

Text, Textuality and Digital Media
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Lecture # 3:
Marshall McLuhan: The Gutenberg Galaxy
Part-1

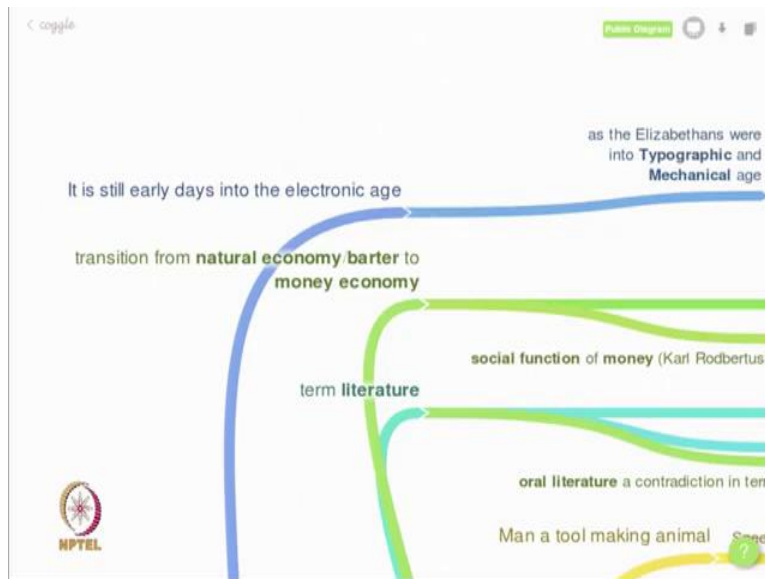
Welcome to the second lecture on the second of Marshall McLuhan's essays "The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man". In the previous lecture, we looked at the previous essay, which is "The medium is the message". Both the essays were written in the 1960s, which is the early era of the electronic age. Just to understand where we are going, I would like to recap a few points about the medium as the message.

The principle reason why we are looking at both these essays is to understand the relationship between human beings and human society and technology and in specific, we are looking at technologies of communication. In this particular course, we are interested in technologies of writing and recording ideas. What McLuhan is trying to assert- and in fact many others are also trying to assert, as we look at some of those essays in this course- is that the development of technology has a very strong relationship with the way human beings communicate, the way communication is framed and the way communication is perceived and interpreted.

This is a relationship which is very often lost upon people. While sending and receiving messages through text, or through speech, people mostly concentrate on the content of what is being said rather than on the form, the vehicle or the medium that is being used to send the message.

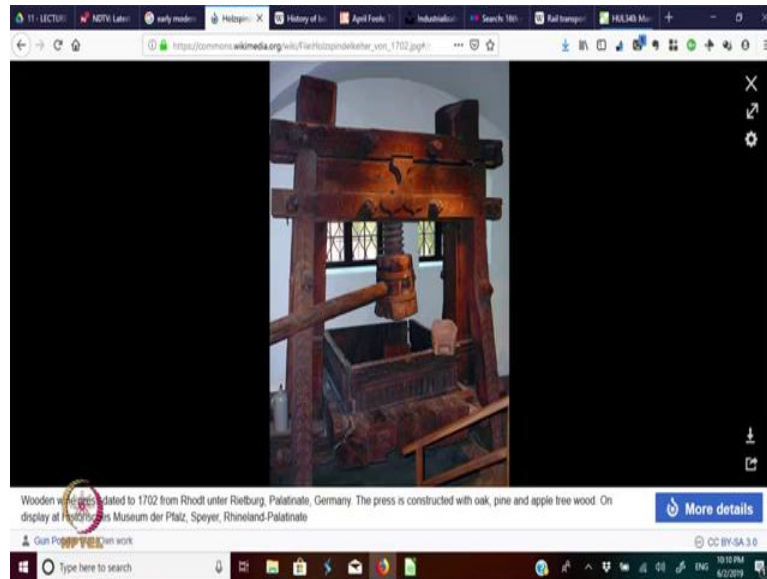
We are interested in this entire history of communication and communication technologies because our principle aim is to understand the present- the contemporary, the digital media, the advent of the digital media and the sweeping changes that the digital media is bringing about in our human communication and in fact in human society, human politics, economics and every facet of life.

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So without much ado, let us begin with understanding the essay. I strongly recommend that you read the essay which has been provided in the reading list for better understanding but for the moment, I will explain to you what the salient points in the essay are. McLuhan to begin with, acknowledges that it is still early days into the electronic age and very crucially, he identifies another period in human history, which is comparable to that of the present- the Elizabethan Age.

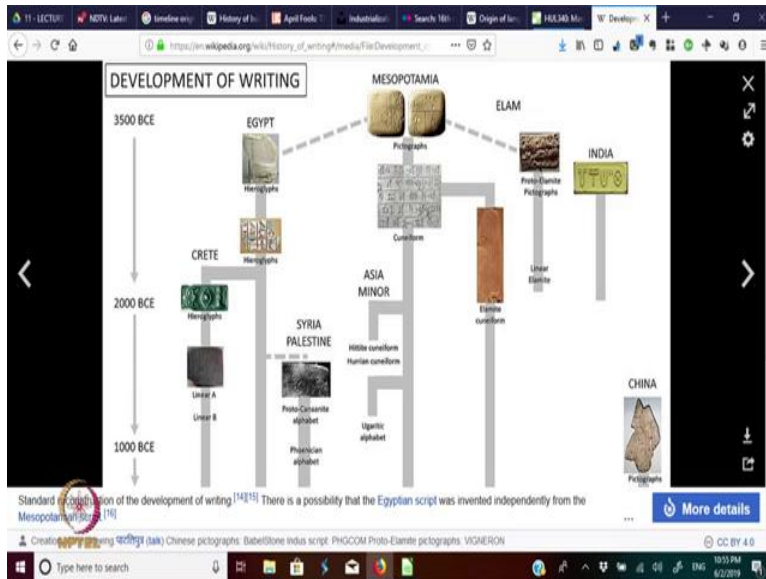
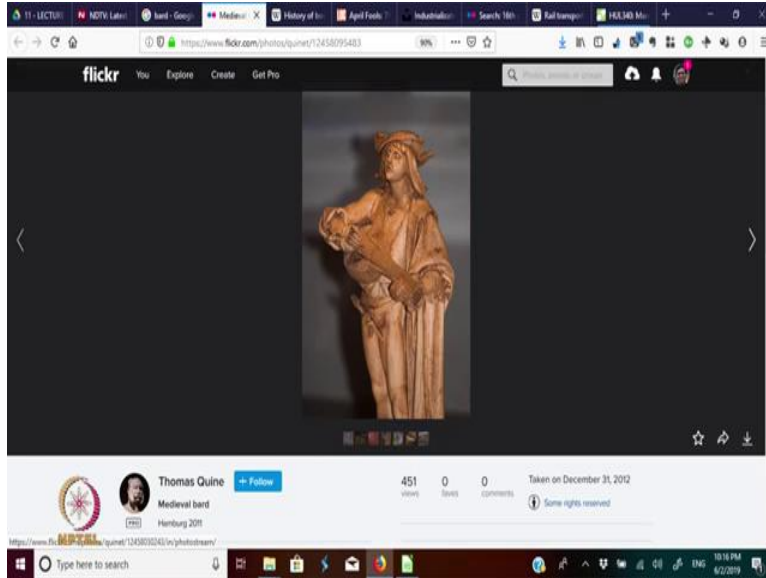
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Now a little bit about the Elizabethan age. Those of you who are students of literature would know that when we talk about the Elizabethan age, we talk about the period of the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First in England, which was towards the end of the 16th century and the very early part of the 17th century. And it's also variously known as the Early Modern Age, the Renaissance or even The Shakespearean Age.

What is important for us to know about this age, is that this was a period which those students of literature would know mostly for the plays of Shakespeare, or the poetry of Spenser, the plays of Johnson and others. However, it's important to remember that this was an age of tremendous growth, tremendous in the sort of churning within British Society and politics (and not only in English politics, but across Western Europe).

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We are going to study this at greater detail later on in this course, but in short, there were series of explorations that were undertaken by navigators and explorers who tried to circumnavigate the world. It was not only Columbus but many people from each of the European nations who were in a scramble to find a new route around the world through Asia. Thereby, they discovered what they called the New World and that brought about a tremendous amount of knowledge systems to open within Europe.

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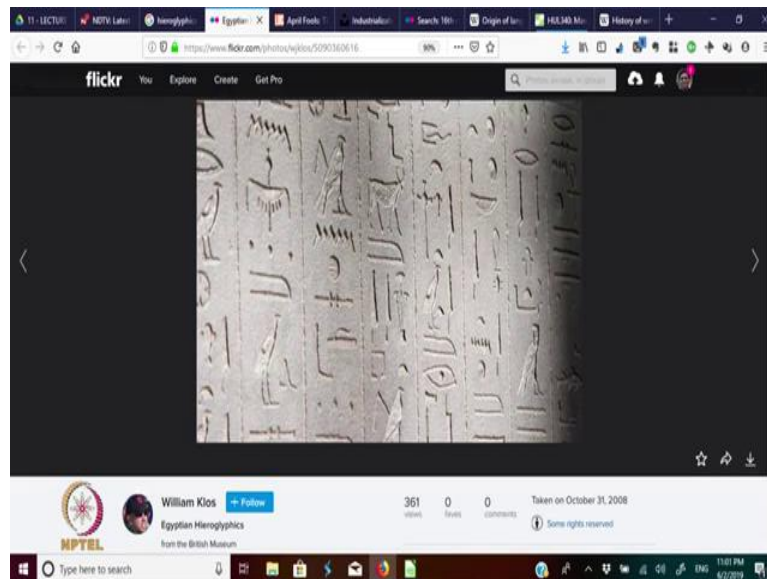


It was also a period of new learning. There was a tremendous growth in history- the coming of the printing machine, the tremendous growth of the number of availability of books, new universities were created- and not only that, people also linked it to the growth of trade and commerce to to an unprecedented scale. Along with that, this was also a period of scientific exploration. What I am going to try to demonstrate in this course is that all these changes that we've discovered as features of the Elizabethan Age, were all interlinked.

