Lecture 18
Globalization and Modernity: Anthony Giddens the Consequences of Modernity
(Continued)

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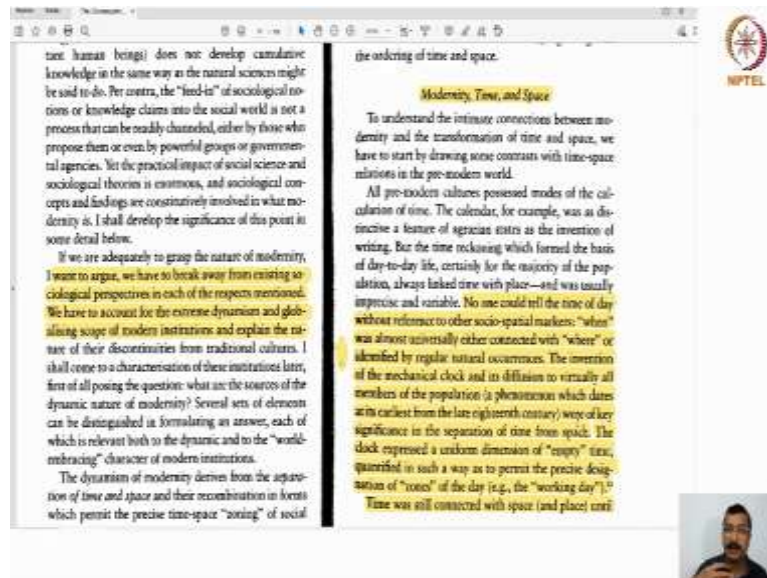
Welcome back to the class, we are continuing our discussion on Anthony Gidden's work, 'The Consequences of Modernity' and this is an extremely important work which discusses the debate around whole question of globalization and modernity. So, this is the third lecture in this week. We started with a class on the whole concept of modernity, its basic assumptions and its historical and social context of its origin and emergence.

And in the last class we started discussing this book, an extremely important book that is 'The Consequences of Modernity'. So, we are going in detail, the first chapter or rather the introduction of this book in which he has kind of summarized almost all major arguments of this book, he introduces a lot of concepts and we need to be familiarized with these basic arguments.

So, I hope you remember the key argument of the previous classes as well as the whole argument of this whole book, that he does not agree with a group of scholars who claim that the term or the conceptual framework of modernity needs to be abandoned, but rather he argues that the conditions of modernity or the very basic processes of modernity itself has become kind of more radicalized.

So, he was talking about a series of concepts from the beginning, how, what were the kind of basic assumptions and so we discussed all these points. So, let us continue discussion with the same essay that is the introduction, the first chapter in his book 'Consequences of Modernity'. So, in this work we are continuing with this discussion on modernity, time and space.

So, in this section titled Modernity, Time and Space, he is introducing some very important, some extremely central arguments about the transformation of late modernity and what exactly is happening in terms of the spatial and temporal aspects of social relationship and this concern about the spatial and temporal aspects of social relationships is yet another central theme on the sociological theorization of globalization.

So, let us see what he talks about. So, no one could tell the time of the day without reference to other social, other socio spatial markers. So, he is talking about the fundamental shift that took place when traditional societies are transformed to become modern societies, so we know that this transition has happened in quite a lot of places.

When you talk about this transformation, that unconnected traditional societies or traditional tribal societies or agrarian societies which had very minimal kind of connections with each other are now all kind of completely integrated into a modern social world during the time of modernity, aided by modern technology and then communication and then a host of other things.

So, what happens there, so he argues that in the pre-modern period, in traditional agricultural or tribal societies, when was almost universally either connected with where or identified by a regular natural occurrence. So, when you talk about when a particular time, a time was understood as connected to a particular place or the time was connected with the kind of natural cycles.

Whether it is winter or autumn or summer or spring or any other period or on the base of lunar calendar or on the base of lunar cycles, so you always required a specific anchorage in the placeness, in the physical setting of a place in order to connect or in order to answer the question when, so when the time was something so deeply anchored, deeply connected with the physicality of a particular geographic area.

In every traditional society they have their own idea of time, many times it could be cyclical, many times it could be linear, but for them the time is something that is so local, so locally rooted, so locally established and they did not have a time about as something as a kind of a global category, so the time was about then and there.

The invention of mechanical cloak and its diffusion to virtually all members of the population; a phenomenon which dates at its earliest from the late 18th century, where of key significance in the separation of times from space. So, here this is an extremely important point, so what did mechanical clock do?

Mechanical clock tells you that on 8 o'clock, 8 am is not only an 8 am for you but it is 8 am for people in another part of the same country or it is the same 8 am in a place which you have not even seen or maybe some thousands of kilometres away also it is 8 am or it could be 9 am or it could be 7 am. So, you understand that the time becomes relational, time is not something that is unique to your uniquely anchored to your, or attached to your own place, it has a global independent character.

So, the clock expresses a uniform dimension of empty time quantified in such a way as to permit precise designation of zones of the day that is the working day. So, the cloak expresses a uniform dimension of the empty time, so the clock expresses a dimension of an empty time in the sense this particular time is not anchored to any particular place.

So, 8 am or 10 pm is can be seen as a time which is not connected to any geography, so 8 am could be in India could be applicable to any part of this whole South Asia, so it is not that you do not need to understand that 8 am is anchored to a particular place. So, it is a kind of emptying of time that Giddens talks about.

