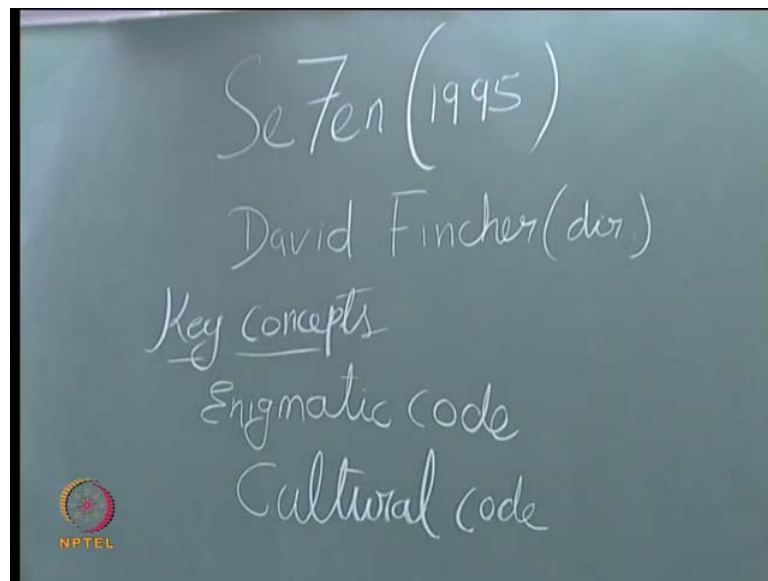


Introduction to Film Studies
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Lecture No. # 03
Cinema & Semiotics – Seven (1995)

Good morning. So, we will begin with reading of David Fincher's seven, 1995 movie, starring Morgan Freeman Brad Pitt, Gwyneth Paltrow, and of course Kevin Spacey. So, you know how important he is. This is the tag line of seven, seven deadly sins, seven ways to die. So, this is the tag line and then you have all those seven deadly sins enlisted on the poster.

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So, we are going to read seven in particular, with reference to semiotics, science symbols and codes, the enigmatic code and the cultural code, and we have already looked at these codes in some detail. What it is, what is meant by the enigmatic code and what is the cultural code? So, can you just refresh what we were doing in the last class, what is an enigmatic code? We looked at the picture of vertigo.

Vertigo.

And two women, James, James (()) planned by two poses, two, two looks, rather of Kim Novak, the dark hair and the blond. So, I said, this is an, this is the good example of the enigmatic code what were we talking about.

Setting of puzzle something, which to the audience of viewers should be solved.

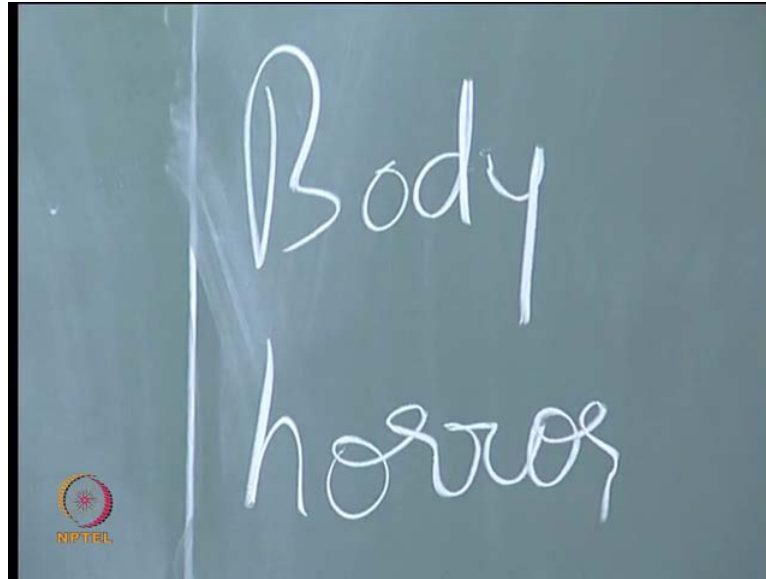
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Good. So, enigmatic code is all about setting a puzzle. So, seven falls in the category of puzzle cinema, it is the cultural category also, cultural code, we will see why. These horrifying images in the title, in the opening credit sequence of seven, mutilated figures of dead body, so what is seven?

