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With the colossal rise of technoscientific imaging technologies such as fMRI scans and computer-brain interfaces, visualizing the brain and its attendant nervous system has relegated the spiritual to a material cause. It is now possible to move a computer cursor with your mind. While aspects of being fundamentally human reside in the subjective: memory, imagination, intelligence, passion, it is the brain's plasticity that transforms our thoughts and notions of the real. What role do illusions, perceptions and sensations play in the epistemological underpinnings of the ways images and thoughts function? How does this knowledge base interweave with "the spiritual?"

In the 19th century, the quest for "the invisible," spurred on in part by the invention of the X-ray, was heralded in theosophical doctrines, diagrams of "thought forms," and spirit photography. Even earlier on, in the 12th century, Christian monks, fascinated by the science of optics, employed the prism as a material example of "revealing how the mind of God works: how His divine grace transmits just like light rays from an illuminating source," so explains eminent art historian Samuel Edgerton.

Is there really such a thing as "the spiritual in art?" Is "the spiritual in art" a real illusion or an illusion of the real? In this conference I assume a materialist position with regards to the spiritual in favor of neuroscientific research, consciousness studies and image interpretation.