

**Introduction to Film Studies**  
**Prof. Aysha**  
**Department of Humanities and social sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Madras**

**Lecture No. # 8**  
**Realism in Cinema**

Good morning, we begin our today's lecture on realism. So, realism has an artistic device has its roots in the writing of French writers, such as Balzac, Honore de Balzac, Flaubert, Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola. Of course, they are also related; they are also associated with the concept of naturalism.

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So, realism and naturalism are two concepts which people usually use interchangeably, but they are not always so, and perhaps one of these days, I will discuss in details some movie which is more naturalistic and less realistic. So, that is one aspect; realism is generally understood as an illusion, when we talk about a film studies as an illusion that what is shown on a screen is connected to reality. We are watching something which is very real, true. So, people have often argued, what is recognizable and what is real. Is their difference between, or can they be used interchangeably. Is everything that is recognizably, real and vice versa. So, realism is a mix of the devices to which film

makers use, to disguise the fact that after all whatever we are watching is not real, and there is lot of controversy about realism, hence how realistic can you be, that is the idea.

Now, naturalism is a concept is based on Darwin's idea about nature that is natural conditions play significant role in the shaping of the individual's mind and character. Realism; however, derives stress ideology from Marx's theory of economics, that is; economic condition of a person, play significant role in the conditioning of his or her mind and character. Remember, both these concept have an element of fatalism, for example, you read a text and flowers madame Bovary in order to understand the subtle distinction between these concepts better. Now, you just watched the clipping from Sidney Lumet's Dog Day Afternoon and 1973 film, based on real life hyst. What are the indications that this could be realistic movie. It is usually regarded as the realistic movie not just, because it is portrays something which actually happened, but what was the science, what was the semiotic you have already done, the codes, the sciences, the symbol which tell u that is very real.

So, the initial one talk about people of Brooklyn and what kind of people are those; working class that what we understand Brooklyn is. It is a predominantly not very affluent place. People are working class, low middle class, middle class, who struggle with their day to day life; what else, we will come to that later and just talking about the first five minutes, the credit sequences. So, we are never given any kind of indication, that anything drastic is going to happen today, and anything is startling happening today. It is an average day; it is regular average day in the life of an average New Yorker or a person from Brooklyn that is the idea. There is trash somewhere; there are beggars somewhere, homeless people. So, Sidney Lumet is very attentive to details, to everyday details, this was just an everyday, this was just regular day and then something like this happened, but while doing that, while showing as this was just regular normal day, he shows as certain details of a Brooklyn, which are extremely realistic, which if you go to that part of New York you will find, that it is in deep true even today.

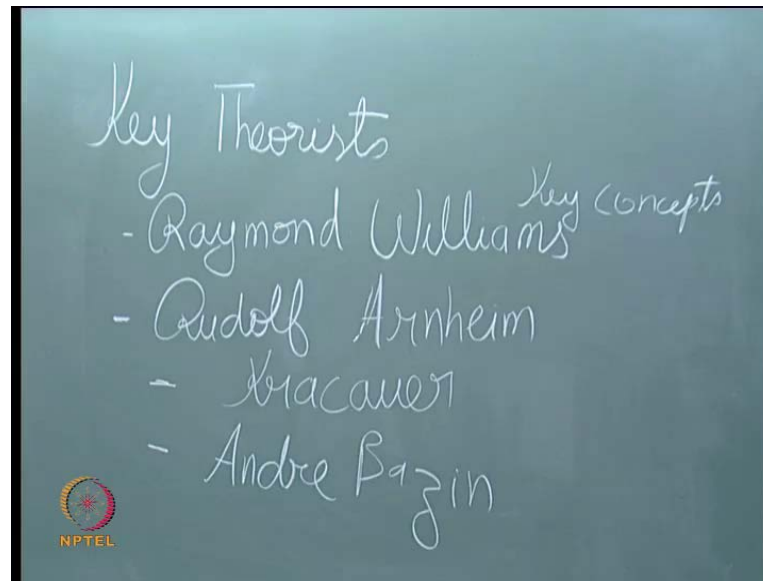
So, that is the idea to show reality and how does he achieved that kind of realism. Now I am asking you more technical question, when Sidney Lumet shows that Brooklyn is after all not a very rich place, not a very affluent place, then he shows you certain scenes, certain shots which depicts the lives of very ordinary regular people, also very poor people that is also there, but what does he do to do that. It looks like footage, like a video

footage, quality of the shorts has the natural lighting. Exactly, what she is trying to say is, it had documentary feel to it. She is also trying to tell you that it looks like the film makers resorted to using as much natural light as possible. So, that means it was not shot inside a studio, remember that. So, the camera people, cinematographer, the director just gone out on the real street and capture the life's of real people, and taking shots of the real garbage.

