

# DAKAM'S SPRING 2025 HUMANITIES CONFERENCES PROCEEDINGS



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# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE OBJECTIFICATION OF CREATIVITY: LABOR DEBATES IN DIGITAL ART

DURSUN CAN ŞİMŞEK, RABİA YAZAR

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how AI-based art production transforms the notions of creative labor, aesthetic value, and cultural production through the lens of Marxist media theory. With the widespread use of generative AI tools such as *DALL-E*, *Midjourney*, and *Stable Diffusion*, questions emerge regarding the replacement of human creativity by algorithmic systems. AI-generated artworks automate the creative process, reducing art to a technical output and the artist to an external observer.

The paper develops its argument through three main axes: (1) the objectification of creativity and commodification of the aesthetic process, analyzed through Georg Lukács's concept of *reification*; (2) the identification of hidden labor behind AI-generated content—ranging from algorithm developers to dataset curators—interpreted via Marx's labor theory of value; and (3) the devaluation of artistic authenticity and experience in the context of technical reproducibility, following Walter Benjamin's notion of the "loss of aura."

Furthermore, the study integrates Tiziana Terranova's theory of *free labor* and Christian Fuchs's analysis of *digital labor* to critically examine the political economy of AI-generated art. Key questions addressed include: Does AI production introduce a new mode of labor in digital culture? How does it redefine the role of the artist? And how is aesthetic value now determined under algorithmic influence?

In conclusion, this paper argues that AI-driven art not only undermines the value of creative labor but also transforms art itself into an algorithmic, quantifiable, and marketable data object within the capitalist mode of production.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence, digital art, creative labor, reification, Marxist aesthetics, commodification, digital culture, labor theory of value

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has brought about a radical transformation in the concepts of artistic production and creative labor. Artworks generated using generative algorithms have begun to challenge the traditional relationship between the artist and the artwork, paving the way for new forms of labor (Manovich, 2024). Visuals produced by AI platforms such as Midjourney, DALL-E, and Stable Diffusion are not only limited to technical and aesthetic innovations but also have profound effects on the social and economic dimensions of the creative process (Crawford, 2021).

In this context, the political economy of AI-assisted art production raises significant debates through the lens of Marx's (1867/1990) labor theory of value. Marx argued that the essence of value lies in human labor and that the separation of labor from the production process leads to alienation. However, in AI-based production, this traditional notion of alienation gains new layers, manifesting through algorithms, data labor, and forms of digital work (Fuchs, 2014; Terranova, 2000). Algorithms that produce art in digital environments not only automate production but also abstract and render invisible the creative labor process (Zuboff, 2019).

Georg Lukács's (1923/1971) concept of reification offers a critical perspective for understanding the cultural dimensions of AI-assisted art production. According to Lukács, individuals and social relationships in capitalist societies are objectified within the logic of commodity production, stripped of their human qualities. Similarly, in the use of AI tools in artistic production, a comparable process unfolds: the artist is reduced from being the creative center of production to a coordinator of options generated by algorithms (Benjamin, 1936/2008).

Finally, Walter Benjamin's concept of the "loss of aura" points to the disappearance of the originality and contextual meaning of artworks that are technically reproducible (Benjamin, 1936/2008). In AI-assisted artworks, this loss has deepened even further; such works are now not only infinitely reproducible, but can also be generated algorithmically, detached from any historical and cultural context.

This study aims to examine the claims that AI objectifies creativity, abstracts the artist's labor, and repositions digital art production within capitalist market relations, drawing upon the aforementioned theoretical frameworks.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Karl Marx's labor theory of value is a foundational concept in critical political economy and remains pivotal in understanding capitalist production systems. Marx laid out this theory in detail in his magnum opus *Capital* (1867/1990), arguing that the value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labor time required for its production. Although classical economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo also emphasized the determining role of labor in value, Marx deepened this analysis by demonstrating that, under capitalism, labor becomes a means for producing surplus value—forming the basis of capitalist exploitation (Marx, 1867/1990).

At the heart of Marx's theory is the distinction between use-value and exchange-value. While use-value refers to the utility or practical function of a commodity, exchange-value denotes its worth in the marketplace. Marx asserts that in capitalist systems, exchange-value takes precedence, leading to the commodification of not just goods but also labor itself. The worker sells their labor power as a commodity, and the capitalist purchases this labor power for less than its value, incorporating it into the market to generate surplus value. This surplus value—the difference between the value produced by the worker and the wages they receive—constitutes profit and is the source of capital accumulation (Marx, 1867/1990).

In the digital era, particularly in the context of AI-assisted art production, Marx's labor theory of value provides a powerful perspective through which to understand the shifting dynamics of creative labor. From a superficial perspective, artworks produced by artificial intelligence may seem to surpass human labor; algorithms generate

images, music, or texts with minimal human intervention. However, a deeper analysis reveals a complex web of hidden labor. Scholars such as Christian Fuchs (2014) and Tiziana Terranova (2000) have expanded the scope of digital labor to include data curators, software engineers, content moderators, and even ordinary users who unknowingly provide data.

Artificial intelligence has been built upon datasets supported by years of labor from photographers, writers, illustrators, and other creators whose content underpins artistic production. This raises significant questions regarding authorship, ownership, and value creation. Although the final artwork appears to be machine-generated, its foundation rests on a global network of human contributions that remain unrecognized and uncompensated, reflecting Marx's concept of alienation and the separation of workers from the products of their labor (Fuchs, 2014).

Moreover, as Shoshana Zuboff (2019) describes, the platform economy commodifies not only concrete outputs but also behavioral data. In this context, every click, interaction, or engagement by users becomes raw material for further economic value production. In this context, similar to Marx's analysis of surplus value, it describes a process where labor, including digital interactions, generates value that is then seized by platform owners. The process is further intensified by the scalability of digital technologies, which allow capitalists to extract value from vast networks of users simultaneously.

In AI art production, we see an extension of this logic. Artists may use tools like Midjourney or DALL·E to produce artworks, but their creative inputs are shaped by algorithmic constraints designed to optimize engagement, marketability, and profitability. Here, artistic labor is mediated and transformed by the algorithm, aligning it more closely with the demands of the digital marketplace than with the artist's intrinsic creative vision. This situation reflects Marx's idea that all dimensions of production—including artistic expression—are subject to the demands of capital (Marx, 1867/1990).

The commodification of creative labor in AI contexts also brings to the fore the question of value redistribution. While AI companies and platform owners reap significant profits, the dispersed network of human contributors—whose data, creativity, and interactions fuel the system—never benefit from the value they help produce. This dynamic highlights persistent inequities and calls for a reconsideration of labor rights, compensation, and ethical use of creative works in the age of AI.

