

**Swinburne University of Technology, Faculty of Health, Arts and Design**

**Professor Josie Arnold**

**A narrative conversation with Azar Nafisi arising from *The Republic of Imagination*.**

Abstract:

In this paper I discuss how creative non-fiction arises from a realisation of the power of the story by referring to Azar Nafisi's story about her interactions with America and American literature in *The Republic of Imagination*. This paper considers her discussions of the cultural importance of the imagination, the utilitarian impulses that act to destroy liberal arts education, the importance of the reader and how creative non-fiction can give rise to a conversation between the writer's points and the reader's understandings. Nafisi's escape from the tyranny of Iran is compared with her American experiences. In her passionate engagement with the importance of a liberal arts education based upon creative artistic narratives, Nafisi positions her beliefs in the importance of the narrative text. She utilises literature, in particular *Huckleberry Finn*, *Babbitt* and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, but is aware of the arts generally as the dynamic way to realise our full humanity through our imaginative capacities that reveal both real and imagined meanings. She recounts how this is under threat in America as a kind of capitalist pragmatism leads to bookshops closing, and libraries as well as 'theatres, performing arts centres, art and music schools' disappearing. Theoretical prisms are examined as a way of entering into, analysing and discoursing upon her passionate statements about the central significance of the imagination in bringing a culture to life.

Biographical note:

Professor Josie Arnold set up the Swinburne University of Technology MA (Writing) in 2002 and the PhD by artefact and exegesis in 2004. She has had over 45 books published in a wide variety of genre including educational, poetry, drama, film and children's literature. She writes critically about and within the areas of textuality and discourse with strong emphasis on the critical frameworks provided by: Postmodernism; Feminism; Postcolonialism and Queer Theory. She writes creatively for film, as a social observer, a poet and as a literary novelist. She writes professionally for electronic and print curriculum materials. Josie is currently constructing the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design online PhD training hub with the Writing Discipline.

Keywords:

Narrative nonfiction – the arts – reader and writer – capitalist pragmatism

## Introduction

Can I enter into a conversation with an author I've never met just through interacting with her book? I suppose the term 'conversation' will benefit from my thinking that it is possible and that the interaction isn't one way because it relies upon Nafisi to get it going.

When I read non-fiction, particularly creative non-fiction, I enter into a dialogic relationship with the text. It's not a reading for information alone, but to enter into what I describe to myself as a 'conversation'. This means that I create another narrative as well as the one before me. I also hear the voice of the writer as well as read what is on the page.

In recording this here, I have not set it out as a sort of *dramatis personae* so that there are statements by Azar Nafisi that I reply to directly, as in a stage or film script. In this paper I intend to convey the ways that my interior dialogue has developed as an interaction in conversation with Nafisi's text. In more ways than one, then, it looks at where Nafisi went next after her self-exile to America from Teheran. It also looks at where I have gone as a result of talking with her.

In doing so I think I am participating in opening what she talks about as the third eye of the imagination.

## The third eye of the imagination

This reference by Nafisi to imagination as our third eye refers to the knowledge of another way of seeing that is not through our recognisable physical eyesight, but relates to our creative and speculative selves. Daniel Boorstin claims it has universal application: 'The idea of the imagination—now carrying modern and regrettable overtones of the imaginary, the unreal—is more specific to Western culture. However, its essence, in the sense of its experiential base in consciousness, is not' (Boorstin 2012: n.p.). This element of consciousness that arises from our imagination is not confined to one culture but is of central concern to artists who inevitably seek to go beyond the known and the given.

The artist is often portrayed as on the edge, even as suffering a form of madness. I'm reminded here that Stalinist Russia sent activists to Mental Hospitals as anyone who couldn't believe in Communism was clearly mad. The question of the role of the artist in society is, however, not simply one of making themselves mad: it is to see further and differently from the cultural metanarratives and consoling social norms. 'Whether regarded as rebel, misfit, eccentric, divine visionary, suicidal painter, or brooding poet, the trope of the Romantic artist has been a mainstay within art history discourse for the last two centuries' (Kosut 2006: 73). Such discourse is necessary to place the artist in a position that enables the subversive imagination that relies upon challenge and change to form a republic of equal opportunity.

