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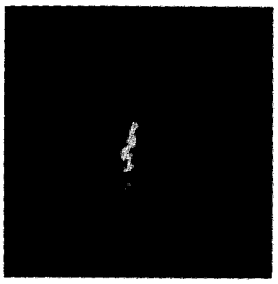
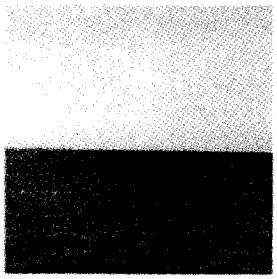
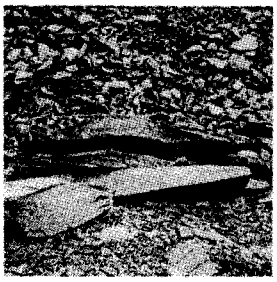

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THINKING CREATIVELY ABOUT THE CREATIVE ACT

DAYA KRISHNA

I have nothing to show you on the screen, rather I would like you to recall things on the screen of your memory. After all, art is not such an isolated separate thing from life that each of us, at least to some extent, has not had an experience of it. In fact, the first thing I would like to consider is whether the usual way of thinking about the arts is the way it ought to be done. Art is certainly close to us all in some form or another. We all remember poems or songs or Urdu couplet or some Paintings, or piece of architecture, or a song that we have heard which takes us out of ourselves. It takes us out of our daily round of living when we recall it. And whenever we have recalled it, it comes with a freshness to us again and makes life worth living. What exactly is this experience? How shall we think about it? Shall the thinking about the arts be confined to the view of the specialists who consider themselves to be the connoisseurs? I suggest that this is a wrong approach. There may be many *sampradayas,* as we call them, or school which attempt to understand it. But basically, what is the understanding of a work of art? The whole problem of demarcation has already failed to even distinguish between science and non-science. The problem of demarcation is the problem of criterion and classification; and whatever criteria or classification one adopts it is bound to have ambiguous instances where the decision to apply it or not to apply it, is a purely arbitrary one. And yet we do make classifications. We do point out differences which seem to be important to us. And thus, the notion of art connotes and denotes something which is considered to be important enough to be differentiated. But, what is the criterion of differentiation?

Art is a paradigmatic example of the creative act. Can art be conceived without thinking that someone created it? Not only this, can we conceive art without reference with the senses that we have? We, of course, talk about the visual and the aural arts. We, of course, talk of tactile qualities but not of an art built on tactuality alone. But, what about the senses of smell and taste? There is the "art" of perfumery and the "art" of cooking, for example. But they never achieve the status either of an art or craft. Why not? One should reflect on this question as to

why only the eyes and the ears are supposed to give to the art?

What is this attempt to understand the arts? We try to understand nature, but can art be understood in the same way as we understand nature? Can we use the same methodology, the same categories with which we try to understand an object which we consider to be given to us by nature? Even within what man creates there is a diversity. Man creates for all sorts of purposes and sometimes he creates only for the joy of it, for the playfulness of it or just for the adventure of exploration. What is this he does? In the understanding of this shall we use categories and concepts which are totally different from that of understanding a work of inanimate nature?

I would like to share with you an attempt at understanding the phenomena of creation itself which, as far as I know, has not generally been attempted. What attracts our attention is the produce of creativity and not the process of which it is the end result. We are taken in by the *products* of an activity. When one sees a painting one sees a frame; something is framed there. I was just saying to someone in the tea-break, one of the participants, that the 'space' in the painting is different from the physical space in which the painting is located on the wall; yet in a certain sense the space of painting is far more real than the space of the canvas. But it is the "unreal" that one values, which is not the "real" i.e., the space of the canvas on which the unreal space of painting is created. Only just a few minutes ago a problem had arisen in the conversation. What about the 'space' that architecture makes possible. It seems difficult to answer this question as alike painting the contrast between two 'spaces' is not possible itself. Is it the same type of unreal space that is created in Painting, or does it raise new problems? There is the flatness of the space in the canvas contrasted with the depth of the space that is created in the painting, or that which appears there or that has been made to "appear". In architecture the space is made visible by enclosing it through walls or by any other structure. But what is the relation of the space which is made to appear in architecture to the space in which architecture itself is built. In architecture, it is very difficult to say because there is no contrast. There is no contrast between space and the space that appears. There is the space and that space is made visible. How is it made visible? By setting boundaries. Let the boundaries collapse and that which was made visible by drawing the boundaries also collapses into nothingness. The infinity of space cannot be seen, connot be made visible. It is made visible by drawing finite boundaries around it. I was

referring to this conversation because I think it points to a factor which I would like to emphasize today and to share with you , a point that I have been thinking about for some time and have tried to apply to the understanding of the arts.

