

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 24
Queer Cinema II

Welcome dear friends. In the previous module, we had looked at two important texts from Queer Cinema 'The Imitation Game' and 'J Edgar'. These two queer films which depicted male homosexuality asked important questions revolving around masculinity and heterosexual norms in the society. In this module we shall examine a movie that extensively portrays female homosexuality.


Queer theory has invigorated sensitive readings of lesbian legibility which earlier had lacked visibility as well as a representation. The unprecedented increase in lesbian representation in political, social and cultural spheres over the past two decades has resulted in a momentous queer representation in movies as well. The lesbian's era of visibility has coincided with more general transformations in production and distribution across screen media including the rise of digital platforms for transnational dissemination.

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Lesbian Cinema after Queer Theory



- The figure of lesbian in contemporary cinema is marked by a convergence of queer and feminist discourses.
- They chronicle both the pains and pleasures of fantasy identifications, codes and conventions; and peripheral characterizations. *
- Recurring scholarly interventions in lesbian cinema indicate a prior invisibility which was historically influenced by invocations of pathologization, isolation and tragedy.
- The cinematic representation of female homosexuality aims to challenge these repeated tropes and stereotypes.

*Bradbury-Rance, B. C. (2019). *Lesbian cinema after queer theory*. Edinburgh University Press.



Source: Edinburgh University Press



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identifications, codes and conventions and peripheral characterizations. Recurring scholarly interventions in lesbian cinema indicate a prior invisibility which was historically influenced by invocations of pathologization, isolation and tragedy.


The cinematic representation of female homosexuality aims to challenge these repeated tropes and stereotypes. They challenge the inherent negativity of female absence compared to the male presence and make visible a wide spectrum of gender identifications. In the 1990s, the term 'queer cinema' developed from use of the word 'queer' in academic writing in the 1980s and 1990s as an inclusive way of describing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identity and experience and also defining a form of sexuality that was fluid and subversive of traditional understandings of sexuality.

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- The 1990s are a significant turning point as it was a decade of change that welcomed varied queer representation both on the cinema screen and in the academy.
 - The term "New Queer Cinema" was first coined by B. Ruby Rich in the monthly film magazine *Sight & Sound*.
 - The term describes a series of films in the 1990s which featured unapologetic depictions of same-sex relationships that reconfigured traditional heterosexual notions of family and marriage.
 - Eventually, the 21st century saw a wave of equality laws privileging the couple form for homosexuals, engendering cultural visibility for the queer community.
- Schoonover and Galt explore how queer filmmaking intersects with international sexual cultures, geopolitics, and aesthetics to disrupt dominant modes of world making.



Source: Duke University Press



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The 1990s are a significant turning point as this decade has been a decade of change that welcomed varied queer representation both on the cinema screen and in the academy. The term new queer cinema was first coined by B. Ruby Rich in the monthly film magazine sight and sound. The term describes a series of films in the 1990s which featured unapologetic depictions of same sex relationships that reconfigured traditional heterosexual notions of family and marriage.

Eventually the 21st century saw a wave of equality laws privileging the couple form for homosexuals, engendering cultural visibility for the queer community. Schoonover and Galt in their work 'Queer Cinema in the World' explore how queer filmmaking intersects

with international sexual cultures geopolitics and aesthetics to disrupt dominant modes of world making.

Cinema creates a uniquely potent mode of queer worldliness, one that disrupts normative ways of being in the world and forges revised modes of belonging. In the era of visibility where the lesbian has now been recognized in law and representation in several countries the new queer cinema reclaimed and quashed the homophobic notions of queer pathology and social stigma.

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- Some of the iconic lesbian films in the 21st century include *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *My Summer of Love* (2004), *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013), *Carol* (2015), *The Handmaiden* (2016), and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019).
- *Mulholland Drive* (2001) is a film that intertwines the conventions of queer representation with Hollywood setting, conventional thriller tropes and technicolor aesthetic. The film also reflects on the censorship practices of Motion Pictures Production Code in the United States.

Some of the iconic lesbian films in the 21st century include ‘Mulholland Drive’ in 2001, ‘My Summer of Love’ in 2004, ‘Blue is the Warmest Colour’ in 2013, ‘Carol’ in 2015, ‘The Handmaiden’ 2016 and ‘Portrait of a Lady on Fire’ in 2019. ‘Mulholland Drive’ is a film that intertwines the conventions of queer representation with Hollywood setting, conventional thriller tropes and technicolor esthetic the film also reflects on the censorship practices of motion pictures production code in the USA. ‘Blue is the Warmest Colour’ has been subject of extensive media scrutiny after its triumph at the Cannes Film Festival, questioning if its explicit representation of the female body is an appropriation of queer desire by a male director for a heterosexual audience. In contrast the French film ‘Portrait of a Lady on Fire,’ dismantles the male gays in its story set during the 18th century. In this movie an artist is asked to paint a portrait of an aristocratic woman for her future Italian suitor.

