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AI FILM FESTIVALS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CINEMA CULTURE: NEW RESEARCH METHODS IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE CINEMA

YAPAY ZEKÂ FİLM FESTİVALLERİ VE SİNEMA KÜLTÜRÜNÜN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ: GENERATİF SİNEMA ÇAĞINDA YENİ ARAŞTIRMA YÖNTEMLERİ

Murat Akser*

Abstract

This article examines how generative artificial intelligence is transforming contemporary cinema and film festival culture. The emergence of AI film festivals represents not merely a technological shift but a broader institutional and cultural transformation in how cinematic works are produced, curated, and evaluated. Drawing on festival studies and digital media theory, the article argues that film festivals function as key cultural intermediaries and gatekeepers, shaping the visibility, legitimacy, and circulation of films. In the context of generative cinema, this role is being reconfigured as festivals engage with new forms of human–machine collaboration, algorithmic aesthetics, and computational creativity. The study further proposes that existing methodological frameworks in festival studies are insufficient to address these transformations. It introduces new research approaches, including digital ethnography, platform analysis, algorithmic aesthetics, and production workflow analysis, to better understand AI-driven media production. The article also considers the emerging AI cinema ecosystem in Turkey, highlighting how regional media cultures engage with global technological shifts. Ultimately, it argues that AI film festivals should be understood as institutional laboratories where the future of cinema is actively negotiated.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, film festivals, generative cinema, algorithmic aesthetics, digital culture

Özet

Bu çalışma, generatif yapay zekâ teknolojilerinin sinema üretimi ve festival kültürü üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Yapay zekâ film festivalleri, yalnızca teknolojik yeniliklerin sergilendiği platformlar değil, aynı zamanda sinemanın estetik, kurumsal ve yaratıcı sınırlarının yeniden tanımlandığı deneysel alanlardır. Makale, film festivallerinin kültürel aracı ve küratöryel kurumlar olarak işlevini tartışarak, bu rolün yapay zekâ destekli üretim bağlamında nasıl dönüştüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Generatif sinema, insan-yapay zekâ işbirliğine dayalı üretim süreçleri aracılığıyla yazarlık, özgünlük ve estetik kavramlarını yeniden düşünmeyi gerektirir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, festival araştırmaları için dijital etnografi, platform analizi ve algoritmik estetik gibi yeni yöntemler önermektedir. Ayrıca Türkiye'de gelişmekte olan yapay zekâ sinema ekosistemi ele alınarak bölgesel medya kültürlerinin bu dönüşüme nasıl katıldığı incelenmektedir. Sonuç olarak, yapay zekâ film festivallerinin sinemanın geleceğinin şekillendiği kurumsal alanlar olduğu savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yapay zekâ, film festivalleri, generatif sinema, algoritmik estetik, dijital kültür

* Prof. Dr.,Ulster University, İngiltere, ORCID: 0000-0001-9772-394X.

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the landscape of audiovisual media, changing how it is produced, distributed, and experienced across contemporary culture (Crawford, 2021; Manovich, 2019). Generative AI tools capable of producing images, video, sound, and narrative structures are increasingly integrated into creative workflows across the global media industries (Manovich, 2019; Zylinska, 2020). As these technologies become more accessible, filmmakers, artists, and media producers are experimenting with new forms of cinematic expression that challenge traditional boundaries between human creativity and computational processes (Pasquinelli, 2023; Steyerl, 2017). Within this rapidly evolving technological landscape, the emergence of artificial intelligence film festivals represents one of the most visible institutional responses to the transformation of contemporary cinema culture. Meanwhile, there is considerable debate about whether AI technologies pose an emerging threat, creating precarity for screen industry professionals (Frederick 2019; Chow and Celis Bueno 2025; Zalipour 2026; Sönmez & Gülay 2026). This author does not want to take a neoliberal anti-labor position of welcoming anything AI-generated; instead, they would point to potential new developments in the curation and critical evaluation of AI-generated cinematic content through film festivals. For more critical perspectives, the readers can refer to Lindgren (2023), Halperin and Rosner (2025), Chung (2026) and Chow, Bueno, and Pereira (2026).