They must have glassed over certain aspects, but it looks like it was shot in a natural setting and in natural light. So, that is one of the aspects that is one of the devices used by those film makers who aspire to make a realistic film, as opposed to what as realism is oppose to. When you talk about artificially constructed sets, artificial lights to make people look prettier than they are, to make sets look place prettier than they really are. So, as a there was a time when New York would be constructed, you know MGM was known for that, MGM studio are you aware of that. So, it there was a point when MGM was a city in itself, and they had replicas, miniatures, replicas of all the famous monument and landmarks of New York. They do not want to go outside and trouble the beautiful actors and female actress to get expose to real people and real life. Whatever was then was done inside the set, on the set, inside the studio.

This tendency to be as realistic as possible started during the late fifty's, corton during the sixty especially with Bonnie and Clyde, if you are aware of the movie, please watch it, note down the name Bonnie and Clyde and then the so called Hollywood new way cinema easy rider is one, and then we had cinema of a those new way American auteur, Martinez Scorsese, main streets, taxi driver we had Sydney, Lumiere of course, and then we also had Coupoole, who actually was audacious enough to go all the way on location and shoot his apocalypse now. (( )) Alan try to do as much as shooting outside on real location, as oppose to creating a replica of the. This is one way in which film makers try to attain realism.

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We will be talking about realism as a theory as we go on, keep theoretician of realism you can look at Raymond Williams's book called key concept; and he gives plenty of description of what is realism. So it is good way to begin, understanding, is not like a definitive book, but it is like a dictionary of terms, key concepts. So, please take a look at Raymond Williams's key concepts; Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer and Andre Bazin, who keep on referring to in this course, Andre Bazin the French theoretician. Now, historical context of cinema and realism, it begins from 1839 with the invention of photography, 1877 we had the invention of phonograph. And between 1889 and 1895 the Lumiere Brothers initiated the cinema project; so you can look these names up and see what are their contributions towards the growth of cinema and the pioneers; of course, but you should understand what they did, and the idea was that with so much innovation in technology, and the development in photography. Camera would be able to capture an objective truth about the world.

There is a difference between subjectivity and objectivity, so the intension was or the ambition was to capture the objective truth. A realist film at least desires or aims to present what appears on the screen as real and as natural. So, one of the earliest efforts in this direction was the Lumiere shot called workers leaving the Lumiere factory, and I quote one of the brothers, who said the purpose of cinema is to capture life on the run, life as it moves, therefore workers leaving the factory. So, workers leaving the factory real people on real location and captured in real lights in real time. So, they were not

asked to put on some extra make up or wear some predict cloth. They were captured as they work, capturing the objective truth. Now, I will take the leap from, because in between the cinema went through several stages, and we have already referred to some, you know the MGM studios system, where everything was monumental, the idea was not to not really did not aspire to be realistic, but aspire to be grand.

Granger was the operative word there, make things as big as impressive as possible, and then after several stages counter culture cinema, realistic cinema we came to a spot where thing started happening and people thought that why not capture life as it is, life on the run going back to what Lumiere advices us to do. So, Andy Warhol the other days someone was mentioning Andy Warhol. So, he made couple of shot one was called sleep, where his friend John Giorno was captured on camera in long takes, sleeping for five hours and twenty minutes, and if you go to the natively actually fine clippings from the movie, is a nicely done film and its experimental. It was called and anti film, why would you call such a film an anti film. My question to you a man is sleeping for five hours and twenty minutes and the camera rest on him, and whatever he is doing while he is sleeping no one told him, no one tells you what to do when you sleep, you are captured as you are objective truth, but it was called, people called it an anti film, what do you think it could be a anti film, think about it.