The active female gaze in the movie shows how women look at each other and are seen by each other rather than reconstructing traditional male images of women. In this module we shall analyze the film 'Carol' in detail. This film was premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2015.

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- Carol is a 2015 romantic, period film directed by American filmmaker Todd Haynes.
- The film is based on the 1952 novel *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith. *The Price of Salt* is her only queer novel about an unequivocal lesbian relationship, and its relatively happy ending, which was unprecedented in lesbian literature.
- *The Price of Salt* has been a major text for LGBT studies since its publication.

Source: movieposters2.com

- Published in 1952 with the "Claire Morgan" alias.
- Republished in 1990 as *Carole* under her own name.

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'Carol' is a romantic period film directed by American filmmaker Todd Haynes it is based on the 1952 novel by Patricia Highsmith. The title of this novel is 'The Price of Salt'. This is her only queer novel about an unequivocal lesbian relationship and its relative happy ending which was unprecedented in lesbian literature. The price of salt has been a major text for LGBT studies since its publication. It was initially published in 1952 with the alias of Claire Morgan.

However, in 1990 it was published as 'Carol' under the own name of the writer according to Patricia Highsmith, the novel was inspired by a blonde woman in a mink coat who ordered a doll from her when she was working as a sales girl temporarily in New York in 1948. Highsmith wrote the novel as a semi autobiographical story from her own life references and desire for a lost love.

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- The film *Carol* was chosen for six Oscar nominations including Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actress.
 - The screenplay was scripted by American playwright and screenwriter Phyllis Nagy.
- Set in New York City during the early 1950s, the film tells the story of a ‘forbidden affair’ between an aspiring female photographer and an older woman going through a difficult divorce.
- The leading roles are played by academy award winning actress Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara.
- The movie was featured prominently in several film lists by critics, and was ranked by the British Film Institute as “the best LGBT film of all time” in 2016.



Cate Blanchett
Source:
www.femalefirst.co.uk




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The film was chosen for six Oscar nominations including Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actress. The screenplay was scripted by an American play writer and screenwriter Phyllis Nagy. Set in New York City during the early 1950s, the film tells the story of a ‘forbidden affair’ between an aspiring female photographer and an older woman going through a difficult divorce.


The leading roles are played by academy award winning actress Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara. The movie was featured prominently in several film lists by critics and was ranked by the British Film Institute as “the best LGBT film of all time” in 2016. In this film the director explores the invisible lesbian subculture of mid 20th century America by highlighting the scary duality of people in their gender identification and heterosexual relations.

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- *Carol* follows two women from very different backgrounds who find themselves in an unexpected love affair.
- A young clerk Theresa Belivet (Rooney Mara) working in a Manhattan department store meets Carol (Cate Blanchett), an alluring, glamorous woman trapped in a loveless marriage. As an immediate connection sparks between them, the innocence of their first encounter dims and their connection deepens.
- Carol is long separated from her husband, Harge; and is going through a difficult divorce while fighting for her daughter's custody.
- Therese's boyfriend, Richard, wants her to go to France with him, hoping they will marry, but she is ambivalent about their relationship.



Source: The Weinstein Company



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'Carol' follows two women from very different backgrounds who find themselves in an unexpected love affair. A young clerk Theresa Belivet who has been played by Rooney Mara is working in a Manhattan department store when she happens to meet Carol, the role which is played by Cate Blanchett. Carol is an alluring glamorous woman trapped in a loveless marriage. As an immediate connection sparks between the two, the innocence of their first encounter dims and their connection deepens.

Carol is long separated from her husband Harge and is going through a difficult divorce while fighting for her daughter's custody. Therese's boyfriend Richard wants her to go to France with him hoping that they would be able to marry some time, but she is rather ambivalent about this relationship. A common friend brings the two women together again Therese is also an aspiring photographer and she was invited by Carol to visit her home.


Therese takes candid photographs of her, but Harge, Carol's husband, arrives unexpectedly and become suspicious of Therese as Carol earlier had an affair years back with her friend Abby.

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- Carol learns that Harge is petitioning the judge to consider a "morality clause" against her, threatening to expose her homosexuality to get full custody of their daughter.
- Meanwhile Therese breaks up with her boyfriend Richard. Both Carol and Therese go on a trip where they meet a travelling salesman Tucker. Tucker is a private investigator in disguise employed by Harge and he is able to obtain evidence of Carol's homosexuality.
- As the case for her daughter's custody intensifies, Carol has to stay away from Therese.
- Carol does not deny her sexuality to her lawyers. She knows that in doing so, she will lose the case and tells Harge that he can have the custody of their daughter.



