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# AI at the greenlight: negotiating creative agency in early-stage film development

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## ABSTRACT

The growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in screenwriting and film development has intensified debates around creativity, authorship, and the role of algorithmic systems in creative processes. AI-driven analytics systems now evaluate screenplays to forecast box-office performance, model audience demographics, and inform casting choices. While scholarship on AI tools in the creative industries has expanded rapidly in recent years, studies focusing on the screen industries – particularly on AI-driven analytics systems used in screenplay evaluation – especially from a practice-led perspective, are still scarce. This study contributes to this area by presenting a practice-led case study that observed the use of a Swiss-based AI-driven analytics system in the development of a German – New Zealand feature film, *Come Together*. Drawing on academic literature, industry reports, and the author's involvement in the script development of *Come Together*, this article discusses the ontological tensions between human creatives and algorithmic evaluation. By examining these tensions, the article develops three interconnected conceptual insights – creative flattening, risk of formulaic feedback, and blind spots – as a framework for understanding the negotiation of creative agency when algorithmic evaluation enters the early stages of film development.

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## AI in filmmaking and screen industries: opportunities and concerns

The filmmaking ecosystem and process have been transformed by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and systems into various stages of production. While much attention in the industry has focused on the ability of AI technologies to create novel visual effects, equally significant is its entrance into the greenlighting and pre-production stage – the phase when scripts are developed and decisions are made about the fundamentals of what a film will look and feel like. In filmmaking process when 'all screenplays are also business plans' (Caldwell 2008, 232), the script development

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and greenlighting decision must balance creative vision against market calculation. New AI-driven analytics systems now evaluate screenplays to forecast box-office performance, model audience demographics, inform casting choices, and even advise on marketing strategies.

Historically, major Hollywood studios would employ professional script readers, alongside distributors and representatives from production companies, to evaluate screenplays and make greenlighting decisions. This evaluative process continues today across the screen industries – not only within major studios but also among low – and mid-budget films – where script reading remains a crucial, labour-intensive component of project selection.

To alleviate the time and cost involved, industry and academic scholars have long explored data-driven solutions. For example, Eliashberg, Hui, and Zhang (2007) proposed a quantitative model in the journal *Management Science* to reduce this burden by forecasting box-office revenue through statistical screenplay analysis. This is precisely where AI offers potential efficiency gains.

Over the past decade, AI technologies have been quietly integrated into Hollywood's decision-making processes, influencing which films enter production (Vincent 2019). By the late 2010s, companies such as ScriptBook and Cinelytic, both founded in 2015, began offering AI-based script analysis services. Using machine learning and natural language processing, these systems assess narrative, genre, and character data to forecast a screenplay's market potential.

Trained on a database of over 6,500 screenplays with known box-office outcomes, ScriptBook's algorithms quantitatively assess elements of a script and output a probabilistic evaluation of success (ScriptBook website n.d.). Similarly, Cinelytic's interactive dashboard lets studio executives simulate 'what-if' scenarios, changing a lead actor or adjusting the genre blend to see how projected revenues respond (O'Brien 2020). Cinelytic's platform mimics a producer's workflow by requiring users to input structured data (e.g. genre), which the AI system then uses to model scenarios and risk factors (Cinelytic website n.d.).

In 2020, Hollywood studio Warner Bros announced a deal to begin using Cinelytic's system, not to automate creative decisions, but to assist executives in optimising budgeting and release strategies – essentially reducing some of the guesswork in greenlighting without replacing human judgment. Fundamentally, these systems function as analytic instruments: they treat screenplays as datasets to be mined for correlations with past commercial outcomes, thereby positioning the greenlighting process as a data-informed, evidence-based practice (Chow 2020). This marked the emergence of a new form of AI collaboration in filmmaking that engages with story content at the earliest conceptual stage, rather than with pixels or sound in post-production. Once the province of major Hollywood studios, such AI-driven platforms are now accessible to independent filmmakers through companies such as Largo.ai in Europe.