Film festivals have historically played a crucial role in the global circulation of cinema, functioning as cultural gatekeepers that shape aesthetic trends, legitimize emerging filmmakers, and facilitate transnational networks of distribution and recognition (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2013; Loist, 2016; Wong, 2011). As Marijke de Valck (2007) argues, film festivals serve as key nodes in the international film ecosystem, structuring how films are curated, exhibited, and discussed within broader cultural and industrial contexts. Festivals not only provide exhibition platforms for new works but also influence critical discourse, audience reception, and the formation of cinematic canons (de Valck, 2007; Wong, 2011). Consequently, any technological shift that transforms film production inevitably affects the institutional dynamics of film festivals themselves.

The growing presence of AI-generated or AI-assisted films within festival circuits signals an important transformation in the relationship between technology, creativity, and cultural institutions (Zylinska, 2020; Manovich, 2019). In recent years, several international festivals and competitions have begun to focus specifically on films created with generative AI tools. These events include dedicated AI film festivals as well as AI sections within established

festivals, where filmmakers experiment with machine-learning-driven image generation, synthetic actors, algorithmic editing, and automated narrative systems (Pasquinelli, 2023; Steyerl, 2017). Such developments raise a range of critical questions concerning authorship, originality, artistic intention, and the role of algorithms in the creative process (Coeckelbergh, 2020; Devlin, 2018).

AI film festivals can therefore be understood as experimental institutional spaces where the boundaries of cinema are actively renegotiated. Unlike traditional film festivals, which typically evaluate films according to established aesthetic and narrative criteria, AI-focused festivals often foreground technological experimentation and hybrid forms of creativity that emerge through human–machine collaboration (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). These festivals frequently operate at the intersection of media art, digital culture, and cinema, bringing together filmmakers, technologists, artists, and researchers interested in exploring the creative potential of generative algorithms (Manovich, 2019; Steyerl, 2017). As a result, they challenge long-standing assumptions about what constitutes filmmaking, who can be considered an author, and how cinematic aesthetics are produced.

At the same time, the rise of generative cinema introduces new challenges for scholars studying film festivals. Much of the existing literature on festival studies has focused on questions of geopolitics, cultural capital, programming strategies, and the circulation of national cinemas within global festival networks (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2015; Loist, 2016). While these approaches remain essential, the emergence of algorithmically generated films requires a reconsideration of the methodological frameworks traditionally used to analyze festivals and film culture (Manovich, 2019; Pasquinelli, 2023). When machine-learning systems may partially produce cinematic images themselves, scholars must account for new forms of authorship, production workflows, and aesthetic processes that differ significantly from conventional filmmaking practices (Zylinska, 2020; Coeckelbergh, 2020).

This article argues that AI film festivals represent a significant institutional and cultural shift in contemporary cinema. Rather than viewing these festivals merely as technological curiosities, they should be understood as key sites where the future grammar of cinema is being negotiated (Elsaesser, 2016; Manovich, 2019). AI festivals not only showcase experimental works but also actively shape emerging debates about the potential future role of AI in shaping cultural industries, the politics of algorithmic media, and the ethical implications of machine-generated art (Crawford, 2021; Pasquinelli, 2023). In this sense, they function as laboratories for exploring new cinematic forms and modes of spectatorship.

In addition to examining the emergence of AI film festivals, this study also proposes that the study of festivals itself must adapt to the changing conditions of digital and algorithmic media production. Traditional methods of film analysis, archival research, and festival ethnography must increasingly be complemented by new research approaches capable of addressing algorithmic creativity and digital production environments (Manovich, 2019; Zylinska, 2020). These approaches may include digital ethnography of online festival platforms, analysis of AI-assisted production workflows, and the study of algorithmic aesthetics in generative media (Pasquinelli, 2023; Steyerl, 2017). By integrating these methodological perspectives, scholars can better understand how the institutional structures of cinema evolve in response to technological innovation.

