

**Postmodernism in Literature**  
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**Lecture - 02**  
**The Genealogy of Postmodernism**

Hello everyone, good morning and welcome to today's session of the NPTEL course entitled post modernism in literature. In the first few sessions we have been taking a look at how postmodernism has been understood, how it gets manifested in various disciplines and how there is an inability to identify one particular kind of post modernism or to limit it to one definition or even to categorize it in many specific terms.

. So, moving on from today's lecture which is titled the genealogy of post modernism, we make an attempt to try and trace intellectual tradition within which post modernism as a theory is getting located.

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This course being post modernism in literature, are primary interest in post modernism, is in locating this as a theory as an intellectual tradition, as a conceptual framework for analyzing literary texts and contexts, and when I say texts keeping in mind, the very post modernist trend, everything is a text and anything even outside the modernist, realms even outside the limiting understanding of literature could also be seen as a text. So, in that sense we move on with this broad understanding of post modernism as a theoretical

and a conceptual framework, as something which could be located within particular intellectual tradition, something for which a continuity could thereby be identify

So, as a theory when we look at post modernism, there is certainly a systematizing role that it plays in the intellectual discourse and this is made possible through a series of a texts series of critiques and a series of commentaries and observations made about various things in the post modernist period, particularly from the mid 20th century onwards.

So, when we talk about the ways in which we try to identify this discourse, this trajectory of post modernism. We also have to keep in mind that we are not particularly only looking at text from a particular discipline. We may be borrowing and drawing resources and texts from a number of disciplines from say architecture and literature from art and economics, and also from a range of cultural critic critiques, and cultural commentary is produced by theorists, writers, artists, philosophers from across the world and this sort of an approach also involves a lot of analysis and polemics, and in that sense post modernism as a theory is both analytical and polemic in, at the same time shall we make an attempt to trace the genealogy of post modernism. So, that the conceptual frameworks, the derivations of particular ideas and ideology become clearer to us as and when we go on.

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**Modernisms**

- o Artistic and scientific movements – emerged from the same intellectual culture
- o Literary Modernism – attacked Science Dec 1910
- o Woolf, Joyce, Picasso
- o Architectural Modernism – worshipped Science
- o Le Corbusier, Bertrand Russell, Samuelson

So, just like we have been doing in the earlier sessions, in order to be able to trace the genealogy of modernism, post modernism, we need to go back a little further, we need to start from the period of modernism. So, during the period of modernism again just like post modernism, it was not a single kind of modernism at work. We have different modernisms at play and we also find this getting enacted in various disciplines, again from architecture to literature, from economics to political theory, from art forms to cultural manifestations.

So, broadly however, we can we can differentiate the kind of modernisms into two different types; we have artistic and scientific movements and though they share the same intellectual culture, there were differences in manifestation, there were differences in the basic principles that they believed it and accordingly emerging from the artistic modernism. We have literally modernism and emerging from the scientific movements, we have architectural modernism.

So, you may have already noticed that we have, we rely heavily on a number of discourses within literature, as well as architecture in order to be able to understand what exactly post modernism is this. We have already noticed in the earlier sessions that we had. So, when we talk about literary modernism and architectural modernism how do we go about differentiating one from the other.

Literally modernism primarily attacked science bigger with a big s. They were very skeptical about the ideas of progress, they were very skeptical about the kind of hope that science seem to offer in the early 20th century. In fact, we have if particularly look at Virginia Woolf James Joyce and Picasso; a writers and Picasso being a painter, we realized that they were all advocates of a literary kind of modernism which attacked science, which attacked the ideas of progress, which were, which, who were also very skeptical about the new things that science had in the offing.