Seven also pay attention to the way the producers, then the film makers, the makers of seven read the title, design the title very enigmatically with number 7 as well inserted. So, giving it an economy of expression, as well as, we are conveying a certain kind of science signal to it.

So, seven is the study-in-sin. If you asked us what is seven all about, what is the movie all about? Seven is the study-in-sin. As someone was rightly pointing out just now, it is thriller, it is the detective movie, the heroes are detectives as played by Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt. It is a crime movie; after all it is a movie where there is the killer at large, just serial killer at large. So, it is crime movie, it is the detective movie, at some level it is also film noir we have been talking about, film neo exploring the dark undertones of some one's personality.

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So, it is a noir, is also horror and what kind of horror? There is the genre of horror called the body horror. It is believed that in modern times, in our contemporary times, the body is no longer sacred; it can be violated, by someone at any time. So, it could be during wars, it could be mugging, it could be anything and here in seven, you have a serial killer who delights in violating bodies. Just in a side, David Cronenberg, the Canadian filmmaker is the master in body horror. If you have watched a movie like, can you give me some example, Eastern Promises or Videodrome, Existenz, Crash, all these movies are studied, studies in body horror. So, body horror, look, looks at with fascination at mutilated bodies; that is where horror comes from. So, we know how seven begins and how horribly it ends with mutilated bodies, body of someone you know. So, that is what we mean by body horror.

The title or number seven is an index; it acts as the index. Index, we know points out something, but point out at what? So, just number seven can tell you that God took seven days to create the world, so seven is an important number. We also talked about seven pillars of wisdom, symbolically; we also talked about seven wonders of the world, seven cardinal virtues, seven sense, seven colors of the rainbow. And of course, you know, detective Somerset in the movie, has seven days to go before his final retirement. So, I am, this would be, perhaps be of interest to you, that inspite of having very huge star like Brad Pitt and reasonably big star like Morgan Freeman in the movie, seven initially did not market itself as a Brad Pitt movie. What did it market itself as? Just the title, the

study-in-sin, because the makers felt, this in the western world, this is catch enough, this is the marketable enough commodity. So, they need not... So, I was reading some review, it was the movie all very, the movie was received extremely well, it has avoid the test of time is the canonical movie.

So, initially, when it was released, people wondered that why inspite of having Brad Pitt, the makers did not bother to put Brad Pitt on the posters and market it that way, why seven? Because because of the fascination of the western world with the idea of sin. So, I draw your attention to the DVD cover, you can look at it, no Brad Pitt, no Gwyneth, only seven, and that is the way the DVD has been released.

Look at this, the inside jacket of DVD, of this DVD and what does it appear to you like? Just like a book, yeah it looks like a book, cover of a book. And why are books so important in the movie?

(())

Collection of note books exactly, so notebooks and books... There is a very integral, very vital scene in the movie, which takes place in the library. Morgan Freeman is trying to decipher the meaning of these murders and we know what book he is reading. So, we will come to that. So, Morgan freeman or Somerset, as his character is called, he also refers to seven slain children in Date's purgatory, purgatory is the part in Date's Divine Comedy, of course, now, that we know the movie, we know it is about seven days in seven, sorry, seven sins in seven days. So, I asked you to watch the movie, how does it begin, I am sorry I cannot show you the movie of the clipping here right now, but how does it begin?

He will be getting ready.

Regular workday in Morgan Freeman's life, how does it begin? He is putting on his cloths, he is very meticulously dressing up, what does it tell you about? So, those are little clues and signs about his character, what do they tell you about? He is very methodical, he is the, he, he likes to be prepared, he is very thorough, it is, a great brain, that is how one of his superiors refer to him, that do not retire so so on. I mean, he wants to retire and they say, you are one of the greatest brains here we know and that is just seven days to go.

