

Twentieth Century Fiction
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Lecture – 27
Solid Objects – Part 1

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**A Haunted House, and other
short stories, by Virginia Woolf**

SOLID OBJECTS

The only thing that moved upon the vast semicircle of the beach was one small black spot. As it came nearer to the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat, it became apparent from a certain tenacity in its blackness that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakable that it was composed of the persons of two young men. Even thus in outline against the sand there was an unmistakable vitality in them; an indescribable vigour in the approach and withdrawal of the bodies, slight though it was, which proclaimed some violent argument issuing from the tiny mouths of the little round heads. This was corroborated on closer view by the repeated lunging of a walking-stick on the right-hand side. "You mean to tell me . . . You actually believe . . ." thus the walking-stick on the right-hand side next the waves seemed to be asserting as it cut long straight stripes upon the sand.

"Politics be damned!" issued clearly from the body on the left-hand side, and, as these words were uttered, the mouths, noses, chins, little mustaches, tweed caps, rough boots, shooting coats, and check stockings of the two speakers became clearer and clearer; the smoke of their pipes went up into the air; nothing was so solid, so living, so hard, red, hirsute and virile as these two bodies for miles and miles of sea and sandhill.

They flung themselves down by the six ribs and spine of the black pilchard boat. You know how the body seems to shake itself free from an



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction where we begin with a new text today. We just finished looking at Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Fly" and we will start with a new short story today which is Solid Objects by Virginia Woolf.

Before I move into this text of the story as I will in a few minutes, just a few little bit of time should be spent talking about the story in general and how to locate it in the entire aesthetics of modernism, because you know as we can see twentieth century fiction, it is largely classified as that modernist period in literature and we will have we already have discussions about some of the characteristics of that period.

I will continue to go back to those points over and over again through the course in this particular lecture and also later. Now, what are the key things about modernism as we saw about in explicitly described in James Joyce's Ulysses also in his Dubliners and also before in Eliot's early poetry is the entire almost obsession with consciousness in terms

of this inward-looking gaze where the character's actions are less important than a character's thoughts and sometimes thoughts they replace actions entirely.

So, if you take a look at for instance *Ulysses* by James Joyce the entire novel is about a not so much about human motor movements which are there very much there in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom hops across Dublin entirely, but also about the mental movements going back and across time, cutting back and across time.

So, the entire idea; the entire notion; the entire experience of space, of space-time gets really problematized in modernism and as we know this is also the time in physics, where the Newtonian laws of physics shall be replaced by the Einsteinian laws of physics right. So, everything becomes relative, psychological. So, you know the relativity of the universe gets represented in fiction in many ways in modernism.

Now, as far as this particular story is concerned, we find that the first striking thing about the story is the visual narrative; the visual representation; the visual form of representation that Woolf uses which is quite cinematic in quality. We saw that already in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* where for instance Septimus Smith walks across London, Peter Walsh walks across London and the movements that they experience around them are very similar to the montage movements in early cinema which is obviously, something that Woolf was aware of as was Eliot as was Joyce as was most of the major modernists, because cinema was coming up in a big way during modernism.

It was very much a part of cultural modernity; it was very much part of the technology of modernity; the technology the visual narrative of modernity was largely informed by cinema and cinematic modes of representation.

Now, we see that cinematic quality early on in this particular story as we will see in a moment when we begin reading it, but you know this long shot with which the story opens, a very-very long shot which shows us very too small specs of a huge, a massive sea beach that we see closer, the shot gets closer and closer until we come to the close up and we find these are two men walking down a sea beach discussing politics.

Now, there is a Bizarre Kafkaesque quality about the story which is interesting because this is quite unlike many stories that Woolf wrote, no stories that Woolf wrote. it is about quote unquote irrational human behavior and the irrationality is important for us to

locate, because in a way it becomes a parody of the political rationality, it becomes a parody of the rationality informing British politics at that time.

So, the irrationality becomes some kind of a romantic escape which is seen as a very bizarre narrative in the story right. So, the strange bizarre uncanny quality, the irrational quality in the story is exactly what we should be looking at. In terms of examination of this as a modernist art work, because it is quite literally you know work of art this particular story.