Source: The Weinstein Company



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Carol learns that Harge is petitioning the judge to consider a morality clause against her threatening to expose her homosexuality to get full custody of their daughter. Meanwhile, Therese breaks up with her boyfriend Richard both Carol and Therese go on a trip where they meet a travelling salesman, Tucker. Tucker is a private investigator in disguise employed by Harge and he is able to obtain evidence of Carol's homosexuality. As the case for her daughter's custody intensify, Carol has to stay away from Therese. Carol does not deny her sexuality to her lawyers.

She knows that in doing so she will lose the case and tells Harge that he can have the custody of their daughter. After a long and difficult journey in their relationship which was unstable and with constant threats Carol interests reunite at the end of the movie.

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The Price of Homosexuality

- Todd Haynes's film adaptation of *Carol* revived the novel with twilight images of mid 20th century anxiety, coded gestures, longing glances and well-chosen words.
- This is primarily due to the brilliance of the screenplay written by lesbian playwright Phyllis Nagy, who had become friends with Highsmith in the decade before the author's death in 1995.
- *Carol* shows the 'price' that the eponymous heroine – a wealthy, discontented suburban wife and mother, willingly pays for her taste of salt – for her affair with a shopgirl she meets during a Christmas rush.
- The movie is an erotically charged period drama with minimal explicit sexual representation. It takes a deeper psychological exploration of queer desire and beauty.




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Todd Haynes's film adaptation of *Carol* revived the novel with twilight images of mid 20th century anxiety, coded gestures, longing glances and well-chosen words. This is primarily due to the brilliance of the screenplay written by the playwright Phyllis Nagy, who has admitted to her homosexual desires and had become friends with Highsmith in the decade before the author's death in 1995. 'Carol' shows the price that the eponymous heroine - a wealthy a discontented suburban wife and mother willingly pays for her taste of salt - for her affair with a shopgirl she meets during a Christmas rush. The movie is an erotically charged period drama with minimal explicit sexual representation. It takes a deeper psychological exploration of queer desire and beauty. The minimalist and discrete title of the movie also carries a certain sense of importance.

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- The movie transports the viewer into the perspective of the salesgirl Therese. She is much younger, innocent, less informed, naïve and confused about not only queer desire, but about love and relationships in general.
- Together with Therese, the audience explores the difficulty and sophisticated nature of 'forbidden' and outlawed queer desire.
- The movie's title 'Carol' is the name of her obsession. So the film's simplistic title refers emphatically to both women - to subject and object of desire, gaining a direct embrace of lesbian desire. (White, 2015)



Director: Todd Haynes on set with Cate Blanchett
Source: The Weinstein Company



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The movie transports the viewer into the perspective of the salesgirl Therese. She is much younger, innocent, less informed, naïve and also confused about not only the queer desire, but in general about love and relationships. Together with Therese the audience explores the difficulty and the sophisticated nature of forbidden and outlawed queer desire.

The movie's title 'Carol' is the name of her obsession. So, the film simplistic title refers emphatically to both women to the subject and the object of desire gaining a direct embrace of lesbian desire. The film also uses the allure and potency of two contemporary star actresses to explore lesbian historical agency and to sketch a dream image of the mid 20th century with all its limitations.


Lesbian representability encompasses social and historical discourses and also the corresponding aesthetic and narrative structures. This makes the desire between the women and its consequences recognizable in both film and in the subjects who decode them.

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- Carol's drifting mood and sketchy plot invite the viewer to find a version of her deeply conflicted desiring self within its constructed world.
- Its characters are ciphers and its dialogues sparse, and the details of setting are more fully realized than those of the story.
- This closeted suppression is reflected in the title of the original novel "the price of salt".
- Openly confessing her sexuality will cause Carol to be deemed as 'unfit' for motherhood by the society. The losing of her daughter's custody before the law is a heavy price that she had to pay.



Source: The Weinstein Company




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Carol's drifting mood and sketchy plot invite the viewer to find a version of her deeply conflicted desiring self or within its constructed world. Its characters are ciphers and its dialogues sparse and the details of sitting are more fully realized than those of the story. The closeted suppression is reflected in the title of the original novel 'The Price of Salt'. Openly confessing her sexuality will cause Carol to be deemed as unfit for motherhood by the society.

The losing of her daughter's custody before the law is a heavy 'price' that she had to pay. Therefore, the film focuses on the world of the lovers, outside of which everything is stricken with unreality. The film's women in the shadows are captured through a careful play of light, color and composition in Lachman's cinematography. In the following scene, we find a frank interaction between Carol and Therese at a restaurant.

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"Flung Out of Space"

- In this scene, Therese is invited for lunch by Carol, and they meet after their initial encounter at the store.
- Carol had forgotten her gloves at the shop and Therese had mailed them to her.
- The restaurant scene highlights how very different these two women are.

- There you are.
- Thank you.

