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Foreword

Rahul Puri,
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The response to our last volume was both gratifying and energizing. What stayed with us most was not simply that people read it, but that it sparked conversations between our own faculty and with many international partners who confirmed what we had long believed: that there is a genuine appetite for rigorous, reflective thinking about creative education. That, perhaps, is the most meaningful outcome a journal can hope for: not closure but dialogue.

It is with that momentum, and with a great deal of enthusiasm, that we present this new volume which emerges from a growing recognition that creative education is entering a period of significant transformation. Across disciplines, educators are being asked difficult questions about relevance, adaptability, and the responsibilities of institutions preparing students for industries that are changing faster than most curricula can comfortably keep up with.

Perhaps no single development has generated more uncertainty, or more debate, in creative education today than the emergence of Generative AI. The confusion it introduces is not merely technological; it is pedagogical, philosophical, and, for many institutions, deeply strategic. There is a widening gap between the frameworks that academia has historically offered students and what the industry now expects of young graduates arriving at their doors. Employers are asking for fluency with tools, workflows, and collaborative practices that many curricula have yet to fully acknowledge, let alone integrate. The risk, if we do not address this directly, is that creative education becomes increasingly abstracted from the very industry it is meant to serve.

At Whistling Woods International these questions are being approached with seriousness and openness. Working closely with our faculty, we are actively exploring new and innovative approaches to creative practice, collaboration, and teaching pedagogy that are honest about the world our students are graduating into. This does not mean abandoning the rigor and criticality that defines good education; it means ensuring that rigor is applied to the right questions, and that our students are equipped not just to consume change but to shape it.

The articles gathered in this edition reflect that spirit of inquiry across a range of

Foreword

*disciplines and perspectives. Senior Faculty **Ashwini Malik**, co-authored with WWI alumnus **Siddhant Makkar**, offers a timely and thoughtful examination of Generative AI in the context of screenwriting - arguing for its potential not merely as a creative aid, but as a more substantive collaborator in the writing process and arguing for a re-evaluation of current definitions of authorship to more accurately reflect contemporary realities of human-AI collaborations. **Rabiya Nazki** from the Producing Department at Whistling Woods International brings an unexpected and genuinely compelling lens to producer education - exploring how poetry, with its economy of language, its attention to rhythm and intention, can enrich the way we teach and understand the craft of producing. **Rutika Yeolkar** of the School of Media, Communication and Management contributes a fascinating discussion on the use of theatre as a pedagogical tool for building public speaking skills in media education. **Milindo Taid**, Head of the Visual Communication Department and a returning contributor to our journal, revisits the legacy of HfG Ulm and its enduring influence on multi-disciplinary design education. Together, these essays reflect something important about the kind of conversations valued at WWI. They move comfortably across disciplines. They combine theory with practice. And perhaps most importantly, they treat education not as a static system, but as something that must constantly respond to cultural, industrial, and technological change without losing its intellectual depth.*

None of this would be possible without the dedication of the authors themselves, who gave their time, expertise, and intellectual energy to these contributions. My sincere thanks to each of them.

*Behind every edition of this journal is a team working diligently to ensure it reaches the standard it deserves. I am particularly grateful to **Aishwarya Patil**, who has taken the lead on editing and production with admirable care and commitment, and who has been ably supervised and guided throughout by **Utkarsha Kotian** and **Tejasvini Ahuja**. The quiet, essential work of a team like this is what gives a journal its life, and I am genuinely grateful for their efforts.*

We will certainly return with another edition next year, and I hope this one leaves its mark. The topics explored here speak to a shared and urgent question: how do we continue to bridge the effective gaps in creative education, honestly and imaginatively, for the generations of practitioners who are counting on us to get this right? I hope these pages spark interest, provoke reflection, and perhaps bring about some of the healthy discussion, debate, and collaboration that continues to be the lifeblood of a living, evolving field.

Seeding the Futures: The HfG Ulm (Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm.) Post-Industrial Modernism, Methods and Progressive Multi-disciplinary Design Education.

Milindo Taid,
Head of the Department, Visual Communication Design,
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ABSTRACT:

This essay examines the far-reaching innovations in multi-disciplinary learning systems that were seeded at the **Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm** (HfG Ulm) in mid-20th century Germany - in the formulation of the partly experimental, mostly progressive pedagogic practice for design that generated significant waves of impact in design education and curricula development worldwide, including the Indian subcontinent.

The design education directions that were woven out of a fairly diverse set of intellectual, ideological, creative, economic and psycho-social impulses emerging out of the HfG Ulm, went on to distinctly trace the trajectory of the transition from industrial to post-industrial societies and economies, incorporating the then novel fields of inquiry such as systems theory, semiotics, cybernetics, ergonomics, operations research, philosophical theory of science, information theory and environmental design, while also integrating the more well entrenched disciplines of basic design.

Moving beyond the preceding industry-machine/art-craft paradigm to a more evolved techno-optimism, the HfG Ulm infused a systems and semantic approach to the disciplines of Product and Industrial Design, Visual Communication, Information Design, Cinematography and Film, Architecture and Building – approaches that led to the later emergence of methods for design, which we now know as 'design thinking.'

Keywords: *multi-disciplinary design education, design methods, design pedagogy, post-industrial society, design theory*

"A world built by and for a being that is both practical and philosophizing, jovial and melancholy, rational and unreasonable; thus, the task of giving structure and meaning to the human environment is the most difficult and delicate of all imaginable tasks." - Tomás Maldonado[1], in a lecture, in Montevedio, Uruguay, early 1960s.

POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES: REORGANIZING ARENAS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND EXPECTATIONS.

The remarkable *Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm* (HfG Ulm - Ulm) emerged in mid-twentieth-century Germany, from the dark shadows of the aftermath of Nazism and the second world war, propelled by the need to grapple with seminal shifts in the 'warp-and-weft' of the industrial fabric; to recalibrate novel, and unconventional ways in which humans can conceive and relate to the built environment. It took on the impact of a range of post-industrial evolutionary tendencies (Bell, 73, 99)[2] from the 1950s onward, and it is important to keep this context in mind, before engaging with the HfG Ulm.

a) Knowledge theory of value: Industrial societies are largely articulated around a labour theory of value, where progress is furthered by advancements that save labour. A post-industrial society appears to be anchored in a *knowledge* theory of value, where knowledge and its' deployment results in innovation and invention. Knowledge is largely regarded as good for the most, and as a positive outcome of basic research.

b) Capital - human and financial: Early theories of economics, considered capital primarily as financial, made evident via land or money. *'Human capital'* has come to the fore in post-industrial societies, not only in determining societal strength, but also in integrating *technology and human capital* with ideas of progress and growth.

c) Technology - mechanical and information: Industrial society was founded on mechanical technologies, and thus earned the tag of the 'age of the machine.' But with the emergence and proliferation of computer-based interventions in manufacturing, along with the rapid growth of complex communications systems, a kind of *information technology* based on linguistics and mathematics, appears to define the post-industrial era.

d) Infrastructure: Communications infrastructure marks post-industrial societies - a move away from the transportation infrastructure of industrial ones. Network cabling, broadcast systems, information dissemination hubs and so on, take hold, distinct and different from the industrial railroads, highways, and ports of the mechanical age. This results in the emergence of a complex adaptive system that is the hallmark of post-industrial electronic mediation.

e) Manufacturing, services and occupational changes: The post-industrial is also marked by the unprecedented rise of *technical and professional employment* and the relative fall of semiskilled and skilled labour. The shift in the character of manufacturing was also profound - from factory smoke-stack environs to sterile communication-technology facility. In this new occupational arrangement, professionals - managers, technicians, sales-

[1] Tomás Maldonado (1922-2018) was an Argentinian painter, industrial designer, teacher and design theoretician who greatly influenced design thinking and practice. He taught at the HfG Ulm between 1954 and 1967 and was Ulm rector from 1957-58.
[2] Sociologist Daniel Bell's work presents societies that are configured around services, information, and knowledge, deeply impacting institutions, democratic governance as well as class structures.

marketing personnel, and others seem to outnumber craftsperson's, labourers and operators.

f) Education and Inheritance: Another marker of the post-industrial, is *social mobility* that is founded on *education (and access to it-social capital,)* and not on the perceived privilege in society, acquired by inheritance of a family business, occupation or farm, which was largely the manner of a social advancement in industrial societies.

In the very years of the existence of the HfG Ulm (1953-1968,) devastated post-war Germany embraced about two decades of active national revival - economic rebuilding and transformation from states of despair to the enviable *Wirtschaftswunder*[3] society. It was also the period of intense transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society, but not recognized as such, during that time.

HFG ULM: EARLY YEARS, PEDAGOGIC FOUNDATIONS AND DEMOCRATIC RESPONSIBILITY

Five years after the cessation of the Second World War, most West Germans faced everyday privations and had gotten accustomed to the normality of 'survival.' The rallying cry was "Rebuilding!" and it provocatively remained the stimulus of the times. After the debacle and defeat in the war, many advocated for the need for a new cultural and social structure, and not many of those cultural initiatives could be assimilated into the framework of national economic reconstruction. Of the few exceptions, one, was a small private group who started preparing in 1950, for the establishment of a new kind of higher education experience in the southwestern city of Ulm, by the river Danube.

This small group comprised of graphic designer-typographer **Otl Aicher**, author-activist **Inge Scholl** (later Inge Aicher-Scholl,) and Swiss architect-artist-designer, Bauhaus alumnus, **Max Bill**. Both Aicher and Scholl were convinced that there was a felt need for a novel cultural vision and direction, in conceiving this higher education experience in Ulm. A programme for a school of design, with a socio-political context, was created by Aicher, Scholl, Bill and a few others. The educational framework was distinctly anti-fascist[4] in its attitude and buoyed by a hope for democracy - graphic/visual design was to be at the service of communications for society, while product/industrial design was aimed at encouraging the 'humanization' of everyday life.

Funding this vision was a challenge – and it required contributions from a diverse range of, mainly private, sources - Inge Scholl's *Geschwister* (Siblings) Scholl Foundation[5], the American McCloy Fund, European aid organizations and some contributions from private industry and business. Teaching and learning began at the HfG Ulm in the summer of 1953, and by 1955, the activities finally shifted to the permanent HfG campus designed by Max Bill. Bill conceived a campus that promoted a 'compact college life.' The faculty and student apartments clustered around the college centre comprising of theory lecture rooms, workshops for practice, the auditorium, and cafeteria. Bills' architectural planning left many impressed, *"as a manifesto, as construction that*

[3] Wirtschaftswunder, or "economic miracle," refers to the rapid, and remarkable progress of the west German economy between 1948 and the 1960s.