They did not grow independently of each other and that's what McLuhan is really trying to point towards: the sweeping changes that was seen within Western European society. However, it is not merely because of these changes within Western European society only, but also because of the history of colonialism and the growth of capitalism and imperialist commerce. These features of European society influenced modern societies across the world.

This kind of sweeping change is something which we can see in present-day society as well, if we look at it closely. So in fact, this course is going to be a mirror for us- what changes came about in the Early Modern Period?

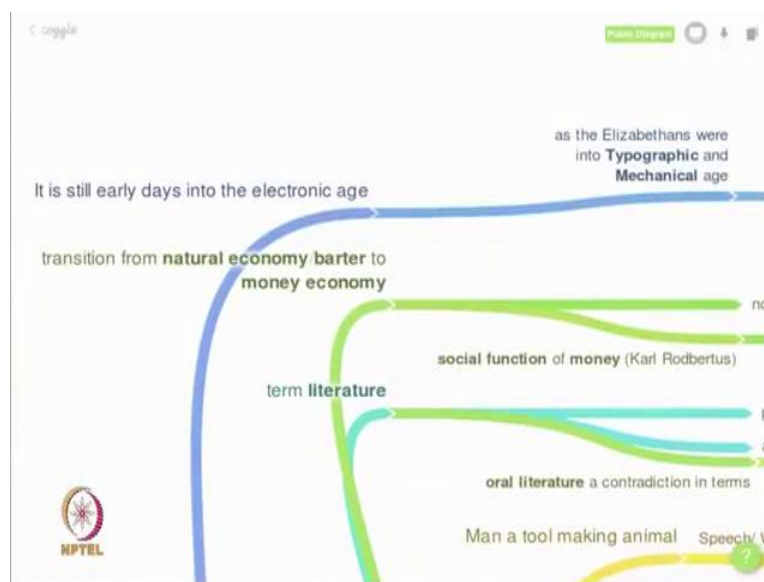
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It is called the Early Modern Period because in this period, we recognize some very important tenets of modern societies: democracy, science, rationality, and capitalism. These are some of the important features that define modern societies and these took their forms and struck roots at around this period. It did not develop in a day but over the next several centuries.

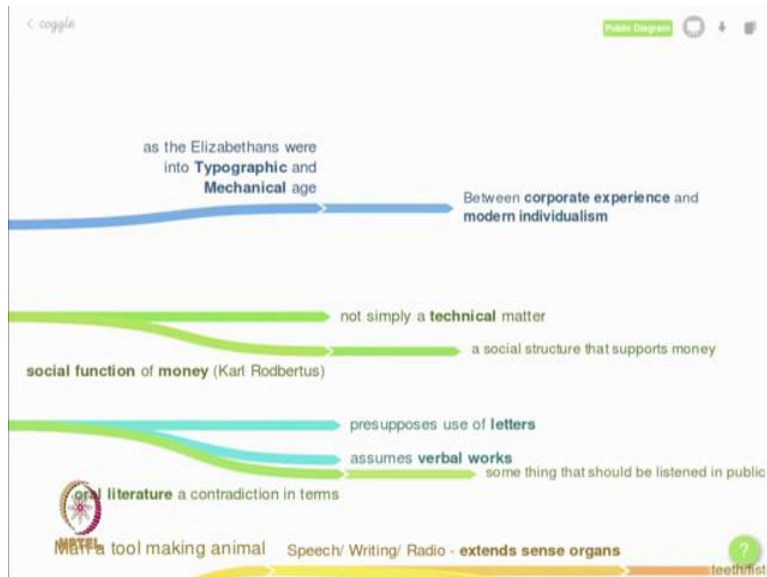
But the first signs of such a change in the world, really could be observed during this period. So, if the changes of a certain technological nature brought about such sweeping changes during the early modern Elizabethan period, then we can only conjecture as to what kind of sweeping changes our own contemporary societies are undergoing.

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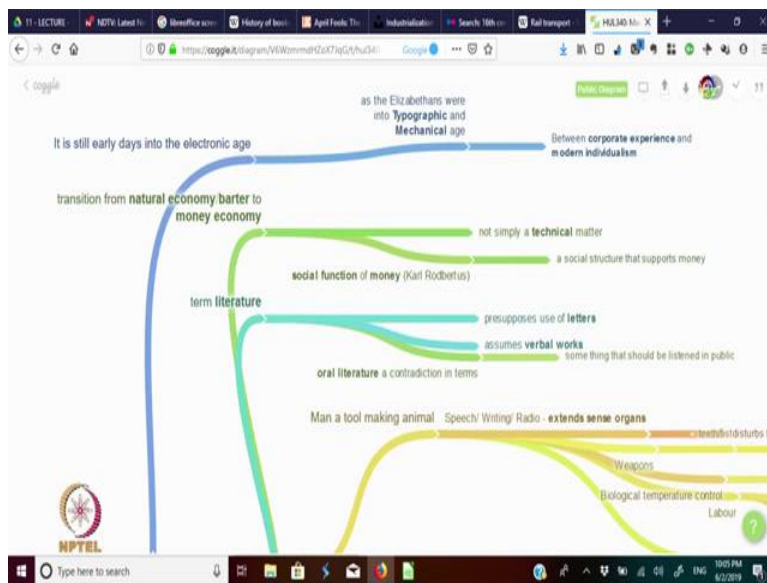
McLuhan says that Elizabethans are still in their early days into the new electronic age. I would like to remind you that he is talking about the 1960s. Although, we have moved some 50 to 60 years ahead after this essay was written, we could still say we are well into the digital age, but we still do not know how much more we have to see.

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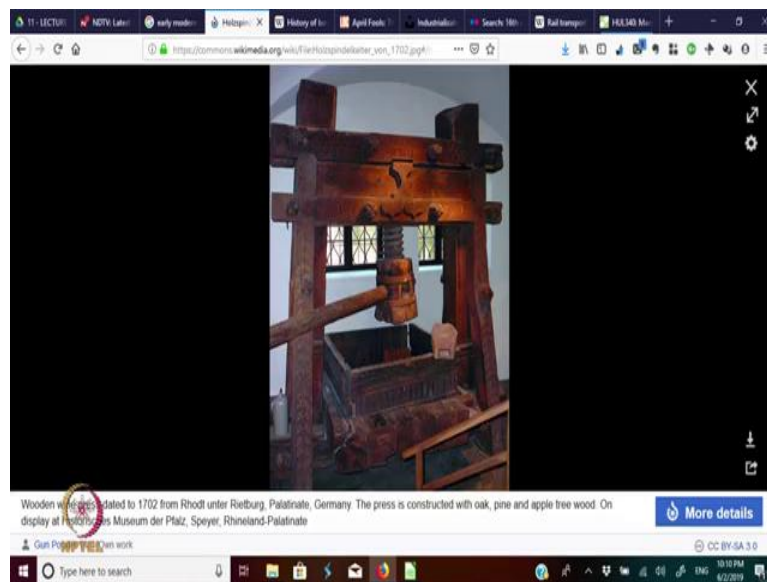
So we can hold McLuhan's essay to be true even today. According to McLuhan, we have not seen the full growth of the electronic age. We can only see the first features and the first development of the electronic age as the Elizabethans were moving in the typographic and mechanical age.

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Now, it is in the Elizabethan era that we see the beginnings of the typographic and the mechanical age. What are these two terms- typographic and mechanical? The mechanical is much more easily understood- it is the use of machines. For the first time, human beings started doing work using machines. Before that, everything was done manually. The creation of machines to do work is a result of scientific development, research within the field of science and also due to the development of technologies through which you can cater to more mass production of various goods in the world, including books and other methods of recording and communicating ideas.

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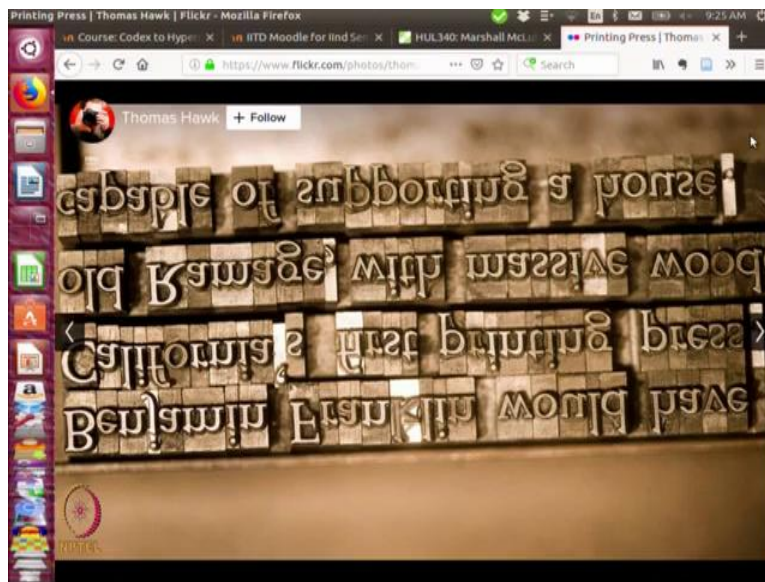


Before that, it would all be manually done. What is the machine that is used for mechanizing communication? We all know it is the printing machine. We are going to study the history of the printing machine in this course. If you study the history of the printing machine, you will find that there was an increased need of books. This required a large number of copies of a certain book to be available, because there would be students who wanted to read them.

