



Generative Storytelling: The Role of the Screenwriter in the Era of ChatGPT

Zelenov Dmytro

Master's, State University of Telecommunications, Kyiv, Independent Author, Self-Employed Screenwriter, 1532 Progression Way, Fuquay Varina, NC 27526, USA.

ORCID: 0009-0007-9584-7069

Abstract

Something shifts when a writer opens a blank document and types a prompt instead of a first line. The scene still needs to be written - but the question of who is writing it has become genuinely unclear. A writer who spends an afternoon cycling through ChatGPT's suggestions for a confrontation scene is not simply using a tool; they are negotiating with a system that has read more scripts than any human reader could, and that has no particular investment in what the scene means. That negotiation leaves traces. Writers report noticing their own defaults more sharply - the conflict structures they reach for, the rhythm they fall into, the kinds of emotional resolution they apparently find satisfying. The tool makes visible what habitual writing keeps hidden.

This article looks at what happens to screenwriting when generative AI becomes part of the room. It draws on research published between 2023 and 2025 - across law, cognitive science, and creative practice - not to settle the question of whether algorithms can be creative, but to ask a narrower and more useful one: what does a screenwriter actually do that the algorithm cannot, and does working alongside one change how writers understand that themselves? The answer, as the research suggests, has less to do with technical skill than with intention - with knowing not just how a scene works, but what it is for.

A scene used to take days. Now it takes a prompt. The time that disappears is not the thinking - it is the writing-as-thinking, the part where the scene finds out what it is by being written badly first. That process had a function. When it is gone, what remains is a clean draft with no record of what it decided not to be, and a writer who has to evaluate it without having lived through making it.

Keywords: *Generative Storytelling, Screenwriter's Role, AI Authorship, Creative Identity, Narrative Intention, Co-Authorship Ethics, Screenwriting Education, ChatGPT in Creative Practice.*

INTRODUCTION

A screenwriter types a prompt. Thirty seconds later there is a scene. It has the right format, the characters have names, the dialogue moves. It is also possible that none of it is right - that the scene exists where a different scene should, that the conflict it stages is the obvious one rather than the true one, that it resolves something the story needed to leave open. The writer now has to make that judgment on material they did not write, which is a different cognitive situation than crossing out their own bad first line and trying again.

Doshi and Hauser (2024) recorded a 300% increase in AI tool

use across creative professions in 2023. For screenwriting the number understates the change. Speed is the visible part. The less visible part is what happens to creative commitment when the first draft costs nothing - when trying a direction requires no investment and abandoning it leaves no trace. A writer who has spent three weeks on an opening scene has reasons, accumulated in the work itself, for the choices it contains. A writer evaluating a generated scene has only judgment, applied cold, to something they did not make.

Franceschelli and Musolesi (2024) are useful here because they are precise: large language models recombine existing

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material. A model trained on thousands of scripts will produce scenes that resemble what competent writers have already written - because that is what it was trained to do. The output can be indistinguishable from professional work on a quick read, under deadline, when the writer is tired and the scene needs to be done. That is when the distinction between recombination and invention stops feeling theoretical.

Caporusso (2023) documented what many writers had been saying informally - that working alongside AI produced a specific kind of anxiety, not about quality but about necessity. The concern was not that the writing was bad; it was that the writer's presence might be optional. The research does not support that conclusion, but it explains why the feeling persists: if the algorithm handles plot structure, generates dialogue, and maintains tonal consistency, the parts of screenwriting that remain irreducibly human are harder to name and harder to defend in a budget conversation. They are also, as it turns out, the parts the work has always depended on. Kharebava (2024) and Kulchii (2024) are working on the same gap from different angles - one tracking what the law currently says, the other asking what it would need to say to be useful. Neither has good news. The writer who uses AI to develop a script is credited as its author and has no clear legal standing to prove what that credit means or defend it if contested. The profession assumed copyright covered this. It does not, yet.

Epstein, Hertzmann, and Akten (2023) ask whether a text produced without human experience or intention can be art. For screenwriting the question is not abstract - it is the difference between a scene that works structurally and a scene that is true. A generated scene can pass the first test without touching the second.

