

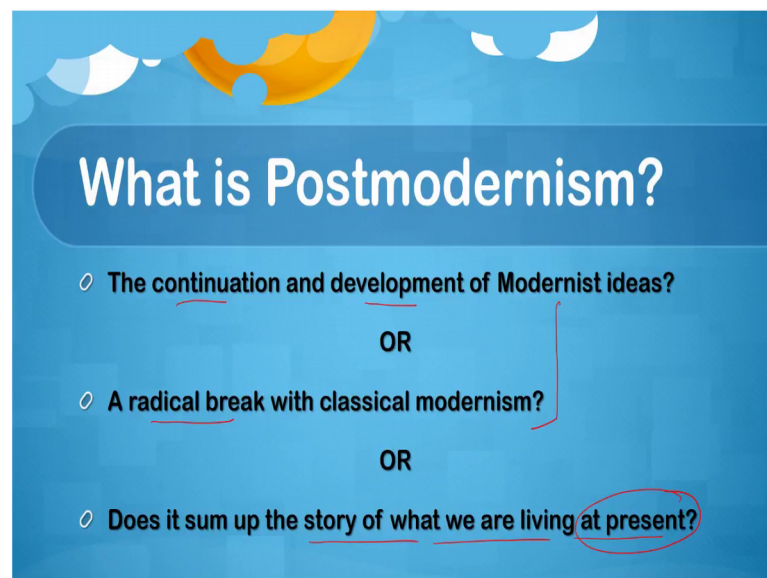
Postmodernism in Literature
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Lecture-1a
Introduction (continued)

Good morning everyone; let me welcome you to yet another session of the NPTEL course entitled postmodernism in literature. In the first session we have taken a look at how difficult the category of postmodern is it ranges from perhaps an inverted urinal present as an art form by Marcel Duchamp, to some of the novels of Kurt Vonnegut and a related on works which entirely challenge the idea of narration the idea of author and the very conception of novel and text itself.

So, where these ambiguities be continued to discuss the idea of post modernism and at the outset of this lecture it is very important to state that there are absolutely no definite definition for this term. Now, this term postmodernism this defies definitions and rest is all kinds of categorization and classifications.

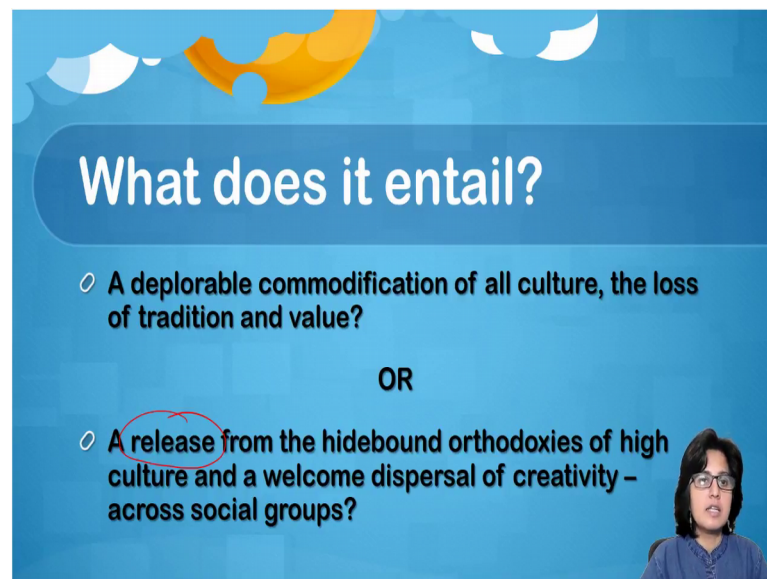
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And never the less it is very important for us to address this question what postmodernism is for the purpose of this course? Whether postmodernism is a continuation and development of modernist ideas or is it a radical break with classical modernism is the question that continues to be asked in debate.

There are also set of other researchers and critics who are also of the opinion that postmodernism is perhaps the only term which could be used to talk about the story of what we are living at present. Whether this is a theoretical formulation in the absence as a radical break or a continuation from the postmodernism idea from the modernist ideas or is it just about the story of the present is something that we would continue to figure as and when this course progress.