Writing creative non-fiction also enables Nafisi to look critically and analytically at the role of the imagination. Familiar as many readers are with Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran* (2008), it is exciting to read what happened next. Her insights into the tyranny of the dominant masculinist right wing takeover of the revolution against the Shah were frightening in their immediacy but also in their insights into the ongoing diminution of women's rights and their resonances for all of us. After fleeing Iran for America, she brings her unflinching energy and critical and yet insightful eye to the threats to freedom that are present in her new country of choice. She looks at America as able to provide a republic of imagination, and shows how this is under threat by increased consumerism in education. This is a powerful personal story based upon fact as well as literary analysis. It is her story and as she says: 'Stories...link us to our past, provide us with critical insights into the present and enable us to envision our lives not just as they are but as they should be or might become' (3). Many others concur with this. For example, Boorstin says that 'creators in all the arts have enlarged, embellished, fantasized and filigreed our experience...creators, makers of the new, can never become obsolete, for in the arts there is no correct answer' (n.p.). Artists are by definition on the edge, but not necessarily mad or deviant, although they may be driven to such states by their extra-sensitive awareness of societal and cultural givens that they are called upon to disrupt.

In her passionate engagement with the importance of a liberal arts education based upon creative artistic narratives, Nafisi begins with positioning her beliefs in the importance of the narrative text. She utilises literature, but is aware of the arts generally as the dynamic way to realise our full humanity through our imaginative capacities that reveal both 'real and imagined meanings' (2014: 5). She recounts how this is under threat in America as a kind of capitalist pragmatism leads to bookshops closing, and libraries as well as 'theatres, performing arts centres, art and music schools' (8) disappearing. She cites Einstein as saying: 'Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination circles the world' (11). For her, 'imaginative knowledge *is* pragmatic: it helps shape our attitude to the world and our place in it and influences our capacity to make decisions' (12). Having to demonstrate that the arts have a relevance in this way is confronting as it seems to indicate they are important only because they are pragmatic. Of course, this is not the case, nor is it borne out throughout this book. Nafisi knows only too well that the arts are the signal of health in any society, coming as she does from a repressive Iran where they are largely banned. As we saw in *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, Nafisi's insights into the cultural and social relevance of the arts comes from a residency in a country that she has had to flee because of their denial.

The imagination emerges and is readily identified in early childhood, and artists are often attributed with this capacity to see differently like children. The artists' imagination is able to experience the controversial as its essence, to see and widely report the emperor with no clothes on:

Through our imaginations, we can explore both possibilities and impossibilities, and combine things not generally seen as coexisting. It is uncontroversial to maintain that artworks may imaginatively explore patterns, colors, shapes, the

movement of bodies, and the interaction of a number of such elements. It should be uncontroversial, as well, to acknowledge that artworks may imaginatively explore moral and political ideas, and the emotional responses they engender. When artworks attempt to explore aspects of our moral and political lives, they may have both artistic and moral or political significance (Mullin 2003:190).

In this way, art does not become a propaganda handmaiden of the dominant social influences.

In supporting a republic of imagination, Nafisi's experiences enable her to deal with the certainty that 'works of the imagination are canaries in the coal mine, the measure by which we can evaluate the health of the rest of society' (15). Yet in this wealthy country of America, she finds that there is 'conformity and complacency' and that this produces a 'materialism' that leads to a 'disdain for thought and reflection' (14). She begs for a reclamation of 'the pristine beauty of truth as revealed to us in fiction, poetry, music and the arts' for a retrieval of 'the third eye of the imagination' (17) that she calls 'this Republic of Imagination' (22) that anyone can visit and become a citizen of through the arts (35). So she challenges us to move beyond a state of stasis and acceptance.

