

**Postmodernism in Literature**  
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**Week -05**  
**Lecture – 13**  
**Critiques of Postmodernism: A Marxist Perspective**

Hello, everyone I am happy to welcome you to yet another session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism and Literature. Today's discussion is titled critiques of postmodernism: a Marxist perspective. As a title implies, this is a discussion about the varied forms of criticisms which have been leveled against the idea of postmodernism. So, far we have been looking at the number of ways in which postmodernism have been defined and critical frameworks.

The conceptual frameworks which we shall be using to access postmodernism from a literary and cultural point of view and we have also looked at major terminologies, major theories, major interventions in the postmodern age. Particularly the kind of interventions which would help us to read various texts and contexts, in the contemporary literary and cultural scenario in that context it is also very important to understand; that there are a number of charges a number of criticisms, which are being leveled against the idea of postmodernism this has been done from range of vantage points from a range of paradigms from a range of theoretical standpoint are the most important ones among these could be identified from within the frameworks of a Marxism as well as a feminism.

In today's session we shall be particularly focusing on the Marxist perspective and how the Marxists have found the postmodern idea is a very incompatible and how they have been rejecting a number of postmodern concepts. So, at the outset of this discussion we begin talking about two works which were predominantly from the Anglo American tradition and they also responded.

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To the idea of postmodernism particularly; the ideas put forward by Baudrillard and Lyotard from previous discussions of the earlier weeks. We are also familiar that Baudrillard spoke about hyper reality about the idea of simulation simulacra and Lyotard sought to define postmodernism as in credibility toward meta narratives.

And both of these works and the concepts and the frameworks that they introduced have been seminal to the understanding of a post structuralism; as well as postmodernism and we have also notably looked at a number of things in the contemporary which also reflect the ideas that they spoke about which also could be seen as an extension of the theories that they had put forward.

So, these two works particularly by Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton and from the Marxist perspective they challenged the ideas they critique the ideas put forward by Baudrillard and by Lyotard and they also extended the discussion to a larger critique of postmodernism. In general and two articles by Jameson and by Terry Eagleton appeared in 1984 and 1985 respectively. In this noted Marxist journal a new left review Jameson article was further extended and published as a book length work in 1991 title postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism Terry Eagleton essay or capitalism modernism and postmodernism could be read as a closer corollary to Jameson's work.

When today's session we begin looking at some of the things and Jameson puts forward and also, how postmodernism could be seen as a departure from a number of Marxist

ideas. And also how post and how Marxist find it compulsive to reject the ideals of postmodernism, because they find a number of concepts related to the same as being incompatible to the ideas I think the ideology of Marxism.

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A presentation slide with a blue background. At the top, there are decorative white and orange shapes. The name "Frederic Jameson" is written in white. To the right is a small photo of him with the text "b. 1934". Below the name are two bullet points in white text.

**Frederic Jameson**

b. 1934

- Consistently explored questions of social, economic and cultural change raised by postmodernism
- The changing nature of capitalism and the place of Marxism within it

Frederic Jameson was born in 1934, could be seen as one of the leading figures of literary theory and also a notable Marxist critic. He consistently explored questions of social economic and cultural change raised by postmodernism and also he focused on the changing nature of capitalism and the place of Marxism within it.

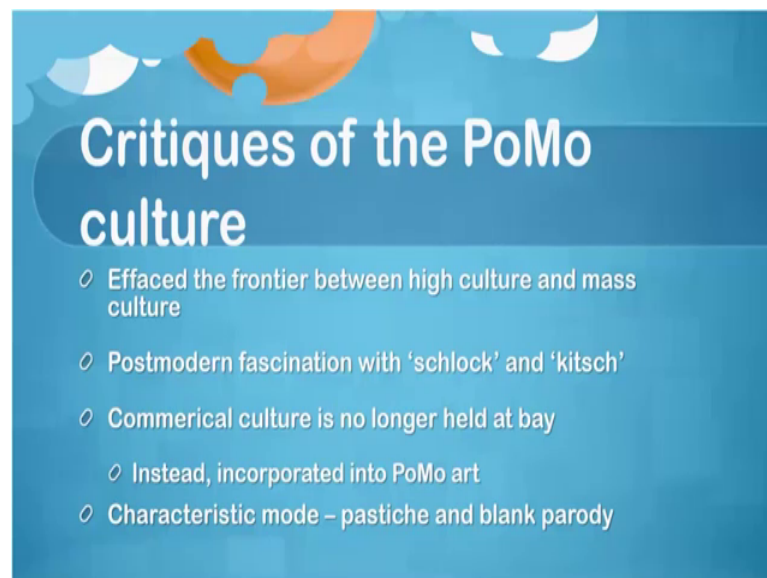
So, in that sense his work could be seen as a critiquing not just postmodernism, but postmodernism as an offshoot of capitalism. In particularly late capitalism as his works title also implies, according to Jameson postmodernism is not one among the many periods it is not one among the many many ages in history, but on the contrary it is a very dominant age and there is a particular reason for Jameson to say, that the postmodern age is also a dominant age it is also because it draws a much it is significance; is drawn much from the context of the late capitalist society..