Source: The Weinstein Company

IIT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

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In this scene, Therese is invited for lunch by Carol and they meet after their initial encounter at the store. Carol had forgotten her gloves at the shop and Therese had mailed them to her along with a Christmas card. The restaurant scene highlights how very different these two women are.

There you are.

Thank you.

I am so sorry to keep you waiting. I will have the creamed spinach over poached eggs and a dry martini with an olive.

I will have the same.

The meal or the drink?

All of it, thank you.

So, what kind of name is Belivet?

It is Czech it is changed, originally it was.

It is very original.

Well.

And your first name.

Therese.

Therese, not Theresa?

No.

Therese Belivet, it is lovely.

And yours?

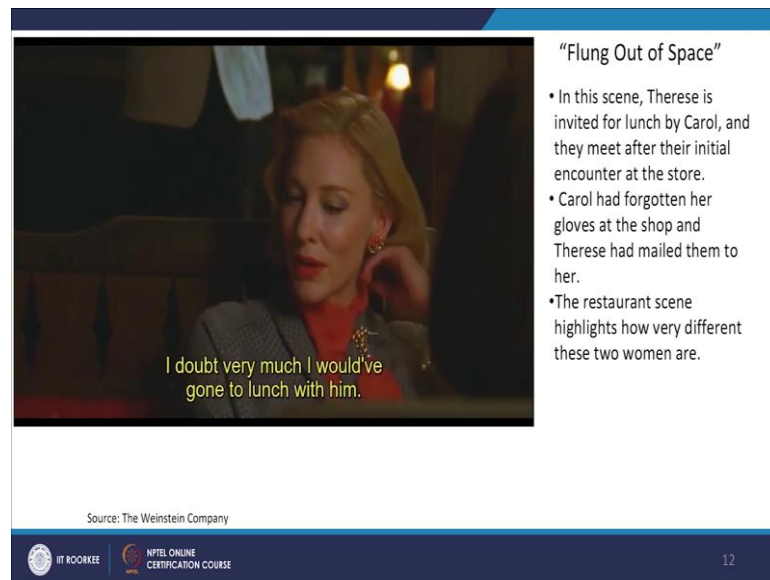
Carol.

So, I am sure you thought it was a man who sent you back your gloves.

I did. Thought it might have been a man in the ski department.

I am sorry.

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"Flung Out of Space"

- In this scene, Therese is invited for lunch by Carol, and they meet after their initial encounter at the store.
- Carol had forgotten her gloves at the shop and Therese had mailed them to her.
- The restaurant scene highlights how very different these two women are.

I doubt very much I would've gone to lunch with him.

Source: The Weinstein Company

IT ROOKIEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 12

No, I am delighted I doubt very much I would have gone to lunch with him.

Oh, your perfume.

Yes.

It is nice.

Thank you, Harge bought me a bottle years ago before we were married and I have been wearing it ever since.

Harge is your husband?

Hm mm. Well, technically we are divorcing.


I am sorry.

Do not be and do you live alone Therese Belivet?

I do.

Well, there is Richard he would like to live with me. Oh no it is nothing like that I mean he would like to marry me.

I see and would you like to marry him?



"Flung Out of Space"

- In this scene, Therese is invited for lunch by Carol, and they meet after their initial encounter at the store.
- Carol had forgotten her gloves at the shop and Therese had mailed them to her.
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Source: The Weinstein Company

IT ROOKIEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

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Well, I barely even know what to order for lunch.

What a strange girl you are.

Why?

(Refer Slide Time: 17:50)



"Flung Out of Space"

- In this scene, Therese is invited for lunch by Carol, and they meet after their initial encounter at the store.
- Carol had forgotten her gloves at the shop and Therese had mailed them to her.
- The restaurant scene highlights how very different these two women are.


Source: The Weinstein Company

IT ROORKEE NPEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 12


Flung out of space.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:55)

- The scene shows their second meeting, but in a more intimate and quieter space of an elegant restaurant compared to the Christmas shopping rush when they first met.
- Both the book and the movie are told from the viewpoint of the young, unreliable Therese and we get shards of Carol's life through the filter of Therese's experience of her.
- Much of the tension of the film comes from Therese's uncertainty with questions like "Is this love?", "Does Carol feel the same or is this just a game to Carol?"
- It mimics the feelings of early love, its allure of beauty and hope, but also the paralyzing fear of rejection and loss.



Source: The Weinstein Company




IT ROORKEE NPEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 13

This scene shows their second meeting, but in a more intimate and quieter space of an elegant restaurant compared to the Christmas shopping rush when they had first met. Both the book and the movie are told from the viewpoint of the young and therefore, perhaps unreliable Therese and we get shots of Carol's life through the filter of her experience of the other woman.