In sum, Marx's labor theory of value remains highly relevant in analyzing contemporary AI-assisted art production. It exposes the underlying human labor embedded in seemingly autonomous technological processes and underscores the enduring centrality of labor in value creation, even in digital economies that seek to obscure or minimize human contributions.

Georg Lukács's concept of reification is one of the most important theoretical frameworks developed to understand the structure of capitalist societies. In his work *History and Class Consciousness* (1923/1971), Lukács defines reification in a manner similar to Marx's analysis in *Capital* (1990), where, under capitalist relations of production, products, production processes, nature, and human beings are separated and estranged from their value, leading to alienation. However, Lukács extends this analysis by asserting that such a distancing from value perception is not limited to economic relations, human beings, or nature. He argues that this process of alienation also occurs in social life and interpersonal relations, ultimately concluding that social relations themselves become "reified." According to Lukács, capitalist production objectifies not only individuals, production processes, products, and nature as separate and isolated entities, but also commodifies the very relationality between them. In this way, individuals become alienated within the totality of interrelations, and categories such as consciousness, law, and politics—which emerge as outcomes of social relations—along with social reality itself, increasingly undergo reification (Lukács, 1971).

Reification is not only an economic process but also has social dimensions. Lukács argues that as humans begin to evaluate themselves and their surroundings according to market-defined criteria, their subjective experiences



become objectified. In this way, individuals drift away from subjective creativity and become integrated into standardized production processes shaped by market demands (Lukács, 1971).

This theory has gained new relevance today with the widespread use of artificial intelligence and algorithms in art production. AI-assisted production directly affects the artist's creative process by algorithmically reshaping art. The artist's creative action increasingly transforms into a process defined and guided by algorithms. Here, Lukács's concept of reification provides a powerful tool to analyze how creative labor becomes objectified and how aesthetic production is subordinated to market logic.

In AI-assisted art production, the traditional link between artist and artwork is dissolved. The artist is no longer the creator of original works but becomes a user who organizes options provided by algorithms. This is a contemporary manifestation of the reification described by Lukács. The aesthetic production process becomes directed by data analytics, algorithmic calculations, and market-oriented strategies rather than individual intuition and creative thought (Benjamin, 1936/2008; Zuboff, 2019).

According to Lukács, the reification process affects not only production forms but also modes of knowledge and consciousness. In capitalist societies, ways of thinking also become objectified; people perceive the world as a structure that is calculable, controllable, and aligned with economic interests. The rise of AI in art creates a new era in which artworks are evaluated not only for their aesthetic value but also for their algorithmic efficiency, click-through rates, and digital marketing strategies. This narrows the deep meaning and expressive dimensions at the core of art (Lukács, 1971).

For example, AI-generated art created through platforms like Midjourney, DALL-E, or Stable Diffusion makes the artist's aesthetic choices dependent on algorithmic filters and datasets. The artist's creative autonomy is significantly restricted in this process, and art production is reshaped within the framework of tools provided by digital platforms. As a result, the creative process moves away from originality and transforms into reproducible and measurable products (Fuchs, 2014; Crawford, 2021).

This transformation integrates artworks into the broader economic structure of the capitalist system. Art becomes not only a form of aesthetic expression but also a commodity that can be bought, sold, analyzed, and reproduced in the digital market. Lukács's reification theory provides a unique theoretical basis for analyzing this condition. The objectification of the artist's creative labor redefines not only the aesthetic domain but also the social value and meaning of labor.

In conclusion, Lukács's concept of reification offers a critical analytical tool to understand the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of AI-assisted art production. This concept shows how technological transformation in art reshapes not only production methods but also the meaning of art, the position of the artist, and the value of labor.

Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, articulated in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936/2008), remains a foundational framework for understanding the transformation of art under technological reproduction. Benjamin defines aura as the unique presence of a work of art that is rooted in its originality, authenticity, and embeddedness in a particular historical and spatial context. According to Benjamin, the advent of modern reproduction technologies—such as photography and film—led to the decay of aura by enabling artworks to be infinitely replicated and detached from their original contexts.

In the era of artificial intelligence, Benjamin's thesis takes on renewed significance. AI-generated artworks are created through algorithmic processes and are capable of producing limitless variations without direct human craftsmanship. This radicalizes the notion of reproducibility: artworks are no longer just copied but are produced anew by non-human agents. As a result, the aura of the artwork—its connection to a unique moment of creation—is fundamentally disrupted (Benjamin, 2008).

Benjamin argues that the loss of aura changes not only the status of the artwork but also the nature of aesthetic experience. The spectator's engagement with art becomes mediated by mass production and consumption dynamics, shifting from a contemplative relationship to one dominated by accessibility and instant gratification. AI-assisted art production further reinforces this dynamic; as artworks are optimized for visibility, shareability, and engagement on digital platforms, deeper aesthetic and critical values are pushed into the background (Crawford, 2021).

Moreover, AI-generated art challenges traditional notions of authorship and originality. When machines create artworks, questions arise: Who is the true author—the programmer, the dataset curators, or the algorithm itself? This blurring of authorship erodes the aura further, as the individual genius traditionally associated with art is replaced by collective and computational processes (Manovich, 2024; Zuboff, 2019).

Benjamin also saw potential in the democratizing effects of mechanical reproduction, suggesting that art could become more accessible and politically potent. However, in the AI context, this potential is complicated by platform capitalism. While AI tools enable broader participation in art-making, the platforms that host and distribute these artworks often operate under a commercial logic that prioritizes profit over the practice of art itself (Fuchs, 2014).

In summary, Benjamin's concept of aura provides a crucial theoretical lens to analyze how AI reshapes art's cultural and economic functions. AI art not only accelerates the loss of aura but also transforms the way we understand authenticity, creativity, and artistic value in the digital age.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the intersections of artificial intelligence (AI), creative labor, and digital art production through the theoretical frameworks of Marx's labor theory of value, Lukács's concept of reification, and Benjamin's idea of the loss of aura. The findings suggest that AI-assisted art not only challenges conventional notions of authorship and creativity but also intensifies processes of commodification, alienation, and cultural abstraction within capitalist systems.

First, applying Marx's labor theory of value reveals that, despite appearing autonomous, AI still relies on human labor at the core of its production process. The creation of AI-generated artworks relies heavily on vast datasets curated and developed by countless human contributors, including artists, engineers, and users who unknowingly provide the raw material for machine learning. This underscores a new layer of hidden labor in the digital economy, echoing Marx's assertion that labor, even when obscured, is the true source of value.

