



When Hollywood and robots collide

European View
1–3© The Author(s) 2023
DOI: 10.1177/17816858231207215
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv**Julian Bonnici**

Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Brussels, Belgium

Step into the wild year of 2023, when pens locked horns with processors and Hollywood became the front line on a digital battlefield.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the spectacle we fondly call the 2023 Hollywood Labor Strike. But this time, brace yourself for a twist in the narrative, a curveball that even the most imaginative screenwriters and actors could not have foreseen: the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and the digital revolution in this epic showdown.

This is not the first time that Hollywood's wordsmiths have taken on the colossal production giants that rule the silver screen. But this time they have found a powerful ally in the Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the union representing nearly every Hollywood star you have ever adored. This has enabled them to bring the entire film industry to a standstill—and put countless productions on hold. At least Barbenheimer has kept us entertained.

It is a clash of creativity versus the digital future, a showdown between a war of words and a battle of algorithms.

So, what is the problem? It is a two-pronged predicament. First, writers and actors are demanding their rightful slice of the streaming pie. Streaming services have rewritten the rules of entertainment, and while we all cosy up at home, scrolling through an endless sea of films, documentaries and TV series, writers and actors are watching their incomes dwindle as viewers rewatch their works without a cent flowing their way. Their earnings are doing a disappearing act.

Corresponding author:

J. Bonnici, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 20 Rue du Commerce, Brussels, B-1000, Belgium.
Email: jb@martenscentre.eu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

And can you really blame the writers and actors? Crafting the next binge-worthy series or delivering a captivating performance is no walk in the park.

But here is the twist: AI, the ever-eager understudy, is stealing the limelight. These digital scribes have been cooking up content that is giving human writers and actors a serious run for their money. It is like stumbling upon a secret, super-smart identical twin you never knew you had.

AI has been churning out content that can go toe-to-toe with human creativity. From news articles to poetry, and yes, even screenplays, these algorithms have been flexing their neural muscles. And truth be told, some of their output is nothing short of impressive. You would almost think Shakespeare himself had been resurrected as a sentient robot.

The writers' strike and AI's role in it have become a battle of 'us versus them'—even though the 'them' is an algorithm with no interest in the outside world. Writers and actors are demanding respect, royalties and recognition, brandishing picket signs like badges of honour and belting out catchy slogans extolling the power of words. Meanwhile, AI sits silently in the background, generating pages of content, blissfully unaware of the human drama unfolding. Maybe this is because AI has not yet learned how to picket—who knows? By 2050 we might just see AI generating thousands of protests per second.

As the strikes rumble on, with the gaming industry poised for its own uprising, one question lingers: is AI the future of storytelling? After all, if you can feed an algorithm every script ever written, it is bound to concoct something groundbreaking, right? Well, not quite. While AI can mimic the style of famous authors, it often lacks the soul, the emotion and the quirks that make storytelling a profoundly human experience.

Imagine an AI-written romantic comedy where the love interest is a sentient toaster. Sure, it might serve up perfectly crafted sentences with impeccable grammar, but it will be missing that spark that makes us root for the characters. Who is going to shed a tear for a kitchen appliance, anyway?

However, it is also undeniable that AI's power will reshape almost everything we know about today's world—even human creativity and the indispensable role it plays in storytelling. AI can assist us with, generate and even mimic our most basic tasks. But the burning question remains: can it ever replace the heart and soul of the human experience?

We will not be bidding farewell to this peculiar clash of pens and processors anytime soon, as the battle between humans and their AI counterparts will spill over into countless sectors around the globe. But it is perhaps crucial to remember that there is room for all—whether that is in the form of words, ones and zeroes, or something yet to be invented by us (or AI).

Author biography



Julian Bonnici is the Communications and New Media Officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. He is a graduate of the University of Malta with a BA in Communications and English. He started his career as a journalist, covering local and international political and social affairs with Maltese outlets, eventually serving as the editor-in-chief at one of the country's largest media houses. He also has experience working in digital and video production. Julian is fluent in both English and Maltese.