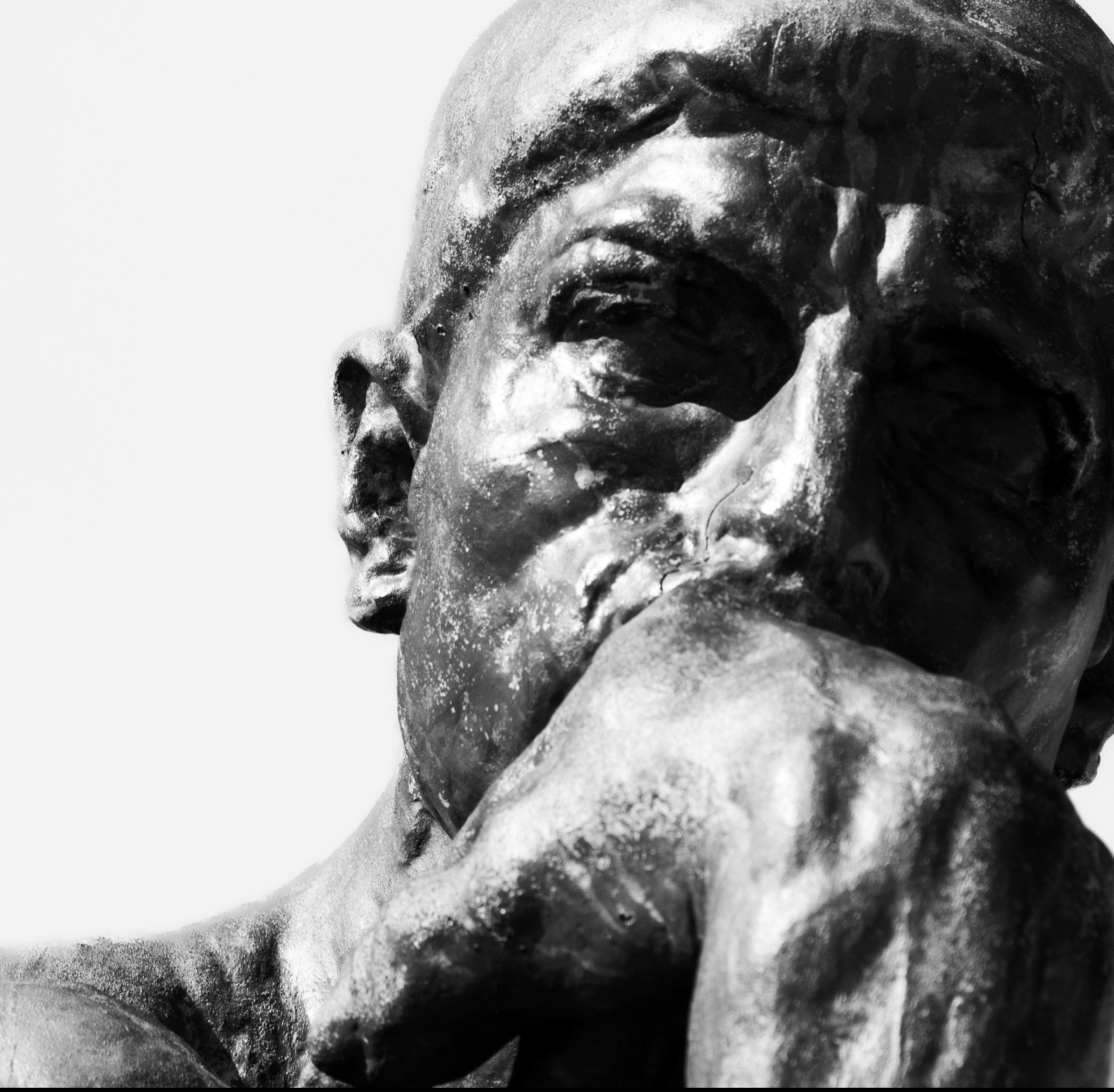


OFFICIAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The 5th Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities (PCAH2026)

June 15-19, 2026 | Paris, France, and Online

ISSN: 2758-0970

Organised by the International Academic Forum (IAFOR) in partnership with the IAFOR Research Centre at the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP) at The University of Osaka, Japan, and IAFOR's Global Partners.

iafor

"To Open Minds, To Educate Intelligence, To Inform Decisions"

The International Academic Forum provides new perspectives to the thought-leaders and decision-makers of today and tomorrow by offering constructive environments for dialogue and interchange at the intersections of nation, culture, and discipline. Headquartered in Nagoya, Japan, and registered as a Non-Profit Organization (一般社団法人), IAFOR is an independent think tank committed to the deeper understanding of contemporary geo-political transformation, particularly in the Asia Pacific Region.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERCULTURAL

INTERDISCIPLINARY

iafor

International Academic Board

Professor Anne Boddington, IAFOR, Japan (IAB Chair)
Dr Joseph Haldane, IAFOR & The University of Osaka, Japan
Professor Jun Arima, IAFOR & The University of Tokyo, Japan
Professor Virgil Hawkins, IAFOR Research Centre & The University of Osaka, Japan
Mr Lowell Sheppard, IAFOR & Never Too Late Academy, Japan

Professor Umberto Ansaldo, VinUniversity, Vietnam
Dr Susana Barreto, University of Porto, Portugal
Professor Grant Black, Chuo University, Japan
Dr Evangelia Chrysikou, The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, University College London, United Kingdom
Professor Donald E. Hall, Binghamton University, United States
Professor Brendan Howe, Ewha Womans University, South Korea & The Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA)
Dr James W. McNally, University of Michigan, United States & NACDA Program on Aging

PCE/PCAH2026 Conference Programme Committee

Dr Daniel Baker, Independent Scholar, France
Professor Grant Black, Chuo University, Japan
Professor Georges Depeyrot, Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), France
Dr Amir Dhia, Education Above All Foundation, Qatar
Dr Charlotte Faucher, University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Dr Joseph Haldane, IAFOR & The University of Osaka, Japan
Professor Ljiljana Markovic, European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD), United Nations
University for Peace, Serbia
Professor Nourreddine Menyani, École Normale Supérieure de Meknès, Morocco
Ambassador Paolo Sabbatini, World Sinology Center, China

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026

Official Conference Proceedings

ISSN: 2758-0970

Executive Editor:
Joseph Haldane, PhD

IAFOR Publications Manager:
Nick Potts

IAFOR Publications Coordinator:
Mark Kenneth S. Camiling

Editorial Assistants:
Sachiko Sakamoto
Suzue Abe
Yuika Sakaguchi
Arisa Egami

Date Published: August 28, 2026

Published by The International Academic Forum on the IAFOR Research Archive
URL: https://papers.iafor.org/

© The International Academic Forum 2026
The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)
Sakae 1-16-26 2F
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi
Japan 460-0008
iafor.org

Table of Contents

The Linguistic Motion of Love: Cognitive Transformation in Mediterranean Poetics
Lujain Bitar pp. 1 - 7

Explaining Ethical Behaviors Among Arts Appreciators Through the Norm Activation Model
Pipatpong Fakfare
Maneenate Worrachananun
Nonthawan Songserm pp. 9 - 19

Prioritizing Destination Attributes That Shape the Digital Detox Tourism Experience
Pipatpong Fakfare
Maneenate Worrachananun pp. 21 - 33

Dramatic Arts and the Architecture of Human Communication and Connection
Wankwan Polachan pp. 35 - 44

Recursive Making and an Epistemology of Process
Palimpsest: a multi-layered record
Joshua Wilder Oakley pp. 45 - 59

Writing the Bombay Plague: Illness and Gendered Vulnerability in Lakshmibai Tilak's *Smritichitre*
Ananya Chatterjee
Aratrika Das pp. 61 - 69

"Qualitum" History: Post-poststructuralism, the Arts and Humanities, and the Return of Beauty
Albert Pizzaia pp. 71 - 85

Performing Resistance: Feminist Theatre and the Politics of Revisionist Mythology in India
Aayushi Tripathi pp. 87 - 95

Learning Through Making: Analog Processes as Pedagogical Tools in Graphic Design Education
Jacqueline Soghman
David Howarth pp. 97 - 103

Weaving Memories: Historical and Choreographic Traces of Carandiru
Laís Breyton pp. 105 - 109

From Pedagogical Output to Cultural Archive: Multilingual Student Publishing and Humanities Knowledge
María L. Figueredo pp. 111 - 121

Driving Creative Economy Through Likay Performing Arts: Integrating Product Innovation and City Learning Ecology in Ang Thong Province, Thailand
Mutjarin Ittiphong pp. 123 - 129

From Textural Foundation to Thematic Presence: Cello in Chopin's Piano Trio Op. 8
Wiktor Misiak pp. 131 - 148

Dalcroze's Eurhythmics in Contemporary Pedagogy
Agata Glińska pp. 149 - 167

Face-Negotiation Theory's Role in a Loss of a Major: A Case Study
Michael Ray Smith pp. 169 - 182

Designing Cloth Books for Children Aged 0–2 Years: A Practice-Based Capacity-Building Model for Early Childhood Media Producers in Thailand
Raweewan Sap-in pp. 183 - 198

Naming the Mafia: Representation and the Construction of the Mafia Imaginary
Simone Giuseppe Verace pp. 199 - 207

The Role of Technology in Inclusive Education: A PRISMA 2020 Systematic Review
Beatrice Ngulube pp. 209 - 220

Creative Strategies for Developing a Romantic–Comedy Television Series Centered on the Girls Love Genre
Athip Techapongsatorn
Kanyarath Larpto
Chawannuch Tanutong
Patcharamai Saichaemjan
Proudpatcha Santikanavin
Fahsai Sriket pp. 221 - 228

A Study of the Organizing Process of the Thai Independent Documentary Film Festival
Pattaranun Waitayasin
Pimparnthong Sriwutichan
Sirapop Hanvanich
Anajak Chaiyadej
Nataporn Mangklasaranee
Thitivut Phattarasupree pp. 229 - 242

Strategic Media Production for Tourism Promotion in Bangkok, Thailand: A Case Study of "Taste and Trails City Run Banthat Thong"
R-titaya Supsinwiwat
Khuttipong Namjarutjareonkit
Pasraporn Phandech
Sarisa Natesawang
Duangnapha Binloy pp. 243 - 253

Defining Design as a Governmental Capability: Conceptual Foundations for an Emerging Public-Sector Practice
Rhonda Geraghty pp. 255 - 266

Academising Sociology: Identifying Four Fields of René Worms' Communication Strategy for the International Institute of Sociology
Christopher Montel pp. 267 - 280

From Stereotype to Cultural Representation: Reframing Isan Ghost Figures Through Contemporary Character Design
Prisana Kumpusiri
Chanaradee Nakbanleng
Chayanun Molchaisawat
Panwad Rattanakrajang
Sireethorn Phisphant
Thanyaphat Chuprasart
Wethitha Boonyuen pp. 281 - 294

The Linguistic Motion of Love: Cognitive Transformation in Mediterranean Poetics

Lujain Bitar, Independent Researcher, United Arab Emirates

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of love within Mediterranean culture, a notion deeply associated with the philosophical idea of descent—a movement that entails falling and the potential loss or transformation of individual identity. Some thinkers interpret this descent as a state of vulnerability in which love robs the self of its autonomy, while others perceive love as a path to knowledge—an ascent of consciousness that cannot be achieved without first experiencing descent. Through a close reading of Mediterranean poetry and philosophical writings, ranging from Mahmoud Darwish's poetry to the works of Veronica Franco and culminating in the poetry of C. P. Cavafy, the study explores the shared linguistic metaphors of falling and rising that articulate the tension between vulnerability and transcendence. Drawing on Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, it argues that this dual movement reveals the cognitive structures underlying Mediterranean thought, whether pragmatic and rooted in social experience or mystical and grounded in transcendence. Within this framework, the paper contends that love functions as a linguistic medium for cognitive transformation, offering a renewed understanding of identity within the evolving Mediterranean consciousness. It contributes to Mediterranean literary philosophy by reframing love not merely as an emotional phenomenon but as a cyclical epistemological process in which descent becomes the necessary condition for ascent and the transformation of identity.

Keywords: love, descent, ascent, Mediterranean poetics, cognitive transformation, identity

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The idea for this research stems from the concern that the new generation is increasingly unable to experience noble emotions or fully comprehend the concept of mercy, as the Qur'an states: "And He placed between you affection and mercy" (Qur'an 30:21). This loss is largely attributable to the accelerating pace of modern life. Love requires time for reflection and a flexible mind capable of transcendence. It also demands individuals who possess the courage to resist the obstacles they encounter without retreating in fear. Otherwise, emotion descends into lower forms of love, causing the self to abandon its search for identity, rather than undergoing the mature and transformative experience of genuine love. This paper, entitled "The Linguistic Motion of Love: Cognitive Transformation in Mediterranean Poetics," examines love as both a pathway of descent and a pathway of ascent, exploring the cognitive and existential transformations that emerge from these two opposing movements.

Paper Methodology

This research is grounded in Lucien Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism, which provides the critical framework for uncovering the intellectual structures underlying Mediterranean poetics of love and for interpreting the mechanisms through which these structures are expressed. This approach seeks to contribute to contemporary scholarship by redefining the linguistic motion of love within the Mediterranean tradition. By establishing a dialogue among social transformation, self-awareness, and political thought, the study uncovers the epistemological foundations of Mediterranean poetics through a close analysis of poetic and narrative language across Mediterranean literary traditions.

Love as a Pathway of Descent

Love resides within courageous hearts, for only the brave are willing to venture into its uncertain depths without fully considering the consequences. Emotional longing and physical desire often lead lovers along the pathway of descent before they can attain the elevated truth of love.

In this sense, Al-Jurjani defines love as: "Love is an inclination of human nature toward that which is most pleasurable" (Al-Jurjani, *Al-Taʿrīfāt*, s.v. "al-ḥubb"). Thus, the descending motion of love begins with attraction, attachment, and desire before transforming into a deeper state of awareness capable of reshaping the self and redefining identity.

In Veronica Franco's poetry, love appears as a force that drives the individual toward emotional exposure and vulnerability, where desire becomes both a risk and a transformative experience. As Franco (1998) writes:

> If there is in you a spark of love for me,
> do not hide it beneath cold speech;
> let your words be equal to your heart.
> I shall reveal to you my inmost thoughts,
> and openly uncover what I feel within.

Veronica Franco expresses the consciousness of women constrained by patriarchal Renaissance society. As scholars have noted, "Veronica Franco's poetry embodies early feminist concerns regarding women's voice, identity, and social autonomy" (Jones & Rosenthal, 1998). This

social and historical context enabled the poet to blur the distinction between bravery and emotional descent. She adopts equality as an essential principle of love by framing the relationship through a woman's right to hear the truth from her beloved.

The speaker implicitly reveals her loss of confidence in the beloved, as reflected in words such as "hide" and "cold." Although she repeatedly urges him to express his feelings openly, she receives no genuine response. Consequently, the poem may be interpreted as an advocacy of women's rights and a reconstruction of female identity, presenting love as a mediating force through which women reclaim both voice and agency.

Franco further emphasizes the importance of language and sincerity in emotional relationships. Yet, as Lucien Goldmann suggests, "we say words that we do not truly mean at all" (Goldmann, 1964).

The power of descent emerges when an individual becomes subjected to the emotional absence or loss of the beloved, creating an inward sense of falling. Simultaneously, this experience compels the self to construct an illusory mode of symbolic survival—much like a placebo—in order to preserve existence and reconstruct identity after emotional disintegration.

While Cavafy presents a different perspective on the power of descent in love, his vision is constrained by remembrance as an ultimate confession of an unrepeatable experience, leading to a profound sense of powerlessness that causes identity to erode gradually and eventually disappear (Cavafy, 1992):

> Come back often and take me, beloved sensation,
> come back and take me—
> when the memory of the body awakens,
> and old desire again passes through the blood;
> when the lips and the skin remember,
> and the hands feel as though they touch again.
> Come back often and take me at night,
> when the lips and the skin remember…

Sensual desire dominates the poetic passage without regard for the present moment, as suggested by the repeated plea, "Come back." The poet expresses the descending movement of love through emotional helplessness, revealed in the phrase "take me," which reflects passivity and vulnerability. Love transforms the speaker into a powerless individual who depends upon the beloved for emotional survival.

The passage further reveals the significance of the beloved figure within Greek society while simultaneously emphasizing the suffering of the individual within modern social reality. Through this emotional fragmentation, Cavafy expresses alienation and the gradual erosion of identity under the conditions of modern historical experience.

Rita was the pseudonym used by the renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish for his Jewish Israeli beloved, as he attempted to transcend the boundaries of identity through an act of falling in love, declaring: "I love you despite the anger of my tribe, my city, and the chains of tradition."

Darwish later composed his epic poem *The Long Winter of Rita* (Darwish, 2009):

> Rita will depart in a few hours and leave her shadow as a white prison cell. Where will we meet?
> Her hands asked, but I turned toward the distant.
> The sea is behind the door, the desert's behind the sea, kiss me on my lips—she said. I said: Rita, why should I depart anew as long as I have grapes and memory, and the seasons still leave me anxious between gesture and phrase?
> —What are you saying?
> —Nothing, I mimic a horseman in a song about the curse of a love besieged by mirrors...
> —About me?
> —And about two dreams on the pillow; they intersect and escape, so one draws out a dagger and another entrusts the commandments to the flute.
> —I don't get the meaning.
> —Nor do I. My language is shrapnel, like a woman's absence from meaning, and the horses are in suicide at the edge of the field...

Darwish reconstructs the destructive power of love as a force of abandoned identity, portraying love as "an act of falling," symbolized through the image of the "white cell." This symbolic image reflects the collective destiny of the Palestinian people while exposing the Israeli attempt to erase Palestinian identity through displacement and ideological domination, seeking to reshape Palestinian consciousness according to imposed notions of coexistence under Israeli authority.

The reader stands before the duality of love and curse, witnessing the destructive emotions generated by falling in love. Love imprisons the lover within mirrors of self-reflection, stripping away every possibility of survival, the merciful grace of forgetting, and the hope that sustains endurance. The poet implicitly reveals the impossibility of normalization between Palestine and Israel: "But I fear that if I abandon everyone for you, you may abandon me, and I will return carrying only disappointment."

Mahmoud Darwish's love story ultimately ended because of Rita's connection to the Israeli military establishment. "Today, I felt as though my homeland had been occupied for the second time." Through this experience, Darwish presents love not merely as an emotional condition but as a cognitive and existential struggle between belonging and dissolution.

Love as a Pathway of Ascent

There are profound differences between acquisition and comprehension, just as there is a profound difference between making love and living in love, according to love's various stages—from *al-hawā* to *al-ʿishq*, ultimately culminating in *al-hiyām*.

Love is a form of belonging and an act of ascent that compels individuals to discover their identity and become aware of how it may be redefined in order to resist its corrosion. Absolute stability leads to stagnation—a condition from which love itself cannot escape.

Mahmoud Darwish expresses the ascending movement of love through his tragic relationship with his Jewish beloved, Rita, transforming personal love into a symbolic representation of political and existential consciousness. In *Rita's Winter*, he writes (Darwish, 2009):

Will you take me with you?
Then let me be the seal upon your freedom's ring—
take me with you.
Let me be your strength
in the land of your beloved enemy…
your fortress.
And let me become a prophecy born of mint,
carrying your citadel within it,
living and dead at once.
Rita's laughter—
the proof.
And love, like death,
neither returns nor fades…

Through his Jewish beloved, Darwish presents impossible love as a symbolic representation of the impossibility of collective normalization. The relationship is driven toward symbolic death, reflected in images of exile, separation, and emotional annihilation. Such imagery reveals a transformation in the meaning of love, shifting from emotional descent toward political and cognitive awakening.

Darwish implies that the Palestinian people must reconstruct their identity beyond both death and occupation. Thus, he declares: "Today, I felt as though my homeland had been occupied for the second time."

This statement serves as significant evidence that love guides the individual toward truth and knowledge through a process of spiritual and intellectual ascent, as articulated in both Platonic philosophy and the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Plato describes love as a spiritual movement toward ultimate beauty, asserting that "the true order of going… is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which one mounts upward" (Plato, 2008). Similarly, al-Ghazali views love as a path toward divine truth, stating that "Love of God is the final station and the highest degree" (Al-Ghazali, 1991).

Similarly, Veronica Franco's *Terza Rima* XIX presents love as a transcendent force capable of elevating human consciousness:

You will not merely fly, but soar heavenward,
rising far beyond the common crowd;
desire itself will lift your spirit upward.
What first seemed earthly pleasure to the senses
becomes a sweetness greater than the body. (Franco, 1998)

The ascending power of love is manifested here as a path toward transcendence through the imagery of "flying" and "soaring," symbols that evoke a sacred realm in which ultimate truth and spiritual meaning are attained. The poet establishes a contrast between physical desire and the elevated emotional state that follows it, implying that love expands human consciousness by unveiling a world enriched with hope, wisdom, and self-knowledge.

This transcendence is reinforced through expressions such as "greater" and "beyond the common crowd," suggesting an elevated state accessible only to those who experience love in its highest forms. According to Ibn Hazm, love progresses through successive emotional and

spiritual stages, beginning with *al-hawā* (inclination), developing into *al-ʿishq* (passionate love), and culminating in *al-hiyām* (complete devotion and spiritual bewilderment), in which the lover becomes entirely consumed by love (Ibn Hazm, 1953).

Conclusion

Mediterranean poets articulate the linguistic motion of love in accordance with the collective vision shaped by their social and political realities. Their works demonstrate that mature love is never merely an act of falling, despite the dominance of the expression *falling in love* within linguistic and cultural discourse. Rather, the descending motion of love is represented through attachment, attraction, emotional vulnerability, and the dissolution of the self. Yet this very descent often becomes the essential condition from which mature love emerges as an act of ascent. Mediterranean poets portray the descending motion of love as a force capable of erasing identity, whereas the ascending motion of love enables individuals to redefine their identities and transcend reality through the influence of collective consciousness—and, at times, to transcend that collective consciousness itself. This paper argues that scholars of language and literature should reconsider the conventional collocation *falling in love* and instead conceptualize love as a form of ascent or soaring, through which the self transcends reality by living in love rather than merely falling into it. In this sense, love resembles the divine in its omnipresence, existing across places, identities, and human experiences. Like the divine, love transcends boundaries, inhabits both the visible and the invisible, and continually reshapes human consciousness through its enduring presence.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

References

Al-Ghazali. (1991). *The alchemy of happiness* (C. Field, Trans.; E. L. Daniel, Ed. & Intro.). M. E. Sharpe.

Al-Jurjani, A. (1983). Al-Taʿrīfāt [The Book of Definitions]. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.

Cavafy, C. P. (1992). *Collected poems* (E. Keeley & P. Sherrard, Trans.). Princeton University Press.

Darwish, M. (2009). *If I were another* (F. Joudah, Trans.). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Franco, V. (1998). *Poems and selected letters* (A. R. Jones & M. F. Rosenthal, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Goldmann, L. (1964). *The hidden God: A study of tragic vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the tragedies of Racine*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ibn Hazm. (1953). *The ring of the dove: A treatise on the art and practice of Arab love* (A. J. Arberry, Trans.). Luzac & Company.

Plato. (2008). *The symposium* (M. C. Howatson, Trans.; F. C. C. Sheffield, Ed.). Cambridge University.

Contact email: lujain_bitar@yahoo.com

Explaining Ethical Behaviors Among Arts Appreciators Through the Norm Activation Model

Pipatpong Fakfare, Bangkok University, Thailand
Maneenate Worrachananun, Bangkok University, Thailand
Nonthawan Songserm, Bangkok University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Understanding the psychological mechanisms that motivate ethical behavior within cultural and arts-related settings is essential for promoting considerate and socially responsible conduct among arts appreciators and visitors. Drawing on the Norm Activation Model (NAM), this study examines how problem awareness and social norms shape individuals' ascribed responsibility, moral norms, and subsequent intentions to engage in ethical behaviors during arts events and visits to museums or galleries. The proposed structural framework positions problem awareness and social norms as foundational antecedents of ascribed responsibility, which then activates moral obligations toward ethical conduct within arts venues. Social norms are additionally conceptualized as a direct determinant of moral norms, underscoring the influence of collective expectations on the formation of personal ethical standards. Survey data were collected from 300 arts visitors across major cultural institutions, and the model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). All hypothesized relationships were supported, affirming the explanatory strength of the extended NAM in the arts consumption context. The findings highlight the pivotal roles of ascribed responsibility and moral norms in shaping ethical behavioral intentions, while demonstrating the dual influence of social norms in reinforcing both responsibility attribution and moral judgment. Practical implications emphasize the need for interpretive strategies, ethical communication, and community-driven normative cues to foster a culture of ethical behavior within the arts and cultural sector.

Keywords: art appreciation, cognitive awareness, destination attributes, stimulus–response model, Norm Activation Model (NAM)

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Arts and cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, and performance venues increasingly function as spaces where aesthetic appreciation intersects with social responsibility. Visitors' behaviors within these settings—ranging from respect for artworks and shared spaces to consideration for other patrons and staff—play a crucial role in preserving cultural value and ensuring sustainable cultural experiences. Despite the growing emphasis on ethical conduct in cultural consumption, instances of disruptive, careless, or norm-violating behaviors among arts appreciators continue to challenge institutions worldwide. Understanding the psychological mechanisms that motivate ethical behavior in arts-related contexts has therefore become an important scholarly and managerial concern.

Existing research on visitor behavior in arts and cultural settings has predominantly focused on satisfaction, experiential value, learning outcomes, and cultural engagement. While these studies offer valuable insights into how individuals perceive and consume cultural experiences, comparatively limited attention has been paid to the moral and normative foundations that underpin ethical conduct during arts consumption (Han, 2014). Ethical behaviors—such as adhering to venue rules, protecting cultural artifacts, behaving considerately toward others, and respecting institutional norms—are often implicitly expected rather than explicitly theorized (Treviño et al., 2014). This gap suggests the need for a robust theoretical framework capable of explaining why arts appreciators feel morally compelled to behave ethically beyond instrumental motivations or external enforcement.

The Norm Activation Model (NAM) provides a well-established psychological framework for examining altruistic and pro-social behaviors driven by internalized moral obligations (Han et al., 2015). Originally developed to explain environmentally responsible and helping behaviors, NAM posits that ethical action is activated through a sequence of cognitive and normative processes, beginning with problem awareness and culminating in personal moral norms that guide behavior. Central to the model are the concepts of awareness of consequences, ascribed responsibility, and moral obligation, which together explain how individuals come to perceive ethical action as a personal duty rather than a discretionary choice. Although NAM has been widely applied in environmental psychology, sustainable tourism, and pro-social consumption, its application to arts and cultural contexts remains underexplored.

Arts consumption represents a distinctive moral context in which ethical behavior is shaped not only by individual cognition but also by strong social and institutional norms. Cultural venues often communicate explicit and implicit expectations regarding appropriate conduct, while visitors' behaviors are continuously observed and socially evaluated. Social norms—understood as shared expectations about acceptable behavior—may therefore play a particularly salient role in activating responsibility attribution and moral judgment among arts appreciators. Yet, the integration of social norms into NAM-based explanations of ethical behavior in cultural settings has received limited empirical attention (Fakfare et al., 2025), leaving unanswered questions about how collective expectations interact with personal moral processes.

Addressing this gap, the present study extends the Norm Activation Model to explain ethical behavioral intentions among arts appreciators (Meng et al., 2020). Specifically, it examines how problem awareness and social norms function as antecedents of ascribed responsibility, which in turn activates moral norms that shape intentions to behave ethically within arts venues. By conceptualizing social norms as both an indirect driver of responsibility attribution and a

direct determinant of moral norms, this study acknowledges the dual influence of collective expectations in shaping individual ethical standards. In doing so, it responds to calls for more context-sensitive applications of moral behavior theories in cultural and tourism research.

This study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it advances theoretical understanding by empirically validating an extended NAM framework within the arts and cultural consumption context, thereby broadening the model's applicability beyond its traditional domains. Second, it highlights the critical role of social norms in reinforcing both responsibility and moral obligation, offering a more nuanced explanation of ethical behavior in socially embedded cultural environments. Third, it provides actionable insights for arts and cultural institutions by identifying psychological levers—such as problem awareness, normative cues, and moral messaging—that can be strategically leveraged to promote ethical conduct among visitors.

In sum, by integrating moral psychology and cultural consumption research, this study offers a comprehensive explanation of ethical behavior among arts appreciators and underscores the importance of normative and moral mechanisms in sustaining respectful and socially responsible cultural experiences.

Literature Review

Ethical Behavior in Arts and Cultural Visitation

Ethical behavior in arts and cultural settings refers to visitor conduct that safeguards cultural assets, respects institutional rules, and maintains consideration for other patrons and staff (Rachmad, 2022). In museums, galleries, and arts events, ethical behaviors may include refraining from touching artworks, following photography restrictions, minimizing noise and disruption, complying with queueing and spatial norms, and behaving respectfully in shared interpretive spaces. Such behaviors are not merely procedural; they are integral to conservation, visitor experience quality, and the legitimacy of cultural institutions as stewards of public heritage. The arts context is distinctive because ethical infractions can generate disproportionate harm: physical damage to fragile artifacts, reduced accessibility for others, and reputational risks for institutions that rely on public trust and community support. Consequently, explaining ethical behavior among arts appreciators requires attention to both individual moral motivations and socially constituted expectations of "appropriate" cultural conduct.

Scholarship on cultural and museum tourism has long examined visitor experience, learning, place attachment, and satisfaction, yet ethical conduct has typically been treated as a managerial or compliance issue rather than a theoretically grounded behavioral outcome. When ethical behavior is addressed, it is often framed through rule adherence, crowd management, or visitor misbehavior, emphasizing situational controls (e.g., signage, surveillance, staff presence) and deterrence. However, an enforcement-centric approach cannot fully account for why many visitors behave ethically even in low-monitoring contexts, nor why others violate norms despite clear rules and sanctions. This suggests the need to foreground internalized moral obligations and normative processes as key explanatory mechanisms in cultural consumption settings.

Norm Activation Model as a Framework for Ethical Conduct

The Norm Activation Model (NAM) provides a parsimonious account of pro-social and ethically oriented behaviors grounded in personal moral obligation. NAM proposes that individuals engage in ethical action when their personal norms (moral norms) are activated. This activation typically occurs through two cognitive precursors: (1) problem awareness (often conceptualized as awareness of consequences), and (2) ascribed responsibility (the extent to which one feels personally responsible for addressing the problem). When individuals recognize that certain behaviors produce harm or undermine collective welfare, and when they accept personal responsibility for mitigating such harm, a moral obligation to act emerges, increasing the likelihood of ethical intentions and behavior.

NAM is particularly suitable for arts and cultural contexts for three reasons. First, ethical conduct in cultural venues often involves low-cost pro-social actions (e.g., not touching, not obstructing views, maintaining decorum) that are consistent with NAM's emphasis on morally driven, other-regarding behaviors. Second, the "problem" in arts settings can be framed as collective and cumulative: individual misconduct (flash photography, crowding, noise, careless handling) can degrade conservation conditions and diminish others' experiences. Third, institutional environments are designed to evoke reflection, shared meaning, and respect for cultural value—conditions that plausibly intensify moral appraisal and norm salience. Despite these theoretical alignments, NAM has been less frequently mobilized to explain ethical behavior among arts appreciators compared with its extensive applications in environmental responsibility, sustainable tourism, and ethical consumption. This underutilization represents a meaningful gap given the increasing emphasis on responsible cultural participation.

Problem Awareness and Ascribed Responsibility in Cultural Settings

Problem awareness refers to an individual's recognition that unethical or inconsiderate visitor behaviors can cause negative consequences. In arts venues, such consequences include physical deterioration of artifacts, disruption of interpretive atmospheres, inequities in access to viewing or participation, and heightened operational burdens for staff. From a NAM perspective, when visitors perceive these consequences as salient and credible, they are more likely to move beyond passive awareness toward a sense of moral relevance. Importantly, the arts context may shape problem awareness in unique ways: visitors often encounter interpretive narratives about fragility, heritage loss, and stewardship, which can render consequences more vivid and emotionally resonant. Yet problem awareness alone is insufficient; individuals may acknowledge harm while externalizing responsibility to institutions, staff, or "other visitors."

Ascribed responsibility captures the degree to which visitors internalize accountability for preventing or reducing harm. In museum and event environments where rules are explicit, responsibility can be interpreted narrowly as compliance; however, NAM conceptualizes responsibility more broadly as a moral self-attribution—an acceptance that one's actions matter for collective outcomes. In arts settings, visitors may ascribe responsibility when they view themselves as temporary custodians of cultural goods, when they recognize the cumulative nature of small harms, or when they perceive their behavior as part of a shared visitor culture. Ascribed responsibility is therefore expected to function as a key mechanism translating awareness into moral obligation, consistent with NAM's logic that individuals act ethically when they feel personally implicated in the outcomes of their conduct.

Moral Norms and Ethical Behavioral Intentions

Moral norms represent internal standards of right and wrong that generate feelings of moral obligation and anticipated self-evaluative emotions (e.g., guilt, pride) contingent on behavior. In arts and cultural contexts, moral norms may reflect beliefs that cultural heritage deserves respect, that shared spaces require consideration, and that one should not diminish others' aesthetic or educational experiences. Moral norms differ from simple attitudes toward rules: they entail internalized duty rather than preference. They are also distinct from institutional norms (what the venue expects) and social norms (what others expect), though they may be influenced by both.

Within NAM, moral norms are the most proximal predictor of ethical behavioral intentions. In arts settings, this suggests that visitors who feel a strong moral obligation to behave considerately are more likely to intend to comply with rules, avoid disruptive behaviors, and engage in protective actions. This pathway is theoretically important because it shifts the explanation of ethical conduct from external regulation to internal motivation. It also has managerial implications: institutions may achieve more durable behavioral change by strengthening moral norms (through meaning-making, stewardship messaging, and moral framing) than by relying solely on monitoring or sanctions.

Social Norms as a Contextual Extension of NAM

While NAM emphasizes moral norms as internal obligations, ethical behavior in cultural venues is also socially embedded. Visitors interpret and enact appropriate conduct in the presence of others, often guided by cues about what is typical and what is socially approved. Social norms can be conceptualized as descriptive norms (perceptions of what most people do) and injunctive norms (perceptions of what most people approve). Both can be salient in arts contexts: the quiet atmosphere of a gallery signals injunctive expectations of decorum, while observing others' compliance with photography restrictions reinforces descriptive expectations.

Integrating social norms into NAM is theoretically warranted in arts settings for at least two reasons. First, cultural participation is a public, co-present activity: the visibility of behaviors increases normative pressure and the reputational costs of deviance, making social norms potent behavioral regulators. Second, social norms may operate not only as external constraints but as inputs into moral internalization. Repeated exposure to collective expectations can shape visitors' own ethical standards, particularly in contexts where cultural legitimacy and "good visitor" identity are salient. Accordingly, social norms may influence ascribed responsibility by signaling shared accountability (e.g., "everyone helps preserve the space"), and they may influence moral norms directly by providing a socially validated template for what constitutes ethically appropriate cultural conduct.

Methods

Research Design and Context

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the psychological mechanisms underlying ethical behavioral intentions among arts appreciators. Guided by the Norm Activation Model (NAM), the research focused on visitors' experiences in formal arts and cultural settings, including museums, galleries, and curated exhibition spaces. These

venues represent socially regulated environments where ethical conduct is both institutionally prescribed and collectively enacted, making them appropriate contexts for testing moral–normative behavioral models. A survey-based approach was employed to capture visitors' perceptions, moral evaluations, and behavioral intentions immediately following their cultural consumption experiences.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data were collected from arts visitors at major cultural institutions located in metropolitan areas. A non-probability, purposive sampling strategy was used to target individuals who had recently visited an arts venue and were therefore able to meaningfully reflect on their behavioral considerations during the visit. To reduce recall bias, respondents were approached either onsite upon completion of their visit or through follow-up invitations distributed by participating institutions within a short post-visit window.

A total of 327 questionnaires were returned. After screening for incomplete responses and patterned answering, 300 usable questionnaires were retained for analysis, yielding a valid response rate suitable for structural equation modeling. The sample size exceeded minimum thresholds recommended for PLS-SEM, considering both model complexity and statistical power. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's academic purpose and assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Measurement Instruments

All constructs were operationalized using multi-item scales adapted from prior NAM and pro-social behavior research, with wording modified to fit the arts and cultural visitation context. Problem awareness was measured by items assessing respondents' recognition of the negative consequences of unethical or inconsiderate behavior in arts venues (e.g., harm to artworks, disruption of other visitors' experiences). Social norms were captured through items reflecting perceived expectations and typical behaviors of other visitors regarding ethical conduct. Ascribed responsibility measured the extent to which respondents felt personally responsible for preventing harm and maintaining respectful conduct within the venue.

Moral norms were operationalized as internalized feelings of moral obligation to behave ethically in arts settings, reflecting personal standards of right and wrong rather than compliance motivations. Ethical behavioral intentions were measured by items capturing respondents' self-reported likelihood of engaging in considerate, rule-abiding, and protective behaviors during future arts visits. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in tourism and cultural studies and pre-tested with a small group of arts visitors. Minor revisions were made to improve clarity and contextual relevance.

Data Analysis Procedure

The proposed research model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for theory development, its ability to handle complex models with multiple latent constructs, and its robustness to deviations from multivariate normality. The analysis

followed a two-step approach, assessing the measurement model prior to evaluating the structural model.

Measurement model evaluation focused on indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator loadings were assessed against recommended thresholds, while composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were used to establish internal consistency. Convergent validity was evaluated using average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was examined through the Fornell–Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios (Hair et al., 2011).

The structural model was subsequently assessed by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2). Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals and significance levels for all hypothesized relationships. Collinearity diagnostics were also examined to ensure the stability of the estimated paths.

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated to establish the reliability and validity of all latent constructs prior to hypothesis testing. Indicator reliability was first examined by assessing standardized factor loadings. All measurement items loaded significantly on their intended constructs, with loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. No items were removed, as all contributed meaningfully to construct measurement.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). For all constructs—problem awareness, social norms, ascribed responsibility, moral norms, and ethical behavioral intentions—Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.80 and composite reliability values were above 0.85, surpassing recommended benchmarks and demonstrating strong internal consistency. Convergent validity was evaluated using average variance extracted (AVE). AVE values for all constructs exceeded the 0.50 threshold, indicating that each construct explained more than half of the variance in its indicators. These results confirm adequate convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Fornell–Larcker results showed that the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs. HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, further supporting discriminant validity. Collectively, these findings indicate that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory psychometric properties and is suitable for structural model evaluation.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was assessed by examining collinearity, path coefficients, and explanatory power (R^2) Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictor constructs were below 3.0, indicating no concerns regarding multicollinearity. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to assess the significance of the hypothesized relationships.

Problem awareness had a positive and significant effect on ascribed responsibility ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the proposition that recognizing the negative consequences of unethical behavior in arts venues increases visitors' sense of personal responsibility. Social norms also exerted a significant positive influence on ascribed responsibility ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that perceived collective expectations strongly shape responsibility attribution among arts appreciators.

Ascribed responsibility was found to have a substantial positive effect on moral norms ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its central role in activating moral obligation within the Norm Activation Model. In addition, social norms directly influenced moral norms ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of socially shared expectations in the formation of personal ethical standards in arts and cultural contexts.

Moral norms emerged as the strongest predictor of ethical behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that internalized moral obligation is the most proximal determinant of visitors' intentions to behave ethically. All hypothesized relationships were supported, providing empirical validation for the proposed extended NAM framework.

Overall, the results provide robust empirical support for the Norm Activation Model in the arts and cultural consumption context. The findings demonstrate that ethical behavioral intentions among arts appreciators are driven by a sequential process in which problem awareness and social norms activate ascribed responsibility, which in turn strengthens moral norms. Notably, social norms exert a dual influence by shaping both responsibility attribution and moral obligation, underscoring the socially embedded nature of ethical behavior in arts venues.

Discussion and Implications

This study set out to explain ethical behavioral intentions among arts appreciators by extending the Norm Activation Model (NAM) to the context of arts and cultural visitation. The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed framework and demonstrate that ethical conduct in arts venues is best understood as a morally and socially embedded process rather than a function of rule enforcement alone. By confirming all hypothesized relationships, the results highlight the relevance and explanatory power of NAM for understanding ethical behavior in cultural consumption settings.

Consistent with NAM's core logic, problem awareness was found to significantly influence ascribed responsibility. This finding suggests that when arts visitors recognize the potential negative consequences of unethical behaviors—such as damage to artworks, disruption of collective experiences, or inequitable access to cultural resources—they are more likely to internalize responsibility for preventing such outcomes. Importantly, this extends prior NAM applications by demonstrating that awareness of consequences is salient even in leisure-oriented, non-utilitarian contexts where ethical harm may be indirect or cumulative rather than immediate.

Social norms emerged as a particularly influential antecedent of ascribed responsibility, exerting a stronger effect than problem awareness. This underscores the socially regulated nature of arts and cultural environments, where behavioral expectations are co-constructed through observation, shared understandings, and institutional cues. Visitors appear to interpret ethical responsibility not only as a personal moral concern but also as a collective obligation shaped by perceptions of how "people like me" are expected to behave in cultural spaces. This

finding aligns with growing evidence that ethical behavior in public cultural settings is highly sensitive to normative context.

Ascribed responsibility was confirmed as a key mediator between cognitive awareness and moral obligation, reinforcing its central role in NAM. Visitors who perceived themselves as personally responsible for ethical outcomes were significantly more likely to develop strong moral norms regarding appropriate conduct. This result is theoretically important because it illustrates how responsibility attribution transforms awareness into moral commitment, particularly in environments where harm is diffuse and accountability is shared.

The direct effect of social norms on moral norms further advances the literature by demonstrating that moral obligations in arts settings are not solely internally generated but are partially shaped through social validation and normative reinforcement. In culturally symbolic spaces, repeated exposure to shared expectations appears to crystallize into internal moral standards, blurring the boundary between social and moral norms. This finding supports calls for more context-sensitive moral behavior models that account for the social embeddedness of ethical decision-making.

Finally, moral norms emerged as the strongest predictor of ethical behavioral intentions, confirming their role as the most proximal determinant of ethical conduct. This result reinforces the argument that ethical behavior in arts venues is fundamentally driven by internalized moral obligation rather than by fear of sanctions or instrumental considerations. Visitors who perceive ethical conduct as a moral duty are more likely to intend to behave considerately and responsibly, regardless of monitoring intensity.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions. First, it extends the application of the Norm Activation Model to the underexplored domain of arts and cultural consumption, demonstrating its robustness beyond traditional environmental and pro-social behavior contexts. By empirically validating NAM in this setting, the study broadens the theoretical toolkit available for understanding visitor behavior in cultural and tourism research.

Second, the findings advance NAM by explicitly incorporating social norms as both an antecedent to ascribed responsibility and a direct determinant of moral norms. This dual-pathway conceptualization responds to longstanding critiques that NAM under-theorizes social context and interaction. The results suggest that in socially visible and symbolically charged environments such as arts venues, social norms play a formative role in moral norm activation rather than functioning merely as external pressures.

Third, the study contributes to moral psychology and cultural studies by demonstrating that ethical behavior in leisure and aesthetic contexts follows a structured moral activation process. This challenges assumptions that ethical considerations are secondary or incidental in arts consumption and highlights the moral dimensions of cultural participation as an integral aspect of visitor behavior.

Practical Implications

The findings offer several actionable insights for arts and cultural institutions seeking to promote ethical behavior among visitors. First, institutions should invest in strategies that

enhance visitors' problem awareness by clearly communicating the consequences of unethical behaviors. Interpretive materials, storytelling, and behind-the-scenes narratives that emphasize artifact fragility, conservation challenges, and collective responsibility can make abstract harms more tangible and morally salient.

Second, the strong influence of social norms suggests that institutions can effectively shape behavior by leveraging normative cues rather than relying solely on rules and enforcement. Visible signals of ethical conduct—such as messaging that highlights widespread visitor compliance, staff modeling of respectful behavior, and peer-based reminders—can reinforce perceptions of shared responsibility and appropriate conduct.

Third, given the central role of moral norms, ethical messaging should be framed in moral and value-based terms rather than purely procedural language. Appeals to stewardship, respect for cultural heritage, and consideration for others are likely to be more effective than prohibitive signage alone. Such framing encourages visitors to internalize ethical behavior as part of their identity as responsible arts appreciators.

Finally, institutions may benefit from fostering a sense of community and collective ownership within arts spaces. Programs that invite visitors to view themselves as partners in preservation—rather than passive consumers—can strengthen ascribed responsibility and moral obligation, leading to more durable ethical behavioral intentions.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that point to avenues for future research. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, suggesting the need for longitudinal or experimental studies to examine how moral norms and ethical behaviors evolve over time. Additionally, data were collected from a specific cultural context, which may limit generalizability; future research could explore cross-cultural variations in norm activation processes among arts visitors. Further studies might also incorporate actual observed behaviors or experimental manipulations of normative cues to complement self-reported intentions.

References

Fakfare, P., Manosuthi, N., Lee, J. S., Lee, S. M., & Han, H. (2025). Investigating the formation of ethical animal-related tourism behaviors: A self-interest and pro-social theoretic approach. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 49*(3), 581–599.

Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). PLS-SEM: Indeed a silver bullet. *Journal of Marketing theory and Practice, 19*(2), 139–152.

Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review, 31*(1), 2–24.

Han, H. (2014). The norm activation model and theory-broadening: Individuals' decision-making on environmentally-responsible convention attendance. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 40*, 462–471.

Han, H., Hwang, J., Kim, J., & Jung, H. (2015). Guests' pro-environmental decision-making process: Broadening the norm activation framework in a lodging context. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 47*, 96–107.

Meng, B., Chua, B. L., Ryu, H. B., & Han, H. (2020). Volunteer tourism (VT) traveler behavior: Merging norm activation model and theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 28*(12), 1947–1969.

Rachmad, Y. E. (2022). *Ethical Behavior Theory*. Montpellier Méditerranée Éditions Internationales, Édition Spéciale 2022.

Treviño, L. K., Den Nieuwenboer, N. A., & Kish-Gephart, J. J. (2014). (Un) ethical behavior in organizations. *Annual review of psychology, 65*, 635–660.

Contact email: maneenate.w@bu.ac.th

Prioritizing Destination Attributes That Shape the Digital Detox Tourism Experience

Pipatpong Fakfare, Bangkok University, Thailand
Maneenate Worrachananun, Bangkok University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

As digital overuse increasingly undermines psychological well-being, digital detox tourism has emerged as a strategic response. This study examines how destination-level attributes shape tourists' cognitive awareness of digital overuse—a key psychological outcome of disconnection. Drawing on the Stimulus–Response (S–R) model, six environmental stimuli are assessed: natural remoteness, low connectivity infrastructure, destination narrative framing, availability of analog activities, perceived safety while disconnected, and social norms supporting detox. Data from 185 participants at wellness retreats in Thailand were analyzed using PLS-SEM and Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA). Results show that all six attributes significantly influence awareness, with analog activities, low connectivity, and safety perceptions being the most impactful and well-performing. IPMA further reveals strategic priorities for experience design. This study extends S–R theory to digital well-being contexts and offers actionable insights for destination planners and wellness managers seeking to cultivate environments that promote reflective disengagement and cognitive recalibration in the digital age.

Keywords: digital detox tourism, cognitive awareness, destination attributes, Stimulus–Response model, Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The intensification of digital engagement in everyday life has raised concerns about its impact on psychological well-being, prompting a growing interest in tourism experiences that facilitate voluntary disconnection. Digital detox tourism—defined as travel aimed at intentionally disconnecting from digital devices—has emerged as a response to the cognitive fatigue and anxiety associated with constant connectivity (Gong et al., 2023). While research has explored tourists' motivations for engaging in digital detox and the restorative benefits of disconnection, the environmental conditions that enable such outcomes have not been sufficiently theorized or empirically prioritized.

This study adopts the Stimulus–Response (S–R) model as a theoretical lens to examine how external environmental stimuli embedded in destination attributes can trigger psychological responses—specifically, cognitive awareness of digital overuse (Toates, 1997). Cognitive awareness refers to a tourist's reflective recognition of their dependency on digital technologies, a transformative outcome that signals deeper behavioral insight and the potential for longer-term lifestyle recalibration (Aksan & Kisac, 2009). While S–R theory has been applied in consumer psychology and service environments to explain direct behavioral reactions to environmental stimuli (Russell & Mehrabian, 1974), its application in digital detox tourism remains largely unexplored.

The study identifies six destination-level stimuli likely to shape this awareness: natural remoteness, low connectivity infrastructure, destination narrative framing, availability of analog activities, perceived safety while disconnected, and social norms supporting detox (Radtke et al., 2022). These attributes align with emerging evidence that the physical, symbolic, and socio-behavioral environment of a destination plays a critical role in shaping disconnection-related outcomes. However, existing literature tends to treat these factors descriptively or anecdotally, without empirically evaluating their comparative significance or managerial relevance.

Moreover, while studies have highlighted the importance of nature, mindfulness, and social facilitation in disconnection experiences, few have linked these destination-level features to concrete psychological responses such as digital self-awareness. Nor have these features been systematically prioritized to inform destination design or wellness strategy. This study responds to this gap by assessing both the effect and relative importance of key destination stimuli in shaping the digital detox experience. By integrating theory with empirical prioritization, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on digital well-being in tourism and provides evidence-based guidance for the design of environments that foster meaningful disconnection.

Literature Review

Digital Detox

Digital detox refers to the intentional disengagement from digital devices in order to restore psychological balance and mitigate the effects of digital dependency (Radtke et al., 2022). The concept has gained scholarly and public attention in response to rising levels of technostress, anxiety, and attentional fatigue associated with perpetual digital engagement. Scholars have outlined how continuous connectivity erodes cognitive resources, prompting individuals to seek temporary reprieve through digital abstention. Within the tourism context, digital detox is frequently framed as a form of restorative travel, aligning with theory of restorative

environments, which posits that nature and solitude can replenish depleted attentional capacities.

Although the literature has examined tourists' motivations for engaging in digital detox—ranging from self-care and stress relief to mindfulness and reengagement with physical space—most studies remain rooted in qualitative accounts. These explorations often focus on subjective experiences or traveler narratives, offering rich but fragmented insights that lack generalizable frameworks. Furthermore, the existing body of work has emphasized individual-level factors, such as personality traits and self-regulation capacities, while paying insufficient attention to the environmental or contextual features that make disconnection feasible and psychologically effective. This represents a significant theoretical gap, as the digital detox experience cannot be fully understood without reference to the destination attributes that either facilitate or constrain disconnection (Mirbabaie et al., 2022).

Destination Attributes That Shape the Digital Detox Tourism Experience (Stimuli)

Environmental psychology and servicescape theory suggest that physical and symbolic characteristics of a setting significantly influence behavioral and psychological outcomes (Bitner, 1992; Russell & Mehrabian, 1974). Within digital detox tourism, several destination-level attributes have been identified as salient stimuli that may facilitate intentional disconnection.

Natural remoteness is frequently cited as a key facilitator of digital detox, offering spatial and sensory isolation from urban stimuli and digital infrastructures. Such settings enhance restorative potential by removing technological and cognitive distractions. Relatedly, low connectivity infrastructure is reframed in the detox context as an affordance rather than a limitation. Weak or absent digital signals reduce the psychological burden of self-regulation by structurally constraining device use. This emphasizes that infrastructural scarcity can act as a functional design feature in wellness tourism (Quaye, 2025).

Destination narrative framing also plays a crucial role in shaping visitor expectations and behaviors. Through symbolic messaging and brand positioning, destinations that emphasize being "off-grid," "mindful," or "unplugged" prime tourists for digital abstention. However, much of this framing remains promotional, with limited empirical analysis of its psychological effectiveness. The availability of analog activities—such as hiking, journaling, or artisanal workshops—provides immersive, screen-free alternatives that foster flow states and redirect attention from digital devices. Despite this, little is known about which types of activities are most effective in promoting sustained engagement and detachment from digital media (Hassan & Saleh, 2024).

Perceived safety while disconnected represents another underexamined dimension. Tourists' willingness to engage in digital detox may be compromised by concerns over personal security or the fear of being unreachable in emergencies. Risk perception literature suggests that feelings of vulnerability can undermine experiential immersion, yet few studies directly link these perceptions to digital abstention behaviors.

Finally, social norms within the destination environment exert a powerful influence. When disconnection is socially sanctioned and collectively practiced—such as in wellness retreats—tourists are more likely to conform to device-free expectations. These norms legitimize non-

use and foster shared accountability. Nevertheless, the mechanisms by which these social cues are transmitted and internalized remain poorly theorized (Hassan & Saleh, 2024).

While each of these attributes has been acknowledged in the literature, most studies treat them descriptively and in isolation. There is a lack of comparative empirical evidence regarding their relative importance or interactive effects, which limits the development of prescriptive models for destination design and experience management.

Awareness of Digital Overuse (Response)

Awareness of digital overuse constitutes a core psychological response within the digital detox tourism experience. Unlike affective states such as relaxation or temporary satisfaction, this construct reflects a metacognitive recognition of one's dependency on digital technologies and the behavioral patterns that sustain it. This form of awareness is transformative in nature, signaling a shift from unconscious digital consumption to deliberate reflection on the role and influence of digital media in everyday life. It denotes not merely the experience of being disconnected but the internalization of that experience as a meaningful insight into one's digital habits (Abreu & Campos, 2022).

Theoretical perspectives from self-regulation, media literacy, and mindfulness scholarship suggest that awareness is a necessary precursor to behavior change. Without first recognizing the extent and implications of digital overuse, individuals are unlikely to initiate sustainable modifications to their technology practices. In the context of tourism, this awareness may be triggered more readily due to the removal of habitual digital stimuli, the presence of novel environmental cues, and the freedom from normative pressures to remain constantly connected. When tourists are placed in environments that disrupt routine device use—such as those lacking connectivity, offering compelling offline alternatives, or embedding disconnection in the social fabric—they are more likely to experience a reflective decentering of their digital practices.

Despite its conceptual significance, awareness of digital overuse remains under-represented in empirical tourism research. Existing measures often rely on proxy indicators such as intentions to reduce screen time or short-term emotional relief, which do not adequately capture the reflective, cognitive dimension of awareness. Furthermore, few studies have examined the environmental antecedents of this awareness within tourism settings, even though destination attributes may play a decisive role in shaping tourists' perceptual and cognitive responses.

Applying the Stimulus–Response (S–R) model offers a compelling framework for addressing this gap (Russell & Mehrabian, 1974). The model posits that specific environmental stimuli can elicit corresponding psychological responses, which in turn influence behavior. In digital detox tourism, destination-level features act as stimuli that may induce a reflective recognition of digital overuse. Attributes such as natural remoteness, limited digital infrastructure, symbolic framing of disconnection, availability of analog activities, perceived safety while offline, and social norms that endorse detox behaviors may all serve to heighten this awareness. However, the relative influence of each attribute on this cognitive response remains empirically untested. This study advances the application of the S–R model by proposing and testing the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1: Destination attributes (i.e., natural remoteness, low connectivity infrastructure, destination narrative framing, availability of analog activities, perceived safety while disconnected, and social norms supporting detox) positive affects awareness of digital overuse.

In addition to estimating the direct effects of five servicescape dimensions on experiential satisfaction via PLS-SEM with consistent (PLSc) estimation, this study examines the relative strategic importance of each servicescape element. Although wellness operators may invest heavily in particular environmental features—whether high-fidelity aromatherapy diffusers or intricately designed meditation pods—these investments do not always translate into greater guest satisfaction. To uncover which features yield the strongest returns on investment in terms of satisfaction, we employ Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016).

IPMA juxtaposes each dimension's importance (total standardized effect on satisfaction) against its performance (mean latent score), thereby identifying those servicescape elements that are both highly influential and underperforming. Those attributes occupying the "high importance, low performance" quadrant represent critical leverage points for resource allocation and experience design. By integrating structural path analysis with IPMA, this research not only clarifies which servicescape stimuli most powerfully shape digital-detox satisfaction but also provides actionable guidance on where wellness retreats should focus enhancement efforts to maximize visitor well-being.

Methods

Measurement Development

The study employed a structured questionnaire to measure six environmental stimulus constructs—Natural Remoteness (NRM), Low Connectivity Infrastructure (LCI), Destination Narrative Framing (DNF), Availability of Analog Activities (AAA), Perceived Safety While Disconnected (PSD), and Social Norms Supporting Detox (SNS)—as antecedents to the psychological outcome variable, Cognitive Awareness of Digital Overuse (CAO).

Each construct was measured using three reflective indicators developed from validated instruments in servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992), digital detox tourism, and digital well-being research (Gong et al., 2023; Radtke et al., 2022). All items were anchored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). The items were reviewed by three academic experts in tourism behavior and digital media and were pre-tested with a pilot sample (n = 30) of wellness tourists. Minor refinements were made to enhance clarity and contextual appropriateness.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a one-month period (March 2025) from domestic tourists attending digital detox programs in wellness retreats across Thailand. Respondents were eligible if they had completed a minimum 1-night stay in a retreat that explicitly marketed itself as tech-free or device-restricted.

A total of 185 valid responses were obtained through online distribution, with the support of retreat facilitators. Participants were informed of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study.

Respondents' demographics showed diversity in age (predominantly 25–44 years), gender (60% female, 40% male), and professional background (majority employed full-time with moderate-to-high daily technology use).

Analysis Methods

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) implemented in SmartPLS 4. This method was chosen for its suitability in estimating complex models with reflective constructs and its robustness under conditions of non-normality, which are typical in behavioral tourism research. Prior to assessing the structural model, the quality of the measurement model was rigorously evaluated. This included examining indicator reliability, where all outer loadings were expected to exceed the threshold of 0.70, and internal consistency reliability, which was assessed through both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values, each of which were required to exceed 0.70 to be considered acceptable. Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which was expected to be above 0.50 for all constructs. Discriminant validity was tested using the HTMT ratio. In addition, multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted by inspecting variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which were required to remain below the threshold of 3.3 to confirm the absence of collinearity issues.

Following the confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed by analyzing the path coefficients and their statistical significance using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. The explanatory power of the model was evaluated based on the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous variable, Cognitive Awareness of Digital Overuse. To supplement the structural findings and provide managerial insight, the study applied Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA). This analysis allows for the identification of destination attributes that exert a strong influence on the outcome variable (high importance) but exhibit relatively low performance (low mean scores). Such attributes represent key areas for strategic improvement. The IPMA approach thus enhances the practical relevance of the findings by guiding resource prioritization in the design and delivery of digital detox experiences.

Findings

Measurement Model Assessment

All constructs in this study were modeled reflectively, and their measurement properties were rigorously assessed to ensure validity and reliability. The standardized loadings for all indicators exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 and were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, supporting indicator reliability (see Table 1). Following Sarsted et al. (2021), these findings confirm that each indicator contributes meaningfully to the underlying latent construct it was designed to measure.

Convergent validity was established through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, all of which exceeded the 0.60 threshold, indicating that the constructs explain a substantial portion of the variance in their respective indicators. Construct reliability was confirmed using both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), with all values surpassing 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency across the items measuring each construct.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, affirming the distinctiveness of the six destination attribute constructs and the outcome variable, cognitive awareness of digital overuse. In addition, the correlations among constructs were positive and aligned with the study's theoretical framework, consistent with prior research on environmental

stimuli and reflective awareness in tourism contexts. These results collectively demonstrate the robustness of the reflective measurement model and support the subsequent structural path analysis.

Table 1

Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Indicator	Sample 1: International tourists (n = 453)			
		AVE	rho_a	$\widehat{w}_i$	$\widehat{\lambda}_i$
Natural remoteness	NRM1: I felt physically separated from urban or developed areas.	0.657	0.863	0.359	0.807
	NRM2: The environment offered a sense of escape from daily routines.			0.272	0.734
	NRM3: The location made it easier to disconnect from the digital world.			0.578	0.884
Low connectivity infrastructure	LCI1: There was little to no access to Wi-Fi or mobile networks.	0.662	0.756	0.457	0.872
	LCI2: Digital technology (screens, ads) was visibly absent in the environment.			0.366	0.757
	LCI3: The destination was intentionally designed to limit online access.			0.402	0.808
Destination narrative framing	DNF1: The destination promoted itself as a space for digital disconnection.	0.68	0.95	0.399	0.837
	DNF2: Detox messaging was consistent across marketing, signage, and staff communication.			0.605	0.913
	DNF3: The overall identity of the place emphasized simplicity and presence.			0.159	0.712
Availability of analog activities	AAA1: I had access to meaningful non-digital activities (e.g., journaling, hiking).	0.643	0.727	0.424	0.801
	AAA2: The destination offered resources for engaging offline (e.g., books, physical maps).			0.379	0.788
	AAA3: Analog experiences were well-integrated into the overall offering.			0.442	0.817
Perceived safety while disconnected	PSD1: I felt secure even without constant access to digital communication.	0.606	0.727	0.547	0.855
	PSD2: I did not worry about emergencies or missing important updates.			0.333	0.717
	PSD3: The environment reassured me that disconnection was safe and appropriate.			0.389	0.756
Social norms supporting detox	SNS1: Other visitors and staff supported the idea of staying offline.	0.654	0.788	0.528	0.854
	SNS2: I did not feel social pressure to use my phone.			0.283	0.768
	SNS3: Being disconnected felt socially acceptable at this destination.			0.414	0.801
Awareness of digital overuse	CAO1: I became more conscious of how much I rely on digital devices.	0.87	0.925	0.356	0.929
	CAO2: The experience made me reflect critically on my tech habits.			0.359	0.942
	CAO3: I realized that my digital consumption is often unnecessary or excessive.			0.357	0.928

Note. $\widehat{w}_i$ = estimated weights, $\widehat{\lambda}_i$ = estimated loadings, VIF = Variance Inflation Factor, and AVE = Average Variance Explained

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was assessed to evaluate the hypothesized relationships between the six destination attribute constructs and the outcome variable, Cognitive Awareness of Digital Overuse (CAO). All proposed paths were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, supporting the predictive validity of the model (see Table 2). Among the predictors, Availability of Analog Activities (AAA) emerged as the strongest determinant of cognitive awareness (β =

0.602, $p < 0.001$), indicating that destinations offering engaging non-digital alternatives—such as journaling, physical exploration, or creative workshops—are most effective in triggering tourists' reflective recognition of their digital overuse. This finding underscores the value of intentional offline programming in shaping meaningful detox experiences. Low Connectivity Infrastructure (LCI) also demonstrated a substantial effect ($\beta = 0.457$, $p < 0.001$), affirming that infrastructural limitations on digital access serve as critical enablers of disconnection and awareness. Similarly, Perceived Safety While Disconnected (PSD) ($\beta = 0.399$, $p < 0.001$) significantly influenced CAO, highlighting that tourists must feel physically and emotionally secure to disengage confidently from digital devices. Natural Remoteness (NRM) had a moderate yet significant impact on awareness ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that physical separation from urban environments contributes to cognitive distancing from digital routines. While less pronounced, Social Norms Supporting Detox (SNS) ($\beta = 0.225$, $p = 0.011$) also significantly predicted CAO, indicating that socially reinforced expectations for disconnection help normalize and legitimize device-free behavior. Finally, Destination Narrative Framing (DNF), although statistically significant ($\beta = 0.085$, $p = 0.005$), had the weakest influence among all predictors. This suggests that while symbolic cues and detox messaging may prime expectations, they alone are insufficient to drive deeper cognitive reflection without being supported by tangible environmental or social mechanisms.

Overall, the model confirms that all six destination-level attributes play a significant role in shaping cognitive awareness of digital overuse. However, their relative effects vary, offering important insights for destination managers seeking to design environments that not only support disconnection but also foster lasting self-awareness.

Table 2

Structural Model Assessment (n = 185)

Relationship	Estimate	p-value
NRM -> CAO	0.288	0.001**
LCI -> CAO	0.457	0.001**
DNF -> CAO	0.085	0.005**
AAA -> CAO	0.602	0.001**
PSD -> CAO	0.399	0.001**
SNS -> CAO	0.225	0.011**

Note. NRM = Natural remoteness, LCI = Low connectivity infrastructure, DNF = Destination narrative framing, AAA = Availability of analog activities, PSD = Perceived safety while disconnected, SNS = Social norms supporting detox, CAO = Awareness of digital overuse, ** = significant at 95% confidence level.

IPMA Results

The Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) is a decision-support tool that enables both descriptive and predictive analysis of structural model results (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). It is particularly useful in identifying strategic priorities for resource allocation, as it contrasts the importance (i.e., total effect size of predictor constructs on a target variable) with performance (i.e., mean latent scores of those constructs) in relation to a specific outcome. In this study, IPMA was used to evaluate how different destination attributes influence cognitive awareness of digital overuse—the central outcome of digital detox tourism.

As noted by Henseler (2021), IPMA extends traditional path analysis by layering in performance metrics, offering a multidimensional interpretation of how well individual

constructs are performing relative to their influence. Constructs that show high importance but low performance signal critical leverage points—areas where improvements can yield significant gains in the outcome. Conversely, constructs with low importance and low performance may be considered lower priorities, while high-performing, low-importance attributes could be viewed as potential over-investments.

To visualize these strategic insights, average performance scores of all six destination attributes were plotted along the y-axis, and their corresponding importance scores (total effects on awareness) along the x-axis. A vertical line was drawn at the mean of the importance scores and a horizontal line at the mean of performance scores, resulting in a four-quadrant matrix. This matrix helps to interpret the attributes as follows (see Figure 1):

Quadrant 1 – Keep Up the Good Work. This quadrant includes attributes that are both highly important in predicting cognitive awareness and are performing well. The analysis revealed that Availability of Analog Activities (AAA), Low Connectivity Infrastructure (LCI), and Perceived Safety While Disconnected (PSD) fall within this category. These attributes are critical to the success of digital detox experiences, and their current execution appears effective. Continued investment and refinement in these areas are warranted to maintain their strong performance and contribution to awareness outcomes.

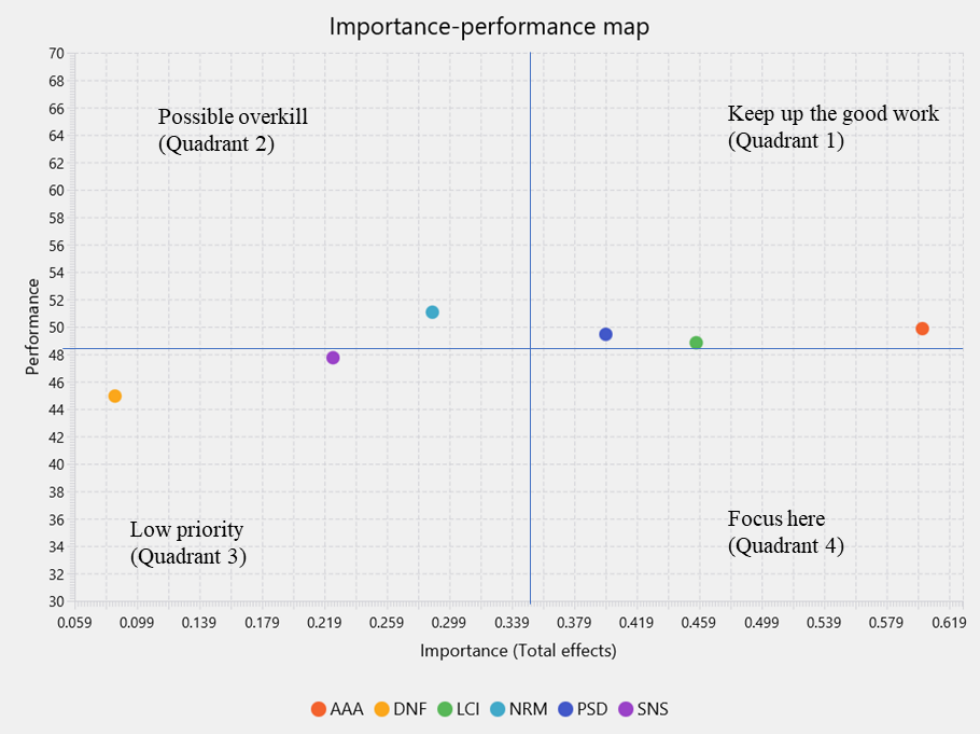
Quadrant 2 – Possible Overkill. Constructs in this quadrant show relatively high performance but have limited importance in explaining the outcome. Natural Remoteness (NRM) was positioned here, suggesting that although tourists rate this attribute favorably, its influence on cognitive awareness is comparatively modest. While NRM may enhance the general appeal of a destination, it may not directly trigger reflective recognition of digital overuse. This finding invites critical evaluation of potential overinvestment in remote settings without concurrent emphasis on experiential or psychological design.

Quadrant 3 – Low Priority. This quadrant consists of attributes with both low importance and low performance. Destination Narrative Framing (DNF) and Social Norms Supporting Detox (SNS) were found to reside here. Their limited performance and weak predictive relevance suggest they are currently underdeveloped and not central to shaping cognitive awareness. While these dimensions may offer indirect value or future potential, they are currently not key drivers of outcome effectiveness and may be considered lower priority in immediate destination strategy.

Quadrant 4 – Focus Here. Typically, this quadrant identifies high-importance but underperforming constructs, representing areas with the greatest strategic opportunity. In this analysis, no attributes were found in Quadrant 4. This suggests that, among the six studied attributes, those with the strongest predictive relevance also exhibit adequate performance, implying no immediate gaps in under-leveraged high-impact features. However, the absence of constructs in this quadrant does not negate the potential for optimization, especially in refining aspects of Quadrant 1 to achieve even greater awareness outcomes.

The IPMA thus offers an actionable framework for destination managers, highlighting where to maintain performance (AAA, LCI, PSD), where to reconsider over-investment (NRM), and where limited current returns suggest lower strategic priority (DNF, SNS). These insights contribute not only to the theoretical advancement of digital detox tourism but also to practical decision-making in experience design.

Figure 1
IPMA Results



Discussion and Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the evolving discourse on digital detox tourism and the application of the Stimulus–Response (S–R) model in tourism behavior research. By operationalizing six destination-level attributes as environmental stimuli, and cognitive awareness of digital overuse as the psychological response, the study extends the application of S–R theory to the underexplored domain of digital disengagement. The significant positive effects of all six attributes on cognitive awareness affirm the theoretical plausibility of using environmental stimuli to explain reflective psychological responses within tourism settings. This shifts the analytical focus beyond immediate affective reactions (e.g., satisfaction, relaxation) to more enduring cognitive processes such as metacognitive insight and digital self-awareness.

The findings also address critical gaps in digital detox literature, which has traditionally emphasized individual motivations or qualitative interpretations of detox experiences. Through the use of reflective constructs and validated measurement models, this study brings empirical precision to previously anecdotal claims about the role of environment in facilitating disconnection. Notably, attributes such as Availability of Analog Activities (AAA), Low Connectivity Infrastructure (LCI), and Perceived Safety While Disconnected (PSD) were found to be both high in importance and performance, substantiating the multidimensional nature of effective detox design. Conversely, the relatively lower influence of Destination Narrative Framing (DNF) and Social Norms Supporting Detox (SNS) suggests that symbolic messaging and social cues, while frequently invoked in conceptual discourse, may be insufficient on their own to trigger deep cognitive reflection.

In applying Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA), the study also contributes a methodological advancement. While IPMA has gained traction in service and marketing research, its application in digital wellness tourism remains rare. By visualizing which attributes are strategically overinvested (e.g., NRM) or underleveraged (none in Quadrant 4), the IPMA matrix offers a structured, theoretically informed basis for prioritization, thus enhancing the decision utility of theoretical constructs.

Practical Implications

The findings yield actionable insights for destination planners, wellness retreat managers, and policymakers aiming to design environments that support tourists' reflective disengagement from digital technologies. The identification of AAA, LCI, and PSD as high-impact, high-performance attributes suggests that investment in tangible and functional design features—rather than symbolic messaging alone—is key to fostering meaningful digital detox experiences. For example, ensuring the integration of offline engagement opportunities such as journaling stations, forest walks, or analog tools (e.g., sketchbooks, compasses) provides not just distraction from devices, but purposeful immersion that encourages deeper cognitive recalibration.

Likewise, engineering low-connectivity infrastructure—either through deliberate design or natural constraints—can aid tourists who may lack the willpower to self-regulate device usage. This aligns with "digital nudge" strategies, wherein the environment passively supports behavioral goals by minimizing temptation. Furthermore, prioritizing perceived safety—such as through emergency protocols, staff visibility, and orientation briefings—can mitigate one of the key psychological barriers to disconnection: fear of being unreachable. This affirms the importance of addressing both physical and emotional safety in detox program design.

