

**Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur**

**National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning(NPTEL)**

**Course Title**

**Visual Perception and Art: A survey across the cultures.**

**Lecture – 11**

**Popular visual culture**

**by**

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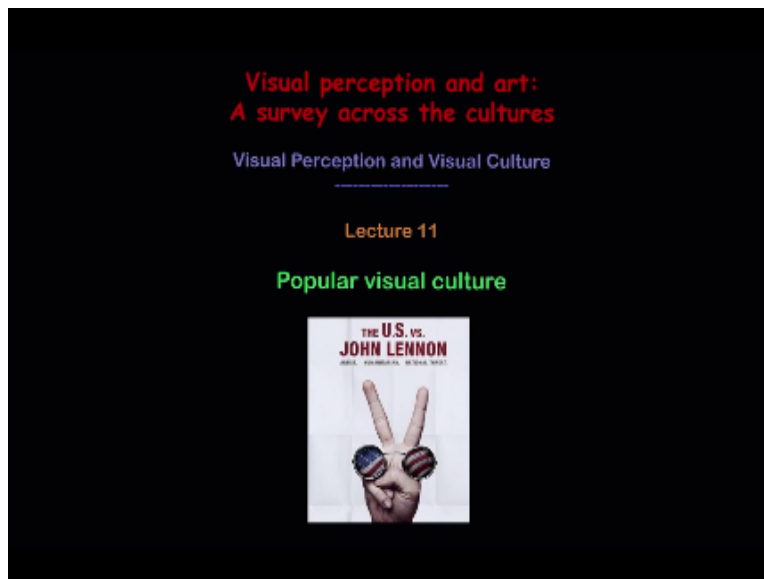
**Dept. History of Art, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan**

**Visva – Bharati**

View

ers welcome to mook online course on visual perception and art survey across the cultures this is the eleventh lecture.

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And today we shall be looking at the popular visual arts in the context of popular visual culture of course and how visual perception works there.

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Now any kind of visual image that is part of our popular culture or mass culture can be identified as sign of popular visual culture film posters for example, advertisement boards shop deco, match box image, packaging design, book designs, cartoons, street visuals, everything that is shared by a huge mass of people in a given culture at a given point of time constitute what we call popular visual culture and needless to say it has a very important commercial aspect particularly when we are looking at the publicity images particularly when we are looking at commodities for sale particularly when we are looking at all kinds of cultural products which are primarily meant to be sold to make business.

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In fact you can make an exhaustive list of the different categories of popular visual culture and you will find that the list is never-ending, we have mentioned just a very few examples here but there are many more to be added and you can do that yourself but what are the different categories of visual art or visual culture that can be considered as a part of popular visual culture of a given society at a given point of time.

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And we often do not realise how our visual perceptions get affected by this innumerable glimpses of popular visual culture around us all the time.

Consciously or not-so-consciously, we all encounter these images, negotiate them and watch in wonder how the social environment too gets affected by them.



And we often do not realize how our visual perceptions get affected by this innumerable glimpses of popular visual culture around us all the time not that we consciously develop a faculty to respond to a popular visual art not that we prepare ourselves consciously to deal or negotiate with popular visual culture but in more often than not in most cases it happens automatically it happens very normally in the normal process of our life activities daily activities and so on.

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So consciously or not so consciously we all encounter these images what we call popular visual images we negotiate them and we watch in wonder how the social environment too gets affected by them, because it is something that we do not need to practice it is something that sits in something that we get habituated with.

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So eventually we acquire that kind of visual perception that very special kind of visual perception I would say that enables us to respond to sad visual culture and interpret them appropriately yes once again the factor of interpretations very important here too because popular visual culture often appears in a coded way it looks like visual code which we are supposed to decode and interpret we are supposed to make some meaning out of it whether it is an advertisement both or a publicity image or a kind of sign went for the public maybe a traffic signal maybe a beautiful packaging design of a commodity to attract the customers nothing is self-explanatory.

We need to explain these things ourselves and it happens very fast it happens very smoothly even without our knowledge.

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Store interiors, Public posters -- though we get habituated with them in the urban life -- are not so easy to interpret and make a sense out of them.

We need to adopt to a different kind of visual perception.



And if we are talking about the context of the popular visual culture of course there is a social context there is a cultural context there is also an industrial context there is a business context that is a commercial context but at the same time physically speaking there are some physical context, for example when you are looking at an advertisement a publicity image on the page of a popular magazine then the magazine in the context when you are looking at a huge advertisement billboard right at some intersection of a very busy street of a metropolis then that city or that Junction is the locational context of that popular visual.