Although, one would say that that is nowhere in comparison to the kind of needs and market for books that we have today, but it was still a tremendous amount of growth which the world saw. The European Society saw a tremendous growth in the demand for books at around the thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen centuries.

Earlier, the only method of reproducing books would be through manual copying, through manuscripts made by scribes. Scribes are those who write books. We all understand that it is a slow process. So one is always on the lookout for the creation of a more efficient and better mechanism through which more books could be made available at a cheaper cost and at a faster rate.

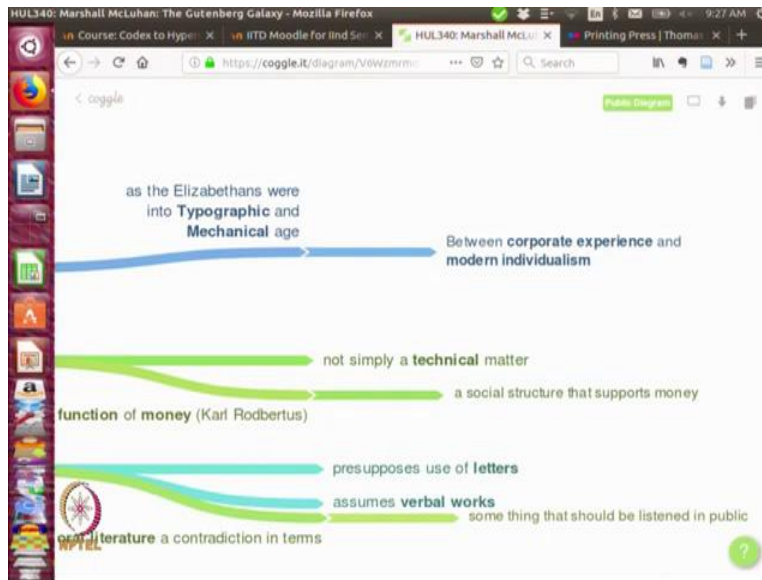
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So, one of the innovations that Gutenberg made was the movable type. You can see on your screen there. This is an example of how the earliest printing machines actually operated. You had these types and each individual type face was put together, it composed lines, and then an impression was taken. That made it really efficient. Before this, and before Gutenberg, people would try to create one entire page carved out of wood or metal, and that was a very inefficient and slow way of working because you could not reuse the same set of types for another page.

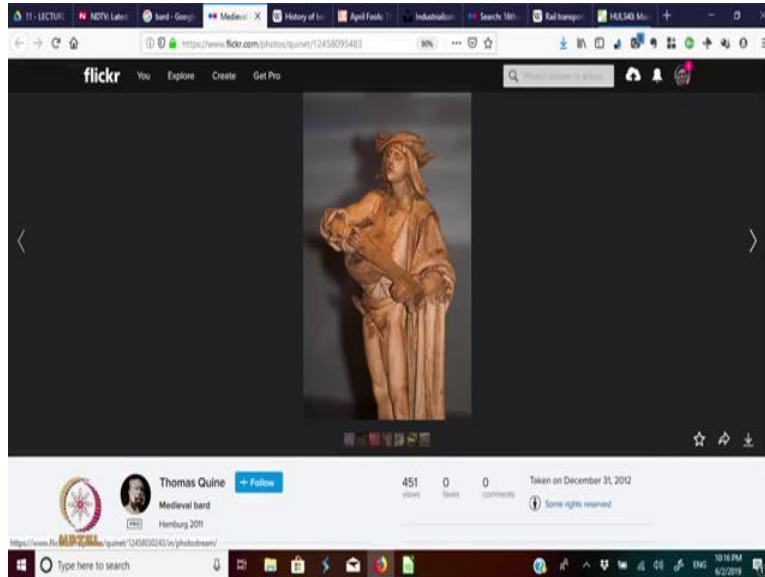
So, the labor involved in creating a full impression of a page would be much more inefficient, whereas the creation of the movable type (it is movable because each of the pieces can be taken apart and put in a box and reused later on), that is the innovation which led to the rise of the modern printing machine.

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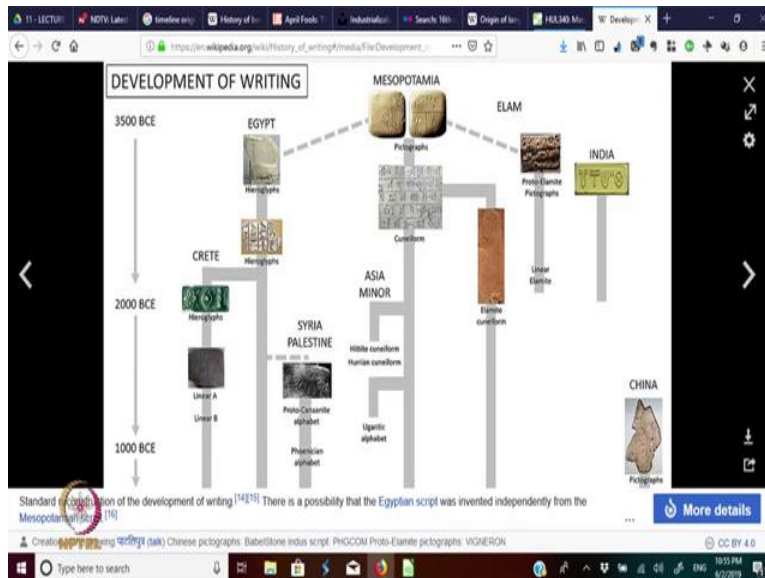
That innovation, is defined as the creation of the typo-graph. This is the typographic method of printing and therefore this age is also called the typographic age. And that is what McLuhan is referring to when he is talking about the typographic or the mechanical age. So this was the very early period of the typographic age that the Elizabethans were moving into, and McLuhan is trying to refer to that. He is trying to suggest that there are sudden changes that came about when human beings became typographic. Now let's talk about the oral world.

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We are going to look at the various broad epochs of writing technologies or communication technologies. It's not only writing, because we are also talking about orality. So there was the oral world or the bardic world, where communication was primarily through old means. Poems would be passed down from generation to generation without anything written and without any scriptures, because human beings had started speaking much before writing was even invented.

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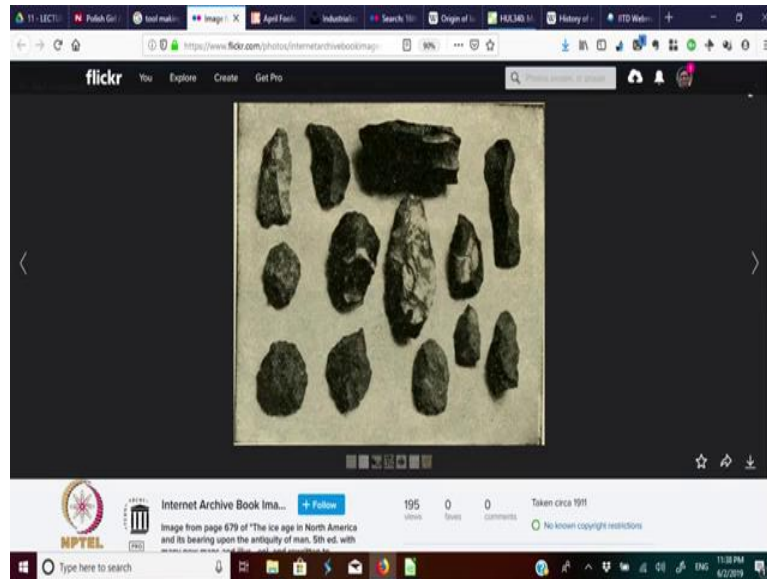
So if we talk about the invention of writing, it is only about five to eight thousand years old in various cultures and in various forms. And the alphabet is much more closer, it is maybe about three to four thousand years old. The earliest forms of alphabetic writing and the creation of the vowel is even more new. So when we are talking about the entire expanse of the human civilization, our communication technologies are very new compared to that. It is a very small period of the entire period of human communication. So, before the invention of writing, human beings would communicate through oral means. That is one phase.

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The second phase is the phase where people started writing. The earliest writing was pictograph- in the form of cave drawings, i.e. the mechanism of communication- cuneiform writing or hieroglyphics- was used to communicate through symbols and after that when the alphabet was discovered and developed, that led to manuscript writing. Paper was a much later discovery.

