

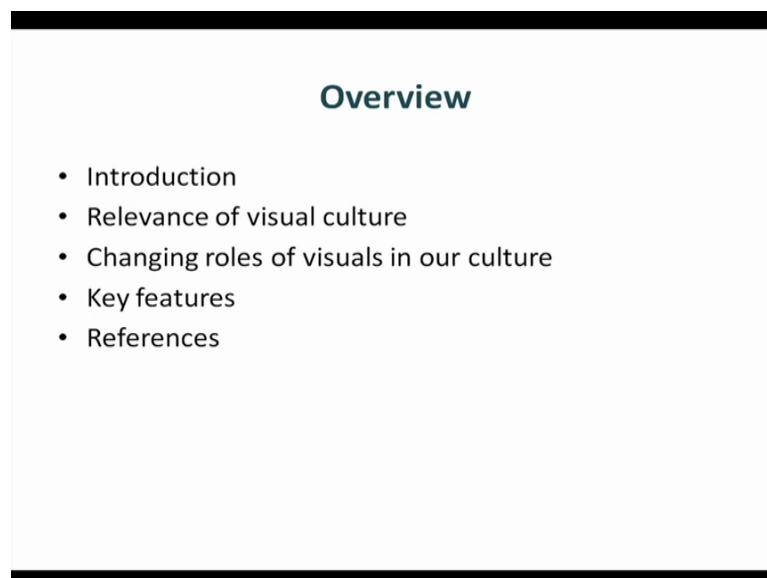
**Soft Skills Development**  
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**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur**

**Lecture - 11**  
**The World of Visual Culture I**

Hello friends, today we are going to talk about; the World of Visual Culture. All these while, we have been briefly mentioning about visuals in one way or the other. We have talked about the significance of visuals, in the context of presentations.

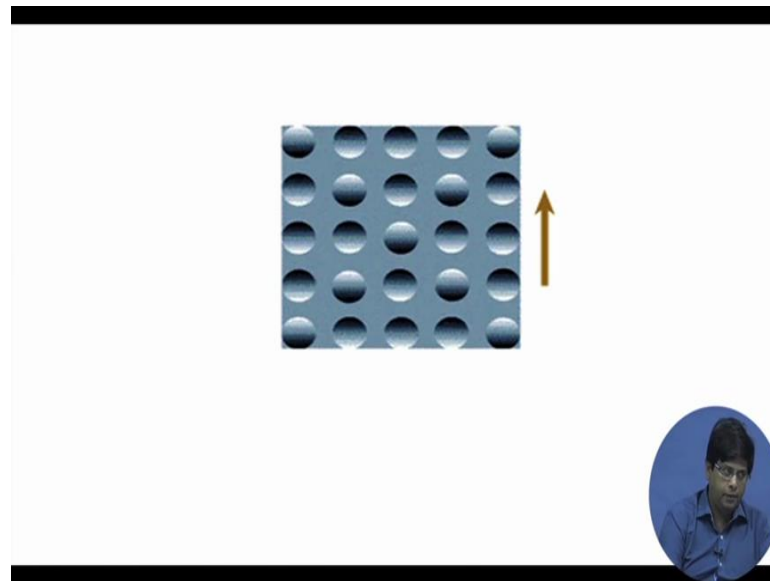
We have talked about the relevance of multimedia as well, but we are going back to all that again today, in this particular context, because it is perhaps very, very important to delve deep into the subject of visual culture. Why is it that we have making use of visuals today to such a significant extent? Now if we have to answer this question, probably we need to look a little deeper into how technology has changed, how our world has changed, how we look at the world, how we experience the world and understanding these things will definitely go a long way in developing sensitivity to the use of visuals.

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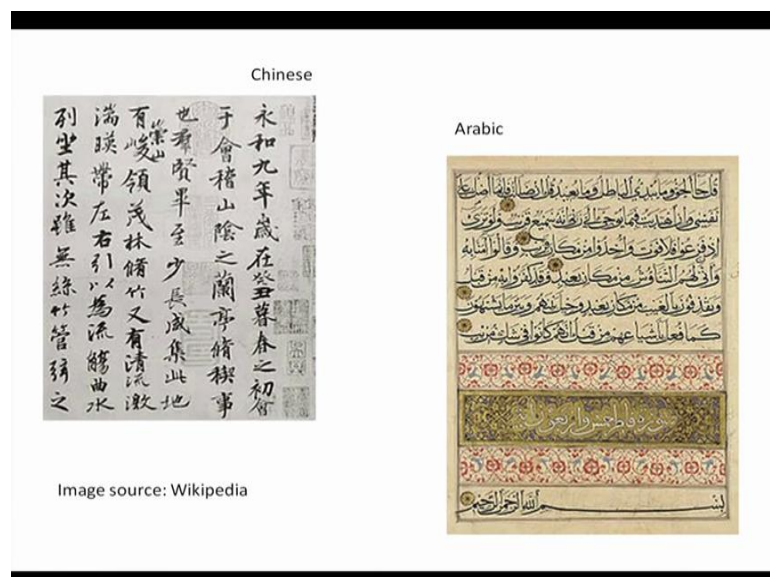
In today's talks, our focus will be on, after the introduction, the relevance of visual culture, changing role of visuals in our culture. The key features of visual culture that would be relevant in the context of soft skills, followed by the references.

