VI. ART, REALITY AND THE ART OBJECT
This chapter is devoted to an analysis of the problems of the nature of art work and its relation to reality in the light of the aesthetic theories that have been discussed in Section I. Like the pattern followed in the Chapter V, here too there is an endeavour to bring together these four aesthetic theories on points of common interest and thus assess them on the nature of the work of art.

Even a cursory glance at the writings of Sartre, Croce, Spengler, and Freud makes it very evident that they are all talking different languages, which have nothing in common unless they are translated into a common scheme of concepts. This diversity of view-points is exemplified by their approaches towards art. Spengler looks at art as a residue of the majestic wave cycles of a culture. This residue acquires its significance because of its ability to embody some one cultural prime-symbol and thus reveals the soul of that culture. For Freud, on the other hand, art is born out of the lack of adjustment between ego and the external world. It is phantasy objectified, and the artist is like the neurotic who shares his phantasies with others. Thus the value and purpose of art lies in revealing the hidden nuances of human personality. For Croce and Sartre, on the contrary, art is valuable not for an extra-aesthetic purpose, but for its own sake. But they arrive
at this autonomy of art from different points of view. Croce arrives at it by holding art to be intuitive and intuition is completely independent and autonomous. Sartre regards art to be the creation of human freedom — this freedom is unlimited, there are no extraneous influences on it, neither moral and religious nor rational.

Similar to these variations in these four approaches towards art are their diverse outlooks on reality. In this context, the term reality denotes the external world — that which is empirically given. Sartre is an epistemological realist; therefore, he takes the independent existence of the external world for granted. But in order to relate realism with his phenomenological leanings, he holds that the external world acquires its significance only because of man's consciousness and freedom. Thus, there is a world only in so far as there is the for-itself projecting itself towards the world. For Croce, however, there is no external world in the sense in which a realist thinks it to be 'out there' — independent of the perceiving mind. In fact, for him, externality too is one of the creations of the Spirit itself.¹ Spengler too regards reality to be

¹"The relation which I there establish between mind or spirit and nature is no longer a dualistic one where the two terms are related by the mediation of God or the Idea, but a unity in which spirit, for its own purposes, fashions the idea of nature or the external world; and thus any intrusion of transcendence is absolutely excluded."
dependent upon the prime-symbol of a culture. To talk about the world as an objective fact, independent of the cultural matrix is meaningless for Spengler. Thus, there is not one world-image but a variety of them; each belonging to its respective culture. Sartre and Spengler both hold that the world, as it is visualized, is visualized through the intervention of human mind. But for Sartre, there is still one aspect of the world, which can be scientifically observed and analysed. While for Spengler on the other hand, even mathematical and physical sciences are not culture-free. It is only Freud who completely holds on to the common sense view of reality. The world for him has an independent existence apart from any perceiver.

Regarding the relation of art and reality, one thing which strikes as the common point of these four aestheticians, is their rejection of the imitation theory of art. The imitation theory upholds the view that art is a symbolic means of achieving a semblance of the external world. For it, the value of art lies in its peculiar ability to sustain the illusion of the external world. And there seems a justification in this rejection, for if art is merely a device for symbolically duplicating the external

world, why make such an effort? One can as well do with the external world itself. Moreover, imitation, taken in an extreme sense is not possible, for the moment one makes an attempt to portray something in terms of a certain medium, the medium itself 'distances' it from the real object. A painting of a table may have successfully captured the colour, outward form and the chiaroscuro of the real table, but the very fact that it is painted on two dimensional surface makes its semblance less realistic. Imitation theory taken even in a broader sense cannot be entertained, for this would imply that the excellence of art-works is dependent upon an extra aesthetic criterion — their capacity to create an illusion of the real. However, Sartre, Spengler, Croce, and Freud all have different reasons to offer in support of their rejection of imitation theory.

For Spengler it would be absurd to talk in terms of imitation, for the so called objective imitation of the external world is really not objective, since the external world is itself the product of the vision of a certain medium.

