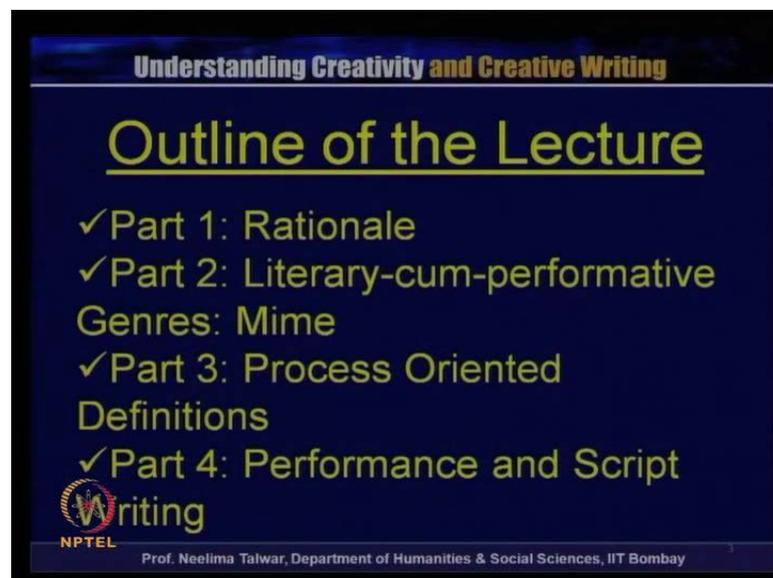


Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing
Prof. Neelima Talwar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay

Lecture - 26
Performance and Script Writing: Mime

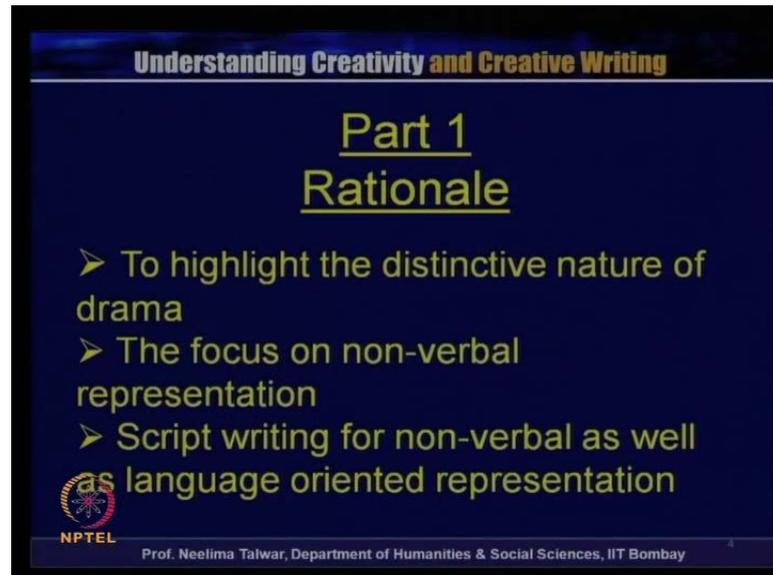
This lecture is titled, performance and Script writing. And what we are going to do is to provide you some rationale about mime as an art form, which provides deep understanding of drama as a performative form.

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The lecture is divided into four parts. In part one, we would provide you this rationale in some detail, then we would look at mime and also some process oriented definitions, and finally the relationship between performance and script writing.

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The slide features a dark blue background with a light blue header bar. The title 'Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing' is in white. Below it, 'Part 1' and 'Rationale' are in yellow and underlined. Three yellow bullet points with arrowheads are listed. At the bottom left is the NPTEL logo, and at the bottom center is the text 'Prof. Neelima Talwar, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT Bombay'. A small number '4' is in the bottom right corner.

Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Part 1
Rationale

- To highlight the distinctive nature of drama
- The focus on non-verbal representation
- Script writing for non-verbal as well as language oriented representation

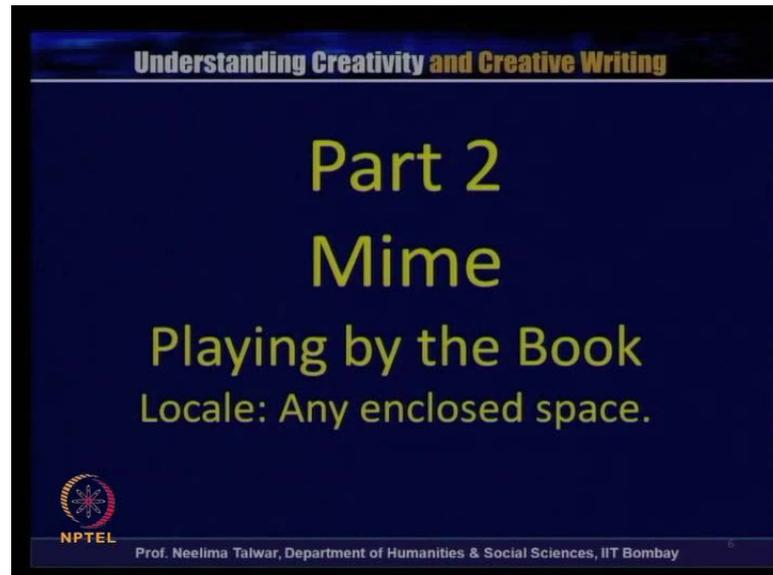
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As I said earlier, we are looking at this material from the point of view of writers. And therefore, our focus is on the writing process. To highlight the distinctive nature of drama we feel strongly that, it is necessary to understand some of the forms that are exclusively non-verbal. And mime, therefore is the most ancient and also in some ways a very powerful building block for understanding theatre performance, drama, all of these inter related terms and also processes.