The article situates these developments within the broader transformation of global cinema culture while also considering their implications for emerging film ecosystems, including Turkey. As generative AI tools become more widely accessible, filmmakers and media practitioners in different regions are beginning to experiment with AI-driven storytelling and audiovisual production (Manovich, 2019; Crawford, 2021). This creates new opportunities for smaller or emerging film cultures to participate in global technological shifts in media production. At the same time, it raises important questions about cultural representation, creative labor, and the uneven distribution of technological resources across different media industries (Srnicek, 2017; Crawford, 2021).

Against this backdrop, the article explores the rise of AI film festivals as a new phenomenon within contemporary cinema culture. It examines how these festivals reshape the relationship between technology, creativity, and cultural institutions. It also proposes new methodological approaches for researching film festivals in the age of artificial intelligence. By analyzing the intersection of generative cinema, festival culture, and emerging research methodologies, the study contributes to ongoing debates in media studies, digital culture, and the sociology of film festivals (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2013).

Ultimately, the article argues that AI film festivals should be understood not only as sites of technological experimentation but also as critical arenas in which the cultural, aesthetic, and institutional future of cinema is currently being negotiated (Elsaesser, 2016; Zylinska, 2020). Despite the growing visibility of AI-generated cinema, little scholarly attention has been given to how film festivals are adapting to algorithmic filmmaking and how these transformations reshape methods used in festival studies.

This article addresses three main research questions:

(1) How are AI film festivals reshaping contemporary cinema culture?
(2) In what ways do AI-generated films transform festival curation and debates surrounding authorship and creativity?
(3) What new methodological approaches are required to study film festivals in the age of generative artificial intelligence?

2. AI and the Transformation of Cinema

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence into audiovisual production has begun to transform not only how films are made but also how cinematic images themselves are conceptualized (Crawford, 2021; Manovich, 2019). The emergence of generative AI filmmaking represents a significant shift in the ontology of cinema, introducing new relationships between human creativity, algorithmic processes, and technical infrastructures (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). In contrast to earlier digital tools that primarily supported post-production or visual effects, contemporary generative systems can produce entire audiovisual sequences using AI-trained models for images, sounds, and narratives (Crawford, 2021; Pasquinelli, 2023). As a result, filmmaking is gradually evolving from a process centered on camera-based recording toward one that increasingly involves computational image synthesis.

This transformation reflects a broader shift within media culture that scholars have described as the rise of algorithmic media (Manovich, 2001; Galloway, 2012). Lev Manovich (2019) argues that artificial intelligence has introduced a new paradigm of media production in which algorithms play an active role in generating visual and narrative content. Rather than functioning merely as tools controlled by filmmakers, AI systems increasingly participate in creative decision-making processes such as image generation, editing suggestions, and narrative structuring. In this sense, AI-generated media represent a new form of computational creativity in which artistic production emerges from the interaction between human intention and machine learning systems (Zylinska, 2020).

Generative AI filmmaking builds upon earlier transformations associated with digital cinema. As Thomas Elsaesser (2016) notes, the transition from analog to digital technologies fundamentally altered the production, circulation, and reception of moving images. Digital cinema enabled new forms of visual manipulation, expanded possibilities for low-budget filmmaking, and reshaped global distribution networks (Tryon, 2013). Artificial intelligence extends these developments by automating aspects of image creation that were previously

dependent on human labor. The capacity of AI systems to generate photorealistic images, synthetic actors, and procedurally constructed environments suggests that cinema is entering a new phase in which the boundaries between filmed reality and computational simulation become increasingly blurred (Manovich, 2019; Steyerl, 2017).