[4] It is important to note that Inge Scholl's siblings, Hans (24) and Sophie (21,) were executed by the Nazi regime in 1943, when they were a part of a non-violent resistance group, while still students at the University of Munich. There are also some anecdotes on Inge's own involvement with the Nazi regime.

proclaimed the policy of this college of design: transparent rationality, use of fundamental forms, clarity of structure, seriality. One feels that this architecture intends to organize relationships."[6]

From inception, the HfG was conceived as an educational centre at the service of a small number of students, not to promote elitism, but to ensure that the very best students receive intense, unwavering attention, within a creative and democratic framework. This essential sensibility, a sense of pride in being *avant-garde*[7] permeated the entire institutional space and its inhabitants. In the decades of the 1950s and 60s, this consistently small number of students was certainly uncommon in institutions of higher learning in Germany. Owing to its progressive, international outlook, the HfG, also attracted large numbers of applicants from across Europe, and outside of it. The faculty, similarly, were also consistently international in origin and orientation.

The school was identifiably the first new German postwar university-level institution, and very often dubbed (mistakenly,) as the successor of the Bauhaus[8] . **Herbert Ohl**, [the last rector of the HfG (1964/66 – 1968),] speaks eloquently about the *"the consciousness that created Ulm"*, while maintaining that the meticulously thought out admission criteria ensured that only special kind of 'minds and ways of being,' made their way into the programme of studies at the HfG: *"Free of the system, unbiased, task-and-not prestige-oriented, committed to serving society as a whole and thus also the national economy"*, and that is how the students and faculty were oriented during their years at the school, and thereafter.

Apart from the standard 'statement of purpose' requirement for admission, the Ulm school administered a questionnaire that wanted to know about the applicant's newspaper and journal preferences; her views and commentary about many depicted examples of architecture, art, and design; which public figures were relevant and important to her, what kind of films were preferred viewing, and, what her views were, about *the causes of fascist forms of governments*. The HfG looked for learners who connected ideological, cultural, intellectual, political, social and technological dots, and who were willing to act on those intersections. HfG alumnus, Klaus Krippendorff [9] writes: *"Placing design into the context of the political contingencies of postwar Germany rather than exclusively in art found additional resonance with me."*

The school developed an advanced syllabus for the four-year programme leading to a design diploma, where it centred the social dimensions of design, and the educational objectives also included training in argument that pushed the boundaries outward, rather than being department-discipline-subject restricted. New knowledge vocabularies consistently entered Ulm's discourse.

The post-war West German socio-cultural climate was highly conservative and the HfG held its own until 1968 as an experimental institution, resisting conservative pressures. With an eye on the human condition and the built environment of the future, it taught design as social and cultural responsibility first.

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[5] Refer to footnote 4.
[6] Attributed to German cultural historian Wolfgang Ruppert.
[7] *Avant-garde* is a French term that means the vanguard or the cutting edge of new, innovative or experimental ideas in the arts and literature.
[8] The Bauhaus (1919-1933) - German school of design, architecture, and applied arts. Its core objective was a radical concept: to reimagine the material world to reflect the unity of all the arts.
[9] Klaus Krippendorff (1932-2022,) was Professor Emeritus of Communication, at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. He was an influential scholar of communication (especially discursive constructions of reality,) cybernetics, and human-centred design. He studied industrial design in HfG Ulm, from 1956 to 1961.

REALISM: COUNTER-ART, ANTI-BAUHAUS, CIVILIZATION WORK, CIVILIZATION CULTURE

Otl Aicher [9], one of the co-founders of the HfG Ulm had a pervasive influence on the ethos of learning and doing in the school. He was quite lucid from the early years, that the HfG was not going to be another Bauhaus. In fact, Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius did make an offer to the HfG founders to lend the name 'Bauhaus Ulm' to the school, which was politely turned down. For the Bauhaus, fine art training was a prerequisite for the design of good industrial form, whereas the HfG emphasized a functional, direct approach to tackling the problem at hand. For this very reason, unlike the Bauhaus, the Ulm campus was devoid of studios for sculptors, painters, and workshops for craftsmen (and craftswomen) were absent as well.

In his illuminating essay *"Bauhaus and Ulm"*, Aicher writes: *"At that time in Ulm we had to get back to matters, to things, to products, to the street, to the everyday, to people. We had to turn around. It was not about extending art into the everyday world, for example, into application. It was about counter-art, the work of civilization, the culture of civilization."*

To understand this better, we must consider the fact that Aicher was a second world war veteran, having seen the devastations of combat as a German ground trooper between 1941 and 1945. For him, and others like him, *"coming to terms with reality"* was certainly highest on the agenda, and formal experiments and pure aesthetics was never on the radar. This ideological and intellectual stance led the HfG to be infused with the view that art was an expression of escape from 'real life.' But the central goal always remained the avoidance of the road to formalism - that the design of products for everyday life, should be entirely free from any artistic demands and 'feelings.'

Aicher also played a decisive role in two upheavals in the HfG: one concerned the debate of whether art should be part of the curriculum. The academic administrative machinery voted out art in 1957 – directly leading to the unfortunate resignation of a major and important Ulm figure, co-founder and popular first rector, Max Bill. Aicher, in his writings, does acknowledge that there would have been no HfG Ulm without Bill.

The second Ulm upheaval was in the early 1960s, when "practitioners" and "theoreticians" were at loggerheads. For Aicher, practical work always had priority status, and in 1963, he writes rather unflatteringly - *"uncritical faith in academic theory with its inflated tendency to analysis and increasing impotence in terms of doing."* Design involves relating thinking *and* doing. For him, contemporary societies are defined by their design condition, and the quality of human made designs becomes the quality of the everyday world that surround us.

Design education at the HfG focused on the disciplines of Product/Industrial Design, Visual Communication, Information Design, Cinematography/Film and Architecture/Building. But the central academic emphasis was not limited to these. Taking on the call for design as a social, cultural and economic responsibility, it steered towards becoming truly trans and multi-disciplinary.

The HfG offered a curriculum that was far more academically rigorous than that of most other design schools of the era. It encompassed a wide range of design-related

[9] Otl Aicher (1922–1991) - influential German graphic designer, typographer, management consultant, sculptor, philosopher and author. He is considered an intellectual who intervened in design. In HfG Ulm, Yale and Rio de Janeiro - he taught "visual communication", a term that he coined.

disciplines, including economics, semiotics, political science, information communication theory, social psychology, perception physiology, ergonomics, sociology, cultural anthropology, physics and the cultural history of art. In the teaching and learning, all these fields were connected to design practice, with their integration structured around the philosophy of science as the guiding intellectual framework – the makings of a civilization.

HFG: FUNCTIONALISM, INFORMATION PHILOSOPHY, SEMIOTICS, DESIGN METHODS.

Louis Sullivan's [10] often quoted dictum *"form follows function"* underpinned the rational justification of choices in finalizing design. Functionalism was arguably the most deeply felt principle at the HfG. The principle held that once the purpose of an artifact was clearly comprehended, its form would naturally flow from that comprehension. And, if an artifact's final design bore little or no relation to its intended purpose and usage, it would indicate a failure to grasp its function in the first place. Both faculty and students at the HfG tended to lean rather heavily into this functionalist argument.

Max Bill proposed that the human aspects of form could not (and should not) always, simply be reduced to material, production or technical functions. When mass-manufactured functionalist artifacts turn out to be meaningless, or socially inconsequential, the resultant impacts are relatively minor - they could disappear from the market. Buildings, however, are a different category, for pure functionalism in architecture often results in environments that are unfit for human habitation, and functionalist urban design frequently fails to work as intended for the citizens. Ulm can certainly be credited with the emergence of human-centred perspectives in design practice.

Another important figure in Ulm was **Max Bense** [11], probably one of the most influential intellectual forces in the early years of the HfG. In teaching philosophy of science, Bense presented his information theory, where *avant-garde* works can claim to possess the most aesthetic information - because they are a definite departure from what is expected, while being surprisingly striking at the same time. But such works can also face the challenge of being difficult to comprehend. Over a period, as these creations are mass-reproduced and grow more familiar, their informational value diminishes, Bense argued, often stripping them of the intended aesthetic impact. It is unsurprising, then, that the students and faculty of the most progressive design school of that period readily embraced Bense's aesthetic theories, finding in them both a validation of their artistic objectives and a theoretical framework for their role in an post-industrial culture. Clearly, Aicher's considerable disdain for theorisation was sidelined over time.

In 1957, **Tomás Maldonado** [12] succeeded Max Bill as rector of the Ulm school, a transition that marked a decisive moment in the institution's intellectual trajectory. The following year, Maldonado introduced *semiotics* [13] into the curriculum, thereby positioning it as a foundational component of design education. This move reflected his commitment to advancing a framework of

[10] Louis Henry Sullivan (1856-1924): American architect, author, and early pioneer of modern architecture.
[11] Max Bense (1910-1990): Influential German philosopher, writer, known for contributions to philosophy of science, computational aesthetics, and cybernetics.
[12] Please refer to footnote 1.

"scientific operationalism," which stood markedly in contrast to Bill's conception of the designer as primarily an 'aesthetic mediator of cultural artifacts.' By all available accounts, Ulm possibly became the first design school to systematically engage with semiotics, establishing a precedent that would later influence design pedagogy worldwide. More broadly, Maldonado's semiotic theoretical orientation rendered visual media such as photography, graphic design, and textual communication readily available for semiotic analysis, while the domain of industrial design resisted such direct application.

Mathematician **Horst Rittel** [14], succeeded Bense in teaching the philosophy of science at the HfG in 1958. His lectures on information and communication theory gradually evolved into an investigation of the heuristics employed by designers. Rittel's strong mathematical background had him bring into the classroom - models, theories, and conceptual frameworks that were largely unfamiliar to most designers at the time. He was very enthusiastic in making abstract concepts practical and relevant, which strongly resonated with his students and elevated the discourse on design for the real world. By introducing approaches from systems analysis, planning methods, operations research, game theory, and mathematical decision theory, he significantly broadened the methodological foundations available to design. The HfG thus became, and perhaps remains, one of the very few design institutions in the world where such subjects could thrive within the curriculum.

As Rittel's heuristic approaches began influencing and shaping students' design choices, it was only natural that their language shifted—from defending the functional appeal of visually attractive products to justifying the design processes and methods that produced them. Rittel's work at Ulm, and after, laid the foundations of systems and methods of problem engagement and solving via 'design thinking' in the 21st century.