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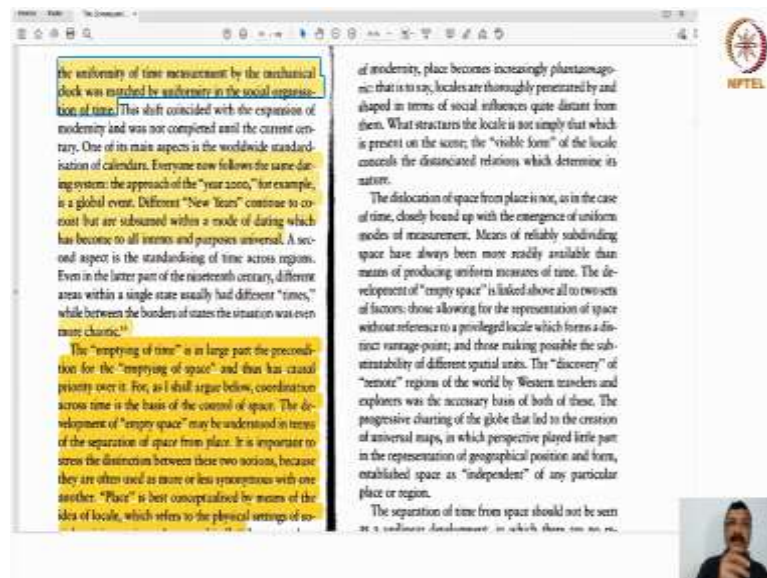
Time was still connected with space and place until the uniformity of time measurement by the mechanical clock was matched by uniformity in social organization of time. So, you know that this a particular idea that the time you can have, very connected time, time connected to any particular geography across the globe but that something else happened, that is the kind of a mechanical clock matched by the uniformity in the social organization of time.

So, how do you organize your social relationship with respect to time? For example, you know that this important argument about industrialization, so the siren of the factory, siren of the factory became an important, important sign around which this entire human activity revolved, with the siren people, thousands of people go into the factory and with another sounding of the siren they stop work and then they begin to eat and then with the next siren they again resume the work.

So, a social organization was completely transformed, it was again organized in a much larger thing. This shift coincided with the expansion of modernity and was not completed until current century. One of the main aspects of this worldwide standardization of calendars. Everyone now follows the same dating system, the approaching year of year 2000 for example, is a global event.

Different new years continue to coexist but are subsumed within a mode of dating which has become to all intents and purpose universal. We, know that the Hindu calendar or Islamic calendar or even every region had its own calendar, all these calendars are there but they are losing its significance and this Christian era, this year is 2020, next year will be 2021 has become the most dominant, the most important mode of making sense of this time period.

A second aspect is the standardization of time across regions. Even in the later part of the 19th century different areas within a single state usually had different times, while between the

borders of states the situation was even more chaotic. But now things have become more standardized; now he is coming to very important definition that is why I highlighted this in more intense yellow color. The emptying of time is in large part the precondition for the emptying of space and this has a causal priority over it.

For I shall argue below, coordination across time is the basis of control of space. The development of empty space may be understood in terms of the separation of space from place. It is important to stress this distinction between these two notions because there are often used as more or less synonymous with one another. Place is best conceptualized by means of the idea of locale which refers to the physical setting of social activity as a situated geographically, as situated geographically.

So, what is he saying? So, he is saying that in the, with the beginning of modernity emptying of time happened, emptying of time happened because the time can be seen as a category irrespective of any geographical area. Now, what he is saying is he is saying with the second modernity or with the advent of globalization what we are witnessing is an emptying of space.

So, emptying of space happens when and so how does he define emptying of space? So, he says that this emptying of time is a it must be a causal priority, it must have happened before the emptying of space which is actually happened. For, I shall argue below coordination across time is the basis of control of space. So, what does it mean? Coordination across time is the basis of control of space.

The development of empty space may be understood in terms of the separation of space from place. So, he talks about the coordination of across time is the basis of control of space. Now, imagine a multinational company, which is headquartered in say New York and they have different offices in all major continents, they have sub, manufacturing units, they have marketing units, they have their financial units, they have sub offices in all major countries.

So, when the decision making is taking place from that New York headquarters, what they are actually able to do is that they are able to control the time. A single video conferencing with all the people, all the heads of this different regional offices across the globe happens, a decision is implemented either to go for a merger or a new investment or a layoff or an acquisition or whatever be that. A particular decision is taking place and then that decision is communicated, it is implemented across the globe.

So, what is happening is they are actually taking control, it is coordinating the time. The local times could be very different in different parts of the globe but they are able to communicate with all these different geographical areas at the given time, what is the impact of such kind of a coordination, the impact of such kind of coordination to the notion of place?

So, he is making a distinction between place and space, this is extremely important, we will come back to this distinction again later in the sixth week, we will come back to this concept again the relation between space and place, how whether a place can be seen, space can be seen as absolute or relational, all these points are something, very important.

So, when you are, when the CEO of that company makes a video call or make a conference call to all his colleagues across the globe, what is happening is a kind of an unprecedented form of coordination between a time and space. So, there the place becomes irrelevant or less significant, whether it is Delhi or Tokyo or London or Beijing, that physicality of that particular

spaces becomes irrelevant to a large extent because the people sitting there are able to listen to and interact to that particular person or interact among each other in the given time.

So, that is what he is saying about the development of empty space may be understood in terms of separation of space from place. It is important to stress the distinction between these two notions because they are often used more or less synonymous with one another. Place is best conceptualized by means of the idea of locale, which refers to the physical setting of social activity as situated geographically. So, a place is connected with the physical aspect at a given geographical area.