Moreover, the alienation that Marx described—where workers become detached from the products of their labor—is amplified in the AI context. Artists using AI tools may find themselves distanced from their own creative processes, as algorithms mediate and transform their inputs into outputs that are often unpredictable and shaped by data-driven logics. Meanwhile, the dispersed network of data contributors typically receives neither recognition nor compensation for their indirect input to the produced works, reinforcing patterns of exploitation and asymmetric value transfer.

Lukács's concept of reification further deepens this analysis. In AI-assisted art production, we observe a profound standardization and objectification of creative practices. Artistic expression becomes increasingly quantified and optimized for market demands—whether through algorithmic aesthetic trends, engagement metrics, or platform-friendly formats. The artist's role shifts from that of a creator to a facilitator of algorithmic processes, highlighting how reification extends beyond economic production to encompass cultural and intellectual labor as well.

The reification process also transforms the audience's engagement with art. Viewers are conditioned to consume artworks as fleeting digital content rather than as singular, contemplative experiences. This not only transforms

aesthetic appreciation but also erodes the cultural and social connections established through art. As a result, the value of art becomes measured more by its viral potential than its artistic merit.

Benjamin's theory of the loss of aura is particularly salient in this context. Artworks produced by AI transcend the reliance on the moment and space of creation of traditional art forms, becoming infinitely reproducible. Often lacking a specific and human-created origin, these works fundamentally weaken the aura that art derives from cultural depth and originality.

While Benjamin suggested that technological reproduction could democratize art and make it more accessible, the commercialization of AI art complicates this potential. Although AI tools enable a broader audience to engage in artistic creation, the platforms that host and distribute these works are primarily driven by profit rather than artistic intent. This dynamic carries the risk of reinforcing existing inequalities and further commodifying creative expression.

In sum, the integration of AI into artistic production reveals both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, AI offers new creative possibilities and democratizes access to artistic tools. On the other hand, it intensifies the commodification of art, obscures human labor, and redefines authorship and authenticity in ways that may undermine the cultural and social value of artistic expression.

Theoretical insights from Marx, Lukács, and Benjamin remain highly relevant for analyzing these dynamics. Their frameworks help us understand how digital technologies, while innovative, are deeply embedded in capitalist systems that shape not only economic relations but also social practices and values. Future research should continue to explore how alternative models of art production and distribution—such as cooperative platforms, open-source initiatives, and fair compensation systems—might counteract the exploitative tendencies highlighted in this study.

Ultimately, as AI continues to reshape the landscape of art, critical engagement with its social, economic, and cultural implications is essential. By making invisible labor visible and examining structural dynamics, academics, artists, and policymakers can contribute to developing frameworks based on fairer and more ethical foundations for digital creativity.

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# AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE: TRABZON KUŞLUCA MOSQUE

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## Abstract

Culture encompasses the lifestyle of a community, including its skills, arts, and traditions. Scholars who define culture as an integral whole of both tangible and intangible values possessed by a society also argue that culture consists of all forms of knowledge, interests, values, perspectives, thoughts, and behaviors existing within that society.

Throughout history, humans have tended to organize their surroundings by utilizing the resources provided by nature to meet their needs. In this process, they have constructed physical spaces that reflect their way of life in accordance with the natural and geographical conditions of their regions. This built environment has acquired a unique identity shaped by both natural and cultural factors.

In a 1964 exhibition, Rudofsky aimed to draw attention to architectural products that were not directly designed by architects. He sought to increase interest in this field by emphasizing that these structures, which fall outside known architectural movements and concepts, are often defined by terms such as vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, and local, and frequently lack specific names. Oliver's studies on vernacular architecture reveal that these structures hold symbolic value as cultural components. The preservation and transmission of structures and urban elements with cultural heritage significance to future generations are of great importance.

In the Eastern Black Sea region, climate, topography, local building materials, and socio-cultural differences play a crucial role in shaping traditional architecture. Traditional house types, influenced by lifestyle and cultural needs, have also been reflected in other architectural forms due to the similarity of available materials. In this context, traditional mosques in the region share similarities with vernacular houses in terms of materials, dimensions, and exterior appearance. According to Tuluk, particularly wooden-structured mosques exhibit close relationships with village houses in terms of construction materials, building techniques, and plan typology, differing mainly in function rather than appearance.

In line with these considerations, this study aims to serve as a source of literature for future research on Kuşluca Mosque, one of the nail-free wooden mosques in Trabzon's rural architecture, recognized for its cultural heritage value. Accordingly, the study examines Kuşluca Mosque through architectural drawings, reports, and contemporary photographs.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Conservation, Rural Architecture, Trabzon, Kuşluca Mosque

## INTRODUCTION

Culture is the entirety of tangible and intangible values created by human societies throughout history. According to UNESCO (2003), culture is a multilayered structure encompassing the lifestyles, beliefs, knowledge, arts, traditions, and behavioral patterns of individuals and communities. It constitutes a multifaceted framework that includes a community's skills, artistic expression, traditions, and social habits (Klemm, 2012; Usal & Kuşluvan, 2002). Researchers have emphasized that culture is not only composed of the material and spiritual values possessed by a society, but also includes all forms of knowledge, interest, values, opinions, thoughts, and behavioral patterns present within it (Turhan, 1994; Uygur & Baykan, 2007). In this context, culture encompasses not only the routines of daily life but also abstract and concrete values such as architecture, language, handicrafts, and technical knowledge, all of which are transmitted across generations. Architecture, therefore, holds a significant role as both a bearer and an expression of cultural identity.

UNESCO does not limit cultural heritage to historical buildings alone; traditional settlement patterns, construction techniques, and architectural practices are also considered part of cultural heritage. The value of these structures lies not only in their aesthetic or historical significance but also in their ability to reflect the collective memory and way of life of a society (UNESCO, 2019).

Traditional building systems, which form the foundation of cultural heritage structures, have been shaped by local knowledge and natural resources, and are often developed in harmony with factors such as topography, climate, local materials, and social structure. These systems were generally implemented by anonymous craftsmen (Oliver, 2006). Construction techniques using local materials such as adobe, stone, wood, brick, and straw offer sustainable practices that can inspire modern building methods in many ways. Traditional architectural practices incorporate a variety of construction techniques, including masonry wall systems, bağdadi (lath and plaster) techniques, himiş (timber-frame infill) systems, timber frame systems, and joinery techniques (Kuban, 1995; Asatekin, 2005). In this regard, preserving these historically and culturally significant structures and transmitting them to future generations is of vital importance.