### **Liberal arts education**

The poet William Blake alerts us to the repressive powers that can reside in education that seeks to inform and enclose rather than alert students to multiple possibilities:

They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;  
They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.  
And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle,  
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning.  
– William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

Nafisi quotes this as she fights against enclosing students and placing them into an abyss of conformity. For her, the burden of reality in culture needs to be seen through 'eyes that are refreshed, or, as Tolstoy would have it "clean-washed" (33), and this comes through engagement with the arts. Today, she laments, much education is no longer in the liberal arts tradition in America, and a type of utilitarian censorship has replaced education for knowledge with education for employment. She asserts the contrary: 'education's goal is to impart knowledge, and knowledge is not only heretical but often unpredictable and uncomfortable' (69). Commercialism is not a significant educative goal, yet today the arts play a less and less significant goal in curricula in secondary and tertiary schools and universities and more to employment, investment and capitalism. She identifies the most significant contemporary question as 'will we risk striking out for new territories and welcome the dangers of thoughts unknown' (149). She repeatedly evidences through her reviews of *Huckleberry Finn*, *Babbitt* and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* that 'imaginative knowledge is one of the most potent ways of understanding and communicating with the world' (180) and that students must 'be given a desire to think and to know, and asked to articulate their

own questions rather than simply scratch a pencil across a page and regurgitate the “right” answers’ (181).

The postmodern artist opposes such regurgitation. For Jacques Lyotard ‘the work he (sic) produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining Judgement, by applying familiar categories to the work’ (1984: 5). James Farley describes this as art acting ‘as an equivalent for some other unrepresentable feeling’ and as having ‘the power to communicate ideas that are otherwise formless and unrepresentable’ (2014: 7). Whether the canary is in the coalmine or not, the artist has an immensely important role to play in a free culture and should be valued and supported both to do that and through a liberal arts education for all so that the imagination flourishes and hence reality grows and develops.

### **Reader power**

Throughout, Nafisi affirms that ‘words, ideas-they can be quite powerful, at least as powerful as math and science. They move people to dream and do exceptional things’ (192)...that is why every tyrannical society’ removes its artists (195). Yet democratic societies also act to remove them from education and publication by ignoring them and underestimating their cultural importance. Nafisi is particularly concerned with the impact of this within her adopted America, but she reveals that such educational rejection of the arts has become quite everyday in many universities. She hopes that the unpredictability of readers will act against this, describing readers as ‘unruly, and no matter how many guidelines you give them, they will find their own way to connect with a book’ (231). Underpinning this subjectivity is loneliness and isolation as ‘one of the contributions of American fiction is its articulation of a modern phenomenon, the isolation of individuals, leading to a sort of emotional and social autism’ (281).

It is the reader’s engagement that leads you to new places, that enables the anxiety endemic to modern life to be, if not ameliorated, at least recognised and perhaps understood. Nafisi describes books as

like children: enthralling, exasperating and not quite so predictable as you might have imagined. You believe you are in control, but a serious give-and-take is really in operation, and in some mysterious way they are equally in charge of you, dragging you to new places, bringing strangers into your house and questioning your ways and habits’ (293),

and writers as ‘truth tellers and that can sometimes put them in conflict with the state’ (294).

During her time in Iran and after her experiences of the Islamic revolution and her exile from her country, she ‘turned not to political theorists or historians but to writers and poets’ (297). It is not, of course, only literary fiction that plays this role. The textuality of culture, the ontology of being, is alerted to its best potentials and its awe-full challenges by the arts generally.

**‘Everything is already there in the work itself’ (2014: 300)**

Of course, postmodern thinking too has alerted us to the importance of the reader in making the text, whatever its creative areas may be. Nafisi’s experiences of teaching literature in Iran and America give her insights peculiar to an understanding of literature through the eyes of her students. This has led her to the discovery and acceptance of difference, but also to how ‘the real surprise comes from the discovery of how alike we are, how much we have in common. No great work of art or literature would survive the test of time if it were not in some deep sense universal’ (302). She reminds us that, like all artists, ‘writers must take risks; all must tread into the void and darkness; all do so passionately, embracing the agony of freedom and the unknown-that is the price of the ticket’ (309). Held within that ticket price is the rejection of the comfort of conformity:

Ideology eliminates paradox and seeks to destroy contradiction and ambiguity. While it is generally ruthless to outsiders, it can be consoling when you are in the group that always wears the white hat no matter what. Hatred and ideology, contrary to all appearances, are comforting and safe for those who practice them (318).