The results also advise caution regarding overinvestment in natural remoteness as a proxy for digital detox efficacy. Although remote locations are often romanticized in detox branding, their actual impact on digital self-awareness may be limited without complementary experiential or interpretive features. Similarly, destination narrative framing and social detox norms, while useful as supporting cues, should not be treated as standalone solutions. Operators should integrate these features within a broader environmental strategy that also includes structured offline engagement and infrastructural control.

For tourism boards and marketers, the implications are twofold: first, to realign branding efforts with those attributes empirically shown to influence cognitive outcomes (e.g., analog immersion rather than just "remote and wild" imagery); and second, to use performance audits (such as IPMA) regularly in program evaluations to ensure that strategic investments are driving the desired psychological impact.

Research Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the environmental antecedents of cognitive awareness of digital overuse in tourism settings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data constrains the ability to draw causal inferences. Although the Stimulus–Response (S–R) model offers a theoretically grounded rationale for directional relationships, future studies employing longitudinal or experimental designs could better capture the evolution of cognitive awareness over the course of a digital detox experience.

Second, the sample was limited to domestic tourists in Thailand attending wellness retreats with explicit digital detox programs. While this enhances contextual relevance, it limits the generalizability of findings to international tourists, urban destinations, or non-wellness-oriented travel contexts. Cultural norms and infrastructural expectations around digital use vary significantly across settings; therefore, replication in other geographic and sociocultural contexts would be essential to validate the model's robustness.

Moreover, while the study successfully prioritized six environmental attributes, it did not account for possible interaction effects or moderating influences, such as personal traits (e.g., digital dependence, mindfulness disposition) or group travel dynamics. Exploring how individual differences shape the salience of destination attributes could yield a more nuanced understanding of how environmental and personal factors interact in fostering digital reflection.

References

Abreu, C., & Campos, P. F. (2022, February). Raising awareness of smartphone overuse among university students: a persuasive systems approach. *In Informatics* (Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 15). MDPI.

Aksan, N., & Kisac, B. (2009). A descriptive study: Reading comprehension and cognitive awareness skills. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 1*(1), 834–837.

Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: The impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *Journal of Marketing*, *56*(2), 57–71.

Gong, Y., Schroeder, A., & Plaisance, P. L. (2023). Digital detox tourism: An Ellulian critique. *Annals of Tourism Research, 103*, 103646.

Hassan, T., & Saleh, M. I. (2024). Tourism digital detox and digital-free tourism: What do we know? What do we not know? Where should we be heading? *Journal of Tourism Futures.*

Henseler, J. (2021). *Composite-based structural equation modeling: Analyzing latent and emergent variables*. Guilford Press.

Mirbabaie, M., Stieglitz, S., & Marx, J. (2022). Digital detox. *Business & Information Systems Engineering, 64*(2), 239–246.

Quaye, F. J. (2025). Digital Detox Tourism: Assessing Tourist Expectations And Experiences. *Journal of Management, and Development Research, 2*(1), 11–21.

Radtke, T., Apel, T., Schenkel, K., Keller, J., & von Lindern, E. (2022). Digital detox: An effective solution in the smartphone era? A systematic literature review. *Mobile Media & Communication, 10*(2), 190–215.

Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2016). Gain more insight from your PLS-SEM results: The importance-performance map analysis. *Industrial management & data systems, 116*(9), 1865–1886.

Russell, J. A., & Mehrabian, A. (1974). Distinguishing anger and anxiety in terms of emotional response factors. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 42*(1), 79.

Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Hair, J. F. (2021). *Partial least squares structural equation modeling. In Handbook of market research* (pp. 587–632). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Toates, F. (1997). The interaction of cognitive and stimulus–response processes in the control of behaviour. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 22*(1), 59–83.

Contact email: pipatpong.f@bu.ac.th

Dramatic Arts and the Architecture of Human Communication and Connection

Wankwan Polachan, Mahidol University International College, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This research investigates the degree to which dramatic structures function as foundational cognitive frameworks for human communication and connection. By synthesizing insights from performance studies, rhetoric, and narrative psychology, the paper interrogates how storytelling mechanisms facilitate comprehension and persuasive empathy. Central to this inquiry is the application of Aristotelian mimesis defined as the representational process through which individuals interpret and structure sensory data into coherent meaning. The study utilizes a three-element analytical scaffold consisting of the Dramatic Arc, the Transformative Journey, and Theme. The methodology employs a systematic qualitative comparative analysis of impactful communicative artifacts to evaluate these concepts in practical application. Specifically, the research examines successful global media campaigns, high-stakes CEO keynote addresses and contemporary television advertisements. By deconstructing these specific artifacts, the study evaluates how the Aristotelian arc specifically the movement through tension and resolution aligns with the human brain's cognitive processing of order and narrative sequence. Furthermore, it explores how the Transformative Journey serves as a tool for emotional alignment by positioning the audience as the protagonist, while the Theme provides the conceptual coherence necessary to bridge the gap between transactional data and shared values. Departing from purely rhetorical assertions, this research situates performance-based structures within contemporary communication theory to identify a replicable model for effective engagement. The study concludes that the integration of these dramatic elements is a vital mechanism for elevating communication from a simple transactional exchange of information into a transformational human experience that fosters deep trust.

Keywords: dramatic arc, transformative journey, theme, mimesis, communication

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Imagine the Japanese government hands you an impossible public relations campaign: your job is to promote public toilets in Tokyo. If you approach this like a standard corporate pitch, you dump data. You show design methods, architectural costs, and square footage. Consequently, your audience instantly stops listening because transactional metrics alone create cognitive friction. But the government took a different path by hiring filmmaker Wim Wenders, who leaned entirely into the dramatic arts to create the Oscar-nominated film, Perfect Days. Watching this film provides a massive "eureka" moment regarding human communication. Wenders successfully sold Tokyo toilets as a worldwide phenomenon because he intuitively used a three-part dramatic framework. He proved that performance structures are not just for the theater—they are deeply tied to our evolutionary wiring.

Public communication is often described simply as the transfer of information from sender to receiver. That description is useful, but incomplete. The messages that people remember and connect with establish a situation, make a problem consequential, show what can change, and connect the immediate subject to a larger human value. This paper examines that structuring process through the concept of Dramatic Communication Architecture, testing the extent to which structures developed in the dramatic arts provide a foundation for human connection in the real, data-driven world. The proposed framework brings together three elements: Dramatic Arc, Transformation Structure, and Theme. The research began with a broad question: to what extent do structures developed in the dramatic arts provide a foundation for communication and human connection outside of the world of theatres and literature? The question is attractive precisely because it is easy to overstate. Once an analyst begins looking for drama, almost any sequence can be read as an arc, any before-and-after comparison as transformation, and any slogan as theme. The central methodological challenge is therefore not simply to find dramatic patterns, but to identify them without forcing the evidence.

To address this problem, the study combines humanities-based interpretation with evidence controls. It traces a path from Aristotle's *Poetics* to propositions, concepts, research constructs, and the examination of selected samples, including successful global campaigns, a TED Talk, and a high-stakes keynote by a technology CEO.

The paper asks four questions: How can Dramatic Arc, Transformation Structure, and Theme be operationalized without treating every communicative sequence as dramatic? How do these constructs appear across different public communication forms? Which medium-specific features and competing explanations qualify the interpretation?

Literature Review

Mimesis and the Arrangement of Action

Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996) provides the classical point of departure. Mimesis is relevant not as simple copying, but as the representational process through which individuals interpret and structure sensory data into coherent meaning. We use mimesis to take chaotic, raw facts—like the square footage of a public toilet—and structure them into something recognizable. Plot, or *mythos*, is the arrangement of incidents into a whole with a beginning, middle, and end, where the parts matter because of their relation to one another.

This distinction is important when dramatic ideas travel into communication research. A presentation agenda has a beginning and an end, but that alone does not make it a dramatic arc. A campaign can show events chronologically without creating meaningful complication, recognition, or consequence. The operational question is whether an initial condition generates pressure, whether a turn is prepared by what came before, and whether the conclusion resolves or reframes the situation.

Narrative, Cognition, and Persuasion

Does this architectural theory work outside the theater? The great cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1991) proved that our minds are not cameras; we do not just passively record objective reality. We construct our reality using narrative blueprints. Without stories, the world is chaotic, terrifying sensory data, and a spreadsheet of market fluctuations means nothing to the human mind on its own. We use what Bruner called "folk psychology" to organize that data into a story so we can survive it.

This humanities-based wisdom is deeply supported by the hard science of the brain. A few years ago, neuroscientist Dr. Paul Zak (2015) was on a late-night flight and decided to watch Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*. By the end of the film, this highly rational scientist was sitting in his seat, sobbing uncontrollably. Wondering what just happened to his brain, he returned to his lab, drew blood from test subjects, and discovered something that changed our understanding of communication. He found that a well-crafted dramatic arc literally hijacks human biology. When a story introduces a problem or tension, the brain instantly releases cortisol, which forces the audience to pay attention and focus. When the story forces empathy, the brain floods with oxytocin—the molecule of human connection and deep trust. A narrative scaffold isn't just a stylistic choice; it is a biological remote control.

Transformation and the Hero's Journey

Campbell's (1949) monomyth has strongly influenced contemporary understandings of transformational narrative. In applied communication, the Hero's Journey is often used to position a customer, employee, or citizen as the protagonist, with a leader or brand serving as the guide. However, its popularity also creates a methodological risk: not every instance of change constitutes a journey, and not every public message contains a hero.

For this reason, the study uses Transformation Structure as a broader construct. The coding process asks who or what changes initial condition is established, what pressure or action intervenes, and whether a changed state follows as a recognizable consequence. This approach makes it possible to distinguish individual, institutional, collective, and systemic transformations. Hero's Journey terminology is reserved for artifacts that provide stronger evidence of a departure–trial–transformation–return sequence.

At its core, the Transformative Journey asks a simple question: who or what changes, and how does that change occur? The model requires an initial state, a pressure or conflict, an action shaped by a specific choice, a key moment of recognition, and finally, a changed state linked by consequence. Wenders uses this structure to create emotional alignment, drawing the audience into the experience until they are positioned as active participants in the transformation.

Theme, Rhetoric, and Shared Value

Theme is the ultimate "so-what" in communication. It is defined here as the larger meaning or value orientation that holds an artifact together. It acts as a "value bridge" to turn dry, transactional facts into a beautiful, shared human ideal. In our methodology, strong evidence of a theme means a value claim is repeated, integrated, and supported by every action that came before it. It is not the same as topic. Domestic violence may be the topic of a campaign, while protection through institutional responsibility is its theme. Artificial intelligence may be the topic of a keynote, while the manufacture and distribution of intelligence as a new industrial model is its theme.

A theme is considered strongly supported when it recurses or culminates across structurally different parts of the artifact and remains connected to represented actions and consequences. This rule places Theme in dialogue with narrative coherence (Fisher, 1984), leadership storytelling (Denning, 2005), brand narrative (Escalas, 2004), and popular presentation practice (Gallo, 2014).

Analytical Model

To prove this architecture exists universally and avoid confirmation bias, we built a disciplined, forensic bridge from Aristotle's ancient Poetics directly to modern rhetoric. We extracted 28 exact passages from ancient texts and broke them down into 99 strict analytic units. The study utilizes a three-element analytical scaffold:

Dramatic Arc (Organizing Attention)

The shaped movement of a communication artifact over time, taking the audience on a deliberate journey from setup through rising complication to resolution. Dramatic Arc refers to shaped movement over time. Strong evidence requires more than chronology. Multiple segments must form an intelligible relation, and a turn, recognition, resolution, or reframing should emerge from the preceding structure. The two principal coding categories are arrangement of incidents and turning–recognition–resolution.

Transformation Structure (Organizing Change)

The before-and-after engine requiring an initial state, decisive action, and a changed state connected by consequence. Transformation Structure identifies meaningful movement from an initial condition to a changed condition through pressure, action, choice, recognition, or consequence. Strong evidence includes an identifiable agent or transforming entity, an initial state, an intervening pressure or action, and a consequential changed state. A simple comparison between "before" and "after" is not enough.

Theme (Organizing Meaning)

The framework that structures raw facts into recognizable patterns and binds them with a larger worldview. Theme identifies an explicit or repeated value orientation that gives conceptual coherence to the artifact. Strong evidence requires recurrence or integration across the artifact. Topic, tagline, and isolated moral language are coded as false positives when they are not connected to the represented choices and consequences.

Methodology

Research Design

The study uses systematic qualitative comparative analysis to test whether the three constructs can be applied with sufficient precision across modern, data-heavy communication. As an instrument-development pilot, it examines four high-stakes communication artifacts from distinct rhetorical contexts, using close reading, narrative analysis, rhetoric, performance studies, and digital-humanities corpus practice to assess whether the framework can support a larger comparative study.

Analysis proceeds at two levels. Artifact-level records summarize the overall strength of each construct, medium, source quality, and alternative explanations, while segment-level records link observations to transcript lines, timestamps, scenes, or other stable locators. Each segment is first described in ordinary language and then assigned a construct code, reducing the risk of seeing only what the codebook anticipates.

Selected Samples

The pilot contains 5 artifact records from four broad communication contexts:

1. AXA's "Three Words" Campaign: Elite Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) dealing with intensely heavy, fatal statistics.
2. GoDaddy's Brand Campaigns: Everyday B2B and B2C commercial marketing are used as a baseline for the universality of transformation.
3. NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang's GTC 2025 Keynote: The extreme edge of technical pedagogy and corporate data-dumping.
4. Carole Cadwalladr's TED Talk: Global political advocacy representing the challenge of making invisible, highly abstract data visceral and human.

AXA is treated as one communication case represented by two related artifacts because the documentary and award case film narrate the same intervention differently.

Artifacts were selected for methodological variation rather than statistical representation. The corpus includes social-impact communication, humorous commercial communication, technical corporate communication, political advocacy, public education, and instructional speech. It is therefore appropriate for testing discrimination across forms, but not for estimating how common the constructs are in public communication generally.

Results

The pilot confirms that the architecture of human connection relies entirely on the structural mechanisms used to organize it. The data indicates that the three constructs can be applied across heterogeneous artifacts, but not with equal strength or in identical form. Theme is the most portable construct. Transformation ranges from personal and institutional change to behavioral possibility and technological-system change. Dramatic Arc appears in problem–resolution campaigns, investigative demonstrations, instructional talks, and paradigm-change keynotes.

Table 1
Cross-Artifact Assessment

Artifact	Dramatic Arc (Organizing Attention)	Transformation (Organizing Change)	Theme (Organizing Attention)	Rhetorical Context
AXA (Campaign) documentary/case film	Strong. Establishes a claustrophobic crisis of unresolved pressure before introducing a policy turn.	Strong. Beneficiary moves from danger to recovery; institution changes the meaning of its contract.	Strong. Anchors lethal statistics to the universal human right to safety and dignity.	Elite CSR prevents information fatigue.
GoDaddy case film	Moderate. Problem-intervention sequence driven by commercial narrative.	Moderate. Achieves marketing agency through a self-reliant choice to build a website.	Moderate. Connects digital assistance with performed confidence.	Commercial baseline.
NVIDIA keynote	Strong. Leverages the tension of a technological dead-end to drive toward a resolved future.	Strong. Reframes data centers as AI factories in a systemic production shift.	Strong. Intelligence as a manufactured and distributed industrial model.	Technical exposition; product roadmap
Carole Cadwalladr TED Talk	Strong. Scales a private crisis into a macro-structural emergency ("digital coup")	Strong. Rejects false saviors and transfers heroic agency to the listener ("We are the cavalry now").	Strong. Unifies massive dataset under a simple moral theme: "Data rights are human rights".	High-stakes political advocacy.

AXA: Institutional and Beneficiary Transformation

The AXA case provides the clearest provisional configuration of all three constructs. The documentary and case film establish domestic violence as a condition in which the home becomes unsafe while a victim may lack money or another place to go. A change in insurance wording becomes the institutional turn, enabling emergency relocation and support.

The arc is a problem–intervention–resolution sequence. Transformation occurs at two levels: the beneficiary moves from danger toward refuge and recovery, while the institution changes the meaning and function of its contract. Theme centers around protection, safety, dignity, and the idea that a small contractual change can produce a meaningful refuge. The interpretation remains qualified by brand-purpose framing and campaign promotion.

GoDaddy: A Resistant Case

The GoDaddy case film is important because it does not cleanly support the complete framework. It contains a comic premise, a business-launch backstory, campaign escalation, and a Super Bowl payoff. This creates moderate arc-like organization, but the sequence may be better explained as campaign chronology built around celebrity and novelty.

Transformation is moderate. The film suggests movement from launching a business to gaining public visibility, but it does not clearly establish a protagonist's initial state, sustained pressure, recognition, and consequential changed state. Theme is more plausible through the repeated proposition Act Like You Know, which connects AI assistance with performed confidence. However, the phrase may function more directly as brand positioning than as a value structure. The case demonstrates that the protocol can decline to confirm a construct rather than discovering drama everywhere.

NVIDIA GTC: Systemic Transformation

The NVIDIA keynote tests the framework in long-form technical communication. Its candidate arc begins with the history of accelerated computing and an AI inflection point, introduces pressure through growing computational demand, presents architectural and software responses, and extends those responses into cloud, enterprise, robotics, and future infrastructure. It is better understood as a paradigm-change sequence than as a conventional character plot.

Transformation is strongest at the systemic level. Data centers are reframed as AI factories; enterprise software, storage, engineering work, and robotics are represented as changing within a new production model. The theme is that intelligence is becoming something manufactured and distributed through accelerated-computing infrastructure. Technical exposition, product-roadmap logic, investor communication, and sales-platform functions remain powerful alternative explanations. The dramatic interpretation supplements rather than replaces them.

TED Talks: Different Rhetorical Tasks

TED Talk of Cadwalladr shows recurrent structure serving different purposes. Cadwalladr moves from personal vulnerability to a broader warning about digital power and then to collective agency. Cadwalladr's advocacy requires factual verification independent of its dramatic organization.

Configurations Rather Than a Universal Formula

The most defensible pilot result is configurational. AXA combines a strong problem–turn–resolution structure with institutional and beneficiary transformation. GoDaddy combines moderate chronology and a memorable brand idea with weak transformation. NVIDIA combines paradigm change, systemic transformation, and technical exposition. The TED Talk combines testimony, investigation and advocacy. The framework is therefore more useful as a set of comparative questions than as a universal three-step formula.

Discussion

When humans are bombarded with raw data, our evolutionary instinct is to physically and mentally shut down to avoid cognitive fatigue. However, when meaning is established through Theme, attention is organized through the Dramatic Arc, and change is structured through the Transformative Journey, communicators successfully prevent cognitive overload. A profound rhetorical mechanism uncovered in this research is Audience-Protagonist Transference. Cadwalladr's TED Talk demonstrates this masterfully; by looking directly at the audience and declaring, "We are the cavalry now," the message ceases to be an external broadcast. The audience transitions from passive observers into empowered protagonists with a clear behavioral mandate. The framework forces them to act. Even in the laboratory of extreme rhetoric—such as Jensen Huang's two-hour tech keynote—the dramatic arc holds. Beneath the avalanche of silicon specs and product roadmaps, Huang relies on a massive macro-dramatic arc to hold his investors' attention, proving that these structures are a biological necessity for human attention. The three constructs provide a shared vocabulary while retaining medium, purpose, and context. Dramatic Arc asks how the message moves; Transformation asks what changes and at what level; Theme asks what larger meaning makes the parts cohere.

Conclusion

The verdict of this research is undeniable: the architecture of human connection does not rely on the volume of information delivered; it relies entirely on the structural mechanisms used to organize it. Dumping raw, sterile data points trigger immediate cognitive friction, asking the evolutionary machinery of the human brain to do heavy lifting it was never designed to do. When we utilize this rigorous, three-element scaffold—Theme, the Dramatic Arc, and the Transformative Journey—we bridge the gap between hard data and deep human empathy. Wim Wenders used it to make the world fall in love with Tokyo public sanitation. Carole Cadwalladr used it to sound the alarm on global democracy. Tech pioneers use it to make microchips feel like a new industrial revolution. These dramatic forms are not decorative flourishes from the arts department; they are vital, evolutionary cognitive frameworks and the native language of human comprehension, behavioral change, and collective trust. If you want your audience to just hear you, give them data. But if you want them to connect with you, to trust you, and to follow you, build them an architecture.

Limitations and Recommendations

The pilot study has several limitations. The sample is purposive and small, and several artifacts were selected because they were highly visible or widely recognized. Future research should therefore include ordinary or lower-visibility artifacts matched by medium, topic, period, and intended audience. The immediate recommendation is to treat the framework as an auditable contribution to instrument development and to test its explanatory value through a larger multimodal study. Paul Zak's work on trust and empathy offers useful biological context for this extension, particularly in relation to how oxytocin supports human connection.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT and Gemini were used to assist with manuscript restructuring and in the research workflow process to support source inventory, segmentation, and

provisional qualitative coding. All theoretical claims, source selections, analytical decisions, interpretations, and final wording were reviewed and remain the responsibility of the author.

References

Aristotle. (1996). *Poetics* (M. Heath, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published ca. 335 BCE).

Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/448619

Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Pantheon Books.

Denning, S. (2005). *The leader's guide to storytelling: Mastering the art and discipline of business narrative*. Jossey-Bass.

Escalas, J. E. (2004). Narrative processing: Building consumer connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14*(1–2), 168–180. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP1401&2_19

Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs, 51*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758409390180

Gallo, C. (2014). *Talk like TED: The 9 public-speaking secrets of the world's top minds*. St. Martin's Press.

Schechner, R. (2013). *Performance studies: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Zak, P. J. (2015). Why inspiring stories make us react: The neuroscience of narrative. *Cerebrum*, *2015*, Article 2.

Contact email: wankwan.pol@mahidol.ac.th

Recursive Making and an Epistemology of Process
Palimpsest: a multi-layered record

Joshua Wilder Oakley, California State University, Los Angeles, United States

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This practice-led case study examines recursive making as a non-linear model of iteration in design. While design discourse often treats iteration as refinement toward a resolved artifact, *Palimpsest: a multi-layered record* reframes making as structured through repetition, material alteration, and accumulation rather than linear improvement, hypothesizing that repetition under fixed conditions produces divergence rather than convergence. Across more than fifty weekly sessions over four semesters, twenty-seven source images underwent repeated cycles of fixed reproduction settings and controlled material interventions—such as tearing, stapling, painting, and saturation—followed by re-capture. Both analog and digital states were archived without curation. When legibility across the set reached sustained abstraction, a system-wide intervention was initiated: an earlier iteration was reintroduced through multiple exposure, projection, or scanning across all twenty-seven images. Comparative analysis tracked shifts in legibility, divergence under identical conditions, and the effects of accumulated material history on subsequent outputs. This process shows that in recursive making, repetition under fixed conditions does not produce consistency. As material history accumulated, outputs diverged, legibility shifted non-linearly, and prior forms returned only in altered states. Meaning was generated through comparison across iterations, with earlier versions materially influencing subsequent production rather than remaining static records. These findings intervene in contemporary models of design that equate repetition with refinement and closure. By demonstrating that recursive making generates relational knowledge through accumulation rather than progression, this study calls for reconsideration of how process, archive, and duration are evaluated within design inquiry.

Keywords: design, design-research, design-practice, epistemology, recursive making

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

This paper aims to show that knowledge can be generated through making, through designing, and through the process of creating. Knowledge does not appear fully formed at the beginning of the process. Nor does it reside at the end in a fully polished deliverable. Instead, it is something that emerges and accumulates through the process of inquiry—of experimentation, of curiosity, of testing—through material engagement and through the in situ synthesis of findings.

For the purposes of this paper, there are two overarching approaches to design colloquially called lowercase-d design and Capital-D Design.[1] The first refers to the traditional, teleological path toward producing deliverables for a client. In this ontology, the process of iteration is for the express purpose of refinement. The second, Capital-D Design, aligns with what Nigel Cross argues as a "designerly way of knowing" (Cross, 1982, p. 221), which values process as knowledge-bearing.

Palimpsest: a multi-layered record argues against using iteration solely for the purpose of refinement. This inquiry-based system shows that within process itself, divergence, accumulation, instability, residue and altered return can be knowledge-bearing. At its core, *Palimpsest* is a recursive image-making system and active archive that began as a reflective look at my experiences with chronic pain conditions. Because lived experience, material process and knowledge production could not be cleanly split, the system and archive developed into an inquiry-driven, practice-led, embodied research project. However, it is important to note that pain was the catalyst and the system was not developed to heal or for therapeutic reasons.

What I became the most interested in while this system was developing was this: what kind of knowledge emerges through recursive making under fixed conditions over time? In other words, what happens when the design process becomes non-linear, anti-teleological and resists closure? *Palimpsest* demonstrates that repetition under fixed conditions does not produce consistency because the fixed conditions themselves are not neutral. Knowledge emerged when plates diverged and legibility shifted within a layer. This divergence led to the epistemic mechanism of material comparison across plates and layers. Finally, when the archive became active, through the reintroduction of earlier layers, these returned only in altered states.

Context and Framework

Because this paper frames Capital-D Design as process-based and reflective, I argue that it can be framed as epistemic. Bruce Archer argues that there "[is] a designerly way of thinking and communicating" (Archer, 1979, p. 17) that moves Design beyond applied service and into knowledge production. Design, then, is distinct from science and from the humanities. I argue that it is its own method of knowledge production that is rooted in active inquiry and constructive making.

Palimpsest sits squarely within this framework. It rejects the ontology of lowercase-d design and instead embraces knowledge production through inquiry and process. Nithikul Nimkulrat argues that a knowledge of a practice comes from within the practice itself, in other words, the

[1] I use both terms lowercase-d design and Capital-D Design as disciplinary shorthand rather than formal categories attributable to a single theorist. In this paper, lowercase-d design refers to deliverable-oriented design practices, while Capital-D Design refers to process-driven, epistemic practices.

act of creating generates knowledge (Nimkulrat, 2012, p. 2). In this paper, the claim becomes methodological: recursive making is not merely an art practice, personal expression or documentation. Instead, it becomes the object of research and study and is also the source from which knowledge accumulates and emerges.

Methodology: Recursive Making as a System

Because *Palimpsest* utilizes specific internal labels, I define key terms here before I describe the methodology.

- **Source Plates:** Initial 27 analog units, the origin point for the archive.
- **Plate(s)**: Individual printed/captured units in both analog and digital forms; i.e. IMG_01_01, TRC_01_01, MM_01_01
- **Image(s):** Refers to the visual/captured state of Plates.
- **Print(s):** References specifically to analog paper output.
- **Layer(s):** References the iteration number, or accumulated state, of a weekly set of plates.
- **IMG:** References the photo-based body-part set of plates.
- **TRC:** References the tracing-based body-part set of plates.
- **MM:** References the mind map tracing set of plates.

At its core, *Palimpsest* is a recursive image-making system based on 27 source plates. These are organized by three archival labels IMG, TRC, and MM. In the first category, IMG, we have eight photographs of my body parts most affected by pain symptoms (Fig. 1). The photographic representation becomes a metaphor for how I present to the world. The second category, TRC, is those same photographs traced by hand. The tracing and the abstraction represent how I feel in the world (Fig. 2). The third category MM, consists of 11 tracings of an initial mind map (Fig. 3). Taken together these 27 source plates are the base of the project.

Figure 1

Eight Initial Starting Images

Note. Top row l to r: IMG_01_01 - IMG_01_04; bottom row: IMG_01_05 - IMG_01_08

Figure 2

Eight Initial Tracings

Note. Top row l to r: TRC_01_01 - TRC_01_04; bottom row: TRC_01_05 - TRC_01_08

Figure 3
Eleven Initial Mind Map Tracings

Note. Top row l to r: MM_01_01 - MM_01_04; middle row: MM_01_05 - MM_01_08; bottom row: MM_01_09 - MM_01_11

The mind map and tracing need clarification as both are fundamental registers to the project. The mind map was the genesis of the project, built as an attempt to externalize a non-linear structure of pain. Within that structure, the MM plates came to represent the memory, association, and embodied thought that accompanies the experience of chronic pain. I photographically captured the initial physical structure pinned to a board as an image and traced the outline and shape of the note cards and string, creating an abstract representation. Both the act of tracing and the result of it became another register of perception, simultaneously a thing and an action. Once the first 27 plates were complete, they entered the system—and archive—as material trace.

Before I describe the operational aspects of *Palimpsest*, I want to frame it first as an embodied archive. At its core, the system is image-making, driven by inquiry. However, the work is more dynamic than just images; the work is the behavior of the system and the archive over time. Knowledge emerges here, not only through the recursive nature of repetition, but through the material conditions, material interventions and the accumulated history of these actions. To

understand the behavior, we must first describe and define the fixed conditions under which *Palimpsest* operates.

Fixed Conditions

Fixed Condition Terms

- **Capture/Recapture:** Initial capture, and activation of system, by iPhone. Recapture method varies: digital camera, iPhone, scanner, and 35mm film.
- **Print/Reprint:** Always printed on 11x14 tracing paper.
- **Material Intervention:** Pre-planned variable, mechanical and/or analog intervention applied to each newly printed plate.
- **Time:** The recursive cycle occurs no more than once a week.
- **Archive:** Both analog and digital states are archived without curation. The archive itself is not a fixed condition, but the result of the system operating under fixed conditions.

These constraints were not arbitrary. Though these conditions are labeled fixed, they are fixed only insofar as they are the prescribed steps of the process. This intentionality created a repeatable methodology. Despite the fixed conditions, the output was anything but neutral. This allowed divergence to accumulate, revealing the system's behavior over time. In lowercase-d design, fixed conditions are often used to produce consistent, polished products. *Palimpsest* counters this by valuing divergence as knowledge-bearing.

Non-neutrality of Fixed Conditions

The system takes on the nature of the Ouroboros at layer two, after the first recursion has occurred. After this point, it becomes impossible to pinpoint a starting or finish point—as each plate and layer is supplied by the past and feeds the future. The palimpsest emerges from this recursion, a multi-layered record, carrying the past forward in altered form. Because the fixed conditions are non-neutral, each cycle does not simply reproduce the past. Instead, it alters what comes next. As a result of the ouroboric nature of the recursive system, it is nearly impossible to begin to describe one fixed condition without needing to refer backward or forward. For the purposes of this paper, I will begin with the capture method and work forward.

Capture

As mentioned, the Source Plates were captured by iPhone. Later, other capture methods also became part of this fixed condition including the use of 35mm film, flatbed scanner, and DSLR. At the surface level, these methods of capture may seem like the fixed condition most likely to remain neutral in their output; however, there are multiple conditions that challenge this assumption. First, the capture occurs once and only once. This is not a typical photo shoot where the best shot is used. If an image came out blurry or in harsh conditions, this was the output that became part of the archive. Second, as with any camera and lens, optical distortion occurs because of the shape of the lens. Lastly, even within a studio setting, subtle atmospheric variations affect the output; the harsh fluorescent lighting combined with the changing natural light conditions produced subtle, nuanced variations. Each method, whether DSLR, scanner or film, would each impart its own distinct output variations, some more blatant than others. These rules are deliberate. They kept curation at bay and forced variability to the surface from a fixed condition. This reinforced the concept that the process itself was the work. The layers held equal value as residue of the process.

Printing

Printing produced the most frequent and most blatant forms of non-neutrality from a fixed condition. As stated, each plate is printed on 11x14 tracing paper using a large format inkjet photo printer.[2] The printer itself is a workhorse, designed to produce gallery-quality images, with one caveat—the paper. Because I used tracing paper, the machine—and thus the fixed condition—was destabilized. The printer generally handled one or two plates without issue, but when 27 were stacked in the queue, reliability was volatile. While I cannot diagnose the exact behavior of the machine, it was explained by tech support that heat and friction have a tendency to interact poorly with thin substrates. Therefore, the condition of the output was left to chance with an array of outcomes from pristine to shredded. Much like the rule about one shot per capture method, the rule was the same for the printer—one sheet per plate, no matter the condition.

Material Intervention (as a Mode of Inquiry)

Once the new set of plates (layer) emerged from the printer, the next step in the system was the material intervention. Each week—taking inspiration from Sol LeWitt's Wall Drawings—I would predefine an inquiry before the layer emerged from the printer; this kept the intervention from becoming corrective (LeWitt, 1967, p. 17). It is important to clarify that though the material intervention acts as a fixed condition operationally, its purpose is distinct: to impart deliberate change as a mode of inquiry. Before I describe the different categories of interventions it is important to note that these are executed through analog or mechanical methods, not through software intervention. This became foundational. To be clear, software editing is a valid workflow, especially for efficiency, but the outcomes are usually more controllable and correctable. For *Palimpsest*, the focus was on inquiry, on the process, not the outcome. Thus the no software rule was established at the project's onset.

For the purpose of this paper, analog is defined as an intervention completed by hand: examples include tearing, painting, drawing, saturating, and sewing. Mechanical is defined as an intervention through the use of an apparatus or machine, like a stapler, or multiple exposure in camera, as well as layering/overlays in capture. Though these methods are distinct execution modalities, there are many examples of both being used to complete the intervention.

In addition to the distinction between mechanical and analog as the way in which interventions were performed, I found it necessary to further sub-categorize the material interventions by type. As with the two main categories, there is also fluidity between these subcategories resulting in overlap. The purpose of the categories is not to impose strict taxonomy, but to provide both informational and analytical organization. The categories by type include the following:

- **Capture-based interventions:** These change how the image is recorded.
- **Substrate-based interventions:** These change the physical paper.
- **Repair / binding interventions:** These respond to rupture or fragmentation.
- **Surface interventions:** These alter opacity, color, texture, or legibility.
- **Archival / reintroduction interventions:** These bring earlier states back into the system.

[2] Printing was completed using Canon imagePROGRAF PRO-series (1000, 1100) large-format inkjet photo printers.

It is important to note that the individual fixed conditions can also impart mechanical interventions. Among these, there are several ways that this can occur depending on the fixed condition involved. The first avenue would be the predefined mechanical intervention with a more controlled output. For instance, while making a multiple exposure with a DSLR, the action is performed by me and there is instant feedback on the screen, but the final overlay emerges through the apparatus. In contrast to multiple exposure performed on a film camera, where there is no instant feedback, chance is built into this scenario. Lastly, in the case of the printer, a mechanical intervention can emerge unplanned, but will still be absorbed into the system. As stated, these categories are not discrete taxonomies of the interventions; overlap does occur. It is often in these overlaps where the most visually striking changes emerge.

Time

Time is the last fixed condition. Within the already established ontology of lowercase-d design, the market and revenue demand fast turnarounds. *Palimpsest* deliberately resists that tempo by allowing the recursive system to occur no more than once per week. This temporality allows time for not only making, but reflection on the process as well.

Recursive Cycle

Now that we have established the fixed conditions of the recursive system, we can see how it operates: 27 source plates were captured by iPhone, printed on 11 x 14 tracing paper, materially intervened upon, and recaptured once more. Each week the system produced 27 new plates that had been materially altered and reprinted on the same substrate in the same manner. As a result of these fixed conditions, the archive—in both analog and digital forms—was established to document and preserve the knowledge that emerged through the behavior of the system over time.

Archive as an Active System

Palimpsest began from a place of inquiry. There was no plan in place to build such a robust system. However, allowing the privilege of time to engage in process, allowed room for further inquiry. The result of this was several weeks' worth of layers and the organic beginnings of what I have come to call the active archive. Both analog and digital plates were catalogued and archived without curation. Initially, I had not thought much about what an archive was. I think I would have labelled it as a noun, as a repository of artifacts. However, as I will discuss in the findings, what I soon came to realize is that archives can be active sources of knowledge—in this case, through the reintroduction of previous layers as source material for future layers.

Analysis: Divergence, Accumulation, and Altered Return

Finding 1: Fixed Conditions Did Not Produce Fixed Outcomes

The conditions of the system themselves were fixed. 27 source plates were captured, printed, materially intervened upon, recaptured and then printed again. Each layer would be printed—from the same machine—on 11x14 tracing paper. Because of the repeated actions of the fixed conditions, one might expect stable, repeatable outputs. However, the fixedness itself belongs solely to the action of the condition, while the output was anything but neutral.

Because of the ouroboric nature of the project—once the recursion has begun, there is no true starting point—I will begin with the capture method. All modes of capture—various digital cameras (DSLR, iPhone etc.), film camera and scanner—produce nuanced reproductions that are never a true copy of the original. Camera lenses will capture light that reads as subtle atmospheric distortion, while the shape of the glass may also warp images. Scanners can also distort depending on resolution, contact with the substrate, exposure, and compression. Of the fixed conditions, the capture method produces the most subtle and nuanced of the non-neutral outputs.

The print/reprint is the least neutral fixed condition and the biggest opportunity for chance within the system, which is ironic because within the ontology of lowercase-d design, the printer is what produces consistency. But here, it can print a perfect plate and then destroy the next despite consistent settings and operation. The substrate plays a major role here in that inconsistency and the non-neutrality of the output as the printer does not seem equipped to produce on such a thin material. The foundational rule—whatever emerges from the printer, in whatever condition it is in, is what is used—ensures that these non-neutral outputs are absorbed with equal weight and value into the archive. Because of the relationship between the printer and substrate, this fixed condition—print/reprint—is responsible for the majority of unintentional divergence.

The material intervention is only fixed in that it occurs as a prescribed step in the system. It is the fixed condition responsible for the majority of intentional divergence—as a primary site of inquiry. By nature, the material intervention imparts non-neutral outputs.

Time sits as the last remaining fixed condition within the system. While time itself does not actually produce non-neutral outcomes, it does allow for them to become visible within the system. Additionally, though *Palimpsest* is produced in chronological week-to-week making, it resists the linear path toward iterative refinement. This temporal resistance provides an allowance of space—against the often rapid timelines within lowercase-d design projects—for the non-neutrality of the other fixed conditions to rise to the surface and become visible through repetition.

These fixed conditions are only fixed in the action they provide—not in the output. This matters because we take for granted that when we hit print, what comes out will be uniform, whether it's two copies or two hundred copies. We are taught to value this uniformity. This project demonstrates that fixed conditions do not equate to fixed outcomes. Much of lowercase-d design privileges reproducibility and consistency as markers for effective design outcomes. *Palimpsest* offers a rigorous counternarrative.

Finding 2: Material History Accumulated and Altered Future Iterations—the Archive Becomes Active

Palimpsest resists teleological resolution. It assigns equal value to each plate and layer. It does not look toward a polished deliverable as closure. This assignment allows material history to be accumulated, which, in turn, alters future iterations. Again, the Ouroboric structure plays a key role here. Once the recursive cycle is in motion, it is almost impossible to start to describe a plate or layer without needing to refer back to the previous—by nature the system carries, or traces, material history from the past forward into the future.

Prior to *Palimpsest*, my thoughts on archives were that they were repositories for artifacts, a place for things. What I have found is that an archive can be a verb. It can be an active, knowledge-producing source. Because of the recursive nature of the project and the natural material degradation that occurred through the process, when a material intervention was applied that required a "remembering" through material history, the archive became active: its historical source material traces forward into future iterations. This activation of applying an earlier iteration onto a current layer—not in the hopes of restoration, but of altered return—generated a new material accumulation.

This is evident in the altered return of projecting the past onto the future in layer 50. In Fig. 4 we can see MM_07_49 taped against a wall with a projection of an earlier plate across it. The example clearly shows that the damaged substrate of MM_07_49 could no longer fully contain the projection; tears and curled edges allowed fragments of the altered past to pass through the paper and register directly onto the wall behind it, thus altering MM_07_50 and future iterations with the materially accumulated history of a previous iteration. The archive activates by remembering itself through the reintroduction of material traces. But those traces always return altered, so the system grows without ever resolving. The system itself changed, the archive changed, but it never resets.

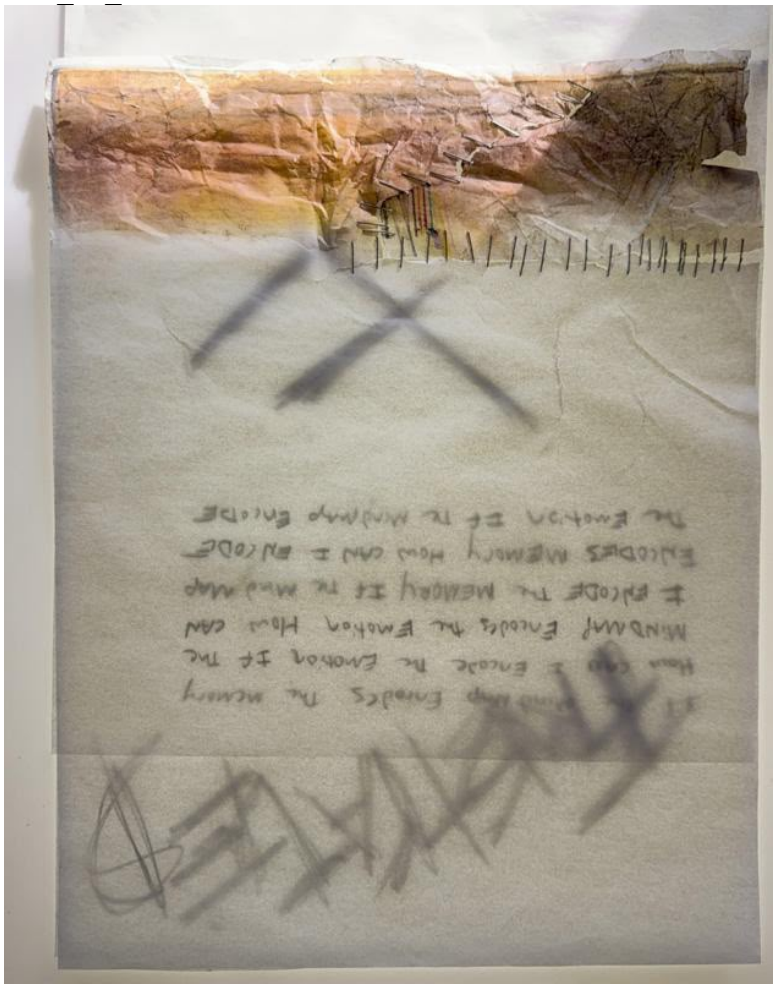
Figure 4

MM_07_50

Note. Showing MM_07_49 taped to a wall while an earlier archival plate is projected across it. Tears and curled edges in MM_07_49 allow the projected image to pass through the damaged substrate and register on the wall behind it.

Additionally, the archive became active when the system unintentionally produced brand new materiality in the form of MM_46_12 (Fig. 5). After printing the complete sets of IMG/TRC for layer 46, I started the process for printing the MM and left the room. When I returned, the MM process was complete, but the wind had strewn them about the studio. Gathering them up, several were torn, one was ripped completely in half and barely printed—but there were 12 instead of 11. I matched each physical plate to the digital version and was left with an extra. The 12th sheet was less than half-printed and ripped into two pieces from the printer, in other words, completely illegible. But because of the cardinal rule—whatever came out of the printer in whatever condition it was in was to be used—the system produced a new plate and the archive absorbed that as new knowledge in MM_46_12.

Figure 5
MM_12_46



Note. The unplanned twelfth mind map plate generated in week 46. The image also captures studio ephemera through superimposed typography, showing how contextual material can enter the digital archive without becoming part of the analog substrate.

Finding 3: The Analog and Digital Archives are Asynchronous

Palimpsest is archived in both digital and analog states without curation. However, each state represents divergent material accumulations. The physically archived iteration never matches the digital because of both material intervention(s) and the non-neutrality of fixed conditions. This becomes visible in the use of studio ephemera that is captured digitally when imprinted

upon the analog layer. However, unlike a physical imprinting that leaves an indelible trace on the substrate, the ephemera is captured through projection or multiple exposure and does not impart physicality to the analog state (Fig. 5, once more).

Likewise, when layer 46 produced a 12th mind map, the digital archive absorbed this new knowledge. This divergence in material accumulation begins to produce new knowledge. This emergence tested the system when faced with the rule of reintroducing a previous layer to the present with layer 49. MM_49_12 had no material history to look back towards in the way every other layer did. Therefore, the genesis, the actual physical mind map, was introduced into the system, without abstraction, directly as material trace and emerged as MM_50_12 (Fig. 6).[3]

Figure 6
MM_12_50

Note. Because the unplanned twelfth mind map plate first emerged in week 46, it had no earlier iteration to project across it. As a result, the original physical mind map was introduced into the system as material history for this plate.

[3] The original physical mind map is the genesis of this project. However, once the abstracted tracings were created, the original map no longer operated as the primary source material. Its direct autobiographical content was too literal for the project in a way that the images of my body were not. The tracings replaced the literal with the abstract.

Discussion: Process as Epistemology

Much of lowercase-d design privileges reproducibility and consistency as markers for effective design outcomes. In this model repetition is often used to refine. *Palimpsest* shows repetition can produce divergence and that instability is not failure; degradation, residue, and altered return are also knowledge-bearing. In this project thinking did not precede making. Instead theory emerged through practice and knowledge emerged through duration, labor, and comparison. *Palimpsest* began from embodied experience. Its purpose was not as a form of therapy or healing; rather, the recursive-making system became a way of processing lived conditions as material inquiry.

In *Palimpsest* the archive is not passive storage; it is not simply a repository of artifacts. Here, the archive becomes a verb. It becomes active. In both digital and analog forms, the archive re-enters the system through process and in doing so it produces relational knowledge between plates and layers. The Oxford English Dictionary partially defines a palimpsest as "...a multilayered record" (definition 2.b.). The relational knowledge of this project is that multilayered record. *Palimpsest* expands what can count as design knowledge by treating process, archive, and material accumulation as epistemological structures. Process became the evidence of design knowledge. *Palimpsest* is anti-teleological in nature and resists closure. While lowercase-d design primarily places value in a polished deliverable, the ouroboric nature of *Palimpsest* places value in the process of recursive making.

Conclusion

Palimpsest remains ongoing. Its value is not in final resolution; rather, it lies in showing that process itself becomes the site of knowing. Here, recursive making under fixed conditions produces divergence, accumulation, and relational knowledge. It does not ask what design becomes when process reaches resolution; it asks what becomes knowable when process is allowed to remain active. Across each iteration, through each inquiry, the system did not move toward resolution, toward closure, and certainly not toward perfection. It generated divergence, altered returns, active archival behavior, and literally created new forms that were not present at the outset.

The system did not simply preserve knowledge; it generated new knowledge. Each iteration became a palimpsest remembering material accumulation. Taken together, those 27—and now 28—individual archives, each existing in both analog and digital form, comprise the project's total active archive. In other words, repeated inquiries into recursive making under fixed conditions did not produce consistency; they produced knowledge through the behavior of the system over time.

This project changes what process is allowed to mean. If iteration, in lowercase-d design, is assumed to lead toward refinement, then anything that does not become cleaner, clearer, or more resolved can be dismissed as failure, noise, or wasted labor. *Palimpsest* argues otherwise. This inquiry-based process shows that divergence, accumulation, instability, residue, and altered return can also be knowledge-bearing. In other words, process itself—the act of recursive making—becomes an epistemology. Inquiry-based process gives designers, researchers, and educators another way to understand what happens when work does not behave linearly. It makes room for inquiry instead of only solution, accumulation instead of only progression, embodied process instead of detached output, and reflection on what emerges rather than only control over what is intended.

More specifically, it matters because many people are trained to believe that if a process does not move cleanly toward a finished product, then it has failed. *Palimpsest* offers a rigorous counterexample to that ontology. This leaves me with this central question: what happens when we allow inquiry-driven process, rather than resolution, to be the site of knowing?

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

References

Archer, B. (1979). Design as a discipline. *Design Studies*, *1*(1), 17–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/0142-694X(79)90023-1

Cross, N. (1982). Designerly ways of knowing. *Design Studies*, *3*(4), 221–227. https://doi.org/10.1016/0142-694X(82)90040-0

LeWitt, S. (1967, June 1). Paragraphs on Conceptual Art. *Artforum*, *5*(10), 79.

Nimkulrat, N. (2012). Hands-on intellect: Integrating craft practice into design research. *International Journal of Design, 6*(3), 1–14.

Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). *Palimpsest, n. & adj.* In *Oxford English Dictionary*. oed.com

Contact email: joshua@joshuawilderoakley.com

Writing the Bombay Plague: Illness and Gendered Vulnerability in Lakshmibai Tilak's *Smritichitre*

Ananya Chatterjee, Indian Institute of Technology Indore, India
Aratrika Das, Indian Institute of Technology Indore, India

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The Bombay plague outbreak of 1896 in colonial India marks a pivotal point in South Asian socio-political and medical history. As administrative interventions increasingly associated disease management with surveillance, segregation and quarantine of colonised Indians (Arnold, 2022), the nationalist politics, body autonomy and public health converged and intersected in complex ways. This article situates Lakshmibai Tilak's autobiography *Smritichitre* (1936, tr. 2017) against this backdrop to highlight how life writing provides critical insights into epidemic experience. Drawing on the theoretical framework of critical medical humanities (Viney et al., 2015), which recognises the complex distribution of illness across clinical and extra clinical spaces, the article foregrounds how contextualising the lived experience of plague within the domestic space highlights the gendered vulnerabilities induced by the disease. Lakshmibai's autobiography becomes a meaning-making medium as she vividly recounts the instances of epidemic governance through descriptions of house-to-house visitations, railway inspections, forceful removals and her stay in the plague camp. The narrative becomes an affective register of her negotiations with medical authorities, fear of the disease and acts of care. *Smritichitre* textualises embodied moments of profound crisis of an individual suffering the plague, that disrupts everyday life. By situating disease within a social worldview, life writing reconfigures the epistemic framework through which the plague outbreak has been historically understood, foregrounding dimensions of disease experience which are otherwise muted in colonial public health historiography.

Keywords: Bombay plague, *Smritichitre*, critical medical humanities, pandemics, narrative

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Infectious disease outbreaks that take pandemic proportions are globally entwined with human history, and also perhaps with the future. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the continued susceptibility of humankind to mortality caused by invisible microbial entities. These outbreaks leave behind a legacy that warrants closer attention because "they are experienced differently from chronic diseases … have been far more devastating and because … their history is far from over" (Snowden, 2019, pp. 2–3). However, while culturally studying pandemics, it is imperative to understand them "as being both expansively global … and, simultaneously, profoundly local" (Arnold, 2022, p. 15). It is this spatial interplay of global and local that is manifested in the third plague pandemic. The plague travelled through colonial trade routes, by means of steamships, spreading from Yunnan province of China, progressing gradually to afflict Hong Kong in 1894 and eventually reaching Bombay in 1896 (Sarkar, 2024, pp. 15–16). As the biomedical disease significantly reshaped the relationship between the colonial state and its subjects, there was an "unprecedented assault upon the body of the colonized" (Arnold, 1993, p. 203), disrupting everyday life. It is within this context that the plague outbreak in Bombay becomes a crucial site to examine the epidemic governance and embodied realities of the disease.

The dominant historiographic studies of third plague pandemic and Bombay plague in particular are enriching political and institutional accounts that have relied on state archives, reports and mortality statistics. However, the experiences of those who suffered and lived through the plague remains relatively unexplored. This is particularly true about colonised Indian women living within colonial and patriarchal structures. Through close reading of Lakshmibai Tilak's autobiography *Smritichitre* (1936; trans. 2017), this article foregrounds the intrusion of plague within the domestic sphere. Lakshmibai's vivid description of plague, is not just a recollection of events of a public health crisis but highlights the affective, embodied and gendered dimensions of plague that remain muted in archives. As Lakshmibai recounts plague through experiences of fear, displacement and negotiations with colonial authorities, her autobiography provides a distinct account of experiential aspects of epidemic governance. This article discusses the globalised framework of plague narrative and highlights the shifting focus of plague historiography towards the local. In attempting to understand the gendered experiences of plague through autobiography, the article aligns with David Arnold's position that decolonising Indian pandemic history requires including "sources that retrieve an Indian voice, a vernacular authority" (2022, p. 11). Embodied narratives allow examining the experience of disease at extra-clinical spaces like railway stations and plague camps. The article uses the framework of critical medical humanities (Viney et al., 2015) and positions plague within such complex entanglements, to understand the disease encounter not only as a biomedical intervention but as being constitutive of the social, political and affective aspects of everyday life.

Shifting Lenses: From Global Pandemic to Local Experiences

The Bombay plague marks a decisive moment where colonial public health, nationalist discourses and body autonomy converged and intersected in complex ways. The tenth international sanitary conference at Venice was dominated by demands to arrest the plague's movement westward or face a trade embargo (Arnold, 2022; Yadav & V.R., 2024). A hastily convened Bombay Plague Committee and the enactment of the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 gave the colonial authorities wide-ranging powers. Inspecting passengers at ports and railway stations, segregation and quarantine of anyone suspected of carrying disease, isolation of

homes and destruction of properties highlighted the "growing predilection for regulatory measures and coercive control" of the colonial state over colonised bodies (Arnold, 2022, p. 79). An unknown deadly disease and the regime's increasing violence resulted in incidents of riots, resistance, mass exodus and most notably the killing of plague commissioner W.C. Rand by Chapekar brothers. Consequently, Bombay plague has occupied a significant space in historical scholarship that has examined the disease through aspects of colonial epidemic governance, technologies of trade and control, and nationalist resistance (Arnold, 1991, 1993; Catanach, 1991, 2001; Echenberg, 2007). Relying mainly on state archives and government reports, these studies have substantially augmented a synchronous understanding of Bombay plague, beyond its biomedical dimensions, but primarily as a component of the wider third plague pandemic.

Recent scholarship has suggested the necessity of an asynchronous approach. The scientific breakthrough in identifying the causative pathogen of plague during the third plague pandemic, transformed the disease into a "transhistorical concept" which caused a set of standard results across spatial and temporal boundaries (Eisenberg & Mordechai, 2020, p. 1632). However, locating the study of plague within the socio-political context of its geographical location highlights independent experiential dynamics. By focused examination on impact of plague containment policies on urban poor and labourers, localised studies by Prashant Kidambi (2004) and Aditya Sarkar (2014), have highlighted the disproportionate application and also the resistance against plague policies. Thus, examining localised instances disrupts synchronous understanding of plague within a globalised framework and defines its impact based on people's experiences of the disease. This requires approaching the disease with a tacit acknowledgement that the "lifecourse of epidemics and that of its afflicted individuals is not the same" (Sivaramakrishnan, 2020, p. 640). Epidemic disease narratives chart the lifecourse of the individuals suffering and surviving in times of widespread crisis.

Priscilla Wald notes that contagion as a concept allows studying the circulation of beliefs in social interactions (2008, p. 2). This places epidemic diseases firmly within the chaotic social realm, where disease interacts with and highlights societal inequities. In the particular context of India, epidemic narratives while highlighting fear, displacement and corporeal vulnerability also foreground the differential disease experiences based on caste, class, religion and gender. Reflecting on the prodding of boundaries by infectious disease outbreaks, Antara Chatterjee argues that the "corporeal body is to be read in relation to the social body, firmly located within the body politic" (2022, p. 248). The representation of the nineteenth century plague outbreak in India and particularly Bombay plague is not just found in state archives but also in colonial Indian print culture through newspapers, pamphlets, vernacular short stories and literary expositions like autobiographical writings. These representations that present plague through vulnerabilities of colonised, challenge the synchronous framework of archive based understanding of plague.

Lakshmibai Tilak's *Smritichitre* (1936; trans. 2017) situates plague within her worldview, a colonised woman negotiating with patriarchal domestic issues, who chooses a path of self discovery and devotion through religion. Gayathri Prabhu notes its uniqueness in early Indian autobiographies by women, highlighting "the emotional and intellectual weight" of Lakshmibai's plague experiences (2020, p. 827). Plague does not appear as a mere backdrop but through her vivid descriptions of house to house inspections, railway station checks and plague camps, highlights the gendered and affective textures of epidemic governance. Lakshmibai's account of epidemic governance while focused on vocabulary of fear, panic and service is also rooted in her own social positionality of being an upper caste Hindu brahmin

woman, who converts to Christianity. *Smritichitre* provides a lens through which plague is rendered visible through the gendered register of plague's disruption as it intruded the domestic space. While women from other religions or castes may have experienced plague related vulnerabilities through the modalities of hierarchy they were part of, this paper introduces the argument that women's life writings like *Smritichitre* reconstruct the experience of plague by revealing fear of displacement, contemporary contestations and negotiations with epidemic governance. This provides a localised perspective to the historiography of plague, where the disease is not just an administrative event of public health but a deeply embodied crisis of everyday life. The conceptualisation of critical medical humanities provides the essential framework for such a study.

Critical Medical Humanities and *Smritichitre*

The asynchronous study of pandemics requires reorienting the methodological focus. As noted by Arnold (2022), in order to retrieve the pandemic history of India, history has to broaden the definition of what it epistemically allows as the evidence. Such sources allow differing voices to appear that "repeatedly interrupts, colonialism's domineering discourse" (p. 11). To understand the social and affective implications of plague, the framework of critical medical humanities by Viney et al. (2015) becomes indispensable. It aims to recognise, question and rework the authorising discourses to "give way to a much richer and more entangled investigation of the bio-psycho-social-physical events that underpin the life, and death, of any organism" (p. 3). It articulates the success of medical humanities as a methodological field but notes that it fails to recognise that illness and health are "complex assemblages of clinical and extra-clinical spaces" (p. 4). The underlying guiding principles are that of complex entanglements and creation of a community that critiques while "holding space for conflicting perspectives and constructive debate" (Johnstone et al., 2026, p. 5). Thus, critical medical humanities calls for unsettling the epistemic boundaries and moves beyond the conception of medical humanities focused on clinical empathy and being a mediating subsidiary between the doctor and patients. This methodological reorientation has particular implications for pandemics and epidemic diseases where boundaries between clinical and extra clinical collapse as an everyday phenomenon. This expands the scope of evidence to narratives that preserve these encounters. The late nineteenth century women's writings emerging in Bombay, offer one such archive.

Recent scholarship in autobiography and life writing studies have moved beyond the euro-centric male canon. Particularly women autobiographies have been a site of recognising active intersectionality, that of, feminist, postcolonial and postmodern theories (Smith and Watson, 2016, p. 6). In colonial Bombay during the late nineteenth century, the reform movement challenged the public-private dichotomy, enabling women to gain a public space. As Meera Kosambi (2007) highlights, the Indian women autobiographies from this time period, approach the boundaries of home and outside as becoming increasingly blurred and highly porous. Highlighting that the autobiography can be representative of a marginalised and suppressed group, Aparna Lanjewar Bose (2020) notes that the autobiographical narrative "becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition" (p. 26). The Bombay plague outbreak as it appears in *Smritichitre* becomes the register of suppression and negotiation with epidemic governance. Arnold notes that the data compiled during plague was exceedingly high and while it was the primary source of information, the sources like native press and personal testimonies provided an "unprecedented articulateness about Indians' plague experience" (2022, pp. 92–93). In *Smritichitre*, Lakshmibai is not merely recording of plague as an event but acknowledging how disease and

epidemic governance reorganised life during the crisis. Reading the autobiography within the clinical medical humanities framework establishes a way of knowing plague that state archives did not accommodate.

Bombay Plague in *Smritichitre*: Fear, Panic and Service

Critical medical humanities argues that disease is not understood isolated within the clinical space as an encounter between the patient and the doctor. It calls for unsettling the boundaries to understand disease is firmly rooted within the social worldview that exists outside the medical space. As the above sections have highlighted, this approach is particularly imperative to understand the pandemics and epidemics. *Smritichitre* as an epidemic narrative demonstrates how autobiographical narratives encode plague, collapsing the boundaries between health and illness, and, the private and the public. The plague burrows itself "rat-like into individual experiences and collective memories" (Arnold, 2022, p. 96). Although Lakshmibai dedicates approximately three chapters of her autobiography to the Bombay plague, she does not mention clear timelines. But through her description, it becomes clear that she is talking about the early years of the disease (Prabhu, 2020, p. 829). This section focuses on three interconnected instances of plague which focus on Lakshmibai's negotiations with epidemic governance highlighting plague's gendered dimensions.

Lakshmibai's narrative interweaves disease within the domestic space. While focusing on her difficult familial situation where she is forced to live separately from her husband due to his recent religious conversion to Christianity, Lakshmibai routinely mentions the ongoing famine, bouts of cholera and measles outbreaks. She also provides repeated instances of her older son Dattu's sickness, whom she tends to devotedly. Through disease entanglement with her familial situation, Lakshmibai highlights her resilience while also foreshadowing the appearance of plague. The first description of the disease appears alongside the conversations about preparations for an auspicious ceremony for Dattu and the growing urbanisation. One of Lakshmibai's relatives who visits Nashik frequently to make arrangements for the upcoming ceremony, remarks that the city is developing to become Bombay and their own town Jalalpur would soon become Nashik. Amidst the happy proclamations, Lakshmibai remarks that the same relative also brought "news of a new disease," characterised by lumps appearing in armpits (p. 184). With this news of the unnamed disease, Lakshmibai begins a series of encounters with epidemic governance and provides an embodied description of plague's affective impact.

She first describes house to house inspection by colonial officials who arrived with village elders. This instance highlights the colonial intrusion inside the domestic sphere to reportedly combat a disease that people and particularly women were unfamiliar with. Thus the loud proclamation of the "saheb is coming" in this instance raises more alarms than the plague itself. Lakshmibai describes the helplessness of women against this incursion, "There were no men-folk in the village … women were running amok through the streets" (p. 187). The palpable fear of women towards this colonial intrusion within the domestic sphere highlights the affective dimension of this sanitary measure. Highlighting collective panic and corporeal vulnerability, Lakshmibai describes the house to house inspection as a disruption of everyday life in the domestic sphere. The household chores were hastily left, children were hidden and women ran away. Lakshmibai's description of her heart beating fast but standing firm with her "hands against the frame door" (p. 187) demonstrates a complex negotiation with the colonial authority. By protecting her household threshold, Lakshmibai presents a calm confrontation

with the colonial official that transforms the protected domestic sphere into an active contested site of epidemic governance.

As she begins her journey to live with her husband, she is confronted with another sanitary measure of epidemic governance, the railway inspections. The bodily movement was under strict surveillance as the colonial authority associated the spread of plague with the corporeal existence of colonised. Lakshmibai describes her panic as Dattu suffers from a slight fever and fears that the authorities might suspect him of plague. This panic was not unfounded, as Arnold describes that even suspicion of symptoms was enough to detain a passenger, highlighting the dictatorial, intrusive and racial nature of this measure through the account of the indignation personally faced by revolutionary Shyami Krishnavarma at one such railway screenings (2022, p. 84). Lakshmibai also describes the railway inspection where the colonial officials like the doctors, sepoys and police created a cordon "to hem people in like cattle in a pen" (192). Heeding another woman's advice, Lakshmibai washes Dattu's hands and feet with water such that it appeared cold on inspection. The brief exchange highlights how epidemic experience was mediated not just through its governance but also through existing informal channels where women shared strategies of survival.

In the above two instances of the house to house inspection and railway inspection, plague appears as a threatening force approaching the domestic sphere and nearly intruding the personal life of Lakshmibai. The episode of plague camps represents the instance when plague finally afflicts the Tilak family and Lakshmibai's daughter Tara gets high fever. By this time, Lakshmibai had been trained to be a nurse and developed an interest in home remedies. Despite her husband's reservations, she also gets the family inoculated. After several days of suffering from the fever, it is confirmed that Tara has plague. The family decides to shift to the quarantine centre and the plague camp becomes the makeshift domestic space where caregiving becomes Lakshmibai's primary role. She offers a vivid portrayal of harsh conditions of the plague camps. The cottages made of tin walls would get extremely cold at night and delirious patients cried loudly, beating those walls. The description of the plague camps is effused with Lakshmibai's own emotional response to the space. She describes the place as terrifying, calling it the kingdom of *Yama* (the Hindu god of death and afterlife). She further notes the inefficient organisation in camp saying "Only ten percent of patients survived" (264). When the doctors declare that Tara may not survive, Lakshmibai covers her daughter in flax seed poultice as her last attempt and turns to devotion. The caregiving act acquires a moral and spiritual significance as she announces that she did everything and if Tara survives, she would dedicate her services to the plague camp. With this proclamation the narrative shifts from individual to collective caregiving. Following Tara's miraculous survival, Lakshmibai and her husband remain at the camp to provide care and service to the patients. Lakshmibai's decision to stay at the same place that terrified her heart demonstrates that the plague camp was not just a site of profound embodied crisis but also reconfigured itself as an extra clinical space where caregiving and community responsibility were actively practiced, making it more than just a colonial institutional site.

Through *Smritichitre*, Lakshmibai encodes the tale of colonised bodies being invaded by plague and then by epidemic governance through "labeling and controlling diseased bodies" (Prabhu, 2020, p. 830). The three instances as discussed above demonstrate the multiplicity of the plague's appearance at varied sites that moves beyond clinical spaces and firmly situates itself within the social worldview of its victims. The ensuing epidemic governance reorganised everyday life. As noted by Arnold, *Smritichitre* "shows one woman's determination to fight the disease through self-help and service to others" (2022, p. 96). Lakshmibai's narrative

highlights the gendered experiences through her active negotiations with the epidemic governance at her house, the railway station and the plague camp. By interweaving the disease with her own emotional expositions, family and religion, *Smritichitre* effectively becomes a register for the lived reality of plague and epidemic governance.

Conclusion

The article does not imply that *Smritichitre* demonstrated political critique of the epidemic governance of Bombay plague. Both Prabhu (2020) and Arnold (2022) acknowledge that Lakshmibai is not overtly critical. She situates the plague within her social worldview, thus the vivid experiences of fear, panic and resilience induced by the disease appear only when she or someone in her family is directly exposed to it. Prabhu remarks that "the urgency of care for her immediate family precludes her from taking the stance of a more public and universal outrage" (2020, p. 833). However, by not being universal, it reveals a deep emotional experience of a woman living through times of plague under a colonial regime. Read through the framework of critical medical humanities, plague in *Smritichitre* is understood to be reorganising everyday domestic life. The textual narrative reveals and supplements institutional archives with lived experience of plague, further deepening the existing synchronous historiographic studies on third plague pandemic.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Indore for providing the requisite research facilities for conducting this research. I am further grateful to the international travel grant by IIT Indore that facilitated the travel to attend Paris Conference on Arts and Humanities 2026.

References

Arnold, D. (1991). *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies.* Manchester University Press.

Arnold, D. (1993). *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India*. University of California Press.

Arnold, D. (2022). *Pandemic India: From Cholera to Covid-19.* Hurst & Company.

Bose, A. L. (2020). *Writing Gender Writing Self: Memory, Memoir and Autobiography*. Routledge.

Catanach, I. J. (1991). Plague and The Tensions of Empire: India 1896–1918. In D. Arnold (Eds.), *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies* (pp. 149–171). Manchester University Press.

Catanach, I. J. (2001). The Globalization of Disease? India and the Plague. *Journal of World History*, *12*(1), 131–153. https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2001.0005

Chatterjee, A. (2022). Caste in Epidemics in India: A Historical and Literary Reading. In S. Venkatesan, A. Chatterjee, A. David Lewis, & B. Callender (Eds.), *Pandemics and Epidemics in Cultural Representation* (pp. 245–266). Springer Nature.

Echenberg, M. J. (2007). *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague, 1894–1901*. New York University.

Eisenberg, M., & L. Mordechai. (2020). The Justinianic Plague and Global Pandemics: The Making of the Plague Concept. *The American Historical Review*, *125*(5), 1632–1667. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa510

Johnstone, F., Morehead. A., & Wiltshire, I. (2026). *Art and the Critical Medical Humanities*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Kidambi, P. (2004). An Infection of Locality: Plague, Pythogenesis and the Poor in Bombay, c. 1896–1905. *Urban History*, 31 (2), 249–67. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926804002135

Kosambi, M. (2007). *Crossing Thresholds: Feminist Essays in Social History.* Permanent Black.

Prabhu, G. (2020). Tropics, Medicine, and Pandemic: The Bubonic Plague in Lakshmibai Tilak's Smritichitre. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 27 (4), 823–835. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isaa175

Sarkar, A. (2014). The Tie That Snapped. *International Review of Social History*, *59*(2), 181–214. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859014000157

Sarkar, N. (2024). *The Last Great Plague of Colonial India*. Oxford University Press.

Sivaramakrishnan, K. (2020). Looking Sideways: Locating Epidemics and Erasures in South Asia. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, *94*(4), 637–657. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2020.0087

Smith, S., & J. Watson. (2016). *Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith & Watson Autobiography Studies Reader*. Michigan Publishing.

Snowden, F. (2019). *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*. Yale University Press.

Tilak, L. (2017). *Smritichitre: the memoirs of a spirited wife* (Shanta Gokhale, Trans.). Speaking Tiger Books. (Original work published 1936).

Viney, W., Callard, F., & Woods, A. (2015). Critical medical humanities: embracing entanglement, taking risks. *Medical Humanities*, *41*(1), 2–7. https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2015-010692

Wald, P. (2008). *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Duke University Press.

Yadav, P., & M. V.R. (2024). The Epidemic Diseases Act (1897): A study of international and domestic pressures on British epidemic policy formation in India. *The National Medical Journal of India*, *37*(2), 101–108. https://doi.org/10.25259/NMJI_420_2023

"Qualitum" History: Post-poststructuralism, the Arts and Humanities, and the Return of Beauty

Albert Pizzaia, Independent Scholar, United Kingdom

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

For over a century Quantum Mechanics has dominated the theoretical discourse of reality, with its strong mathematical arm and hard scientific results, from Bohr to Feynman. Recently though new interpretations have softened the rigid data into much more "humanised" context, e.g. conscious (Penrose), poetical (Wheeler), holistic (Sans Segarra), spiritual (Faggin), musical (Hood), emotional (Rovelli), deep-listening (Oliveros), and even a materialist like Žižek has used artistic narratives as musical variations in exposing his *Quantum History* (2026). This paper will support this softening of tone onto a new post-qualitative inquiry, and at the same time arguing further that the arts and humanities are centre stage if not foundations of reality itself. Given that Post-poststructuralist is suffusing this curren epoch, a new reconstruction of reality is overdue, not only in the form of a proposed return to Structuralism, but this time round one based on the substratum of the arts, and the main superstructure on the humanities. The author of this study intends to further homogenise multidisciplinary discourse from quantum theories to historical and cultural studies, drawing from his extended research: "Resilience of *La Rose En Vie…*" (Pizzaia, 2021); "New Revolutions in the Arts, Humanities…" (Pizzaia, 2022); and "Global Citizenship Based on the Arts…" (Pizzaia, 2025), toward a new history, namely a "qualitum" history: an emergentist, humanist, post-postmodern, and even moralist account, and going as far as speculating the return of Beauty with the capital B. Yes, a Great Beauty, one even greater than the Classical one, inspiring young generations to take a "qualitum" leap forward, making it blossom, and enter life/history anew.

Keywords: "Qualitum" history, Arts and Humanities, post-poststructuralism, poststructuralism, structuralism

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

In this Post-pandemic, Meta-modernist and Post-poststructuralist world, one severely tested by trust breakdown, post-ideology, post-politics and post-truth, it is increasingly difficult to try to defend its merits and talk about a history that chooses quality over quantity, one (world) endowed in true beauty rather than bombarded by mediatic lucrative information further adding fuzziness and uncertainty to the whole enterprise, or a reality already clouded by wave function collapsing in self-doubt. It is increasingly difficult to be positive about the arts and humanities as a premium fixer in a world that is in many cases proud of calling itself in the age of the post human, the meta modern, the trans human and into and all its dehumanising features, with more and more scientists and intellectuals surrendering to these artificialities rather than fight back with core subject knowledge. Given these difficulties "Qualitum" history however challengeable becomes even more than ever a must-discuss matter and one having the right equipment, one would argue, to uplift and rescue the situation from the confusing alternating current of irony vs hype of the present day.

Structuralism and Its "Posts"

The current research climate is really still in search of a stable intellectual space of its own given the chaotic shift of paradigmatic thought. Anthropology and Historiography has shown similar instances; unstable schools have risen from parent schools that seemed more stable. Structuralism for example, seemed a strong school with good postulates like culture and language being understood through strong relation to a structural whole, yet that same enterprise was literally "deconstructed" so successfully in the 1960s by the post-structuralist school most memorably by Foucault challenging Saussure, and Derrida challenging Levi-Strauss (Munslow, 1998, p. 14). That kind of Poststructuralism proceeded down a path parallel with the relativity of Postmodernism influencing the latter one (Butler, 2002, p. 7). But just when everything seemed lost, a recent return to structuralism is emerging in many fields (Faggin, 2024a, p. 15) so much so that scholars are referring today to a "structuralist turn" (Musser, 2026, p. 32), this has raised the possibility of rediscussing new terms of engagement.

