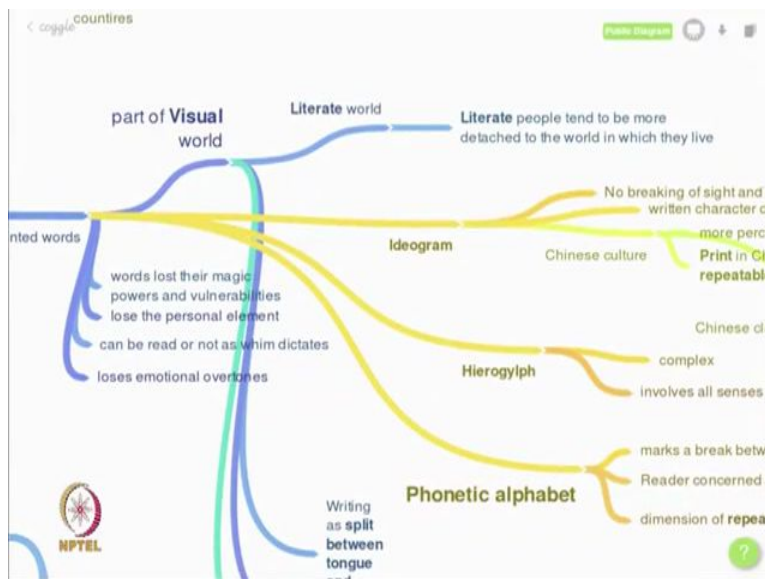


**Text, Textuality and Digital Media**  
**Professor Arjun Ghosh**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi**  
**Lecture 04:**  
**Marshall McLuhan: The Gutenberg Galaxy**  
**Part -2**

(Refer slide time 1:11)



Welcome back. We will continue our discussion on Marshall McLuhan's essay on the typographic man today. We have been discussing this essay. Here in this essay he talks about the distinction between typographical resources and chirographical and oral resources, how the different kinds of ways of communication and usage of media are far reaching. Media is not invisible but media is very much visible and has a great implication on the way our thought processes work.

So continuing our discussion we move to the visual world. Visual world is because writing is visual, however it's not completely visual to begin with, because when people start writing they use it as a mnemonic- as a way of remembering certain concepts and ideas and certain constructions. The articulation comes by reading out loud, so whenever there is a shift of media

from any one particular form of communication to another, there's always -we will see in this course- this crossover.

Literate means people who can read or write. In the literate world people tend to be more detached from the world they that they live in. What are the reasons for this? There are certain important reasons why this happens and we shall see. When people started writing either in writing or in printed world, the words lost their magic.

When we say the words lost their magic, it means the utterance. Imagine you know the kind of mantras in the Vedas or you know certain rituals not only within the Indian or South Asian context, but even across the world. Litany is a very important ritualistic practice and across the world in various tribal communities, various communities, the utterance and repetition of a certain word has a certain magic associated with it and that is something that is lost, slowly and gradually, as we shifted more towards writing.

So the words lost their magic, they lose a personal element. This is a text written by Marshall McLuhan. You are of course not listening to Marshall McLuhan. I would suggest that you might want to look up some videos by Marshall McLuhan on the internet and listen to him also. But at the moment, you're listening to me.

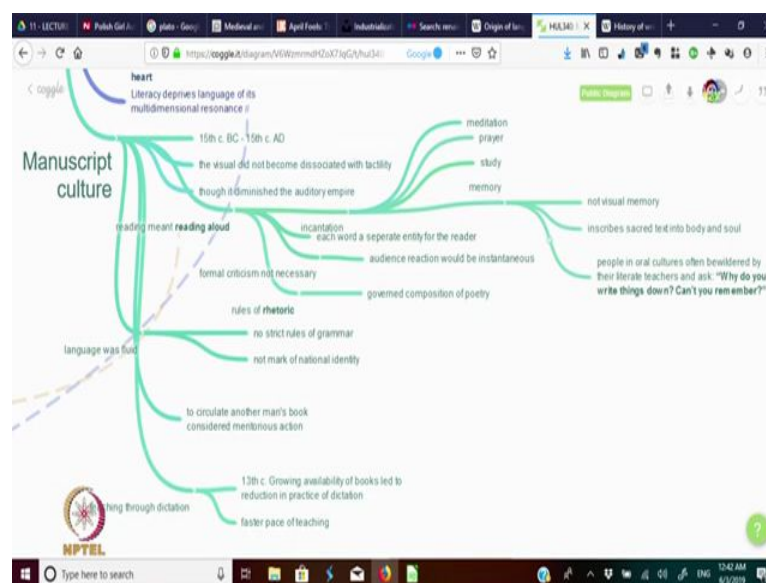
It is a little bit of a problem because you are listening to me across this camera, not in person. If you were listening to me in person, that would have been a much more overwhelming sort of experience: my personality would have impressed upon you a lot more than this particular screen. But here at least you are able to listen to my voice and even on a two dimensional space, you are able to see me, so this is a personal take on Marshall McLuhan's essay.