Within the screen industry, predictive-analytics AI systems like ScriptBook and Cinelytic have become visible, yet their integration into early-stage creative processes remains under-examined in academic scholarship. Song (2021), for instance, examines AI-centred predictive analytics in the movie value chain, highlighting ScriptBook and Cinelytic, but prioritises business objectives over narrative development or creative workflow. Moon, Jalali, and Song (2022) extend this quantitative line of inquiry by modelling early-stage greenlighting through text-mined screenplay data. Their 'LIWC (a text-

mining tool)', published in the *Journal of Business Research*, demonstrates that emotional and thematic language patterns can predict revenue from script content alone.

Earlier applications of data science in film forecasting have employed techniques from machine learning – neural networks, random forests, and support vector machines – to predict box-office outcomes from pre-release data such as genre, cast, and budget (Brewer, Kelley, and Jozefowicz 2009; Sharda and Delen 2006). Some models have achieved notable accuracy within specific markets – Liao et al. (2020) reported over 85% accuracy in the Chinese market – while more recent approaches incorporate profitability metrics and social media sentiment analysis (Singh and Rokde 2024). Nevertheless, challenges persist around biased data (McGowan, Sagredo-Olivenza, and Fraile-Narvaez 2024), algorithmic opacity (Mackenzie 2015), and limited generalisability across diverse film markets (Oyewola and Dada 2022).

Parallel to this work, emerging scholarship on AI technologies, particularly generative AI, in creative industries depicts a landscape of both promise and contention. Some scholars describe AI's potential to expand creative authorship and aesthetic experimentation (Sugiarto and Widiastuti 2021), while others chart its applications across VFX, editing, and cinematography (e.g. Azzarelli, Anantrasirichai, and Bull 2025; Narayan et al. 2024). Concurrently, research on ethics and generative AI raises questions of authenticity, ownership, and creative consent amid the rise of deepfakes and synthetic performers (Cover 2022; Lee 2023).

The rapid advancement of generative AI and large language models (LLMs) has extended research into screenwriting workflows, though such investigations remain exploratory. 'HoLLMwood: Unleashing the Creativity of Large Language Models in Screenwriting via Role-Playing' (Chen et al. 2024) demonstrates improved narrative coherence when LLMs are cast as 'Writer,' 'Editor,' and 'Actor.' Gértrudix and Rubio-Tamayo (2024) situate generative AI within broader audiovisual production, noting its capacity for rewriting and stylistic experimentation. Qualitative studies such as Vainikka et al. (2025) add that while professional screenwriters often welcome generative AI-assisted ideation, they also express concern about diminishing creative autonomy and labour displacement. Such anxieties surfaced during the 2023 Writers' Guild and Screen Actors Guild strikes, when creatives protested AI to generate scripts or replicate actors' likenesses. As one production designer noted, 'if you know that this thing you're experiencing was not generated by a human, it interrupts that process' of emotional engagement (Landkic, quoted in Johnston 2023). More broadly, screen industry practitioners warn that AI threatens 'not only their jobs but also the core of artistic authorship and cultural integrity' (Bender 2024; Khattak, Rao, and Tavares 2025, 3).

Unlike predictive analytics systems such as Cinelytic and ScriptBook, which operate in a supportive capacity, generative AI actively produces new content through algorithmic synthesis. As Hutson et al. (2024) argue in *Creative Convergence*, 'by incorporating [generative] AI into the creative process, artists can tap into its generative capabilities and leverage new abilities to generate novel ideas [...] to augment the creative process' (22–24). Hutson et al. (2024) describe generative 'AI as co-creator,' enabling artists to guide generative systems to 'produce outputs' (217).

While research on generative AI continues to expand (e.g. Ahmed, Waqas, and Afzal 2020; Hutson et al. 2024) scholarly attention to predictive AI-driven analytics systems in film development remains limited. This article contributes to that gap through a

practice-led research case study of *Come Together*, a German – New Zealand feature film co-production that sought AI input on its screenplay from the Swiss-based company Largo.ai. Drawing on academic literature, Largo.ai's analytics reports, and the author's direct involvement in the project, the study critically evaluates the reports and the creative team's responses to AI-driven insights.

### Positioning the practice-led study

*Come Together* is the story of a Muslim Syrian refugee woman, a surgeon suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, who comes to Christchurch in New Zealand to forget her past, and she gets caught in an unlikely friendship. This drama is written by a senior German writer-director and a New Zealand-based researcher-practitioner-educator (the author), who also served as cultural adviser on the project. The creative team – comprising the two writers alongside one New Zealand and one German producer – undertook an intensive script development and recce trip in New Zealand's South Island, supported by the New Zealand Film Commission in 2022.

