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Creativity Across Cultures

By Kirpal Singh

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My grandmother always gave me a lot of hints for what she would have called humble and gracious living. And one of the things that she advised me was that when you're speaking to a lot of people all at once, it is always advisable to crave their indulgences.

So I would crave your indulgences for all sins of omission and commission. It is also interesting to be speaking just before the stomach decides to sing out and send out all kinds of butterflies. So what I will do is, I will keep my presentation fairly brief, hoping that there will be time for engagement through a question and answer session.

I want to say that a lot of the ground I expect to cover is actually grounded, and is very, very controversial, problematical, and complex. And it is not at all easy, even in a whole day's presentation, to do justice to even some of the aspects that I hope to raise, let alone to cover such a wide field in about the thirty or so allotted minutes.

I want to begin by acknowledging the great debt I owe to my friend and fellow Singaporean, CILECT Vice-President for Programme Development Victor Valbuena, who put me in touch with the CILECT Executive, and to the CILECT Executive, for inviting me here. I am very, very honoured. It is very interesting. In recent years, I have been speaking mainly with what they call "managers of innovation," you know, corporate types, business types, like IBM and L'Oréal, AMEX, and various banks, ABN and all of that. It is very interesting to be actually speaking with actual colleagues, in the sense that we are all – I like to associate myself with you – in some ways, are people for whom creativity may not be an alien concept. Creativity is part of our planet, part of our being, and I think that is very, very important. And of course, it is splendid to be standing here in Madrid, the great capital of a very great and ancient place, a city that has seen a lot of grandeur, particularly the grandeur of creativity across cultures. Because historically, Spain gives us much evidence to suggest that there was a time when, no matter what religion we belonged to, or what cultural habits we conducted ourselves with, it was possible to live in peace and harmony.

Unfortunately, just as cracks appeared in history, some very big gaps and cracks are appearing today- *and these cracks are worrying*, so I want to preface my remarks with my belief that I think today, almost more than ever before in the history of mankind, it is absolutely critical that we try to understand each other's cultures and be sensitive to a lot of the nuances of these cultures. It is one thing to be sensitive to the broad frames, but another to be sensitive to the sub sub-frames, the minor but important frames. And as people involved in photography and creating of all kinds of cinematic images, you are more aware than I of what subtle differences the very tiny details can actually make in the creation of an art object, or an art product.

Artists throughout history have done two things, I think, beyond the simple fact of just informing and documenting. One is, some artists believe it is their duty to rake old wounds in the search for truth, and in that way, an artist can become a wounder, a person who wounds. I would like to take the belief that because we live in an age which is desperate for some kind of harmony and understanding across

cultures, that as artists we can contribute our their little bit to healing those wounds. So I'd like to suggest that we think about the artist as a healer, rather than a wounder. And I think between the person who wounds, using all of his or her creative talents, and the person who tries to heal, using his or her creative talents, lies the polarity that I am hoping to cover in this short presentation.

You know, this is the land that produced the great Cervantes. And we have the Cervantes Award. I don't know if Gabriel García Márquez has been given it yet. He probably has, right? But it is very interesting that Miguel de Cervantes, one of the greatest of creative minds, born in Alcalá de Henares, about 55 km. from where I am standing, has actually travelled the world in the ways that few others have. Even as a boy, when I was growing up, in what was then the Malay Federation, about 13,000 km from where I am standing, we had a lot of fun with, Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, going here and there, jousting with all kinds of imaginary mills and windmills that were not there, and falling in love with women who were thought by them, at least, to be very respectable, only later to find that they were, perhaps, not so.

I think **appearances and reality have always been the hallmark of the creative mind**, but how this has been interpreted across cultures differs greatly, and therefore, we have to be extremely cautious how we think about these issues, especially in our day and age. Much of what I am about to say is perhaps political, in a sense, We all have different agendas – but I think that filmmakers particularly have to be very much aware of the new political sensitivities that are arising all over the globe. I'll be very happy to respond to specific questions and engage in a discussion about these little issues, because as I said, creativity is a troublesome, and sometimes frustrating area in which to try to be an expert, which I'm not. I'm a big learner on this crucial journey. So I'm going to learn from you, and as we go along, I hope this will be a very happy journey.