Now, the very title of the story solid objects it is ironical in quality, because as you can see as you will see when we read the story it is more a story about fragility and fetish and I have got a conference paper on this which I read many years ago. It is exactly about the fetish and fragility on this particular short story. So, if you know if you are keen on reading the conference paper do email me in that platform that we have, I am happy to share that with you. That was something which examined the whole entanglement of fetish and fragility, because you know the fetish in the story is about fragility.

So, he is someone that the character in the story is someone who becomes obsessed with broken objects; with half broken objects; with abandoned objects and that becomes important for us, because the whole idea of abandoned objects becomes very important signifier of modernity. Objects which are now useless, which are post-use, post commodity commodification or post-purpose right and a post-purpose quality is something which we are keen on, because you know we have on the one hand a story about a would-be politician, someone who has political ambitions, but that ambition gets replaced in the story.

Instead what happens is he becomes essentially a rag picker. He goes around London picking up broken objects right. And that post-value, the post-purpose quality about these objects is exactly what gets; what gets mapped onto his political career as well, because his political career gets completely you know sidelined and by the time the story ends, it is all but done, it is all but you know relinquished, the political ambitions that he has had at some point before.

So, this story is about the fragility and a fetish about fragility which is something that is embodied by this very strange character called John. Now, before we move on, there is

something which you know we need to contextualize the story of course, any work of art, any work of fiction needs to be located in a cultural setting of its times.

Now, one brilliant book that I recommend looking at the entire idea of the object; the entire experience of the object in modernity is actually called *Solid Objects* which is by Douglas Mao, a major modernist scholar. so; obviously, Mao draws on this story about Woolf and it is published by Princeton university press. If you Google up Douglas Mao *solid objects* which is entirely about the politics of production in modernity.

So, the whole idea what gets what is worthy of production or what is worthy of consumption; what is worthy of reproduction in modernity is what Mao talks about.

Now, this story on the other hand I mean; obviously, Mao draws on the story literally and quite ironically and it is a brilliant work on the idea of machines and you know materials in modernity. This story is actually about abandoned objects right.

So, it is about post commodification objects which have run their course in terms of the commodity value, objects which are you know de-commodified now; objects which are you know non purposeful now; and this whole idea of post-purpose which I mentioned a while ago it is like I said the materiality of post purpose is mapped onto the politics of post purpose, because you know what we see in the story is someone giving up on his political dream someone relinquishing; someone just completely ignoring his political dream and instead becoming obsessed with solid objects with broken objects; with shattered objects right. And also, we need to understand this is a story written around the First World War.

So, finding lots of broken objects in London was actually quite you know easy, because it was a very heavily bombed site and you know the First World War and then Second World War, it essentially shattered London you know in terms of its architecture. Lots of buildings were broken bombed heavily and the heavy bombing of buildings, the heavy bombing of materials in a way produced a shattered object. So, in a way interestingly what we see here is the production of abandoned objects; the production of post-commodification which is something which is caused by the war, because the war with this bombing the war with its destruction. It produces things which you know becomes post-commodity.

So, in a way you can put it in by saying that it becomes the production of purposelessness right and what I would like to do in this lecture is map this production of purposelessness onto the more human production of purposelessness which we saw in Mrs. Dalloway where Septimus Smith, who was once a purposeful productive man, now finds himself completely abandoned existentially, medically, biologically, emotionally. So, he in a way becomes a post production man a post purpose man.

So, the purposelessness of Septimus Smith and a purposelessness of the objects over here, in this particular short story could be very interestingly mapped on to each other that is something that you know some of you might want to do more research on this and that is one idea that you can reasonably pursue, I think.

So, this is the background of story. It is about the obsession the fetish about fragility, the fetish about broken objects and how that you know in a way consumes the person right and that brings me to the other important point which I want to talk a little bit about today the whole idea of consumption; the whole experience of consumption.

Now, what you see here is, it becomes an act of irrational consumption. Somebody who is not consuming the rational things; not consuming the consumable things; quote unquote consumable things, but rather as someone who is actually wanting or aspiring to consume broken things; shattered things; abandoned things and the whole idea of abandoned projects his own political career being one supreme example. He abandons that project, he abandons the idea of becoming a politician that; obviously, is get gets mapped into more metonymically into all the different abandoned objects that he is collecting all the time.