Alongside my creative and advisory roles in this professional film development project, I conducted academic research examining the script development process. Methodologically, the broader practice-led framework was designed to investigate how principles of cultural sensitivity and integrity inform screenplay development. The inquiry into AI's role arose serendipitously when the team used Largo.ai, extending one angle of my academic research into examination of how AI-driven analytics may affect creative agency.

The practice-led framework of the larger study positioned my own dual role as both the site and method of research inquiry (Batty and Kerrigan 2018; Batty and Zalipour 2024). Within this broader research project, data were collected through reflective journals, field notes and observation, analysis of script drafts, and semi-structured interviews. This approach enabled critical reflection on my creative practice and, specifically for this article, facilitated a focused critical analysis of Largo.ai's analytics reports on the *Come Together* screenplay. The findings also analyse how the creative team responded (or chose not to respond) to the reports; whether the AI's input fostered a productive dialogue that refined the script. To contextualise the analysis, theoretical perspectives concerning creativity and AI situate the case study within the broader debates on algorithmic assistance and resistance in creative process.

### *Come together* – AI system as script analyst

By 2022, Largo.ai had gained attention in European film circles for its ability to forecast a film's financial and critical prospects, and the German producer involved in *Come Together* was already familiar with it. Largo.ai positions itself as a data analytics system offering data-derived insights. Largo.ai for script analysis is not a chatbot, generative AI, or a human-curated service. According to Largo.ai's website (n.d.), it 'analyses video, audio, and text to predict audience engagement, genre patterns, and financial outcomes,' using AI-driven data points and projections. Filmmakers engage directly with a web-based dashboard, uploading scripts or footage and receiving automatically generated visual and textual reports – structured as charts, forecasts, and insights – without direct

human curation. The German producer submitted the draft script to Largo's platform and received a series of pdf reports.

*Come Together* script is a character-driven story. During initial thinking about whether to engage Largo.ai, the team was curious what AI could make of it; the New Zealand producer commented, 'Fascinating and but a bit depressing that what we do can all be reduced to a recipe!' (pers. comm., September 17, 2022). I observed that there was an experimental mindset at play. As part of the team, I wanted to see firsthand what this emerging technology could offer and whether it might reveal insights we had not considered.

The reports were composed mainly of graphs, diagrams, and tables with minimal explanatory text, presenting a quantitative portrait of *Come Together*. Largo.ai's analytics included predicted audience appeal by genre, expected content rating, similarity indices with past films, casting suggestions, and projected box-office performance and return-on-investment. For the purpose of this article, [Table 1](#) was created to show examples of Largo.ai's key outputs which are examined in the sections that follow alongside the team's responses.

In the comparable films section, the 'audience' comparison suggested that *Come Together* appeals to an educated, emotionally literate audience – those drawn to real-life drama, moral complexity, and character introspection rather than spectacle. The audience affinity shows commercial comparable in quality-driven adult drama markets, often successful in European or festival circuits.

'Genre' and 'content' comparisons were also included in the comparable films section. Genre clustering aligned the film with arthouse dramas and psychologically grounded narratives exploring trauma, loss, and moral reckoning. *Come Together* was identified as a slow-burn, emotionally intelligent drama, grounded in realism yet expressed through lyrical and contemplative storytelling. The analytics positioned the film in aesthetic proximity to filmmakers such as Terrence Malick and Pawel Pawlikowski, known for their quiet intensity and moral inquiry.

