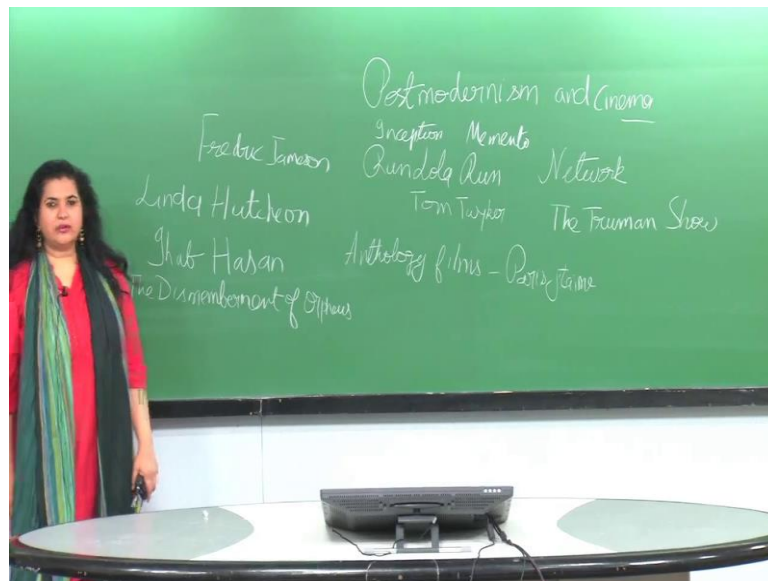


Film Appreciation
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Lecture - 40
Postmodernism and Cinema

(Refer Slide Time: 00:14)



Good morning friends. So, as we come to the end of the course, I thought it appropriate to run through a very important critical theory and critical concept that is postmodernism. This is a much discussed term. I am talking about postmodern cinema, primarily today, because as you would remember that I started this course with discussing modernism. We also, talked a great deal about film theory and criticism. So, if you have been talking about modernism cineotic, various critical concepts; we have also talked about masculinity in relationship to (refer time: 01:01) raging bull. It is important that while we are winding up the course, at least, we get familiar with one key theory of the late 60s, 70s and 80s. That is postmodernism. The root term modernism, but that we have already discussed, while postmodernism as the prefix, posed very clearly, suggest a postmodernism describe something, that comes after modernism. As you know, modernism was a response to the ordered, stabled and essentially, meaningful world view of the 19th century; the world view, which could not comprehend the anarchy of the 20th century. So, that was what modernism was all about.

Postmodern is something that comes after modernism. Some of the films that I mentioned here; these are not all, but these are primarily, some of the films that fall very neatly under the category of postmodern cinema, but first let us talk about the key theories that whose theories, we will be calling over back on Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon and Ihab Hassan, whose the dismemberment of Orpheus is a key text of postmodernism. We will be referring to very key postmodernist text. Primarily, I will be talking about John Woo Face Off and also (refer time: 02:54) pulse fiction, but it would be instructive to know that there are other very important texts that have been discussed through the lengths of postmodernist theory inception, memento, rundola, run by Tom Tykwer.

We will also talk about how postmodernism is represented through films about media. So, in that category, we have films such as Network, A True Men Show, Confession of a Dangers Mind, Good Night, Good Luck. We will also talk about another genre; that is anthology films. Anthology films are those, which are short films like port mento to or an Omni Bus that put together in a complete set films is a very (refer time: 03:52) this very experimental kind of film making. We don't have great number of examples from our own cinema of anthology films, but it is a very popular genre, especially, for horror cinema; however, other kinds of films also used it; use it occasionally this genre and we will be talking basically, about a movie called (refer time: 04:20) like Paris I Love You.

So, as I was talking about by the mid or late 60s, it was felt that modernism, the key concepts of modernism and its entire notion of you know, having a center or having an inherent stability and order. So, these concepts started getting questioned, which led to the growth of postmodernism. Now, according to Linda Hutcheon in politics of postmodernism; postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural and for example, architecture, literature, photography, art, film painting, video dance, etc. In general terms, it takes the form of self conscious, self contradictory, self undermining statement.