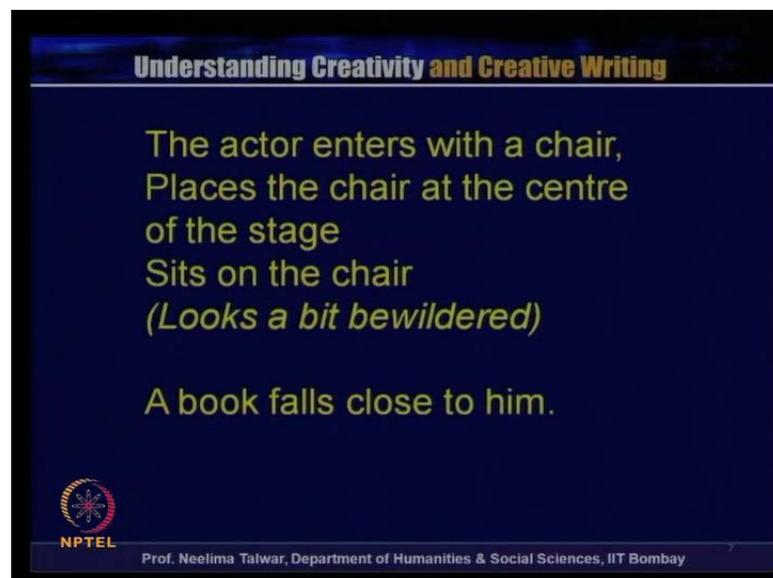
What we also would like you to remember is the fact, that even when you are performing a mime or you want to write a mime, you have to think about it as an artistic process. And also a process which provides your imagined world view, and also the manner in which you want to present it. It should be clearly edged out in the script that you write. So, let us actually start with this process in a slightly different way. Let us first imagine empty space of the stage.

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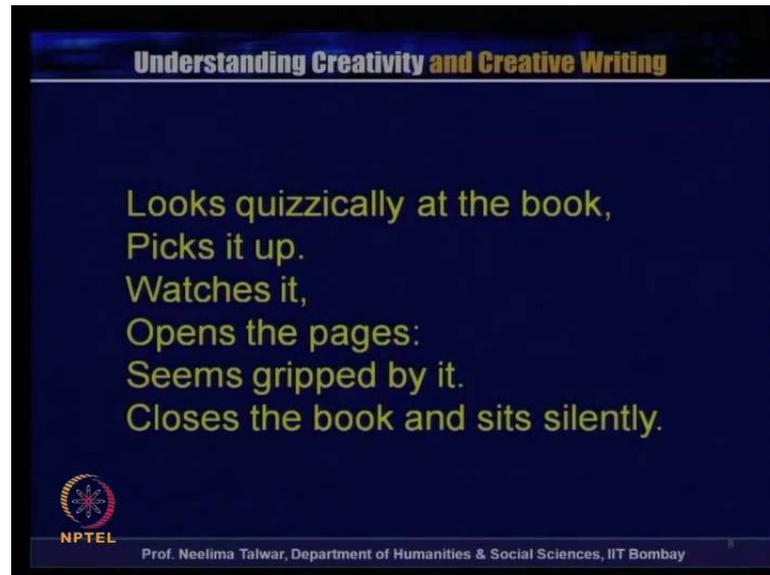
After looking at this empty space, let us move to a mime. It is titled laying by the book. And you can play it anywhere, but we would place our actors in a setting that is familiar to us.

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The actor enters with the chair, places the chair at the center of the stage and sits on the chair. Looks a bit bewildered; a books book falls close to him.

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Looks quizzically at the book, picks it up. Watches it, opens the pages seems gripped by it. Closes the book and sits silently. Picks the book, holds it tightly. Slow anger builds up. With the sudden impulsive gesture, throws the book, fade out. The audience, that is, you reads his body language and the stage setting. Silence speaks. After watching this performance, what you can do is to record your response.

And of course, the response cannot be predicted, but I suppose what it would do is to help you understand various strands of the mime. For example, the way the empty space is battled, the way the gestures and the body language is constructed very deliberately, almost modifying your sense of natural, social behavior; is sort of modifies it to achieve an artistic intent. It may also help you understand and evaluate whether this particular piece requires words or it is enough to really look at the piece and experience the point of view of the author and the point of view of the actor who is interpreting the script.

This is only part of the script right now. The next part will be placed before you towards the end of this session, but I think what we are trying to really help you understand is the physical nature of this mode of representation. So, even while writing the script, I think a playwright vividly imagines the physical gestures. I think there is a slight difference in the imaginative process of, let us say a short story writer and a playwright. There may be many other reasons as to why writer decides to write plays as a post to short stories or

fiction or poetry. But at the same time I think the physicality is much more vivid in writing plays and then imagining your characters.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