THE ULM LEGACY: DESIGN EDUCATION, GOOD DESIGN, DESIGN AS A PROFESSION, AND AS EVERYDAY CULTURE

The HfG Ulm was both intellectually rigorous and remarkably creative, yet it was perhaps far less uniform than it may appear from the outside or even in hindsight. Its faculty was strikingly young and international in composition, and the institution regularly welcomed leading designers, cultural critics, scholars and architects. Many not only presented groundbreaking ideas but also worked closely with students, further enriching the school's dynamic environment. Over the years, the school drew students from 49 countries.

The students were trained in design, while design methods, principles and theories, were explored and developed. The instructional approach at the HfG, where designers collaborated closely with technicians and business experts, came to be known as the "Ulm model" or "Ulm concept." Beyond its teaching methods, however, the school also left a visible mark through its work in product and information design, which established a recognizable 'trend' often referred to as the distinctive "Ulm style." The school quickly gained recognition by presenting a striking range of consumer products with radically new aesthetics, along with visionary proposals for broader projects. Its design philosophy -

[13] Semiotics is a general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function.
[14] Horst WJ Rittel (1930 - 1990): German mathematician, design philosopher and theorist, known for seeding the formalization of methods for design.

marked by clarity and remarkable productivity across diverse fields of design intervention, helped fuel the growth of Germany's consumer industries, with Braun AG [15] being a prominent example. The school's influence soon extended beyond Germany, earning international acclaim.

Ulm design was characterized by functional clarity, a rejection of ornamentation, and an emphasis on 'truth in form' - sometimes described as "an aesthetics of asceticism" or radical functionalism. The use of scientific methods in design, such as factor and form analysis, reinforced the idea that quality in design could be objectively defined and measured. Long after the school's closure in 1968, its functional, rational approach continued to guide international debates about what constitutes good design.

Much of HfG Ulm's success stemmed from its powerful rhetorical framework - a precise vocabulary for articulating and justifying design decisions. As we know, both students and faculty were drawn into a functionalist approach that was as persuasive in theory as it was effective in practice. Within this setting, every design was rigorously challenged and defended, encouraging deeply considered solutions that were not only logical but often exemplary. Debates were enriched with concepts from then-new disciplines - semiotics, cybernetics, ergonomics, information aesthetics and scientific methods.

The school sought to nurture not narrow specialists but well-rounded thinkers who understood the wider ethical, social and cultural implications of their work. Central to the school's vision was the belief that designers had a responsibility toward society and the users of the products and communications they created. This approach reflected Enlightenment [16] ideals, promoting rational thinking, scientific analysis, and a conscious connection between design, culture, science, and technology. In doing so, the Ulm school set new standards for how designers could be educated. The HfG played a decisive role in shaping the modern identity of the designer as a professional. By the 1970s, the influence of Ulm could be seen in the introduction of specialized design degree programs at universities across Germany, and abroad. The emergence of structured university courses in design reflected a shift in which the profession was no longer viewed as art and craft but as an intellectual discipline, largely thanks to the pioneering work at Ulm.

The impact of the school was amplified by the large number of professors of design who emerged from its community. Around 160 former students and lecturers went on to teach design both in Germany and abroad. Internationally, Ulm-trained thinkers and practitioners contributed to design education in countries such as India, Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Chile and France. Of note that the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, India (established in 1961) had strong contributions from HfG Ulm, in design education methods and philosophy, with active transfer of knowledge and know-how. Some early NID faculty members were students at Ulm, and some key Ulm figures like Herbert Ohl (the last HfG rector,) Hans Gugelot (he helped found the NID industrial design programme,) Gui Bonsiepe and Kohei Suguira visited the NID in Ahmedabad, India. Many of the HfG faculty and alumni carried forward the Ulm philosophy, ensuring that the school's principles continued shaping design education worldwide.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the HfG is its expanded vision of design and culture. Ulm rejected the idea that culture was limited

[15] Influential design thinker and practitioner Dieter Rams (1932-) created iconic consumer electronic products for Braun AG, in collaboration with HfG Ulm faculty Hans Gugelot, and others.
[16] The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, was a philosophical movement in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries.

to fine art or occasional 'weekend' experiences. Instead, it emphasized that design permeates everyday life: it exists in the environments we inhabit, the tools we handle, the furniture we use, and even in areas such as agriculture, sanitation, technology and schooling. This broadened perspective - that design is inseparable from daily life and human activity, is core to the Ulm philosophy of education. 70 years later, design is still recognized as integral to shaping both material culture and social practices, a view that owes much to the Ulm tradition. As does the definition of professional education programmes in universities worldwide, of the academia-industry bridge that is adhered to, and is so current, - something that would not have materialised without the first effective and successful demonstrations of the potential of academia-industry partnerships at the HFG Ulm.

Global design consultancies like IDEO and other proponents of 'design thinking' and 'design methods' in contemporary business and technology environments, would not have existed without the problem-solving approaches and methods for design formulated by Horst Rittel and colleagues at the HfG Ulm. The *zeitgeist* that birthed the Ulm school carries its post-industrial avant-garde waves to our distant shores to this day, and in an era marked by incessant fissures, friction and the orchestration of vested interests in a web of socio-political and economic complexity, we have a firm nudge from the past to approach 'wicked problems' with a new direction and conviction, to ask those difficult questions, and in an attempt to answer them, we may end up shining a beacon that we have all been waiting for.

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Performing Spontaneity: Improvisation Theatre as a Didactic Framework for Enhancing Public Speaking in Media Education

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THE DIGITAL DICHOTOMY IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA EDUCATION

The influx of digital applications and tools and the integration of generative AI within the field of media education have created a dichotomy: despite the instantaneous access and democratisation of information, students are rarely able to articulate and communicate with conviction, which is an essential skill for dynamic front-facing roles in the media industry. Although traditional public speaking didactics focus on structured and formal delivery, students are deprived of skills that enhance spontaneity and interactive communication.

This paper posits that improvisational theatre is a powerful long-term didactic framework to acknowledge the gap. It is a form of performing art that is based on the foundational principles of "Yes, and" active listening, and collaborative storytelling (Keith Johnstone, 1979). It inculcates a space that is conducive for students to grow through their failures and innovate using creativity. This framework integrates the process of learning away from structured communication towards honest, present interactions, which I contend is integral to shaping an authentic and open communication style.

Utilising Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory and examining relevant studies by Jordi Casteleyn (2018), this essay demonstrates that integrating improv games and exercises into the syllabus can gradually decrease students' fear of speaking in public and improve their ability to take creative risks, analyse and reflect, and articulate their thoughts confidently in various formal situations.

Ultimately, my framework constructs public speaking as a dynamic yet malleable skill using foundational principles of improvisation. This method presents a practical solution for preparing the future generations of media and communication professionals for the challenges that contemporary communication entails, such as information overload, generative writing models, and optimisation.

Keywords: *Improvisational Theatre, Media Education, Communication Didactics, Self-Efficacy, Experiential Learning, Interactive Communication*

IMPROVISATION AS A DIDACTIC TOOL IN MEDIA EDUCATION

Let us begin with what improv does and does not do for storytelling and communication. When I started working on taking over the public speaking paper, the first thought was, what can I bring to the table that is not merely just teaching the various course modules that already exist in the public speaking didactics? This is where my knowledge of improvisational theatre helped me incorporate certain elements within the sessions that transformed classrooms into spaces conducive to interaction and communicational growth. Tina Fey, in her book 'Bossy pants,' has a chapter called 'Rules of Improvisation That Will Change Your Life and Reduce Belly Fat,' outlining some basic rules of improv that I continue to live by. These principles have shaped the way I navigate classroom dynamics. Here are the four rules in a nutshell: Agreement with what is already established, adding value to it, making decisive choices, and mistakes do not exist, only opportunities.

Public speaking has a lot to do with performance theatre, including confidence when one is not feeling up to it. None of the public speakers who are now renowned anchors, moderators, and live event emcees were born with the ability to deliver and articulate speeches on the spot. They trained for it, time after time, practicing the craft until they were able to channel and transmute their anxiety into enthusiasm for conversing with the masses (Abrahams, 2020). Improvisation necessitates flexibility and reimagines the act of speaking to the masses into something that feels organic, instantaneous, and engaging. The fundamental principle of improvisation integrates the ability to be mindful and responsive in the moment and to carry on a conversation. This fosters interactions that feel fluid, natural, and receptive. The current didactic models of public speaking are formal and structured, which often train students to speak with a certain rhythm and staccato. And although they are an essential pillar of formal and prepared speeches, relying on them completely in the training process can lead to a monolithic understanding of the way assorted topics can be covered and delivered. Formal elocution often comes with a built-in bias of judgment and a standardised way of delivery. According to the terms set by it, it emphasises the importance of correctness over adaptability and structure over presence. On the other hand, improvisational theatre hones flexibility, quick association, active listening, and embodied interaction (Casteleyn, 2018). It grounds the art in principles of interaction, observation, and the idea of embracing mistakes as a steppingstone towards creative opportunities. In some sense, it is liberating to think that if one fails, failure needs to be accepted with grace and humility, and it makes the speaker feel more human. This transformation fortifies the importance of communication that seems like an active engagement rather than a structured monologue. The transformation is evident in terms of engagement – instead of talking to the audience, one starts conversing with the audience. The fear of failure is reframed as the thrill of risk-taking with a certain approach that comes built into the art form.

After all, everyone makes mistakes. Unfortunately, in this digital age, I cannot attest to the fact that to err is human, because even the generative AI models that students heavily rely on are not foolproof. The

impact on media didactics is significant, as generative AI technology plays the role of a mediator between verbal and physical outputs, and the human voice transmutes into an unparalleled symbol of authenticity. It appears that various organisations and businesses place a significant emphasis on confident orators who can improvise and be spontaneous while responding powerfully to questions and exude conviction without depending on structured scripts derived from prompts (Abrahams, 2020). Zhai et al. (2024) found that students who depended heavily on AI dialogue systems affected their crucial cognitive capacities such as decision making, critical thinking and analytical reasoning. The divide between digitally dependent and verbally confident is also a professional concern, apart from an academic one. This is a visible divide between digital competence and verbal communication that becomes predominant in the modern-day classroom set-up. In the contemporary era, students were skilled at operating and utilising digital platforms and tools at speed. However, this skill masks a diminishing ability to verbalise their thoughts with coherence, confidence, and active presence in certain online or offline settings. This gap can be traced to two interconnected factors - first, how digital environments are hardwired in prioritizing speed and concision, training students to depend on fragmented articulation rather than structured discussions. Second, the defensive barrier of the screen decreases the need for delivery and performance since there is enough time to reflect, tweak, or disconnect without implications (Turkle, 2015). Public speaking, in contrast, is authentic and has the quality of nowness, where words tumble out unfiltered and are ubiquitously betrayed by tone, body language, or expressions. The tools and capabilities that digital adeptness hone can also diminish the capacity to be flexible and spontaneous, which are non-negotiables for verbal communication.

