the entertainment they provided (Silko, p. 680).

Story telling is a highly creative art, even when the stories are handed down generation after generation and the content is revered as sacrosanct by the storyteller as *onawumi*, "one who loves creativity" (Watson, 1997, p. 61). And some tellers can weave their stories into great epics: the written work viewed today as the product, frozen in time, of a long tradition of creative story-telling and singing about legendary events.

In a sense, this oral "tradition" allows for greater creativity than does our literary tradition, despite Western prejudices to the contrary. While true in a traditional society, its oral character prevents the original creation from ever being "cast in stone," and new tellers and new listeners may create their own versions. In a literate culture will invariably reinterpret a written text, it is rare that we remove words or add sentences. For us, the written text becomes its way. In fact, it is in part thanks to the power of the written word in our culture that written ethnographic depictions of "primitive" indigenous people are static (Medicine, p. 24).<sup>20</sup>

Not merely story-telling, but also traditional music, dance, and theater express both repetition of patterns and constant opportunity for creative expression. "Music, like speech, is believed to have the power to enrich the life force of the listener and to restore order to the world" (Metropolitan, 1990); for example, and of course, when dance, music, and theater pieces are well known, the audience can compare the quality of the performances and may become resistant in the community to major alterations of a classic, but there may also be genuine enthusiasm for an unusual but respectful rendition. In fact, directors formally determine what an actor is supposed to do, he or she might exhibit great creativity in playing out the role. And here we can see how these functions in our culture, too: Western actors, dancers, and musicians will probably not keep their jobs if they fail to display any creativity, or conform to the director's and/or audience's conceptions of the piece.

Reinterpretations of traditional forms by creative artists occur in diverse circumstances and develop in myriad ways. And in the act of creating, the work is as important as that of a modern western artist, even though the traditional artist is readdressing established themes (Jhanji, pp. 162-63, 171). As the work of the creative work of a musician performing classical Indian *ragas*,

A *raga* is an aesthetic projection of the artist's inner spirit, it is a representation of his most profound sentiments and sensibilities, set forth by the notes of a *raga*, by themselves, have no vitality or force. The musician must breathe life into each *raga*; impossible to describe but brought to life through the life. Through the guidance of the *guru*, and by his own talent and genius, the musician learns how to make the bare notes vibrate, pulsate, and

Shankar himself is an extraordinary example of a modern, cosmopolitan man performing traditional national material and winning audiences by merging his music with Western classicists like Yehudi Menuhin and rock and roll musicians like the Beatles. In Shankar's case, we see a tradition that had heard of his power and wanted to learn from and collaborate with him. Through the collaboration, Shankar apparently developed new understandings of the same time, Shankar managed to resist what he considered the corrupting fetishism of celebrity-dom in the West.

Another interesting example is that of Willie Seaweed, an early 20th century Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) Indian from British Columbia. Trained in traditional responsibilities included wood carving for his tribe. Seeing his people decimated by disease and succumbing politically, culturally, and economically, Seaweed carved both to restore pride to his people and to show Anglos the greatness of his tribal culture. In doing this, he modified traditional art forms today by both the Kwakwaka'wakw and the international art community. Seaweed's popularity has allowed his descendants to follow in his footsteps, from, and to some degree, transcending their traditions.<sup>21</sup>

Often though, "if an [American] Indian artist ventures into commercialism, he or she must contend with the perception that creativity or cultural innovation is a betrayal" (1993, p. 24). Some members of Indian and other "traditional" cultures find themselves strait-jacketed by the dominant society's fascination with a "traditional" art. In her critique of the current state of Native American Indian art, Margaret MacKichan (1993), director of the Sinte Gleska (Lakota) Center for the Arts, writes:

Look around today at what is perceived as "traditional" Indian art. It usually bears only the most tenuous connection to traditional art forms and is an outgrowth of the Santa Fe and Oklahoma Schools of the early twentieth century, and the pervasive Pan-Indian Movement. Ironically, the Pan-Indian Movement was superimposed on Kiowa, Pueblo and other groups of young student artists by well-meaning white teachers, in order to help them (p. 22).

So blatant has been the commercialization of Indian artists for the past few decades that Zuni Edmund Ladd could baldly state, "we've gone from a time when we could paint his superb parody, "Coyote and Rose Doin' It At The Indian Market" (Heard Museum).

This situation is similar to that of many other traditional peoples around the world, and like some of those people, American Indian groups and individuals have tried to improve it. Irony and humor no doubt help. Beyond that, the Smithsonian's Museum of the American Indian directly addresses the consequences of the loss of Indian culture. In one 1994-95 exhibit, "The Journey of Interpretation," individual creations are compared from the perspectives of Western art historians and Americans from diverse walks of life. In another exhibit, "This Path We Travel," an extraordinary collaboration of fifteen contemporary Indian artists from the Western Hemisphere reveals their struggles and joys in exploring each others' traditions and unique creations. Sponsored by the Smithsonian, these fifteen indigenous groups throughout the Hemisphere which were attempting to maintain traditional cultural patterns. The resulting collaboration of vivid narratives explicitly confronts the issues of tradition and change, power and resistance, art, technology, and society. What the collaborators found was that the peoples were attempting to grapple with these issues in diverse, creative ways. The Smithsonian project as a whole and the individual participants

As this effort makes clear, creativity is hardly reducible to art. Indeed, according to anthropologist, Victor Turner, life in virtually all cultures is filled with experiences which are fertile contexts for creativity.<sup>22</sup> When everyday structures and symbols are altered, as they intentionally are in initiation rituals, people encounter significant opportunities to consider and recreate themselves. What is more, according to Turner, every period of social upheaval and its aftermath is a time of response. Indeed, as Jacob Neusner (1989) has said about the Jewish people's response to the brutal oppression they have often experienced, social forces may actually provoke some to believe even more strongly in the creative power of their tradition (pp. 198-99).