I want to begin by saying that **the creative mind itself has become a very big major issue in all parts of the world today**, and so one of the things that we have to think about is basically how to ask a few very simple questions. As an academic, I've gone around the whole circle of being very scholastic and scholarly, and writing papers with 300 footnotes, to the point where I have come to realize that the quintessence of real learning, learning that results in understanding and wisdom, actually begins with asking some very basic and simple questions. So let's begin by asking, then what is the creative mind? Associated with this question are a whole lot of other questions, like, what do we mean by mind? Is our understanding of "creative" same as theirs? We had a very philosophic presentation by my previous colleague, but I remember that all manner of people had similar concerns, like the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who held the grand title of Waynefleete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford, and wrote a most influential book, "The Concept of Mind".

This problem has literally been mind-boggling. Is our mind distinct from our brain and our body? Well, Ryle didn't think so, and rejected the argument as "Cartesian Dualism." It's a question that's been around for three thousand years, and we're still debating. Whenever we use words like —mind, we must be ready to recognize that there are no simplistic answers. What, then, is the "creative mind?" How do we define creativity? I will try to open up the discussion by saying, very simply, that if you think of the subsets of the creative mind – such as the inventive mind, the innovative mind, the adaptive mind, and maybe even the creative mind.

I'm particularly interested in the creative mind, the mind that brings about something that hitherto has not been experienced by the human beings who are going to be exposed to it, In other words, what I am referring to is the very highest orders of creation, and the very highest order of creativity. It is different from adaptation, from innovation, and from invention, which I think are of a slightly lower orders, but again, this is very controversial and debatable. And in my view, the creative mind is the mind that is incessantly looking for something to bring about, to give birth to, something which is not yet there, at least not there in an ordinary vision. **The creative mind breaks through the usual and shows us the unusual, the extraordinary, the unfamiliar, the unknown.**

I recently taught a stint at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, as visiting professor in what they call the “Faculty of Revealed Knowledge”. It’s very, interesting because the title of the faculty clearly implies that there are two kind of knowledge, revealed knowledge, to which we have access, and hidden knowledge, which is available only to certain people. The great religious traditions have always assumed this as a given, but today we are trying – I say trying – to bridge the gaps... or are we and are we getting anywhere? Obviously, we have access to revealed knowledge, whereas some people have also access to knowledge that is hidden. So there’s concealed knowledge, as well as revealed knowledge. It made me think a lot about knowledge and creativity.

How did the creative mind come about? Well, we’re still trying to discover the answer. We heard some valuable ideas from someone like Todd Lubart the other day. It’s interesting, and like psychology, it is descriptive and analytic, but unlike philosophy, it is shy about predictions.

HOW DO WE ACTUALLY EXPLAIN WHERE IS THE CREATIVE MIND HEADED TODAY?

That’s a very, very dangerous question, because it has many ramifications. I see it headed in at least two different directions. One is, to try to fulfil or realize the strange belief that by bringing havoc and destruction to the world, the creative mind is contributing to its sense of final destiny and fulfilment. The other is that, in very simple terms, the creative mind is trying to celebrate the glory and the beauty of the universe.

I think between these two polar directions of the creative mind, we live in a time when perhaps it is possible that many of us can make small contributions, and veer a little bit away from the realization of the route of destructive fulfilment toward the realization of constructive celebration. I see that as a critical task for us at this time of momentous social and political change.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND CULTURES?

Again this is a, very controversial area. As we celebrate the creative mind, it is necessary for us to acknowledge and then begin to study the fact that that not all cultures, even those that seem much like our own, think of the creative mind as something particularly good or positive. **Many cultures believe that the creative mind is the work of the devil.** Even in the Christian understanding of the world, Eve’s punishment for seeking knowledge of the forbidden fruit led to the fall of man, and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It was the search for knowledge that created Original Sin. The devil was the first to ask the “what if” question, that is basic to creativity, when he asked say, “Why should I do this? What if I took over God’s position?” There is a very long history of the creative mind being seen as something that is devil inspired, and therefore, something that should be avoided, and if possible, destroyed or at least cabined, confined, controlled and isolated.