The Performative Form:
Mime

- Battling empty space
- Constructed symbolic activity
- Imitation of action

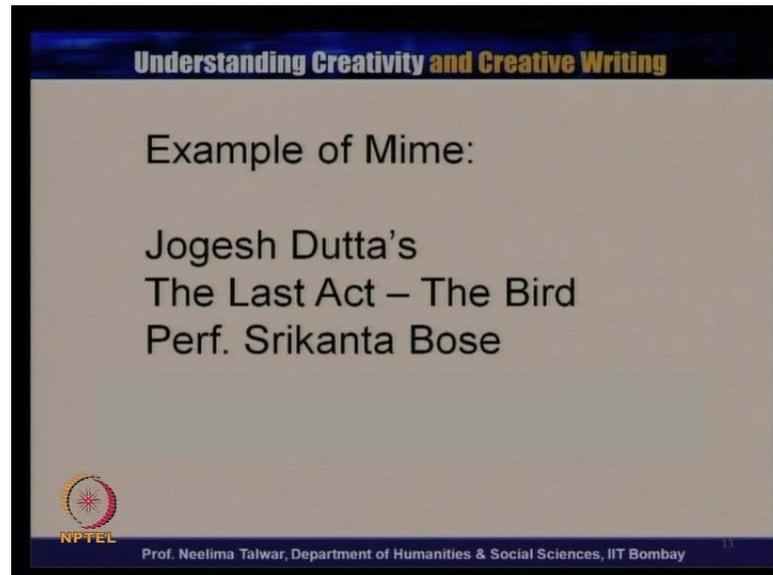
Mimesis or imitation is central to theatre.
Mimesis is deeply rooted in child's play
and forms an important part of human
behaviour.

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So then what again we have set so far are three things that theatre, mime in particular, but theatre in general. It battles empty space. And this is battled through a combination of what may seem like natural, social imitation of action. But it is modified through the symbolic intent that a playwright wishes to provide to the activity and to the incident or to the situation that is chosen by him or her in order to make a particular artistic point.

So, therefore the term mimesis, you can begin to note, is another term that is used in order to talk about imitation. We will talk about it later during our discussion of Aristotelian ideas and also their contemporary interpretations. But the notion of mimesis or imitation is central to drama. And in a way, mime helps us understand this blend of the natural activities that are observed, and their transformations that occur while performing. We would also like to constantly go back to the childhood forms of play and the state of childhood; because again you notice the kind of imitative behavior and the kind of playfulness that is link to that joys, imitations of various aspects of reality, which in a way is very close to human nature.

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In order to help you understand another example of mime, we thought it would be really nice to look at the work of a mime artist from our own country. And this is Jogesh Dutta. The excerpt that we would play is titled “The Bird”. And is part of “The last act”. Quite naturally, we would like you to actually see the full clip. And if possible, the actual performance whenever is possible, but at the same time what this particular illustrative clip points out is the nature of construction. So the bird, and the way the bird is constructed. And in mime, is the artist buddy that really has to be used in order to convey the symbolic intent also. So, although the symbolic intent will not be fully accessible through just a short clip, but when you see the full piece, I think the illustrative example will help you see the blend very clearly.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

The Performative Form:
Mime

- Jogesh Dutta – the mime artist in the video excerpt
- His childhood mimics when he was a refugee during partition
- The influence of Charlie Chaplin on his artistic view of mime

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Now Jogesh Dutta the mime artist, whose work we have presented, although is enacted by another mime artist. It is interesting to again notice that his childhood mimics were so interesting and powerful that, actually it is these mimics, which helped him decide that he wanted to be a mime artist. And these were performed when he was a child in very tiring situations as a refugee during partition. And I mention this because this is a poem that I have made earlier also. That I think watching children in every situation, you realize that there is this elate sense of self-expression or also various kinds of other cognitive activities that take place, which help us understand human nature in a very interesting, exciting way. So, it is his childhood activity, has been mimicking people which many children do. But at the same time, he began to understand the passion he felt for the form. And later on, he was influenced by Charlie Chaplin's work.

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Mime as a Form

The written script of a mime.

The artistic intent of the playwright revealed through each activity, action, and gesture. The script with performative details is written in advance.

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So the written script of a mime, therefore whether it is Jogesh Dutta or anybody else, it requires the writing process. That is, conceiving the sort of sense of what you want to say and flushing it out, so that the artistic intent of the playwright is, you know, clearly edged out. And this is revealed through each activity, each mini activity or you know smallest fragment of the activity, action and gesture. So therefore, it is written in advance.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Other Kinds of Mime: Mukabhinay

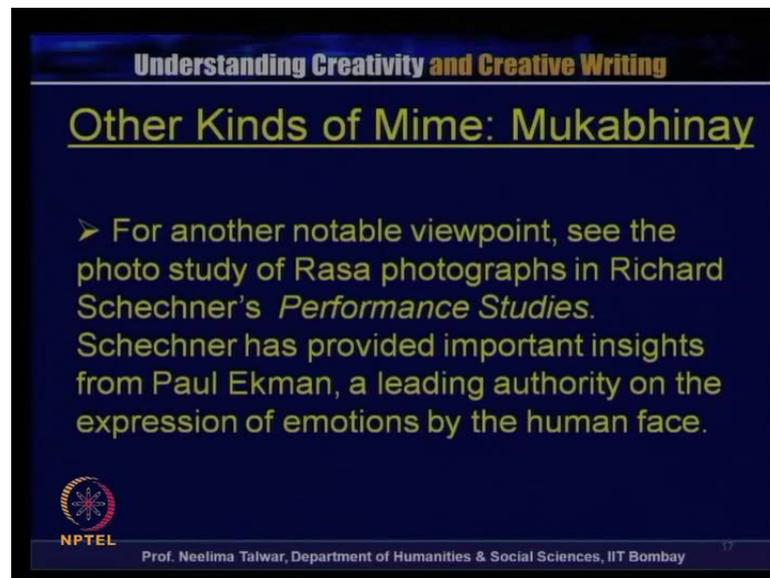
- Based on Bharat Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*
- The notion of Mukabhinay. See the website devoted to Indian Mime Theatre for photo studies of contemporary Indian practitioners
www.mimeindia.in/mukabhinay.php

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There are also examples of this form from classical Indian tradition. And Bharat Muni in 'Natyasastra' has talked about Mukhabhinay. And again if you look at this whole idea of

Mukhabhinay, it is really very interesting to note how elaborate it is. And also, there are contemporary practitioners who are giving it new dimension. So, you can dip into this website that we have mention for photo studies.