In some cases where we frequent quite often the marketplace the shopping malls the shopping arcade is the physical context for a number of images and visuals which fall apart a significant part of popular visual culture of a market or a shopping mall or shopping arcade.

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Store interiors, Public posters -- though we get habituated with them in the urban life -- are not so easy to interpret and make a sense out of them.

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So store interiors public posters though we get habituated with them in the urban life are not so easy to interpret and make a sense of out of them we get habituated we get used to it not that somebody comes and teaches us how to look at them like the way we are taught how to look at art like the way we are taught how to interpret isn't appointing or a painting by Michelangelo nobody comes and teaches of how to interpret work of advertisement on a publicity images.

If somebody has to do that then rest assured that particular advertisement image is failure because it is supposed to convey the message very fast to the consumer to the viewer to the client without the need of any kind of intervention on part of anybody else so the visual perception with which we are supposed to make a meaning out of this popular visually major is supposed to be there or it'ssupposed to be occurred by us very fast and perhaps unconsciously.

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Store interiors, Public posters -- though we get habituated with them in the urban life -- are not so easy to interpret and make a sense out of them.

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So we need to adopt we need to adopt to a different kind of visual perception the kind of visual perception with which we are generally used to in our daily life in our painting in other forms of art will not be very suitable to understand the popular visual images.

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For example when you look at a shop, a shop selling utensils stainless steel utensils like this one even in order to measure even in order to get some sense what kind of objects he is selling we need to adjust our eyes because the plenitude that welcome across in this kind of situation is rather baffling it is rather confusing at times so we need to have a very sharp visual perception with which we will be able to make out when we are in front of a shop what this shop contains what are the different objects then we are supposed to is in fact exercise or choice as a customer .

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So a plenty of different kinds of arrangements in different kinds of shops are there available particularly in a country like India where the shopping arrangement still not standardized unless and until you go to a shopping mall where you see the arrangement of the products the arrangement of the commodities is generally very standardized and as result almost all the shopping malls across India look the same.

But if you are looking at the street shops if you are looking at the independent markets and their shops they will find that the standardization is less individual independent idea of arranging beautifying decorating a shop is more. So it is in this case that you find each and every shop has a different decor has a different kind of visual appeal which implies that to interpret or make sense out of this different kinds of shops we need to have different kinds of visual perception we need to have different kinds of visual tools to interpret them to understand them.

Just one kind of sensibility will not be sufficient to interpret and see and make sense of all these different kinds of shops but as far as.

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The shopping mall is concerned one single kind of visual perception or visual sensibility is enough to go and move around freely and interpret all the shopping malls across India and perhaps across globe. but when you looking at this kind of Street shops like this one or this one.

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Everything right from the kind of stuffs that you see here the commodities the objects the arrangements unique from one shop to another shop. so you need visual perceptions or visual sensibilities are needed on part of the customers to make sense of these shops.

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Or this one in fact, as a visual artist or as somebody who has a deep interest in visual art and actually do a survey from shop to shop particularly.

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Street shops and make a study of how sharp objects and objects and commodities in a shop are arranged differently one from the other. And also every city has its own unique way of arranging and decorating the shops.

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For someone who has not experience this kind of visual perception before,  
it may pose a serious challenge to grasp and make sense.



So shop culture is also unique in the context of India I mean the way vegetable shop is arranged and decorated in a city like Mumbai will be very different from the way it is arranged in city like Kolkata, or in a city like Chennai, or Bangalore, But with the advent of this idea of shopping mall this variations of visual culture is reducing we are missing out on these variations we are getting used to a very standard popular visual culture which is same in every shopping mall but if you are looking at the street shops it is not the same.

There are different ways of promoting your objects there are different ways of arranging them so as to attract the consumers towards your objects and commodities and ensure that they buy your stops all these things these methods are very cultural they are locally thought about there is no universal standard rule like they have in shopping malls even simple things like.

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This will have a slightly different kind of arrangement and the very choice that all these beads are kept in yellow bubbles also give you a sense of decoration and where did this particular seller who is a street vendor as you can see where did he or she get this idea from what kind of visual perception drove the seller toward this kind of idea that, that he or she would select just one single color in this case it is yellow and all the bubbles all the containers are yellow color of varying shapes and all the stops and weights are kept in yellow colored bowls and the goals are obviously different the containers are very different.

So this is very interesting also that when you look at this popular visual culture in the street shop Street markets then it is also interesting to realize that almost each and every seller is an artist in his or her own right everybody exercises sense of artistic ability to decorate their shop to arrange their stuff in a way that they become visually attractive because that is the main point.