So the presence of the creator, the speaker, the writer, is a very important element of a non-literate world. Whereas, in a literate world, when I write something down, after having written it, that piece of paper can move anywhere without me being present, so that kind of personal element may be lost. We will explore this particular issue a lot more in this course later on. These are early lectures in which I am trying to introduce some of the problematics and issues related to this change of different media.

They lose, in some sense, the emotional overtones. Now imagine when I am speaking, I am speaking with a certain tonality; I am saying something you can understand at certain emotional levels. It is not a very emotional talk but it is a more deliberative sort of situation, where one is actually arguing a case: then, one can get a lot more emotional.

Now, that emotion does not get carried across only through the words that are used, they're also carried across through the tonality of expression. So, that element is somewhere lost in the written world, So there is a clear distinction between the written world and the spoken world.

(Refer slide time 06:29)

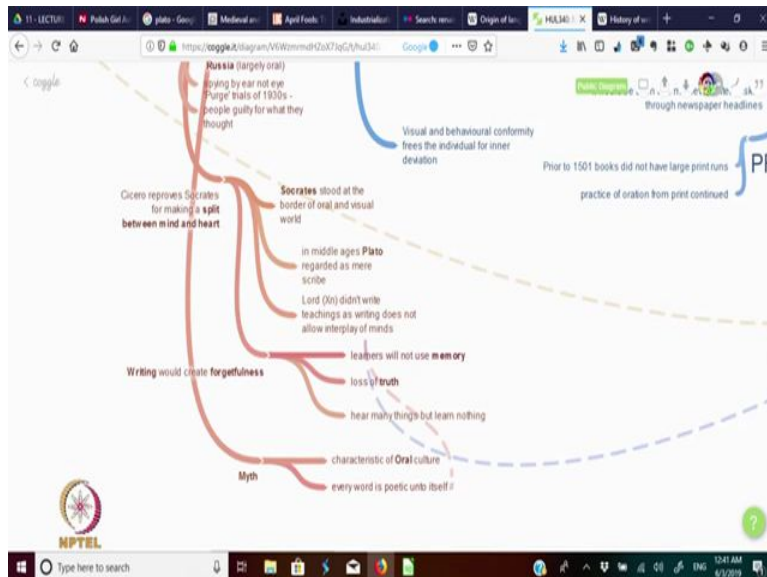
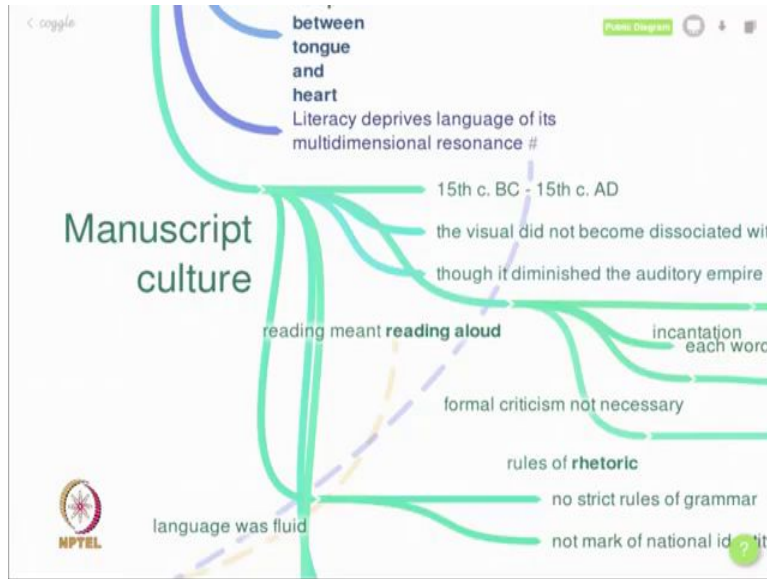


McLuhan says that when we move to manuscript culture in writing, there is a split between the tongue and the heart. You may have heard this term called 'learn by heart'. These are vestiges of earlier practices where learning by heart means you would not be learning from, but learning in order to read; you internalize something and you speak as if from within. So the speech actually emanates from me. Whereas, when I am reading from a text, the speech emanates from that piece of paper and not from the heart. So there is a split between the speech and the inner being.