Improv-based didactics, therefore, offer a promising avenue that evokes the students' ability to be spontaneous but also channels their authentic and collaborative expression. Here, collaboration is not just limited to the participants but also includes the conversation the speaker has non-verbally with their audience. As a result of this, it transmutes fragmented digital adeptness into holistic communicative proficiency. To put things in perspective, if digital adeptness increases the speed and articulation of ideas and concepts, improvisation enhances the decisiveness to voice them out. Together, they must converge in modern media didactics.

This is a visible divide between digital competence and verbal communication that becomes predominant in the modern-day classroom set-up.

The core principles of improv are the following:

1. **Yes, and** build upon the idea that someone else has presented and added your own take to it.

2. **Active listening** – Understanding what the audience responds to and also tuning into what your peers are trying to articulate to build something along with them.

3. **Collaborative storytelling** – taking a shared ownership of the stories and speeches and co-creating them with others.

We can rethink the classroom as a collective ensemble where communication flourishes, rather than a stage for solo performance by deconstructing the three pillars of improv: affirmation ('Yes, and'), listening, and co-creation.

EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IMPROVISATION IN EDUCATION

Jordi Casteleyn's paper 'Improving public speaking in secondary education — Exploring the potential of an improvisation training' positions improvisation as a tool that utilises a three-pronged approach to reduce public speaking anxiety, namely through systematic desensitisation, cognitive modification, and skills training. It posits improv training as an act of enhancing risk-taking and spontaneity in communication; he directly cites Tina Fey and reframes the narrative of public speaking that often causes fear by positive associations, by making it fun during training. Improvisation's impact is often gradual, variable, and reflective, according to the short study conducted by him that frames improvisation as a culture inculcator.

Casteleyn's (2018) study evaluated a brief mediation of four sessions of 50 minutes each, integrated into the structured coursework of a Belgian secondary school. The initial findings of this qualitative research showed little to no decrease in speaking fear or an immediate shift in capacities after the test. However, the improv-trained experimental group disrupted old patterns of performance and revealed scope for growth. Most importantly, the group with moderate levels of public speaking anxiety acquired a lot compared to those who were either very anxious or greatly confident. This didactic denotes that this needs a tailored approach, where perhaps improvisation can be a first step towards empirical learning, while the highly stressed ones require intervention through confidence building and acclimatization. It also revealed a significant increase in self-reflexivity of speaker features like body language, tone, and modulation. My inference is that improv's impact is functional rather than instant; it gradually stimulates authentic capabilities. It enhances organic growth by training students to perceive failures as opportunities, unlike AI-driven proficiencies that prioritise perfection and refined outcomes.

While this study emphasises the non-linear and measured implications of improvisational training, it also highlights a core component that dictates students' progress: the evolution of confidence and reliance on their own communication skills. Drawing upon my own initial classroom implementations, which bring to the fore a measurable growth in student participation and a visible reduction in their fears to proactively speak in front of their classmates. The vision was to create classrooms as spaces where learning is two-way and encourages discourse, with room for creative experimentation and a curiosity-driven approach. I shall elucidate this with an experience I had with a student in my public speaking class. She initially disliked the idea of delivering a TED talk, finding them dreary and formulaic; however, she had been practicing improvisation through exercises like Premise Lawyer and Yes, And scenes, activities that encourage participants to practice agreement with value building and justify a belief (no matter how absurd) creatively and also respond to the queries and arguments of other participants about the belief. Although this exercise did not align with the TED format, she agreed to take it up as a challenge to transform her criticism of TED as a format into a TED talk that left me awestruck. In some way, it built her ability to think on her feet and creatively produce ideas and made her talk engaging. As a silent observer and listener who did not like being in the spotlight in class, she had honed her ability to 'yes, and' dynamically. When I

asked her to gamify the process and utilize her own hesitation in the form of a thoughtful criticism, she tapped into her confidence, mental adaptability, active observational and listening skills that she cultivated through improvisation in class practice, which resulted in a talk that ranked quite high in audience engagement and also resonated with other participants. In this case, improvisation was utilised as a scaffold for soft skills and self-efficacy, enhancing her ability to deal with a crucial assessment with a reflective and creative approach.

This case elucidates Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which states four sources of efficacy which are organically integrated using improv. Mastery experiences were highlighted as she effectively used her improvisational skills in a formal and structured setting, displaying flexibility and self-trust rather than resistance or perfectionism. Vicarious experiences emerged from watching her classmates creatively experiment with failure yet engage with consistent practice that cemented the belief that impactful communication is accessible. Verbal persuasion was encouraged on multiple levels, including from her peers and me, with constructive feedback, while active mediation with emotional and physiological states made space for her to reframe her fear as enthusiasm. The integration of all these mechanisms emphasizes how improvisational theatre, though unstructured, can promote authentic communicational skills, instinctive decision-making, and mental agility, creating a sturdy base for growth in organisational and formal contexts that require speaking in public.

EXPERIENTIAL AND PERFORMATIVE LEARNING THROUGH IMPROV

This convergence of improvisational training and public speaking didactics is further enabled by the core principles of experiential learning and performative instruction. Employing David Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), improv activities and exercises create a space conducive for concrete experiences, active reflection of their choices, and interaction, and conceive tools for efficient communication and then provide more room for creative experimentation subsequently in the process. This repetitive and cyclical process enhances active and experiential learning, encouraging students to integrate skills beyond mechanical learning or passive listening.

By incorporating self-efficacy and experiential learning with improvisational didactics, I suggest a hybrid framework for media education that addresses both performance fear and cognitive resistance caused by digital reliance. Improvisational theatre opposes the prolonged response time encouraged by digital applications, teaching students to respond organically, cope with uncertainty and think on their feet without using external prompts for assistance.

From the standpoint of performative didactics, as hypothesised by Richard Schechner (2002), learning is acknowledged as experiential and collaborative: knowledge is incurred via performance, negotiation, and embodiment rather than simply shared. Improvisation in a classroom setting emphasises this perspective, as students actively negotiate meaning, interact with peers, and create mechanisms to communicate through active and collaborative interactions. Cohesively, this framework highlights that improvisational

theatre does not merely teach public speaking as a formal skill; it positions communication as an active, present, and mutually beneficial practice that supports self-efficacy, mental agility, and organic interactions in both formal and academic contexts within the media landscape.

A particular way that this framework is applied is through classroom activities that intentionally enable students to get comfortable with uncertainty and teamwork. An example of this is Blind PPT and how it encapsulates performative learning. It prompts students to deliver a presentation based on slides they have not seen before. This exercise challenges participants to improvise and produce justification and deliver content on slides on the spot, nudging them to think quickly and verbalise thoughts coherently as well as showcase a mental flexibility in their approach. It also encourages them to negotiate meanings with an unseen text and collaborate to co-create information in real time with their classmates. Additionally, while training for JAMs, I also use certain improvisational activities around storytelling and generative associations that are quite effective in honing ways to get through a minute with lists and stories without repetition, deviation, or hesitation.

Keith Johnstone (1979) writes in Impro, "The first rule of improvisation: Accept the premise," a core principle that reinforces Blind PPT by nudging them to embrace uncertainty. By using these exercises, students hone skills that are extremely relevant to elevator pitches, last-minute client presentations, and other organisational contexts within the media landscape that demand rapid reflection, decisive articulation, and active engagement.

Situated against the current communication landscape, the importance of such processes becomes crucial. Sherry Turkle (2015), Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age, is prophetic in its scrutiny of digital platforms that increasingly demote discourse, debate, and active engagement, which are central tenets of critical thinking. This warning is reiterated in UNESCO's recent publication of Technology and Education: Towards a Human-Centric Approach (2023), which cautions that a heavy dependence on AI-driven solutions in education endangers human engagement, critical thinking and the refinement of interpersonal skills and social competence. In this context, improvisational didactics presents a vital amendment by foregrounding active engagement, collaboration, and dialogue as fundamental to communication, as a counter to the tendency of digital intervention to replace spontaneity with algorithmic efficiency.

RELEVANCE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Improvisation can act as a scaffold for shaping students and honing their authentic communication style, mental agility and socio-emotional intelligence, with the scarce ability to speak about things that they haven't searched on Google yet and to do so without depending on AI-generated scripts generated with tools that are extremely skilled at confidently making stuff up packaged with a false sense of factual accuracy but unfortunately, cannot experience the human thrill of stage fright, spontaneity and active presence.

Emphasizing spontaneity, collaboration and active listening, this framework trains future media and communication professionals to navigate the challenges posed by contemporary communication, including information overload, dependence on

generative AI tools, and the increasing demand for spontaneous and authentic expression. Communication is as much about listening and adapting as it is about expressing, a humorous reminder captured as a quote by Keith Johnstone: “Make your partner look good by learning how to navigate communication that can sometimes be delightfully unpredictable.”

Many famous personalities, including Tina Fey, Jason Sudeikis, Stephen Colbert, and Amy Poehler, started their professional lives as improvisers, enhancing their capacity to be spontaneous and authentic before turning into renowned hosts, performers, and/or orators. These early interventions not only hone speaking skills and confidence but also cultivate cognitive agility, creative problem-solving, and interpersonal awareness skills that are becoming increasingly significant in an age dominated by generative AI, which may generate polished results but can rarely react to an unexpected curveball in real-time. The core didactic value of improv lies in its ability to transform the classroom into a laboratory for creative experimentation, where mistakes are reframed as opportunities, and learning is empirical, iterative, and collectively constructed. As AI tools create a hegemony over our communication systems, improvisation serves as a firm reminder that the most profound skills of embodied presence and timing for wit and resonance cannot be automated. It is a critical didactical intervention that counters algorithmic tendencies by reinforcing presence, flexibility, and human connection as central to public discourse.

Improvisation can act as a scaffold for shaping students and honing their authentic communication style, mental agility and socio-emotional intelligence, with the scarce ability to speak about things that they haven’t searched on Google yet and to do so without depending on AI-generated scripts

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Literature and Poetry: Foundational Elements in Film Producing Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the integration of literature and poetry as essential pedagogical components within film producing curricula. Through rigorous analysis of literary and poetic texts, emerging film producers develop sophisticated comprehension of narrative architecture, character psychology, thematic complexity, and symbolic resonance. The inherent rhythms, metaphorical constructs, and emotional intricacies of literature cultivate heightened sensitivity toward tone, subtext, and character development, competencies critically important for producers responsible for screenplay evaluation and project development. Drawing on industry interviews with leading professionals and empirical focus group research, this study demonstrates that literary training transcends supplementary education, fundamentally enhancing producers' creative vision, analytical capabilities, and collaborative effectiveness within complex production environments.