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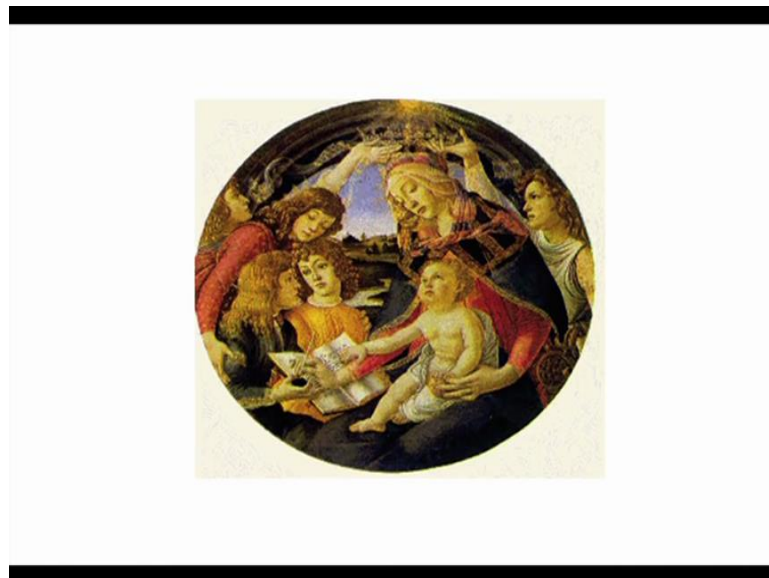
So, here we go, now I will be talking this figure again and again, but if you look at this figure, this particular figure, you have find that certain things look convex and certain things look concave to us. Now the point is that, if we ask this question why is that such a thing happens? Probably it will not be very easy to answer this question easily because; obviously, the object that is object that you saw were neither convex nor concave, they were on a plain surface and they were photographs or the objects that you saw, was inside a photograph on a plain surface. So, why is it that we experience this kind of a thing? This is one dimension of visuals.

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Here is another example of another image, the first one on the left hand side is a Chinese script, which we read from the top to the bottom and the other one is an Arabic script which we read from left to the right. What are the implications of the way we read things, on the way we look at things? Now this becomes very relevant in the context of advertising, because this will let us you what is known as scanning bias, how we scan objects, in which direction we move, how do we move from one side to the other side or from top to the bottom. How does that relate to the way we experience meanings of things, when that link to one another. This is something which we will highlight, when we look at the relationship of images texts and music, the overall side which will be dealing with, in the next few classes, but these are also relevant.

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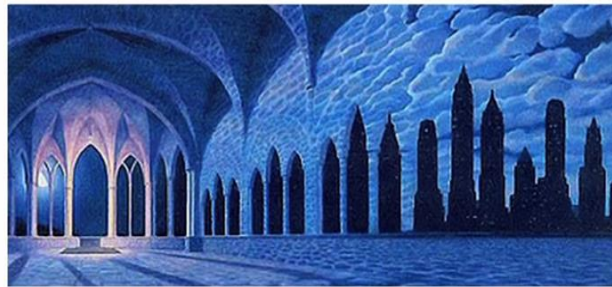
If you are looking at this image, you find that, it is not a square frame, but within a circle. Now what is the significance of a circular frame, as opposed to a square or rectangular frame? What is a frame for that matter? What function does it play? Because framing is something within which, we start looking the moment we have a frame, we tend to look within the frame, rather than outside the frame. When we break a frame what happens? You are looking at me through a computer monitor, right now you are looking at me through a oval or a circular frame, what do this things really mean?

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If you looking at this particular image, you can see, you can experience distance things moving away, how does is happen? On a flat surface, how do we perceive distance? This is another intriguing question, which would be asking yourselves.

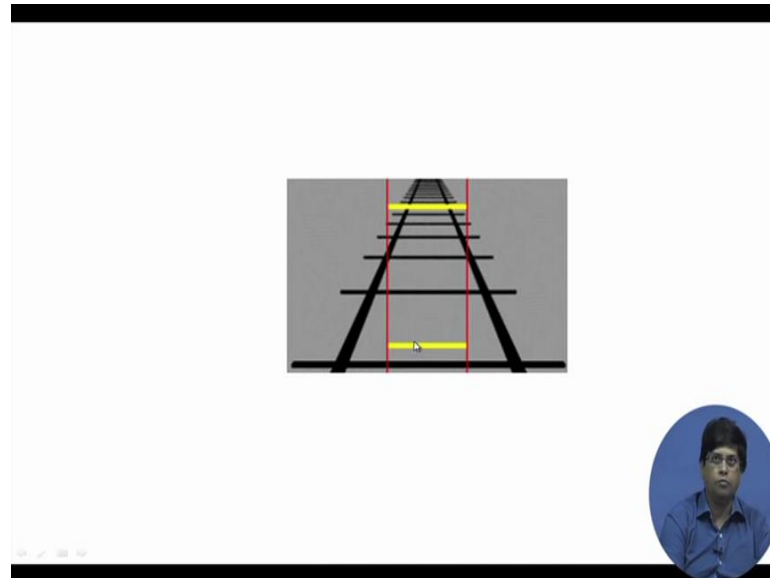
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Or the concept of illusion, where or a paradox for that matter, where relationship between inside and outside is confused. If at some point of time, this is the foreground and these clouds are the background, if you move in this direction, at this point, this is the background and this which apparently was clouds a little earlier, is the foreground.

So, these are again issues which have interesting, problematic, exciting and in this session and the next session, we will be focusing on some of these aspects of things.

