

**Film Appreciation**  
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**Lecture - 37**  
**Canadian Cinema**

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Welcome friends. So, today we start another interesting lecture. I am continuing in the tradition of discussing world cinema. We are going to talk about Canadian cinema, I have written over there. Canadian cinema, which has its roots in a cinema verite; I am sure you remember what is cinema verite; almost like a documentary kind of cinema; cinema which is true it to life; these are the early film makers. We have to understand that in Canada there are two important languages. One is French and another is English. So, a Canadian cinema always, hops the boundaries between the two languages. So, we have, it is a very bilingual kind of a cinema.

So, the early film makers and these are all French names, French Canadians; Pierre Perrault, Michel Brault, Claude Jutra and Gilles Carle. So, they were francophones and from the 70s onwards, and also in the 80s, and some of these directors are also currently, very active in film making on the stage of world cinema. Denys Arcand, Patricia Rozema, who is known for a feminist stake in films. Atom Egoyan, an extremely important film maker. The focus of today's lecture will be on David Cronenberg and his

cinema Body Horror and then, you also have a film makers such as James Cameron and Jason Reitman, who are of Canadian origins, but who have made it very big in Hollywood, while still retaining their Canadian roots particularly, in the case of Jason Reitman.

The Canadian pacific railway setup (refer time: 02:18) in 1900; however, it was in 1939 when a national film board of Canada was established, under John Grierson to counter the challenge posed by Hollywood. We have to remember this concept very clearly that Hollywood has always been a very major threat to Canadian cinemas. See, we are talking about North American continent; Canada and the United States of America; they share the border and it is very easy to travel between the two countries and get permission to work in each other's territory

So, film makers from Hollywood have always utilized this opportunity. Many of their films are shot in Vancouver, because it is easy to shoot there; permission is given legally and infrastructure is readily available. So, many of the Hollywood film makers prefer to shoot their films in Vancouver; however, all these films, which are shot in Canada; they are British product, sorry, they are Hollywood products. As Hollywood cinemas as we know, most of us now has taken over the world stage and it is very difficult for they indigenously produce films to get attention. So, Canadian cinema has always a struggle and is still, struggling to counter the challenges posed by Hollywood. Now, the board; we are talking about the national film board; it built up a department of animation and after the Second World War, francophone Canadians made cinema, verity kind of films.

Among the leading film makers of this category were Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault; names are written over the board. Soon French Canadian film makers became a major first in the Canadian film industry, such as people like Claude Jutra, Gilles Carle and Denys Arcand, seen here, some of the greatest film makers since the 70s. Some of them are still, like Denys Arcand is still, extremely active. Again and I quote here the great Atom Egoyan to be a Canadian film maker, is to exist in the shadow of Hollywood; that is a bitter truth that exists. Very often, an average cine goer, he doesn't even know the difference between Hollywood product and a Canadian product.

Canadian films are extremely difficult to market and distribute across the world. We really get to see Canadian cinema, except in, let us say, film festivals. So, that is the reality of it. Coming to the great film maker, Atom Egoyan, he is known for his

thoughtful exposition on alienation displacement and the amorphous nature of home and family. Family is extremely important in the films of Atom Egoyan. His films incorporate innovative narrative devices of circular structure and they are quite reflective, introspective kinds of films. You do not find in too much of hysteria or hyperventilating, even a midgrade tragedy in an average Atom Egoyan film. He has also done a lot of work for Canadian television particularly, documentaries with musical subjects.

His best known film is *Sweet Hereafter*, which is based on a novel by Russell Brands, where an insurance man comes to a locality, traumatized by a recent event, involving a bus accident or tragedy, and it is one of his best known films; one of his greatest films and a very well received film. I strongly recommend that you watch *Sweet Hereafter*. His most recent film is *Devil's Knot*. I think it is a 2013 film, which stars Hollywood stars Reese Witherspoon and Colin Firth and again, as I was trying to prove a point that Canadian film makers have to look towards Hollywood to generate interest in their films. Here is a clipping from Atom Egoyan's film *Ararat*. Denys Arcand is known as the god father of the new Canadian cinema and has made satires on Quebec society such as *Jesus of Montreal* and *the Barbarian Invasions*. In his *Decline of The American Empire*, which is a 1986 film, a group of Quebec intellectuals discuss the problems of success, fidelity, intimacy and aiding.