How may we become uncomfortable? For scholars there are particular theories that provide prisms through which we may view differently, understand anew, and challenge the regimes backed by and producing immovable ideological positions.

Nafisi cautions us against not hearing the stories that shock and challenge us, and theoretical prisms can act to magnify our understandings of what is already in the text. Certainly scholarship claims so, and I believe that in this instance Feminist Standpoint Theory (Hartsock 1983) provides a prism that makes deeper and more reflective insights available to the reader that enhance what is already there in this book. What is already there, then, can be both found and more deeply understood through such theoretical prisms that act to enable the intellectual debate to be further enriched by the analysis and critical evaluations that they highlight.

Taking a feminist standpoint theoretical perspective means identifying the skewed masculinist view of the world that underpins most cultures. Nancy Hartsock calls this ‘phallographic domination’ (1983: 283), leaving her readers in no doubt as to her standpoint. She states that ‘...the lived experience of women is structurally different from that of men, and that the lived realities of women’s lives are profoundly different from those of men’ (1983: 284). As well as diminishing women’s knowledge views, this also gives them a privileged position of being able to see cultural norms from an anterior position that she describes as ‘...a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallographic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of the patriarchy’, that is, a feminist standpoint.

This is significant in analysing Nafisi’s work as she has seen the tyrannical Iran that she is in exile from through the gauze facemask imposed upon her dress. All, then, may be contained within the book but may need to have such theoretical prisms

applied to unveil it. Scholarship calls upon us to understand, to critically analyze and to enter into current academic discussions that arise from our readings.

### **Creative non-fiction**

In the study of literature, the three genres are defined as poetry, fiction and drama. Today, 'creative non-fiction', is described as the fourth genre that is cutting-edge and still evolving (Root et al. 2011). Duncan Brown and Antjie Krog describe it as writing that 'makes meanings at the unstable fracture between the literary and the journalistic, the imaginative and the reportorial' (2011: 1). Perl and Schwartz describe it as '...a new name for an old impulse...an ever-expanding interest in memoir, personal essay, travel writing, and literary journalism'' (2006: xi). The genre divisions have never been stable, but creative non-fiction is a better way to describe and define such writing. Creative nonfiction provides us with insights into the writer's self as well as information about and ideas around the pertinent topics. Thus we 'hear' the voice of the writer quite directly asserted and claimed.

It is clear that a sense of 'voice' within a text is of central concern, for as Sandra Perl and Mimi Schwartz express it, 'at the heart of all good writing is a compelling voice,: one that demonstrates, with confidence and authority, that words matter, that they have the power to persuade, explain, illuminate, evoke, depict and inspire' (2006: xi). They suggest further that: 'creative nonfiction makes it easier to find our voices by encouraging us to explore what we most care about' (2006: xi). As this is as true of fiction as non-fiction, it provides us with the capacity to draw together genres so that the dichotomy between declared story or fictional narrative can be overcome and all narratives can be seen to have the attributes of story-telling. The interesting attribute that they isolate in fiction and draw to non-fiction is that writing should be '...informative *and* engaging' (2006: xii). Clearly, it is inevitable that our own authorial 'voice' will come through in our writing. Moreover, we are all constructed and constricted by our culture (Caully 2008).

In applying fiction's techniques, creative non-fiction utilises the subjective reflective self as data through revealing the interior monologue. It displays literary writing techniques such as the use of the first person narrator; the use of metaphor; an awareness of tone and style; it includes reported conversations and involves dramatic reconstructions that show rather than tell. This fourth genre of creative non-fiction addresses these questions of authorial voice and style as well as introduces an immediacy and liveliness into the first-person active text.