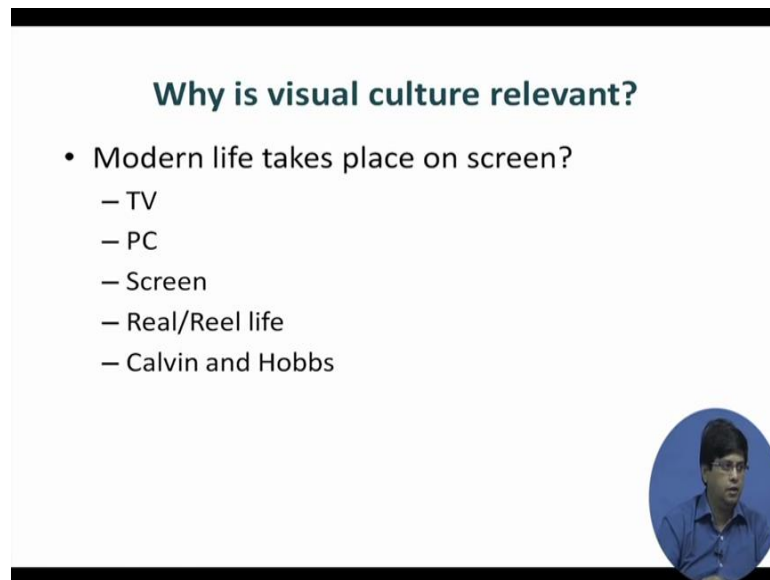
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More interestingly, we will be also looking at how is that we experience worlds of the visuals and then we will be having a number of exciting interactive, let us say, surveys and activities, through which together we will try to find out how we do it. So I am sure, that you will find it interesting and definitely, implore all of you to do those surveys, because they are going to be very exciting, the findings are also going to be equal exciting, when we together share, whatever we have learnt.


About how we experience visuals, how visuals manipulate our understanding of meaning and be get it linked to some of the other things, which will happen later like persuasion, manipulation and all those kinds of things, which is very much significant component of advertising, which is essentially, dominantly, either visual, if it is a print media, if it is a tabloid, it is a print media or it is dominantly multimedia, if it is anything else, like the television, the computer screen and so on and so forth. Now here for instance, you have something which is again known as illusion, this line looks much larger than the line below, why does it happen? And these are questions that we may answer, as we proceed.

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**Why is visual culture relevant?**

- Modern life takes place on screen?
  - TV
  - PC
  - Screen
  - Real/Reel life
  - Calvin and Hobbs



However, before we go into the visuals and the way that visuals make sense for us, which is what will be doing in the next session, we let us get a basic understanding about visual culture, because as I told you little earlier, visual culture is something which has dominated the 20th part, last part of the 20th century and right now we are in the midst of visual and multimedia culture. I will just start off with a small anecdote, 18 years back when I joined this institute, at some point of time, I heard about a VG card being installed somewhere and this gave us a glimpse into actually being able to record edit and modify videos and to generate animations and those days it was exciting thing and in our entire institute, there were just one or two places where this facility was available.

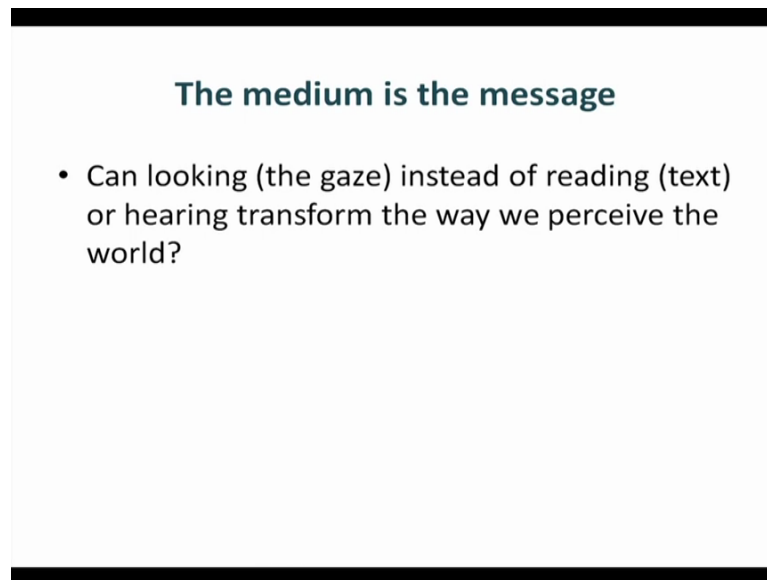
Now, let us come first forward 18 plus years and look at our generation, next, mobiles and we that the entire concept of generating an image, manipulating that image, editing that image, is a rather generating a motion picture. So, generating an animation generating a video and manipulating and playing around with that video using that small device, is something which is child's play, even our young kids can do that. So, the technology has significantly come forward and it is rapidly and exponentially increasing and growing and there must be some underlying reasons for that. So, in today's talk, which will be slightly brief, it will be brief, compared to the next one where we will be elaborating the things that we saw just a minutes back. We will be asking this questions, as to, what is happening in today's culture which is to begin with visual and gradually becoming more and more multimedia.

So, some of the statements that I am making over here, based on the ideas evolved by many theorists, who talk about visual culture, are, some of these concepts we will just quickly touch upon and let us see what they tell us about ourselves. One of the things that happen is that modern life takes place on screen, what exactly does it mean? It means that our experience of the visual, to a very great extent is, were mediated or interfaced by either a television screen, computer screen or digital mobile screen or whatever. So, we experience the visual directly through our eyes, but to a much greater extent, we are spending time, by looking at the screen and experiencing various other kinds of visuals, which; obviously, we would not have access to sitting over here, through these screens.

So, TV screens, PC screen real life and there is a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon strip, where you see that one of the small tiny characters, a young boy spends the entire day watching TV and then in the evening he goes out and looks at the world and then makes a comment to, to the effect that, the world is very much like what we see on the TV, but much less exciting and colorful. You see that, this kind of a reversal is something which we are experiencing to a certain extent, even today, where some of our students, even in the IIT system, spend such a huge amount of time playing games, that they gradually lose touch with reality. But in any case what is the reality? Reality is something which is mediated by our senses and today we find that beyond our senses, although they are mediated by senses, our senses again, have something else blocking them on the way to reality, which is the computer screen or various kinds of screen.