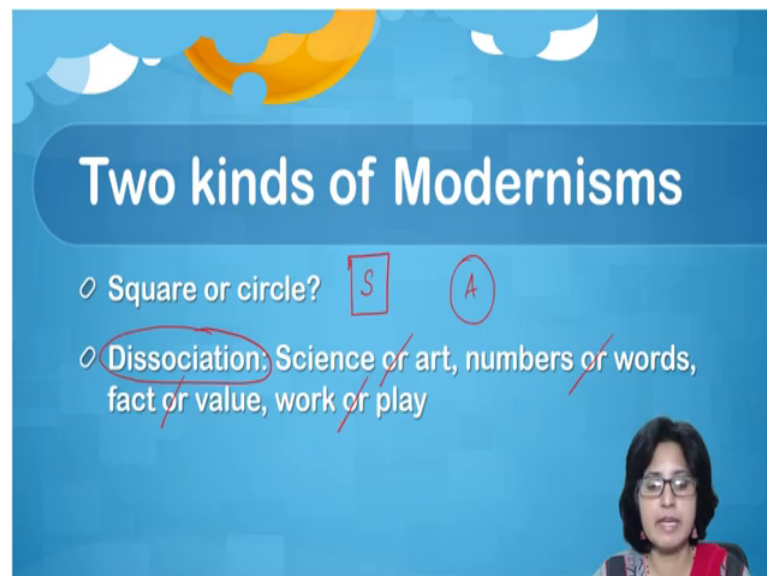
On the other hand architectural modernism worship science and this is very evident in the works and also in the views propagated by Le Corbusier, he being the most important architect of the 20th century, he is also said to have produced the manifesto of 20th century, 20th century modernist architecture, but Russell philosopher and Samuelson an economist.

So, in that sense we find two different strands two different kinds of discipline emerging all together and the art, the literature writings, painting and similar cultural productions from literary modernism and architecture philosophy and economics and related disciplines from architectural modernism.

So, our understanding of post modernism is also based on the different kinds of figurations that these two kinds of modernisms produced in the early 20th century. And it is also important to remember that even in terms of timeline they all follow the same kind of a modernist timeline, which perhaps is from 1910 onwards. A 1910 becomes very very important as some of you may know Virginia Woolf had famously declared that human life changed around December 1910.

So, whether it belongs to the scientific or the artistic sight, we find that all of these, all of these artists, all of these economists, all of these philosophers, they all subscribe to the view that the world order changed the world view, changed from December 1910 onwards, but; however, the ways in which they responded to this change was a radically different, though they were all situated within the intellectual epicenter of 20th century modernism.

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So, in these two kinds of modernism, two different approaches also involved. So, there is famous comparison being made between one, being like a square and the other one being like a circle. The square being more defined with rigid compartments and also inflexible

to change, but the circle was in comparison was more accommodating, it was more inclusive, it also had a fair sense of flexibility associated with it.

So, in that sense, associating the square with the scientific with a scientific temper and the circle with the artistic temper we find that there is a clear dissociation that emerged during the early modernist phase itself. So in that sense, from the early 20th century onwards responding to the various modernist trends and artistic trends and the scientific trends of the period; we have a very clear demarcation between science and art numbers and words facts and values and work and claim.

We do not find there could be some overlaps here in there, but otherwise we do not find any sort of a confusion regarding whether a particular discipline or a particular approach is scientific or artistic, whether based on numbers or words, based on facts or values, based on work or play related to a discipline or pleasure. So, in that sense these strict strict disassociation, these strict compartmental measures, they also lead to different kinds of understandings and emergence of post modernism at a later period and this dissociation.

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The mental categories of  
1950s — *delimiting, rigid, NOT flexible.*

- o Either a scientist or a touchie-feelie
- o Rational, scientific and empirical OR into Zen and emotion
- o Einstein or Ezra Pound
- o Man of science or Mystic
- o Scientism or humanism; Physics or Tao

And this is a strict compartmentalization. There is a difference between the square and the circle and also led to the formation of a particular kind of mental categories in the 1950s. This is also to say that in the 1950s being an intellectual in the both, in the either in the late modernist or in the early post modernist phase, being an intellectual, meant

that one had to be part of one or the other camp in that sense. One had to be either a scientist or a person with a with a lot of feelings, with a lot of emotions and that was also seen as a bit derogatory compared to be lofty scientist.

And there was also a very significant way in which differences were made between rational scientific and empirical methods, and the attributes of say emotion and similar kinds of feeling based approaches and accordingly a person an intellectual in the 1950s a learned person, an educated person in the 1950s had to become either an Einstein or Ezra Pound. The coexistence of both of these aspects together was not often found, it was rather rare and it was not advocated either.