If we recall some of the discussions that, we had earlier in context of the definitions related to postmodernism postmodernism and postmodernity has always been associated. Now, with highly developed capitalist societies it is a phenomenal which is seen in computerized societies and also in unwind societies it is something which is related to societies which have been part of the mass media culture in the 20th century it is also

related to a kind of disillusionment a kind of degradation and a move away from the traditional modernist notions which have been particularly exemplified in advanced modernized technologist computerized advanced capitalist societies.

So, in that sense Jameson's critique also needs to be seen as a critique of capitalism I (Refer Time: 05:45) use postmodernism as an offshoot of late capitalism.

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Before, we precede into the details of the various arguments that James makes in his work postmodernism. The cultural logic of late capitalism let us tried a brief outline of the critiques of postmodern culture that he offers at the outset postmodernism and postmodernity. As we know it effaced the frontier between high culture and mass culture. And this also something that distinctively demarcates postmodernism from the modernist trends a number of critiques which is Jameson, where very unsettled by this sort of a breakdown of the frontier, because it also marked a particular kind of political tendency which showed a dominant shift towards capitalism.

And among the are the other critiques of postmodern culture Jameson particularly points out the postmodern fascination with schlock and kitsch ah. So, it is important to understand; what these terms are schlock are refers to cheap inferior goods which are all which have also become extremely popular in the postmodern digitized 20th century culture and kitsch refers to certain kinds of art forms which are originate which could be

considered as in poor taste, but it also gets appreciated in a particular context though in an ironical and also in a very different way.

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So, it is important to look at a way in which kitsch has been defined in contemporary terms kitsch has been defined as a reduction of aesthetic objects or ideas into easily marketable forms. So, it is also in maintains a close relation with the commercialization of art and also with the ideas of globalization and the ideas of modern forms of art getting art of getting reduced into marketable goods. Some theories of postmodernism see the kitschification, this is also a term which exists in connection with the postmodern condition some theories of postmodernism see the kitschification of cultures.

One symptom of the postmodern condition Baudrillard provides with a useful definition and the kitsch object is commonly understood. As one of that great army of trashy objects made of plaster of Paris or some such imitation material that gallery of cheap junk accessories falls in knickknacks, Sudanese lampshades are fake American masks which proliferate everywhere with the preference for holiday resorts and place of leisure. As Baudrillard goes on to the aesthetic of beauty and originality kitsch opposes it is aesthetics of simulation everywhere reproduces objects smaller or larger than life it imitates material in plaster plastic etcetera.

It aids forms or combines in discordantly; it repeats fashion without having been part of the experience of fashion. This proliferation of kitsch which is produced by the industrial

reproduction and the vulgarization; in the level of objects of distinctive signs taken from all registers the bygone the (Refer Time: 08:42) the exotic the or the foxy the futuristic and from a disordered excessive readymade science has it is basis like mass culture. The sociological reality of the consumer society kitsch remains on the whole completely unselfconscious and without any political or critical edge at a later point in one of the sessions we shall also be discussing some of these are things in detail and we talk about postmodern narrative techniques, it may be possible to see schlock and kitsch is very liberating from a certain sense.

But at the same time it is also it is also important to look at, how Marxist critiques view this as a reduction of certain kinds of culture and also, how the reduction of all forms of art and schlock and kitsch. Further moves at a where from the possibility of a political or a cultural understanding of art and the other criticism against a postmodernism is that; the commercial culture is no longer held at bay. In the in the postmodern phase instead; the commercial culture it is being incorporated in the postmodern art, this is in stark contrast to what happened during the modernist phase? Where they did exist a commercial kind of art, but it was a held at bay there was very clear distinction between the high art of modernism and the mass a popular low art which was to be consumed by the common mass of public.

And finally, the major criticism that Jameson also levels against postmodernism is; that the characteristic mode of postmodern art postmodernist postmodern culture. In general seems to be pastiche and blank parody it is all about a mutation there is there as no sense of an original idea or an original art at all. So, why should these things begin to worry anyone from a postmodern perspective, if there was a breakdown of distinction across a high and mass culture and if the postmodernist are fascinated with schlock and kitsch and f commercial cultures no longer held it to be and if the characteristic mode a pastiche and blank parody.