Take Spain’s Pablo Picasso. Not all cultures celebrate Picasso’s creativity as genuine creativity because they think that if it is creativity, then it is mal-developed creativity. In the western cultural traditions, even in recent centuries, you might think of someone like the Marquis de Sade, who I think provided some very original creative insights into patterns of psychosexual behaviour patterns. Recall what he was subjected to, and what he himself subjected other people to. Even as recently as two or three hundred years ago, people who believed they were enlightened, didn’t always think that the people around them were equally enlightened. The example of English poet William Blake is another classic example. Blake was not recognized as a creative genius until fairly recently and even then there are those who still consider Blake to have been deviant, and of the devil’s party.

WHERE DOES THE CREATIVE MIND COME FROM?

Well, it may be that God gives us the creative mind. In English literature, we remember the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote that great poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” Coleridge distinguished between two kinds of creativity, which links to the third point I’m going to make about imagination. He said that the primary imagination is the one that tries to repeat God in His creative modes. In other words, creativity becomes arrogated to man himself, and man says, “I’m going to be God, I’m going to be the final Creator.”

That act of arrogance can result in all kinds of retributive consequences. Other creative talents would try to celebrate their divine inspiration and acknowledge that if they are indeed creative, it is only because they have been given this great gift by God, the ultimate final creator known as God. And I think that is very, very important as well.

In ancient times, when the divinity of different people was perhaps recognized, and maybe even debated, the discourses very often were theoretically quite exciting because they went something like: “I respect your creative mind, and you respect my creative mind, and we both acknowledge that both of our creative minds come from God, but I want to say to you that my mind is better, somehow, than your mind.” At least there was a mutual admiration and adoration, and that’s, very important because today this state of peaceful debate and controversy seems to be more and more absent.

I think **between the demonic and the divine is where the role and place of the imagination comes in**. In some cultures, the stimulation of imagination is left until very late in the education of a child. In other cultures, the active stimulation of the imagination is begun even prenatally, while the baby is still developing in utero.

Starting from that, and working it through in terms of other factors, we realize that the imagination is a very powerful manifestation of what I would call the link between creativity and culture. If you think of the position of the imagination in different cultures, and how different cultures celebrate imagination and its physical manifestations, I think you probably also come very near to where this journey of discovery of creativity across cultures is leading me.

AREAS OF CONFLICT AND MISUNDERSTANDING

One cannot talk about the creative mind and creativity across cultures without recognizing areas of conflict and misunderstanding. I want to be so basic here that you might find it amusing, but I think there are some very basic issues that increasingly create a lot of problems.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, or “9/11” as it is known, my trips to Europe and America, have become very highly problematical because of my headgear. I am a Sikh, and our sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib commands “Let living in His presence, with mind rid of impurities be your discipline. Keep the God-given body intact and with a Turban donned on your head.” Even though I’m usually assured by airport authorities that it’s all random checking, I’m always sent for a second screening, because of my turban. It’s very, very interesting how a simple thing like that, a piece of cloth wrapped around the head, creates an area of conflict, and misunderstanding. I get upset, and the airport authorities get upset when they see me upset, because they think they’re just doing their duty, and I think I’m doing my religious duty by saying “hey, I’m a nice guy, not a terrorist.” So it becomes a problem--a problem which, dare I say it? – could lead to a sense of alienation resulting in mistrust and suspicion.

I want to put forward three areas where I think that as filmmakers, and the teachers of filmmakers, as people involved with the very powerful mass media, we have to be very extremely careful about how the creative mind exercises itself across cultures.

Take the issue of **the young versus the old**. Very simple. The scenario begins with a scene of a family having dinner. Halfway through dinner, the young guy who's the third eldest child...it's a big family...says, "Dad, you know, I don't know why Mummy always subjects me to this rubbish that I am eating. I hate this stuff." Close-up of dad, who laughs and says, "Never mind. Mummy does her best."

