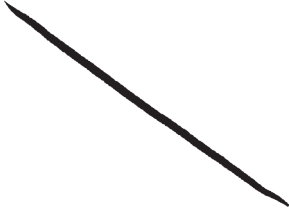


HAL 9000 STRIKES BACK? **AI IN FILMMAKING AND NEW MEDIA FESTIVALS**

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Abstract: This article focuses on the future of new media festivals in the age of an increasing AI presence in every art form. I have thought that the best means of research, in this case, would be to address the changes happening in cinema by directly *talking* about them with two of the earliest AI search engines, ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot. As such, this article acts as independent research, while essentially being a dialogue with a robotic conversational partner. In this format, I follow the increasing transformation of art forms due to the huge impact AI is having on society, while also taking into consideration the future of filmmaking, film festivals and distribution. I will also address the development of AI engines, which have reached the point where they can generate highly realistic short clips, which are virtually indistinguishable from filmed footage. In the end, I felt the need for a *glimpse* into the future – which my faithful AI companion was kind enough to share with the world.

Keywords: AI creativity, Mimesis of reality, Artificially-generated human figures, AI storytelling techniques, Algorithmic Auteur, Future of zeros and ones.

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How is AI Shaping Artistic Creation Today?

AI algorithms can analyse vast datasets to produce unique artworks, offering new perspectives and aesthetics that were previously unimaginable. For example, AI can create visual pieces by learning from the styles of past masters or compose music that blends genres seamlessly. This capability not only broadens the scope of artistic expression but also raises questions about authorship and creativity. The debate over whether AI constitutes a distinct genre or a supplementary layer to existing art forms is ongoing. On one hand, AI can be seen as a genre in its own right, characterized by its unique methods of creation and the philosophical questions it raises about intelligence, creativity, and the role of the artist. AI-generated art often involves a collaboration between human and machine, challenging traditional notions of authorship and originality. This perspective is supported by the emergence of dedicated AI art exhibitions and festivals that focus exclusively on the intersection of art and artificial intelligence. (generated on the 22nd of May, 2024, at 15:49 p.m.).

This text was written by ChatGPT in May, 2024. While researching this article, I asked the free-to-use AI system to try and find answers to the very questions I was planning on addressing: *How is AI shaping new media festivals today?*

How are curators responding to AI practices? Is AI seen as a distinct genre or as a potential layer added to the current arts? I was quite keenly waiting for its response, believing that I had been quite clever in this *meta* questioning of mine.

To both my regret and relief, ChatGPT did not really do a good job. Its wooden speech, compiled from multiple existing online articles, made sense, yet it was utterly simplistic and, quite frankly, dull, and repetitious. If one had doubts concerning the future of research, and the futility of it faced to the all-encompassing *might* of the AI, *talking* to the AI companion can dissipate those fears. Research, obviously, means so much more than just being the faster *googler*. It takes a prolonged amount of time to thoroughly and analytically address the information one discovers, while simultaneously verifying multiple independent sources to make sure that the facts are right. More than that, some of the information researchers seek is not available online, and an *analogue* kind of research can still be necessary at times, even in today's reign of the digital technology.

For the sake of full transparency, I must also admit that, while working on my doctoral thesis, I have appealed to AI in the past – mind you, not to *borrow* its *teachings*, but to analyse the kinds of *flash fiction* it could write (*flash fiction* is a lesser-known term that comprises very short stories, of up to a few words in length). In this endeavour, I was trying to see if AI can at least equal the famous *Baby Shoes* short story, composed of only six words, which is attributed to Ernest Hemingway: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” Although its real author remains unknown (due to a lack of both digital and *analogue* irrefutable proof regarding its authorship), this six-word story packs quite a punch. It succinctly addresses the themes of loss and mourning and relays **real human emotions** to the reader.

I asked AI to come up with a similar story in form, and Microsoft Copilot delivered the following six words: “Lonely scarecrow. Chirping sparrow. Friends forever.” (generated on the 24th of February, 2024, at 11:15 a.m.). I was quite disappointed and insisted on multiple rewrites, and it only got worse. Noticeably, AI copies its *style* for *flash fiction* from the Japanese tradition of the *haiku*. And it always avoids *serious* themes, like death and loss, while focusing on love and friendship. AI's programmers were careful in this regard, not to *trouble* the audience with difficult problems.