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**So what?**

- The disappearance of the subject
- The loss of history – deprives art of originality
- PoMo art no longer represents real past – only ideas/stereotypes about the past – reduced to ‘pop’ history
- No historicity? Makes Marxists incompatible with PoMo theories

Why do we have to worry about it, what are the consequences of this.

So, Marxist particularly Jameson he begins to argue that this also leads to the disappearance of the subject and consequently. It also leads to the loss of history and loss of history has a further fatal consequence, because it deprives art of originality because originality is also an act of historicizing. It is also a part of history and postmodern art in that sense it begins to no longer represent a real past.

We only have a sense of ideas of stereotypes about the past everything is reduced to pop history just like pop art, when there is a loss of history when there is an absence of historicity the Marxist begin to feel extremely uncomfortable and also incompatible with the postmodern crs this is also, because Marxism draws much from a sense of history and also it is a conception of theoretical frameworks are closely linked with the many things which happen in history to real men and the women.

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In order to understand; the implications of the criticisms leveled against postmodernism from a Marxist point of view. We also need to understand Marxism in context Marxist criticism as we all know is offshoot of the political and economic theory developed by Marx and Engels in 19 century and in terms of when we begin to use Marxism as a critical framework as a conceptual framework to understand read and critique art and culture. It is a kind of theory which allows us to locate all forms of culture within a social context.

And when we say forms of culture it could be just about anything, it could be art, it could be art, it could be painting, it could be music, literature films, and anything which is produced in the cultural context. So, in that sense a Marxist approach to questions of is that excess also linked inactively with questions of class economic conditions and power, and where the Marxist criticism.

The Marxist critical approach towards various cultural phenomena and cultural texts, it also tries to explore power relations embedded and concealed. In cultural texts it also operates with the inherent assumption, that every cultural text every littering text every representation of culture is also a product a byproduct and an offshoot of every every single political economic and power shifts which are happening in the society. An art form a cultural form according to the Marxist framework cannot exist, cannot be



generated cannot be produced in isolation with the existing power structure or the existing political and our social historical conditions.

And for the same reason Marxist criticism is also known as materialist criticism, because it explores a link between the actual material conditions and the cultural forms. It could be the various conditions related to power politics the means of production the commercial conditions so, on and so, forth.

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**Jameson on narratives**

- Writings on postmodern architecture, cyberpunk – Marxist approach to culture in the postindustrial era
- Narrative is central to our understanding of reality – The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (1981) ✓
- All narratives must be read for their connection with the concrete material realities (outside) – dialectical criticism

To further make a sense of Jameson's critiques on postmodernism from a Marxist perspective it is important to take a look at a book published little earlier in 1981, titled the political unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act. This were notably offers a commentary on narratives by Jameson and it was also a part of a number of his writings on postmodern architecture and cyberpunk; particularly and he also uses the Marxist approach to understand to read and critique culture in the post industrial era.

So, his work on narratives also needs to be understood in this context, because he believes that narratives are central to our understanding of reality. It is based on this assumption, that he goes on to critique various forms of narrative and in modes of conduction and how they engage with the kinds of reality and the kinds of power structures which are inherent in societies. And one of the premises on which his work and political unconscious address is that; all narratives must be read for their connection with the concrete material realities outside this refers to the outside of the text. The text

could be anything as that we have already noted in a post structuralize deconstructive a sense.

Accordingly, Jameson was also associated with a dialectical criticism of which he was a proponent of it is also important to further understand, what exactly dialectical criticism is, a dialectical criticism requires situating cultural object or a practice within particular specific historical conditions and practices. And, it also locates culture within social and political structures, it also encouraging a totalizing form of thinking; which we have noted that postmodern theories post modern frameworks postmodern ideologies are starkly against dialectical criticism also encourages to look at narratives as a techniques of containment by the contradictions of history our marks are silent.

The term containment is extremely important, because from a Marxist perspective as exemplified by the work by Jameson on narratives the narratives. In general are seen as objects tools of containment and this can be further explained, because from a Marxist point of view all narratives are considered political. In that sense the number of Marxist critiques the Jameson and Terry Eagleton, they look at narratives as a political objects they also engage with the possibility of a narrative being used as a tool for repression.

And this is this works at a very interesting level, because according to the Marxist critiques. There is a political unconscious in all kinds of literary and cultural texts, when the Marxist critiques look at the political unconscious which are available in all kinds of narratives they are also engaging with a narrative in a very unique way, because they talk about narratives has spaces in which social and political anxieties are transformed and (Refer Time: 16:37) the films into novels into various kinds of literary and cultural productions. In that sense one can either see these narratives as expressions of these anxieties as expressions of these are political and are social anxieties, but this is where the Marxist intervened.