But the bigger narrative here is you know the whole idea of you know entangling yourself emotionally with things which do not have any utility that becomes important over here and that; obviously, becomes a critique in a certain way of the very utilitarian principles of modernity where everything has its value; everything has a commodity; a signifier; everything has a price tag; everything has a purpose.

So, the purposelessness, irrationality of this principle character, the protagonist in the story becomes a very interesting commentary, perhaps a criticism or critique rather of the entire you know commodity driven obsession with objects that modernity had.

So, therein lies the Kafkaesque quality of the story where you know the obsession with broken objects, obsession with purposeless objects, obsession with shattered objects those as that obsession actually becomes a critique of the obsession with consume, you know consumption in modernity right. So, the act of consumption becomes important.

So, the protagonist over here becomes irrational consumer which is; obviously, a critique of the idea of rational consumption in modernity and again, if we compare this in contrast and compare this and have a nice dialogic study with let us say Mrs. Dalloway, we find that the whole idea of masculinity as embodied by Septimus Smith and this is again, this story is also about masculinity, because we have two men who want to become politicians. So, you know the whole idea of political masculinity gets critiqued over here, gets parodied over here.

Now, in Septimus Smith's case in Mrs. Dalloway, it is about military masculinity and it is about medical masculinity and how there is a degree of collusion between medical masculinity and military masculinity in terms of the by politics, represented by the doctors Holmes and Bradshaw right.

Now, Holmes, Bradshaw the political figures over here in this particular story, they all could be aligned together as principle you know masculinist figures and those are figures which are critiqued, those are figures which are parodied sometimes, those are figures which are looked as enemies of the true existential self by Woolf and in a in a case of Septimus Smith and Mrs. Dalloway we see how Holmes and Bradshaw essentially drive Septimus to suicide to killing himself, because they pound upon him you know they completely coerce him and consume him in that sense.

Now, in this story we have this character, who is on his way to become a politician, but then he develops this bizarre fascination, this bizarre fetish for you know collecting broken objects and that fetish essentially consumes him.

So, that in a way as it is mentioned that becomes the very interesting critique of consumption in modernity right. So, what you consume, consumes you back right.

So, this particular uncanny act of consumption in a way becomes extreme example; extreme sort of visual example of the uncanny, needless, purposeless consumption of modernity right. So, which is something which is critiqued over and over again the act of consumption in modernity, you know in a way that you know what you consume, consume you back right and the irrational consumption in this particular story is actually a critique, an oblique critique of the irrational consumption of modernity as well, because what you consume rationally also consumes you back in the way.

The difference between the consumer and a consumed blurs away as you could see for instance in this very infamous or famous rather episode in Eliot's wasteland which we studied in great details the fire sermon section of wasteland where the typewriter and the typist or the typist and the clerk they have this loveless sex with each other and amidst this Loveless-ness you know the difference between man and machine blurs away completely, because the act of you know the act of you know loveless sex becomes completely machinic in quality.

And at some point as we saw in this particular episode when the clerk goes away, you know the typist she allows a half form thought to pass her brains and then she puts an automatic hand and puts an automatic record on a gramophone. So, the hand becomes automatic as we have mentioned at that point.

So, again the whole act of consuming music through gramophone in a way makes it machinic in quality. So, in a way that consumes you back in quality as well. So, the act of consumption in this particular story is irrational, uncanny and almost erotic in quality as well, because you know he is sort of he develops a fetish for broken objects as we see and sometimes he puts himself in risk.

Socially, it goes through a shame, it goes through a degree of ostracization as well everyone starts avoiding him the principal character in the story, but that does not dampen his spirits in terms of going about and collecting things over and over again right.

So, this is the long and short of the story this is the thematic background, the cultural background, the political background against which the story is written and should be situated. So, with that we move into this text and see how it develops in due course.

So, this is solid objects by Virginia Woolf and this should be on your screen. The only thing that moved upon the vast semicircle of the beach was one small black spot. As it came nearer to the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat, it became apparent from a certain tenuity in its blackness that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakable that it was composed of the persons of two young men.