In fact, it was not much of an encouragement for the amalgamation of three; these two apparent, these two seemingly very different categories. This is not to say that there were no individuals at all who transcended these boundary is, who in, whose lives these qualities overlap, but the point that I am trying to highlight is that institutionally there was no way in which these two categories merge together. It was a very clear demarcation in terms of institutions, in terms of formal approaches, in terms of official understanding, they were two very clear distinct approaches based on the scientific temper and the artistic temper.

So, accordingly one also if you continue with the analogy, if Einstein and Ezra Pound, one had the option of either becoming a man of science or becoming a mystic and a literary writer at the same time; like Ezra Pound, and there was hardly any choice available except to follow the scientism or humanism to be to believe in physics or in tao.

So, in that is in the mental categories of the 1950s, regardless of whether one was privileged to the other, the most important complain at later period. The most important thing that the post modernist quarrel against these mental categories was that they were very delimiting, they were rigid, they were not flexible.

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**The elitism of modernism**

- “The intellectuals could not, of course, actually prevent the masses from attaining literacy. But they could prevent them from reading literature by making it too difficult for them to understand” (Carey 1993)
- The obscurity of modernism kept literature, arts, music and painting in the hands of cultured chaps

So, this was what the post modernist were revolting against believing these very strict categorization and strict compartmentalization, there was no other way for the modernist to go ahead except to become extremely elitist in their approach, either to science or to art. So, as Carey in one of his works published in 1993 puts it. The intellectuals could not of course, actually prevent the masses from attaining literacy, but they could prevent them from reading literature, making it too difficult for them to understand. If you notice one of the modernist victims was also quite similar, it believed in making art different new and difficult.

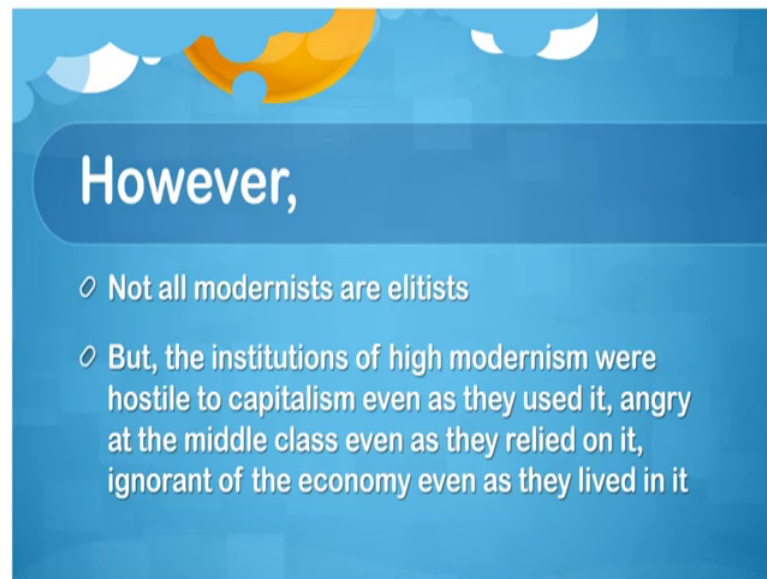
So, the very typical modernist agenda, the very typical modernist manifesto itself was to make art different by making it new and making it difficult. So, this obscurity of modernism had kept literature arts music and painting in the hands of the cultured chaps, it was adequate care was taken that it would not go into the masses. And also going back to the modernist times if you remember when Eliot (Refer Time: 12:32) Joyce and Virginia Woolf wrote, they are very very difficult to kinds of prose and poetry, it was also followed by a range of supplementary material, a range of secondary material, a range of notes and the references and glossaries to enable our understanding of the text.

So, the modernist field in that sense, it also ensured that an entire industry which would make a difficult literature accessible to the public, accessible to the student, accessible to

universities will also be produced as Joyce had famously remarked. If not anything I am very sure that Ulysses would keep professors busy for a number of years ahead.