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They will have to make their objects we should and arrangement visually attractive.

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And depending on the objects either you keep them on the floor or you hang them vertically or you keep them differently.

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One more like that.

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So we are looking at different kinds of street shops and street vendors who keep and decorate their shops but we need to remember it is a very temporary arrangement every day they need to pack up and come back next day and arrange the objects once again the way it was the day before so it is the practice that they have to do on daily basis. it is not a kind of permanent shop where you keep and arrange your stuffs permanently for a long time unless you decide to change it once again but here there is no option but to rearrange it every day every morning.

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So it is almost like a ritualistic practice that these sellers go through every day.

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Or this one and look at this one the way this patters destroy patters has been stitched active to each other and they are all hanging from a pole but the way they are all made to hang it almost looks like they are still life leader so chirping they are even the hanging that positions is not very uniform and this very absence of uniformity also makes it stops very attractive.

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One more tope seller hat seller then.

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When a street vendor cannot find a pond space enough on the ground she chooses to use this particular portion of a boundary wall very narrow lengths and he keeps his wooden house over there. so this is also interesting about this kind of popular and local market who do not have permanent shop or structure they utilize the available spaces and create makeshift shops now this requires a very flexible visual perception to adjust to these changes because if you have a fixed Bush perception if you have only one singular thought or concept of displaying your objects then you would not be able to adjust to this light but very significant changes.

In order to accommodate the different kinds of display strategies this kind of sellers are very open to ideas.

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Or look at this one how one gives different kinds of fruits in a shop which is semi-permanent mean it is permanent but it does not have a permanent structure hence every night the seller has to empty his shop pick up all the fruits and put them back into boxes and unpack them again next morning and display it again either the way it was the morning the day before or within a new wave. So along besides selling the object this everyday activity.

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Without our conscious knowledge, we are engaged in continuous interpretations of popular visual culture. It is a part of our effort to understand the socio-cultural environment around us. It is not an individual activity. It is a part of larger social collective activity. Thousands of other people are doing the same all the time.



Is very important for this street shops having very temporary kind of arrangement but when we are looking at something like a shopping mall everything is very permanent very concrete and hence the display of the commodities are also very permanent in the sense that one does not have to display them when arrange and rearrange them every day.

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Without our conscious knowledge, we are engaged in continuous interpretations of popular visual culture. It is a part of our effort to understand the socio-cultural environment around us. It is not an individual activity. It is a part of larger social collective activity. Thousands of other people are doing the same all the time.



Now without our conscious knowledge we are engaged in continuous interpretations of popular visual culture as I have already said it is a part of our effort to understand the socio-cultural environment around it is not an individual activity it is a part of a larger social collective activity thousands of other people are doing the same all the time now this I think is A very vital issue the kind of visual perception we are talking about in the context of popular visual culture is not something that is very individual it is collective I mean the entire community whom we call on humor in this case the clients or the customers the entire community sharing a similar visual sensibility or perception in order to interpret and make sense of what is being shown to them.

What they are encountering every day whether it is a shopping mall or a street shop or other forms of visual culture popular visual culture that we encounter every day.

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From a tiny matchbox to the consumer packaging to a huge billboard, we tend to interpret them all the time. Thereby, we practice a certain visual perception as a part of our daily survival.



So from a tiny matchbox to consumer packaging to a huge billboard we tend to interpret them all the time and we do that once again collectively not that I am always doing but with few more people with me even we are doing at different points of time but we are all doing it almost with the same purpose of making some sense thereby we practice a certain visual perception as a part of her daily survival.

So popular visual imagery is popular visual culture let us say it almost compels us it makes it mandatory for us to practice a certain kind of visual perception if not for anything else at least for our daily survival.

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This is a very famous packaging which we all interpret seeing enjoy and perhaps begin some begin to like it so we develop a kind of like in which my body you may like this packaging somebody else may like something else.

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But it is the packaging also that we like along with the content of the packet. So in visual cultural setting like this inside a shopping mall we exercise certain kinds of visual sensibilities and visual power or visual idea to interpret.

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Right from inside or outside everywhere we do that otherwise we would not be able to grasp the situation we will be lost so the sensibility of the visual perception we are talking about in the context of ocular visual culture is not merely about only the visuals we are thing about it is also about the context the physical context within which we find them.

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Even in a fair in a popular Mela or fair when we encountered this kind of Rights which are called rights coming in different forms we always to solve or kind of our kids all the skills that they like this dragon or they like something else now these are all primarily made to attract the customer and the whole point is the amount of variations they go through inured to attract the customers.