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What does it entail?

- A deplorable commodification of all culture, the loss of tradition and value?

OR

- A release from the hidebound orthodoxies of high culture and a welcome dispersal of creativity – across social groups?

And again talking about the various forms of manifestations of postmodernism and what it entails to be postmodernist whether that whether this is a deplorable commodification of all culture; the loss of tradition and value or.

Whether this is on the other hand a release from the hidebound orthodoxies of high culture and a welcome dispersal of creativity which includes all social groups which defines all kinds of marginality which entirely questions the idea of the center and includes and celebrates inclusion and these are also certain things that we would perhaps continue to figure out.

And at the same time this is there is also this confusion about post modernism is something entirely negative, something entirely deplorable or does it also entail certain celebratory aspects which would also characterize a many things about the contemporary ways of living.

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Periodization?

- When did it begin?
- Post-War developments in advanced media societies and capitalist economies
- Has it already ended? *Habermas*
- Are we now living in the Postmodern Age or not??
- Is it limited to a particular historical period alone?
- Tristram Shandy, Nietzsche – *already* Postmodern? *18th - 19th - 20th*

And as and when we continue to situate this movement this idea to and this trajectory of the contemporary known as postmodernism it is important for us to answer this question right at the outset when did postmodernism begin.

There are no particular dates that we can give that is no particular decade; there is no definite starting point for this movement known as postmodernism. But; however, as we have mentioned right in the beginning of this course perhaps post war developments in general the post world war developments in general particularly in advanced media societies and capitalist economies could be characterized as the starting point of postmodernism.

When we talk about post war we particularly have in mind the range of events the range of unfortunate events that followed the second world war we may particularly refer to the existential dilution created by the very unfortunate events later to holocaust and the and then a number of terrorist and related activities which are followed or the many unfortunate events which dominated the twentieth century could be considered as part of this post war development and the post war existential angst.

And to answer the question whether this period has already ended we may also need to defer to some of the recent works such as what was postmodernism by Brian McHale where he argues that the postmodern period has already ended.

So, whether this period began which began in the post war decade in the 1950s and 1960s whether this is already ended by the 1990s continues to be a matter of debate and contest. And there are also number of theorists who ask this question whether we are now living in the post modern age or not.

If the contemporary is not post modern then is it post modern there are these multiple questions that one also needs to negotiate as and when we talk about post modernism in various facets of in different disciplines in diverse fields of study. And also there are certain philosophers such as Habermas who hold the opinion that the project of modernity has not been fulfilled yet.

So, he thinks that we are we have too soon relinquish the elements of modernity and has entered post modernity the phase of post modernism too soon before even completing the original project of modernity. So, there are these questions are also embedded within this various philosophical concerns whether within these various articulations about the doubts regarding the very existence of postmodernism and the very character of postmodernism.

And finally, to answer this question whether postmodernism is limited to a particular historical period. And to answer this we may also have to take a look at some of the precursors some of the texts and authors and sites which have been identified as precursors to this moment to this postmodern moment. For example, there is this 18th century text authored by Lauren Sterne which has also been widely celebrate as the first post modern novel in English.

And this text Tristram Shandy it has got a number of post modern elements built into it including the ideas of meta fiction and about non-linear the celebration of non-linear narration etcetera. And we also have the philosopher Nietzsche Fredrick Nietzsche who had celebrated the death of God and also leading to many articulations about the death of the author at a later point. And we know that these texts have been identified as already post modern though they do not historically and chronologically belong to the 20th century belong to the post modern period.

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So, having said that it is important to identify certain historical and cultural markers to situate this ambiguous period to in order to be able to identify certain ways in which the period could be contained within a particular scope within a particular historical conventions and paradigms.

So, the first one as we have already spoken about it is a post war phenomenon and it is also post modernism post in the sense after modernism. This was also the period when the cold war culture was dominating and we all know that it comes to an end only towards the it only by the 1990s; this was also the period of neoliberalism and the post 1960s were also written with by a number of complexities regarding conflicts, regarding nationalist movements, regarding the rise and fall of dictatorships, the various forms of nationalism the various forms of political articulations etcetera.