The emergence of AI-assisted storytelling is transforming the field. Recent generative models are capable of producing scripts, dialogue, and narrative structures based on prompts provided by human creators. These systems allow filmmakers to experiment with hybrid creative workflows in which narrative ideas are partially generated or modified by algorithms (Pasquinelli, 2023). While AI-assisted storytelling does not eliminate the role of human authorship, it complicates traditional notions of creative control and narrative intention (Coeckelbergh, 2020). The resulting films often reflect a collaborative process in which human creators curate, refine, and reinterpret outputs generated by machine learning systems (Zylinska, 2020).

The concept of algorithmic aesthetics provides a useful framework for understanding how AI-generated cinema differs from traditional filmmaking practices. Manovich (2020) argues that algorithmic media produce distinctive visual patterns shaped by the statistical structures of training datasets and the computational logic of machine learning models. Unlike conventional cinematography, which relies on physical cameras and controlled lighting environments, AI-generated imagery emerges through probabilistic processes that synthesize visual elements from large collections of existing images (Manovich, 2019). This often results in aesthetic characteristics such as hyperreal textures, dreamlike morphing between visual forms, and the blending of stylistic references from multiple cinematic traditions (Steyerl, 2017).

From this perspective, generative cinema can be understood as a form of technical image production in the sense described by Vilém Flusser (2011). Flusser argued that technical images are produced through apparatuses governed by programmed rules rather than through direct human perception. In the context of AI filmmaking, machine learning models function as complex apparatuses that translate datasets into visual outputs based on statistical correlations embedded in the training data (Pasquinelli, 2023). The filmmaker’s role shifts from capturing images through cameras to designing prompts, curating datasets, and guiding algorithmic processes. As a result, authorship becomes shared between sentient and artificial within the production process (Zylinska, 2020).

These technological transformations must also be understood within the broader political economy of contemporary media industries. The rapid development of generative AI tools is closely tied to the expansion of platform capitalism, a system in which large technology companies control the infrastructure through which digital production and distribution occur (Srnicek, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). Nick Srnicek (2017) describes platform capitalism as a model in which corporations accumulate data and monetize digital ecosystems by controlling the platforms that structure user activity. Many generative AI tools used in filmmaking are developed and maintained by large technology firms whose economic models depend on data extraction and algorithmic innovation.

The integration of AI into creative industries, therefore, raises important questions about power, labor, and ownership in digital media production. As Kate Crawford (2021) emphasizes, artificial intelligence is not merely a neutral technological innovation but a complex socio-technical system shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. AI systems rely on vast datasets that often incorporate existing cultural materials without transparent acknowledgment of their sources. In the context of filmmaking, this raises ethical concerns about intellectual property, creative labor, and the appropriation of artistic styles (Crawford, 2021; Coeckelbergh, 2020). The ability of AI models to generate images based on previously produced cultural content complicates traditional frameworks of copyright and authorship.

At the same time, generative AI tools are becoming increasingly accessible to independent creators, potentially lowering barriers to entry within the audiovisual industries (Manovich, 2019). For emerging filmmakers and small creative teams, AI-assisted production tools offer new possibilities for experimentation with visual styles and narrative formats that might otherwise require substantial financial resources. This democratizing potential has led some scholars and practitioners to view generative cinema as an opportunity to diversify media production and expand creative participation within the global media landscape (Zylinska, 2020).

At the same time, the expansion of generative AI within creative industries has generated significant concerns regarding labor displacement and precarity within the audiovisual sector. The increasing automation of image generation, editing, animation, and scripting processes may reduce demand for certain forms of creative labor while concentrating technological control within major platform companies. Recent restructuring and layoffs within global media corporations have intensified debates surrounding the long-term implications of AI-assisted production for film workers, visual artists, and creative professionals.

Consequently, discussions surrounding generative cinema cannot be separated from broader questions concerning labor rights, technological inequality, and the political economy of digital media production (Crawford, 2021; Srnicek, 2017).