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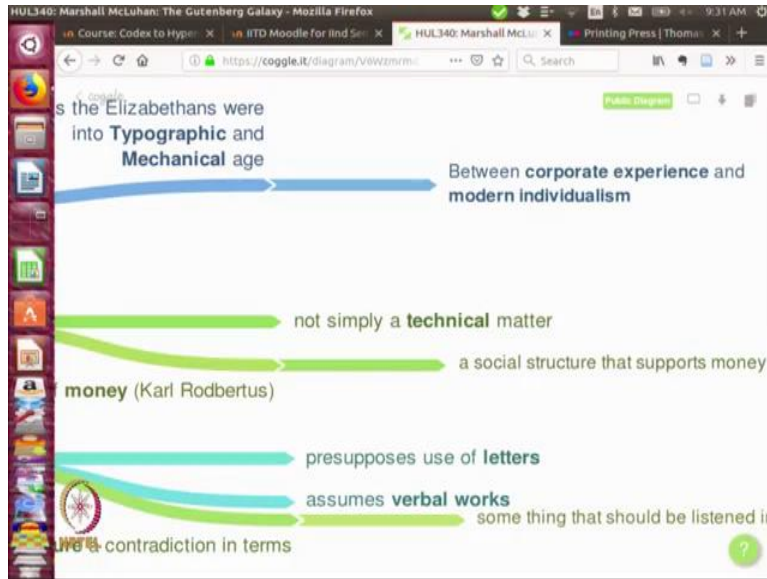


In this entire period, people are writing by hand. I told you in the previous class about how the shape of the human hand allows us to hold tools of various kinds, weapons, tools to create, to hunt, tools to cook, tools to create other tools and of course tools of writing. So therefore, the period where human beings are writing manually is called the chirographic age followed by the typographic age, where people are writing using machines like the typograph.

That is the typographic age and the typographic age follows into what McLuhan calls the electronic age, but I think we will make a distinction between McLuhan's understanding of the electronic age and our understanding of the digital world because McLuhan did not have too much mingling into what the digital age is really all about.

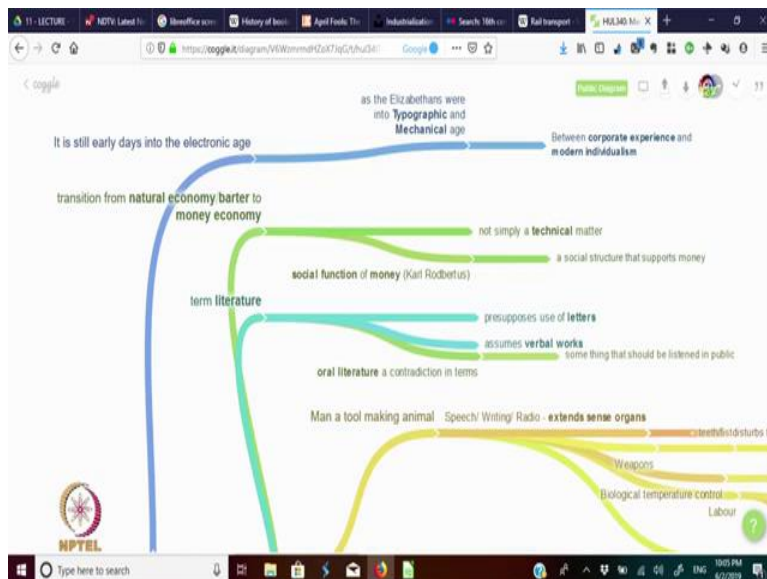
He was looking more at the transmission of radio and television, but there is a linkage. The radio and television, we can still say is part of the mechanical era because the TV, camera and the radio were mechanical devices to begin with in the 1960s.

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The era of digital recording, really begins with the coming of the internet, which really revolutionizes the way the world communicates. So he says, the coming of the typography period is the early modern age.

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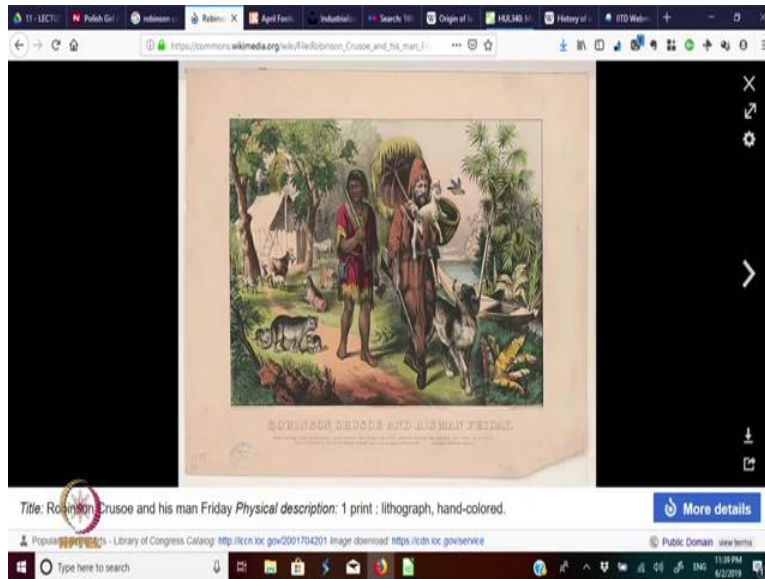
A distinction was happening between human experience as a corporate experience and human experience as modern individualism. Now just to explain this issue a little bit. One of the facets or the features of modernity, among various other things like colonialism, capitalism and democracy, is also the rise of the individual.

The idea is that the individual is at the center of the universe, that the individual is driving growth. This is very important as it is very much interlinked to the way capitalism operates, because it is the individual who is granted the right to property, and the right and will to invest and reap profits from that investment.

So individualism becomes a very important characteristic of modernity. Before that, you had clan identities and tribal identities. People would identify themselves not as separate from their clans, but as part of their clans. So it was a more corporate experience of a group of people in a community together. So that distinction, where the individual branches out of that corporate existence and strikes an individual faith for oneself, is very important to understand the kind of characters we encounter in the literature of this period.

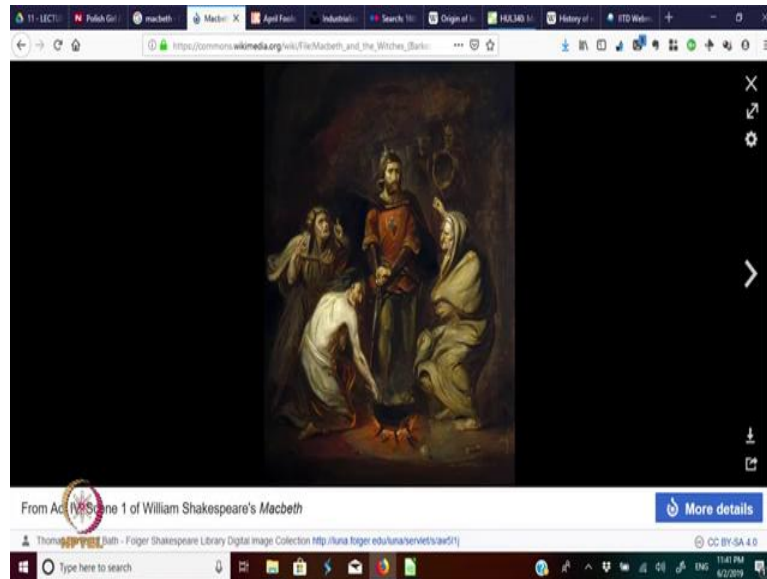
If you look at Robinson Crusoe, for example, Crusoe is someone who was fated to be a clergyman, but he then moves out of his house (and is probably the second or third son in his family). He moves out against his father's wishes, against the corporate notions of what his duties and responsibilities are, and he tries to chart a career/an experience for himself, and that is the risk taking that he undertakes. The second example is that of Macbeth, from Shakespeare's tragedy, *Macbeth*.

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Now in *Macbeth*, in the second scene, we find that Ross comes in to tell Duncan of the heroics of Macbeth, of what Macbeth has achieved in the battlefield: he has shown quality, and protected his entire people, he has fought very hard and very bravely. There is a character Duncan who is the king and he is an old man. Frail man. He is certainly not someone who can protect his people from their enemies who are attacking Scotland at that point of time and it is Macbeth who is protecting them instead.

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Now if you understand the the responsibilities and duties of the king, then one of the things that the audience would understand, is that Macbeth is perhaps much better suited to be king than Duncan. But he does not have the necessary qualifications. He has the abilities, but he does not have the necessary sanctions because he is not born into the royal family.

In the monarchical system, you have the understanding that the King's son will become king and that is how the inheritance operates. When Macbeth becomes king, through whatever means, the entire universe sort of conspires against him, the entire universe tries to set it right till Malcolm becomes becomes the king and Macbeth is removed from the world. He has to give up his life and only then order is restored. Order is what is seen as proper.

So here we see a very interesting conflict between feudal societies- this corporate experience- there is Macbeth, who is very capable and has the abilities, but his fate will not be determined on the basis of his abilities, but rather on the basis of his place within that corporate front. The most Duncan gives to him is the Thane of Cawdor.

That is his place within the corporate experience. But Macbeth tries to branch out. Macbeth tries to move out and become that individual who goes and gets things for himself, who takes risks, who wants to achieve beyond what the fates have ordained for him, beyond what sanction has ordained for him, beyond what he is slated to do by birth, and to have by birth. There are many stories in this early modern Elizabethan period, where we can trace this same trajectory of a conflict between the individual and the larger society.