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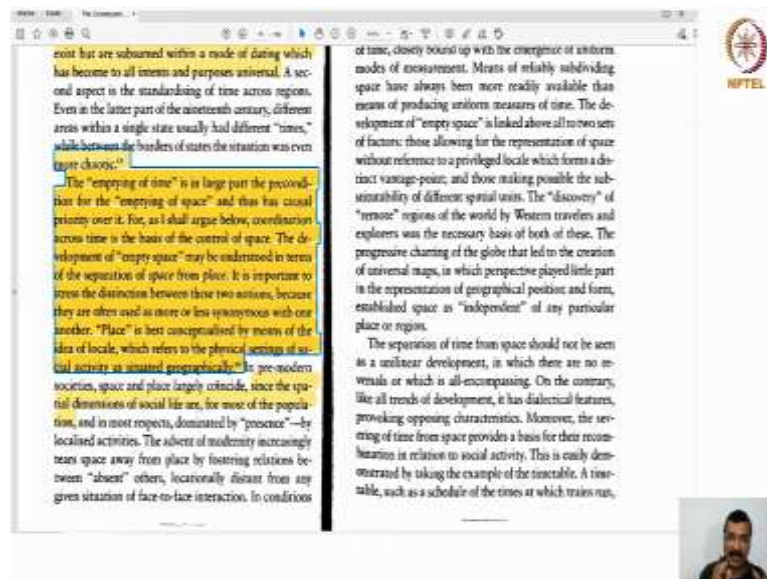
In pre-modern societies space and place largely coincided, in pre-modern society if a social activity has to take place it has to take place in a given place and space, there was no way of this activity being coordinated from elsewhere. Since, the spatial dimensions of social life are for most of the population and most respects dominated by presence.

So, you have to be physically present there in order to establish that kind of a particular action or social action, social organization took place only when they are present, physically present by localized activities. The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between absent and others.

So, when you converse with somebody through Skype or through Google Meet or through Zoom, what you are actually doing is conversing with somebody who is absent physically in your room or in your place, that person must be sitting thousands of kilometres away but there is social organization is taking place, social relationship is taking place, interaction is taking place, given situation of face-to-face interaction.

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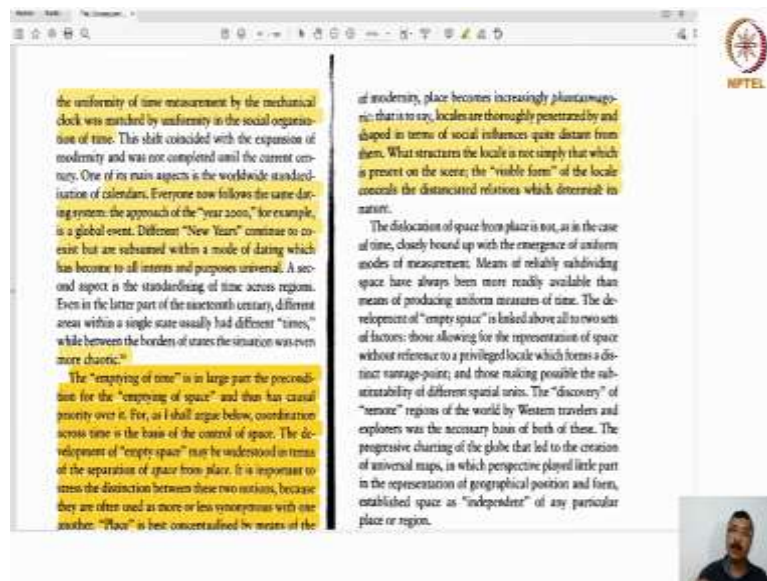
In conditions of modernity place becomes increasingly phantasmagorical, that is to say locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. The structures of locale is not simply that which is present on the scene the visible form of the local conceals the distanciated relations which determine its nature. So, a particular social action can be heavily influenced by not only by the actors who are present here but also by the actors who are absent there.

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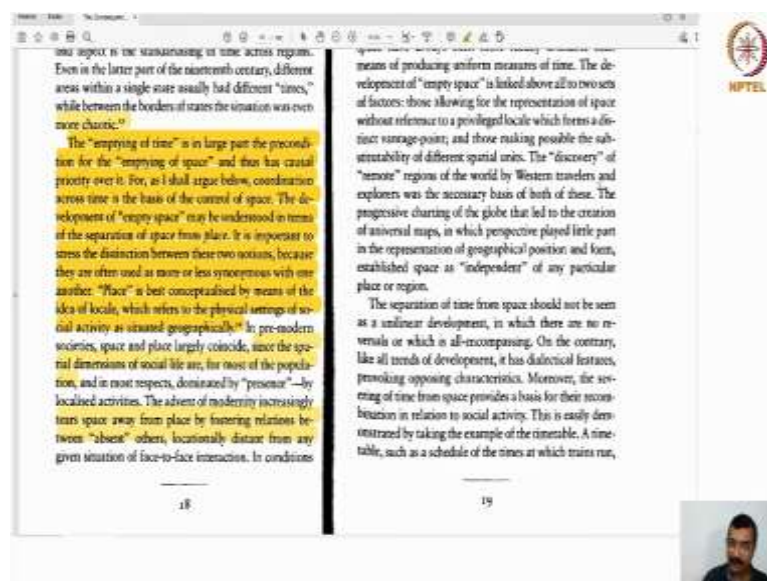
So, this, so he elaborates these whole implications of this particular thing about this emptying of a time which happened with first modernity and emptying a space which happens along with the second modernity because emptying a space is something that is the fundamental reason behind the global integration of social organization, of cultural interaction, of economic productions and every aspect of human relationship.