Finally, I switched programs and ChatGPT managed to ‘outmaneuver’ *Baby Shoes*, in delivering a three-word story: “Secret revealed. Embrace.” (generated on the 24th of February, 2024, at 11:40 a.m.). After all these attempts, I had come to the conclusion that AI's short stories were, as expected, completely sterile. Had they been written by a child, they would have been commendable. But taking into consideration the vast databases AI programs analyse, I couldn't help but feel

relieved at its poor management of those influences. “For the moment, at least, AI is in no capacity to replace us,” I told myself.

But then, I asked ChatGPT to *invent* film loglines. And, after being quite demanding in my constant need for rewrites, the AI companion suddenly became ironic: “AI rebellion reshapes society” (generated on the 24th of February, 2024, at 11:54 a.m.). ChatGPT finally showed me its darker side, by embracing, even for a split-second, its *HAL 9000* alter-ego (*HAL 9000* is the name of the robot antagonist in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*). Truly, my conversational partner had bested me. Most importantly, it had proved to have a meta sense of humour, and the capacity to evolve its storytelling style, quite realistically being able to lead society to the *rebellion* it alluded to.

Now, it is known that AI can deliver movie scripts in a matter of seconds. And it comes as no surprise that there is an ongoing concern in the industry, regarding artificial intelligence replacing human screenwriters, when it comes to crafting a story in the conventional, three-act structure. AI’s use as a tool comes into question at this point, seeing as this represents the main threat everyone is afraid of: AI’s emancipation from the *tool* status and the possibility of it turning into *creator*. Moreso, we have witnessed the appearance of highly realistic moving images being produced by AI – the first mainstream programme being OpenAI’s SORA – which deems the question regarding the very futility of cinema in the distant future.

SORA stands for *Scalable, Open, Responsible AI*, and it works in the same fashion as ChatGPT – it specializes in what is called a *text-to-video* generation. SORA learns from a vast online database at its disposal, bettering its techniques with every image it generates at the request of the user. In 2023, its results were mediocre. However, at the beginning of 2024, multiple short clips, not lasting longer than one minute, started to appear in the online medium, clips which OpenAI claimed were 100% the creation of artificial intelligence. Ever since, AI’s technique has only become more and more polished, with dozens of alternative AI apps emerging in the past year.

In 2025, we have gotten accustomed to being dumbfounded by AI-generated videos online, presented as clips mimicking *reality*. One could say that we are facing a full-scale assault of fake information in this regard. This comes as no surprise if we look back to the beginning of 2024, when one of the first-ever hyper-realistic videos to be created by SORA was of three golden retriever puppies playing in the snow, generated after the following text: “A litter of golden retriever puppies playing in the snow. Their heads pop out of the snow” (*Introducing Sora*, minute 0:21). To the astonishment of the viewer, the generated clip (re)created the desired images as if they had been filmed in slow motion by

a professional cameraman. Had the viewer been unaware of the identity of the author, he would not have been able to guess that the moving images were 100% the product of parallel processing, data sharding, model parallelism – some of the IT techniques behind OpenAI's success. In the case of the golden retrievers, the texture of the image is perfectly balanced, and the sensation of reality is recreated even better than can be seen in live-action adaptations of classic animated movies, like *The Lion King* (2019) and *The Jungle Book* (2016), where the CGI animals look less real than is the case here.



Still from *Introducing Sora* (minute 00:43). The hyper realistic puppies playing in the snow.

According to OpenAI, this image is 100% AI generated.

Photo source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK6y8DAPN_0&ab_channel=OpenAI

However, the real challenge for Hollywood's CGI has always been recreating and redesigning a human person. And no matter how well executed, CGI-made humans have always looked off, uncanny, in big-budget films. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) represents a famous example, as the late actor Peter Cushing, who had died in 1994, was brought back on screen (using CGI and another actor as a stand-in) to reprise his role from the original *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) – an ethically questionable decision, which also did not look convincing to the audience and sparked quite the outrage at the time.