The title I had suggested for this lecture is "Thinking Creativity about the Creative Act". Of the two sets of creativity here, one is the creative act of which the paradigmatic example is exhibited in the arts. On the other hand, we think about it. Thinking is a second level of creative activity which when it is done about the art assumes a first level of exercise of that creative activity which resulted in the production of what we call the "art object". We want to understand it. But what is this 'thinking' about the arts? Is this thinking itself a 'creative' activity? Or does it merely reflect on the nature of the art object, or upon the creative activity whose end result is the work of art or both. What does it do? Because unless we understand "thinking" itself, we cannot understand it. Why do we not talk about creativity in the realm of thinking? It is because we are taken in by the illusions of the creations of thought. If you take a book, or take, for example, the papers that have been presented and will be presented to you, they have a beginning and an end and you read them from start to finish. But what is the process that has gone into their production? 'Is that just a logical process or a mechanical process, or something else? I want to shift your attention from the products to the process and from the process to that which lies beyond them. For example, one cannot understand any work unless one ceases to see it as a finished product. The same person who has written an article will go back and write on the same subject again unless he has become intellectually dead. Also, he is not the only person who is thinking; others are also thinking not as the result of the activity of one 'single' person alone. But it we take this aspect seriously then the work that is produced would not be seen as something 'finished' and 'final'. Instead it will be seen as a temporary halting place for thought, which at that point of time the author who had been merely an "instrument" of thought, felt that there was something worth saying, even though he 'knew' that what he was saying was incomplete and had some objections to it for which at least at that time, he had no answer. But still he thought that in spite of the incompleteness and the unanswered objections it was worth saying. The reader on the other hand has the illusion that it is something completed, something final. The tentativeness of the work which is so obvious to the author is hidden from the reader and he is taken in by the format in which the thought is present. But, in the realm of thought it was some-

thing 'cognitive' that troubled one. It may have been a question to which he wanted to seek an answer, or it may have been a problem to which he wanted to seek a solution. These questions and these problems might have arisen accidentally in his mind or for any reason whatsoever. But because the question became his question because the problem became his problem, he tried to answer it. But we who read the book do not see the question or the problem to which the author was finding an answer or seeking a solution. We do not ask ourselves what the question was to which the thinker was seeking an answer or what the problem was to which he was seeking a solution. However, the question that he had asked is in a sense, perennial because he may again write another book as he may find the earlier answer unsatisfactory. The thinkers who came after him either take up from where he left off or raise some new questions. Thus the story goes on and we have in his country at least three thousand years of recorded history where such thinking has been documented.

The impression that the present thinking is the only thinking that goes on in one's culture or in one's language is an illusion. Just there is an illusion of finality about the book, there is the illusion of finality about the present. We all seem to believe that present is the only reality, but at the end of the biological journey or the journey of thinking or the journey of creativity, one is almost where one was at the beginning. Have you ever met a person with a great reputation whose books you have read and then gone to meet him and talked to him? You might have been surprised to find that he feels himself to be even more unsure than he was when he began his career.

I understand a text better when I ask myself what this person is trying to do. I make that text my own and then see what question arises in my own mind about what he does, about what he is saying. And then, I try to see whether his thoughts moved in the same way as mine or not. And thus, I get into work, into his thought process, and then I see that he has been making choices all the time among paths that he did not take, but which he could have taken. In fact the interesting thing about the work is not what has been done but what has been left undone. And then I take up the same thing and carry it in a direction where it was not taken. By 'I', I mean anybody who approaches the text in this way and thus joins the perennially on going process of thought whose beginning no one knows and whose end no one can foretell.