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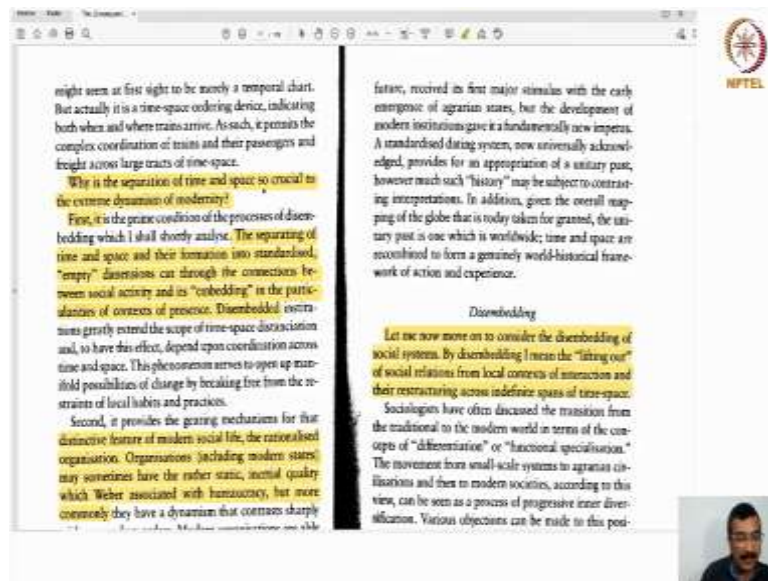
So, why is the separation of time and space so crucial to the extreme dynamism of modernity? So, first it is a prime condition of the process of disembedding which I shall shortly analyse. We will come back to this in the next page. The separating of time and space and their formation into standardized empty dimensions cut through the connections between social activities and its embedding in the particular context of presence.

So, this emptying of time and space, it has the ability of disembedding social actions from a particular social context, this is what he wants to argue and that is why he is introducing this term disembedding and it is a very, very important term. So, in the pre-modern societies, a social action takes place in a particular context, a violence takes place because of some reason that happened and that violence is enacted in a given context, so this context becomes extremely important.

And that the specificities of that the geographical area, the people, its culture, its history, its economic character, nature of that particular geography, everything is so important, it is something so closely connected with that. But in the late modernity, in the era of globalization what happens that actions can take place without much to do with the kind of a local context.

A company in which I am working or somebody is working whether it will work or not, whether it will be closed down or not has may not have nothing much to do with what is happening in that geographical place in which this company is located, that decision could be taken by somebody sitting thousands of kilometres away.

Or a particular kind of food that you take, a particular kind of fashion that you want to follow, a particular kind of music that you consume may not have anything to do with the local context, rather it could be produced everywhere, it could be produced anywhere. So, things that happen here can have impact somewhere else, things that happen somewhere else will have impact here.

So, that kind of a continuous process has this ability of disembedding, disembedding things taking away, uprooting things from its own context. Second, it provides the gearing mechanisms for that distinctive feature of modern social life, the rationalized organization. Organizations including modern states may sometimes have the rather static internal quality which Weber associated with bureaucracy.
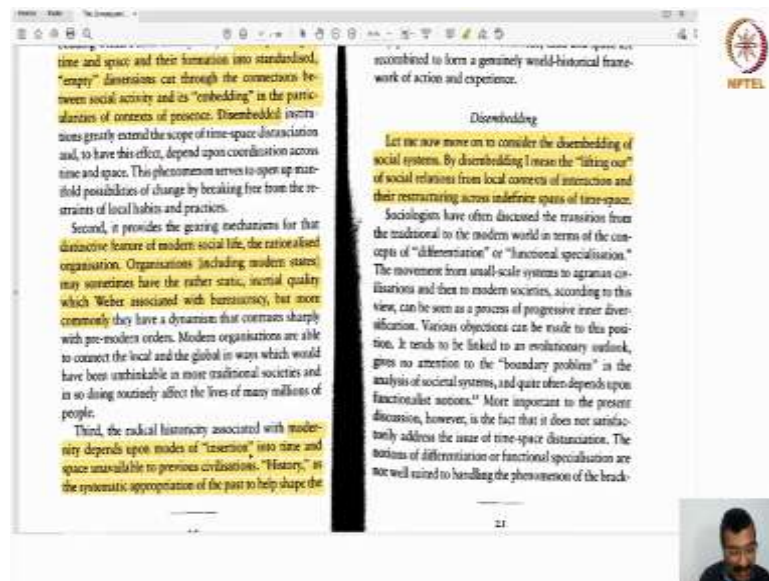
But more commonly they have a dynamism that contrasts sharply with pre-modern societies. And then the third point, the radical historicity associated with modernity depends upon modes of insertion into time and space unavailable to previous civilization. So, what does it mean? The radical historicity associated with modernity depends upon modes of insertion into time and space unavailable to previous civilization.

So, we know that this whole idea that we have evolved over a period of time and there is something called as a Christian era, then there was BC, there was AD and then we are in 2000 and then we have a large picture of this historicity in front of us and that is why we are able to place our society, our social context into this larger historical canvas and this was something simply unavailable to the pre-modern society because this pre-modern society.

Even now quite a lot of tribal societies simply do not have this understanding of history; their understanding of history could be very, very different. They may have an understanding that things are completely eternal or they may have an understanding that things are completely cyclical but this kind of a rooted historical understanding is something completely unavailable for the pre-modern societies.

So, let us now discuss what you see what does he mean by this term disembedding. Let me now move on to consider the disembedding of social systems. By disembedding I mean the lifting out of social relations are from local context of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time- place. That is an extremely important point.

So, he is talking about the lifting out of social relationship from local context of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time and space. So, for example, a festival like Diwali, so Diwali has a very specific local context but now you know that Diwali is a very important festival even in diaspora across the globe.

So, when Indian diaspora in the US when they celebrate Diwali, what is happening is that they are celebrating Diwali in a completely disembedded place. So, this disembeddedness can be spread across any geographic areas, so when we enjoy a Bollywood, a Hollywood movie, when we are able to identify with the emotional turmoil of a particular actor in one of the Hollywood

movies, even though that context in which that film is depicted comes from a completely different place, it is uplifted and we are able to consume it.

So, this particular disembedding of ideas, disembedding of practices, disembedding of social norms have become one of the central features of globalization and that is why for Giddens this whole process of disembedding is something extremely important.