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There is no plot, is there no plot, no entertainment after all we go to movies to get entertain, that the truth cannot be challenged, what else. No he moved while sleeping, there was some motion. There are no problem, may be few looks at the concept of progress and interpret it thread bear then you can even say, that well from the start to finish the man slept for five hours, and he woke up there is plot, there is progression you say something was happening, idea of film 1963, narrative you known challenging the concept of narrative and think of what we have done in this class, while you are discussing concept of narrative. They challenged (O) everything that the narrative should be, and why not and again another shot empire. Are you aware of that, are you aware of empire, watch empire, look it up Andy Warhol's empire, what is it about, empire state building a single shot of the famous empire state building from early even one day till three am next morning, and what was happening there, what change could have happened; lights, natural light, a real monument captured in natural light.

So, if you look it up, you will find empire state building in all its glory captured through various lights, all natural lights, dim light, bright light etc, but single shot. What was he trying to do, try to be as objectives as possible. How real can you get, that is the idea, pushing the limits of reality and then telling us how monotonous reality could be. So, I refer again to Andre Bazin anthology of photographic image, his essays from what is cinema 1952, and according to Bazin photography does not create eternity as are does, it embalms time, rescuing it, simply from its proper corruption. So, in other words Bazin's telling us photography has historical purpose in capturing the view of world, for every time embalm some moment, it frizzes a moment. In the essay he also compares photography with painting, and according to him photography and specially cinema is much more important as an art in capturing reality than painting.

Moreover idea frizzes and he, it is a controversial idea, because few risks would always disputes that, painting, captures reality many would argue, but this is what Bazin felt that photography and the cinema are discoveries that satisfy once and for all, and in it's very essence are obsession with realism as compared to painting, because in painting you know that is another hand that is at work, cinema although is a collaborative art, when you watch a movie you do not feel the intervention of and outsiders hand. So, again continuing with Bazin, Bazin feels a film of powerful medium with technical process of production, which allows it to represent an object larger than, replace it which painting

does according to him, and ensures the sense of being true to life, and the world for being true to life is, very similitude. So, cinema according to Bazin is an art that comes closest to capturing realism of very similitude.

Various cinematic movements which claim to be as realistic as possible, so most important is it in the earliest Italian new realism, give me some example, Bicycle Thieves by De Sica, we will be looking at these film maker, we will be discussing these film, as we go on with the cause. So, Italian new realism, there is a French pioneer as far as realism is concerned John Renoir, John Renoir happens to be the son of the painter Renoir. Therefore, there is the painting the painterly quality in his cinema, watch it. Does u know anything about the famous disciple of John Renoir, not the painter, but the son. There was a disciple; there was someone who learnt realism from Renoir, very famous person who you should know about, Satyajit Ray. When Renoir was in India shooting the movie called river, Satyajit Ray was one of his associate in India and it was, because of Renoir's influence largely, Ray got interested in poetic realism.

Therefore, in spite of all allegations about rays showing gross poverty, actually it is a poetic poverty, poetic realism. There is a difference between realisms also, there are various kinds of realisms that we look at, but this was poetic realism; realistic, but poetically shown, esthetically captured. We also have the politically motivated films of Cinema Verite. the name itself suggest Verite, true, real, a Cinema Verite, associated with documentaries in France, and then of course, there was spat of the so called new wave cinema. So, we have the Hollywood new wave, we have the French new wave, as associated with the works of Godard, and Truffaut, Luchino, Checco Zalone, but we will be looking at those makers as well. New wave British cinema, extremely important, and then new wave in the India, the so called parallel cinema in India, especially in Hindi cinema, there was a particular period when cinema there existed a kind of parallel cinema. Of course, today also we have version of parallel cinema, but there are more main stream.

Today we have big stars like Ranbir Kapoor willing to act in a so called realistic film, but there was a time when parallel cinema had its own exclusive news, its own exclusive director and actor. There was no crossover there, today there is crossover there is the difference. Dogme ninety five is a movement which was the stabilized in Denmark in 1995 by Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, and this setout of the place of

manifesto, and the call the manifesto refer to it as vow of the chastity that this should be, it's like a religious text we will stick it, to the Dogme. So, the idea was to focus on the form of cinema, not necessarily the content. And it all features of so called realistic cinema, which you would find in Italian new realism, and French new wave, we will be discussing that soon, but lastly we dealt with bleak aspects of life. So, we would not find an entertainment there, if you are looking entertainment as the way we understand.