Bearing this in mind, we should recognize that no matter how striking the artwork created by a member of a "traditional" culture may be, probably like the Kwakwaka'wakw can be viewed as creative is in the ability of the remaining members of this tribe to survive as a group at all, given the epidemic of loss they suffered a century ago and the "upheaval and reorientation" accompanying the global market today.

But adapting traditional culture to new circumstances is a universal experience. This is true, whether, for example, an artist or thinker enthusiastically

another culture, whether he or she simply attempts to deal with the societal changes taking place, or whether the person is making a desperate attempt to win favor economically or politically from a dominant outside culture. The process of adapting tradition to changed circumstances will always involve inventiveness, and/or imaginative expression, and in some cases, it may involve such significant creativity that it leads to a more powerful tradition.

The survival of a group's traditions through change would seem to require that the members of the group strive for their common good, but this matter, as Dan Namingha of the Tewa-Hopi nation has remarked (This Path We Travel). The fact that we know the names of artists like Namingha women, and that we can purchase their creations, shows clearly that these individuals not only maintain connections to their traditional cultures but also participate in capitalist, global culture as well.

However, to the extent that an individual emphasizes traditions at all, that person necessarily also asserts his or her affiliation with a group of people, not merely by blood but also by common beliefs, particularly religious beliefs. This has a direct influence on the creative process. For example, no matter how they work to the outside culture, those we've mentioned and many others are inclined to practice meditation, prayer, ritual offerings or cleansings as part of preparing to do any kind of significant work. Of course, this is the case with Tibetan Buddhists, orthodox Jews, and others copying sacred texts; a woodworker carves an idol or paints an icon; but special preparatory efforts are common for a wide range of creative activities in a number of traditions. Abstaining from sex and alcohol for some days before a major creative project is common in many cultures; individuals who are known not to abstain from carrying out the project, or otherwise punished. In many cultures, lengthy prayers to the divine and recitation of ancestors' names often precedes a work in some way to moderate the significance of the individual self by focusing on the larger realities of community, universe, and the divine. In the West, such rituals, but these rituals are entirely a personal matter, subject to change, and rarely an issue for the community; the society at large cares far more about what it came into being or about the spiritual or moral perfection of the creator. The character of the process is of greater importance in traditional societies, perceived as part of a larger web of relations.

## Religion

In many respects, what makes a society cohesive in a "traditional" sense is the centrality of religion. Religion expresses and determines what people do, how it is structured, how people should behave. One common form of behavior in traditional societies is, accordingly, ritualistic, because in religion, shared reality is reinforced. In a positive sense, religion highlights and sanctifies; in a negative sense, it restricts: where there is reverence and ritual, what is not done. While Americans may buy and sell paintings of the Madonna and debate in Congress whether Serano's painting, "Piss Christ," should be sold, other cultures might find the sale of religious objects incomprehensible and the mere thought of Serano's work utter blasphemy. In recent years, Moslems condemned to death for what seems to outsiders a less offensive critique of Islam. Obviously, while many creators have been accepted by their societies, others have been killed, tortured, censored, excommunicated, ostracized, or ignored.

In the West, the Biblical distinction between divine creating and human doing dominated conceptions of creativity for centuries, and in line with that, people were supposed to follow divine commandments; the pursuit of novelty was viewed in many cases as irrelevant or evil. Major segments of American society at the same time share the common national ideology of creativity, which in some respects contrasts with that perspective. Of course, there is no single "American" view on creativity or anything else: different denominations and individuals are more or less "traditional" in their attitudes, and will not accept what others accept. Nonetheless, because commitment to the dominant Western conception of creativity includes a willingness to reject tradition, it poses a threat to religious belief. Because religion is about "ultimate reality" (Tillich, 1955), commitment to it will inevitably prevail over novelty.

This is why Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Native Americans, fundamentalist Christians and Moslems, and orthodox Jews, despite all their differences, are often united against the prevailing Western conception of creativity. This conception, is, they might say, egoistic, immoral, aggressive, blasphemous, destructively illusory.<sup>23</sup>

A brief look at some of the major Asian religions may be illustrative. Many Hindus and Buddhists, for example, might say that all our seeming creations are like the Biblical God, the Hindu gods create and destroy endlessly, and we humans are on a nearly endless wheel of birth, death, and rebirth. The amount or greatness of external creations will break this wheel—only enlightenment (*moksa, nirvana*) will. For Hindus, *moksa* involves the dissolution of the individual into the Brahman; for Buddhists, *nirvana* involves the realization that there is no self, that the Buddha-nature is our nature, and that when desire ceases, suffering ends.

Creativity in the Western sense is absurd from common Hindu and Buddhist perspectives: either nothing new ever comes into the world, or the things that do come are insignificant. Individuals who desire to create something new live in ego illusion. There is nothing to create: "Thou art that... true thyness." Hindu and Buddhist productions like the *Bhagavad Gita*, Angkor Wat, and Haiku poetry, were indeed new and unique creations. China invented paper; the history of Hindu and Buddhist thought is filled with extraordinary creativity: the concept of Nirvana itself is a great example of a new idea. A rejoinder would be that Nirvana is not an invention but a realization and that all the other creations, however excellent, are not to be fixated upon to the end.