A very simple thing like this in one culture might be understood in a positive way, as a very good sign because the young person is articulate and is able to honestly explain his feelings.

But in another culture, it would be absolute anathema for filmmakers to put on the big screen a young brat complaining to Daddy about Mummy's cooking. It is just not acceptable, nor is Daddy's failure to defend Mummy's culinary skills. Therefore, this could have considerable repercussions in terms of how the movies are received. Today, we live in a world where the young, on the one hand, have a lot of power, a lot of money, a lot of education and a lot of wonderful information. But the old are also people who have experienced much and gained a lot of wisdom. Most cultures claim that wisdom belongs to the old. I can't fully explain this, but I think that it's something to do with experience, I'm told. But these days the young have also got a lot of experience.

One of the things I try to tell my students when I teach them, or try to teach them, or try to talk with them, or try to facilitate the whole idea of creative thinking is, why do we assume that wisdom comes with age? Must it be that way? Can you think of a universe where nine-year-olds are very, very wise human beings? Maybe, but offhand, I can't think of any. I don't know. After all, the incarnation of the great Dalai Lama is supposed to be enlightened from the time of birth, which gives one cause to pause. I mean, the incarnations of the great Great Avatar are supposed to be so spiritually advanced that all they need to do is learn how to brush their teeth, so maybe age and wisdom doesn't matter to them. My point, simply stated, is that one's perception of what is wisdom becomes questionable, when the creative mind begins to stretch and exercise its full stretched workings.

An eternal cinematic scenario in many cultures is the "Battle of the Sexes." D.W. Griffith directed a film with that title in 1914, about the male versus the female. A loose woman tempts a husband, a wife does what she needs to in order to bring him back home, all in one reel. In some cultures, the underlying idea is highly controversial, and a great area of debate, especially today, and especially in the Islamic world, where the role of the female is raising a lot of issues for debate and discussion, with which the creative mind must engage itself.

When we treat the relationship between male and the female, we have to be very careful that we fully comprehend the cultural framework of the audience who we expect to see the film. The targeted audience is an audience that the film maker fully understands in terms of the audience's cultural frameworks. Then he or she has the possibility of working within what we call a safe territory. But the moment the film maker wants his documentary, or little video clip, or little advertisement, to transgress the borders of his own cultural familiarity, he needs to be very careful, not merely of misreading the audience, but of the audience misreading the message in a totally opposite, and perhaps even hostile, manner from what was intended.

Many of us claim to be very progressive, and therefore we think that those who are traditional are merely old fashioned, and if they're old fashioned, we don't have time for them. But again the creative mind, I think, has to ask itself: "Is this fair?" Who gives us the right to dismiss the old tradition as unnecessary and obsolete? It's one thing to say that a computer is obsolete or that a big old petrol-guzzling automobile is obsolete, but it's another thing to say that an aged human being, or the social customs that have defined and maintained a culture are obsolete.

These issues are very sensitive, particularly in some cultures, because we are talking about representations of the human form. In some cultures, the very idea of representation is in itself very bad. It is assumed to spring from an evil intent. If we look at Chinese paintings, most of the time, at least in the traditional Chinese classical paintings, the hills, the rivers, the mountains, and other

manifestations of nature occupy 95% of the allowable space and somewhere, in a small corner, there would be a little human being, reflecting or sitting, or meditating. In other words, in the great glory of the universe that God has given us, we as human beings occupy a very little place, and even that is a great honour, because we could be just outside of that space.

When the human individual began to dominate the landscape thanks to the Renaissance and the development of science and technology, which also came about as the signal products of human inventive creative mind in western culture, things began to take on very different overtones. We know that unlike traditional Chinese paintings, in the western tradition man seems more and more to dominate and occupy centre space.