Now, *Jesus of Montreal* is an important film. It was fascinated the director actually, was fascinated with the lives of Montreal based artists, who made a living as biblical figures by night. They would act out performances, public performances, based on biblical stories and by day time, they would work in beer commercials, and very commercial kinds of films. So, he was fascinated by this dichotomy. Now, the protagonist of *Jesus of Montreal* is ah played by one of the greatest star actors of Canada, that is Lothaire Bluteau and he is Daniel Cullum in the movie. He is engaged by a Montreal priest to improve on the parishes' representation of passion play; passion play, you know as in the life and suffering of Jesus Christ so, plays based on that, but the parish and the priest feel that people are losing interest in this kind of theoretical form and something new has to be done.

So, they approach new blood, new kinds of actors, new kinds of theaters, exponents who can infuse new energy into something that has been going on and on for a very long time, and people are, general public is losing interest. So, Daniel is excited; he is a very quiet

man and very good actor, but not very flamboyant. He is excited why the possibility and he invites a group of old friends to join him in revitalizing the ancient ten. So, together these stage the performance by torch light on the crust of Mount Royal with the lights of the war city flickering below. So, it is a very well photographed film. You know, you have to just watch the film for its beauty of cinematography, its Brestian devices and also its excellent plot. So, as Daniel and his friends revised the script, they make it more modern and engage the audience.

The actors, all managed to improve their personal life situations. A man, for example, gives up, dubbing the scripts for commercial kinds of films; a women leaves an abusive partner while she is playing McDelyn. So, they start living or embodying the characters. Daniel, of course, starts acting like Jesus himself. The play is a huge success, but soon clerical authorities are disturbed by the very experimental and Avangar performances in the absence of support from the priest, the local authorities revoke the right to perform. So, it is issued; an order is issued that they cannot perform the play anymore. Another truth that extremely defined and the perform anywhere; however, during, and this is very interesting; during the crucifixion scene, fight takes place between the authorities and the theater group, and Daniel suffers an accidental head injury. So, he is taken by ambulance to a busy hospital, where he is neglected for a while. He manages to discharge himself from the hospital, but collapses in a subway station. He is again taken to a hospital, where he finally dies. It is a tragic story, but beautifully told. Here is a clipping from Jesus of Montreal.

Patricia Rozema is known from making films, which are saturated with feminist passion, and it has actually; she has broken new grounds especially, in the world of out art house cinema. Most Canadian cinema is art house; they have a strong message; they have a strong sense of social consciousness. So, Patricia Rozema, she tells us this story or struggles, faced by women in their day to day life. She made her debut in 1987 with a film called *I Have Heard the Mermaid Singing*. This is story of an unfulfilled thirty something, single woman, living in Toronto. It was also a film that Rozema wrote, coproduced and edited and the movie won excellent reviews.

She is also known for her 1999 adaptation of Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* and the film became very controversial. You have to watch it to understand this. David Cronenberg, which who I am going to concentrate on in today's lecture, is one of the most successful Canadian film makers. He makes his films from Canada, but he had

masters the art of balancing art and commerce. An extremely crown speakers presence in world cinema, since the commercial success of his film, *Scanner*. The English Canada, the English speaking Canada have never been very comfortable with Cronenberg. Now, it could be that his films, very carefully, tread a boundary between art and commerce, and he is not what an average Canadian film maker would be.

His films always try to break certain new boundaries, but there is always a desire to be commercially, successful at heart. He is an extremely original film maker and he is interestingly, enough; he hasn't received great reception from his homeland, but it is happening now, but for a large part of his career, he was by and large, ignored by Canadian critics for some unexplainable reasons. He is often called a very nick, interesting nick name is given to him; that is Dave Duprey. Now, he is also called the baron of blood. He is one of the principle originators of what is now commonly, known as the body horror genre of film making, which explores people's fears of bodily transformation.