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2 Bullough has discussed this peculiar nature of artistic medium in his article, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and Aesthetic Principle" in *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays*. He says that the frame of the painting, the stage for the drama and the pedestal for the sculpture make the art work distant from its audience. See pp. 113-114.
cultural epoch. This rejection of imitation theory is exemplified by Spengler's analysis of Impressionist painting which is generally regarded as a form of realistic art. Spengler does not see in Impressionism, as is generally conceived, an attempt to capture the light and shade of the external world. But on the contrary, he regards it as an expression of infinite space, the prime-symbol of the Western culture which transcends the limitations of the perceptually present. Croce excludes the imitation from the so-called pure expression and offers two reasons for doing so:

a) Expression (or art) is not a duplication of impressions, between impressions and expressions there is no causal connection; and

b) Expression is autonomous and self sufficient.

Thus, according to Croce, pure art is free from any extraneous influences. Of the two (Croce and Spengler) Croce's reasons for the rejection of imitation theory seem to be more sound because he directs the attention towards

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3'Impressionism is the inverse of the Euclidean world-feeling. It tries to get as far as possible from the language of plastic and as near as possible to that of music. The effect that is made upon us by things that receive and reflect light is made not because the things are there but as though they "in themselves" are not there.... Impressionism is the comprehensive expression of a world-feeling, and it must obviously therefore permeate the whole physiognomy of our "Late" Culture.' Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, Vol. I, pp.285-86.
the individual art-work. Spengler's imposing but intricate system of cultural prime-symbols and their concretization in art-works, pressurises one to forget that the artistic creation is unique and complete in itself and no amount of dabbling in abstract categories will help the on-looker confronting himself with the work of art. Spengler also criticises the attempts of art historians to categorize art-works in terms of their material media and certain technical characteristics. He also is against associating any linear progression with art-history, the general pattern of Classical, Renaissance and Modern. But he criticises these categories only to form fresh ones, there is no linear progression, but there is cyclic progression relative to every culture. Every art undergoes its growth and decay corresponding to its respective culture. Similarly, art forms are not bound by their material media but by their cultural prime-symbols.

Freud perhaps was never so much concerned about such problems since his primary interest in art was not aesthetic, but psychological. He does hold, however, that the artist's job is not merely to effectively imitate the external world. If imitation of the external world be the sole concern of art, art cannot become a vehicle for a release of inhibited instinctive urges. Thus Freud conceived of art as a realm that does not follow the dictates of the external world. The artist is free to choose and modify his images and forms.
And Freud also, though not explicitly denying conceptual categories in aesthetics, does not leave any hints for categorization of art-works. He was never interested in the formal characteristics of art-works, but their content—content is not the apparent theme or subject matter of an art work but the unconscious desires that it portrays. And from this point of view of content, there is no categorization possible. Sartre's rejection of imitation theory involves different reasons; he holds that realism is a shield to cover one's lack of authenticity by grand eloquent reasons. For, art is not a slavish reproduction of the external world, every element of an art-work speaks of the conscious choice of the creative artist. To follow rigidly the pattern of external reality would be an attempt at 'bad-faith'—the desire to escape freedom and subjectivity, for it is really not possible to portray the world impartially; every attempt is partial. "The error of realism has been to believe that the real reveals itself to contemplation, and that consequently one could draw an impartial picture of it. How could that be possible, since the very perception is partial, since by itself the naming is already a modification of the object?"

Thus, Sartre and Spengler arrive at a similar conclusion that impartial portrayal of reality is a

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4 J-P. Sartre, What is Literature? p. 44.
misnomer, though their reasons are entirely different. Sartre adds to Spengler by thinking the imitation of reality as a worthless pursuit for an artist, as it takes him away from his authentic existence. Furthermore, he has no quarrel against categorization of art-works, if it is not applied rigidly, for it is an aid to practical criticism. He is well aware that a work of art is a value in itself and there cannot be any a priori categories stamped upon it. Just as there are no norms prior to human existence, similarly there are no norms prior to the art-work. If categories are taken moderately even Croce has no objections. His rejection of the building of categories and types is with a view to direct one's interest more towards the art-work itself rather than to any conceptualizations about it.