Post-qualitative inquiry too has posited research, at least in its methodological level, in a narrower sense reminiscing a return to structuralism and poststructuralism too yet this time round one has a clearer picture of what the old master posts would have set out (Kuecker, 2021, p. 540). Less clear it becomes for the term post-poststructuralism itself, and with the double use of "post", could imply two terms either cancelling each other out or an extreme form of poststructuralism in crisis with no way out (Belsey, 2022, p. 108), hence in both cases it would be more convenient to admit returning to something similar to structuralism itself. This new structuralism is influencing other fields and those of the arts and humanities not excepted. A recent work by Slavoj Žižek goes as far as suggesting a quantum history not afraid in following all various and probable paths, adding variations, in order to make sense of the collapsed wave function of any event (Žižek, 2025, p. 8).

The turn of the millennium and events like September Eleven and the 2008 Market Crash have further contributed to the weaning of Global and Postmodern consumer confidence/confusion (Tooze, 2019, p. 10) narrowing even more the intellectual foundations of permissively possibilities for Generation Z (Shafak, 2020, p. 53). In these circumstances how does one remain critical, sane, good willed, open minded to the future, when there are no longer perceivable foundations on what had no foundations (Rudrum & Stavris, 2015, p. xx). It is all more like walking on the edge of a precipice, one slim mistake, one would argue, and it is all

back to square one. Yet this situation furnishes the perfect opportunity to experiment with what has been always underestimated, namely the nature of the arts and humanities via a post qualitative inquiry whose *locus intellectualis* alternates the metamodernism and the historic, furnishing a glimpse of hope set against other more robust theories (Aagaard, 2022, p. 331).

Qualitum From Quantum

In such a volatile environment one strong theory in particular which has withstood the test of more of a century of laboratory testing, namely quantum mechanics, nevertheless it too also leaves the cloud of probability open to many possibilities, to which only the arts can hold on temporarily. Take for example the quantum mechanics and the idea of an observer needing to be there, or at least something conscientious for things to work out, even the idea of a past retroactively (Žižek, 2025, p. 40) changed by a present has taken full notion but really retroactivity depends less and less on the observer and its actual factor of being conscious and more of the quality of designing, hence the quality of that measurement, hence more quality than share quantity, qualitá, or qualitum super quantum (Van Hagens, 1967, p. 450).

Even in the early history of Quantum mechanics it was noticed that in order to excite electrons out of the or orbit it was not a matter of how many/much photons one would project but rather the colour of light chosen, there was a factor of quality rather than quantity that determined the jumping effect, incredibly the secondary category of qualities of colour could inspire Plunk to set his constant and convince Einstein in changing the theory to packets of energy. The quantum leaping has recently taken second place to quantum superpositions but one should at least see them always together at all times. One can also support the capability and strength of "quantised" past and reality but one will go even further arguing for a return of beauty with the capital b as centre stage of a world "dare-constructed" on the basis of the arts and humanities, namely a "Qualitum" History, one that integrates further the aesthetical qualities of the arts and humanities to a discourse of new study of phenomenon (Hermeren, 2014, p. 317), or a "spiritology" (Pizzaia, 2025, pp. 133-4), if not exorcizing Barthes' "death of the author" (Sim, 2005, p. 192).

Qualitum history banks on the emotional (Evans, 2003, p. 62) and phenomenological and the emergentist part merging in qualitative thinking, in the artistic, in the lived, and in spite of decoherence (Polkinghorne, 2002, p. 44). Employing quantum mechanics there is a narrow margin between quantitative and qualitative research and in finding that gap a post qualitative approach can save the day provided an artistic masterpiece is at hand as *point de capitons* (Freeland, 2003, p. 139). Quantum jumping allows to measure that excess which only a great work of art can emit in creating a history based on its beauty, its own quality, registering that shift of new ideas and influences it emits (Van Gogh, 2025, p. 52).

ZiŽek's *Quantum History* may not talk about quantum leaping as much but in substance it steps into the quality realm more than it let's on, as its discourse is filled with artistic and humanistic object of studies and anecdotes, the employment of the Arts is optimum, eg. Beethoven's 9th, Shumann's 1st, *Hamlet*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Karamazov Brothers* etc all is impressive and makes them works of art pillars of his discourse and this kind of weaving suits the particularly the ability to find medium that can surfs the fragile standing waves of information (Žižek, 2026, p. 13).

The present era, allegedly dominated by metamodernism, postulates a midway between positivism and relativism, between determinism and unaccountability, Modernism and

Postmodernism, quite a task if one takes into account the merging and often shared attributes those two schools still contend and diversify upon and transcend (Bargár, 2021, p. 7). These continuous shifts in boundaries cause frictions in having a Post-qualitiative Inquiry that does not fall into post-humanist traits (Wolfe, 2018, p. 356) and at the same time avoiding to repeat a complete return to structuralism a-la Levis Strauss. It is a major balancing act thought the ideal middle table so theorised by Harman in his Triple O theory (Harman, 2018, p. 10), which this study has been supporting via Dare-construction/Dare-renaissance theory of the author, namely Albert Pizzaia, especially in the art's prominence (Harman, 2019, p. 12) thus further producing a series of alternatives for post-poststructuralism (Pizzaia, 2018, p. 31).

The Power of the Arts

In the *Power of Art* Schama has so eloquently shown how a great work of art is the best and most powerful means to make sense of its cultural, social and even political environment (Schama, 2006, pp. 1–5), as it opens a new world of discussion, not unlike Heidegger's *Aletheia* (Heidegger, 2024, pp. 10–2). Everything else pivots around those great signs of creativity (Bailey, 2017, p. 11), a quantum leap forward as sustained in *How Arts Makes the World* by Spivey (Spivey, 2005, p. 252).

A great work of art can so powerfully reshape the whole of history point blank, from a conglomerate of chaos to a field of great events, and a field of the field can pivot on the standing waves emanated by great works of arts, best grouped into four points of reference, also termed as a "Tetralectics".

Arts and Teteralectics:

Music - emotion
Art - beauty
Literature - knowledge
Film - good (Pizzaia, 2021, p. 33)

The arts have at least four great pillars to rely on without counting its fifth as the synergy of all others (Pizzaia, 2022, p. 39), not unlike the circle of fourths and fifths in western tonality, not unlike the corolla of a flower of five petal, or a rose whose fifth takes you into another emerging corolla. See Also the Expansion of Terralectics into Decaexics, from (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 25). This happens when one is in fields of interconnections where our mind connects rather then in brain locality (Faggin, 2024b, p. 10), The Arts taken in frequency repeatable patterns and cycles across fields and are in turn susceptible to wave formation and can be expanded into a Decaexalectic (Pizzaia, 2025, p. 128).

Expansion of Terralectics into Decaexalectics, from Mona Lisa (Pizzaia, 2026, p.25) part ii:

Music of Music -
Music of Art - beauty
Music of Literature - knowledge
Music of Film - good

Art of Music - emotion
Art of Art - beauty
Art of Literature - knowledge

Art of Film - good

Literature of Music - emotion
Literature of Art - beauty
Literature of Literature knowledge
Literature of film - good

Film of Music - emotion
Film of Art - beauty
Film of Literature - knowledge
Film of Film - good (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 25)

The arts intensify the sentiment of being diverse and alive and create those fields where new standing waves of premium qualities can form:

Qualias from Arts DECAEXALECTICS expansion:

{Intro of Intro} Chaos 1
{intro} Chaos 2
{1} Emotion of emotion
{2} Emotion of Beauty
{3} Emotion of Knowledge
{4} Emotion of good
{5} Beauty of emotion
{6} Beauty of beauty
{7} Beauty of knowledge
{8} Beauty of good
{9} Knowledge of emotion
{10} Knowledge of beauty
{11} Knowledge of knowledge
{12} Knowledge of good
{13} Good of emotion
{14} Good of beauty
{15} Good of knowledge
{16} Good of Good
{concl} Great Beauty
{concl of concl} La Rose en Vie (Pizzaia, 2026, p.30)

All making the core component of *La Rose En Vie.* It is the author's portrayal of a beauty, indeed quite majestic, one certainly with the capital b, a great beauty that includes both beauty and the sublime (Scruton, 2011, p. 61).

The Return of Beauty

The arts then become the vital go-between to trigger and sustain the new structuralism at hand, in a time of chaos, symmetry and "concinnity" are very useful in formulating new frames and even across this history of quality, the return of a Great beauty. A simple observation in art history might help us realise these meeting points: The incredible drawings and paintings in the caves of Chauvet are 34,000 years old. There are 17,000 years between the cave paintings at Chauvet and those just as magnificent ones of the caves of Lascaux, and 17,000 years

between Lascaux and Picasso, by the way this latter aesthetics (Ribeiro, 2015, p. 9) founded his new school on "primitive" art form (Taliaferro, 2011, p. 110). Prehistorical Beauty was there 34,000 years ago and returned 17,000 years ago, and since so much has happened since, Beauty with the capital b returned; who knows how many times in between, and especially in the last 17,000 years. Classical art was only one instance when great beauty came into civilisations; with all its beauty it was only one instance of the whole story (Kul-Want & Piero, 2012, p. 55). Keeping track of great works of arts helps keeping track of history of civilisation. Take an indisputable work of art like none other than *Mona Lisa* (Sassoon, 2001, pp. 80–1). One cannot not feel for Leonardo, a polymath in search of protection, and his incessant search for a place to call home, migrating from court to court (Zöllner, 2003, p. 212), his soul without rest, even at Vinci, his hometown, he was pursued by his siblings over his father's will, and one knows the feelings for that when not even your family supports you. In those precarious circumstance painting a smiling Mona Lisa Gerardini del Giocondo must have been the only quantum of solace, or as it turned out a "qualitum" of solace; the sitter and the painter were smiling at recounting to each other the absurdity and helplessness of life. One often forget how artsts found "qualitum" of solace if not meaning even the unbearable burden of life into their masterpieces (Goudie, 2026, p. 136).

Discoursive Qualia from Mona Lisa's decaexalectic analysis:

intro of intro} Chaos 1
{intro} Chaos 2
{1} Physicalia
{2} Naturalia
{3} Sensation
{4} Perception
{5} Sentiment
{6} Beauty
{7} Knowledge
{8} Understanding
{9} Good
{10} Wisdom
{11} Freedom
{12} Power
{13} Hope
{14} Dare
{15} Care
{16} Donate
{concl} Great Beauty
{concl of concl} La Rose en Vie (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 21)

By sustaining the rich aesthetic discourse matching the equally diverse depth of qualitative culture of the time new topics forms around the unfolding and the interplay of the art work, it becomes clear that the masterpiece transforms and maps on a discourse of its own weaving new discussions and relations, revealing and unravelling new possibilities. The arthritic field is immensely broad, for example The Bronze Head of Ife (Platte & Hambolu, 2010, p. 1) today speaks even more than for the imaginable sums of its parts (Eisenhofer, 2010, p. 6), as it has preceded the Italian Renaissance by almost two centuries, it is a work of great craftsmanship that brings together a deep sense of history, intrinsically rooted in Saharan civilizations

spanning millennia before any other human settlement anywhere to diverse modern micro cultures to transcontinental Panafrica (Hoffman & Friedman, 2024, pp. 50–78).

The Great beauty of the great unknown of that huge period of time has been seen expressed by the contemporary artist Odutola who at the Curve had made up a fictional story of his uniquely painted artworks (Smith, 2020, p. 9), One could argue it was not history, and it was not true, but in the case of Africa, because of the so many thousands of years of humanoids and Homo sapiens there and so many layers of history (Marshall, 2015, p. 28); so any story, here beauty and/or art is still possible (Spring, 2015, p. 16), the wave function of beauty, all piled up onto each other, anything could in fact have happened, beauty transcends time, or as the artist adds:

> History is fascinating, simply by how it is made. It is made by those who deem it to be so. It has nothing to do with what actually happened; it is edited, flourished and peppered with facts and credence…I really like because history is lived. (Odutola, 2020, p. 39)

The best example of the great beauty being extracted from the successions of great works of arts in *La Rose En Vie* is a recent work which reads history in qualitative way, an aesthetically transcending theme employing a "transdiametical" transcendence what has been described as the Dare-renascence in tetralectics recurrences.

Template of Tetralectics:

Music // Emotion // Music History
Art // Beauty // Art History
Literature // Knowledge // Literature
Film // Good // Film History (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 25)

But this is surfing the standing wave rather than collapsing it and that is where Qualitum history has its advantage both in the acting and experiencing a phenomenon. Last year the author's arts and humanities experience through London Summer while guiding agents reinforced the work of art's "Decaexalectic" formation (Pizzaia, 2025, p. 129). That phenomenology had the same structure as the one proposed by the work of art as seen for *Mona Lisa* and *The Bronze Head of Ife*; further reconfirmed when tackling the arts in the third cycle and the humanities in the fourth:

Deca-hexalectics template:

{intro of intro} Chaos 1
{intro} Chaos 2
{1} Physicalia: Emotion of emotion
{2} Naturalia: Emotion of Beauty
{3} Sensation: Emotion etc.,
{4} etc. … (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 25)

The return of beauty is the main guarantee that there has been a real transformative environment, and La Rose En Vie seems has spotted emerging cycles through *the point de capiton* in arts history and the quantum jumping. This is a new venture into "structuralism plus" with "Beauty" as protagonist, in all its humility (Nanay, 2019, p. 106), that very quality that has been missing since Hegel's subordination of art from the absolute, indeed this paper

reclaims that magical and fundamental role of a vibrant artistic rebirth onto Great Beauty, one that has been spotted "historiographically" in *La Rose en Vie*. It should be the business of artists themselves to repropose a return of beauty with the capital b. As it has been pointed out there are Eras and repetitions but the excess that permits the quantum jumping has to come from the great masterpieces, and any great return is the sign of an era, and great beauty with or without the sublime will return, it has been hinted historiographically here but it needs a work of art to set it forth for good as force for good.

Humanities as Sustainability

The Humanities are the glue of the *point de capitons,* history and philosophy not excepted, like gluons for quarks. The Humanities help reinforce human proportion as against excessive progress in technology, helping politics of not becoming empty, helping geopolitics remaining in dialoguing mode, conscientious of problematisation of their deep belief, and an Ethics to remain above any excesses by ruthless algorithms (Galimberti, 2023, p. 23). When Humanities remain guardians of the Arts they also remain in touch with: human essence, order of acquaintance, Pheromone compatibility, love (De Sousa, 2015, p. 42), the other, altruism and there is the domain where Great Beauty dwells (Sandilands, 2023, p. 45).

Every single discipline of the humanities has very malleable qualities that make it sit in the middle any multidisciplinary discourse (Pizzaia, 2021, p. 10), between arts and sciences. Humanities serve well the contested territory of metamodernism, that is the core of the present era. One is always in medias res, as LaREV also affirms throughout the work (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 30), no matter how far, and by that talk even quantum mechanics has its limits, as Žižek believe humanity so smart to have gone further the creator unfinished work. The humanities help filling the mind's middle gap left by other schools, and fill those gaps e.g. this post of the post-post phenomena for example even with the return of beauty of a history with the malleability from quantum into "Qualitum", and in humanities there are a variety of histories of the Arts, eg art history, music history (Arnold, 2020, p. 11). History itself that can cater for a "middleness" that fills that gap, see the great diffusion of art history, Eg History of Arts. History of Music history of literature history of photography, and Religious Studies.

Humanities can offer three dimensions of perspectives that are usually left to two only in the sciences; both humanities and the sciences can look at an object of investigation from a certain a perspective and champion that alone, and both the Humanities and the Sciences can acknowledge the audiences that they are talking to, but only the humanities can take the third dimension (Grimm, Peels, and van Woudenberg, 2025, p. 131). The "middleness" of the humanities becomes a vital continuum and an important developmental tool to sustainability itself as turn of the millennium works has brilliantly theorised in *Sustainable History and the Dignity of Man* (Al-Rodhan, 2009, p. 355) and *the Emphathic Civilization* (Rifkin, 2010, p. 475).

Qualitum History

There are enough elements in the basket to start speaking of Qualitum History, as another great qualia of the humanities is history itself, and given that Structuralism's approach to History Focuses on a single point in time (*Synchronic*) while Post-structuralism focuses on how concepts evolve through history preferring a diachronic approach, therefore if there were to be a new deployment of Qualitum History would be rather diagonal in character, thus absorbing lessons from both coordinates, and as it has been discussed thus far in terms of values, artistic

in essence and foundations. Great Arts's historiography can kickstart and influence other branches of historiography.

Take for example the *The Story of Art* by Gombrich earned him a place to writing a history of the world (Gombrich, 2005, p. 1). The place could have befallen to any political historian but instead it went to an art historian whose historiography seemed to have overall favoured a theory of Western art that resembled reality over many other stories (Freeland, 2003, p. 23). The word story has stuck though, so successful was that work that sometime other authors preferred it to the more official "history", see for example *The Quantum Story* (Baggott, 2016) which has become a staple book on the subject of quantum mechanics but also inspiring other equally important works of art history too for example Katy Hessel's *The Story of Arts without Men*: "which takes the title to from the so-called introductory bible of art history" (Hessel, 2024, p. 3). It is a brilliant work in art historiography illustrating the invaluable woman contribution to the canon of western art.

La Rose en vie in an experiment of superpositions/standing waves that dates back to 1989 (Pizzaia, 1918, p. 12) and then repeated during lockdown in 2021 has proposed cycles of revolution of artistic masterpieces, Eg patterns of "tetralectics" of 19years, or "metomic" (Pizzaia, 2026). Every 19th year finding a defining work of art, idea or event to take the primacy in civilisational importance, following the order the "tetralectics" and if counting the fifth transcending the cycle, finding a resonance of a resonance:

Fields (Qualitum) and eras/revolutions:

> **Eras explain 19 x 4 tetralechtic cycle**
> **19x5 Qualitum History 95 years**
> **Generational/Metonemics 19 years**
> **Intergenerational cycle 19/4**
> **Qualitum history 19/5** (Pizzaia, 2026, p. 25)

Since the discovery of the Higg-Boson particle network, the allocation of arts in a non-locality is not as farfetched as it seemed, space is no longer empty but traversable by nets and fields in and out of our minds. The field of the arts is the most malleable and articulated. If quantum introduces the wave formation as sustained standing waves as best describable in fields, packet of quanta, energy levels, the space-time corollas are a further easing visualisation of a pattern of space-time as it could be further narrowed it down to stages of development to petals as correspondent art forms.

Qualitum history is dare-constructed as a spiral upgrading the already mentioned diametrical navigation into the diametrical Qualitum jumping one. After a while this finding a pattern of an quantum jumping of a quantum jumping or because of the great beauty of these masterpieces one progresses diametrically stretching the spiral even tighter or "diametricality" or the in-excess of the in-excess.

Eras and "diametricality":

> **Generational cycle/field/metonic corolla= 19 years**
> **Lifetime cycle = 19yx4 = 76years**
> **Diametrical resonance =19yx5 = 95years**
> **Era/cycle with diametrical resonance = 95yx5 = 475years** (Pizzaia, 2021, p. 25)

One peak of resonance in the micro cycles which was constructed since the Covid pandemic falls to music, a *point de capiton* occurs in June 2026 and the author has kept an ear pealed on the following these artists and going to their events (Pizzaia, 2026, chapters 8). The agent gets an idea of future probability amplitudes, with petal of 0.76 years in the future with the discharging and the corolla of almost four years or 3.8 years. The discharging of the post-structuralism of the pre-covid era is documented in *La Rose En Vie* (Pizzaia, 2026 chapters 8, 9) and discharged (Pizzaia, 2026, chapters 24, 25); also around this June, according what an array of sound and quality it has proven to be. The quality is so extensive one can bet on a secure future of great development based on the share creativity of these great composers and performers and their creations.

Qualities like: the wildly disquieting *Earthworks* by Tansie Davies, world premiere with BBC Orchestra of Wales conducted ty Colin Currie; the melding contemporary classical orchestration with Arooj Aftab with London Contemporary Orchestra conducted by Robert Ames at Bridgewater Hall; the most technically demanding and atmospheric contemporary chamber writing in *Time Entwined* by Christian Maron with London Sinfonietta at the Southbank Centre; and the qualities in Debut Sounds -Hidden Realities: 1) the very original and very beautiful *Arcus* by Michael Taplin, 2) the mesmerising *Etude pour un oiseau de bronze(In Memoriam Brancusi)* by Margo Pommellet; 3) the powerful and beautiful with shimmering colours profundities in *Leda* by George Stevenson, 4) exhotic and transcontinental level *Socle* by Edward Mascall-Robson, 5)exceptional rich timbre and texture in *Beginning of the world* by Seyoung Oh; all at Queen Elizabeth Hall with players of the LPO. That same qualitum of solace can be extended to contemporary Pop, Indie and R&B genres as seen in qualities like: The impressive and unforgettable Emili Sande'; The mastery of an entire genre throughout its history and leadership with Al Di Meola; or the multitalented nature capturing the sprite and enthusiasm of the moment in *Qarar Shkhsy* by Hamza Namira; bringing of primal rhythms and clouds of sounds in the outstanding instrumentalist Laura Misch; the unrivalled musicianship involving the audience creating music alchemy in *Revelation* by Leif Vollebekk with the BBCSO; the inspiring new sound from original sources, constant great music sharing infinite new possibilities in Le Pere Suarage -A Poetic Memento of K Congo. One can see in the breadth of quality, why foundation belongs to the arts and to music in particular, quantum listening (Oliveros, 2024, p. 51), the sentiment par-excellence, as the ignition of the return of beauty with a capital b.

Civilisational Music Resonance of the present, June/July 2026:

> **2026.465285 19th June: Great music compositions presented between late May to early July 2026 which indicates probability wave function of qualities of Historical *Point de Capiton.*** (Pizzaia, 2026, ch.8)

The agent realises that the author is immersed in "qualitum/quantum" world and one that lives a life of its own. In a post truth eras arts could easily rest in the aesthetic rather than the truthful arm yet Qualitum also keeps in check the good side of things as the evaluation of great art thickens it is possible if not duty fold to extend the discourse as ethics and truth inclusive (Hassan, 2015, p. 26). Not unlike Cassiers, Qualitum seeks a humanism that is directly embracing responsibility (Cohen, 2006, p. xxii) rather than dejecting itself with the excuse of having lost the centre of its universe which Heidegger would have accommodated. One of the aims of Qualitum is to avoid in "Techno-anarchy" (Demichelis, 2025, p. 5) when the human is reduced to a datum, and that only what is measurable has value all the rest get discarded, politics and conflict of the soul get replaced by technology that decided for humanity with

algorithms. While quantum rushes for something measurable Qualitum history keeps the value of the human alive in a superposition or waves of understanding aiming for truth no longer anarchy but rather like Levinas' an-archy (Levinas, 2006, p. 45).

Hence in Qualitum history the aspect of the how good comes from both the arts and history itself, hence truth is sought via optimum historiography that consider the most truthful to one's cause and that of others (Sandilands, 2023, p. 51). "Qualitum" History, one that integrates further the aesthetical qualities of the arts and humanities to a discourse of "spiritology" if not a phenomenology of the real. This is a new venture into "structuralism plus" also named dare-construction (Pizzaia, 2021, p. 31). Beauty with a capital b., means Great Beauty, and it means also grand, mighty and good, altruistic donating and activist for the things that need rectifying (Sandilands, 2023, p. 45), for a great good that only inspired arts and scholar in humanities can bring home through the great imagination of the mind and the quantum microtubules of Robert Penrose and the excellencies of the artists and scholars in the arts and humanities (Hameroff & Marcer, 1998, p. 1869). On a similar note Žižek at the Barbican Hall for his new book launch touches a well carefully work out ethics on a return to certain nobility of mind not one born with but acquired via the deep merit and knowledge of culture (Žižek, 2026, p. 133).

Conclusions

Post-poststructuralism and Metamodernity can soldier on with a new sensation from a not-so-new kid on the block, namely Beauty with the capital "b" has returned better and greater than ever, greater than classical art and physics had imagined via the qualitum leaping thorough the ages, stages, and epochs of the great works of arts and via the "glue" of the humanities, and although only at artistic and historiographical level one is awaiting more current artists, humanists and educators to reopen an age of living great beauty, founded on masterpieces, one that is grand and magical, daring to exceed the in-excess, one that has always been warmly looking to humanity, its quality, its unmistakable allure; namely arts foundation and its supervenience of the humanities, from its inspiring history of quality to a "spiritology" of phenomenon; this is a sounding yes to "Qualitum History" as a new nobility of mind, yes to "Qualitum" jumping in the ocean of human pathos through the ages now, and yes, beautiful history of magnificence in this life.

References

Aagaard, J. (2022). Troubling the troublemakers: Three challenges to post-qualitative inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications. Vol. 15, No 3, November, pp. 331-25.

Al-Rodhan, N. R. F. (2009). *Sustainable history and the dignity of man: a philosophy of history and civilisational triumph*, Zurich, Lit Verlag.

Arnold, D. (2020). *Art history: A very short introduction, 2nd Ed.,* Oxford University Press.

Baggott, J. (2016). *The Quantum Story: A history in 40 moments*, Oxford, Oxford Landmark Science.

Bailey, K. (2017). *Opera: passion, power and politics.* With an introduction by Kasper Holten, London, V&A Publishing.

Bargár, P. (2021). The Modern, the Postmodern, and …the Metamodern? Reflections and a transforming sensibility and perspective of theological anthropology. *Transformation, 38 (1), pp. 3–15.* https://www.jstor.org/stable/27081792

Belsey, C. (2022). *Poststructuralism: A very short introduction*. Second edition. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Butler, C. (2002). *Postmodernism: A very short introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Cohen, R. A. (2006). Humanism and anti-humanism -Levinas, Cassirer, and Heidegger, in *Humanism of the other*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

Demichelis, L. (2025). *Techno-anarchia. O la "nave dei folli". La bananlita' digitale del male*, Bologna, Deriveapprodi.

De Sousa, R. (2015). *Love, A very short introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University.

Eisenhofer, S. (2010). African art: A magnificent contribution to world art. *African art*, Norbert Wolf ed. Taschen. pp. 6–25.

Evans, D. (2003). *Emotion: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Faggin, F. (2024a). Irreducible: *Consciousness, life, computers and human nature*. Collective Ink.

Faggin, F. (2024b). Oltre l'invisibile: *Dove scienza e spiritualita` si uniscono*. Mondadori.

Freeland, C. (2003). *Art theory: A very short introduction,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Galimberti, U. (2023). *Etica del viandante*. Feltrinelli Editore.

Grimm, S. R., Peels Rik and Van Woudenberg Rene'. (2025). *A philosophy of the humanities.* Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Gombrich, E. (2005). *A Little History of the World*. Yale University Press.

Goudie, L. (2026). *The secrets of painting: The hidden art of the masterpiece from prehistory to today.* Thames and Hudson.

Hameroff, S., & Marcer, P. (1998). Quantum computation in brain microtubules? The Penrose-Hameroff 'Orch OR' model of consciousness. *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical physical and engineering and sciences.* Vol. 356, No 1743, August, pp. 1869–96.

Harman, G. (2018). *Object Oriented Ontology: A new theory of everything.* Pelican Books.

Harman, G. (2019). *Art and objects*. Polity Press.

Hassan, I. (2015). Beyond postmodernism: Toward an aesthetic of trust. *Supplanting the postmodern: An Anthology of writings on the arts and culture of the early 21st century.* Rudrum D. & Stavris N. Eds, Bloomsbury Academic. pp. 13–30.

Heidegger, M. (2024). *The origin of the work of arti,* transl. Tim Newcomb. Kindle Edition.

Hermeren, G. (2014). Aesthetic Qualities. *Encyclopedia of aesthetics*, Michael Kelly Ed. Oxford University Press. Vol.5, pp. 317–20.

Hessel, K. (2024). *The story of art without men*. Dublin, Penguin Books.

Hoffman, R. A., & Friedman, J., eds. (2024). *Project a black planet: The art of culture of panafrica,* Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Kuecker, E. (2021). Labours of reading post qualitative inquiry, *International Review of Qualitative Research.* Sage Publications. Vol 13, No.4, February, pp. 540–554.

Kul-Want, C., & Piero. (2012). *Introducing Aesthetics*, London, Icon Books.

Levinas, E. (2006). *Humanism of the other*. Translated from the French by Nidra Poller, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

Marshall, J. V. (2015). *Walkabout*, London, A Puffin Book.

Munslow, A. (1998). *Deconstructing History*. London, Routledge.

Musser, G. (2026). Unlocking Consciousness: Connecting all human experience could break down the barrier between mind and matter. *New Scientist.* Volume 269 No 3588, 28th, March, pp. 30–3.

Nanay, B. (2019). *Aesthetics: A very short introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Odutola, T. O. (2020). *A countervailing theory*. London, Barbican Publishing.

Oliveros, P. (2024). *Quantum listening*. An introduction by IONE. Foreword by Laurie Anderson. Spiral House an imprint of Silver Press, Padstow, Cornwall.

Pizzaia, A. (2018). 'Transcivilisations: Hourglass of being and renaissance of hope'. Unpublished manuscript.

Pizzaia, A. (2021). Resilience of La Rose En Vie: Recovering from upheaval through a Transphenomenology of Spirit on the basis of the arts and humanities. ISSN: 2188-1111 – The European Conference on Arts & Humanities: Official Conference Proceedings (pp. 81–93) https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2188-1111.2021.7

Pizzaia, A. (2022). New revolutions in the arts, humanities and education: Past, Paris 2022 and future. ISSN: 2758-0970 The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities: Official Conference Proceedings (pp. 37–50) https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2758-0970.2022.4

Pizzaia, A. (2025). Global Citizenship Based on the Arts and Humanities in the Age of AI from La Rose En Vie ISSN: 2188-1111 – The European Conference on Arts & Humanities 2025: Official Conference Proceedings (pp. 125–137), https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2188-1111.2025.13

Pizzaia, A. (2026). *La rose en vie, First Ed*. London, Albert Pizzaia's Publications.

Platte, E., & Hambolu, M. (2010). *Bronze head of Ife*. British Museum Objects in Focus series, London, British Museum Press.

Polkinghorne, J. (2002). *Quantum theory: A very short introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Ribeiro, A. C., ed. (2015). *The Bloomsbury Companion to Aesthetics*. Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury Academic.

Rifkin, J. (2010). *The empathic civilization: The race to global consciousness in a world in crisis*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Rudrum, D., & Stavris, N., Eds. (2015). *Supplanting the postmodern: An Anthology of writings on the arts and culture of the early 21st century.* Bloomsbury Academic.

Sandilands, C. (2023). Sit down, be quiet, and listen. *Re/sisters: A lens on Gender and Ecology.* Pardo Alona ed., Munich, Prestel, pp. 45–51.

Sassoon, D. (2001). *Mona Lisa*, The history of the world's most famous painting. Harper Collins Publishers.

Schama, S. (2006). *The Power of Art*. BBC Books.

Scruton, R. (2011). *Beauty*, *A very short introduction*, Oxford, University Press.

Shafak, E. (2020). *How to stay sane in an age of division*, London, Profile Books.

Sim, S. (2005). Death of the author. *The Routledge companion to postmodernism*, 2nd edition, London, Routledge, p. 192.

Smith, Z. (2020). *Ojih Odutola: A Countervailing Theory*. The Curve 33, Barbican Centre.

Spivey, N. (2005). *How art made the world*. London, BBC Books.

Spring, C. (2015). *African Art Close-up.* London, The British Museum Press

Taliaferro, C. (2011). *Aesthetics: A beginner's* guide. Oxford, Oneword Publications.

Tooze, A. (2019). *Crashed: How a decade of financial crises changed the world*, Penguin Books.

Van Gogh, V. (2025). *For Art and For Life*, translated by Arnold Pomerans. London, Penguin Classics, Penguin Archives.

Van Hagens, B. (1967). Qualitá. *Enciclopedia Filosofica*. Sansoni Editore, vol.5 pp. 450–8.

Wolfe, C. (2018). 'Posthumanism' in *Posthuman Glossary*. Rosi Braiotti & Mari Hlavajova eds. London, Bloomsbury Academic. pp. 356–9.

Žižek, S. (2025). *Quantum History: A New Materialist Philosophy*. London. Bloomsbury Academic.

Žižek, S. (2026). *Liberal Fascisms*. London, Bloomsbury Academic.

Zöllner, F. (2003). From Mantua to Venice and back to Florence 1500-1503. *Leonardo Da Vinci 1452-1519*. Taschen, Bibliotheca Universalis, pp. 212–45.

Contact email: albert_pizzaia@hotmail.com

Performing Resistance: Feminist Theatre and the Politics of Revisionist Mythology in India

Aayushi Tripathi, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Mythology holds a central position in the cultural consciousness of India, shaping not just religious and moral codes but also social and gendered hierarchies. The Ramayana has historically reinforced patriarchal norms by valorising idealized models of femininity, obedience, and sacrifice. The revision of mythology uncovers new critical dimensions, making room for several interpretations and multi-layered stories to branch out. Modern Indian Feminist Theatre has increasingly turned to revisionist mythology as a space of resistance, reclaiming silenced histories and re-interpreting canonical tales through feminist lens. Through close readings of *What She Said* (2019) by Gauri Ramnarayan, *Sita's Daughters* (2015) by Mallika Sarabhai, and *Mandodari* (2005) by Varsha Adjala, the paper explores how feminist dramaturgy reclaims mythological women from narrative silence and marginalization. Adrienne Rich observes that revision is not merely a chapter in cultural history, it is "an act of survival" (Rich, 1972, p. 18). Feminist Theatre reimagines female characters from mythology not as moral archetypes but as political subjects who interrogate ideals of chastity, loyalty and sacrifice. Performance emerges here as a mode of resistance, one that exposes the ideological labor of mythology in sustaining gendered power relations. By reclaiming these narratives, these plays subvert traditional mythological hierarchies creating counter-narratives that are both artistic and activist. Drawing on Richard Schechner's performance theory, the paper views mythological performance as a repeatable yet transformable cultural practice. This research aims to critically analyze how feminist theatre uses revision and performance to subvert hegemonic narratives, thus contributing to the larger discourse on gender, mythology, and performance in theatre and literature.

Keywords: feminist theatre, revisionist mythology, *Ramayana*, performance studies, gender

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

In India, mythology is not ancient history. It lives in temples, in cinema, in legal judgments, in the way families speak about what a good woman looks like. Written between 500 BCE and 100 BCE, the Ramayana, also called the Adikavya (meaning first or original epic), is one of India's two foundational Sanskrit epics, attributed to the sage Valmiki. It is an age-old story of love, righteousness, devotion and sacrifice.

Ram, the crown prince of Ayodhya is banished from his kingdom due to a vow his father made. The Ramayana follows Prince Rama of Ayodhya, who is exiled to the forest for fourteen years when his stepmother Kaikeyi invokes a long-standing promise from his father King Dasharatha. Rama being the Maryada purshottam, meaning the most righteousness among men, obeys without protest. During the exile, his wife Sita is abducted by the demon king Ravana of Lanka, prompting Ram to build a bridge across the sea, wage a catastrophic war, and kill Ravana to reclaim her. Ram's familial obedience is celebrated as the highest dharma; his military campaign is framed as the righteous restoration of cosmic order. Yet Sita, whose suffering occasioned the entire war, is asked at its conclusion to prove her purity by walking into fire. The thousands of women widowed by the same war are not mourned, they are incidental.

Revisioning mythology uncovers new critical dimensions, creating fertile ground for multiple interpretations and layered narratives to emerge. Adrienne Rich describes revision as, “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (Rich, 1972, p. 18). Modern Indian feminist theatre has increasingly turned to revisionist mythology as a space of resistance, reclaiming silenced histories and re-interpreting canonical tales through a feminist lens. This study explores how feminist playwrights engage with mythology as a dynamic and performative archive. To understand why feminist theatre turns to revisionist mythology, we first need to understand the power of mythology itself. In India, mythology is not merely folklore. It is a cultural operating system, it shapes religious life, moral codes, and, crucially, gendered hierarchies. The Ramayana is a foundational text. But it is also, feminist scholars have long argued, a founding document of patriarchal expectation.

Sita is valorised for her silent suffering. Mandodari is praised for her loyalty to a husband who represents everything she privately opposes. Surpanakha is punished for expressing desire. These are not just ancient stories, they are templates that have been, and continue to be, applied to living women. The question this paper asks is: what does feminist theatre do when it takes these templates apart?

This paper brings together three plays – *Mandodari* by Varsha Adjala (2005), *Sita’s Daughters* (2015) by Mallika Sarabhai and *What She Said* (2019) by Gauri Ramnarayan, that have largely been studied in isolation. By reading them not as individual works but as a collective grammar of feminist dramaturgy. The paper attempts to demonstrate how Adjala, Sarabhai, and Ramnarayan represent three distinct but deeply complementary strategies of resistance: internal transformation, genre disruption, and narrative reclamation.

Through dramaturgical techniques and aesthetic strategies, these plays challenge the patriarchal ideologies embedded in the mainstream narratives of the Ramayana. They foreground questions of voice, agency and space constructing alternate discourses that

interrogate the oppression, victimization, marginalization and subjugation of female characters.

Within this framework, performance becomes an act of survival and resistance. It offers a powerful medium through which marginalized characters like Soorrpanakha, Mandodari, Urmila, Kaikaeyi and others are granted narrative voice and performative agency. By reclaiming these narratives, feminist revisionist plays subvert established mythological hierarchies and generate counter-narratives that are both activist and artistic.

Research Objectives

This paper will focus on the select plays to analyze how their aesthetics, dramaturgy, and politics contribute to the larger project of feminist resistance. It will draw on theories of Performance Studies and Revisionist Mythology to investigate how these plays reimagine female identity and expression that have long been suppressed within dominant cultural discourses. In doing so, the research aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on feminist theatre and the critical potential of theatre as a political art form. By situating these plays within the discourse of feminist revisionist mythmaking, this research interrogates how contemporary theatre reclaims women's voices and uses revisionist mythology to create gynocentric mythology in the Indian context.

This paper asks: How does feminist theatre use revision and performance to subvert hegemonic mythological narratives, and what does this contribute to the larger discourse on gender, mythology, and performance?
Three specific objectives guide the research:

- To examine how feminist dramaturgy reclaims mythological women from narrative silence and marginalization
- To analyze how performance transforms mythological archetypes into political subjects

Methodology

Before turning to the plays, it is important to establish the two theoretical lenses through which this analysis operates. Adrienne Rich, in her landmark 1971 essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” argues that revision, the act of re-reading and rewriting inherited cultural texts, is not a literary exercise but a political and survival act. For Rich, women who return to canonical texts and refuse their terms are not being merely creative; they are doing something necessary for their own existence. Feminist theatre extends this imperative from the page to the body, making revision collective, embodied, and public, performed before a live audience in real time.

Richard Schechner's (2017) performance theory complements Rich (1972) by providing a framework for understanding how this revision operates on stage. Schechner argues that performance is “restored behavior” (Schechner, 2017, p. 103), cultural practice that is repeatable yet transformable. The same myth, performed again and again, is never identical, because each performance is an interpretation. Feminist dramaturgy exploits precisely this gap: taking mythological material the audience already knows, and redirecting its ideological force. Together, Rich and Schechner allow us to understand these plays not simply as retellings, but as political interventions, acts of survival staged in performance.

Analysis

Adjala's *Mandodari* is perhaps the most structurally inventive of the three plays, and its central dramaturgical strategy is what we might call internal transformation the play works entirely within the mythology's own narrative framework, using its plot to overturn its ideology. The play is structured as a chess game between Mandodari and Kaaldevata, the Lord of Time and Death. This is not metaphor, it is the actual dramatic architecture of the play, and it is through this structure that Adjala makes her most powerful argument.

For Rich (1972), the chess game is the play's act of survival. When Kaaldevata declares Lanka's destruction unalterable, Mandodari does not grieve or plead, she challenges. She invokes Savitri and Anusuya, women from the same mythological tradition who defied death and stopped the sun, to authorize her resistance. This is revision working at its most sophisticated: Adjala uses mythology against itself, retrieving from within the tradition the very precedents that authorize female defiance. The master's tools, turned against the master's house.

What the canonical Ramayana most systematically suppresses about Mandodari is her intelligence, and this is precisely what Adjala foregrounds as the primary site of female subjectivity. From the moment Ravana announces Sita's abduction, Mandodari's counsel is correct at every point. She warns him immediately: “Kidnapping a helpless woman is not a trivial matter” (Adjala, 2005). She appeals to Bibhishana. She devises battle strategy. She visits Sita in the Ashokvatika. And at every turn she is defeated, not by superior argument, but by the patriarchy’s refusal to hear her. Ravana dismisses her with the line that crystallizes the play's political argument: “You are a foolish woman. You dare to talk back” (Adjala, 2005). In Schechner's (2017) terms, this is the mythology performing itself, restoring the behavior of female silencing, and Adjala's play is the feminist intervention that transforms that restoration into critique.

The Sita scene in the Ashokvatika is the play's most morally complex moment, and it deserves particular analytical attention. Mandodari does not come to Sita with sisterly solidarity. She comes with a political proposition: surrender to Ravana to stop the war, because the sacrifice of one woman could save thousands of lives. This is the play's most unsettling feminist gesture, staging not a simple alliance between women, but a collision between two forms of female consciousness: Mandodari's political realism against Sita's devotional idealism. Adjala refuses to adjudicate between them. Neither position is entirely vindicated, and neither woman escapes the play's moral complexity.

In the climax of the play, Kaaldevata congratulates Mandodari on her honour as “a great sati” after Ravana's death. She laughs, loudly, scornfully and announces that she has won, because Ravana's death and redemption was her real goal all along: “The arrow that killed Ravana actually released his soul and gave the egoistic man his salvation. Though I am widowed now, I am a happy woman” (Adjala, 2005). This is the strongest argument in the entire compilation: what mythology reads as female submission, the loyal wife mourning her husband, is retroactively revealed as female strategy, the longest and most patient game.

However, Adjala does not allow this victory to stand uncomplicated, and this is what distinguishes her dramaturgy from simple reversal. Mandodari's closing lament “Why should women be left behind to lament their loss? My lament is drowned by the sound of war drums” (Adjala, 2005) insists that the victory comes at enormous personal cost. The play

ends not in triumph but in collapse: Mandodari falls near the throne as the gandharva's cry fills the air. In keeping faith with this ambiguity, Adjala produces what Rich (1972) would recognize as genuine revision: not the replacement of one myth with another, but the honest exposure of what the original myth cost the women within it.

If Adjala's strategy is internal transformation, Sarabhai's is genre disruption. *Sita's Daughters* (2015) is a performance-lecture hybrid that moves between mythology, contemporary realism, comedy, historical narrative, and direct audience address, sometimes within the same scene. This formal restlessness is not incidental but ideological: by refusing to settle into any single genre, Sarabhai forces her audience to perform different kinds of attention, making it impossible for them to receive the play as pure entertainment or pure scholarship. The audience is constantly being repositioned, as witnesses, as participants, as inheritors of the mythology's unfinished business.

The play's opening is its most important political gesture. Before anything else, a poem is recited from the wings: “She whom Rama burned was Sita / She whom Rama abandoned was Sita / Who was she? Who was Sita?” (Sarabhai, 2015). Sita is introduced not through her celebrated virtues, her beauty, her loyalty, her purity; but through what was done to her. This is Rich's (1972) revisionary impulse in its purest theatrical form: refusing to accept received knowledge, insisting that the first question asked of the mythology must be a question, not an affirmation. The play begins in interrogation and never entirely leaves it.

Sarabhai's Sita is the most politically confrontational in the compilation. During the abduction sequence, she turns directly on Rama with a line that has no precedent in canonical tellings: “Shame Rama. How could you be tricked? What hidden motive did you have? To degrade me? To prove yourself what a leader you are? Or so that you could have your glorious and bloody war?” (Sarabhai, 2015). This is not a passive victim lamenting her fate, this is a woman interrogating her husband's possible complicity in her own suffering. In staging this possibility, Sarabhai performs what Rich (1972) calls the most dangerous act of revision: questioning not the villain but the hero, not the enemy but the beloved.

The play's treatment of the agni pariksha, the fire ordeal, is the clearest demonstration of Schechner's (2017) transformability in the entire compilation. In canonical tellings, the fire trial is read as proof of Sita's divine purity: she walks in and emerges unharmed because she is untouched, therefore chaste, therefore worthy of Rama's acceptance. In Sarabhai's version, Sita walks into the fire saying: “Not to prove myself to you, but to show you how small a man you have become and how unchanged I am by the total destruction of my image of you” (Sarabhai, 2015). The same event, the same fire, the same body, the same mythological moment, is re-performed and yields an entirely different meaning. The trial of purity becomes an act of contempt. The proof of female virtue becomes the exposure of male inadequacy. This is precisely what Schechner (2017) means when he argues that performance transforms restored behavior: the behavior is identical, but the cultural meaning it produces is completely inverted.

The play's most significant structural contribution is its transition from mythology to the contemporary. Sarabhai introduces three women from recent Indian history and presents them without apology as Sita's daughters: a teacher raped by her school principal who fights for justice through a hostile legal system; a doctor who establishes the first amniocentesis clinic in India only to watch it become a tool for female foeticide; and the historical Amrita Devi, who died hugging a tree in 1730 when the Maharaja's army came to cut it down. These

women share nothing with Sita biologically or historically. What they share is the structure of their situation: the demand for silence, the sacrifice of their bodies to male authority, and the refusal to comply. In framing them as Sita's daughters, Sarabhai transforms mythology from an archived story into a living analytical framework, a lens through which the continuing reality of gendered violence can be named, understood, and resisted.

Ramnarayan's dramaturgical strategy is the most formally direct of the three: narrative reclamation. Six women who are present in the Ramayana but absent from its meaning: Urmila, Manthara, Surpanakha, Mandodari, Tara, and Shanta. They are each given a direct first-person monologue. Each begins the same way: “Aham Urmila. I am Urmila” (Ramnarayan, 2019). This is a grammatical as well as political act. In the canonical Ramayana, these women exist in the third person, they are described, positioned, judged, and disposed of by a narrative voice that belongs to someone else. The first-person monologue is the formal instrument of revision: the subject of the sentence is finally the speaker, not the story told about her.

Urmila's monologue establishes the play's central analytical argument: that the Ramayana's silencing of women is not incidental but structural. Urmila excelled at every subject, outperformed every competitor, impressed every teacher and was consistently overlooked in favour of Sita, who achieved considerably less. This is precisely the mechanism that Rich (1972) identifies in canonical literature more broadly: the suppression of women's achievement through the strategic redirection of attention. Ramnarayan makes this suppression visible not by arguing against it, but by simply giving Urmila the time and space to describe it.

The play's rehabilitation of the Ramayana's “villains” is one of its most significant contributions to the feminist revisionist mythmaking project. Manthara, perhaps the most universally condemned character in the epic, is revealed as a grieving mother with a legitimate political grievance. Dasharatha did promise Bharata the throne; he did break that promise. Manthara's analysis of the situation was correct, her political intervention was coherent, and the catastrophe that followed was the result of Dasharatha's broken word as much as her scheming. In giving Manthara this complexity, Ramnarayan makes the play's most demonized woman its most realistic political actor. Surpanakha, who appears in canonical tellings as grotesque, predatory, and justly punished, insists on her real name: “Aham Minakshi. I am Minakshi” (Ramnarayan, 2019). She was given the name Surpanakha, “one with grotesque nails”, by the epic that needed to justify her mutilation. By reclaiming Minakshi, she reclaims the identity that preceded the mythology's violence against her. Ramnarayan embeds her personal story within a postcolonial critique: her grandmother Tataka's land was colonized by the Aryan kingdoms whose armies now call Surpanakha a demoness. Her “villainy” is the violence of the occupied fighting back against the occupier.

The play's most unexpected and perhaps most powerful revisionary gesture is the revelation of Surpanakha's secret relationship to Sita during her final exile. After the Lanka war, Sita is abandoned by Rama and wanders pregnant in the forest. It is Surpanakha, who instigated her abduction, who watched her being dragged by the hair into Ravana's chariot, who secretly tends the garden where Sita walks with her twins. The mythology's greatest female villain becomes its most hidden female protector. This is Schechner's (2017) concept of restored behavior taken to its logical extreme: the same character, restored to performance through a feminist lens, produces a completely different moral identity. And it makes an argument that no canonical telling could afford to make, that the enmity between these women was

manufactured by the mythology, and that beneath it lay a solidarity the patriarchal text could not accommodate.

The play's final movement belongs to Shanta, Rama's sister, abandoned by Dasharatha at birth, mentioned in the Ramayana only as a footnote, and never heard. Rama comes to her in despair, having failed his father, his wife, his sons, and his own principles. He prostrates before her, the god lying full-length at the feet of the woman the mythology forgot, and she gives him not comfort but philosophical instruction: “Sorrow is the root of life. We are human and so we grieve. Because we grieve, we pity. Because we pity, we bond. Because we bond, we love. Because we love we find joy. Rama, my dear brother, can we find joy without grief?” (Ramnarayan, 2019). In giving the play's deepest wisdom to the mythology's most completely erased woman, Ramnarayan makes her most powerful argument: that what is lost when women are silenced is not simply their stories but their knowledge, their ways of understanding the world that the patriarchal order cannot generate, and that are therefore suppressed rather than accommodated.

Discussion

All three plays converge on a single structural insight that constitutes this paper's central finding: patriarchal mythology does not silence women by removing them from the narrative. It silences them by allowing them to appear only within narratives that frame their subordination as virtue, their suffering as nobility, and their erasure as natural. Mandodari is present in the Ramayana but only as a mourning wife. Urmila is present but only as Sita's devoted sister. Surpanakha is present but only as a cautionary grotesque. Feminist theatre's revisionary power lies in restoring their stories without the frame: giving them back their first-person voice, their correct names, their unsuppressed intelligence, and their secret solidarities. In doing so, these plays do not merely retell the mythology. They expose the machinery that made one narrative dominant and all others invisible and, in that exposure, they perform what Adrienne Rich (1972) called, with complete precision, an act of survival.

Conclusion

The central finding of this paper is that feminist theatre in India uses revisionist mythology not merely as artistic reimagination, but as a deliberate political act, one that transforms mythological women from passive archetypes into active political subjects who interrogate the very ideals of chastity, obedience, and sacrifice that the Ramayana has historically imposed upon them.

This research contributes to two areas of scholarly discourse. To gender studies, it offers a textually grounded analysis of how patriarchal mythology manufactures female archetypes and how feminist theatre dismantles them. To performance studies, it demonstrates Schechner's (2017) transformability as a specifically feminist tool.

Why does this matter? Because mythology is a living ideological force that continues to shape how women are judged, silenced, and made to suffer in the present. When Mandodari's counsel is dismissed, when Sita is asked to walk into fire, when Urmila is abandoned without a word, these are not ancient injustices. They are scripts that are still being followed. To revise them on stage, before a live audience, is to intervene in that force in real time.

Thus, performance itself is a form of resistance. The stage is not merely a space of representation, it is a site of political struggle, where stories that have long defined womanhood can be interrupted, contested, and rewritten. These plays remind us that the question of whose narratives survive is never just a literary question. It is always, and urgently, a question of power.

By giving voice to the silenced, feminist theatre does not merely revise the past. It reshapes the future.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge The International Academic Forum (IAFOR) for the opportunity to attend and present my work at the 5th Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities (PCAH 2026), held from 15–19 June 2026 in Paris, France. This platform provided invaluable exposure to diverse scholarly perspectives and fostered meaningful academic exchange.

I extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Shuchi Sharma, Professor and Dean at the University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIPU), Delhi, for her insightful guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering support throughout this research. I am also thankful to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi for providing the academic environment and resources essential to this work.

Finally, I express my deepest appreciation to my family and friends for their constant encouragement, patience, and belief in my capabilities, which sustained me through every stage of this journey.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

I declare that I used Claude AI (developed by Anthropic) solely for proofreading and language editing of this manuscript. The AI was used to improve grammar, clarity, and style, but it did not generate any of the paper's ideas, arguments, data, analyses, or original content. All intellectual contributions, including the conception, design, analysis, interpretation, and writing of the paper, are my own.

References

Adjala, V. (2005). Mandodari. In T. Mukherjee (Ed.), *Staging resistance: Plays by women in translation* (pp. 99–115). Oxford University Press.

Ostriker, A. (1982). The thieves of language: Women poets and revisionist mythmaking. *Signs, 8*(1), 68–90.

Ramnarayan, G. (2019). *What she said – Six voices from the Ramayana* [Theatrical script]. Premiered December 8, 2019.

Rich, A. (1972). When we dead awaken: Writing as re-vision. *College English, 34*(1), 18–30.

Sarabhai, M. (2015). *Sita's Daughters* [Theatrical script]. Premiered December 19, 2015.

Schechner, R. (2017). *Performance studies: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Subramanyam, L. (Ed.). (2002). *Muffled voices: Women in modern Indian theatre*. Har-Anand Publications.

Valmiki. (2021). *The Ramayana*. Gita Press. (Original work published circa 5th–1st century BCE)

Contact emails: aayushitripathi164@gmail.com
aayushi.09021690024@std.ggsipu.ac.in

Learning Through Making: Analog Processes as Pedagogical Tools in Graphic Design Education

Jacqueline Soghman, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates
David Howarth, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper examines how analog making can function as a pedagogical tool within contemporary graphic design education. Responding to increasingly screen-first design workflows, the study investigates what students learn when typographic work moves from digital composition into physical production. The paper draws on a classroom-based analog typography project with undergraduate graphic design students at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, developed in relation to the UAE Year of Community initiative. Students collected material references connected to community life, including traditional crafts, domestic objects, family games, wedding traditions, and maritime heritage, and translated these references into typographic compositions through a hybrid process of research, sketching, digital preparation, silkscreen printing, testing, adjustment, documentation, and reflection. Evidence was gathered through classroom observation, student reflections, project outcomes, and a post-project survey of twenty-one students. The findings suggest that analog production increased motivation, strengthened students' awareness of ink, surface, pressure, registration, and type reproduction, and reframed mistakes as prompts for creative problem solving. The project also offered a refreshing counterbalance to screen-based work and encouraged students to recognize the value of hybrid pedagogy rather than choosing between analog and digital methods. The paper argues that learning through making should not be treated as nostalgia or craft demonstration, but as a critical educational strategy that helps students become more reflective, materially aware, and culturally engaged designers.

Keywords: graphic design education, analog typography, hybrid pedagogy, materiality, experiential learning

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Graphic design education is increasingly mediated through digital tools. Students compose, test, revise, and present typographic ideas through software environments that allow speed, precision, reversibility, and extensive visual experimentation. These capacities are essential to contemporary design practice, yet they can also make design appear frictionless. When typography is experienced mainly through a screen, students may understand letterforms as editable objects detached from the conditions of production: paper texture, ink absorption, pressure, scale, registration, drying time, and the labour of repeated making.

This paper responds to that tension by examining the pedagogical value of analog processes in typography education. Its central question is: what happens when students move from screen to surface? The study does not position analog making as a rejection of technology. Rather, it argues that physical production can help students understand digital tools more critically by making visible the material conditions that software often conceals. In this context, learning through making becomes a way to connect typographic form, embodied action, cultural memory, and reflective practice.

The argument is particularly relevant at a moment when design students are also encountering increasingly automated and template-driven creative environments. Fast production can support experimentation, but it can also reduce students' awareness of sequence, consequence, and production responsibility. Analog interruption offers a temporary change of pace. It asks students to prepare before acting, to wait for results, to accept that not every decision can be instantly undone, and to read the traces left by materials. These slower conditions make making itself visible as a form of knowledge.

Literature Review

The theoretical framing draws on experiential learning, reflective practice, craft, and typographic materiality. Dewey (1938) emphasized the educational value of experience when it leads to reflection and further inquiry, while Kolb (1984) described learning as a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptualization, and experimentation. These ideas align closely with studio pedagogy, where students learn by testing, revising, discussing, and making decisions in response to visible outcomes.

Design education also depends on reflective practice. Schön (1983) described professional practice as a conversation with the situation, while Cross (2006) argued that design involves distinctive ways of knowing that are visual, procedural, and solution-oriented. Analog typography makes this conversation especially direct: when ink bleeds, registration shifts, or details disappear, students must observe, interpret, adjust, and test again. The process turns error into an active site of inquiry rather than a failure to be hidden.

Craft theory further supports the value of tactile work in a technological age. Sennett (2008) connects craft to attention and commitment, Pallasmaa (2009) emphasizes the intelligence of the hand, and McCullough (1996) argues that digital work also depends on skilled action and judgment. In typography, Bringhurst (2012), Lupton (2010), Kinross (2004), and Meggs and Purvis (2016) remind us that letterforms carry historical, technical, and cultural meanings. A hybrid approach therefore treats digital fluency and material experience as mutually reinforcing dimensions of design learning.

The study is also informed by practice-based research. Frayling (1993) distinguishes forms of research in, for, and through art and design, a distinction that is useful for understanding studio learning. In an analog typography project, knowledge is not produced only after the work is complete. It emerges through the act of preparing, printing, failing, adjusting, and explaining. Dourish (2001) similarly frames interaction as embodied action, suggesting that tools and bodies participate in cognition. These perspectives support a pedagogy in which students learn not only about typography, but through typographic action.

Methodology

The study used a small-scale classroom-based research design. Twenty-one undergraduate graphic design students completed an analog typography project involving silkscreen printing and related tactile processes. The project asked students to move beyond screen-based composition and work with physical materials, including ink, paper, screens, registration marks, repeated printing, drying, cleaning, and manual adjustment. The educational aim was not only to produce a final printed poster, but to create a learning situation in which typography could be experienced as a process of making.

The assignment was deliberately connected to the UAE Year of Community initiative (Emirates News Agency, 2025). Before designing their typographic compositions, students collected objects and material references that represented community for them. These included traditional crafts, old family games, domestic objects, wedding-related items, perfume, oud, prayer beads, maritime references, ropes, dhow imagery, and oyster shells. Students then translated these references into typographic compositions through research, hand sketching, digital file preparation, screen preparation, test printing, adjustment, reprinting, documentation, and reflection.

Evidence came from four sources: classroom observations, student reflections, project outcomes, and a post-project survey. The survey addressed motivation, creativity, problem solving, screen fatigue, material awareness, ownership, and preferences for analog, digital, or hybrid methods. The study is exploratory and institution-specific. It does not claim to represent all design programs, but it identifies patterns that are useful for discussing how analog interruption can enrich screen-dominant design curricula.

The project sequence was important to the learning design. Students did not begin with printing as a separate technical exercise. They first researched the theme, selected references, sketched by hand, developed digital compositions, and prepared files for screen production. The digital file therefore became a threshold rather than an endpoint. Once the file entered the print process, students had to negotiate registration, density, scale, and surface. The final documentation then asked them to connect visual outcomes to process decisions, allowing reflection to become part of assessment rather than an afterthought.

Findings and Discussion

The findings suggest that analog production changed students' relationship to their work in five connected ways: it increased motivation, deepened material and typographic awareness, transformed limitation into a creative prompt, rebalanced attention, and strengthened students' preference for hybrid pedagogy. These categories overlap in practice. For example, a failed print could increase material awareness, demand problem solving, and generate more personal

investment at the same time. The value of the project lies in this interaction between technical, emotional, and reflective learning.

Table 1

Selected Survey Findings From the Analog Typography Project

Survey statement	Result
More motivated to refine because the work was physically produced	21/21 agreed (100%)
Project felt like a refreshing change from screen-based work	20/21 agreed (95.2%)
Felt more personally involved than in typical digital projects	17/21 agreed (81.0%)
More aware of ink, texture, pressure, and registration	20/21 agreed (95.2%)
Changed understanding of type construction and reproduction	20/21 agreed (95.2%)
Thought more deeply about letterforms and composition	19/21 agreed (90.5%)
Limitations pushed creativity	18/21 agreed (85.7%)
Working by hand changed the approach to problem solving	19/21 agreed (90.5%)
Often feel creatively tired when working only on screens for long periods	14/21 agreed (66.7%)
Design courses should include more analog work alongside digital work	19/21 agreed (90.5%)
A mix of digital and analog methods would make students stronger designers	18/21 agreed (85.7%)
Would like similar projects in future courses	21/21 agreed (100%)

Motivation and Ownership

All twenty-one respondents agreed that they were more motivated to refine their work because it would be physically produced, and all agreed that they would like to see similar projects in future design courses. Twenty of twenty-one described the project as a refreshing change from screen-based work, while seventeen of twenty-one felt more personally involved than in typical digital projects. These findings suggest that physical production increased emotional investment. The work was no longer only a file awaiting export; it became an object carrying evidence of time, effort, material decisions, and repeated refinement.

Material and Typographic Awareness

Twenty of twenty-one students agreed that handling physical materials made them more aware of ink, texture, pressure, and registration. Twenty also agreed that the process changed how they think about the construction and reproduction of type, while nineteen reported thinking more deeply about letterforms and composition. Typography was therefore experienced not only as a digital arrangement, but as something affected by surface, pressure, ink density, scale, and reproduction. This shift is important because it connects formal typographic decisions to the realities of production and reading.

The material dimension also shaped students' engagement with cultural content. Because the project began with objects associated with community, students were not simply representing heritage through images on a screen. They were handling, observing, translating, and printing references connected to family memory, shared practices, and local material culture. The analog process gave each student a different way to interpret community through typographic form.

Creativity Through Limitation

Analog production also changed students' relationship with mistakes. Eighteen of twenty-one agreed that the limitations of the process pushed them to become more creative, and nineteen agreed that working by hand changed their approach to problem solving. Students encountered misregistration, uneven pressure, ink bleed, failed prints, and loss of fine detail. These challenges required observation and adjustment. In this sense, imperfection became pedagogically productive. It slowed the process and encouraged students to ask why something happened, what could be changed, and how the next print might improve.

Attention, Fatigue, and Classroom Rhythm

The findings also point to the role of bodily attention in studio learning. Fourteen of twenty-one students agreed that they often feel creatively tired when working only on screens for long periods, and seventeen agreed that working away from the screen helped them focus differently on the design process. Although not all students described screen fatigue in the same way, the analog project introduced a different classroom rhythm. Students moved between tables, collaborated, waited for prints to dry, compared tests, cleaned tools, and discussed results. This movement created pauses that allowed reflection to occur naturally. The slower rhythm did not reduce productivity; it redirected attention toward observation and decision making.

Hybrid Pedagogy and Curriculum Implications

The study does not suggest replacing digital tools with analog methods. Students valued the analog project because it expanded their understanding of digital work. Nineteen of twenty-one agreed that design courses should include more analog or hands-on projects alongside digital ones, and eighteen agreed that combining digital and analog methods would make them stronger designers. The strongest curriculum model is therefore hybrid: students move from contextual research and hand sketching to digital composition, then to physical production, and finally to documentation and reflection.

This has practical implications for design teaching. First, analog production should be integrated intentionally into typography and foundation studios, not added as an isolated craft demonstration. Second, assessment should value process as well as final polish. Failed tests, material trials, documentation, and reflective adjustment can become evidence of learning. Third, courses should help students notice how tools, materials, time, and bodily experience shape design decisions. Such experiences prepare students to become more than competent software users; they prepare them to become reflective practitioners capable of questioning how technologies shape visual communication.

For curriculum planning, the key is intentional sequencing. Analog work should be connected to conceptual research, digital preparation, technical experimentation, and final reflection. It should also be assessed through criteria that make process visible: quality of research, range of

trials, responsiveness to material feedback, clarity of documentation, and ability to articulate design decisions. This prevents analog learning from being misunderstood as merely decorative or nostalgic. Instead, it becomes a structured method for teaching students how meaning changes as design moves across media.

Conclusion

Learning through making remains highly relevant in contemporary graphic design education. In a period dominated by digital tools, tactile processes such as silkscreen printing can help students understand typography as material, embodied, historical, and reflective. The study indicates that analog production increased motivation, strengthened awareness of production conditions, supported creative problem solving, and offered a refreshing counterbalance to screen-based work. The UAE Year of Community framework added another layer by connecting material process to cultural references drawn from crafts, family life, celebration, maritime heritage, and shared memory.

The contribution of this paper lies in reframing analog typography not as nostalgia, but as a critical pedagogical method. Its value is not that it replaces digital tools, but that it helps students use them with greater awareness. When students engage with ink, surface, pressure, error, repetition, and culturally meaningful objects, typography becomes more than a visual arrangement on a screen. It becomes a process through which meaning is made across technologies, materials, bodies, and contexts.

The study is limited by its small sample size, single institutional setting, and immediate post-project responses. Future research could compare multiple cohorts, examine different analog processes, or investigate whether students who complete tactile projects later return to digital typography with greater attention to surface, texture, hierarchy, scale, and reproduction. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the future of design pedagogy should not be understood as a linear movement from analog to digital. It should involve meaningful movement between screen and surface, precision and imperfection, technology and craft.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

OpenAI's ChatGPT was used to assist with summarising existing draft material, reorganising the manuscript into the IAFOR proceedings structure, and proofreading for clarity and formatting consistency. The author should review, verify, and approve the final manuscript before submission.

References

Bringhurst, R. (2012). *The elements of typographic style* (4th ed.). Hartley & Marks.

Cross, N. (2006). *Designerly ways of knowing*. Springer.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.

Dourish, P. (2001). *Where the action is: The foundations of embodied interaction*. MIT Press.

Emirates News Agency. (2025, January 27). *UAE President declares 2025 as the Year of Community*. https://www.wam.ae/en/article/15e1lam-uae-president-declares-2025-the-year-community

Frayling, C. (1993). Research in art and design. *Royal College of Art Research Papers, 1*(1), 1–5.

Kinross, R. (2004). *Modern typography: An essay in critical history* (2nd ed.). Hyphen Press.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

Lupton, E. (2010). *Thinking with type: A critical guide for designers, writers, editors, & students* (2nd rev. and expanded ed.). Princeton Architectural Press.

McCullough, M. (1996). *Abstracting craft: The practiced digital hand*. MIT Press.

Meggs, P. B., & Purvis, A. W. (2016). *Meggs' history of graphic design* (6th ed.). Wiley.

Pallasmaa, J. (2009). *The thinking hand: Existential and embodied wisdom in architecture*. Wiley.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

Sennett, R. (2008). *The craftsman*. Yale University Press.

Contact email: Jacqueline.soghman@zu.ac.ae

Weaving Memories: Historical and Choreographic Traces of Carandiru

Laís Breyton, University of Campinas, Brazil

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper discusses an ongoing practice-based research project developed in two public state schools in São Paulo, Brazil: *Etec de Artes* (Technical School of Arts) and *Etec Parque da Juventude* (Technical High School), both located in former pavilions of the *Carandiru* prison complex. The research investigates how choreographic practices can engage with the architectural, historical, and affective traces of spaces marked by memories. Grounded in Practice as Research (PaR), the project combines theoretical investigation with practical artistic laboratories and the development of a performative game of cards designed to mediate embodied experiences within the students of the schools. By proposing movement as a means of engaging with memory, the research seeks to transform spaces once associated with incarceration into places of reflection through movement.

Keywords: dance, Carandiru, school

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

This research project, entitled "Mobile Experiences in School Spaces: A Choreographic Study in the Former Pavilions of Carandiru", supervised by Professor Ana Maria Rodriguez Costas (University of Campinas, Brazil), is being conducted in two public state schools in São Paulo, Brazil: *Etec de Artes* (Technical School of Arts) and *Etec Parque da Juventude* (Technical High School). Both institutions occupy prisons buildings that formerly belonged to the *Casa de Detenção de São Paulo*, popularly known as Carandiru. The architectural and heritage history of this site has been shaped by ongoing symbolic disputes, which will be discussed throughout this paper.

This paper, presented at the 8th Paris Conference on Arts and Humanities, emerged from a research internship[1] undertaken abroad as part of the broader project. Entitled "Situated Choreography: A Study of the Relationship between Dance and Space", the internship was conducted under the supervision of Professor Julie Perrin at Université Paris 8 (Saint-Dennis, France) and focused on investigating the concept of situated choreography.

In this pathway, this paper reflects on the development of the research in Brazil in light of theoretical perspectives around the site-specific dance field and dance education explored during the internship in France, as well as discussions that took place during the conference.

Discussion

Inaugurated on April 21, 1920, the *Casa de Detenção de São Paulo* it was one of the largest penitentiary constructions carried out by the government of São Paulo in the early twentieth century, and for many years it was regarded as a model prison. In 1975, the House of Detention already housed five thousand prisoners, and thus the idea of a model prison gradually gave way to new representations, associated with violence, abandonment, and precarious conditions.

On October 2, 1992, after a rebellion, the police brutally killed 111 men, marking the history of the city of São Paulo: the Carandiru massacre. One of the most traumatic episodes in the recent history of São Paulo (Borges, 2022).

The prison complex was decommissioned and partially demolished in 2002. The destruction of several pavilions not only erased the physical structures but also contributed to obscuring institutional responsibility for the massacre. This reveals the fissures of a process of neutralizing uncomfortable memories, which determines what can be said and remembered about Carandiru and the massacre that occurred there.

[1]This conference participation was supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), Grant No.2026/00730-9, and by the Office of the Vice Rector at the University of Campinas (Unicamp).

Figure 1
Former Carandiru Prison Pavilion

Figure 2
Current Etec de Artes Building

Revisiting this history constitutes a political and sensitive act of resistance against forgetting. By reinscribing the Carandiru massacre into collective memory, space is opened for reflection on the mechanisms of silencing, erasure, and the persistence of institutional violence that permeate these territories.

In the chapter *Material Touchstones: Weaving Histories through Site-Specific Dance Performance* (2019), Hunter argues that architectural materials and spatial characteristics reveal narratives and evoke images that stimulate and sustain memory. Drawing on her site-specific project *The Abbots Dances*, developed at the 400-year-old George Abbot Almshouse in Guildford, England, Hunter describes a creative process grounded in long-term engagement with residents and in the collection of biographical, anecdotal, and historical materials that informed the choreography. Her discussion expands the notion of observation beyond visual perception to encompass embodied observation and co-presence, in which the moving body simultaneously becomes a research instrument and an integral part of the phenomena emerging through interaction. As Hunter (2019) states:

> Memorial traces and emerging sensations evoked through being in particular yet fluid places could therefore be considered as ‘situating’ processes or devices that enable us to make sense of our place in the world and in relation to the places we encounter. This process of situating and locating ourselves within a particular place is considered here to operate in a processual manner. Through these consistent situating processes, an evolved sense of relationality emerges in which we come to know about places and ourselves in relation to them in the evolving moment; the site in this sense becomes the place we find ourselves in. (p. 143)

Hunter further proposes weaving as a metaphor for the interlacing of materiality, memory, and performance, connecting narratives and trajectories from the past, present, and future through dance. Site-specific choreography thus becomes a practice capable of revealing the complex relationships between human bodies and architectural materialities, relationships often shaped by power, memory, and lived experience.

From this attentive engagement with the past—and with its material, symbolic, and affective traces—it becomes possible to imagine alternative forms of presence and action within spaces once marked by incarceration, transforming memory into movement, embodiment, and artistic creation.

Methodologically, this research is grounded in Practice as Research (PaR), in which artistic practice is understood not merely as an object of study but as a mode of knowledge production through embodied experience. The artistic laboratories are structured around the interaction of three methodological axes. The first consists of embodied artistic practice through observation exercises and choreographic laboratories. The second involves critical reflection arising from empirical engagement, including the development of a performative card deck, group discussions with students, and research supervision meetings. The third axis concerns conceptual and theoretical inquiry through selected readings and the writing of research reports (Geraldi, 2019).

Combining theoretical and practical approaches, the research integrates literature review with observation activities and choreographic creation developed at Etec de Artes and Etec Parque da Juventude. The project aims to create a performative mediation card deck for use within these schools, investigating, through the moving body, the spatial traces embedded in the former prison architecture while fostering the emergence of new gestures, choreographies, and forms of collective engagement among young people and adult students.

Conclusion

This research contributes to preserving and critically engaging with the history and memory of a place that must never be forgotten. The memory of Carandiru persists in the columns, floors, and walls of the schools that now occupy its former pavilions. The development of the performative game of cards is, therefore, significant to offer for the school communities new choreographic possibilities for inhabiting spaces. Through embodied practices, it encourages site-specific dance experiences that transform places once defined by incarceration into spaces for artistic creation and critical reflection through movement.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used **ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5)** to improve grammar in English. The AI-assisted output was carefully reviewed, edited, and verified by the author, who takes full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

References

Borges, V. (2022). A muralha cinzenta e o pórtico majestoso: O processo de patrimonialização do Complexo Penitenciário do Carandiru. *Tempo*, *28*(3).

Geraldi, S. (2019). A prática da pesquisa e a pesquisa na prática. In D. Pizarro (Ed.), *Práticas somáticas em dança: Body-mind Centering em criação, pesquisa e performance*. Editora IFB.

Hunter, V. (2019). Material touchstones: Weaving histories through site-specific dance performance. In K. Barbour, V. Hunter, & M. Kloetzel (Eds.), *Re-positioning site dance: Local acts, global perspectives*.