But they also remain at the level of the narrative they in in turn narratives thus; operate as agents which would manage control and repress, these anxieties because they do not the possibility of narratives do not allow these anxieties to erupt into the form of revolution they do they manage the anxieties are managed and the level of the narrative. So, that they escape the possibility of becoming any kind of a social revolt and this is also the same logic, that the Marxist critiques have been are giving for the emergence for

the development of narratives and number of kinds of expressions particularly in the a post capitalist societies.

In other words the Marxist critiques particularly Jameson's work on narratives it entails, that the narratives transform the threat of a social or political anxiety which could have potentially led to a revolution and they limit it to a mere literary representation or a climatic representation in the form of literature or films or any such social cultural texts. So, given this sort of an approach towards a narratives; this sort of a dialectical critical approach towards and narratives Jameson also argue said.

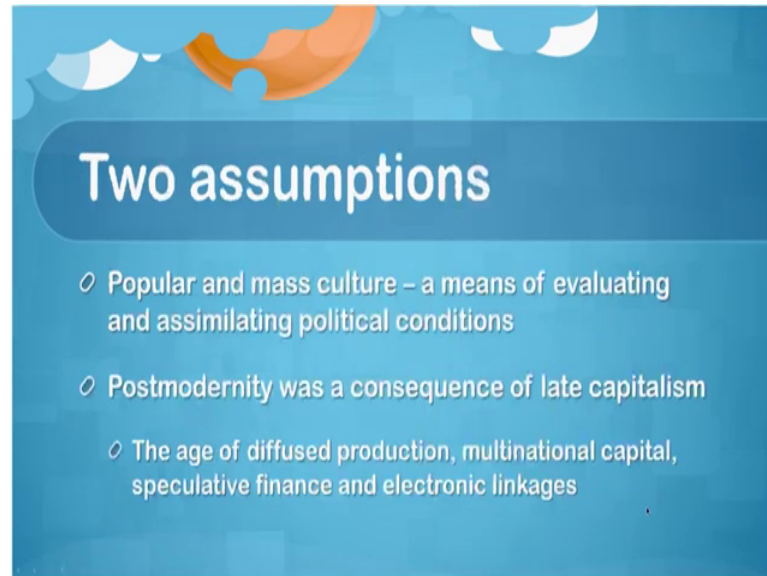
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There is a cultural logic inherent as part of every kind of capitalism, which had been a part of all kinds of societies. In that since there exists a cultural or literary equivalent of all kinds of capitalisms, in that sense he talks about how realism operates during the; age of market capitalism and modernism is a dominant during imperialism and how postmodernism this becomes logically the part of multinational capitalism.

So, all of these are forms of literary and cultural expressions such as realism, modernism and postmodernism. Jameson argues they are all merely cultural expressions of a deeper socio economic form of capitalism. In that since every literary or cultural age or every literary or artistic expression is also there is the equivalent of different kinds of capitalism and also derives from a certain logic that each of these different kinds of capitalisms entail.

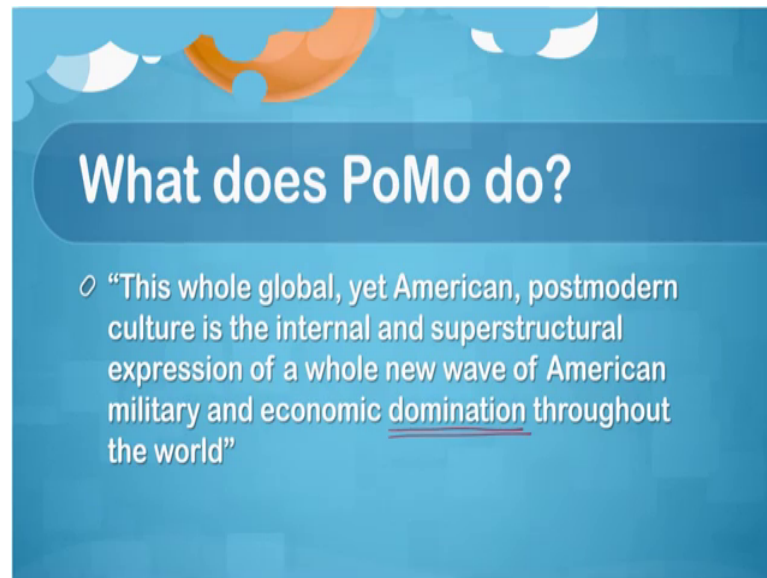
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Jameson's particular work postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism is based on two major assumptions. One popular and mass culture could be a means of evaluating and assimilating political conditions to postmodernity is a consequence of late capitalism, because late capitalism by late capitalism he also means the age of diffused production of multinational capital of speculator finance and electronic linkages.