Even thus an outline against the sand there was an unmistakable vitality in them; an indescribable vigor in the approach and withdrawal of the bodies, slight though it was, which proclaimed some violent argument issuing from the tiny mouths of the little round heads. This was corroborated on closer view by the repeated lunging of a walking-stick on the right-hand side "You you mean to tell me. "You actually believe it" thus the walking stick on the right-hand side next the waves seem to be asserting as a cut long straight stripes upon the sand.

Now, as I mentioned the story begins with a long shot. It has a huge long shot where it just shows you one dot, one little black dot and then it moves closer to the dot and then we see it has a limbs, four different, limbs two different sets of limbs and then it move closer even closer and you realized there are two different men and they are walking together almost in sync with each other across the beach and then we see we get even closer we hear the animated discussion they are having and also the walking stick. They are using as they walk and of course, the walking stick was used to assert arguments right to make shapes on the sand as they are walking down ok.

So, tiny mouths, little round heads. So, all these become more visible as the camera moves in closer. So, we can see how the focalization done in the story is very cinematic in quality right.

So, it moves towards the hands and lips at the end, but at the beginning it is a complete long shot, almost a panoramic shot, a top shot panoramic shot across the entire wilderness of the sand in which the two human beings blend together in one little dot and then of course, it becomes clearer to us that they are two different persons, two different men with limbs and you know other kinds of human bodies and other human organs as well and they are having a discussion presumably about something profound, something intellectual, probably something political as we know, but there is a disagreement that is happening ok.

So, I am you know just hear snippets in the conversation; “You mean to tell me you actually believe” that is a walking stick on the right-hand side next the waves seemed to be asserting as it cut long straight stripes upon the sand. “Politics be damned!” issued clearly from the body of the left-hand side; and, as these words were uttered, the mouths, noses, chins, little mustaches, tweed caps, rough boots, shooting coats, and check stockings of the two speakers become clearer and clearer; the smoke of their pipes went up into the air; nothings nothing was so solid, so living, so hard, red hirsute and virile as those two bodies from miles and miles of sea and sand hill.

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and virile as these two bodies for miles and miles of sea and sandhill.

They flung themselves down by the six ribs and spine of the black pitchard boat. You know how the body seems to shake itself free from an argument, and to apologize for a mood of exaltation; flinging itself down and expressing in the looseness of its attitude a readiness to take up with

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A Humbled House, and other short stories, by Virginia Woolf (chapter 10)

something new—whatever it may be that comes next to hand. So Charles, whose stick had been slashing the beach for half a mile or so, began skimming flat pieces of slate over the water; and John, who had exclaimed “Politics be damned!” began burrowing his fingers down, down, into the sand. As his hand went further and further beyond the wrist, so that he had to hitch his sleeve a little higher, his eyes lost their intensity, or rather the background of thought and experience which gives an inscrutable depth to the eyes of grown people disappeared, leaving only the clear transparent surface, expressing nothing but wonder, which the eyes of young children display. No doubt the act of burrowing in the sand had something to do with it. He remembered that, after digging for a little, the water oozes round your finger-tips; the hole then becomes a moat; a well; a spring; a secret channel to the sea. As he was choosing which of these things to make it, still working his fingers in the water, they curled round something hard—a full drop of solid matter—and gradually dislodged a large irregular lump, and brought it to the surface. When the sand coating was wiped off, a green tint appeared. It was a lump of glass, so thick as to be almost opaque; the smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge or shape, so that it was impossible to say whether it had been bottle, tumbler or window-pane; it was nothing but glass; it was almost a precious



So, again now we can see a very-very interesting close up of the two bodies. You can see the mouth, noses, chins, mustaches, tweed caps, rough boots, everything can be seen through certain metonymic signifiers. So, that the close up now replaces a, the long shot and we see a closer look at the two men and the smoke of the pipes too coming out of the you know the act of smoking. and then we are also told that across the distance these are the only two men available or animated very virile, very hard, very-very you know organic in quality and you know everything becomes about them.

So, we can see at the beginning of the story the two men just form a dot. So, the humanism or the human presence is very insignificant, but then the camera moves close up, as it were and then we see the two men emerging with all the details - moustaches,

tweed caps, boots, smoking pipes, etcetera and then that replaces the wilderness and you know that becomes important, a principal situation, the principal scene as it were right.