Much of the tension of the film comes from Therese's uncertainty with questions like "Is this love? Does Carol feel the same or is this just a game to Carol?" It mimics the feelings of early love its allure of beauty and hope, but also the paralyzing fear of rejection and loss. Also, because there was a real danger to open homosexual desire in a time of criminalization. The film is depicted with this strange girl case which is marked by a gentle curiosity and willingness to listen to an alternate perspective.

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- The scene also shows that Therese was not intimidated by the style of a much older Carol and even complements her.
- Carol, who is impressed, confesses to Therese that she wouldn't have invited a man for lunch if he had sent her the Christmas card from the shop. She says, "what a strange girl you are, flung out of space".
- the film describes the connection of two women in deeper sense beyond friendship, as a space beyond the ordinary, even dangerous considering the period.
- But young Therese was ready and adventurous to tread those spaces, a universal unknown of falling in love.



Source: The Weinstein Company



IT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 14


This scene also shows that Therese was not intimidated by the style of a much older and much more sophisticated Carol and she is able to even compliment her. Carol who is impressed confesses to Therese that she would not have invited a man for lunch if he had sent her the Christmas card from the shop. She says, "what a strange girl you are flung out of space." The film describes the connection of two women in a deeper sense which is beyond friendship as a space beyond the ordinary even dangerous considering the times they were living in.

But young Therese is ready and adventurous to tread these spaces a universal unknown of falling in love. The scene also shows how several emotions are conveyed without words through prolonged silence. The two actors communicate with their bodies and their expressive faces in ways that speak volumes. This use of body language particularly of the lingering gaze counters the gaze of the heterosexual as well as of the patriarchal surveillance. We should now look at some of the recurrent motifs in the movie.


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Of Trains and Journeys

- Trains are a recurring motif in the movie. There are numerous references to a train set in the department store, which Carol bought for her daughter in the beginning of the film. It carries important symbolism.
- Shots of Therese looking wistfully at the toy train provide a thematic relevance.
- When Carol meets Therese for the first time, she was there for buying a doll for her daughter. However, she changes her mind. Carol asks Therese:
 - “what did you want when you were this age?”
and Therese replies a “train set”.



Therese curiously looking at the toy train.
Source: The Weinstein Company



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 15

A particular recurring motif in the movie is that of trains. There are numerous references to a train set in the department store which Carol bought for her daughter in the beginning of the film. It carries important symbolism. Shots of Therese looking wistfully at the toy train provide a thematic relevance. When Carol meets Therese for the first time, she was there for buying a doll for her daughter as a Christmas present.

However, she changes her mind and she asks Therese what did you want when you were this age and Therese replies “train set”. The following scene shows this first interaction between Carol and Therese. This scene begins with Carol admiring the toy train that Therese had adored. Then they make eye contact and have a simple yet honest conversation. This encounter leaves a lingering impression on both women.

“I wonder if you might help me find this doll for my daughter.

Bright Betsy oh, she cries and wets herself, but I am afraid we are all out of stock.

Oh, I have left it too long.

Well, we have plenty of other dolls all kinds actually.

Right, what was your favorite doll when you were four?

Me? I never... Not many to be honest. I am sorry you are not allowed to smoke on the sales floor.

Of all the... forgive me shopping makes me nervous.

That's alright. Working here makes me nervous.

You are very kind, here she is.

Oh, she looks like you around the eyes.

• The scene begins with Carol admiring the toy train that Therese adores.

• Then they make eye contact and have a simple yet honest conversation.

• This encounter leaves a lingering impression on both of them.

Source: The Weinstein Company

ITT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 16

You think so, what did you want when you were this age?

A train set!

Really? Do you know much about train sets?

I do actually and we just got a new model in last week its hand built with hand painted cars it is a limited edition of 5000 you might have seen it on the way in over by the elevators. I would show you, but I am sort of confined to this desk.

Do you ship?

Special delivery you could have it in two or three days. They would even assemble it for you.


Well, that's that. Sold. Shall I pay now?

Oh yes of course.

Where would you learn so much about train sets?

Oh, I read too much probably.

That is refreshing.



- The scene begins with Carol admiring the toy train that Therese adores.
- Then they make eye contact and have a simple yet honest conversation.
- This encounter leaves a lingering impression on both of them.

- Merry Christmas.
- Merry Christmas.

Source: The Weinstein Company

IT ROORKEE NITEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 16

Thank you, Merry Christmas.


Merry Christmas.

I like the hat.


There is a gift for everyone in our accessories department on street level where you will find the entire parker pen line on sale including parkers new smooth lining.”

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- Trains carry the themes of travel, transience and romance.
- After listening to Therese, Carol buys the expensive toy train set instead of the doll that she came for.
- The trope that Therese is not conditioned by traditional female toys like dolls, becomes a symbol for the rejection of gender norms as well as a coded signal of queerness (Benson, 2018).
- It is also a reminder of how their lives have been 'redirected' by this chance encounter.