He has made a number of shockers and some of the early shockers are *Shivers*, *Rabid*, *The Brood*, *Scanners* and *Videodrome*. His subsequent films include *the Dead Zone*, *The Fly*, *Dead Ringers*, *Naked Lunch* which is based on William Burrough's novel *Madama Butterfly*, *Crash* and *Existence*. So, these are his films, all during the 80's and the 90's. These films have increasingly tended to downplay body horror in favor of esthetic and psychological contemplation, while his existence is reprieve of many of his themes and concerns. He is a staunch Canadian film maker; nevertheless, with nearly all his films including his major studio vehicles, such as *The Fly*; all these films have been filmed in his home premise; it is Ontario. Notable exceptions remain as *Madama Butterfly* in spider, film which was shot in China and England, respectively.

Now, *Rabid* and *Shivers* were also shot in an around Montreal. Most of his films have been at least primarily, financed by Telefilm Canada and Cronenberg is a vocal supporter of government backed film projects, saying every country needs a system of government grants in order to have a national film cinema, a national cinema in the face of Hollywood. Hollywood remains a major concern, where somehow Deaid Cronenberg has managed to work around his way. Now, coming to his very popular, very successful and highly acclaimed *Dead Ringers*; it is a 1988 film. It had the great actor, star Jeremy Irons in a double role and the Montreal based French Canadian actor, Genevieve Bujold; she was the heroine. It falls under the genre of medical horror and is adopted from the true

crime novel of Twins, which is a documentation of the Mendel Twins, two New York gynecologist twins, who committed suicide; they were facing charges of malpractice and they committed suicide. So, that is very disturbing kind of a plot.

Now, the movie has Jeremy Irons, playing the twins, twin doctor brothers; Elliot and Beverly; they are not completing themselves out of complete a complement each other. Both characters have a feminine touch in them, and the idea is that Elliot attracts more women; has a greater facility with the superficiality of the everyday life, particularly, with women, but in terms of establishing emotional connect with women, Elliot is very unsuccessful. On the other hand, Beverly's course on this account, but he does not see this as an achievement; instead, he views this as another part of his weakness. The movie is a set in Toronto, 1988. Actually, it begins with the information Toronto, 1988 and Cronenberg is very specific about the location. He, at the male mind and the female body, are explored in the most literal of senses, avoiding prudish sensibility.

Cronenberg always had a passion for science and *Dead Ringers* partly, seem to stem from Cronenberg's lifelong passion for science especially, by chemistry. We get a glimpse of the director's autobiographical impulses when we see the Mendel twins in the initial scenes of *Dead Ringers*, whose fascination with the mysteries of human body is obvious by their early experiments in gynecology. *Dead Ringers*, in a true Cronenberg style, explores an idea of imposed order with its blue lit examination theaters, sterile red gowns in the operation theater and polished, pent out surfaces in the shades of white and blue and gray. So, colors are important in Cronenberg and nowhere, do colors play such an important role as in *Dead Ringers*.

Again, you have motives such as insects in the form of a specialty commissioned set of surgical steel instruments again, illustrating Cronenberg's gesture positions of the unassailably, human with inhuman. This kind of cinema can also be called the O and V cinema, where the doctors specialize in the area of female fertility and later, they become obsessed with. The heroine of the film is played by the actress Genevieve Bujold, and she is a mutant women. She has some problems related to gynecological health. One begins as a distraction for the brothers, turns into a dangerous game, leading to the decent in jealousy rivalry and self destruction. Elliot's passion for clear and Beverly's discomfort with his twins love life and brother subsequent decent into self induced misery; forms the crux of the plot.

