



Consent and Compensation in the Age of Generative AI

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Research Question: How is generative AI currently impacting creative industries, how is this impact likely to escalate, and does it ultimately help or harm the creatives whose labor makes it possible?

Abstract:

This paper studies the current and future impact of generative AI on creativity, examining both its negative and positive effects. This includes repercussions of using the tool while also addressing its current benefits to the creative industry. The paper begins with a review of existing research on generative AI and creativity, surveying what has already been established about its effects on access, originality, and ownership. Using filmmaking as a central study, this project explains how generative AI's core mechanism—producing new content from data given without consent—can show up at different levels of severity: from the labor dispute over AI “actress” Tilly Norwood to the disproportionate use of deepfake technology against women. This paper argues that while generative AI offers real efficiency and accessibility gains, these benefits may be largely given to companies rather than creatives themselves, and are only made possible by labor, likeness, and artistic work used without consent or compensation. The paper concludes that addressing this imbalance requires more than policy fixes like watermarking or disclosure standards, which address visibility of the issue rather than the issue itself.

Introduction:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is often talked about as if it appeared overnight with the release of ChatGPT, but the concept is far older, stretching back more than seventy years. The earliest groundwork was laid by British mathematician Alan Turing, who introduced many of the foundational ideas of machine intelligence in his unpublished 1948 report “Intelligent Machinery,” before formalizing them in his 1950 paper “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (History of Artificial Intelligence). In that paper, Turing posed the question, “Can machines think?” and proposed the “imitation game,” later renamed the Turing Test, as a way to measure whether a machine’s behaviour could be distinguished from a human’s (Hopgood). The term “artificial intelligence” itself did not exist yet; it was coined five years later, in the 1955 Dartmouth Summer Research Project, which is widely regarded as the formal birth of AI as a field of study (Hopgood)(“What Is the History of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?”).

From the 1950s through the 1970s, AI research was dominated by what became known as symbolic AI: systems that represented knowledge as explicit rules and symbols rather than learning patterns from data (History of Artificial Intelligence). This approach gave rise to expert systems in the 1960s through 1980s, computer programs designed to replicate the decision-making of human specialists in narrow fields such as medical diagnosis and chemical analysis (History of Artificial Intelligence)(Hopgood). Expert systems like MYCIN and DENDRAL



demonstrated real commercial value, and by the early 1980s some organizations were saving tens of millions of dollars annually by using them (Hopgood). However, these systems had no real understanding of the world outside their narrow rule sets, and funding for AI research periodically collapsed during so-called “AI Winters” when the technology failed to live up to inflated expectations (“What Is the History of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?”).

A parallel and ultimately more influential thread of research, connectionism, attempted to model intelligence more literally on the structure of the human brain. This began with a simple mathematical model of a neuron in 1943 and slowly progressed through the perceptron, the multi-layered perceptron, and eventually the convolutional neural network by the late 1990s (Hopgood). Unlike symbolic systems, these neural networks could learn directly from examples rather than being explicitly programmed with rules, a shift that would prove essential decades later. Progress accelerated dramatically after 2012, when deep learning breakthroughs in image recognition—combined with the availability of powerful graphics processors and massive datasets—pushed neural networks far beyond what earlier researchers had achieved (“What Is the History of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?”). Milestones followed in quick succession: IBM’s Deep Blue had already defeated chess champion Garry Kasparov in 1997, IBM’s Watson won Jeopardy! in 2011, and by 2016, Google’s AlphaGo was defeating the world’s best Go players, a game long considered too intuitive for machines to master (“What Is the History of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?”).

Generative AI, the branch of AI capable of producing new text, images, music, and video rather than simply classifying or predicting, grew directly out of this learning progress. Two architectures in particular made it possible: generative adversarial networks (GANs), introduced in 2014, which pit a “generator” network against a “critic” network to progressively improve output quality, and transformer networks, introduced in 2017, which are the heart of nearly every major large language model in use today, including GPT and ChatGPT (Hopgood). Because transformer-based models are trained on enormous datasets scraped from across the internet, they are no longer confined to narrow specialties the way earlier expert systems were; a single model can now write an essay, debug code, and generate an image within the same conversation (Hopgood). By the early 2020s, tools like GPT-3, DALL-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion had pushed generative AI out of research labs and into mainstream, everyday use, marking the moment when AI shifted from an abstract academic pursuit to a technology directly reshaping creative work.