Let's not talk biology here. These are conceptual (ideas) sort of domains and so when we are speaking from the heart, it is as if there is no distinction. In an oral universe, I say what I have not internalized. But in a written world, I may be saying something which I have actually not

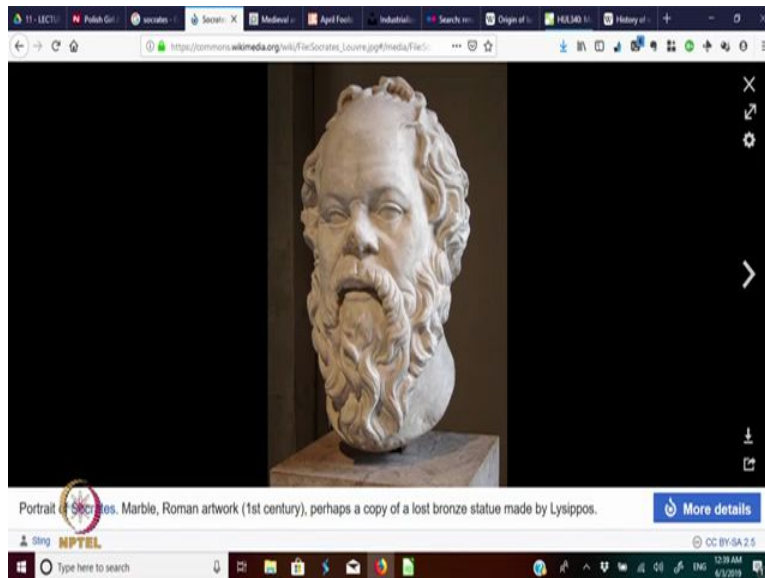
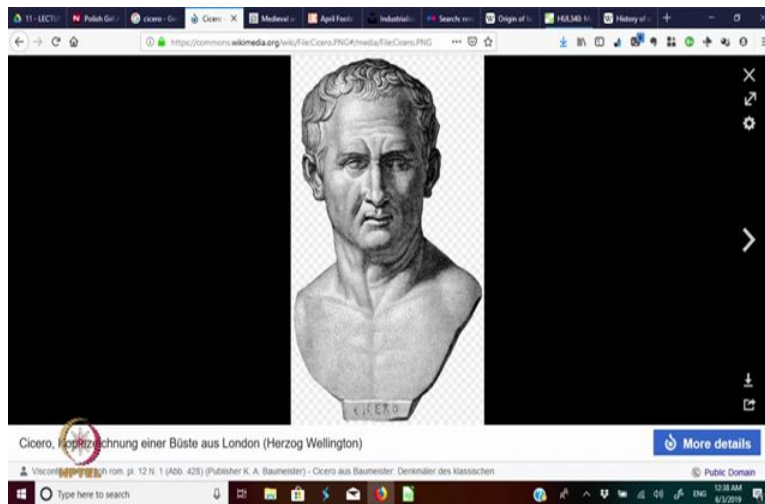
internalized; which I am reading from a piece of paper. So, in the written world, the existence of that thought is outside of me, whereas in an oral universe that thought exists in me.

(Refer slide time 08:00)



So, literacy deprives language of its multidimensional space. When we write something down, it gets fixed in a certain sort of way. This point is related to the earlier point about the distinction between the oral and the chirographic world. It was the chirographic world in which Cicero had reproved Socrates for making a split between the mind and the heart.