So, another layer of mediation is taking place, which is the mediation of visual culture, which is experiencing the reality, second hand, through some kind of a screen or magazine or paper or whatever.

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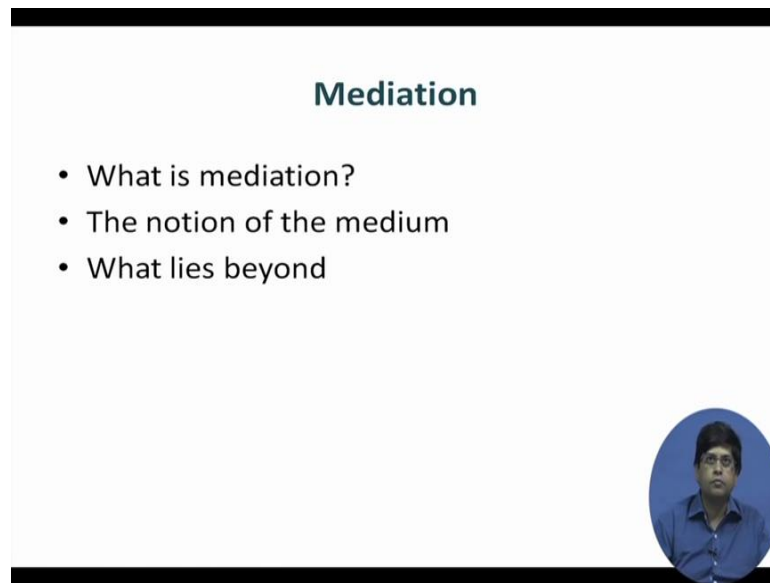


So, you see that Marcel McClain's famous statement, the medium is the message, is something which is to be understood in the sense that, different kinds of cultures depend on different modes of communication and today's culture essentially depends on the culture of visuals and that has its influence in the way we communicate. Now the fact that we are in a technology oriented world, for instance, makes it understandable that and in a world which is busy and where, using a very small screen we have to communicate our messages has resulted in different kind of a language, the language of texts, SMS, the language of SMS where there are a lot of abbreviations, there are a lot of use of short hand, because the space is limited, the screen is limited, you are using a single fingers or maybe one single hand for writing or typing, whatever. The implication is that, this particular technology, this particular kind of medium, which is being used, has modified the way that the message is communicated and in the process the meaning of the message to a very great extent as well.

The fact that we have smiley's, the fact we have emoticons, the fact that we have images which go viral on social media, tells us that, images now play a very significant role. Messages which were communicated through texts, now are translated into image based symbols, the emoticons, especially emotion based things. So, you see that these transformations, definitely point to the fact that visuals have taken over in a significant way.




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**Mediation**

- What is mediation?
- The notion of the medium
- What lies beyond

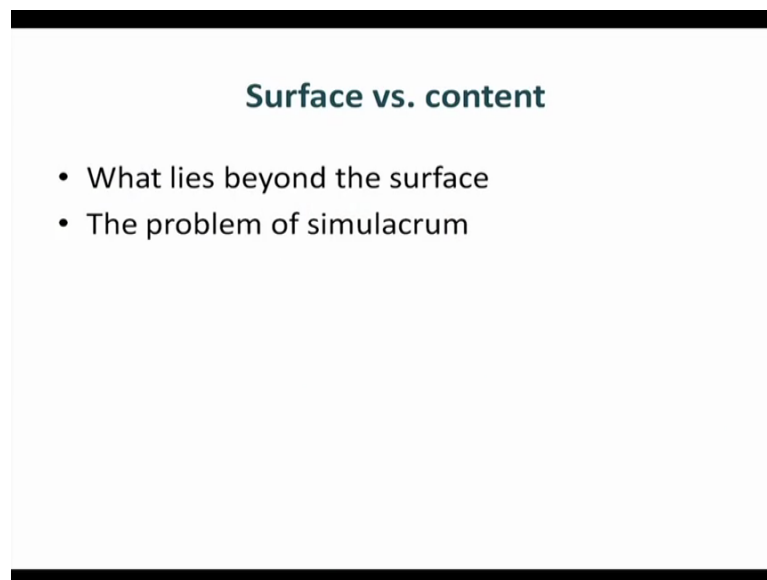


So, I have talked about mediation and mediation is about something which stands between you and the reality or me and the reality. Let us say that, what stands between me and you today, as you are listening to this talk, is your computer screen or your mobile screen or whatever, it is through which, you are listening to this lecture. So, this mediating surface presupposes, that beyond this surface there is a real me, with whom you are talking and it also presupposes that, beyond this screen, the camera at which I am looking right now, there is a real you, to with whom I am talking, but you see that with the advent of technology we reached a point, where this simulation of reality becomes so significant that, you do not need a real and sometimes you are not even sure whether there is a real.

So, the only reality that becomes available to us is the reality of mediating screen. What guarantee is there that I am not fiction? In today's digital age, we can make characters, known as avatars in computer language, which can interact with human beings. Some of our researchers are working, I am also involved in some of this work, where you see that you try to identify the facial expression of the person who is communicating with the computer, you have an avatar who tries to emulate or mirror those responses and talk in intelligent way. So, what it basically means is that, these avatars or this computer graphic images which looks so real life like, are talking and what you are talking does not really exist. So, if there is a reality beyond, well, what is that? We do not really know, in that sense, we see that the only which exists is the surface of the screen and nothing beyond

that. The examples of many fantasy movies like Godzilla and Jurassic Park movies and all that I tell us about, this aspect of life, where the beyond simulation of reality, probably there is nothing, there is absence of reality, the surface is all the meaning that we have.