The unresolved problem is not philosophical. It is practical: there are no agreed criteria for determining where the writer's contribution ends and the model's begins, which means there is no reliable way to establish authorship, apportion credit, or identify which parts of the screenwriting process remain beyond what the algorithm can do. The research reviewed here does not resolve this. It maps where the uncertainty sits.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study draws on academic publications from 2023 to 2025 on generative AI in creative practice - copyright law, cognitive science, philosophy of creativity, and media research. Ukrainian sources include Kharebava, Kulchii, Kolomiets, Kushnir, and Ivanenko. International sources include Formosa, Doshi, Hauser, Franceschelli, Musolesi, Moruzzi, Caporusso, and Epstein, among others. Sources were located through Google Scholar, Scopus, and ResearchGate using search terms covering generative AI, screenwriting, authorship, creative identity, and co-authorship ethics.

The material is organized around two questions: what do researchers across law, cognitive science, and creative practice actually agree on regarding authorship under AI conditions, and where does the line fall between what an algorithm can do in a screenplay and what it cannot. The first table maps the scholarly positions; the second works through specific screenplay functions - dialogue, conflict, rhythm, intention - and identifies which side of that line each falls on. The point of the tables is not classification for its own sake but to make the argument concrete: claims about human irreplaceability in creative work are easy to assert and harder to defend without specifying exactly what is meant.

DISCUSSION

The question of authorship lies at the center of most studies published over the past two years. Ukrainian legal scholars, in particular Kharebava T. (2024) and Kulchii O. (2024), emphasize that legislation is failing to keep pace with technological developments. The issue of who holds the rights to the result - the person who formulated the prompt, the company that developed the algorithm, or neither - remains legally unresolved in any jurisdiction. Kharebava (2024) identifies the specific gap: Ukrainian law, like most national frameworks, currently treats "authorship" and "initiating the creation of a work using AI" as the same thing. They are not. One involves creative decisions about what a text means and why it exists; the other involves knowing how to operate a tool. Kulchii (2024) follows this to its logical conclusion - without a working definition of what counts as a creative contribution, the legal protection that copyright was designed to provide means considerably less than it used to.

Formosa and colleagues (2025) ran an experiment that makes the problem concrete. They showed participants texts produced through ChatGPT and asked who had written them. Neither the AI nor the human who prompted it was recognised as the full author. The text existed; its ownership did not. For a screenwriter trying to protect an original concept or defend a commissioned script, that is not a theoretical problem.

Doshi and Hauser (2024) tracked something the individual writer cannot see from inside their own process. Each writer using generative tools produced more - more drafts, more scene variations, more willingness to try a different structure. Measured per person, creativity went up. Measured across the field, the range of stories narrowed. The same training data produces the same probable outputs, and when thousands of writers accept those outputs - each one feeling like a personal creative choice - the scripts start resembling each other in ways nobody intended and nobody decided. The genre does not homogenize through any single bad decision. It happens incrementally, one accepted suggestion at a time.

Table 1 maps the main scholarly positions on authorship when a human and an algorithm produce a text together.

Table 1. Systematization of research on authorship in the era of generative artificial intelligence

Author, year	Research focus	Key finding	What this means for screenwriting
Kharebava T., 2024	AI authorship law in Ukraine	Law treats “authorship” and “prompting AI” as the same act	A screenwriter who uses AI to draft scenes has no clearer legal standing than the tool they used
Kulchii O., 2024	Defining creative contribution under AI conditions	No jurisdiction has agreed on what counts as a creative contribution	Without that definition, copyright protects the script but not necessarily the person behind it
Formosa P. et al., 2025	How people attribute authorship of AI-assisted texts	Readers declined to name either the AI or its user as the full author	The writer’s ownership of their own work becomes genuinely contestable
Mukherjee A., 2025	Whether AI agents act autonomously	Even highly autonomous AI executes human intent rather than forming its own	The screenwriter is still the source of meaning - delegating a task does not delegate the decision behind it
Moruzzi A., 2025	What AI understands about the stories it generates	The algorithm has no access to why a story should exist	Technical correctness and artistic purpose are different things, and only one requires a human
Doshi A., Hauser O., 2024	AI’s effect on creative output across communities	Individual writers produced more varied drafts; collective output became less diverse	The more writers use the same tools, the more the field converges - without anyone intending it