And this was also the period of civil rights movements emerging in different parts of the world. And we also know that this twentieth century particularly to a from the 1970s onwards we witness an increasing dominance of the age of computers, age of cyber punk and also it was the age of late capitalist culture as one particular theorist Jameson has very succinctly put it that post modernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism.

And this was also very; obviously, the era of a globalization and we also have witnessed that in spite of this over reigning influence of technology digitization and all kinds of

scientific progress and growth, we have also witnessed a number of unpredictable incidences of terrorism as well.

So, the historical cultural markers of post modernism also indicates that this is a plethora of events, this is not just about a number of new things happening; it is also about a number of unfortunate and a number of unprecedented things happening within history society culture literature art and almost everything that concerns modern life.

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And accordingly when we continue to situate this term and we need to give a lot of emphasis to this the this term post which also means after and since the term since the term post modernism also laterally means after modernism we cannot really ignore the kind of influence that modernism has perhaps had on the figurations and on the trajectory and on the trajectories leading to the post modern moment.

So, as we have note multiple times by now; this is perhaps a shift from modernity and perhaps this also a way in which the post modern phase contest the number of privileges attributed by modernity to the general and the universal in matters of truth, beauty and goodness.

So, these three aspects were seen as very general universal features in the previous decades. But now we know that these are all contested matters these are all matters

which cannot be narrowed down to a single definition on within or even within a single framework.

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Identifies itself by something it isn't

The Post' in Postmodernism

Postmodernism: A Graphic Guide

- Result? ✓
- Aftermath? ✓
- Afterbirth? ✓
- Development? ✓
- Denial? ✓
- Rejection? ✓

- A confusion of meaning stemming from two riddles
- Resists and obscures the sense of modernism ✓
- Implies a complete knowledge of the modern which has been surpassed by a new age

Appiah's 1991 essay

So, we continue to situate the realms of the post in post modernism and also its useful to remember that Antony Appiah has also written a 1991 essay entitled the is the post in post colonial the same as the post in post modernism. So, there are number of debates discussions about the idea of the post, about the idea of the that the meaning of the post in post modernism. And the paradoxical fact also remains that since this is after modernism, since post modernism is technically after modernism; it also tries to identify itself by something it is not.

So, there was an inherent paradox even in the in the nomenclature post modernism and drawing certain excerpts from this very influential and helpful book graphic guide which also is a beginners guide to post modernism. And this also talks about the various aspects of post modernism through a number of graphic representations; it gives a genealogy of the post modern period beginning from the late romantic and the early modernist period onwards.

And drawing from some of the tenets expressed in post modernism a graphic guide they ask this a question about whether the post in post modernism means a result of modernism or is it the aftermath of modernism or is it the after birth or developments after or is it a complete denial or a rejection of modernism. And in fact, the meaning of

the term post modernism is also situated within this confusion and this transition from modernism to post modernism.

Many way we can also say that the idea of post modernism also resists and obscures the sense of modernism. And also to sum up in terms of the various sorts of definitions which has been circulating and the commentaries which are available we can also say that the term post modernism implies a complete knowledge of the modern which has been surpassed by a new age.

So, there is absolutely no way in which we can cut out the aspects of modernism when we try to understand what post modernism is.

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Only certain often-discussed tendencies, not absolutes

Attempts to define

Modernism	Postmodernism
- Fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as existential crisis, <u>a problem to be solved</u> - Epistemological dominant <i>↓ knowledge</i>	- This <u>chaos is inevitable</u>, the only recourse is to play with the chaos - Concerned with questions of ontology <i>↓ being</i>

And incidentally this is also one of the most convenient and easiest frameworks within post modernism has been attempted to define. And here we talk about some of the aspects which differentiates post modernism from modernism. And here we are only talking about certain often discussed tendencies and this is not an absolute comprehensive list.