Is there something called an art-object? And if so, what is its status? These are the questions which immediately arise in this context. It has already been seen that the term art-object does not denote objects as they are commonly conceived. At the outset the meaning of the term 'art-object' must be clarified and an attempt made to analyse the various constituents that go to make an art-object. However, it must be remembered that any such analysis cannot be exhaustive, for the term art-object is vague and its connotation cannot be absolutely marked out. A few of
the important constituents that are associated with art-objects are:

a) Externalized or materially created artifact: a sensuously created object;

b) Symbolism, the disposition in the artifact of arousing and embodying images and emotions;

c) Organic unity; and

d) Freedom from moral and intellectual norms.

Let us discuss these constituents in the light of the aforementioned aesthetic theories. It has been seen that amongst the four it is only Croce who excludes the externalized artifact from his conception of the so-called pure art. The art-object is conceived in a sensuous symbolism constituting a medium but this conceived symbolism is not concretized in terms of a physical structure. It remains purely at the imagined level. For Croce, art is expression and expression is purely an imaginative creation. Thus, if art-object be taken to imply the material artifact then for Croce there is no such thing as an art-object. However, it is very difficult to think how a distinction between a mental image and its concretization can be eliminated. For the mental image is always vague as compared to the one concretized. And the image exhausts its possibilities only in the process of concretization. Croce disregarded the externalization in the artistic process, his purpose for doing so was to emphasize the value of
imagination. But his indifference to the material artifact creates serious difficulties for art-criticism and aesthetic evaluation and he has therefore been amply criticised for this. To be sure, the material artifact is absolutely essential for any judgement and preference to be made about it. Furthermore, Croce's theory suffers from the confusion between the process and the product. Imaginative visualization of forms of the art work is a very important step to artistic creativity; but howsoever essential the process may be, it cannot be confounded with the created product that emerges from this process.

Sartre has a better solution to offer: he does not disregard the material artifact, he is quite clear that an

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5 The next important feature in Croce's account of the process of expression is his assertion that externalisation, translation into physical media, is optional, an economic not an aesthetic fact. Logically, it is sufficient to point out... that upon this basis the subject matter of aesthetics is beyond our reach, and Croce's work might have begun and ended like the chapter on snakes in Iceland. There appears, however, to be a more serious error in this false idealism. Croce's contempt for the external result overlooks the fact that the artist must, not may have a medium, external to himself, in and through which to express the beautiful. The potter without the clay is powerless, the sculptor without the stone has nothing to express, and the poet works and is a craftsman with words, with sounds.... Externalisation, then, is not optional, but necessary, essential, and inevitable. Every art has its appropriate medium which is the artist's indispensable material. Albert A Cock, "The 'Aesthetic' of Benedetto Croce", Proceedings of Aristotelian Society, New Series, Vol. XV. (1915), pp. 190-191.
art-object is not a mental image in a mentally conceived medium. On the other hand, the art-object is an image with a 'sensory residue'. Thus, this sensory residue which is the externalized artistic creation is not complete in itself, it acquires completion only in the imaginative process that it generates. Left to itself, an art-object is only a dead thing, it lives only in the imaginative fulfilment of the beholder. But this dead thing is essential to generate the process of imagination. Furthermore it is only the process of externalization that brings the image to a clear-cut focus. For instance, a mental image of a landscape fulfils its details only when it is painted. Thus, what was vague in the mental image of landscape sharpens its contours in the process of concretization. Sartre, therefore, holds both the imaginative visualization of forms as well as their concretization into a material artifact equally important for the creation and appreciation of an art-object. He regards the art-object unreal; however, this unreality is not Platonic: 'twice removed from reality' because of being a copy of the copy. It is a truism that a painting of grapes is unreal as contrasted with the real grapes that are lying in the plate. Sartre's concept of unreality is not so simple. Looking closely at it we find that for him, an art-object is unreal because of two reasons. Firstly because it is a creation in terms of a medium and thus estranges it from objects in the external world and, secondly, because it is not identical with itself,
it continuously transcends its physical being. Reality is the being-in-itself, which is complete and identical with itself. Art is unreal because it has only the potentiality of completion and it is thus constantly indicating towards a beyond; away from its mere physical structure.