Some of the Dogme principle suiting on the location and using no artificial props, showing city of the location as it is. There was one movie which shot entirely on a set, the term is represented with square boxes, this is the movie with Nicole Kidman; Dogville's, what is the theme of the movie, perhaps there he has taken a break from add hearing to Dogme principles. Of course when you take big stars, then it comes with compulsion. Sound must not be produced, using real sound and not the dubbed version. Camera must behind held, and if you remember this particular clipping from Dog Day Afternoon, you do feel that is the camera is never static, spanning around, its moving, it's as restless as an edgy as the characters.

Color as it is natural with no special lights to beautify it, no optical works and filters. What do the so called filters do, camera filters, if you are interested in photography. No one is using a filter to capture me let me assure you. They give a skin the consistent look that is one, also filters are normally used to beautify and prettify actors, make them look twenty years younger than what they are. Particularly, the actors are forty five years or you know even fifty years old people who are playing teenagers on screen. You use the special filters which would make them, you can think of many numbers of films. That is the idea to make the movie; you know give a glossy look to the film, but then that is artificiality; therefore that is what Dogme did not want. No melodrama, I want you to understand, what is melodrama?

Explain to me, what is melodrama? I have a feeling that what you are going to tell, but I want to hear it from you. What is melodrama, I do not know. What is melodrama; what is cheesy. Something that is trying to lead you to something about this in whatever may be, over the top way over the top kind of emotions, give me an example so that people who are watching us are understand it. P.S. I love you; melodramatic. Om Shanti Om, Devdas, but you know Om Shanti Om is the very cleverly done film, it also sub words



and spoof its own melodrama. So, it is a different kind of melodrama, it is very self conscious about its melodramatic aspiration. (O)

Not necessarily, they are quite realistic, but melodrama you know are essentially those movies its try to its freeze out emotions from you. So, certain representations are remakes, I would call of Devdas could be termed as melodramatic, but not every visit to Devdas is necessarily, although the plot itself is quite in the sentimental. So, sometime it cannot be help. I would request you to watch a movie, perhaps I am may not able to be screen it, because I have a list of film that I want you to watch, it's called twenty one grams; twenty one grams; Sean Penn Benicio, del Toro, Naomi Watts. Critic has often interpreted twenty one grams is the very good example of melodrama, perhaps one of these, it is a good way to understand what is the melodrama and if you agree that it is a melodrama, but then it all depends on how it is done. Whether it is over a top melodrama or it is a subdued melodrama.

If you look at plot of twenty one grams, it is an out and out melodrama. Women's husband get killed and his heart is transplanted in a dying man's heart and then that this dying man played by Sean Penn, he comes alive and falls in love with the widow of the dead man and she also responds. So, lots of the narrative that saves the movie, plot is melodramatic. What are Johns. No Johns are not easy to explain, usually we say western is a John, we also say gangster is a john; category, but then john itself is heavily contested term and scholars like Rick Altman have done phenomenal work on understanding what is the john, but coming back to our Dogme principle johns are unacceptable. They do not want to make a kind of movie which can be categorized. No making or no filming of john kind of movies. They also gave some technical dictators, like format should be thirty five mm, not cinemascope format, and this is interesting they wanted to make it very clear that cinema is the collaborative art. So, there no is such thing is an auteur.

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Remember those who join this class late, it is for them what is an auteur. Please look it up, I think we refer to it in one of our initial classes. So, director should not be credited, director by so and so that means director is the captain of the ship, not for those who believed in Dogme principles. Film is a collaborative art that is what they believed.

(( )) and obviously, those may not be short in the in a real location it should be; no, again he himself is, contradicting himself; not necessarily, see when this say a movie should be shot according to Dogme principles, then the manifest it to secret, but sometime if they occasionally if they want to break out then why not. So, perhaps one of the films, just mentioned Dogville or antichrist, definitely not subscribing to Dogme principles, but that is what he wanted to do at a particular moment that is what. Now, Cinema Varite, literally it means truthful cinema, more or less the same principles usually short with light, hand held cameras, actual locations and this is important now shooting with real people, making film with real people the way the seat are did, The Bicycle Thieves. Those were non professional actors, they were not actors who were in the profession of acting, just pick them from somewhere and ask them to act, very often it happens, non professional actors, within constraints of budget.