They flung themselves down by six ribs and spine of the black pilchard boat. You know how the body seems to shake itself free from an argument, and to apologize for a mood of exaltation; flinging itself down and expressing in this the looseness of its attitude a readiness to take up with a something new- whatever it may be that comes next to hand.

So, we see again this is a very detailed description of the body behavior that Woolf is giving us over here and again this is something the modernists do all the time. They talk about the human limb movement, the human consciousness, the human body movement and everything becomes very-very embodied in quality as you can see. So, now, Woolf is describing how the human body is exhausted after a long argument and once you know release yourself from the stress of argument and then it flings itself down to a less stressed position, a more relaxed position which is what they are doing these two men over here right.

So Charles, whose stick had been slashing the beach for half a mile or so, began skimming flat pieces of slate over the water; and John, who had exclaimed "Politics be damned!" began burying his finger down, down, into the sand right. So, again the, it almost involuntary movements are described in great details. So, he has taken his walking stick and making burrows in the sand. So, almost again irrational motor behavior is in action over here.

As his hand went further and further beyond the wrist, so that he had to hitch his sleeve a little higher, his eyes lost the intensity, or rather the background of thought and experience which gives an inscrutable depth to the eyes of grown people disappeared, leaving only the clear transparent surface, expressed in nothing but wonder, which the eyes of young display, young children display.

So, again we have great details of the human eyes over here how the film of maturity goes away from the eyes and we have a sense of wonder, it is almost naive wonder at something new which begins to emerge in the eyes which is captured in great details and described to us right. So, he is not becoming like a little child he is displaying the sense of wonder, the amazement of a little child over here.

He remembered that, after digging a little, digging for a little, the water oozes around your fingertips; the hole then becomes a moat; a well; a spring; a secret channel to the sea right. So, again as it is making the hole deep and deeper in the sand, he realizes how it becomes connected to the sea in a very microcosmic way right. So, it is making a little pool of water essentially and that pool is going to connect to the sea.

So, again look at the way in which the almost involuntary human movement over here. It creates a sense of connect to the vast wilderness of nature, the sea over here, he is digging the hole in the sand with his walking stick and of course, is the waters are oozing around the fingertips which gives an organic sensation.

Now, what this scene does essentially is that it connects the organic human body to the vast inanimate nature, the wilderness of the sea, the vastness infinity of the sea right. So, the body is; obviously, very finite over here, it is a finite frame. The fingernails are very small, very metonymic, very tiny and the tiny-ness of the fingernails has been connected to the vastness of the sea. in a seemingly involuntary act of digging hole inside a burrow, digging burrow in the sand. So, again look at the very careful attention to details, that Woolf is displaying over here and now; obviously, the gaze is very cinematic and it is very-very close up.

The fingernails are shown in great details and the contrast that to the visual grammar with which the story this particular fiction began which is a long shot of two men walking together as if they are one small dot in a vast wilderness of the sea ok. As he was choosing which of these things to make it, still walking his fingers in the water, they curled round something hard- a full drop of solid matter. This is the first solid object which comes in the story and this is the first touch that he has with a solid object which makes him you know, which creates and develops his fetish that he has subsequently, a full drop of solid matter.

Again, look at the interesting description, a full drop of solid matter and normally, when we talk about solid matter you do not use the word drop; drop is liquidity in quality, but Woolf is; obviously, describing the very complex tactile experience over here, because you know the fingers are dipping in the sand which is a part of the sea and water is curled around the sand and the fingers and amidst all that curling round water, a curl round water, we suddenly touched something solid.

So, there is something semi solid something half liquidy about the entire solid object which makes the word drop very-very interesting as a description over here. A full drop of solid matter - and gradually dislodged a large irregular lump, that is the first object which comes over here a large irregular lump and brought it to the surface. So, the lump surfaced up, it came to the surface. When the sand coating was wiped off, a green tint appeared. It was a lump of glass, so thick as to be almost opaque right. So, this is now the solid object, the first solid object in a story, a lump of glass which is now so thick as to be opaque.

The smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge or shape. It is a flat piece of glass any edge or shape, it may have had one point of time, it is completely smoothened away by the endless coming in and going of the sea.