Freud too held art to be unreal in the sense of being illusory because it is a substitute for direct instinctive satisfaction. Artistic creativity leads to phantasy-making and the very basis of phantasy-making implies a transcendence from reality. Thus, Freud's concept of unreality is entirely different from Sartre's and it is so because reality and unreality have different meanings in their theories. Reality for Sartre is the self identical and pure being while for Freud, it is manifested through man's instinctive urges on the one hand and the suppression caused by the mores and customs of society (which he calls the Reality Principle) on the other.

Spengler did not concern himself with the reality and unreality of art, but his views lean towards conceding art some reality. It is primarily because there is no special reality or unreality of art as against the other

6"The substitute gratifications, such as art offers, are illusions in contrast to reality, but none the less satisfying to the mind on that account, thanks to the place which phantasy has reserved for herself in mental life." S. Freud, Civilization & Its Discontents, p. 25.
cultural products. Every world-image is equally real and so is every art-work. There is no 'nature' which may be regarded as real as contrasted to the illusory character of art, for nature too is different for different cultures. For Croce also, art is real, but real not because it is a 'physical fact' but because it is a creation of the spirit. "If it is asked why art cannot be a physical fact, it is necessary to state, first of all, that physical facts lack reality. On the other hand, art, to which so many devote their whole lives and which fills everyone with heavenly joy, is supremely real. Consequently, it cannot be a physical fact, which is something unreal." Thus, we see that for Croce reality is mental and since the proper art activity is theoretical and mental (excluding the physical aspect of art, which is practical activity) it is absolutely real. These varied conclusions regarding the status of the art-object have one thing in common: all emphasize the value of imagination in the creation and appreciation of art.

Spengler holds the view that without the imaginative participation an art-work is merely a cultural fossil. But his imagination is not like that of Sartre: free and autonomous; quite the contrary it is culturally conditioned.

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With the decay of a culture, its art-forms also die down, for the imagination that participated in their creation has died down. Spengler does not specifically lay down the distinction between art and non-art. All the various manifestations of a culture equally embody its characteristic prime-symbol and they all die out with their respective cultures. In this sense, there is no difference between Euclidean Geometry and Classical Sculpture. The only difference left (between art and non-art) is the difference of medium and that too has been ruled out by Spengler.

Freud's system suffers from a similar weakness, perhaps his pre-occupation with the analysis of the causes that lie behind the creative process made him indifferent to the created art-object. All products of creative activity — science, art and religion are born out of man's dissatisfaction with his surrounding world. Thus, the causes that generate creativity are essentially the same, but the created products are entirely different. Freud directed his sole attention to the content of art-works — the suppressed unconscious desires of man and the process that brings them forth to the conscious level. He treated art-works as ciphers, embodying in them the strange and unknown messages of the unconscious. This is seen in Freud's analysis of various art-works like Shakespeare's Hamlet, Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Michelangelo's Moses, Leonardo's Mona Lisa and Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov etc. Freud
does not find in Oedipus Rex the catharsis of the sublime emotions of pity and fear as is gathered from Aristotle's remarks on Oedipus Rex. Neither does he look upon Oedipus Rex as the ideal representation of a dramatic plot. He, on the other hand, finds in both Oedipus Rex and Hamlet the inherent desire for incest that the son has towards his mother. However, Freud also believes that the spectator who witnesses Sophocles' Oedipus Rex undergoes a catharsis, not of pity and fear but of his repressed incestuous desires. Similarly, it has been seen, that Leonardo's "St. Anne with Virgin and Child" is nowhere discussed and analysed by Freud as an art object but as symbolizing one of the incidents of Leonardo's early childhood with his mother. And in Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky manifested his own guilt of parricide. Howsoever important these messages may be for a psychoanalyst, they have very little value for aesthetics. For an aesthete, what is of