Today, creativity has to grapple with the idea of the centrality of man, because on the one hand, there's an urge to really go to the stars, and to create our own clones, while on the other hand, there's the advisory caution that comes from the traditional, that warns us "Hey, this is dangerous territory." The world of Superman is not a world for every man. I think between the Superman and everyman, not only the philosophers Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, but a lot of people come into play, including some the very powerful figures who have founded some of the world's great religions. This is a very powerful area of discourse, because when my students ask me, "Can you give examples of creative people?" I tell them among the most creative of human beings have been the founders of great religious faiths. Jesus was immensely creative, and for his labours he was crucified. Muhammad was great. He founded another one of the world's great religions, and for his accomplishments he was persecuted and made to flee from Mecca to Medina. It was much the same with the Buddha, and with virtually every other founder of a religion. Whenever the creative mind engages itself and tries to bring about what it considers good, it always faces persecution, oppression, repression, suppression. I sometimes hypothesize that, perversely, one index of measuring a mind's creativity is that the more you're persecuted, the more you're oppressed or suppressed, repressed, the more creative you might turn out to be. What I am getting at is that history is full of examples that human nature on both sides of the divide has never been completely at ease with what we call the creative mind.

WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS?

Obviously **home and upbringing** are important, and I think it behoves us to try to understand how the very notion of family, is understood. I know that among some of our more academic disciplines, such as cultural anthropology and sociology, the concept of family in the traditional sense, is becoming obsolete. But I think it is important that we reconfigure the very idea of home and upbringing. I was told the other day that in many cultures, the word "home" is highly suspect because what it refers to is what we who live in developed societies would call a "house." The moment we begin to engage in concepts like that, and ask what it is that makes a house a home, or that a houseless person still possesses a home, we are exercising our creative faculties. I think that is important for us to do this, because the home and early upbringing is where the growing child first encounters what we might call the world outside of himself. The first contact with the rest of the world, apart from the nurses and doctors, who does the delivery if he is lucky, and with everything else that serves to acculturate, as an infant, as a toddler, and as a very young person is key and fundamental, and we often don't do justice to the different models of acculturation when we attempt to understand people from different cultural backgrounds.

Then, there is **schooling and education**. Only relatively recently have school educational curricula all around the world begun to change. A classic example of this is what happened at the venerable Cambridge University, which began in 1284, about the time that Edward I invaded Wales and Scotland, and expelled the Jews, and Marco Polo had his first Chinese dinner, but that's another story. All the world holds Cambridge in awe. Some people even worship graduates of Cambridge University, like that truly great creative mind Stephen Hawking, Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, whose book "A Brief History of Time" has been bought by many, but understood by few.

About eight years ago, Cambridge decided to have a change of vice chancellors. In British higher education, the vice chancellor is the chief academic officer of the university. The chancellor is an honorary position, and the current holder of the title is HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, which tells you how honorary it really is. For the first time in its long and distinguished history, it was thought okay for a woman to occupy the top position. It took them six hundred-over years to realize that a member of the other half of humanity, a woman, could become the leader of this very revered institution. And what did this woman do when she took over as vice chancellor? An entire revamp of the entire Cambridge curricula, because she said, that other than its glorious past, the curriculum had nothing much of which to boast. It takes a very courageous individual to come up with that pronouncement and to try to use the creativity with which we are blessed to change the parameters of schooling and education, especially in a hallowed institution like Cambridge.

When the Singapore Management University decided to make creative thinking an integral part of its university core curriculum, meaning that no matter what the specific field of study ... even our accountants have to do creative thinking ... the university forged the conviction that the future belongs to the creative people. Similarly, we are greatly blessed, because as teachers, in our hands and our heads, and our hearts and ourselves depends the future of generations. To paraphrase the writer Henry James, because education, like the novel is notoriously heavy baggage, like a sacred monster. A former Minister of Education in Singapore said that his work is very problematic, because in the ministry of education, the head is very flexible, but the body is very lethargic, and very hard to move. Ministries of Education everywhere resist creative changes, because the creative mind challenges the status quo, the creative mind asks questions that we don't feel comfortable answering.