Not only is creativity valued differently in Asian religions from the dominant Western model, but the creative process as well is perceived in a different way. In the *Tao te Ching*, which has strongly influenced Zen Buddhism as well as many contemporary Western thinkers, disparages willful striving and proclaims that to create, live well, and improve society. "Not seeking fulfillment," the sage is "not swayed by desire for change" (Book 15). The "sage . . . , like water, flows and empties himself of everything" (Book 16), because it is the empty space in the clay vessel which makes it useful (Book 11). Not fullness, but emptiness, is the aesthetic. This was the case with medieval Chinese landscape paintings, Zen gardens, and poetry, and it continues to be the case even in heavily influenced modern art. The concept of *ma* refers to the "between," the space within which everything takes place. As famed architect, Fumihiko Maki, has said, "We appreciate the void."

The goal is not to fill the void or to impose shape or order on the world through human will, but to be receptive to the nature of the cosmos and the mother of all things, and he who sees this knows his own nature and "the Way:"

Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing,  
teaching no-talking.  
The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease,  
Creating, yet not possessing,  
Working, yet not taking credit.  
Work is done, then forgotten.  
Therefore, it lasts forever (Book 2).

The Western belief in invention and novelty and the West's celebration of individual accomplishment seems as foreign to this view as possible. The creative process does in fact take place—while the sage supposedly takes no credit for what he does, Taoists in fact venerate Lao Tzu as the author of the *Tao te ching*.

To adherents of the various religions of the world, each one's own religion does not appear as a "creation," but as the "truth" regarding "ultimate reality." The look in amazement at the creations we call religion. The various religions have also thus far been the most powerful source of human creativity or

architecture, etc. And in traditional societies—as opposed to secular ones—religion continues to be the principal domain of creativity.

Religion doesn't merely strongly influence most aspects of a society's life, it also is the context for great intellectual/spiritual creativity on the part of artists who work to expound their religion. Just as an artist's commitment to following a tradition does not preclude the possibility of a unique interpretation, a religious tradition excludes creative interpretation of that faith. Indeed, the histories of the world's religions show an ongoing struggle between doctrinal uniformity and creative interpretation. The fact that Jesus and Paul, for example, clearly viewed themselves as faithful Jews while creating what we call "Christianity" and that Luther an essential Christian tradition when they opposed the Vatican and created Protestantism shows that religious traditions are tremendously fertile in creative interpretation. Traditions is often a matter of dispute.

But of course, a "traditional" society is one in which a common consensus frames such disputes and all the creative interpretations of the part. The primary means for maintenance of this framework. As noted earlier, not tradition, but thoughtless repetition or routine, seems to be the opposite of what is carried out "by the letter" without "the spirit," the tradition either ultimately dies or is reborn thanks to a new, creative interpretation.

For many religions and traditional societies, myths of creation play a significant role in reinspiring the adherents. Tied to the cosmological myth or introduction of various human activities or customs: myths of the first hunt, the control of fire, the beginnings of agriculture, the origins of the keep the idea of generation alive.

For example, the traditional Dine'e' (Navajo) creation story, which is represented in several different versions because of its oral character and it depicts a number of different worlds which evolve from one to the next: the insect, the swallow bird, the grasshopper, the animal, the present-day myth is meant to accompany rituals of beginning; in the nine-day "Blessing Way" ceremony, the myth is chanted and reflected upon in sand painting (1994, pp. 202-208). One of the many stories deriving from the greater creation myth of the Navajo is that Spiderwoman taught humans how to weave. Indeed, artistic creation, animal and plant fertility, and the creation of the cosmos are often tied directly to one another, as can be seen in "Man and Woman," who were sent to earth by Spiderwoman and who are addressed by all potters (Babcock, 1993, pp. 87-88).

According to religious scholar, Mircea Eliade (1959), the people in traditional societies experience themselves as participating in "the creative rituals celebrate their cosmogonic myths" (p. 158). These rituals often connect the creation of the cosmos with the cycles of nature: day and night, the winter and the equinoxes, birth, death, and rebirth. As a result, creation is apparently viewed as unique and yet also continually renewed.<sup>24</sup> As in the case of traditional creativity derives from divine creativity, and ritual reinforces this. Divine creativity has ultimate priority, and human activity is of consequence or Human creativity may well be for current use or enjoyment, but is done (in theory at least) with an eye to eternity.

#### How Legitimate is the Distinction Between "Traditional" and "Modern" Cultures?

Great artists and writers of Western society have also created with an eye on the eternal (Blake, Dostoyevsky, Van Gogh come to mind) but we see them as eternally *same* or eternally *repetitive*. The Biblical tradition has infused the West with a linear sense of history (despite the cyclical elements in Judaism) which allows us to conceive of a divine creation *ex nihilo* and the "new" breaking into history. As the West developed in the Renaissance, this direction was toward invention, discovery, and creation, and to take individual credit for it. And in a secular age, it has allowed many of us to believe that what we are doing is beyond divine imperatives or limitations.

Of course only a small minority in the West would deny their limitations or rule out a role for the divine in their lives, but the willingness to subject religious doctrine to questioning and criticism is a common and defining aspect of Western culture. Moreover, the West's distancing from tradition and religious authority, scientific reasoning and individuality.