The fictional elements of style do not mean that the material is 'made up': the genre is creative non-fiction, after all. The material is reliable and the reportage is interesting; the use of first person narrator; characterisation; dialogue and so on enhance the presentation of knowledge and of opinion. This genre also reveals the inherently unstable nature of rigid 'givens' within any area of knowledge. It allows for revealing, for example, as well as their content: how studies are undertaken, what happens within them, the ways in which they are always interpretive, their emotional content, their gendered and cultural boundaries, and the role of their author(s). Rigid binaries

such as those between the imaginative and the realistic, truth and fiction, the personal and the general, are thus overcome and new possibilities for knowledge construction emerge. It is in creative non-fiction that many stories are explored for their imagined truth. Memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, local histories and so on are a significant element of creative fiction and flourish in the republic of imagination.

Nafasi's story about her American experiences and ideas are, then, able to be read as a truth that only creative fiction can reveal. As an example of this, in her search for her father and mother, both Holocaust survivors and hence badly damaged, Romana Koval makes a journey into her past and present so that future generations of her family (and readers) might understand where they have come from. Her book is about being haunted by what it is to be, and she sees the truth in stories:

We cherish our stories and, even if they have gaps, they continue to nourish us and to hold us secure as we make new ones, until we fade into the memories of others, mythic, dreamlike, forever silent. This is how it always is in the songlines of our lives: in the ending of the song are the seeds of a new one, the chorus we sing together, our melodies, coalescing into the greater human symphony (2015: 270).

The ontology of being is central to our search as it is to our personal development: can we understand this as scholars when we take a step to say that our being is never uninfluenced by the past or only occurring in a present that has no influence upon the future? In attempting to address it, if not to answer it, I turn to hauntology.

### **Hauntology**

It is clear that Nafisi is heavily influenced by her past in constructing her present and previewing a possible future. The ghosts of the past that haunt us also take traces of the past into our lives, undoing any logical Western representations of time itself. Jacques Derrida coined this term 'hauntology' in 'Spectres of Marx' (1993) to describe the ghost-like influences of the past that follow us through our lives and our representations of the future. It is a play upon the word 'ontology': the study of being.

This study of the spectral traces and liminal spaces of the connections of the past, present and future is described thus by Kevin Tavin (2005: 1): '...a trace of voices, epistemologies, and temporalities that haunt history and awareness, where the past, present and future come together'. The study of being is, then, not confined to the time of being, and 'hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive' (Davis 2005: 373). This is not to claim the reliability of ghosts that haunt, nor even their existence: rather it acknowledges that nothing comes from nowhere and that living in the present does not efface the past and does influence the future. Colin Davis describes this as permitting the combination of 'close reading with daring speculation' that uncovers 'textual secrets' and in doing so 'always brings to the fore other enigmas which might demand, but not be susceptible to, solution' (377). Certainly, Nafisi's text reveals her phantoms and is enabled by a hauntological reading to explore the boundaries between the past liberal education and thinking underpinning the republic of imagination and the present

*Writing the Ghost Train: Refereed conference papers of the 20th Annual AAWP Conference, 2015*

capitalist and narrowly focussed cultural western movements that are acting to shrink it.

Capitalism itself is a dominant haunting of contemporary peoples. For John Caputo the economy that controls capitalist culture is itself a ghost arising from a gift that exists only to be annulled from its beginning (2012: 24). He sees this as produced by an education that haunts and even destroys 'equilibrium', that is a cutting 'hauntological sword' that destabilizes and displays 'Everywhere questions, suspicions, doubts, dreams, wonders, puzzles where peace once reigned' (25). For Caputo this shows that we always have something to learn, that we should always question givens and the known, and that 'something' is always on its way. In this way, the probable may encompass the improbable, and the improbable may hold the impossible. Temporality, then is not linear as 'the present contains what it cannot contain' (27), and the event does not exist; it insists' (28). Nafisi carries with her such events and they become the basis for her battle against the suppression of the imagination and the concomitant repression of liberal arts education.

Systems act to control: the imagination acts freely, it must resist control if it is to flourish. So Caputo describes Derrida's concept of deconstruction not as destructive nor even anarchical, but as being 'all about institutions-schools, hospitals, political bodies, courts, museums-and how to keep them in creative disequilibrium without tipping over, how to spook their complacency with the promise/risk of the future' (29). Such 'creative disequilibrium' – itself a powerful paradox – is identifiable through hauntological understandings and applications to our readings.