This study aims to contribute to the literature for future research on the Kuşluca Mosque, located in the rural architecture of Trabzon and considered culturally significant. Accordingly, the study examines the Kuşluca Mosque in Sürmene, Trabzon, through its architectural drawings, restoration reports, and contemporary photographs.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUES OF TRABZON AND NAIL-LESS MOSQUES

Throughout history, humanity has sought to organize its surroundings and construct shelters using the resources provided by nature, in response to fundamental needs. In doing so, natural and geographical conditions such as topography, climate, and orientation were taken into account, while cultural elements reflecting lifestyles were also incorporated into physical space. This built environment, formed through prolonged trial-and-error processes, gradually acquired a unique character and identity shaped by both natural and cultural factors. Within the discipline of architectural history, such structures are recognized as traditional architectural products (Kazaz, 2016).

In the exhibition he organized in 1964, Rudofsky aimed to draw attention to architectural products that were not directly designed by architects. He sought to increase interest in a category of structures that fall outside recognized architectural movements and concepts—often described as vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, and local—emphasizing that many of these constructions do not even have specific names (Rudofsky, 1965; Kazaz, 2016). Oliver's extensive studies on vernacular architecture reveal that such structures are not only functional entities but also carry symbolic meanings as cultural components (Oliver, 2006; Kazaz, 2016). The

preservation and continued existence of buildings and urban elements with cultural heritage value is of vital importance to ensure their transmission to future generations (Kirci, 2023).

The Eastern Black Sea region has historically served as a settlement area for diverse communities, with its transformation into a Muslim-Turkish domain occurring during the 15th and 16th centuries. Following its conquest by the Ottoman Empire in 1461, Trabzon and its environs preserved their status as a cultural center (Kazaz, 2016). The formation of traditional architecture in this region has been strongly influenced by climatic conditions, topography, local construction materials, and socio-cultural diversity. Traditional house typologies, shaped by lifestyle and cultural requirements, have also influenced other building types due to the shared use of similar materials. In this context, the region's traditional mosques resemble traditional houses in terms of materials, scale, and exterior appearance. Especially timber-structured mosques differ from rural houses only in terms of function, while offering little visual distinction in their overall appearance (Tuluk & Durmuş, 2010; Kazaz, 2016).

Traditional or vernacular architecture constitutes a spatial context that integrates with its environment through harmony with nature, topography, and socio-cultural structures. However, changes in construction methods after the Industrial Revolution, rapid urbanization, population growth, and the disappearance of master-builder and artisan guilds have led to the gradual decline—and potential extinction—of traditional architecture associated with rural contexts.

Trabzon, as one of the key cities in the Eastern Black Sea region, stands out with its rich traditional architecture and cultural heritage assets. Both the city center and its rural surroundings host numerous structures built using traditional construction techniques. Among these, the timber mosques constructed without nails draw particular attention. These nail-less mosques in Trabzon have been identified and recorded through cultural heritage inventories. According to the current inventory, five cultural heritage structures are listed under this category (URL-1, 2025).

### **KUŞLUCA MOSQUE IN SÜRMENE, TRABZON**

Located in a village of the Sürmene district on the eastern side of Trabzon, the Kuşluca Mosque bears an inscription in its forecourt (son cemaat yeri) indicating that it was constructed in 1893 (1311 AH) by the architect Hacımehmetoğlu Ömer Usta. The structure was restored in 2011 by the General Directorate of Foundations (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü) and continues to function as a mosque today (T.V.B.M., 2011). The Kuşluca Mosque is situated on a flat plot within a garden. Within the mosque's surrounding area, there are additional structures including a building used as a residence and a ablution fountain (şadırvan), as well as a public fountain (çeşme) (Figure 1). On the western side of the mosque, family cemeteries belonging to the local community are located (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Structures within the protection zone of the Kuşluca Mosque in Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)



Figure 2. Family cemeteries of the local community situated to the west of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)

The mosque features a nearly square rectangular plan oriented in the north-south direction and consists of a forecourt (son cemaat yeri), prayer hall (harim), women's gallery (mahfil), and minaret (Figure 3). It is constructed entirely of timber using the traditional interlocking notch (kurtboğazı) technique. Access to the prayer hall is provided through a wooden door located in the forecourt (son cemaat yeri) (URL-2, 2025; T.V.B.M., 2011).

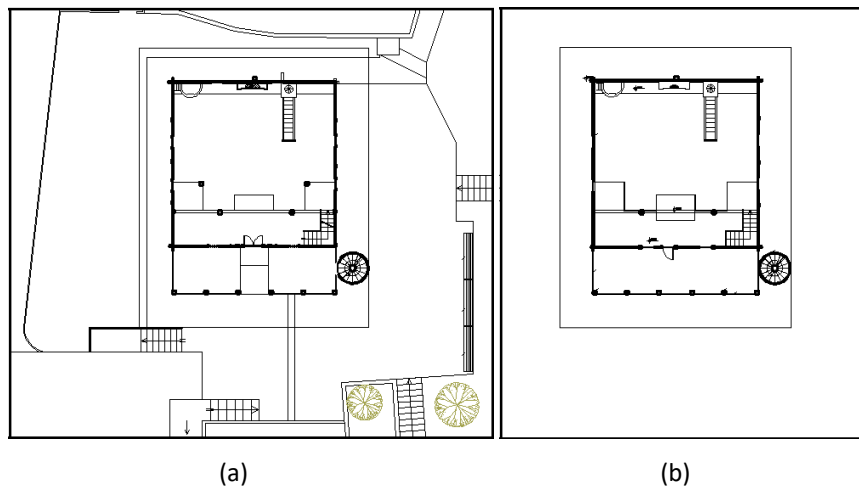


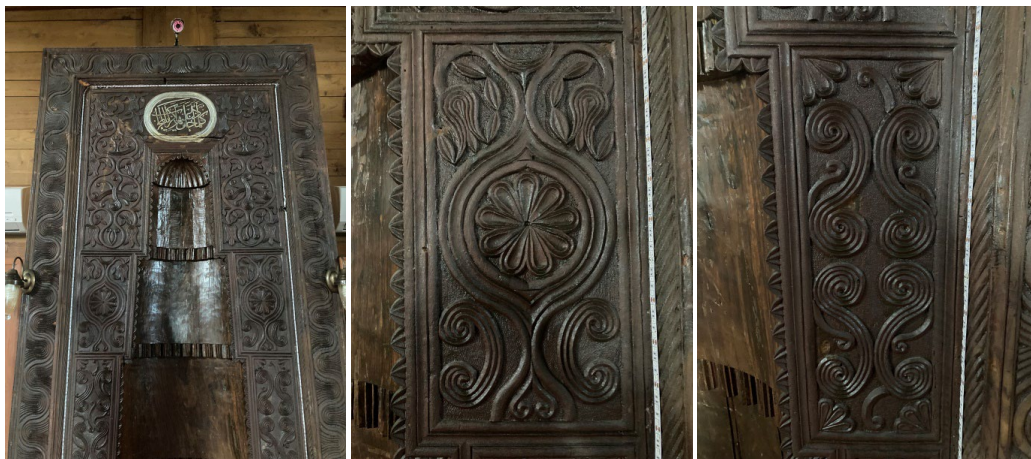
Figure 3. Restoration plan of the ground floor of the Kuşluca Mosque in Sürmene, Trabzon (b) Restoration plan of the first floor of the Kuşluca Mosque in Sürmene, Trabzon (T.V.B.M., 2011)