So, this was the way in which the modern is deliberately operated, they want to deliberately make it difficult, different and inaccessible to the common masses. So, in that sense modernism also had gone a bit out of fashion with the common public.

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This again is not to say that all modernist are or were elitist and it is not an attempt to say that individually all of them were elitist in their attitude, maybe there were exceptions, maybe there were a number of our people, who even moved against the grain of the modernist trends in the modernist tendencies, even in the during the high the high period of modernism, but; however, what we have in mind when we say modernism was elitist word, that the institutions of high modernisms were very very elitist.

So, once it gets institutionally elitist it is very difficult to move away from it, unless one practices a very radical form of art, a radical deliberate way of moving away from these accepted and established elitist. So, the institutions of high modernism, were very hostile to capitalism even when they used it, angry to middle class even as they relied on it and ignorant of the economy even as they lived in it.

So, here we can see that there is an inherent contradiction or complication and the problematization, even within the modernist period. So, there is no reason to assume that



the postmodern period will be less complicated or freer from the contradictions and paradoxes.

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And here we also notice that post modernism gets defined, it emerges and gets defined in stark contrast against modernism. So, by contrast a post modernism emerges as a more plebeian and middle class phenomenon, it is also very evidently in deliberately an anti elitist, and we also see that in terms of its critical approaches, it is more inclusive, its more accommodating. For example, we there is a possibility of analyzing and studying and seriously pursuing an academic research oriented study of say; movies or TV or style and clothing and automobiles.

These were otherwise not seen as subjects worth worthy of serious academic pursuit, maybe in the modernist period, but we find that in the postmodern period, all these otherwise non serious subjects, non serious frameworks are also subjected to a very serious study in comparison with the sacred cultural products of high modernism.

So, here we find a very different kind of attitude emerging with the postmodern period which is starkly in contrast with the modernist period, moving away from the elitist tenets and also moving closer to the masses, moving closer to the moving, getting more accessible for the common readers and the Layman aspect.

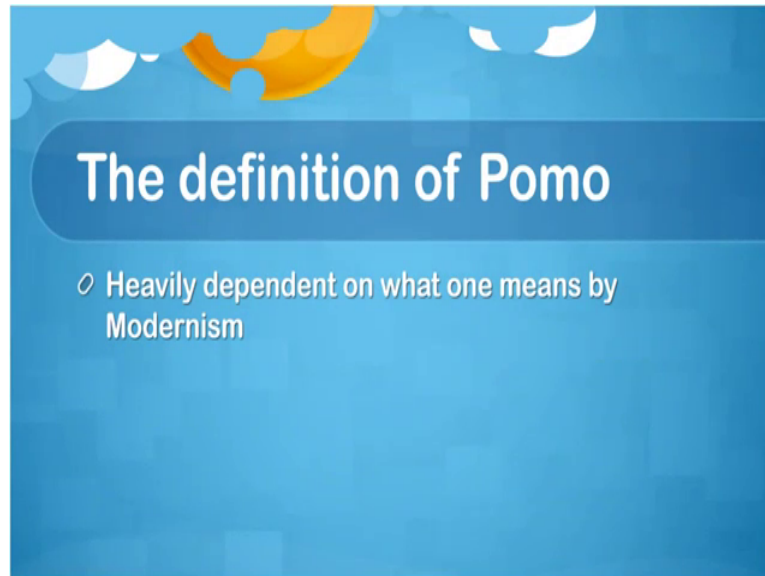
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One of the supreme examples perhaps from recent times would be the movie title I.Q, which came out in 1994 where there is a figuration of the postmodern Einstein, fascinated by 1950s style convertible cars and rock music. So, Einstein is presented as a fun loving genius in this movie I.Q. And also interestingly postmodern is absolutely delight in such absurdities while this was certainly a complete no during the modernist a phase.

They do not find a representation or an emergence of a fun loving genius; such a character emerging during the modernist period. And post modernism in that sense is also about making many things possible and loving many things and also reveling in these things, rather than lamenting the fact that we have moved away from the rigidity and from from the compartmentalized patterns of disciplines, approaches, criticisms etcetera.