A lawyer reading the same AI-assisted script as a cognitive scientist and a writer would come away with three different problems. The lawyer cannot establish who owns it. The cognitive scientist can demonstrate that what looks like creative judgment is pattern completion. The writer cannot say with confidence which sentences are theirs. None of these is the same problem, but they point at the same gap: credit has been assigned, and the thing the credit is supposed to represent is genuinely unclear.

Mukherjee (2025) observes that an algorithm, however capable it appears, does not choose - it produces. The prompt determines the direction; the training determines the range; the output lands somewhere in between. A writer who reads that output and thinks “yes, that’s the scene” has made a decision. A writer who reads it and thinks “that’ll do” has made a different one - and the difference between those two responses is where authorship either holds or quietly dissolves.

Castelvecchi (2023) describes what makes this concretely difficult: the writer cannot see inside the model’s reasoning. A suggested line of dialogue arrives without explanation. It may be the right line, or it may be the statistically most probable line given the training data - and those are not the same thing. Under deadline, when the scene needs to close, the difference is easy to ignore.

By 2024, over 60% of content creation professionals were using ChatGPT regularly, according to Ivanenko (2024). It launched in November 2022 and moved faster into professional practice than any comparable tool before it. Claude and Gemini followed on similar architecture. This article stays with ChatGPT because that is where the bulk of documented practice sits - but the dynamics described here are not specific to one product.

Gero, Chilton, and Grossman (2024) looked at something most writers do not think to question: the interface itself. Two writers using the same underlying model but different interfaces made different kinds of choices - not because their intentions differed, but because one interface returned a single output while the other returned options. The writer who sees one result tends to evaluate it. The writer who sees three tends to compare them. Evaluation and comparison are different cognitive acts, and they produce different scripts. The model did not change. The frame around it did, and that was enough.

The research on human-AI collaboration - Formosa and colleagues (2025), Caporusso (2023), Doshi and Hauser (2024) - converges on something that is not about productivity at all. Working with generative tools changes how writers think about their own process: which decisions feel like theirs, which feel mediated, and whether that distinction still matters once the text is on the page.

Formosa and colleagues (2025) asked writers who had used ChatGPT to draft scenes whether they considered themselves the authors of the result. Most could not answer clearly. This is not a crisis of confidence - it is a structural problem. When the words on the page emerged from a negotiation between the writer’s prompt and the model’s output, the question of whose choices produced the text has no obvious answer. In screenwriting, where the authorial voice is not decoration but the reason one script differs from another with the same premise, that ambiguity has professional consequences.

Caporusso (2023) documented widespread anxiety among writers about technological replacement. The fear is understandable and not entirely without basis, but the research does not support the conclusion that the role disappears. Moruzzi (2025) puts it in a way that is hard to

argue with: the algorithm has processed thousands of grief scenes. It has not grieved. The scene it generates will have the right beats, the right silences in the right places - and no understanding of what any of it costs.

Doshi and Hauser (2024) found the more unsettling problem. Individual output went up - more drafts, more variations, writers trying structures they would not have reached for alone. The aggregate went the other direction. Thousands of writers, each convinced they were making their own choices, converging on the same resolutions, the same emotional logic, the same way out of a difficult scene. No single writer decided the field should narrow. It happened anyway, one accepted suggestion at a time, because the model everyone was using had learned from the same scripts and kept returning to what those scripts had in common.