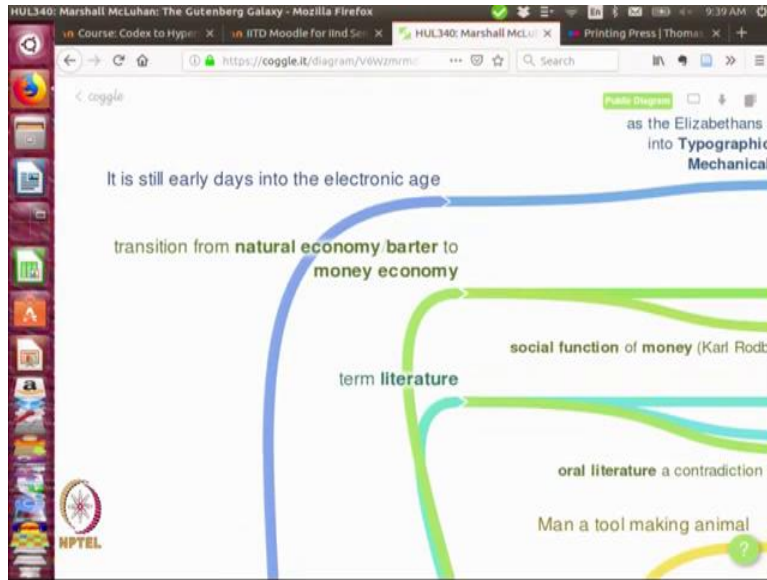
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The society is still very much within a corporate experience, but now we are producing these men who would strive to live an individual life. It is a very patriarchal world. We do not see too many women figures, though there are some exceptions, but that will probably be discussed in some other course. You had these characters, these people, who would try to live an individual life, and chart their own careers and their own histories of development. So that is something that McLuhan identifies as an important facet of this period- the Early Modern Period.

He says that on the one hand, you have the movement from the chirographic (the manuscript world) to the mechanical age (the typographic world), and on the other hand, the corporate experience to individual experience. He sees a link between the two. Let us see what he has to say further.

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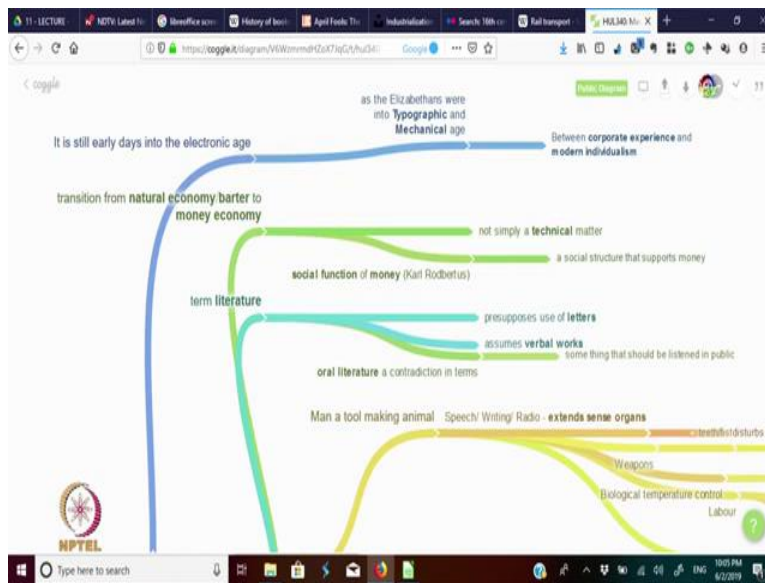
He looks at a series of changes that took place. It is a period where there is a transition from natural economy or barter economy to money economy. The idea of money really starts developing in this period. You would argue that it is not only in the Elizabethan period that we had coins printed, that coins were printed much earlier in history, but the nature of money in the Elizabethan period and the nature of money before that was very different. Earlier, coins would be made of valuable metal like gold or silver and the value of the coin is exactly the value of what the gold or silver value is.

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Though you're functioning through coins, it is still a barter economy. Whereas, in a money economy, if you pull out any currency, you find that there is a note from the governor of The Reserve Bank who says, "I promise to pay the bearer the sum of..." ten rupees or twenty rupees or fifty rupees or a hundred rupees or whatever. This means that the currency note is not worth ten rupees till The Reserve Bank guarantees that amount.

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That note itself is actually a piece of paper that costs much less than five hundred rupees or two thousand rupees. It is the bank guarantee which is written on the note that gives value to the bill.

That is what lends value to that currency note. Person A knows that when he goes and offers this note to Person B, Person B cannot refuse, because the Reserve Bank is guaranteeing it. All of us have gone through the history of demonetization. What is demonetization? Notes were demonetized. The Reserve Bank withdrew. They said that they had promised that this is a five hundred rupee note or this is a thousand rupee note. They were now withdrawing that promise, and those notes became mere pieces of paper.

It is not worth five hundred rupees or thousand rupees anymore. That is what we mean by money economy. There is a movement from the natural economy to the money economy because of the mechanization of the production of the coins and the notes, which leads to a mass creation of currency. And he says that this is not simply a technical matter.

This is not merely a matter of how a currency note is printed, whether it is printed out of gold or silver. Rather, he is talking about the social function of money. That money has a social function. It creates a social structure, and this kind of an economy can only be sustained by a social structure that functions within a money economy rather than a barter economy. What does he mean by that? He means that this is only possible within modern institutions, where you have institutions which support a money economy, very importantly, banks.

Without the creation of banks, or without the guarantee of these social institutions, you do not have a structure that will support a money economy. Many of these institutions which are modern institutions, actually start coming in to being at around this point of time. So he says this is not merely a technical matter.

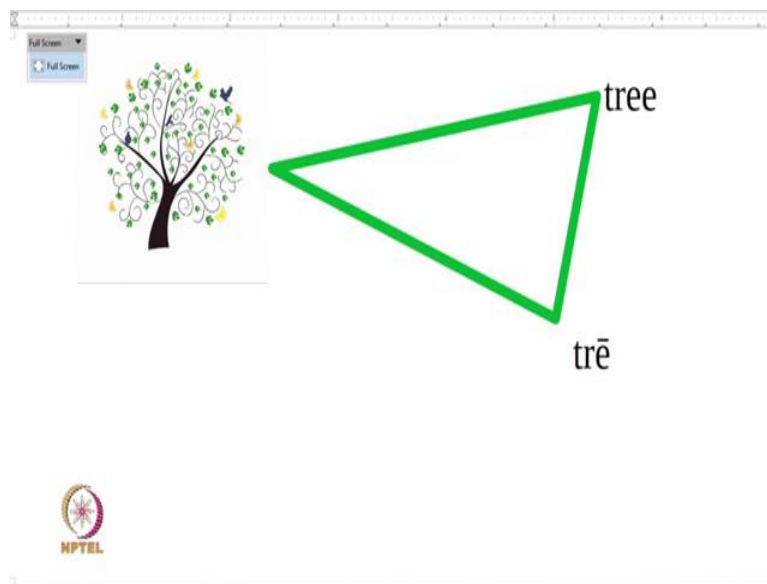
Earlier, if you had gold coins, these gold coins were minted by one particular Kingdom in one particular place and but you could go to another kingdom with the gold and the gold would still retain its value. Whereas in a money economy, the notes that are printed within a certain country may not hold value in another country unless there is an exchange that is worked out. So this now gets linked to the creation of nation states. A kind of relationship exists between nation states. There are some kinds of exchange rates and other things which are rules and laws, which govern the circulation of money.

This is not true of the barter economy. So this is not simply a technical matter and just to remind you of the previous essay by McLuhan, McLuhan talks about technology not being an academic matter. He talks about how electricity actually changes the way human beings relate to each other and changes the nature of the human society altogether. So that is what he is pointing out.

He also focuses on the use of the term literature. Before the chirographic world, there was orality. He says that the term oral literature is a contradiction because the word literature presupposes the use of letters. It assumes verbal works, works which are written through words, and through alphabet.

But oral literature is something that is not written. Oral works did survive, even before the development of the alphabet. So you cannot have oral literature, because it is oral by nature, something that people listen to, not read. It is very important to note, that when we talk about the oral world, we talk about a world that is an idea. Let us say, when we utter a certain word, say tree.

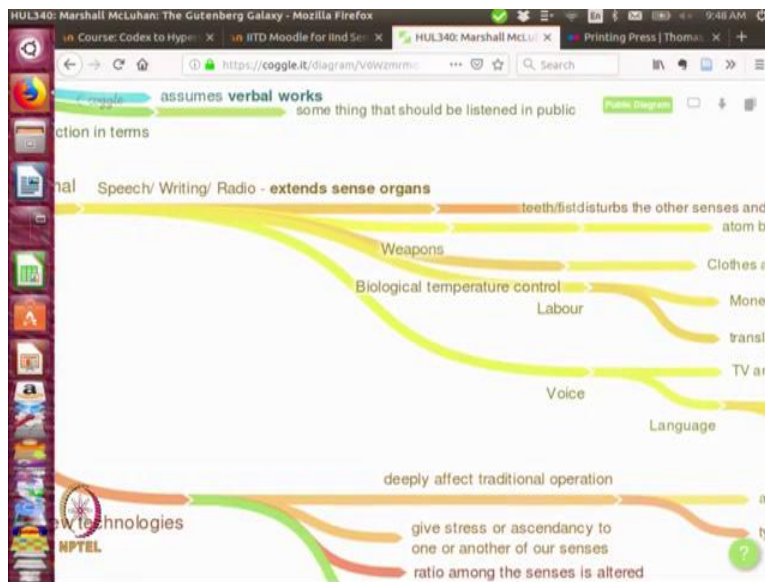
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The word tree, brings in the sounds t r ee. Now this combination produces in the mind's eye, the idea of what the tree is, the sound tree. This is something that we in today's world will not be able to fathom. Because the moment we say, or I say the word tree, what you think of, is T-R-E-

E. The first thing that we do not think of is the tree out there. Some of us may but we cannot help thinking of T-R-E-E as well even if we think of the physical tree that is outside.