The mihrab, minbar, and pulpit (kürsü) inside the mosque are made of wood (Figure 4). The main entrance door of the prayer hall, the balustrades of the corner loggia (mahfil köşkü), the central ceiling medallion, the mihrab, and the minbar are all ornamented with traditional wood carving techniques. These decorative elements feature stylized floral, geometric, and vegetal motifs such as tulips, rosette flowers, spiral branches, carob pods, passion flowers, and interlacing bands (Figure 5-8) (URL-2, 2025; T.V.B.M., 2011).

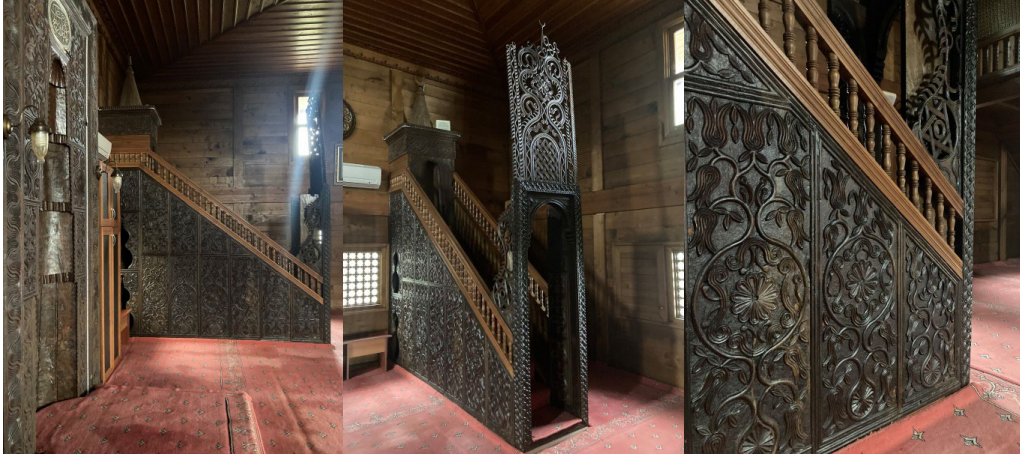


*Figure 4. Interior view showing the mihrab, minbar, and pulpit (kürsü) of the Kuşluca Mosque located in Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025).*



*Figure 5. Wooden carving techniques on the mihrab of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)*





*Figure 6. Wooden carving techniques on the minbar of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)*



*Figure 7. Wooden carving techniques on the main entrance door of the prayer hall (harim) of the Kuşluca Mosque (Author, 2025)*



*Figure 8. Wooden balustrades of the corner loggia (mahfil köşkü) in the Kuşluca Mosque (Author, 2025)*

The flat wooden ceiling features a polygonal medallion in the center, stepped inward in form, and decorated with detailed woodwork (Figure 9) (URL-2, 2025).



*Figure 9. Ceiling of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)*

Access to the women's gallery (mahfil) is provided via a two-flight wooden staircase located on the north side. The U-shaped women's gallery is supported by four wooden posts (Figure 10). Above the forecourt (son cemaat yeri) is a balcony accessed from the women's gallery, supported by six wooden columns. The balcony door is rectangular, single-leaf, and made of wood (Figure 11) (URL-2, 2025; T.V.B.M., 2011).



*Figure 10. Columns supporting the women's gallery in the Kuşluca Mosque (Author, 2025)*





*Figure 11. Balcony accessed from the women's gallery and the door opening to it (Author, 2025)*

The forecourt (son cemaat yeri) on the southern side of the mosque has been later enclosed with glass panels (Figure 12) (URL-2, 2025).



*Figure 12. Forecourt (son cemaat yeri) of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)*

The mosque has two floors and a hipped roof, sloped on all four sides. The wide wooden eaves and the hipped roof are covered with traditional Ottoman-style terracotta tiles (alaturka kiremit) (Figure 13). The facades of the building feature a two-tiered window composition. All the windows are rectangular with wooden frames. The ground floor windows are smaller than those above and are adorned using wooden latticework (kafes tekniği) (Figure 14-15) (URL-2, 2025; T.V.B.M., 2011).



*Figure 13. Eaves of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)*



*Figure 14. Windows of the Kuşluca Mosque, Sürmene, Trabzon (Author, 2025)*



*Figure 15. Detail of a window from the mosque's interior (Author, 2025)*

## CONCLUSION

The Kuşluca Mosque, located in parcel 2 of block 273 in the Çamburnu/Kuşluca neighborhood of the Sürmene district in Trabzon, was originally constructed in 1893 (1311 AH) by the architect Hacımehmetoğlu Ömer Usta. In 2011, the mosque was restored by the General Directorate of Foundations (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü). The

mosque has a nearly square rectangular plan in the north-south orientation, features a four-sloped hipped roof, and was built using the traditional timber log (wooden mass) construction technique.

The 2011 restoration of the Kuşluca Mosque was carried out in accordance with the original architectural features. During the restoration, the minaret—previously altered—was reconstructed in wood to reflect its original form. Non-original additions to the last congregation area (son cemaat yeri) were removed, and traditional wooden columns were reinstalled in their appropriate locations. Oil paint scraping (yağlı boya raspası) was performed on the central ceiling dome, pulpit (minber), and mihrab, and original wooden materials were preserved using wood protection treatments. In addition to these interventions, the condition of all wooden components in the mosque was examined, and deteriorated elements were replaced with new ones of the same type.

Following the 2011 restoration, the Kuşluca Mosque was examined in situ and evaluated with the support of photographic documentation. Based on these observations, a literature resource has been prepared for potential future studies on the Kuşluca Mosque, which holds significant cultural value within the context of rural architecture in Trabzon. In this way, the cultural heritage value of the structure, along with its traditional construction techniques, can be preserved and transferred to future generations.

