Research Innovator

ISSN 2395 – 4744 (Print); 2348 – 7674 (Online)

A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed

Multidisciplinary International Research Journal

Volume III   Issue I: February – 2016

Editor-In-Chief

Prof. K.N. Shelke

Head, Department of English,
Barns College of Arts, Science & Commerce, New Panvel (M.S.) India

Editorial Board

Advisory Board

Research Innovator is peer-reviewed refereed and indexed multidisciplinary international research journal. It is published bi-monthly in both online and print form. The Research Innovator aims to provide a much-needed forum to the researchers who believe that research can transform the world in positive manner and make it habitable to all irrespective of their social, national, cultural, religious or racial background.

With this aim Research Innovator, Multidisciplinary International Research Journal (RIMIRJ) welcomes research articles from the areas like Literatures in English, Hindi and Marathi, literary translations in English from different languages of the world, arts, education, social sciences, cultural studies, pure and applied Sciences, and trade and commerce. The space will also be provided for book reviews, interviews, commentaries, poems and short fiction.

-:Subscription:-

	Indian Individual / Institution	Foreign Individual / Institution
Single Copy	₹ 600	$40
Annual	₹ 3000	$200
Three Years	₹ 8000	$550

-:Contact:-

Prof. K.N. Shelke

Flat No. 01,
Nirman Sagar Coop. Housing Society,
Thana Naka, Panvel, Navi Mumbai. (MS), India. 410206.knshelke@yahoo.in

Cell: +91-7588058508

Research Innovator

A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Volume III   Issue I: February – 2016

CONTENTS

Postmodernist Themes and Techniques in Cinema

Zinat Aboli

Assistant Professor, Bachelors of Mass Media Department, Usha Pravin Gandhi College of Management, Mumbai, (M.S.) India

Abstract

'In Modernism, reality is used to validate media. In Postmodernism, the media validate reality. If you don't believe this, just think how many times you have described some real event as being 'just like a movie.'- Brad Holland.

Postmodernism is a late-20th-century movement in the arts, architecture, and criticism that was a departure from modernism. Postmodernism emerged in a time not defined by war or revolution but rather by media culture. Despite being a highly debated and perplexing descriptive term, postmodernism has already brought much to cinema and its academic study. Intertextuality, self-reflexivity, hyper-reality, non-linear narrative and pastiche are the most commonly identified characteristics of postmodern cinema. These features may be found in a film's form, story, technical vocabulary, casting, mise-en-scène, or some combination of these. This paper briefly attempts to explore some themes and techniques in postmodernist films.

Key Words: Postmodernism, Cinema, intertexuality, pastiche

Postmodernism cannot be understood without reference to modernism. Postmodernism is a late-20th-century movement in the arts, architecture, and criticism that was a departure from modernism. Postmodernism is a complex paradigm of different philosophies and artistic styles. The movement emerged as a reaction to high modernism. Modernism relates to master and meta-narratives of history of a teleological nature. Postmodernism on the other hand attempts to subvert and differ from the preoccupations of modernism. Postmodernism includes sceptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy, history, economics, architecture, fiction, and literary criticism. It is often associated with deconstruction and post-structuralism.

Postmodernism emerged in a time not defined by war or revolution but rather by media culture. It came to the fore when media began to pervasively influence human life through images from film, television and advertising. This influence led to a loss of distinction between the real and the imagined, giving rise to a culture of hyper-reality. Postmodernism is interested in contradiction, fragmentation, and instability. It is often focused on the destruction of hierarchies and boundaries. Postmodernism takes a deeply subjective view of the world and identity and art, positing that an endless process of signification and signs is where any "meaning" lies.

The term "postmodernism" is a product of the late-20th century and was first used in psychology in 1979 by Jean-Francois Lyotard. In general, it is used to explain the movement of the arts and literature

from the ideas established by mass communication techniques in the late-19th century to the ideas of the late-20th century and beyond. Postmodernist film, like postmodernism as a whole, is hard to define and there is little agreement on the exact characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern film. However, unifying features often coincide with Lyotard's concept of the "metanarrative" and "little narrative", Jacques Derrida's concept of "play", and Jean Baudrillard's "simulacra." In story based art, the main ways this is expressed is in narrative structure.