Source: The Weinstein Company

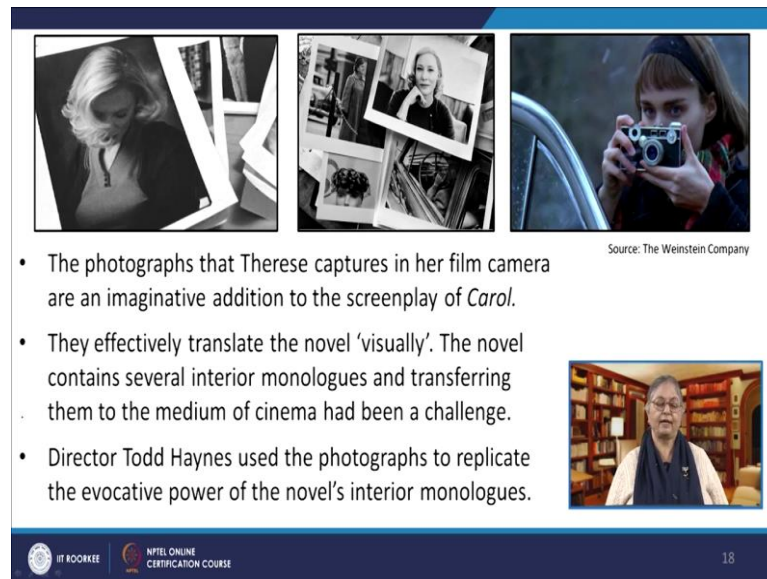


IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 17

Trains and cars are usually considered as toys only for boys when they are young children. Therese explains that she was fond of trains in her childhood and has read a great deal about them. Trains carry the themes of travel, transience and romance. After listening to Therese, Carol buys the expensive toy train set instead of the doll she had come for.

The trope that Therese is not conditioned by traditional female toys like dolls becomes a symbol for the rejection of gender norms as well as a coded signal of queerness. It is also a reminder of how their lives have been redirected by this chance encounter. Another recurrent motive in the film is that of photographs.

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- The photographs that Therese captures in her film camera are an imaginative addition to the screenplay of *Carol*.
- They effectively translate the novel 'visually'. The novel contains several interior monologues and transferring them to the medium of cinema had been a challenge.
- Director Todd Haynes used the photographs to replicate the evocative power of the novel's interior monologues.

Source: The Weinstein Company


IIT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 18

The photographs that Therese captures in her film camera are an imaginative addition to this screenplay of 'Carol'. They effectively translate the novel visually. The novel contains several interior monologues and transferring them to the medium of cinema had been a challenge. Director Todd Haynes used the photographs to replicate the evocative power of the novel's interior monologues.


This element of photography digs deep into the mid 20th century milieu. They illustrate a symphony of emotions from sly seduction to piercing grief without the need for a raised voice.

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- Another important element of the film's initial part is the pair of leather gloves that Carol leaves behind at the store.
- The leather gloves are not mentioned in the original book, but have become emblematic of the film *Carol*.
- The director prompts the audience to ask the following questions:
 - Did Carol leave the gloves on purpose?
 - Was it another code like the train set?
 - Was it a calculated move or a fortunate mistake?
- The film does not answer these questions and leaves it to the audience to interpret.



Carol places her leather gloves on the table.
Source: The Weinstein Company



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Another important element of the film's initial part is the pair of leather gloves that Carol leaves behind at the store. The leather gloves are not mentioned in the original book, but have become emblematic of the film 'Carol.' The director prompts the audience to ask certain questions for example, "Did Carol leave the gloves on purpose? Was it another code like the train set? Was it a calculated move or a fortunate mistake?"


The film does not answer these questions and leaves it to the audience to interpret. The leaving of the gloves can be interpreted as an act that shows Carol's estrangement with her husband where she finds herself torn between the daughter she would always love and the man she never could.

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- The novel's adaption appears very authentic to the novel, "not because it is accurate to the letter, but because it creates the same mood, tone and atmosphere" (Woodall, 2021).
- The film successfully recreates the mysterious ambiguity of the novel with great detail. This is partly because the film is made to look surreal and dream-like where time passes differently.
- Additionally, the film is shot in 16mm 'film' (instead of digital format) replicating the 20th century style.
- The 'film' format can provide a unique aesthetic with film grain and color, emulating the yesteryears in a way that the digital format cannot.



Carol and Therese on a road trip.
Source: The Weinstein Company



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

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The novel's adaptation appears very authentic to the novel not because it is accurate to the letter, but because it is able to create the same mood, tone and atmosphere. The film successfully recreates the mysterious ambiguity of the novel with great detail. This is partly because the film is made to look surreal and dreamlike where time passes differently. Additionally, the film is shot in 16 mm film instead of the digital format replicating the 20th century style.