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Temporary mandaps -- or puja pandals -- also add to the vibrant popular culture!



In many places and particularly in Bengal during durga Puja we have a number of a huge number of temporary temple structures which are called multiples or pujabundles which also add to the vibrant popular visual culture of a particular community and when you look at them something like this it almost gives you a sense of permanency which it is not only after six seven days they are pulled down the dismantled and the place where it was becomes empty so why I am bringing up this example is to raise another very important point that there are not many examples of popular visual culture like there are many examples of folk art where the objects are very temporary .

It is this ephemeral quality that that also adds to the character of popular visual culture people carries a lot of these ideas of popular visual culture in their memory rather than as permanent objects like this puja pond dolls.

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To interpret popular visuals like a film or an advertisement poster or a cartoon, it requires some amount of intelligent involvement along with an adequate visual perception.



Now beside these things there is straight shops or shopping malls or various kinds of other products or puja bundles a couple of things that is really popular and we are very much familiar with everywhere is for instance film posters now to interpret popular visuals like a film or advertisement poster or a cartoon for that matter require some amount of intelligent involvement also it cannot be do new only visually you need tools because you see all these things like packaging or an advertisement on poster or a film for so they also involves what we call text.

So it is important that you can read the text and it is also important that you connect the text with the given visual so film posters for a very important part of a popular visual culture and it influences our visual sensibilities to a great deal.

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So even if you have not watched the film you can always begin to guess or imagine the content of the film by looking at the poster itself and that is the film poster is very important it is supposed to attract you not only by the appearance of the stars very examine stars who are featured on the posters but also by the fact that a poster should be designed in a way that it should be able to very quickly convey the content of the poster that is the content of the film and that attracts you of course you have pre reviews you have trailers on the YouTube nowadays.

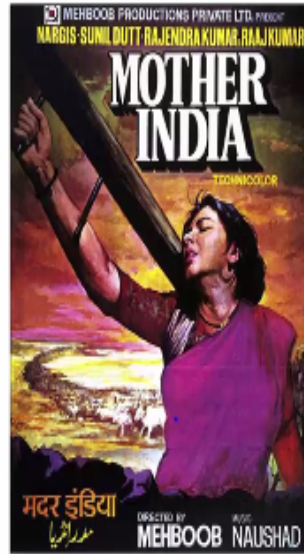
But still a poster and particularly in the pre-internet era poster actually was very important not only as a part of popular visual culture but also as an agent which was invested with a huge task of creating the mark of a film even before it was released.

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And postern were making a poster designing is such a beautiful and the creative category that if you go through even 20 to 25 film posters of any country will be amazed to see the right of ideas the right of aesthetics the variety of designing that they employ the designers employ in order to make this sell posters and film posters.

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As popular visual art is also a reflection of the particular society or particular culture looking at this particular film poster of Mother India even if you do not know even if you do not know when this film was made just by looking at the poster even if you're not familiar with the names of the stars featuring in this film when it's written on the top still just by looking at the poster by looking at the figure by looking at the color you can make out that this still has to be an old film . Now what makes you think so ask yourself you will have the answer.

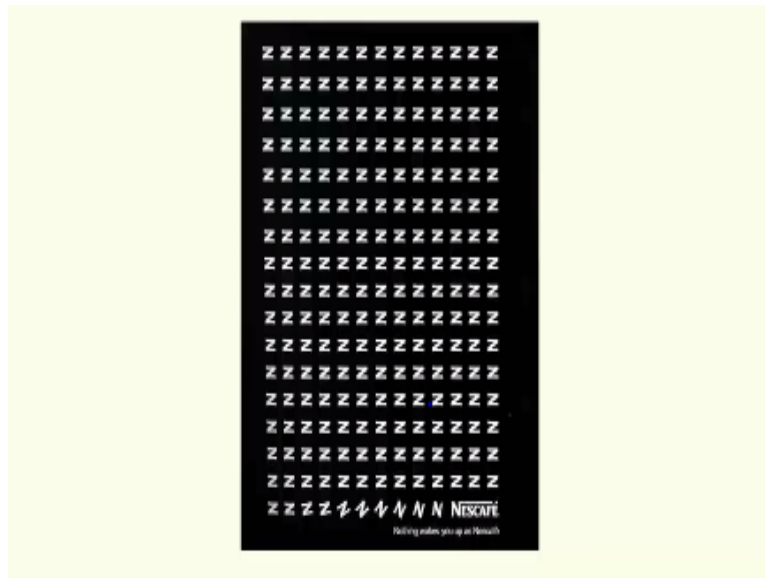
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Then we have of course different kinds of visuals which are not directly posters but publicity images now it is all about writing text letter it is about like as the text says in this particular visual if you really want to touch someone send them a letter so these posters is supposedly encouraging people to write handwritten letters and send so it is through letters it is to writing through manuals handwritten letters you are able to touch somebody.