And a number of theorists as the as a convenient method when they begin to define and when they begin to delimit the category of post modernism they have begun by talking about what modernism is and then moving across and moving away from modernism towards the towards more post modern features.

And here we begin to see that in the modernist period, there was a certain scents of lament over the fragmentation of the world. Because when we talk about the socio political and historical aspects after the first world war which was also the modernist period, the high modernist period things were not really getting better they were also very disillusioned by the way in which the war had impacted the world and it also took a lot of time for them to recover from whatever more have inflicted upon various societies of the world there.

So, it also had led to sort of a breakdown of the existential question. And there was a major crisis there was also a problem to be solved even during the modernist period, but in the post modernist period that the problems remain pretty much the same. Perhaps the problems have even escalated to a different level, but the post modernist argue that this chaos is inevitable and the only recourse is to play with the chaos rather than attempting to solve it.

So, from an attempt to solve this crisis we have moved on to a paradigm where it is to have such crisis and whether where it is to humorously talk these crisis. And also perhaps just ignore and play with this chaos; so, in that sense in the modernist sense there is a more focus in the modernist paradigm for epistemological dominant and in their which also means that it is about the idea of knowledge, but in the post modern period its more about ontology it is about being.

So, there is a transition from a knowledge based system to a more being based system which makes all the more difference in subjectivities and ideas of celebrating fragmentations so, on and so, forth.

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Attempts to define

Modernism	Postmodernism
<i>Yeats centre cannot hold things fall apart</i> Fragmented view of human subjectivity and history as something to be lamented and mourned as a loss Art can provide unity, coherence and meaning in modern life	Celebrates fragmentation and incoherence. Embraces the possibility that the world may be meaningless Does <u>not</u> pretend or assert that art can make meaning

And while modernism lamented the fact that human subjectivity and history were changing. And it is not going to be the same anymore we find post modernism completely celebrating this incoherence and this is breakdown of identity and this entire loss of subjectivity.

So, we have Yeats in the modernist period talking about how the centre cannot hold and things fall apart. So, there is a very pronounced sense of loss and they are lamenting the fact that the center cannot hold any more. But in the post modernist period we find that there is an absolute celebration of this idea of fragmentation and the fact that the this need not be mourned anymore at all.

And during the post during the modernist period the modern artist believed that art can provide unity, art could be perhaps the solace perhaps the artist is the one who is about to solve all these problems. But post modernism has no pretensions of that sort they do not believe that artist can resolve anything. In fact, some of the post modernist also believe the artist is so, important that he cannot even take care of his or her own literary or cultural artistic productions.

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Attempts to define

Modernism	Postmodernism
◦ Cultivated <u>austerity</u>	◦ Interested in <u>pleasure</u>
◦ <u>Reality</u> through individual consciousness	◦ Realism is just an incoherent and deluding notion
◦ Struggle for <u>wholeness and unity</u>	◦ Posits a radical indeterminacy

And in the modernist period we also have an element of cultivated austerity leading to a lot of seriousness and a lot of gravity to whatever they are trying to produce. But post modernism is about having a lot of deliberate amount of pleasure in art forms in writings so, on and so, forth. And in the modernist period there is a focus on reality through individual consciousness.

But in the post modern period we understand that realism is only a an incoherent and deluding notion there is absolutely no attempt to portray reality. Because the post modern adhere is that the post modern writers also believe that reality cannot be captured perhaps they are only copies perhaps they are only simulations and there is absolutely a futile attempt to try and capture any forms of reality in and translate it into art forms.

And in the modernist period keeping in tune with whatever they believed in then we see a continuous struggle for wholeness and for unity. But post modernism on the other hand it for such a radical indeterminacy and there is no attempt, there are no attempts being made to create anything whole or to or to even build a more coherent form of art or coherent form of cultural production.

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And on the whole when we talk about when we talk about post modernism as a departure from modernism; it is also important to reiterate that it is not really about anti modernism; it is not an outright rejection of modernism either and we cannot really say whether this is actually a continuation.