### **The power of the paradox**

Although artists are frequently opposed to givens and act to display cultural metanarratives for criticism or even for ridicule (as in Charlie Hebdo), they are also supported by wealth from groups involved in capitalism such as elite collector, political support and social or institutional grants. Nevertheless 'They remain a powerful source of articulated opposition to societal status quo and a major force for innovation (Markusen 2006/1921). Art may confront such cultural 'givens' or may support them commercially via groups and financial investments, as Bourdieu identifies in his discussions of cultural capital and market forces (cited in Ley 2003). The capital investment may be overtaken by power, regimes, lack of education and disrespect for the liberal arts. The republic of imagination can be supplanted by the regime of repression – whether overt or covert.

An interesting example of both overt and covert repression of the cultural imagination is seen in the depiction of North Korea in the novel *The Orphan master's Son* by Adam Johnson. The protagonist is amazed by the empty wall of a room he enters: 'Never in his life had he been in a room without portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il above the door. Not in the Lowliest orphanage, not in the oldest train car...Never had he been in a place that did not merit the gaze of the Dear and Great Leaders' constant concern.' (2012: 229). Throughout there is a comparison between the safety this makes for citizens and the so-called 'freedom' of the American enemy:

No nation sleeps as North Korea sleeps. After lights-out, there is a collective exhale as heads hit pillows across a million households. When the tireless generators wind down for the night and their red-hot turbines begin to cool, no lights glare on alone, no refrigerator buzzes dully through the dark. There's just eye-closing satisfaction and deep, powerful dreams of work quotas fulfilled and the embrace of reunification. The American citizen, however, is wide awake. You see a satellite photo of that confused nation at night-it's one grand swath of light, glaring with the sum of their idle, indolent evenings. Lazy and unmotivated, Americans stay up late, engaging in television, homosexuality, and even religion, anything to fill their selfish appetites (Johnson: 340).

In his creative writing in this novel, Johnson echoes what Nafisi addresses in creative non-fiction.

Such work is disruptive. It fulfills what Edgar Shein describes as the work of the artist: to challenge the safe cocoons that most of us construct for our lives. Such defamiliarisation means that the culture is enriched rather than demolished. Where it is forbidden, there is tyranny. However, does commercial and capitalist complacency perform itself as a kind of tyranny as Nafisi suggests? Certainly it can be successfully shown that art in all of its creative forms acts to defamiliarise: that, after all is a very satisfactory definition of creativity. In her realisation of the importance of art to her poetic, lesbian and black background, bell hooks (1995) claims: 'Regardless of subject matter, form, or content, whether art is overtly political or not, artistic work that emerges from an unfettered imagination affirms the primacy of art as that space of cultural production where we can find the deepest, most intimate understanding of what it means to be free' (1995, 38). It may be that artistic rebellion against the givens and dominant narratives of culture is what Nafisi is discussing in this book that yearns for a possible world in an America that is the republic of imagination.

### **Articulating trauma**

It is particularly galling to Nafisi, who has experienced such firsthand trauma in her life in Iran-trauma so dangerous that she is in exile from her birth land so as to survive- to discuss how the dangerous elements of life that are displayed in fiction are being questioned as unsuitable for American students: 'students from different colleges have requested that classic works of fiction be labelled with warnings to prevent students from being traumatized by the book's painful content' (319). She 'finds it amazing' that such works and such situations are trivialized and censored and asks: 'what will we say to the young girl in Iran who is arrested and flogged for going to a party, or to the mother in Nigeria whose daughter has been kidnapped by terrorists and sold into slavery, or to the young girls abducted, raped and kept in captivity for years right here in the United States? Should we tell them we cannot bear to hear their stories?' (321). Nafisi also reminds us of the many fairy stories, myths, legends and dystopic children's fiction that exist. The pain in fiction is there so as to enable readers to see through trauma 'before confidence, love and joy could be offered up as a reward for ingenuity under pressure and for surviving hardships big

and small' (322). She calls such censorship a denial of pain in our lives stating that 'to deny literature is to deny pain and the dilemma that is called life' (323). For her, 'willpower married to technology' will not provide self-help and how-to that will prevent life trauma and its effects.