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sand. As his hand went further and further beyond the wrist, so that he had to hitch his sleeve a little higher, his eyes lost their intensity, or rather the background of thought and experience which gives an inscrutable depth to the eyes of grown people disappeared, leaving only the clear transparent surface, expressing nothing but wonder, which the eyes of young children display. No doubt the act of burrowing in the sand had something to do with it. He remembered that, after digging for a little, the water oozes round your finger-tips; the hole then becomes a moat; a well; a spring, a secret channel to the sea. As he was choosing which of these things to make it, still working his fingers in the water, they curled round something hard—a full drop of solid matter—and gradually dislodged a large irregular lump, and brought it to the surface. When the sand coating was wiped off, a green tint appeared. It was a lump of glass, so thick as to be almost opaque; the smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge or shape, so that it was impossible to say whether it had been bottle, tumbler or window-pane; it was nothing but glass; it was almost a precious stone. You had only to enclose it in a rim of gold, or pierce it with a wire, and it became a jewel; part of a necklace, or a dull, green light upon a finger. Perhaps after all it was really a gem; something worn by a dark Princess trailing her finger in the water as she sat in the stern of the boat and listened to the slaves singing as they rowed her across the Bay. Or the oak sides of a sunk Elizabethan treasure-chest had split apart, and, rolled over and over, over and over, its emeralds had come at last to shore. John turned it in his hands; he held it to the light; he held it so that its irregular mass blotted out the body and extended right arm of his friend. The green thinned and thickened slightly as it was held against the sky or against the body. It pleased him; it puzzled him; it was so hard, so concentrated, so definite an object compared with the vague sea and the hazy shore.

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So, it is impossible to say whether it had been a bottle, tumbler or window pane; it was nothing but a glass; it was almost a precious stone. Now, this is the interesting bit and I just want to spend a little bit of time with this, because as you can see that this piece of glass is impossible to see what this glass was part of initially. Now, it could have been a bottle, it could have been something else, it could have been a you know window pane, it could have been a tumbler. In other words, it is now post-purpose, now the sea which has come and gone over and over again, and which has smoothened it in due course of time that had made it essentially and infinitely and perfectly purposeless in quality.

Now, the purposelessness is something which is interesting for us to understand, because the only and this is something which we can read very interestingly and very nicely and complexly with thing theory, because the whole idea of seeing something as a thing, purely as a thing is only possible when the value of that thing or the functionality of that object becomes interrupted, gets terminated. So, what we see over here as a termination of functionality. So, we do not quite know where this glass object had come from, whether it is a part of a tumbler or a piece of glass in a mirror may be or may be a bottle, we do not quite know that and the nonutility quality, nonutilitarian quality about this glass is what makes it purely a thing right.

So, in a sense we can look at this entire story as a human organic engagement with the thing, a thing which is completely outside of the human parameter of knowledge, purpose, utility, etcetera. And so, this becomes a very fertile story, a very fertile frame to look at with thing theory that particular frame is very useful over here. Those of you are interested in thing theory could look up you know lots of articles on that and related topics in different parts of different databases.

If you are more keen to know more about thing theory, do email us, do write in the platform and I will be happy to recommend some articles for you, but suffice it to say over here what happens over here, what is happening here essentially is that this human involvement with something which is purely a thing and not an object; not a commodity is what makes the story complex is what generates the irrationality right, as human engagement with non-objects.

So, thing over is a non-object or rather post-object, a post-commodity. It may have served a purpose at some point of time, but that purpose had run its course right and now, we have this you know this entire encounter happens near the sea and you know when I use run its courts it becomes ironically relevant and appropriate, because this entire discovery of an of a thing which is not an object, you know it is not a commodity anymore happens right by the sea.

It was almost a precious stone. So, this glass is not so smooth and so purposeless; so in describable in terms of its connection to something bigger that it becomes almost a precious stone and the word almost is important, because we know when the moment

you use the word almost it is not a precious stone right. It is just an object, a thing which is not even an object anymore. It is a post-object thing.