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# POST-INDEPENDENCE CULTURAL ASSIMILATION IN TELUGU FILM

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## **ABSTRACT**

India got independence in 1947. The Colonising Country, The Great Britain, left India hurriedly fearing the violence of Decolonisation happening in the other European colonies. The fallout of this is the disarray the country was left in. Amidst the political turmoil of establishing India as a Sovereign country the other major challenge was regaining cultural tenets that were obliterated by Missionaries and administration of the coloniser. The regional cinemas used this opportunity and gap to contribute in nation building. We have different eras in the film history which is a commentary on the cultural lacuna and a need for its redressal. The paper attempts to chart the history of Telugu Film and analyse the cultural context which they represent.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, Indian Film, Telugu Cinema, Mythological Movies, Historical Movies, Literary adaptations, Movies on Social reforms



## INTRODUCTION

History of cinema worldwide begins with the human fascination for the moving image. It started with mechanical moving pictures in contraptions like Bioscope, Praxinoscope and Kinetoscope to the actual recording of moving picture and playing it back in Lumiere brothers' Cinematographe. Experiments with recording the life around it moved to the institutionalising of film research with Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography in Russia in 1919. Back then Cinema, Film, Talkies and Movies were terms used for different purposes, in a way of recording and history of cinema. In the current day, all these terms are almost synonyms.

## HISTORY OF INDIAN CINEMA

Invention of Lumiere Brothers' Cinematographe caught the creative imagination spurring various attempts at making cinema. The idea that something could be recorded for eternity was part of human being's shot at immortality. In India the earliest attempts of film making was during years 1912 and 1913. In 1912 Dada Saheb Torne recorded a play in action using Lumiere Brother's Cinematographe. In 1913, there was a concerted effort of the complex cinema making process with casting, sets, scenes, costumes, practise and execution by Dada Saheb Phalke. These were silent movies accompanied by live narration and music. The first sound integrated cinema was Alam Ara in 1931. Since then, Indian film industry has been extremely prolific in making movies with around 1000 films per year contributing to one fifth of world cinema.

## UNIQUENESS OF INDIAN CINEMA

Indian Cinema has a uniqueness that is rooted in the socio-cultural context. In rural India, where the majority of its population resides, is its agricultural community. This sector in India binds communities and villages. To overcome the hardships of labour and celebrate life, we have a rich folk culture which is either song and dance rituals or performance cultures. Public dance-drama performances have been part of its cultural context. Chindu Bhagavatham, Burra Kathalu, Yaksha Ganalu, Hari Kathalu and Nritya Pradarshanalu are some forms unique to Telugu cultural scenario and the broader Indian context.

Most of Indian traditional performance art forms is governed by Bharatha Muni's *Natyashastra*, a treatise about the various aspects of Indian Dramaturgy. According to this treatise, performance arts need to have all the nine rasas in every performance. The *Natyashastra* is a treatise, with 36 chapters, covering various aspects of dramatic art. The *Natyashastra* has had a profound and enduring influence on Indian dance, music, and theatrical traditions. The *Natyashastra* aims to provide a comprehensive guide for playwrights, actors, and performers, ensuring the creation of meaningful and engaging dramatic experiences. The history of Indian Cinema which was based on *Natyashastra*, defined by the two early specimen of Film, Shree Pundalik and Raja Harischandra, cementing the film making processes into Indian performance arts.

Indian performance arts also are social commentaries. The performances that were usually presented at town centres were places where the people from all social strata would gather giving the opportunity to the performers to point out in the guise of their performance, the social evils and how to correct them. This element superimposed onto film because film replaced these live performances. The films became vehicles to educate, to correct and to motivate people.

## INDIAN COLONIAL HISTORY AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM

The British colonial administration in India was marked by a systematic and hierarchical structure designed to maintain control over the vast and diverse subcontinent. Initially, the British East India Company established a commercial and military foothold, gradually transitioning from a trading entity to a governing

power. Following the Revolt of 1857, the British Crown took direct control, initiating the British Raj, which lasted until 1947. The colonial history was from 1600 to 1947 eroding the indigenous systems that were organically designed to suit the local socio cultural context. They replaced them with British centred policies, though hybrid, destroyed the existent systems.

There were imposed identities in Indians based on superficial categories, collective identity through resistance against the coloniser, cultural revival and reclamation and the struggle to reconcile colonial legacies with indigenous traditions continues to shape India's post-colonial identity, highlighting the enduring influence of the colonial period. Post-independence, there was a conscious effort to reclaim and revive traditional cultural practices and identities. Swadeshi movement, which promoted indigenous goods and self-reliance, exemplified this cultural resurgence.

In sum, if political nationalism is focused on the achievement of political autonomy, cultural nationalism is focused on the cultivation of a nation. Here the vision of the nation is not a political organization, but a moral community. As such, cultural nationalism sets out to provide a vision of the nation's identity, history and destiny. The key agents of cultural nationalism are intellectuals and artists, who seek to convey their vision of the nation to the wider community. The need to articulate and express this vision tends to be felt most acutely during times of social, cultural and political upheaval resulting from an encounter with modernity. Cultural nationalism often occurs in the early phase of a national movement, sometimes before an explicitly political nationalism has appeared. But it can also periodically recur in long-established national states.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Archival Research

Listing films pre independence to post independence and studying them thematically

Historical Analysis

Attempting to correlate the social changes and changing trends in film

## **PAN INDIAN CINEMA & REGIONAL CINEMA**

The Pan Indian Commercial Cinema or is popularly called 'Bollywood'. Regional Cinema, has four strong lines and they are the Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam. Bengali cinema has had a rich heritage but is currently struggling to go global. Marathi cinema is emerging with state funding. \* The rest of the India does not have a sustainable movie industry. Most of the films of India except for Bengali, Marathi, Telugu. Tamil, Kannada and Malayali cinema have collapsed into the so called 'Bollywood'.

## **TELUGU CINEMA INDUSTRY**

The first Telugu silent film was Bhishma Pratigna (1921), directed by Raghupathi Venkaiah Naidu, often called the father of Telugu cinema. In 1931 the first Telugu talkie, Bhakta Prahlada, directed by H. M. Reddy, marked the start of sound cinema. It was produced by Imperial Movietone. Erstwhile Madras in Tamilnadu, India was the centre for Telugu and Tamil films. Later there was a shift of Telugu Film Industry to Hyderabad, Telangana.