As a father of four over, I know how frustrating and irritating it is to be asked, "Why daddy, but why, daddy, why?" After a while, we just say, "Shut up and just do as I tell you, kid, ok? Don't waste my time." Everybody does that, daddies, bosses, CEOs. Conceptually, the "shut up and do as I tell you" syndrome is a kind of cultural hegemony, which Antonio Gramsci once defined as a situation in which everyday practices and shared beliefs provide the foundation for complex systems of domination. What is the creative mind going to do when confronted by this kind of a cultural hegemonic type? That's an interesting question. Religion is obviously a fundamental factor in creativity. In the broad Islamic world – and I hope that some of my Islamic brothers and sisters in the room might help me here – the representation, and imaging of especially of God, the Prophet, and of human beings, are almost virtually taboo. So when we say, "We're going to protect this Muslim brother of ours, who is trying to make a film, from persecution and prosecution, and those prosecuting and persecuting him are all bastards," I think we have to ask a deeper question: Are we obviously correct, and even if we are, do we understand the broader frames from which the opposition comes? That is the point I really am trying to make about creativity across cultures. It is one thing to say these cultures are bad and evil and all that, but it's quite another thing to appreciate that perhaps not so long ago, our own culture might have been that way as well. These days we seem to have forgotten the lessons of history, so that in our intercultural dialogues we sometimes omit the fact that just because we have come over a certain hurdle doesn't mean that other cultures have also leaped the same hurdle. In fact, given history and geography, and time and space, it is very difficult for everybody to cross the hurdles in the same way at the same time, and are we even sure that crossing these hurdles has all been for the better?

Religion is very powerful. In the old days, if a religious person thought that the creative individual presented a problem for a community, and that the real creative person was divinely inspired, the temple, the church, the mosque would provide a sanctuary. The idea of religion acting as a sanctuary may seem quaint these days but I think it is still very powerful in many parts of the world, because minus the religion, that same individual could be flogged and crucified and sacrificed because of his or her obvious differences from the rest of the community's hegemonic code of belief, conduct and behaviour.

When I was teaching at the International Islamic University in Malaysia I was working with a poem with my first class. The students were undergraduates in the last term of their final year. As I walked out of the class at the end of the session, two girls totally covered from head to foot in *burka* and *niqâb* came up to me and said, “Could we have a few moments with you?” I said, “Sure,” and they said, “Just because we’re dressed the way we are, doesn’t mean we’re not sexual.” I said to myself, “Oh my God, what have I done now?” So I looked at them and said, “Well, please explain, because I don’t know where you’re coming from.” And they said that apparently, what I had done was to compromise my teaching, because in my subconscious I had thought that because I was at an Islamic university, I tread carefully. They said, “When you explained the poem, you explained every single line, image, metaphor, symbol, everything. But when it came to the two lines that had sexual allusions, you just glossed over them. You didn’t bother to explain with the same detail.” They just wanted to assure me that their way of dressing had nothing to do with their outlook, and their biology, or their hormones. This is a very important cultural fact to carry away. In other words, the cultural artefacts, the cultural images with which we present ourselves to the world, very often belie what actually lies beneath and within. Given the current debate going on about customs of dress in places like France and England, how do we engage with it? I think the creative mind has to find out creative strategies, or creative ways of negotiating around this the issue. Interestingly the Muslim manner of dressing is not religiously Islamic alone. Like celibacy in Catholicism, it was adopted into Islamic culture. It did not grow from religion organically. It goes back into the deeper roots of history. In any case, how our appearances and are realities represented in, and by, the creative mind, is very important and significant.

FEAR AND TRUST

Fear and trust are especially important for educators. They play a critical role both in the nurturing of creative minds, and in the destruction of creative minds. Why are they important? Because by and large, the world tends to believe that, other things being equal, it is absolutely fundamental that order be maintained.

The creative mind, if it does one thing brilliantly, says that it is going to change that order, no matter how subtly, no matter how narrowly, but somehow it will impact on that order and change it. To what extent do we want to maintain order in all that we do? Because that extent, the way we define it, will measure how much we fear and how much we trust.

Most cultures are quite accomplished at instilling fear, whether it is the ultimate fear of God and the fear of hell, or whether it is the fear of losing a job, or not getting a promotion, or the fear of getting punished by Mummy or

Daddy, or lover, or spouse, or teacher. Today, many of us are gripped by fear. I admit that I am fearful. Every time I take a plane flight, or every time I walk out in the street, I am always full of fear. Why am I that way?