So, Morgan Freeman, after all, you know great actor, but in 1995, we have had glimpses of his greatness in film, such as Driving Miss Daisy, it was an Oscar winning movie, The Shawshank Redemption and also, he was Robinhood's partner in Kevin Costner's The Prince of Thieves. So, we knew Morgan Freeman, you know the movie capitalizes on the Morgan Freeman persona, and I am not talking about his more contemporary movies, like The Dark Knight series, all this happen later, after seven. But before seven we had the Shawshank Redemption, we had Driving Miss Daisy, we had the Prince of Thieves. And what kind of character did he specialize in playing? Wise person, the wise guy, not wise guy as in, as a (()), but wise guy in a very positive way. He is the person who has wisdom, who the hero can depend on.

So, therefore, if the hero is Brad Pitt, the young good looking hunky hero, you have the older, wiser Morgan Freeman. The movie has, let me stress it very emphatically, that movie has no interest in the color of his skin, Seven is not about racism at all, it is just, that we have black actor doing the great role, a great job of it, otherwise there is no important as such to his race, to the color of his skin.

Opening scene, key connotations we have been looking at, connotations and denotations remember, so connotations when the movie opens and we know, that Morgan Freeman very meticulously getting dressed up, getting ready for the day, we see road science at the, science. So, film's fascination, preoccupation with science continues. David Fincher is the maker who is fascinated by the system of science, Zodiac, the External Sound.

Now, which city is it set in?

Does not mention anywhere...

Does not mention, it is just any metropolis, and what happens in metropolises according to seven?

(())

So, when we are talking about film, (()) the other day, we all talked about, we all agreed, that film noir is, more often than not, certain big cities, sometimes evens in suburbs, sometimes even in rural areas, like the postman always rings twice, but not always. So, certain metropolis, unnamed metropolis, could be any city. The city sounds at the

beginning, so we have cars honking, neighbors making some kind of sounds etcetera, etcetera. And how, notice how the maker, the film maker contrasts those external sound with Somerset's internal world, the internal, the inner space of being. So, it is very calm, it is very quiet, while he is, he lives in calmness and quietude. You hear all these city noises outside.

What, what are those science? What is the filmmaker trying to tell you here? In spite of the chaos outside, he is still able to find some moments of space within themselves, that is the kind of character because say, he is the world weary character. We recognize that he has seen too much, he is sick of the crime, of the crimes, that he has been witnessing throughout his professional life, but still he has been able to retain some semblance of sanity. That is because it comes from within the calmness, come from within. Thus, an important feature of Morgan Freeman's character in Seven, and this is completely juxtaposed with always on the edge hero Brad Pitt.

So, we also see in the beginning opening sequence the chess, a set in the foreground, that says, tell you lot about a man who is very, who is quite an expert in the game of chess, he is an intellectual. We are given certain signs and clues, it may not necessarily be so but the filmmakers, what they do to emphasize on someone's mind, they surround the room with books perhaps, the room with so called intellectual game, like set of, you know, chess. Then you have metronome, remember metronome in the beginning of the movie, what does he do? He, such the metronome and excludes the sounds, which are taking place outside. So, metronome dissolves sort of the sound that are emanating from the outside what does it tell you about somerset? He is someone who can take control of things if he wants to and that is his character; that is the way his character is established.

At one point, when the first murder occurs, and Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman visit the scene of crime and Brad Pitt never stops talking, he is always the hubbub, and then somerset at one point cannot take it anymore and he says, will you please be quiet. He wants, only he can he knows cannot control everything, but things that he can control he does control and calm and peace is something that he requires. So, at one level, seven, seventh hero can also be Morgan Freeman because he is the most identifiable character in the movie.

Opening credit, wonderfully done, if you have not watched the movie watch it again and just watch the first 10 and, and the last 10 minutes of the movie, you will get a hang of it. So, opening credit is the montage; you know montage? Quick cutting between two different, at a couple of different acts going on.