But, how do we apply this to the understanding of the arts? In

my view, thinkers are conceptual artists. They deal with concepts, create new worlds of concepts by giving prominence to one concept rather than another. They bring concepts into being, or change old concepts by bringing them into relationship with other concepts in the context of which they had never occurred before. How can we apply what we call the "art of conceptual creativity" to the understanding of the creative act which is embodied in a work of art? I suggest that the understanding of artist will be totally mistaken if it is not seen in terms of its own creativity. Most attempts at understanding are attempts to deny the creativity aspects of the creative act itself. They try to think about it in causal terms. We may have a psychoanalytic approach, but how does it help? Why should I be interested in somebody's subconscious drive? In fact, the causal understanding at any level, whether it is sociological, philosophical, or historical, at whatever level it may operate, does not help one. It is totally irrelevant to the understanding of the creative novelty of the act. To the extent that such approaches to the understanding of art are successful, they merely show the failure of the artist to achieve what he was trying to achieve. I can argue for this position at least to some extent in the field which I know a little better, the "history of thought". I can take a great thinker and show that such attempts to understand him are wrong because they do not illuminate what he was trying to do. Therefore, the next point that I would like to share with you is that any understanding of the arts which sees them in terms of causality, at whatever level, is mistaken, thought most people will continue to do so because they do not know what else to do. It is so easy to find the causal factors or to suggest the causal factors without even caring or worrying as to what, would validate their contention. A causal hypothesis can only be validated if one can reproduce the conditions and see if the effect will be reproduced or not; even if we have a probability hypothesis, the effect will be reproduced most of the time. Would you like the work of art to be 'reproduced' in this manner? Certainly, I hope, not. Therefore, causal understanding, though tempting, is always irrelevant to the situation. However, one shall always be tempted to use it as the "model of understanding" is built on our understanding of nature in respect to which we want to reproduce the events by having a knowledge of the causes. As we are interested in power, we are interested in reproducibility; we are interested in controlling the cause so that we may control the effects. In fact, if one has a causal knowledge but no possibility of control over the phenomenon, the knowledge becomes totally irrelevant. It is only when one can control the causes that causal knowledge is worthwhile.

Most frame-works of understanding rest on the assumptions of a causal understanding in some form or other. Causal understanding sometimes may be contextual understanding in nature. But unless one can free if of the context in which it arises, or to which it is bound, the understanding does not have much significance. When I think, I think in a particular language; I think in a particular tradition. I an situated somewhere in space and time and culture; I have friends and I have a biography. But to the extent that I am bound by these, I am determine by them in my act of creativity. Every great master used a language that he has learnt but he is not bound by it. Similarly, one may situate a person's thought in the matrix of the previous thinking which had been done, but if it could be totally explained by it, it would be a total failure. One would not be interested in it. Similarly, I suggest that any attempt at understanding any work of art in which there is an element of creativity in terms that have little to do with creativity or that have only a partial relationship in terms of either materials or conditions will not help one to understand it. If what I am saying is even partially true, then I would like to suggest some new dimensions in which we might try to understand a work of art in a non-causal creative perspective. Firstly, there is the radical division between the arts, that is, the literary and the non-literary. Language, in which the literary arts have their being, is one of the strangest entities in the world. It has no being-in-itself. If has no being something for-itself. If has a being which is completely outside it. But even when something is undeciphered, that is, we do not know what exactly is "outside" it. We still call it a language. But till it is deciphered it does not "exist" for us. Even the greatest piece of literature in a language, one does not know, is a 'closed' 'dead' thing for that person. What then exactly is the reality of language which completely exists outside it? Language is not always transparent, thought it is always presupposed that it ought to be so. One has to first understand its meaning, but what is "meaning"? The whole realm of literary arts presents one with a very strange situation. New words certainly arise, but how few they are. The new vocabulary that is added to language by a succession of writers even across centuries is negligible. Rather, it is with new combinations of the same words that new worlds of meaning are created. But what is this creation of new worlds of meaning? And what is meant by the novelty of meaning? This "meaning" is not exactly cognitive in the sense that it has no 'reference', which could possibly make it true or false. It is not a scientific fact to be tested to find whether it really is as it has been stated in the language. If fact the question of truth or validation

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does not operate in this context. Why does it not operate? Let me give you a simple example, two drinks if taken separately will not have much effect on one. Gin and dry vermouth are the obvious examples. But it one mixes them in a certain proportion, one gets a very strong drink which is called a dry martini. The same happens to be the case with language; single, isolated words may not have much effect, but a master brings them together and there is a sudden explosion of new meaning. This happens in the conceptual realm also. The concepts are brought together and suddenly a new thought emerges. But the world of meanings that one builds is a strange phenomenon which needs a long exploration of its own. However, I would not like to discuss this issue further, as I wish to return back to the issue of the non-literary arts and the problem regarding their understanding.