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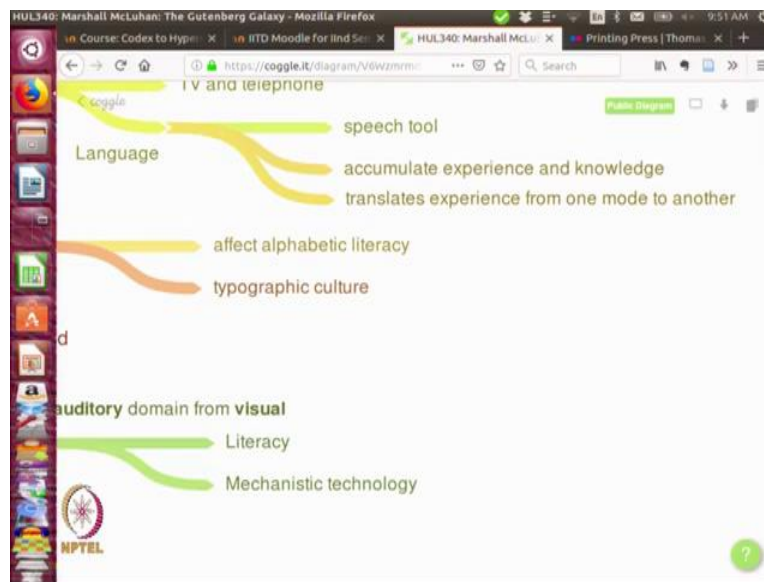


So we are moving with the development of the alphabet from oral space -sound- to a visual space- that which we see. The symbolism shifts from the oral space to the visual space. That is something that we need to keep in mind. He then goes back to the same point in the previous essay that, human beings are tool-making animals and tools are an extension of sense organs. Now when we talk about extension of sense organs, we are also talking about extension of organs which are used for communication- speech and writing and video. These are extensions, weapons are an extension of our limbs- nuclear weapons or biological. The body has a mechanism of controlling temperature.

Clothes and houses are an extension of the human body's ability to control temperature. If you look at money as a technology, money has a way of storing labor, and of extending labor. I work hard so I can get some money and I can keep it for other things. So I store my labor power in the form of money. Or, I have money, so I can buy somebody else's labor power. So I work hard or I am a good craftsman, but I also need to buy wheat from the market. I cannot produce wheat, my labor-power cannot do that. So I use the money of my craftsmanship to buy another skill, i.e. the production of wheat. So that is what technology does. Technology extends our sense organs.

TV and telephone, he says, is an extension of voice. Language itself, he identifies, as a speech to the way we understand. Because language not a natural thing, it is something we acquire when a child is born. The child learns the language and we are able to understand each other because that language actually exists between us. Language does not emanate from me, language does not emanate for you. I am aware of what language you might understand and you are aware of what language I might be able to put together. Therefore, when we sit across the screen and we interact, language actually exists between us, so speech is a tool.

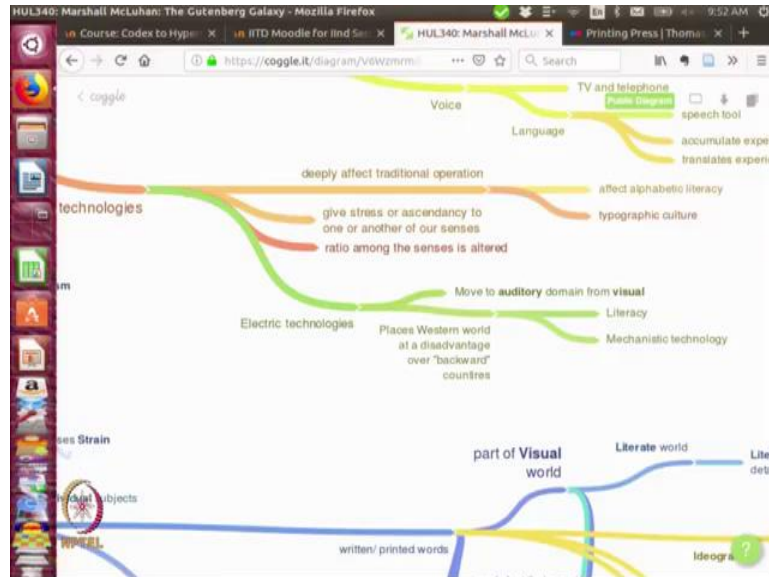
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And what language does is that it allows us to accumulate experience and knowledge. What I am transmitting through this lecture today is a certain experience and certain degree of knowledge. I would have spent a lot many more hours acquiring what you are getting within the space of a lecture or a course. When you read a book, someone may have researched that book for many

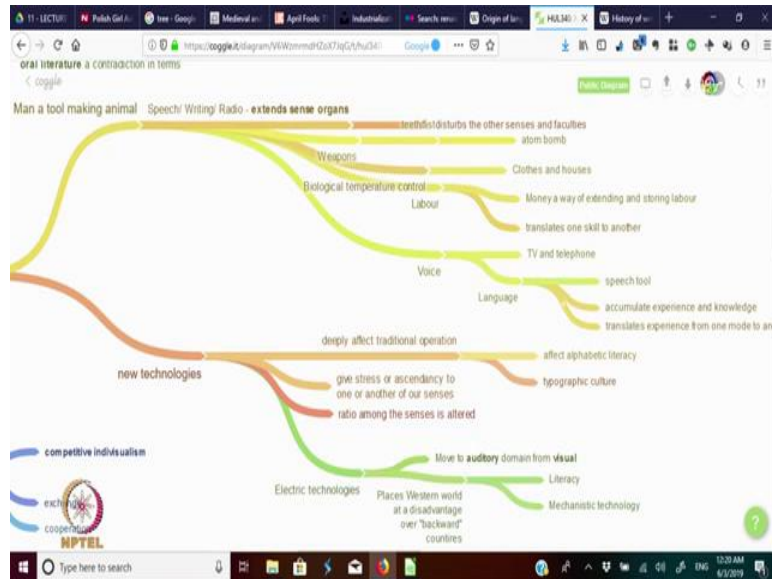
months or years. And by reading that book, you gathered that experience and you accumulated that experience within the space of a few hours or a few days. So, not only is language not merely communication, but it also allows us to move experience from one mode to another mode.

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So, he says that new technologies deeply affect traditional operation. When technologies change, things undergo a sea change altogether. It is not merely a change of technology. But the way we operate affects the way we operate altogether. And he says that each technology actually alters the ratio among the senses and this is very crucial.

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We just talked about how the word tree when spoken is pronounced in the oral world. It reminds people of the tree through the utterance of those sound forms. Whereas in a chirographic world or a typographic world, you look at the visual shape of the word itself. You imagine in your mind's eye the visual shape of the word. Therefore, the ratio among the senses is altered. Whereas in the oral world, the ear plays a very important role, however in the chirographic world or even the typographic world, the visual space plays a far more important role.

In fact, with the coming of print, and in the advanced stages of the manuscript universe, the development of silent reading existed- where the word would not be uttered. So the relationship or the ratio between the ear and the eyes in the understanding of the word tree has undergone a change because of the change of technology. Typographic culture brings about a very different kind of practice. We will discuss the following later on when we look at things in the next few lectures:

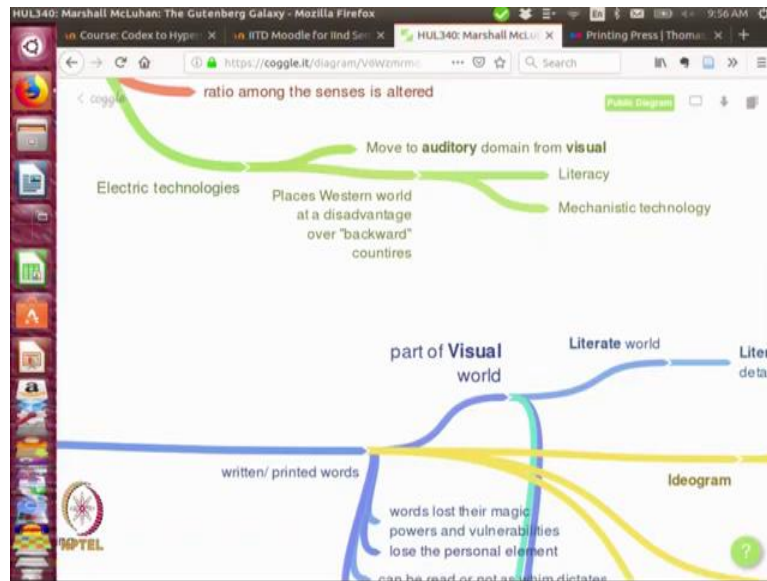
We will see how in an oral universe you can only partake of ideas or experience in the presence of the speaker. Whereas in the print universe, I write a book and it gets printed and the book travels without me. I am not required to be present there. Now, look at this particular lecture. If it were a live lecture we would say at least we inhabit the same, temporal sort of space.

I'm on the side of this camera. You're on the other side of the screen and you communicate with me. Maybe if there was a mechanism through which I could see you and it could be a two-way process, then one would say one is existing in the same time across various geographies.

But in this particular case, once this lecture is recorded, I do not even know who is going to register for the course. But I am speaking to you. I mean, speaking to an audience who is yet to come into existence, isn't it? So, the technology of this recording device that is there before me- the camera- and the transmission device that is there- the internet- is making it possible for me to have an audience who are yet to come into being.

So therefore it brings in a different kind of relationship between me and you; this would not have been the case with other kinds of technology. Suppose, I had put all these ideas in the form of a textbook. The textbook would behave very differently- you would not see me. You would not see me moving my hands around. You would not hear my voice, you would not see me moving my lips. So, each technology operates very differently.