**Table 1.** Examples of outputs from Largo.ai's reports.

Analytics Category	Selected Outputs from Largo.ai Reports
<i>Genre Composition</i>	Identifies script's genre blend as ~62% Drama, ~18% Comedy, ~13% Romance, ~7% Sci-Fi, ~12% Action, ~5% Adventure, ~9% Crime, ~30% Thriller, ~14% Horror (a genre-fluid ensemble piece).  – By genre: <i>The Three of Life</i> ; <i>IDA</i> ; <i>Aftermath</i> ; <i>Incendies</i> ; <i>The Innocents</i> ; <i>Lore</i> ; <i>Giraffe</i> – By content: <i>Hide Away</i> ; <i>The Cut</i> ; <i>Honey</i> – By audiences: <i>The Railway Man</i> ; <i>The Untouchables</i> ; <i>Mr. Turner</i>
<i>Audience Demographics</i>	Predicted primary audience: Adults 30+ (majority); secondary audience: teens/adults; minimal appeal to under-18 viewers.
<i>Comparable Films</i>	Similar titles identified.
<i>Box Office Forecast</i>	Opening domestic gross ≈3.6M USD; total domestic gross ≈12.9M USD; Streaming forecasts ≈2.4M USD
<i>Financials</i>	Estimated Budget 2.75M USD P&A Budget 3.3M USD
<i>Casting Recommendations</i>	Suggested actors for main roles with 'match scores' (e.g. Actress X – 96% fit for lead female role; Actor Y – 95% fit for the male lead role).
<i>Content Flags</i>	No major content warnings

Thematically, analysis of the comparable films in Largo.ai's reports shows *Come Together* was understood as an exploration of emotional endurance, reconnection, and personal healing against broader historical or social backdrops. The comparable films section in the report sparked a bit of curiosity in the team – some comparisons felt apt, others were interesting.

An 'age suitability' rating indicated that the film's content would likely be classified as appropriate for general audiences (no restrictive content), though its thematic maturity meant its core viewers would be adults. These findings largely aligned with the team's own sense of the project's profile.

More unexpected in the analysis of Largo.ai's reports were the casting recommendations, which drew on statistical models of actor 'fit' and box-office influence. For each major role, Largo.ai suggested performers – sometimes internationally known, sometimes local – whose inclusion might enhance the film's commercial potential. For three New Zealand male characters exhibiting racist behaviour, reports proposed actors of Pacific Island and American backgrounds. These casting choices appear to have been primarily determined by visual resemblance and physicality.

Another part of the report was a structural and content analysis that highlighted elements like 'character relationships', 'character appearance' or character's screen time in narrative, 'dynamic recipe' and 'genre recipe'. As a co-writer, I found the 'character appearance' visualisations interesting, as mapping appearance over time helped me to trace a character's emotional and temporal arc. When looking at the visualisation, I thought whether the script were high on emotional variance – frequent shifts between dramatic and action or thriller moments – and therefore frequent tonal shifts (Personal reflection notes, May 23, 2023). Ultimately, the script was not altered Largo.ai's website (n.d.), as the decisions were guided primarily by human creative judgement.

The analytics reports benchmarked the script's length and pacing against industry norms, suggesting that the first act was somewhat longer than average. This essentially meant that the story setup might be taking longer than typical to get going (Personal reflection notes, March 3, 2023). The team was unconcerned by this feedback Largo.ai's website (n.d.), as the extended setup was an intentional narrative choice.

Notably, the genre analysis attributed 6.47 percent to Science Fiction and 14.13 percent to Horror, despite the script containing neither. I reflected that this misclassification likely stemmed from overinterpreting isolated cues – tonal intensity, or metaphorical imagery – as genre markers (Personal reflection notes, March 15, 2023). As I noted at the time, 'was the emotional tension in refugee driven story of *Come Together* mistaken for horror, while poetic abstraction was coded as speculative fiction?' Largo.ai's website (n.d.). Such results demonstrate the absence of interpretive judgment grounded in narrative, character psychology, and thematic intention.

Although the visualisation of dialogue frequencies and character presence was interesting, my analysis of the reports highlights that they offered no insight into symbolic meaning, cultural nuance, or moral subtext. In treating the screenplay purely as data, Largo.ai stripped away the *soul* that a human reader or creative writer would perceive – the interwoven layers of culture, emotion, and subjectivity that give narrative its artistic life.

The financial forecasts, genre breakdowns, and audience profiling provided data for pitching and planning, which potentially could help the producers have a clearer sense

of how to position the project. It was the team's choice to use Largo.ai system's insights or not. Most of the data was what the team already knew.