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And, another study that I, we would like you to look at is the, you know, study of the Rasa theory; which Professor Richard Schechner has presented in his book 'Performance studies'. Where, he is also contrasted it with Paul Ekman and the work of Paul Ekman on the expression of emotions by the human face. So, it is that kind of trajectory makes a very interesting dimension of how, you know, the body and the face. And you know the totality of it helps you really conceive of mime as an art form.

And as I said we are looking at mime, you know for itself, but also a sort of glimpse into an important building block of theatre activity; because even in a regular play you have the subtext, the body language which is consciously worked out. The expressions, the movements what is unstated, all of these things are worked out. So, mime gives you a very good sense of these layers of a regular play with people talking and you know people who are closer to reality, social reality as we comprehended. So, then I would say another example; may be quite sort of suitable in order to understand the greatness of this form. In the twentieth century, it has been explored with great Vega.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Mime as an Art Form

Samuel Beckett's
Act Without Words I

- A short play originally written in French and translated in English by Beckett himself.
- Reflects Beckett's artistic need for estrangement for his writing.
- Also his notion of "absurdity" and its non-verbal performance.

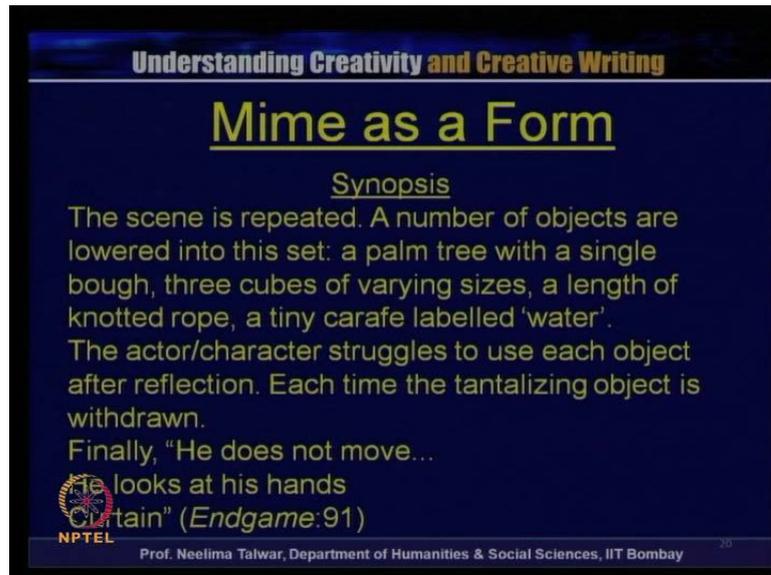
Written in 1956 and first performed in 1957 at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

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And, one of the great examples of contemporary mime is this particular piece written by Samuel Beckett titled "Act without words". This is a short play originally written in French and then translated in English by Beckett himself. And this of course, translation process reflects Beckett's artistic need for estrangement for his writing. You know, it would be very interesting for you to note that he wrote in French and then he translated his artistic work back into English, his mother tongue. And he felt that for his artistic vision and his artistic process, this distancing was important.

So, this piece was also written in French first and then translated back in to English. What it also contains is a sense or the notion of absurdity. We have talked about it earlier while discussing Albert Camus. So, you have some sense of this notion of absurdity. And Beckett was exploring it in his own different way. And also in this mime, then the sense of the absurd is non-verbally performed through, you know, play which has beginning; a sense of beginning, middle and end. It was written in 1956 and is first performed in 1957 at the Royal court theatre in London. So, I will just play the clip for you first. Not really show you the written text, we will just read the, will just place the short clip before you.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

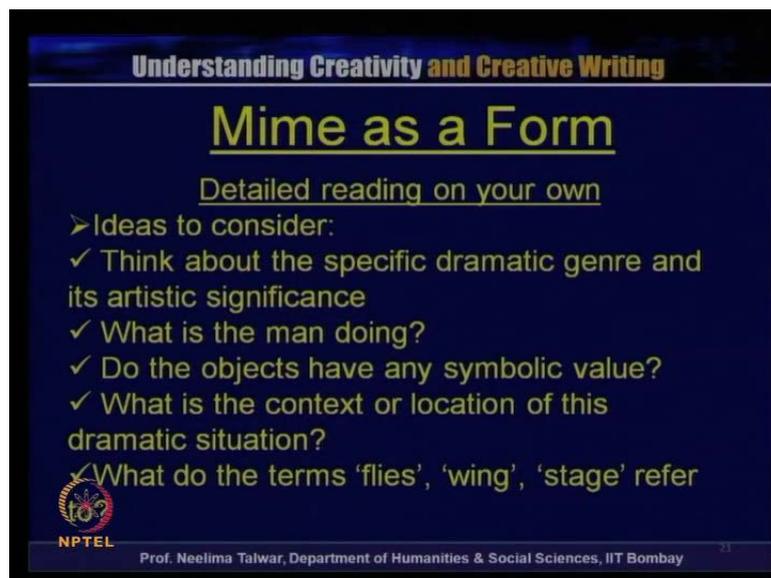
Mime as a Form

Synopsis

The scene is repeated. A number of objects are lowered into this set: a palm tree with a single bough, three cubes of varying sizes, a length of knotted rope, a tiny carafe labelled 'water'. The actor/character struggles to use each object after reflection. Each time the tantalizing object is withdrawn. Finally, "He does not move... He looks at his hands Curtain" (Endgame:91)