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**The definition of Pomo**

- Heavily dependent on what one means by Modernism

So, our understanding our and the definition of post modernism is heavily dependent on what one means by modernism. So, post modernism as an intellectual tradition as a theoretical and conceptual framework, is heavily dependent on how we approach a modernism and given that there are many modernisms. There are that, there are different figurations of modernisms in different disciplines, the approaches and the genealogy and the intellectual tradition of post modernism will also differ radically and substantially.

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**How do we differentiate?**

Literary Pomo	Architectural Pomo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Radicalization of self-reflexive moment within modernism</li><li>○ Turning away from narrative and representation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ An explicit return to narrative and representation</li></ul>

**They all seek to transcend what they see as the self-imposed limitations of Modernism**

So, how do we really begin to differentiate the different kinds of post modernisms? Firstly, when we look at literary postmodernism, we find that there is a radicalization of self reflexive moment within modernism. So, in the sense at the self reflexivity, the and, the approaches towards metafiction meta narratives, it was not completely alien for the modernist.

We also find Joyce and Woolf experimenting in Leslie with different narrative techniques. And in post modernism we find that there is a radicalization of this move which has already existed within modernism, and there is also a turning away from narrative and representation. While the modernist were doing it for the sake of form, for the sake of being different, for the sake of experimenting with a number of narrative techniques, we find that the literary post modernism is a deliberate moving away from all kinds of narratives and representation.

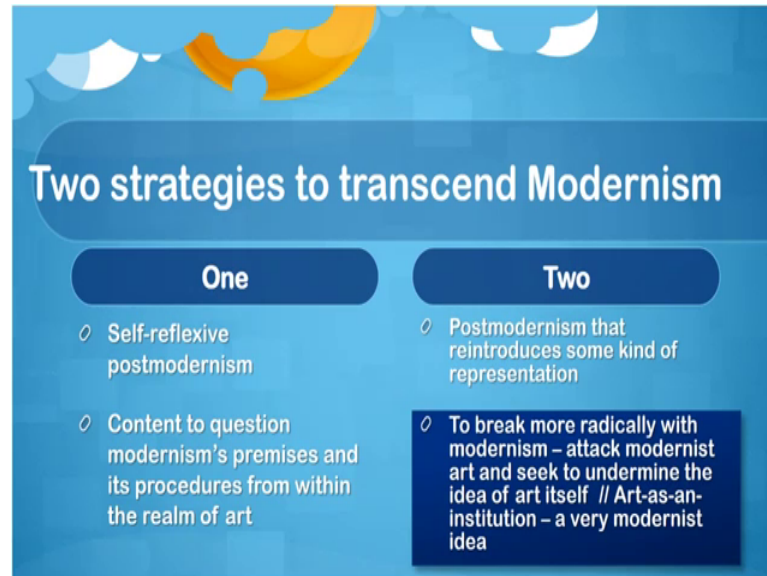
There is a complete rejection of whatever constitutes, conventional, narratives and conventional forms of representation in, but in the case of architecture we find that it gets manifest in a very different way, while there is a very definite move away from the narrative traditions and representations in a literary post modernism. In architectural post modernism, we find an explicit return to narrative and this is very interesting, because the only thing that concern the post modernist was the promise of moving away from whatever modernism stood for. So, if modernism stood for a set of things within literature, the intention of the postmodern right, postmodern writers was to move away from whatever those tenets were.

So, if modernism meant a set of another thing for architecture. The post modern architecture, the only thing that they could do was move away from whatever they stood for. So, regardless of how they all turned out to be, whether it was a return to narrative or whether it was a move away from narrative, there was one thing which held literary post modernism and architectural post modernism together.

It was that they all seek to understand what they see as self imposed limitations of modernism. So, this is perhaps a common denominator, connecting both literary post modernism and architectural post modernism, that they both are collectively they wanted to transcend, they all the limitations imposed by modernism, but this difference this move away from the narrative and return to narrative gets really interesting and it

becomes later useful for to further problematize and further complicate the idea of post modernism itself.