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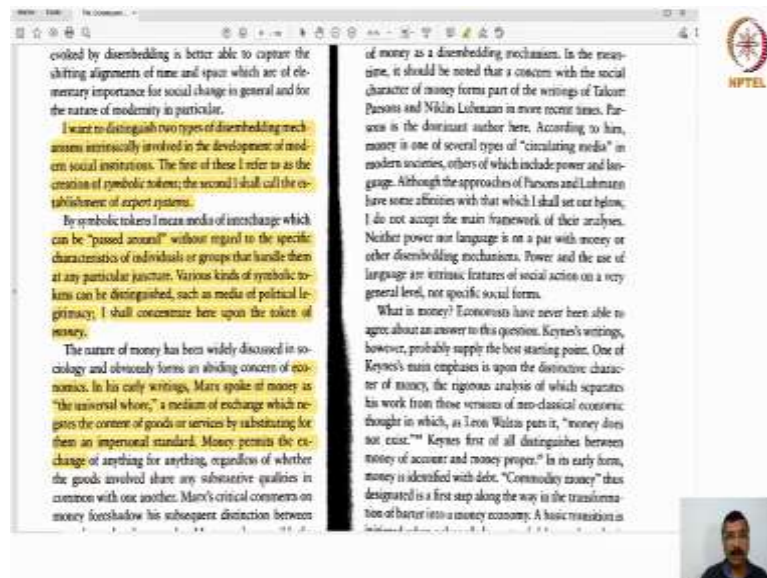
And he offers very important interesting analysis about it by bringing in notions of risk and trust and before that he brings in two important categories known as symbolic tokens and expert systems as two important mechanisms that play a very vital role in this process of disembodying. So, I want to distinguish two types of disembedding mechanisms intrinsically involved in the development of modern social institutions.

The first of these I refer to as the creation of symbolic tokens, the second I shall call the establishment of expert systems. So, these two terms symbolic tokens and expert system, he say, play a very important role in the disembedding of social relations from a given cultural and geographical context and thereby making it kind of a global. Thereby, disembedding lifting out things from its own local context.

By symbolic tokens I mean media of interchange which can be passed around without regard to specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them at any particular juncture. Various kinds of symbolic tokens can be distinguished such as media of political legitimacy; I shall concentrate here upon the token of money.

So, he is talking about symbolic token as tokens which have a universal appeal, which is understood and brought in practice not only by people of a particular community but it has a universal appeal and he gives the example of money and there is a lengthy examination into the philosophical aspect of money.

Karl Marx calls it as the as the universal whore, you know a very negative characterization, why he calls it as a universal whore because you can use a money to buy any artifact. So, Marx used the term, spoke of money as the universal whore, when he wanted to talk about how the

money in a sense really conceals the kind of labor that goes into the production of certain things.

So, here money, that money unlike the previous period, unlike maybe the pre-modern period, even then money existed, but here when you talk about electronic forms of money, we are talking about money which we do not even see that. Imagine that with a barter system, in a barter system you have to have a commodity and this commodity is exchanged with another commodity but with the advent of money, money has a universal character.

You can use the money to buy anything that you want and this money is appealing to everyone and this scope of appeal began to exceed, the scope of money began to exceed when we became more and more progressive with the establishment of nation state, every nation produce their own money and then of course, there was always the possibility of exchanging money with another currency and with countries like European union, with the introduction of euro it became much more easily transferable and became kind of a thing.

So, in the in the current era, when you are buying something from an Amazon or from a Flipkart or from abroad when you pay online, we do not even see what exactly money is, whether it is physical form, whether it is dollar or euro we do not even see that, but we believe in this kind of things and then the transactions are made possible.

So, he says that there are a host of such kind of symbolic tokens which have replaced our traditional ways of exchange and these all these symbolic tokens have a universal character, that means everybody and anybody from any part of the globe are able to interact within that and it conveys the same meaning to everybody.

So, you do not need to really even look at the value that is printed on a particular coin or a particular thing in the current time because it hardly matters, it hardly matters whether you are using a coin or a note or nothing matters because it is mostly it is electronic transfer, it is electronic money and bitcoins and other things are another extreme which talk about it.

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So, there is a lengthy section on the philosophical theorization on money, he invokes Simmel which I am not really go into that but the point here is that all disembedding mechanisms, both symbolic tokens and, yes, so before that he also talks about expert systems. So, what is expert system?

Expert system, I hope, I think the discussion is here or yes, so all disembedding mechanisms both symbolic tokens and expert system depend upon trust. Trust is therefore involved in a fundamental way with the institutions of modernity. Trust here is vested not with individuals but in abstract principles.

Expert system he is talking about here. Giddens is arguing that modernity demands a different kind of trust. In the pre-modern societies for example, when you enter into a barter exchange when you exchange a particular commodity and buy another thing you can really trust your eyes. You can just see that transaction taking place and you can bargain with that particular person; you sell one basket full of oranges for another basket full of apples.

So, you can see the quantity, you can verify it and then you can do that. But when it comes to the question of money as in the form of currency or paper or as gold or bronze or coin you began to develop a further level of risk as well as a kind of a faith, a kind of a trust that you believe that, for example, 2000 rupees note, the governor of Reserve Bank in India he promises that is not it, there is a promise by the governor of Reserve Bank on Indian note.

So, every state promises that, the bearer of this particular note has this much of amount with him, it is a promise and we have learned to trust that. So, in a modern society unlike that of a pre-modern society has learned to face certain kind of risk as well as certain kind of trust.

Now, trust exist for example, Simmel says when we believe in someone or some principle, it expresses the feeling that there exists between our idea of being and being itself a definite connection and unity, a certain consistency in our conception of it and assurance and lack of resistance in the surrender of the ego to the conception which may rest upon particular reasons, but is not explained by them.

Trust in short is a form of faith, in which the confidence vested in probable outcome expresses a commitment to something rather than just a cognitive understanding. So, when you trust certain things, when you sell certain thing and then buy a bundle of cash that particular act has some set of trust in this validity of this particular bundle of note, saying that all these are original notes, they are not counterfeit.