The above research findings demonstrate the reductive tendencies of algorithmic evaluation. While the system effectively parsed tropes and measurable elements, it failed to apprehend the story's deeper emotional, cultural and thematic dimensions. Additionally, human reactions to Largo.ai's analysis did not play a decisive role in shaping the subsequent creative decisions in *Come Together*. Within the team, there was a sense of both reluctance and general validation – I observed some data points aligned with what the team had already intuited about the project but perhaps not articulated, while other insights were taken more experimentally (Personal reflection notes, March 3, 2023).

### Critical insights from the case study

The case study pointed to a broader ontological gap between artistic creation and algorithmic assessment – tensions between the filmmaking creative team's vision for the script and what the film will look like and the AI system's pattern-based analytics. To critically engage with these tensions, this article develops and discusses three interrelated conceptual insights – Creative Flattening, Risk of Formulaic Feedback, and Blind Spots.

#### Creative flattening

One outcome of this study was the identification of the risk of *creative flattening* – the algorithm's tendency to reduce complex, idiosyncratic creative elements into comparable, data-derived templates. By breaking down the script into comparable components and audience appeal metrics, Largo.ai effectively framed *Come Together* against a backdrop of past successes. This led to suggestions that skewed toward the familiar, indicating that algorithmic assessments privilege what is proven over what is potential.

The tendency toward flattening can be understood in light of creativity theory. Boden's (2010, 2018; quoted in Gaut and Kieran 2018, 173–192) influential typology distinguishes 'combinational' creativity – novel mixes of familiar elements – from deeper forms like 'exploratory' and 'transformational' creativity that push or redefine the boundaries of a conceptual space. Boden argues that AI (she uses AI in its broadest sense) excels at combinational creativity, reassembling known ingredients in new permutations, but operate within the limits of their training data. AI analytics reports in this case study exemplified this: it recognised the blending of genres but could not perceive that this hybridity served as an exploration of intergenerational connection and moral recovery, rather than genre play for its own sake. This combines genre hallmarks and demographics in statistically favourable ways, without suggesting leaps beyond these established structures. This is a form of convergence that can flatten creative possibilities. Boden (2018) says, human creators often seek the exploratory and transformational leaps – for example, in this case study, the unexpected tonal combination or narrative structure not anticipated within the old framework. AI-driven analytics undervalue these leaps because they fall outside the data-driven model of what works.

Indeed, generative AI tools – which scholars note artists effectively engage in as 'co-creative' (Celis Bueno, Chow, and Popowicz 2024; Garcia 2024; Moruzzi 2022) – have

been shown to introduce novelty by prompting artists to interpret and iterate on AI outputs using various prompts. A non-generative AI technology like Largo.ai script analysis tends to do the opposite; it reins in novelty to stay safely within known parameters of success. The experience with *Come Together* bears this out. Largo.ai's system collapsed complex narrative and character nuances into quantifiable metrics. For example, it matched three male characters – each written with racist and right-wing supremacist traits – to a list of actors based solely on physical attributes such as muscular build and shaved heads, reproducing a stereotypical visual trope of supremacist masculinity. These matches show distinctive traits were flattened, effectively translating them into precedents from past films. The creative intentions and thinking behind the character designs, shaped by the team's imagined and researched backstories, could not be understood. As a result, imaginative depth and the subtle contextual relationships between characters and their environments were flattened into surface-level traits.

In another instance, the Largo.ai cast a supporting character in *Come Together* – a compassionate Pakeha (a term used for New Zealanders of Anglo-European descent) nurse – by aligning her with non-New Zealand actors purely on the basis of age and previous roles the actors have played as a nurse. This means the erasure of the character's symbolic significance, narrative context, emotional relationships within the story, and thematic function or chemistry with others. These examples reveal how the algorithm's conception of storytelling elements fundamentally diverges from that of a human scriptwriter.

Such misalignments expose a crucial limitation: algorithm's casting operates through statistical analogy rather than interpretive insight. A meaningful casting choice connects an actor's interior rhythm and emotional register to the psychological world of the character. Lacking contextual awareness of New Zealand's cultural, ethnic, diasporic, and Indigenous dimensions, the algorithm was unable to make such associations.