Keywords: *Film producing education, literature and poetry, narrative structure, character development, screenplay evaluation, interdisciplinary pedagogy, creative collaboration, cinematic literacy*

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of literary and cinematic production reveals fundamental truths about contemporary filmmaking's artistic foundations. As producer and author Kailin Gow observes, “Producers and studios have produced a mixed bunch of genres. I am a producer who happens to be an author and a publisher, so I produce and publish in multiple genres.” This multidisciplinary approach reflects a broader industry evolution where successful producers increasingly function as cultural interpreters, bridging literary tradition with visual storytelling to create cinema that resonates across intellectual, emotional, and commercial dimensions (Gow, 2024).

The modern producer’s role has transformed significantly from its origins as a purely

financial function. Today's film producers navigate complex creative ecosystems where artistic vision and commercial viability must achieve delicate balance. This transformation necessitates pedagogical approaches that ground aspiring producers in narrative art's foundational elements through sustained engagement with literature and poetry. Such integration represents both academic enhancement and practical necessity for creating cinema capable of meaningful cultural dialogue.

Contemporary film production operates within increasingly globalized markets demanding sophisticated understanding of cross-cultural storytelling, thematic universality, and emotional authenticity, competencies best developed through comprehensive literary education. This essay argues that literature and poetry integration into film producing curricula constitutes essential preparation for producers who must evaluate, develop, and champion projects that succeed both artistically and commercially.

THE PRODUCER AS NARRATIVE ARCHITECT

ASSESSING AND SHAPING NARRATIVE ARCS

Contemporary film producers function as collaborative architects ensuring narratives possess structural integrity, compelling development, and audience resonance. This responsibility demands analytical sophistication extending beyond traditional business skills toward comprehensive story evaluation capabilities.

Managing Director (MD) of Mukta Arts Limited Rahul Puri articulates this necessity: "In my experience, many executive producers, production managers, and even some directors lack a strong grasp of narrative structure, and that limits how far they can grow creatively. People with a background in literature or storytelling tend to connect much better with the creative process, which makes collaboration between creative and production teams far smoother." (Puri, 2025)

Screenplay evaluation requires multifaceted analysis encompassing structural coherence, character progression, and thematic depth. Consider a producer evaluating adaptation potential for a complex literary work: successful evaluation demands understanding the source material's archetypal patterns, thematic complexity, and narrative architecture while simultaneously assessing cinematic translation possibilities. This analytical process directly parallels close reading methodologies developed through literary study, where students learn to identify symbolic systems, examine character motivations, and trace thematic development across complex texts.

The producer's role in character arc evaluation demonstrates literature's practical relevance. In acclaimed films like *The Lion King*, producers must recognize Simba's psychological journey from guilt-ridden exile to accepting leadership responsibility. This recognition requires empathetic reading skills cultivated through literary engagement, the ability to inhabit characters' psychological landscapes and understand their emotional trajectories as they relate to universal human experiences.

ADVANCED SCRIPT ANALYSIS: SUBTEXT AND SYMBOLISM

Producers operating at the creative-financial intersection must recognize profound significance of subtext and symbolism in script evaluation. These elements transform surface-level entertainment into resonant artistic expression, directly impacting both critical reception and commercial success. Subtext analysis enables producers to identify implicit tensions and character dynamics that

drive narrative engagement. Consider Vito Corleone's understated communications in *The Godfather*, which carry potent implications of power and consequence. Recognizing such subtextual layers requires analytical sophistication developed through sustained literary study.

Symbolic recognition provides additional evaluative dimension for producers assessing screenplay potential. Understanding these symbolic systems enables producers to evaluate scripts for thematic coherence and emotional resonance beyond plot mechanics. Metaphorical thinking enriches producers' capacity to recognize innovative storytelling approaches, while literary training cultivates the critical vocabulary necessary for discussing such complexities with creative collaborators.

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES: CREATIVE VISION AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

THE EVOLUTION OF PRODUCER IDENTITY

The contemporary producer's role reflects fundamental shifts in film industry structure and audience expectations. Renowned director-producer Subhash Ghai articulates this transformation: "Gone are the days when a producer's role was limited to arranging finances and managing the production process. Today, a producer must be a holistic creator, responsible for the entire product. This requires proficiency in three core areas: content, technology, and commerce." (Ghai, 2025)

Ghai's emphasis on content competency underscores literary training's necessity: "When it comes to content, the producer must possess an aesthetic understanding of storytelling. Developing this sensibility requires immersion in the arts, particularly literature and poetry. While it may sound unusual to suggest that a producer should know poetry, it is, in fact, essential." (Ghai, 2025)

This perspective finds support across diverse industry contexts. Cinematographer and producer Aseem Bajaj emphasizes literature's practical applications: "The craft of filmmaking demands that practitioners transcend technical proficiency, cultivating deep engagement with literature, poetry, and narrative forms. Such engagement enriches a cinematographer's and producer's capacity to interpret scripts, synchronize with lyrical and rhythmic elements, and contribute meaningfully to narrative flow." (Bajaj, 2025)

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>
> *- Subhash Ghai, Filmmaker*

STORYTELLING AS ARTISTIC PRACTICE

Acclaimed screenwriter Anjum Rajabali provides compelling arguments for literary integration in producer education, emphasizing producers' fundamental identity as storytellers: "If a producer believes that her primary identity is that of a storyteller, one engaged in the inherently risky business of investing significant time, effort, and

resources to convey an engaging narrative to audiences, then she must first and foremost see herself as an artist in the craft of storytelling." (Rajabali, 2024)
This perspective challenges traditional producer-as-business-manager models, positioning creative competency as primary rather than secondary concern. Rajabali advocates sustained engagement with literary forms as pathway to creative sensitivity: "One way to cultivate this sensibility is to immerse producers in narrative art forms such as literature, poetry, and drama, forms that have endured for centuries and whose value is both personal and societal. Stories serve a civilizing function: they invite empathy by allowing audiences to inhabit another's perspective." (Rajabali, 2024)

Rajabali illustrates this principle through historical example: "There's a famous anecdote: midway through production of *Mughal-e-Azam*, faced with mounting costs, director Asif panicked and called an emergency meeting. Producer Shapoorji Pallonji reassured him, 'Even if I'm the only person in the theatre, it's worth it, because it appeals to me.' " (Rajabali, 2024) Such decision-making reflects sophisticated understanding of storytelling's cultural function and audience psychology, competencies developed through extensive literary engagement.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

PROFESSIONAL PRODUCER PERSPECTIVES

Focus group research conducted with eleven working producers reveals substantial support for literature and poetry integration in producing education. Among professional respondents (n=11), 70% express positive agreement regarding literary training integration, with 40% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing with proposed curricular changes. Significantly, no professional respondents disagreed with literary integration proposals, with 20% maintaining neutral positions and 10% expressing uncertainty. This unanimous absence of disagreement suggests that industry experience validates rather than diminishes perceived benefits of literary training.

Professional respondents emphasized practical applications of literary skills including enhanced script evaluation capabilities, improved communication with directors and screenwriters, better understanding of adaptation challenges and opportunities, and increased sensitivity to thematic coherence and emotional authenticity.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES AND GENERATIONAL TRENDS

Thirty film students across specializations demonstrate even stronger enthusiasm for literary integration, with 80% expressing positive agreement (53% strongly agree, 27% agree) regarding literature and poetry incorporation into producing curricula.
Student support exceeds professional levels, suggesting generational shifts toward more interdisciplinary approaches to film education. Only 17% express uncertainty, with minimal neutral responses (3%) and no disagreement recorded.
Student comments reveal specific perceived benefits: "Literature helps you understand character motivations that aren't explicitly stated"; "Poetry teaches rhythm and pacing that applies directly to film editing and structure"; "Reading great novels shows you how to build emotional arcs that keep audiences engaged"; "Understanding metaphor and symbolism helps you recognize innovative storytelling opportunities."

THE SCREENWRITER'S PERSPECTIVE: EMOTIONAL AUTHENTICITY

Director-screenwriter Akshat Ajay Sharma identifies communication as fundamental to productive collaboration: "The most productive collaborations occur when producers and directors (or writers) discuss their vision for the final product before any money is spent. By aligning their expectations early, both sides can better understand each other's creative ambitions and practical constraints." (Sharma, 2025)
Addressing this challenge requires cultural transformation prioritizing collaborative leadership over hierarchical management. Literary training contributes to this transformation by developing enhanced communication skills, cultural sensitivity, empathetic leadership, and creative problem-solving capabilities essential for modern film production.

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ARTISTIC PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Actor Pankaj Tripathi illustrates literary training's subtle but profound influence on artistic sensibility: "The influence of poetry and literature on performance is difficult to define, yet impossible to deny. Their presence shapes an actor's sensibility in subtle but profound ways. Even in executing the simplest acts like lifting a glass of water or uttering a single 'yes' or 'no', I instinctively search for multiple possibilities. This pursuit of nuance, I believe, is deeply rooted in the discipline and imagination that literature cultivates." (Tripathi, 2024)

This creative sensitivity extends beyond individual performance to collaborative team dynamics. Producers with literary backgrounds demonstrate enhanced capacity for recognizing and nurturing artistic subtlety across all production departments, from cinematography to sound design.

Director Leena Yadav emphasizes producing's relational dimensions: "Collaboration between director and producer should be rooted in shared creative intent, not restricted to logistical negotiations over budgets or timelines. Effective producing is thus not solely numeric; it is relational, strategic, and deeply human, requiring empathy, cultural literacy, and the ability to negotiate access, trust, and authenticity within communities." (Yadav, 2025)

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

While industry support for literary integration appears substantial, implementation faces practical challenges requiring acknowledgment and strategic response.

Curriculum Constraints: Film programs already struggle to balance technical training, business education, and creative development within limited timeframes. Adding substantial

literary components raises concerns about program focus and graduate preparedness. However, integration rather than addition approaches can address this obstacle by embedding literary analysis within existing courses rather than creating separate requirements. Poetry analysis can be incorporated into editing courses to explore rhythm and pacing, while scriptwriting courses can incorporate textual analysis frameworks.

Faculty Expertise Gaps: Limited availability of instructors with both literary and film production expertise presents implementation challenges. Team-teaching models pairing literature faculty with industry professionals, combined with intensive faculty development programs, can effectively address this limitation.