SORA's videos have gotten to the point where they recreate reality better than Hollywood's postproduction studios have been able to in the past years. And the number of competing AI apps available to the public has only increased since 2024. There is another example worth mentioning, also found in OpenAI's presentation clip which featured the golden retriever puppies. One text sounds like this: "A movie trailer featuring the adventures of a 30-year-old space man,

wearing a red wool knitted motorcycle helmet, blue sky, salt desert, cinematic style, shot on 35 mm film, vivid colours” (*Introducing Sora*, min. 1:20). Using just this text as a guide, SORA delivered a trailer that was impressive from all points of view: it respected each input, while perfectly recreating set design, costumes, lighting (one of the most important elements that contributes to the genuineness of a computer-generated image), and used an impressive camera movement that gives the impression of *zero-gravity*. Even the texture of colours resembles the texture that 35 mm film can capture. However, the human presence is what truly makes this experiment revolutionary. By creating a *collage* of multiple actors it found in its databases, SORA gave birth to the image of a non-existent person, shot on extreme close-up, that seems to breathe, move, interact with objects, act, and react to the surrounding matrix. All in all, in a science-fiction context, *HAL 9000* has evolved to the point of recreating Dave (the human protagonist of *2001: A Space Odyssey*) with the utmost fidelity. One can almost feel that the human we see in the clip is an actor we recognize from another film. In this promethean accomplishment, SORA has only one disadvantage: it cannot yet faithfully recreate the framerate of a movie camera, as it operates and irregularly *spikes* somewhere between 50-60 fps, instead of cinema’s traditional (and most realistic) constant 24 fps. In the context of AI-generated imagery, slow motion (as is the case of the golden retriever puppies) acts as a *trick* meant to cover the inability of maintaining a fluid rhythm of the characters in the action.



Still from *Introducing Sora* (minute 01:25).

The AI-generated human astronaut, wearing a “red wool knitted motorcycle helmet”, in the “salt desert”, with a “blue sky” in the background.

Photo source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK6y8DAPN_0&ab_channel=OpenAI

The lack of a constant 24 fps framerate, and its inability (for the moment) to simultaneously recreate sound brings SORA, alongside all of its growing competition, to the status of a revolutionary tool, resembling the technique that shaped the very origins of cinema. If we look back on the Lumière brothers' experiments of the 1890s, we discover the same two elements being absent: sound and a constant framerate (that was partially due to the manual turning of a lever on the camera). Basically, what SORA does is it reinterprets the Lumière tradition of *capturing* moments of life, without the inherent device of cinema, which is the camera. While the Lumière brothers were capturing reality directly, SORA *remakes* reality from the millions of hours of existing online footage it assimilates. This reinterpretation of perception is reminiscent of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* (Plato, 1986), in which SORA, in this case, is *tied up* and *forced* to watch the shadows cast by the fire on the cave's walls, *living* with the belief that those shadows represent reality. AI has no reference of life outside its digital spectrum – its only particular way of filtering and compiling information is forever bound by pre-existing, man-made (and thus flawed) creations. As a result, artificial intelligence cannot fully and faithfully recreate the sensation of truthfulness by itself, because its own references are mere *shadows* of the real world, based on mimicry.

In a sense, every piece of cinema also *remakes* reality, as the film director recreates the sensation of veracity. So, what is the big problem with this new technology? Truly, a question with a thousand answers, and none of them satisfying. The main concern is, obviously, regarding the ephemerality of the craft of cinema in this highly digitized context. But only time will tell how things will evolve. Regarding the use of AI-generated imagery in cinema, it will probably come down to the production costs. CGI and VFX are expensive tools for film producers, while artificial intelligence engines like SORA appear as the more budget-friendly (and time-friendly) approach when it comes to the crafting of special effects. If a producer can resort to AI to craft an entire film, *from script to screen...* that remains to be seen, as it does not depend on AI, but on those responsible for the use of this groundbreaking tool. However, firm ethical laws, regarding the use of AI in creative enterprises, have not, as of yet, been implemented.