So, you have Doe, and who is Doe? John Doe, the serial killer, we do not see his face for a very long time a major star playing John Doe and we do not get to see him for a very long period of time, that is interesting. Now, Doe's work and when it goes on we see close up of those hands and his handiwork. So, writings on the note book, stitching bodies, peeling of skin from his fingers, now so that not to leave finger prints, yeah, using scissors, things you know, which required dexterous use of hands. So, therefore, at the begin, in the beginning of the movie we saw very close-up shot of hands, mutilated fingers, that hands are important.

And Doe's work is accompanied by the Nine Inch Nails, the sound track is Closer, you take me closer to God, that is the closing line of that song and which is important because Nine Inch Nails were fascinated with another serial killer Charles Manson and initially, this song, soundtrack was recorded in Charles Manson's house. So, Nine Inch Nails, the group was extremely close to notorious real life serial killer Charles Manson. Somerset's word, on the other hand is contrasted with Doe's. Now, why Doe and why Samoset, why are they comparing the two, one is an out-and-out good guy?

Both extremely methodical, both extremely intellectual, Brad Pitt men's character, he does not come anywhere close to these people intellectually; he is just not there. So, nine time mind game is between Somerset and John Doe. Therefore, it is interesting to note, that John Doe handiwork is matched with Nine Inch Nails' soundtrack, cacophonous sound, lots of sound remixes, lots of, number of sounds mixed up there, whereas Marvin's song is box air on a G-string. So, it is all about calm, quietness, stability. So, the enigmatic code, that you will looking at.

What is seven? What is so important about the title number Seven and how is the myth of the seven deadly sins used in plot development, if you remember, the killer at one point surrenders himself, after which murder?

(C)

Yeah, after the 5th murder, and David Fincher says that when he first read the script, he thought, ok, movie is going to end now, 5th murder and perhaps, there would not be any two more murders, (()). But we know there are two more murders to come, it does not really happen. So, that, you know, in a crime movie you have certain expectations, the other is while discussing genre, so we were talking about we expect certain things, certain conventions from this genre, rom-com and an action movie, all these movies evoke certain expectations; crime movie, murder movie, evoke certain kind of expectation. That means, that we expect the policeman of, after all Brad Pitt is, Brad Pitt is our hero, so we expect him to catch the killer, does not happen, he surrenders himself. That is the, that is the enigma, the movie place on the enigma of the conventional genre.

So, the similarities between, point of similarities between Samoset and John Doe, both painstaking thorough professional and intellectual, they take great pride in the professionalism. Interestingly, they have the same worldview, they know, that civilization is beyond redemption. But while Morgan Freeman looks at the world with kindness and compassion, John Doe's character is more furious. He wants, he wants to avenge himself with it, he cannot tolerate other people's weakness, limitations with imperfections. So, Somerset tolerates, Doe is intolerant.

And now, of course, the movie also plays on the name John Doe. Is this is a real name, but real name is Jonathon in the movie. John Doe is an American, every man, the regular average guy. So, he is the regular average guy, thus another enigmatic code the movie is interested in, why this name? Now, the trope of an older black cop and younger white cop, we have already seen Lethal weapon and how does Seven differ from each other? (()), Mel Gibson what is the relationship between them?

(())

But here, there are hierarchies, the senior and more experienced, more intelligent cop on the verge of retirement and the rookie who is all brawn and hardly any brains. So, that dichotomy is brought out very early on the movie. It plays on the genre of buddy movie, that friends and both Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt characters, they act as foils to each other. So, look at their initial interaction, it begins on a note of hostility, first they do not like each other they do not want to work with each other. They dress very differently, one is methodical, as we have already seen, another is quite sloppy. Manner of speaking,

Morgan Freeman, very calm, very measured, very poised; Brad Pitt, on the other hand, cannot stop speaking, talking, he is a chatter box and most of the time he does not make much sense. The library scene gives the game away with the difference between the two men, emphasizes the difference between two men very, very prominently, where Morgan freeman is able to decipher codes from date is (()). And what does Brad Pitt do? He is, yeah, yeah, and he also reads clip notes in order to understand Date's (()). So, that is the difference between their intellectual points.