What is the artist trying to do through the creation of a work of art? We had started by pointing out that most of the non-literary arts build on the visual and the auditory worlds that our ordinary senses naturally create for us. The artist tries to create new worlds out of these which have only a deceptive, illusory relation to them. The ordinary act "understanding" these arts is taken in by this deceptive illusion and, combined with the natural tendency of the intellect to understand in causal terms, tries to understand them as if they were "worlds" on at par with the normal, actual world which we see or hear with our senses. But what is this world created for? This is a world in which we would like to enter and live in, leaving the world which we inhabit most of the time. It is a world where the possible becomes the actual and the constraints of the biological world no longer operate. It is also the world where causality ceases to function in the way we find it in the inert world of nature. A work of art, then, is an invitation to enter and live in, at least for some time, a world which is more meaningful than the world we ordinarily find ourselves in. What exactly is the nature of this "world" or the "world" that art creates and invites us to enter? It is a world which is more profound, more meaningfual and more significant where "freedom" obtains in a deeper sense than we are ever able to find in the so-called "normal" world we live in. The ordinary realm in which we live, in which our senses function is the realm of necessities. This is a world where causality reigns, and causal knowledge is used by us to achieve wealth and power and control over others. But such a knowledge does not give enlightenment or freedom in the sense in which it is not essentially an exercise of power over others, but the achievement of a state of consciousness which is not only permanent in a deeper sense than the world we live in, but

where what we aspire for is actualized to a greater extent than it can ever be in the day to day world to which we are bound by the necessity of existence itself. There is, thus, a feeling of "release" when we enter the world of art along with the feeling that we can return to it again and again whenever the ordinary world allows us some time to do so.

However, this world of freedom is itself a strange world. There are those who create and those who appreciate. Art is an invitation from one person to another to enter into a world where necessity is minimized and freedom is maximized. But this freedom can be of different sorts and the differences between the arts and the works within the same art-form may be seen in terms of the "Freedom" they embody and the possibility they seek to actualize. Yet, whatever the freedom that is embodied or the possibility that is actualized, one has necessarily to come out of it even though there was the freedom to enter it or to return to it. Thus there is continuously a dialectical inter-play between the freedom to enter the worlds that art creates and the necessity to leave them and return to the ordinary world. What happens to one when one returns to this ordinary world after a visit to that other world which art had created and in which one lived for a certain while? What survives is only a memory of what was "lived" in that world and "experienced" more intensely than we ever do in our lives. Besides this, it sometimes affects our sensibility, or a alters our way of looking at things and even the way we feel about them.

The sensibility, however, that is cultivated and developed through our resort to the world of one particular form of art which is generally centered in our senses does not normally affect our sensibilities in other field. The greatest artists have shown that they only have sensibility on one domain. A great painter may appreciate music that is third rate. A great musician nay appreciate bad paintings, and great artists in their own life may not be very good human beings, that is sensitive to what other human beings feel or do. Similarly, those who are connoisseurs of art are not connoisseurs of human relations.

Thus the creativity that is revealed in works of art and the sensitivity they display and infuse to some extent in one who beholds and appreciates them is fragmented and partial. It, therefore, needs to be supplemented by a deeper and more comprehensive vision that relates them to the roots of creativity that lie in the self consciousness of man which continuously challenges him to transform everything that he apprehends in the light of some vague, immanent ideal which demands to

be actualized both in himself and in his relation to everything else in terms to both knowing, feeling and action. The understanding of a work of art, therefore, has to ulimately be in terms of the creativity that lies behind it and which sees it as a tentative product in the pursuit of the realization of a vision which informs the created work with the possibility of a different world which is freer, more sensitive and more significant so that our encounter with it, however brief, may change and modify our ordinary living with a subtler, deeper sensitivity to nature, human beings and above all, the transcendent which surrounds us all the time. The understanding of art, then can only be successfully attempted in terms of the apprehension of both the actualized and unactualized possibilities that are there in the created work and that open directions which the immanent vision embodied in it suggests for its further realization and actualization. It is also to be done in terms of the type of the possible world that has been created and suggested in the work of art and thus invites a critical evaluation of it in terms of all that man seeks to realize and actualize in all the diverse domains of his being.

The arts, then, are ulimately rooted in what may be called "the art of living" and unless life is seen in terms of an artistic creation, we cannot understand the creation which is embodied in a work of art. It is, of course, true that we all are most of the time bad artists as far as the art of living is concerned. But then, how few are the works of art that are really good. Most of them are inferior and very few attain a greatness which endures in time. A Gandhi is as rare as, say, a Shakespeare or a Michelangelo. To link creativity in the field of art with the one that is there at the foundations of life itself to see the world and ourselves with a transformed vision which challenges each one of us to look at ourselves and the world anew and face the challenging task of creating ourselves and the worldl we live in, in a better, more beautiful way. The 'grafting' of being through the act of becoming is the secret of both ourselves and the world and it is through art that we learn this truth most easily. Let us try to understand the art is this perspective and perhaps our lives would become a little more akin to art than it has been until now.