Postmodernist film is a classification for works that articulate the themes and ideas ofpostmodernism through the medium of cinema. Postmodernist film attempts to subvert the mainstream conventions of narrative structure and characterization, and tests the audience's suspension of disbelief. Postmodernist films therefore do not abide by traditional narrative expression and also do not adhere to typical portrayals of gender, race, class, genre, and time. Typically, such films also break down the cultural divide between high and low art.

It is imperative to understand that postmodernism is not a single, monolithic body of ideas. Despite being a highly debated and perplexing descriptive term, postmodernism has alreadybrought much to cinema and its academic study.Before addressing the postmodern features of individual films it is important to take note of the evolution of postmodern nature of technology and distribution in the film industry. Earlier the film was shot on 35 mm celluloid by one of a handful of studios whereas today it is shot on digital format not just by major studious but also

by independent studios, independent filmmakers, or even amateurs. Earlier films were screened in theatres but with technology films are available on DVD, video, TV, in an airplane, or downloaded (legally or illegally) via the internet.This feature of the current film industry provides several entry points into a discussion of the postmodern.

Intertextuality, self-reflexivity, hyper-reality, non-linear narrative and pastiche are the most commonly identified characteristics of postmodern cinema. These features may be found in a film's form, story, technical vocabulary, casting, mise-en-scène, or some combination of these. In an effort to explain postmodern film, researchers often refer to individual films that possess examples of postmodernism. Here some themes and techniques are discussed with examples from popular Hollywood films.

Intertextuality: In a broad sense, intertextuality is the reference to or application of a literary, media, or social "text" within another literary, media, or social "text." In literature, intertextuality is when a book refers to a second book by title, scene, character, or storyline, or when a book refers to a social "text" such as a media, social, or cultural story. This borrowing invites a comparison between the readers understanding of the text outside of the book, and its use inside of the book. Many directors have the characters hold a book to "import" the meaning of that book into the film. For instance when Neo takes the disc out of the book to give it to the people at his door, the book is Simulacra and Simulation by Baudrillard. An example also would be from *Toy Story 2* when there is reference to the shortage of Buzz Lightyear toys as

an intertexual joke, which is connected to the manufacturers' underestimated demand for the toy.

Hyper-reality: The digital age of cinema represents its introduction into hyper-reality. For theorist Paul Virilio, the digital revolution signals the further substitution or displacement of reality, in which a technological or virtual reality replaces the human one and the distinction between factual and virtual becomes meaningless. Hyper-reality is described in relation to where technology creates realities which are original or more desirable then the real world. The use of technology to negatively affect the life of human beings is often included in postmodern films as well, referred to as examples of hyper-reality. Cases of hyper-reality attempt to show that the world can be a better place when reality is not what we believe it to be. For example, *The Truman Show* is the story of a man who discovers that his life has been recorded for a reality TV show with his friends and neighbors being paid actors. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* might be the best known postmodernist film. Ridley Scott's 1982 film is about a future dystopia where "replicants" (human cyborgs) have been invented and are deemed dangerous enough to hunt down when they escape.

Meta-reference or self-reflexivity: While viewing a classical narrative, the narrative will try to hide the fact that it is a fictional product. Compared to a classical/modern film, a postmodernist film will not hide the fact that it is a fictional account and infact draw attention to itself and its modes of construction.It never lets you forget that its a highly constructed film using a number of storytelling devices.This element highlights the construction and relation of the image to other images in media and not

to any kind of external reality.A self-referential film calls the viewer's attention – either through characters' knowledge of their own fictional nature, or through visuals – that the movie itself is only a movie. This is sometimes achieved by emphasizing the unnatural look of an image which seems contrived.This in a way changes the meaning of story-telling. Irony and deconstruction are the major methods used. For instance in *Fight Club*, Brad Pitt in the film rejects celebrity culture. This creates a sense of dissonance in the minds of the viewers as Brad Pitt was the ace celebrity then. At one point the film itself wants to reflect a dissonance as Brad Pitt speaks directly to the camera and it appears that the very film in the camera itself is affected as it shakes and jitters and goes in and out of focus.

