

Co-Creation or Delegation?

Reassessing Artistic Control in Audiovisual Culture under Generative Intelligence

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This paper explores the evolving nature of artistic authorship in the context of generative artificial intelligence (AI), with a focus on audiovisual production. As tools like Runway Gen-2 and OpenAI's Sora become embedded in creative workflows, they do more than accelerate production—they intervene in the very structure of artistic decision-making. While public discourse celebrates this shift in terms of empowerment and democratization, a subtler transformation is taking place: the delegation of aesthetic agency from the artist to the algorithm. Through a conceptual framing supported by practical case studies, the paper proposes that authorship in the age of generative AI is not disappearing but becoming refracted—shifting from originator to curator. It introduces three principles as a critical framework for reasserting creative control: algorithmic transparency, critical prompting, and aesthetic reassertion. Each principle is illustrated through examples from commercial and experimental work where generative systems were used not as neutral tools but as active co-authors. Rather than advocating for rejection or uncritical adoption, this paper argues for friction over harmony—intentional resistance as a strategy for preserving meaning. In a culture increasingly shaped by algorithmic inference, authorship must be redefined not as absolute control but as the design of boundaries within which creative agency can be reclaimed.

Keywords: generative AI, artistic authorship, curated co-authorship, audiovisual production, algorithmic aesthetics

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence in audiovisual production marks more than just a technological shift - it fundamentally unsettles established conceptions of authorship itself. From text-to-video generation tools such as Runway Gen-2 to automated sound design platforms, AI is no longer simply a passive executor of human commands. Increasingly, it intervenes, proposes, and redefines the creative process it was initially intended only to support.

More concerning, however, is the rhetorical framing of this shift. The optimistic language of “empowerment” and “co-creation” frequently obscures a subtler, yet profound, reality: a quiet but persistent delegation of creative authority from human artists to statistical models (Manovich, 2022). The artist continues to initiate and define the boundaries, yet the final outcomes are often determined by algorithmic inference rather than human intuition or artistic judgment.

This paper does not seek merely to lament the erosion of traditional authorship, nor does it advocate a nostalgic return to pre-digital practices. Instead, it confronts a sharper, more pressing question: In a culture increasingly defined by generative systems, how can artistic intentionality persist? Amid probabilistic outputs and algorithmic decision-making, where exactly does human creative agency reside?

By examining this dilemma through conceptual analysis and specific practical examples - including documented uses of generative AI tools such as Runway Gen-2 and OpenAI’s Sora in commercial audiovisual projects - this paper proposes a critical framework. Here, authorship is approached not as a binary opposition between human and machine but as a dynamic space of negotiation, tension, and deliberate resistance.

Context and Terminology

To fully grasp the implications of AI-driven transformation in creative industries, we must clarify three interrelated concepts: aesthetic agency, curated co-authorship, and delegated authorship. Each reflects a different mode of artistic negotiation with generative systems - less about tools, more about power and responsibility.

Aesthetic agency refers to the capacity to shape sensory and narrative experience through intentional creative choices. Traditionally, this agency resided with the artist, whose intuition, vision, and material engagement anchored the aesthetic outcome. In generative environments, however, this agency becomes diffused - partially embedded in models trained on vast datasets, where probability often substitutes for deliberation. The result is a blurred authorship, not entirely human, not entirely machinic (Esling & Devis, 2020).

Curated co-authorship describes a hybridized creative mode wherein the artist filters, selects, and refines outputs generated by AI. The machine proposes; the human disposes. On the surface, this seems collaborative. But too often, it masks delegated authorship - a condition in which aesthetic control slowly migrates to the algorithm and the artist assumes the role of editor or approver rather than originator.

In the audiovisual domain - where narrative rhythm, image, and temporality intersect - this shift is especially visible. Generative systems now affect not only content but also form, tone, and pacing: dimensions once considered inviolable aspects of directorial authorship. What arises is a new

choreography of decision-making, one part scripted by prompts, another surrendered to machine prediction.

By unpacking these concepts, this section lays the groundwork for deeper questions: Can authorship survive delegation? If so, under what conditions? And where, if anywhere, does intentionality still assert itself within generative production?

Examples from Practice

The dilemma of aesthetic agency becomes more tangible when grounded in the use of real-world tools. Two generative platforms - Runway Gen-2 and OpenAI's Sora - demonstrate how algorithmic systems not only streamline production workflows but also subtly redistribute authorship.