So, taking off from the ideas of narrative from the Marxist perspective and also about the various kinds of critiques against a capitalism it becomes only logical that postmodernism is at loggerheads with the Marxist political social and cultural ideas.

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So, what is postmodernism do? In this sense to quote a Jameson, this whole in global yet American postmodern culture is internal and super structural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout, the world here domination is a key term over here though postmodernism rejects all kinds of domination and moves raisomatically against any kind of hierarchical as well as structural approaches.

One of the key critiques that Jameson posits against postmodernism is that, that it also has a propensity towards various forms of domination. And this could be seen very evidently in connection with the capitalist tendencies which are demonstrated, which are illustrated in different kinds of postmodernism and having said that he draws their attention to the consequences of mass culture.

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When we talk about capitalism and, when we talk about postmodernism it is important to be aware of the consequences of mass culture and Jameson draws our attention, precisely to that some of the things that Jameson finds a problematic or whether the mass culture is that it assimilates even the radical into common place.

So, with this absence of hierarchy with this absolute breakdown of distinctions between high art and mass culture there is no place for the radical, because the radical can no longer be separate no longer be distinguished from the common place. So, even those things which were once considered radical or revolutionary, they have lost their significance their political and also their cultural significance as something radical.

Secondly, as we have already noted postmodernism and by extension the mass culture, it converts all art forms into commodities an art and that sense becomes reduced to a consumer product with little intrinsic value as art is no longer art. And we have also seen how Baudrillard talks about the various kinds of imitations the different kinds of productions of hyper reality. And how we have access not to the original, but only to copies and copies and here Jameson particularly draws our attention to this idea of depthlessness, because the mass culture imposed by postmodernism it implies a culture of surface appearance with no depth value and to illustrate this point he also brings in a discussion of Vincent Van Gogh and Andy Warhol.

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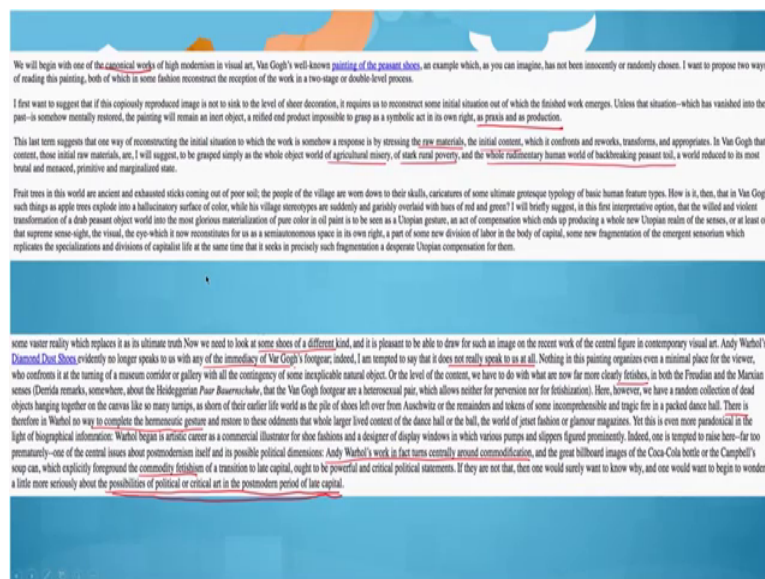
And he draws their attention two paintings one a 19th century; work a pair of shoes by Vincent Van Gogh and the 20th century work by Andy Warhol a digital painting title diamond dust shoes.

And here be also fine in terms of the artistic periods that they occupy one is part of high modernism and a Warhol's work as part of postmodernism they both thematically related as we can see. It is about shoes, but there is much more to this than meets the eye and Jameson uses this distinction the distinction between Van Gogh painting and the digital art by Warhol to talk about the ways in which what high modernist art and postmodernist art differs in certain critical rendering, how it is impossible to look for any kind of depth any kind of meaning in the postmodern art and in this meaninglessness he finds a certain futility. As well though post modernism is in heavenly also about moving a where from these kinds of distinctions.

Jameson is also making this very succinctly aware to the impossibility of any kind of a political critique or any kind of a cultural critique. In the wake of postmodernism at the first painting Van Gogh's a pair of shoes it is actually drawing our attention to something beyond, the actual shoes and Jameson also uses a high biggers interpretation of a pair of shoes by Vincent Van Gogh and talks about how this is a reconstruction of a whole peasant life itself.