So, when we talk about study in binaries it cannot get better than that. So, I mean, we have been talking about chalk and cheese and that is, our trope of buddy movie. Again, Lethal Weapon also plays on these binaries, brains and brawn, relationship that begins in hostility, but ends in mutual respect.

There is a very interesting, enigmatic scene, many people like that, it is rain sequence, city is drenched in rain and Brad Pitt chasing the killer and the killer almost gets him. Yeah, he puts the gun on his head, but does not shoot, he walks away, if you watch the movie for the first time, do you ever wonder what is going on here? Do you think that is an enigma there? Yeah, I mean, you know, the killer if he wants to, if he is after self preservation, if he does not want to be caught, then why would he let very, very smart detective get away? He had all the chance, all the opportunity in the world to kill him, but he does not do that and that is another enigma. Why does he not kill Brad Pitt? Why cannot Brad Pitt, our hero, save himself? Why does not Morgan Freeman arrive from somewhere and save Brad Pitt? But Brad Pitt is saved by the killer, enigmatic. Why does the killer turn himself in enigmatic? So, the movie plays on this. Any question at this point. I have been talking too much, any comments, anything that you can recall from the movie.

The movie actually based Morgan Freeman and Kevin Spacey; Brad Pitt is never brought out as the hero.

Exactly, so that is the point. Intellectually they are on the same wavelength, Doe and Somerset, yeah. Therefore, this younger hero, the rookie, it is, if you want to look at him as a hero, well, it is a coming of age movie, right; there is some learning that takes place. However, that learning, with he learns all life lesson and he also knows why this particular horror was done to him. He realizes something about himself, something, that

we all understand, but we never feel that it is such a big sin, that it should be punished so horribly. So, the movie actually pits up Doe again Somerset, but Brad Pitt character becomes a medium.

First murder, that is committed and after every commit, after every murder, he, the killer leaves his signature, he is trying to leave certain clues behind. So, gluttony, how does he kill the gluttony? By forcing him to eat till his stomach bursts. (()) where the, so called, sinner is tied to the bed for one year. A beautiful woman takes moment of pride in have beauty, her face is cut off and then she is given a choice if she wants to call for help she will have to live with the disfigured face or she has the choice to commit suicide by taking pills. And she choose the latter, thus the crucifixion, the science all over Kevin Spacey's (()), Kevin Spacey's (()) yeah.

So, John Doe's first appearance, we see him at several points in the movie, but we fully see him for what or who he is in the first time as he surrenders himself, that again is big reversal in expectations. We expect our heroes to catch him, killer surrenders himself after five murders, he is covered in blood and later we realize whose blood it is.

So, one reason, that the movie was called the bleakest and the gloomiest film ever made, the reason was, I mean, this is the BBC interview, BBC review, whether the critic commented, that is, by far this is the gloomiest movie he had ever watched. Now, what could be the reason for this? The movie offers us no hope. Generally, in a crime movie, in a thriller movie we feel, that our heroes to take care of the world. We are safe because there are heroes out there, we, we are safe because there are forces of law who are there to take care of us. What does Seven do to these expectations? The killer is always the step ahead of the law. So, therefore, the film denies us any kind of comfort, there is no comfort in the movie because we know there is, there is no hope for us and that comes on very strongly in the movie by the way, that killer is projected.

So, Kevin Spacey surrendering himself covered in the blood of someone he has just murdered, when does this scene happen?

(())

The climax, yeah; when the killer makes the request, that he should be taken to, yeah, to a certain point to find the dead body, yeah to find, there are two more dead bodies and he

is asking us to, he leads us to that and the heroes give in. That is also very interesting, that criminal has just been caught and the heroes succumb to demand.