And not only that they are original the other person whom you are going to give this cash will accept that, that is a faith, so that is a faith you have, you deeply believe, that you are convinced that the bundle of notes that you have in your hand, it contains the value of stuff that you sold and when you give it to somebody to sell, to buy something from another buyer he will accept it.

So, there must be an exchange of such kind of faith and that exchange is something what he calls it as the as a very important element of this abstract, sorry, this expert systems.

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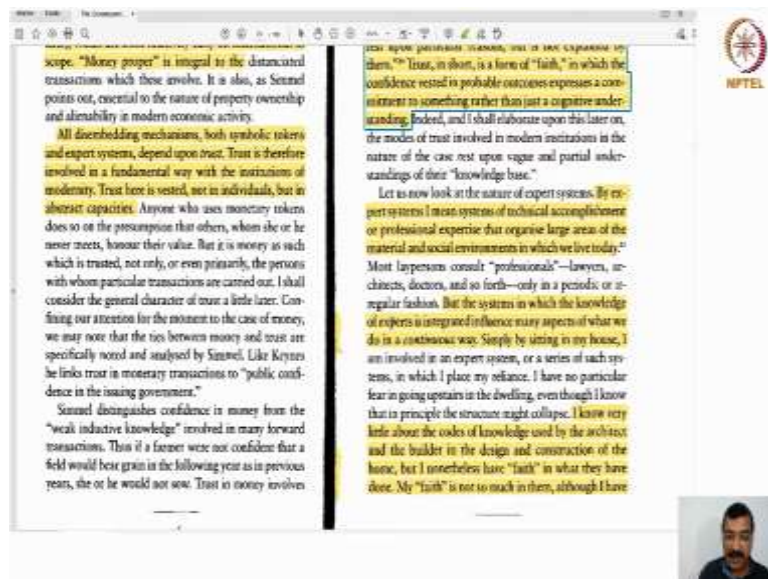
So, now let us look at the nature of expert systems. By expert systems I mean systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organizes large areas of the material and social environment in which we live today. But the systems in which the knowledge of experts is integrated influence many aspects of what we do in a continuous way.

So, he is saying that modern societies have necessitated that we place our trust into a continuous series of expert systems whose working that we do not know much about, it is a very, very interesting argument for example, he gives the example of a flight, I know very little about the codes of knowledge used by architects and yes, there are quite a lot of examples.

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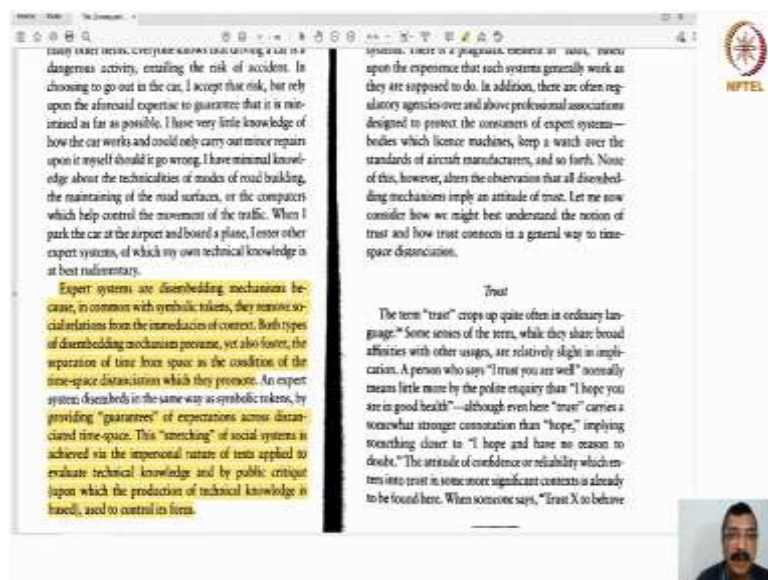
For example, when you decide to fly, when you decide to fly you have absolutely vast majority of the people have absolutely no knowledge about the whole entity called as an aeroplane, its aerodynamics, the control system, the quality of the pilot, whether the pilot is qualified enough, is he experienced enough.

Does he have enough knowledge? We do not even know whether there is sufficient fuel is filled in the airplane, we know nothing, we know nothing. We know that it is a system that has been put in place by an expert, a group of experts, thereby it should work. So, similarly, when we go into an ATM or when we use our credit card, we repose our faith into an unseen system which is developed by experts.

And this is something markedly different from a non-modern society, in which you simply do not have anything which is beyond your immediate realm of cognition, immediate realm of intelligence or intellectual abilities or anything. You know the things that are working, you know that these people are good at doing that you can observe everything; they are part of your social system.

But here we are investing millions of rupees, millions of dollars into some entity just by a click, the whole money vanishes and even the bank shows you that you own this much money and we think that we own this much money, so we are continuously in a state of affairs which is decided by symbolic tokens and abstract systems.

So, expert systems are disembedding mechanisms because in common with symbolic tokens they remove social relations from the immediacies of contexts. Both types of disembedding mechanisms presume, yet also foster the separation of time from space as the condition of the time- space distanciation which they promote.

Expert systems disembeds in the same way as symbolic tokens by providing guarantees of expectations across distanciated time-space. This stretching of social systems is achieved via the impersonal nature of tests applied to evaluate technical knowledge and by public critique upon which the production of technical knowledge is used to control its form.

So, there is a stretching of social systems that the travel, you get into bus and then there is a railway system, there is a aeroplane systems. So, all these systems are providing you with possibilities to engage in travel or in the case of transaction of money which are prepared by different people with adequate claims to technical expertise and we only believe that. So, that really brings to the whole question of trust which we need to quickly go through that.