An interesting thing is that they execute the idea of having a bound script, one of these days we will have real screen writer talking to you about, how important it is to have the bound screen play. We had someone like Jaideep Sahni, two years back with us who to

wrote the screen play for Chak De India and several successful films; company etc, and verity felt that it is very important to have the sanctity of a bound script, but cinemas verity felt that films can be short without a script, shoot it that way it comes to u, and later we will edit it, and make a movie out of it. We have already seen social realism and soviet socialist realism, we also talked about Lev Kuleshov; the man with a movie camera, capturing this is what he did before these concepts became fashionable. So, whatever people like Lev Kuleshov and Eisenstein did those days, Dogme and so called cinema verity, they just you know expanded on that, but the idea was much present. Again to respond to your concept of surrealism, which was the short lived artistic movement, but then again once rear brings it back in antichrist. The idea was to explore subjective and not objective, we were talking about distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. So, here to capture real dream like states, capture subjectivity during dream states, and was concern with subverting the logic of representation, surrealism at one level, please with narrative form.

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I will give you some example, this is still from asiya ant thello by Louis Burrelle; a Spanish master, where you see close up of a women's eye and a man's hand holding a razor blade and trying to, what? Trying to do what? Yes cut her across her eye ball. This is greatest kind of realism, one can attain an. Did they actually do it? Whose eye was that? Akaf's eyes, but actually had a Akaf, and that hand belongs to director himself, how real can you get. Now, the Italian new realism, they focus on films of working class

people. Again think Dog Day Afternoon, we are talking about poverty, we are talking about chasm between the rich and poor, and Italian realism we came a vehicles of film maker who were interested in description of Italian history and society.

Again it exposes the same idea is soviet socialist cinema, and also some of our own new wave parallel cinema of the seventy's were concerned with the same idea, same principles in a just society the means of production would be more justly distributed, evenly distributed. Italian new realistic cinema also was based on true incidents, just the way you have Sidney Lumet Dog Day Afternoon based. So, they as far as possible, they tried to base the plots on real and true incidents, occasionally they also used news real footage. As in cinema verity, as in Dogme principles manifesto, they aspire to shoot films on as much as possible on actual locations, and tried using non professional actors, actors who are not really trained to be, people who are not trained to be an actor's.

How many of you familiar with theories called Fredric Jameson; are you, not really Fredric Jameson; The Political Unconscious is the book, and also there is another book called the Signature of the Visible, and Fredric Jameson who is supposedly the most influential literary critic of our time. He has written extensively on several aspects of our license cinema and society, where he discusses thread where Dog Day Afternoon. So, Italian new realism; the plot and character were often used as vehicle for ideas. Those of you who familiar with the work of, Bertolt Brecht; the German dramatist, he uses the term called agit-prop, agitation and propaganda. Agit-prop all art should be agitation and propaganda that should; that means, in other words art vehicle of idea, not just for entertainment.

So, legacy of new realism is extremely impressive and if you look at the films of Satyajit Ray, especially Ray's early cinema, you just mention Ghatak, if you watch his cinema, then you will understand that how these people continue the legacy of new realism. Roberto Rossellini; another practitioner of Italian new realism, and one of his most well known movies is Open City Rome 1945. Again dealing with the particular historical event and having non professional actors in the lead roles, shot an actual location, natural light with natural sound. De Sica's the Bicycle Thieves, and many of time we are asked what is surrealism and how far is it different from realism.

I told you surrealism is concerned basically with interpreting the state of mind, dream like state. Magic realism on the other hand is associated with the fantastic in films and literature of course. So, many of these Latin American writers, is Isabella Allende for example, Laura Esquivel, like *Like Water for Chocolate*. They resort to using magic realism, even a film like *Shkollon*- based on novel, it plays on that elements. These are realistic works; films as well as literature they are based on, but why use the elements of magic realism at all. What does this tone or tinge of magic do to these films, character whenever they want to portrait character which is non-conformist, this is always safer to use magic realism, because which is many a time when you present them in a stark realism, they may become monotonous, that is the idea Marx's does it all the time, Salman Rushdie does it all the time.