So it is basically enhancing and promoting this human quality of letter-writing which has almost become a passing in the age email addresses now you have to read the poster the text of course and of course more than that you have to read the visual now it is not very difficult for common people to get the message that inbeing conveyed because it is not a very complex painting by Picasso or Michelangelo they had different objects here.

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Any good poster will primarily be able to convey the message for example this one a poster of a coffee brand and how they turn the Z which originally signifies that you are sleepy to n which signifies a particular brand name of a coffee it is nothing but text but it also has a very strong visual configuration so that needs a kind of sophisticated visual perception to understand the character the content and also the language of this publicity poster

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And then lastly we have something that we call Cartoon now this is a cartoon or for that matter for any cartoon we quickly want to read the text the caption so please read this text unless you know Chinese unless you are able to follow Chinese you would not be able to read what is written there because it is written in Chinese but what I am trying to say is we will be able to reach let us say read this cartooning spite of the fact that you do not follow Chinese I mean straight away do you get any idea from the visual so hold on look at the drawing and try to get the weaning directly from the drawing if we cannot make many guesses but if you feel desperate to know what is written over there we have an English version of the same cartoon.

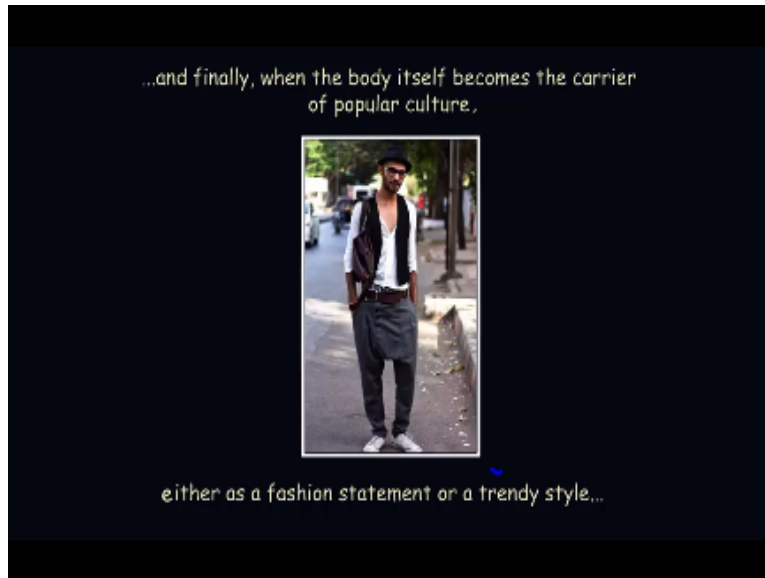
Where it issued that the schoolteacher father is saying that why having to gone to bed end and the school boy son replies back why have not you because the school boy she is midnight anthem still writing papers or finishing his homework whereas his schoolteachers father is midnight and he still yet to finish a whole lot of exam papers to mark they are both in the same so because of the tremendous pressure of school education in a country like China in 1960s this is a garden that was wrong in 1964. Now it is true that the text gives us a clue about the content of the cotton but guess.

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Even when there is no text till we can make some attempt for example this month this cotton does not have anytext but you have to your suppose to make the meaning of this cotton just by looking at the visuals and popular visual culture really speaking often has this power to make people understand the visual directly it is that kind of visual perception we are talking about today.

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And then you have finally human body itself who carries certain signs of popular visual culture through very trendy dress fashionable attire and accessories like this one so when the body itself becomes the carrier of the popular culture we get a different kind of popular visual either as a fashion statement or a trendy style like this.

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or...as a ritualistic performance...

Or as a ritualistic performance by rural people who are dressed up either as a skeleton or as an elephant or as some kind of mythical animals mainly to beg money but they also then they transform themselves it is their body they dress everything into an imagery which is a part of a popular visual culture and finally this one.

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Where a young girl she transforms herself into the goddess of Kali and she roams around so from society to urban space to various kinds of cultural spaces and also to the body itself popular visual culture can be found everywhere right from our kitchen to the street out there right from Avery interior rural community to an ultra-modern urban center as well thank you.

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