

Film Appreciation
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Lecture - 12
Action Cinema

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Good morning everyone, and welcome to another class as part of the course on Film appreciation, but today's class, we turn our attention to the action cinema, very popular genres for many of us. And although Hollywood genres are not water tight, the heroes or hero of an action film or put through various physically demanding challenges and perform physical fetes typically involving violence fighting sequences and chases. This action cinema has always been extremely popular it is one of the safest genres all over the world, and it is a rare movie know you also have the genres of that is so called b cinema the b grade films.

And so if you cannot make a high budget film, there is always a scope or opportunity to make a b class, b grade movie that is so called b film which will do extremely well in certain pockets. And it is true; it is a universally accepted fact. The physical bodies of the heroes specially and also the other characters is put through risk infused an environment and is subjected to forces that try to push it out of that environment. This is important to remember in action cinema the resulting battle and you know that triumph and fantasy of empowerment are physicalized in characters of action cinema. One of the greatest films and earliest examples of this was the Great Train Robbery released in 1903, which is

considered to be the first action film is a very short film, but it has a distinction of being the first narrative film - a complete film as you know cinema was still in its early stages you had the short features by the Lumiere brothers and George Melies but a full pledged narrative film; however, short it may be was the Great Train Robbery which had a narrative.

But as a time passed, action cinemas they tended to take a more larger than life image with the hero is a one man army that is the time we are living in now a days or but you know this reached its peak in the seventies think of the Dirty Harry movies starring Clint Eastwood and think of our own cinema. Starting Amitabh Bachchan hero as a one-man army and this phenomenon reached its pinnacle in the eighties with the films of Stallone and Schwarzenegger and Van Damme. The type of action films moved from cowboy films, especially in Hollywood to war adventures like The Guns of Navarone to James Bond movies of the sixties which present the resource full hero. Some of the early action heroes include John Wayne, Steve McQueen, the greatest Steve McQueen, and I suggest that you should watch some of his movies like Bullitt. Bullitt is important and also The Great Escape. Also actors like Bruce lee, Chuck Norris, Clint Eastwood they became a very popular in the seventies. Bruce lee of course, was the ultimate in Hong Kong martial art cinema and his brand of cinema also became very popular worldwide. The time action movies became more nuanced and more sub cultures emerged in the Lethal Weapons series Mel Gibson and Danny Glover popularized the buddy cop cinema where Chuck Norris and Bruce lee were pioneers in the martial art cinema.

Given the importance of creating in and an audiovisual is spectacle a combination of economic incentives and artistic imperatives, filmmakers to create a certain you know wow factor in action films. It is therefore, important to create a sensory experience that is beyond every day experience that is spectacle or is spectacles sake rather than be an entity to assist a narrative it is suggested that action sequence could aid in taking the narrative forward. In action films there work of the body is constantly, the image of the body is constantly in focus and film makers use rapid editing as a device and also close up shots of the face and body wide ranging camera movements of the action films are intensified using these devices.

So, the action audiences are not passive spectators, but in the case of cinema, action cinema they are active and I use it in quotations participants who are responding to be on screen stimuli. While visuals are an important component to action cinema, the auditory

sense is also constantly used to enhance the action experience apart from explosions and gun shots background music to plays an important role in the setting the mood facing the film etcetera and sound tracks are not used to offer the real bodies, but represent heroic idealized bodies. Now action cinema is body centric in that the body within the universe of the film the laws of physics are constantly set and broken by the protagonist to enhance the heroism of the performer and to emerge the viewers body itself within the stunts and action sequences of the film.

So, this is the reason why people identify so much with that you say we have been talking about cinematic terms such as suture where the viewers they almost feel one with the happenings on the screen. And therefore, this is a reason why many youngsters try to imitate the action that dangerous action scenes which they watch on the cinematic screen. Until about the nineties action cinema were dominated by man and it was scene as a male bastion the protagonist was typically white male who would emerge from the crisis by performing physical feats and stunts. and of course, the great heroes were Bruce Lee , BruceWillis, Schwarzenegger and Stallone. Women in such cinema were reduced to few archetypes such as the Damsel in Distress, but that was also a fact a fact in the western genre and this is a constant allegation by cinema experts towards the action films led by Amitabh Bachchan big that the idea was the allegation was that there were nothing for his heroines to do, there his heroines are nothing to do there, it was a one man show and he was a one man army. Most of his action films are all over and if you watch those movies some of the greatest films starting Amitabh Bachchan, you will feel that women are just relegated to the side lines mother however, was an important character in most Bachchan movies.

So, we also talk about action movies for example, characters of Rika in the Lethal Weapon the second part, who exist to affirm the heterosexuality of the protagonist. So, you either have damsel in distress or the prostitute with a golden heart. So, this is you know Yarki type characters in action films the bodily integrative of the hero and the male body as a location of security were maintain through such unidimensional characters. However, things started changing and Brigitte Nielsen was one leading lady who posited an interesting challenge to this masculine space as her androgynous image was complimented by her exaggerated female sexuality, and she acted in action film such as a Red Sonja, Cobra and Rocky the fourth Rocky. Although the female protagonist is relatively new to Hollywood, the action female protagonist, we should also understand

the success in of female characters in Hong Kong action movies.