Runway Gen-2, widely adopted in the creative industry, enables users to generate video sequences from text prompts or reference images. At first glance, this appears to empower users with unprecedented creative control. Yet in practice, particularly in commercial short-form projects, these outputs often remain untouched - not due to neglect but because their internal logic resists manual refinement. The machine generates full visual scenes with built-in stylistic coherence. In our own agency's work with fashion and tech brands, Gen-2 has been used to produce dreamlike visual layers and transitions - segments that, while compelling, defy precise direction. The artist's role becomes one of response: choosing from algorithmic suggestions rather than composing from scratch.

Sora pushes this logic further. With its cinematic consistency and interpretive nuance, it can render entire narrative moments with minimal human input. In a recent concept video for a sustainability-focused campaign, we used Sora to create mood-driven environmental transitions. While we controlled tone and theme, the spatial rhythm and visual continuity emerged from the model itself. These sequences, though moving, arrived as complete units - less a collaborative canvas, more an autonomous draft. Such a shift in narrative construction aligns with observations by Momot (2022), who describes how generative tools in filmmaking begin to determine not only form but also compositional logic, even at the level of scene development.

This shift generates a paradox. In many cases, the AI-generated content aligns with or even exceeds our initial intention. In others, it deviates but remains aesthetically persuasive. We are no longer solely creating; we are selecting, filtering, and interpreting. The author's voice is not absent - it is refracted, redistributed across interfaces, prompts, and code.

What remains, then, is not full authorship but curated authorship - a mode where meaning emerges not through control but through critical mediation. In this space, prompting becomes compositional; curation becomes a form of authorship. The question, then, is not whether machines can create but whether artists can still embed intentionality within the system's output.

Conceptual Proposal

In response to the shifting landscape of authorship under generative intelligence, this paper proposes a model that privileges friction over harmony. The dominant narrative in creative AI fields tends to favor smoothness: seamless collaboration, frictionless iteration, and aesthetic efficiency. Yet such fluidity

often undermines authorship. When machine outputs flow too smoothly into final works, the space for critical intervention shrinks - and with it, the visible trace of human intention.

Rather than integrating AI into creative workflows as a passive enhancement, artists might do better to design for tension: to deliberately complicate, resist, or reframe the outputs of generative systems. In this framework, authorship is not preserved by micromanaging variables but by strategically disrupting the automatic flow of machine-generated content.

This proposition rests on three interlinked principles:

- Algorithmic Transparency

Artists must understand - and, where possible, make visible - the architectures, datasets, and stylistic defaults that shape generative output. For instance, in a recent speculative identity video, we intentionally used an open-source diffusion model with known training data (LAION-5B) to highlight visual clichés embedded in the dataset. Transparency, even partial, enables critical orientation. Without it, prompting becomes aesthetic guesswork.

- Critical Prompting

Prompting is not merely technical input - it is a rhetorical act. Instead of optimizing for coherence, artists can structure prompts to surface contradiction, trigger edge behaviors, or expose gaps in the model's knowledge. In one experiment, we generated distorted visual metaphors by deliberately overloading scene descriptions. The result wasn't clean, but it was charged. Critical prompting repositions the model from an obedient assistant to a provokable interlocutor. This idea is echoed in artistic strategies explored by Guljajeva and Canet Sola (2023), where prompting becomes a method of tension-building and controlled breakdown within interactive generative systems.

- Aesthetic Reassertion

After generation, the artist must remain present. Editing, re-sequencing, and reframing - these are not peripheral acts; they are acts of authorship. In a music video concept developed with Gen-2, we used AI only for the transitional sequences while reclaiming final pacing and narrative flow in postproduction. Curation here becomes composition - a method of reasserting aesthetic agency amid automation.

Together, these principles offer a model of authorship as an ongoing negotiation - not a legacy role to be defended but a dynamic position to be reclaimed. In a generative culture, control is not inherited. It must be strategically reoccupied.

Conclusion

In the era of generative intelligence, artistic control is no longer a matter of directing outcomes - it is about defining the conceptual, ethical, and aesthetic boundaries within which machines may operate. The shift from creation to curation, from authorship to orchestration, does not necessarily entail loss. But it does demand conscious resistance.

If seamless integration becomes the default, authorship risks devolving into a symbolic gesture - retained in name but hollowed out in function. This paper has proposed a counter-model: reflexive authorship, built on friction, transparency, and aesthetic reassertion. It is not about rejecting generative tools but about intervening critically in the ways they frame artistic production.

Artists must move from passive adaptation to strategic agency. Prompting, editing, and even refusal - these are creative acts that reintroduce intentionality into algorithmically generated environments. Meaning, in such a landscape, is not delivered. It must be carved out - deliberately and sometimes against the grain.

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