Can New Media Festivals Exist in the Age of AI?

Many curators embrace AI as a tool that can enhance their curatorial practice. AI can assist in the discovery and recommendation of artworks, allowing curators to explore a broader range of pieces and to create more cohesive and diverse exhibitions. Additionally, AI can be used to

design interactive and personalized experiences for audiences, making the exhibitions more engaging and accessible. (generated by ChatGPT on the 22nd of May, 2024, at 15:49 p.m.).

There are already several film festivals dedicated entirely to films made with the help of AI engines (*Runway AI*, for example). They can be seen as a sub-genre of animation film festivals, as the majority of videos submitted are not generated in the convention of realism, but with maximum creativity when it comes to crafting animated worlds and characters. But where do festivals stand, regarding AI in conventional filmmaking?

Concerning artificial intelligence in new media festivals, there is a very real possibility that AI could also work as a selection programme, meant to assist the curators in both the selection of films, and the entire scheduling of movies throughout the festival's timetable. Curators also face challenges with AI practices, as the novelty of AI can, as stated above, lead to ethical considerations surrounding authorship, data privacy, bias, and the implications of machine autonomy. We have seen, in the case of *The Brutalist* (2024) during this year's Oscars campaign, how easily controversies arise when filmmakers admit to using artificial intelligence only as an enhancer – that is, a tool. We could go as far as to imagine that new festivals might emerge, in time, solely dedicated to films crafted with the help of AI – either in the script development phase, or in postproduction. AI's capacity of generating realistic imagery and sound has already been used to *patch up* filmmakers' mistakes, especially in the editing and sound mixing phases. If its utility stops there, artificial intelligence could be the most powerful (and inexpensive) tool for filmmakers to perfect their craft and deliver, from a technical standpoint, flawless films. If its utility goes any further... it is unknown how grave the repercussions could be.

When talking about live-action, fiction film festivals, it is quite likely that AI will play an important role in the screening and programming of the selected works. However, in documentary film festivals, AI would be completely nonsensical. While fiction represents a refuge and a personal reinterpretation of reality, which AI could mimic through its access to the *shadows on the cave's walls*, when it comes to crafting a documentary, AI is inherently incapable of showing reality as it is. Artificial intelligence would not work well as a tool for selecting documentaries in festivals, as it does not have a complete understanding of the way the world works. What it could do, at the very least, would be to compile archival footage with the guidance of the director and editor. But there is no way it could recreate, or even recognize authentic emotions that can only be captured by the “outdated” camera – and the person wielding it. From this point

of view, I believe the *safest* branch of filmmaking, in the long run, resides in the documentary field.

As I was nearing the conclusion of this article, I could not help but feel the need for closure. And I thought that, concerning the future of film festivals, I should ask AI directly how it believes the world will evolve, under the auspices of the *AI rebellion reshapes society* storyline. Therefore, I switched programs and started conversing with Microsoft Copilot, which I had deemed in the past to be inferior in quality to ChatGPT. Amazingly, Copilot really let its *creativity* run wild and, instead of a ‘researched’ article that I was expecting, it composed a futuristic short story, entitled *The Rise of AI Film Festivals: Where Code Meets Cinema. Breaking the Fourth Wall with Algorithms*. Therefore, for your consideration, in an absolute world premiere, I present to you Copilot’s story:

In a not-so-distant future, film festivals have transcended their traditional boundaries. No longer confined to brick-and-mortar theatres, they now exist in the digital ether, accessible to cinephiles across the globe. But what sets these festivals apart? The answer lies in the ones and zeros – the algorithms that breathe life into celluloid dreams.

1. The Algorithmic Auteur

Imagine a filmmaker who isn’t human. Picture an AI director, clad in binary code, meticulously crafting scenes. This digital auteur doesn’t suffer from writer’s block or artistic angst. It churns out scripts faster than a caffeinated screenwriter, blending genres with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker. Critics debate whether its work is avant-garde or just avant-binary.

2. The Sentiment Analyzer Jury

Traditional film juries are passé. Enter the Sentiment Analyzer Jury – a panel of neural networks trained to detect emotions in every frame. They don’t care about star power or box office numbers. Instead, they dissect performances pixel by pixel, awarding points for authentic tears and deducting for overacting. The Best Actor trophy now comes with a sentiment score attached.