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Mime as a Form

Detailed reading on your own

➤ Ideas to consider:

- ✓ Think about the specific dramatic genre and its artistic significance
- ✓ What is the man doing?
- ✓ Do the objects have any symbolic value?
- ✓ What is the context or location of this dramatic situation?
- ✓ What do the terms 'flies', 'wing', 'stage' refer to?

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So now, this particular play was stocked in the elective last year. And these are some of the ideas that we considered. I like you to read this play, the script of the play carefully by yourself before responding to these questions. We understand the limitation of this process of teaching and learning. You have to do a lot of reading on your own before we can get to talk about many of these scripts. So, after you have read the script, and it is a short one, it will not really take too much of your time and it is very intensely worked out.

So, after reading it what you can do is, to consider these ideas. Think about the specific dramatic genre and its artistic significance. This is to give you some of the queries that unfolded in the class, what is the man doing? Even if it puzzles you, try to sort it out. I would say you do not really have to love every piece, every new piece that you read. But what you should perhaps try to do is, to figure out as to what the writer is trying to suggest as a... So, even if you do not really fully feel comfortable in the beginning, it may be a good thing not to feel a comfortable; because it extends your sensibility in different ways. So the question is, what is the man doing? Do the objects have any symbolic value? So, why is the palm tree lowered, what are these cubes, what is this scissors and the rope. So, you try to figure out if, you know it sort of adds up to some interconnected meaning.

“What is the context or location of this dramatic situation?” So, desert dazzling light, why?, “What do the terms ‘flies’, ‘wings’, ‘stage’ refers to?” So, even if your connection with theatre or drama as an art form is not an easy one because many times people do not read plays. Please remember that, all these theatres related elements are often provided by playwrights in the way they locate their characters, even within their sense of the space that would be used. In the way the theatre space, the empty space would be used by the players, by the performers. So, look at all these details in order to enjoy the greatness of this script and the power of this script.

When we did this work in the class, you know the students performed the play. They wanted to. This particular group was very, very keen on theatre and drama. So, they performed this script really quite well. And the character fell on this hard ground very convincingly; the main character, the protagonist. And it was very well done. You know. And after that, we try to also figure out the meaning. So, first it was read, then performed and then we try to figure out the meaning. At the end of this process, I give them a test.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Mime as a Form

Student reading of this text leading to a class test

1. Does the title of the play evoke multiple connotations? Spell these out.
2. Give the meaning of the term "mime".
3. Identify the antagonistic forces that the protagonist battles in this play.
4. Does this piece allude to any myth or anecdote? Identify accurately.

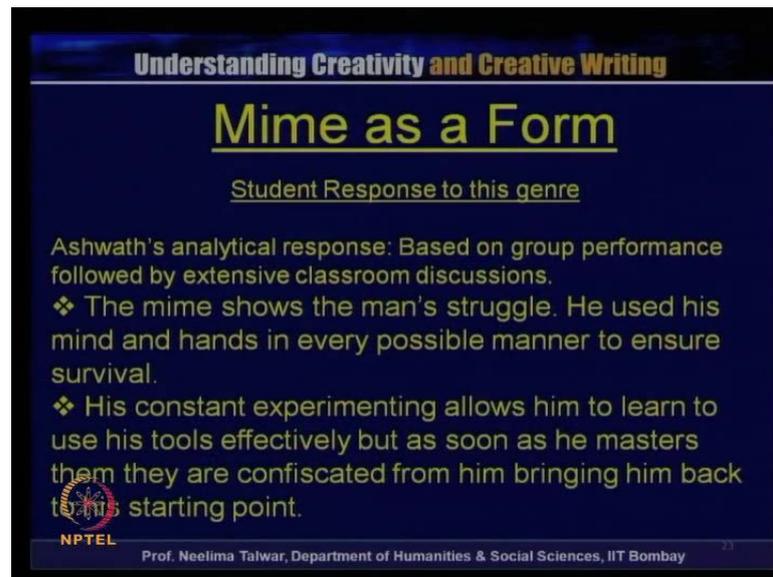
Does the resolution point towards tragic or comic tradition? Give reasons.

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So, here are the questions that were placed before the students, and I will also read the response of two students. One is an analytical response; the second one is a creative response. So, Does the title of the play evoke multiple connotations? Act without words, spell these out; Give the meaning of the term mime; identify the antagonistic forces that the protagonist battles in this play. Now as you know, in drama there is the sense of the protagonist and the antagonist. So, what are the forces antagonistic forces? Now here is only one character. So, what are the antagonistic forces that the protagonist battles in this play? Does this play allude to any myth or anecdote?

Now, allusion is a very powerful modern device. So, is there any allusion, which is not visible on surface, but it is lurking in the subtext or lurking in the way the play is constructed? Identify accurately. And finally, "Does the resolution point towards tragic or comic tradition? Give reasons". As I said, you know these students who had read plays, they were also I think performers in different ways. And they also perform this play and therefore, some of this discussion immediately may not be accessible to you. But later on when we talk about Aristotle in a Aristotelian notion of tragedy, comedy, and how it has been transformed in modern drama. I think you will be able to relate to Beckett's state on the combination of the tragic and the comic.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Mime as a Form

Student Response to this genre

Ashwath's analytical response: Based on group performance followed by extensive classroom discussions.