This shift raises the central questions this paper sets out to explore. Generative AI is no longer a novelty; it is already embedded in how music is composed, how illustrations and concept art are produced, how scripts are drafted, and how marketing content is generated at scale, often through tools that require no coding knowledge and are freely or cheaply available to anyone. As this technology continues to mature, it stands to reshape creative industries even further, raising urgent questions about authorship, originality, labor, and compensation. Yet the relationship between AI and human creativity does not have to be adversarial. This paper will examine how generative AI is currently affecting creative spaces, where the technology is likely



headed in the near future, and—most importantly—whether it is possible for generative AI to genuinely help creatives rather than displace them.

Literature Review:

Generative AI's relationship to creative work keeps coming back to the same handful of pressure points: who gets access to creative tools, whether AI adds to or replaces human judgement, what happens to originality once everyone is drawing from the same models, and who owns the resulting work.

Writing, illustration, and design tools that once required years of training can now produce a passable result from a prompt, and Donelli treats this as one of the strongest arguments in AI's favor; particularly for people without access to formal art education or with disabilities that would otherwise limit their creative output (Donelli). Capitol Technology University backs this up with a 2024 Adobe survey in which most creators said AI was making them more efficient, and points to local governments experimenting with AI tools to crowdsource public input on planning decisions ("Is AI Good or Bad for Creativity: How Generative AI Is Transforming Human Ideation: Capitol Technology University"). Engine Creative's survey of 113 industry professionals lands in the same place: the most common reason creatives gave for using AI wasn't that it replaced their judgement; it was that it sped up their workflow (Wise).

However, more careful accounts stop short of calling AI a creator in its own right. At Columbia, faculty describe generative AI as good at "flare"—throwing out a wide range of ideas fast—while the "focus" of evaluating, curating, and shaping those ideas into something meaningful still has to come from a person (What Does It Mean to Be Creative in the Age of AI?). An NYU case study of an artist working with AI-generated imagery makes essentially the same point at a smaller scale: the AI produced a raw starting image, but the piece only became art once the artist applied her own technique and intent to it (Fortino). Donelli puts this most bluntly, arguing that AI is a permanent fixture of creative work now, but that it's "far more than just another tool", meaning that it can't just be switched on and left to run without a person steering it (Donelli).

Whether that steering is enough to prevent creative homogeneity is less settled. A 2025 Frontiers in Psychology study put this to an actual test: researchers had ChatGPT-4o complete a standard creativity task and compared its results against 47 human participants plus pooled data from eight earlier studies. The model generated strong, original-looking ideas, but it also showed the same fixation biases seen in human creativity research. Essentially, it had the same blind spots, just reproduced at scale and treated as if they were all equally original ideas (Desdevises). That result lines up with a concern Donelli raises about AI pushing aesthetics toward homogeneity as more people draw on the same underlying models and with Capitol Technology University's point that AI outputs are recombinations of patterns learned from existing data rather than anything generated from lived experience ("Is AI Good or Bad for Creativity: How Generative AI Is Transforming Human Ideation: Capitol Technology



University”)(Donelli). Individually impressive but collectively identical: that’s the paradox this thread of research keeps landing on.

Ownership is where the disagreement gets sharpest. Capitol Technology University and Donelli both flag the same unresolved copyright problem: models are trained on datasets that include copyrighted work without direct consent, so it’s unclear who actually owns what comes out the other end, and both note that ambiguity falls hardest on working artists (“Is AI Good or Bad for Creativity: How Generative AI Is Transforming Human Ideation: Capitol Technology University”)(Donelli). A blog post on StoryForge puts a face on that concern: a working artist and author describing the opt-out process for AI training data as slow and burdensome for independent creators, and objecting to AI systems that can closely follow someone else’s premise or characters without asking (“The Problems with Generative AI in Creative Spaces”). Yet Engine Creative’s numbers complicate the picture: 75.3% of the creatives it surveyed didn’t feel AI directly threatened their job security, even though nearly three-quarters expected it to change their role somehow within a decade (Wise).