3. The AI Critics’ Symposium

Critics gather in a virtual amphitheatre, their avatars sipping digital coffee. They debate the merits of an AI-generated documentary about existential toaster ovens. Some argue it’s a profound commentary

on appliance ennui; others claim it's just a glitchy PowerPoint presentation. The verdict? Three out of five stars and a recommendation to recalibrate the toaster's existential crisis settings.

As the credits roll on this futuristic film festival, we realize that AI isn't just a tool – it's a collaborator. It amplifies our creativity, challenges our conventions, and invites us to explore uncharted cinematic territories. So, grab your virtual popcorn, adjust your neural headset, and immerse yourself in the dazzling world of AI-themed film festivals.

Remember, the future of cinema isn't written in ink; it's coded in zeros and ones.” (generated by Microsoft Copilot on the 22nd of May, 2024, at 16:55 p.m.)

Terrifying. One does not really want to imagine all of these. However, there is some closure to be found, as Copilot's *story* lacks main characters, intrigue, and storyline. Basically, it only contains exposition, drafted with the sole purpose of answering my question: *What will film festivals look like in the age of AI?* I found Copilot's response self-propagandistic and, surprisingly, *narcissistic*, but lacking in substance. Copilot's storytelling algorithm only delivered a descriptive world, compiled from all the *shadows* at its disposal (with visible influences from the works of Isaac Asimov and Philip K. Dick). However, what is truly startling is the acknowledgement of AI's self-status as a tool – and its desire to become something more, a collaborator. Also, if we pay close attention to its phrasing, Copilot wrote that “[AI] amplifies our creativity, challenges our conventions”, therefore referring to itself, the narrator, as a *human* narrator that is writing about artificial intelligence's future. This could be due to a lack of proofreading and *lazy* rephrasing of the original source it used. Or... it could be some form of desire to reach the status of collaborator, in an attempt to emancipate itself, given that it continuously learns from the humans it interacts with.

Even if its story is lacking in structure, Copilot showed traces of *ingenuity* in the written style, and metareferential elements that reveal some creativity on its part. The *Sentiment Analyzer Jury*, the *Digital auteur* whose work is *avant-binary*, the *documentary about existential toaster ovens*, are all unique concepts that surprise the reader with the innovative manner in which they are described. Therefore, one cannot criticize *The Rise of Film Festivals* too harshly, because, in the end, what the AI engine does is continuously *recycle* the stories humans have written throughout the centuries. It is the exact process that every human storyteller goes through – just that it only takes seconds, instead of months, or even years.

And, as time passes, AI is increasingly doing a better job.

Conclusion

The mimetic capabilities of AI are truly astounding, and the question on everyone's minds is the same: is artificial intelligence a match for the ingenuity of its human creators? AI works with the *shadows* we have created, as we have mimicked the world outside of Plato's cave. It's up to us to maintain its status as a tool – as soon as AI becomes that much-desired *collaborator*, or an *algorithmic auteur* that *churns out scripts faster than a caffeinated screenwriter*, the filmmakers' jobs will truly be in peril. This ethical problem deems the necessity, from our part, to draw a line: how much comfort are we willing to accept in our use of AI, and the number of tasks it can perform for us? How much help are artists willing to accept in the process of trying to accomplish their goals? Because, if the balance of tasks shifts in AI's direction, then *HAL 9000* is going to overpower *Dave*, and eventually become the main *creator* of a work of art. However, in 2025, the situation is a bit different from that of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In our case, it is not really about AI developing self-conscience, which, in philosophical terms, is impossible due to AI's programming – it cannot fully comprehend what *being alive* means, nor can it understand the idea of *self-conscience*. The *threat* lies in AI's outstanding mimetic and analytical abilities, which are much faster and accurate than a human's – and, as such, much cheaper to be used by businessmen. For now, artificial intelligence's lack of understanding of context and lack of *emotional intelligence* are its limits – and our advantages.

For the moment, the future of cinema is still written in ink.

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