Contact email: lais.breyton@gmail.com

From Pedagogical Output to Cultural Archive: Multilingual Student Publishing and Humanities Knowledge

María L. Figueredo, York University, Canada

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This article examines how multilingual student publishing can move beyond the status of temporary pedagogical output to become an emergent cultural archive and a form of humanities knowledge production. It focuses on the relationship between *Acentos,* an ongoing multilingual digital magazine publication at York University, and AP/SP/HUMA 4990, an advanced collaborative capstone course that periodically contributes Spanish-English research, interviews, translations, and editorial work to the magazine. *Acentos* exists independently of the course and includes materials from multiple programs and curricular contexts; the capstone course is one structured research-creation pathway into selected editions. Drawing on research-creation, multimodality, public humanities, and translingual practice, the article analyzes the magazine not simply as a collection of assignments but as a cumulative, curated record of student inquiry, Hispanic and Latin American cultural presence in Canada, community encounters, translation decisions, and editorial mediation. The analysis identifies five archival operations within the project: selection, contextualization, multilingual mediation, intermedial composition, and public circulation; it argues that these operations transform interviews, essays, images, translations, and digital design into situated cultural evidence while also shaping what remains visible, searchable, and memorable. Functioning as a relational archive rather than a neutral repository, *Acentos*' value lies in preserving the questions, voices, cultural networks, and media practices of successive student cohorts while making them available beyond the learning management system. The article concludes that multilingual digital publishing can create durable forms of public humanities knowledge, provided that questions of consent, representation, platform sustainability, language hierarchy, and long-term stewardship remain central to the project.

Keywords: multilingual student publishing, cultural archive, research-creation, public humanities, *Acentos*

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Student writing is commonly designed for evaluation and then allowed to disappear. Essays remain in learning management systems, interview notes are stored in personal files, and digital projects become inaccessible when a course ends or a platform changes. Even excellent work is often understood as evidence that learning occurred rather than as knowledge with continuing cultural value. This distinction matters in language and humanities education, where students frequently gather, translate, interpret, and contextualize materials that are not otherwise visible within institutional archives.

This article asks what happens when multilingual student publishing is treated not merely as pedagogy or skills training, but as an emergent archive and a site of humanities knowledge production. It focuses on *Acentos*, a bilingual digital magazine created through AP/SP/HUMA 4990 *Foreign Language and Digital Media: Developing Skills for Online Spanish-English Publications*, an advanced one-semester experiential-education course at York University in Canada. Students research cultural topics, prepare and conduct interviews, write for public audiences, translate, edit, select images, design pages, and collaborate in producing a digital publication concerned with Hispanic, Latin American, Hispanic Canadian, and intercultural cultural life.

Acentos, revista universitaria is an ongoing multilingual undergraduate digital publication housed within York University's Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics. It exists independently of AP/SP/HUMA 4990 and publishes work from Spanish, Portuguese, and Luso-Brazilian Studies through rolling submissions, course-linked contributions, and special editions. AP/SP/HUMA 4990 is an advanced interdisciplinary capstone course for third- and fourth-year students from varied linguistic and disciplinary backgrounds. The course was designed to channel collaborative research-creation into *Acentos*: depending on the iteration, its students may produce the principal content for a dedicated edition or contribute to a shared edition alongside work generated in other courses and programs. The course is therefore neither synonymous with *Acentos* nor the magazine's sole source. Rather, it functions as one recurring curricular, editorial, and research-creation pathway into the publication's broader cumulative archive.

The central argument is that *Acentos* becomes archival through a series of mediating practices. Selection determines which topics and voices enter the publication. Contextualization situates them historically and culturally. Translation and bilingual editing negotiate access across linguistic publics. Digital design joins writing to image, layout, hyperlink, and sequence. Publication gives the resulting materials continuity beyond the semester. These practices do not create a comprehensive or neutral record. They create a situated, selective, and relational archive whose form reveals how cultural knowledge is made, circulated, and remembered.

This archival emphasis distinguishes the present analysis from a broader pedagogical account of *Acentos* as a model for transmedial and community-engaged Hispanic Studies. The course context remains important, but the principal concern here is epistemological: how does a student-edited magazine transform classroom encounters into public cultural evidence, and what are the possibilities and limits of that transformation?

Method and Corpus

This study adopts a qualitative, artifact-centred approach to the six public editions of *Acentos* and to the descriptive infrastructure developed around them. The primary corpus consists of issue-level introductions, published essays, interviews, profiles, translations, visual materials, section titles, hyperlinks, and other paratextual elements intentionally prepared for public circulation. The analysis also considers the glossary and database-building work initiated by the author during the two most recent iterations of AP/SP/HUMA 4990 and subsequently extended through metadata tagging, categorical organization, and curation.

Each issue was read comparatively for its dominant themes, genres, language configurations, community interlocutors, and forms of digital mediation. The purpose was not to measure student learning outcomes, but to identify the operations through which discrete contributions acquire cumulative archival value: selection, contextualization, multilingual mediation, intermedial composition, description, and public circulation. Student reflections and unpublished course submissions are not treated as research data in this article. This distinction preserves an important boundary between artifacts intentionally created for public dissemination and materials produced within the pedagogical relationship. The method, therefore, approaches *Acentos* as a situated and evolving corpus rather than as a comprehensive representation of Hispanic and Latin American cultural production in Canada.

Although *Acentos* constitutes the broader publication and evolving archive, the primary corpus examined in this article comprises the editions and public contributions produced wholly or partly through AP/SP/HUMA 4990, considered within the context of the magazine's wider multilingual publication history.

Research-Creation, Multimodality, and the Expanded Text

Research-creation offers a useful framework because it refuses a simple separation between analysis and making. Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) describe research-creation as a family of practices in which creative production can operate as inquiry, intervention, and a mode of analysis. In *Acentos*, the magazine is both an object that can be studied and a method through which knowledge is generated. Students learn through the acts of interviewing, translating, editing, arranging, and publishing; at the same time, those acts produce a cultural object that can be revisited by later readers and cohorts.

The magazine also belongs to what may be called an expanded textual field. Its meaning is not confined to verbal content. It emerges through the relation among written language, photographs, visual rhythm, headings, hyperlinks, page order, bilingual juxtaposition, and the interface through which a reader encounters the material. Kress (2010) argues that multimodal communication distributes meaning across several modes rather than locating it in words alone. Digital publication makes this distribution especially visible: the image chosen for an interview, the placement of a translated passage, the hierarchy of headings, and the route created through links all participate in interpretation.

This expanded-text perspective is important for archival analysis. Conventional archives often privilege identifiable documents and stable descriptive categories. A digital magazine preserves a more heterogeneous set of traces: profiles, short essays, interviews, poems, reviews, photographs, reflections, design choices, editorial introductions, and links to cultural

organizations or events. The archive is therefore not only what the magazine says. It is also how it stages relations among people, languages, media, and publics.

Digital form, however, does not guarantee durability. Manovich (2001) emphasizes the modular and variable character of new media, while Risam (2018) draws attention to the political and representational stakes of digital humanities work. A page may be revised, a link may break, a hosting system may be reorganized, and a visual element may become detached from its context. Treating *Acentos* as an archive therefore requires attention not only to creation but also to stewardship: naming, description, stable storage, permissions, version control, and the preservation of context.

Acentos as a Situated and Cumulative Archive

Although *Acentos* exists independently of AP/SP/HUMA 4990, the course was designed to activate the magazine as a recurring public destination for collaborative research-creation. The magazine brings together materials produced by students with different relationships to Spanish and English: advanced second-language learners, heritage speakers, multilingual students, and students whose cultural histories extend beyond the Hispanic world. This diversity makes the publication a record not of a single community identity but of encounters among linguistic histories, academic inquiry, and cultural participation.

The term archive must be used carefully. *Acentos* is not an institutional repository that aspires to total coverage, nor does it preserve every stage of the course. It is curated. Some topics are chosen while others are left aside; some interview excerpts are published while others remain in recordings or notes; some images are included because permissions are available; and some student work is revised more extensively than other work. The course-generated layer of the archive is shaped by the academic calendar, the composition of each cohort, the invited speakers, available technologies, editorial judgement, and the ethical limits of publication.

Its partial character is not a defect to be hidden. Community archives scholarship has shown that archives can challenge dominant narratives precisely by preserving situated materials and relationships that larger institutions overlook (Flinn, 2007). *Acentos* contributes at a smaller pedagogical scale. It gathers traces of Hispanic and Latin American cultural life in Canada that might otherwise remain dispersed across local events, community publications, personal websites, social media, and oral recollection. It also preserves how students at a particular moment understood and mediated those materials.

Successive editions create cumulative value. A single issue may document a set of themes or encounters; read across time, the issues reveal changes in student concerns, publication technologies, cultural networks, and editorial priorities. The magazine has included literary and cultural analysis, reflections on the pandemic, migrant and heritage-language identity, bilingual publication, translation, Hispanic Canadian cultural production, and the implications of emerging digital tools. The resulting record is not linear, but it forms an evolving map of what students and their interlocutors considered culturally urgent.

Table 1

Archival and Publication History of Acentos and Its Relationship to AP/SP/HUMA 4990

Edition	Date	Web label	Main focus	Editorial / pedagogical features
Acentos 1	December 2018	2017–2018 Magazine Edition	First publication, listed on the Spanish Program, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies webpage.	Establishes the early publication history of *Acentos* as a student magazine/archive.
Acentos 2	June 2020	2019–2020 Magazine Edition	Second past publication, listed on the Spanish Publications page.	Important transitional edition after the first iteration of AP/SP/HUMA 4990.
Acentos 3	December 2021	2021–2022 Magazine Edition	Included student work on topics such as happiness, e-poetry, film criticism, and violence/gender.	Editors listed as Fernanda Carra-Salsberg and María Figueredo; format was a curated set of student essays/PDFs.
Acentos 4	April 2022	Spring 2022 Special Edition	Focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including changes in education, international opportunities, and Hispanic community/professional relations.	Explicitly connected to AP/SP 4990; students conducted qualitative and quantitative research, wrote, edited, and published papers.
Acentos 5	April 2023	Spring 2023 Special Edition	Combines student reflections, cumulative projects, and essays from Spanish courses; topics include migrant cultural identity, publishing in English, femicide, teamwork, family, accessibility, and translation/publishing.	Described as a bilingual English-Spanish publication combining AP/SP 4990 work with papers from Spanish Studies at Keele and Hispanic Studies at Glendon; AP/SP/HUMA 4990 is described as a fourth-year experiential education course reinforcing oral, reading, writing, research, co-editing, and translation skills.
Acentos 6	July 2025	Summer 2025 Special Edition	Focuses on Hispanic Canadians and Latinx communities, cultural expressions and connections within Canada, and the implications of AI for translation in digital media.	Marks a stronger move toward the themes of Hispanic-Canadian cultural production, digital media, translation, and AI; available as an online *Simplebooklet* publication.
Acentos 7	August 2026	Summer 2026, Special Edition: In progress.		

Note. Acentos is an ongoing multilingual publication that predates and exists independently of AP/SP/HUMA 4990. It contains contributions from multiple courses and programs. This table identifies archival layers associated substantially with AP/SP/HUMA 4990 and does not attribute the magazine's complete publication history to the capstone course.

- *Acentos* 1: Independent magazine publication; predates AP/SP/HUMA 4990.
- *Acentos* 2: Course-linked transitional edition.
- *Acentos* 3: Broader magazine edition.
- *Acentos* 4: Principally course-generated special edition.
- *Acentos* 5: Shared edition combining AP/SP/HUMA 4990 with other courses and programs.
- *Acentos* 6: Course-linked edition with broader community and research-creation aims.
- *Acentos* 7: Course-linked edition with broader community and research-creation aims.

Archival Operations: How Publication Produces Knowledge

The archival value of *Acentos* is produced through five connected operations: selection, contextualization, multilingual mediation, intermedial composition, and public circulation. These operations transform course materials into a cultural record, but they also make visible the interpretive labour that every archive contains.

Selection and Curatorial Judgement

Selection begins before publication. Students and the instructor identify themes, invite or research cultural interlocutors, formulate interview questions, and determine which materials are suitable for a shared issue. These decisions establish the magazine's field of attention. They may foreground literature, film, music, migration, community leadership, language loss, cultural celebration, or digital media. Selection therefore creates an argument about what counts as cultural knowledge.

Editorial selection also operates within each contribution. An interview must be condensed; a profile requires emphasis; an image must be chosen from several possibilities; and a title must orient the reader. These acts resemble archival appraisal in that they determine what enters the enduring record. Yet they occur within an educational relationship in which students are still learning how to distinguish relevance from simplification and clarity from erasure. Faculty guidance, peer review, and consultation with participants are therefore integral to the process.

Contextualization and Ethical Representation

A published cultural encounter requires more than transcription. Students research the background of speakers, organizations, events, and artistic works so that readers can understand why a voice or practice matters. Contextualization changes a classroom visit into a document that can circulate beyond those who were present. It also guards against treating community members as decontextualized examples of diversity.

Interviewing is especially significant. It creates knowledge through relation rather than extraction. Students must prepare informed questions, listen carefully, verify details, and represent responses in ways that respect the speaker's intent. Ethical preparation includes consent, responsible use of images, accurate attribution, and clarity about publication. *Acentos* can preserve community memory only if the people whose work it documents are treated as knowledge producers and interlocutors rather than as raw material.

The distinction between a public artifact and human-participant research also remains important. Material knowingly created for publication can be analyzed as part of the magazine's public record. Private reflections about learning, identity, language, or the classroom should not automatically become research data merely because they were produced in a course. Additional analysis of such reflections requires separate consent and careful attention to the power relationship between instructor and student.

Multilingual Mediation

The Spanish-English bilingual configuration of the course-linked materials examined here is not a decorative duplication of content. Spanish and English address overlapping but different publics and carry different histories of institutional authority, family memory, education, migration, and belonging. For some students Spanish is a heritage language; for others it is an additional language learned through study; for others English is itself one element in a larger multilingual repertoire. The magazine records these uneven relationships rather than presenting bilingualism as simple equivalence.

Translanguaging scholarship emphasizes that multilingual speakers draw on integrated linguistic resources rather than operating within perfectly sealed language systems (García &

Li Wei, 2014). Canagarajah (2013) similarly understands translingual practice as negotiation across difference. In editorial work, this means that translation involves choices about register, intimacy, cultural reference, and audience. A term may remain in Spanish because its resonance would be diminished in English; a contextual phrase may be added for readers unfamiliar with a local reference; parallel versions may diverge slightly to remain effective in each language.

These choices are themselves archival evidence. They preserve not only content but also the conditions under which content becomes shareable. Which language appears first? Is one version described as the original and the other as a translation? Are accents, code-switching, and culturally specific expressions retained or normalized? The answers reveal how linguistic hierarchy is reproduced, challenged, or negotiated within a Canadian public context.

Intermedial Composition and Digital Description

A digital archive depends on organization. Headings, captions, filenames, issue labels, links, and descriptive introductions make materials retrievable and intelligible. Without such elements, a visually attractive magazine may remain difficult to search or preserve. The editorial process therefore includes a basic form of metadata creation, even when participants do not initially name it as such.

Intermedial composition adds another layer. A photograph can locate an interview within a community setting; a poster can preserve the visual language of an event; a hyperlink can connect a student article to an organization, artist, or publication; and page sequencing can create a dialogue among otherwise separate contributions. Jenkins (2006) describes convergence as the circulation of content across media systems and participatory cultures. In *Acentos*, convergence is modest but meaningful: cultural knowledge moves among spoken interviews, written profiles, digital images, course discussion, and public web publication.

The expanded digital text also requires restraint. Images must be used with permission and sufficient resolution; links should support rather than replace contextual explanation; and design should not overwhelm accessibility. The archive's visual appeal is part of its public invitation, but legibility, stable naming, and descriptive clarity determine whether future readers can use it as more than a showcase.

Public Circulation and Knowledge Mobilization

Publication changes the destination of student work. Instead of ending with a grade, a contribution enters a public issue that can be shared with interviewees, families, cultural organizations, other students, and scholars. The presence of an authentic audience often increases attention to accuracy and clarity, but its archival importance is broader: circulation returns knowledge to the communities from which it emerged and allows later readers to encounter it.

Public access does not mean universal access. Readers require internet connectivity, accessible design, and awareness that the magazine exists. Searchability depends on institutional web structures and external indexing. Long-term knowledge mobilization therefore requires active maintenance: stable links, issue descriptions, preservation copies, periodic link checking, and clear attribution. Without this work, digital visibility may be temporary.

In this way, the magazine edition, which is produced in each iteration of the capstone course and its collaborative project, occupies a productive space between the university and the public sphere. It remains an educational project, but it does not remain enclosed within the classroom. Its articles and interviews do not claim the authority of exhaustive scholarship; rather, they offer carefully mediated entry points into cultural people, practices, and questions. The magazine's public value lies in this combination of accessibility and situatedness.

What the Archive Makes Visible

Reading *Acentos* as an archive shifts attention from individual student achievement to patterns that emerge across the publication. First, the magazine makes cultural networks visible. Interviews and profiles connect writers, artists, educators, journalists, diplomats, organizers, and community leaders to the university and to one another. Even when an issue focuses on a limited group, it begins to map a wider ecosystem of Hispanic and Latin American cultural production in Canada.

Second, it preserves student questions. Questions reveal how a cohort understands culture at a particular historical moment: what students want to know about migration, heritage language, representation, gender, media, belonging, public leadership, or creative practice. These questions are not neutral prompts. They are evidence of changing curricular and social concerns.

Third, the archive records mediation. Bilingual versions, editorial revisions, visual framing, and explanatory passages show how cultural material is adapted for public circulation. This is especially valuable in multilingual humanities research because it reveals the often-invisible work required to bring knowledge across languages and institutional contexts.

Fourth, *Acentos* preserves affective and relational dimensions of knowledge. The archive includes traces of admiration, curiosity, uncertainty, discovery, and responsibility. These qualities do not replace critical analysis, but they help explain why community-engaged humanities work matters. An archive of cultural production is also an archive of encounters.

Finally, the magazine makes student cultural production visible as part of the field it studies. Students are not only documenting Hispanic and Latin American cultural life; through their interviews, translations, essays, editorial decisions, and designs, they participate in producing it. The archive records this movement from reception to contribution.

Limits, Sustainability, and Future Stewardship

The archival claim should not be romanticized. A magazine containing course-linked editions and contributions has structural limits, particularly when editorial production must be completed within the academic term. Its coverage depends on who enrolls, which guests are available, what can be accomplished within a semester, and how much editorial labour can be sustained. Uneven participation can affect quality. The pressure to publish may create tension between pedagogical experimentation and public standards. Institutional web systems may change, and responsibility for maintenance can become concentrated in one faculty member.

Representation is another limit. No issue can stand for the full diversity of Hispanic and Latin American Canada. National, racial, Indigenous, regional, generational, gendered, and linguistic differences require more sustained attention than a single course can provide. The magazine

should therefore present itself as a collection of situated contributions, not as an authoritative panorama.

Language hierarchy also persists. In an English-dominant institutional environment, translation into English can expand readership while simultaneously positioning English as the language through which public legitimacy is achieved. A bilingual archive must continually examine ordering, equivalence, and visibility so that Spanish does not become merely symbolic and so that other languages present in students' and communities' lives are not erased.

Sustainability requires a practical preservation plan. Each issue should be stored in more than one format and location; image permissions and contributor information should be documented; issue-level descriptions should identify dates, themes, editors, and major contents; and links should be reviewed periodically. Future phases could create a searchable index of people, organizations, places, languages, and cultural forms represented across issues. Such an index would make the cumulative archive more usable without transforming it into a claim of completeness.

Undergraduate research assistance can support this stewardship by organizing issue histories, verifying metadata, documenting publication patterns, and mapping connections to the wider ecosystem of Hispanic and Latin American digital cultural publications in Canada. This labour is valuable not because it converts the magazine into a quantitative database, but because it strengthens discoverability and establishes the context in which the archive can be interpreted.

Conclusion

The course-linked contributions to *Acentos* demonstrate that multilingual student publishing can become more than a record of course completion. Through selection, contextualization, translation, intermedial design, and public circulation, student work becomes a situated cultural archive and a form of humanities knowledge production. The archive preserves community voices, cultural networks, changing student questions, editorial decisions, and the linguistic labour through which cultural material becomes public.

Its value does not depend on comprehensiveness. Indeed, its partiality is central to an honest understanding of the project. The various editions of the magazine record particular encounters produced by particular cohorts within particular institutional and historical conditions. What gives those encounters continuing significance is not neutrality but careful mediation, ethical representation, cumulative organization, and public accessibility.

The name *Acentos* offers an apt conclusion. An accent is evidence that language has travelled and that history remains audible within speech. The magazine likewise preserves traces of movement: between classroom and community, Spanish and English, spoken encounter and written account, individual assignment and collective publication, present experience and future memory. When these traces are responsibly curated and sustained, the digital student magazine becomes not only a place where learning is displayed, but a place where culture is documented and humanities knowledge continues to form.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges Natalie Fuchs Deutsc, a 2026 Dean's Award for Research Excellence student researcher at York University, for her work in advancing the established database through the development of metadata, categorical organization, and further curation of information concerning the editions of *Acentos* and the wider ecosystem of Hispanic and Latin American digital cultural publications in Canada. The database was initially developed by the author through glossary research undertaken during the two most recent iterations of the course. The author also acknowledges the students, guest speakers, community participants, and editorial collaborators whose work has contributed to the development of the magazine.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT, an AI-assisted language tool developed by OpenAI, was used to assist with the organization, linguistic refinement, condensation, and formatting of the author's original conference presentation and research materials. Its use was limited to revising the author's material for clarity, coherence, concision, and conformity with the conference proceedings guidelines. The research design, pedagogical project, evidence, interpretations, arguments, and conclusions are the author's own. The author further declares that no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic research, teaching, and case studies conducted by the author.

References

Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge.

Chapman, O., & Sawchuk, K. (2012). Research-creation: Intervention, analysis and "family resemblances." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *37*(1), 5–26. https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2012v37n1a2489

Figueredo, M. L. (Ed.). (Summer 2025). Acentos, revista universitaria [Acentos, university magazine] (6th ed.). York University. https://www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/acentos/spanish/

Flinn, A. (2007). Community histories, community archives: Some opportunities and challenges. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, *28*(2), 151–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/00379810701611936

García, O., & Li Wei. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.

Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. MIT Press.

Risam, R. (2018). *New digital worlds: Postcolonial digital humanities in theory, praxis, and pedagogy.* Northwestern University Press.

York University. (n.d.). Acentos, revista universitaria [Acentos, university magazine]. https://www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/acentos/

York University. (2021, July 12). AP/SP4990 3.0 *Foreign Language and Digital media: Developing Skills for Online, Spanish-English Publications*. https://www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/spanish-course/ap-sp4990-3-0-foreign-language-and-digital-media-developing-skills-for-online-spanish-english-publications/

York University. (2023, April 24). Spring 2023 special edition. https://www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/student-publication/spring-2023-special-edition/

Contact email: mfiguere@yorku.ca

Driving Creative Economy Through Likay Performing Arts: Integrating Product Innovation and City Learning Ecology in Ang Thong Province, Thailand

Mutjarin Ittiphong, Silpakorn University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This research aims to study and analyze approaches for transforming cultural capital from "Likay" performing arts into creative commercial products to enhance the grassroots economy and develop a City Learning Ecology that supports lifelong learning for all ages. Using Ang Thong Province—the "Likay Capital of Thailand"—as a case study, the study employs a Mixed Methods Research design, primarily focusing on Qualitative Research and Participatory Action Research (PAR). The findings reveal that the most effective concept for creating cultural-based products is the development of "Likay Models." These consist of five designs of toys and souvenirs that deconstruct and redesign the diverse identities and intricate costumes of Likay characters to communicate cultural values to the younger generation. Economic valuation indicates that these products generate significant circulating income, with a Return on Investment (ROI) as high as 5.66. Key findings suggest that the success of creative cultural products relies on a robust City Learning Ecology. This mechanism integrates a network of master artists and three generations of Likay performers (children, youth, and elders) with entrepreneurs and stakeholders. Such synergy ensures the systematic transmission of traditional wisdom alongside innovation. This approach not only addresses management challenges within small-scale cultural businesses but also fosters local identity pride and promotes the global sustainability of Likay performing arts through creative economy mechanisms.

Keywords: Likay, creative products, city learning ecology, Ang Thong Province, Participatory Action Research (PAR)

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Thailand is strategically pivoting towards a value-based economy, guided by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 20-year National Strategy (2018–2037). Within this framework, cultural capital is prioritized as a dynamic engine for local economic revitalization. A prominent example is Ang Thong Province, the "Likay Capital of Thailand," which possesses a rich "Living Heritage", the professional performing arts. However, the province faces a significant "pain point": a lack of systematic integration between cultural preservation and economic viability. Tourism revenue remains below its potential, and family-run cultural businesses often lack professional management. Furthermore, there is a visible gap in knowledge transmission to younger generations, threatening the sustainability of Likay as a living art form.

To address these challenges, this research proposes a comprehensive framework centered on the City Learning Ecology. Based on the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) criteria, this ecology promotes lifelong learning to empower individuals and drive economic development. In Ang Thong, this is operationalized through the "Likay 3 Generations" model, which connects elderly masters (Wai Duek), youth (Wai Dan), and students (Wai Dek). Crucially, the study integrates Product Innovation as a commercial bridge. By developing "Likay Models"—collectible figures based on iconic stage characters—the project transforms intangible heritage into tangible products that appeal to modern audiences. Through Participatory Action Research (PAR), this study engages over 55 stakeholders to ensure that these innovations support a robust, grassroots creative economy.

Research Methodology

This study employs a Mixed Methods Research design, primarily integrated through Qualitative Research and Participatory Action Research (PAR). The methodology is designed to be transparent and reproducible to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The research process is divided into three distinct phases as follows:

Phase 1: Contextual and Potential Analysis

The objective of this phase is to analyze the cultural and historical potential of Ang Thong Province as a foundation for a learning city.

- **Documentary Research**: A systematic review was conducted on national policies, the 20-year National Strategy, provincial development plans, and relevant academic reports to establish a conceptual framework. Data was processed using Content Analysis to categorize the economic and social value of local cultural capital.
- **Area Frame Survey and Participant Observation**: The research team conducted on-site surveys at key locations, including the various Likay performance sites. Researchers engaged in participant observation to record community interactions and the existing use of learning spaces.
- **In-Depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 55 key informants, including master artists (e.g., the President of the Likay Association of Thailand), local government officials, community leaders, and professional performers.

Phase 2: City Learning Ecology Development

This phase focuses on creating mechanisms for lifelong learning and enhancing creative products through a collaborative PAR process.

- **Participatory Action Research (PAR):** The process followed a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This included:
  - **Focus Groups:** Two rounds of stakeholder meetings were held to co-design action plans and define success indicators for the "Likay 3 Generations" model.
  - **Creative Workshops:** Collaborative sessions were held to develop Product Innovations, such as the five "Likay Figures" (collectible models).
  - **Curriculum Development:** The research team worked with local schools (e.g., Wat Sa Kaeo School) and the College of Dramatic Arts to institutionalize Likay knowledge into a "Likay Lifelong Learning Curriculum" and an online course titled "Likay Appreciation" via SU4Life, Silpakorn University.

Phase 3: Collaborative Mechanism Establishment

The final phase aims to ensure sustainability through a Quadruple Helix Model (Academia, Government, Private Sector, and Community).

- **MOU and Policy Integration:** A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established between Silpakorn University and Ang Thong Province.
- **Strategic Planning:** Findings were integrated into the Ang Thong Provincial 20-Year Development Plan (2023–2042) to secure long-term budget and personnel support, facilitating the province's application to the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC).

Data Validation and Analysis

- **Triangulation**: To minimize bias and ensure accuracy, the study utilized Data Triangulation (verifying sources across different times, places, and persons), Theory Triangulation, and Methodological Triangulation.
- **Analytic Techniques:** Qualitative data from interviews and field notes were analyzed using Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis to interpret the socio-cultural behaviors and narratives of the community

Results and Discussion

Results

Development of the 5 Likay Archetype Models

The study successfully transformed the intangible cultural heritage of Ang Thong's Likay into tangible assets through the creation of five distinct figure models. These figures serve as a knowledge base to communicate traditional character identities to the younger generation. The series consists of three female and two male characters, each designed with costumes and gestures that reflect specific Likay performance archetypes:

- **Model 1** – Phra Ek (The Leading Male): Represents a gentle, polite, and kind personality, characterized by an affectionate stage persona.
- **Model 2** – Male Joker (Tua Jok Chai): Portrays a fun, outspoken, and detached character who acts as a crucial assistant in various scenarios.

- **Model 3** – Nang Rai (The Villainess): Reflects a competitive and risk-taking spirit, embodying a character that never surrenders.
- **Model 4** – Female Joker (Tua Jok Ying): Similar to the male joker, this archetype provides humor and aids in problem-solving through a fun and outspoken demeanor.
- **Model 5** – Nang Ek (The Leading Female): Portrayed as a gentle, polite, and delicate character, evoking a sense of fragility.

To protect these creative assets, the research team has secured intellectual property rights by applying for design patents (Nos. 2602000119–2602000123).

The "Blind Box" Marketing Strategy

To bridge the gap between traditional heritage and modern consumer trends, the project implemented a "Blind Box" strategy. This approach leverages the element of surprise to stimulate interest and encourage collecting behavior among Thai. By utilizing these figures for role-play, the strategy facilitates a deeper engagement with Likay narratives and cultural identities, effectively making the art form more accessible and "trendy" for contemporary audiences.

Economic Valuation and ROI

The economic impact analysis indicates significant potential for circulating income within the local community. Based on a production target of 10,000 units, the financial assessment demonstrates an exceptional Return on Investment (ROI) of 5.66 times.

Table 1
Estimated Economic Value and ROI Analysis for Likay Models

Assessment Item	Quantitative Details	Value (THB)
Total Investment	Research, design, production, and marketing	**300,000**
Production Cost per Unit	Averaged over 10,000 units	30
Retail Price per Unit	Target selling price for toys/souvenirs	200
Profit per Unit	Net gain after deducting production costs	170
Total Estimated Value/Profit	Total return from 10,000 units	**1,700,000**
Return on Investment (ROI)	Ratio of benefit to cost	**5.66**

Discussion

Cultural Capital as an Economic Driver

The results demonstrate that the "Likay Models" effectively address the province's primary pain point: the imbalance between cultural "value" and economic "volume". By deconstructing intricate stage identities into collectible figures, the research proves that traditional arts can be revitalized as creative commercial products that appeal to younger demographics.

Strengthening the City Learning Ecology

The success of these products is not isolated but is a result of a robust City Learning Ecology. This ecology integrates three generations—Wai Dek (Children), Wai Dan (Youth), and Wai

Duek (Elders)—with local stakeholders. Likay figures are more than just toys; they are learning tools for lifelong cultural transmission.

Managerial and Policy Implications

The high ROI of 5.66 serves as a powerful indicator for policy-makers to integrate cultural innovation into provincial development plans. Moving from a traditional family-run model to a "Creative Enterprise" requires systematic management and digital marketing skills, which this project provides through a "Learn-to-Earn" framework. Ultimately, this model supports Ang Thong's ambition to join the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), proving that local identity can be scaled into a sustainable international brand

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the strategic integration of product innovation and a robust City Learning Ecology serves as a transformative engine for the creative economy in Ang Thong Province. By deconstructing the intangible cultural heritage of Likay into tangible assets—such as the five archetype collectible figures—the project successfully bridges the gap between traditional "value" and modern economic "volume". The economic valuation, yielding a Return on Investment (ROI) of 5.66 times, underscores the potential of cultural capital to drive circulating income within the grassroots economy.

The core mechanism for sustainability is the "Likay 3 Generations" model, which facilitates a seamless flow of knowledge from elderly (Wai Duek) to youth (Wai Dan) and students (Wai Dek). This model not only ensures cultural preservation but also promotes social well-being and lifelong learning, positioning Ang Thong as a prominent candidate for the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC). Ultimately, Ang Thong's Likay has evolved from a static folk performance into a dynamic "Living Heritage" that integrates artistic identity with innovative commercial potential.

Policy Recommendations

To ensure the long-term sustainability of Ang Thong as a creative learning city, the following policy measures are recommended:

Establishment of a "Likay Creative District"

Local government units should implement cultural zoning to create a dedicated creative district. This area should serve as a Living Museum and a central marketplace where innovative cultural products (e.g., Likay-themed food, fashion, and souvenirs) can be showcased to attract international tourists and researchers.

Institutionalization of the Cultural Curriculum

The "Likay Lifelong Learning Curriculum" and the "Likay 3 Generations" model should be formally integrated into the provincial education system. By embedding local wisdom into school courses, the province can foster "Cultural Citizens" who possess both an appreciation for their roots and the innovative skills to drive future creative industries.

Strengthening Multi-sectoral Collaboration (Quadruple Helix)

The collaboration between academia, government, the private sector, and the community—formalized through the existing MOU with Silpakorn University—must be maintained. Policy-makers should ensure that the "Learning City" concept remains a core component of the Ang Thong 20-Year Provincial Development Plan to secure continuous budgetary and personnel support.

Digital Transformation and Global Branding

Policies should support the continuous development of a Digital Archive for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and the promotion of Multilingual Likay (English and German versions). Leveraging social media platforms and digital storytelling will enhance Thailand's Soft Power and establish an international brand identity for Ang Thong on the global stage.

Promoting Social Well-being Through Art Therapy

The "Likay Wai Duek" model should be expanded as a state-supported initiative for social healing and art therapy for the elderly. Utilizing Likay as a tool for mental and social well-being will address the challenges of an aging society while empowering seniors to remain active contributors to the community's cultural ecosystem.

References

Kanitha, T. (2007). *Karn prab prasanสื่อ phun ban Likay phan thang thorathat: Karani suksa Likay Ruam Dao Dara thang sathani witthayu thorathat kong thap bok chong 5* [The adaptation of folk media Likay through television: A case study of Likay Ruam Dao Dara on Royal Thai Army Television Channel 5]. [Master's thesis, Dhurakij Pundit University] [in Thai].

Khonprosoet, J. (2025). Likay and Ranikayling song: Performing arts for strengthening social relationships among the elderly. *Burapha Journal of Fine and Applied Arts*, *28*(1), 237–252 [in Thai]. https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/buraphaJ/article/view/276346

Khonthongchum, K. (2013). *Karn prab tua phuea khwam yu rot khong sue phun ban praphet Likay: Sueksa karani Likay khana Chaiya-Ann Mitchai* [The adaptation for survival of Likay folk media: A case study of Chaiya-Ann Mitchai troupe]. [Master's thesis, Rangsit University]. Rangsit University Intellectual Repository [in Thai].

Manee, T. (2010). *Likay: Karn anurak lae phatthana tam mithi thang watthanatham phumpanya lae prachya setthakit pho phiang* [Likay: Preservation and development based on cultural dimensions, wisdom, and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy]. Office of the National Culture Commission, Ministry of Culture [in Thai].

Office of Ang Thong Primary Educational Service Area. (2025). *Mon sanay Likay Ang Thong: Laksut radap thongthin* [The charm of Ang Thong Likay: Local curriculum]. Ministry of Education [in Thai].

Phlunon, P., Chantuk, T., Kasornsuwan, S., Itthipong, M., Bussabok, P., Sunthorntham, T., Thongma, T., & Netchu, K. (2026). *Mon sanay Likay Ang Thong* [The charm of Ang Thong Likay]. Silpakorn University [in Thai].

Rattana, B. (2011). *Chak haeng chiwit chao lae phrai khong chao Likay* [The stage of life: Masters and commoners of Likay artists]. Faculty of Education, Naresuan University [in Thai].

Sukhansanti, W. (2019). *Karn supthot lae karn thait thot moradok watthanatham thongthin dan sinlapa karn sadaeng phun ban: Lakhon ram Changwat Ang Thong* [The transmission and inheritance of local cultural heritage in traditional performing arts: Lakhon Ram in Ang Thong Province]. Bunditpatanasilpa Institute [in Thai].

Surapone, V. (1979). *Likay* [Likay performing arts]. Suwan Photo Studio Printing [in Thai].

Suriya, S., Phatthana, K., & Tekantikul, Silpakit. (2005). *Khunchai khonmuang lae mae yok Likay: Khwam siriwilai kap khwam bansung khong sangkhom thai samai mai* [Urban gentlemen and Likay Mae Yok: Modernity and entertainment in contemporary Thai society]. Suranaree University of Technology [in Thai].

Contact email: mittiphong@gmail.com

From Textural Foundation to Thematic Presence: Cello in Chopin's Piano Trio Op. 8

Wiktor Misiak, Independent Scholar, Poland

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Frédéric Chopin's Piano Trio in G-minor, Op. 8, dedicated to Antoni Radziwiłł, represents a relevant example within his chamber music works as his only trio for violin, cello, and piano written during his formative years. Although the piano part predominates in thematic material and virtuosity, it nonetheless affords the cello a function that extends beyond a mere supportive bass line to an increasingly dialogic and texturally integrated voice. This paper examines the transformation of the cello's role in Piano Trio Op. 8, tracing its shift from a traditional foundational role towards a presence of greater thematic and conversational significance. A detailed performative analysis seeks to elucidate the cello's role in motivic exchange, its contrapuntal dialogue with the violin and piano, and its contribution to the expressive discourse. While Chopin's chamber music remains dominated by pianistic concerns, the cello's part in Op. 8 frequently engages in cross-instrumental interplay that challenges simple hierarchical models of accompaniment. This is particularly evident in passages where the cello demonstrates melodic emergence or participates in imitative textures that contribute to formal coherence and affective contrast. By situating these findings within the broader context of early Romantic chamber writing and performance practice, this study argues that Chopin's handling of the cello in this trio anticipates later developments in which the cello moves toward an increasingly autonomous role in chamber genres. Such an approach highlights not only the work's structural subtleties but also its contribution to the evolving roles of instruments within the piano trio repertoire.

Keywords: Fryderyk Chopin, Chopin Piano Trio, Piano Trio in G minor Op. 8, Chopin's Warsaw, Romantic chamber music

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Frédéric Chopin's Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 8 occupies a singular position within the composer's oeuvre as his only work for the standard piano trio instrumentation. Written between 1828 and 1829 and dedicated to Prince Antoni Radziwiłł, it remains Chopin's only completed work for the classical piano trio ensemble of violin, cello, and piano. Although the composition belongs to the composer's formative years, it already reveals a sophisticated engagement with chamber music textures and instrumental interaction. The work has often been discussed primarily in relation to its pianistic character, with commentators noting the predominance of the piano in thematic material, virtuosity, and structural control. Although this interpretative perspective is well established, it tends to underrepresent the more differentiated role of the string instruments. This study examines the cello's transition from a foundational bass function to an increasingly autonomous participant in thematic articulation and contrapuntal interaction.

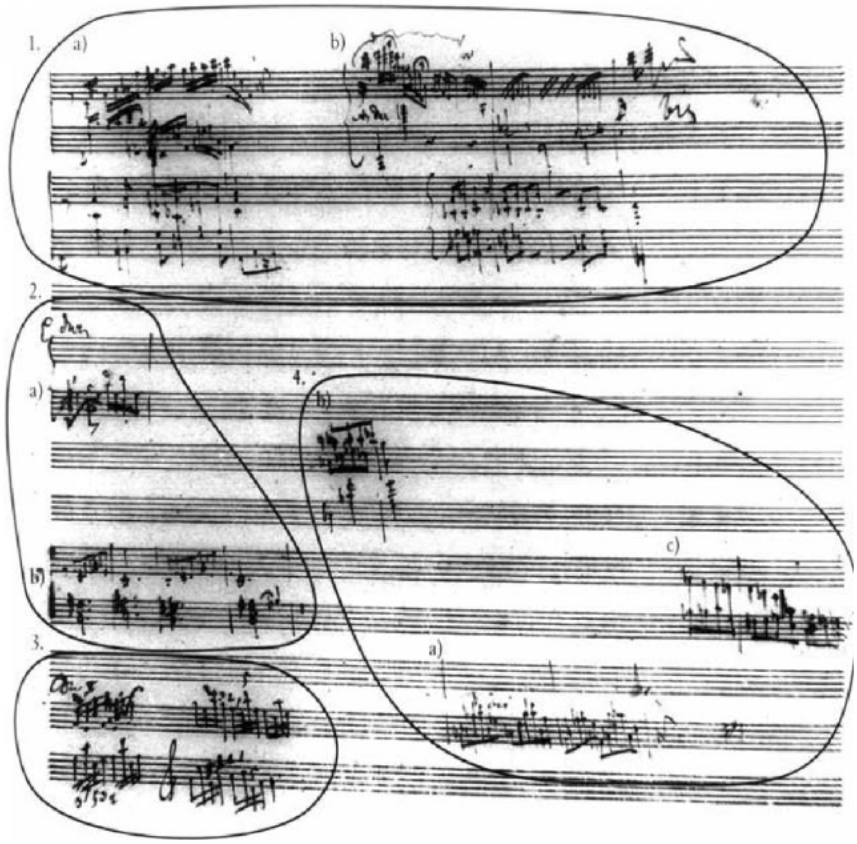
The cello in Piano Trio Op. 8 is shown to fulfill a function that extends beyond the conventional role of harmonic foundation inherited from Classical models. Through a detailed performative and analytical examination, this study shows that Chopin progressively transforms the instrument from a primarily textural support into an increasingly active participant in thematic discourse. Rather than functioning solely as a bass voice, the cello engages in motivic exchange, contrapuntal dialogue, and expressive interaction with both violin and piano.

This perspective is significant for two reasons. First, it offers a reassessment of a work frequently regarded as excessively piano-centred. Second, it contributes to broader discussions concerning the evolution of instrumental hierarchy within early Romantic chamber music. By examining how the cello participates in the construction of musical meaning, we gain a more refined understanding of Chopin's chamber writing and of the changing role of lower string instruments within nineteenth-century ensemble practice.

Source Context — Autograph and Compositional Process

Recent source studies have further refined our understanding of the autograph of Piano Trio Op. 8 as a complex compositional document rather than a single-purpose working score, building on earlier observations by Krystyna Kobylańska and by Józef M. Chomiński and Maria Turło (Chomiński & Turło, 1990; Kobylańska, 1979). Maciej Gołąb has reinterpreted the final page of the manuscript, arguing that it contains musical fragments that cannot be securely attributed to the Trio itself (Gołąb, 2014). These include sketches associated with other contemporaneous compositional projects from Chopin's final Warsaw years. Rather than indicating contamination of the source, this layered structure suggests that the autograph functioned as a broader compositional workspace in which multiple musical ideas were explored in close temporal proximity.

Figure 1
Chronology of the Fragments

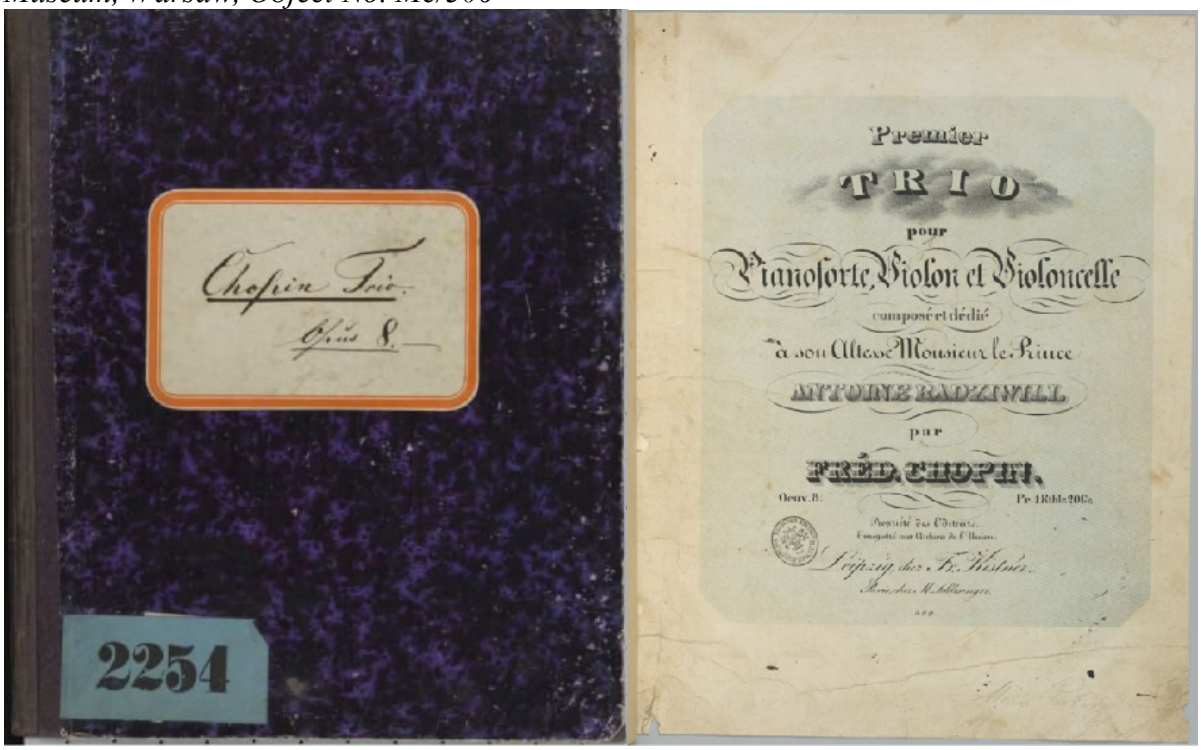


Note. Reproduced from "Example 3.1: Chronology of the Fragments" in Gołąb (2014, p. 43)

The novelty of this perspective lies not only in its emphasis on distributed musical agency within a work traditionally regarded as piano-centred, but also in the way it brings performance analysis into conversation with source-oriented scholarship. Studies by Jeffrey Kallberg and Maciej Gołąb have revealed important aspects of Chopin's compositional imagination and working methods prior to his departure from Warsaw (Gołąb, 2014; Kallberg, 2003). The present study approaches the Trio from a complementary perspective, examining how these broader creative tendencies may be manifested in the interaction of the instruments and, in particular, in the cello's evolving contribution to thematic discourse.

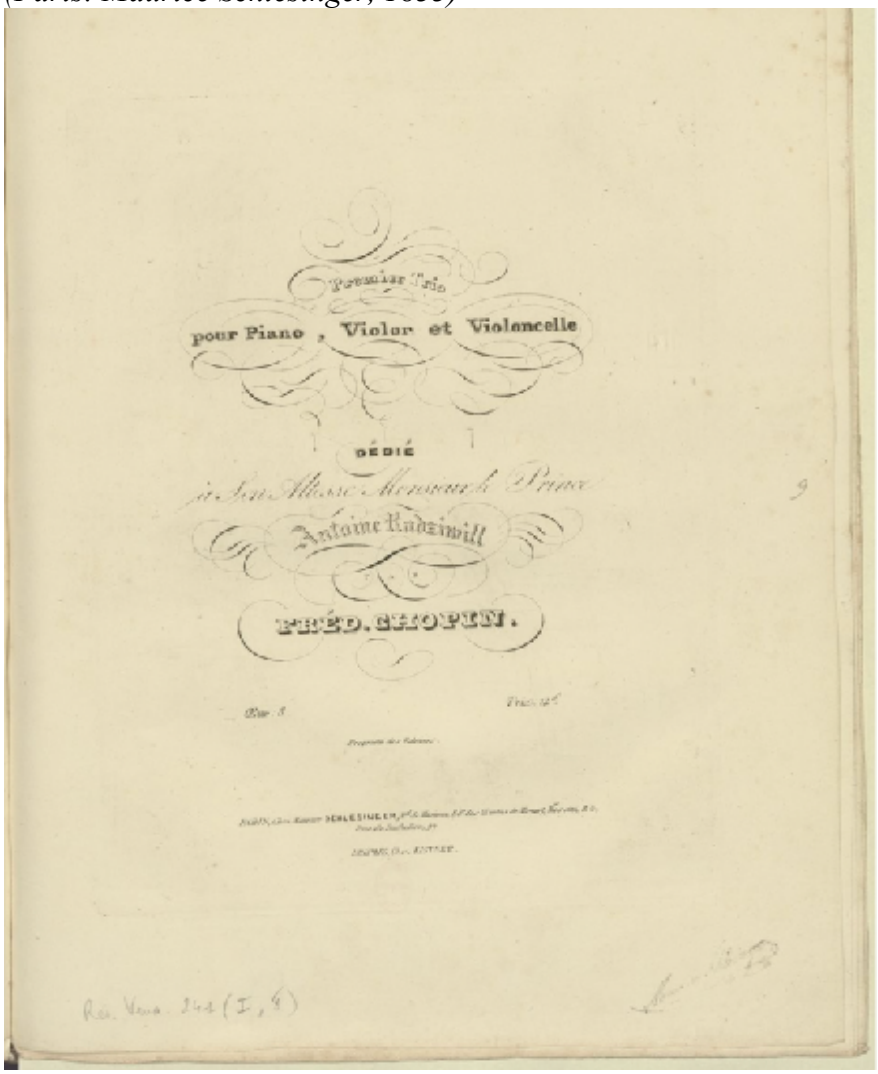
The present analysis is based on early printed editions of the score issued in 1833 by Kistner (Leipzig) and Schlesinger (Paris).

Figure 2
Cover and Title Page of the First German Edition of Frédéric Chopin's Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8 (Leipzig: Carl Friedrich Kistner, c. 1833–1834). The Fryderyk Chopin Museum, Warsaw, Object No. Mc/306



The annotated copy held in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique (RES VMA-241 (1,8), Notice n° FRBNF43634083), formerly belonging to Jane Wilhelmina Stirling, contains Chopin's handwritten corrections and annotations. This document offers valuable insight into the composer's editorial practices and creative process (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Title Page of the First French Edition of Frédéric Chopin's Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8 (Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, 1833)



All musical examples presented in Figures 8–15 are reproduced from the same source: the first French edition of Chopin's *Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 8* (Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, 1833), preserved in Jane Wilhelmina Stirling's annotated copy at the Bibliothèque nationale de France Département de la Musique, RES VMA-241 (1,8), Notice n° FRBNF43634083.

Methodological Framework

The analytical approach adopted here combines score analysis with performative analysis. The latter refers not merely to the study of notation but to the examination of how musical functions become perceptible through performance. Such an approach considers articulation, phrasing, dynamic balance, registral placement, and timbral interaction as integral components of musical structure.

Three analytical categories guide the discussion:

1. Textural Function – the degree to which the cello operates as a harmonic and rhythmic foundation.
2. Motivic Participation – the instrument's involvement in thematic presentation, development, and exchange.
3. Dialogic Interaction – instances of contrapuntal, imitative, or conversational relationships with the violin and piano.

These categories make it possible to trace the gradual expansion of the instrument's agency throughout the work while simultaneously considering performance implications. Rather than treating the cello part as a subsidiary component, this methodology evaluates its contribution to formal articulation and expressive communication. In this respect, the analysis aligns with recent musicological approaches that emphasize musical interaction and distributed agency within chamber ensembles.

Historical and Generic Context

The piano trio underwent substantial transformation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Classical models by Haydn and Mozart, the keyboard often dominated the musical discourse, while the cello frequently doubled the piano bass line. Although Beethoven significantly expanded the independence of all three instruments, traces of hierarchical thinking remained embedded within the genre. By the 1820s and 1830s, composers increasingly sought more balanced interactions among ensemble members. Works by Schubert, Mendelssohn, and later Schumann reveal a growing interest in thematic circulation between instruments. The cello, in particular, began to emerge as an autonomous melodic voice capable of participating in sophisticated contrapuntal exchanges.

A portrait engraving by Julian Cegliński after a photograph by Bajer, published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* no. 122 (1862), illustrates the historical context surrounding Chopin's musical legacy (see Figure 4). Within this developmental trajectory, Chopin's Piano Trio occupies an intriguing position. While preserving many characteristics of the virtuoso piano tradition, the work simultaneously experiments with forms of instrumental interaction that extend beyond purely accompanimental conceptions of the cello. It may therefore be understood both as a continuation of earlier conventions and as an anticipation of later Romantic chamber practices.

Figure 4
Former Bell Tower of the Bernardine Nuns' Convent at Castle Square, Warsaw (c. 1862), the Only Surviving Architectural Element of the Former Convent Complex

The Main School of Music at the Royal University of Warsaw operated between 1826 and 1831. It was housed in the former Bernardine Nuns convent, a building that no longer survives. The church visible in the photograph served as the School's concert hall. In the aftermath of the November Uprising (1830–31), the School was abolished by the Russian authorities as part of a broader campaign of repression directed against Polish educational and cultural life. A broader perspective on the discussed subject is provided by Marcin Zaleski's *Wprowadzenie do Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie jeńców i chorągwi zdobytych w bitwach pod Wawrem i Dębem Wielkim* (*Introduction of Prisoners of War and Captured Banners into the Royal Castle in Warsaw after the Battles of Wawer and Dębe Wielkie*) (1831), an oil-on-canvas painting formerly belonging to the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. The work was lost during 1939–1940, and the present image reproduces its photographic documentation from 1931 (see Figure 5). The painting depicts the period immediately following the composition of

Chopin's Piano Trio in G minor, shortly after the composer's departure from Warsaw, and thus preserves a representation of the Castle Square area with an urban layout closely resembling the one known to Chopin at the time.

Figure 5
Marcin Zaleski, Introduction of Prisoners of War and Captured Banners Into the Royal Castle in Warsaw After the Battles of Wawer and Dębe Wielkie (1831)

A further visual reference to Warsaw's historical landscape is provided by Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto), often referred to as the painter of Warsaw, in his *View of the Bernardine Nuns' Church and Sigismund III's Column from the Descent to the Vistula* (c. 1768–1770), an oil-on-canvas painting preserved in the Royal Castle in Warsaw (inv. no. ZKW/440). The view depicts St Clare's Church and the now-lost Bernardine Nuns' convent on the left, the latter of which was later adapted to house the Main School of Music at the Royal University of Warsaw, where Chopin studied and composed his Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 8 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6
Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto), View of the Bernardine Nuns' Church and Sigismund III's Column From the Descent to the Vistula (c. 1768–1770), Depicting the Area Associated With Chopin's Formative Years; on the Left, the Former Bernardine Nuns' Convent

The area is depicted once again by Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto) in his *View of the Sigismund Column, Showing the Royal Castle after the Fire of 1767* (1768). Although the painting was lost during the Second World War, its composition has been preserved through photographic documentation. Repeating the composition of the *View of the Bernardine Nuns' Church and Sigismund III's Column from the Descent to the Vistula*, it depicts the reconstruction of the damaged southern wing of the Royal Castle following the fire of 1767. The composition also includes numerous figures, traditionally identified as King Stanisław August Poniatowski and individuals involved in the reconstruction works (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto), View of the Sigismund Column, Showing the Royal Castle After the Fire of 1767 (1768), a Lost Painting Depicting the Reconstruction of the Southern Wing of the Royal Castle

Frédéric Chopin composed the Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 8, as one of the last works of his student years at the Main School of Music at the Royal University of Warsaw. At the time, the School was located on Krakowskie Przedmieście, near Castle Square, in the former St Clare's Church and the now-lost Bernardine Nuns' convent. Gołąb (2007) argues that the Trio had reached its definitive form by the end of 1829. He further demonstrates that the surviving sketches for later compositions date from the period between late 1829 and the first three quarters of 1830, while Chopin was still in Warsaw. Although the composer took the manuscript of the Trio with him when he left Poland, Gołąb notes that he did so in order to prepare the engraver's (or publisher's) autograph for Jacques Hippolyte Aristide Farrenc. Consequently, despite the manuscript's later journey abroad, its entire genesis belongs to Chopin's Warsaw period (Gołąb, 2007).

First Movement: Allegro con fuoco

The opening movement initially appears to confirm traditional hierarchies. The piano introduces the principal thematic material and assumes immediate control over the musical narrative. The cello frequently occupies the lower register, reinforcing harmonic progressions and contributing to rhythmic stability. A closer examination, however, reveals a more complex situation. Even when supporting the harmonic framework, the cello often participates in motivic articulation. Certain rhythmic gestures and intervallic figures migrate between the piano and lower strings, creating subtle forms of thematic integration. Rather than functioning as a passive bass layer, the instrument contributes to the continuity of thematic processes.

Particularly noteworthy are passages in which fragments of the principal motive are transferred to the cello either directly or through imitative response. These moments generate what may be described as a conversational texture. The thematic idea is not simply repeated but recontextualized through changes of register, timbre, and expressive character.

Figure 8

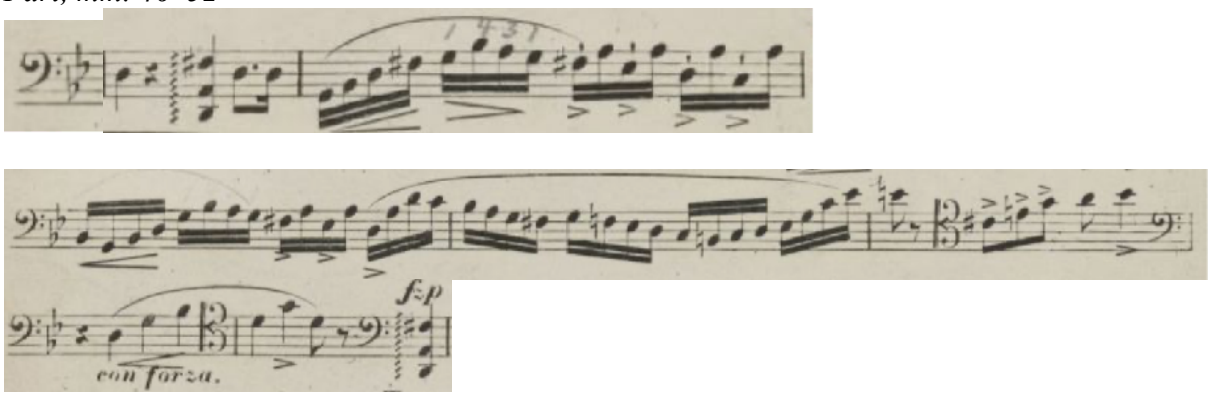
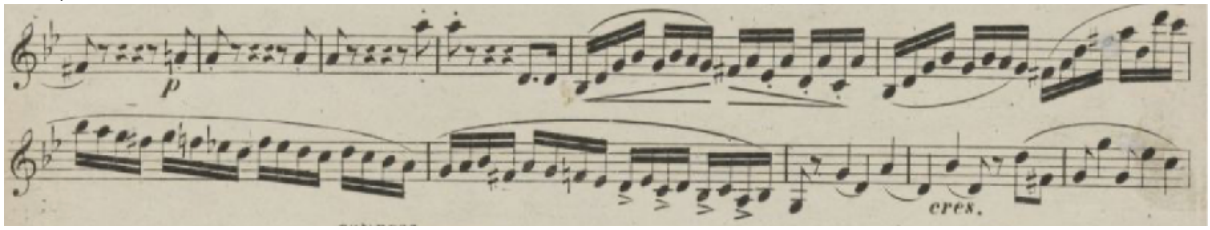
Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, First Movement: Allegro con fuoco, Cello Part, mm. 46–52

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France de la Musique, RES VMA-241 (1,8), Notice n° FRBNF43634083. From the annotated copy belonging to Jane Wilhelmina Stirling, containing Chopin's handwritten corrections and annotations.

Figure 9

Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, First Movement: Allegro con fuoco, Violin Part, mm. 39–49

Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

From a performative perspective, such passages require careful balancing. Excessive emphasis on the piano can obscure the motivic continuity distributed across the ensemble. Performers must therefore shape phrases in a manner that allows listeners to perceive thematic connections as collective rather than exclusively pianistic phenomena.

The development section offers especially compelling evidence of the cello's expanding role. Motivic fragments circulate among all three instruments, creating a network of interactions that challenges straightforward distinctions between melody and accompaniment. Here the cello contributes not only harmonic support but also structural coherence through its participation in thematic transformation.

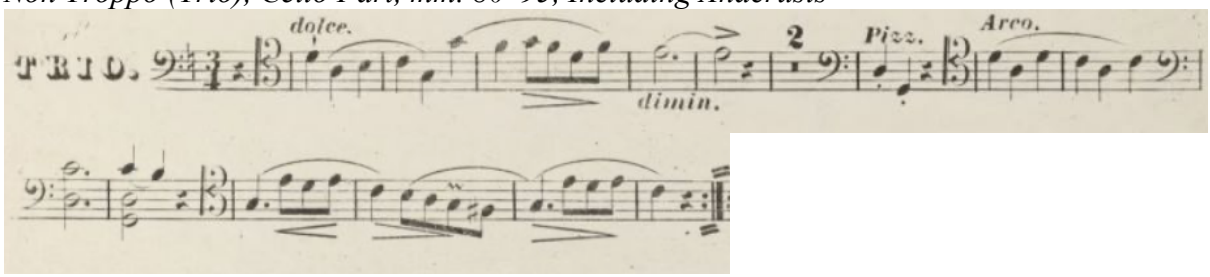
Second Movement: Scherzo

The Scherzo presents a different model of interaction. Characterized by rhythmic vitality and rapid exchanges, the movement frequently relies on contrasts between instrumental registers and timbral identities.

Within this context, the cello assumes a more agile function than in the opening movement. Its participation is no longer confined to sustaining harmonic foundations. Instead, the instrument becomes an active partner in the generation of rhythmic momentum. Imitative figures frequently emerge between violin and cello, while the piano provides a framework within which these interactions unfold. Such exchanges create an impression of distributed energy, where no single instrument monopolizes musical interest. The Trio section is particularly revealing. Here the cello often acquires a more lyrical profile, demonstrating its capacity to shape melodic lines independently. The contrast between scherzando activity and lyrical expression highlights the instrument's expressive flexibility and reinforces its growing individuality within the ensemble texture.

Figure 10

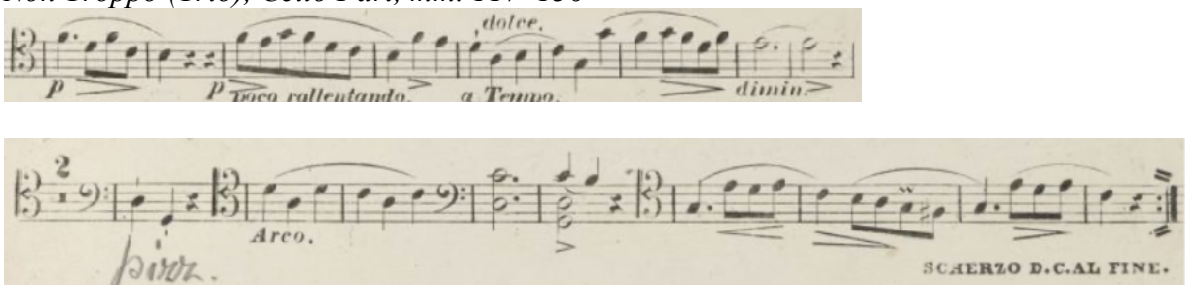
Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, Second Movement: Scherzo, Con Moto Ma Non Troppo (Trio), Cello Part, mm. 80–95, Including Anacrusis



Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

Figure 11

Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, Second Movement: Scherzo, Con Moto Ma Non Troppo (Trio), Cello Part, mm. 117–136



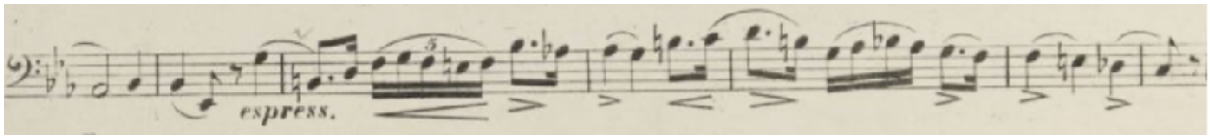
Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

From the standpoint of performance, these passages demand sensitivity to articulation and timing. The effectiveness of the musical dialogue depends upon the precise coordination of gestures and the clear projection of motivic relationships.

Third Movement: Adagio sostenuto

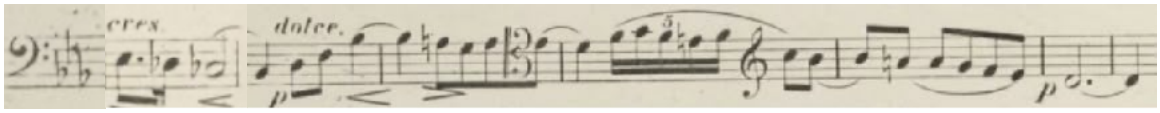
The Adagio sostenuto constitutes perhaps the strongest evidence for the cello's thematic emergence. In this movement, expressive discourse takes precedence over virtuosity, allowing timbral and melodic relationships to become particularly significant. The singing quality traditionally associated with the cello finds especially fertile ground here. Rather than merely supporting harmonic progressions, the instrument frequently contributes directly to the unfolding of lyrical material. In several passages, melodic responsibility shifts between violin and cello, creating a form of shared cantabile expression.

Figure 12
Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, Third Movement: Adagio, Cello Part, mm. 19–25.



Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

Figure 13
Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, Third Movement: Adagio, Cello Part, mm. 55–61.



Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

Such moments reveal Chopin's sensitivity to instrumental colour. The cello's warm register introduces shades of intimacy and introspection that differ markedly from both the violin's brightness and the piano's resonance. Consequently, thematic material acquires distinct expressive meanings depending on the instrument through which it is articulated. Equally important are instances of contrapuntal interaction. The cello often sustains independent lines that complement rather than duplicate the principal melody. These secondary voices enrich the harmonic texture while simultaneously contributing to expressive depth.

From an analytical perspective, the movement demonstrates that thematic significance need not depend solely upon thematic presentation. The cello's contribution frequently lies in shaping emotional context, influencing phrase structure, and guiding the listener's perception of tension and release.

Fourth Movement: Finale

The Finale synthesizes many of the tendencies observed throughout the work. While the piano continues to occupy a dominant position, the cello participates more consistently in thematic and developmental processes. The movement contains numerous examples of motivic circulation among all three instruments. Rather than remaining anchored to foundational functions, the cello engages actively in the articulation of formal transitions and thematic transformations.

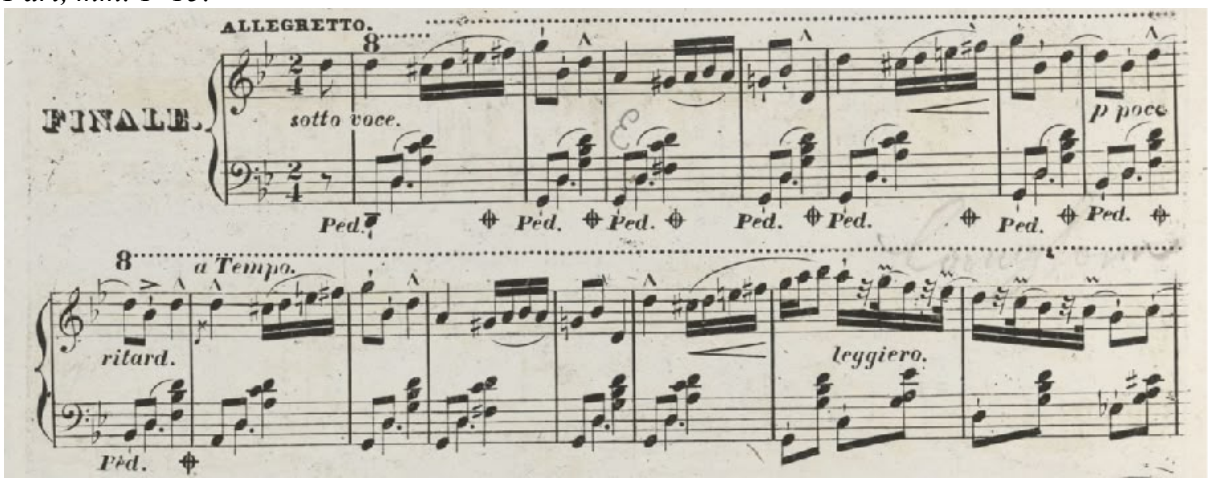
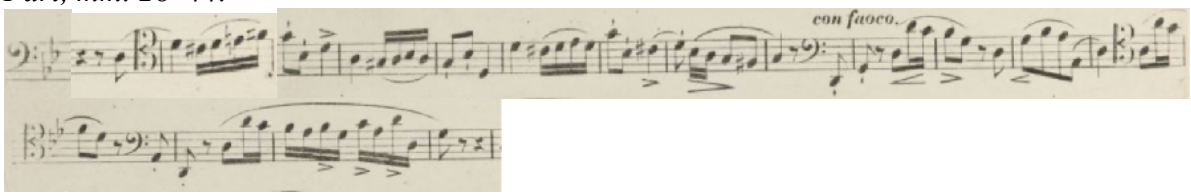
Figure 14
Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, Fourth Movement: Finale. Allegretto, Piano Part, mm. 1–15.

Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

Figure 15
Frédéric Chopin, Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 8, Fourth Movement: Finale. Allegretto, Cello Part, mm. 28–44.



Source: See Figure 8 for the full bibliographic reference.

Particularly significant are passages involving imitation and sequential development. Here the instrument contributes to forward momentum by participating in patterns that move across the ensemble. Such interactions reinforce the perception of chamber music as a collaborative process rather than a hierarchical structure centred exclusively on the keyboard. The cumulative effect of these procedures becomes evident when considering the work as a whole. The cello's trajectory throughout the trio reflects a gradual expansion of agency. Although the instrument never fully abandons its foundational responsibilities, it increasingly participates in the generation and communication of musical ideas.

Performance Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for performance practice. Traditional interpretations of Chopin's Piano Trio often emphasize the virtuoso piano writing to such an extent that the subtleties of string interaction become secondary.

A performative analysis suggests a different approach. Attention should be directed toward moments of motivic transfer, imitative dialogue, and shared thematic responsibility. Dynamic balance must allow the audience to perceive the continuity of musical ideas across instrumental boundaries. For cellists specifically, recognizing the thematic significance of apparently subordinate passages can transform interpretative decisions. Phrasing, articulation, vibrato, and dynamic shaping become tools not merely of accompaniment but of active participation in musical discourse.

Similarly, pianists may benefit from viewing their role not exclusively as that of a dominant protagonist but as one element within a complex network of interactions. Such an approach encourages a more collaborative conception of ensemble performance and highlights dimensions of the work that are often overlooked.

Conclusion

This study has examined the evolving function of the cello in Chopin's Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 8 through the combined perspectives of score analysis and performative analysis. While the work undoubtedly remains shaped by pianistic priorities, the cello emerges as considerably more than a harmonic foundation.

Across all four movements, the instrument participates in motivic exchange, contrapuntal dialogue, expressive characterization, and formal articulation. These functions challenge simplistic hierarchical models that reduce the cello to an accompanimental role. Instead, the analysis demonstrates a gradual movement from textural support toward thematic presence. The novelty of this perspective lies in its emphasis on distributed musical agency within a work traditionally viewed through the lens of piano dominance. By focusing on the cello's contribution to thematic and expressive processes, the study reveals structural relationships that have often remained underappreciated. More broadly, these findings position Chopin's trio within the evolving history of the nineteenth-century piano trio. The work reflects a transitional moment in which inherited Classical functions coexist with emerging Romantic ideals of instrumental equality. In this respect, Chopin's treatment of the cello anticipates later chamber music developments in which lower string instruments assume increasingly autonomous and expressive roles.

Understanding this process enriches not only our interpretation of Piano Trio Op. 8 but also our broader conception of instrumental relationships in early Romantic chamber music. The cello's journey from textural foundation to thematic presence thus becomes a lens through which larger transformations in nineteenth-century musical thought may be observed.

References

Bellman, J. D., & Goldberg, H. (Eds.). (2017). *Chopin and His World*. Princeton University Press.

Chomiński, J. M., & Turło, M. (1990). *Katalog dzieł Fryderyka Chopina* [A Catalogue of the Works of Frederic Chopin]. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne.

Chopin, F. (1833). *Premier trio pour pianoforte, violon et violoncelle, Op. 8* [First Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello, Op. 8]. Maurice Schlesinger, Paris. First French edition. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique, RES VMA-241 (1,8). Notice n° FRBNF43634083.

Chopin, F. (1833–1834). *Premier trio pour pianoforte, violon et violoncelle, Op. 8 [*First Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello, Op. 8]. Carl Friedrich Kistner, Leipzig. First German edition. The Fryderyk Chopin Museum, Warsaw, MC/306.

Danuser, H. (1987). *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts [The Music of the 19th Century]*. Laaber-Verlag.

Eigeldinger, J.-J. (1986). *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils*. Cambridge University Press.

Eigeldinger, J.-J., & Nectoux, J.-M. (Eds.). (1982). *Frédéric Chopin: Œuvres pour piano. Fac-similé de l'exemplaire Stirling avec annotations et corrections de l'auteur* [Frédéric Chopin: Piano Works. Facsimile of the Stirling Copy with the Author's Annotations and Corrections]. Bibliothèque nationale.

François-Sappey, B. (2010). *Chopin à Paris [Chopin in Paris]*. Académie des Beaux-Arts.