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So, the main definition of trust in the Oxford English Dictionary describes it as a confidence in or reliance on some quality or attributes of a person or thing or the truth of a statement. So, these are some of the old definitions of trust, I am not going into the details you must read these sections, it is a very interesting historical analysis of how these notions of trust evolved and how these notions of trust are socially constructed.

Where the trust is involved in Luhmann's view, alternatives are consciously born in mind by the individual in deciding to follow a particular course of action. Someone who buys a used car instead of new one risks purchasing a debt. So, risk is not only fear about a certain natural calamity or certain misfortune, we know about the possible outcomes.

As, in the case of an example that he gives when you buy a used car you know that it could be a bad one or it may not work or it might come with huge repairing costs but you know about the possible outcomes and you know that some of these outcomes might be quite bad but we nevertheless, we engage in that.

And if you look into our everyday activity, we do this kind of calculations on a momentary basis. On every day every moment we do this and this was something very different in a pre-modern society. You never had this much of occasions where you were forced to undertake so much of risk in their everyday life.

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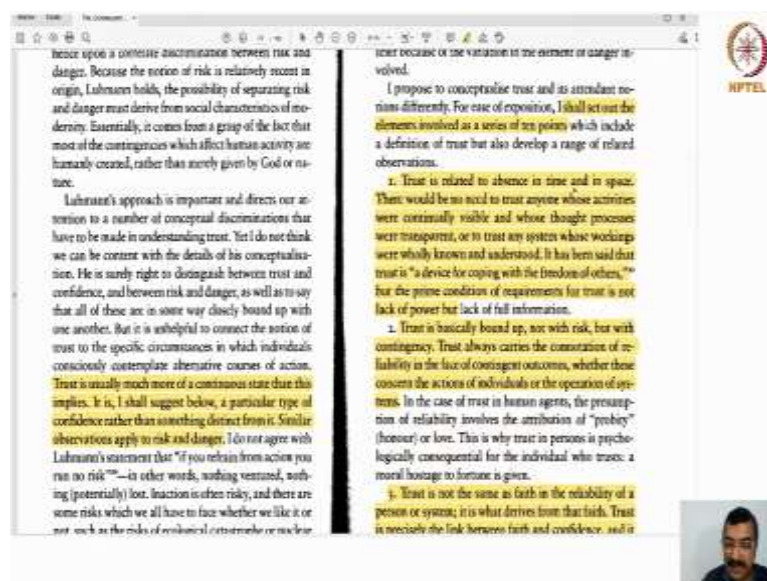
So, trust is usually much more of a continuous stage than this implies. That is I shall suggest below, a particular type of confidence rather than something distinct from it. Similar observations apply to, read that it is a kind of more elaborate thing. So, now he comes to, I propose to conceptualize trust and its attendant notion differently.

For ease of exposition, I shall set out the elements involved as a series of ten points which include a definition of trust but also develop a range of related observations. So, he talks about his own argument about how trust in the second modernity is something different. Trust is related to absence in time and in space.

There would be no need to trust anyone whose activities were continuously visible and whose thoughts process were transparent or to trust any system whose working were wholly known and understood. Because we know that you do not need to even to trust it, it is known to that.

It has been said that trust is a device for coping with the freedom of others. Very interesting one because you think that that person is capable of doing it and his ability to do so, your confidence in that thing is what you understand it as trust. But prime condition for the requirement of trust is not lack of power but lack of full information.

It is not the lack of information but the lack of power but lack of full information. Trust is basically bound up not with risk but with contingency. Trust always carries the connotation of a reliability in the face of contingent outcomes, whether these concerns the actions of individuals or the operations of systems. We are always worried about what happens such in a situation of a contingency, not always about the risk.

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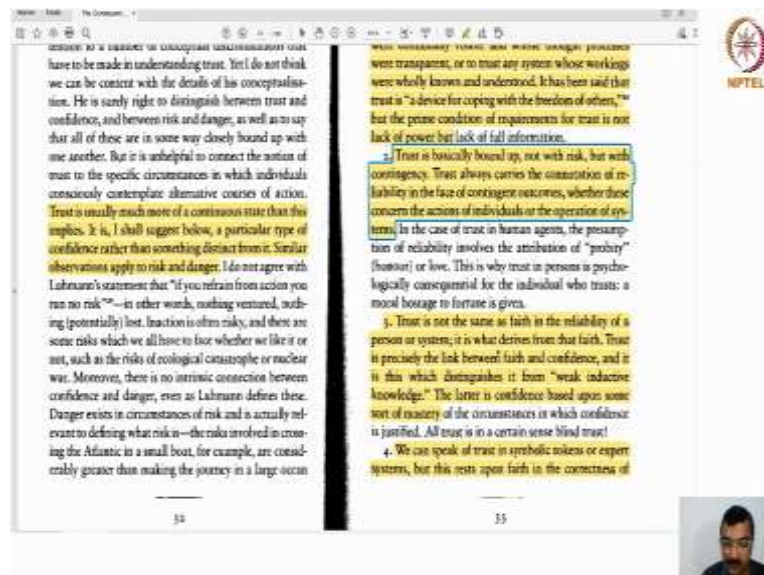
Trust is not the same as faith in the reliability of a person or a system, it is what derives from the faith. Trust is precisely the link between faith and confidence and it is this which distinguishes it from the weak inductive knowledge. The latter is confidence based upon some sort of mastery of the circumstances in which confidence is justified. All trust is in a certain sense a blind trust. Again, very important points that he talks about.