Now, Magic realism has become a common plays device, practically every second writer's uses this device, but that was not the intension and purpose, it was used for reason. It has become like as common as jumkat now. Pan's *Labyrinth* is another interesting movie we should be doing it. Well it combines elements of realism and magic realism; it is not know, because when certain film maker and writers they want to convey certain political truths, they resort to magic realism that is the idea. When they want to add a layer to the character as she said, they resort to magic realism, otherwise it will end of becoming a documentary, that saves it from becoming a documentary, but still it tries to convey certain truths. Not exactly magic realism, but it has the categories of its own, see we are going to now look at, there is no category, there is no john, but broadly speaking *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is cinema of the mind. Mind has several layers to it, yesterday we were discussing *Old Boy*, hypnosis, eraser of memory.

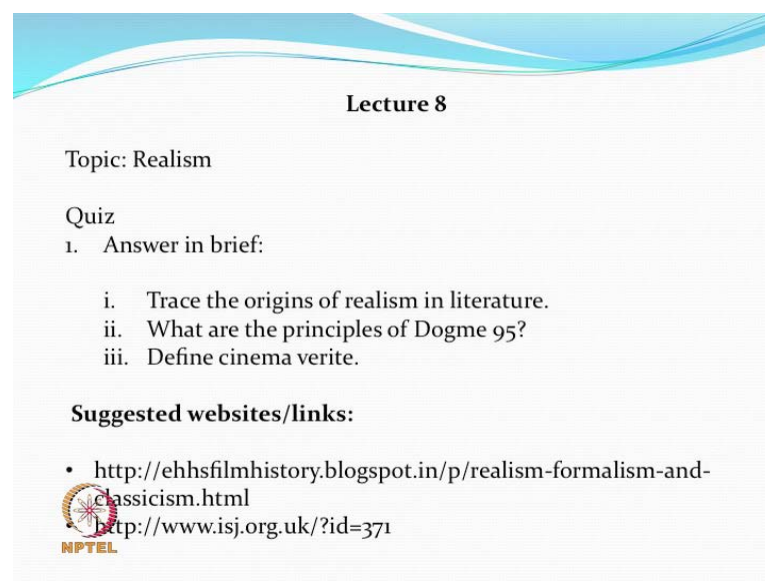
So, all these things are also done in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*; *Memento*. Pan's *Labyrinth* by del Toro is definitely example of magic realism, and these are comic films lawyer Bruce Almighty with Jim Carrey, they employ magic realism in order to convey certain comic elements, they have no other higher purpose, entertaining film watch them, but definitely they are not, we could not call them realistic also, but they do employ the device of magic realism. This is what I was talking about as contrasted with poetic realism you have the category of dirty realism.

So, the word itself says it all poetic realism you understand what is poetic realism and dirty realism, you understand what I mean, and think *Slum Dog Millionaire* is an

example of dirty realism. Think train spotting that is one of the greatest movies ever made, weak stories of everyday life and told plumbucky. There is no romantization there, no glossing over there, and very closely associated is the idea of gritty realism, life and its struggles in realistic manner, again looks like one twenty seven hours. Can lodge is consider one of the greatest exponents of gritty realism, can lodge. Absolutely, the movie, what was that movie that beat Lagan at the Oscars; No man's land; No man's land is the very good example of gritty realism, watch it, it is not as bleak, but it they of course it deals with not so glamorous aspects of life, after all its about war; watch it, wonderful movie. Where is the realism in lagan, the so called realism in Lagan and you contrast it with No man's land, and you will understand.

(O) Gangs of wasseypur of course, but then you know again we are talking about the parallel cinema movements in India which is happening, which has become main stream. Dipaker Banerjee's movies, basically I mean think shanghai, shore in the city. All these cities symphonies, they are basically adhering to these principles, but then of course they are glamorizes version, I mean once upon a time in Mumbai. I do not have to elaborate on that, but shore in the city, it claims to be extremely realistic, it tries to be, and we had the director, who spoke at one of our recent conferences, Krishna D. K Shore in The City. So, we will continue tomorrow, thank you very much.

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**Lecture 8**


Topic: Realism

Quiz

1. Answer in brief:
  - i. Trace the origins of realism in literature.
  - ii. What are the principles of Dogme 95?
  - iii. Define cinema verite.

**Suggested websites/links:**

- <http://ehhsfilmhistory.blogspot.in/p/realism-formalism-and-classicism.html>
- <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=371>

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