Throughout the scene, throughout the car drive we see Brad in conversation with Kevin Spacey and through this grid, of course, you know. Kevin Spacey being dangerous criminal, you cannot thus keep him along with the hero. So, there has to be some kind of barricade. But we also see Brad Pitt's character through these barbed wires, not just Kevin Spacey's, but also both of them are trapped in their own sins. Brad Pitt may not be aware of that. So, this grid act as the very strong sign, very strong index for telling us both these men are now on par with each other. Mogen Freeman, on the other hand, is always looking away; he is free, literally free.

Some people have also, now I do not know how many of you paid attention to this aspect, see usually serial killers are, if you take their statistic, in the western world, more often than not, they are white man. So, far we have, we have not had any requirement of women serial killer, women serial killer, maybe women murder once or twice, but serial killers not many are aware of. So, let me know if you are aware of one, but then generally, does not happen. Statistics also prove, that most of the time, at least nine out of ten times these are white man. So, in seven you do not have this in.

Now, what do these men, what are these men after? What is the pattern? I mean, you know, Jack the Ripper, white serial killer, who would he kill? So, there is the bias against the women of, so called, not so good morals. So, serial killers have a pattern, they are usually, let us not called them insane people, but there is the strong sense of some injustice or strong sense of restoring some kind of a moral balance in the society. And what, how do they restore this moral balance? By eliminating certain unwanted people. Now, who are the unwanted people? Jack the Ripper killed prostitutes, you know, women of this, women with so called, no morals should not be tolerated in our society. So, that is one pattern. What else, who do they kill, who else do they kill?

(())

Homeless, homeless, homeless people, the very poor, thus people whom we do not want them long, they are killed one after.

(())

Sure, yeah, we do not want them around; they should be killed. One, I mean, in literature also we have add several examples where literary figures have been killed because of there ambiguous sexuality. (()) Spanish poet, dramatist, he was gay and he was murdered by a fascist who did not want such people to be around. So, yeah, people of color perhaps, we do not one thing, people of certain race, certain nationality around. So, there is a pattern. Is there are pattern in seven?

(())

Only sinners, but if you look, if you forget the sin element he is quite democratic. There are three women, four men, all white and he the killer himself is a white male, but then what about his sexuality? And I quote, it appears from the movie, the scene where he has just killed the wife Tracy and this is what he tells Tracey's husband been played by Brad Pitt, I tried to play husband, I tried to taste the life of a simple man, it did not work out. Now, what could it mean, I try to play her husband and did not work out?

Yeah, some kind of perhaps repressed homosexuality, perhaps some kind of sexual inadequacy and it did not work out. So, (()) pretty head, because I envy normal life, it seems, that envy is my sin. So, I need to punish for that and who better than you to eliminate.

(())

And therefore, he wants to be killed.

No, but he mentions envy.

But not according to the (()), according to the (()) envy is a sin and home sexuality is not mentioned, right. As the punishable sin, I am talking about the seven deadliest sins. This is not, there is somewhere perhaps implicitly, but not very, very explicitly stated

You know, I mean that is chidden cooperate can just mean the chidden cooperate he try

Could be anything, could be anything, therefore we are saying ambiguity about his sexuality. Could be did not try, could be she did not cooperate, could be he could not, he could not; you know, live up to the moment and therefore, he had to take out his... When of course, he wants to punish Brad Pitt for what, which sin is he being punished for?

(())

And do you see elements of (()) throughout the movie? Where is it most highlighted? Where John Doe decides, this is the man I should be singling out for (())?

Photograph...

When he takes photograph of Victor, yeah, Victor, we, we have been misled to thinking, into believing, that Victor is the serial killer and when they, when the cops arrive on the scene, John Doe is there somewhere in the background trying to take pictures and Brad Pitt explodes on seeing him. That is the point whether serial killer decides this is an ideal victim for him. So, all this clues, you know, look, you need to read, you need to understand Seven backwards, at first go you would not understand all the enigmas, which are implicit there. Any comments, any questions?

(())

Very open space, extremely open space, the movie actually begins in darkness and as the movie progresses it becomes lighter. And lighter as far as camera work is concerned, but the overtone of the movie becomes dark. It is a very dark movie as we have been talking about, although the final scenes do take place in open spaces and in extreme light.