You had only to enclose it in a rim of gold, or pierce it with a wire, and it became a jewel; a part of a necklace, or a dull, green light upon a finger. Perhaps after all it was really a gem; something worn by a dark Princess trailing her finger in the water as she sat in the stern of the boat and listened to the slaves singing as they rode her across the Bay ok.

Now, this is interesting, because if you read it with racial politics, it becomes very-very complex, because you know; obviously, the object here is very-very exotic, it is a thing as I mentioned it is outside the utility driven object economy that human beings engage with. So, it is a purely a thing outside the economy.

Now, the moment it becomes outside the economy, it gets, it gets very easily located in an exotic human setting and we have this dark princess in a boat sailed by slaves who are singing some exotic song and that is where the object becomes situated now outside the white economy of production and consumption.

So, we have this racial politics, very interestingly a interwoven with a thing theory politics over here which is something that we should pay some attention, because in the moment it becomes post utility; the moment it becomes post value; the moment it becomes post cognition; it gets very easy to transfer to a different economy, a more exotic economy of nonwhite imagination right and that that racialization is interesting over here and we should spend some time thinking about that in terms of how this politics play against each other.

Or the oak sides of a sunk Elizabethan-treasure chest had split apart, and, rolled over and over, over and over, its emeralds had come at last to shore. How it goes back in time and you know the Elizabethan treasure chest opens up and; obviously, we do know Elizabethan treasure chest would be a treasure chest, filled with different parts of different ornaments and gems from across the world.

It becomes quite literally a very exotic space that had opened up and you know it just there is this particular glass piece is probably one of those things in that particular treasure chest. John turned it in his hands; he held it to the light; he held it so, that its

irregular mass blotted out the body and extended right arm of his friend. The green thinned and thickened slightly as it was held against the sky or against the body. It pleased him; it puzzled him; it was so hard, so concentrated, so definite an object compared to the vague sea and the hazy shore right.

So, the objectivity of the object becomes interesting over here. It is a shape, I mean it is a shapelessness of the sea, it means a shapelessness of the shore and that gives him some kind of a human connect to that particular thing right.

So, on a one hand it is something he does not recognize, something that that could be from anywhere, but at the same time the tactility the tactile relationship he has with the thing, assures him it gives him something tangible to hold on to, to grip it with amidst this vast vagueness and fluidity of the sea and the shore. So, the vague and, the word vague and the word hazy over here are interesting for us to locate.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:45)

The slide displays a quote from Virginia Woolf's 'A Haunted House' and a video of a man in a blue shirt speaking. The quote is: 'body. It pleased him; it puzzled him; it was so hard, so concentrated, so definite an object compared with the vague sea and the hazy shore.' Below this, the text reads: 'A Haunted House, and other short stories, by Virginia Woolf : chapter 10' and 'Now a sigh disturbed him—profound, final, making him aware that his friend Charles had thrown all the flat stones within reach, or had come to the conclusion that it was not worth while to throw them. They ate their sandwiches side by side. When they had done, and were shaking themselves and rising to their feet, John took the lump of glass and looked at it in silence. Charles looked at it too. But he saw immediately that it was not flat, and filling his pipe he said with the energy that dismisses a foolish strain of thought: "To return to what I was saying—" He did not see, or if he had seen would hardly have noticed, that John, after looking at the lump for a moment, as if in hesitation, slipped it inside his pocket. That impulse, too, may have been the impulse which leads a child to pick up one pebble on a path strewn with them, promising it a life of warmth and security upon the nursery mantelpiece, delighting in the sense of power and benignity which such an action confers, and believing that the heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it, to enjoy this bliss instead of a life of cold and wet upon the high road. "It might so easily have been any other of the millions of stones, but it was I, I, I!" Whether this thought or not was in John's mind, the lump of glass had its place upon the mantelpiece, where it stood heavy upon a little pile of bills and letters and served not only as an excellent paper-weight, but'.

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So, that is outside the cognitive kin as it were. Whereas, this object even though he does not know what it is, this thing even if he does not know what it is, it gives him some kind of a tactile tangible marker of meaning even though he does not quite know its historical background, where it came from etcetera.

Now, a sigh disturbed him- profound, final, make him aware that his friend Charles had thrown all the flats stones within reach, or had to come to the conclusion that it was not worthwhile to throw them. They ate their sandwiches side by side.