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So, we find two different strategies being employed to transcend modernism, and one was a one was by adopting a self reflexive post modernism, and this was also about being more conscious about ones own status as a Jonour or as a form or as a kind of writing. So, the ones who are adopting this first strategy were also content to question modernisms premises and the procedures from within the realm of art, they continue to believe in the form of art and by staying within the system, by stay within the limits they were also trying to question the various paradigms which were being set, but the on other hand it was this different strategy which also tried to reintroduce some kind of representation.

This is again not to say that they were always supporting all kinds of narratives and representation, but perhaps some form of representation was needed to revolt, to protest against the dominant forms of modernism which was being practiced in that particular discipline and. One is not too sure whether we can really draw a linear trajectory of these two strategies being employed in a literary post modernism and in architectural post modernism, but; however, we also say see that, in order to be able to move and break more radically away from modernism, one also had to attack modernist art and seek to undermine the idea of art itself, and here we find the art as an institution being critiqued,

because art as an institution was a very modernist idea, and this that was also about putting things together, it was about the center holding and things cannot fall apart then.

So, there was also, but it was also about an attempt to bring in coherence, harmony, some kind of a structure and order, but the post modernism, it was all about challenging the idea of art, it was about rejecting art as an institution. So, regardless of which strategies one was employing and how accordingly it got manifested in different disciplines, we find that, all strategies employed, all disciplines were it manifested we see a radical break of moving away from the dominant modernist trends.

I reiterate this, because even later on when we try to go through different texts and delay later, particular intellectual tradition, it becomes very very important to go back to the idea of modernism and see how the postmodern theorists, how the writers during the postmodern period, how the various philosophers who spoke about a range of things from language, text about society and about culture in the postmodern period. They all use a framework within which, it becomes easier to move to understand how things moved away from the modernist towards the post modernist figure.

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So, when I say the figuration of the post modern, the idea of the postmodern, it depends on the artistic discipline, it may also try and explain this meta narrative. And if we talk about certain disciplines; such as literature, architecture, dance, film and photography. We can also perhaps say that the postmodern figurations are seen differently in all of

these disciplines. For example, when we take the case of, in the case of literature we have already noted there is a very straightforward deliberate to move away from narrative challenging all kinds of traditions and techniques and conventions of art which existed not just during the modernist period, but even from the earlier times onwards, but there is an absolute irreverent rejection of tradition and narrative techniques.

And in the case of dance if we take a look at it, and it is interesting to see that in all of these disciplines, there is a very definite break from the modernist trends towards a post modernist trend. In dance we see that there is an early movement towards a functionality, purity and self reflexive attitudes and later there is also a rekindling of interest in narrative structures.

And here we find two different phases operating within a single discipline, within a single a form of art, and the case of photography, there is a post modernist photography would be more anti representation, anti narrative and deconstructionist, because photography was also about modes of production about a copy is being made available in the age of mass production, it was also about challenging the idea of reality. So, we find different theorization of post modernism in different disciplines.

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So, coming back to an original intent of tracing the genealogy of post modernism is, particularly within the within the theoretical and conceptual framework, we can also identify different phases. First of all in the 1960s; this is after the after the high modernist

period, after the world war and after and after the development of a complete disillusionment with the modernist project altogether. We find that in the 1960s post modernism emerges initially as an attitude.

So, in the 1960s there was no clear sense of manifesto put forward to come up with a set of post modernist trends, if because the term was just getting currency, it was there was no particular proper definitions or any frameworks are being made available. So, initially it emerges more as an attitude as a reactionary attitude in the 1960s against the dominant modernist trends.

So, we can also see the emergence of a counterculture which is eclectic and democratic at the same time, and we also find a very prominent and deliberate avant garde attack on art as institution. For example, we can take a look at some of the art critics in the American as seen by Leslie Fiedler, where post modernism is presented as an attitude only form of response, only form of framework to understand whatever change was coming about in the American (Refer Time: 26:27).