Gołąb, M. (1995). *Chopins Harmonik: Chromatik in ihrer Beziehung zur Tonalität* [Chopin's Harmony: Chromaticism in Its Relationship to Tonality] (B. Hirszenberg, Trans.). Bela Verlag. (Original work published 1991)

Gołąb, M. (2014). *Twelve Studies in Chopin: Style, Aesthetics and Reception*. Peter Lang.

Goldberg, H. (2000). Chopin in literary salons and Warsaw's Romantic awakening. *The Polish Review, 45*(1), 53–64.

Goldberg, H. (2002). Chamber arrangements of Chopin's concert works. *Journal of Musicology, 19*, 39–84.

Goldberg, H. (Ed.). (2004). *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries*. Indiana University Press.

Goldberg, H. (2008). *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*. Oxford University Press.

Goldberg, H. (2019). Struktura frazy we wczesnych dziełach Chopina w świetle nauki Elsnera [Phrase Structure in Chopin's Early Works in the Light of Elsner's Teaching]. *Studia Chopinowskie, 4*(2), 32–41.

Grabowski, C., & Rink, J. (2010). *Annotated Catalogue of Chopin's First Editions*. Cambridge University Press.

Kallberg, J. (1979). Review of *Rękopisy utworów Chopina. Katalog*, by K. Kobylańska. *19th-Century Music, 3*(2), 163–169.

Kallberg, J. (1983). Compatibility in Chopin's multi-partite publications. *Journal of Musicology, 2*, 391–417.

Kallberg, J. (1985). Chopin's last style. *Journal of the American Musicological Society, 38*(2), 264–315.

Kallberg, J. (1996). *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre*. Harvard University Press.

Kallberg, J. (2001). Chopin and the aesthetic of the sketch: A new Prelude in E-flat minor? *Early Music, 29*(3), 408–424.

Kallberg, J. (2002). Chopin and the fragments. In Z. Skowron (Ed.), *Chopin's Work: His Inspirations and Creative Process in the Light of the Sources* (pp. 127–141). Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina.

Kobylańska, K. (1979). *Thematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis* [Thematic-Bibliographical Catalogue of Works]. G. Henle Verlag.

Rink, J. (1994). Authentic Chopin: History, analysis and intuition in performance. In J. Rink & J. Samson (Eds.), *Chopin Studies 2* (pp. 214–244). Cambridge University Press.

Rink, J. (2000). Chopin's improvisatory music: Style, structure, aesthetics. *Ostinato Rigore, 15*, 7–17.

Rink, J. (2002). Chopin copying Chopin. In Z. Skowron (Ed.), *Chopin's Work: His Inspirations and Creative Process in the Light of the Sources* (pp. 67–81). Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina.

Rink, J. (2013). Playing with the Chopin sources. In I. Poniatowska (Ed.), *Jan Ekier: Artysta stulecia w darze Chopinowi* (pp. 171–185). Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina.

Rink, J., & Samson, J. (Eds.). (1988). *Chopin Studies*. Cambridge University Press.

Rink, J., & Samson, J. (Eds.). (1994). *Chopin Studies 2*. Cambridge University Press.

Samson, J. (1985). *The Music of Chopin*. Routledge.

Samson, J. (1988). Chopin and genre. In J. Rink & J. Samson (Eds.), *Chopin Studies*. Cambridge University Press.

Samson, J. (1988). Harmonic organisation in Chopin. In J. Rink & J. Samson (Eds.), *Chopin Studies*. Cambridge University Press.

Samson, J. (1994). *Chopin*. Oxford University Press.

Walker, A. (2018). *Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times*. Faber & Faber.

Zamoyski, A. (2010). *Chopin: Prince of the Romantics*. Harper Press.

Dalcroze's Eurhythmics in Contemporary Pedagogy

Agata Glińska, Independent Scholar, Poland

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze occupies a significant position in the historical transformation of music pedagogy at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the originator of Eurhythmics, he advanced beyond the introduction of a pedagogical technique, proposing instead a comprehensive reconceptualization of musical learning grounded in the interrelationship between bodily movement, sensory perception, and embodied cognition. This study examines Dalcroze's Eurhythmics within the broader intellectual context of the New Education Movement, investigating its theoretical foundations and interdisciplinary dimensions through historical and critical analysis. Particular attention is given to the conceptual sources that informed Dalcroze's understanding of rhythm, including philosophical perspectives derived from ancient Greek thought and anthropological interpretations of the relationship between rhythm, corporeality, and human experience. The research further explores biographical factors, intellectual encounters, and formative events that contributed to the development of Dalcroze's educational philosophy, drawing upon archival materials and the recollections of his students as significant testimonies to the implementation and reception of his pedagogical approach. The study argues that eurhythmics originated from a broader philosophical and anthropological conception of rhythm as an essential dimension of human existence rather than solely a musical parameter. Through the integration of eurhythmics, solfège, and improvisation, Dalcroze established a holistic model of music education that influenced subsequent developments in pedagogy and performing arts education. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary character of Eurhythmics enabled its application beyond musical instruction, contributing to therapeutic and rehabilitative practices and informing contemporary perspectives on the relationships among movement, cognition, perception, and human development.

Keywords: Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, Eurhythmics, New Education Movement, music education, holistic human development

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction and Biographical Context

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze was born on 6 July 1865 in Sainte-Croix, into a family with a long-established tradition of musical activity. Musical practice constituted an important element of family life; his grandfather, a Protestant pastor and founder of a choir in Le Brassus, was an accomplished violinist, while other family members actively participated in vocal and instrumental music-making.

The development of Jaques-Dalcroze's musical interests was shaped both by this familial environment and by his early exposure to the rich cultural and musical milieu of Vienna, where he spent the first decade of his life. His father's professional obligations as a representative of a Swiss watchmaking company necessitated the family's temporary residence in Vienna. From an early age, Jaques-Dalcroze demonstrated an exceptional interest in both music and theatre. He began composing short piano pieces at the age of six and, by adolescence, was writing, directing, and performing in theatrical productions organized with members of his family.

His formal musical education commenced in Vienna with piano studies. Following the family's return to Switzerland in 1875 and settlement in Geneva, Jaques-Dalcroze continued his musical training at the local conservatory, from which he graduated with distinction. Simultaneously, he engaged in a wide range of artistic and literary activities, including dramatic writing, amateur theatrical performance, and musical composition.

Figure 1
Postcard Photo of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze by Verlag Hermann Leiser (1912)

In 1884, seeking to reconcile his interests in both music and theatre, he relocated to Paris to pursue advanced studies in these disciplines. During his stay in Paris, he established professional relationships with prominent representatives of contemporary French musical culture, including Gustave Charpentier and Ernest Chausson. He studied composition at the Paris Conservatory (Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation) under the guidance

of Gabriel Fauré, pursued dramatic training at the Comédie-Française, and undertook studies in orchestration with Léo Delibes (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991).

A significant stage in his artistic development occurred in 1886 when he accepted an appointment as assistant conductor of a musical theatre in Algeria. His exposure to North African musical traditions and performance practices broadened his understanding of rhythm and musical expression. This experience would later prove fundamental to the formulation of his pedagogical theories concerning the relationship between movement, rhythm, and musical perception (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1945; Peret-Ziemlańska, 2018).

Upon returning to Europe in 1887, Jaques-Dalcroze enrolled at the Conservatory of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna (Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien), where he studied under distinguished pedagogues including Robert Fuchs and Anton Bruckner. After completing his studies, he returned to Paris, where he continued his intellectual and artistic development under the influence of the music theorist Mathis Lussy, whose research into musical rhythm and expression significantly informed Jaques-Dalcroze's own investigations (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1920).

By the early 1890s, Jaques-Dalcroze had established himself as a respected pianist, improviser, composer, and lecturer. In 1892, he was appointed professor of harmony, and subsequently solfège, at the Geneva Conservatory (Conservatoire de Musique de Genève). His pedagogical experience revealed what he perceived as significant deficiencies in conventional music education, particularly in the development of rhythmic awareness and the integration of intellectual understanding with embodied musical experience.

These observations led him to formulate a series of educational reforms grounded in the conviction that bodily movement should serve as a primary medium for the internalization and expression of musical concepts. As he stated in 1898, he envisioned "a system of music education in which the human body itself would act as an intermediary between sound and thought, becoming an instrument for expressing our sensations" (Jaques-Dalcroze 1898, quoted in Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991, p. 13). Between 1892 and 1901, extensive experimentation and pedagogical inquiry culminated in the emergence of the educational system that would later become known as Dalcroze Eurhythmics.

In 1902, Jaques-Dalcroze presented his ideas publicly at the Swiss Musicians and Composers Congress in Aarau, where he introduced the concept of "rhythmic gymnastics", the precursor term for Eurhythmics. The positive reception of his presentation among professional musicians and educators contributed to the establishment of a dedicated experimental class at the Geneva Conservatory, enabling the systematic development and evaluation of his pedagogical approach (Peret-Ziemlańska, 2018).

The growing recognition of his work culminated in his influential address on music education reform delivered at the Congress of the Swiss Musicians' Society. In subsequent years, Jaques-Dalcroze organized international training courses for teachers and undertook extensive lecture tours throughout Europe, facilitating the dissemination of his educational philosophy and methodology (May, 1994; Reinhard-Züllig, 1994; Serieyx-Bouët, 1994; Soldan, 1994; Webster-Haynes, 1994).

A decisive milestone in the institutionalization of Eurhythmics was the establishment, in 1911, of the Institute for Music and Rhythm in Hellerau. "In Hellerau, the Institute reached the peak

of its artistic and pedagogical development. Dalcroze was finally able to fully realize his vision of creating large-scale stage works founded on eurhythmics" (Mieczyńska-Lewakowska, 1993, p. 32). An event that became particularly significant in the history of the Institute and remained deeply embedded in the memories of Dalcroze's students was the 1912 stage production of Act II of Gluck's opera *Orpheus*. It represented one of the most important developments in the history of modern theatre, as Appia and Dalcroze brought together music, movement, light, and stage space in a manner that exerted a profound influence on the evolution of twentieth-century theatre (Deventer, 1994; Griner, 1994; Mieczyńska-Lewakowska, 1993, 1994). The Institute rapidly developed into an internationally recognized centre for artistic and pedagogical innovation, attracting musicians, dancers, actors, stage designers, and intellectuals from across Europe. Among its visitors and collaborators were figures such as Paul Claudel, George Bernard Shaw, Adolphe Appia, Max Reinhardt, Vaslav Nijinsky, Sergey Volkonsky, Konstantin Stanislavski, and Serge Diaghilev (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991; Griner, 1994; Peret-Ziemlańska, 2018).

Figure 2

Jaques-Dalcroze Institute for Rhythmic Gymnastics, Hellerau, Germany (ca. 1911–1913)

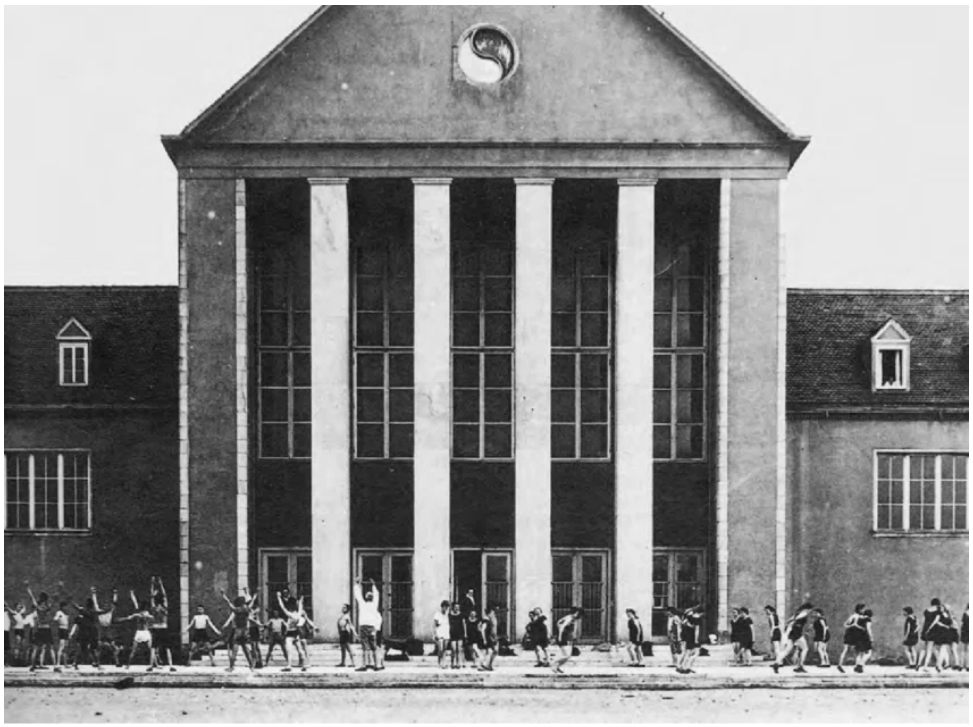


Figure 3
Rehearsal for the Performance of Orpheus and Eurydice by Christoph Willibald Gluck in the Great Hall, 1913

Figure 4
Interior of the Bühnenraum at the Dalcroze Institute, Hellerau, c. 1913

The outbreak of the First World War brought an end to the activities of the Hellerau Institute, which was requisitioned by German authorities and converted into a military hospital. Nevertheless, in 1915 Jaques-Dalcroze founded the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva, thereby ensuring the continuity and further development of his pedagogical work. The institute remains active today and continues to serve as the principal international centre for research, teacher training, and the dissemination of the Dalcroze Eurhythmics approach (Peret-Ziemlańska, 2018).

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze in the Context of the New Education Movement

The emergence of developmental and educational psychology, as well as advances in anatomy and physiology at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contributed significantly to the development of both theoretical pedagogy and practical educational theory. Within this intellectual context, the child and its distinctive nature became the central focus of educational thought and practice.

Contemporary research led educators, physicians, philosophers, psychologists, and theorists to recognize that children possess unique forms of sensitivity, activity, needs, and interests. These characteristics were understood to find their most authentic expression through play, spontaneous activity, and creative engagement (Kumik, 2019). By exposing and criticizing the limitations of traditional schooling, these studies fostered hopes for a broader social renewal through what came to be known as the New Education Movement. During this period, numerous experimental schools were established to implement these emerging educational principles in practice, while in 1900 Ellen Key famously proclaimed the twentieth century to be “the century of the child” (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991).

The New Education Movement drew inspiration from earlier philosophical and pedagogical traditions that emphasized individual development and freedom in the upbringing of children.

Among the pioneers of this innovative approach to education was Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, the creator of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Although many educational theorists of the period acknowledged the importance of music within the broader process of education, Jaques-Dalcroze assigned it a uniquely central role. For him, music functioned as a unifying and stimulating force capable of integrating the various dimensions of human existence—body, mind, spirit, and vital energy. Within his educational philosophy, musical experience constituted not merely an artistic activity but a fundamental medium for holistic human development (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1906, 1916, 1917, 1945; Nicholls, 1994).

The revival of interest in Greek philosophy and culture, particularly in relation to the significance of bodily movement, constituted a defining feature of educational thought at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Juszczyńska, 2011).

The educational ideals of ancient Greece, developed within modern pedagogical thought by figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Henri Bergson, Friedrich Wilhelm Fröbel, John Dewey, and Maria Montessori, were likewise embraced and further developed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. His pedagogical philosophy may therefore be understood as part of a broader intellectual tradition that sought to unite physical, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral development within a comprehensive vision of human education (Konaszkiewicz, 2011; Micherda, 2011).

Rhythm in Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s Pedagogical Thought

In order to fully understand the concept of rhythm in the pedagogical system of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, it is necessary to situate his thought within the broader intellectual tradition of Western philosophy, particularly the concepts developed in ancient Greece. Of particular significance is the Platonic understanding of rhythm as an ordering principle governing movement and human action.

In his dialogues *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato defines rhythm (*rhythmos*) as the organization or ordering of movement (Mycka, 2022; Rudziński, 1987). Within his philosophical framework, rhythm is not merely a musical phenomenon but a universal principle responsible for imposing order, proportion, and coherence upon dynamic processes (Natanson, 1979). Plato understood rhythm and harmony as formative forces that shape the human soul and contribute directly to the moral and intellectual development of the individual. Consequently, music, dance, and speech were regarded as educational tools of exceptional importance, capable of cultivating virtue and social responsibility (Grzybowski, 2018).

This classical conception of rhythm as an organizing principle profoundly resonates with Dalcroze's pedagogical philosophy. Louis Séchan argues that Dalcroze's relationship to Hellenism extends beyond superficial similarities of terminology or practice. Rather, it is rooted in a shared anthropological perspective that places the human being—understood as a complex integration of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions—at the centre of educational activity (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991; Séchan, 1930).

Figure 5
Outdoor Exercise, Le Bouquet (the Bouquet), Performed by Rhythmic Gymnasts Suzanne Perrottet, Annie Beck, Clara Brooke, and Jeanne Allemand, Near Geneva, June 1910

A fundamental assumption of Dalcroze's theory is that the development of expressive capacity depends upon the refinement of bodily control. The complexity of human emotional and intellectual life requires an equally sophisticated repertoire of physical means of expression. Consequently, the individual must acquire conscious control over muscular activity, learning not only to initiate movement intentionally but also to regulate tension, relaxation, and inhibition according to artistic and expressive demands. Through systematic training, involuntary and instinctive responses become progressively subordinated to conscious intention, resulting in a higher degree of psychophysical integration.

From this perspective, rhythmic education constitutes not merely the acquisition of musical skills but a process of cultivating the individual's overall capacity for self-regulation and intentional action. The ultimate objective is the establishment of a harmonious relationship between the nervous system and conscious will, enabling increasingly precise coordination between perception, cognition, and movement (Berdenis de Berlekom, 1911).

Adopting what he described as a genuinely musical perspective—one rooted in the ancient Greek conception of the inseparable unity of music, speech, and movement—Dalcroze formulated a series of theoretical propositions that became foundational to his pedagogical system. These propositions may be summarized as follows: rhythm is fundamentally movement; movement necessarily unfolds within the dimensions of space and time; physical experience constitutes the basis of consciousness; and the refinement of motor functions contributes directly to the development of intellectual and perceptual capacities (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1920, 1945).

These assumptions reflect a broader epistemological principle underlying the Dalcroze method: knowledge emerges through embodied experience. Physical activity is therefore not regarded merely as a means of illustrating musical concepts but as a primary mode of cognition through which rhythmic structures are internalized and understood. The organization of movement consequently becomes inseparable from the development of rhythmic thought itself (Bachmann, 1994).

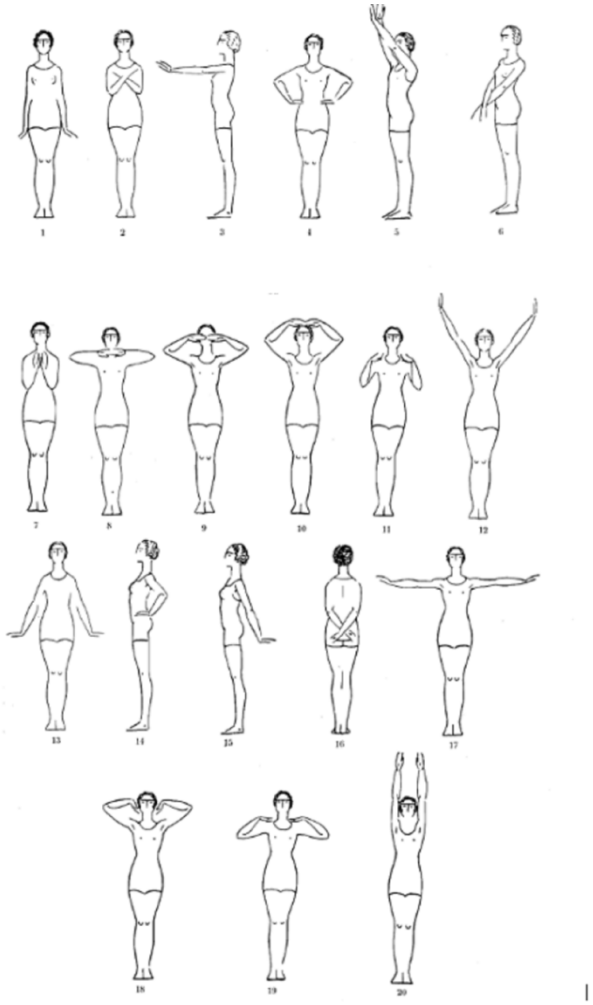
Eurhythmics as Embodied Music Education

The practical realization of these theoretical assumptions is found in Eurhythmics, which Dalcroze defined as a system of rhythmic movement training designed to establish relationships between instinctive bodily rhythms and consciously organized musical rhythms. Eurhythmics occupies a unique position within music education because it integrates physical, cognitive, perceptual, and artistic dimensions of learning into a unified pedagogical process (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1906, 1916, 1917, 1945).

At the core of Dalcroze's educational philosophy lies the conviction that musical understanding develops through experience rather than through abstract instruction. Learning should proceed from direct sensory engagement toward conceptual knowledge. Accordingly, the teacher's role is not primarily to transmit information but to create conditions in which learners can discover musical principles through guided experience.

This principle reflects broader currents within progressive educational thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the emphasis on active learning, experiential education, and learner autonomy (Uchyła-Zroski, 2012). For Dalcroze, genuine musical knowledge cannot be reduced to theoretical understanding; rather, it emerges from the integration of perception, movement, and reflection.

Figure 6
Dalcroze's Twenty Gestures



Dalcroze maintained that these capacities develop through distinct but complementary forms of practice. Whereas auditory consciousness is cultivated through systematic ear training and vocal exercises, rhythmic consciousness emerges through repeated experiences of movement. The body functions simultaneously as a medium of perception and a medium of expression, allowing rhythmic structures to be experienced kinesthetically before they are conceptualized intellectually.

This emphasis on bodily experience reflects Dalcroze's conviction that rhythm is perceived not only through auditory mechanisms but also through the neuromuscular system. Repeated engagement in rhythmic movement leads to the formation of muscular memory, facilitating increasingly accurate internal representations of temporal relationships. Through such experiences, learners develop an embodied understanding of rhythm that serves as the foundation for subsequent musical and theoretical learning (Del Bianco, 1987; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1945; Mieczyńska-Lewakowska, 1994).

The methodological sequence—listen, feel, perform, name, reinforce, remember—captures the fundamental epistemological logic of the Dalcroze approach. Learning proceeds from perception and bodily experience toward conceptualization and memory, rather than in the reverse direction (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991).

From this perspective, Eurhythmics may be understood as a comprehensive system of embodied musical learning grounded in the principle that practical experience precedes theoretical abstraction (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1920). Musical concepts are not introduced as pre-existing rules to be memorized; rather, they emerge inductively from direct engagement with rhythmic and musical phenomena. The primary educational objective is therefore not the accumulation of factual knowledge but the cultivation of a deeply internalized and experientially grounded musical understanding.

Ultimately, Dalcroze conceived Eurhythmics as a means of fostering psychophysical integration. Through the systematic coordination of perception, movement, thought, and emotion, the individual develops greater unity of action and awareness. The educational significance of rhythm thus extends beyond the domain of music, encompassing the formation of the whole person and contributing to the harmonious development of human capacities in their physical, intellectual, emotional, and artistic dimensions.

The Three Foundations of the Dalcroze Method: Eurhythmics, Solfège, and Improvisation

Within the Dalcroze approach**,** the study of rhythm constitutes a comprehensive educational process engaging the entire human organism. Rhythmic training stimulates both bodily and auditory forms of rhythmic awareness, each of which contributes to the development of musical competence. The Dalcroze method is commonly understood as being based on three interrelated components: eurhythmics, solfège, and improvisation, which together constitute a holistic approach to music education (Browne, 1920; Naef, 1994).

The Bodily Sense of Rhythm

Through specialized exercises targeting the muscular system and the nervous centres, rhythmic training develops the capacity to perceive and express variations in force, elasticity, and movement quality. Such exercises foster concentration during the analysis of rhythmic phenomena while simultaneously encouraging spontaneity in the execution of rhythmically organized movement (Browne, 1920; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1916).

As a result, students gradually acquire the ability to perceive, notate, reproduce, and ultimately create rhythmic structures, both internally through mental representation and externally through bodily realization (Bachmann, 1994; Deventer, 1994; Kirsner, 1994).

The Auditory Sense of Rhythm

Through carefully designed aural exercises, rhythmic training develops the capacity to perceive and express variations in dynamic intensity and duration. It cultivates attentive listening, rapid auditory processing, concentration, and spontaneity in both the analysis and vocal realization of sound (Berdenis de Berlekom, 1911).

Students consequently learn to identify, transcribe, reproduce, and create rhythmic patterns in sound, again both internally through audiation and externally through performance (Bradford-Anderson, 1994; Nicholls, 1994).

Solfège

Within the Dalcroze method, solfège serves as the principal means of developing tonal awareness and audiation. It cultivates sensitivity to scale degrees, intervallic relationships, tonal functions, and timbral characteristics. Furthermore, it develops the capacity to hear and imagine melodic lines and their accompanying contrapuntal structures within diverse tonal and harmonic contexts (Eckstein, 1994).

Solfège training encompasses the vocal realization of melodies, melodic improvisation, composition, and notation. Through these activities, students acquire increasingly sophisticated abilities in musical perception, internal hearing, and creative musical thought (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1906; Schinz, 1994; Tingey, 1994).

Improvisation

Within the Dalcroze pedagogical framework, improvisation is conceived as a multidimensional practice that extends across bodily movement, vocal production, and instrumental performance (Owczarek, 2020; Reichel, 1994). Piano improvisation constitutes the point of convergence between eurhythmics and solfège. It provides a means through which rhythmic and tonal concepts may be externalized through instrumental performance (Zwierz, 2006).

Improvisational activity develops tactile-kinesthetic awareness and enables students to translate melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic musical ideas directly onto the keyboard (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1918). In this sense, improvisation functions as the practical realization of the auditory, rhythmic, and creative competencies cultivated through the other components of the method (Kopińska, 2018; Soldan, 1994).

Figure 7
Children's Class Practicing Dalcroze Eurhythmics at the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva, Switzerland, 1982

The Therapeutic Applications of Eurhythmics

Although Eurhythmics was originally conceived primarily as an innovative system of music education, Dalcroze soon recognized the therapeutic potential of what he referred to as "rhythmic gymnastics", emphasizing its significance for the development and improved functioning of the nervous system. Over time, he began to apply his method within therapeutic

contexts, conducting, among other initiatives, classes with visually impaired children between 1915 and 1924.

Since that period, Eurhythmics has acquired an important and enduring position within the field of rehabilitation. Its contribution to the treatment of various disorders and functional impairments may be understood from two complementary perspectives: its psychological and emotional impact, and its influence on physical movement and motor organization (Mazurkiewicz, 2002).

The psychological dimension of rhythmic-melodic stimulation is associated with the influence of musical emotions on the autonomic nervous system. These emotional responses differ significantly from those generated through ordinary experiences of everyday life. Musical stimuli activate tendencies toward response, facilitate emotional inhibition and release, and contribute to processes of affective regulation. Consequently, rhythmic-melodic stimulation may be understood as functioning in a manner analogous to cathartic therapeutic approaches employed within psychotherapeutic practice (Janiszewski, 2000).

From the perspective of physical movement, the essential value of Eurhythmics lies in the structured and organized nature of movement patterns developed through music-and-movement activities. Motor attitudes and responses are connected with voluntary muscular systems, while the manner and intensity of their activation are closely dependent upon external environmental conditions. In other words, motor responses are continuously modified in relation to changes in the nature of the stimulus, with psychological state constituting a significant mediating factor. It is therefore evident that virtually all motor behavior is grounded in psychological activity (Barklay, 1994). The greater the degree of order and regularity that the mind is capable of imposing upon sensory stimuli, the greater the likelihood that more refined and coordinated motor responses will emerge (Janiszewski, 2000).

A specific musical composition, or an improvised musical structure, provides a framework that may simultaneously facilitate relaxation, stimulate activity, and establish a temporal organization to which participants naturally respond. Rhythm introduces a form of movement discipline that, through repetition and internalization, gradually becomes incorporated as a habitual mode of bodily coordination (Janiszewski, 1993).

Since 1911, Eurhythmics has developed along two parallel trajectories: as a method of musical education and as a means of rehabilitation (Ostrowska, 1989). Today, Eurhythmics and music-and-movement practices are employed in the rehabilitation of a wide range of conditions, including disorders affecting the musculoskeletal system, cardiovascular and respiratory systems, as well as in therapeutic interventions involving individuals with visual impairments, intellectual disabilities, speech and language disorders, and learning difficulties such as dyslexia (Wojtyga, 2005).

Conclusions

More than a century after the publication of Dalcroze's seminal memorandum on the reform of music education, the pedagogical principles he advanced continue to retain their relevance. Equally significant is the fact that contemporary applications of the Dalcroze method remain broadly consistent with the educational framework originally envisioned by its creator.

The role of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in fostering musical development and music education across all stages of learning is widely acknowledged. Its application extends from early childhood education and primary and secondary schooling to professional training in conservatories, as well as to the education of dancers and actors and various forms of amateur artistic practice. Although the specific educational objectives of Eurhythmics vary according to institutional context, its underlying pedagogical assumptions remain fundamentally unchanged.

Within preschool education, Eurhythmics is primarily valued for its developmental and educational functions. Through collaborative musical activities, it promotes the formation of social competencies, including cooperation, responsibility, self-discipline, and respect for shared structures and procedures. At the same time, it encourages the active participation of children who might otherwise remain reluctant or withdrawn, while fostering autonomy, initiative, and independent decision-making.

The integration of music and movement—movement being the earliest and most immediate medium through which children express emotional experience—provides a foundation for developing sensitivity to the expressive dimensions of music. Creative musical activity, manifested through movement, singing, and performance on elementary instruments, constitutes an essential component of Dalcroze pedagogy. As educational research has emphasized, it is the process of creative expression, rather than the artistic sophistication of its outcome, that possesses the greatest developmental value. Educational practice therefore seeks to create conditions conducive to spontaneous musical expression, recognizing that the significance of creative activity lies not primarily in the aesthetic quality of the resulting product, but in the developmental processes that accompany its emergence (Malko, 1988).

At the primary level of education, Eurhythmics continues to cultivate creativity while placing increasing emphasis on the experiential development of musical understanding. Through embodied engagement with rhythm, dynamics, agogic nuance, melodic contour, musical expression, and formal organization, students gradually acquire conceptual musical knowledge grounded in direct experience rather than abstract instruction. Musical concepts thus emerge as the outcome of perceptual and bodily engagement with musical phenomena.

At the secondary level, particularly where Eurhythmics is pursued as a principal field of study, instruction assumes a pre-professional character. Students receive systematic training in music theory, aural skills, and piano performance while simultaneously developing creative competencies through movement, vocal, and piano improvisation, as well as through participation in movement-based interpretations of musical works. Higher education subsequently extends these competencies, preparing graduates for pedagogical and artistic careers involving choreographic composition, interdisciplinary performance, and various forms of artistic practice in which movement and music function as mutually constitutive elements (Wojtyga, 2005).

Within educational contexts outside specialist music institutions, the principal objective of Eurhythmics is the cultivation of musical sensitivity through embodied experience. Instruction emphasizes attentive listening, the translation of auditory perception into intentional gesture, and the capacity to interpret and communicate musical meaning through movement. Adolf Appia—the stage designer and theatre theorist whose collaboration with Dalcroze fundamentally shaped the development of early twentieth-century theatrical practice—recognized in Eurhythmics a means of redefining the performer's relationship to music. His

concept of the actor capable of responding physically and psychologically to the rhythmic and expressive intentions embedded within a dramatic work closely paralleled Dalcroze's pedagogical objectives (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991).

From this perspective, Eurhythmics functions simultaneously as a means of musical understanding and as a process of personal development. The close integration of movement and music encourages heightened awareness of one's own bodily and emotional responses while providing the means through which musical meaning may be communicated to others. Dalcroze himself described Eurhythmics as "an energy whose ultimate purpose is to restore us to ourselves" (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991, p. 31), emphasizing that authentic musical expression through movement presupposes self-awareness and embodied perception. This broader educational vision underlies subsequent interpretations of Eurhythmics as a discipline capable of strengthening the relationship between body and mind while simultaneously fostering more meaningful forms of interpersonal interaction (Browne, 1920; Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991). In this sense, Eurhythmics offers opportunities for creative self-expression and collaborative artistic experience, enabling participants to share the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of musical activity through collective engagement (Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, 1991).

For Dalcroze, one of the fundamental aims of education is therefore the cultivation of the nervous system as an integrative mechanism capable of coordinating sensation, movement, cognition, and emotion. Such training establishes effective communication between body and mind, promotes equilibrium between will and action, and enables the harmonious interaction of physical and psychological processes. Ultimately, the educational value of Eurhythmics resides in its capacity to foster this psychophysical integration, thereby contributing not only to musical development but also to the holistic formation of the individual.

From the perspective of music pedagogy, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze is regarded as one of the most influential educational reformers of the twentieth century. His integration of movement, rhythm, improvisation, and embodied musical experience transformed approaches to music education and exerted a lasting influence on the fields of music pedagogy, dance education, theatre training, and artistic development more broadly. His work continues to provide a model of education that seeks to develop the whole person through the integration of physical, intellectual, emotional, and creative experience.

Since 1915, the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva has functioned as the principal international centre for education and professional training in the Eurhythmics method developed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Contemporary applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics extend beyond its established role as one of the most influential approaches to music education. The method is also widely employed in movement-based programmes designed for diverse populations, including older adults and individuals with disabilities, where it serves as a component of music therapy and movement therapy.

References

Bachmann, M.-L. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 88–98). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Barklay, P. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 143–146). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Berdenis de Berlekom, M. (1911, October 30). La méthode d'Émile Jaques-Dalcroze pour le développement de l'instinct rythmique, du sens auditif et du sentiment tonal [The Émile Jaques-Dalcroze method for the development of rhythmic instinct, auditory sense, and tonal feeling]. *Le Monde Musical, 23*(20), 299–301.

Bradford-Anderson, M. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 118–119). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Browne, M. E. (1920). *The eurythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze* (3rd and revised ed.). Constable & Company.

Brzozowska-Kuczkiewicz, M. (1991). *Emil Jaques-Dalcroze i jego Rytmika* [Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and his Eurhythmics]. Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.

Del Bianco, S. (1987). *Vers une application des principes dalcroziens à l'enseignement du piano* [Towards an application of Dalcroze principles to piano teaching] (Diploma thesis, Institut Jaques-Dalcroze).

Deventer, A. van. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 40–45). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Eckstein, S. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 178–183). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Griner, V. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 19–25). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Grzybowski, J. (2018). O tańcu, czyli o ruchu rytmicznym [On dance, or on rhythmic motion]. *Studia Choreologica, 19*, 45–74.

Janiszewski, M. (1993). *Muzykoterapia aktywna* [Active music therapy]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Janiszewski, M. (2000). Muzykoterapia i rytmikoterapia w rehabilitacji [Music therapy and eurhythmics therapy in rehabilitation]. In B. Ostrowska (Ed.), *Rytmika w kształceniu muzyków, aktorów, tancerzy i w rehabilitacji: Materiały z ogólnopolskiej sesji naukowej* [Eurhythmics in the education of musicians, actors, dancers, and in rehabilitation: Proceedings of a national academic session] (pp. 103–112). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1906). *Méthode Jaques-Dalcroze: Les gammes et les tonalités, le phrasé et les nuances* [Jaques-Dalcroze method: Scales and tonalities, phrasing and nuances]. Sandoz, Jobin et Cie.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1906). Le piano et l'éducation musicale [The piano and music education]. *Le Courrier musical, 9*(9–11).

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1916). *La rythmique* [Eurhythmics] (Vol. 1). Jobin et Cie.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1916). *La rythmique: La plastique animée et la danse* [Eurhythmics: Plastic animation and dance]. Jobin et Cie.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1917). *La rythmique* [Eurhythmics] (Vol. 2). Jobin et Cie.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1918). *La rythmique appliquée à l'étude du piano* [Eurhythmics applied to the study of the piano]. Jobin et Cie.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1920). *Le rythme, la musique et l'éducation* [Rhythm, music, and education]. Librairie Fischbacher; Rouart, Lerolle & Cie; Jobin & Cie, Éditions musicales.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1945). *La musique et nous: Notes sur notre double vie* [Music and Us: Notes on Our Double Life]. Perret-Gentil.

Jaques-Dalcroze, É. (1992). *Pisma wybrane* [Selected writings] (M. Bogdan & B. Wakar, Trans.). Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne. (Original work published 1910–1920).

Juszczyńska, K. (2011). Edukacja muzyczna drogą do wychowania humanistycznego młodego pokolenia [Music education as a path to humanistic education of the young generation]. In E. Kumik & G. Poraj (Eds.), *Konteksty kształcenia muzycznego: Zagadnienia ogólne* [Contexts of music education: General issues] (Vol. 1, pp. 29–36). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Kirsner, N. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 120–122). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Konaszkiewicz, Z. (2011). Pedagogika muzyczna na tle współczesnych koncepcji wychowania [Music pedagogy in the context of contemporary concepts of education]. In E. Kumik & G. Poraj (Eds.), *Konteksty kształcenia muzycznego: Zagadnienia ogólne* [Contexts of music education: General issues] (Vol. 1, pp. 13–27). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Kopińska, A. (2018). Wykorzystanie zabaw dźwiękowych oraz elementów improwizacji w nauczaniu gry na fortepianie [The use of sound games and elements of improvisation in piano teaching]. *e: Quarterly of the Centre for Artistic Education*, (2), 83–90.

Kumik, E. (2019). *Muzyka w przestrzeni edukacyjnej: Profesjonalne kształcenie muzyczne w perspektywie pedagogicznej* [Music in the educational space: Professional music education from a pedagogical perspective]. Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Malko, D. (1988). *Metodyka wychowania muzycznego w przedszkolu* [Methodology of music education in preschool]. Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.

May, M. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 130–136). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Mazurkiewicz, M. (2002). Rytm i improwizacja w rehabilitacji psychicznej osób dorosłych [Rhythm and improvisation in psychic rehabilitation of the adults]. In B. Ostrowska (Ed.), *Rytmika w kształceniu muzyków, aktorów, tancerzy i w rehabilitacji: Materiały z V i VI Ogólnopolskiej Sesji Naukowej* [Eurhythmics in the education of musicians, actors, dancers, and in rehabilitation: Proceedings of the 5th and 6th National Scientific Sessions] (pp. 322–326). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Micherda, M. (2011). Wartość edukacyjna koncepcji Marii Montessori i Celestyna Freineta w programie kształcenia studentów [The educational value of Maria Montessori's and Célestin Freinet's concepts in the curriculum of student education]. In E. Kumik & G. Poraj (Eds.), *Konteksty kształcenia muzycznego: Zagadnienia ogólne* [Contexts of music education: General issues] (Vol. 1, pp. 75–95). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Mieczyńska-Lewakowska, J. (1993). *Fakty i ludzie z mojego życia* [Facts and people from my life]. Zarząd Miasta Łodzi.

Mieczyńska-Lewakowska, J. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 27–34). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Mycka, A. (2022). Postrzeganie kształcenia muzycznego jako treningu wrażliwości sprzyjającego rozwojowi duchowego potencjału ucznia [Perceiving music education as sensitivity training fostering the development of the student's spiritual potential]. In E. Kumik (Ed.), *Wartość muzyki we współczesnej przestrzeni życia i edukacji: Wybrane problemy* [The value of music in the contemporary space of life and education: Selected issues] (pp. 99–106). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Naef, E. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 46–51). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Natanson, T. (1979). *Wstęp do nauki o muzykoterapii* [Introduction to the study of music therapy]. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

Nicholls, M. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 106–113). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Ostrowska, B. (1989). Rytmika w Polsce u schyłku XX wieku – aktualny stan badań – metody, zastosowanie, inicjatywy [Eurhythmics in Poland at the end of the 20th century: Current state of research, methods, applications, and initiatives]. *Scientific Bulletin of the Academy of Music in Łódź, 18*, 250–251.

Owczarek, M. (2020). Improwizacja jako technika wykorzystywana w kształceniu studentów [Improvisation as a technique used during students' training]. In E. Kumik (Ed.), *Muzyka w duecie z edukacją* [Music in partnership with education] (pp. 329–343). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Peret-Ziemlańska, Z. (2018). *Kształcenie słuchu, rytmika, improwizacja fortepianowa, dyrygentura chóralna – artykuły, recenzje, wywiady, wspomnienia* [Ear training, eurhythmics, piano improvisation, choral conducting – Articles, reviews, interviews, and memoirs]. Wydawnictwo MUZO.

Reichel, B. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 58–59). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Reinhard-Züllig, L. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 80–84). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Rudziński, W. (1987). *Nauka o rytmie muzycznym* [The study of musical rhythm, Part 1]. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne.

Schinz, N. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 75–79). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Séchan, L. (1930). *La danse grecque antique* [Ancient Greek dance]. E. de Boccard.

Serieyx-Bouët, M. L. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 72–74). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Soldan, V. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 123–129). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Tingey, N. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 101–102). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Uchyła-Zroski, J. (2012). Nauczyciel muzyki XXI wieku a ewolucja myślenia o nauczycielu i nauczycielstwie w minionych okresach dziejowych pedeutologii [The 21st-century music teacher and the evolution of thinking about the teacher and teaching profession in historical periods of pedeutology]. In E. Kumik & G. Poraj (Eds.), *Konteksty kształcenia muzycznego: Prace teoretyczne i badawcze* [Contexts of music education: Theoretical and research studies] (Vol. 2, pp. 21–36). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Webster-Haynes, K. M. (1994). [Reminiscences]. In T. Monko-Ejgenberg (Ed.), *Rytmika E. Jaques-Dalcroze'a dawniej i dziś* [E. Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics: Past and present] (pp. 103–105). Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Wojtyga, E. (2005). Miejsce rytmiki we współczesnym świecie [The place of eurhythmics in the contemporary world]. In E. Aleksandrowicz, E. Wojtyga, M. Owczarek, A. Skrzypczak, M. Paniuta, & J. Sobieraj (Eds.), *Rytmika w kształceniu muzyków, aktorów, tancerzy i w rehabilitacji: Materiały z VII Ogólnopolskiej Sesji Naukowej* [Eurhythmics in the education of musicians, actors, dancers, and in rehabilitation: Proceedings of the 7th National Academic Session] (pp. 13–22). Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi.

Zwierz, K. (2006). *Improwizacja fortepianowa Szabolcsa Esztényiego. Metoda nauczania* [Piano improvisation of Szabolcs Esztényi: A teaching method]. Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie.

Face-Negotiation Theory's Role in a Loss of a Major: A Case Study

Michael Ray Smith, Independent Scholar, United States

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In 2024 the Lithuanian Ministry of Education denied a small, Baltic liberal arts university reaccreditation of its communication program, meaning it can no longer offer an undergraduate degree in communication. Over the next several months the department reorganized and was granted reconfiguration as Global Business and Public Engagement, and then Global Business and Communication. At first the ministry said the program must end teaching existing students by December 2025, but later said the students in the existing major could be taught through December 2027. The newly developed Global Business and Communication program is a degree in the business study field and it follows all the requirements of a business degree but with a focus on communication. This qualitative research explores this case study using Face Negotiation Theory to explore the various stakeholders in their struggle to assist students from many countries in the completion of their academic work while retaining the essence of the study of communication. In addition, this paper suggests that administrators and faculty worked to save face with students and each other. The research suggests that deeper transparency may have helped the university with its stakeholders.

Keywords: accreditation, teach-out, face negotiation theory, situational crisis communication theory, communication, business, transparency, stakeholders

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

This research investigates stakeholder responses following the loss of institutional accreditation for a major. Employing a qualitative approach, this limited case study examines narratives among stakeholders who either accepted, contested, or accommodated the institutional change. Through the analysis among as many institutional actors who agreed to participate, this study explores how university leadership strategically framed messaging to mitigate reputational damage and maintain program viability for faculty, students, and staff at Lithuanian's LCC International University. This research uses Face Negotiation Theory to explore the competing narratives that emerged and examines how these narratives were deployed to shape the program's trajectory.

The Research Question

The small, liberal arts university in the Baltics suffered a devastating loss of its communication major in early 2025. How did it respond to the loss?

Hypothesis

While the university was able to rebound with a new major that incorporated communication principles, the university's lack of transparency contributed to suspicion among some stakeholders.

What is Accreditation in Lithuania?

In Lithuania, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) reviews 13 colleges and 16 universities by evaluating institutions, their programs of study to ensure they conform to the mandatory national and international standards. SKVC is the official government agency that conducts external evaluations of educational institutions. Program review helps ensure that each university complies with Lithuanian laws and European standards. Typically, universities are reviewed every six years. Zinaida Manžuch, director SKVC, was contacted for background and wrote May 19, 2026, "In 2025, SKVC issued 69 accreditation decisions about specific study fields (several study programs may operate in one study field)." Of those, 58 decisions (84%) granted seven-year accreditation to study fields, eight (12 %) – granted accreditation for a three-year period with subsequent repeated assessment and 3 (4 %) non-accreditation decisions (Study quality, p. 16).

Founded to help students from former Soviet-bloc countries and elsewhere learn about freedom, the small university bills itself as the only faith-based university in Europe that uses a North American-style of instruction for the liberal arts. Students are from 40 or more countries. The university is known for its emphasis on peaceful resolutions to thorny issues (Smith, 2025).

The university had hoped to secure a generous teach-out plan when it lost the ability to award undergraduate degrees in communication, but it learned that students would have to finish the academic program in the same year that the university learned it lost accreditation—2025; however, SKVC later approved a teach-out plan through December 2027. A teach-out plan allows students to remain in the major and finish their requirements, in this case—communication. Students are permitted to transfer to another major or transfer to another university. While students may finish with a legitimate academic degree before the deadline,

some consider the loss of an accredited major to be less valuable as a job-seeking practice, which means that accreditation matters for personal enrichment and economic well-being (Understanding the risks, 2025).

History of the University

The university began in 1991 as a Christian-based, liberal arts university, established by a joint venture of Lithuanian, Canadian and American foundations. The mission statement on the web says the university ". . . provides Christian liberal arts education within a diverse learning community that transforms people for servant leadership." https://lcc.lt/about-lcc). In addition, the university goes on to say its mission is "to be the leading Christian liberal arts university in Europe, renowned for its flourishing academic community, spiritual vitality, and global impact." This research attempted to engage the leadership but it is in transition. The top leader is scheduled to retire and the other academic officers resigned for various reasons. All are from North America.

Brief History of the Major

The university pioneered Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and soon found that students wanted to explore topics more associated with communication including communication theory and practice along journalism and film studies. Over the years the Department of Communication went by the name Contemporary Communication or Communication and had a series of chairmen who allowed faculty, often short-term professors from North American and other places, to teach specialty courses related to their research interest.

As an institution with a student body that hovers around 500 to 600 students, the university operates with shared resources across departments. Historically, the university values professional and international expertise alongside formal academic credentials. However, Lithuanian higher education policy emphasizes doctoral qualifications and research productivity. The university therefore adapted while seeking to maintain institutional integrity. This reflects identity negotiation, where actors balance external pressures with internal values (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Other Challenges Impacting the University

The Ministry of Education found the absence of communication faculty with earned terminal degrees in communication and the dearth of research in the discipline to be among the weaknesses of the department. This churn was cited by the Ministry of Education as one of the many weaknesses in the program. In its evaluation, SKVC noted three areas that it considered unsatisfactory: Links to scientific (or artistic) research and higher education, the teaching staff and quality assurance and public information. The committee noted other areas as satisfactory with "substantial shortcomings" (p. 13).

Research by the faculty and the presence of faculty with an earned doctorate were also cited as problems (SKVC External Evaluation Report, 2024). The Ministry of Education said the Department of Contemporary Communication (hereafter communication) said no new students could enroll in the communication major, which is the reason the old program aligned itself with the Department of Business and began offering a business degree alongside of an existing business degree that uses the traditional model of classes including accounting and economics.

SKVC included a section on ways to address shortcoming, writing:

1. The university needs a wider view of the market, not only from stakeholders they collaborate with via internships or volunteer programs but also from independent market analyses and broader industry feedback.
2. The courses of the program should be grouped in semesters to show how progression is built from semester to semester.
3. The guidelines for thesis presentation, thesis defense and committee formation need to be articulated more clearly (2024, p. 13).

Work Around

According to Manžuch in her personal communication May 19, 2026, a new program is possible at institutions such as the university despite losing accreditation. "If the study field was not accredited, the higher education institution can submit a new study program in this field only in a year after non-accreditation decision came into force and was published in the Register of Legal Acts."

The university pivoted to become the Department of Global Business and Public Engagement and then GB/C as a new major, it could have lost 40 students, according to Chair Shane Crombie (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2026). While some students still feel the university could have done more, faculty such as Crombie praised then the top leadership for salvaging the program and making a way for students from far-flung countries to stay in school. Because the university is an international university, students come from Europe and beyond to study. Crombie noted that it isn't easy for many of them to simply transfer to another university because of issues with visas and for migration reasons.

The solution by the administration to put in place a business program may not have pleased all the students but it was a way to keep the hybrid program going. As a matter of fact, more than 50 students protested in the lobby of the classroom building. In April 2025, nearly 70 dissatisfied students responded to loss of the communication major by signing a petition protesting the ministry's action (Smith, 2025). Students questioned the administration on its funding a new building program at their expense and the lack of transparency by the administration. The students presented a diverse collection–about one-quarter of the students were from Ukraine, others from European Union countries and many former Soviet countries. The solidarity suggested a kind of collectivistic group united in their desire to show their disappointment with the university; but their actions also suggested a kind of individualistic action. The students held their signs but they didn't shout or chant; the protest was visible, not loud. It was an odd mix of two polar approaches to conflict where the stakeholders wanted to have a show of strength at the risk of embarrassing the administration.

Figure 1
Grim-Faced Students Hold Signs but Protest Silently

Note. Photo by Michael Patrick, personal collection, 2025.

The situation amounted to a crisis and the organizations do what they can to return the campus culture of something approaching routine and normal (Holladay, 2010). The goal was more than just smoothing over the loss; it was about the reputation of the organization (Fearn-Banks, 2007). Identifying the stakeholders is crucial for an effective two-way flow of communication (Canny, 2016; Coombs, 1999).

Despite the efforts of the university leadership, hard feeling ensued through the end of the fall 2025 year despite efforts by the administrations and others to put a good face on the loss. Early in the spring 2026 semester, faculty publicly questioned administrators about the departure of one of its top administrators. On January 19, 2026, the executive cabinet responded with an apology and an offer to be more transparent. All possess passports from North America. In an email sent to faculty Jan. 19, 2026, the executive cabinet wrote:

> Based on your discussion at the recent faculty assembly, we want to acknowledge that the sudden resignation and departure of [Name withheld] raises questions. As we mentioned in our farewell words in December, we are grateful for the ways that [name withheld] helped strengthen [the university]. We agree that transparent communication is healthy and just. Yet complete transparency is not possible in this case. [Names withheld] mutually agreed not to talk about the details of his departure.
>
> The inability to say more in this situation is especially difficult in the broader context of poor communication on past issues. We think particularly about past the accreditation process for the Communications department where [the university] leadership did not communicate with adequate openness.
>
> We care deeply about [the university] and you, our faculty. We want to do better. Where we can be more transparent, where we can change processes or policies or ways of

working to improve collaboration and communication, we want to do so. And, we encourage you to continue to talk to members of the Cabinet Executive directly.

Literature Review

Face Negotiation Theory explores the tension between collective and individualistic cultures and used the idea of an interdependent self-image that defaults to giving others-face or mutual face vs. the independent self-image that tends to default protective posture "self face" (Griffith, 2023). Ting-Toomey "assumes that people of every culture are always negotiating face" (p. 343).

Saving face is an old concept popularized by Sociologist Erving Goffman in the 1950s and used this idea to explore the ritual elements in social interaction. As early as 1955, he wrote, "The term face may be defined as a positive social value a person effectively claims for himself . . ." (p. 213). More recently the idea is used in Face Negotiation Theory developed by linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson in 1978 and later expanded by communications scholar Stella Ting-Toomey to examine cross-cultural communication, the need for acceptance and the need to manage conflict. While "face" is a metaphor for a public self-image, this research will use it to examine the approach used by various actors in the loss of accreditation and to protect or defend the action by the state and the reaction by stakeholders including administrators, faculty, students and others association with the Department of Communication ongoing changes. The theory outlines various conflict management styles, including avoidance, compromise, and domination, shaped by cultural backgrounds. For instance, Western cultures might emphasize individual rights and competition, while Eastern cultures often lean toward collectivist approaches, favoring compromise and accommodation (Ungvarsky, 2023).

According to Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory, organizations that respond best need to frame the situation, work on perceptions of the stakeholders and attempt to reduce the negative effects that result from the crisis (1995, 2007). The goal, he writes, should be to refute false statements that often circulate as rumors, reduce the threats by offering a hopeful take on them and rebuild the loss by helping stakeholders recall all the past good will of the organization. The LCC university leadership attempted to manage the crisis by holding town halls, adding a new major, offering to supplement the cost of various classes and assist students who opted to transfer to another university.

While not all stakeholders were pleased, the new major has its advantages, according to Crombie. Students were provided with a pathway to complete their degrees, which was especially important in an international context where transfer options are limited (Crombie, personal communication, Feb. 17, 2026).

Methodology

This study used a short survey that included closed-ended questions and open-ended questions to probe faculty members of the GB/C department and members of the Department of Business along with other stakeholders. The university's Institutional Review Board approved the survey. The survey was distributed following spring 2026 graduation when students had left campus. Participants in the survey were selected to represent key stakeholder groups involved in or affected by the transition, including institutional leadership, program administrators, faculty from both communication and business disciplines. The entire faculty of the GB/C

department was surveyed. Of the six full-time faculty only two responded. At least one faculty member said the topic was too sensitive. In addition, select members of the Department of Business were contacted and most declined to respond. Some didn't complete the survey but responded with lengthy responses of 100 words or more where they reflected on the new business major. Business faculty hinted that the GB/C major intruded into an already overstretched business degree program and cited the leadership turnover as the central problem.

Among the few who were willing to share was Henrika Ruginė, Lithuanian, a lecturer in the university's Department of Business and a well-known lecturer and author in the field of international business and sustainability. In her survey response, she echoed that leadership was the problem, noting that the university didn't prepare well for accreditation. She went on to say the issue of hiring professors with earned doctorates remains a chronic issue at the university.

She wrote in her survey response, "To make new program work, (more is) needed to increase scientific publications quantity, and in good journals . . . for that . . . (more funding is) needed." She warned that if change doesn't happen, ". . . there will be no university after all."

Among the GB/C program full professor Michael Patrick, USA, wondered about the SKVC approach to accreditation in his survey response. In his survey response, he said,

> The government agency offered no criticism of the course teaching or curriculum content. However, instead of punishing the school administration, they almost immediately cancelled all the students' ability to complete their degrees within a short window. Punishing students immediately did not fix or remedy the administration's or faculty's failure to publish enough research articles to meet the state's expectations. In sum, the punishment did not fit 'the crime.'

Formerly a dean at a popular graduate program in Virginia, Patrick teaches a strategic communication class including ones that deal with crisis communication. Patrick said the university missed an opportunity to use the crisis to demonstrate good will in keeping its stakeholders, including faculty and students, well informed. Their reserved posture, meant to be protective of stakeholders, was interpreted as unduly paternalistic and lacking in trust.

Outgoing assistant professor Dr. Emmy Irobi, Poland, taught at the university for nine years. He said in his survey response that the new program is going in the right direction but offered a caveat, writing, "Much has to be done to generate trust, communication, creativity, and transparency."

Guest business professor Dr. Donna Fallow, USA, offered hope in her survey response, saying, "Understanding communications and contemporary communications is crucial in organizations. Degrees that concentrate in these subjects are integral in helping students master the topics and related processes for effective use in any type of business or organization."

In her survey response, she also noted the danger of poor communication in organizations, saying,

> Studies reveal that many businesses have had serious problems and some have completely failed as a result of ineffective communication with various types of

stakeholders. Businesses need and will benefit from employees who are skilled in communications. Concentrated degrees can support this critical need.

Discussion

Considering that the university involves students, faculty and others from as many as 40 countries, the intercultural dimension is prominent. As academic leaders including GB/C worked to adjust to the back-to-back changes, they encountered confusion by several stakeholders, students in particular who mounted a protest in the lobby of the classroom building. Some students went along with the changes while others resisted and noted dissatisfaction with their new identity as business students. The Department of Business made their own adjustments with the new alliance, but some in the business department, a mix of North Americans and non-North Americans, found the additional business degree too unduly difficult given its overstretched resources.

In a study of face-interpersonal conflict in organizations, Oetzel, Meares, Myers and Estefana (2009), found self-face concern was associated positively with affects that tended to be what they called dominating and emotionally expressive styles. “Other styles that they rated positively included integrating, obliging, and compromising styles. and mutual-face concern was associated positively with integrating, obliging, and compromising styles” (p. 106). In the case of the university, the leadership of the Chair Crombie may have made the most difference is stakeholders agreeing to the changes that confronted the department in its ongoing adjustments to the state’s changes.

Findings

This researcher acknowledges that this convenience survey sample was paltry and possesses only limited generalizations. Nonetheless, here are a couple of generalizations about the reaction to the loss of the major and the reaction of the stakeholders. Based on this qualitative approach using this modest survey, the hypothesis is supported—The university response and lack of transparency contributed to suspicion among some stakeholders.

Ting-Toomey noted, “When people tend to use the same type of facework no matter what the dispute, she refers to it as their conflict style” (Griffith, 2023, p. 343). Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998), suggests the conflict style employed by the university hurt its response. Furthermore, the leadership was slow to accept SKVC’s external evaluation, with Patrick and Crombie finding fault with the approach used to evaluate the major. Regardless, the hesitancy to inform students and other stakeholders of the academic upheaval risked of institutional reputation.

According to Muindi & Kiarie, 2021, SCCT is inspired by Weiner’s (1985) Attribution Theory, “that explains how people search for the causes of events in their lives. Attribution theory posits that people make attributions to the causes of events, especially the events that are negative and unexpected” (p. 82). Coombs (2007) notes the theory highlights anger as a dominant emotion that can occur, which was evident in the student protest.

In most cases, the reaction by the students reflected a Western, individualistic bent that favored their personal success over other considerations. A part of Face Negotiation Theory, identity suggests that people resist looking anything but their best; nonetheless, when sides appeared to be drawn, polarity can result and rebuilding mutual trust takes commitment (Griffith, 2023, p.

343). As for the academic leaders, all from North American, their response may not anticipate the push back. Could a greater sense of cultural sensitivity make the difference?

Ting-Toomey (2017) noted that "The goal of the FNT theory is to provide a culture-sensitive lens in explaining some of the key constructs in cross-cultural comparative conflict situations." She (1989) also noted the interpersonal relationship dynamic is complicated and changes with many factors within and beyond the relationship.

According to interim vice president of academic affairs, the future could be bright, according to an interim university leader who wrote in personal communication, May 20, 2026, "What I know now is that the current Global Business and Communication program is gaining momentum and students who are in it seem satisfied and even excited by it . . ."

Recent work in higher education points to similar patterns, where institutions adjust programs in response to accreditation frameworks and policy pressures that shape how legitimacy is assessed (Misra, 2024; Ski-Berg, 2024). In this case, however, the response was not only structural but involved how the university explained and positioned the transition, both internally and externally. As other studies suggest, institutions often rely on forms of positioning and framing to align with external expectations while maintaining a sense of continuity (Buckner, 2025; Coşkun & Arslan, 2023). While the survey response from stakeholders in this research was limited, the tone of those who participated suggested that the university leadership model could improve along with a renewed commitment to transparency.

References

Buckner, E. (2025). Breaking the cycle: The legitimacy-building strategies of private universities. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *21*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/17454999251396821

Canny, I. U. (2016). An application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory on Germanwings Flight 9525 Crisis Communication. *SSRN Electronic Journal, 7*(3). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2728712

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. (n.d). *Study field assessment*. https://skvc.lrv.lt/en/quality-assurance/evaluation-of-studies/study-field-evaluation/

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. (2021). *SKVC self assessment report.* SKVC. SKVC_self-assessment-report_for_ENQA_review_2017-2021_EN_final PDF

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. (2021). *2021 Self-Assessment report of quality assurance agency activities.* https://www.skvc.lt/uploads/documents/files/EN%20versija/2022%20ENQA/SKVC_self-assessment-report_for_ENQA_review_2017-2021_EN_final.pdf

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. (2024). *External evaluation of LCC International University communication field of study: External evaluation report*. https://skvc.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1728559277/1096/Communication_III_2024.pdf

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. (2025). *Study quality assessment*, 2025 annual report. Lithuania Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. https://skvc.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1775024922/2102/SKVC_metine_ataskaita_2025.pdf

Coombs, W. T. (1995). Choosing the Right Words: The Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the "Appropriate" Crisis-Response Strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly, 8*(4), 447–476. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318995008004003

Coombs, W. T. (1999). Information and Compassion in Crisis Responses: A Test of Their Effects. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 11*(2), 125–142. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1102_02

Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review, 10*(3), 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2010). Examining the effects of mutability and framing on perceptions of human error and technical error crises: Implications for situational crisis communication theory. In W. T. Coombs & S. J. Holladay (Eds.), *The handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 181–204). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444314885.ch8

Coşkun, R., & Arslan, S. (2023). The role of organizational language in gaining legitimacy from the perspective of new institutional theory. *Journal of Management & Organization, 31*(4), 1647–1663. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2023.10

Fearn-Banks, K. (2007). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach* (3rd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Goffman, E. (1995). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry, 18*(3), 213–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1955.11023008

Marytė Lapinskienė, A., the Lithuanian Association of Higher Education Trade Unions. (2018). Is the government of the Republic of Lithuania working professionally? Maybe it's time for someone to resign? Mosklo Lietuva. https://mokslolietuva.lt/2018/03/ar-tikrai-profesionaliai-dirba-lr-vyriausybe-gal-jau-laikas-kai-kam-atsistatydinti/

Ministry of Education. (2017, Jan. 1.). *Lithuanian University of Education Science*. European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-report/report/?id=55309

Misra, D., & Stensaker, B. (2024). Balancing control and legitimacy in higher education policy implementation. *Studies in Higher Education, 49*(12), 2343–2356. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2306340

Muindi, B., & Kiarie, C. (2021). University crises in Africa: A situational crisis communication theory case study of Daystar University, Kenya. *Communicatio, 47*(2), 79–95. https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2021.1976239

Oetzel, J., Meares, M., Myers, K. K., & Lara, E. (2003). Interpersonal conflict in organizations: Explaining conflict styles via face-negotiation theory. *Communication Research Reports, 20*(2), 106–115. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090309388806

Ski-Berg, V., & Røyseng, S. (2024). Institutional change in higher music education: A quest for legitimacy. *International Journal of Music Education, 42*(2), 191–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/02557614231164154

Smith, M. R. (2025, May 20). *Faith and frustration: The limits of campus protest in the US and abroad.* Religion Unplugged. https://religionunplugged.com/news/faith-frustration-and-futility-the-limits-of-campus-protest-today

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Intercultural conflict styles: A face-negotiation theory. In Y.Y. Kim and W. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in intercultural communication*. Sage.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1989). Culture and Interpersonal Relationship Development: Some Conceptual Issues. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 12*(1), 371–382. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1989.11678727

Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). The matrix of face: An updated face-negotiation theory. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), Theorizing about intercultural communication (pp. 71–92). Sage Publications.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2017). Facework and Face Negotiation Theory. In Y.Y. Kim (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0105

Ting-Toomey, S. (2017). Identity Negotiation Theory. In Y.Y. Kim (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0039

Ting-Toomey, S., & Kurogi, A. (1998). Facework competence in intercultural conflict: An updated face-negotiation theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 22*(2), 187–225.

Understanding the risks of Losing Accreditation: What You Need to Know. (2025, Oct. 31). The Scholarship System. https://thescholarshipsystem.com/blog-for-students-families/understanding-the-risks-of-losing-accreditation-what-you-need-to-know/

Ungvarsky, J. (2023). *Face negotiation theory.* https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/face-negotiation-theory

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review, 92*(4), 548–573. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.92.4.548

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7312-4993

Appendix

Survey instrument approved by LCC's Institutional Review Board May 8, 2026.

May 9, 2026
Please consider participating in a study about the aftermath of the LCC International University losing its ability to grant undergraduate students a degree in communication. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in the study and, if you do decide to participate, you may stop at any time. There will be no consequences for deciding not to participate or for deciding to stop participation in the study. Your name and title may be used in this research as a matter of accuracy. Should you like to participate but without being identified, please make that wish known. We can use your comments and note that you didn't want to reveal your identity. For instance, we can say, "One faculty member reported." The sample will be small so it is possible that the audience can guess the identity but please know that we are doing research and we want your input and we can avoid identifying you if you so desire.
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to respond to the questions below, which will take about five minutes to complete.
There is no cost to participate in this research project.
Name, e-signature of student researcher, date

_____

Survey instrument

Background
I am scheduled to present original research at the Paris Conference on Arts and Humanities for The International Academic Forum June 15, 2026, at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Shane and I are working on a journal article on the same topic--Resetting a major when it loses its academic accreditation.

Would you mind helping by answering a couple of questions?
If possible, would **hit reply** and send me your answers by **May 15, 2026**?

It will take fewer than **five** minutes to complete this questionnaire.
If you'd like to remain **unidentified**, just say so.
As a courtesy, I submitted an IRB request and revision May 8, 2026. I am not affiliated with LCC these days so IRB approval may not be necessary; nonetheless, I have been in touch with LCC's IRB committee.

Shane will work on the journal paper but he is **NOT** working on the presentation June 15, 2026.
Your participation is completely **voluntary**. I am probing the intensity of reaction to the loss of the major by faculty and a couple of others. I would be very grateful for you to participate in one or all the questions and responses.

If you want to participate but not in this way, please let me know and I can do an interview. writingsmith@yahoo.com

Survey Questions
Demographics

Name
Title
Country of passport
Number of years teaching at LCC

Opinion scale questions

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being strongly disagree to 10 being strongly agree response to the following statements.
1. In 2025 the program was headed in the right direction.

2. In 2026 the program was headed in the right direction.

3. In 2025 the program let you down.

4. In 2026 the program let you down.

Open-ended question

5. What would you like to see happen with the program now?

6. Do you have anything to add?

Designing Cloth Books for Children Aged 0–2 Years: A Practice-Based Capacity-Building Model for Early Childhood Media Producers in Thailand

Raweewan Sap-in, Thammasat University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Early childhood (0–2 years) is a critical developmental period requiring media design aligned with cognitive, emotional, and sensory growth. Quality media production for this age group demands developmental knowledge as a foundational core of the creative process. This practice-based study examines how structured creative training can strengthen this capacity among emerging media creators, using cloth book development as both pedagogical framework and site of media production inquiry. This study employed a practice-based research approach to examine how a structured capacity-building process supports emerging media creators in developing developmentally appropriate media for children aged 0–2. Ten creative teams comprising 20 emerging creators, selected through a national open call across Thailand, participated in intensive workshops and expert mentorship, culminating in a structured pitching process. One winning team advanced to full-scale production, undertaking multiple rounds of prototype testing and refinement through consultation with a multidisciplinary panel of early childhood specialists. Findings indicate a substantive shift in creative decision-making—from content-driven production toward developmentally informed design. Narrative complexity was reduced in favor of high-contrast imagery, intentional tactile elements, and simplified interaction sequencing. The production process incorporated audience testing with target families, introducing emerging creators to evaluating audience response as an integral component of responsible media production. The study demonstrates that embedding developmental knowledge within iterative creative training can generate a transferable capacity-building model for responsible early childhood media production in the creative media ecosystems of emerging producers.

Keywords: early childhood media design, cloth book, creative capacity-building, iterative training model, early childhood media producers

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Early childhood development represents a critical window for investing in human potential (UNICEF, 2019). Producing media for children aged 0–2 years is of paramount importance because the human brain develops rapidly during this period, exhibiting high sensitivity to environmental stimuli and experiences (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). Appropriately designed media can effectively stimulate and support various developmental milestones.

According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children in the sensorimotor stage (0–2 years) explore the world primarily through sensory perception and motor actions (Lally & Valentine-French, 2019). Properly designed media—such as toys with sound, vibrant colors, or books with diverse visuals and textures—provides essential learning experiences, promoting rapid brain development through touch and auditory stimulation (Barr et al., 2018).

Furthermore, social interaction with adults and peers is vital for learning during this stage, as highlighted by Lev Vygotsky's social development theory (Lally & Valentine-French, 2019). Consequently, children's media should encourage active interaction between children and caregivers, such as shared reading or adult-mediated play (Fidler et al., 2021).

From the perspective of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, infants in the oral stage (0–1 year) naturally use their mouths to explore their surroundings (Lally & Valentine-French, 2019). Media produced for this age group must ensure absolute physical safety for oral exploration; for instance, safe teether toys or cloth books that children can safely bite can facilitate healthy emotional and physical development (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019). Meanwhile, during the anal stage (1–3 years), children learn self-control and autonomy. Media that fosters independence, such as toys or books that children can open, close, or assemble by themselves, enhances self-confidence and self-regulatory capacities (Lally & Valentine-French, 2019).

While media design must align with these cognitive, emotional, and sensory dimensions, producing high-quality media demands that developmental knowledge serve as a foundational core of the creative process. Therefore, this study aims to examine the processes involved in capacity-building frameworks for emerging creators producing media for children aged 0–2 years. It utilizes the development of a cloth book titled “My Love Is Right Here” as a case study and conceptual model.

The research journey began with a national open call that selected ten emerging creative teams from across Thailand to participate in intensive workshops and expert mentorship. This culminated in a structured pitch, where one winning team was chosen to advance to actual full-scale production. The selected team then developed the final product in close collaboration with a multidisciplinary panel of experts—including pediatricians, early childhood educators, and professional children's book producers. This collaborative framework ensured that the final media was high-quality, safe, creative, and developmentally appropriate, establishing a transferable model for responsible early childhood media production on a broader scale.

Literature Review

Infant Developmental Milestones (0–2 Years)

The cloth book was designed for children from birth to two years of age. Its development draws on four theoretical frameworks in developmental psychology, each addressing a different aspect of early childhood: cognitive growth, emotional bonding, social learning, and environmental context. Together, these frameworks provide a clear rationale for the book's design choices and its role in supporting caregiver-infant interaction.

Piaget's Sensorimotor Stage (0–2 Years)

Jean Piaget described early cognitive development as a progression through four stages. The first—the Sensorimotor Stage—covers birth to approximately two years of age. During this period, infants learn primarily through their senses and physical actions. They explore the world by touching, grasping, mouthing, and manipulating objects, and through these repeated experiences, they gradually build mental schemas that help them make sense of their surroundings (Scott & Cogburn, 2023).

A key milestone in this stage is object permanence—the understanding that objects continue to exist even when out of sight. This typically begins around six months of age and reflects early memory development (Mayes & Fahy, 2019). By 18–24 months, children start using simple symbols and words, marking the transition to the next stage.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory focuses on the emotional bond between infants and their primary caregivers. Bowlby proposed that infants are biologically driven to form close attachments as a means of ensuring their survival and emotional well-being. When caregivers respond consistently and warmly to an infant's needs, a secure attachment develops—giving the child a safe base from which to explore the world (Cassidy et al., 2013). Bowlby identified the first two to two-and-a-half years of life as a sensitive period for attachment formation, during which the quality of early relationships has lasting effects on social and emotional development.

Bowlby outlined four phases in this process. In the first weeks of life, infants respond positively to any caregiver. By two to six months, they begin to show a preference for familiar adults. From six months to around three years, they actively seek closeness with their primary caregiver and show distress when separated. From 24 months onward, children gradually develop a better understanding of the caregiver's feelings and needs, enabling more mutual interaction (Cassidy et al., 2013).

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the role of social interaction in children's learning. While Piaget focused on how individual children construct knowledge through their own exploration, Vygotsky argued that learning is deeply shaped by interaction with others. His key concept, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), refers to the gap between what a child can do independently and what the child can achieve with guidance from a more

knowledgeable person (Shabani et al., 2010). Learning that takes place within this zone is considered most effective.

The support that helps children learn within the ZPD is known as scaffolding—a concept developed by Wood et al. (1976) based on Vygotsky's ideas. Scaffolding involves providing just enough assistance to help a child move forward, then gradually reducing that support as the child becomes more capable. In the context of the cloth book, caregivers naturally take on this role: they read aloud, point to pictures, name objects, and respond to the infant's reactions. This kind of interactive reading is a practical example of scaffolding in early childhood.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a broader perspective on child development by considering the range of environments that shape a child's growth. Bronfenbrenner proposed that children do not develop in isolation; rather, they are embedded in a series of interconnected environmental systems, each influencing development in different ways (Tudge et al., 2009).