The film format can provide a unique aesthetic with film grain and color emulating the yesteryears in a way that the digital format cannot. It strongly evokes a sense of the period and creates a grunge - an ethereal quality with the creative use of negative space and long takes in wide angles.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:32)



Source: The Weinstein Company


- In the film, we join scenes halfway through or leave them partially resolved or even unresolved.
- The camera angles, coupled with the conventional film format, provide the audience a dream-like image of the characters -- as if they are obscured through a looking glass.



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 21


In the film we join scenes halfway through or leave them partially resolved or even unresolved. The camera angles coupled with a conventional film format provide the audience a dreamlike image of the characters as if they are obscured through a looking glass. Director Haynes repeatedly films his characters through glass while depicting romantic, tense and intimate moments.

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Source: The Weinstein Company

- In the context of the film, a number of key moments are shot through glass – either through windowpanes or reflections. This foregrounds the act of looking itself.
- It also shows that clandestine and secretive nature of the relationship between Carol and Therese.



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In the context of the film a number of key moments are shot through glass either through window panes or reflections this foregrounds the act of looking itself. It also shows that


clandestine and secretive nature of the relationship between Carol and Therese. We are seeing the early moments of a love story in this film. Carol and Therese fall in love on the other side of the glass inhabiting a world few of the audience have experienced and living in a time foreign to the film's viewers.

Therefore, the director persuades his audience to consider individuals in a world alien to their own and experience a romance that they cannot fully understand.


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Carol as a Queer Counter Space

- Director Haynes has paid meticulous attention to textures, patterns and spaces to underline the centrality of female-to-female gaze in the film. (Smith, 2018)
- The earlier dialogue “flung out of space” then becomes indicative of having no space for *deviant* desire – that these lovers will have to occupy an ‘other space’ – what Michel Foucault calls ‘heterotopia’ in his *The Order of Things* (1971).
- Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring cultural and discursive spaces that can have more layers of meanings or relationships. (Foucault, 1971)



Source: The Weinstein Company




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The director has paid meticulous attention to textures, patterns and spaces to underline the centrality of female-to-female gaze in the film. The earlier dialogue “flung out of space” this becomes indicative of having no space for deviant desire - that these lovers will have to occupy an ‘other space’ what Michel Foucault has called ‘heterotopia’ in his work ‘The Order of Things’ which was published in 1971.

Heterotopias are worlds within worlds mirroring cultural and discursive spaces that can have more and multiple layers of meanings or relationships. Heterotopias function to disturb sameness to reflect the inverse of society and to subvert the signification. The queer space and visual of Haynes’ film is an anti-heteronormative rejection of the early 1950s social as well as sexual propriety.

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- The narrative during Christmas can also be studied as if the director is making a temporal disruption - a "holiday time" - outside of the ordinary time.
- The spectator enters a very specific heterotopic space of mid-century melancholic New York City before the post-war abundance and brightness; a period of anxiety and transition.
- The film's gritty, washed out colours, bleak spaces and framings obscure the characters with complex turmoil within.
- Through visual fragmenting, Haynes renders his protagonists in their struggle against social constraints – of marriage, motherhood and the unspeakability of same-sex desire.




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The narrative during Christmas can also be studied as if the director is making a temporal disruption, a holiday time outside of the ordinary time. This spectator enters a very specific heterotopic space of mid-century melancholic New York City before the postwar abundance and brightness a period of anxiety and transition. The films gritty washed out colours, bleak spaces and framings obscure the characters with complex turmoil within.

Through visual fragmenting, Haynes renders his protagonist in their struggle against social constraints of marriage, motherhood, and the unspeakability of same sex desire. In the following scene, we see the vulnerable version of Carol who has been normally strong and also hit fat throughout the movie.

In this scene we see that Carol does not deny the accusations about her sexuality she knows that she cannot be a good mother to her daughter Rindy if she is denied agency to express herself.

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- In this scene, Carol does not deny the accusations about her sexuality.
- She knows that she cannot be a good mother to her daughter Rindy if she is denied agency to express herself.

Source: The Weinstein Company

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Harge, I want you to be happy I didn't give you that. I failed you. I mean we both could have given more, but we gave each other Rindy and that is the most breathtaking the most generous of gifts. So, why are we spending so much time trying to keep her from each other? Now, what happened with Therese I wanted and I will not deny it or say that I, but I do regret and I grieve for the mess we are about to make of our child's life. We Harge are both responsible. So, I think we should set it right. Now I think that Harge should have custody of Rindy.

Could I suggest we just take a break for a moment?

No. Fred will you let me speak because if you do not, I will not be able to cope.

Now, I am no martyr, I have no clue what is best for me, but I do know and I feel it in my bones what is best for my daughter.