In contrast, the combination of religious piety and community cohesion in traditional societies has generally meant that, except perhaps for legendary creators are forgotten after a fairly short amount of time. The fact that artistic creativity may remain anonymous makes it no less creative or valuable. as the fabulous art treasures in Tutankhamen's tomb in Egypt, the great temples, vases, jewelry, and palaces of ancient India, Mexico, and China were expenditures of time and money to create, were preserved and protected, were taken as treasures by invaders, and are still glorified by us today. Still, many (often slaves) generally remain unknown to us.<sup>26</sup>

In some cases, the collaboration in the creative effort is such that there is no need or ability to single out an individual creator; even when one person dictates anonymity. In addition, the most important creations of traditional societies are usually perceived as communal property. Totem poles, for example. Similarly, the 500 year old *q'epis* of sacred textiles from Coroma, Bolivia, are believed by the Aymara community to be the garments of the ancestors. The collectively owned and religiously venerated works were recently stolen (bought?), apparently, by American art dealers. For these dealers, which could be sold profitably to museums or individual collectors; for the Aymara, the loss of the *q'epis* "hit at the very core of their existence" (p. 43). As Coroma spokesperson, Pio Cruz said,

... we carry out the veneration of our ancestors through our *q'epis*, and we consult them for advice about our communal works ... we today are maintaining these traditions (Lobo, p. 45).<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, the question of ownership of particular creations reveals a stark difference in worldview between "traditional" and "modern" societies. In traditional societies, we collectively own and venerate our national parks, the Capitol, Independence Hall, etc., and the loss of these would be viewed as a national tragedy. In modern societies, national identity, and we would almost certainly rebuild the structures and carry on with our society. We look at human creations as human, not divine, and even the most important ones are for sale ("privatization" of national resources is a political buzzword in Europe and America, and Russia re-sells souvenirs, including the capsule from the first human space exploration in history). In the "Global Marketplace" the differences between cultures are transformed into monetary data and transferred electronically around the world with dizzying rapidity. In the "embedded economies" of traditional societies, relations, and nature determine or at least take precedence over economic activity, even for those living at subsistence level.

Furthermore, while both traditional and non-traditional societies might treasure that which is unique, modern secular culture tends to treat that which is something mass produced almost always as "uncreative." In a religious society, however, even a crudely made or mass-produced icon will be saved for its significance, it usually cannot be discarded or repaired, even if it is ugly, torn, or broken, except through some special rituals, if at all. The moment when outsiders should probably be defined as the moment when the society stops being "traditional."

The commercialism of Western society is tied to two particular inventions which reveal precisely where the line is to be drawn between our "modern" and "traditional" ones: laws of patent and copyright. These laws, first developed in 1474 in Venice, and around that time in Florence and London as well, have evolved into a normal feature of Western, and increasingly, global society. These laws affirm the importance of what is new and seek to prevent imitation through awarding copyright and patent only to that which has not been done before. We have government offices for these legal designations, and individuals' rights under these designations—because they can help them attain money and therefore power.

How different in a "traditional" society! The legal protections we grant individuals and corporations against their competitors would make little sense in a culture where the community is the primary goal. And our concept of plagiarism would make little sense in a culture where creativity can best be understood as

could say that a traditional society dictates, "you must imitate," while our society demands, "you dare not." <sup>28</sup>

Corresponding to this difference are other important ones regarding social roles and education. While every group socializes individuals and he societies stress not only the imitation of inherited creative paradigms but also the continuation of long-established social roles. Certain clans may which are different from those of other clans. Men and women will often have different opportunities and will not be allowed to encroach on each systems of apprenticeship. In some cultures, only a very special calling, coming from a vision or some other powerful source, will entitle someone role. In any case, definitions and expectations of social roles will be much clearer in a traditional society.

That is why, for example, when Helen Cordero created her clay storyteller figurines and thus broke gender boundaries and altered the artistic tr as a minor revolution within the culture (Babcock, pp. 7011). While this clearly shows that such changes are possible, it also shows how rare such however true it is that 'there have always been gifted individuals who can bend the culture in the direction of their own capacities' (Benedict, 193: degrees, and "traditional" cultures resist it especially.

In the dominant Western society there are some parallels to the role structures of traditional societies, but the ideology of merit over inheritance power of a money economy lead to considerable shifting and revision of roles. In the West, there are books and courses on creativity and even "c West proclaim that everyone can and should be creative. The notions that women as well as men, and that people of all ages and classes should be creative pursuits within the same realm of activity is inconsistent with the beliefs and structures of many traditional cultures, and that is why, for women's rights is causing major tension. (This is true of course even in the "more developed" West, where traditions regarding gender roles are st

It is often said that a major difference between "modern" and "traditional" societies is that the former is technologically-oriented and the latter though traditional societies certainly have their technologies, "primitive" as they may seem to those in the "developed" countries, and though Wes "aggressively" it may seem to traditionalists). In truth, a desire to live in harmony with nature, and scepticism, even outright hostility, to some tec least since the Romantic era. And, as we've seen, "traditional" peoples today may in fact use "advanced" technologies while attempting to maintai entirely a matter of the technology itself, but of the attitudes toward it: does the new technology fit with the community's needs? Does it contradict traditional society understands the natural environment to be the source of most of its physical needs, and to the extent that it perceives the earth, that society will strive to make sure that any new technology it adopts fits with "the ways of nature."

In some respects, "modern" society's commitment to the "scientific method" seems to distinguish it from "traditional cultures;" but it is a comrr traditional cultures don't routinely formulate questions, employ trial and error, and seek to verify judgements through experimentation. What is di realms of existence to which those methods may be applied—for the central tenets of religion and community well-being are based on the authori *priori* truths about these realms, and taboos against crossing them.