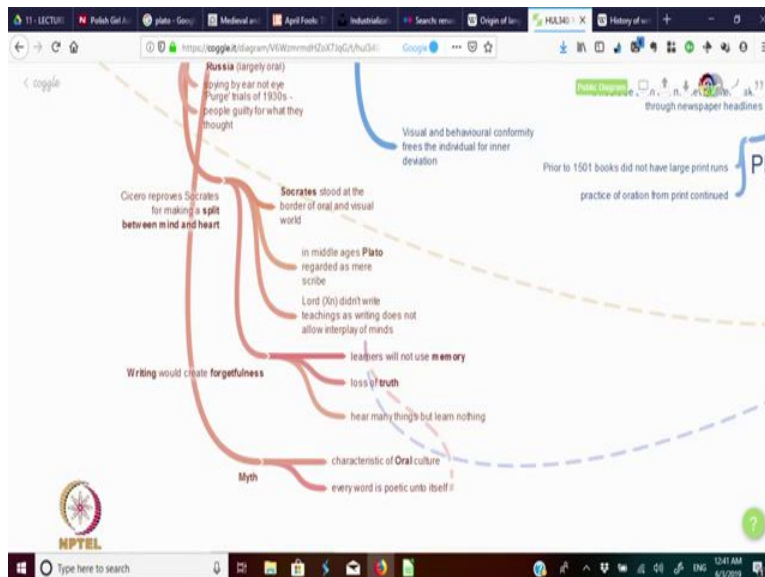
(Refer Slide time 08:47)





Socrates, as a person and historical figure, actually stood between this border between the oral and the visual world. Plato also was regarded by some of the people in the Middle Ages as a mere scribe; someone who is just noting down what his teacher had to say. And then there is an argument on the Christian lord (God)- that the Bible was orally given, that some of the teachings of the Christian God were orally given.

(Refer Slide Time 9:18)



And if it was written down, then it wouldn't allow for that interplay of minds; that multiplicity could not be there. So, there was a lot of movement and it was a slow movement. In today's world we see the movement from the print to the digital as a very fast paced movement; everything that has happened, has happened within the pace of twenty thirty years. We have not seen the end of it. But it is not like the movement from the oral to the chirographic world which may have happened over a period of five hundred to a thousand years.

There is a lot of give and take, a lot of interplay that is happening, and there are a lot of anxieties as to what this change of medium is going to bring about. Similar anxieties could exist for today as well. One of the things that Plato was anxious about was that writing would create forgetfulness, that internalization, that learning by heart, that knowing something by heart would make knowing something from within us go away. Speaking about something that comes from within is going to go away; because whenever I want to write something, or say something, I'll write it down, and after that, I'll just read from the paper. That knowledge exists outside the being.

People will stop using their memories and this loss of memory would lead to a loss of truth. These were the anxieties through the movement from the oral to the chirographic world. We are going to move to an essay by Walter Ong, in which this theme will be explored a lot more. For the moment, what McLuhan says, is that there was an anxiety during this movement from the oral to the chirographic world: writing would create forgetfulness. Memory was looked upon as a very important resource. Today we do not think of memory as important at all. We certainly think of memory as much less important than people did in the oral universe.

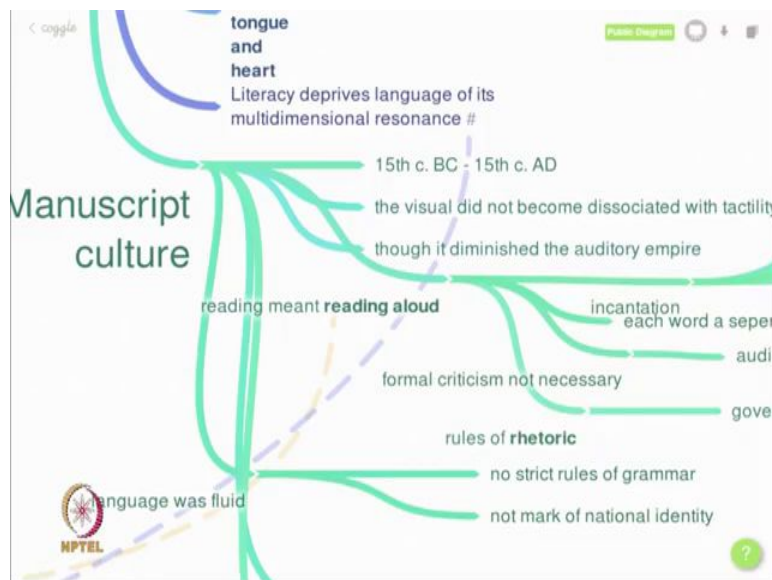
Today, when we talk about memory, the first thing that comes to our mind is physical memory in the form of a detachable drive; it may be a pen drive or a hard drive. We talk in terms of gigabytes or terabytes rather than talk about the memory in the mind. We do not try to remember things, when we have to find something out, we just straight away head to to a screen and try to look up on a search engine. We have moved; human life has moved forward.