So, these are the terms that you should remember when you discuss postmodernism; self conciseness, self reflexivity. When you look at the films that we have been talking about particularly, Rundola run, and there is also, film by Michael Haneke that is Funny Games. So, watch these films and you will understand that how self reflexive these films are. So, that is one of the key terms related to it. Now, we know that in literature or particularly, literature of realism, that becomes a mode of slice of life, representing slice

of life and capturing the very similarity to, you know, of being through to life. Postmodernism literature, postmodernist literature rather; it is a case against realism. It rather than, being mono logic; it is dialogic and heteroglossic.

Now, this is anti-realist and anti-realist, intended to function as dissenting art that challenges the unreliability of realism. Generally, the term or the point is a 1968, where the poet Steven Spender, who was very active those days and the period was referred to by Steven Spender as the year of the young rebels for a variety of reasons. We have been talking about why 1968, is a very critical period socially, culturally, when you are talking about American view. So, you have to go back to the previous lectures; why 1968 is important; this student revolt of Paris. So, there were so many things happening in the year 1968 and therefore, it is important.

So, Steven Spender calls the year as the year of the young rebels and postmodernism is often considered modernism's nemeses, signifying break; it is a very deliberate fracturing of the narrative. Fredric Jameson, in is post modernism or the cultural capital, sorry, the cultural logic of late capitalism; that is the title of the book. Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism; it is a 1991 book. He refers to the key concepts or features of postmodernism. One element is the erosion of the distinction between high and low culture and incorporation of material from other text, a think of pulp fiction as the key text and think how Tarantino incorporates material from other text.

Even his earlier film, the ground breaking (refer time: 08:04) and just go back to the entire discussion of Madonna's MTV videos, just before the highest seen; the frequent use of sources music. So, incorporation of material and being very self-conscious about it, self-reflexive about it. Postmodernism again, according to Jameson also as just breaking down boundary is between different genres of writing. Now, you don't know whether this film is a love story or an action film or something else or a musical; it becomes several kinds of genres. So, we have been talking about genre theory. Now, we are talking about genre, bending genre blending. Postmodern artists cannot invent new perspectives and new modes of expressions; instead they performance bricolage as bricolage (refer time: 09:08) or people would take material from different sources and they try to construct something of their own so, leading to recycling previous works and previous styles.

Again, think of perfection and how it is leading; it is basically a gangster genre, but and

where several previous works and styles have been recycled. Genres have bended and blended and again, use of pasties. PASTIES is very important concept in postmodernism. PASTIES is kind of parody, but a parody that has lost essence of human. It is not the funny kind of parody that we generally understand. In the dismemberment of Orpheus, which is a 1971 book by Ihab Hassan. Ihab Hassan refers to the image of classical Orpheus, is the divine singer, who is torn to pieces by the mainers in HADEES as he looks for his wife EURELDISE, but his head continue singing, although his hair is broken into hundred pieces. Now, this is a key text for understanding postmodernism; torn into several pieces, but it still something, there is something that is still remains.

Modernism was essentially rationalized; we have already talked about, but unlike the modernist, who created works out of pure imagination the postmodern artist works with cultural givens, trying to manipulate them in various ways, such as again, I will use the same terms that I have been talking about earlier; past age, collage, the collage parody and also gesture position. So, Hassan makes a distinction between modernism and postmodernism, where he calls modernism as an off suite of romanticism, which has a form and a purpose and has design and certain kind of centralized hierarchy. There is finished product at the end, whereas according to Ihab Hassan, postmodernism is empty from; it is play full, rather than depending on design or carefully constructed design; it depends more on chance; it is inner kick, rather than resorting to low goers or worse; it depends on silences. It is more about being a work in progress; a performance in happening, rather than being a finished work.