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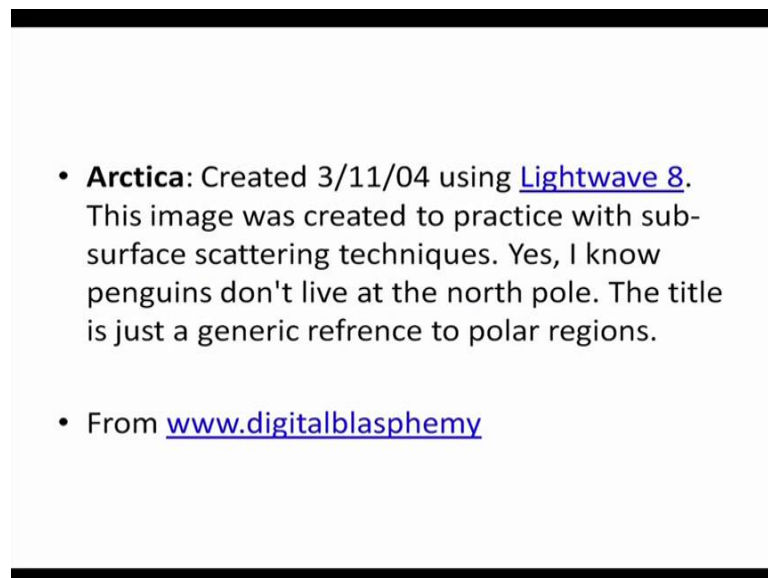
So, that is what I was talking about, which is known as the problem of simulacrum. This is the term to indicate that simulation of realities, the only realities which is sometimes presented to us, because human beings have a tendency of searching for meanings and when we search for meaning, the language at the communicating medium, becomes the surface through which we try to penetrate and reach to some ultimate meaning, but in today's world, very often, this surface is the only meaning that is available to us. This can have valid in consequences, as I just shared with you, that some of our students, very few, luckily, are so addicted to let us say, multi user games, that they have to go for a de-addiction, they have to meet psychiatrists or counselors, because they are disoriented and they live in a different world, a world which does not exist, outside of the realm of mobile television or the computer, in which they are playing the game.

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So, these are interesting things, that image here is an example of simulacrum, absolutely life like, an image which looks more real than any photograph that is possible.

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But which is actually an animation, I am sorry, a creation, which is it is an illustration created using light wave 8 and it is it is more than almost 11 or 12 years old, at that point of time you find that we could, generate such life like images, which are more real than real images.


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**What is visual culture?**

The immense amount of visuality that we are involved with and have to interpret makes everyone from film critics to sociologists interested in it.

What emerges is visual culture.

Visual events with information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer




So, now, having discussed all these things, if you ask the question, what is visual culture? Then the, the immense amount of visuality that we are involved with and have to interpret to make sense of, make everyone from critics to sociologists interested in it, what emerges is visual culture. Visual culture is something within which we submerged, we experience it every day of our lives, without being conscious of it; however, if you develop a certain degree of sensitivity to certain aspects of visual culture, then it gives us a certain insight into how we communicate through visuals and obviously, we are in a better position and we can make a more effective communicators and thus it would help us without soft skills in various ways.

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**Seeing is not knowing**

Some one is always watching and recording  
yet

- TWA flight 800 in 1996 in New York
- The Abduction of Jamie Bulger in 1995
- Smart Bombs of Gulf War



Now, you see that, as I told you little earlier during the introduction, we will be looking at certain elements of visual culture. One of the interesting elements about contemporary visual culture is sometime, seeing is not knowing and this has direct implications relationship with the concept of simulation, as well as the fact that, very often, the image is not the truth, the image can lead to deception to illusions. So, examples, there are many examples, The Smart Bombs of Gulf War, which kind of look like, the smart gulfs bombs of gulf war bombarded many tankers, bunkers and various kinds of things, which were actually rubber floats, rubber blow ups.

So, what basically happened was that an illusion of actually destroying things was what was created in the early phase of the war and actually nothing was being destroyed. So, you see that, if you have even if you do not go this far, if you are looking at just the newspaper and the television, when we see something through the heightened intense colour and drama of the television reports and the newspaper reporters or the television reporters, dramatizing it, just to draw our attention over, the kind of reality which is painted, may not have much to do with actuality, which exist over there.


So, you see a city being presented in particular way and you feel that city is very much like that, but when you go to that city, you find that it is very different from what has been painted through the media screen, through the television, through advertising and things like that. So, we see that, we had traditionally, very strong belief, that what you

see is what you believe, we have a phase which tells us seeing is believing. On the other hand, today's reality is seeing is not believing, we live in a world of illusions. So, this becomes very, very important for us to realize.

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### Seeing, Power and Knowledge

- Seeing has always been significant in the West
- Spiritual Vision
- Perspective
- Forensic, eye signature and visuality
- Photographic evidence (Benjamin)
  
- What about the Indian context – *sruti*?



One of the other things which I would touch upon is that, someone is always watching our recording. We live in a visual culture, where we have perpetually being watched. This watching could relate to varies into (Refer Time: 19:19) pleasure, it could relate to surveillance where, people a conscious citizens are watching one another capturing videos of anything which is suspicious, so that every time some untowardly things happens on news, in the news you can see some mobile phone having captured the event, maybe a crash of a planes or whatever. So, perpetually everywhere visuals are being documented, with our knowledge and without our knowledge. So, how, we are not only visible, we kind of indulge in this visibility and we use it in two different ways, one for pleasure in visualizing ourselves and visualizing others and other one is for surveillance in watching ourselves and in watching others.