However, the democratization narrative must be considered carefully in light of the structural realities of platform capitalism. While AI tools may enable new forms of creative experimentation, the infrastructures that support them remain largely controlled by a small number of technology companies (Srnicek, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). This concentration of technological power may ultimately shape the aesthetics, distribution channels, and economic structures of future media production. The increasing reliance on proprietary algorithms and cloud-based infrastructures raises questions about the autonomy of filmmakers and the long-term sustainability of independent creative practices.

Within this context, the emergence of AI-generated cinema should be understood not only as a technological development but also as a broader transformation of the creative industries. AI systems are reshaping the division of labor within media production, altering the skills required for filmmaking, and introducing new forms of collaboration between artists, programmers, and machine learning systems (Crawford, 2021; Pasquinelli, 2023). These developments are gradually redefining the meaning of cinematic creativity in the twenty-first century.

The transformation of cinema through artificial intelligence also has important implications for cultural institutions such as film festivals. As generative filmmaking practices become more widespread, festivals increasingly serve as experimental spaces where new forms of algorithmic cinema are exhibited and evaluated (de Valck, 2007; Wong, 2011). AI film festivals, in particular, provide platforms for showcasing works created through hybrid human–machine collaborations while simultaneously stimulating debate about authorship, creativity, and the future of cinematic expression (Zylinska, 2020; Coeckelbergh, 2020).

Understanding these developments requires an interdisciplinary approach that connects media theory, digital culture studies, and the political economy of the creative industries. By situating generative AI filmmaking within broader transformations in digital media production, scholars can better understand how algorithmic technologies are reshaping the aesthetic, institutional, and economic structures of contemporary cinema (Manovich, 2019; Crawford, 2021).

3. Film Festivals as Cultural Gatekeepers

Film festivals have become one of the most influential institutional structures within contemporary cinema culture. Beyond functioning simply as exhibition venues, festivals play a decisive role in shaping the circulation, reception, and cultural value of films within global media ecosystems (de Valck, 2007; Wong, 2011). Over the past two decades, scholarship in festival studies has emphasized that film festivals operate as powerful cultural intermediaries that influence which films gain visibility, prestige, and distribution opportunities (Iordanova, 2013; Loist, 2016). Through their programming decisions, award structures, and industry networking functions, festivals actively participate in constructing the symbolic hierarchies that define the global film landscape.

Marijke de Valck's foundational 2007 study of film festivals conceptualizes film festivals as key nodes in an increasingly transnational film culture. According to de Valck, festivals serve as institutional platforms where films circulate outside traditional commercial distribution channels and where cultural legitimacy is assigned through processes of selection, competition, and critical recognition (de Valck, 2007). Historically, major European festivals such as Cannes, Venice, and Berlin emerged during the postwar period as instruments of cultural diplomacy and geopolitical competition. Over time, however, they evolved into central institutions within a global network of festivals that shape the international visibility of filmmakers and national cinemas (Iordanova, 2013).

Within this global festival ecosystem, programming decisions function as powerful acts of cultural mediation. Festival curators do not merely select films for exhibition but actively construct narratives about cinematic trends, aesthetic innovation, and emerging cultural movements (Wong, 2011). In this sense, festivals operate as curatorial institutions that frame how films are interpreted and discussed by critics, scholars, and audiences. Through thematic programming sections, retrospective screenings, and special competitions, festivals guide critical discourse and influence the positioning of particular cinematic forms within broader cultural debates (de Valck, 2007; Wong, 2011).

The role of film festivals as taste-makers has been widely recognized in the literature on cultural intermediaries. By selecting particular films for premiere screenings, competition sections, and awards ceremonies, festivals contribute to the formation of aesthetic value within the global film industry (Wong, 2011). The symbolic capital associated with festival recognition often determines whether a film will attract international distributors, secure further funding for filmmakers, or gain attention from critics and academic researchers. As a result, festivals

function as mechanisms through which cultural prestige and legitimacy are produced and distributed (de Valck, 2007).