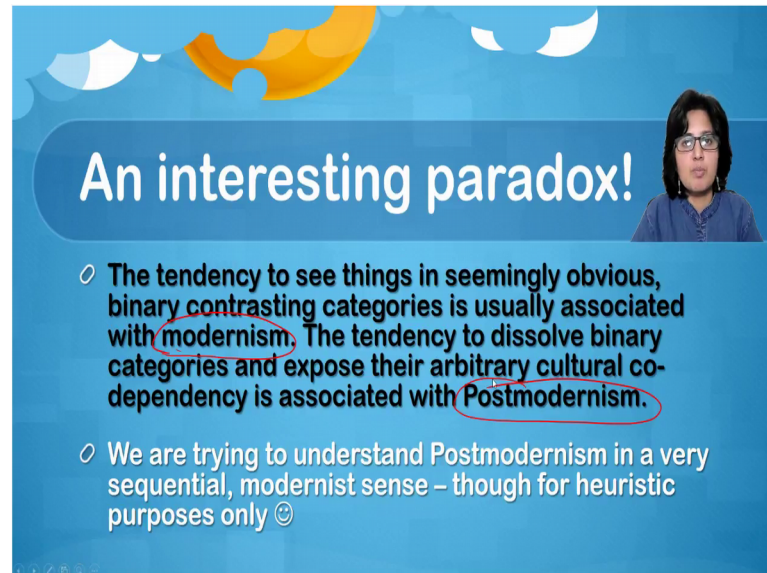
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But because there are number of works have also discussed this aspects of transition ; the nature of the precise relation between the modernist and the post modernist element. And they have not yet been able to reach a consensus about whether this is a transition or a

rejection or even an anti thesis. But never the less modernism gives us a framework to access post modernism in whichever form whether as a continuation.

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An interesting paradox!

- The tendency to see things in seemingly obvious, binary contrasting categories is usually associated with modernism. The tendency to dissolve binary categories and expose their arbitrary cultural co-dependency is associated with Postmodernism.
- We are trying to understand Postmodernism in a very sequential, modernist sense – though for heuristic purposes only 😊

Or even as a departure from the dominant modernist ideas and here we also note a very interesting paradox. Even the tendency to see things in seemingly obvious binary contrasting categories; it is usually associated with modernism it is a very very modernist system of thinking and system of knowing; it is a very epistemological thing. And this tendency to dissolve binary categories and expose their arbitrary cultural codependency is associated with post modernism.

So in fact, there are these two contrasting elements modernism and post modernism. And through all of these attempts to make sense of post modernism to give a sense of meaning to post modernism and attribute certain frameworks and try to delimit the post modernism as a category in. In fact, is a very modernist trend and in other words it (Refer Time: 18:38) scores also what we are trying to do is to understand post modernism in a very sequential and modernist sense.

And though this though this is only for heuristic purposes only for the purposes of learning and only for the purposes of framing particular systems of thought and systems of knowledge within frameworks; we understand that there is an interesting and inherent paradox even in the way any course or any learning experience related to post modernism itself is framed.

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The slide features a blue background with a white title bar at the top containing the text "General characteristics". To the right of the title is a small video inset of a woman with dark hair and glasses. The main content area contains two columns of bulleted points, each preceded by a small circle. The text is white, and there are several handwritten red annotations. In the top left corner, there is a red circular diagram with the words "book", "fiction", and "meta-fiction" written around it. The first column lists: "Reflexivity, Metafiction", "Self-referentiality", "Irony, Black humour", "Parody, Playfulness", and "Instability of meaning". The second column lists: "Rupture with traditions", "Pastiche (mixing genres)", "Intertextuality", "Hybridity", and "Mixing the conventions of high and popular art". Handwritten red notes include "theory" next to "Reflexivity, Metafiction", "mixing" next to "Pastiche", and a list of "Biography fiction", "diction", "pastiche", and "examination paper" next to "Hybridity".