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10 For a detailed discussion of Brothers Karamazov, see S. Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide", in Collected Papers, Vol. V, pp. 222-242.
greatest value is the created art-work and not the causes that can be associated with its creation. Causes of all creative activities being the same, Freud did not sharply focus on the differences between the diverse end-products. He took for granted the commonsense distinction between art, science and religion, and did not concern himself with their formal characteristics. In other words, one can say Freud has shunned to talk about preferences and evaluative judgements in relation to art-works. A neurotic's phantasies also reveal the dormant unconscious urges but nevertheless, there is a difference between a neurotic and an artist. Freud says that an artist's phantasies are communicable and make him better adjusted with his environment. Here it seems that by better adjustment Freud means the pragmatic value of art. This distinction is not enough because it does not provide any understanding of the nature of the art object. Freud himself admits this:

"What psycho-analysis was able to do was to take the inter-relations between the impressions of the artist's life, his chance experiences, and his works, and from them to construct his constitution and the impulses at work in it — that is to say, that part of him which he shared with all men. With this aim in view, for instance, I made Leonardo da Vinci the subject of a study, which is based upon a single memory of childhood related by him and which aims chiefly at explaining his picture of 'St. Anne with the Virgin and Child'.... The layman may perhaps expect too much from analysis in this respect, for it must be admitted that it throws no light upon the two problems which probably interest him the most. It can do nothing towards elucidating the nature of the artistic gift, nor can it explain
the means by which the artist works — artistic technique."11

So far the attention has been concentrated on the created art-object and its status vis-a-vis the external world, now passing reference must be made to the peculiar symbols that art works employ. That art is symbolic has been conceded by all the four of these thinkers, this is evident from their analysis of the causes of creativity. In spite of their divergent views regarding the motivating force behind creativity, all the four, in their own way, look upon the creative impulse as a product of the desire for symbolic transformation. Freud regards art as the agency for symbolically representing the inhibited and repressed material; Spengler thinks it to be a symbolic representation of the world-image (through the eyes of a culture), in order to limit the threatening and overwhelming elements of nature. Sartre holds art to be symbolic of man's desire to fulfil and commit himself. Croce also associates with art, this symbolic character, even though he does not think it necessary for art to be communicative because communication for him is essentially an arbitrary and accidental feature of art works. In spite of according secondary status to communication in artistic creativity, Croce does believe in the symbolic character of art. If

we mean by the term symbol, a creation of a coherent sensuous pattern, abstracted from the objects in the external world by being a projection in a medium, then art is certainly symbolic. Croce, too, like others, has given enough evidence for it. His identity of the linguistic and the aesthetic is a clear cut proof of this symbolic character of art. Thus it appears that the main difference in these thinkers lies in their analyses of art-symbols. However, a detailed analysis of the concept of art-symbol would be done in a separate chapter, whatever is said here is only by way of a comparison and contrast of the remarks of these four thinkers on the problem.

Unlike signs which are externally related to the thing they signify, the art-symbols have internal relation — the emotions and images symbolized are embedded in the art-work: thus obviating a strict distinction between the symbol and the symbolized. Sartre has demonstrated this nature of art-symbols through his analysis of literature. Language acquires a different meaning in literature; words in a novel undergo a change of meaning. 'The physiognomy of the word becomes the representative of the physiognomy of the object. A real contamination takes place. When I read "this beautiful person", the words no doubt mean, above all, a certain young woman, the heroine of the novel. But to a certain degree they represent the beauty of the young woman; they enact the role of this something, which
is a beautiful young woman. Thus, for Sartre the artistic symbolism has an opacity about it and this is so because symbols in art-works are not purely referential. Their very patterns are attractive, this is the reason why the choice of words is very important in literature. And it is not possible to translate literary works without changing their affect considerably.

Croce also regards art-works symbolic, and if this symbolism be regarded as referential, it implies that intuition is not autonomous. Intuition on the other hand is self-sufficient and complete in itself. Thus, he holds that it is one and the same thing to say that art is intuitive and that art is symbolic. Croce and Sartre agree on the point of regarding artistic symbols as unique and untranslatable.