But, on the other hand there is an impossibility to engage with Warhol's painting in the first place it is about the depthlessness of cultural products, but what bothers Jameson and many other Marxist critiques is that; in a painting such as Warhol's and in such a digital painting which is only an imitation there is a nothing in it to allow us to take a how many you take step it is also, because there is nothing behind the actual image that one can look for this it is very well with a number of postmodern theories, that we have discussed a number of postmodern concepts that we have been talking about.

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But, it is also important to take a look at the ways in which Jameson finds it impossible to engage with Andy Warhol's postmodern painting. We zombie the modernist painting by Vincent Van Gogh; in order to give you a sense of the original work by Jameson, I also read certain accepts from his work post postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism; and this is from the first two sections: where we also see Jameson are using his prophecies as a cultural critique as a literary critique and how he draws their attention to the different modes of criticism which a modernist painting and a postmodernism painting in (Refer Time: 25:08) I read from Jameson's work.

We will begin with one of the canonical works of high modernism in visual art, when Van Gogh's well-known painting of the peasant shows, an example which, you can imagine, has not been innocently or randomly chosen. I want to propose two ways of reading this painting, both of which in some fashion reconstruct the reception of the



work in a two-stage or double-level process. I first want to suggest that if this copiously reproduced image is not to sink to the level of sheer decoration; it requires us to reconstruct some initial situation out of which the finished work emerges. Unless that situation--which has vanished into the past--is somehow mentally restored, the painting will remain an inert object, a reified end product impossible to grasp as a symbolic act in his own right, as a praxis and as production. These are terms very important for Marxist criticism.

This last term suggests that one way of reconstructing the initial situation to which the work is somehow response is by stressing the raw materials, the initial content, which at conference and reworks, transforms, and appropriates. In Van Gogh that content, those initial raw materials, are, I will suggest, to be grasped simply as a whole object world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty, and the whole rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil, a world reduced to a it is more brutal menaced, primitive and marginalized state.

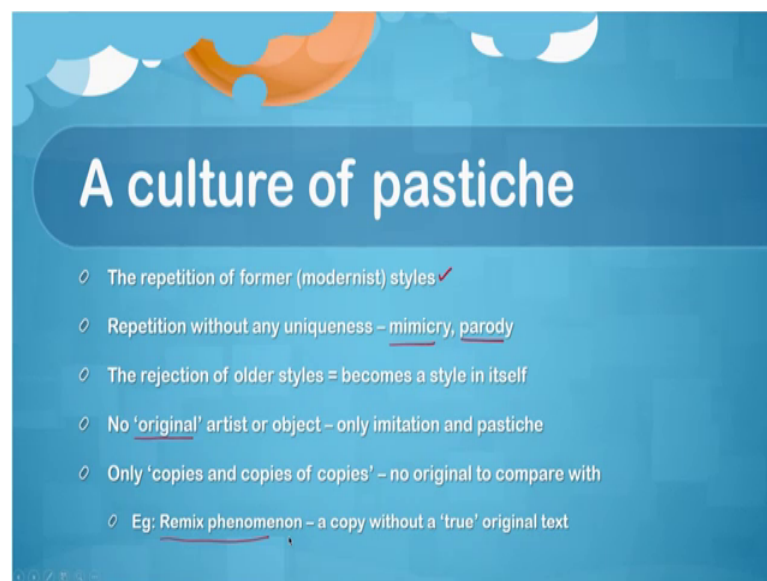
So, this sort of reading Jameson goes on the same is impossible to undertake with Andy Warhol. Now, we need to look at some shoes of a different kind, and it is pleasant to be able to draw for such an image on the recent work, of the central figure in contemporary visual art. Andy Warhol's diamond does shoes evidently no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear, indeed, I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all. Nothing in this painting organizes even a minimal place for the viewer, who confronts it and the turning of a museum corridor or gallery with all the contingency of some inexplicable natural object.

Or the level of the content, we have to do with what are now far more clearly fetishes, in both the Freudian and the Marxian senses moving on he argues that therefore, in Warhol no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture and restore to these oddments that whole larger lived context of the dance hall of the wall, the world of jet set fashion or glamour magazines yet; this is even more paradoxical in the light of biographical information: Warhol began his artistic career as a commercial illustrator for shoe fashions and the designer of display windows in which various pumps and slippers figured prominently.

Indeed, one is tempted to raise here--far too prematurely--one of the central issues about postmodernism itself and its possible political dimensions: Andy Warhol's work in fact

turns centrally around commodification, and the great billboard images of Coca-Cola bottle or Campbell's soup can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism offer transition to a late capital, or to be powerful and critical political statements. If they are not that, then one would surely want to know why, and one would want to begin to wonder a little more seriously about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital. I use this rather lengthy piece from Jameson to put forward this argument which he clearly articulates about the possibility of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital.