General characteristics

- Reflexivity, Metafiction
- Self-referentiality
- Irony, Black humour
- Parody, Playfulness
- Instability of meaning
- Rupture with traditions
- Pastiche (mixing genres)
- Intertextuality
- Hybridity
- Mixing the conventions of high and popular art

So, moving on if we talk about the general characteristics of post modernism; there are number of characteristics which could be listed and some of them we can also note that its continuation from the modernist period. We have reflexivity and metafiction, self referentiality irony and black humor parody and playfulness instability of meaning; rupture with traditions pastiche which also means mixing of genres intertextuality hybridity and also the and also mixing the conventions of high and popular art.

If we talk about some of these some of these items in detail for example, self reflexivity, metafiction and self referentiality. It is about a way in which we take the case of novel the telling becomes more important more conspicuous than the tale itself. And also we notice that technically the element of minuses which forms the bases of all forms of art perhaps in a conventional way it is weakened we do not find the element of minuses being privileged over the other forms in a self reflexive metafictional form of narration.

And it is also about writing for example, in a book in a book structure for example, if this is a novel that we have in mind the novel will be talking about the process of writing; let us say another book and we will also have a number of analysis happening about the book. This is within the same novel and these analysis interestingly are not provided by the reader, but by the author himself.

So, here we find a book within the book and this book written within the book is also discussed and analyzed. We find a subtle way in which the distinction between fiction

and literary criticism also being broken down over here. So, this is one of the ways in which the post modern texts challenged the idea of narration the idea of conventional forms of narration and the various attributes of art.

And one of the examples of one of this kind of work would be Stephen King's ; Stephen King's novel *Misery* which engages with the metafiction through the genre of horror. And when we talk about hybridity again that is another interesting attribute to post modern text; if we take an example of Julian Barnes novel *Flaubert's parrot*, we find that within the space of the novel a number of things are being made being used.

For example, in terms of hybridity we have Julian Barnes novel talking about biography using excerpts from dictionary. There is also; obviously, elements of fiction, there is pastiche, there is also interestingly an examination paper which also forms partly the narrative technique and also contributes to the telling of the novel.

So, altogether when we look at the general characteristics of post modern text we understand that there is no sense which conventional sense of a beginning middle or an end one could begin anywhere. And also perhaps maybe it is more less like some of the contemporary music videos where it does not really matter where the video begins there is no linear connection, it is not coherently presented it is all perhaps a play of pastiche mixing of genres; no matter where you begin and no matter in which way you mix the video, it pretty much give the same result.

So, this sort of a play when we find it in a in a medium of a text; it becomes all the more interesting we find that in the number of cultural productions and popular culture of the contemporary we can find almost all of these elements being getting used consciously, unconsciously deliberately and even quite inadvertently.

And about irony and black humor in fact, conventionally as it is related to death would be spoken with a lot of gravity a lot of seriousness it is not something to joke about. But we find it in a number of text produced after the second world war given that the world war itself had given rise to a number of irrational political events including the holocaust.

We find some novelist using the technique of irony and black humor to talk about even death in a very irreferential manner. For example, we have certain novels like by Joseph Heller, *Tom Joad* (Refer Time: 24:06) and Kurt Vonnegut in and also one short story by

(Refer Time: 24:12) the school where he talks about the ironic death of plants animals and people connected to the children who sit in one class.

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General characteristics

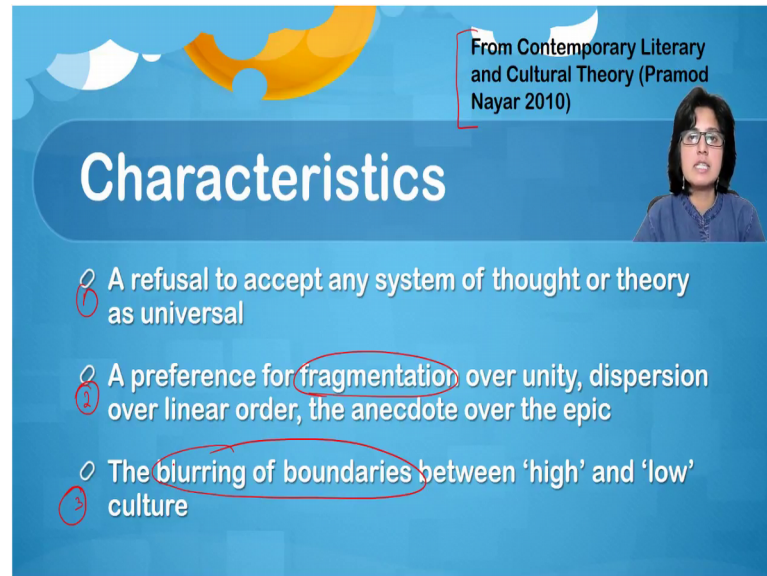
- Treats serious subjects as jokes
- No organizing principle in a chaotic world - art or literature or in life
- Distrust of ideologies, of narrator/author, of modern assumptions about history, identity, culture
- ✗