There was actually lot of controversy, lot of conflict regarding the climax of Seven. David Fincher, at one point, actually decided, that he should go for a happy ending, you know, while the wife is being murdered, he arrives just in nick of time and save her, he is the hero after all, you know, after all this is what we expect. It does not matter whether he is the Bollywood or Hollywood, you know, the hero has to be a hero. Spiderman is always there, arrives on the scene at right time, so therefore, Brad Pitt also, and they actually thought about it. Who put the, who put his foot down? Brad Pitt himself, he said I do not want this, you gave me the script with certain ending I stick to it because the entire movie leads towards that climax, it cannot be any other way, there cannot be a happy ending.

Is John Doe a preacher? Yes, Somerset actually says at one point, that he is giving us a sermon. You can read through the clues that he leaves behind. Actually, John Doe is giving us that he is the preacher and why do we call him preacher and why does he

thinks of himself as the preacher? He sees himself as the moral voice of the society he lives in; he feels that someone has to stand up where the law has failed. So, he is the law and enforcer in the society and at one point he even justifies all the killing, he says they were not good people. The greedy lawyer was a villainous character, the woman who he kills for lust, he has his own reasons for killing that woman. So, it is not like he just killed in a way he had no reason to kill his in tolerance comes through.

He identifies with the moral code of society and which kind of society? A Christian society, so thus very, when you are talking about the cultural code in Seven, unless you understand the moral code in a Christian society, much of the enigma, much of the codes Seven talks about will be lost on us. And most importantly, he recognizes that like everyone else he too is the sinner and he needs to be punished. So, he is not just a random villainous character, he is the sinner he recognizes that, he chooses a kind of death he should get, he chooses the kind of men who should give him that kind of death. So, as an example of cultural code, Seven takes us on a journey into moral and philosophical territory, debate over social responsibility and human nature and the conflict is always between crimes against humanity and acts or sins against God; sins, that offend God, thus the seven sins.

So, Kevin Spacey's character refuses to see himself as an ordinary criminal. He is the law and enforcer, he is the moral voice in the movie according to him and he is attempting to bring some sort of moral stability in our lives. So, therefore, so while he did, from the detective's point of view, there is a conflict because murder, after all whoever murder it does not matter, murder is the sin, is the crime. But what he says, what John Doe feels is that he is punishing sins and therefore, not committing (()). So, between the nature of sins and the nature of crime, there is, therein lies the conflict (()).

Does (()) kill him? Does he kill him? How does the movie end? He is taken away in a car, who? Brad Pitt is taken now in a car, we have, we are told, that he killed Kevin Spacey. See, Morgan Freeman stops him from killing John Doe, why does, do you remember the reason, why should he not kill?

(())

Yeah, he does not want Kevin Spacey, now we are no longer talking about the crime of killing a person, he is no longer talking about the law, he is talking in Kevin Spacey's

language do not give him the satisfaction. He is leading you on, he has been leading you on and he wants to do it, so do not do this, but then he does not.

Again, in the movie, while shooting the movie there have been some, there has been some kind of controversy rather, Brad Pitt should eventually kill Kevin Spacey or not? And they decided to, **yes** it should happen, because then crime, you know, the seven murders have been taken care of, otherwise we will be one murder short.

So, you have seen the movie, what has been your response to the movie? What kind of feelings are you left with when you watch Seven? Was it the first time you watched the movie? Yes, you did not expect it, it hits you absolutely in the face and leaves you with the sense of hopelessness, there is absolutely no hope for us except perhaps, you look at the older, wiser guy who just walks away, but **but** then when, why, why is he still able to retain some sanity?

(())

He has seen a lot of things **yes**, but still.

(())

Yeah, the opening scene, which we were talking about, so let me take back to the opening sequence. He has managed to put aside, exclude all the unpleasant things, events of life from his life. So, he wants certain control over his life and that is, some kind of defence mechanism, which works for him, which Brad Pitt lacks. So, that is the very important lesson, that Seven teaches you, the ability, the ability to let go. So, thank you very much.