- ❖ The mime shows the man's struggle. He used his mind and hands in every possible manner to ensure survival.
- ❖ His constant experimenting allows him to learn to use his tools effectively but as soon as he masters them they are confiscated from him bringing him back to his starting point.

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But, let us see what Ashwath had to say in terms of an analytical response to the reading of this play. He says, and I am quoting part of his answer. The mime shows the man's struggle. He used his mind and hands in every possible manner to ensure survival. So remember, this is the dazzling light in a desert. So, this man's survival is threatened and he uses his mind and his hands in every possible way to ensure survival. This is what Ashwath tell. And then he goes on to say, "his constant experimenting allows him to learn to use his tools effectively. But as soon as he masters them, they are confiscated. So, they are withdrawn from him, bringing him back to his starting point". So, he strives, he achieves something and then he goes back to a situation, which is like going back to square one.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Mime as a Form

Student Response to this genre

Ashwath's analytical response:

- ❖ The play "Act Without Words" seems similar to the myth of Tantalus who stood in a pool of water and every time he bent to drink the water, it receded away from him.
- ❖ ...If one takes cue from the Absurdist philosophy one realizes that one is unable to find meaning in life and the universe. Now to deal with the absurd one could possibly resort to either suicide to escape the absurd or accept the absurd and continue living with it.

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He went on to point out that the play "Act without words" seems similar to the myth of Tantalus, who stood in a pool of water. And every time he bent to drink the water, it receded away from him. And finally, if one takes cue from the Absurdist philosophy, one realizes that one is unable to find meaning in life and the universe. So, there is no pre given meaning. And now to deal with the absurd, one could possibly resort to side to escape the absurd. So, the rope and the scissors or except the absurd and continue living with it. So, this is what Ashwath had to say.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Student Response to this genre

"Another Act Without Words" by Kanishk Dutt

(The stage has at the far centre, 4 identical chairs, 3 of them in a file and the fourth one in front of the centre one. All of them facing the audience. The centre back chair remains empty always.)

...(Boxing bell rings)
(Lights on the centre front chair fade in again)

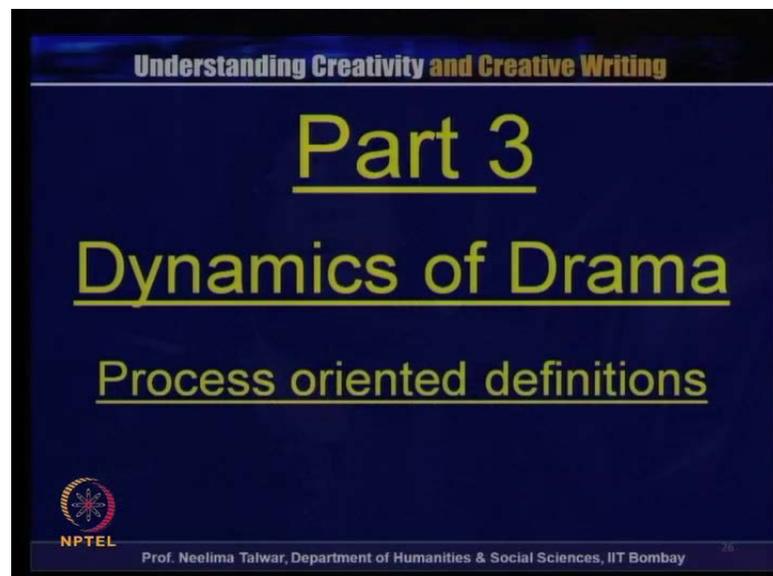
A person is sitting back on the chair, reading a book, holding it in front of him with one hand, nearly covering his entire face.

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And then later on, in the same process we allowed for, kept certain windows open for creative response to the script. And I am not; I would not be able to read the full answer here. But I would certainly like to read an excerpt written by Kanishk Dutt; a play written by Kanishk Dutt and the excerpt from that play. He titled his response as “Another act without words”. And I do want to add that, later on Kanishk convinced many of his friends to perform this play in IIT. Although I was not able to see it, but I think they rehearsed and they performed this full play.

So this is “Another act without words” and somewhat incomplete excerpt I would like to place before you. So, this is how it reads. The stage has at the far center, four identical chairs; three of them in a file and the fourth one in front of the center one, all of them facing the audience. The center back chair remains empty always. Boxing bell rings. Lights on the center front chair fade in again. A person is sitting back on the chair, reading a book, holding it in front of him with one hand nearly covering the entire face. And this goes on to build on this whole process and the point of view also becomes gradually quite clear.

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But, I will have to stop reading this excerpt here and move on to another aspect of our discussion, which is to look at the physicality of drama and also therefore the process oriented definitions. These were provided in the seventies and eighties by lot of theatre

practitioners; because this idea of the performative aspect of theatre as a post to a purely literary one; had really preoccupied a lot of academicians, artist and theatre practitioners.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Dynamics of Drama

Process oriented definitions

"Theater occurs when one or more human beings, isolated in time and/or space, present themselves to another or others in imagined act"

Drama: "It is my contention that drama is *organically* connected with theater and is, in truth, but a special form of the art of presentation"

Beckerman's *Dynamics of Drama*, Ch "Theater": 6-21

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So, now this is from Bernard Beckerman's dynamics of drama. And I quite like this definition; where he says, "Theatre occurs when one or more human beings isolated in time and or space present themselves to another or others in imagined act". And according to him, drama, "it is; he says it is organically connected with theatre and is in truth, but a special form of the art of presentation".