So, this has interesting implications, now you find that seeing is related to power and knowledge, because in the earlier tradition you see that, visibility of things, if you are in a position to see things, you are powerful, but more important in the earlier tradition, if other people see you, they get an idea about your power. So, you find that the huge buildings, huge monuments which were built, if you are talking about Egyptian sphinx, if

you are looking at the Qutub Minar, if you are looking Taj Mahal, display of grandeur, display of things which are very significant, which are powerful, which are big. On the other hand, in today's culture another kind of power has come, the power of watching others without yourself being watched. You have various kinds of surveillance cameras all most everywhere today, today you can even get a surveillance camera for 4 to 5 thousand rupees, which you can play inside your home to watch may be a specific room and what is happening there.

So, this ability to be invisible yourself while watching others, is a new kind of a power which has certainly emerged as very, very powerful. If you remember AJ Wells story about the invisible man, you would also realize that, in that particular novel, the man after his invisibility turns evil, because invisibility gives him an immense amount of power, when nobody can see him, nobody can see him do things, which you see that in a society would be taboo, which somebody would stop him from doing and the same thing is taken forward into films, when we have the Hollow Man, where the same thing is again repeated, how invisibility leads to power and power leads to evil, so that dimension of things is also something which is very much there.

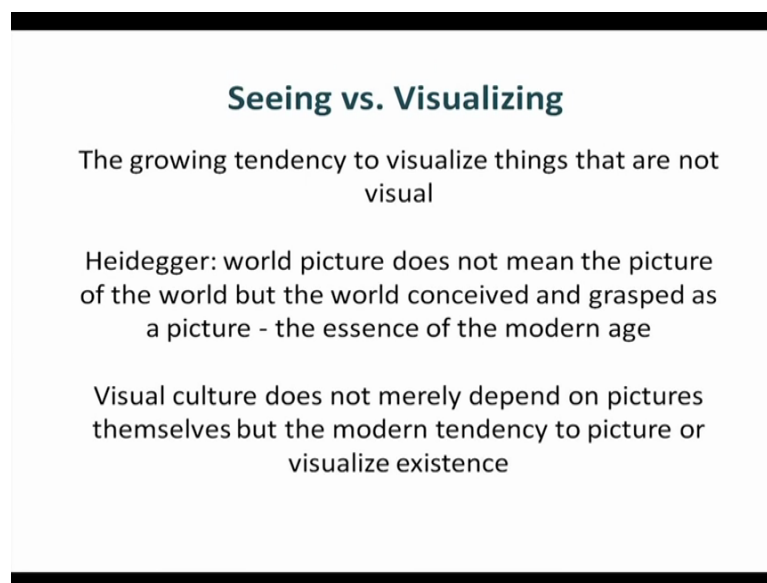
However, I would like to quickly share with you, that such a tradition is fairly recent, may be last 40 to 50 years, prior to that we had a tradition of texts, where texts is dominated and images where subservient and still before, that if you are looking at the Indian tradition, we had a, we had a strong interdependency, again if you are looking at a very early tradition, on Shruti, on hearing, on the auditory senses, on memory, remembering while listening to things and memorizing things and you find that, it was in that tradition, that the Vedas were transmitted, by word of mouth, known as the overall tradition.

So, that was a tradition where, things happen in a different way, in a overall tradition, history got, I would say, transmuted, transformed into wisdom which was timeless, a temporal so, we have been lot of difficulty in identifying dates, when we look our ancient scriptures, even stories, history if you can call it, history or [FL] you can call it that. It is very difficult because, if the in the olden traditions, the absence of written documents, dating and other kinds of thing I mean, techniques, were not considered significant.

On the other hand, if you are looking at the written tradition of the Greeks, there you find a distinctive temporal approach to things, where time and linear time where things happen one after the other, are documented systematically and we have a strong sense of a history, European sense of history, which is essentially a linear chronicle of what events happen one after the other.

On the other hand if you are looking at the Indian tradition, it is a tradition of recurrence. So, the points which are noted down, points which are jotted down are not unique, but the ones which are persistent, which are cyclic which are will come back again and again, dealing, leading in the direction of wisdom, that these things are within quotes universal, which persists. So, having talked about that, let us quickly talk about few other things, the first being, seeing versus visualizing.

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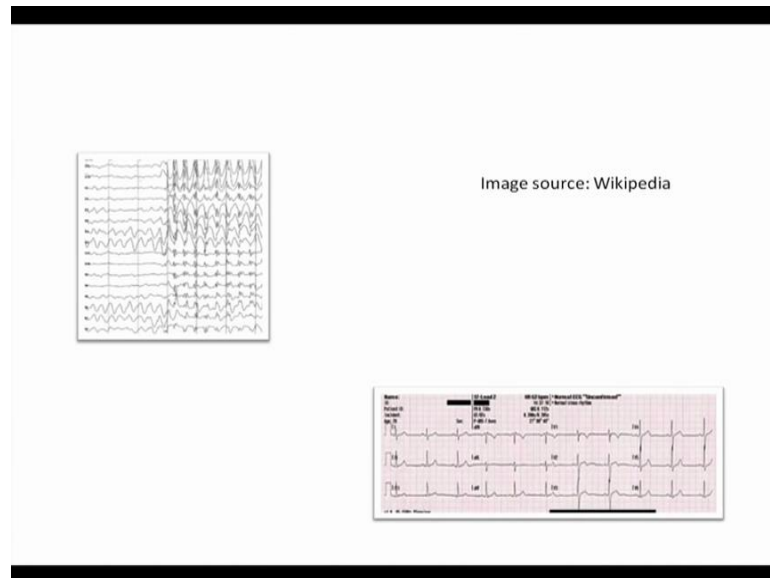
**Seeing vs. Visualizing**

- The growing tendency to visualize things that are not visual
- Heidegger: world picture does not mean the picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture - the essence of the modern age
- Visual culture does not merely depend on pictures themselves but the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence

When I see something, that thing has to be visual, that is I am seeing you, I am seeing the camera, I am seeing the power point right now; this is seeing.