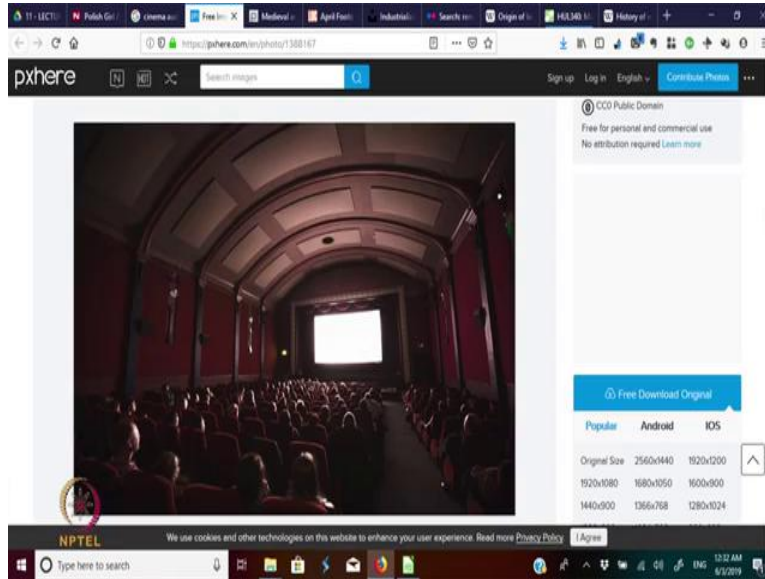
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And he says one of the important facets of- and now he is returning to the Modern Times- the contemporary times is that electronic technologies have moved from the auditory domain to the visual domain. What does it mean? Certainly, one point that needs to be understood here is that when certain words are used, they can be used in different senses across different contexts.

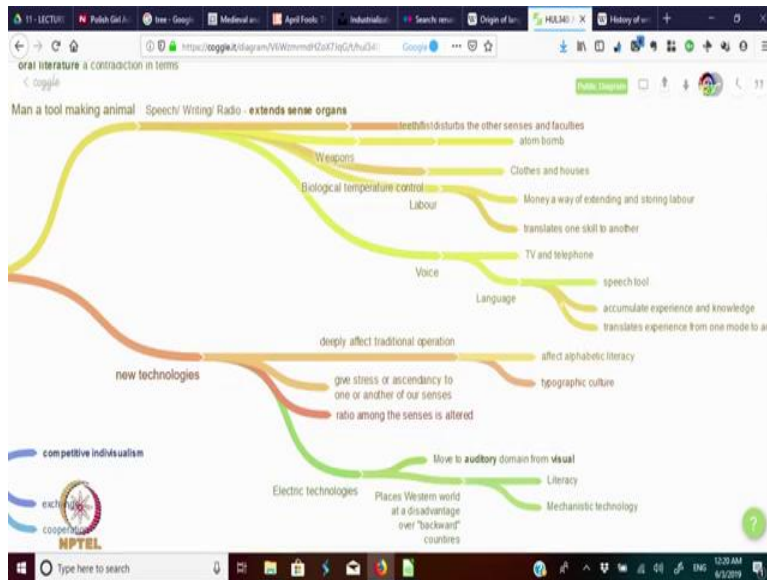
Now we already said that the movement from the oral to the chirographic or the typographic world is a movement from the oral to the visual because you see the word rewritten on a white piece of paper, but what is important to understand is that it's not a complete separation from the oral altogether because even when we are reading something silently, we are reading it in our mind's eye.

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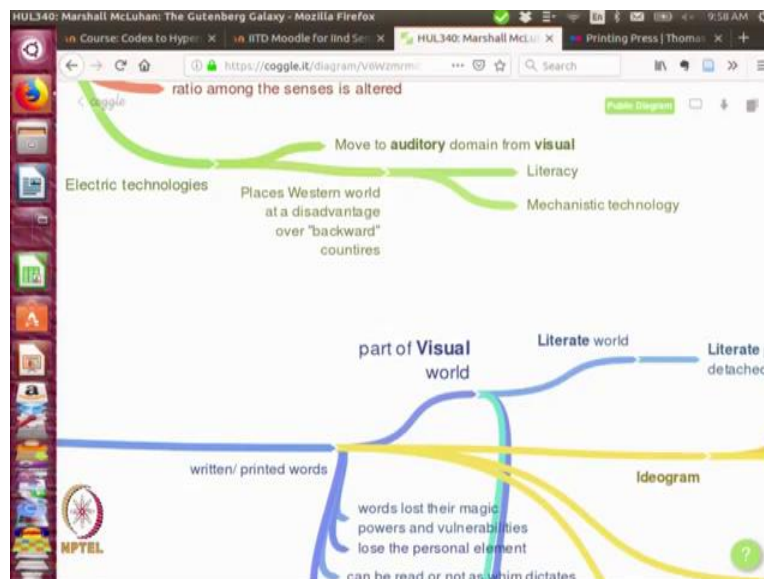
We are actually reading it outside silently, we are voicing those words, as if, we are speaking. So it is oral. But when you are seeing something on a television screen, you are not-- when we are looking at a painting or we are watching a cinema watching cinema or television, then it is-- part of it is not an articulation of a silent reading. It is purely visual.

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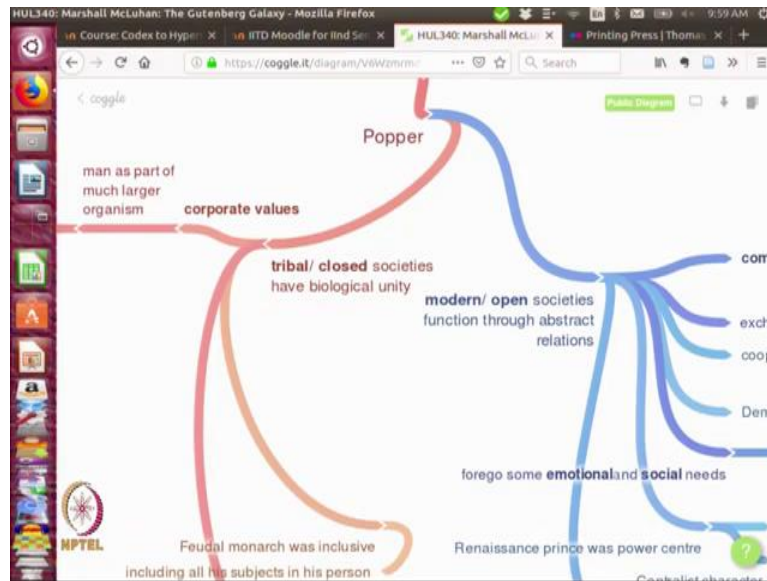
There could be an image on the screen which is purely visual, like, for example, the distinction between this image and what you are seeing here. Here, because there are texts written, you would be reading and articulating it in your mind. Part of it is the mind mapping which is purely visual but because there is text on it, you will see it. But if it is another image- a painting- then it is visual because you are not reading it out. You are not articulating the sound of it in your mind. So that is what he is saying, that the electronic media moves to the visual; he's talking about television here, and then he makes a very crucial point which he is going to elaborate in sometime.

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Contrary to what common sensically you would say, he says that the electronic world actually places the Western World at a disadvantage over what he calls within quotation marks of course, “backward countries”. Because “backward countries” is something he relates to the oral universe- the distinction between the oral universe and the print universe. Why he says that, is something that we are going to come to in a moment. Let us not discuss that right now because we want to discuss it at greater length in a little while.

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So, let us move to the next part of the discussion, in which he takes on the philosopher Karl Popper and he discusses the distinction between tribal societies and modern societies. Tribal societies are closed societies and modern societies are open societies and tribal societies have a biological unity whereas modern societies function through abstract relationships. So now what does it mean to be in tribal societies?

They are smaller, close-knit societies. This is the corporate universe that he is talking about. They have a biological unit- people live together. People see each other, not like across a camera. It is not across the screen. You actually see your teacher, you live in the same space. So that is what he means by biologically. People are born together, they die together, it is not merely the relationship between teacher and student in your University or in your school, for example.

You go to a school, the teacher comes there to work and the teacher goes away and you go away. The teacher may be teaching there for twenty years, but a student in a college is studying only for three years, and the student goes away. But imagine if you were to live your life completely in a village or a tribe where you are born, the teacher was there and when the teacher dies, the student is there, or whichever way it is, they live their lives together, and live their entire universe together.

It is a closed universe, and there is biological unity. We live with each other. It is not an institutional unity. When I teach in my institute and there are students, I see them for a course. I may see them for a couple of years, after that they are gone. Then they only exist through correspondence. There is no biological endemic unity between us. It is merely through abstract notions, through institutions. These are more institutional relationships.

So he says, taking on Karl Popper, that these tribal closed societies function on the basis of corporate values, whereas modern and open societies function through competitive individualism- points that I have already made- and he explains what we mean by corporate values. He says, man or human beings look upon themselves as part of a much larger organism, not an independent unit, not self-reliant but part of a clan or a family or other larger entities, whereas in modern individualism, the individual is existing separately and there is a functioning of exchange and cooperation.

The relationship is that of exchange, not that of a biological unity, but in that exchange between teacher and student, between boss and employee, between employer and employee, between the Member of Parliament and the elected electorate, it is fragmented isn't it? To a certain person, I am-- so to the shopkeeper, I am a customer. Whereas to my colleagues, I am a co-worker. The same person has different facets. Whereas in a corporate entity, I am completely what I am with another person who is completely what he or she is with me. We see everything about that person.