Whereas modernism believed in genres and boundaries between genres; for the postmodernism, a text is always inter text so, blaring and dissolving the boundaries in text. So, these are the important terms that we should understand about postmodernism. It is ironical; it is marked by indeterminacy, Now, coming to postmodernist cinema; postmodernist cinema again, is a literary and cultural phenomenon; it is characterized by delegitimization of authority and which leads to indeterminacy and erosion of a centralized authority. Some of the key features of postmodernist cinema and think Runlola Run, Tom Tweker's Runlola Run. Also (refer time: 13:16); think of all these films and consider the fragmented editing style; the non-linear narrative parallel stories that are unrelated, total lost of centrality or central hierarchical figure; fluidity of identity; intertextuality and depending on illusion and pasties and coating from other sources; all these postmodernist works; they encourage multiple readings; they are told

from several perspectives, multiple perspectives.

They celebrate the inner key. They resist closer. So, again go to the Rundola Run. Again, think about pulp fiction or a film like *memento* and also, *inception* and you will understand that how well more these films, fit into this genre. Now, we know that what is pasties. The postmodernist section asses to make distinction, but not choices between high and low art and therefore, we have the mixing level of genres or cultures, that create a kind of hybridity, that challenges the traditional notions of uniformity. So, when we are talking about narrative fragmentation, think again of a movie, *legzalik*, you know, Goody Ali's documentary; it is done in a documentary way, but it still mocks the genre.

Memento and *Fight Club* are other important works as well as *Requiem for a Dream*; these are the films that rely on narrative fragmentation. Think of *Mularush*, where which is fragmented; the narrative is extremely fragmented and MTV style editing, which is very self conscious and has truly global post modernist look; for example, the spectacle it creates and then, think of the musical styles, which are identifiable in the film; the European Wader Will, Cabre culture, music hall stage shows, comic opera, pop songs and the melodramas on which, some series Italian operas are based. So, this is what we understand when we talk about fragmented narratives and pastises.

If you watch *Mularush*, we will understand how all these features come into play nostalgia. Now, going back and looking with certain kind of funness for the cinema or styles or genres of the earlier period; now, this is a prevalent mode of postmodernist cinema. You have film like *Pleasant Will* in which, brother and sister, they go back to the period of the 40s and 50s when it was considered that life was more pleasant, but then soon, reality starts coming out. So, Nostalgia and questioning Nostalgia. You also have *Devil Inche's Blue Velvet*, a key example of postmodernist film.

Consider also *Hair Spray* and *Cry Baby*, *Adverse Season Hens* and *True Men Show* and various pastises of Hitchcock films that have been made of late especially, by (refer time: 17:10) and also Brian De Palma. Postmodernist cinema also relies on fragmented and cyclic delusion. So, think of all David Lynch films, and we have already talked about David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* and *Crash*. Other good examples of this genre would be *Eternal Sunshine of Spotless Mind*, being John Malcavage, (refer time: 17:28) in New York, (refer time: 17:41) the serious man and Martinus Cause's *Shatter Island*; all of which depict very deluded mind and a fragmented sigh key. Now, resisting closure is

another key element of postmodernist cinema.

So, for example, again go back to Iranian cinema. We have been talking about Iranian cinema. If you watch *Taste of Cherry* by Kiarostami, we will understand that it resists closure. We don't know how the man is going to end up. Again, Chinese cinema; we have talked about Chinese cinema also in one of our earliest lectures. Think of films of *Wang* Why; think of films of the German director Wim Wenders, pulp fiction of course, *Inception* and *Memento*; yes, all these films, they resist closure. Again, they are self-referential; they refer to the process of cinema, pop culture and you know, drawing attention to the production and process of film making. So, you have one of the earliest key examples, such as Fellini's *Eight and a Half*. Then more recently, *Beverly Hills Cop*, starring Dustin Hoffman and Robert De Niro.

You have *Stardust Memories* by Will Woody Allen and the *Purple Hearts* of Cairo again, by Woody Allen. *Edward*, that is *Tim Burton* movie and *To Die For*, this movie starring Nicole Kidman in a small town. So, all these things neatly fit in the category of postmodernist film. Now, there is another concept called *hyperlink cinema*. Now, *hyperlink*; the term is coined by someone called Elisa Quate and Elisa Quate uses this term, *hyperlink cinema* as particularly for films, which are multi-linear in a metaphorical sense; for example, *pulp fiction*, also *adaptation*, *The Coffin Man* brother's *adaptation*, then *Sliding Doors*, *Twenty One Grams*, *Baywatch*, *Suriyana*, *City of Gods*; these films are characterized by their multi-linearity and therefore, they can be called *hyperlink cinema*.