Now, I want visits with her Harge. I do not care if they are supervised, I just want them to be regular.



- In this scene, Carol does not deny the accusations about her sexuality.
- She knows that she cannot be a good mother to her daughter Rindy if she is denied agency to express herself.

Source: The Weinstein Company

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Now, there was a time when I would have done almost anything I would have locked myself away to keep Rindy with me. But what use am I to her to us if I am living against my own grain.

So, that is the deal I will not I cannot negotiate anymore you take it or leave it. But if you leave it, we go to court and if we go to court, it will get ugly and we are not ugly people Harge.”


Carol strongly states that she does not regret the truth of her homosexuality and says what happened with Therese was wanted by her and that she would not deny it. In an honest yet vulnerable moment Carol acknowledges that she has failed as a wife to Harge, but she does not think that her relationship with another woman is an act of sin even though her lawyer was trying to hide it before others, as if same sex desire is something that should evoke shame stigma and guilt.

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- Before the scene with lawyers, Carol sees Therese crossing the street through the window of her car.
- Seeing Therese right before the court scene influenced Carol's decision deeply. She realized that she was living a life where she doesn't belong, where her gender expression and identity are suppressed. She says,
 - I do know what is best for my daughter... There was a time when I would have done almost anything, I would have locked myself away to keep Rindy with me. But what use am I to her or to us, if I am living against my own grain?
- Carol, in this scene, does not give up motherhood, but grants custody to her husband Harge, rather than dragging their daughter through a difficult childhood with trials and court cases.



Source: The Weinstein Company



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Before the scene with lawyers Carol sees Therese crossing the street through the window of her car. Seeing her right before the court scene influenced Carol's decision deeply, she realized that she was living a life where she does not belong, where her gender expression and identity are suppressed and she says,

“I do know what is best for my daughter. There was a time when I would have done almost anything I would have locked myself away to keep Rindy with me. But what use am I to her or to us if I am living against my own grain?”


In this scene, Carol does not give a motherhood, but grants custody to her husband Harge rather than dragging their daughter through a difficult childhood with trials and court cases.

The film shows Carol strongly rejected her status as a wealthy suburban mother and wife. She did empathize with Harge's role as Rindy's father and she did not abandon her daughter either. Carol has claimed another space for herself despite all the danger and uncertainties that come along with it.

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Conclusion: Unutterable Passion

- *Carol* is one of the finest queer films placed at the paragon of its genre by several critics. It is a story inspired by real homosexual experiences based on actual homosexual characters that the author knew.
- The movie, on the other hand, has been written (Patricia Highsmith), adapted (Phyllis Nagy), and directed (Todd Haynes) by artists who are themselves homosexuals.
- It took 18 years for the film to be made because *Carol* had been in development since 1997, when Nagy wrote the first draft of the screenplay.
- It was difficult to fund a film which was unapologetically queer and to get a big company to support and produce a project with two female leads.




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‘Carol’ is one of the finest queer films placed at the paragon of its genre by several critics. It is a story inspired by real homosexual experiences based on actual homosexual characters that the author knew. The movie on the other hand has been written, adapted and directed by artists who are themselves homosexuals. It took 18 years for the film to be made because ‘Carol’ had been in development since 1997 when Nagy wrote the first draft of the screenplay.


It was also difficult to fund a film which was unapologetically queer and to get a big company to support and produce a project with two female leads. What is refreshing about ‘Carol’ is that both the women in the film are not brought down by guilt about their sexuality.

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- The attraction these characters feel for each other is never questioned or deconstructed, never moralized or explained.
- The film does not end with a typical happy ending resolution as we do not know what the future holds for Carol and Therese. Will they live together, will Carol see her daughter often or will their life be beset with more struggles?
- Therese was confused about their future, and she tries to push Carol away initially. But she does not allow her thoughts to dawdle in questions about an uncertain future; because at the moment, she loves Carol unconditionally and they reunite.
- In the film world where queer stories often end in tragedy or involve shame, self-denial or penance, *Carol* is a rare exception.



Carol smiles as Therese returns to her.
Source: The Weinstein Company



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The attraction these characters feel for each other is never questioned or deconstructed never moralized or explained. The film does not end with a typical happy ending resolution as we do not know what the future holds either for Carol or for Therese. Will they live together, will Carol see her daughter often or will their life be beset with more struggles?

Therese was confused about their future and she tries to push Carol away initially, but she does not allow her thoughts to dawdle in questions about an uncertain future because at the moment she loves Carol unconditionally and they ultimately reunite. In the film world where queer stories often end in tragedy or involve shame, self-denial or penance 'Carol' is a rare exception.

In the next module we will look at how queer representation in digital OTT platforms have transformed the availability, immediacy and regularity of video production and transmission and how it widens this spectrum of queer depiction.

Thank you

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