If we get that capability today of trying to imagine ourselves in a period where mostly the practice of communication was oral, then we would try to understand that the coming of writing

brings in this anxiety: if I am writing everything down, I do not need to remember things and if I do not remember things, then I am not going to be speaking from within me and therefore, there will be a loss of truth because that truth -whatever speech that I am uttering- is not going to be identified with me, rather, it would be identified with an external entity. So, that is something that we need to note. Very importantly, if we as students of literature, link these technological shifts in media and map it with the various kinds of literary forms that were prevalent, then mythologies and myth making is a characteristic of oral cultures. Because, the way mythology operates, is that it moves from story to story; it actually links various stories. We will see what Walter Ong has to say about Homer.

So, mythology is a characteristic of oral culture where the narrative is not fixed. The narrative can meander between various stories. You can tell the story of of a mythological character by including stories a,b,c,d or you can tell that story through a,x,y and u. There could be various stories that could be woven together to form a myth and the exact telling of the myth is dependent on the person who is telling it, whose truth it is, because they are speaking from within and not from a written document or text.

(Refer Slide Time 14:28)



I hope you have been able to gather some bits of this thought. If at any point of time you find that you need greater clarity, it would be a good exercise to go back to the text and read it or just note



those issues. These can then be raised on the forum, and you will find clarifications on it. Or, you can also wait for future lectures in which some of these ideas will be revisited through other essays- more specific essays- that we are going to look at.

So, literacy deprives language of a multidimensional resonance, i.e. when a certain idea is discussed in the oral domain and it is communicated in the oral domain, the personality of the teller is intrinsically linked with the speech. And therefore, there could be as many viewpoints on a certain matter as there are speakers. Whereas, the moment a certain discourse is written down in a physical form, that form actually becomes static and uni-dimensional.

Speaking about manuscript culture, he says that it was a long period between the fifteen century BC to the fifteen century AD. That's really three thousand years. So, manuscript culture gradually took over and became the predominant form over a period of three thousand years.

He says that the visual did not become dissociated with tactility; when you are reading something, it is not merely that you don't use any of the other sensory organs, because reading always meant reading aloud: for a long period of time till the end of the manuscript culture. People did not read silently.

They would read aloud and it was only the sound that was produced in the reading aloud that would create the meaning for the person reading it. So even if I were to read something as a medieval priest or scholar, I would read it aloud even if I am reading it for myself, because the sound would make sense. In fact, some of us (I am not sure if your generation would really be able to appreciate this), but at least when I was a child, when I had to learn something up, I would be asked by my parents or my teachers to read it aloud. It was only by reading aloud that you would memorize it.

Somewhere, those traditions of the oral culture were coming in; to learn something by heart, you needed the sound to go in through the ears, and therefore, to get it internalized. These are practices through which the human body gets accustomed to certain forms of communication media and so there are various kinds of oral cultures which got transferred slowly through to the chirographic or manuscript culture.

You are aware of the cultures of meditation, prayer, and study well enough and you know each incantation was not a visual memory to begin with. Even in the manuscript era, people were not reading and not reading the word tree T-R-E-E as tree, but associating the sound of the tree to the physical object which is the tree. So it was not a visual memory, it was more of an oral memory.

People in oral cultures would have been often bewildered by literate people and why they wrote things down- Can't you remember?- because in oral cultures, the work of memory is a lot more. Memory has a much greater emphasis, and it is something that helps the brain get organized.

This is something that Ong is going to talk about: that with the change of medium or communication practices, there physical changes that take place. The brain gets oriented very differently and the human brain structurally also undergoes a certain change- which is why people in the literate world are unable to substitute that space, which has been lost to memory.

And now the human brain does other things than just use it for memory. Earlier, if a person had many texts learnt by heart, he was considered learnt. He could utter Milton's Paradise Lost verbatim- that was 'great learning'. However, in today's day and age, we have people whose understanding of Paradise Lost is superior to other persons. We do not need to remember the text because we have access to the text, so we just have to open the book and refer to the lines. The memory is not required.