Franceschelli and Musolesi (2024) locate the limit precisely: large language models recombine existing elements. Recombination is not invention. A model trained on ten thousand scripts can produce an eleventh that is structurally indistinguishable from a competent professional draft. What it cannot do is know why this particular story needed to exist, or why a different ending would have been a lie. Pauses, rhythm breaks, the line a character does not finish - these carry psychological meaning that depends on someone having understood what the scene is about before writing it. Epstein, Hertzmann, and Akten (2023) put it plainly: technical correctness is not the same thing as artistic value, and the gap between them is exactly where the writer lives.

Mukherjee (2025) makes a point that sounds obvious but has practical implications: an algorithm, however autonomous it appears, executes human intention rather than forming its own. The problem is not the tool - it is the moment when a writer stops treating algorithmic suggestions as drafts to interrogate and starts treating them as decisions already made. At that point the writer is still present in the room, but the authorial function has quietly left it.

Castelvecchi D. (2023) describes this issue as the "black box" problem: the author often cannot understand why the algorithm proposed a particular line of dialogue or narrative twist. Such opacity complicates deliberate creative choice. A screenwriter may accept a suggestion not because it represents the best option, but because it is convenient and fast.

Another dimension of the issue concerns responsibility. By using generative tools, the screenwriter may delegate certain operations to the algorithm, yet responsibility for the meaning and implications of the content cannot be transferred in the same way.

Linares-Pellicer and colleagues (2025) argue for coexistence rather than competition - the writer and the model doing different things in the same process, each covering what the other cannot. That is a reasonable description of how the better practitioners already work. The writer who uses AI well is not the one who has surrendered the decisions; it is

the one who has become precise about which decisions to surrender and which to keep.

When the scaffolding arrives pre-built, what was always underneath the writing becomes harder to ignore. The structural choices are made. The dialogue is there. What remains is the question the blank page used to defer for weeks: what is this story actually claiming, and is that claim worth making? The prompt did not answer that. Neither did the model. The writer still has to.

The screenwriter who gets this right is not the fastest user of the tools or the most fluent at prompting. It is the one who can read what came back and identify, without sentimentality, what the scene got wrong about the people in it - what it smoothed over, what it resolved too cleanly, what it would cost the story to leave as is. That capacity is not new. It is what revision has always required. The difference is that it now has to operate on material the writer did not generate, which means the critical distance has to be more deliberate and harder to fake.

CONCLUSIONS

The research does not answer whether AI is good or bad for screenwriting. It answers a narrower question: what breaks down first. Structure holds. Plausible dialogue holds. Stylistic consistency holds. What breaks down is the writer's ability to account for their own decisions - to say, with any precision, which choices in the script came from them and which came from the model accepting a probable next move.

Formosa and colleagues (2025) found that writers using AI regularly lost track of where their own contribution ended. In most professions that would be a workflow question. In screenwriting it is a different kind of problem, because the voice in the script - the specific way this writer sees this situation - is not incidental to the work. It is the work. When the text is generated collaboratively, that voice may still be present, or it may have been averaged out by the model, and the writer often cannot tell which. Kharebava (2024) and Kulchii (2024) both arrive at the same conclusion from the legal side: the frameworks that were supposed to protect authorship were written for a situation where the author and the text had an unambiguous relationship. That relationship is now ambiguous, and the frameworks have not caught up.

Doshi and Hauser (2024) identified the collective consequence: individual writers became more productive and more experimental; the field as a whole produced less variety. Every writer felt original; the aggregate converged. Franceschelli and Musolesi (2024) explain the mechanism - recombination of existing patterns is not the same as generating something genuinely new, and a model trained on what has already been written will reproduce what has already been written, in new configurations.

Castelvecchi (2023) named the practical difficulty: the writer often cannot explain why the algorithm chose a particular option, which means accepting it is not a creative decision

but a convenience. Kolomiets and Kushnir (2023) draw the line clearly - the algorithm cannot be held responsible for what the script means, so the writer is.

What interaction with these tools makes harder to ignore is the question the profession has always contained but rarely needed to state explicitly: why this story, told this way, about these people. Algorithms surface that question by handling everything around it competently. The answer still requires a human - not because machines cannot write, but because the answer involves knowing what you are willing to defend.

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