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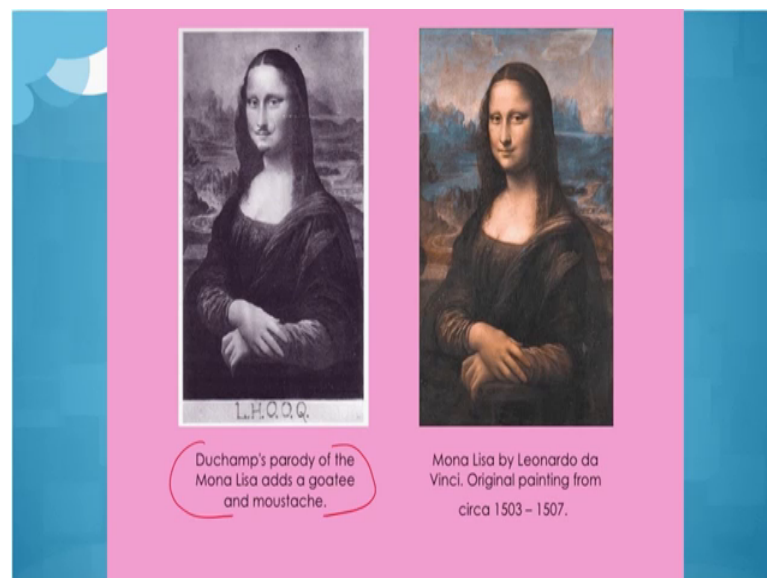
Moving on from this rather self explanatory pastiche we also look at how Jameson argues that postmodernism promotes and postmodernism rather fetishize is a culture of pastiche. Pastiche means a imitation or a parody and it is also it could also be referred as the referred to as the repetition of former modernist styles without anything unique for itself anything originality claim for itself it is that sense repetition without any kind of uniqueness any kind of originality, it could also be termed as mimicry or a parody.

In that sense, when he talks about pastiche which could also be identified in Warhol's paintings as Jameson does it is also about the rejection of older styles and this rejection the rejection becomes a style in itself one does not have to try too hard to be original to be creative the rejection of an older modernist style becomes post modernist by itself.

So, in that sense Jameson was also a bit critical and a very very dismissive about the kind of art which is dominant in the postmodern period and, thereby we also know that there are no original artists or objects. And these are something certain things which we have surveyed a little earlier in the course. As well about the lack of originality about the absence of any idea of the original or the copy and we only have imitations and pastiche.

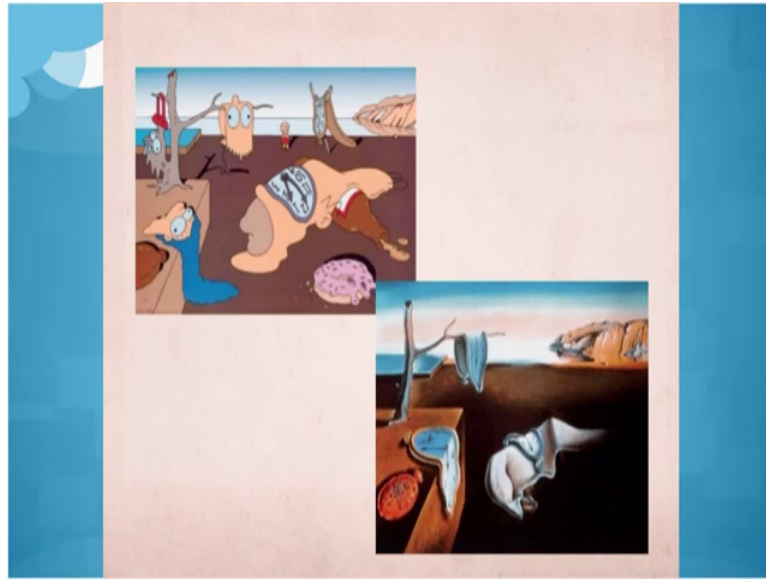
In step we only have copies and copies of copies and there are no originals to compare with or maybe one of the other reason examples that we can use to talk about pastiche would be the remix phenomenon in the contemporary, where it becomes impossible to locate the original in certain cases and the remix or the copy becomes the original version just by virtue of being an imitation.