Dina Iordanova's research on festival networks further emphasizes the importance of festivals as interconnected institutions within global cinema circulation (Iordanova, 2013). Rather than existing as isolated events, film festivals form complex networks through which films travel across multiple geographical and cultural contexts. A film that premieres at a major festival often continues its circulation through a chain of smaller regional festivals, thematic festivals, and specialized cultural events (Iordanova, 2013). These festival circuits create alternative distribution pathways that operate alongside commercial theatrical markets and digital streaming platforms.

The existence of these circuits highlights the role of festivals as nodes within transnational networks of film circulation. Festivals not only showcase films but also facilitate professional connections between filmmakers, producers, distributors, and critics. Industry markets, co-production forums, and networking events organized within festival environments allow filmmakers to secure funding, negotiate distribution deals, and build international collaborations (Loist, 2016). Through these mechanisms, festivals contribute to the globalization of film production and the cross-cultural exchange of cinematic ideas.

Skadi Loist's work on festival circuits expands this perspective by examining how festivals structure patterns of film mobility and cultural visibility. According to Loist, the contemporary festival landscape consists of a hierarchical system in which certain festivals occupy positions of greater prestige and influence (Loist, 2016). Major "A-list" festivals function as central nodes that attract global media attention, while smaller specialized festivals focus on particular genres, political themes, or regional cinemas. This hierarchical structure shapes the trajectories of films as they move through different festival circuits, influencing how audiences and critics interpret their cultural significance.

The economic dimensions of film festivals have also received increasing scholarly attention. Cindy Wong's analysis of the film festival economy demonstrates that festivals operate not only as cultural institutions but also as significant economic actors within the global film industry (Wong, 2011). Festivals generate revenue through sponsorship agreements, tourism, accreditation fees, and partnerships with media organizations. At the same time, they contribute to the broader film economy by providing platforms for negotiating distribution deals and for emerging filmmakers to gain access to professional networks (Wong, 2011).

These economic and cultural functions reinforce the role of festivals as gatekeepers within cinema culture. By determining which films are selected for screening and which filmmakers receive institutional recognition, festivals exert considerable influence over the global circulation of cinematic works (de Valck, 2007; Loist, 2016). Films that secure festival premieres often gain increased visibility within international media coverage and critical discourse, while those excluded from major festivals may struggle to reach wider audiences.

The gatekeeping function of festivals is closely connected to the broader dynamics of cultural power and representation within global cinema. Scholars have noted that festival programming decisions frequently reflect particular aesthetic preferences, political values, and institutional priorities (Iordanova, 2013). The selection of films for prestigious competition sections often reinforces dominant narratives about artistic innovation, national cinema identity, or global political concerns. Consequently, festivals not only shape film circulation but also help define which cultural perspectives are amplified within international cinema culture (de Valck, 2007).

In recent years, the festival landscape has expanded significantly with the emergence of specialized festivals dedicated to particular themes, technologies, or social issues. Environmental film festivals, human rights festivals, and queer film festivals have become important platforms for alternative cinematic voices and activist cultural movements (Loist, 2016). These specialized events demonstrate that festivals are not static institutions but evolving cultural spaces that respond to broader technological and social transformations.

The rise of artificial intelligence filmmaking represents one of the most recent developments reshaping the festival ecosystem. As generative media technologies become increasingly integrated into creative production processes, festivals are beginning to confront new questions concerning authorship, creativity, and the boundaries of cinematic expression (Zylinska, 2020; Crawford, 2021). Some festivals have introduced dedicated sections for AI-generated films, while others have established entirely new events focused specifically on generative cinema.

Understanding the emergence of AI film festivals, therefore, requires situating them within the broader institutional history of festival culture. Like earlier specialized festivals, AI festivals represent an attempt to curate and interpret a new technological and aesthetic movement within cinema (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2013). At the same time, they challenge traditional curatorial frameworks by introducing works that blur the boundaries between human authorship and algorithmic generation (Zylinska, 2020).

By examining film festivals as cultural gatekeepers and global circulation nodes, it becomes possible to understand how new technological forms, such as AI-generated cinema, enter the broader film culture. The next section explores how artificial intelligence film festivals are emerging as new institutional spaces where the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of generative cinema are actively negotiated.