This phenomenon underscores an ontological gap – artistic creation thrives on intuition, tacit knowledge, lived experiences, political, social, and cultural awareness, sensitivity and particularity, whereas algorithmic technology operates by abstraction and generalisation. Largo.ai could only interpret what is legible in its training data, mapping script features onto existing patterns. The result is decontextualisation – a reduction of the thick, creative context and vision to thin, comparable metrics. This article considers this gap as the representational – imaginative divide. The algorithm sees characters as data points in a genre space; the creators see them as living entities within a narrative world. Each team member brought intuitive tacit knowledge, professional experience and insights, and lived experiences shaping the characters and story world.

Scholarly discourse supports this divide. Celis Bueno, Chow, and Popowicz (2024) argue that debates on 'creative AI' too often assume creativity is an abstract faculty detachable from human context. Creative flattening in this study exemplifies that fallacy: the algorithm treats creativity as fungible content, whereas for the filmmakers, creativity inheres in the specificity and intentionality of their choices. An algorithmic system, as shown in this case study, can strip away the very features that make a creative work singular, confirming theoretical concerns that treating creativity as merely pattern generation is a misguided approach.

The notion of creative flattening also resonates with criticisms in the case of generative AI tools, that efface context by design. Garcia (2024) observes that in AI-generated

artwork, while technically impressive, they lack ‘elements crucial to traditional artistic creation, including the unique experiences, emotions, and perspectives of the artist, as well as conscious decision-making and purpose behind the artwork – aspects that AI, in its current form, cannot replicate’ (4). This shifts the artist’s role from direct creator to guide in the case of generated AI art works. Even though the nature of generative AI tools in the creative process differs from Largo’s AI-driven analytics system, Largo effectively assumed a quasi-director-writer-producer role. The fact that the team was reluctant to engage with the report shows that the AI system possessed little or no creative agency over the final screenplay.

Dahlstedt (2021) points out that the ‘black box’ nature of many generative AI tools has the potential to remove key experiential aspects of the creative process that allow for intentionality and self-expression. O’Toole and Horvat (2024) note that this opacity can strip away facets of creativity that enable those qualities. In this study, following the AI’s optimal formula would have meant sanding down quirks and risks – a loss of creative depth in exchange for predictive conformity, a smooth, palatable version of the film *Come Together*, different from the textured, intimate and personal story and the vision the team sought to achieve.

The creative flattening insight warns of a potential cultural consequence: characters and stories converging toward a narrower band of ‘familiar’ types. This reminds of the peril of what Gunkel (2021) calls ‘computational creativity’ frameworks and the risk of normalising the view that creative value can be fully quantified. This study underscores that the creator’s subjective, often uncomputable knowledge is essential. As co-writer and scholar, I noted in my reflective journal, ‘The algorithm can tell us who our characters look like, but only we know who they are’ (Personal reflection notes, March 3, 2023). The absence of genuine creative impulse in algorithmic analytics reveal the persistence of irreducible human creative knowledge and intelligence that resists replication by algorithmic means.

### **Risk of formulaic feedback**

A second insight from the *Come Together* case is the risk of formulaic feedback. Largo.ai’s reports did more than just categorise content. They offered predictive feedback meant to guide the project toward greater success. Largo.ai’s selling point lies in its ability to compare a screenplay to thousands of prior films and predict box-office performance (Largo.ai’s website). In practice, this meant their reports referenced high-grossing comparators and genre exemplars, implicitly suggesting whether our film emulate the proven structures.

The inclusion of box-office forecast of 3.6 million reinforced this logic by numerically confirming what was already known: *Come Together* was never going to be a blockbuster. Notably, the reports did not indicate how this figure might increase if specific recommendations were implemented. Seeing an actual number could have a psychological effect but based on my observational notes the team was primarily reluctant to engage with the reports.

This reluctance can itself be read as a response to the perceived risk of formulaic feedback. In hindsight, when analysing the reports for the purpose of this study, it became evident that Largo.ai’s predictions can operate through an implicit logic: alignment

with its recommendations can be assumed to increase the likelihood of success. Although alternative outcomes were not explicitly modelled, analysis of the reports suggest that following the casting recommendations or aligning more closely with popular genre formulas, would assist with improved indicators of success. In effect, algorithm diagnosed *Come Together's* deviations from genre norms as liabilities, and prescribed formulaic adjustments to maximise appeal. As I noted in my reflective journal, while the reports are data-driven analysis, they could function as a subtle form of pressure toward standardisation (Personal reflection notes, March 15, 2023). I observed, 'the AI's idea of success seems to be making *Come Together* more like the last 100 films that succeeded' Largo.ai's website (n.d.), encapsulating the formulaic drift inherent in such feedback.