While Sartre and Croce concern themselves with the analysis of the nature of artistic symbols, Spengler and Freud direct their attention upon the basis behind art, in other words, that which art symbolizes. In this context, an allusion must be made to Susanne K. Langer's distinction between the art-symbol and symbols in art. Art-symbol


is the total art-work as a pattern of symbols and the elements which constitute this pattern are the symbols in art as against the united art-work. While Croce and Sartre analysed both the art-symbol and the symbols in art, Spengler and Freud, on the other hand concern themselves with the art-symbol and its causes. For Spengler and Freud art is symbolic of something extraneous to it — something extra-aesthetic. And there is nothing special about artistic symbolism that is not true of other products of their systems. Another important characteristic of the symbols in art is their organic unity. The principle of organic unity, as applied to art-works holds that the value of the completed art-work is not equal to the sum-total of the value of its constituents. Croce wholeheartedly subscribes to this view. For him any division of the art-work into its various elements reduces the art-work to nothing, just as the division of human being into heart, brain, lungs etc. reduces him to a dead thing. The very being of man defies such division, for man is not identical with his various bodily organs taken together. Thus for Croce organic unity is the essential characteristic of an art-work and it is also an aesthetic norm. According to him a work of art is a work of art only if it fulfils its peculiar norms like expressiveness and organic unity or it is not a work of art at all, there are no intermediaries. He follows the principle of organic unity absolutely, and
never entertains the possibility of degrees of unity, relative to works of art. Furthermore, he never concerns himself with the fact that certain elements are more valuable to the unity of the work than others. For instance a patch of colour in the background of Mona Lisa can be altered without changing the effect of the portrait while the same is not true of Mona Lisa's face. However, this aspect of organic unity has not been elaborately discussed by any of these four thinkers. This point has been extensively discussed by Catherine Lord in her paper, "Organic Unity Reconsidered";\(^\text{14}\) she has demonstrated through her analysis of poems that art works constitute a hierarchy of relevant elements. Not all the lines in a poem are equally relevant and all genre of art do not present the same kind of unity of their constituent elements. For instance, while the various elements of a lyric have a strict unity, this is not so in the case of epics. This gradation in relevance shows that while certain elements are of major importance to unity there are others, the deletion of which merely lessens amplitude. And thus these can be easily substituted by others. This interpretation of organic unity seems cogent, as Catherine Lord very aptly says, "that the work of art exhibits grades of relevance,... is an essential feature

of organic unity, taken in its original sense... that subtraction and addition do not necessarily diminish the value of the work of art as a whole nor change the character of all its parts.15

So far as moral and intellectual autonomy of the art-work is concerned, Croce grants it fully. Sartre too begins with granting autonomy to art, but he ends up in the moral and social commitment of the artist. He superimposes the moral maxims on aesthetic ones,16 though initially he himself had subscribed to their independence. It is difficult to reconcile the autonomy of art with a concern for the social value of art. For, the concern for social value imposed on art an extra-aesthetic norm which disturbs its autonomy. Freud took for granted the autonomy of art, for him the problem of moral intervention does not arise, because by bringing to the forefront, the latent

15Ibid., p. 264.

16"And if I am given this world with its injustices, it is not so that I may contemplate them coldly, but that I may animate them with my indignation, that I may disclose them and create them with their nature as injustices, that is, as abuses to be suppressed. Thus, the writer's universe will only reveal itself in all its depth to the examination, the admiration, and indignation of the reader; and the generous love is a promise to maintain, and the generous indignation is a promise to change, and the admiration a promise to imitate; although literature is one thing and morality a quite different one, at the heart of the aesthetic imperative, we discern the moral imperative." J-P. Sartre, What is Literature? p. 45.
tendencies of human personality he has broken the barriers between moral and immoral. Thus, for him, no moral can be imposed on art, rather it liberates man from the dictates of social mores and symbolically objectifies the suppressed and inhibited instinctive desires. For Spengler on the other hand, the autonomy of art qua art has no meaning. The only distinction he draws is between the systematic and physiognomic; art being a living unit, is physiognomic and cannot be evaluated by the systematic concepts of science and mathematics. But since in a way even science and mathematics are physiognomic, there is nothing special in art, it too like other cultural products equally represents its cultural prime-symbol. Thus, for Spengler the problem of artistic autonomy becomes meaningless.