Just imagine and compare your relationship with the members of your family from the relationship with your classmates, for example. It's a very different kind of a relationship. You know a lot more about members of your family than you know about, or you will ever know about your classmates. Mostly that would be the case. There would be exceptions. But our engagement in the institutional space of a college or a school is an example of a modern society. Whereas, our existence within the family space is an example of the tribal or clan mode of existence.

Now, he is going to take this distinction further and say that within feudalism, you had a situation. He is talking about politics. The feudal Monarch was inclusive, including all his subjects in his person. What does he mean by this? I hope you have heard of the term- The Royal plural. The Royal plural is, when the Kings speaks in this manner: "We shall visit the sea tomorrow" or something. He uses the word 'we' because the feudal Monarch- within his own understanding of himself- he includes all his subjects. It's the way the language operates.

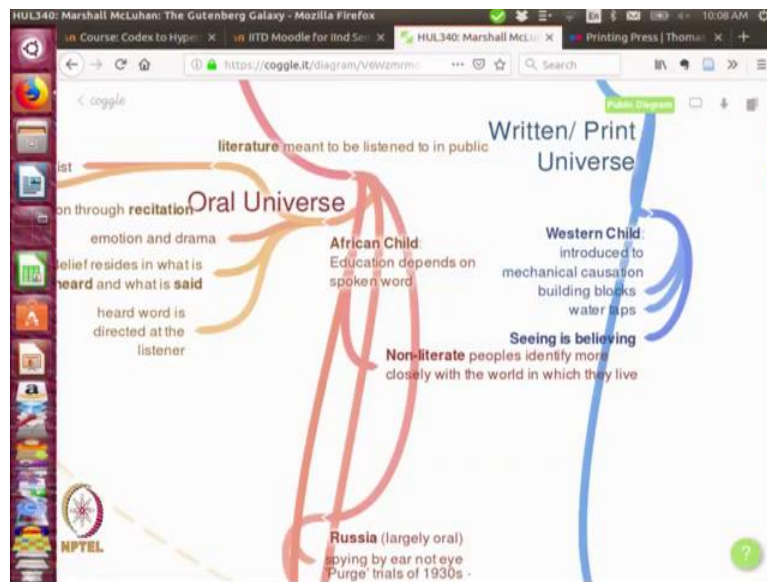
So the fate of the Monarch is linked to the fate of the people and the fate of the people is linked to the fate of the Monarch. They are not separate from each other. Whereas in modern societies, you have entities of power who are in a republic; the head of state is not hereditary, but is decided through constitutional basis, there is constitutional rule. So therefore, the person who is ruling the country is only holding an office, and is not actually holding power by himself or herself.

Whereas in case of monarchy, the feudal monarch is holding the entire power to himself or herself. And another crucial distinction, between feudal monarchy and the modern ruler- the democrat, of the democratic world- is that the latter is brought about by the rule of law. The law is above that of the ruler. So in the case of a feudal monarch, it will be the prince or the king who would decide what the resolution to a particular matter would be.

He could be arbitrary, he could decide on his own, he would be the supreme authority altogether. Whereas, you know, if you look at a constitutional world, there is a constitution, there is a set of laws. There are a set of laws and there is a separation of powers and it is the Judiciary which decides on what is right and what is wrong, how a particular dispute is going to be decided, what

is the quantum of punishment that would be given, so therefore, that is a very important distinction between office and authority.

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This distinction comes about in the modern period. And the most crucial distinction for us is the distinction between the oral universe and the printed, print or written universe. And here he is trying to work with the distinction between the Western child and the African child, with caveats one would say, because you know in the 1960s, one would say that the spread of Western technologies and Western institutions was still very limited within Africa.

So, McLuhan takes it to be a very apt example, though Africa was, and the various Africans in some countries and societies are, perhaps as much modern as that of Europe today. McLuhan in this essay makes that distinction: he relates the African world with orality and the Western World with the written and print universe.

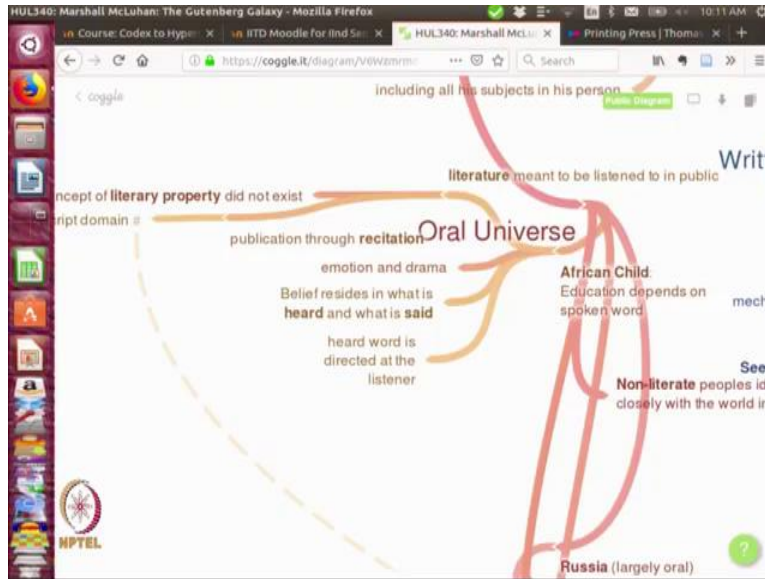
We shall not go into the politics of this distinction and relationship that McLuhan draws, because that would only draw away from the moot point that he makes. I am not absolving McLuhan of anything, but I think we need to get on with it and discuss what is the point about technology that McLuhan is making. He says, for the African child, education depends upon the spoken word. Whereas for the Western child, the latter is introduced to mechanical causation.

So, for the African child, for example, water is something that flows in the streams or flows down through lanes or comes out of caverns, but for the Western child, the first introduction to water is through water taps- it is mechanical.

So it is like this, for many of us who are urban bred. We would encounter food on our plates and we think food comes from the kitchen or that food is produced in the market. Whereas, for a child who is more likely to be in the traditional oral universe, food is actually produced on the field in the farm. So there is that disjuncture between the biological world and the mechanical world.

So in the oral universe, the concept of literary property did not exist. Because when I come and tell you a story, I am not bothered about whether I have written the story or not. Because you want to listen to a story told by me. The same story told by another person may not be that interesting to you because you are not only interested in the way in what this content is, but also the way the story is being told. So, the concept of literary property actually did not exist.

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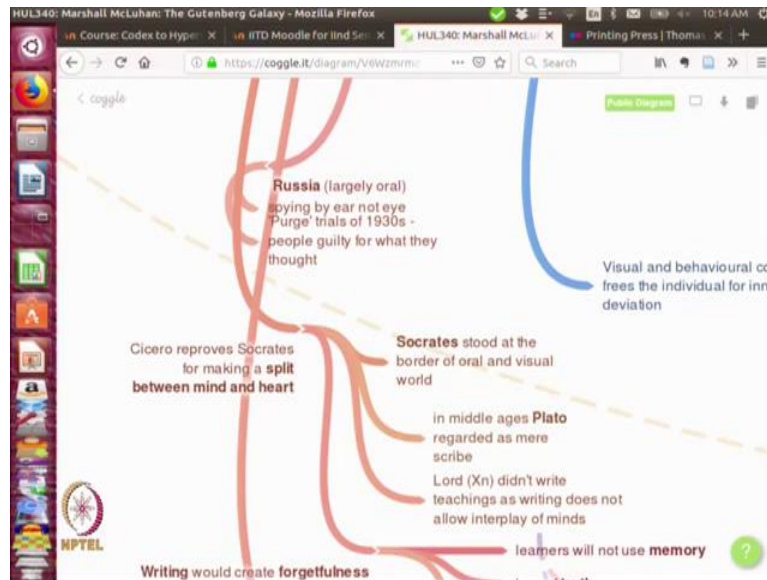
And this actually continued into the manuscript domain, as he says, because, even when manuscripts were produced, manuscripts were principally produced as a mnemonic tool- as a way to help the the orator remember the next line or the next sentence or the next idea- and you have this even today in in our societies where there would be manuscripts which would be read out during various rituals.

The priest would read out from a certain book or something but it is actually orated. Imagine people who are reading the Hanuman Chalisa, for example, It is not to be merely read in the mind. Well, even though without actually uttering a sound, people are supposed to read, but that is a practice of the early manuscript world, where manuscripts were merely a way to remember things and they come into existence only in the utterance of it.

As I said, that when somebody is speaking, what is carried with it, is not merely the words or the meaning of the words but also the meaning of the gestures and the expressions. When someone is telling you a story, the way they are, and their mannerisms conveys a lot of sense into what the audience understands. So this is a universe where the belief resides in what is heard and what is said, so the word is directed at the listener not at the written work. Whereas in the Western World, seeing is believing. However in the oral universe, hearing is believing.

“I have heard about this”, compared to, “I have seen it”- there is a distinction. And he says that non literate people- those who believe in the spoken word rather than the written word- they would identify more closely with the world that they live in; because it is a more biological unit. I would relate much closely with the tree, because that printed word, T-R-E-E does not stand between me and the tree. The tree is right there. I understand what a tree is.

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And he takes on a few more examples, like for example, he says that in Russia, which was at that point of time largely an oral world, spying was not through the eye but through the ear. People would hear things, evidence would be on the basis of whether you have heard him say so, whereas in modern mechanisms of spying, people will take photographs, or photocopies, which would be passed around.

So you need some visual evidence of everything but in the early days of Russian espionage, spying was primarily through whether you hear something across the wall. That is something very important. So I think we can stop here for today and we'll take on the rest of the essay in the next lecture.