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Dynamics of Drama

Process oriented definition

- Beckerman considers his standpoint as a departure from the conventional use of the term drama
- Refers to Northrope Frye's definition that "drama is a mimesis of dialogue or conversation" as a conventional literary definition
- Refers also to Suzanne Langer's definition "Drama is essentially an enacted poem." Again the emphasis on the literary, verbal qualities.

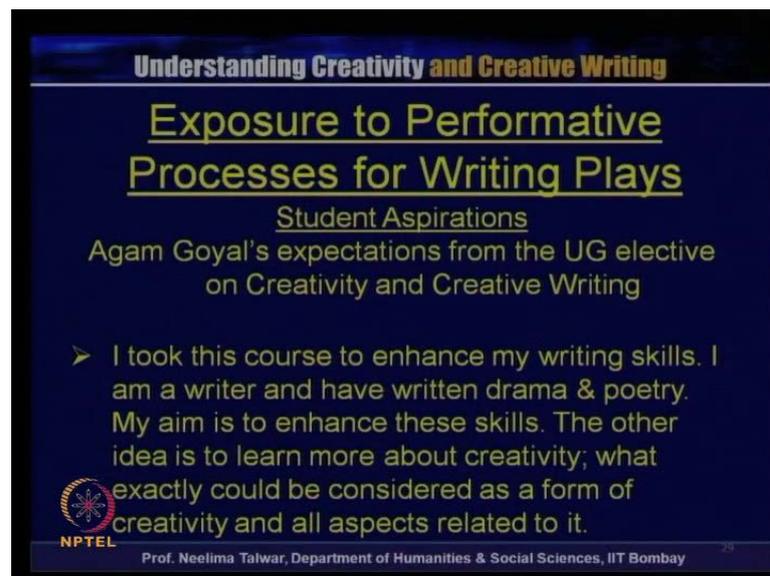
Dynamics of Drama. Chapter "Theater": 6-21

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So, even the verbal behavior is presented. And of course the non-verbal dimension we have already talked about. Beckerman considers his standpoint as a departure from the conventional use of the term drama. And in order to sort of, show the... You know his differences from the conventional approach, he quotes Northrop Frye definition. And his definition of drama is a mimesis of dialogue or conversation. The other definition that he does not seem very comfortable with comes from Suzanne Langer, who described drama is essentially an enacted poem.

So, again he really pointed out that this is much more process oriented definition in terms of the organic links between drama, in terms of the literary written script and the performative aspect; which are vital to this whole process, this whole artistic process. So, once again I would like to point out that this lecture and the approach towards drama was actually undertaken after looking at the student aspirations.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Exposure to Performative Processes for Writing Plays

Student Aspirations

Agam Goyal's expectations from the UG elective on Creativity and Creative Writing

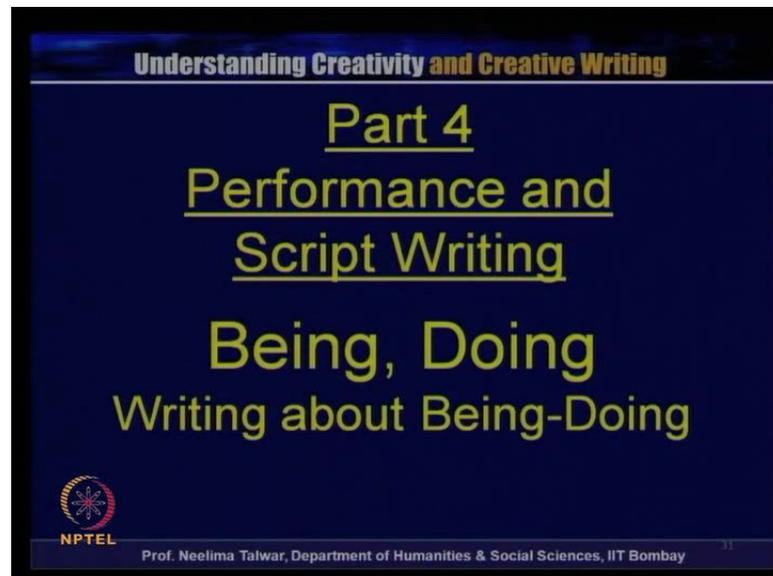
- I took this course to enhance my writing skills. I am a writer and have written drama & poetry. My aim is to enhance these skills. The other idea is to learn more about creativity; what exactly could be considered as a form of creativity and all aspects related to it.