Moreover, we should court the many aspects of life that are articulated in literature so that we are disturbed and enlivened, so that we understand and act against racism and inequality. Nafisi quotes James Baldwin: 'Artists are here to disturb the peace' (326) and F. Scott Fitzgerald: 'Draw up your chair to the edge of the precipice and I'll tell you a story' as the final note to her book (328).

## Conclusion

Imagining the unimaginable may be the definitive role for Nafisi's thinking on the power of the republic of imagination. She speaks strongly to those who want to stand against the dominance of any single way of viewing the world. Coming as she does from such a repressive culture, she sees the necessity for art being able and willing to transgress and to disturb the peace, and for artists and readers to involve themselves in a story as/from the edge of the precipice, and for education to celebrate this. Importantly she fears that America (the West) will self-repress.

Writing creative non-fiction, Nafisi tells a truth that hits home out of her own experience to ours. Her literary capacities are as evident as her critical and analytical abilities, and this work has poetic and dramatic impulses as well as cultural insights. Her creative non-fiction writings have stimulated my reader's imagination and have evolved into this paper that is a conversation with Nafisi about the importance of the republic of imagination.

## List of works cited

- Boorstin, Daniel J 2012 *The creators: A history of heroes of the imagination*, New York: Vintage
- Brown, Duncan & Krog, Antjie 2011 'Creative non-fiction: A conversation', *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 23:1, 57-70
- Caulley, Darrel N 2008 'Making qualitative research reports less boring: The techniques of writing creative nonfiction', *Qualitative Inquiry* 14:3, 424-449
- Caputo, John 2012 'Teaching the Event: Deconstruction, Hauntology, and the Scene of Pedagogy', *Philosophy of Education Archive* 2012: 23-34
- Davis, Colin 2005 'Hauntology, spectres and phantoms', *French Studies* 59:3, 373-379
- Farley, James 2014 'Trepidation: Void', *Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language* 6:1, 30
- Hartsock, Nancy 1983 'The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism' in S Harding & M Hintikka (eds) *Discovering Reality*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co.
- Johnson, Adam 2012 *The Orphan master's Son*, Great Britain: Black Swan
- Kosut, Mary 2006 'Mad artists and tattooed perverts: Deviant discourse and the social construction of cultural categories', *Deviant Behavior* 27:1, 73-95

- Koval, Ramona 2015 *Bloodhound. Searching for my father*, Melbourne: Text Publishing
- Ley, David 2003 'Artists, aestheticisation and the field of gentrification', *Urban studies* 40:12, 2527-2544
- Lock, Andy & Tom Strong 2010 *Social constructionism: Sources and stirrings in theory and practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Liotard, Jacques 1984 *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Nafisi, Azar 2014 *The Republic of Imagination*, London: William Heinemann
- Markusen, Ann 2006 'Urban development and the politics of a creative class: evidence from a study of artists', *Environment and planning A* 38:10, 1921
- Markusen, Ann, Wassal, Gregory, DeNatale, Douglas & Cohen, Randy 2008 'Defining the creative economy: Industry and occupational approaches', *Economic Development Quarterly* 22:1, 24-45
- Mullin, Amy 2003 'Feminist art and the political imagination', *Hypatia* 18:4, 189-213
- Perl, Sondra & Schwartz, Mimi 2006 *Writing True. The Art and craft of creative nonfiction*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Root, Robert, Michael Steinberg & Sonya Huber 2011 *The fourth genre: Contemporary writers of/on creative nonfiction*, New York: Longman
- Schein, Edgar H 2001 'The role of art and the artist', *Reflections* 2:4, 81-83
- Tavin, Kevin 2005 'Hauntological shifts: Fear and loathing of popular (visual) culture', *Studies in Art Education* 46:2, 101-117