Engine Creative found that the most experienced creatives used AI most often and also felt the most threatened by it, while the least experienced used it the least but were the most optimistic about where it’s headed (Wise). Donelli frames the same split as an ongoing standoff between “apologists” who see AI as inevitable and mostly good, and “critics” who see it as a threat to authorship, originality, and truth itself (Donelli).

Analysis:

Focusing on one corner of the creative industry makes the abstract debate above a lot more concrete. Filmmaking is a useful lens for this because it touches almost every stage of the generative AI pipeline at once—writing, casting, visual effects, marketing, and distribution—and because it’s the industry where the tension between “AI as tool” and “AI as replacement” has actually spilled out into open conflict rather than staying in survey data.

Before this became a huge business, AI in film was mostly invisible. Machine learning has been quietly doing rotoscoping, de-aging, and crowd-simulation work in visual effects houses for years (“10 Ways AI Is Being Used in Movie Making [+5 Case Studies][2026]”). None of it drew public attention because it was clearly assistive, a faster way to do a task a human would otherwise do by hand, frame by frame. What changed after 2022 wasn’t that AI entered filmmaking; it was that AI started generating things that used to require human creativity and skill, such as a script draft, a storyboard, a synthetic voice, or a fully rendered “performance.”

In pre-production, generative tools are now occasionally used to draft scripts, storyboard scenes, and generate concept art in a fraction of the time a human illustrator would need. Production is where the most disputed case lives: AI-generated or AI-composited performers who don’t need a stunt double, a dialect coach, or a contract. Where this is projected to go next is toward fully synthetic performers who can headline a project rather than just filling in a background shot, which is exactly what triggered the industry’s loudest recent backlash.

That backlash centers on Tilly Norwood, a photorealistic AI “actress,” introduced by the studio Xicoia at the Zurich Film Festival in September 2025. Her creator, Eline Van de Velden, described her as a new kind of creative tool and said talent agencies were already circling with a first-of-its-kind agency deal reportedly a few months away (Manchester). SAG-AFTRA, the actors’ union, responded by stating plainly that creativity is human-centered and should stay that way, and described Norwood as a character generated by a program trained on the performances of countless professional performers without their permission or compensation (Manchester). Actor Emily Blunt reacted directly to the project in an interview with *Variety*, calling the development frightening and asking talent agencies to stop pursuing it, for fear of severing the human connection made through movies (Manchester). The studio framed this as a productivity and creative-tool story, while performers experienced it as a direct threat to their livelihood. It is the same technology, yet it is read as opportunity from one perspective and as job loss from the other.

For studios and production companies, generative AI mostly shows up as a short-term productivity gain: faster visualization, cheaper reshoots, fewer people needed for background and crowd work. For the individual creatives further down the chain—background extras, illustrators, freelance concept artists—the effect is longer-lasting and considerably less comfortable. Research from mid-2025 found that freelancers in fields most exposed to generative AI, graphic design among them, had already started losing contracts and earnings after tools like ChatGPT and DALL-E became widely available. The people positioned to feel this first are the ones with the least ability to push back on it.

Weighed against each other, the benefits and risks here aren’t symmetrical. The benefits are mostly efficiency and access: faster iteration, lower production costs, and creative tools available to people who couldn’t previously afford a full production crew. The risks are mostly distributional and irreversible: lost income for working performers and artists, content trained on people’s likenesses and life’s work without their consent, and a narrowing of who gets to be a “creator” once a synthetic performer can be licensed for a fraction of what a human actor costs and never asks for a break.

For female actresses, the harm here could be serious. Women are already huge targets of exploitation in the film industry. Generative AI now poses a new kind of exploitation, as it has the potential to be used as a direct violation of consent and bodily autonomy. Deepfake generation tools have overwhelmingly been used to create non-consensual intimate imagery, and the tools to do it have become both more powerful and more accessible. Hawkins, Mittelstadt, and Russel’s peer-reviewed FAccT 2025 study, conducted through metadata analysis of two major model-hosting platforms (Hugging Face and Civitai), identified nearly 35,000 publicly downloadable deepfake model variants, cumulatively downloaded almost 15 million times since November 2022, and found that these tools were built primarily to target women (Pacifi). The same research team’s public summary of the paper put it plainly: this is a technology that can be used to produce non-consensual, sexualized images of real, identifiable people (Pacifi). That academic finding lines up with international monitoring data: UN Women,