That is why it is virtually inconceivable that a "traditional" society would accept the kinds of challenges to and criticisms of its core values that First Amendment Rights from the U.S. Constitution, our Supreme Court has allowed all manner of protest against the Constitution, almost any va burning of the U.S. flag, etc. This would hardly be tolerated in most societies insisting on the integrity of their cultural traditions and on the respo

As we've seen, however, things are not so absolute. We must remember that mainstream Western culture (never a monolith) acted very much li Einstein is revered as a hero by many in our century, Galileo was denounced as a heretic in his day. And today, many "conservatives" in the West occurring in the society and work doggedly to assert "traditional values" in the political and social realms. Indeed, many people in the West have determines how they proceed in life, what kinds of questions they will entertain, and so on. As the displays of censored works in the 1991 "Play o Museum made clear, our society certainly has its limits and regards certain forms of creative expression as antisocial, taboo. At the same time, ma even invent traditions as a means of strengthening their movement (Kwanza, Women's History Month, etc.). The environmental movement, too, p "preserve and protect."

What is more, "traditionalism" thrives in many parts of society, even where there is an explicit commitment to creativity: repetition of classical moreover, is often stated as, "he's another Michelangelo," or "she's a regular Einstein." And even where imitation is explicitly forbidden, it routine colleges and universities." In other words, what the society says and does are not always the same things.

At the same time, millions of creative individuals, like Shankar and Seaweed, have managed to challenge or revise the established beliefs and p without suffering major consequences. We must remember that all the inventions of "prehistory" occurred in "traditional" cultures, which general disseminated those inventions.

Nor should we ignore how much creativity in the western world continues to follow traditional patterns today. We too, for example, celebrate c paradigms: Beethoven, Verdi, and Brahms are performed repeatedly around the world today. Indeed, all that we refer to as "classical" music,<sup>31</sup> op traditional material. The same is true for most gospel and folk music and often even for popular music (Lennon and McCartney's "Yesterday," for more than two thousand versions). This is also obviously true for the countless performances of Shakespeare's plays. Indeed, in our culture, peopl forms of musical scores, choreography, and dramatic scripts, which are then presented with varying degrees of individual interpretation. In fact, c That is why museums and libraries exist. Most writers, for instance, don't merely learn the art of writing but are motivated to emulate or transcend or been provoked by in some way (see T.S. Eliot, 1917). Furthermore, historians, philologists, archeologists, and, indeed, most academics, in their uncovering something new about the past, but primarily by reconceptualizing existent material.

In fact, much of what passes for novelty in our society is unconscious repetition of traditional forms. Those outside a particular field see this m Thus, innovation in business looks like mere variations on a theme to philosophers; creativity in the world of rock music as mere variations on a t

Furthermore, as Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1970) has emphasized in his study of scientific "revolutions," traditional views carry tremendous weight supposedly open-minded, critical scientists of our society. Educational institutions inculcate dominant scientific views, and careers are built up by within the framework of those views. Major change is therefore threatening to individuals' livelihoods and society's institutions. This of course, is

At the same time, some individuals in the West have consciously adopted elements of "traditional" and other non-western cultures. This is clear art museums, but also in the music of several Western performers (Tony Scott, Paul Simon, Yehudi Menuhin), in the revival and transformation of Asian religions and traditional martial arts, in the numerous works entitled, "Zen and the Art of. . .," in the respect for American Indian earth spiri faddishness, and it may even be exploitative; without a doubt, it also expresses a desire for some of the key features of traditional culture.<sup>32</sup>

What is more, one of the perceived features of traditional cultures—community involvement and collaboration—is actually far more prevalent individuality might have us believe. In the corporate world, teams are routinely formed to carry out particular projects, and in academic as well as In the realms of theater and film, collaboration is essential, and a sizable number of contemporary artists and writers have worked together as well

Despite all this, our society tends to focus on virtuosity and heroic individual accomplishment; and we consider scientific revolutions such as tl artistic ones ushered in by Giotto or the Impressionists, as the highest forms of creativity. At first, it is only those who are trained practitioners wit capable of seeing the limitations of that tradition and the value of the creators' new paradigms (Edwards, 1968, p. 454; Schaffer, 1994).<sup>33</sup> In other alters the status quo, we implicitly acknowledge how much of our society is traditional or habitual.

In any given society, all manner of novelty may emerge, but different societies will circumscribe creativity to varying degrees and in various re



phenomena as novel and as significant based upon a) the realms of endeavor they consider meaningful and b) the degree to which they believe in the wider the range of human activity considered important, but not sacred or taboo, the more a society looks to innovation as a potential source of creativity will be (Lasswell, 1959, p. 207; cf also Amabile, 1983). Thus, the United States appears to be at the high end of what is essentially a continuum. The more a society has fewer areas of importance and a lesser degree of concern for some kinds of creativity, it does not follow that creativity is absent. The invention obviously took place in societies we would view as "traditional"—were of far greater importance than most things we today so readily call creative.

Thus, we must always qualify the differences we believe we see between "modern" and "traditional" cultures. Each cultural group will express individuality. Each individual may feel closer to or further from a particular tendency at any given time. It is, however, legitimate and sometimes helpful to note these "Western" culture:

- places greater emphasis on novelty
- accepts and encourages creativity in a wider range of activities
- places fewer social restrictions on creative opportunity
- allows for a greater degree of creativity independent of religious or other archetypal patterns
- is less concerned with "acceptable" or "unacceptable" rituals and procedures in creating
- is less appreciative of and sometimes strongly opposed to imitation
- celebrates individuality, authorship, and ownership
- is relatively unconcerned about how a particular creation fits in with a broader network of social (and religious) structures
- is far more interested—in fact, will almost always—buy and sell creations, i.e. treat them as commodities
- reveres not merely modifications within traditional patterns, but especially paradigm shifts or "revolutions"
- believes that people can be trained to be creative
- is more committed to questioning and criticizing assumptions and traditions
- uses the terms "creative" or "innovative" almost always as forms of praise.