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The next phase – 1970s

- o Pomo within the Poststructuralist orbit
- o Stage 1 – Deconstructionist practices ✓
  - o Barthes and Derrida
- o Stage 2 – Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze
  - o Translation of Lyotard's work - 1984 Anglophone character
  - o Merger of an originally American Pomo with French poststructuralism

In the next phase in the 1970s, we find post modernism reaching a different status all together, because it gets it locates itself within the post structuralist orbit. So, now, no matter how hard we try post structuralism and deconstruction are two movements, two schools of thought to theoretical frameworks which move in closer, in close conductivity, in close connection with post modernism.



and there is a, we do not even attempt to differentiate one from the other, because they are, there is a lot of overlaps and this lot of in interconnection and inter mitten relation and ongoing dialogue across these different schools of thought. And in the first stage of post modernism getting located within the post structuralist orbit, in the first stage we find the deconstructionist practices are getting foregrounded.

This is particularly in the works of Barthe and Derrida. So, Rolen Barthe in Jacques Derrida were not really philosophers, who tried theorize post modernism, but the way we looked at language, texts, the approaches towards the author, the way in which language culture and a politics interacted with each of them. So, in all of these things, it was a very convenient to see a framework suitable for understanding the postmodernist periods emerging.

So, in the same way in the stage two of this operation of post modernism within the post structuralist orbit, we find a foregrounding of mission Foucault Lacan and Jules Delueze. Lacans influence as some say is relatively limited compared to the other philosophers, and are doing this stage in fact, something very significant also happens, Lyotards work which was originally published in 1979, it get translated into English only by 1984 and this work incidentally is also the most important work of the 20th century in terms of the attempts that it makes to define post modernism, its titled the postmodern condition a report on knowledge.

So, Lyotards work originally published in French, it was not accessible to the English speaking public for a very long time. In fact, some of the early philosophers at the American and the American philosophers who made use of Lyotard were, also those who knew French. So, otherwise it was post modernism was something with a very a heavy Anglophone character. This also something that we should come back to look at in detail, the Anglophone character of a post modernist theories and post modernist frameworks, which also makes it inaccessible to certain other culture which also does not lend itself to certain other cultures and sites with, which are not heavily bent on their Anglophone nature.

So, with the publication, with the publication and more importantly the accessibility and availability of Lyotards work in 1984. In the stage two we also find a sort of a merger happening, there is an originally American post modernism which gets merged with

French post structuralism. So, with the, with the coming together often a number of works, a number of philosophical discourse is generated by Barthe Derrida, Foucault Lacan Deleuze and later Lyotard.

We find at a particular framework a particular form of an understanding of post modernism begins to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s. Though this was critiqued as being very Anglophone, we find that this is also the most suitable and the most commonly used a framework in the contemporary to understand post modernism as a theoretical and a conceptual framework, and also the intellectual tradition of post modernism is also traced with respect to the foregrounding of these authors and the texts that they produced.

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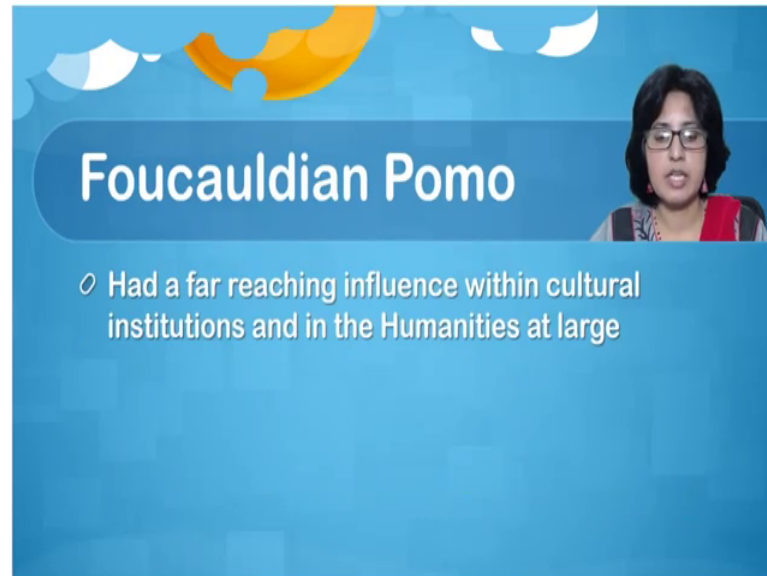