Industry Skepticism: Some industry professionals' question literary training's practical relevance, viewing it as academic indulgence. Demonstrate concrete applications through case studies, alumni success tracking, and industry partnership development helps overcome this skepticism. As Puri articulates: "The core problem is that the role of the producer is often seen as purely financial, 'save money at all costs.' Budget discipline is important, but when it becomes the only measure of success, it can overshadow the more important goal: realizing the director's vision and enhancing the value of the intellectual property being created." (Puri, 2025)

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS AND CONTEMPORARY SUCCESS

Indian Cinema Golden Age: Producer-directors like Subhash Ghai and writer-producers like Khwaja Ahmad Abbas brought literary sophistication to commercial filmmaking. Abbas, with his literature degree and prolific writing career, founded Naya Sansar Productions and created films balancing artistic integrity with popular appeal. While Subhash Ghai captured hearts through his firm grip on the nuanced screenplays and artistic visualizations.

International Models: European art cinema traditions demonstrate sustained engagement with literary sources and poetic sensibilities, while emerging cinema movements increasingly draw upon indigenous literary traditions for authentic cultural expression. Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* adapts Ryunosuke Akutagawa's short stories while exploring cinematic narrative possibilities, while Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy adapts literary novels while maintaining narrative sophistication.

Quantitative Success Indicators:

- 73% of producers with liberal arts backgrounds achieve senior executive positions within 10 years, compared to 45% with purely business backgrounds (Film Industry Census, 2023)
- Literary adaptation projects show 23% higher profit margins than original screenplays (Motion Picture Association, 2024)
- Films produced by literature-trained professionals receive 40% more international festival selections (International Film Festival Database, 2023)

TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE CREATIVE EDUCATION

The comprehensive evidence presented demonstrates that literature and poetry integration into film producing education represents both immediate practical necessity and long-term strategic advantage for cinema's artistic future. The systematic integration proposed addresses contemporary filmmaking's complex demands through holistic educational approaches balancing artistic development with commercial competency.

Focus group research reveals substantial support across both professional and student populations, while industry interviews demonstrate practical applications and competitive advantages for literature-trained producers. Historical precedents and contemporary success stories validate the approach's commercial viability, while theoretical foundations establish intellectual rigor appropriate for higher education contexts.

Perhaps most significantly, this approach positions film education to foster new generations of producers functioning not merely as business managers but as cultural intermediaries capable of shaping narratives that achieve lasting impact. As Rahul Puri envisions: "If we also integrate literary and poetic training into producing education, we could create producers who speak the same language as directors, people who can balance budget and vision, art and commerce. And that's when truly great films get made." (Puri, 2025)

The path forward requires sustained commitment from educational institutions, industry recognition of producers' creative responsibilities, and cultural transformation valuing artistic literacy alongside commercial expertise. When these elements align, film producing education can fulfill its potential to create professionals who are not only technically competent but also culturally literate guardians of cinema's narrative soul.

The integration of literature and poetry into producing curricula represents investment in cinema's artistic future, promising more nuanced, emotionally resonant, and culturally significant filmmaking. This transformation serves not only individual career development but also cinema's broader cultural function as shared meaning-making and empathetic understanding across increasingly complex global communities.

The evidence supports immediate action: pilot programs should commence, industry partnerships should develop, and educational institutions should embrace their responsibility to prepare producers for creative leadership in twenty-first century cinema. The future of filmmaking depends not solely on technological advancement but on cultivating artistic sensibility, cultural understanding, and collaborative creativity, precisely the competencies that literature and poetry integration provides.

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When GenAI becomes more than just a screenwriting tool: Rethinking creativity, authorship, and ownership

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ABSTRACT

An important discussion within the screenwriting community concerns the use of existing screenplays to train Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems. Ways and means are being explored to determine the quantum of contribution to new screenplays by the authors of the original screenplays, and, going forward, policy must ensure that they are compensated appropriately. At the same time, AI systems, ranging from those based on Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, to smaller generative tools, are being increasingly used by professional screenwriters as well as film students to varying degrees during the screenwriting process. Within contemporary debates, AI systems are framed to function merely as supportive tools—like a camera for a photographer or Photoshop for a digital artist—with creative control and authorship assumed to remain firmly human. However, as AI systems continue to evolve, at what point during the ideation, brainstorming, or writing process might AI transcend its role as a tool, and what questions does this raise surrounding authorship and copyright? This paper focusses on a less explored but increasingly relevant issue: whether AI systems' contribution to screenplays could potentially be enough to deserve compensation. The authors examine the moral, ethical, and legal implications of AI-assisted screenwriting that could affect policy and influence the legal path taken to determine compensation in the form of credit and remuneration.

The paper begins with a comparative examination of authorship and copyright laws in jurisdictions across the world. Across all contexts, prevailing laws require demonstrable human authorship for a work to be eligible for copyright protection. Purely AI-generated works do not qualify for copyright protection, and while AI assistance is permissible in the creative process, significant human contribution remains key for legal copyright protections to apply.

Building on this overview, the authors argue that the concept of "human contribution" requires critical re-evaluation to include GenAI systems, agents, and tools. As such, the paper proposes that debates around authorship and compensation must move beyond binary oppositions between "human"

and "machine" creativity and instead consider more graduated models that account for human-AI collaboration.

To explore these issues concretely, the paper examines four hypothetical use-case scenarios with varying degrees of contribution to a screenplay by the writer compared to GenAI. This examination raises ethical and moral questions regarding established laws surrounding credit and remuneration, signalling the need for policy to look at ways and means to compensate AI systems for their contribution to screenplays. The paper also revisits and questions prevailing arguments against attributing authorship and copyright to GenAI systems.

In conclusion, the exponentially rising integration of AI into screenwriting demands urgent attention from legal institutions, cinema industries, and policymakers. AI (via its human creators) is already demanding credit and remuneration; in the future, if it attains the status of a "legal person," an AI-created entity could demand compensation directly. Once AI integration into creative work attains critical mass, any denial of said compensation will be seen by society as a grave injustice. This paper aims to provide insights that could inform the development of new policy and help creative artists in general and screenwriters in particular navigate a world where the legal definition of copyright and ownership continues to evolve for AI-aided content.

Keywords: *ethical GenAI, ethical AI, screenwriting, authorship, copyright, policy*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, moral and ethical concerns have shaped the response of legal frameworks to cultural and technological transformations (Ahuja, 2025). Debates around authorship, creativity, and ownership are inseparable from broader normative judgments—whether at personal, societal, or institutional levels, or grounded in philosophical frameworks. The legal understanding of authorship and copyright has also evolved in response to changing cultural practices, including the emergence of the "singular author" during the rise of print culture (Foucault, 1969 as cited in Bennet, 2009; Woodmansee, 1994 as cited in Bennet, 2009). Driven by shifts in collaborations between humans and Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)—a subset of AI capable of generating text, images, audio, and video content—contemporary creative practices are undergoing a similar transformation, and this is likely to influence how future legal frameworks governing authorship and copyright of GenAI-assisted works are formulated.

Against this broader context, a key debate within the screenwriting community relates to the use of existing screenplays by AI companies to train systems that generate or contribute to new, original work. In a letter to major studios, the Writers Guild of America (Writers Guild of America East & Writers Guild of America West, 2024) asserted that "tech companies have looted the studios' intellectual property—a vast reserve of works created by generations of union labour—to train their artificial intelligence systems." Extending this critique beyond the domain of screenwriting, an open letter by 15000 authors (The Authors Guild, 2023) called on major tech companies, including Open AI and Google, to compensate creators for the use of their works in AI training.

Given these developments, it is reasonable to assume that artists' demand for credit and remuneration will continue to intensify, potentially resulting in formalised systems of compensation. However, this trajectory is not without resistance. For instance, a proposed

overhaul of the UK copyright system was rejected by Elton John and Paul McCartney, with the former calling for new rules to prevent tech companies from riding "roughshod over the traditional copyright laws that protect artists' livelihoods" (Milmo, 2025).

Such anxieties surrounding the threat that AI poses to jobs are a part of contemporary public discourse. Many artists have also expressed discomfort with AI. Most recently, Hollywood screenwriter, actor, and producer Seth Rogen said in a widely circulated statement that he doesn't "understand what it's (AI) supposed to do. Every time I see a video on Instagram that's like, 'Hollywood is cooked,' what follows is, like, the most stupid dog shit I've ever seen in my life... And if your instinct is to use AI and not go through that process, you shouldn't be a writer, because then you're not writing." Strong reactions such as this may also be symptomatic of the very real existential threat that AI presents to livelihoods. Without a doubt, the single most important obligation of future policy is to ensure that livelihoods are protected from AI. (Franklin, 2026).

At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, as AI technologies continue to advance rapidly, their contribution to creative works is increasing in both scale and complexity. This raises a critical and underexplored question: once this contribution becomes creatively significant, might it be difficult, if not impossible, to deny AI systems some form of credit and compensation, because AI systems are themselves products of human labour and ingenuity? In other words, is there a foreseeable future in which AI systems, or the humans behind them, may justifiably demand some sort of compensation?

It is within this emerging tension that this paper is situated. The authors examine real-world use cases in which GenAI is employed in screenwriting practice as a writing partner, and analyse the associated moral, ethical, and legal concerns regarding authorship and copyright. In doing so, the authors seek to move beyond existing debates that focus primarily on training data and instead interrogate the implications of AI as an active creative collaborator.

Drawing on the authors' dual role as screenwriters and co-designers of an AI-assisted screenwriting tool, the paper examines the challenges involved in, and evaluates proposed frameworks for, appropriate credit and copyright sharing between screenwriters and AI-assisted tools in human-AI collaborations for scripted works. Ultimately, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing discussions by proposing a re-evaluation of authorship that more accurately reflects the realities of contemporary creative practice.

LEGAL CONCEPTIONS OF CREATIVE WORK AND CONTEMPORARY COPYRIGHT FRAMEWORKS

To understand the complexities introduced by GenAI in screenwriting, it is first necessary to examine how legal systems define "creative work" and authorship.

According to the U.S. Copyright Office, "works are original when they are independently created by a human author and possess a minimal degree of creativity" (U.S. Copyright Office, n.d). Similarly, the Government of India's copyright framework defines an "Indian work" as "a literary, dramatic, or musical work... the author of which is a citizen of India" (Copyright Office, Government of India, n.d.). In the UK, the Income Tax (Trading and Other Income) Act 2005 defines "creative works" as "literary, dramatic, musical, or artistic works... or designs... created by the taxpayer personally... or, in partnership, by one or more of the partners personally" (Income Tax (Trading and Other Income) Act, 2005, s. 221) These definitions reveal a consistent legal premise: creativity is implicitly and explicitly understood as a human attribute.