Why can’t I be more trusting? Why can’t I walk out bravely and confidently, trusting that everything around me is okay? Because unfortunately, trust has been betrayed, and every time trust is betrayed, it becomes a problem.

The other day I asked someone “Why are we going backward backward in the management of certain things in my university?” and she said, “Well you know, how it is, Kirpal, one rotten apple spoils the entire basket.” I said, “but why should it be? Why do we allow the one damn rotten apple to ruin the other ninety-nine? Why? Why are we so prone to this kind of thinking?” After some thought, I came to the conclusion that it is because we want to maintain order. We are nervous so that if even one spoiled apple is included, the whole basket will have to be discarded and cleansed. I think it becomes a salutary lesson, because the creative mind again has to ask a fundamental question. In my mind, the

moment we were able to think that the walls did not just protect us from invading enemies who would destroy our beautiful sculptures and artworks and temples and mosques and churches, was the moment when we realized that walls also made us prisoners within this space and prevented us from knowing the world outside.

That was a very creative moment in history of ideas, because of the answer it provoked. It's very important that we think about the many different manifestations and variations of the argument about whether the glass is half full or half empty. I think that for better or worse, the dialectic of fear and trust is very important when it comes to maintaining order. Each of us will have to ask this question, in our own families, in our own homes, in our own relationships, about whether we make decisions about our lives: "Are these things based on fear or on trust?" Trust is very risky. Failures are very painful, and it can be very costly to trust, because betrayal runs deep.

But I was brought up on the Bible as well, and someone said, it is written in Job 13:15 "Yea, though you slay me, yet I will trust thee." Trust relies on mutual negotiation. It is very difficult to trust a total stranger, or a strange situation, until you have achieved sufficient knowledge to make a decision. The default position is fear.

STRETCHING BOUNDARIES

The creative mind always wants to stretch boundaries. I applied for sabbatical leave, and a research grant from my school, and part of the application asked about what I intended to do. I am working on a book, "Leadership Across Cultures." My previous book was, "Creativity Across Cultures", but I had to give all kinds of precedents and cite all kinds of other research areas. I told the university, "I don't know where this research is going to lead. I just don't know. As for the final outcome of this, I don't know. And besides, what relevance does this question have to anything important?"

The result was that my research proposal was rejected. Why? Because it had no precedent. No one had done it before. Precedent may be important, but how can you stretch boundaries when you're always following precedents? Whenever you break new ground, you ask has anybody anywhere else done it anywhere else in the world before? And if it has, how was it received, bearing in mind the cultural imperatives? In some cultures, it is never good to be the first. In many cultures, it is never good to attempt to be perfect, especially from an artistic point of view, because even if you're perfect, that act of perfection is obnoxious to the people who believe that by definition, or scripture, humankind cannot be perfect, that there will be something that is bad. Art works were made intentionally imperfect to assure that there was no doubt that human frailty can never imitate the final ultimate act of creation that which belongs to God alone.

STAYING ALIVE AND UP TO DATE

These are again very important concepts, because the creative mind wants to stay alive. It doesn't just want to get bogged down and bored. It is so easy for us to get become bored. Very creative people are easily bored, and it's very hard to maintain their attention span for long because, they want to be up and doing things. They're passionate, they're obsessed, but of course, these are not things that contribute to our sense of security, and the maintenance of order.

Imagine the student who suddenly gets up and says, "I'm sorry, professor, but I'm fed up, I'm just tired of listening to that crap again," and walks out. You want to say, "How dare you?! Come back!" and you think of ways to punish such insolent behaviour. You are caught up in human revenge, and I think the creative mind is constantly fighting against that. When we are trying to update ourselves, the mind that is very creative is not only alive, it is vitally alive. It imagines other scenarios that are so

exciting and seem so much worth the journey. Do we have the capacity to allow the creative mind to actually flourish? Do we have the capacity to help that flourishing, to be aware of cultural nuances? That is too is fundamental, especially at this time in the convoluted history of our civilisation. Our move forward depends on how creatively we find solutions to cross-cultural conflict. And here, you, makers and teachers of film, have a major and dynamic role to play.