## **MAJOR TRENDS VS HISTORICAL CHANGES**

Post-Independence Era (1940 – 1960)

Mythologies



Literary adaptations

Historical

Social Reforms

70mm - Eastman Colour Era (1960-90)

Western Culture

Commercial Cinema

NRI – Software (1990 – 2010)

NRI movement

Changing social norms

Modern Era (2010 – Present)

Realistic Narratives

Reinventing regional identity

The focus of this research paper is the 1940-1960 era. This is the most tumultuous in terms of national identity resurgence. The hurried decolonisation did not give Indian Government the opportunity for an alternate leadership other than colonialism. The recovery process of consolidating India lead to the most violent events with the India-Pakistan partition which affected millions of lives and whose influences can be still felt today. There was a need to consolidate Indian National Identity to emerge as a sovereign nation. In this effort, films played a major role.

## **MYTHOLOGICAL MOVIES**

In the context of cultural identity, a myth is a traditional story, often involving supernatural beings or events, that explains fundamental aspects of a culture's worldview, history, or values. Myths are not just entertaining stories; they are deeply intertwined with a culture's identity, shaping its beliefs, practices, and sense of belonging. Mythological Movies are

**Narratives of Creation and Origins:** They often recount the origins of the world, humanity, or a specific culture. These stories explain how the world came to be, who its inhabitants are, and what their relationship is with the natural world and the supernatural.

**Explanations of Natural Phenomena:** Many of them attempt to explain natural events like earthquakes, storms, or the seasons. These explanations often involve gods or supernatural beings who control the natural world, reflecting a culture's understanding of its environment.

**Moral and Social Guidance:** These films often convey moral lessons and cultural values. Through the actions of heroes and villains, myths illustrate what is considered good and bad behaviour, teaching a community about appropriate social norms and ethical behaviour.

**Collective Identity and Belonging:** The Mythological films create a shared understanding within a community, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. By recounting a common history and sharing the same narratives, people develop a sense of shared identity and connection to each other.

**Symbolic Representation:** These films use symbolic language to convey complex ideas and emotions. They often feature archetypal characters and motifs that resonate with the human experience, providing a way to understand the world and our place in it.

## **HISTORICAL MOVIES**

History, in the context of cultural identity, is the narrative of how a group of people have come to be, their shared experiences, values, and beliefs, and how these have shaped their sense of belonging and distinctiveness. It's not just a collection of facts, but a story passed down through generations that helps define who they are as a culture.

**Shared Memory and Narrative:** Historical films provides a shared memory, a collective understanding of the past, that unites people within a cultural group. This shared memory is often expressed through stories, traditions, and rituals that reinforce their cultural identity.

**Origins and Destiny:** Historical films helps individuals understand their place in the world, their sense of origins, and their perceived destiny as a group. This understanding can shape their values, beliefs, and behaviours.

**Distinguishing Features:** Historical films helps define a cultural group's unique characteristics, separating them from other groups. This can include things like language, customs, traditions, art, and social practices.

**Cultural Resilience and Identity:** Understanding the history of a culture can contribute to its resilience and strengthen its sense of identity in the face of change and external pressures.

**Learning from the Past:** Historical films provides valuable lessons that can help guide the present and shape the future, fostering a sense of continuity and connection to the past.

**Intercultural Understanding:** Studying Historical films can also promote intercultural understanding and empathy by helping individuals appreciate the diversity of human experiences and perspectives.

## **MOVIES REINVENTING LITERATURE**

In the context of cultural nationalism, literature can be defined as a tool and a reflection of national identity, culture, and history. It serves as a means of shaping national narratives, promoting shared values, and fostering a sense of belonging. This includes using literary works to express and reinforce nationalist ideologies, often drawing upon myths, legends, and folklore to create a unique national identity.

**Shaping National Identity:** Literature plays a crucial role in constructing and solidifying a nation's identity by representing its cultural heritage, values, and historical experiences.

**Promoting Nationalist Ideologies:** Authors may use literature to promote specific nationalist agendas, such as strengthening a sense of unity, patriotism, or even promoting a particular political ideology.

**Creating Shared Narratives:** By recounting shared experiences, myths, and legends, literature can cultivate a sense of collective identity and belonging, uniting individuals under a common cultural banner.

**Reflecting Societal Conditions:** Literature can also serve as a reflection of the social, political, and economic realities of a nation, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by its people.

**Influence on Society:** Through its portrayal of characters, events, and ideas, literature can influence social attitudes, political discourse, and cultural practices, shaping the way people perceive their nation and their place within it.

**Nationalism and Literature:** Nationalist literature often emphasizes the importance of language, culture, and shared history in defining a nation's identity, and it may also be used to promote a sense of national greatness or superiority.

## **MOVIES ON SOCIAL REFORMS**

These below listed social reforms, laid the foundation for a modern and progressive Indian society by promoting social equality, rationality, and national consciousness. They contributed to the growth of

education, the abolition of social evils, and the upliftment of marginalized communities. The legacy of these reformers continues to inspire social justice and equality in India.

**Women's Rights:** Reformers championed women's education, widow remarriage, and the abolition of practices like Sati and purdah.

**Caste System:** The movement sought to dismantle the rigid caste structure and promote social equality and inter-caste interaction.

**Untouchability:** Reformers actively fought against the practice of untouchability and worked towards the upliftment of marginalized communities.

**Education:** The need for modern education and access to education for all, especially women, was a central theme of the reform movement.

**Religious Tolerance:** Reformers promoted a rational approach to religion and sought to eliminate superstitions and practices that perpetuated social inequalities.

Year	Mythological	Historical	Literary	Social Reform
1940	5	-	-	5
1941	1	-	-	4
1942	2	-	-	1
1943	2	-	-	1
1944	1	-	-	1
1945	3	-	-	1
<b>1946-1953 - No films were Released</b>				
1954	-	1	1	9
1955	8	1	-	6
1956	5	2	1	8
1957	5	-	-	8
1958	7	-	-	7
1959	13	-	-	12
<b>1960- No films were Released</b>				

*Table explaining the Categories of Telugu Cinema from 1940 - 1960*

## CONCLUSION

Films have been technological marvels to entertainment to an artistic expression and a social message. In India, around the most important event of fighting for Independence from the British rule, Films have played an important role. Though this paper presents the case study of only Telugu Cinema, there is scope for research to analyse cinema in other Indian languages as well. All the films that have been produced from 1940 to 1960, fall into four categories. Mythological movies, Historical Movies, Movies based on Literature and Movies on Social Reform. In Telugu Cinema of this period, hardly 3 to 4 movies are comedy, the rest all are within the above categorisation. One can deduce that there were efforts to revive mythologies in an effort to recreate historical reference, literary adaptations were a way of consolidating national literary

references and a healthy debate on social evils and on how to reform. Hence the context of the country's political scenario influenced the cultural side and vice versa.