Non-linear texts: Postmodernist films allow the audience to construct their own meaning of the work of art to expose the meaning-making process and to generally self-consciously allow for a multitude of interpretations, instead of trying to cut ofalternative readings.This is often achieved by introducing non-linear elements to the film and then letting the audience make its own story out of the various elements.Many of David Lynch's films reject the traditionalist idea of character evolution and plot development through his own insight and skill. For example, the basis of his film *Blue Velvet* is the ear found in the yard. Also Taratino makes non-linear films, sometimes, which break away from "traditional" narratives to some extent.

Pastiche: Pastiche is one of the common examples cited by academic researchers in postmodern film. This feature of postmodern technique makes use of well-

known areas of pop culture, which are referenced by the filmmakers often in a comic style. An example of a pastiche in Hollywood movies is the Austin Powers series of films that pay homage to the spy movies and culture of the 1960s.

Pastiche can also be a cinematic device wherein the creator of the film pays homage to another filmmaker's style and use of cinematography, including camera angles, lighting, and mise en scène. A film's writer may also offer a pastiche based on the works of other writers. Quentin Tarantino often uses various plots, characteristics and themes from many lesser-known films to create his films. He has even openly stated that he "steals from everyone". There is extensive use of homage or pastiche, resulting from the fact that postmodern filmmakers are open to blending many disparate genres and tones within the same film. The use of homage and pastiche can, in and of itself, result in a fusion of high and low. For this reason, homage is sometimes accompanied by characters' value judgments as to the worth and cultural value of the works being parodied, ensuring the viewer understands whether the thing being referenced is considered highbrow or lowbrow.

The sterility and loneliness of modern and future life is another feature of the postmodern film that explains the changing of human nature into a machine-like detached personality. Examples of the advance of technology over human feelings are known as the flattening of affect, and include the film *Taxi Driver* featuring the descent into insanity of a lonely taxi driver in a big city. Altered states are another example of postmodernism, showing the changing of personality in a film's characters often because of the use of hallucinogenic drugs.

Ambiguity, doubt, or anti-climax also are additional features of postmodernist films. The films can result in a sense of uncertainty and the shaking up of previously understood beliefs and roles. Postmodernist filmmakers such as Christopher Nolan, Stanley Kubrick and David Lynch challenged aspects of life or belief systems. This can be said of Nolan's film, *Inception*, when the audience is made to decide if Di Caprio's character is trapped in reality or a simulated /constructed reality. So a postmodernist detective story may leave the mystery unsolved vis a vis a traditional detective story that would normally have the detective solve and rationally explain the mystery in the end.

References:

1. Bazin, André. What Is Cinema? 2vols. Edited and translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
2. Bruno, Giuliana. "Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner." October 41 (1987): 61–74.
3. Denzin, Norman. Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and
4. Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.

5. Kracauer, Siegfried. Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960. Revised edition, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

6. Laurent Kretzschmar (July 2002). "Is Cinema Renewing Itself?" Film-Philosophy 6 (15).

7. Linda Hutcheon (January 19, 1998). "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern".University of Toronto, English Library.

8. Lyotard, Jean-François. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

9. Mary Alemany-Galway (2002). A Postmodern Cinema. Kent, England: Scarecrow Press.

10. Rodowick, D. N. Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy After the New Media. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

11. Susan Hopkins (Spring 1995). "Generation Pulp". Youth Studies Australia 14 (3): 14–19.

12. Virilio, Paul. The Vision Machine .Translated by Julie Rose. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Dhanashree Publications

**Flat No. 01, Nirman Sagar CHS,
Thana Naka, Panvel, Raigad - 410206**

www.research-chronicler.com