These tendencies would almost definitely be phrased in other terms if one were speaking from a traditional perspective. Western culture might have a sense of community; a dim awareness of and respect for ancestors and traditions; a lack of distinction among creative spheres; a tendency toward toward nature and the divine; and an obsession with novelty. (And the corresponding, positive virtues of reverence for tradition, community, nature, and an important part of "traditional" creativity.)

The many exceptions to this general dichotomy are significant; they reveal, among other things, the traditionalism of the West and the dynamism possible that they also reveal that the "modern" approach is increasingly dominant and that the effort to maintain traditions is particularly difficult. The two cultural modes are important to consider. Regardless of whose perspective is presented, and regardless of the relative nature of the differences of creativity exist is expressed frequently by people coming from the so-called more "modern" as well as those from more "traditional" cultures, and economic implications.

This is not to say that these conceptions have dictated historical reality. Creativity of all kinds—artistic, scientific, philosophical, architectural—only the blinders of racism, religious dogma, and nationalism, armed with military, technological, and economic dominance, have allowed the West to attempt to measure the relative levels of creativity in different societies (Eysenck, 1994; Martindale, 1994), it seems impossible to assess whether, for example, is any more "creative" than was ancient Egypt. The only reasonably valid claim might be that a broader range of the American population expresses creativity as it wishes. Ironically, it is only now that the West has successfully exported such fruits of our creativity as capitalism, experimental science, and that many in the West have been able to acknowledge the greatness of other cultures. However, we also acknowledge certain genuine differences that have expressed and affected these differences.

## Contemporary Global Encounters

In traditional societies, as we have seen, creativity takes place within a coherent network of custom and belief. What happens when artists, such as those from the Mahabarta, and paint whatever they want, as we in the West do? Or when a Native American artist breaks with tradition? Or when creations traditionally carried out by women are given such status in the West that traditional gender power relations are threatened? Or when structures which alter the society's traditional living patterns? Some societies are very adept at integrating these new approaches to creativity; others perceive as the Western "devil."

Surely, the single most important way in which a society is creative is how it maintains social coherence while integrating change. Indeed, in many societies, the maintenance of social coherence is more important than with any individual product or activity introduced—which is the ultimate challenge for any society devoted to "tradition." This includes zeal for the new, the commodification of creations, the singling out of individual creators, and to some degree, the determined rejection of change.

In this light, it is not so much the painting, dancing, and music of Bali which deserves the title, "creative," as the talented maneuvering between tourism and social integration, between Javanese political dominance and Balinese clan authority which goes on daily. Indeed, a key inheritance of Indonesian Hindu culture from Java to the isle of Bali in the face of Moslem conquerors in the fourteenth century. In other words, adapting tradition to Balinese tradition. And to some extent, every culture must develop the same ability, if it is to survive.

Today, the interconnection of cultures and the intrusion of Western society into all corners of the globe is a reality. Environmental destruction, and the "global reach" of television and capitalism march "forward" without pause. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, the music we hear, the dance we see, is everywhere on earth. But unfortunately, this does not yet mean that we experience much of a sense of global community. In this context, many understand the value of tradition. Without a doubt, the *preservation* of a culture or any part of it may involve great creativity—and for this reason, it seems quite possible to be conservative and still be creative. The United Nations' creation of its "World Heritage List" is a case in point.

Therefore, when contemporary Western authors define creativity as something which changes the context within which it arises (social, political, economic), they are being very carefully. JMB Edwards, for example, maintains:

The *creative* work of art or science does not only claim to be incorporated into the institution appropriate to it; it also claims to modify or even to replace the institution in some important respect. It is the fact that the claim is made good that enables us to identify the work as creative (p. 443).

While this might be an accurate definition when applied to our society, it does not apply so easily to a traditional one: such a society would not seek to utilize creative modifications in a traditional framework in order to *bolster* societal values. Every culture and every institution which succeeds attempts to integrate creative change in this way. "Tradition" is, in an important sense, this successful integration, which translates the "new" of to without this continuity, we could not speak of a group cultural identity.

The Americans, no less than the Balinese, have their traditional ways of adapting tradition to change. For example, in the U.S., the customary v cultures was to require schooling in English and to emphasize Anglo-American customs and beliefs while praising the cultural "melting pot." In t minority groups have asserted their identities: African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Native-Americans, and other ethnic groups have proclaim and their traditions. As a result, the dominant culture has acceded somewhat to "bilingual education," "affirmative action," and a more "multicult "mosaic" and the "quilt" (taken from Canada) have to some extent replaced that of the "melting pot." But all the separate groups in "multicultural' national identities, and therefore in important ways also between "tradition" and "modernity."

Maintaining a separate traditional identity is often very difficult, not merely because many people are of "mixed" heritages, but also because it characteristics of a particular cultural identity are. This is excellently portrayed in Maxine Hong Kingston's (1976) *Woman Warrior*; a book movir and family chronicle, China and America, generations and gender roles. The culmination of the book is when the author literally and figuratively creative self-actualization so honored in contemporary American culture. But Kingston also very clearly realizes that to simultaneously maintain must come to terms with her ambiguities about it. And in doing so, she addresses her fellow immigrants and their descendents, and perhaps anyor degree, with any ethnic or national group:

Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to your childhood, to mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies? (Kingston, p. 6).

Ongoing cultural identity presupposes that there are clear traditions worth maintaining. But in our global culture, the interactions between cultu people's lives are changing so much that identifying traditions may become complicated. How "African" are African-Americans? Must you like p homogenous is either group? How much of their identity is based mainly on the attempt to define themselves in opposition to others?<sup>34</sup> And for t "traditional" cultures examined in these pages? Each group creatively reforms its traditions on an ongoing basis: new approaches are adopted fro create "traditional" patterns which may then foster or block new forms of creativity.