One story leads to one other; that is what. Again, we will be talking about, I will be referring very briefly to *anthology cinema* also and the key films here, are *Coffee and Cigarettes* by Jim Jarmusch, *Parijatham* made by multiple authors, multiple directors, because you see, even a film, even one film has several authors so, complete disintegration of authority. *The New York, I love you*, the *New York stories*, *Tokyo stories*, *Toronto stories*; all great examples of *anthology films* and again, going back to our concept of *postmodernism*; that is breaking down a central hierarchical figure. We have been talking about *Face of John*, whose face off, which is a 1997 film, starring Nicolas Cage and John Travolta.

So, again think of the idea of blurred identities in the film, one man assuming the identity of another and then also, slowly becoming like him. The movies also known for its *hyper-real violence*, which is a typical of John Wolf, making cinematic spectacle and also, how

you know, we are talking about nostalgic cinema. So, even in the opening scene, we find in sepia color tone references to the climax of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*. So, you look at the climax of *Strangers on a Train* and the opening scene of pulp fiction and we will find how John Woo is hacking back to that cinema, to Hitchcock cinema. Now, coming again, coming back again to Fredric Jameson and he is the cultural logic of late capitalism. James thus sees the reliance on the styles of the past as an indication of the particular kind of nostalgia; that is one of the defining characteristic of postmodern art. He also says that random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, reduces the past to a series of spectacles, the collection of images, disconnected from any genuine science of historical process.

In his postmodernism and consumer society, Fredric Jameson says that he guesses as a concept of cyclic fragmentation on schizophrenia and an experience of the isolated, disconnected, discontinuous materials signifiers, which failed to link into a coherent sequence. This is the postmodernist condition. Now, again going back to *Face/Off*, think of the pasties it evokes. Music becomes a kind of pasties' we have been talking about diegetic and non diegetic sound. So, diegetic is within the film and think when Nicolas Cage's character is seen against the backdrop of Händel's classic symphony *Halle Louya*; whereas the extra diegetic scene, it becomes like rock; the rock scene when he first arrives from the airport and you know, giving as or establishing the character of Nicholas Cage.

Again, think of the shootout scene at one point in the film, which is done to the music of Judy Garland's, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* from the wizard of forest; again, very interesting use of music and pasties nostalgia. We also know the story of *Face/Off* and how John Woo uses the concept of doppelgänger, you know, every person has his other; that kind of concept here; that idea here. The heroes, the two heroes, they swap identities and how they assume not just each other faces, but also their behavior, behavioral patterns. So, soon Nicholas Cage's transformation into Archer; he becomes the haunted hero and we remember Nicholas Cages from his earlier films, *Moon Struck* and *Cornier*; whereas Travolta, he turns into polex and his customary fluid moments and they remind us of Greece, *Saturday Night*, *Fever*, *Pulp Fiction*.

Now, again postmodernist cinema, which relies on fragmented editing styles. A key text of this would be of course, *Face/Off*, but also *Natural Born Killers*; that is a movie by Oliver Stone, a 1994 film. So, *Natural Born Killers* is about serial killers on the run and

it discusses or it focuses on the idea of crime and criminal psychology in media saturated society. Some of the great films by Oliver Stone are *The Hand*, *Salvador*, *Wall street*, *The Dors*, *Jfk*, *Nixon*, *U Turn*, *Any Given Sunday*, *Alexander*, *World Trade center*, *W*, etc. So, think of Oliver Stone's films and how grounded the film maker is in the socio cultural politics of his times. Oliver stone is also remembered for the Vietnam Trilogy that is *platoon* *born on 4th of July* and *Heaven in Earth*. Now, in *Natural Bound Killers*, he addressed the violent tendencies of American society and again, uses MTV style quick cutting and intrusive acting.