So, where the post modernist generally they treat very serious subjects as jokes much to the shock of certain contemporary readers and much to the alarm of the conventional moral fabric and the conventional ways in which particular emotions and particular attributes are generally being dealt with.

So, all together in the post modern period we can say that there is no organizing principle in this chaotic world and there is no attempt to make a make a coherent organizing principle either. And there is also general distrust of ideologies and also narrator and author of modern assumptions about history identity culture.

Pretty much there is nothing much that the post modern text or the post modern author or the post modern site relies upon everything is viewed with a lot of distrust and everything is seen as futile and totally meaningless and not contributing to the meaning making process of culture art or anything in general.

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From Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory (Pramod Nayar 2010)

Characteristics

- 1 A refusal to accept any system of thought or theory as universal
- 2 A preference for fragmentation over unity, dispersion over linear order, the anecdote over the epic
- 3 The blurring of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture

In order to windup this discussion about the characteristics of post modern art, the characteristics of post modernism; I use certain excerpts from Promod Nayar's interesting work from contemporary literary and cultural theory published in 2010; where he offers a very interesting sum up of the characteristic of post modernism. The post modernism first of all is a refusal to accept any system of thought or theory as universal.

It focuses on the particular focuses on the on the local rather than the universal. And secondly, there is a preference for fragmentation over unity dispersion over linear order the anecdote over the epic. So, thirdly we have the blurring of boundaries between high and low culture as we have seen in the introductory session itself, there is absolutely no distinction between an art form presented in the form of a inverted urinal or a digital form of art or even the works of Shakespeare everything is seen with equal preference or with equal irreverence.

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Characteristics

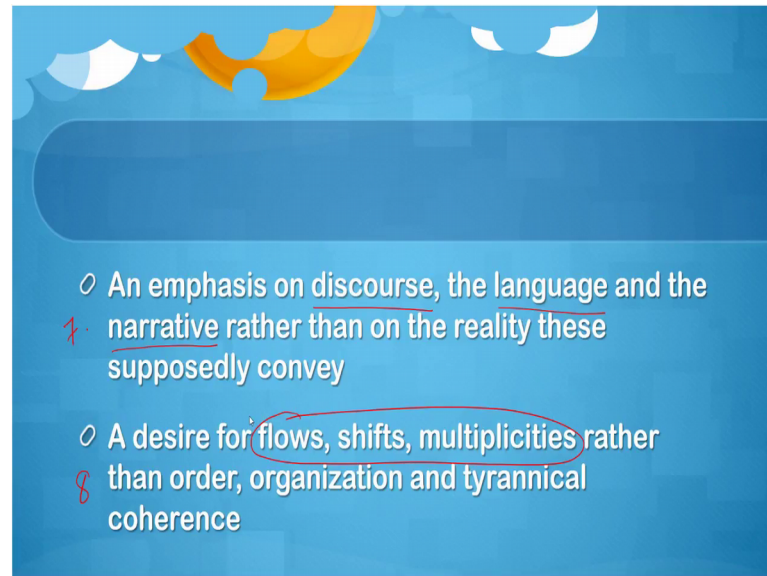
- 4 A sense of playfulness, contingency and self-reflexivity
- 5 An interest in the surface, the image and the copy rather than in the depth, the reality and the original
- 6 A fascination with the strategies of representation rather than the 'truth' of/behind the representation

And fourthly there is a sense with playfulness a contingency and self reflexivity associated with anything considered post modern. And fifthly there is an interest in the surface the image and the copy rather than in the depth in the reality and the original.