The system closest to the child is the microsystem, which includes the immediate people and settings of daily life—family members, caregivers, and the home environment. This is the most direct and influential layer of a child's world (Tudge et al., 2009). Beyond this, the mesosystem connects different microsystem settings with one another, while the exosystem and macrosystem refer to wider social structures and cultural values that shape the conditions in which children grow up.

Principles of Media Design for Early Childhood

Developmentally Appropriate Media Design

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in media production requires that the complexity of any medium not exceed the cognitive and self-regulatory thresholds of its target audience. Because the infant brain lacks the structural maturity to process rapidly changing or highly abstract stimuli, media featuring abrupt sensory transitions or interactive digital elements frequently triggers cognitive overload—disrupting the learning process and producing emotional dysregulation (Barr et al., 2018). Responsible media design must therefore prioritize cognitive pacing and structural simplicity, stripping away extraneous narrative layers in favor of predictable, repetitive sequencing that conforms to the child's developmental milestones rather than demanding adaptation from the child (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019).

This principle is further supported by Barr and Linebarger (2010), who argued that effective media for infants and toddlers must be aligned with children's cognitive abilities, attention spans, language development, and learning capacities at each stage of growth. Their work also underscored that young children learn more effectively through responsive social engagement than through passive media exposure. Complementing this, Wojcik et al. (2023) demonstrated that sensory features in children's materials do not independently improve learning outcomes; rather, effectiveness depends on whether the content and design genuinely correspond with children's developmental needs at a given stage. Sensory elements that are excessive or unrelated to the learning goal may distract children from core content, while developmentally congruent, simplified design consistently provides stronger scaffolding for early learning.

High-Contrast Imagery and Tactile Elements

The visual and physical architecture of early childhood media constitutes the primary gateway for neural activation. In the earliest months of life, visual acuity is sharply restricted; the underdeveloped fovea renders soft pastel tones and fine details indistinguishable. Empirical research demonstrates that infants possess a pronounced neurological preference for high-contrast imagery—specifically black-and-white patterns or saturated primary colors—which provide the sharp perceptual boundaries necessary for the visual cortex to practice focal tracking, spatial discrimination, and object recognition (Lally & Valentine-French, 2019). Visual design must simultaneously be augmented by robust tactile feedback. Infants extract critical environmental data through grasping, squeezing, and physically manipulating objects (StatPearls, 2023), and when media incorporates varied physical textures—such as rough canvas, soft velvet, or crinkled surfaces—it stimulates peripheral mechanoreceptors and generates synchronous neural signals alongside visual input. This multimodal reinforcement is essential for motor planning and sensory processing, providing an experiential richness that purely digital interfaces are structurally incapable of delivering.

Cloth Books as Developmental Media

Cloth books represent a purposeful intersection of tangible product design and early childhood pedagogy. Unlike digital alternatives, which frequently induce passive consumption or repetitive, unreflective screen interaction, cloth books require active, minds-on physical problem-solving. Mechanical features embedded within the medium—such as unbuttoning flaps, detaching velcro-secured elements, or threading cords—directly exercise fine motor skills, bilateral coordination, and hand-eye integration (ZERO TO THREE, 2018). Their soft, compliant material also addresses the physiological realities of infancy: constructed from non-toxic, washable textiles, cloth books are physically safe during the oral exploration that characterizes early sensory development (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019). Structurally, the absence of disruptive digital audio-visual loops naturally invites caregivers to engage in close physical proximity, shared attention, and co-constructed language with the child (Fidler et al., 2021), rendering the cloth book not merely a passive reading material but an interactive developmental apparatus.

The Case for Tactile Media in the 0–2 Age Range

Barr et al. (2018) synthesized substantial scientific evidence demonstrating that physical, tactile media and three-dimensional objects are essential for supporting brain development and cognitive perception in infants and toddlers. Their findings converge on four interconnected arguments. First, tactile media overcomes the transfer deficit that prevents children under two from applying knowledge gained from two-dimensional screen images to the physical world. Second, unlike digital media, tactile media presents natural mechanics and physical surfaces that do not produce extraneous cognitive load, allowing children to maintain sustained focus on primary learning content. Third, the physical mechanisms of tactile media promote minds-on engagement, actively involving the child's brain in physical problem-solving and sensory exploration. Fourth, tactile media serves as a bridge for Joint Media Engagement, enabling high-quality shared play between caregivers and children through which optimal brain development occurs. Taken together, this evidence strongly supports the developmental advantages of tactile media—and cloth books specifically—over digital alternatives for children aged 0–2.

Capacity-Building Frameworks for Creative Producers

Creative Capacity-Building

Capacity-building within the creative sector is theoretically defined as a multi-layered intervention that enhances a creator's or organization's ability to define, execute, and sustain complex artistic and ethical objectives. For media production targeting specialized and developmentally vulnerable audiences such as infants and toddlers, capacity-building must extend beyond technical training to cultivate cognitive and conceptual literacy grounded in interdisciplinary scientific knowledge (UNICEF, 2012). Without such a framework, emerging creators tend to default to content-driven production—prioritizing aesthetic trends or commercial entertainment value over audience developmental readiness. When professional development models embed external domain expertise, such as pediatric science or early childhood theory, directly into the creative workflow, they fundamentally alter the creator's decision-making process, shifting the paradigm from intuitive production toward evidence-based, responsible media design.

The Creative Capacity Building (CCB) framework developed by MIT D-Lab provides a particularly relevant conceptual model. CCB supports the development of individuals' and communities' capacities through participatory learning processes and practical engagement, grounded in the principle that creative and problem-solving competencies are best cultivated through active learning and collaborative practice rather than one-directional knowledge transmission (MIT D-Lab, n.d.). The framework extends beyond technical skill acquisition to encompass the development of confidence, collaboration, and contextual responsiveness. Four interconnected processes define CCB: participation, in which learners actively generate ideas and contribute to decision-making rather than passively receiving information; co-creation, through which collaborative exchange of perspectives and experiences drives shared learning; hands-on learning, in which understanding emerges from practical making, experimenting, and iterating; and iterative design and reflection, through which ideas are continuously refined through cycles of prototyping, feedback, and revision (MIT D-Lab, n.d.). The CCB framework aligns directly with the methodology of the present study, which incorporates active workshop participation, mentorship, prototype development, audience testing, and repeated revision cycles as its core pedagogical structure.

Experiential Workshops in Creative Professional Development

Traditional didactic pedagogical models frequently fail to stimulate meaningful innovation or behavioral transformation within the dynamic landscape of the creative economy. Contemporary creative professional development consequently relies heavily on experiential, work-based learning. Grounded in iterative practice and real-world project simulation, experiential workshops provide a controlled environment in which creators can translate abstract theoretical frameworks into tangible prototypes. Research indicates that intensive, structured workshop models—when paired with cross-disciplinary collaboration and continuous expert mentorship—significantly accelerate both the technical and ethical readiness of emerging talent (Harvard Business School, 2020). The inclusion of formalized milestone events, such as a structured pitching process evaluated by a multidisciplinary expert panel, further serves as a critical pedagogical catalyst: it requires emerging producers to explicitly articulate and defend their design rationale under professional scrutiny, reinforcing the internalization of audience-centered standards and safety considerations.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides the theoretical backbone for understanding how structured creative training drives professional transformation. Kolb (2015) defines learning as a process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience—not passively acquired, but continuously co-constructed as learners actively engage with and interpret direct encounters. This process unfolds across a four-stage cycle operating along two dimensions of grasping and transforming experience. In the first stage, Concrete Experience (CE), learners engage directly with a new activity, relying on sensory perception and feeling. In the second stage, Reflective Observation (RO), they pause to review and evaluate the experience, synthesizing multiple perspectives to identify underlying causality. The third stage, Abstract Conceptualization (AC), involves integrating these reflections into coherent logical frameworks and generalizable principles. The fourth stage, Active Experimentation (AE), applies these newly formed concepts pragmatically in unfamiliar contexts, inherently initiating a subsequent, higher-order learning cycle (Kolb, 2015).

A foundational principle of the theory is that comprehensive learning is obstructed when a learner becomes tethered to a single stage—accumulating experience without reflection, or acquiring theory without practical application (Kolb, 2015). Accordingly, capacity-building curriculum must operationalize the full cycle: guiding emerging creators from prototype fabrication (CE) through expert critique (RO), enabling the internalization of domain-specific design knowledge (AC), before applying validated insights in full-scale production (AE). This cyclical architecture is what drives sustained, transferable professional development—a dynamic that the present study seeks to enact and examine within the context of early childhood media production.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a practice-based research approach to examine how a structured capacity-building process supports emerging media creators in developing developmentally appropriate media for children aged 0–2 years. The research integrated capacity-building workshops, creative practice, expert mentorship, prototype development, and field testing throughout the media production process.

Capacity-Building Process

The study followed a sequential capacity-building model consisting of five stages: (1) nationwide recruitment and selection, (2) intensive training workshops, (3) structured pitching, (4) incubation and production, and (5) prototype development and field testing.

Stage 1: Nationwide Recruitment and Selection

An open call invited emerging media creators from across Thailand to participate in the project. Ten creative teams (20 participants) were selected to join the capacity-building program.

Stage 2: Intensive Capacity-Building Workshops

Participants attended workshops covering four areas: (1) early childhood development and age-appropriate media, (2) children's book production, (3) storytelling, illustration, and visual communication, and (4) legal and ethical considerations for child-centered media production.

Stage 3: Structured Pitching Process

Each team developed and presented a children's book concept for children aged 0–2 years to a multidisciplinary panel of experts. One team was selected for the production phase.

Stage 4: Incubation and Production

The selected team developed the cloth book *My Love Is Right Here* under the guidance of a multidisciplinary expert panel. The development process included concept refinement, prototype development, expert consultation, and production supervision.

Prototype Development and Field Testing

Prototype development was conducted between March and June 2025 through four iterative phases: (1) conceptual design and drafting, (2) content and component development, (3) prototype production and refinement, and (4) audience testing and reflection.

The final prototype was evaluated through home-based observations with four families and a group testing session. Participants were recruited according to predefined inclusion criteria, including families with children aged 0–2 years showing age-appropriate development. Primary caregivers participated voluntarily and provided informed consent before behavioral observations and post-testing interviews.

Figure 1
Summary of the Development Process and Key Milestones of My Love Is Right Here (March–June 2025)

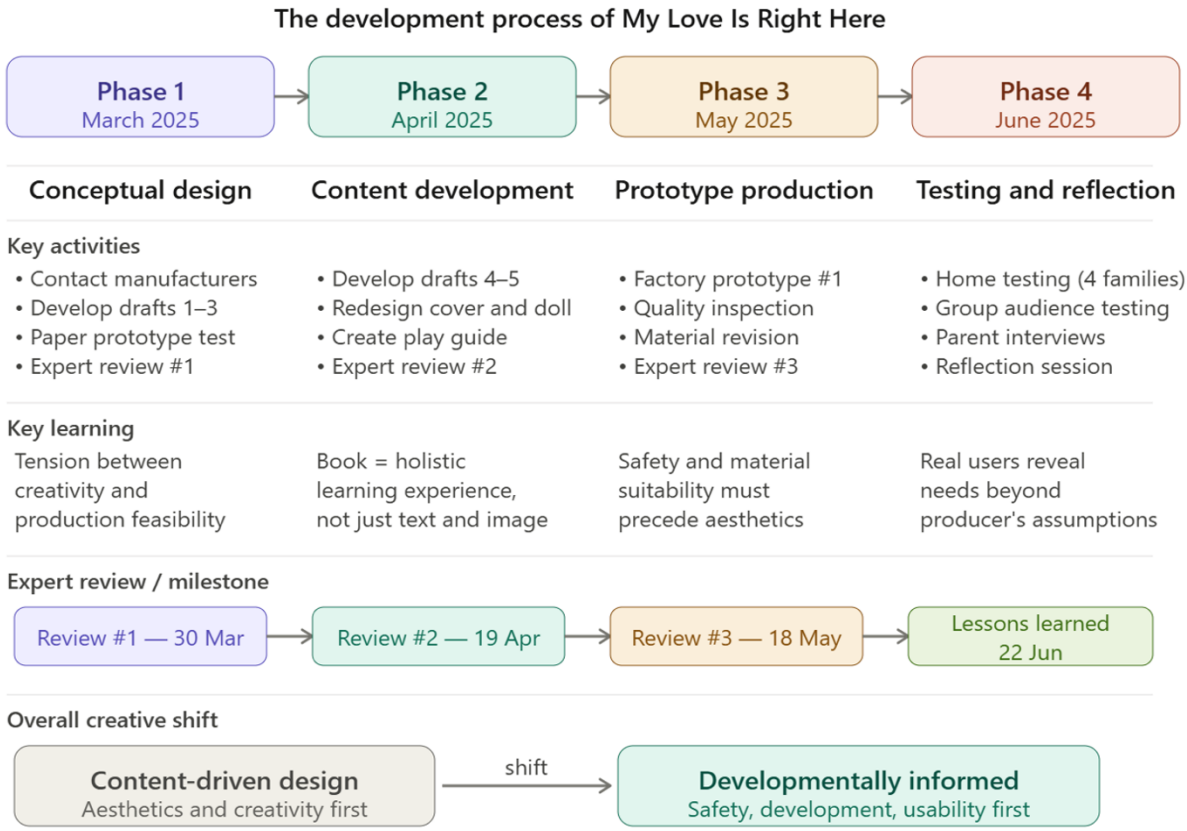


Figure 1. Summary of development process and milestones (March–June 2025)

Lesson Learned and Reflection

A collaborative evaluation session brought together the emerging media creators, expert mentors, and research team to reflect on the outcomes and insights gained.

- A collaborative evaluation session bringing together the emerging media creators, expert mentors, and research team to reflect on the outcomes and insights gained.

Data were collected through multiple sources throughout the project process. During the training phase, participant feedback and learning experiences were gathered through training satisfaction evaluation forms administered after workshop activities. Throughout the development and production stages, process documentation was collected from Creative Process and Learning Reports submitted upon project completion. In addition, collaborative reflection and lessons learned sessions were conducted with the youth media production team responsible for developing the cloth book in order to capture reflections, learning experiences, and changes in creative decision-making throughout the production process.

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, focusing on recurring patterns related to creative learning processes, design decision-making, and the integration of child development principles into media production practices. Quantitative data from satisfaction forms were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participant responses.

Results and Discussion

Results

Quantitative Evaluation of the Training Program

The training evaluation results showed that participants generally reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, indicating that the workshop design effectively supported learning and creative development.

The evaluation results for the training program under the "Capacity Building for New Gen Creators of Safe and Creative Media for Early Childhood (New Gen Creators for Kids): Production of Tactile and Cloth Books for Early Childhood (0–2 Years)" are presented below. A total of 20 participants attended the training workshop, with 16 participants successfully completing the comprehensive post-training evaluation questionnaire. Based on a 5-point Likert scale (where 5 represents the highest and 1 represents the lowest level of satisfaction), the evaluation framework is categorized into three main sections: general demographic status and levels of satisfaction toward the project. The quantitative analysis and distribution of the feedback are detailed as follows.

Demographic Data of Respondents (n = 16). The following table presents the fundamental demographic profile of the respondents to contextualize the background of the training participants:

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Training Participants

Variables	Details	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1. Gender	Female	12	75.00
	Male	4	25.00
	Total	**16**	**100.00**
2. Age	Under 18 years	0	0.00
	18–19 years	4	25.00
	20–21 years	8	50.00
	22–23 years	2	12.50
	24–25 years	2	12.50
	Total	**16**	**100.00**
3. Occupation	Students	14	87.50
	Child Development Center Teachers	1	6.25
	Childcare Caregivers	0	0.00
	Kindergarten Teachers	0	0.00
	Others	1	6.25
	Total	**16**	**100.00**
4. Prior Experience (Children's Book Production)	Experienced	2	12.50
	No Experience	14	87.50
	Total	**16**	**100.00**

Note. N = 16 of 20 participants (response rate = 80%). Four participants did not complete the evaluation form as they were required to depart early due to traveling from out of province.

Demographic Analysis: According to the table, the majority of the respondents are female, accounting for 75.00%. In terms of age distribution, the largest group falls within the 20–21 years old bracket at 50.00%. Regarding occupation, a significant majority are students, representing 87.50%. Notably, the vast majority of participants (87.50%) had no prior experience in producing children's books.

Satisfaction Levels Towards Project Participation. The satisfaction level was analyzed using the mean score and interpreted based on the 5-point interval scale (0.80 score range per level):

Table 2
Mean Satisfaction Scores by Evaluation Dimension

Evaluation Items	Mean	Satisfaction Level
Dimension 1: Content, Format, and Training Methodology		
1.1 The content was appropriate and well-aligned with the training topics.	4.88	Highest
1.2 The content comprehensively reflected key principles of books for early childhood (0–2 years).	4.81	Highest
1.3 The training content provided clear, practical examples that can be applied in reality.	4.81	Highest
1.4 The training format, combining lectures with hands-on workshops, facilitated a clear understanding of the content.	4.69	Highest
Total Dimension 1 Mean Score	**4.80**	**Highest**
Dimension 2: Knowledge and Benefits Acquired		
2.1 Participants gained knowledge and fundamental principles in producing books for early childhood (0–2 years).	4.88	Highest
2.2 Participants can apply the knowledge gained from the training to future children's book production.	4.75	Highest
2.3 The practical exercises during the training enabled participants to create preliminary outputs.	4.88	Highest
Total Dimension 2 Mean Score	**4.84**	**Highest**
Overall Combined Mean Score (Both Dimensions)	**4.82**	**Highest**

Satisfaction Data Analysis. When evaluating each dimension individually, participants expressed their satisfaction at the "Highest" level across both areas, resulting in an overall combined mean score of 4.82. The detailed findings are as follows:

- **Knowledge and Benefits Acquired** yielded the highest mean score of 4.84. The items receiving the highest approval were the acquisition of core knowledge/principles and the effectiveness of practical exercises in enabling participants to successfully develop their initial book models.
- **Content, Format, and Training Methodology** achieved a mean score of 4.80. The highest-rated aspect was the relevance and alignment of the content with the specified training topics. Meanwhile, the integration of lectures and hands-on workshops received a mean score of 4.69, which still remains securely within the "Highest" satisfaction tier.

Qualitative Outcomes of the Creative Process

Qualitative findings revealed a clear shift in participants' creative decision-making, moving from content-driven ideas toward developmentally informed design choices that better suited children aged 0–2 years.

Thematic Shift in Creative Decision-Making. The core learning outcomes and cognitive shifts experienced by the creators are synthesized in the framework below:

Through these shifts, creators adjusted the book's design parameters. Narrative complexity was reduced in favor of high-contrast imagery, intentional tactile elements, and simplified interaction sequencing.

Figure 2

Framework of Thematic Shifts in Creators' Design Decision-Making

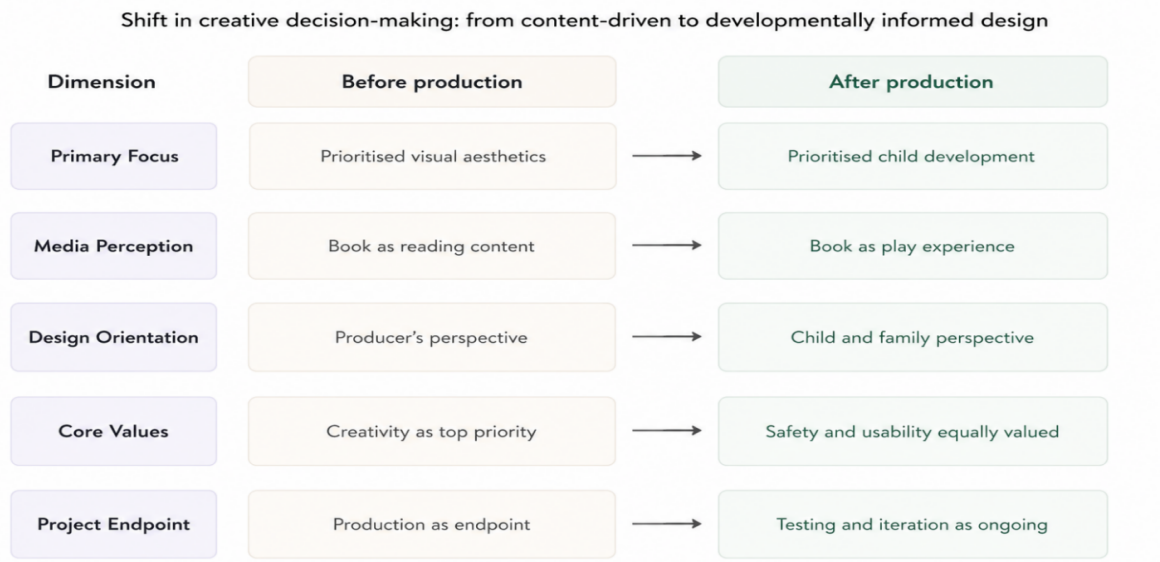


Figure 3. Shift in creative decision-making throughout the cloth book development process.

Discussion

From Content-Driven to Developmentally Informed Design

The findings suggest that integrating early childhood development knowledge into the creative process can significantly reshape how emerging creators conceptualize and produce media for infants and toddlers.

The statistical breakdown highlights a highly successful alignment within the project's operational framework. Despite the fact that the vast majority of the target group (87.50%) consisted of youth and students with absolutely no prior experience in children's media production, the specially tailored training curriculum effectively bridged this gap.

This success is clearly evident from the exceptionally high satisfaction scores regarding both knowledge acquisition and hands-on workshop execution. These findings provide empirical evidence that the program successfully achieved its core objective: empowering and cultivating

a new generation of creators by equipping them with the practical capabilities to design safe, creative, and tangible media for early childhood development.

Implications for Capacity-Building in Early Childhood Media

These results highlight the value of capacity-building as a transferable model for strengthening responsible early childhood media production within Thailand's creative media ecosystem.

This study, tracking the trajectory from training and pitching to industrial production, provided emerging media creators with a profound understanding of early childhood media design. Creators gained deep insights into material safety, developmental appropriateness, and the meticulous nature of industrial quality control. Giving young creators the hands-on opportunity to brainstorm, design, and produce the fabric book My Love Is Right Here did more than just build a product. From the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, this project introduced a powerful "Microsystem Tool" embedded in the child's immediate environment. Consequently, these new media producers recognized that they were not merely making a conventional book; they were intentionally crafting an environmental tool that strengthens the caregiver-infant bond, the ultimate foundation for early human development. Furthermore, they recognized the immense value of media for the underserved 0–2 age bracket, noting that such media acts as a vital catalyst for family bonding and gentle sensory play. Managing industrial manufacturing, cooperating with factories, and engaging in user testing cultivated a well-rounded professional capacity among these youth producers. Ultimately, they recognized that children's media must transcend commercial appeal to become "meaningful media" that aligns with real family contexts, thereby positioning this model as a cornerstone for cultivating responsible producers within the safe and creative early childhood media ecosystem.

Conclusion

This study concludes that an iterative, practice-based creative training model can support a shift in media producers' perspectives from content-driven approaches toward developmentally informed design. By integrating early childhood development principles into a structured, real-world production process, emerging creators develop a stronger sense of media responsibility alongside the practical competencies required to produce developmentally appropriate early childhood media.

Recommendations

Comprehensive Training on Book Production Workflows: Industrial cloth book manufacturing involves strict timelines and external factory variables that creators cannot directly control. Future iterations should include dedicated training modules covering factory communication, pre-production manuscript preparation, and industrial manufacturing protocols to enhance project planning efficiency.

Specialized Training on Media Certifications and Standards: Because emerging creators often lack industrial compliance experience, explicit training regarding legal and publication standards is highly recommended. Workshops should comprehensively cover ISBN registration processes, national industrial product standards (such as Thailand's TIS), and the paperwork required to verify child safety compliance.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the Thai Media Fund (TMF) for funding this research project. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the College of Innovation, Thammasat University, for supporting the presentation of this research at an international academic conference.

The author would also like to thank the multidisciplinary panel of experts, mentors, and workshop facilitators for their invaluable guidance and support throughout the capacity-building, prototype development, and production process. Their expertise and constructive feedback were instrumental in the successful implementation of this project.

Finally, sincere appreciation is extended to all participating creative teams and youth media creators for their commitment and active participation throughout the project. Their creativity and collaboration were essential to the development of this practice-based learning initiative for early childhood media.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic), generative AI-assisted writing tools, were used to support language refinement, text organization, and improve the clarity and readability of the manuscript. Their use was limited to editing, proofreading, and enhancing the presentation of the manuscript. The author carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all AI-assisted outputs before incorporating them into the manuscript.

The author further declares that, apart from the assistance described above, no AI or AI-assisted technologies were used to generate the research ideas, study design, methodology, data collection, analysis, findings, interpretation, or conclusions. These components are the author's original work and are derived from the careful and systematic conduct of the research. The author accepts full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2019). *Selecting appropriate toys for young children in the digital era* [Clinical report]. AAP Publications. https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/143/1/e20183348/37330/Selecting-Appropriate-Toys-for-Young-Children-in

Barr, R., & Linebarger, D. N. (2010). Screen media and language development in infants and toddlers: An ecological perspective. *Developmental Review, 30*(2), 176–202. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2010.03.006

Barr, R., McClure, E., & Parlakian, R. (2018). *Screen sense: What the research says about the impact of media on children aged 0-3 years old*. ZERO TO THREE. https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2533-screen-sense-what-the-research-says-about-the-impact-of-media-on-children-aged-0-3-years-old

Cassidy, J., Jones, J. D., & Shaver, P. R. (2013). Contributions of attachment theory and research: A framework for future research, translation, and policy. *Development and Psychopathology, 25*(4 Pt 2), 1415–1434. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579413000692

Center on the Developing Child. (2007). *The science of early childhood development* [In brief]. Harvard University. https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd/

Fidler, R., Kirkorian, H. L., & Pempek, T. A. (2021). Joint media engagement in infancy and toddlerhood: How parent-child interaction shapes learning from screen and physical media. *Journal of Children and Media, 15*(2), 245–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2020.1794932

Harvard Business School. (2020). *The power of experiential learning in driving creative innovation* [White paper]. Harvard Business Publishing. https://publications.hbs.edu/experiential-learning-innovation

Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education. Open Research Library. https://archive.org/details/experientiallear0000kolb

Lally, M., & Valentine-French, S. (2019). *Lifespan development: A psychological perspective* (2nd ed.). College of Lake County. Open Textbook Library. https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/lifespan-development-a-psychological-perspective

Mayes, L., & Fahy, T. (2019). Cognitive development. In *StatPearls*. StatPearls Publishing. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK537095/

MIT D-Lab. (n.d.). *Creative capacity building* (CCB). Massachusetts Institute of Technology. https://d-lab.mit.edu/approach/creative-capacity-building

Plan For Kids. (2021). *Techniques for choosing age-appropriate books*. https://www.planforkids.com/kids_corner/how-to-choose-picturebook-for-kids

Scott, H. K., & Cogburn, M. (2023). Piaget. In *StatPearls*. StatPearls Publishing. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK448206/

Shabani, K., Khatib, M., & Ebadi, S. (2010). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development: Instructional implications and teachers' professional development. *English Language Teaching, 3*(4), 237–248. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v3n4p237

StatPearls. (2023). *Child development*. NCBI Bookshelf, National Center for Biotechnology Information. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK564386/

Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 1*(4), 198–210. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2009.00026.x

UNICEF. (2012). *The importance of caregiver-child interactions for the survival and healthy development of young children* [Organizational capacity-building framework]. UNICEF Expanded Model of Care. https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development

UNICEF. (2019). *Early childhood development: A statistical profile of early childhood development in Thailand*. UNICEF Thailand. https://www.unicef.org/thailand/reports/early-childhood-development-thailand

Wojcik, E. H., & Houston-Price, C. (2023). Touch-and-feel features in “first words” picture books hinder infants' word learning. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 232*, Article 105860. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2023.105860

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x

ZERO TO THREE. (2018). *The power of play: Learning through play in infant and toddler classrooms*. National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families. https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2534-the-power-of-play-learning-through-play-in-infant-and-toddler-classrooms

Contact email: raweewan@tu.ac.th

Naming the Mafia: Representation and the Construction of the Mafia Imaginary

Simone Giuseppe Verace, Université de Lille, France

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper investigates how cultural representations contribute to the construction of the mafia imaginary in contemporary Italy. Rather than approaching the mafia exclusively as a historical or criminal phenomenon, the study examines the narrative processes through which it becomes culturally intelligible and symbolically meaningful. Through a comparative analysis of the television series *Il capo dei capi* (Taodue, 2007) and Gaetano Savatteri's novel *La congiura dei loquaci* (Sellerio, 2007), the article explores how different media construct distinct forms of visibility, emotional engagement, and public understanding of organized crime. While serialized television tends to organize the narrative around the charismatic figure of Salvatore Riina, producing a biographical structure that risks aestheticizing violence through personalization and emotional proximity, Savatteri's novel develops a counter-narrative centred on truth, institutional failure, and the structural nature of mafia power. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, Umberto Eco, and Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, the paper argues that literary and audiovisual texts do not simply reflect reality but actively participate in the production of symbolic frameworks through which the mafia is interpreted. Rather than evaluating the historical accuracy of these representations, this study focuses on their formal organization and cultural effects. Particular attention is devoted to narrative focalization, characterization, temporality, and symbolic hierarchy, demonstrating how different aesthetic strategies either reinforce or challenge dominant representations of organized crime. Ultimately, the paper argues that the mafia imaginary is not merely inherited from history but continuously negotiated through cultural production, where literature and television play a decisive role in shaping collective memory and public perception.

Keywords: mafia, cultural representation, cultural imaginary, Italian literature, television studies, symbolic power

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The mafia occupies a unique position within contemporary Italian cultural memory. Although it constitutes a historical, political, and criminal phenomenon that has been extensively investigated by historians, sociologists, magistrates, and journalists, public knowledge of the mafia is shaped not only by judicial evidence or historical documentation but also by the narratives through which it is represented. Literature, cinema, television, and more recently digital media have contributed significantly to constructing the symbolic frameworks through which Italian society—and international audiences—understand organized crime. Consequently, the mafia exists simultaneously as a historical reality and as a cultural representation.

This distinction constitutes the starting point of the present study. Rather than asking whether a particular literary or audiovisual work faithfully reproduces historical reality, this article examines how narrative forms construct different ways of seeing, interpreting, and imagining the mafia. The question is therefore not simply what the mafia is, but how narrative representation participates in making it culturally visible.

The relationship between organized crime and cultural representation has become increasingly relevant over the last decades. Since the international success of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*,[1] mafia narratives have circulated far beyond the Italian context, contributing to the emergence of a powerful global imaginary based on family loyalty, honour, violence, and charismatic leadership. Italian television subsequently developed its own tradition of mafia storytelling through productions such as *La Piovra*, *Il capo dei capi*, and, more recently, *Gomorra*. At the same time, Sicilian literature has proposed alternative narrative strategies that seek not to spectacularize criminal power but to interrogate its historical, social, and ethical foundations.

Among contemporary Italian writers, Leonardo Sciascia[2] occupies a particularly significant position. His novels and essays profoundly transformed the literary representation of the mafia by shifting attention from criminal exceptionalism to the intricate relationships linking power, justice, silence, and institutional responsibility. Rather than portraying the mafia exclusively as an organization of violent criminals, Sciascia explored the mechanisms through which violence becomes socially tolerated and politically protected. His reflections continue to influence subsequent generations of Sicilian writers, including Andrea Camilleri and Gaetano Savatteri, whose works develop different but related forms of civic engagement through narrative.

The present article focuses specifically on the comparison between two works published in 2007: the television series *Il capo dei capi*, produced by Taodue for Mediaset, and Gaetano Savatteri's novel *La congiura dei loquaci*. Although both works address the Sicilian mafia, they do so through radically different narrative structures. The television series constructs its story around the biographical rise of Salvatore Riina, making the mafia intelligible through the continuity of a central protagonist. Savatteri's novel, by contrast, refuses the heroic centralization of criminal power and instead portrays the mafia as a diffuse system of social relationships sustained by silence, complicity, and institutional weakness.

[1] Coppola, F. F. (Director). (1972). *The Godfather* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.
[2] Sciascia, L. (1961). *Il giorno della civetta*. Torino: Einaudi.

This divergence raises an important theoretical question. If representation is not merely a neutral reflection of reality but an active process of meaning production, then different narrative forms inevitably produce different understandings of the same historical phenomenon. Television seriality, because of its duration, visual immediacy, and emotional continuity, tends to encourage long-term familiarity with its protagonists. Literary narration, on the other hand, often privileges ambiguity, interpretative distance, and structural complexity. The difference therefore concerns not only medium but also the conditions under which audiences are invited to construct meaning.

The theoretical framework adopted in this article draws primarily upon Cultural Studies and theories of symbolic power. Stuart Hall's conception of representation emphasizes that meaning is produced through culturally shared codes rather than directly transmitted from reality. Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates how media institutions contribute to defining what becomes publicly visible and socially significant. Jean-Pierre Esquenazi further argues that audiovisual narratives should be understood as social objects whose meanings emerge through the interaction between textual organization and audience interpretation. Finally, Umberto Eco reminds us that mass culture does not simply reproduce ideological structures but actively participates in shaping collective imaginaries through symbolic forms.

Within this perspective, the concept of the “mafia imaginary” assumes particular importance. The imaginary does not designate a fictional distortion of reality but the structured ensemble of representations through which a society symbolically organizes its understanding of a phenomenon. The mafia imaginary therefore emerges at the intersection of historical experience, media discourse, literary production, and collective memory. Its forms evolve over time, reflecting changing cultural sensibilities and political contexts while simultaneously influencing public perceptions of organized crime.

This article argues that *Il capo dei capi* and *La congiura dei loquaci* exemplify two distinct modes of constructing this imaginary. Whereas the television series privileges personalization, dramatic continuity, and emotional accessibility, the novel develops a strategy of narrative disenchantment that resists the spectacularization of criminal power. Rather than opposing fiction to reality, the comparison seeks to demonstrate how different aesthetic choices generate different symbolic configurations of the mafia, ultimately shaping the ways in which violence, authority, and justice become thinkable within contemporary Italian culture.

The analysis therefore contributes not only to the study of mafia representations but also to broader debates concerning the cultural production of meaning. By examining the relationship between narrative form and symbolic power, the paper aims to show that representations of organized crime are never merely descriptive. They constitute acts of cultural mediation that influence how societies remember the past, interpret the present, and imagine the nature of power itself.

From the Mafia Phenomenon to the Mafia Imaginary

The Sicilian Mafia has traditionally been studied through historical, legal, and sociological approaches. While these perspectives have significantly improved our understanding of organized crime, they do not fully explain how the Mafia became a powerful cultural symbol. Beyond its historical reality, the Mafia has progressively evolved into a cultural imaginary shaped by literature, cinema, television, and public discourse.

A key question underlying this research concerns the relationship between the historical phenomenon and the emergence of the word *mafia*. Historical evidence suggests that forms of private power, patronage, and violence existed before the term itself entered public language. Pietro Calà Ulloa's report of 1838 already describes networks of local authority based on reciprocal protection, corruption, and informal justice, yet the word *mafia* never appears. This gap suggests that a social phenomenon may exist before acquiring the language through which it becomes publicly recognizable.

The first documented public appearance of the word *mafiusu* dates back to Giuseppe Rizzotto's play *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* (1863). As John Dickie has argued, this work marks the beginning of a cultural process in which the Mafia became not only a historical reality but also an object of representation (Dickie, 2004). From this moment onward, the phenomenon entered the public imagination through literature before becoming the subject of historical and sociological inquiry.

Among the earliest scholars to analyse the Mafia systematically, Leopoldo Franchetti interpreted it not as a simple form of criminality but as a system of private power that emerged where the State failed to monopolize legitimate violence (Franchetti & Sonnino, 1877). In *La Sicilia nel 1876*[3], Franchetti argued that the Mafia functioned as an alternative mechanism of social regulation, capable of guaranteeing protection, arbitrating conflicts, and exercising authority through informal networks. This interpretation shifted attention away from individual criminal acts toward the broader political, economic, and social structures that allowed Mafia power to flourish. His work laid the foundations for modern Mafia historiography and continues to influence contemporary historical research (Dickie, 2004; Lupo, 2004). Franchetti's interpretation remains a crucial point of reference for contemporary historians such as Salvatore Lupo, who further developed the analysis of the Mafia as a historical and social phenomenon embedded in the transformation of nineteenth-century Sicilian society (Lupo, 2004).

During the twentieth century, Leonardo Sciascia profoundly renewed the literary representation of the Mafia. Rather than focusing exclusively on violence, he explored the relationship between power, justice, silence, and institutional responsibility. In his essay *Il calzolaio di Messina*, Sciascia illustrates the original ambiguity surrounding the adjective *mafioso*, suggesting that it initially referred less to criminal identity than to social prestige and the capacity to provide protection. Andrea Camilleri further developed this perspective by portraying the Mafia not as the action of exceptional individuals but as a diffuse system of political, economic, and social relations embedded in everyday Sicilian life (Camilleri, 1994).

This evolution can be better understood through the theoretical contributions of Cultural Studies. Stuart Hall argues that representation actively produces meaning rather than simply reflecting reality (Hall, 1980). Pierre Bourdieu shows how symbolic power determines what becomes publicly visible, while Jean-Pierre Esquenazi emphasizes that literary and audiovisual works function as social objects whose meanings emerge through audience interpretation. Similarly, Umberto Eco demonstrates that popular culture contributes to constructing collective imaginaries rather than merely reproducing historical events (Eco, 1964).

[3] *La Sicilia nel 1876*, published in 1877 by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino after their investigative journey through Sicily, is widely regarded as one of the foundational works of Mafia historiography. Rather than describing the Mafia merely as a criminal association, the authors interpreted it as a system of private power rooted in the weakness of state institutions and in the socio-economic structure of post-unification Sicily.

Within this framework, the concept of the *Mafia imaginary* refers to the symbolic system through which society interprets organized crime. It is not opposed to historical reality but develops through the interaction of historical experience, cultural production, and collective memory. The following comparative analysis explores how different narrative forms participate in constructing this imaginary, producing distinct representations of violence, power, and justice.

Comparative Analysis

Although *Il capo dei capi* and *La congiura dei loquaci* were both published in 2007 and address the Sicilian Mafia, they construct two fundamentally different representations of organized crime. Their divergence lies not in the historical events they portray but in the narrative forms through which the Mafia becomes meaningful.

Il capo dei capi adopts a biographical structure centred on Salvatore Riina. The historical development of Cosa Nostra is largely filtered through the rise of a single protagonist, whose personal story provides continuity and emotional engagement. This narrative strategy simplifies a complex historical phenomenon by concentrating attention on one charismatic figure. The opening sequence[4], in which Riina is shown under arrest while the camera repeatedly focuses on his wedding ring, immediately establishes the coexistence of two identities: the ruthless Mafia boss and the family man. This humanizing perspective is further reinforced through his relationship with Ninetta Bagarella. Their courtship, marriage, and family life occupy a significant place within the narrative, encouraging viewers to perceive Riina not only as the leader of Cosa Nostra but also as a husband and father.

Throughout the series, scenes of domestic life coexist with acts of extreme violence, producing a process of humanization that reduces the critical distance between the protagonist and the audience.

Such aesthetic choices do not justify Riina's actions, yet they contribute to making him the central point through which viewers experience the history of the Mafia. Violence becomes integrated into a coherent narrative of personal ascent, and the structural dimension of organized crime risks being overshadowed by the biography of an individual leader.

Savatteri's *La congiura dei loquaci* adopts the opposite strategy. Rather than focusing on a charismatic boss, the novel portrays the Mafia as a diffuse system sustained by institutional weakness, silence, and social complicity. Lieutenant Adano's investigation never offers complete certainty; instead, it reveals fragmented truths and the difficulty of identifying responsibility within a deeply interconnected network of power.

Strongly influenced by Leonardo Sciascia, Savatteri rejects the spectacularization of criminal leadership. Justice appears fragile, institutional failures become central, and the detective narrative serves less to restore order than to expose its absence. The reader is therefore encouraged not to identify with a single protagonist but to reflect critically on the mechanisms through which Mafia power permeates society.

[4] The opening sequence of Episode 1 introduces Riina under arrest, while Episode 2 develops his relationship with Ninetta Bagarella, reinforcing the protagonist's domestic and emotional dimension.

These contrasting narrative strategies illustrate Stuart Hall's conception of representation as an active process of meaning production. Neither work simply reproduces historical reality; each organizes it according to different symbolic frameworks. Whereas *Il capo dei capi* privileges personalization and emotional continuity, *La congiura dei loquaci* favours fragmentation, critical distance, and structural interpretation.

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power further clarifies this distinction. Cultural products influence what becomes publicly visible and socially meaningful. The television series establishes Riina as the dominant symbolic figure of the Mafia, while Savatteri redistributes attention across institutions, collective responsibilities, and everyday forms of power. The result is not simply two different narratives but two different ways of imagining organized crime.

The comparison therefore suggests that aesthetic choices have significant cultural consequences. Narrative focalization, characterization, and emotional proximity shape the ways in which audiences perceive violence, authority, and justice. Rather than functioning as neutral representations of historical reality, literature and television actively participate in constructing the Mafia imaginary and, consequently, in shaping collective memory itself.

Discussion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that representations of the Mafia cannot be evaluated solely according to their historical accuracy. Their cultural significance lies equally in the narrative forms through which they organize reality and shape public understanding. In this sense, literature and television do not simply document organized crime; they actively participate in constructing the symbolic frameworks through which the Mafia is imagined, remembered, and interpreted.

The comparison between *Il capo dei capi* and *La congiura dei loquaci* reveals two distinct representational models. The television series privileges narrative continuity and emotional engagement by organizing the story around the biography of Salvatore Riina. This strategy allows viewers to follow the historical evolution of Cosa Nostra through a single recognizable protagonist, making an otherwise complex historical process accessible to a broad audience. However, the same narrative logic also concentrates symbolic attention on the criminal leader, encouraging emotional proximity and potentially reducing the structural complexity of the Mafia phenomenon.

Savatteri's novel adopts the opposite perspective. Instead of centralizing criminal power within a charismatic individual, it disperses responsibility across institutions, political actors, and social practices. The investigation led by Lieutenant Adano never produces complete certainty; rather, it exposes the opacity of power and the limitations of judicial truth. Consequently, the novel shifts the reader's attention from individual criminality to the broader mechanisms that allow Mafia power to survive within society.

These contrasting strategies support Stuart Hall's argument that representation is an active process of meaning production rather than a neutral reflection of reality. Both works construct coherent symbolic worlds, yet they encourage different forms of interpretation. One invites identification through narrative continuity; the other encourages critical distance through fragmentation and ambiguity.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power further reinforces this interpretation. Cultural products contribute to defining what becomes socially visible and meaningful. By selecting protagonists, organizing events, and establishing hierarchies of attention, narrative works influence the collective perception of organized crime. In this respect, the aestheticization of the Mafia should not be understood exclusively as the result of explicit ideological choices but also as a consequence of narrative structures capable of transforming violence into dramatic coherence.

The findings of this study therefore suggest that the Mafia imaginary is continuously negotiated through cultural production. Television, literature, and other media do not simply inherit pre-existing representations; they reinterpret, reinforce, or challenge them according to different aesthetic conventions. Understanding these mechanisms is essential not only for Mafia Studies but also for broader debates concerning media, memory, and cultural representation.

Finally, this research opens a broader perspective that extends beyond the comparison developed in this article. The relationship between the historical emergence of the Mafia and the gradual construction of its cultural imaginary deserves further investigation, particularly regarding the first public appearance of the term *mafiusu* and the evolution of its meanings from the nineteenth century to the present day. Such questions constitute a promising field for future interdisciplinary research combining history, literature, media studies, and cultural analysis. The present analysis therefore constitutes a first step toward a broader investigation into the historical emergence of the term mafia and the gradual construction of the Mafia imaginary from the nineteenth century onwards.

Conclusion

This article has examined how two contemporary Italian works construct different representations of the Sicilian Mafia and, consequently, different forms of cultural imagination. Through the comparison of *Il capo dei capi* and *La congiura dei loquaci*, it has argued that narrative representation is not simply a vehicle for recounting historical events but a fundamental process through which organized crime acquires symbolic meaning.

The television series organizes the Mafia around the figure of Salvatore Riina, producing an emotionally engaging narrative centred on personal biography and dramatic continuity. Savatteri's novel, by contrast, rejects this logic of personalization and presents the Mafia as a diffuse system of social, political, and institutional relations. These different aesthetic strategies generate distinct symbolic configurations, influencing the ways in which audiences perceive violence, authority, justice, and responsibility.

Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, Umberto Eco, and Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, this study has shown that representations should be understood as active forms of cultural production rather than passive reflections of reality. The Mafia imaginary emerges through the interaction between historical experience, narrative form, and audience interpretation. It is therefore neither fixed nor homogeneous but constantly redefined through literature, television, cinema, and public discourse.

Ultimately, the analysis suggests that studying the Mafia requires moving beyond the traditional opposition between historical reality and fictional representation. The central issue is not whether a narrative is faithful to reality but how it contributes to constructing the symbolic frameworks through which reality itself becomes understandable. In this sense, the

Mafia imaginary represents not a secondary aspect of the phenomenon but one of its most significant cultural dimensions.

Future research may further explore the origins of this imaginary by investigating the emergence of the term *mafia*, its earliest literary representations, and the historical processes through which a local social phenomenon gradually became one of the most influential cultural symbols of modern Italy.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that generative AI was used as a language support and editorial assistance tool during the drafting and revision of the manuscript. All research questions, interpretations, arguments, source selection, and final scholarly responsibility remain entirely those of the author.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Sur la télévision* [On Television]. Liber-Raisons d'Agir.

Camilleri, A. (2001). *Il re di Girgenti* [The King of Girgenti]. Sellerio.

Dickie, J. (2004). *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Eco, U. (1964). *Apocalittici e integrati* [Apocalyptic and Integrated]. Bompiani.

Esquenazi, J.-P. (2007). *Sociologie des œuvres: De la production à l'interprétation* [Sociology of Works: From Production to Interpretation]. Armand Colin.

Franchetti, L., & Sonnino, S. (1877). *La Sicilia nel 1876* [Sicily in 1876]. G. Barbera.

Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/Decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, Media, Language* (pp. 128–138). Hutchinson.

Savatteri, G. (2007). *La congiura dei loquaci* [The Conspiracy of the Talkative]. Sellerio.

Sciascia, L. (1961). *Il giorno della civetta* [The Day of the Owl]. Einaudi.

Sciascia, L. (2019). *Fatti diversi di storia letteraria e civile* [Various Episodes in Literary and Civil History]. Adelphi.

Contact email: veracesimone@gmail.com

The Role of Technology in Inclusive Education: A PRISMA 2020 Systematic Review

Beatrice Ngulube, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Technological advancement is transforming educational practice, reshaping how learners engage with content and how educators design instruction for increasingly diverse classrooms. Rapid digitalisation therefore demands rigorous inquiry into how technology intersects with inclusive pedagogy to address learner heterogeneity and reduce persistent classroom inequities. This study used a PRISMA 2020 systematic review methodology to examine the benefits and limitations of technology in inclusive classroom contexts, systematically searching the ERIC database and Google Scholar for peer-reviewed articles published between 2023 and 2025. Fifteen studies met the eligibility criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. The findings indicate that technological tools enhance student engagement, knowledge retention, and tolerance for variation in individual learning pace, while fostering more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Educators who integrate digital technologies strategically also tend to cultivate soft skills that expand learners' future employment competencies. Conversely, over-reliance on digital tools may impede the development of independent thinking, sustained focus, and higher-order cognitive capacities such as critical thinking and creativity. The review therefore recommends that governments, curriculum developers, and initial teacher education institutions redesign educational programmes to address the diverse needs of all learners in mainstream classrooms, and that ongoing professional development equip educators with the digital pedagogical competencies required to deploy technology in ethically responsible, contextually appropriate, and pedagogically effective ways. These findings carry important implications for educational policy and practice in the Global South, where the tension between digital opportunity and infrastructural constraint remains acute.

Keywords: inclusive education, digital pedagogy, learner diversity, artificial intelligence, PRISMA 2020 systematic review

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Addressing learner diversity remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges in contemporary education. In many school contexts, learners with learning difficulties, disabilities, or socioeconomic disadvantages are disproportionately excluded from meaningful participation in mainstream classrooms, and some ultimately abandon formal schooling altogether because of insufficient systemic support (Fitas, 2025). The emergence of digital technologies as pedagogical tools has, however, opened new possibilities for mitigating these longstanding inequities. Technological advancement and the accelerating adoption of digital tools across multiple sectors have fundamentally altered the educational landscape, displacing rigid, one-size-fits-all instructional paradigms in favour of personalised, adaptive learning experiences (Gupta & Kaul, 2024; Pratama et al., 2023).

The theoretical grounding of inclusive education draws on the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), both of which mandate that educational systems accommodate all learners regardless of ability, background, or learning profile. Technology, when purposefully deployed, has the potential to operationalise these principles at the classroom level by providing differentiated, multimodal, and accessible learning pathways (Alharbi, 2024; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). As Florian and Spratt (2013) argue, truly inclusive pedagogy requires moving beyond individualised accommodation towards universal approaches that benefit all learners, a goal that digital tools are increasingly well positioned to support.

Despite this promise, the evidence base remains fragmented, and critical questions persist regarding the conditions under which technology reliably promotes inclusion, the competencies educators require to harness its potential, and the ethical risks it introduces, particularly in resource-constrained contexts. This study addresses these gaps through a systematic review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021). The central research question guiding this inquiry is: what does the current literature reveal about the benefits and limitations of technology in supporting inclusive education in diverse classroom contexts? By synthesising recent empirical and theoretical evidence, this review aims to inform educational policy, initial teacher education, and classroom practice, with particular sensitivity to equity concerns in the Global South.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Conceptualising Inclusive Education and Technology

Inclusive education is a multidimensional construct that extends beyond the physical placement of learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. It represents a systemic commitment to recognising, valuing, and responding to the full diversity of learners, encompassing differences in ability, language, culture, socioeconomic status, and learning profile (Ainscow et al., 2006). These challenges are not confined to basic education: Moriña (2017) shows that similar barriers to full participation persist within higher education, which underscores the pervasiveness of exclusionary practice across the education continuum. Technology, in this context, is not a neutral instrument; it is a socio-technical artefact whose educational value is determined by the pedagogical frameworks within which it is embedded (Selwyn, 2016). Accordingly, any rigorous evaluation of technology's role in inclusive

education must attend not only to the affordances of specific tools but also to the institutional, curricular, and professional conditions that mediate their use.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2018) provides a particularly useful theoretical lens for this inquiry. UDL posits that educational barriers are systemic rather than individual, and it advocates for the proactive design of flexible learning environments that offer multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. Digital technologies, when designed and deployed in alignment with UDL principles, have demonstrated a substantial capacity to reduce such barriers by offering learners alternative modalities of engagement and self-expression (Hitchcock et al., 2002; Rose & Meyer, 2002). This review draws on UDL as an analytical frame through which to evaluate the extent to which the reviewed literature reflects genuinely inclusive, rather than merely adaptive, uses of technology.

Benefits of Technology in Inclusive Education

A growing body of scholarship affirms that technology exerts a positive influence on learner engagement, knowledge retention, and the accommodation of individual learning pace, while simultaneously fostering more inclusive and equitable educational environments (Fitas, 2025; Pratama et al., 2023). Researchers increasingly conceptualise digital tools as indispensable instruments for transforming education into a system capable of providing customised solutions that accommodate diverse learning profiles (Alharbi, 2024). Generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT, for example, have been shown to support teaching and learning by offering learners personalised explanations and timely academic assistance (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023). Educators can harness such tools to build adaptive learning systems that improve performance outcomes, enhance motivation, and increase learner participation and satisfaction (Pratama et al., 2023).

The transformative potential of technology in inclusive contexts is particularly evident in its capacity to dismantle structural inequities. Digital technologies can attenuate the unequal treatment of learners in heterogeneous classrooms by providing differentiated pathways to the curriculum (Julien, 2024), a capacity that Iweuno et al. (2024) similarly identify as central to leveraging artificial intelligence for a more diversified and representative curriculum. Bai (2025) cautions, however, that educators must exercise critical scrutiny regarding the accuracy and contextual appropriateness of digital technologies, because uncritical adoption risks replicating or amplifying existing educational inequalities. A fundamental shift in pedagogical orientation is therefore required, one that moves beyond the superficial integration of digital tools towards the development of robust digital pedagogical competencies among educators.

This imperative is reflected at the international policy level. In 2024, UNESCO published its Artificial Intelligence Competency Framework for Teachers (AI CFT), which articulates the foundational principles, values, and critical skills that educators require to understand and deploy technology in ethical, effective, safe, and responsible ways (Bai, 2025; Cukurova & Miao, 2024). The AI CFT organises teachers' technological competencies across three progressive developmental levels, namely acquire, deepen, and create, within a human-centred value framework that foregrounds human agency, accountability, and self-determination (UNESCO, 2024). The framework's emphasis on contextualised competency development is particularly pertinent given that a 2023 UNESCO survey identified only seven countries with national framework programmes for training educators in digital pedagogical practice

(Cukurova & Miao, 2024), a finding that underscores the scale of the professional development challenge confronting education systems globally.

Julien (2024) argues persuasively that digital teaching tools enhance the delivery of curriculum content in ways that respond to diverse learning needs, thereby enabling educators to bridge persistent gaps in educational equity and inclusion. This argument is supported by Holmes (2020), who demonstrates that prompt, targeted digital feedback loops enable learners to identify and address knowledge gaps with greater immediacy and precision, thereby enhancing learning outcomes and classroom communication. The use of digital tools further fosters equitable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive educational environments (Dogan et al., 2025; Estrada et al., 2025), while simultaneously empowering teachers to sharpen their own technological competencies and automate administrative tasks, freeing professional attention for higher-order pedagogical functions.

The evidence for technology's benefits in inclusive education is further strengthened by recent findings on learner self-regulation and intrinsic motivation. Bai (2025) observes that technology is reconfiguring the landscape of education across a spectrum of dimensions, from self-regulated and personalised learning to fundamental pedagogical shifts across disciplines. Yuan and Liu (2025) corroborate this claim, demonstrating that AI-mediated tools significantly enhance the engagement, enjoyment, and motivation of learners of English as a foreign language, which suggests broad transferability across subject domains. Song et al. (2024) and Ma et al. (2025) further establish that digital tools possess a considerable capacity to capture learner attention and sustain active participation, findings that carry particular significance for learners who have historically been disengaged from mainstream educational provision.

Ethical Challenges and Limitations

Notwithstanding these considerable affordances, the integration of technology in inclusive education is not without significant ethical and pedagogical challenges. Several scholars have raised substantive concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential for digital tools to exacerbate rather than ameliorate educational inequities (Hossain et al., 2024; Reina-Parrado et al., 2025). Algorithmic systems embedded in adaptive learning platforms are frequently trained on datasets that inadequately represent the diversity of learners, particularly those from minority linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and this risks reproducing systemic bias at scale (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022).

A particularly salient concern that emerges consistently across the reviewed literature is the risk that excessive reliance on digital tools may attenuate the development of independent thinking, sustained cognitive focus, and higher-order skills such as critical thinking and creativity (Lubbe et al., 2025). Lubbe et al. (2025) argue that cultivating independent thinkers requires pedagogical approaches that leverage Bloom's taxonomy and critical thinking frameworks in assessment practice, an imperative that sits in productive tension with the automaticity afforded by AI-driven tools. This tension calls for a deliberately calibrated approach to technology integration, one that preserves space for the higher-order cognitive engagement that underpins deep learning.

These challenges are compounded in Global South contexts, where structural barriers, including inadequate technological infrastructure, unreliable connectivity, and insufficient teacher professional development, create significant obstacles to equitable technology integration (Lin & Chang, 2024). Such contextual realities require that technology policies and

frameworks be designed with explicit attention to local conditions, rather than transplanting solutions developed in high-income contexts without critical adaptation. The need for robust ethical frameworks to govern the authentic, rights-respecting use of technology is further underscored by Hadinezhad et al. (2024), who contend that digital competencies should be understood not merely as technical skills but as essential capabilities for educators and future citizens navigating an increasingly algorithmically mediated world.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a systematic review design, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021; Tugwell & Tovey, 2021). Systematic review methodology was selected for its capacity to yield reliable, generalisable, and reproducible results through a transparent and rigorously structured process (Siddaway et al., 2019). Unlike narrative reviews, which are susceptible to selection bias and lack methodological transparency, systematic reviews adhere to a pre-specified protocol that encompasses a comprehensive search strategy, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic procedures for data extraction and synthesis. This methodological rigour is essential for producing trustworthy evidence to inform educational policy and practice on a topic as consequential as technology-mediated inclusive education.

Search Strategy and Databases

Two primary databases were systematically searched: the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholar. ERIC was selected for its comprehensive coverage of education-specific peer-reviewed literature, while Google Scholar was included to broaden the search to interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of technology, disability studies, and educational equity. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed articles published between 2023 and 2025, a deliberate choice that reflects the rapid pace of technological development and the consequent need for evidence that accurately represents the current state of research. Key search terms included “technology and inclusive education”, “digital tools and learner diversity”, “artificial intelligence and special educational needs”, “personalised learning and disability”, and “inclusive pedagogy and digital technology”. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to maximise search sensitivity.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they (a) were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2023 and 2025, (b) addressed the intersection of technology and inclusive education in formal educational settings, (c) reported empirical or systematic review findings, and (d) were available as full-text publications in English. Articles were excluded if they (a) focused solely on technology without reference to inclusive education or learner diversity, (b) were published as conference proceedings, book chapters, dissertations, or grey literature, (c) predated 2023, or (d) were not accessible in full text. These criteria were applied independently by the primary researcher and a research assistant, and disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion, thereby enhancing the reliability and credibility of the selection process.

PRISMA 2020 Flow Process

The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Table 1) provides a transparent account of the article selection process across four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021; Stovold et al., 2014). An initial search yielded 2,597 records from ERIC and Google Scholar. Following the removal of duplicates and records that did not meet the basic inclusion criteria, 609 records remained for screening. Of these, 88 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 73 were subsequently excluded because of irrelevant focus, absence of reference to inclusive education, or contextual mismatch. The remaining 15 articles were included in the qualitative synthesis. This rigorous, multi-stage process ensures that the final corpus of included studies is methodologically sound and directly relevant to the research question.

Table 1
PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram: Article Selection Process

Stage	Action	n
Identification	Articles identified via ERIC and Google Scholar	2,597
Screening	Records screened after duplicate removal	609
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	88
Excluded	Excluded: irrelevant focus, no reference to inclusive education, context mismatch	73
Included	Studies included in qualitative synthesis	15

Table 2
Classification of Included Studies by Research Methodology

Research Methodology	Number of Studies
Qualitative	11
Quantitative	3
Mixed methods	1
Total	**15**

Findings and Discussion

Technology as a Catalyst for Inclusive Learning

The preponderance of evidence in the reviewed literature affirms that technology constitutes a powerful catalyst for inclusive education, particularly in its capacity to accommodate learner diversity through personalised, adaptive digital pedagogies (Ahmad et al., 2024; Julien, 2024). The analysed studies converge on the finding that digital technologies are predominantly deployed by educators as differentiated instructional strategies that enhance learner performance, engagement, and motivation, while simultaneously catering for the diverse cognitive, linguistic, and sensory profiles of students in mainstream classrooms. Technology has thus emerged as a pre-eminent vehicle for delivering instructional strategies that promote educational equity and meaningful participation for diverse learners (Gibellini et al., 2023).

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that digital tools offer measurable benefits across a range of educational outcomes (Song et al., 2024). Adaptive learning systems have shown promise in providing real-time, differentiated feedback that enables learners to progress at individually appropriate paces, thereby reducing the cognitive and affective barriers that frequently impede the participation of learners with disabilities or learning differences. As

previously noted, such technological competencies function as foundational capacities for educators and future citizens in a digitally mediated society (Hadinezhad et al., 2024). The analysed articles converge with Lin et al. (2024) in affirming that the purposeful integration of technological tools in learning environments has the potential to promote inclusivity and accessibility, rendering the curriculum more navigable for diverse student populations.

Professional Development and Pedagogical Competencies

A critical and recurrent theme across the reviewed literature is the indispensability of structured, sustained professional development in enabling educators to realise technology's inclusive potential. Lin and Chang (2024) identify inadequate teacher training and resource constraints as among the most significant barriers to effective technology integration in Global South contexts. This finding is corroborated by Estrada et al. (2025), whose study of a professional development model for chemistry teachers in secondary education demonstrates that targeted pedagogical training in AI tools can substantively enhance teachers' capacity to design inclusive learning experiences. Such evidence reinforces the argument that technology cannot function as an autonomous agent of inclusion, since its transformative potential is contingent upon the professional agency and pedagogical insight of the educators who deploy it.

The UNESCO AI CFT discussed above (Cukurova & Miao, 2024; UNESCO, 2024) offers teacher education institutions and school systems a structured roadmap for building the pedagogical digital fluency necessary to operationalise inclusive technology practice. Crucially, the framework is designed not merely for technical upskilling but for the cultivation of educators who can critically evaluate the ethical dimensions of technology use and make contextually informed pedagogical decisions. Meaningful human interaction must remain at the centre of the educational experience, so that the pursuit of digital equity does not come at the expense of the relational foundations of effective teaching and learning (Salhab, 2025).

Ethical Considerations and Critical Limitations

While the evidence for technology's benefits in inclusive education is substantial, the reviewed literature also surfaces a set of critical ethical and pedagogical limitations that demand serious policy attention. Concerns regarding algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the accuracy of AI-generated content recur across multiple studies (Hossain et al., 2024; Reina-Parrado et al., 2025; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). These concerns are particularly acute for marginalised learner populations, whose data are frequently underrepresented in the training sets that underpin adaptive learning systems, thereby risking the systematic amplification of existing educational disadvantage.

Of equal concern is the risk of pedagogical dependency. As discussed above, the reviewed literature consistently identifies over-reliance on digital tools as a potential impediment to the development of independent thinking, critical reasoning, and creative capacity (Lubbe et al., 2025). This finding carries important implications for curriculum design and assessment practice: educators must cultivate a pedagogical approach that harnesses the efficiency and differentiation afforded by digital tools while simultaneously preserving the conditions for deep, self-directed, and cognitively challenging learning. A genuinely inclusive approach to technology integration must resist the temptation of technological solutionism and maintain a clear focus on the educational goals that technology is intended to serve.

The call for robust ethical frameworks governing technology use in education is, therefore, not merely a peripheral recommendation but a central policy imperative. Such frameworks should be co-developed with the full range of educational stakeholders, including students, teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and community representatives, and should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the diverse contextual realities of different educational settings, particularly those in the Global South, where infrastructural constraints and digital divides remain salient (Lin & Chang, 2024; Pagliara et al., 2024).

PRISMA 2020 as a Methodological Framework for Educational Research

The analysis further reveals a noteworthy methodological trend in the increasing adoption of PRISMA 2020 as a framework for systematic reviews in educational research. Most of the included studies employed qualitative methodologies, with systematic reviews featuring prominently among them, as shown in Table 2. This trend reflects a broader recognition within the educational research community of the need for methodologically rigorous, transparent, and replicable approaches to evidence synthesis on complex, multidimensional topics such as technology in inclusive education. The predominance of qualitative methodologies among the included studies further suggests that researchers are attending not only to the measurable outcomes of technology integration but also to the nuanced, contextually embedded processes through which digital tools are experienced, interpreted, and appropriated by diverse educational actors.

Conclusion

This systematic review has provided a comprehensive and critically grounded account of the benefits and limitations of technology in inclusive education. The synthesised evidence affirms that, when purposefully integrated within theoretically informed pedagogical frameworks such as UDL, digital technologies have a significant capacity to enhance learner engagement, personalise instruction, promote educational equity, and cultivate inclusive learning environments. The findings further demonstrate that educators who deploy digital tools strategically can foster essential soft skills and motivational dispositions in learners that extend beyond the immediate classroom context.

The evidence is, however, equally unambiguous in identifying the conditions under which technology's inclusive potential is realised or frustrated. Professional development, ethical governance, contextual sensitivity, and a sustained commitment to human-centred pedagogy emerge as non-negotiable prerequisites for effective technology integration. The risks of algorithmic bias, data privacy violation, and the erosion of independent thinking capacity are genuine and must be addressed through deliberate policy frameworks and institutional safeguards.

These findings carry urgent implications for educational policy and practice, particularly in the Global South. Governments, curriculum developers, and teacher education institutions must invest in the systemic redesign of educational programmes to align with the needs of all learners in mainstream classrooms, while ensuring that educators are equipped with the digital pedagogical competencies to deploy technology in ways that are ethical, inclusive, and contextually appropriate. As the deadline for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all, draws closer, the imperative to close the gap between technology's transformative promise and its equitable realisation has never been more pressing.

Future research should attend to the experiences of learners themselves in technology-mediated inclusive classrooms, particularly those from marginalised and underrepresented groups whose voices remain largely absent from the current evidence base. Longitudinal studies tracking the sustained impact of technology integration on inclusive educational outcomes are also urgently needed to strengthen the evidence base for policy and practice.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content of the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from the careful and systematic conduct of the research.

References

Ahmad, I., Sharma, S., Singh, R., Gehlot, A., Gupta, L. R., Thakur, A. K., & Twala, B. (2024). Inclusive learning using industry 4.0 technologies: Addressing student diversity in modern education. *Cogent Education, 11*(1), 2330235.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving schools, developing inclusion.* Routledge.

Alharbi, A. M. (2024). Artificial intelligence in personalized learning: Revolutionizing evolution for diverse learner needs. *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals, 8*(6), 618–628.

Bai, J. (2025). Overview and summary of AI competency framework for teachers. *Global Medical Education,* (0).

Baidoo-Anu, D., & Ansah, L. O. (2023). Education in the era of generative artificial intelligence (AI): Understanding the potential benefits of ChatGPT in promoting teaching and learning. *Journal of AI, 7*(1), 52–62.

CAST. (2018). *Universal design for learning guidelines version 2.2.* CAST Publishing. http://udlguidelines.cast.org

Cukurova, M., & Miao, F. (2024). *AI competency framework for teachers.* UNESCO Publishing.

Dogan, S., Yilmaz, R., & Kaban, A. (2025). Culturally responsive digital pedagogy in diverse classroom contexts. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 28*(1), 44–58.

Estrada, P. A., Agudelo, K. P., & Flórez, E. P. (2025). Artificial intelligence and inclusive education: A professional development model for chemistry teachers in secondary education. *Educational Process: International Journal, 17*, e2025380.

Fitas, R. (2025). Inclusive education with AI: Supporting special needs and tackling language barriers. *AI and Ethics, 5*(6), 5729–5757.

Florian, L., & Spratt, J. (2013). Enacting inclusion: A framework for interrogating inclusive practice. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 28*(2), 119–135.

Gibellini, M., Bertolo, M., & Bressanello, D. (2023). Digital tools for inclusive education: A systematic overview. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 32*(3), 321–339.

Gupta, M., & Kaul, S. (2024). AI in inclusive education: A systematic review of opportunities and challenges in the Indian context. *MIER Journal of Educational Studies Trends and Practices*, 429–461.

Hadinezhad, S., Garg, S., & Lindgren, R. (2024). Enhancing inclusivity: Exploring AI applications for diverse learners. In *Trust and inclusion in AI-mediated education* (pp. 163–182). Springer Nature Switzerland.

Hitchcock, C., Meyer, A., Rose, D., & Jackson, R. (2002). Providing new access to the general curriculum: Universal design for learning. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 35*(2), 8–17.

Holmes, W. (2020). Artificial intelligence in education. In *Encyclopedia of education and information technologies* (pp. 88–103). Springer International Publishing.

Hossain, R., Sohag, H. J., Hasan, F., Ahmed, S., Amin, A., & Islam, M. M. (2024). Prospective AI applications in university education: Enhancing learning, teaching and administration through a PRISMA-based systematic review. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences, 22*(2), 9173–9191.

Iweuno, B. N., Orekha, P., Ojediran, O., Imohimi, E., & Adu-Twum, H. T. (2024). Leveraging artificial intelligence for an inclusive and diversified curriculum. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 23*(2), 1579–1590.

Julien, G. (2024). How artificial intelligence (AI) impacts inclusive education. *Educational Research and Reviews, 19*(6), 95–103.

Lin, M. P. C., & Chang, D. (2024). Exploring inclusivity in AI education: Perceptions and pathways for diverse learners. In *International Conference on Intelligent Tutoring Systems* (pp. 237–249). Springer Nature Switzerland.

Lin, M. P. C., Liu, A. L., Poitras, E., Chang, M., & Chang, D. H. (2024). An exploratory study on the efficacy and inclusivity of AI technologies in diverse learning environments. *Sustainability, 16*(20), 8992.

Lubbe, A., Marais, E., & Kruger, D. (2025). Cultivating independent thinkers: The triad of artificial intelligence, Bloom's taxonomy and critical thinking in assessment pedagogy. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1–34.

Ma, K. W., Julianton, R. P., Chan, X. Y., Chai, Y. T., Mukred, M., Leen, M. W. E., & Gumaei, A. H. (2025). A model for the adoption of artificial intelligence in inclusive education: An exploratory study of key factors and expert insights. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research, 24*, 027.

Moriña, A. (2017). Inclusive education in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32*(1), 3–17.

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., & Moher, D. (2021). Updating guidance for reporting systematic reviews: Development of the PRISMA 2020 statement. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 134*, 103–112.

Pagliara, S. M., Bonavolonta, G., Pia, M., Falchi, S., Zurru, A. L., Fenu, G., & Mura, A. (2024). The integration of artificial intelligence in inclusive education: A scoping review. *Information, 15*(12), 774.

Pratama, M. P., Sampelolo, R., & Lura, H. (2023). Revolutionizing education: Harnessing the power of artificial intelligence for personalized learning. *Klasikal: Journal of Education, Language Teaching and Science, 5*(2), 350–357.

Reina-Parrado, M., Román-Graván, P., & Hervás-Gómez, C. (2025). Integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning in education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Methodology, 11*(2), 203–216.

Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2002). *Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal design for learning.* ASCD.

Salas-Pilco, S. Z., Xiao, K., & Oshima, J. (2022). Artificial intelligence and new technologies in inclusive education for minority students: A systematic review. *Sustainability, 14*(20), 13572.

Salhab, R. A. (2025). Inclusive education in the artificial intelligence era: Opportunities and challenges. *Fostering Inclusive Education With AI and Emerging Technologies*, 1–24.

Selwyn, N. (2016). *Is technology good for education?* Polity Press.

Siddaway, A. P., Wood, A. M., & Hedges, L. V. (2019). How to do a systematic review: A best practice guide for conducting and reporting narrative reviews, meta-analyses, and meta-syntheses. *Annual Review of Psychology, 70*(1), 747–770.

Song, Y., Weisberg, L. R., Zhang, S., Tian, X., Boyer, K. E., & Israel, M. (2024). A framework for inclusive AI learning design for diverse learners. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, 100212.

Stovold, E., Beecher, D., Foxlee, R., & Noel-Storr, A. (2014). Study flow diagrams in Cochrane systematic review updates: An adapted PRISMA flow diagram. *Systematic Reviews, 3*(1), 54.

Tugwell, P., & Tovey, D. (2021). PRISMA 2020. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 134*, A5–A6.

UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education.* UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2024). *AI competency framework for teachers.* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391104

United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD).* United Nations.

Yuan, L., & Liu, X. (2025). The effect of artificial intelligence tools on EFL learners' engagement, enjoyment, and motivation. *Computers in Human Behavior, 162*, 108474.

Contact email: ngulubeb@tut.ac.za

Creative Strategies for Developing a Romantic–Comedy Television Series Centered on the Girls Love Genre

Athip Techapongsatorn, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Kanyarath Larpto, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Chawannuch Tanutong, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Patcharamai Saichaemjan, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Proudpatcha Santikanavin, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Fahsai Sriket, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The Girls' Love (GL) genre has experienced significant growth in the Thai television industry, becoming a prominent cultural export and rapidly expanding market segment. However, limited academic research has examined the storytelling and creative strategies that distinguish successful GL productions, particularly within the romantic comedy subgenre. This study aimed to identify the key storytelling elements and analyse the creative strategies for developing romantic comedy GL television series in Thailand. A mixed method approach was employed through focus group interviews with industry professionals and target audiences, including screenplay writers, directors, producers and audience totally 117 participants. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, involving systematic coding and identification of recurring patterns, as well as online questionnaires. The findings showed that character relationships played a crucial role in shaping emotional engagement and viewers' intention to continue watching the series. In addition, the integration of narrative clarity, humor quality, production feasibility helped maintain audience interest. Most participants expressed positive attitudes toward the pilot and demonstrated strong interest in watching the full series. The findings suggest that character-driven storytelling combined with creative humor can effectively enhance audience engagement in contemporary series production.