And as we can see in the case of Kingston, as well as those of Namingha, Cordero, Shankar, and Seaweed, the evolution of the group is accomy Because the modern, global culture has so seriously undermined the coercive authority of many traditional groups, individuals are much freer to p they will retain. What is more, the uncertainty of traditional identity allows, even requires, individual self-definition. This is the inheritance of We self-portrait of 1500, in market capitalism, and in contemporary theories of "self-actualization," and because of the West's power, this ideal has co in every culture now seem destined to take on the challenge of "self-creation" that the global culture calls for. Indeed, modernity and global cultur whether we would prefer to be sheltered by "traditional" identification or not.

But how consistent is anyone about his or her "identity," and who can understand him- or herself outside of a context? Perhaps the "post-model perhaps the concepts of self-identity and of group-identity, of "modernity" and of "tradition" are illusions. Perhaps, the word, "creativity," has tak precisely because all else seems so ambiguous. "Creativity" is undoubtedly a social construct, referring to some degree of novelty *within a given co* through our creative efforts right now. Indeed, the complexities of our "global culture" call for ongoing creativity of an extraordinary degree.

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## Endnotes

1. This essay is one chapter of manuscript currently in review, entitled, *Creativity and Beyond*. It examines conceptions of creativity historically contemporary policy issues as well as conceptual changes in our use of the word "creativity" today. I would like to express my thanks for the from: Paula Sensi-Isolani, Chair of Anthropology at Saint Mary's College of California; Paul Giurlanda, Professor of Religious Studies at Sai School of Liberal Studies, Sonoma State University; Stan Bailis, Professor at San Francisco State and Editor of *Issues in Integrative Studies*; : doctoral fellow in Anthropology at UCLA.
2. Of course, Europeans rarely thought of themselves as a single group. Superior as most seem to have felt toward peoples of other continents ar condescension and bitterness toward each other. And of course, chauvinism and ethnic rivalry abounded on other continents as well.
3. This tendency applies not only to the West, but also to other areas strongly influenced by the West. Heavily "modernized" already at the end o similar to that of the West to save traditional arts which were in the process of disappearing. That is why Soetsu Yanagi and others founded th While this clearly reflects the same kind of thinking Clifford (1988) referred to in which we strive to rescue creations from the world we are d nationalism had reached a feverish pitch in 1936, and efforts there and in Germany at that time to preserve folk traditions had multiple rationa
4. Our fascination with the "exotic" character of other cultures is hardly new. Herodotus was intrigued by the Egyptians, Renaissance Italians by accounts of the "noble savages" of the Americas.
5. In this article, I, too, extract elements from diverse cultural contexts, and I may as a result do injustice to these cultures. My intention, howev these cultures and their productions in order to shed light on Western conceptions of "creativity" and to point to some common and some diffe cultures.
6. Even the outstanding University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, which is strongly committed to respecting the c the public about them, explicitly encourages its visitors to acknowledge the works it displays as autonomous works of art.
7. These negative portrayals often served political ends, of course. Aside from this, it generally helps a group to define itself by characterizing o widespread Christian view, based upon claims of the New Testament, that the Hebrew Bible was the "Old" Testament, a "Law" without spirit, Judaism as an antiquated religion, soon to die out. The widespread European view of American "Indians" as "primitive" or worse, as "heathen mercilessly with their "manifest destiny" to expand westward.
8. Greek theater followed clearly delineated rules; sculptures of gods were certainly not for sale (except copies which were later available to pilg appropriate human doing was an imitation of the divine ideas.

9. Even anthropologists committed to seeing the dynamic and glorious achievements around the world usually restrict their vision to particular t all cultures are theoretically the subject matter of anthropology. As is evidenced by Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo's book, *Creativity/Anthropology* one of the excellent essays included deals with a politically, technologically, economically dominant, or secular society like the U.S. or Japan. anthropology, anthropology generally continues to focus on groups of people attempting to live in ways that are "traditional" to their group.
10. The official title is "the 1970 UNESCO Convention on The Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ow
11. In a rural village of Indonesia where my wife and I were intrigued by the "exotic" cloth designs local women were painstakingly creating on l villagers dropped their activities, grabbed their meager savings, and rushed out to the nearby road when a truck brought a supply of Levi's blu
12. In fact, the use of the label, "American Indian Made," intended to support the craftwork of Native Americans, eliminates from exhibitions and enrolled as a member of a federally recognized tribe.
13. This is precisely what is meant by the anthropological focus on the integrated web of a particular society. The parts are supposed to fit with th means to encourage and enforce this cohesion. According to Marjorie Shostak's (1993) analysis of the !Kung people, however, the "popular r demand greater conformity in individuality and creative expression than larger-scale societies finds no validation here" (p. 55). However, Sho she studied seek to repress their strong, creative personalities—because of social pressure (pp. 55-6, 64).
14. In some places, I've ridden on 40 year old public buses for which no replacement parts existed. Local mechanics and metalworkers had mana Of course, the mere existence of a motor vehicle in a culture shows that its traditions are under heavy pressure from the "modern" world.
15. Hynes (1993) puts it this way:
 

Something about the antics of the trickster causes this figure to be enjoyed worldwide. The heartiest laughter within belief systems seems to be reserve tricksters profane the the most sacred beliefs and practices—be they occasioned by Hermes in Greece, Maui in Hawaii, Loki in Scandanavia, or Agu Toi generating firm adherence to their constitutive values are discovered to be simultaneously and contradictorily maintaining a raft of tricksters who perpe to these same values (p. 202).