So, very often we can find that the surface is being the depth is being compromised which is presenting the surface reality for image and the copy for the original and so, much so, that after a while it becomes almost irrelevant and entirely a nonsensical to even try to distinguish between the copy and the original between the image and the reality or whether this is actually something at the surface level or something which has got a deeper meaning.

And sixthly there is a fascination with the strategies of representation rather than the truth of or behind the representation truth very contested. And in the post modern period in very typical sense truth becomes absolutely unimportant as well it is not important to know whether something is the truth or not it is the even the pursuit of this sort of the single truth the single idea of meaning everything becomes absolutely a meaningless affair itself.

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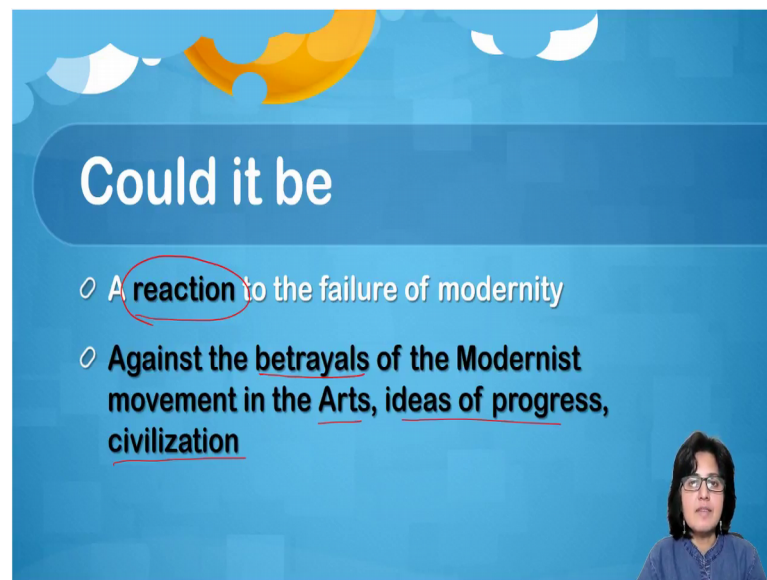


And next there is an emphasis on discourse, the language and the narrative than on the reality they supposedly convey.

So, even during our discussions we will find that is a lot of way in which our critical analysis would also engage with discourse language and the narrative rather than on the content or the ways in which the text represents reality. Here we are again reiterate the fact that minuses as a as a bases of narration; as the basis of representation of literary and artistic text, it seizes to play any sort of a role. And there is a desire for flows, shifts and multiplicities rather than order organization and tyrannical coherence.

So, we find that there is a certain way in which the post modern narration the post modern text and the post modern sites; they resist all kinds of attempts to linear order any kind of structural organization ah; never the less as we mentioned before as part of the course we do try to bring in a sense of order organization and at least a marginal kind of coherence in order to make sense of this entire phenomenon known as post modernism.

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Could it be

- A reaction to the failure of modernity
- Against the betrayals of the Modernist movement in the Arts, ideas of progress, civilization

So, as and when I wind up this lecture I also leave you with this question whether post modernism could it be a reaction to the failure of modernity. Because the modernity; the phase of modernism though it promised beginning at the beginning of the project, it failed to deliver a number of these things. And particularly with the post world war events and also about the various forms in which the political economies the consumerist culture, the human nature itself was undergoing a radical change in the 1960s.

And thereafter we do see a sense of the failure of modernity creeping in and leaving you with this question whether post modernism is a reaction to this failure of modernity. Is it a reaction against the betrayals of the modernist movement in the arts, ideas of progress and civilization. We do not know whether we would try to whether we would be able to find a definite answer to this question.

But definitely this question will help us engage with post modernism in the context of modernity; in the way which departs from modernism and also to be able to provide a framework for talking about arts, ideas of progress and civilization in the post modern age.

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