When they had done, and was shaking themselves and rising to their feet, John took the lump of glass and looked at it in silence. So, again there's almost an erotic tension developing over here I was looking at a glass piece and he gets drawn into it as some kind of a fetish formation happening. Charles looked at it too. But he saw immediately that it was not flat, and filling his pipe he said with the energy that dismisses a foolish strain of thoughts: "To return to what I was saying -"

So, again he goes back to the earlier conversation; the more rational conversation; the more political conversation; the more acceptable conversation whereas we know now that his friend John has now drifted to a more irrational uncanny economy and that uncanny economy is about broken objects; it is about solid objects which are actually nonutilitarian. And again, as I mentioned the post purpose quality of these objects is exactly what makes it so interesting; which makes it such an important critic of the entire politics of production and consumption of modernity which Charles here the friend, the more rational friend is very much a part of for his political ambitions with his diplomatic ambitions etcetera.

So, the story starts with two men who are drifting along the same narrative of political productive ambitions. One of them drifting away from the narrative and finding another narrative which is irrational, uncanny is entirely about non-production or post-production and how that complicates the entire discourse of production and consumption and modernity. So, this story becomes in a way a very Kafkaesque tale, a Kafkaesque Carnavalesque tale about production and consumption in modernity ok. To return to what I was saying. So, he goes back to his earlier narratives narrative and once they finish it off. He did not see, or if he had seen would hardly have noticed, that John, after looking at the lump for a moment, as if in hesitation, slipped it inside his pocket.

So, this becomes the first act almost kleptomaniac in quality almost erotic in quality stealthy in quality of taking a solid object and slipping it into his pocket as some kind of a fetish and; obviously, this is a beginning of the fetish this is a formation of the fetish

which happens in due course in the story. So, you know Charles did not see it, that John had slipped it in his, in his pocket.

That impulse, too, you have, it may have been an impulse which leads a child to pick up one pebble on a path strewn with them, promising it a life of warmth and security upon a nursery mantelpiece, delighting in a sense of power and benignity with which such action confers, and believing that a heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it, to enjoy this bliss instead of a life of cold and wet upon the high road. "It might so easily have been any other than the million of stones, but it was I, I, I!"

So, I stop at this point now, because this needs a bit of an unpacking now. What Woolf is doing here is interesting, because it is almost she is almost giving a voice to the inanimate objects. So, and this is exactly what thing theory tells us today, because you know if we look at thing as something outside the human radar not as the objects; not as commodities, but things which lie outside. The human radar of recognizability; the human radar of cognition so, this interesting essay that you should all read is called Can the Sofa Speak which is; obviously, draws on can the subaltern speak, but the point is can things speak for themselves or can speak, can things only speak mediated by human narratives over here.

Now, what Woolf does over here is interesting, because what she is telling us is this childlike slash; childish quality that John is exhibiting by picking up this little solid object and slipping it inside his pocket to take it home and exhibit it later maybe or consume it visually later. Almost in a very kleptomaniacal kind of a way. From that object's perspective; from the thing's perspective; this becomes an excitement, because this gets chosen by human being and this is how a thing enters the human radar; the thing enters or re-enters rather the human economy, because as you know for this particular object, this may have been a part of a broken thing which was presumably used by human beings for some amount of time.

So, in a way it is post value, a post production; post consumption now to re-enter the economy of consumption is something of a delight for this particular thing. So, in a way the voice over here it was I, I, I! it is almost as if when a stone gets picked up by a child; a whimsical child, the randomness is celebrated; randomness with which a particular

stone gets picked up you know above and among the other stones that becomes the moment of celebration for the stone and Woolf is almost giving a voice to the stone over here, either way which is very-very interesting.

So, from the stone's perspective being chosen by a whimsical child among millions of stones becomes an act of celebration and in a way that gives voice to the thing which now becomes an object which may or may not become a commodity or gift value right. So, therein lies a very complex politics of commodification, value formation and fetish formation which this story particular, this particular short story you know really problematically engages with as we will see in due course of time.

So, I stop at this point today. We will continue with this entire politics of production, consumption and fetish formation as I move on in due course. So, I will continue with this in the next lecture.

Thank you for your attention.