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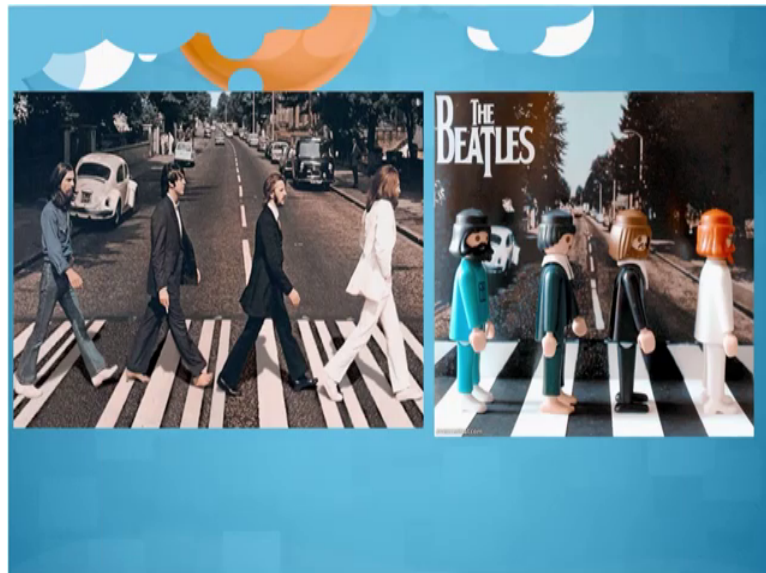
And these are some of the major examples of pastiche or parody there is this painting a Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci as we all know it is a 16th century early, 16th century work. There is also a parody by pastiche by Marcel Duchamp it is this kind of imitation it is this a kind of a parody that the Marxist critiques, are extremely critical of they do not find anything original anything inherently creative in this kind of works, but they only see this as a degradation of art and also a removal of art from any political or historical context.

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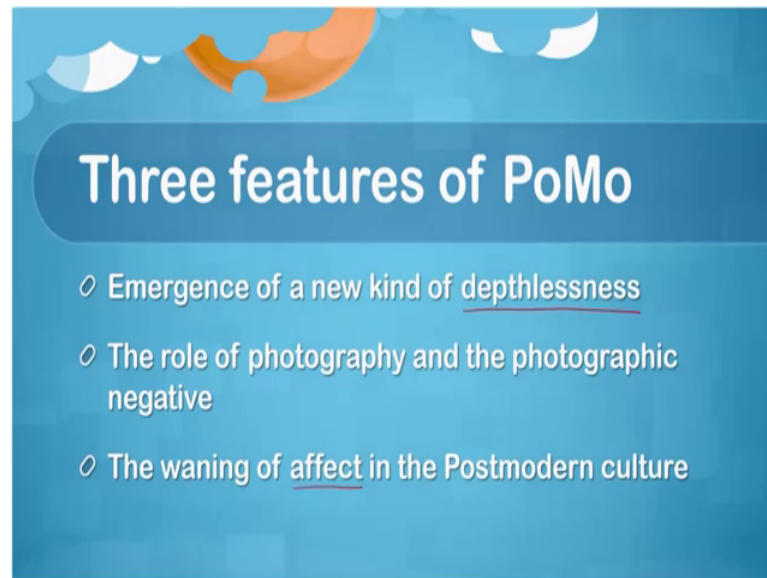
There is also another pastiche of Salvador Dalis painting and here, we also find a kind of mimicry at work over here a kind of parody at work over here and it becomes impossible to even figure out; what the parody are stands for unlike, the original modernist painting which talks about the modernist crisis and the pastiche time.

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And, it also operates at different levels there is this famous photograph of the Beatles which has been parodied in the form of a pastiche in this in this postmodern version over here.

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So, to sum up I draw your attention to three features of postmodernism; that Jameson says he is extremely uncomfortable with he also seeks to criticize postmodernism on the basis of three major features that he highlights in the first two sections of his work. First of all; there is an emergence of a new kind of depthlessness and this is not something a positive that he argues and.

Secondly, there is a role of photography and the photographic negative which he which he argues has come to replace art. In particular ways and it also takes away the possibility of any kind of uniqueness or creativity within the artist. And thirdly, he is more concerned about the waning of effect in postmodern culture Jameson talks extensively about these three features and how they also characterize the end of certain kinds of dilemmas which were part and parcel of the modernist crisis.

And the end of this dilemma and the embracement of a new kind of fragmentation is not something the Marxist are very comfortable with and; in the next session we shall continue to look at some of the concerns raised from the Marxist of point of view as a charges as criticisms leveled against postmodernism. It is also important to understand this perspective it is also important to engage with Jameson as well as Terry Eagleton at length, because it also gives us a different vantage point from which we can engage with postmodernism and postmodernism.

In that sense it is not about single point of view it is not about accepting or unified or a totalizing view of things and so, we also encourage these diverse aspects which are engage with postmodernism; in order to be able to understand postmodernism at work in different literary and cultural contexts. So, with that we come to the end of today's lecture thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.