The space which the brain dedicated to memory in oral cultures have now been dedicated to other mental practices. There are other aspects which he talks about which was not necessary in an oral world- formal criticism. Because the audience would immediately be there to react whereas, formal criticism becomes part of a practice only when the text gets dissociated from the speaker.

I speak something and you listen to it, you are right there and you react to it. Whereas, if I write something down, when you are reading it I am not there, therefore you will write a critique. You will write a critique of what I have written. So that is where formal criticism becomes necessary. In an oral universe, language was much more fluid. There was no strictness over the rules of grammar because, as I said in a previous lecture, language actually existed between the inter human space, between the speaker and the hearer, the listener, and the interlocutor. So as long as

we are able to communicate with each other, the rules of grammar do not matter. Rules of grammar become important when a particular text travels to a place where the speaker is no longer there, and the speaker is not part of that context, or the speaker is not part of that domain. So imagine a situation where I am lecturing and I am lecturing in a remote place in very different geographical locations, where the language works very differently. In order to communicate there, I will first have to understand the local linguistic practices. So you see, in ancient times, when there were cases where scholars would travel from place to place for learning things, they would go to a certain place and live there and spend a lot more time there, unlike modern professors or present day scholars who fly down for a conference and fly back in two days across the globe.

Ancient scholars would travel great distances, often by foot and by other mediums, which would take great time. Once there, they would spend a lot of time, maybe several years there. First they would try to imbibe and understand the culture that is there and then, to communicate with them. But when written texts came into being, it was no longer required for the scholar to move from place to place.

What travels now is the text- the written document that has been produced. For someone to be able to understand it, you need a common language. One of the ways in which that common language is created is stricter rules of grammar; so that everybody understands exactly or tries to be as exact as possible in capturing the meaning of what is written.

In today's day and age, we talk about copyright and that is looked upon as a very sacrosanct sort of legal practice and it is looked upon as something that cannot be violated at all. There was a certain point of time in the oral universe when copyright did not exist at all. In fact, in this course we will look at copyright as a concept that develops along with print very closely. It is closely associated with the history of print, but more of that in a later lecture.

As of now, what McLuhan is saying is that it would have been meritorious actually to circulate another person's book, in a chirographic universe. Because the idea is that you try to communicate more and more with the audience that is there. You are trying to spread the domain of ideas, because a person's worth was not located in the book itself, but was located in his or her

presence. When I am speaking, or I am teaching McLuhan's essay, the important thing is what I am saying rather than only what McLuhan is saying.

If McLuhan were to articulate it himself he would have probably done it very differently. I am more interested in the largest span and series of lectures that we are going to undertake to understand the digital media. That wasn't McLuhan's objective. I can give you an alternate example: there are many singers in our country and certain sounds are associated with those particular singers- Lata Mangeshkar, or Muhammad Rafi. There are other singers who actually sing Muhammad Rafi's songs or Lata Mangeshkar's songs.

But that does not take away that resonance, that voice is not recreated, it is created only by that particular singer who is singing out there. When I am there in person, there is no way that I can be replaced, good or bad. If a speaker is not good, that speaker also cannot be replicated by another person. Whereas a book can be reprinted, you can go and do a photocopy of the book, but you cannot do a photocopy of the voice, at least not in conventional technology.

We do not know what the future holds but in conventional technology that could not be done. If someone's ideas are getting articulated through a third person or through another communicator, it is not the same as this person's- the originating person's ideas getting communicated- because it gets mixed with the other person's articulation.

Ideas of copyright did not develop in the oral universe at all. And towards the end of the manuscript culture, you had teaching through dictation, because as I said, by the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, the rise of universities in Europe meant that there was a lot more emphasis on secular learning. Before that, you had more ecclesiastical or religious learning.

Now, slowly, education was getting outside the domain of the ecclesiastical and moving into the secular. There was a lot more interest in people trying to learn, to participate in the learning process. When more and more people get attracted to the learning process, there are more and more students in university towns, and there is a greater need for books.

Teaching through dictation becomes an important resource because you printing had not yet been invented. So people would note down thoughts and those books and manuscripts would then get passed on and replicated and that was the exercise that was taking place at that point of time.

So in this particular essay, McLuhan is talking about this movement from the oral to the chirographic world. This movement to the manuscript or even a printed world and universe, creates a different kind of human practice, way of communication and it changes the way human beings actually relate to each other and relate to ideas and communication. It is not merely a change of medium. The change of medium is important for us to note. Thank you so much.