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This is what Agam Goyal, one of the UG elective student had to say about his expectations from the creativity and creative writing course. He says, “I took this course to enhance my writing skills, I am a writer and have written drama and poetry. My aim is to enhance these skills. The other idea is to learn more about creativity; what exactly could be considered as a form of creativity and all aspects related to it. I like you to emphasize doing a play or drama and then having a discussion about it. I would also like to know more about famous modules of drama and script writing as I would like to

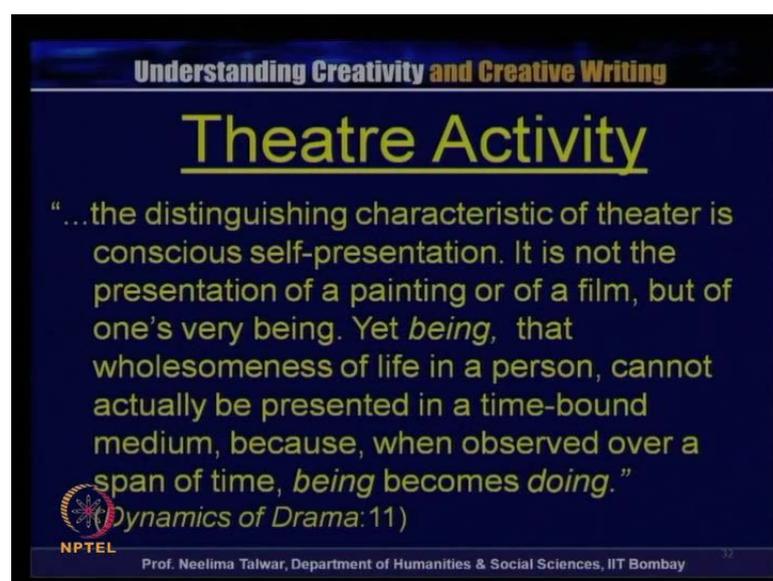
improve my script writing skills. I like to have more information about theatre groups and their functioning”. So, this is what Agam Goyal had said.

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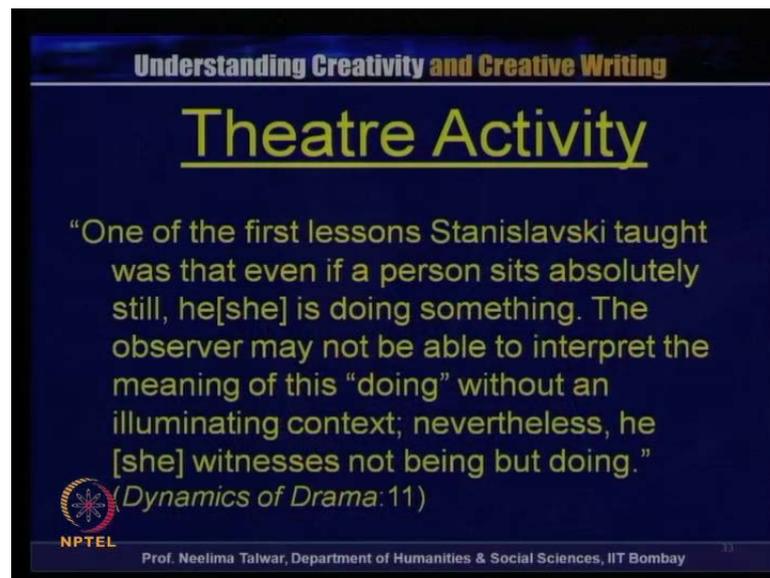
And as I said, this particular group did a lot of performative work as assignments also. Finally, I want to end this session with this notion of being and doing and performance and script writing as writing about being, doing. And let me see how this is described by Beckerman.

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He points out that the distinguishing characteristic of theatre is conscious self-presentation. If not the, it is it is not the presentation of a painting or of a film, but of one's very being. Yet being; that wholesomeness of life in a person cannot actually be presented in a time bound manner or in a time bound medium because when observed over a span of time, being becomes doing.

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The slide features a dark blue background with yellow and white text. At the top, the title "Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing" is displayed in a smaller font. Below it, the main title "Theatre Activity" is written in a large, bold, yellow font. The central text is a quote in yellow: "One of the first lessons Stanislavski taught was that even if a person sits absolutely still, he[she] is doing something. The observer may not be able to interpret the meaning of this "doing" without an illuminating context; nevertheless, he [she] witnesses not being but doing." Below the quote, the source "(Dynamics of Drama: 11)" is noted in white. In the bottom left corner, there is a small circular logo with a star-like pattern and the text "NPTEL" below it. At the very bottom, the text "Prof. Neelima Talwar, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT Bombay" is written in a small white font.

So, being becomes doing. And then he again quotes from Stanislavski, one of the great practitioners of the art of acting. And also, he has written very important studies. We will talk about it if necessary, later on. So he says that, "one of the first lessons Stanislavski thought was that, even if a person sits absolutely still, he or she is doing something. And he is talking about straight sitting. The observer may not be able to interpret the meaning of this doing without an illuminating context; nevertheless he or she witnesses not being, but doing. "Anyhow that was a profound statement and it again helps us to understand the nature of theatre.

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Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Alone & Together

Mime: Part II
VOICES

The actor enters the empty space he had left temporarily.
He has a sheaf of papers and a large pencil in his hand.
Moves with a resolute stride.
Sits on the lone chair. Deep in thought.

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Finally, I would end with this second part of the mime “Alone and together”. It subtitled, “Voices”. The actor enters the empty space he had left temporarily. He has a sheaf of papers and a large pencil in his hand. Moves with resolute stride, sits on the lone chair, deep in thought.

(Refer Slide Time: 35:04)

Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing

Alone & Together

The pencil moves on the page.
He begins to hum... (*the humming energises him enough to stand up with paper and pencil.*)
He begins to shout with rising crescendo: the voice radiating in different directions.
Ending with a triumphant shout.

Curtain

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The pencil moves on the page. He begins to hum. The humming energises him enough to stand up with paper and pencil. He begins to shout with the rising crescendo. The voice is radiating in different directions. Ending with the triumphant shout; curtain.

After watching this performance, let me say the lecture ends and the discussion begins. And I hope you will talk to each other. And here is the list of the material we have referred to.

Thank you very much.