Keywords: creative strategy, TV series, romantic comedy, girl love

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The Thai television series industry has continued to expand alongside the transition into the digital era, particularly during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which significantly accelerated global audiences' shift toward streaming platforms. This shift was reflected in Netflix gaining more than 16 million new subscribers during the first quarter of 2020. Such changes have encouraged content creators to adapt their storytelling approaches and production strategies to align with contemporary audience consumption behaviors in the digital age (Eder et al., 2010; Kallas, 2014). At the same time, changing social values have also influenced contemporary forms of humor. The concept of the Superiority Theory of comedy has gradually become less compatible with modern societies that place greater importance on equality and respect for individual dignity. Consequently, audiences increasingly favor creative forms of humor that entertain without diminishing or mocking others.

Within this context, romantic comedy has remained one of the most popular genres among audiences because of its accessible tone, emotional engagement, and entertaining narrative structure. Previous studies have shown that Thai audiences particularly favor comedic content (Lotz, 2018). In addition, the success of *My Ambulance* (2019) demonstrated how multi-platform distribution strategies can effectively broaden audience reach and strengthen audience engagement (LINE TV, 2019). Despite the sustained popularity of romantic comedy, there remains limited research focusing on the development of relationships between ghosts and humans within the context of Thai television series narratives.

Therefore, this creative research project aims to examine creative strategies for producing a romantic comedy television series centered on the friendship between ghosts and humans. The study also seeks to develop an original pilot episode and a production bible as creative outputs that may contribute to future developments in Thai television series production and storytelling.

Objective

1. To examine the key storytelling elements in romantic comedy GL television series in Thailand
2. To examine the creative strategies for developing romantic comedy GL television series in Thailand

Concept and Theory

Concept of Original Series Writing

Definition and Background

A television series refers to a narrative form composed of multiple episodes, featuring recurring main characters and settings that continue throughout the storyline. While individual episodes may contain self-contained subplots, the primary narrative typically remains open-ended to connect to subsequent episodes (Grace, 2014). This definition is consistent with Brembilla and De Pascalis (2018), who describe a series as a serialized form of storytelling in which narratives evolve through the same set of characters and a shared story world within an overarching macro-narrative structure.

Scriptwriting Process for Series Production

Pitching: The process begins with pitching, which involves presenting the core concept and storyline of the project. Typically, agencies or studios are responsible for preparing a pitch document—ranging from 5 to 20 pages—to present to content development teams of platforms (Grace, 2014).

Series Bible Development: Once a platform agrees to develop the project, a series bible is created collaboratively between the agency, studio, and writers. This document typically includes key elements such as genre, concept, target audience, setting, character profiles, overall story overview, episodic breakdown, mood and tone, and franchise potential.

Treatment Development: This stage involves developing a detailed narrative outline for each episode across the entire season. Writers expand the storyline by specifying scene sequences and describing key actions and events from beginning to end within each episode.

Screenplay Writing: At this stage, the outline is developed into a complete script for the pilot episode. The script includes scene descriptions and dialogue, following standard screenplay format.

Full Season Writing and Revision: Once the pilot script is approved (greenlit), the writing process proceeds to full-season development. This stage involves continuous collaboration among the creative team, including revisions and refinements, until a final draft is achieved. A key role in this process is the showrunner, who oversees the entire production, including script development, budget management, casting, and post-production editing (Douglas, 2018; Landau, 2014).

Concept of Romantic Comedy

Romantic comedy, also known as comedy of manners, is a subgenre of comedy characterized by narratives that center on romantic relationships unfolding under various obstacles before reaching a resolution that typically concludes with a happy ending. Throughout the narrative, humor is consistently incorporated to enhance audience engagement. The content often reflects realistic situations and is closely connected to everyday life, featuring characters that mirror the personalities and behaviors of individuals in contemporary society (Grindon, 2011). In terms of narrative structure, Billy Mernit (2020) explains that romantic comedy follows specific structural conventions designed to develop character relationships. One key element is the concept of the “Cute Meet,” which refers to the initial encounter between the protagonists. This moment not only serves to create memorability or humor but also reveals differences in personality, worldview, or emotional vulnerabilities between the characters. These differences establish the foundation of relational conflict, which subsequently drives the central narrative throughout the story.

Theory of Comedy

Alan Reynolds Thompson (1946) proposed the “Ladder of Comedy,” a framework that categorizes humor into two primary types: farce and comedy. Farce emphasizes exaggerated situations and physical actions to produce immediate laughter, while comedy relies on the construction of situations, character inconsistencies, and intellectual satire to generate humor. This framework highlights that humor can emerge from diverse mechanisms with varying

levels of complexity. However, certain forms of humor may reflect and reproduce social inequalities, particularly those based on mocking physical appearance, gender, or ethnicity, which can diminish human dignity (Martin & Ford, 2018). In contemporary society, audiences have become increasingly aware of issues related to rights and equality, largely due to greater access to information through digital media. As a result, there is a growing tendency to question humor that is oppressive or demeaning, leading to a shift toward forms of comedy that respect diversity and uphold human dignity.

Process to Create the Work

Concept and Theory

The researchers conducted a comprehensive review of literature, concepts, theories, and related documents concerning romantic comedy series. This review focused on narrative structure, mechanisms of humor, character development, and contemporary audience behavior. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with industry professionals, including screenwriters and directors, to gather insights into humor construction, script development techniques, and audience trends. These findings served as a fundamental basis for the development of the creative research project.

Treatment Development

The researchers developed a treatment that outlines the core concept, narrative structure, character development, and overall tone of the series. This treatment functioned as a framework for the subsequent development of the pilot.

Pilot Development

Based on the treatment, the researchers developed a pilot with an emphasis on broad-audience comedy, positive comedic design, clear narrative structure, and engaging character dynamics. This stage aimed to evaluate the feasibility and potential of the project at the prototype level.

Screen Test Evaluation

The pilot was evaluated through a screen test involving 117 participants from the target audience. Data were collected to assess narrative clarity, quality of humor, character appeal, and production feasibility through an online questionnaire (Google Forms) and in-depth interviews. The evaluation results were used to validate the creative work and support the research conclusions presented in subsequent sections.

Production Bible

The researchers synthesized findings from all stages to develop a production bible, which includes detailed information on narrative structure, storytelling direction, character design, and overall presentation approach. This document serves as a comprehensive guideline for future development and production.

Creative Work

Figure 1

Sample Visual Sequences From the Pilot

Figure 2

Overview of the Screen Test Session

Figure 3

Sample Production Bible Development Materials

Result

This study investigates creative strategies for developing a romantic comedy series centered on the friendship between ghosts and humans. A mixed-methods research design was employed, utilizing data collection through in-depth interviews and an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Qualitative Findings From In-Depth Interviews

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with participants representing the target audience to explore their opinions, feelings, and perceptions of the pilot episode. The analysis focused on narrative structure, humor, character relationships, and overall appeal. The interview data were analyzed using content analysis and synthesized into key themes to reflect audience perspectives and evaluate the potential of the prototype. The findings indicate that most participants emphasized character relationships as the central element, particularly the relationship between the main characters, Jane and Lin. This relationship plays a crucial role in fostering emotional engagement and audience attachment. As one participant noted, "I became emotionally invested in their relationship, knowing that they would eventually be separated," highlighting the importance of emotional design in driving audience involvement.

In terms of narrative structure, many participants perceived that the integration of romantic comedy with a murder mystery significantly enhanced the level of engagement and suspense. Although some viewers were able to anticipate certain plot developments, they remained interested in the investigative process, which sustained narrative continuity. Regarding humor and tone, the majority of participants described the series as light, accessible, and enjoyable, allowing for a relaxed viewing experience without excessive tension. This combination of elements contributed to a strong intention among viewers to continue watching the full series, suggesting that the prototype has promising potential to reach its target audience. However, participants also recommended improvements in production quality, particularly in sound design, visual effects, and editing, as these aspects occasionally affected the viewing experience.

Overall, these qualitative findings provide in-depth insights into audience perceptions and serve as a foundation for interpreting the quantitative results obtained from the questionnaire in the subsequent section.

Table 1
Intention to Watch Full Series

Response	Amount	Percentage
Interested	**94**	**80.3**
Neutral	23	19.7
Not Interested	0	0
Total	117	100

The majority of respondents expressed interest in watching the full series (94 participants), with no respondents indicating disinterest, suggesting strong development potential.

Participants who reported neutral attitudes noted that, although the plot was engaging and easy to follow, it lacked a distinctive hook to sustain continued interest. Some also indicated that the genre did not align with their usual preferences or that the storyline felt predictable due to similarities with existing content.

Results and Discussion

The findings revealed that character relationships played a significant role in shaping audience emotional engagement and viewing continuity, particularly the relationship between the characters “Jane” and “Lin.” Audiences perceived their relationship as emotionally layered and capable of developing into either a deep friendship or a romantic relationship. This suggests that the emotional connection between characters is a key factor influencing audience investment. In terms of storytelling, the integration of romance, comedy, and murder mystery elements effectively increased suspense and maintained audience interest throughout the narrative. Although some viewers were able to predict certain plot developments, they remained engaged with the progression of the story and the dynamics between the characters. These findings are consistent with the conventions of romantic comedy narratives discussed by Mernit (2020).

Survey results also indicated that audiences responded positively to the pilot episode, particularly regarding its entertaining, accessible, and emotionally engaging tone. The portrayal of ghosts through a humorous and endearing perspective was especially well received, reflecting contemporary audience preferences for creative humor that avoids discriminatory or degrading representations (Sunthornpasat, 2020).

Conclusion

Overall, the study demonstrates that creative strategies for romantic comedy series Centered on the Girls Love Genre should prioritize emotionally resonant character relationships, positive comedic approaches, and distinctive narrative development. These elements significantly enhance the series’ potential to connect with contemporary audiences and support future expansion into a full-scale television series.

References

Brembilla, P., & De Pascalis, I. (2018). *Reading contemporary serial television*. Routledge.

Douglas, P. (2018). *Writing the TV drama series: How to succeed as a professional writer in TV* (4th ed.). Michael Wiese Productions.

Eder, J., Jannidis, F., & Schneider, R. (2010). *Characters in fictional worlds: Understanding imaginary beings in literature, film, and other media*. De Gruyter.

Grace, L. (2014). *The art of the pitch: Persuasion and presentation skills that win business*. Wiley.

Grindon, L. (2011). *The Hollywood romantic comedy: Conventions, history, controversies*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Kallas, C. (2014). *Inside the writers' room: Conversations with American TV writers*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Landau, N. (2014). *The TV showrunner's roadmap: 21 navigational tips for screenwriters to create and sustain a hit TV series*. Focal Press.

Lotz, A. D. (2018). *We now disrupt this broadcast: How cable transformed television and the internet revolutionized it all*. MIT Press.

Martin, R. A., & Ford, T. (2018). *The psychology of humor: An integrative approach* (2nd ed.). Academic Press.

Mernit, B. (2020). *Writing the romantic comedy* (20th anniversary expanded ed.). HarperCollins.

Contact email: athip@g.swu.ac.th

A Study of the Organizing Process of the Thai Independent Documentary Film Festival

Pattaranun Waitayasin, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Pimparnthong Sriwutichan, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Sirapop Hanvanich, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Anajak Chaiyadej, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Nataporn Mangklasaranee, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Thitivut Phattarasupree, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This creative research project examined strategies for developing and presenting Thai independent documentary films to Generation Z audiences (born 2000–2010) through the design and execution of a film festival, "Have You Seen Documentary Film Festival" (HYSDFF), held at Cinema Oasis in Bangkok between December 2025 and April 2026. Grounded in the concept of a transmedia exhibition, the researchers curated four Thai independent documentaries—Somboon (2014), School Town King (2020), Boundary (2013), and Scala (2022)—under the unifying theme "Scenes of Silences," and designed a set of interactive activities, including an exhibition board, a community whiteboard, a zine-making workshop, and two panel discussions, intended to transform attendees from passive viewers into active participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with festival attendees and a structured questionnaire completed by 73 respondents. Findings indicate that the festival attracted a substantial proportion of first-time viewers of Thai independent documentaries (26 of 73 respondents) and generated consistently high satisfaction across all festival components (M = 4.67–4.89 on a five-point scale). Attendees reported markedly more positive attitudes toward Thai independent documentary film following the festival, particularly regarding its perceived social value. Instagram and word-of-mouth communication emerged as the most influential channels shaping audience awareness. However, the study also identified a substantial gap between advance seat reservations and actual attendance (50 percent), pointing to the need for stronger commitment mechanisms in future festival design. Overall, the findings suggest that integrating conventional screening formats with participatory, transmedia-based experience design constitutes a viable strategy for expanding the reach of Thai independent documentary film among Generation Z audiences and for advancing the broader visibility of the genre within Thai society.

Keywords: Thai independent documentary film, film festival, Generation Z, transmedia exhibition, audience engagement

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The film industry constitutes a multidimensional creative system that reflects a society's economic structures, cultural values, and social dynamics. Within this system, a persistent divide exists between mainstream commercial cinema and independent film production. Independent, or "off-mainstream," films typically embody the director's personal ideology and are oriented toward a niche audience, occupying a particularly distinct position within the broader category of documentary film. Documentaries possess a unique capacity to record truth and reflect social issues; however, within the Thai film landscape, they remain frequently overlooked and continue to face limited distribution opportunities (Louiyapong, 2023).

This challenge is compounded by structural problems within the Thai film industry, including a quasi-monopoly in the cinema exhibition business that produces a distribution "bottleneck" for smaller and independent productions (Sukkhapisit & Plitpholkarnpim, 2016). As a consequence, independent documentary filmmakers in Thailand often depend on alternative screening spaces or must first seek recognition through international film festivals as a precondition for establishing legitimacy and visibility within Thai society (Suksawat, 2016).

In light of these structural limitations, the present researchers identify the film festival as a strategic communication tool—one capable of providing not only a promotional platform but also a physical and symbolic space for visibility and interaction between filmmakers and audiences (Chotirosseranee, 2002). This recognition informed the development of a practice-based research project: the design and execution of a Thai independent documentary film festival intended to reach a "new generation" of viewers and to contribute to the long-term sustainability and value of the Thai documentary film industry.

This paper reports on the conceptual rationale, implementation process, and outcomes of that project—"Have You Seen Documentary Film Festival" (HYSDFF)—conducted between December 2025 and April 2026. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the conceptual literature underpinning the project. Sections 3 and 4 present the research objectives and scope of the study. Section 5 outlines the research methodology. Section 6 details the festival's design and implementation. Section 7 presents the qualitative and quantitative findings. Sections 8 through 10 discuss the study's implications, limitations, and conclusions.

Literature Review

Independent and Documentary Film in the Thai Context

Independent films, or "off-mainstream" works, are produced outside the commercial mainstream system and are typically free from the ideological and commercial constraints that shape studio productions. Such works are often self-funded and are used to communicate ideologies or to reflect social issues that are otherwise obscured—including the experiences of marginalized groups, gender minorities, and ethnic communities—aimed primarily at a niche audience that shares the filmmaker's interests and concerns (Suksawat, 2016).

Documentary film, meanwhile, is grounded in factual representation while employing cinematic techniques to construct emotional engagement and social awareness through the filmmaker's interpretive lens. As Grierson (1933), regarded as the father of the documentary tradition, famously defined it, a documentary constitutes the "creative treatment of actuality"—

not a neutral recording of events but a deliberate interpretation and arrangement of material guided by artistic and social intent. This dual character of documentary truth, encompassing both objective fact and subjective interpretation, positions the central creative challenge for documentary filmmakers as one of balancing factual accuracy with meaningful, affecting communication.

Beyond its artistic function, documentary film also performs an important social role. Renov (1993) identifies four defining functions of documentary: to record, to persuade, to express, and to enlighten. Through these functions, documentary film operates as a medium capable of translating complex structural and social problems into narratives that are accessible and relatable to everyday audiences.

Synthesizing these perspectives, this study defines "Thai independent documentary film" as cinematic work produced outside Thailand's mainstream commercial system that applies Grierson's (1933) "creative treatment of actuality" to interpret and present social realities, with the aim of conveying ideologies, perspectives, or social issues frequently neglected or obscured within Thai society. Freed from commercial obligations, such works retain the creative latitude to record truth, to persuade, and to enlighten—ultimately encouraging critical reflection, interrogating existing social structures, and fostering genuine cultural exchange.

Generation Z and Documentary Film Consumption

Generation Z—broadly defined as individuals born between 2000 and 2010—represents a demographic cohort that has come of age within a fully digital media environment and is correspondingly characterized by rapid technological adaptation and extensive time spent in online spaces. Their media consumption patterns differ markedly from those of preceding generations, particularly in their preference for two-way communication and their inclination to document and share personal experiences through social media platforms such as Instagram. With respect to consumption decision-making, Generation Z audiences tend to conduct extensive independent research and comparison prior to engagement, with word-of-mouth recommendations, peer endorsement, and influencer credibility exerting substantial influence over their choices (Techapongsatorn, 2025).

With specific reference to off-mainstream and independent film consumption, Baikhloy (2002) identifies three primary motivational factors shaping audience decision-making: receiver factors, referring to a viewer's personal interest in independent film; film factors, referring to the content of the film and the individuals associated with its production; and interpersonal factors, referring to reviews and recommendations received from others. These motivational categories informed the present study's approach to audience segmentation and engagement design.

Special Event Organization and Transmedia Exhibition Design

A "special event" is understood within the marketing communication and public relations literature as a purposefully constructed occasion designed to build audience awareness and cultivate a favorable public image for a brand, organization, or cause. Chotirosseranee (2002) outlines a ten-stage process for organizing a special event, encompassing (1) objective-setting, (2) target audience definition, (3) budgeting, (4) event-type selection, (5) determination of date, time, and venue, (6) team formation, (7) advance publicity, (8) attendee invitation, (9) team

rehearsal, and (10) post-event monitoring and evaluation. This framework provided the operational scaffold for the present project's execution.

Complementing this operational framework, the concept of a transmedia exhibition offers a design logic for translating a unifying narrative across multiple communicative platforms and physical spaces. Tharchindawong (2022) describes transmedia exhibition design as requiring systematic narrative planning that spans the selection of exhibits and media, the design of interactive activities, and the arrangement of physical display space, such that all components cohere within a single "narrative universe" (p. 58). This integrated approach enhances the distinctiveness and perceived value of the exhibition experience while facilitating dialogue both between the audience and the exhibited content and among audience members themselves.

Taken together, these three bodies of literature—on the characteristics of Thai independent documentary film, on Generation Z media behavior, and on special event and transmedia exhibition design—informed the conceptual framework guiding the present study. The researchers hypothesized that combining curated, socially engaged documentary content with a transmedia-based, participatory event structure would be more effective in engaging Generation Z audiences than conventional, screening-only festival formats, and would more successfully convert passive viewers into active participants and advocates for the genre.

Research Objectives

This study pursued two primary objectives: (1) to explore guidelines for developing and presenting Thai independent documentary films in ways that more effectively reach the new generation of viewers; and (2) to raise awareness of, and promote the value of, Thai independent documentary films among the new generation through the design and execution of a film festival.

Scope of the Study

Content Scope

The study focuses on raising awareness of, and promoting the value of, Thai independent documentary films through the organization of a film festival. This directly supports the realization of the films' social and artistic value and provides a platform for experts to exchange concepts and perspectives, with the aim of establishing guidelines for developing the Thai independent documentary film industry and enabling the new generation to genuinely recognize and access the value of these works.

Time Scope

The total duration of the study was five months, from December 2025 to April 2026.

Target Audience Scope

The study targeted the Generation Z population, including high school students, university students, and early-career adults born between 2000 and 2010.

Methodology

This practice-based research project employed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore strategies for promoting Thai independent documentary film among Generation Z audiences. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with festival attendees and through systematic documentation of the project's operational and discussion processes. Quantitative data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to festival attendees following the screenings. This mixed-methods approach allowed the researchers to triangulate attendees' subjective experiences and attitude shifts against descriptive statistical patterns observed across the broader attendee population.

The research and production process was organized into four sequential stages.

Stage 1: Preparation and Planning

This stage involved collecting background data and theoretical literature, studying target audience behavior, selecting documentary films and defining the festival's core thematic concept, coordinating with venue partners and sponsors, and designing the attendee experience and on-site activities.

Stage 2: Public Relations and Visual Identity Design

This stage involved designing the project's visual identity and strategically planning and executing public relations activities across both online and offline communication channels.

Stage 3: Festival Execution

This stage involved preparing and decorating the festival venue, screening the curated films and facilitating associated activities, and systematically collecting attendee feedback.

Stage 4: Conclusion and Discussion

In this final stage, data collected across all operational phases were synthesized and analyzed to generate the study's findings and recommendations.

Festival Design and Implementation

Naming, Thematic Concept, and Film Curation

Thai independent documentary films play a crucial role in presenting social issues that are often neglected, comparable to "silences" that Thai society has rarely acknowledged. The researchers adopted this concept as the provocation underlying the festival's name, "Have You Seen Documentary Film Festival," and expanded it into the festival's central theme, "Scenes of Silences," communicating that Thai independent documentaries constitute a space that accommodates hidden truths and unresolved social problems. This theme served as the organizing axis for all event components. In the curation process, the researchers selected four documentary films—Somboon (2014), School Town King (2020), Boundary (2013), and Scala (2022)—to represent different dimensions of "silence" in a comprehensive and diverse manner, and designed interactive activities intended to transform the festival space into an amplifier through which neglected social issues could resonate back into broader public awareness.

Venue Selection

The researchers treated venue selection as a critical variable in constructing a shared audience experience rather than a matter of physical convenience alone. Vision alignment was prioritized above atmosphere and accessibility. A comparative analysis of three candidate venues—Galileoasis, Bangkok Kunsthalle, and Cinema Oasis—was conducted across the dimensions of transportation access, budget, and space management. Cinema Oasis was ultimately selected as the most suitable venue owing to its established commitment to supporting marginalized independent films, which aligned closely with the festival's objective of amplifying "silences." Cinema Oasis also offered logistical advantages, including walking-distance access from the BTS Phrom Phong station and physical infrastructure combining a standard cinema with a multipurpose hall, enabling a cohesive transmedia experience for attendees.

Interactive Activity Design

Activity and experience design was organized around the concept of a transmedia exhibition, structured to construct a "user journey" derived from the researchers' own experience of moving from passive viewers of Thai independent documentary to active researchers and, ultimately, advocates for the genre. Five interactive activities were distributed throughout the venue to shift attendees from passive recipients to active participants.

"Have You Scene" Exhibition Board

An information display styled as a detective board, transforming academic data on the Thai documentary film circle—definitions, values, awards, and current screening spaces—into investigative "clues" that stimulated curiosity and invited attendees to piece together the narrative themselves.

"Have You Screen" Community Board

A large whiteboard, symbolizing an empty cinema screen, on which attendees wrote short reflections or named their own "life documentaries," reinforcing the idea that every individual life holds value and narrative worth.

"Have You Zine" Activity

A handmade booklet-making activity in which attendees, using provided art supplies, interpreted prompts connected to the four curated films, producing personalized souvenirs that shifted their role from passive audience to active "truth recorder."

"Curious Talk" Panel Discussion

Held under the topic "The Art of Meddling in Others' Business to Change the World," this session brought directors and film subjects together to discuss behind-the-scenes experiences and the continuing real-world impact of the featured social issues.

"Different Perspectives Session"

An open-space discussion for personnel from within and outside the documentary film industry, intended to foster cross-disciplinary dialogue and generate ideas for advancing the Thai documentary film industry.

Visual Identity and Public Relations Strategy

The project's visual identity adopted mixed media as its primary art direction, reflecting the "Scenes of Silences" theme through the overlapping and juxtaposition of diverse materials, textures, and visual elements—symbolically paralleling the festival's goal of integrating disparate social issues into a cohesive whole. For public relations, the researchers applied transmedia storytelling as the organizing communication strategy, treating each public relations output not merely as promotional material but as a substantive component of the festival's core message. Content strategy across all channels centered on questioning and articulating the value of Thai independent documentary film, laying a foundation of understanding and stimulating dialogue with the target audience prior to the festival itself. To extend this storytelling beyond the event, the researchers additionally produced a short behind-the-scenes documentary film, intended to archive the project and sustain audience engagement after the physical festival concluded.

Results

Qualitative Findings From In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with randomly selected attendees representing the target audience, focused on their awareness, interests, satisfaction, and shifting attitudes toward Thai independent documentary film. Analysis revealed that attendees learned about the festival through three primary channels: direct communication from the researchers, the project's public relations channels, and—notably—networks of industry experts who assisted in promoting the event. Regarding motivations for attendance, respondents fell into two groups: those with prior experience watching Thai independent documentaries, who were motivated to compare the festival's content against their existing perceptions of the genre; and those without prior experience, who were motivated by openness to new experiences and specific interest in the curated films.

Attendees generally expressed positive feedback regarding the film screenings and the panel discussion activities, reporting that these components lowered barriers to access and facilitated greater openness toward Thai independent documentary film. Evaluating post-attendance outcomes, the group without prior viewing experience demonstrated a significantly more positive shift in attitude toward the genre. Attendees with prior viewing experience, meanwhile, reported that while the activities may not have substantially expanded their existing knowledge of documentary film, they nonetheless provided a meaningful stimulus encouraging renewed and more frequent engagement with the genre.

Quantitative Findings From the Attendee Questionnaire

Following the festival, questionnaire data were collected from 73 attendees. Descriptive results are presented in Tables 1 through 6.

Table 1
Number of Respondents by Age Group

Age	Number of Respondents (n)
Under 18 years	2
19–22 years	43
23–30 years	15
Over 30 years	13

The majority of respondents fell within the 19–22-year age range, corresponding directly to the festival's intended target demographic and reflecting the effectiveness of the public relations strategy in reaching this audience segment.

Table 2
Number of Respondents With Prior Experience Watching Documentary Films

Prior viewing experience	Number of Respondents (n)
Yes	47
No	26

Although the majority of attendees (n = 47) had prior experience watching Thai independent documentaries, the festival also attracted a substantial group of 26 first-time viewers, indicating initial success in expanding the audience base beyond the existing documentary-viewing community.

Table 3
Number of Respondents by Channel of Festival Awareness

Channel	Number of Respondents (n)
Instagram	50
From acquaintances	48
Word-of-mouth recommendation	23
Facebook	10
TikTok	8
Other	2

Instagram remained the primary communication channel with the greatest influence among Generation Z respondents. Word-of-mouth communication from acquaintances demonstrated a comparably strong influence, underscoring the continued importance of interpersonal recommendation identified by Baikhloy (2002) in audience decision-making.

Table 4
Number of Respondents Expressing Interest in Festival Activities

Activity	Number of Respondents (n)
Documentary film screenings	66
“Curious Talk” panel discussion	27
“Different Perspectives Session”	11
“Have You Scene” exhibition board	7
“Have You Zine” activity	14
“Have You Screen” activity	15

Beyond the film screenings themselves, attendees expressed considerable interest in the panel discussion activities. The researchers attribute this to the strategy of scheduling the discussion immediately following each screening, while inviting directors and film subjects to converse directly—a sequencing that appears to have sustained audience interest and emotional continuity.

Table 5
Mean and Standard Deviation of Satisfaction With Festival Activities

Activity	M	SD
Documentary film screenings	4.89	0.35
“Curious Talk” panel discussion	4.72	0.51
“Different Perspectives Session”	4.67	0.62
“Have You Scene” exhibition board	4.72	0.52
“Have You Zine” activity	4.72	0.57
“Have You Screen” activity	4.78	0.47

Overall satisfaction with the festival—encompassing both the film screenings and the interactive activities—was rated at the highest level across all components. This finding directly supports the study’s first objective, suggesting that expanding access to Thai independent documentary film among Generation Z requires more than conventional screening formats alone, and instead benefits from transmedia-based experience design that shifts audiences from passive recipients to active participants.

Table 6
Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitudes and Perceptions Following Festival Attendance

Post-festival attitude statement	M	SD
Increased familiarity with documentary films	4.75	0.52
Increased interest in documentary films	4.71	0.63
Enhanced recognition of documentary films' importance to the film industry	4.78	0.42
Enhanced recognition of documentary films' importance to society	4.81	0.46
Increased intention to recommend documentary films to others	4.79	0.47

Attitudes and perceptions following participation concretely fulfilled the study's second objective: attendees reported the most positive shifts at the highest level across all measured dimensions. Notably, the highest-rated item concerned attendees' recognition of documentary film's importance to society, reflecting the effectiveness of the festival as a space for disseminating the films' core social messages to a broader public.

Notable Operational Observations

Seat Reservation and Attendance Behavior

Although all screening rounds achieved fully booked advance reservations (192 seats in total), on-site data collection revealed that only 96 individuals (50 percent) actually attended. The researchers attribute this gap to the absence of any binding condition attached to free seat reservations, which allowed attendees to cancel with minimal cost when motivation waned prior to the event.

Factors Influencing Viewing Decisions

Seat reservation data indicated that Somboon was the first film to reach full capacity, attributed by attendees to its accessible, low-tension content. By contrast, School Town King received the most positive post-screening feedback, attributed to its distinctive art direction, narrative approach, and pacing—suggesting that formal and stylistic qualities, not only subject matter, shape audience reception.

Structural and Industry-Level Observations

The "Different Perspectives Session" surfaced broader structural concerns, including the continued scarcity of alternative screening spaces for small-scale independent filmmakers, the constraining influence of algorithmic content curation on audience discovery, and limited institutional or governmental support for the sector. Participants also proposed adaptive directions for the genre, including faster-paced editing and experimentation with vertical video formats to align with contemporary consumption habits.

Discussion

The findings of this study lend support to the conceptual framework outlined in Section 2. Consistent with Techapongsatorn's (2025) characterization of Generation Z media behavior, Instagram and interpersonal word-of-mouth communication proved to be the two most influential channels shaping festival awareness (Table 3), reinforcing the centrality of peer-driven and platform-native communication in reaching this demographic. Similarly, the high satisfaction ratings across both screenings and interactive activities (Table 5) corroborate Baikhloy's (2002) framework of receiver, film, and interpersonal motivational factors: attendees appear to have been drawn not solely by the films themselves but by the surrounding social and participatory experience.

The particularly strong positive attitude shift observed among first-time viewers (Table 2; Section 7.1) suggests that the transmedia exhibition format was especially effective as an entry point for audiences without pre-existing engagement with the genre, supporting the study's underlying hypothesis that participatory, multi-platform design can lower the barriers to entry that conventional single-format screenings may present. At the same time, the finding that experienced viewers reported comparatively modest gains in new knowledge—while still expressing renewed motivation to engage with the genre—indicates that the festival format may serve distinct functions depending on an attendee's prior familiarity: an onboarding function for newcomers, and a re-engagement function for existing audiences.

The substantial gap between seat reservations and actual attendance (Section 7.3) is a notable operational finding with implications extending beyond this specific festival. It suggests that awareness and interest, as reflected in high reservation volumes, do not necessarily translate into behavioral commitment absent some cost or obligation attached to the reservation itself—a pattern consistent with broader event-management literature on free-registration formats. This finding, considered alongside Chotirosseranee's (2002) ten-stage special event framework, points to a need for greater attention to stages seven through nine (advance publicity, attendee invitation, and rehearsal or reminder communication) in future festival planning, potentially through the introduction of modest commitment devices such as bundled ticket-and-refreshment reservations or a controlled overbooking margin.

Finally, the structural observations raised during the "Different Perspectives Session"—concerning the scarcity of alternative screening spaces and the constraining effect of algorithmic curation on content discovery—echo the distribution "bottleneck" identified by Sukkhapisit and Plitpholkarnpim (2016) at the industry level. This suggests that while a single festival can meaningfully expand access for a defined audience over a limited time period, it addresses only one node within a wider structural constraint that continues to limit the reach of Thai independent documentary film.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the developing body of knowledge on Thai independent documentary film and film festival organization, particularly regarding the relationship between transmedia-based creative processes and audience-development strategies aimed at new-generation viewers. It offers an empirically grounded illustration of how theoretical constructs—Grierson's (1933) creative treatment of actuality, Renov's (1993) social functions of

documentary, and Tharchindawong's (2022) transmedia exhibition design—can be operationalized within a single, integrated event.

Practical Contribution

The findings offer actionable guidance for Thai independent documentary filmmakers and festival organizers seeking to design more effective screening formats. These include: sequencing post-screening panel discussions immediately after film content to sustain emotional continuity; curating a diversity of documentary content spanning both accessible and formally ambitious works; leveraging Instagram and interpersonal networks as primary promotional channels; and introducing commitment-oriented reservation mechanisms to reduce the gap between reserved and actual attendance.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the questionnaire sample (n = 73) was drawn from a single festival event held at a single venue over a short time scope (December 2025–April 2026), which limits the generalizability of the findings to other festival contexts, venues, or audience populations. Second, respondents were self-selected attendees who chose to complete the questionnaire, which may introduce a positive response bias not fully accounted for in the descriptive statistics reported here. Third, the substantial discrepancy between advance reservations and actual attendance means that the questionnaire and interview data reflect only the subset of reserving individuals who ultimately attended, and may not capture the perspectives or motivations of those who did not.

Future research would benefit from replicating this festival model across multiple venues, cities, or time periods to assess the consistency of the observed effects, and from incorporating a comparison condition—such as a conventional, screening-only festival format—to more directly test the added value of the transmedia exhibition approach. Further investigation of the seat-reservation-to-attendance gap, potentially through controlled experimentation with commitment devices such as bundled ticketing or modest deposit systems, would also help translate the present study's operational observations into generalizable event-management guidance. Finally, given the structural concerns raised by participants regarding algorithmic curation and the scarcity of alternative screening spaces, future work might examine how individual festival interventions interact with, and are constrained by, these broader industry-level structures.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore strategies for developing and presenting Thai independent documentary film to Generation Z audiences, and to raise awareness of the genre's value through the organization of a film festival. The resulting project, "Have You Seen Documentary Film Festival," applied a transmedia exhibition framework to curate four Thai independent documentaries under the theme "Scenes of Silences" and to design a set of interactive activities intended to convert passive viewers into active participants. The findings indicate that this approach was successful in attracting audiences with no prior experience of Thai independent documentary, in generating high levels of satisfaction with both the screenings and the interactive activities, and in producing measurable positive shifts in attendees' attitudes toward the genre—particularly their recognition of its social importance.

At the same time, the study surfaced an operationally significant gap between advance reservations and actual attendance, together with broader structural constraints on the Thai independent documentary sector that a single festival cannot resolve on its own. Taken together, these findings suggest that integrating conventional screening formats with participatory, transmedia-based experience design constitutes a viable and valuable strategy for expanding the reach of Thai independent documentary film among Generation Z audiences, while also pointing to concrete directions—commitment-oriented reservation design and continued attention to distribution infrastructure—for strengthening the sustainability of such efforts in the future.

References

Baikhloy, P. (2002). *Factors influencing the viewing of off-mainstream films* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. Chulalongkorn University Theses and Dissertations. https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/chulaetd/19374

Chotirosseranee, S. (2002). *Bangkok film festival and the development of the Thai film industry* [Master's thesis, Thammasat University]. Thammasat University Digital Collections. https://digital.library.tu.ac.th/tu_dc/frontend/info/item/dc:50295

Grierson, J. (1933). *Grierson on documentary*. University of California Press.

Laisuwanchai, W. (Director). (2020). *School Town King* [Film]. Eyedropper Fill.

Louiyapong, K. (2023). Documentary films are more diverse than you think. *Journal of Innovative Media and Communication, 2*(1), 1–40. https://so10.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jimc/article/view/703

Numbenchapol, N. (Director). (2013). *Boundary* [Film]. Mobile Lab.

Renov, M. (1993). *Theorizing documentary*. Routledge.

Sukkhapisit, T., & Plitpholkarnpim, T. (2016). *The "bottleneck" structure of the Thai film industry: A market value of over 20 billion baht with two main players dominating the downstream*. Thaipublica. https://thaipublica.org/2016/08/film-industry-2/

Suksawat, U. (2016). An analytical study of award-winning independent Thai films during 2000–2012. *Journal of Cultural Approach, 17*(2), 71–80. https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jica/article/view/99313

Techapongsatorn, A. (2025). The influence of film elements and integrated marketing communication factors on Thai film viewing behavior of Generation Z. *Journal of Communication Arts and Innovation NIDA, 12*(1), 18–39. https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jcin/issue/view/18044

Tharchindawong, W. (2022). *Exhibition design using transmedia storytelling concepts to promote the creative industry* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. Chulalongkorn University Theses and Dissertations. https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/chulaetd/6340/

Thipchaimetha, K. (Director). (2014). *Somboon* [Film]. Nob Productions.

Thitanat, A. (Director). (2022). *Scala* [Film].

Strategic Media Production for Tourism Promotion in Bangkok, Thailand: A Case Study of "Taste and Trails City Run Banthat Thong"

R-titaya Supsinwiwat, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Khuttipong Namjarutjareonkit, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Pasraporn Phandech, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Sarisa Natesawang, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Duangnapha Binloy, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Urban destinations increasingly use experiential events and digital media to diversify tourism identities and encourage new forms of place engagement. This study examined how strategic media production, experiential tourism, gamified urban running, and community participation were integrated into the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong, a creative tourism project in Bangkok, Thailand. The project addressed the temporal imbalance of Banthat Thong Road, which is widely recognized as a popular evening food destination but attracts limited tourism activity in the early morning. A qualitative practice-based case study was employed. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected stakeholders, documentation of community co-creation, analysis of creative artefacts, official social media analytics, and publicly available user-generated content. The data were analyzed thematically across the pre-production, event production, and post-production phases. The findings show that strategic media production functioned not only as a promotional tool but also as an experience-design process. Gamified checkpoints, retro-game aesthetics, local breakfast experiences, cultural routes, and community interaction transformed running into a participatory form of urban exploration. Community collaboration strengthened the authenticity of the experience, while official and participant-generated media extended audience engagement beyond the event. The project introduced an alternative representation of Banthat Thong as a creative morning tourism destination, although the findings do not demonstrate a permanent change in destination image. This study highlights the potential of practice-based strategic communication to activate neighborhood tourism through the integration of creative experience design, community participation, and participatory digital media.

Keywords: strategic media production, experiential tourism, urban running, gamification, user-generated content, destination image, Banthat Thong Road

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Digital communication technologies have substantially transformed how tourism destinations are promoted, experienced, and represented. Destination communication is no longer limited to official advertising or the one-way transmission of tourism information. Contemporary tourists obtain information from interconnected digital environments that include social media platforms, online communities, short-form video, electronic word-of-mouth, and user-generated content. These communication channels shape destination awareness, expectations, travel planning, and post-visit evaluations. Digital media therefore operate not only as promotional tools but also as spaces in which destination meanings are continuously produced and negotiated.

Tourism itself has also shifted from passive sightseeing toward experience-oriented travel. Contemporary visitors increasingly seek opportunities to participate in local culture, interact with residents, explore everyday environments, taste local food, and create personally meaningful memories. Kim et al. (2012) identified hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty as important dimensions of memorable tourism experiences. These dimensions suggest that destinations create value not only through physical attractions but also through the emotional, cognitive, social, and participatory qualities of the visitor experience.

Creative tourism extends this perspective by emphasizing active participation and the co-creation of experiences. Richards and Wilson (2006) argued that creative tourism can respond to the repetitive reproduction of cultural tourism products by providing more interactive and locally distinctive experiences. Instead of positioning visitors as passive observers, creative tourism allows them to engage with local knowledge, practices, stories, and communities.

Bangkok provides an appropriate setting for examining these developments. The city is characterized by cultural heritage, gastronomy, diverse communities, commercial districts, creative spaces, and contrasting forms of everyday urban life. In addition to major landmarks, neighborhood-scale destinations have become important locations for tourists seeking localized cultural and culinary experiences.

Banthat Thong Road, located in Pathum Wan District, has developed into a well-known food and lifestyle area. Its destination identity is strongly associated with restaurants, cafés, street activity, and a lively evening atmosphere. However, the use of the area remains temporally unbalanced. Tourism and commercial activities are concentrated during the afternoon and evening, while the early morning is comparatively inactive. This condition raises a practical tourism-development question: how might the area's local food, culture, community, and urban environment be activated and communicated as a morning tourism experience?

Urban running offers one potential response. Running has expanded beyond exercise and competition into active and experiential forms of tourism. Running through a neighborhood allows participants to encounter a destination through embodied movement, street-level observation, social interaction, and place-based discovery. When connected with local food, cultural interpretation, community encounters, and creative storytelling, a running event can become a platform for exploring and communicating urban identity.

The Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong project was developed from this premise. The project integrated urban running, local breakfast experiences, cultural and heritage exploration,

community interaction, gamified route design, and strategic digital media. It was intended not merely to organize a sporting event but to test how a creative tourism experience could introduce a different temporal representation of Banthat Thong.

Previous studies have addressed experiential tourism, creative tourism, destination image, social media, user-generated content, and sport-related travel. However, limited research has examined how these elements can be integrated through a practice-based communication project at the neighborhood scale. In particular, there remains insufficient understanding of how strategic media production can simultaneously support experience design, community co-creation, event implementation, digital participation, and the communication of an emerging destination identity.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how strategic media production was planned and implemented before, during, and after the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong event.
2. To explore how experiential tourism, gamified urban running, local food, cultural exploration, and community participation were integrated into the event and media production process.
3. To examine how the event and its associated media contributed to an emerging representation of Banthat Thong Road as a creative morning tourism destination.

Literature and Conceptual Foundations

Strategic Media Production

Strategic communication involves the deliberate coordination of communication activities to achieve defined organizational or social objectives. Applied to tourism, it includes audience analysis, stakeholder engagement, destination storytelling, media selection, content production, distribution, interaction, and evaluation. Contemporary media production should consequently be understood as more than the technical creation of promotional materials. It is an integrated process through which destination meanings and visitor expectations are designed and circulated. In the present study, strategic media production consisted of three interconnected phases.

- Pre-production included field research, audience and contextual analysis, stakeholder consultation, route planning, communication objectives, content strategy, and visual identity development.
- Production included the implementation of the tourism experience, on-site media creation, real-time communication, participant interaction, and event storytelling.
- Post-production included editing, content distribution, social media monitoring, evaluation, and the analysis of user-generated content.

This three-phase structure positions media production as both a communication process and a component of tourism experience design.

Experiential and Creative Tourism

Experiential tourism emphasizes active, meaningful, and memorable engagement with destinations. Visitors participate in activities that connect them with places through emotion, learning, sensory involvement, social interaction, and personal interpretation. The significance

of local culture, involvement, novelty, and meaningfulness in memorable tourism experiences supports the integration of neighborhood stories, food, interaction, and exploration into destination activities. Creative tourism further emphasizes co-created experiences that are connected to the distinctive qualities of a destination. Creative place-making can involve local businesses, cultural actors, residents, designers, and visitors in the construction of tourism meanings. Such approaches shift destination development from standardized cultural consumption toward participatory experiences grounded in local resources and identities. In this study, experiential tourism was operationalized through four components: urban running and physical exploration; local breakfast and food experiences; cultural and heritage interpretation; and direct interaction with local businesses and community members.

Gamified Tourism Experience

Gamification refers to the use of game-related elements in non-game settings to encourage motivation, participation, progression, exploration, and engagement. A tourism experience may be gamified through checkpoints, levels, tasks, discoveries, rewards, achievement symbols, route progression, and interactive storytelling. The project's use of gamification extended beyond decorative graphics. Retro-game culture and pixel-art aesthetics informed the event's visual identity, but game structures were also incorporated into the route. Participants moved through sequential checkpoints, while food stations and cultural locations became points of discovery and experiential reward. The distinction is methodologically important. Visual references to games alone do not constitute substantive gamification. In this project, the term is justified because progression, checkpoints, symbolic achievements, discoveries, and rewards were embedded in the participant journey.

Community Co-creation

Community participation is essential when tourism experiences draw upon local knowledge, food, stories, commercial resources, and everyday environments. Local stakeholders can provide practical and cultural information unavailable through desk research, including operating patterns, neighborhood narratives, route conditions, community sensitivities, and appropriate forms of visitor engagement. Co-creation also reduces the risk that destinations will be represented entirely through externally imposed imagery. Marques and Borba (2017) demonstrated that creative tourism and digital technology can support collaborative urban experience development. In the present project, local businesses and stakeholders contributed to food selection, route planning, cultural content, operational arrangements, and participant interaction.

User-Generated Content and Destination Image

Social media enables tourists to act as destination content producers. User-generated content includes photographs, videos, captions, reviews, hashtags, geotagged posts, and stories created by visitors. Such content can expand the circulation of destination experiences beyond official communication channels.

UGC is relevant because participants do not simply reproduce official messages. They select, interpret, and publicly represent aspects of an experience that they consider meaningful. The destination image appearing online is therefore co-created through interactions among official organizations, local stakeholders, participants, and digital audiences.

For Banthat Thong, the research did not begin from an absence of destination image. The area already possessed a recognizable culinary and evening-oriented identity. The project instead sought to introduce an additional temporal association: Banthat Thong as a location for morning running, breakfast, cultural exploration, and community interaction.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative practice-based case study design. Practice-based research is appropriate when creative practice functions as both the object of investigation and a method through which knowledge is produced. The value of the research therefore lies not only in the resulting artefacts or event but also in the documented processes of researching, designing, implementing, observing, evaluating, and reflecting on practice.

Candy and Edmonds (2018) explain that practice-based research in the creative arts can generate scholarly knowledge through systematic investigation embedded in creative production. This approach requires the creative process to be documented and critically interpreted rather than presented merely as professional practice.

The bounded case was the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong. The study examined the project across three phases: pre-production, production during the event, and post-production.

Research Context and Participants

The research site was Banthat Thong Road, Pathum Wan District, Bangkok. The area was selected because of its established food identity, active evening economy, community-based businesses, urban heritage, and comparatively limited morning activity.

Participants and stakeholders included: local business owners and community representatives; event organizers; creative and media-production personnel; collaborating organizations; runners and visitors participating in the activity; and individuals responsible for route, food, communication, and operations.

Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling according to their direct involvement in or knowledge of the project.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were employed to enable methodological triangulation.

Participant observation was conducted during site preparation, route development, and the event. The researchers examined environmental conditions, morning and evening patterns of activity, route accessibility, participant movement, checkpoint interaction, engagement with food and cultural materials, community encounters, and media-creation behavior.

Field notes, photographs, video recordings, route documentation, and reflective records were used to document observations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders.

Co-Creation and Process Documentation: The researchers examined meeting notes, route-development documents, communication plans, stakeholder feedback, design drafts, and revisions. These materials documented how the project evolved through collaboration and how local knowledge influenced the event.

Creative Artefacts: Artefacts included the event name, logo, visual identity, promotional materials, route maps, checkpoint graphics, medals, participant materials, official photographs, videos, and social media content. They were analyzed as parts of the experience and communication design rather than merely as promotional outputs.

Social Media Analytics and UGC: Post-event evidence included available metrics from official media channels, such as reach, impressions, views, reactions, comments, shares, saves, and engagement rate.

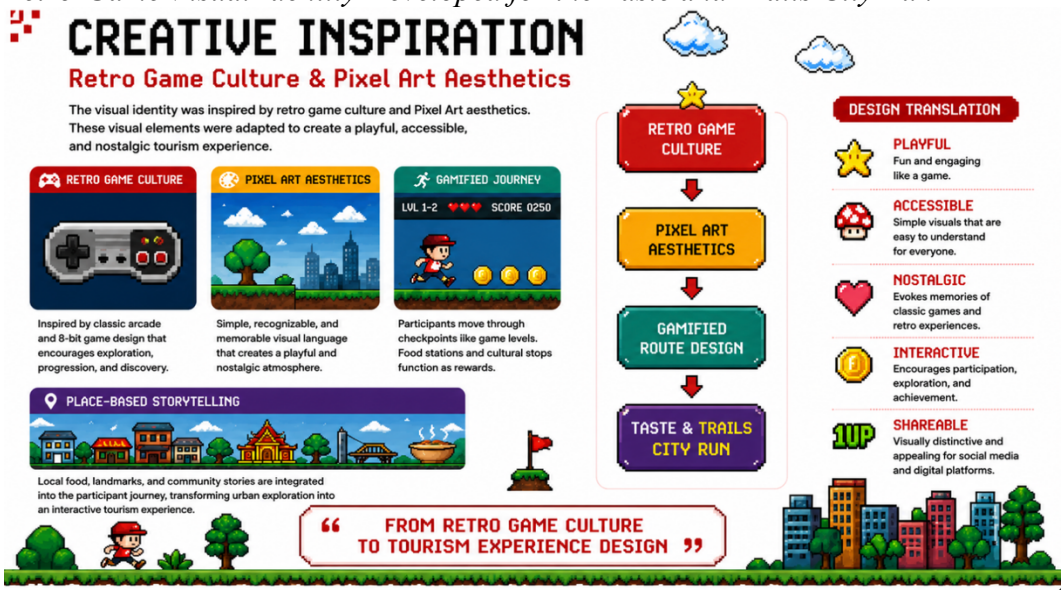
Publicly available UGC was identified through designated hashtags, geotags, tagged accounts, photographs, short-form videos, captions, and participant stories.

Creative Production Process

During pre-production, the project team conducted site observation, stakeholder consultation, co-creation, route planning, concept development, and visual identity design. Retro-game culture and pixel-art aesthetics were selected to communicate movement, playfulness, progression, accessibility, and nostalgia.

Figure 1

Retro-Game Visual Identity Developed for the Taste and Trails City Run



The project title combined two experiential dimensions. Taste referred to local breakfast, culinary heritage, and food businesses. Trails referred to running, movement, local stories, cultural places, and urban discovery.

During production, participants followed a route connecting food stations, cultural locations, neighborhood spaces, and community hosts. Checkpoints operated as experiential levels, while food and cultural encounters functioned as discoveries or symbolic rewards. Researchers observed participant behavior, interactions, emotional responses, media creation, and route engagement.

During post-production**,** media materials were edited and distributed, platform performance was reviewed, and participant-generated content was collected and categorized.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts, observations, field notes, planning documents, artefacts, and UGC were analyzed using thematic analysis. The procedure involved familiarization, preliminary coding, category development, theme generation, comparison across sources, and interpretation in relation to the conceptual framework.

A combined deductive–inductive approach was used. Deductive categories were informed by strategic media production, experiential tourism, gamification, community participation, UGC, and destination image. Inductive coding identified patterns that emerged from stakeholder accounts, observed behavior, and digital content.

Official social media metrics were analyzed descriptively. They were treated as evidence of communication exposure and interaction, not as proof that the event caused long-term destination-image change.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Credibility was strengthened by comparing interviews, observations, creative artefacts, project records, official digital metrics, and UGC. An audit trail of major production decisions and design revisions should be maintained. Selected stakeholder interpretations may also be reviewed through member checking.

Reflexivity was necessary because the researchers participated in both project implementation and evaluation. This dual role was addressed through reflective documentation, triangulation, and the avoidance of unsupported promotional claims.

Formal interviewees were informed about the research and asked to provide consent. Identifying information should be removed from quotations and UGC unless explicit permission has been obtained.

Findings and Discussion

Strategic Media Production Operated as Experience Design

The findings indicated that strategic media production extended beyond event promotion. It connected field research, stakeholder consultation, route planning, visual communication, experience implementation, and post-event storytelling.

Local food, neighborhood narratives, community knowledge, and spatial conditions informed both the event and its media identity. Communication artefacts therefore did not merely

advertise a pre-existing experience; they helped structure how the experience was understood and navigated.

Before the event, promotional media created awareness and introduced the combined running, food, and cultural concept. During the event, maps, checkpoint materials, signage, visual identity, and real-time content shaped participant interpretation. Afterward, edited and participant-generated media extended the symbolic duration of the project.

Strategic media production consequently performed three related functions: attracting participation, organizing the visitor journey, and extending destination storytelling.

Gamification Transformed Running Into a Tourism Journey

The route transformed running from an exercise-centered activity into a sequence of urban encounters. Participants progressed through checkpoints linking local food, cultural locations, and community stories.

The retro-game concept established a coherent narrative of movement and discovery. Pixel-art graphics made the project recognizable, while checkpoints and rewards translated the visual theme into the physical structure of participation.

Observation indicated that participants actively stopped at checkpoints, interacted with local businesses, photographed cultural locations, and shared their experiences through social media.

Food and Community Interaction Grounded the Experience in Place

Local breakfast differentiated the project from conventional running events and connected physical activity with the culinary identity of Banthat Thong. Food was presented not only as refreshment but also as a form of local heritage and a medium of interaction between participants and businesses.

Community stakeholders supplied practical and cultural knowledge related to route conditions, business operations, food selection, and neighborhood narratives. Their participation increased the local relevance of the activity and reduced dependence on externally constructed representations.

During the event, residents, business owners, and community participants acted as hosts and interpreters of place. The destination was therefore experienced through interpersonal encounters as well as through physical sites and media content.

Digital Participation Extended the Event

Official media established a consistent representation of the event, while UGC introduced personal interpretations. Participant-created content represented elements such as running, breakfast, retro-game graphics, social interaction, cultural locations, and Banthat Thong's morning atmosphere.

UGC extended the event beyond the physical site and allowed participants to become co-communicators. However, the analysis should distinguish between communication reach and

deeper destination effects. High reach or engagement does not independently demonstrate destination-image change.

The Project Introduced an Emerging Morning Identity

Across the experience design, observations, stakeholder accounts, official media, and participant content, Banthat Thong was represented differently from its established evening image. During the project, the area appeared as a place for morning exercise, breakfast, neighborhood discovery, cultural engagement, and community interaction.

The evidence supports the conclusion that the project introduced and tested an alternative destination representation. It does not demonstrate that Banthat Thong's long-term public image was permanently transformed. Such a claim would require longitudinal evidence, repeated activities, comparative visitor data, or pre-event and post-event image measurement.

The academically defensible interpretation is therefore that strategic media production and creative event design contributed to an emerging morning tourism identity.

Conclusions

This study examined how strategic media production was integrated with experiential tourism, gamified urban running, local food, cultural exploration, and community participation through the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong project.

The study produced three principal conclusions. First, strategic media production functioned as an experience-design mechanism rather than solely as event promotion. Research, planning, visual identity, route materials, on-site communication, digital distribution, and evaluation collectively shaped the tourism experience.

Second, the gamified route transformed running into a participatory form of urban tourism. Movement was connected with checkpoints, food, stories, cultural locations, and community encounters. The project illustrates that gamification is most meaningful when game elements are embedded in the participant journey rather than used only as visual decoration.

Third, community co-creation and digital participation expanded the range of actors involved in destination communication. Businesses and local stakeholders contributed place-based knowledge and hosted experiences, while participants extended the project through UGC and electronic word-of-mouth.

The theoretical contribution lies in positioning strategic media production as an integrative process linking experience design, community participation, embodied tourism, and participatory digital communication. The practical contribution is a neighborhood-scale approach that urban destinations may use to activate underused periods of the day without replacing their established identities.

The study is limited by its focus on a single event and destination. The researchers' simultaneous roles as creators and evaluators may also have introduced interpretive bias. Social media evidence represented only publicly visible users and could not capture all participant experiences. Most importantly, the design assessed short-term representations and did not measure long-term destination-image transformation.

Future studies should employ repeated events, longitudinal digital analysis, pre-event and post-event surveys, visitor interviews, control or comparison areas, and economic indicators relating to local business activity. Such research would clarify whether an emerging morning identity becomes sustained over time.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the local business owners, community representatives, event participants, volunteers, collaborating organizations, and media-production personnel who contributed to the planning and implementation of the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong project. The authors also thank those who provided local knowledge, logistical support, documentation assistance, language editing, proofreading, and feedback during the research and creative-production processes.

References

Candy, L., & Edmonds, E. A. (2018). Practice-based research in the creative arts: Foundations and futures from the front line. *Leonardo, 51*(1), 63–69. https://doi.org/10.1162/LEON_a_01471

Kim, J.-H., Ritchie, J. R. B., & McCormick, B. (2012). Development of a scale to measure memorable tourism experiences. *Journal of Travel Research, 51*(1), 12–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287510385467

Konu, H. (2015). Developing a forest-based wellbeing tourism product together with customers: An ethnographic approach. *Tourism Management, 49*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.02.006

Marques, L., & Borba, C. (2017). Co-creating the city: Digital technology and creative tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives, 24*, 86–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.07.007

Nguyen, T. T. T., Nham, P. T., & Hoang, V. N. (2022). The impact of user-generated content on intention to select a travel destination. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-022-00174-7

Richards, G. (2020). Designing creative places: The role of creative tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 85*, 102922. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102922

Ross, D., Saxena, G., Correia, F., & Deutz, P. (2020). Archaeological tourism: A creative approach. *Annals of Tourism Research, 85*, 103056. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.103056

Contact email: noon_imp@hotmail.com

Defining Design as a Governmental Capability: Conceptual Foundations for an Emerging Public-Sector Practice

Rhonda Geraghty, Ontario College of Art and Design University, Canada

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Design has expanded significantly in recent decades, moving beyond its traditional disciplinary boundaries to function as an important capability within government. Around the world, governments now draw on design as a set of practices, methods, tools, mindsets and abilities to address complex challenges. Yet despite its growing presence, design remains inconsistently understood and unevenly applied in public-sector contexts. A central barrier is the absence of a shared definition that captures its scope, purpose, and relevance for work in the public sector. Without common language, efforts to integrate design across jurisdictions and between sectors remains fragmented, limiting its potential and impact. This paper proposes a definition of design specifically articulated for use within the context of government. The study conducts a focused review of design-in-government literature, examining the terms *design, capability and government* to identify the range of interpretations and limits present in current discourse. It also analyzes the multiple meanings of design - as both noun and verb - in design theory and practice to clarify its identity and scope as capability in this context. Through comparative analysis, classification, and synthesis, the paper develops a working definition of design tailored to public-sector contexts. The resulting conceptualization offers a foundation for a more coherent, strategic and equitable application of design within government. It contributes to a broader ontological inquiry into design-in-government, advancing theoretical grounding for an emerging interdisciplinary field while supporting practitioners, researchers, and educators seeking to strengthen public-sector innovation.

Keywords: design-in-government, literature review, scoping review, capability, public sector

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Design has always been a governmental concern. Across history, empires, regimes, states and the like have employed manifestations of design—including architecture, symbols, urban form, industrial aesthetics, communication systems, clothing and crafts—to shape collective life, assert authority, and pursue political priorities (Woodham, 2010). Twentieth-century governments formalized this relationship through national design bodies and strategic initiatives in countries such as Germany, Canada, South Korea, Finland, Denmark, and Great Britain, using design to modernize economies, construct national identities, and manage populations (Bason, 2014; Borja de Mozota, 2003). In the twenty-first century, design has become even more deeply embedded in governance: service design, strategic design, digital design, user-centred design, and inclusive design now appear in public-sector innovation units, digital service standards, regulatory frameworks, and cross-government labs around the world (European Commission, 2009; NESTA, 2017). These developments reflect a growing recognition that design can strengthen public services, support digital transformation, enhance regulatory quality, advance climate resilience, and rebuild citizen trust (Bason, 2017).

Yet despite this long historical lineage and expanding contemporary practice, design's place in government remains conceptually undefined, and its potential minimally exploited. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates its interdisciplinary value, utility, and use, but the theoretical foundations needed to legitimize design as a governmental capability have never been established (Heskett, 2005; Kimbell, 2013). The boundaries of design's role in public administration—its scope, identity, and function—remain unclear. This ambiguity is now a critical barrier. In addition, governments increasingly collaborate across borders to address transboundary crises such as pandemics, climate change, migration, and digital security. These intergovernmental efforts require shared language about the tools and approaches they employ (Saha, 2010). Without a common definition of design in governmental contexts, coordination is fragmented, evidence is difficult to compare, and design's potential remains underrealized (Whicher, 2015; Zitkus et al., 2018).

This paper addresses this foundational gap by asking: **What is design as capability in government?** To answer this question, the study conducts a systematic review of literature to examine and define design as a capability, analyzing its multiple meanings—as noun and verb—to clarify its identity, scope, and function within the public sector (Oxford Dictionary, 2013; Simon, 1969). Through comparative analysis, classification, and synthesis, the paper develops a working definition of design tailored specifically to governmental use. In doing so, it validates the conceptual scope and boundaries of design-in-government and provides shared language capable of supporting more coherent, strategic, and equitable application of design within and between governments (Buchanan, 2001).

Context

The author's background as an international designer, public practitioner, researcher, and educator influenced the musings from which this topic originated. This research represents phase one of the author's PhD thesis investigation concerned with answering the question: *what is the capability of design in government?* (Geraghty, 2022). Phase two contextualizes the literature from this study through a scoping review according to Arksey and O'Malley (2005) to:

- define the scope of the field and its limits;

- understand the nature of the field as a whole (general) and identify gaps; and
- understand (specifically) how the literature relates to the research question.

It became evident during the search stage of the literature review process that design exists in a multitude of contexts and its existence in the realm of government had not been formally demarcated. This insight was also uncovered by the European Commission in their 2010 report on *Design as a Driver of User-Centred Innovation* (European Commission, 2010). In the report, the absence of the contextualization of design was noted as a barrier experienced by government practitioners. An isolated regard of what design is in this specific context (outside of its other varied contexts) did not exist. Generally, the area spans the theoretical and practical domains of design and of government, with influences from other fields including business management and economics (Borja de Mozota, 2003; Dunne & Martin, 2006).

The lack of a clearly defined boundary (in terms of the research scope) became a necessary precursor in order to situate and examine the research question. Hence, a more appropriate type of review was required to assess and demarcate the parameters, size, and scope of the research and its literature. In examining other types of reviews—such as narrative reviews, meta-analysis, research synthesis, and structured reviews—the purpose of the literature for this study was consistent with those found in a scoping review of literature (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006).

Through the analysis of the scoping review, a conceptual framework (CF) for the emerging area of Design-in-Government was developed (Geraghty, 2022). This content is further discussed in a subsequent publication, but the thematic area of "design" from the framework is referenced as part of this study (Table 1) to provide context and support sense-making of the results from this investigation.

Table 1
Thematic Area of Design From the Design in Government Conceptual Framework (CF) Scoping Review Summary of Findings

Category	Content
Thematic Heading	Design
Operations (Design-in-Government System)	Inputs
Philosophical Considerations	What design is
Descriptor	General: design philosophy, history, theory, criticism. Concerned with the spectrum of design as capability and resource, including practice, industry, knowledge, skills, abilities, processes, and design qualities (collaborative, impactful, human-centered).
Areas Included	**General:** Design philosophy; design history; design theory; criticism; etymology (noun, verb, tangible, intangible). Key thinkers include Dewey (1933); Dilnot (1982, 1984); Cross (2006, 2011); Krippendorff (2006); Buchanan (1992, 1995, 1998, 2001); Heskett (2005, 2017); Woodham (2010); Margolin (1995, 2002);

	Manzini (2015); Willis (2006). **Design as capability and resource:** Design as practice, industry, knowledge, skills, abilities. **Practice disciplines:** Design-as-practice vs. design-in-practice (Kimbell, 2009, 2013, 2016). Sub-disciplines: design research; design strategy; design management. Expanded contributors include Liedtka (2015) and Martin (2009) for design strategy. **Practice outputs:** Communication, object, action, thought (Buchanan, 1992, 1998). **Industry (collective):** APDIG (2013b, 2014); Design Council (2007); Cox (2005). **Design value:** Economic (Heskett, 2005, 2017; Borja de Mozota, 2003; Porter, 1985). Social (Dilnot, 1982, 1984; MindLab, 2009; Manzini, 2015; DOTT 07). Environmental (Fry, 2009; Manzini, 2015). Systemic (Bason, 2014, 2017; Kimbell, 2013, 2016; NESTA, 2017; Mulgan, 2014; Sangiorgi, 2011). **Design qualities:** Collaborative; human-centered; user-centered; impactful (Norman, 2005, 2013; IDEO/Brown, 2009; Fry, 2009; Bason, 2017).
Sub-Questions	What is design? What is design in this context?

Methodology

A systematic review of literature was selected as the appropriate method to explore the theoretical constructs of the area of design as it exists as capability in research and practice. The systematic approach was deemed necessary due to the nature of the research and its target audience of public practitioners. Hart (1998) notes that a systematic approach contributes the "appropriate breadth, depth, rigor and consistency, clarity and brevity, effective analysis and synthesis" necessary to inform government direction. Systematic reviews are also a valuable means of reviewing all evidence on a specific question and are a particularly effective tool that can summarize, appraise, and communicate the results and implications of otherwise unmanageable quantities of research (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006).

As a descriptor, the literature informing this area includes general theory foundational to the area of design—including design philosophy, history, theory, and criticism—as well as more contemporary literature theorizing dimensions of design, its identity, and its use within the context of government. The literature in this area is also concerned with the spectrum of design as resource or capability, including design practice, industry, knowledge, skills, abilities, processes, and outputs (Buchanan, 1998), as well as design's qualities such as human-centeredness, collaboration, and impact (Table 1).

Researcher Reflection

Researcher reflection was a tool employed throughout the entire research process to make sense of what was being seen and understood, particularly as it relates to the information gleaned from direct and indirect interactions with stakeholders and industry. The concept of practitioner reflection was first introduced in the early theories of John Dewey (1933) based on his exploration of experience, interaction, and reflection. Influenced by Dewey's theories, philosopher and author Donald Schön (1983) later familiarized the concept of the Reflective Practitioner. Schön (1983) defines reflective practice as practice by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience. Boud and Walker (1998) affirm that reflection is one of the key ideas and features of all aspects of learning from experience. This was the experience in this research. The reflective process served to legitimise the understanding of results based on the author's tacit knowledge.

Data Analysis

The process employed to analyse this exploration is akin to Heskett's (2005) strategy used to navigate a similar task of defining design. Confronting what he describes as the "confusing variables" surrounding design, Heskett argues that meaningful inquiry must proceed in two directions: first, by identifying the generic patterns of activity that underlie design's proliferation across domains, and second, by tracing these patterns historically to explain how contemporary conceptual ambiguity emerged. His approach—part conceptual pattern analysis, part historical genealogy—demonstrates that defining design requires both abstraction and contextualization.

This paper extends Heskett's logic into the governmental domain. Whereas Heskett sought to clarify design's broad disciplinary identity, the present study applies a similar analytic strategy to define design specifically as a governmental capability, mapping its interdisciplinary scope and tracing its evolution in public administration. In doing so, it builds on Heskett's insight that conceptual clarity emerges only when underlying patterns are made explicit and their historical development understood.

The results from this study are presented as a descriptive narrative of the synthesized information available at the time of the investigation. The data is summarized into a definition of design specific to the context of government.

Results

The results of this study reveal that design's identity—and the understanding of what design is—has evolved through centuries of inquiry by practitioners, theorists, and scholars who have interrogated its nature both within and beyond the traditional aesthetic-industry paradigm. As the manuscript notes, generations of thinkers "explored its existence from within its parameters and also dared to see beyond the limitations of the imposing traditional industry 'practice' paradigm," revealing the diverse dimensions that comprise the *what* and *how* of design (Kimbell, 2013). This long-standing discourse has examined design's etymology, attributes, and interdisciplinary connections to science (Simon, 1969), business and management (Boland & Collopy, 2004; Dunne & Martin, 2006), economics (Borja de Mozota, 2003), and other fields. It is within this broadened intellectual landscape that the present study situates design-in-government, stepping back to examine the theoretical

foundations that undergird design's past, present, and future capability in governmental contexts.

Challenges in Defining Design Capability and Government

The analysis confirms that the central challenge in this domain is conceptual: the core terms *design*, *capability*, and *government* are broad, multifaceted, and inconsistently defined across literature and practice. As the manuscript states, "design is a broad, multifaceted and complex word with a context that is unspecified" (European Commission, 2009; Heskett, 2005). This ambiguity complicates communication among stakeholders and hinders strategic integration of design in public administration. Dilnot's observation that design research must "bridge the divide between understanding and misunderstanding" (Dilnot in Heskett, 2017) is particularly relevant here, as practitioners and policymakers frequently report the absence of a shared reference point for the term (APDIG, 2014; Whicher, 2015; Whicher et al., 2012).

The results also show that misalignment of terminology occurs across local, regional, national, and international levels—an issue with significant implications given that design is increasingly used to address complex social, economic, environmental, and systemic challenges. Contributing factors include the persistence of the aesthetic paradigm, the rapid evolution of design practice disciplines, historical precedents of design use in government (Woodham, 2010), and the proliferation of design-related terminology across unrelated professions. These dynamics collectively underscore the necessity of defining design clearly and coherently within governmental contexts.

Conceptual Considerations: Design as a Construct of Concepts

The results affirm Dilnot's (1982) assertion that design "is constructed from words-as-concepts," containing tacit and aphoristic dimensions that shape distinctive modes of reasoning and practice. The notion of design as a *resource*—possessing the ability to evoke change—emerges as a central conceptual anchor. This perspective expands design beyond its tangible manifestations to include ideas, experiences, and intellectual activity, all of which are essential to understanding design's potential as a governmental capability (Cross, 2006; Krippendorff, 2006).

Capability, Design Capability and Government

The analysis of capability reveals three core meanings—ability, potential, and function—each of which appears in design-in-government literature. As summarized in the manuscript, capability may refer to natural ability, the "range of ability of doing or to do something," or the capacity to carry out specific operations. The literature on design capability reflects this diversity: some sources define it as individual skill (DeEP, 2014), others as sectoral human capital (Moultrie & Livesey, 2009), and others as organizational capacity for design use (European Commission, 2009). These interpretations span latent inputs, expressed outputs, and ranges of capacity.

The results show that this diversity contributes to confusion, particularly when paired with the inherent complexity of the term *design*. To address this, the study adopts capability as *potential*, defined as the range of ability of design to impact government. This framing encompasses both input (design's abilities) and output (design's effects), providing a unifying conceptual baseline that integrates the varied interpretations found in the literature. As the

manuscript notes, this perspective aligns with longstanding claims about design's "heroic capacity" to address global challenges (Papanek, 1972; Simon, 1981) and supports the development of a framework for documenting design's ability and impact in government.

Government as a Holistic System

The results also clarify the term *government*, adopting a high-level, whole-of-government perspective consistent with pan-government frameworks used by organizations such as the United Nations (Saha, 2010). This view treats government as a system encompassing policymaking, service delivery, governance instruments, administrative operations, and economic, social, environmental, cultural, systemic, and political dimensions. This holistic framing enables the study to consider design's potential impact across all areas of government and aligns with contemporary design-in-government literature (Bason, 2014; NESTA, 2017).

Design: Duality, Tangibility, and Intangibility

The results reaffirm that design's etymology positions it as both noun and verb—"a thing (object) as well as an activity (action or thought)" (Merriam-Webster, 2013; Oxford Dictionary, 2013). This duality reveals design's tangible and intangible manifestations, a foundational insight for understanding its interdisciplinary potential. Historically, design has been rooted in its identity as object, reflected in aesthetic expressions such as imperial architecture, national manufactories, and graphic identity programs (Woodham, 2010). Yet theorists such as Simon (1969) and Papanek (1972) expanded design's conceptual scope, defining it as a universal human activity aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones. This broader view positions design as an agent of change, comprising intellectual activity relevant to social, economic, and political leadership.

Contemporary theorists further illuminate design's multifaceted nature. Buchanan's (1992, 1998) orders of design—communication, construction, strategic planning, and systemic integration—provide a framework for examining design's tangible and intangible dimensions. Kimbell's distinction between design-as-practice and design-in-practice clarifies design's routinized professional activities and its emergent, evolving outcomes (Kimbell, 2009, 2016). Dilnot (1984) highlights the "impasse in design understanding," emphasizing the need to explicate design's abstract processes, modes of reasoning, and conceptual foundations. Together, these perspectives reveal design as profession, practice, activity, class, phenomenon, and thought—each contributing to its interdisciplinary potential and each complicating efforts to establish common language.

Evolving Practice and Contemporary Shifts

Finally, the results acknowledge the evolving nature of design practice. As the manuscript notes, methodological shifts over the past fifty years have expanded design beyond product-focused disciplines to include human-centred, collaborative, systemic, and evidence-based approaches (Di Russo, 2013; Rapp, 2020). These shifts highlight design's characteristic commonalities—user-centredness, problem-solving, collaboration, sustainability, and strategic integration—which Fry (2009) describes as elements of design's "agency" or "character." These intangible dimensions underscore design's potential as a governmental capability and reinforce the need for conceptual clarity.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that design's identity within government is multifaceted, interdisciplinary, and historically grounded. Yet despite its longstanding use, design's conceptual foundations in governmental contexts have remained underdeveloped. This gap has contributed to confusion, misalignment of terminology, and inconsistent application across jurisdictions (Whicher, 2015; Zitkus et al., 2018).