**Two moments**

- Within the Poststructuralist Pomo
- **1970s** – from Barthes and Derrida
  - Linguistic and textual in orientation ✓
- **1980s** – from Foucault and Lacan
  - Enabled close links with feminism and multiculturalism

And accordingly we can identify two major moments, emerging within the poststructuralist post modernism 1970s from Barthe, derived from Barthes and Derrida and 1980s, derived from Foucault and a bit from Lacan. So, in the 1970s it primarily had a linguistic and textual orientation, in that sense we will also be taking a look at a couple of works by Barthe Derrida, which were also, which are also useful for us to look at the post modernists work and even works from the other periods to a very radical postmodern lets. And in the 1980s with the emergence of Foucault and with the combination of the Foucaultien idea of post modernism with the framework that Lyotard had are put forward, we find a definite kind of post modernism emerging which also enabled and established close links with feminism and multiculturalism.

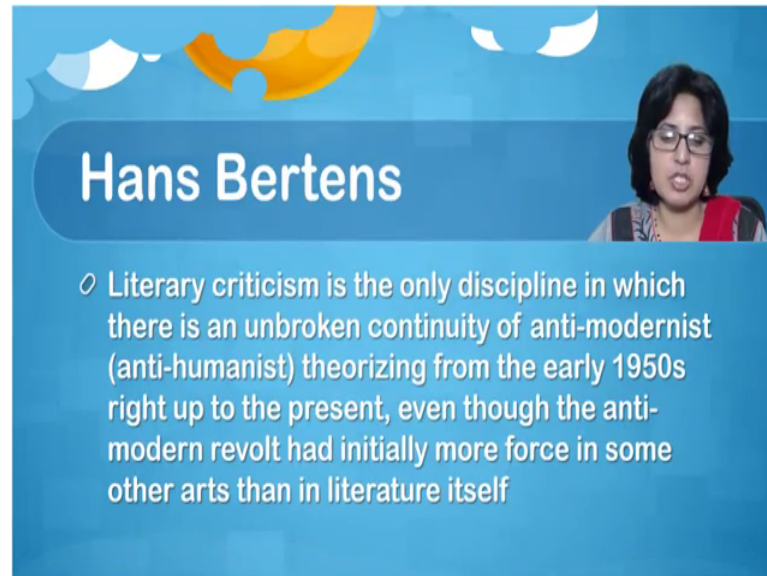
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So, now when we look back and try to trace the genealogy we find that something that could be identified today as Foucauldian post modernism, it has got a far reaching influence within the cultural institutions and in the humanities at large. So, when we attempt to trace the genealogy of post modernism as a theoretical and conceptual framework, we shall be looking at what eventually led to a trajectory, which would promote, when which would foreground and which would privilege the Foucauldian post modernism over the others.

What was more enabling the Foucauldian post modernism, in what ways did the precursors and the intellectual tradition work around in order to make the Foucauldian postmodern approach more inclusive and more multicultural and more accessible and more empowering to the feminist and a number of other marginal ideologies.

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**Hans Bertens**

- Literary criticism is the only discipline in which there is an unbroken continuity of anti-modernist (anti-humanist) theorizing from the early 1950s right up to the present, even though the anti-modern revolt had initially more force in some other arts than in literature itself

So having said that, and in anticipation to the next few lectures, where we shall be particularly tracing the intellectual tradition of the postmodern approaches through a discussion of a series of texts I wind this lecture with a quote from Hans Bertens. Hans Bertens tried to provide a history of post modernism and he also argued that its only in the literary tradition that one can identify and site a number of prominent continuities. In his own words literary criticism is the only discipline in, which there is an unbroken continuity of anti modernist or anti humanist theorizing from the early 1950s right up to the present, even though the anti modern revolt had initially more force in some other arts than in literature itself.

So, from the next session onwards we also enter a phase where we particularly and more, with more focus we look at the literary works and the genealogy which would enable us to understand and critically access a number of postmodern works and writers.

Thank you for listening and we look forward to seeing you in the next session.