The stories is about; again, it is like *Bonnie and Clyde* plot. Here, you have Mickey and Mallory Ox and all American couple; they go on a cross country killing spree. Halfway through the film, they are captured by sadistic police men, Jack Scagnetti. The climax focuses on Mickey and Mallory's escape, which is like a parody of the standard Hollywood fair. So, all this is shown through tinted, saturated color, weird camera angles, slow and fast motion camera, motion. Stone provides the viewers with a chaotic and fragmented feel and makes an empty violence statement. He deals with the psychic fragmentation of the individual subject and maps a loss of temporal continuity, leading to schizophrenia (refer time: 28:10). Like true postmodern individuals, Mickey and Mallory have fragmented plural and discontinues identities.

The film offers a pasties, a cologne of popular genre through interpreting of images, films, images from *Scarface*, flash on the screen as Mickey and Mallory brutalize a young women; then images from television, cartoons. The film's music is a mix of contemporary rock, traditional, romantic products and implies that postmodernist fragmentation is centrifugal and denying the possibility of closure. So, while in a film like *Pulp Fiction*, violence is cool. Still in *Natural Bond Killer*, violence is not so cool. While, *Pulp Fiction* relies on hip music and also, John Woo also relies on hip music. *Natural Bond Killers* has rather, dark kind of digetic music or even extra digetic music. *Pulp Fiction* relies on non-linear narrative; whereas, *Face Off* and *Natural Bond Killer*, both experimented editing.

We have been talking about disruption of the centralize figures and again, in *Pulp Fiction*, as well as in *Natural Bond Killers*, the authority figures are corrupt, violent. They are desperate to be in lime light. Jack Scagnetti is the cop; he is a deranged person, a deranged drug addict cop, who cannot be trusted and the warden as played by Tommy Le Jones. He is another psychotic character and again, the question is the dark impulses

that run through the American society. Media Two, and here in Robert Downey Junior's character, we have a media figure. The idea is in contemporary America, reality exists only in the context of media images. So, film about media this is an important aspect and we have been talking here about films about media, which deal with how American society is represented through its media, and how media looks at the society and creates identities. So, some of the characteristics about films about media are the commoditization of American culture.

They map the decline in the ability of Americans to distinguish between fiction and reality. They reduce everything to mere entertainment as was shown so clearly by Sydney Lumet in his network and again, there is a blurring of boundaries between media and different levels of reality. Again, films about media show how there is no fixed, stable and concrete reality. At this point, it would be instructive to go back to Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, where Benjamin calls film as the most powerful agent of the work of art by modern mechanically reproduced art forms, where there is no original for Benjamin films are fragmented as short scenes, and takes and disrupt the sense of wholeness that gives traditional art, much of its religious flavor. Films shatter the aura of the traditional sanctity of art and acts or rather act as democratization of human societies.

So, films about and critic in media are a part of cinematic culture. As early as during the late 40s, Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe*; it explores the nexus between politics and media. Again, George Cukor's *It Should Happen to You*, is a 1954 movie was one of the earliest films discussed the notion of celebrity and how media hypes certain people, making them famous for being famous. Coming to Sydney Lumet's *Network* in 1976; again, it reflex or illustrates postmodernist tendency of converting reality into spectacle, where one of the characters say there is no America; there is no democracy; there is only IBM and DuPont, Dove and Union Carbide. So, films about media; they are very self conscious, very postmodernist way of cinema and always, there is one key theme or key message; media is dangerous. This was done in David Kornberg's video drama and before that in Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd*. It has also dealt with addiction and corruption that media can be addictive as well as corrupt, as (refer time: 33:50) in *Requiem for a Dream* and also in Robert Redford's *Quiz Show*.

In George Clooney's *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, which is a biopic of Chuck Barris. Chuck Barris, a well known television personality, but he was many other things as well.

He is a game show host and also, and an assassin for the CIA. Then there are films which deal with black comedy; these are a sub genre of drama; that is black comedy and media and black comedy as were seen in is the (refer time: 34:27) *King of Comedy* and also, *To Die For*. *To Die For* is a (refer time: 34:32). The Media is Dangers and Face in the Crowd and Video dram is addictive. In *Recoom* for a Dream and Quiz Show and also, in *Slumdog Millionaire* and media people can get or become obsessive with media and media personalities; for example, in *King of Comedy* and *To Die For*.