While this clearly shows that "traditional cultures" are not absolute in their commitment to traditions, it is significant that the trickster figur appear, as Hynes says, on certain "mythic and ritual occasions." Most likely, the tension released by the parody on those occasions allows mer reverence for the traditions the rest of the time.
16. The fact that we have to use the qualifier, "orthodox" Jews is indicative of the fact that so many other Jews—the majority, in fact—are far fro numbers of them might maintain certain elements of their traditional culture by celebrating holidays, etc.
17. While most museums in the West assume some degree of Western cultural awareness on the part of the audience, many museum goers are prc medieval icon or a piece of abstract minimalism as they are to a sculpture from New Guinea.
18. Geertz (1977) writes of "the curious combination of fussiness and sensuality [which] ffe Balinese direct toward ritual objects generally" (235 offerings).
19. This articulation is precisely what happens in all cultures: creations are comprehensible and have significance only against the background of modifies those traditions (Eliot, 1917, p. 27; Edwards, 1968, p. 443).
20. On the other hand, however, writing frees us from memorizing the story's content, so that a literate culture can have millions of lengthy works diversity than might exist in an oral culture.
21. There are countless other examples of this. After their 1874 defeat by U.S. troops, Kiowa and South Cheyenne warriors who were imprisoned to small-scale drawings in ledger books for sale to tourists (Norton Gallery of Art). While Sun Yat Sen was leading revolutionary changes in ( the twentieth century, Chao Shao-an of the Lingnan School reformed and revitalized traditional Chinese painting, spurred in part by Western c
22. Compare with Abraham Maslow's (1959) emphasis on "peak experiences" and creativity.
23. Philosophers like Martin Heidegger and many other twentieth century Westerners not associated with these religious groupings might react si
24. This is visible in Judaism and Christianity in a number of ways, but these religions also aim quite explicitly at the transcendence of nature.
25. The cyclical aspects of Judaism and Chrisitanity can be seen in the myth of the return to paradise, the second coming of Jesus, and the liturgic creativity seem to emphasize the relative insignificance of human doing compared to divine creating and establish paradigmatic understanding though the secular West abandoned the hard and fast line between divine "creating" and human "doing" which had held sway from Biblical ti to accept the principle that humans are finite and imperfect in contrast to divine perfection. Somehow this has not hindered the West's reveren some Hindu and Buddhist texts speak of the attainment of perfection—which on the surface would support human creativity as well—except perfection leads to the transcendence of the individual self, hence the rejection of the belief in the individual creator.
26. Among the exceptions from ancient Egypt are references to the Royal Architect, Imhotep, and a few individually named craftsmen, whose tor Interestingly, despite the Communist proclamations of the late Soviet Union, the names of individual creators continued to be recognized in n "modern" and secular, and not religious or "traditional."
27. Efforts by the residents of Coroma to repatriate the textiles have been strongly supported by American Indian groups working on repatriation Smithsonian's Board of Trustees of the National Museum of the American Indian (1991) agreed to repatriate materials illegally acquired, as w Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions" (Lobo, 91).
28. There is no question that one of the defining aspects of modern Western society is its cult of individuality. The U.S. Constitution, for example while saying next to nothing about the responsibilities of individuals to the society. Individual creations have similar significance in the societ
29. Significantly, the West's interest in the creations of traditional cultures has helped break down the West's own tradition of categorizing art, cra completely separate: talking about the aesthetics of engineering is no longer so strange—modern art museums have displayed computer circu buttresses the 20th century Western conception of creativity as a ubiquitous, cross-disciplinary phenomenon.
30. American cultural hero, Martin Luther King Jr., was found by scholars to have plagiarized, or at least, not accurately recorded sources, and sui "plagiarism is rampant," even at the most prestigious institutions (New York Times, 1990, p. 36).
31. According to Leonard Burkat (1994), the western "tradition" of classical music did not begin until Handel's "Messiah" (1742) generated so m

perform it again and again. Until this time, and even a bit later, western "musical life depended principally on novelty, on the newest, latest was performed only with a sense of participating in a revival of something long gone." Since then, of course, large groups of musicians have created masterpieces.

32. Among the countless examples of Western "borrowing" from traditional cultures, I think of the explicit African influences in Paul Simon's music (for that matter), the American Indian influences on painter Jackson Pollock, the Japanese tradition on musician Tony Scott, and, as mentioned, the painting of Braque and Picasso.
33. This has been emphasized by Kuhn (1962; 1970) in his studies of the history of science, by Eliot regarding poetry, and by Shils (1988) regarding Traditional consensus must exist for creativity to be acknowledged as its reinterpretation or rejection (JMB Edwards; Hausman).
34. In a multicultural society such as the United States, the intentional merging of cultural traditions is a realm of considerable creativity and some of the Chicano comedy group "Culture Clash" says, "we've always embraced a kind of Catskills humor—a burrito belt counterpart to the borscht belt."
35. Whether these are "modernist" or "post-modernist" ideas is unimportant here. In any case, this perspective differs from both the Buddhist idea of the primacy of the collective.
36. And yet it is barely clear how the context should be defined. In this changing situation, defining how to judge something as "creative" will be difficult. There is such a strong tendency today to call almost everything and everyone "creative" ... a tendency which surely begins to make the word meaningless.

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Museums visited in conjunction with this essay:

- Asian Art Museums, San Francisco
- De Young Museum, San Francisco
- Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California Berkeley CA
- Heard Museum, Phoenix AZ
- Museum of Anthropology of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver Canada
- Ubud Museum, Bali, Indonesia
- The Louvre, Paris
- Museum of the American Indian, New York NY
- Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY
- Norton Simon Gallery, West Palm Beach FL
- Smithsonian Museums, Washington DC
- National Museum of Archeology. Athens