Because algorithmic analysis is based on patterns of past success, it implicitly encourages 'safe' choices. Favouring actors with proven track records, nudging the project toward conventional formulas. This case study illustrates an inherent conservatism in AI-trained advice that fails to reflect the essence of creativity, which by definition often lies in deviating from the patterns of the past.

The ontological gap illuminated here also lies in differing definitions of 'success'. For the algorithm, success was something measurable – higher box-office revenue or alignment with genre benchmarks that historically correlate with audience satisfaction. For the team, success included intangible, ideological values: challenging stereotypes by portraying a professional Muslim woman (a character type rarely ever seen on screen in a New Zealand story; see Zalipour 2016), exploring insights into a white supremacist era, and creating emotional and artistic resonance through originality and representation. The algorithm's formulaic feedback assumed an objective stance on what the film should be, reflecting what John Turing famously dubbed the 'Lovelace objection' – the idea that an AI can only recombine existing patterns and not truly originate something new (Moruzzi 2022; Natale and Henrickson 2022). Indeed, algorithm's advice is not creative in the human sense; it is derivative shaped by training data of prior successful films.

What emerges from this discussion shows that the risk of formulaic feedback is twofold. First, the creative integrity of the work is at stake: following the algorithm's advice might make *Come Together* more market-friendly but at the cost of its original voice. Second, there is a systemic risk of feedback loops: I noted in my reflection if many creators actually follow and make changes in their projects based on similar AI advice, the screen industry could spiral into homogenised projects and monotony, which means creativity stifled by algorithmic convergences (Personal reflection notes, 29 March, 2023). This dynamic reflects what researchers have noted about the challenges posed by generative AI in the art world – it can amplify prevailing patterns and discourage deviation. Celis Bueno, Chow, and Popowicz (2024, 346) note that while many herald generative AI tools in artistic production and their potential for "creativity" to be automated and "augmented" by algorithmic machines, such augmentation is often conceived in quantitative terms – 'improvements in the speed and efficiency of production processes [...] mostly designed and deployed for increasing economic profit' (346). This case study indicates that when augmentation is defined as maximising the metrics of past success rather than fostering qualitative originality, it inherently favours formula over novelty. The algorithmic feedback can essentially valorise exploitation over exploration, to borrow terms from creativity and labour management studies (McKinlay and Smith 2009). This bias toward the already-proven is precisely what creativity theorists warn

against. Boden's (2010, 2018) taxonomy is again illustrative: AI excels at combinatorial creativity within established frameworks, but it struggles with truly novel 'transformational' moves. By suggesting that *Come Together* does not adhere strictly to genre formula, the algorithm operated squarely in the realm of combinatorial creativity – tweaking known ingredients – and eschewed the transformational potential of the film's more unconventional elements.

### **Blind spots**

The third key insight from this case study is the identification of *blind spots* in the AI system's evaluative capacity. Despite Largo.ai's analysis of script and audience correlations, the system did not register several aspects of the film that the team regarded as artistically and creatively crucial. These blind spots include matter related to sensitive and culturally responsible screen storytelling; the story's cultural context, significance, and meaning, thematic subtext, characters' emotions, values and power relationships, and socio-political dimensions and context of the setting where the story happens (Zalipour 2024). For instance, *Come Together* is set in a specific community with distinctive cultural codes of behaviour, customs and relationships, social humour, language and dialect nuances. Largo.ai's analytics, based largely on universal genre tropes and character and dialogue sentiment analysis, did not account for these specific cultural and identity-based elements – they were effectively invisible in the reports. This means that the algorithm has no concept of socio-political and cultural contexts in which the story unfolds; for instance, how the story navigates race, class, or gender, or ethics unless explicitly trained on such metrics. It did not flag, for example, anything about representation of refugee, Muslim women characters (except that in the casting suggestions for the lead female character, language the actor knows included both English and Arabic), or the inter-ethnic and cultural nuances of migrant and refugee communities in Christchurch where the story is set. If the script had problematic stereotypes, it is unclear whether it would recognise them.