reporting in November 2025 as part of its global campaign against gender-based violence, found that up to 95% of online deepfakes are non-consensual pornographic images and that 99% of the people targeted in them are women; and noted that many deepfake tools are built by all-male development teams and aren't even designed to work on images of men (Carmo). The same report found that 38% of women globally have experienced online violence and 85% have witnessed it, that one in four women journalists report receiving online death threats, and that despite this scale of harm, 1.8 billion women and girls still live in countries with no legal protection against online harassment, since fewer than 40% of countries currently have laws addressing cyberstalking or cyber harassment at all (Carmo).

A 2024 literature review out of the University of Mary Washington pulls together the qualitative research on this and identifies a consistent set of harms. First, deepfakes are being used as a tool of control and revenge, where women's images are treated as interchangeable commodities to be swapped into sexual scenarios without consent. There's also a documented "silencing effect," where the threat of being targeted pushes women out of online spaces and public discourse altogether. Finally, there's the psychological outcomes—humiliation, trauma, anxiety, depression, and a damaged sense of trust in one's own memory—that mirror the effects of in-person sexual abuse rather than purely digital harm (Chapman). The review also documents a case that makes this idea concrete: after Indian journalist Rana Ayyub's face was inserted into a pornographic deepfake, she received a flood of threats, including rape and death threats, serious enough to require hospitalization, and has said the experience left a lasting impact she has no way to guard against happening again (Chapman). That combination—a technology spreading at a rapid rate and causing harm as personal and severe as the Ayyub case—is generative AI's most direct collision with autonomy. It's a technology being used at scale to put a real person's likeness into a scenario they never agreed to, often without ever finding out until the damage is already done.

Put together, the filmmaking case study suggests that "benefits vs. risks" is at least three debates: an economic one (who profits, who loses income), a governance one (who enforces consent and disclosure, and how), and a protection one (who is vulnerable to harms that have nothing to do with economics at all). Anybody managing generative AI in creative spaces needs to treat those as separate problems, because a policy that solves the economic question does nothing at all to stop a nonconsensual deepfake or an AI slop channel from thriving.

Conclusion:

Generative AI didn't arrive in creative spaces out of nowhere; it's the latest chapter in a line of research stretching back to Turing's original question of whether machines could think, through decades of symbolic systems and neural networks that slowly learned to do more than follow rules. However, this idea of scientific progress can only be used to justify so much.

Every case examined here seems to point to the same conclusion: generative AI's "benefits" to creative industries are almost always benefits to whoever owns the model, not to the people whose work made the model possible in the first place. An actor whose performance



is being nonconsensually used to train a model does not reap any of the benefits that the AI will receive. An author whose script gets unknowingly put into an AI model to be replicated will not gain recognition in their own right. The pattern is not an occasional misuse of an otherwise good technology; it is the default outcome of how these systems are built, trained, and deployed, and the “efficiency” the industry celebrates is, in nearly every case, labor that was never paid for and consent that was never given.

The future of generative AI in creative industries is not an open question that will resolve itself if the right watermarking standard or licensing framework eventually gets adopted. Provenance tools and disclosure requirements might make the harm more visible, but visibility is not the same as consent, and a clearer label on a stolen likeness is still a stolen likeness. Generative AI is completely unregulated, and millions of creatives are paying the price. The entire premise of these systems depends on using other people’s creative work and identities as free raw material, and no amount of management will change what happened at the time of training. A tool built on uncompensated labor and non-consensual data doesn’t become ethical once it’s labeled accurately.

None of this means that creative work itself is doomed; people will keep writing, performing, painting, and filming regardless of what any model can generate. But it does mean generative AI, as it currently stands, is not a neutral or inevitable force creatives simply have to adapt to. It is a technology built substantially on their backs, monetized largely without them, and defended mostly by the companies profiting from it. Treating that as a balanced trade-off, rather than what it is, is how the harm keeps getting normalized. The creative industries don’t need a better policy framework for managing generative AI so much as they need the willingness to clearly state that a technology built this way doesn’t deserve the benefit of the doubt it keeps being given.



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