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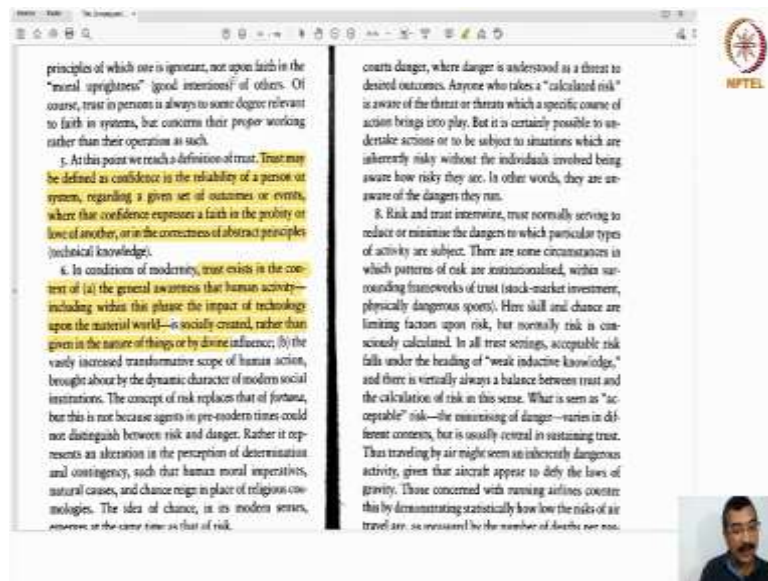
We can speak of trust in symbolic tokens or expert systems but this rest upon faith in the correctness of principles which one is ignorant. I think you go through that he talks about some eight or nine points about how this trust is different, he makes a distinction.

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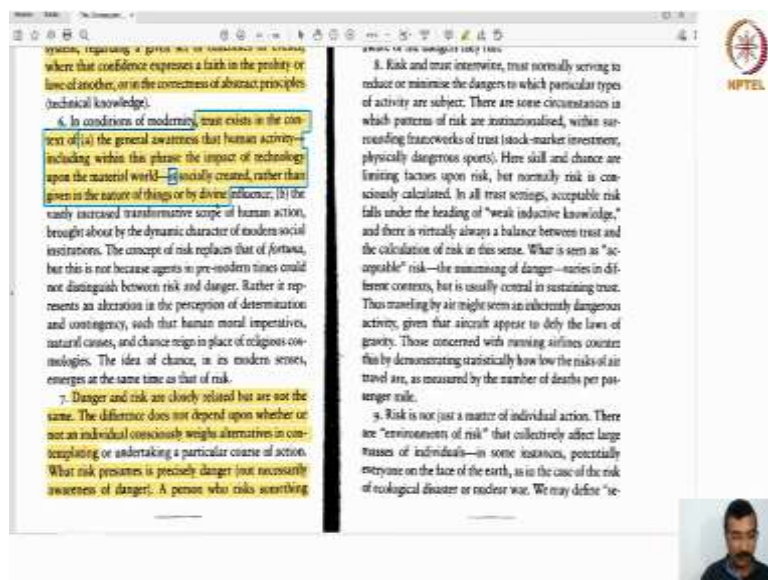
Let us see the sixth point. In conditions of modernity, trust exists in a context of a general awareness that human activity including within this phrase the impact of technology upon the material world is socially created rather than given in the nature of things by divine influence. And danger and risk are closely related but they are not the same.

The difference does not depend upon whether or not an individual consciously weighs alternatives in contemplating or undertaking particular course of action. What risk presumes is precisely danger not necessarily awareness of danger.

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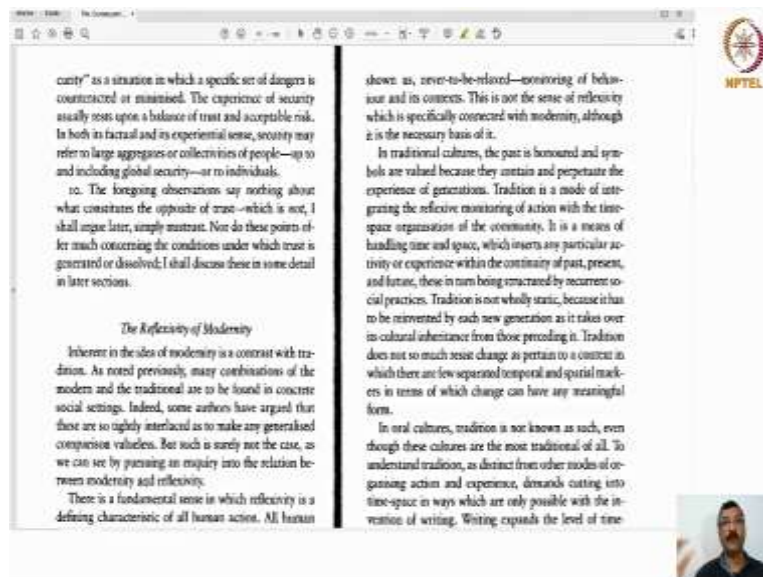
So, read that, it is a more nuanced understanding of risk and how in late modernity we are forced to deal with this ever-present notion of risk in a continuous manner in our life because the risk and trust come together, they are the two sides of the same coin and unlike any pre-modern society these things become omnipresent in our everyday life, because we are forced to deal with these symbolic tokens and abstract systems.

Symbolic tokens and abstract systems because this abstract system is what we are dealing with in our everyday life, you walk into a hospital, you meet a doctor and the doctor gives you medicine, we do not know who prepared the medicine, you do not know where it is produced from, you blindly believe the doctor or the doctor gives you some medical test and the report.

Somebody examines your blood and then gives you a report and then you trust that report, a report prepared by unseen people, a report prepared by using all kind of machines and chemicals and other things but we believe and then we take medicine. So, every action of human beings in the modernity and more so in the late modernity is forced to depend upon the symbolic tokens and then expert systems and which creates its own sense of anxiety, risk and then different qualities of trust.

And this risk is again a very important point which we will discuss later, as I mentioned you the other day Ulrich Beck's theory on risk society something very, very fascinating. So, let us stop here, it's time up and this is the last part the reflexivity of modernity which we will take up in the next class. Thank you.