The film implies that they are two bodies with one soul and turns; it takes a very graphically violent sequence or turn, when the twins are depicted organically joined like Zymese twins. It is almost like an expressionistic device and as a dream sequence. As Elliot increases his dependency on drugs, he starts taking sleeping pills and all, Beverly plunges into guilt. He blames himself for destroying his brother. They use their band instruments to kill themselves. At the end, both are found dead. *Dead Ringers*, like most Cronenberg's films, evoked a deep sense of shock among the audience. Again, I am talking about the body horror genre. The film was particularly praised for its sophisticated acting and cinematography. According to Janet Maslin, among the films, more hauntingly strange developments are Beverly's invention of a new set of surgical devices, which frighten everyone who sees them. The brother's growing identification with the Zymese twins, Chang and Eng, and the drug addiction that finally, leaves one brother utterly, oblivious to the sibling's fate.

These are the scary points of the story. *Crash*, for another controversial film, it is a 1996 film starring James Spader, Debra Hunger and Holly Hunter. It falls under the category of speculative fiction. So, Cronenberg here, explores his passion for the automobile. See, automobile is a very important motive in all, especially, literature and cinema from the North American continent. We have had great literature based, and great cinema based, around, in and around cars, because the cars are very important part of, integral part of the western culture, especially, the late 19th' early 20th and 21st century culture, and many films have focused on cars as a motive. There is a research waiting to be done there; although lot of people have done some work there, but perhaps you know, one of you, some of you, who are interested in doing this kind of work can do and explore this cars in cinema.

So, here again, Cronenberg explores his passion for the automobile. The film is adopted from J.G. Ballard's 1973 novel, *Crash* and here, Cronenberg documents the nature of human tendency and his fascination with the limits to which, individual can push himself or can bear to endeavor, to possess what they desire. The film's mood is essentially, cold and grey, under the metallic grey palette. So, the movie has again steal grey palette, almost mirroring the state of minds of the characters. The focus is on James Spader's character; he is a television commercial actor, and he has a wife, played by Debora Hunger. In the first crash, we see James collide with another car on a free way, because he is looking at a set of his storyboards while driving. The crash is over in a flash and we

find the other driver, dead on the hood of James's car.

The dead man's wife has played by Holly Hunter, Helen, is injured. Soon, they are, they get acquainted with someone called wagon, a survivor of multiple crashes. He introduces James, Helen and Catherine; Catherine is his wife; to an entire cult built on fascination with car crashes. So, this is an important part. J.G. Ballard says or talks about crash as throughout crash, I have used the car not only as a sexual image, but as a total metaphor for man's life in today society. As such, the novel has a political role. So, at its score, crash is a complex and frightening look at, where the predictability and innovations of modern life have lead us and how dull are overstated senses had become; over saturated senses have become. Again, like the book, the movie is a caution retail; at the heart, is a caution retail of how we might adopt to the environment that we have ourselves, created sterile and alienated from nature; that is the moral.

See, behind, beneath the strong graphic and violent content, there is a message and that message could be the apocalyptic view of the world that we are all becoming more mechanized and alienated, increasingly, alienated from each other. We are losing the human connect. Crash, thus unfolds without moral judgment, presenting and unflinching vision of modern wild also, to in a jungle or modern jungle kingdom; manmade concrete and metal. This is what we have created for ourselves and this is what Cronenberg draws our attention to. So, we have to remember there is a thin line of demarcation between what could be considered extremely, graphic and moral and here, using certain graphic imagery, he presents us with an extremely moral and caution tale.

Again, like most Cronenberg's films, Crash and Dead Ringers; they are not for the weak hearted. Crash was received well, particularly, at the 1996 Cane's film festival and it got a special jury award for originality, audacity and daring. Such a response from the judges of that prestigious event, and a substantial amount of critical acclaim from other quarters, did not prevent Crash from being banned in England, and having its release in the United States, delayed by nearly six months. It is still, banned in the west minister section of London on the ground that it would encourage something called road race.