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But if let us say that heart is experienced, where the heart beats are translated into waves or if the various activities of the brain are translated into waves, and then you see that, other senses are getting transferred into visuals. So, what exactly is happening over here, we find that things which are not visual, that are also translated into visuals. The heart beat is not a visual thing, but we visualize things which are not visual. So, the difference between seeing and visualizing, I hope, becomes clear here.

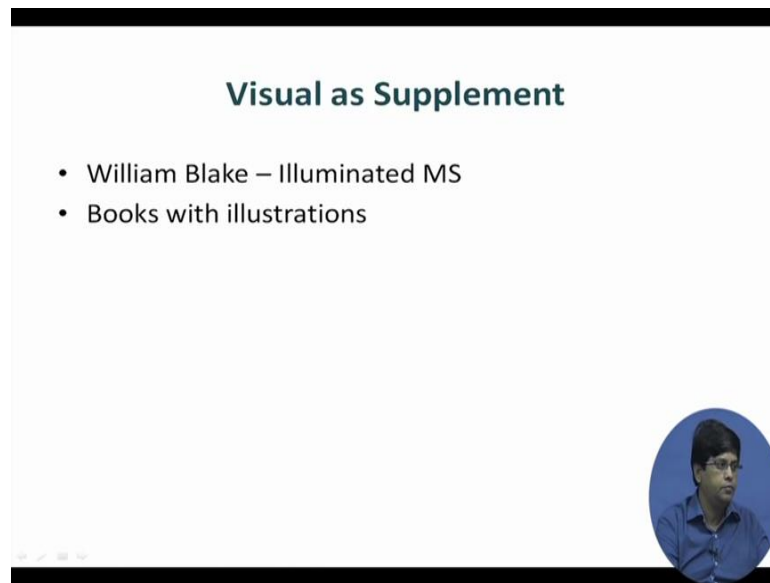
We live in a culture where almost everything we tend to visualize, all the medical devices uses various kinds of things like ultrasound, another kinds of technologies so that you can finally see, some kind of a graph or an image - Ben brain scanning method do that and Egests or ECG record the measure, the different impulses, whether they are vibration or there electrical impulses, as I have already shown you on the screen.

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- Heartbeat
- Heat
- Smell stimulation
- The language of metaphors – primarily visual

So, this is the difference between, this is where you see that visual have today have become so dominant, that we are visualizing or translating into visual things, which are not necessarily visual. The computer screen and the entire technology behind it is, in fact, an example of that, because when windows came prior, prior to that we had dos, we had, we had inputs, which were textual inputs, but with windows we had visual inputs, we had iconic inputs and that kind of totally transformed the way that computers came down from the higher citadels of universities and have become, so common place, so powerful, that even the youngest of kid uses the processor and machine which is may be hundred or a thousand times as powerful, as some of the early machines of the 1960s and 70s, which would take many rooms in universities, where computers, where computer science was being taught.

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**Visual as Supplement**



- William Blake – Illuminated MS
- Books with illustrations

A circular inset photo of a man with glasses and a blue shirt is located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Now, another thing which I would bring to your notice is that, if you are looking at the recent past, we find that we lived in a textual kind of a society. Society which dominantly, predominantly was text oriented, the hangover of it is still there, we still communicate a lot with texts, but the way that we communicate with texts is gradually changing, it is becoming more visually oriented, as I told you little earlier, it is becoming abbreviated and grammatical, a new kind of texts emerging in the world. Earlier, if you are looking at the early part of the 20th century, even when way beyond that into the 16, 17th century, the illustration was supplement to the text, today the text is a supplement to the illustration.

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### Blake: Songs of Experience


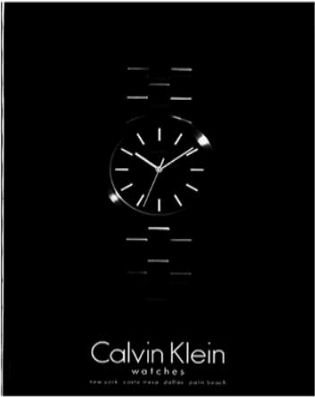


London, see how  
The little poor boy  
That crows and sings  
In the street  
And looks so sad  
And complains  
Of his little trade,  
That many a time  
I see him  
When he is lame  
With the bare feet  
And the little hands  
That are so cold  
And the little face  
That is so pale  
And the little voice  
That is so wailing  
And the little soul  
That is so despairing.

Sorry, the illustration was supplement to the text yes; the text is a supplement to the illustration. So, here is an example of a poem by William Blake and you can see the poem over here and you have illustrations; obviously, the poem is very important and you have this printed elsewhere and the illustrations is what you find is incidental, even without illustrations you can read the poem.

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### Text as Supplement to Visual



Calvin Klein  
watches



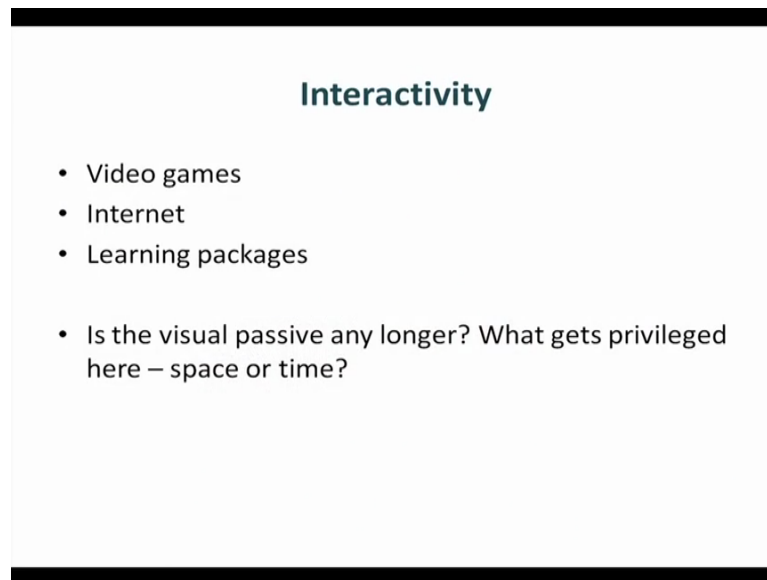
illustrations supplement the story. What happens to Thomas Edison, the young Thomas Edison, is elaborated over here.