These blind spots highlight the ontological limits of algorithmic assessment. Certain qualities of creative work in script development – especially when multiple creatives are involved in collaborative creative thinking, as in *Come Together's* team, and as is common in film production – are emergent, contextual, intuitive, and experiential. Elements like character psychology, tonal ambiguity when drawing from multiple cultural worlds and uncertainties of human experience, symbolic imagery related to ethnic customs, cultural and lived experiences, or socio-political contexts and subtexts do not translate into the input features the AI evaluates. This aligns with a broader recognition as Gunkel (2021) discusses it in the case of generative AI, that operates on 'rhetorical constructs' and patterns rather than genuine understanding. Boden's (2018) scholarship similarly reminds that the deeply personal and emotionally nuanced aspects of creativity – such as embedding personal experiences or cultural commentary into art – remain uniquely human. The *Come Together* analytics reports demonstrate the AI's blind spots in capturing thematic undercurrents and nuances of performance and subtext. In particular, the portrayal of an educated, professional Muslim woman, whose subtle anxiety and PTSD are rendered with grounded realism, countering the usual tropes of victimhood and dependency, can be lost in the algorithm's assessment, including her complex professional friendship with the white lead character.

These blind spots reveal the boundaries of human creative agency in contrast to algorithmic evaluation. The algorithm cannot perceive subtext, intention, cultural resonance, or emotional texture – what belongs to the realm of lived, embodied creativity of human creatives. Such dimensions arise from the writer’s creative practice and expertise, shaped by experience, memory, and emotions, and are inseparable from the social, historical, political, and cultural contexts in which stories are imagined, written, and told. Pearlman and Allen (2025) in their workshop on AI in the filmmaking process note that creative expertise in filmmaking emerges from knowledge and skills accumulated through years of professional practice.

These blind spots reveal not merely a failure of perception but a fundamental limitation in the AI system’s design – it was never taught to value those dimensions. In this study, creativity resided precisely in the spaces the algorithm could not penetrate: the local knowledge, the intuitive structuring, and the unspoken emotional rhythms and relationships that emerge when characters are situated within a specific time, place, and network of social, historical, and cultural relations. It is within these richly contextual and affective layers that human creative agency operates at its fullest, beyond the reach or the scrape of algorithmic data.

Recognising algorithm’s blind spots dovetails with understandings of ‘distributed agency’ and the division of labour between human and machine. Celis Bueno, Chow, and Popowicz (2024) propose that in creative contexts there is often a relational form of agency where neither human nor algorithm is sole author. This study illustrates that the blind spots essentially demarcate the boundary of the machine’s agency. What lay beyond – the interpretation of meaning and cultural relevance – remain the domain of human creators.

## Conclusion

This practice-led research demonstrates that while algorithm can offer structural and market-oriented insights, its analytical frameworks remain limited in apprehending the emotional, contextual, cultural, and philosophical dimensions that underpin cinematic storytelling. The examination of AI-driven analytics in script development reveals complex tensions of creative agency, where AI technological affordances and human intuition intersect.

The three conceptual insights developed in this article – *creative flattening*, *risk of formulaic feedback*, and *blind spots* – articulate the layered dimensions of such tensions. Creative flattening describes the reduction of narrative, affective, and ethical complexity into computable parameters, reshaping agency through the normalisation of what is familiar and statistically legible as success. Formulaic feedback captures how predictive analytics recursively privilege historically validated structures, reconfiguring agency as anticipatory compliance rather than speculative authorship. Blind spots foreground the epistemic limits of algorithmic vision, where ethno-culturally, emotionally and historically embedded meaning, situated knowledge, and moral ambiguity remain structurally unseen. These concepts constitute a framework for understanding the evolving tensions of creative agency in the age of algorithmic mediation.

The study calls for a recalibration of practice in which filmmakers engage AI technologies reflexively – not as neutral instruments of efficiency or co-creation, but as

interlocutors that must be continually questioned, resisted, and reimagined within the broader ecology of film development.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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