That is Cronenberg for us. Politically, he is extremely active in 1995, he met Salman Rushdie at that point, still deep in hiding from the fatwa issued against him and interviewed him at length for the Canadian magazine, Shift. The similarity between the two could be to due to the fact that Cronenberg too, has experiences with moral



vanguards and puritans, trying to prevent his art from finding an audience. In terms of its mass marketability, *Crash* started out by hitting a lot of people in the wrong way. It could not be shown in certain countries and it shows how much lively debates and it still, sparks a lots of debates on its content. In 2005, Cronenberg made a big budget studio style film, *A History of Violence*, starring Viggo Martinson. Many of his loyal fans were disappointed; they felt that he has sold out to commerce, but then still, the film is extremely, entertaining and the code it retains the essence of Cronenberg. That is his enduring interest in the physical bordering on metaphysical. Here is a scene from *A History of Violence*.

His next big film was *Eastern Promises*, about Russian Mafia, based in London, starring Viggo Martinson and Vincent Cassel, the great French actor. Viggo Martinson and Vincent Cassel again, appeared in Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method*, which is an adaptation of Christopher Hampton's play, *The Talking Cure*. The movie also starred Keira Knightley and Michael Fassbender. The film focused on the relationship between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, and a troubled Russian woman, named Sabina, has played by Keira Knightley, who went on to become one of the first female psychoanalysts. Another interesting movie by Cronenberg is *Cosmopolis*, which is a 2012 movie, which is based on Don DeLillo's novel.

The film functions as an urban road movie and its set largely, you know, the action takes place largely in the hero's head, while he is driving his limousine, he is a full the ridge wall street person, almost in the category of shcummen (refer time: 32:05) a bond fire of vanities. It is a novel and also, there is a film based on the novel and again, Gordon Grekko has played by Michael Douglas in wall street; that is in *Oliver Stone*. So, all these wall street big wigs and again, our hero here played by Robert Pattinson, who plays a character called Packer. Packer is going on, going in his limousine on a long days journey. The purpose of his drive is seemingly, to get a haircut at some old traditional place, which he used to frequent in his childhood. So, that is the reason we are given, but then during his time in the car, during his journey in the car, he appraises his life. For much of the time, he is in the car packed with computer's screen, flashing out the latest financial information from around the world.

Occasionally, he leaves the car to visit an old kind of book shop, a theater, a dinner, a hotel and a sense of (refer time: 33:18) starts building up. So, again coming to Cronenberg, the questions that interesting now, remain the same as ever; how permeable

is the border line or the human body between one person and another, between one person and the natural world and our attempts to find new places in which, to breach that border, including telepathy, love, jean splicing, surgical invasion, other kinds of transgression; are these heroic or are they leading us towards a future? Do cine goers feel we have come to terms with Cronenberg's point of view, where he says I think that is a primary function of art and which is to do violence to the little cocoon that we sometimes, find ourselves enveloped in.

So, that is Cronenberg for you. Another great director from Canada of Canadian origin is James Cameron; of course, all of us are extremely familiar with James Cameron. He has some of the biggest money making in block buster kinds of movies in recent times, such as Terminator; part 1, part 2; Titanic; Avatar and before that, there was Aliens. So, I move on to talk now about Jason Reitman, who is Montreal bound and known for directing Thank You for Smoking, starring Aaron Eckhart. He earned academy award nomination for his Juno, which is a delightful film with Allyn Page and Up in the Air, starring George Clooney. He also directed Young Adult, starring Charlize Theron.

Although Reitman is known for his Hollywood hits, he maintains his Canadian roots and he does produce Canadian films or shoots on locations, somewhere in the nation. Each of his films, he has played at the Toronto film festival; Reitman has been extremely encouraging of young Canadian film makers. His Canadian root and heritage is a specially reflected in his writing and directing choices, especially, in the use of Suttle Humor and Dead Pelle. Like a true Canadian film maker, he is also interested in cinema with his strong social message; although, his films are extremely popular, money making films and were accepted by all. They have a worldwide visibility. So, this is one director, who had managed to struggle the two worlds, very successful. He has touched on forbidden topics, such as teen pregnancy, smoking as in Thank You for Smoking, job loss, for example, in Up in the Air. Here is a scene from Thank You for Smoking, is a 2005 film.

Thank you very much. We will continue in our next class.