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# PALEOCLIMATE BLUES

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to share poems that address the current environmental crisis of climate change. The poems chosen are from my work in progress, *Paleoclimate Blues*, which turns its gaze on “ice caps melting / at the poles, penguin colonies and / glaciers collapsing as temperatures rise, flooding of whole / indigenous villages, the ice- / dependent krill becoming fewer / as the ice melts, which means less / food for fish, birds and whales.” Some poems will praise what individuals are doing to save habitats and species at risk due to climate change. Other poems will celebrate nature as savior and offer suggestions for how to refuse to yield to eco-anxiety. Ecotheology and ecojustice are recurring themes as the poems advocate for preservation and conservation in this time of climate change.

## INTRODUCTION

This first poem opens the collection.

### PALEOCLIMATE BLUES

As the ice cubes melt  
in my lemon and mint, I lose myself  
in thoughts of ice caps melting  
at the poles, of penguin colonies and  
glaciers collapsing as temperatures  
rise, of flooding of whole  
indigenous villages, of the ice-

dependent krill becoming fewer  
as the ice melts, which means less  
food for fish, birds and whales.  
Do we not choose by every action  
we take what to keep and what to lose?  
Somewhere deep within us we know  
what we must do. The ice cubes

all melted now in my drink, I think  
about dying beached whales  
and the latest string of shark attacks  
on boaters and floaters in coastal  
waters. Why are they suddenly  
attacking humans? We have to ask  
ourselves: Does it have anything

to do with all the plastic trash,  
the drilling and fracking in their  
waters? Are they not plotting and  
scheming to destroy whatever/  
whomever is damaging their territory?  
Wouldn't we do the same  
to defend our kin and domain?

## TUNING OUT

It's been surmised that climate change  
is an existential risk, so essential

to our own survival are all other  
species. I wish

I was a jellyfish,  
going just where the sea

takes me. Living becomes truly  
more and more an act of faith

these last days. Perhaps  
just a phase I'm going through,

but due to the constant  
violent rhetoric swirling all

around me, I'm tuning out,  
deciding life is all about

truth and justice,  
relationships with my non-

human kin, and keeping  
biodiversity afloat.

## THE WHALES ARE FILLING UP

The whales are filling up  
on plastic shards, no fault  
of their own, dying from starvation  
once bellies lack room for fish.  
How I wish it wasn't true.

How I wish we could light a match  
to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch,  
and destroy it once and for all.  
The glaciers and ice sheets are melting,  
the seas rising, spilling their salt

onto farmers' coastal crops, killing  
them. How do we stem the tide?  
How do we undo the damage  
and right the wrongs? The whales  
no longer can hear their own songs

because of all the underwater drilling  
and fracking. Half the world's  
now charred and smoke-choked,  
the other half flooded and drowning  
in debris. Woe are we.

But here's what will save me  
from despair this one day:  
the sight of one Great Blue heron  
soaring over the river,  
the sound of one Wood thrush,

a chorus of crickets at dusk. I do not  
ask for much—only that my senses  
might remain sharp, my hopes and  
dreams continue to rise up with  
the meadow lark to the skies.



## WHAT ONE PERSON CAN DO

Here's how it all unravels:  
the krill, who need the ice to thrive,  
will die off as it melts, then  
everything from whales to fish

to birds will go hungry without  
the abundance of krill. If you will  
dwell on this one fact and try not  
to harm or kill even a fly,

Earth might have a fighting  
chance. One glance of a Polar  
bear and her cub stranded there  
between melting shrinking ice

floes is enough to break the heart.  
The corals are bleached and dying,  
but we can't stop trying  
to save (revive) them. Spectacled

petrels breed within a plastic  
exposure hot spot, South Atlantic  
Ocean—ranked among the ten birds  
most at risk from global plastic

pollution. What is the solution?  
What can one person do?  
Last evening on the news,\* I met  
a young girl who's farming and caring

for oysters, a project begun as a Girl Scout.  
Now she's thinking about turning it  
into her life's work, crusading  
for saving polluted waters.

Here's how it's all mended: one person

with a passion for saving one species,  
one ecotone, one biome, can unite us  
and bring us all back home.

## NATURE AS SAVIOR

Recalling two scenes from the day  
to save me from the latest world news:  
all traffic stalled midday

at the busy intersection, letting  
the slow-moving line of parents  
with their five goslings in tow

cross over to the greener patch  
opposite side of the road;  
back home, two huge American

crows in the throes of taking turns  
bathing in the too-small birdbath.  
I had to laugh till I cried for them

and all who cannot fit in  
or find enough water and food,  
or a place to bathe in this shrinking

climate-changing world.  
Every day now, landslides  
and raging wildfires, torrential

rains one place, years-long droughts  
another—all blamed on man-caused  
climate change. The gist of it:

disparity exists in climate risks.  
But amidst all the inequalities,  
marginalized communities are working

together to build a more sustainable  
world. Two scenes that saved me  
from despair this day remind me

it's all about connecting and caring,  
sharing and moving together as one,  
being more compassionate and

kinder than ever.

## ALL AROUND ME

All around me,  
trees are toppling,  
smashing through roofs  
into bedrooms where toddlers  
lie sleeping. Who's keeping  
watch? How can I lead  
a calm, untroubled old age

when each day's bad news  
leaves me angry and confused?  
Refusing to yield to eco-anxiety,  
I turn to the latest reports from  
the field, to beavers coming back  
to restore damaged habitats,  
to bison returning to tribal lands.

Beyond all the exploitation and  
extraction unraveling whole webs of  
life, good people are putting up a fight.  
And buffalo—grazing once more  
where they belong—restore tribal  
culture, transform a landscape as they  
create nesting habitats for birds,

wallows for amphibians, and plant  
wildflowers and new grass that attracts  
pollinators. All around me,  
tornadoes are swirling, strong  
winds are hurling people and  
their property in all directions.  
Winters are warmer, summers hotter.

No wonder we all totter  
on the edge. But the river goes on  
flowing under the bridge, the Great  
Blue heron soaring above it.

The heart goes on aching and  
breaking, waiting for (anticipating)  
a miracle.

**NOTES:**

“The Whales are Filling Up” – Over 70 trillion plastic particles are floating on the sea surface.

\*PBS News Hour, June 24, 2024

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