In the *True Man Show*, which is a Peter Ware film in 1998, starring Jim Carry through the blurring of reality and fiction, we see dehumanizing forces that work for higher rating. Here is a scene from *King of Comedy*. So, again if films such as *Network* or *Recoom* are a dummy portrayal of television. Occasionally, media is also shown as a positive and corrective force; for example, you have films about Makati period, as seen in *Good Night and Good Luck*, which is a film directed by George Clooney, based on Add marrow's show. Add marrow was a very respected, respectable TV host, who exposed Sanita Mekathi's witch hunting of communist in America. Again, in Michael Man's *The Insider*, which is a 1990 films, deals with an episode in the life of doctor Jeffrey Wallent and his confrontation with the big tobacco company.

So, *The Insider* is a great movie, starring Elpachino and Russel Grow and the movie has to be voiced, because in a meticulous effort that media men can put into a story and expose something that is really rotten. Again, in movie like Garry Rossil's *Pleasant Will*, there is brother and sister played by Tobi McGoer and sister (refer time: 36:48) spoon. So, they are troubled high school kids and fascinated by reruns of the 50 sitcoms. *Pleasant Will* is the name of sitcom pleasant will, because it seems to project a perfect world in which, life is so much simpler, than they lies in the 90's. So, soon there comes a TV repairman in the lies. He gives them a magical remote control; David and his sister. They are transported to the 40's, quite like back to the future.

They propelled into the television world of the town of *Pleasant Will*. There, they assume the roles of the son and daughter of George and Betty Parker and thus, they become a part of the central family in the Sitcom. This is a town, where houses have picket fences and people are all whiter middle class. In the black and white world, the 90s kids introduce truth, art and passion in ways that make color; bloom selectively on town's people; now, who turn into three dimensional figures. Soon, there is a conservative backlash. The film acknowledge the extent to which, memories of the 50's are

constituted through media representation, especially, on television. At another level, it foregrounds the process of representation through its symbolic use of black and white to represent the spiritual poverty of the conformist past and brilliant colors to represent the richness of the human potential that is being thwarted by this conformation. The film also bless the distinction between reality and representation by having the central characters begin the film in the realities of the 1990's and then, literally projecting them into the world of 1950's television Sitcom. Most films as I have been telling you about media does present life. In the postmodern world, where we all encounter a reality that is constituted by the media and its images.

Now, coming to the last part of this lecture I will quickly, go through anthology films; why and how they are so postmodernist in character? An anthology film which is also called omniverse (refer time: 39:25) film, constituting of several different short films, often tied together by a single theme premise or brief inter locking event. Sometime, there is a theme or place such as New York stories or Toronto stories, even Parijatham or sometime, there is person or a thing such as coffee and cigarettes; that is presented in each story and serves to bind them together. In general terms, it takes the form of self conscious, self reflexive and self contradictory statement.

So, this is what we are tracking about that how postmodernist anthology films can become. In recent times, directors such as Wanker (refer time: 40:11) and even Steven is sort about they have come together to make film such as Irros, Roam with Love and also, which To Rome with Love is a Woody Allen movie, which is an Vote to Rome with a touch of magic realism and where several story are intertwined. Now, coming to Parijatham; it is 2006 film; it is a very popular film with 18 short films by 21 celebrated directors from around the world, including all your Assiers, Gurinder Chadha (refer time: 40:50) and Alexander Pang. Here is a shot from Parijatham.

So, this is what I wanted to introduce you to a movie that questions identities; it questions its spaces and also, it questions the very fact, you know, its very self conscious; its very self reflexive; it draws attention to the process of making films. So, this is what postmodernist cinema is all about. So, I would like to end here today's lecture at this point, but I would suggest that you refer to Pulp Fiction and see how Pulp Fiction and also, a film such as Network and the True men show; how they resort to using all these characteristics and features and how they fall in the category of great contemporary postmodernist cinema. Thank you very much.