When there is an increase in the number of action heroine films of late especially the female and the action film is simultaneously being marginalized. Earlier the hero advanced the narrative while the woman was just a spectator the male heroine contemporary action picture provides both action as well as spectacle, and the woman is again reduced to motivation for the heroes revenge. Now, there has been you know some challenges to the male bastion in action cinema film such as Kill Bill, Charlie's Angels and Lara Croft which are situated in post-feminist societies. The present to the viewer action girls who are sanitized of the biological and psychological realities. While these films can be seen as progressive in their representation of the female body and its capacity for action, there also generally heterosexual their white and situated within a family, so there conventional, but it still unconventional.

On other hand the end of the millennium a series of filmsthere was a spate of films such as Fight Club and Dark City, also the Matrix which portrait the crisis of masculinity. So, given the public engagement with queer identities the constructive nature of gender identities where in these films especially Fight Club. However, it doesn't mean that the epic male body is over, or the spectacle is over. it still continues in films such as Gladiator, but just that a parallel discourse challenging traditional male bodies has already emerged.

Now we have to also think of the eighties. Let's talk about the eighties and the beefed up bodies of Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone as well as Bruce Willis. And now this has given way to people like Keanu Reeves, Tom Cruise and Nicholas Cage who are not so beefed up. So, this new set of action heroes like Frank Martin in The Transporter comfortable with making up affluent life style choices and even comfortable with dancing so much so that it is even used in a fight sequence. And in Vin Diesel's one of his films he is seen a wearing flamboyant costumes and the Fast and Furious franchise brought out high-speed cars and certain flavor of metro sexuality through its protagonist.

Now a think of films such as Die Hard especially Live Free or Die Hard which explore the intra generational tension between John McLane and Farrell in which the older hero gets to displaced masculinity to a younger tech savvy hero the idea could be that see whatever may happen to the modern man and metro sexual man the old world

masculinity still prevails still dominates. Another way traditional sense of masculinity is still persists through the use of catch phrases for the hero that continue in the Die Hard franchise, the Bond franchise and also of late in Expendables franchise. The representation of race is another key theme in action cinema the kind of racism that exists in action cinema ranges from hegemonic representation of whiteness in contemporary Hollywood films such as City of Joy which portrait a white man as a savior or so, the casual racism present in Transformers non-white characters typically Black and Hispanics are either used for humor through stereotypes times or they are just treated as sidekicks of the hero, the white hero.

Now non-whites in action films are typically portrayed as fetishized 'other'.... taking on roles such as help buddy or sole action hero. The advent of action heroes or actors such as a Will smith and the Rock Johnson, Jet Li, Lucy Liu has opened up new types of spaces within action film genres in Hollywood, but despite their emergence there exists a sort of racism in a way non-white characters are discussed and represented. I would urge you to watch Lethal Weapon the fourth part to understand race and masculinity in an action movie.

Now coming to more recent blockbuster Avatar, so in Avatar the trope of the non white character in this case Trudy Chacon played by Michelle Rodriguez, she sacrifices herself for the sake of the white men and this trope continues in this film... and Jake played by Sam Worthington stands as a mediator between the savage world and the civilization and yet, it is he who saves the 'savages' from the conquering .

Now homosexuality's another angle that is constantly being renegotiated in contemporary Hollywood action cinema, which typically has a heterosexual hegemony. So, far it was a completely white and heterosexual male bastion things are changing now homo sexuality is either used as a comic relief as in the case of Michael Bay's Bad Boys of second part or the demonizing of seemingly homo sexual characters in Zack Snyder's 300. in 300 Xerxes sticks to all the stereo types of homo sexuality transvestism, transexuality while at the same time glorifying the homo erotic nature and potential of the army of 300 as played by Gerard Butler.

Similar depictions of homosexuality are also found in The Silence of the Lambs, Watchman, A Man Apart et. Films like Spider Man second and the third part, they take a

more settle turn as they play on the campiness of peter parker as being evil specially in the third part where that you have the dark Spider Man with dark edges, this is exemplified when he comes into contact with symbiote. on the other hand film such as Alexander are comfortable positing the protagonist a sexual grey area. So, the mark shift in the nature of Hollywood action films occurred after the nine eleven attacks on America; heroism is enhanced when a heroes violence is emitted out in the name of justice; nine eleven was a new currency through which such heroism could depicted although films such as Black Hawk Down and Fahrenheit nine eleven dealt with the sensitive subject directly many other more casual references to eight hour made in film such as Transformers, Iron Man and War of the World.

While it is important as we are interested in cinema. So, we love cinema, so as a students or cinephiles to keep in mind the existence of stereo types and politics within Hollywood action films and also in Hindi action films we have to understand that no film industry is devoid of politics Indian films too are full of negative stereo typing, the hero being a fair North Indian heterosexual male or the villain being darker in color or crude references to homosexuality are persistent in our cinema as well. While new spaces are being opened up for discussion it is important to remain alerts to the larger political project that action cinemas are part of.

So, thank you very much, and we will meet for our next class.