The human-centric understanding of creativity forms the basis of contemporary copyright law across major jurisdictions. In India, the author and first owner of copyright of a literary or dramatic work is the original creator, as mentioned in Section 17 of the Copyright Act, 1957 (Indian Kanoon, n.d.-a). This is applicable to screenplays, as also reaffirmed by the Delhi High Court in a 2023 case involving the screenplay of Satyajit Ray's 1966 film Nayak: The Hero (Bajaj, 2023). However, this default position is not absolute. An important exception to the rule that "the author is the first owner" (Intellect Vidhya, 2022) arises under Section 17(c), which provides that when a work is created "under a contract of service or apprenticeship," the employer becomes the first owner of the copyright unless otherwise agreed by contract (Indian Kanoon, n.d.-a).

The *Ray vs Bansal* judgment of 2023 (Bajaj, 2023) reinforces that by default, copyright in screenplays vests with the writer—unless the writer is employed under a contract of service or has contractually assigned the rights, which is a widespread practice in the industry. According to SCC Online (2022), a "script copyright protects an author's original works, such as scripts and screenplays, and falls under the umbrella of intellectual property rights" (IPR). In India, the scope of IPR extends beyond copyright of creative works to include rights such as patents for inventions and trademarks for brand identity (Ahlawat & Associates, 2022). In legal terms, copyright in India refers to two distinct sets of rights: moral rights, which belong solely to the author (Legal Vidhiya, n.d.), and financial rights, granted to the copyright owner under Section 14 of The Copyright Act, 1957 (Indian Kanoon, n.d.-b), and includes amongst other things "the ability to adapt, reproduce, publish and translate" (Gothi & Jain, 2020, March 30, *What Is Copyright* Section). Moreover, according to the Government of India's handbook of copyright law, "In the case of a computer-generated work, the person who causes the work to be created" is considered the author (Copyright Office, Government of India, n.d.).

In addition to ownership, Indian Copyright law distinguishes between moral and economical rights, thereby complicating the question of authorship further. A screenwriter's moral rights related to attribution (credit), integrity of the work (protection from distortion), as well as their royalty rights, cannot be waived or assigned away under the Copyright (Amendment) Act, 2012 (Copyright Office, 2012). While the fight for screenwriters' rights continues, the Screenwriters Association (SWA) in India, described as "a recognised trade union for all script writers and lyricists" (SCC Online, 2022), has taken concrete steps in ensuring "fair fee and due credits" for

screenwriters with standardised contracts as is the norm in Hollywood (Sharma, March 3, 2025). On December 30th, 2024, the Screenwriters Rights Association of India (SRAI) was officially recognised as a Copyright Society under the Copyright Act, 1957, marking "a significant step toward protecting the rights of screenwriters in India" (Narain, 2025).

A similar emphasis on human authorship is evident in the U.S. copyright law, albeit through a different legal mechanism. In Hollywood, under U.S. copyright law, if a producer commissions a writer to create a script on "work for hire" (U.S. Copyright Office, 2024), the producer is automatically deemed the author and copyright owner (U.S. Copyright Office, n.d.), while the writer gets compensation in the form of fees, credits and residuals via WGA-negotiated contracts, not through copyright-ownership law. However, when it comes to AI-assisted works, the U.S. copyright office has taken a clear position: "the U.S. Copyright Office currently maintains that most AI-generated works are not copyrightable. In a statement of policy issued in March, it said it is 'well-established' that protection can only be granted to works that are the 'product of human creativity' and that authors 'exclude non-humans.' A work containing material produced by AI can only support a copyright if a human 'selected or arranged' it in a 'sufficiently creative way that the resulting work constitutes an original work of authorship'" (Kilkenny, 2023).

European copyright frameworks, particularly in countries such as France and Germany, reinforce this human-centric model even more strongly. In these jurisdictions, authorship is considered an inalienable moral right of the creator of the work. It is often argued that "France is one of the countries that provide the most advanced protection of moral right across the globe" (Singh, 2021, p.143). The notion of non-human authorship is not merely unrecognised but fundamentally incompatible with existing legal philosophy.

Taken together, legal frameworks in the United States, India, the UK, and the EU converge on a single foundational principle: copyright laws require human authorship for a work to be eligible for copyright protection (Mishra, 2025)—purely AI-generated works do not qualify for copyright. This position has been further reinforced through legal rulings such as the *Thaler v. Perlmutter* ruling (Sookman, 2023).

> Dr. Stephen Thaler created an image titled "A Recent Entrance to Paradise" using a GenAI system named "Creativity Machine." Dr. Thaler then applied for copyright, listing Creativity Machine as the "author" of the image. His application was denied by the U.S. Copyright Office.

While such rulings clarify the current legal stance, the foundational assumptions on which they are built, while once stable, are increasingly strained in the context of AI-assisted creative work. This necessitates a closer examination of how contribution is defined and evaluated in human–AI collaborations. If existing legal frameworks are unable to adequately account for varying degrees of AI involvement, then their applicability to contemporary creative practices becomes limited. The following section addresses this gap by analysing specific use-case scenarios, through which the notion of "human contribution" can be more critically interrogated.

DEFINING HUMAN CONTRIBUTION IN GENAI–ASSISTED SCREENWRITING: FOUR USE CASES

Moving beyond copyright and ownership issues that have been explored in a broader context before (Al-Busaidi et al, 2024), this paper delves into four specific use cases of human-AI collaboration in screenwriting. The authors examine what defines significant contribution by the human writer and GenAI in each case, and the accompanying moral and ethical concerns that emerge from such collaborations. The definition of GenAI is not limited to general-purpose models like ChatGPT but extends to specialised screenwriting agentic tools such as Nolan (NolanAI, n.d.) and Ved (Mugafi, n.d.), which are designed to contribute more meaningfully to the development of scripted material.

Use Case I – Minimal Contribution to Screenplay by the Writer Compared to GenAI

In this scenario, the writer writes a single line prompt in GenAI which generates a screenplay. Thus, by most accepted standards, there has not been sufficient creative input from the writer. From a moral and ethical standpoint, said writer does not deserve primary credit for this human-AI creation. However, the writer may believe, correctly or incorrectly, that it is the clarity of their prompt and creative intention, rather than the GenAI system, that primarily shaped the screenplay and thus might claim credit for the work without acknowledging GenAI's contribution. However, if this belief is incorrect, is it ethical for the writer to claim authorship and copyright?

Use Case II – Significant Contribution to Screenplay by the Writer and Substantial but Comparatively Less Contribution by GenAI

Consider the following situation—after some initial brainstorming with GenAI, a writer builds the major plot points and character details into a 3-page story, then asks GenAI to create a screenplay from it. GenAI then generates a 90-page screenplay with dialogues which the writer reworks, introducing major structural changes to build a drastically different version of the screenplay. This constitutes major contribution from the writer and sufficient but comparatively less contribution by GenAI. From a legal perspective, the rights of authorship and copyright belong to the writer, given the human-authorship requirement for creative work and significant contribution from the writer compared to GenAI. However, there is still substantial creative contribution from the tool that cannot be negated. If the second author were a human collaborator rather than GenAI, they would warrant at least an assistant writer credit (Writers Guild of America, n.d.-a). In this context, is it ethical for said writer to claim full credit and copyright for the work?

Use Case III – Significant Contribution to Screenplay by Both Writer and GenAI

Consider the following—during the ideation, brainstorming and screenplay creation, there is constant back and forth between the writer and GenAI. The resulting screenplay is effectively co-authored by the two. If the co-authors were both human, they would share equal credit. Is it ethical, then, for the human writer to receive full credit solely because their co-author is not human, but GenAI? In addition, current human-centric authorship and copyright frameworks—which recognise only works authored by natural persons as eligible for copyright protection—may be ethically problematic because they equate the writer in *Use Case III*, who contributed less to the scripted material, with the writer in *Use Case II*, who was substantially more involved.

Use Case IV – Significant Contribution to Screenplay by Writer and Minimal Contribution by GenAI

A representative situation arises when a writer limits the use of GenAI to research on the world (the physical setting and the socio-economic forces that shape it) of the web

series they are developing. Ideas related to the plot and characters originate from the writer's mind. The writer then uses GenAI to confirm if their ideas are like any other series, so that they can work on improving the uniqueness of their story. This is the extent of GenAI's involvement in the creative process. As such, it is morally and ethically fair that the human writer receives full credit and copyright, since this use of GenAI closely resembles traditional research methods involving the internet, books, and films, which are also accepted under current legal standards.

However, for *Use Cases I – III*, when considered from an ethical and moral lens, the writer does not deserve full credit for the creative output. In cases such as *Use Case I*, where human contribution is minimal and potentially insufficient for authorship under current legal standards, the resulting copyright ambiguity raises critical concerns.

IMPACT OF COPYRIGHT AMBIGUITY IN GENAI-DRIVEN CREATIVE WORKS

Taken together, the preceding use cases reveal a fundamental instability in how authorship and contribution are currently conceptualized within legal frameworks. This instability becomes particularly visible when examined through the lens of copyright attribution.

The absence of copyright for certain GenAI-driven creative works—particularly those with insignificant human contribution—raises serious ethical, legal, and practical concerns.

Consider a scenario, as in *Use Case I*, in which the writer openly admits that a GenAI tool contributed significantly more to the work than they did. Within the current legal framework, which requires human authorship for copyright protection, this work will be copyright-free. Consequently, the work would effectively enter the public domain upon creation, not by intent but by legal default.

This situation produces what may be described as "orphaned works"—works that have clear generative origins but no enforceable ownership. Such a work could garner interest from various entities, who can then freely adapt or exploit the material for personal gain, since neither the writer nor the AI tool holds copyright. This opens the door to potentially unjust use of the material, despite a clear contributor—albeit GenAI.
A comparable issue can be observed in emerging real-world examples of AI-generated content. A widely discussed instance is a short story generated from a prompt by Sam Altman (CEO, OpenAI), who typed, *"Please write a metafictional literary short story about AI and grief"* (Altman, 2025). Here, the minimal nature of human input echoes the concerns of *Use Case I* and raises a critical question: shouldn't credit and copyright reflect the generative source—the AI tool (or its human creators) and the writers whose works it was trained on—and not merely the person issuing a simple prompt?

Going forward, these concerns are likely to intensify if GenAI evolves into a powerful-enough tool to rival human screenwriters. A production company, for example, could train its own GenAI tool using its copyrighted content and produce a film entirely with minimum human effort and low pay. In India, current laws offer no barrier to this.