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On the other hand if you are looking at the 1980s, you find that, the image dominates and the text is just one line and this small text is something which you cannot read. So, what is significant amount of difference has happened today and if you are looking at this spot arts today, most of them tells stories and certain things related to the advertisement, we will not discuss here but the point that I am trying make is that, visuals and then multimedia dominate and spot ads dominate today and in many cases even the print ads kind of refer to the spot ads. So, if you have seen the spot ad, if you are looking at the print ad, you will be able to make sense of it. That is the degree of linkage between a print and the multimedia that happens today in our daily lives.

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The other interesting thing about visuals today, is interactivity. We can interact with the visuals and the visual can be animated, getting an additional dimension to it. Even texts can be animated, thus developing a visual quality about them and you see that interactivity have become a key motto. So, this is another dimension of the visual culture today, that the visual is not passive, as it was in 1980s or 90s. Today it is something where, you see that interactivity is very, very important, you are able to pause or play, you are able to repeat whatever I am speaking right now. You are able to stop it, go back to another lecture or move forward to another lecture. This interactivity, the playfulness of the entire thing, in a visual medium is another distinctive feature, which we find in the visual culture today. Now you see that, I would like to touch upon just a few issues quickly, one of them being that, the image is everything today, the image in the early traditions was holy, sacred, sanctified and precious.

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### The Image as Everyday Life

- TV: soap opera, films, music videos
- Paintings, photographs: books in any setting
- The image became portable. With the internet, the image became virtual. The distinction between the real and the copy became problematized (computer art).
- Laptop: viewing, any space, any time.



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Portraits used to be painted, then photography which mechanized the entire process and today, you see that even today, process of photography and the delay in developing photography is no longer there. Photographs have become instant, they are captured instantly and they are transmitted instantly. So, the image has become a part of everyday life. The text earlier was a part of everyday life, very often people used to take notes, today I have find that many people start recording, either the through use of audio video, a talk which is taking place, rather than taking notes, rather than listening carefully, where memory plays an important role.

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### Transformation of Function

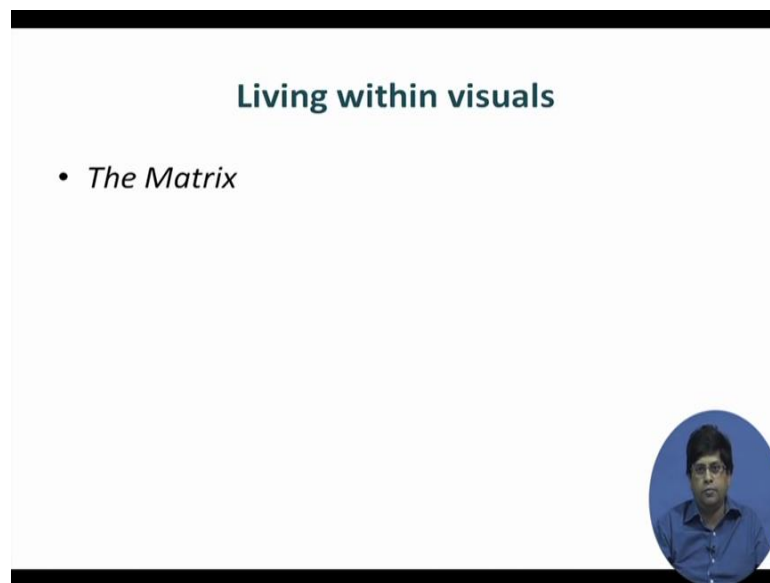
- The transition from structured formal settings to the unstructured. The image is no longer precious, holy, to be placed on an alter and viewed.
- Transformation of function

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So, you see that is where we are moving, that is the direction in which we are moving. I will skip this, you can see it in slides that the functions have been transformed, from holy it has become common place, from sacred it has become ordinary, this change have taken place.

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But the last point I would like to make is that, in this particular context, the, the matrix trilogy kind of drives home the point of taking us to an extreme, where somebody lives in the world of virtuality. What I am trying to share you with you friends, is that the visual world has gradually given way to virtual world and we have started emerging in the virtual world.

Being in the IIT system, an being an part of one of the oldest IITs in the country, we are getting exposed to new technologies and people coming with concepts of immersive technologies, which even they are planning to set up in different places, which implies that, we live in a virtual world or a virtual world is created for you, for instance we were exploring that for our Nehru museum, where you see that, your experience of the visual or the experience of the virtual, is so life like, that you forget that it is a virtual medium, you become emerged in that virtual medium. This is the new immersive technology which is coming.

Something which your are is shown in at most mature and extreme form, in a film in a movie like The Matrix, where you see that your virtual identity and your real identity

cannot really be segregated or separated. It is fine that we need, we aware of these issues, we are aware of these interesting dimensions of visual and from visual, the virtual culture, but it was also very important to know that, these are leading us inevitably in a direction, which is very very different from the world that we experienced as young kids and the more we proceed, the more we move in the world of immersive world; however, how to make sense of this immersive world? How to make sense of this visual world? How to play around with it, experience it, manipulate it, to make it more effective communication, more impressive communication, is something which we will touch upon in the next talk.

Thank you.