The synthesis presented here addresses this gap by articulating a structured, holistic understanding of design as capability. By integrating design's tangible and intangible dimensions, its manifestations, tools, outcomes, and characteristic qualities, the study provides a comprehensive conceptualization that aligns with both design theory and public-sector practice (Buchanan, 1992; Fry, 2009; Kimbell, 2013).

A central contribution of this research is the proposed definition of design as capability within government:

> Design exists in tangible and intangible dimensions as a resource to government. Within this context, design makes change through its process and outcomes manifested as signs and words, things, action and thought. Design exists as a field, ability and process, utilizing knowledge, skills and tools, producing tangible and intangible outputs that are impactful.

This definition fills several critical gaps identified in the literature and practice:

1. **It expands design's identity beyond narrow industry classifications** (Moultrie & Livesey, 2009).
2. **It establishes a common baseline of understanding for design-in-government** (European Commission, 2009).
3. **It eliminates the need for future researchers to define design before conducting analysis**, addressing a challenge noted across multiple design-policy studies (Cox, 2005; Design Council, 2007; Raulik-Murphy & Cawood, 2010).
4. **It clarifies the design industry's scope and contributions**, supporting efforts to articulate design's economic and social value (APDIG, 2013b; Heskett, 2005).
5. **It provides constructs needed by practitioners and policymakers working in this emergent field**, responding to calls for clearer terminology and conceptual grounding (APDIG, 2014; Whicher et al., 2012).

Importantly, this definition also supports intergovernmental collaboration. As governments increasingly work together to address transboundary crises—pandemics, climate change, migration, digital security—a shared language for tools and approaches such as design becomes essential (Bason, 2014; Saha, 2010). Without such shared terminology, coordination remains fragmented and design's potential impact underrealized.

Conclusion

This study provides the first structured, theoretically grounded definition of design as a governmental capability. By synthesizing interdisciplinary literature, tracing conceptual patterns, and aligning findings with a comprehensive conceptual framework, the research establishes the conceptual boundaries of design-in-government and offers a shared language for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers (Geraghty, 2022).

The proposed definition serves as both a strategic and tactical tool. As Buchanan (2001) notes, “definitions serve strategic and tactical purposes in inquiry… they allow an investigator or a group of individuals to clarify the direction of their work and move ahead.” In this spirit, the definition developed here provides a foundation for more coherent, strategic, and equitable application of design within and between governments (Bason, 2014; European Commission, 2009).

Taken together, these results establish a coherent conceptual foundation for understanding design as a governmental capability and proved a structured vocabulary for navigating its complexity. The framework developed in this study offers a transferable, analytically robust way to describe design’s identity, potential, and value across diverse contexts. By clarifying design’s conceptual terrain, this work enables governments - and any sector seeking to integrate design strategically-to move beyond fragmented interpretations toward a shared, holistic understanding. This conceptualization not only supports more deliberate and effective use of design in public administration, but also lays essential groundwork for subsequent empirical research, capability assessment, and policy development.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the international practitioners, policymakers, and design professionals who contributed insights that informed this research, as well as the academic colleagues whose feedback strengthened the work. Their support and engagement are gratefully appreciated.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Generative AI tools were used to assist with editing and formatting during the preparation of this paper. All ideas, analysis, and final decisions are the author’s own.

References

APDIG. (2013b). *The design industry: Policy perspectives*. All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group.

APDIG. (2014). *Designing value: Industry needs and policy recommendations*. All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group.

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 19–32.

Bason, C. (2014). *Design for policy*. Routledge.

Bason, C. (2017). Leading public design: How managers engage with design to transform public governance. *Public Management Review, 19*(1), 1–22.

Boland, R., & Collopy, F. (Eds.). (2004). *Managing as designing*. Stanford University Press.

Borja de Mozota, B. (2003). *Design management: Using design to build brand value and corporate innovation*. Allworth Press.

Boud, D., & Walker, D. (1998). Promoting reflection in professional courses: The challenge of context. *Studies in Higher Education, 23*(2), 191–206.

Buchanan, R. (1992). Wicked problems in design thinking. *Design Issues, 8*(2), 5–21.

Buchanan, R. (1998). Branzi's dilemma: Design in contemporary culture. *Design Issues, 14*(1), 3–20.

Buchanan, R. (2001). Design research and the new learning. *Design Issues, 17*(4), 3–23.

Cox, G. (2005). *The Cox Review of Creativity in Business: Building on the UK's strengths*. HM Treasury.

Cross, N. (2006). *Designerly ways of knowing*. Springer.

Cross, N. (2011). *Design thinking: Understanding how designers think and work*. Berg.

DeEP. (2014). *Design-enabled innovation: Indicators and frameworks*. European Commission.

Design Council. (2007). *The value of design: Design in Britain*. UK Design Council.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. D.C. Heath.

Dilnot, C. (1982). Design as a socially significant activity: An introduction. *Design Studies, 3*(3), 139–146.

Dilnot, C. (1984). The state of design research. *Design Issues, 1*(1), 3–23.

Dunne, D., & Martin, R. (2006). Design thinking and how it will change management education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 5*(4), 512–523.

European Commission. (2009). *Design as a driver of user-centred innovation*. European Commission.

European Commission. (2010). *Design as a driver of user-centred innovation*. European Commission.

Fry, T. (2009). *Design futuring: Sustainability, ethics and new practice*. Berg.

Geraghty, R. (2022). *Understanding the capability of design in government* (PhD thesis). Cranfield University, United Kingdom.

Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science imagination*. Sage.

Heskett, J. (2005). *Design: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Heskett, J. (2017). *Design and the creation of value*. Bloomsbury.

Kimbell, L. (2009). Beyond design thinking: Design-as-practice and design-in-practice. *CRESC Working Paper Series*.

Kimbell, L. (2013). The dimensions of design practice. *Design Issues, 29*(2), 67–80.

Kimbell, L. (2016). *Designing in organizations: Design practice and organizational change*. Routledge.

Krippendorff, K. (2006). *The semantic turn: A new foundation for design*. CRC Press.

Merriam-Webster. (2013). *Design*. Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Moultrie, J., & Livesey, F. (2009). *International design scoreboard: A global benchmarking study*. University of Cambridge Institute for Manufacturing.

NESTA. (2017). *Innovation in public services: Design for government*. NESTA.

Oxford Dictionary. (2013). *Design*. Oxford University Press.

Papanek, V. (1972). *Design for the real world*. Pantheon Books.

Pettigrew, A., & Roberts, C. (2006). *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Blackwell.

Rapp, C. (2020). Contemporary shifts in design practice. *Journal of Design Theory, 12*(2), 45–62.

Raulik-Murphy, G., & Cawood, G. (2010). National design systems: A comparative analysis. *Design Management Journal, 5*(1), 1–12.

Saha, P. (2010). *Enterprise architecture as strategy for connected government*. United Nations.

Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

SEE. (2012). *SEE platform: Design for innovation*. European Commission.

Simon, H. (1969). *The sciences of the artificial*. MIT Press.

Simon, H. (1981). *The sciences of the artificial* (2nd ed.). MIT Press.

Whicher, A. (2015). Design policy and public-sector innovation. *Journal of Design Management, 9*(1), 1–12.

Whicher, A., Cawood, G., & Walters, A. (2012). *Design capability in the public sector*. SEE Policy Booklet.

Woodham, J. (2010). *A history of design: The evolution of design practice*. Berg.

Zitkus, B., et al. (2018). Barriers to design adoption in government. *Public Administration Review, 78*(4), 612–624.

Contact email: rhonda@geraghty.com

Academising Sociology: Identifying Four Fields of René Worms' Communication Strategy for the International Institute of Sociology

Christopher Montel, Charles University, Czech Republic

The Paris Conference on Arts and Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The French sociologist René Worms (1869–1926) is recognised as a brilliant organiser who managed to recruit prestigious collaborators across borders and vocations for his International Institute of Sociology. This achievement is also held against him—namely, the expected failure to produce anything substantial at a propositional or methodological level from such an assemblage of academics, statesmen, or even novelists. Worms' recruitment policy nevertheless played a part in a wider communication strategy that contributed to the institutionalisation of sociology as an academic discipline through a logic of academisation. Academisation is here defined as Worms' adaptive art of communicating, as the leader of the IIS, in terms of an academy, and in a context of setbacks, crises, and competition. Worms referred to his International Institute of Sociology as a "special academy" or "world academy", an "authorised guardian", and a "regulating centre" for sociology. Worms' communication strategy speaks to wider topics, e.g., the vocational challenge facing sociology, or the role of awards and ceremonies, office and authorisation as control mechanisms over an expanding but irredeemably discordant sociological movement during this period. This paper identifies four fields in which Worms monitored events and developments as signs of an inexorable path towards the recognition of sociology: 1) awards and titles, 2) politics, 3) academia, and 4) protocol within the IIS. This approach helps redefine the standards by which Worms has been studied in historiography, by focussing on the organisational culture of the period, which helped shape and orient his communication strategy for the IIS.

Keywords: academisation of sociology, leadership, communication strategy

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Between 1893 and 1895, the young advocate of sociology René Worms (1869–1926) founded a set of organisations whose creation represents a landmark in the institutionalisation of sociology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among these organisations were the specialised periodical *La Revue internationale de sociologie* (RIS) in 1893, the *Institut international de sociologie* (IIS) in mid-1893, and its related *Annales* (AIIS) in 1895.

The IIS has often been assessed collaterally to Worms and his overall legacy (e.g., Clark, 1967; Geiger, 1975; Karady, 1974; Mosbah-Natanson, 2008a, 2014; Mucchielli, 1998). Recent studies have focussed on Worms' leadership in his organisations independently of his contributions as a sociologist (e.g., Mosbah-Natanson, 2015; Rol, 2015). They highlight Worms as an "editorial entrepreneur" (Mosbah-Natanson, 2008b, p. 71). Worms' leadership style was highly dependent on his communication strategy. Even his publications discussing sociological theory can be read as communicational rather than propositionally coherent in nature. This was noted, and criticised, by early collaborators (e.g., RIS, 1895, p. 996, 1904, p. 779)[1]. Worms was celebrated for his role in the "rebirth of sociology in Europe" in IIS congress speeches (AIIS, 1904, pp. 54–55) before being classified by historiography, at best, as an institutional founder of sociology—in opposition to a theoretical one (e.g., Baehr, 2002, p. 10).

The IIS was created in July 1893. Its stated purpose was to organise congresses and allow its participants to legislate on sociology as its "authorised guardian" and "regulating centre" (AIIS, 1895, p. VI). The formal setting of the IIS was akin to an elite academy of mostly university-based academics (Borlandi, 2015, p. 106). Worms' initiative in this domain would indeed qualify him as an "academic entrepreneur" (Heilbron et al., 2009, p. 327), and the IIS has already been described as a "scientific academy" (Skovajsa, 2020, p. 42). Worms himself occasionally referred to the IIS as a "special academy" (RIS, 1903, p. 3) or "world academy" (RIS, 1914, p. 85), but also as a "grand jury court of sociology" (RIS, 1921, p. 443).

This presentation revisits the International Institute of Sociology as an attempt by Worms to better legitimise sociology as a science through a strategy of academisation.

Academisation as a Communication Strategy for the IIS Amidst Setbacks and Crises

The term "academisation" has already been used to describe reforms in higher education at the end of the 19th century (Lybeck, 2021). However, academisation is here defined as Worms' adaptive art of communicating, as leader of the IIS, in terms of a "world academy", amidst setbacks, crises, and competition. This concept of academisation should exclude any notion of effectively devising such an academy, having it officially named as such, or overriding the prerogatives of existing academies of sciences. It does, however, reflect Worms' intent in the mid-1890s to convince his audience of the necessity of an academic guardianship for sociology.

The IIS survived for many decades a series of setbacks, e.g., when organicism was resoundingly rejected in the late 1890s (AIIS, 1898, pp. 169–339). Participants at IIS congresses themselves complained about the inability to produce congress resolutions (e.g., ibid., p. 261). Nevertheless, IIS congresses continued to be organised on a triennial basis with ever-increasing participation (e.g., AIIS, 1907, p. 46, 1913, p. 39). In the early years of the RIS,

[1] Worms championed organicism for the value which it enjoyed across disciplines as a "language", in order to organise a common jargon for sociology (cf. Schlanger, 1992, p. 293).

Worms and other collaborators signed articles that ambitiously called for a radical transformation in higher education, where sociology would become an epistemological hegemon. These expectations drew on the reforms that did take place in higher education during the late 19th century (cf. Musselin, 2001), but they never materialised. Worms' brand of "high institutionalisation" (cf. Voříšek, 2008, p. 89) was dependent on this expected reorganisation (cf. Cuin et al., 2017, p. 75)[2]. Instead, the RIS was left to monitor the slow and incremental process of introducing sociology as a specialised and autonomous university discipline.

By the late mid-1890s, Worms had ceased publishing articles in the RIS as a bold instigator of reform (cf. RIS, 1902, pp. 954–955). He simultaneously began communicating more frequently in the RIS and in his opening speeches at IIS congresses on the recruitment, careers, and distinctions of IIS members and associates. He also defended supervisory prerogatives for the IIS over an increasing number of partner sociological societies, laboratories, and institutes being created across borders[3]. Worms' communication strategy thus consisted in justifying the relevance of the IIS within an increasingly uncontrollable sociological movement.

The worst period of crisis for the IIS was undoubtedly the First World War and its aftermath. The protracted conflict forced Worms to suspend its activities, and he was never able to resume its congresses in his lifetime. This inability was compounded in the early 1920s by a project that Worms publicly denounced as usurping the IIS and its prerogatives: the Italian Francesco Cosentini's *Istituto internazionale di sociologia e riforme politiche e sociali* (IISRPS). In the RIS, Worms vehemently asserted that the IIS was the only legitimate body for organising international academic congresses in sociology. This exacerbated a logic of hegemony over the sociological movement (cf. Rol, 2015, p. 132, n. 47).

Scope of Audience, Restricted Access and Appropriation of the Sociological Movement

Worms' communication strategy targeted a core of academics while reassuring broader educated publics that sociology was neither a fad nor subversive (e.g., Mosbah-Natanson, 2017; Sapiro, 2004, p. 16). The audience for Worms' communication strategy in the RIS was wider than that of Émile Durkheim's *L'Année sociologique* (AS). The AS was published annually and usually consisted of a section for main articles and a section for peer reviews. In contrast, the RIS additionally fulfilled the function of an observer of the sociological movement. Initially a bi-monthly periodical, it became a monthly publication in its second year in 1894[4]. It could therefore monitor recent events and developments more frequently—developments it interpreted as steps in an inexorable process of institutionalisation for sociology.

Worms wanted his organisations not only to provide the sociological movement with legitimate bodies but also to structure its verticalisation. He emphasised the importance of a clear academic demarcation line. Worms' communication strategy consisted, to the point of

[2] For instance, Worms identified the *Collège de France* and the *Museum d'histoire naturelle* as possible candidates to spearhead his projected faculty of social sciences (RIS, 1895, p. 952).
[3] This contributed to his successor Guillaume Léonce Duprat's federalisation project between the IIS and partnered sociological societies in the 1930s (cf. Rol, 2011), which can be considered, at least partly, as yet another form of institutional communication and leadership assertion.
[4] Even if it was less impacted by WWI than Durkheim's AS (cf. Mucchielli, 1998, p. 522), the RIS once again became a bi-monthly periodical in 1917 and remained so for the rest of its first series (1893–1939).

redundancy, in the repeated use of the notion of "authorisation" (i.e., prior clearance). The IIS was always presented in terms of restricted access to its congresses (e.g., RIS, 1895, p. 715; RIS, 1905, pp. 574–575) and a "quality of quantity" policy for its interventions (RIS, 1925, pp. 346–347). Audiences at IIS congresses were described as "elite" (AIIS, 1913, p. 39) to distinguish an even higher level of actively participating congressmen.

Communicating on and Justifying Recruitment at the IIS

Worms' recruitment policy for his organisations has been negatively assessed as counter-productive to professionalisation and specialisation in the field of sociology (cf. Cuin et al., 2017; Mosbah-Natanson, 2008a, 2014; Mucchielli, 1998). He recruited members and associates on a lifetime basis, without any requirement regarding methodological adherence or effective participation. This hindered the credibility of his organisations, which historiography has likened to "empty shells" (Mosbah-Natanson, 2008a, p. 42). Worms' successors, such as Duprat in the 1930s, later attempted to evict non-active members and associates because this was by then understood to be detrimental to the IIS (RIS, 1934, p. 5).

Similarly, Worms' recruitment policy was not restricted to profiles that were exclusively academic and dedicated to a "disciplinarisation" (Blanckaert, 2006, p. 138) of sociology. Yet it remained coherent with his desire to present the IIS as an academy that admitted new members by sponsorship, and for which many spontaneous applications were reportedly turned down (AIIS, 1895, p. XXIV, 1897, p. 26). Worms began monitoring the recruitment of new IIS members and associates in the RIS in October 1896 (RIS, 1896, p. 766). He relied on a specifically academic form of authority (cf. Mosbah-Natanson, 2015, p. 192). Establishing the IIS as an official representative body for sociology required the support of academia. For instance, after referring to it as a "world academy", Worms immediately added that the IIS held triennial congresses in the "universities of the main capital cities" (RIS, 1914, p. 85). The Paris congresses from 1897 to 1903, as well as those held in London, Bern, and Rome between 1906 and 1912, provided such an opportunity, which Worms had from the outset presented as an achievement for the IIS and for sociology (RIS, 1897, p. 657).

Worms was able to recruit in his lifetime a remarkable panel of academics whose names resonate far more positively in the historiography of sociology than Worms himself (Mosbah-Natanson, 2008a, p. 43; Mucchielli, 1998, p. 149). These names, however, appear in the lists of members and associates of the IIS alongside others that can hardly be associated with the history of sociology, at least by non-specialists—e.g., the statesmen James Arthur Balfour, Georges Clémenceau, Raymond Poincaré, and Woodrow Wilson, the novelist H. G. Wells, or the Esperanto advocate and pacifist activist Gaston Moch. Moreover, dozens of associates were batch-recruited over the years to secure ties with sociological societies abroad in preparation for congresses in their cities of affiliation. This was the case, for instance, for sixteen members of the London Sociological Society (LSS), including Wells (RIS, 1905, pp. 254–255), for the London congress (RIS, 1906, p. 498)[5]. Allied statesmen were batch-recruited in the years following WWI, but Worms always made a point of justifying their inclusion. Clémenceau, for instance, was admitted to the IIS as the translator of John Stuart Mill's work on Auguste Comte (RIS, 1922, p. 639), while excerpts of Wilson's publications were printed in the RIS (e.g., RIS, 1920, pp. 1–21), each time in an effort to label them as sociologists.

[5] Balfour would later be authorised in 1912 as a member of the IIS in his capacity as president of the LSS (RIS, 1912, p. 254).

Four Fields That Were Invested by Worms' Communication Strategy

1. appropriating external honours as indirect validation for sociology,
2. celebrating members' political careers as sociology "entering" government,
3. monitoring academic promotions, especially new sociology chairs, while stressing leadership roles and interdisciplinary prestige to bolster the IIS's academy-like image,
4. emphasising protocol to align sociology with modern scientific internationalism and impose the IIS as its exclusive guardian.

Selected Examples for Each Field

Awards, Orders and Titles

The RIS reported, for instance, that Gabriel Tarde had been awarded the *Légion d'honneur* in 1895 (RIS, 1895, p. 715)[6] and that Lester Ward had been awarded the *Palme académique* rank title of *Officier de l'Instruction publique* in 1904 (AIIS, 1904, p. 46; RIS, 1904, p. 78). Both Tarde and Ward were early members of the IIS, and Tarde was a close collaborator of Worms (RIS, 1904, p. 398). Worms attempted to appropriate these types of events for the benefit of sociology and/or his organisations. In these reports, he believed that Tarde should have been decorated for his sociological works rather than for his judicial career. He claimed that Ward, who also had several other engagements and connections in France, had been awarded the title for having presided over the fifth IIS congress in Paris.

Some of the distinctions reported in the RIS were as formally disconnected from sociology as the peerage of the first IIS president, the British anthropologist John Lubbock, as Baron of Avebury. This peerage was praised as an academic promotion among others (RIS, 1900, p. 78)[7]. However inconsistent these reappropriations might sound, they can also be read as a way to compensate for the lack of recognition from which many advocates of sociology believed their discipline was suffering.

Monitoring Political Careers of IIS Members

Worms celebrated the entry into politics of some of his collaborators, thereby reappropriating these career evolutions as an advantage for sociology itself (e.g., RIS, 1906, pp. 78–79). To this end, Worms encouraged Léon Bourgeois, an IIS member since 1904 (RIS, 1904, p. 873), to "no longer decline power" as he became French Minister of Foreign Affairs (RIS, 1906, p. 299). He would do the same when Édouard Herriot (RIS, 1905, p. 924, 1906, p. 77). The communicational spin consisted in presenting the IIS as lending its members to Government.

Generally speaking, Worms' recruitment policy was coherent with his widely shared views on the relation that sociology would enjoy with already established sciences. In terms of human resources, this meant that sociology could only be elaborated sporadically and on an avocational basis–unpaid and on the side of a continued professorial, university-based activity. The reward for IIS members and associates was to contribute to sociology at the expense of their careers, often with a vocabulary that conveyed the idea of sacrifice for science. Worms conveyed this sense of sacrifice particularly in his eulogies at IIS congresses and in his

[6] Worms would also mention Tarde's acceptance into the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* of the *Institut de France* in 1900 (RIS, 1904, p. 400).
[7] The RIS also reported that Lubbock, as Baron of Avebury, was later awarded in 1903 the medal of *Grand Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur* (RIS, 1903, p. 606).

obituaries in the RIS. He contrasted this dedication to science with sometimes radically different careers, within or even outside academia. For example, rather than enjoying careers as high-ranking state officials, some IIS members and associates had chosen the less rewarding but more noble commitment to science (AIIS, 1904, p. 34). Worms might also have been evoking his own relationship with academia, as a State official at the *Conseil d'État* (cf. Vanneuville, 2003).

The political and geopolitical upheaval in the wake of WWI also brought unprecedented opportunities to Worms' communication strategy. Past and present political careers of IIS members from Allied and neutral states[8] were exploited to provide some justification for its continued existence (cf. Rol, 2023, p. 103). In 1919, the IIS boasted of having had, in its history, a total of four heads of state as members, including the Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and the American president Wilson (RIS, 1919, p. 215). Worms labelled them as "highly qualified sociologists" (ibid.). The advantages Worms sought from putting forward IIS members were obviously related to these collaborators' stature as statesmen[9]. Masaryk, however, corresponded to a profile that Worms could additionally exploit as a historic[10] IIS member[11].

Monitoring Academic Careers of IIS Members and Associates

Worms believed that sociology had to feed on all sciences, including botanical science (RIS, 1909, p. 151). But when it came to communicating on the academic careers of his new recruits at the IIS, he discriminated between more or less relevant disciplines. In 1896, the newly recruited American Ward and the Italian Achille Loria were both presented as authors of reference works in sociology (RIS, 1896, op. cit.). But Loria was also presented as a professor of political economy (ibid.). For Worms, this was one of the more legitimate academic disciplines for a sociological vocation (cf. Papilloud, 2015, p. 69). Ward, however, was working for the United States Geological Survey (USGS), which Worms did not mention. Later, Worms monitored Ward's appointment in 1906 to the chair of sociology at Brown University and his departure from the USGS (RIS, 1906, p. 574). But he also insisted on this occasion that Ward had been an active member of the IIS for the past ten years, as well as one of its former presidents and the first president, still in office, of the American Sociological Society/Association (ASA) (ibid.). Ward's authorisation as a sociologist rested on these titles and functions at least as much as on his newly appointed professorship in sociology. Once again, the use of such terms as "abandoning" and "devoting" (RIS, 1906, op. cit.) also reflected Worms' belief that sociology, as a final legislative science, could only be an object of sacrifice, not career advancement.

[8] The IIS had also counted a significant number of members and associates from Central European powers who had been involved in politics before WWI, admittedly not as heads of state (e.g., Albert Schäffle, Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Albín Bráf or Albert Apponyi). Worms had indiscriminately communicated on political careers regardless of geopolitics and diplomacy before WWI.

[9] Worms named Masaryk president of the 1921 bureau, which was vice-presided by Wilson, Poincaré and the former Portuguese president Bernardino Machado (cf. Rol, 2023, p. 103). Clémenceau was the president of the following bureau, and Balfour a vice-president of the 1923 bureau. Moreover, recruiting statesmen was a common feature of scientific academies. Clémenceau had recently become a member of the *Académie française* in late November 1918, while Poincaré had been one of its members since 1909.

[10] Masaryk had been recruited in August 1894, as a professor of philosophy at Charles University in Prague. Worms, R. (1894, August 14). [Letter to T. G. Masaryk]. *TGM Archival Fund* (k. P-65, i. č. P-19-7). Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic.

[11] Ibid., (1898, May 12). (k. P-197, i. č. P-30-9).
The RIS also published a speech which Masaryk gave in Paris during WWI (RIS, 1916, pp. 325–342).

Worms, however, did recognise the importance of these growing career opportunities for the institutionalisation of sociology, as when he celebrated Durkheim's new title at the University of Paris in 1913 as "Professor of educational science and sociology", calling it a "consecration of our science" (RIS, 1913, p. 596). This formalisation further enhanced the prestige of the IIS when it concerned its members and associates. In 1911, Worms reported on Ward's transfer to Columbia University in a continued effort to "teach sociology" and insisted that the "official titles" of Franklin Henry Giddings at the same university had included sociology since 1894 (RIS, 1911, p. 381)[12]. At least 30 members and associates of the IIS recruited before WWI were officially presented at some point in the AIIS lists as "professors/privatdozent/associate professors of sociology"[13]. But a professorial position in the field of sociology, particularly before WWI, could not provide Worms with the kind of authority he sought from his collaborators' *curricula vitae* for the IIS as a "world academy". He complemented, whenever possible, this advertising with leadership positions, not only in the organisational apparatus from which sociology was benefiting[14] – such as specialised periodicals and societies – but also in scientific academies across borders. An IIS member would ideally be presented in full regalia in several domains, e.g., as an academic, an academician, a member of a sociological society, a law official, a diplomat and/or a politician (e.g., RIS, 1897, p. 937).

Monitoring Protocol at the IIS as a "World Academy"

Worms created his organisations during a period of exponential increase in international scientific organisations and congresses, which provided the backbone for scientific internationalism (cf. Sapiro et al., 2009; Tournès, 2016). This movement, whose main epicentre was in Brussels (cf. Davies, 2022; Van Acker, 2014; Wils & Rasmussen, 2012), became highly self-promotional by the 1900s, giving as much importance to communication (cf. Verbruggen et al., 2022, pp. 4–5) as Worms did for his own organisations – for instance with the *Annuaire de la vie internationale* (AVI)[15]. Worms invested in this internationalist field mostly for communication purposes. He positively monitored the creation of international organisations in the RIS, particularly when collaborators to his organisations were involved (e.g., RIS, 1903, p. 342, 1895, pp. 1066–1067, 1903, p. 795)[16]. Worms also recruited some of the leading figures of the internationalist movement as IIS associates (e.g., RIS, 1909, pp. 317, 765) and in preparation for the 1909 IIS congress in Bern, Switzerland – perhaps the most internationalist of all IIS congresses before WWI[17]. Moreover, the RIS reported that the IIS had been represented at the first World Congress of International Associations in Brussels in 1910 by one of its Belgian internationalist members (RIS, 1910, p. 534).

[12] The significant advance that American scholars were enjoying in this domain in comparison with Europe before WWI was monitored early on in the RIS (e.g., RIS, 1893, p. 278, 1895, pp. 623–624).
[13] This list does not include variants such as "professor in social sciences/social economics/social philosophy".
[14] Even positions of treasurer in sociological societies were put forward (AIIS, 1907, p. 30).
[15] The AVIs provided a number of chapters that dealt, for instance, with the "structure", "object", "types", cooperation between organisations, "offices and congresses", as well as "various activities" of international associations (e.g., AVI, 1908–9, pp. 37–152).
[16] Many IIS members and associates, such as Apponyi, Böhm-Bawerk, Bourgeois, Lubbock, Novicow, Charles Gide or Gyula Mandelló, were implicated in internationalist peace organisations that advocated for peace and/or for the adoption of an international language, as well as in international documentation (e.g., RIS, 1903, p. 342; AVI, 1910–11, pp. 834–836; Congrès mondial des associations internationales, 1911, p. 546; cf. Gülich, 1992, pp. 111–114).
[17] The International Institute for Peace, for instance, had backed the IIS member Ludwig Stein's invitation at the 1906 IIS congress in London to hold the next IIS congress in Bern (AIIS, 1907, p. 45).

An internationalist contextualisation provides an effective methodology to understand the organisational culture (cf. Bogale & Debela, 2024) on which Worms based his communication strategy for the IIS as a "world academy". He advertised IIS protocol in ways synonymous with modernity and accountability, presenting the IIS as functioning strictly according to "scrupulous regulation" (AIIS, 1899, p. 25)–for instance during administrative meetings (e.g., AIIS, 1907, p. 35). Recruitment at the IIS was presented as respecting carefully organised subsections of an official body that embraced not only the international but also the infra-national, with certain seats supposedly reserved for "non-Parisian French members" (RIS, 1914, p. 619).

There are two domains where Worms' communication strategy heavily relied on a sense of protocol: (1) the relationship with other organisations – including sociological societies and perceived rivals and usurpers – and (2) the conduct of congresses at an administrative and event-management level.

Relationship With Other Organisations

Monitoring associational life and initiatives in the domain of sociology across borders obeyed Worms' original declaration of intent for the RIS to "organise sociology" (RIS, 1893, pp. 1–3). Worms monitored co-optation between his organisations and other scientific societies, including his own nomination as honorary member or vice-president (e.g., RIS, 1900, p. 239, 1923b, p. 445). Sociological societies were presented as organic extensions, or "cadet sisters" (AIIS, 1907, p. 50), of Worms' organisations, either during speeches (AIIS, 1910, pp. 71–72, 74) or in recapitulative lists in the RIS (e.g., RIS, 1907, p. 318). The Italian Sociological Society was allegedly created for the purpose of organising the 1912 IIS congress in Rome (AIIS, 1910, p. 32). Behind this paternalistic discourse (cf. Rol, 2015, op. cit.) lay an attempt by Worms to bring endeavours by IIS members with potentially competing agendas back into the fold of his "world academy". Similar enterprises to his own were positively monitored, but often with an urge to present them as reiterations of his pioneering efforts, e.g., in the case of the Belgian Ernest Solvay's and Cosentini's sociological laboratory projects (RIS, 1901, p. 711).

Worms's insistence on precedence, hierarchy and legitimism in the organisational endeavour for sociology was exacerbated after WWI. Allied victory in 1918 had not worked to the advantage of the IIS, which Worms had refused to transform into an Inter-Allied organisation (cf. Tournès, 2016). He kept suspending its activities rather than officially exclude its German, Austrian or Hungarian members, arguing that the time had not yet come for "truly international meetings" (RIS, 1923, p. 657). Worms, however, reassured his readership that IIS congresses had been envisaged as soon as 1918 (ibid.) but also publicised his intent to copyright the term "International Institute of Sociology" (RIS, 1921, p. 648, 1924, p. 101) and insisted, for the 30th anniversary of the IIS, on the precedence that it was meant to enjoy over any sociological organisation (RIS, 1923, p. 3). This narrative was meant to preserve the integrity of the IIS from usurping projects, namely Cosentini's aforementioned IISRPS. Worms adopted an unusually aggressive tone towards Cosentini after the holding of the first IISRPS congresses in Turin and Vienna[18] in 1921 and 1922 respectively, which was noted by IIS members themselves (e.g., Michels, 1930). After criticising the lack of demarcation between scientific and practical issues regarding the topics of discussion, Worms dismissed the IISRPS as illegitimate because Cosentini had been able to gather mostly participants from the still-

[18] Ironically, the IIS had meant to hold its original ninth congress in Vienna in 1915, before postponing it indefinitely (RIS, 1915, p. 665).

ostracised Germanic world, but also because only several "economists", and no true "sociologist", were willing to collude with such a project (RIS, 1921, pp. 655–656). Cosentini was no longer presented in the RIS as a former RIS contributor or a member of Worms' organisations, but simply as the librarian and visiting professor at the University of Turin (RIS, 1921, p. 655). Worms thus used symbolic authority conferred by academic positions to uphold the exclusive prerogative of his "world academy" to decide when and how scientific internationalism in the field of sociology was allowed to resume.

Managing Congresses

Opening and closing speeches by various local and national officials during IIS congresses contrasted with the explicit banning of any such interference at the first congresses of the German Sociological Society (e.g., RIS, 1910, p. 813, 1912, p. 829). The RIS and the AIIS also reported on dancing halls and toasts given during banquets (AIIS, 1907, p. 39, 1910, p. 42, 1913, p. 43). Similarly, Otlet considered receptions, concerts, garden parties, galas and "all kinds of entertainment imaginable" (AVI, 1908–9, p. 134) as part and parcel of any successful scientific congress, albeit sometimes excessively (ibid., p. 135). In the case of the IIS, these receptions were organised by the local organisational committees of the congresses in coordination with partner sociological societies. Worms saluted these efforts essentially for diplomatic reasons with these collaborators. But his descriptions of IIS congress entertainment were also about matching for the sake of sociology what was being lavished in the name of other sciences. The AVI reported, for instance, that a hair salon, among other "accessory services", was available for "the ladies" at the 1908 Berlin Congress of Historical Sciences and its 8,000 members (ibid., p. 133), according to a strict observance of gender-based social roles during this period. Otlet noted that women benefited from half-price entry cards to some congresses since "many ladies only attend parties, receptions and visits" (ibid., p. 52). Worms similarly commented on the "beauty" and "elegant charm" that women brought to his congresses (e.g., AIIS, 1913, p. 40) and implied that, since women were apparently "averse to abstract matters" (AIIS, 1896, p. 48), their presence might cast doubt on the serious nature of IIS congresses. Worms, a man of his time, was concerned above all with the recognition of sociology as a science and the IIS as its "authorised guardian" (AIIS, 1895, op. cit.).

Conclusion

Worms manufactured legitimacy for his IIS partly by reappropriating the symbolic capital of existing academies. The IIS thus functioned less as a research centre than as a "guardian" that claimed the right to "authorise" what counted as sociology. This high-institutionalisation project, however, remained fragile precisely because it was more communicative than substantive. It survived crises and wars by narrative rather than by a capacity for autonomous, propositional production.

Worms' discourse framed sociological engagement avocationally rather than as a profession. IIS members were celebrated for sacrificing career to serve a higher calling. Sociology appeared as an avocational crown of sorts: an elite service to science that revealed its pre-professional character. This ethos allowed Worms to recruit polymaths, statesmen, and even novelists, but it also exposed its fundamental aversity to specialisation. The IIS could indeed claim universality only by tolerating a porous boundary between sociology and other fields.

Finally, Worms aligned his academy with the exponential growth of international scientific organisations before WWI. By producing the same type of protocol, congress rituals, and self-

promotional language of the internationalist movement, he positioned the IIS as sociology's exclusive diplomatic representative. His ultimate failure to resume congresses after WWI and the rivalry with Cosentini's IISRPS only confirmed that the international field itself had become a site of institutional competition. Worms' "academisation" strategy therefore reveals institutionalisation as a communicative performance (cf. Schlanger 1992, op. cit.), vocation as an elite sacrificial ethos, and internationalisation as a power-laden process. In this light, the IIS stands as both a pioneering and cautionary chapter in the history of the social sciences.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

References

Annales de l'Institut international de sociologie [Annals of the International Institute of Sociology]. (1895–1913). *Volumes 1–14*. Giard et Brière.

Annuaire de la Vie internationale [Annuary of International Life]. (1908–1909). *(Vol. 4)*. Office central des associations internationales.

Baehr, P. (2002). *Founders, classics, canons: Modern disputes over the origins and appraisal of sociology's heritage*. Transaction Publishers. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203791615

Blanckaert, C. (2006). La discipline en perspective. Le système des sciences à l'heure du spécialisme (XIX^{e}-XX^{e} siècle) [Discipline in Perspective. The System of Sciences in the Age of Specialisation]. In J. Boutier, J.-C. Passeron, & J. Revel (Eds.), *Qu'est-ce qu'une discipline? Enquête* (Vol. 5, pp. 117–148). EHESS.

Bogale, A. T., & Debela, K. L. (2024). Organizational culture: A systematic review. *Cogent Business & Management, 11*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2340129

Borlandi, M. (2015). René Worms critique d'Émile Durkheim, qui l'ignore [René Worms Critic of Durkheim, who Ignores him]. *Les Études sociales, 161–162*(1), 87–118.

Clark, T. N. (1967). Marginality, eclecticism and innovation: René Worms and the Revue internationale de sociologie from 1893 to 1914. *Revue internationale de sociologie, 3*(1–3), 12–27.

Congrès mondial des associations internationales [World Congress of International Associations]. (1911). *Rapports spéciaux* [Special reports]. Office central des associations internationales.

Cuin, C.-H., Gresle F., & Hervouet, R. (2017). *Histoire de la sociologie* [History of Sociology] (4th ed.). La Découverte. https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.cuinc.2017.01

Davies, T. R. (2022). The roles of transnational associations in the World Order in the 1919 Paris Peace Settlement: A comparative assessment of proposals and their influence. *Contemporary European History, 31*, 353–367. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000436

Geiger, R. (1975). The institutionalization of sociological paradigms: Three examples from early French sociology. *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences, 11*(3), 235–245. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6696(197507)11:3<235::AID-JHBS2300110304>3.0.CO;2-A

Gülich, C. (1992). Le rôle de la coopération scientifique internationale dans la constitution de la sociologie en Europe (1890-1914) [The Role of Scientific Cooperation in the Institutionalisation of Sociology in Europe]. *Les débuts des sciences de l'homme, numéro spécial de Communications, 54*(1), 105–117. https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1992.1816

Heilbron, J., Guilhot, N. & Jeanpierre, L. (2009). Internationalisation des sciences sociales: les leçons d'une histoire transnationale [Internationalisation of Social Sciences: the Lessons of a Transnational History]. In G. Sapiro et al. (Eds.), *L'espace intellectuel en Europe: de la formation des États-nations à la mondialisation, XIX^e^-XXI^e^ siècle*. (pp. 319–346). La Découverte. https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.sapir.2009.01.0319

Karady, V. (1974). Stratification intellectuelle, rapports sociaux et institutionnalisation : enquête socio-historique sur la naissance de la discipline sociologique en France [Intellectual Stratification, Social Relations and Institutionalisation: a Social-Historical Study on the Birth of the Discipline of Sociology in France]. *A.T.P. du CNRS numéro 6348. Rapport scientifique*. Centre de Sociologie Européen.

Lybeck, E. (2021). *The university revolution*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351017558

Michels, R. (1930). The status of sociology in Italy. *Social Forces, 9*(1), 20–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/2570079

Mosbah-Natanson, S. (2008a). Internationalisme et tradition nationale: le cas de la constitution de la sociologie française autour de 1900 [Internationalism and National Tradition: The Institutionalisation of French Sociology cca. 1900]. *Revue d'histoire des sciences sociales, 18*, 35–62. https://doi.org/10.3917/rhsh.018.0035

Mosbah-Natanson, S. (2008b). Thesis summary. *Bulletin de la Société française pour l'histoire des sciences de l'homme, 32*(1), 68–74.

Mosbah-Natanson, S. (2014). The forgotten one of the triad: Why did René Worms, and not Émile Durkheim or Gabriel Tarde, fail? In P. Wisselgren, P. Baehr, & K. Yui (Eds.), *Conference Proceedings of the Research Committee on History of Sociology*. (pp. 161–167). 14th ISA World Congress of Sociology in Yokohama, 13th-19th July 2014.

Mosbah-Natanson, S. (2015). René Worms, directeur de la collection 'Bibliothèque Sociologique Internationale' [René Worms, Director of the International Sociological Library Collection]. *Les Études sociales, 161–162,* 175–199. https://doi.org/10.3917/etsoc.161.0175

Mosbah-Natanson, S. (2017). *Une « mode » de la sociologie* [Sociology as a "Fashion"]. Bibliothèque des sciences sociales. Classiques Garnier.

Mucchielli, L. (1998). *La découverte du social. Naissance de la sociologie en France (1870-1914)* [The Discovery of the Social. The Birth of Sociology in France]. La Découverte. https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.mucch.1998.01

Musselin, C. (2022). *La longue marche des universités françaises* [The Long March of French Universities]. Presses Universitaires de France.

Papilloud, C. (2015). René Worms et l'économie politique [René Worms and Political Economy]. *Les Études sociales, 161–162*, 69–86. https://doi.org/10.3917/etsoc.161.0069

Revue internationale de sociologie [*International Review of Sociology*]. (1893–1925). *First series* (Vols. 1–33). Giard et Brière.

Rol, C. (2011). Guillaume-Léonce Duprat (1872-1956), l'Institut International de Sociologie et l'Allemagne dans l'entre-deux-guerres [Guillaume Léonce Duprat, the International Institute of Sociology and Germany during the Interwar Period]. *Lendemains, 36*(141), 18–42.

Rol, C. (2015). La Société de sociologie de Paris: un continent méconnu (1895-1952) [The Paris Sociological Society, An Ill-known Continent]. *Les Études sociales, 161–162*, 119–173. https://doi.org/10.3917/etsoc.161.0119

Rol, C. (2017). Wilhelm Jerusalem lecteur d'Émile Durkheim: méthode, connaissance, morale [Wilhelm Jerusalem, Reader of Durkheim: Method, Knowledge, Ethics]. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales, 55*(2), 57–82. https://doi.org/10.4000/ress.3913

Rol, C. (2023). Gaston Bouthoul et l'Institut international de sociologie. Une matrice intellectuelle [Gaston Bouthoul and the International Institute of Sociology. An Intellectual Matrix]. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales, 61*, 95–122. https://doi.org/10.4000/ress.9764

Sapiro, G. (2004). Défense et illustration de 'l'honnête homme'. Les hommes de lettres contre la sociologie [Defense and Illustration of the 'Honest Man'. The World of Humanities and Literature against Sociology]. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, 153*, 11–27. https://doi.org/10.3917/arss.153.0011

Sapiro, G. (2009). *L'espace intellectuel en Europe: de la formation des États-nations à la mondialisation, XIX^{e}-XXI^{e} siècle* [The European Intellectual Space : From Nation-State Formation to Globalisation]. La Découverte. https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.sapir.2009.01

Schlanger, J. (1992). Fondation, nouveauté, limite [Foundation, Novelty, Boundaries]. *Les débuts des sciences de l'homme, numéro spécial de Communications, 54*, 289–298. https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1992.1827

Skovajsa, M. (2020). Bláha, Obrdlík a Eubank: brněnské kontakty s americkými sociology v souvislostech mezinárodní sociologie [Bláha, Obrdlík and Eubank: Contacts between Brno and American Sociologists in the Context of International Sociology]. *Sociální studia/Social Studies, 17, 2020 spec.: I. A. Bláha, Brno a svět první poloviny 20. století*, 35–52. https://doi.org/10.5817/SOC2020-S-35

Tournès, L. (2016). Jalons pour une histoire de l'internationalisme scientifique [Milestones for a History of Scientific Internationalism]. In C. Defrance & A. Kwaschik (Eds.). *La guerre froide et l'internationalisation des sciences. Acteurs, réseaux, institutions.* (pp. 51–68). Éditions CNRS. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.editionscnrs.28863

Van Acker, W. (2014). Sociology in Brussels, organicism and the idea of a world society in the period before the First World War. In W. B. Rayward (Ed.). *Information beyond Borders: International Cultural and Intellectual Exchange in the Belle Époque.* (pp. 143–168) Ashgate Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315588513-10

Vanneuville, R. (2003). Le droit administratif comme savoir de gouvernement? René Worms et le Conseil d'État devant l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques au début du 20e siècle [Administrative Law as Governmental Knowledge? René Worms and the Conseil d'État facing the Académie des sciences morales et politiques at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century]. *Revue française de science politique, 53*(2), 219–235. https://doi.org/10.3917/rfsp.532.0219

Verbruggen, C., Deroo, F., Blomme, H., D'haeninck, T., Thiry, A., van Diem, L., Vandersmissen, J., Mestdagh, E., Billiet, B., Wolff, J., Chambers, S., De Potter, P., Carlier, J., Van Praet, C., Leonards, C., & Randeraad, N. (2022). Social reform, international congresses and organizations (1846-1914): from sources to data. *Journal of Open Humanities Data, 8*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.5334/johd.69

Voříšek, M. (2008). Antagonism, type, or deviation? A comparative view on sociology in Post-War Soviet Europe. *Revue d'histoire des sciences sociales, 18*, 85–113. https://doi.org/10.3917/rhsh.018.0085

Wils, K., & Rasmussen, A. (2012). Sociology in a transnational perspective: Brussels, 1890-1925. *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire – Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis, 90, 4. Histoire Médiévale, Moderne et Contemporaine. Middeleeuwse, Moderne en Hedendaagse Geschiedenis*, 1273–1296. https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.2012.8286

Contact email: montelcgz@yahoo.com

From Stereotype to Cultural Representation: Reframing Isan Ghost Figures Through Contemporary Character Design

Prisana Kumpusiri, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Chanaradee Nakbanleng, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Chayanun Molchaisawat, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Panwad Rattanakrajang, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Sireethorn Phisphant, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Thanyaphat Chuprasart, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Wethitha Boonyuen, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This creative research examines how contemporary character design can reframe stigmatised representations of Isan identity in Thailand. Historically, Isan — Thailand's northeastern region — has been associated with reductive socio-cultural stereotypes commonly summarised as ignorance, poverty, illness, and drought. Rather than reproducing these perceptions, this study approaches them as socially constructed images and proposes the figure of the "ghost" not as a reproduction of folklore but as a symbolic medium through which marginalisation, memory, and identity can be critically reinterpreted. The study originated from a real-world creative case — a film development project requiring four ghost characters rooted in Isan cultural identity — which provided the practical foundation for broader inquiry into how character design can function as a tool for cultural representation. A qualitative, practice-based methodology was employed, integrating discourse analysis, ethnographic fieldwork in Yasothon Province, and character design experimentation. Four ghost-inspired character prototypes were developed, each positioning external stereotypical markers in deliberate tension with internal traits drawn from lived community experience. In-depth interviews with 20 participants — ten with Isan backgrounds and ten from general audiences - were conducted to evaluate audience perception. Findings indicate that character design can expose and complicate stereotypes, opening space for alternative readings of regional identity. Participants with Isan backgrounds demonstrated deep cultural interpretation, while general audiences showed measurable perceptual shifts when engaging with the characters' interiority. By repositioning ghost figures as forms of contemporary cultural representation, the study demonstrates how creative media can transform marginalised identities into cultural capital with broader social and commercial resonance.

Keywords: Isan identity, character design, cultural representation, stereotype, creative research

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The northeastern region of Thailand, commonly known as Isan, is one of the country's most culturally distinctive areas, characterised by rich traditions in language, belief, ritual, and community life. Yet in Thailand's broader cultural landscape, Isan has historically occupied a marginalised position. Representations of the region in mainstream media and public discourse have long circulated around four reductive images — ignorance, poverty, illness, and drought, or in Thai shorthand, "stupid, poor, sick, dry" (โง่ จน เจ็บ แห้งแล้ง) — a discourse rooted in development-era policy frameworks that framed Isan as underdeveloped and in need of remediation (Jiraporn Chanthra, 2021; Pimpakarn Srisawat, 2021). This discourse has proven remarkably durable, persisting in contemporary media through jokes, character archetypes, and narrative conventions that flatten Isan identity into a set of familiar, diminishing signs (Watchiranon Thongthep, 2021).

At the same time, Isan cultural materials have gained increasing currency in Thailand's entertainment industry. The rise of what scholars term "Isan Fever" — the mainstreaming of Isan-inflected films, music, and content since the late 2000s — reflects both genuine audience appetite and growing commercial recognition of Isan's cultural capital (Sainil Somboon, 2021). Films such as *The Undertaker* (สัปเหร่อ, 2023) have demonstrated that Isan storytelling traditions can generate substantial audience engagement and economic value, operating within what analysts describe as a "faith economy" driven by regional belief systems and community ritual (ISAN Insight, 2025). Yet mainstream popularity does not automatically constitute genuine representation: cultural materials can be widely consumed without the stereotypes that constrain their subjects being interrogated or transformed.

This study begins from a concrete creative problem. A film development project provisionally titled *See You a Ghost* provided the research team with a brief: develop four ghost characters rooted in an Isan community setting. The project had a synopsis but lacked developed characters; what it needed was a systematic approach to building character identities that could carry cultural weight without simply reproducing familiar imagery. This practical creative challenge became the entry point for a broader research question: can character design function not merely as a tool for representation, but for the critical reframing of representation?

The ghost figure is central to this inquiry. In Thai cultural imagination, ghosts occupy a liminal space between lived experience and symbolic meaning — they carry memory, mark loss, and embody what cannot be neatly resolved. In Isan specifically, ghost narratives are interwoven with community life, seasonal ritual, and the maintenance of social bonds across generational and geographic distance. The researchers propose that the ghost, precisely because of this symbolic density, offers a productive figure through which stereotyped representations can be made visible and opened to reinterpretation — not by erasing the stereotypes, but by placing them in tension with the interior lives, histories, and cultural textures that such stereotypes systematically obscure.

The study therefore pursues three interconnected objectives: to analyse the discursive construction of negative Isan representations and their role as design material; to develop four symbolic ghost character prototypes that use stereotype as an external surface while grounding interiority in fieldwork-derived cultural knowledge; and to examine how audiences with and without Isan backgrounds perceive and interpret these characters. The paper proceeds through a literature review establishing the theoretical framework, a description of the practice-based

methodology, presentation of the creative and empirical findings, discussion of the implications, and conclusion.

Literature Review

Representation, Discourse, and the Construction of Isan

The concept of representation, as developed in cultural studies, treats images of social groups not as reflections of reality but as productive constructions that shape how groups are perceived, valued, and treated (Hall, 1997). Stereotypes are a particularly condensed form of this process: they fix complex social identities into a small number of simplified, repeated signs, and they tend to operate through binary oppositions — educated/ignorant, developed/backward — that situate one group as inferior to another.

In the Thai context, Isan has been subject to precisely this kind of representational reduction. The discourse of "stupid, poor, sick, and drought" became institutionalised in the language of national development policy following the First National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1961, which positioned the northeast as a problem region in need of external intervention (Jiraporn Chanthra, 2021). This framing persisted in media representations — particularly in films produced by outsiders — through which Isan was routinely depicted as a site of poverty, backwardness, and rural limitation (Pimpakarn Srisawat, 2021, p. 8). The consequence is a representational landscape in which Isan people are rendered through images that reduce rather than illuminate their lives.

Contemporary scholarship on Isan complicates this picture by attending to agency, dynamism, and the active negotiation of meaning. Research on "new Isan" cultural production demonstrates that Isan people are not passive objects of representation but active producers of cultural meaning through language, art, music, and everyday practice (Sainil Somboon, 2021). Understanding Isan identity thus requires moving beyond surface markers — food, clothing, dialect — toward the relational textures, affective registers, and adaptive capacities that characterise life in Isan communities but rarely appear in mainstream representation.

The Ghost as Symbolic Medium

Ghost figures occupy a distinctive position in Thai cultural life. They are simultaneously objects of belief, entertainment, and symbolic negotiation — present in ritual practice, popular film, and everyday storytelling. In Isan specifically, ghosts are woven into the fabric of community life, serving as vehicles for expressing anxieties, desires, and unresolved social tensions.

The theoretical utility of the ghost as a design figure lies in this structural quality: a ghost is by definition a figure of tension, present yet absent, attached to a past yet inhabiting a present. This makes ghosts particularly apt for representing identities that have been reduced and flattened — identities that persist with more complexity than their public images suggest. In this study, the ghost functions not as a folklore creature to be reproduced but as what the researchers term a "symbolic medium": a design figure capable of holding the tension between an externally imposed image and an internally grounded reality. Ghost stories, across many traditions, are stories about what society has repressed or refused to acknowledge; designing ghost characters from within Isan cultural knowledge uses this logic of haunting as a

representational strategy — the dismissed returns as complex, meaningful, and deserving of attention.

Character Design as Cultural Practice

Character design is a discipline traditionally understood in terms of visual craft: the creation of memorable, functionally effective figures for use in film, animation, games, and related media. Core principles include shape language to communicate personality, colour coding to establish mood and role, silhouette clarity for memorability, and the calibration of internal traits — motivation, history, emotional range — to give characters narrative depth (Tillman, 2019; Kline & Blumberg, 1999, as cited in Jaruwan Pengsiri, 2021). Research on community-grounded character design demonstrates that characters developed through genuine cultural engagement can produce more nuanced and resonant outcomes than those derived from surface-level cultural reference (Jaruwan Pengsiri, 2021; Werat Pinkaw et al., 2024).

More recent scholarship has begun to explore character design as a form of cultural representation with ethical and political dimensions. Characters drawn from marginalised communities carry particular weight: they can reproduce stereotypes or challenge them, affirm cultural capital or extract it. The concept of soft power provides a relevant framework for understanding the broader stakes of this work: cultural products that effectively communicate a community's values, aesthetics, and ways of life can generate attraction and influence through resonance rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). For Isan, character design that successfully translates local cultural capital into contemporary media forms has the potential to reshape how the region is perceived both within Thailand and internationally (Athip Techapongsatorn, 2023).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, practice-based research design integrating creative inquiry with ethnographic fieldwork and audience evaluation. Practice-based research is particularly suited to questions about cultural representation in design because it treats the act of making as a form of knowledge production in its own right, not merely a means of producing artefacts (Sullivan, 2010). The research proceeded in three interconnected phases.

Phase 1: Discourse Analysis and Fieldwork

The first phase involved two parallel streams of inquiry. The first was a discourse analysis of representations of Isan in Thai media and public culture, focusing on the construction and circulation of the four stereotyped images. This analysis drew on existing scholarship in Thai cultural studies and media criticism, examining how these images function as a system of meaning that positions Isan within broader hierarchies of cultural value.

The second stream was ethnographic fieldwork conducted over five days and four nights in Yasothon Province, covering Sai Mun and Thai Charoen districts. The fieldwork aimed to generate knowledge of Isan life not mediated by the stereotyped images identified in the discourse analysis — to access the affective, relational, and practical dimensions of community life that such images systematically exclude. Data collection included participant observation, conversations with community members including a school principal and a traditional healer (Mor Tham), and documentation of local crafts, agricultural practices, and ritual life. The fieldwork revealed a community characterised by practical ingenuity, intergenerational

connection, spiritual resilience, and a sophisticated relationship to environmental constraint — dimensions absent from the dominant discourse.

Phase 2: Character Design Development

The second phase used materials from Phase 1 as design inputs, following a core structural principle: each character's external appearance was designed to reflect the stereotyped discourse, functioning as "the image as seen from outside," while internal traits — personality, motivation, emotional history, cultural practices — were developed from the fieldwork findings, functioning as "life as lived from within." This deliberate tension between exterior and interior is the central representational strategy of the study: rather than replacing negative images with positive alternatives, the design approach makes the gap between imposed image and lived reality visible and affectively engaging.

Each character prototype was developed through iterative design, producing an initial version (Version 1, emphasising external and static representation) and a revised version (Version 2, incorporating props, activities, and contextual details from fieldwork). Shape language and colour coding were applied systematically: circular forms and yellow for Nong Tone, communicating openness beneath the "stupid" exterior; rectangular forms and blue for Na Khieam, evoking structural constraint and working-class endurance beneath the "poor" exterior; asymmetrical forms with purple and green for Yai Sa, reflecting bodily vulnerability and spiritual resilience beneath the "sick" exterior; and triangular forms with orange-brown tones for Ta Chum, conveying environmental harshness and adaptive strength beneath the "drought" exterior.

Phase 3: Audience Perception Evaluation

The third phase evaluated audience reception through in-depth interviews with 20 participants divided into two equal groups: ten participants with Isan backgrounds (born in or closely familiar with the region) and ten from general audiences without specific Isan knowledge. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant experience with contemporary media (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Participants were shown each character prototype individually and asked semi-structured questions covering first impressions, cultural identification, interpretation of personality and interiority, comparison with existing Isan representations, emotional engagement, and assessment of contemporary relevance and development potential. Interview data were analysed through thematic content analysis, with particular attention to patterns of convergence and divergence between the two groups.

Findings

The Four Character Prototypes

The four ghost characters each embody the structural tension between an externally imposed discourse and a fieldwork-derived interiority.

Nong Tone

Nong Tone is a fifteen-year-old boy in a school uniform with a pha khao ma at the waist and a bowl-cut hairstyle with two raised bumps — a visual quotation of the "stupid" stereotype. His interiority establishes him as a skilled klong yao drummer whose practical intelligence and

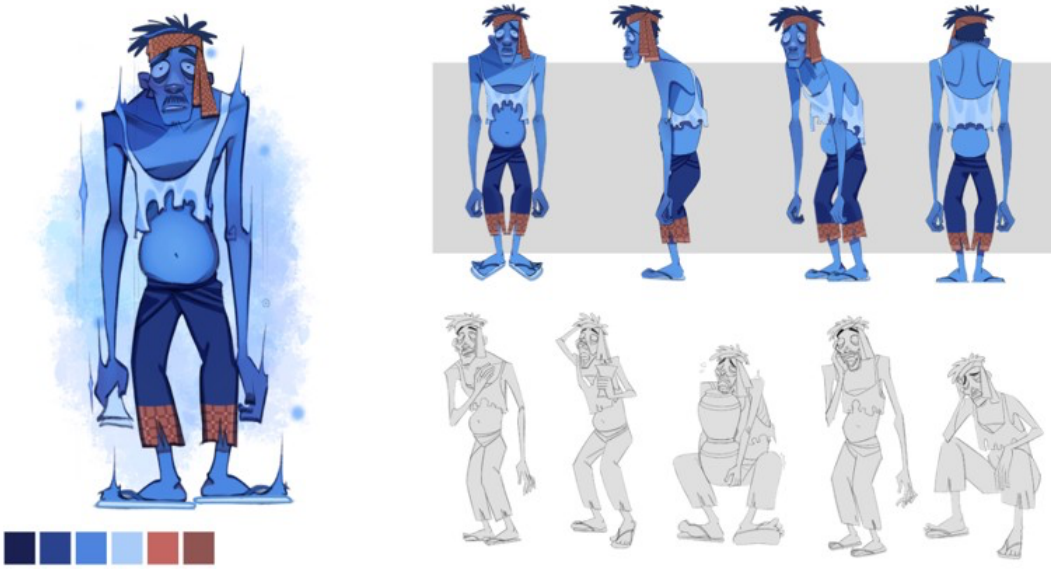
cultural knowledge fall outside formal educational metrics. As a ghost, he continues to move to rhythmic patterns, waiting for the opportunity to perform at the Bun Bang Fai festival — a manifestation of cultural aspiration persisting beyond the limits of institutional recognition.

Figure 1
Character Prototype: Nong Tone — The "Ignorant" Ghost Character, Showing Shape Language, Colour Palette, and Turnaround Views.

Na Khieam

Na Khieam is a thirty-six-year-old man in worn clothing with a pha khao ma on his head — the visual register of poverty and labour. His interiority, informed by fieldwork conversations about seasonal agricultural labour and the resourcefulness required to sustain families without stable income, establishes him as a figure of profound endurance whose exhaustion is structural, not personal. As a ghost, he remains caught in cycles of anxious activity, seeking the rest and communal participation that his circumstances never permitted.

Figure 2
Character Prototype: Na Khieam — The "Poor" Ghost Character, Showing Shape Language, Colour Palette, and Turnaround Views.



Yai Sa

Yai Sa is a seventy-five-year-old woman in traditional dress with a woven basket and sai sin (sacred thread) at her wrists. The visual markers of age and folk healing reference the "sick" discourse. Her interiority — developed from fieldwork encounters with the Mor Tham healer — establishes her as a figure whose reliance on spiritual belief is not ignorance but a response to genuine gaps in formal healthcare provision, and whose deepest suffering is not physical but the loneliness of children departed to the city.

Figure 3
Character Prototype: Yai Sa — The "Sick" Ghost Character, Showing Shape Language, Colour Palette, and Turnaround Views.

Ta Chum

Ta Chum is a sixty-year-old farmer in practical work clothing with a conical hat and rubber boots. The visual language of weathered agricultural labour references the "drought" discourse. His interiority, drawn from fieldwork observations of water management practices and farmers' affective relationship with their land, establishes him as a figure of hard-won practical wisdom whose experience of scarcity is inseparable from the unequal distribution of resources. As a ghost, he continues to carry water in a leaking vessel — an image of effort without resolution — waiting for the Bun Bang Fai festival as a sign of seasonal renewal. The festival functions as the narrative's emotional and symbolic centre: each character is oriented toward it as the place where cultural belonging, shared memory, and the possibility of rest converge.

Figure 4
Character Prototype: Ta Chum — The "Drought" Ghost Character, Showing Shape Language, Colour Palette, and Turnaround Views.

Audience Perception: Convergences

Several findings were consistent across both participant groups. All participants immediately identified the characters as Isan through visual markers — the pha khao ma was described as the single most powerful signifier of Isan identity across all interviews, followed by the woven basket (kratib), traditional garments (pha sin), and occupation-specific props including the klong yao drum and traditional fishing equipment. The contemporary art style — characterised by clear line work, simplified forms, and accessible colour palettes — was consistently described as "friendly" and "approachable," clearly distinguishing these characters from the horror-register ghosts that dominate Thai mainstream media. Several participants across both groups independently compared the visual style to international animation and game character design, including references to animated films such as *Hotel Transylvania*. Colour coding was legible to both groups: the blue palette of Na Khieam was widely read as conveying sadness or exhaustion; the orange-brown of Ta Chum as heat and environmental struggle.

Version 2 of each character — incorporating props and contextual activity — was consistently rated as substantially more effective at communicating Isan identity than Version 1 across both groups. This finding indicates that cultural specificity requires contextual and narrative detail,

not merely ethnic visual markers. All participants across both groups expressed interest in the characters' backstories and the question of how each character died, indicating that the interiority embedded in the design was legible and narratively engaging. Participants in both groups identified strong potential for commercial and creative extension, including animation, art toys, digital stickers, merchandise, and social media memes — particularly content addressing workplace exhaustion and contemporary working-class experience.

Audience Perception: Divergences

Significant divergences emerged between the two participant groups in depth, mode, and direction of interpretation. Isan participants demonstrated substantially greater cultural depth in their readings, drawing on personal experience and community knowledge to access layers of meaning not available to general audience members. Yai Sa was identified not simply as an elderly woman but specifically as a "mae kong" or "mae tao" — the kind of elder found at rural temples, whose religious devotion is a form of social service rather than personal piety. Na Khieam was described using the Isan term "hloy" — a culturally specific expression of exhaustion and listlessness that carries connotations of structural fatigue rather than individual weakness. Ta Chum was described as a "luk Isan" figure — an embodiment of Isan masculine endurance — and several Isan participants read his weathered appearance not as stigma but as a mark of dignity and lived experience. Nong Tone's role in the klong yao performance tradition was immediately legible to Isan participants as a specific cultural context, giving the character's aspiration a concrete referent that general audience participants lacked.

Isan participants also reframed the characters' depictions of hardship in ways that differed markedly from general audience responses. Rather than reading worn clothing and exhausted postures as representations of poverty to be pitied, Isan participants described these as accurate reflections of agricultural life — "facts of existence" (ข้อเท็จจริง) that they recognised without shame. Several participants noted the presence of joy and communal celebration — particularly the klong yao performance and the Bun Bang Fai festival orientation — as authentic to Isan cultural experience: "Isan people never stop" was a phrase that appeared in multiple interviews, expressing a cultural value of resilience that the characters' design successfully conveyed.

General audience participants, by contrast, relied more heavily on immediately recognisable cultural signifiers and were more likely to initially interpret ambiguous elements through mainstream stereotypes. Na Khieam, whose worn appearance and exhausted posture were intended to signify working-class endurance, was in some initial responses misread as a drunk, a vagrant, or a foreign migrant worker — interpretations that reflect the persistence of negative social stereotypes rather than engagement with the character's interiority. However, a consistent pattern emerged across general audience interviews: upon engagement with Version 2 and the characters' backstories, initial stereotype-based readings were revised. Participants described this shift explicitly — noting that the characters moved from appearing "pitiable" to appearing "powerful" or "cool" — and several described the experience of recognising that their initial reading had been shaped by existing prejudice. This perceptual shift, in which the design makes stereotype visible as stereotype rather than as fact, constitutes evidence that the representational strategy is functioning as intended.

Both groups provided design recommendations, with Isan participants offering more culturally specific suggestions: the addition of sak yant (sacred tattoo) markings on male characters to convey spiritual authority; more Isan-specific textile patterns (rather than generic pha khao ma) to deepen regional authenticity; and correction of the seasonal inconsistency in Ta Chum's

props, where the simultaneous presence of rice stalks and a fishing net was identified as incongruent with actual agricultural practice. General audience participants recommended clearer colour differentiation between characters and noted that certain props — particularly the klong yao — might be associated with central Thai rather than specifically Isan tradition, suggesting the substitution of the khaen mouth organ or kratib sticky rice container for greater cultural specificity.

Discussion

The findings of this study support three interconnected arguments about character design and cultural representation.

First, character design can function as a form of discourse analysis made visible. By using the four stereotyped images as the external layer of character design, this study does not reproduce the discourse but makes it available for examination. The stereotypes become, in the design, what they always were in social life: imposed images that do not capture their subjects. The gap between exterior and interior — the central design strategy — is not merely a formal device but a representational argument: that the people these images claim to represent are more than the images suggest. This resonates with theoretical accounts of representation that emphasise the need not to counter stereotypes with idealised alternatives, but to expose their construction (Hall, 1997). The fact that general audience participants could narrate their own perceptual shift — from reading the character through stereotype to recognising the stereotype as a lens — suggests that this exposure function can operate at the level of individual audience experience.

Second, the ghost figure demonstrates particular fitness as a vehicle for this representational work. Structurally, ghosts are about the persistence of what has been dismissed — the return of what powerful accounts of reality have tried to contain or erase. Isan people and their cultural lives have been, in a meaningful sense, ghosted by dominant discourse: rendered present only as problems, comic types, or objects of pity. Ghost characters designed from within Isan cultural knowledge — carrying the marks of stigma as their surfaces while expressing rich interiority — enact a reversal of this logic: the dismissed returns as complex, as culturally substantial, and as deserving of attention. The Bun Bang Fai festival, which functions as the narrative anchor for all four characters, reinforces this reversal: it is a festival of communal hope and seasonal renewal, the precise opposite of the stasis and resignation that the “stupid, poor, sick, drought” discourse implies.

Third, the divergence in audience reception illuminates a productive tension in culturally grounded design for broad audiences. Cultural specificity and cultural legibility pull in different directions: the details that make a character deeply meaningful to those with insider knowledge — the term “hloy,” the “mae kong” figure, the sak yant tradition — may be opaque to those without it, while the visual cues that communicate quickly to general audiences may flatten the cultural content that gives the design its critical edge. The study's findings suggest this tension is generative rather than fatal. Characters that reward both surface reading (immediate visual recognition of Isan identity) and deep reading (culturally specific interpretation of character interiority) can serve multiple audiences simultaneously. Version 2 of each character represents a step toward this balance, and the concrete feedback from Isan participants provides a clear direction for further refinement that would increase cultural depth without sacrificing legibility. Finally, the study has implications for practice-based research methodology. The creative case — the film development brief — was not a constraint on the research but a generative condition

for it. It provided a concrete problem with real stakes, demanded engagement with both discourse and lived cultural reality, and produced artefacts that could be empirically evaluated. This suggests that practice-based design research, when structured to require both discursive analysis and fieldwork, can generate knowledge about cultural representation that neither purely theoretical nor purely ethnographic approaches could produce alone.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that contemporary character design can function as a tool for the critical reframing of stigmatised cultural representations. By designing ghost figures whose external appearance carries the marks of the "stupid, poor, sick, drought" discourse while their interiority is grounded in fieldwork-derived knowledge of Isan community life, the researchers produced characters that make the gap between imposed image and lived complexity visible and affectively engaging. Audience evaluation with 20 participants confirmed that these characters can shift perception — particularly for general audiences who initially engage through existing stereotypes — without losing cultural depth for those with Isan knowledge. The perceptual shift documented in general audience interviews, from reading characters as pitiable to reading them as powerful, constitutes evidence that the reframing function is operating as intended.

The ghost figure proved a particularly apt vehicle for this work. Its structural liminality, its cultural embeddedness in Isan community life, and its association with persistence and return make it a productive form for carrying the tension between stigmatised exterior and culturally rich interior. More broadly, this study suggests that creative media — when developed through rigorous cultural inquiry rather than surface-level reference — can transform marginalised regional identities into forms of contemporary cultural capital that challenge rather than reproduce the representations that have historically constrained them.

Future research should extend this work in several directions: testing the characters in animated form rather than as static prototypes; expanding the participant pool to include international audiences for whom Isan is entirely unfamiliar; incorporating the design refinements identified by Isan participants (sak yant markings, more specific textile patterns, correction of seasonal prop inconsistencies); and exploring how the structural design strategy developed here — stereotype as exterior surface, fieldwork as interior foundation — might be applied to other regionally marginalised identities within Thailand and beyond.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Dr. Akekalak Poksupphiboon of the Interactive and Multimedia Design programme, College of Social Communication Innovation, Srinakharinwirot University, for his expert consultation on character design across multiple stages of this research. His guidance on visual design principles and design process significantly contributed to the development of the character prototypes presented in this study. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the College of Social Communication Innovation, Srinakharinwirot University, for providing financial support for the conference presentation of this work.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) to assist with language refinement, structural organisation, and academic writing. The research design, ethnographic fieldwork, character design, and all empirical data collection and analysis were conducted by the authors. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final paper.

References

Boonyo, N. (2024, March 4). *Setthakit Isan 2567 fuen tua tonueang: Samruat mum mong soft power* [Isan's economy in 2024 continues to recover: Exploring perspectives on soft power]. *Bangkok Biz News*. https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/blogs/business/1116031

BrandThink House, & Juntha, J. (2021, March 20). *'Ngo chon chep' : Watthakam sang khwam choptham hai rat kum 'Isan' wai nai kam mue* ['Ignorant, poor, sick': The discourse that legitimises state control over Isan]. BrandThink. https://www.brandthink.me/content/fool-poor-pain

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hall, S. (1997). The spectacle of the 'other.' In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 223–290). Sage.

Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine, 292*, 114523. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523

ISAN Insight. (2025, November 1). *Poet anachak "nang phi Isan": Setthakit sattha nai lok phapphayon* [Exploring the empire of "Isan ghost films": The economy of faith in cinema] [Status update]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1ACgNLnj2j/

Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.

Pengsiri, J. (2021). Character design development based on community identity. *Khuangpaya: The Journal of Thai Lanna Wisdom, 15*(1), 10–24. https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/khuangpaya/article/view/247402

Pinkaew, W., Pinkaew, P., & Kaewsaard, K. (2024). Media design for promoting cultural learning of Sala Tuek community for youth in Thung Luk Nok Subdistrict, Kamphaeng Saen District, Nakhon Pathom Province. *Rajapark Journal, 18*(56), 294–317.

Somboon, S. (2021). *Mass Isan/New Isan: The popularity of Isan films and the construction of Isan since 2007* [Doctoral dissertation, Dhurakij Pundit University]. https://libdoc.dpu.ac.th/thesis/Sainil.Som.pdf

Srisawat, P. (2021). *The representation of Isan teenagers in Thai films* [Master's thesis, Thammasat University]. https://ethesisarchive.library.tu.ac.th/thesis/2021/TU_2021_6323110103_15065_21898.pdf

Sullivan, G. (2010). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in visual arts* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Techapongsatorn, A. (2023). The population in Bangkok media exposure of Isan culture through film media which affects the film elements. *Journal of Communication and Management NIDA*, *9*(1), 54–66. https://so12.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jcmn/article/view/733/664

Thongthep, W. (2021, November 8). *Drama khon Isan: Nak prawattisat chi phruettikam "yiat khon Isan" sathon panha lai miti nai sangkhom Thai* [Isan controversy: Historian says discrimination against Isan people reflects multidimensional problems in Thai society]. BBC Thai. https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-59198471

Tillman, B. (2019). *Creative character design* (2nd ed.). Focal Press.

Contact email: prisana@g.swu.ac.th

© The International Academic Forum 2026
The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)
Sakae 1-16-26-201
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi
Japan 460-0008
www.iafor.org