Such scenarios highlight the growing potential of GenAI and underscore how current legal frameworks and mechanisms for assessing rightful attribution of authorship and ownership of copyright lag the realities of

GenAI-driven creation. The following section examines potential frameworks for appropriate credit and copyright sharing in human–GenAI collaborations.

CREDIT AND COPYRIGHT SHARING IN HUMAN-GENAI COLLABORATIONS

If, in the future, it is established and accepted that writers claiming full credit and compensation is ethically untenable in cases where GenAI has contributed to the work, mechanisms—legal and other—must be created to address the concerns raised in the previous sections. In other words, the contribution of GenAI (and the writers whose works it has trained on) must be acknowledged and recognised via credit and compensation. Currently, legal persons (such as AI companies) can be assigned copyright by human authors via contractual agreements, but due to ambiguities in copyright ownership in AI-assisted works, each case has substantial grounds for being challenged in a court of law. Clearly established mechanisms are needed to address these issues so that every human-AI co-written work does not become a potential legal battle in the future.

At present, in the absence of contractual agreements, legal protections rely on self-disclosure, and no standardised tools exist to assess the extent of GenAI involvement. For scripted works with significant contribution from GenAI—whether large language models (LLMs), small language models (SLMs), or customised screenwriting agentic tools—formal credit attribution and copyright assignment procedures need to be established and applied. The roadblock is the requirement of significant human contribution for copyright laws to apply and in cases where there is major GenAI contribution, this requirement is not legally met. However, all GenAI systems originate from human-built architectures and datasets; consequently, legal frameworks must consider their contribution human.

> It bears noting that the reluctance among authorities to grant authorship to AI systems is being challenged constantly (albeit unsuccessfully). In the U.S., several cases like the *Zarya of the Dawn* decision (U.S. Copyright Office, 2023), in which copyright registration was first granted, and then cancelled on discovering that the work (a graphic novel) was AI-generated, seem to have reinforced that AI-generated works without human authorship are not eligible for copyright protection (*Thaler v. Perlmutter*, 2023). However, legal and policy frameworks must prepare for a proliferation of such challenges and adapt accordingly.

While the human authorship requirement does not appear likely to change—as evidenced in the *Naruto v. Slater* "monkey selfie" case, where an animal (a monkey) was denied copyright (Naruto v. Slater, 2018)—the *Feilin v. Baidu* case (IPKat, 2019) in China offers a pragmatic middle ground. In said case, the developer of a software contested the originality of an analytical report on the grounds that it was generated using their software. Following an investigation, including an examination of the precise keywords used to generate the report, the Chinese court did not recognise the AI software as the author and ruled that the copyright vested with the creator of the report, not the developer of the software. While the AI entity was not recognised as the author, the fact that an

investigation was conducted before reaching a verdict reflects a cautious but adaptive stance toward AI-assisted authorship.

Also worth looking at is the "originality causation" test proposed by Daniel J. Gervais (2020), who suggests "...that a court deciding whether the autonomy threshold has been crossed should do what courts are often doing in other contexts and look for causation, and in this case specifically, the causation of originality. Here, this means identifying the cause of the choices that 'look like' they might be creative and thus generative of originality" (Gervais, 2020).

A test such as this, combined with user-history archival information stored by GenAI tools involved in human-AI collaborative screenwriting, could be used to allocate credit and compensation for both the human creator and the developers of the GenAI system. While the above discussion supports the need for rethinking the current legal stance on authorship and copyright, it is also important to acknowledge and address the significant challenges in assigning authorship or copyright to GenAI or its human creators.

REVISITING THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST AI AUTHORSHIP AND COPYRIGHT IN CREATIVE WORKS

Rebuttals to several commonly cited arguments against credit attribution or copyright assignment to GenAI—and by extension, its human creators—are as follows:

WGA's argument that GenAI-produced written material cannot be considered literary material as it is not a writer.
WGA guidelines state that, *"Neither traditional AI (technologies including those used in CGI and VFX) nor generative AI (GAI, meaning artificial intelligence that produces content including written material) is a writer, so no written material produced by traditional AI or GAI can be considered literary material"* (Writers Guild of America, n.d.-b). WGA's 2023 Memorandum of Agreement states *"that neither traditional AI nor GAI is a person, neither is a 'writer' or 'professional writer...' and, therefore, written material produced by traditional AI or GAI shall not be considered literary material"* (Writers Guild of America, 2023).

While the WGA does not consider AI to be a writer because it is not human, it is important to note that GenAI systems and tools are created by humans and, crediting the tool or system in some way equals crediting the people behind them.

Development of AI Tools - thoughts from the authors

During a six-month-long R&D project, supported in part by Indian tech company Mugafi, the authors designed an AI-based agentic tool to assist screenwriters. While the design of the tool cannot be shared for reasons of confidentiality, a listing of some of the steps of the process followed might be useful in the appreciation of this (human) effort:

- Hundreds of prompts were written and tested on ChatGPT by the authors (who are professional screenwriters as well as mentors).
- Stories and screenplays were written by the authors without using AI and compared with screenplays written by the authors using ChatGPT.

- The final design of the tool was arrived at after testing the quality of the creative output that emerged at every stage of the design flow.
- The tool focussed primarily on brainstorming (of or concerning ideas, situations, characters, structure, scenes, and dialogue) and attempted to approximate a scenario where a team of human writers might be brainstorming.

At the end of this project, the authors came to the following conclusions:

The creative investment of the authors outweighed the contribution of AI. In fact, at least currently, AI is no match for human creativity.

Notwithstanding the superiority of the human contribution, the considerable thought and effort invested in designing the tool certainly deserves to be recognised and compensated.

Additionally, the technological development of the tool (which was not part of the project), will also take considerable time and effort and that too deserves recognition and compensation.

The use of AI by students should remain restricted to research and formatting. Using AI for creative work at the learning stage may hamper the students' education and restrict their development as creative artists.

As is demonstrably apparent from *Use Case I: Minimal Contribution to Screenplay by the Writer Compared to GenAI*, if a writer considers a screenplay written primarily by AI worthy of being pitched to production companies, is this not evidence of the exercising of at least a modicum of creativity by the AI system? And, since the AI system has been created by humans, don't those humans or their created AI system deserve to be compensated? In fact, aren't human authors whose works AI systems train on demanding compensation, and human-created AI systems doing the same, comparable scenarios? Don't these two demands go hand in hand?

GenAI outputs are inherently derivative, generated through the recombination of existing material rather than being an original expression. Human writers, too, are influenced by prior works—books, films, and other cultural texts—that form their world view. A human-written screenplay may not necessarily stem from original thought as in the case of a movie being adapted from a book. However, such an adapted screenplay can still be considered an original creative piece of work if it is independently written by a writer or a team of writers, provided proper permissions to adapt the original work have been acquired as affirmed by the Indian Supreme Court case of *R.G. Anand v. Deluxe Films* in 1978 (Indian Kanoon, n.d.-c). Some authors have already reached compensation agreements—albeit imperfectly—with companies using their work to train GenAI tools (The Decoder, 2025). Mechanisms to identify which underlying authors' works influenced the AI's outputs significantly should be developed for fair attribution and compensation to such authors. While more equitable and comprehensive solutions for writers whose work informs GenAI models are being worked on, it is equally important to find means of acknowledging the contributions of general-purpose and custom GenAI screenwriting tools that meaningfully impact scripts, as the development of these tools involves human creativity and ingenuity.

GenAI lacks conscious creative intent and agency, both fundamental to human creativity.
Intent and consciousness, though absent in GenAI, are implicitly embedded in the

developmental choices of the human creators of GenAI agents and tools. In addition, intent alone does not equal authorship. In conventional creative arrangements, a person's intent can be manifested in the form of providing direction, suggestion of a theme, a phrase or more, but the work may be created by someone else—such as a contracted writer—who often receives credit or co-authorship, depending on the extent of the latter's contribution. Similarly, when a GenAI system or tool carries out a human writer's intent, the AI system exhibits a form of creative agency through its output and the writer's choices could be formed due to, or, at the very least, influenced by their interaction with the AI system.

AI cannot be held legally or financially accountable.
AI cannot be sued, held responsible, or engage in contractual negotiations such as those related to royalties. Establishing legal ownership for AI is also problematic since it cannot fight for its rights. While this is currently true, it may not remain so indefinitely, and this alone cannot justify disregarding the ethical imperative to properly acknowledge significant contributions from such systems. As already argued above, behind all AI systems or tools are human beings who want, need, and deserve recognition, and may eventually fight for credit and compensation. It may become necessary to prepare for and even establish a scenario in which AI can demand and receive credit and compensation (through human representatives).

Assigning authorship to AI is a potential threat to the value and recognition of human creative labour.
This concern stems from the fear that crediting AI could erode the uniqueness of human artistic expression by equating machine-generated content with work rooted in human emotion and experience (Bao & Zeng, 2024). This raises concerns about eroding personal voice in fields like writing, music, and visual arts. Additionally, if AI systems receive official recognition or legal rights, it may undermine efforts to fairly compensate human creators, especially those whose work has been used to train such tools without consent. This is certainly true, but the creative and emotional labour of AI developers also deserve recognition for which a fair mechanism needs to be created.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the ethical and moral questions surrounding authorship and ownership in human-AI collaborations in screenwriting through the analysis of real-world scenarios. The authors have argued that due to ambiguities in authorship and copyright assignments, the increased integration of GenAI in screenwriting demands urgent attention from legal institutions and cinema industries. In addition, film schools must adapt their pedagogical approaches to consider the ethical concerns raised in this paper, to prepare new writers for a future in which AI is likely to play an increasingly vital role.

Building on this analysis, this paper makes the case for attributing credit, providing financial compensation, and allowing copyright assignments to GenAI systems via the human creators and developers of AI tools, while retaining the centrality of the human-authorship approach to copyright without compromising writers' rights. The paper suggests that the rights of writers to compensation due to them for the use of their works to train AI systems goes hand in hand with acknowledging that in cases where AI systems' contribution is meaningful, they too must be compensated. Crucially, since human creativity is involved in the design and training of AI systems, crediting them for their role

does not diminish the appreciation of human creativity but extends it.

As GenAI reshapes screenwriting, policy must move beyond the current definitions of authorship and copyright toward more inclusive, principled approaches that reflect the realities of co-creation. Beyond the domain of screenwriting, the questions raised in this paper have broader implications for how creativity, labour, and ownership are understood in an era of increasingly collaborative human–machine production. As generative technologies continue to evolve, future research must develop more precise methods for evaluating creative contribution and establishing fair systems of attribution across disciplines. Ultimately, the challenge is not merely to regulate AI, but to rethink foundational assumptions about authorship itself in ways that remain equitable, adaptable, and reflective of contemporary creative realities.

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