4. The Rise of AI Film Festivals

The rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence tools in audiovisual production has begun to reshape not only how films are created but also how they are curated, exhibited, and evaluated within cultural institutions (Crawford, 2021; Manovich, 2019). In recent years, a growing number of film festivals and competitions dedicated to AI-generated or AI-assisted filmmaking have emerged across the global media landscape. These events represent an important institutional response to the technological transformation of cinematic production. By providing platforms for works created through human–machine collaboration, AI film festivals function as experimental spaces where new forms of cinematic aesthetics and creative authorship are actively explored (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023).

The emergence of AI film festivals can be understood within the broader historical pattern of film festivals responding to technological and aesthetic shifts in cinema (de Valck, 2007; Elsaesser, 2016). Just as earlier festivals played key roles in legitimizing movements such as neorealism, the French New Wave, or digital cinema, contemporary AI-focused festivals are beginning to institutionalize a new form of audiovisual production centered on algorithmic image generation and machine learning (Manovich, 2019). In this sense, these festivals act as curatorial laboratories where the cultural meaning of artificial intelligence in filmmaking is negotiated among filmmakers, programmers, critics, and audiences.

One of the most visible examples of this emerging institutional landscape is the Runway AI Film Festival, organized by the AI research company Runway. Launched in 2023, the festival is open to filmmakers from around the world to submit short films created using generative AI tools. The festival showcases works that combine human storytelling with algorithmically generated visuals, sound design, and animation. Rather than emphasizing traditional filmmaking techniques such as cinematography or location shooting, many of the selected films highlight the creative possibilities of prompt-based visual generation and synthetic imagery (Manovich, 2020; Zylinska, 2020). The event demonstrates how generative

AI tools are increasingly integrated into the workflows of experimental filmmakers and digital artists.

Similarly, the AI Film Festival in New York and other emerging AI-focused competitions have begun to establish dedicated platforms for showcasing algorithmic cinema. These events often operate at the intersection of film culture, digital art, and technological experimentation (Steyerl, 2017). Participants frequently include independent filmmakers, media artists, researchers, and creative technologists who explore the aesthetic possibilities of machine learning systems. By bringing together practitioners from different creative and technical backgrounds, AI film festivals contribute to the formation of new interdisciplinary communities centered on generative media production (Pasquinelli, 2023).

In addition to fully dedicated AI film festivals, many existing festivals have begun incorporating experimental AI competitions or thematic sections devoted to generative filmmaking. Some festivals have introduced awards for works created with artificial intelligence, while others organize panels and workshops exploring the ethical and aesthetic implications of AI-generated media (Crawford, 2021; Coeckelbergh, 2020). These initiatives indicate that AI filmmaking is gradually entering the institutional frameworks that traditionally define cinema culture.

The emergence of these festivals raises a number of important theoretical and practical questions for film studies. One of the most frequently discussed issues concerns the concept of authorship. In classical film theory, the filmmaker or director has typically been regarded as the primary creative agent responsible for shaping the film’s aesthetic and narrative structure. The introduction of generative AI tools complicates this framework by introducing algorithmic systems that actively participate in image creation and narrative generation (Zylinska, 2020; Coeckelbergh, 2020). When a film is produced using AI by using existing images and audiovisual materials, the boundaries between human creativity and computational processes become increasingly difficult to define (Pasquinelli, 2023).

AI film festivals therefore provide a unique context in which debates about authorship are brought to the forefront of cultural discussion. Festival juries and programmers must decide how to evaluate works created through hybrid human–machine collaborations. Questions arise regarding whether the creative agency lies primarily with the filmmaker who designs prompts and selects outputs or with the algorithmic system that generates the visual material. These debates challenge long-standing assumptions about individual artistic authorship and raise

broader questions about the nature of creativity in an age of algorithmic production (Zylinska, 2020).

Closely related to authorship is the issue of originality. Traditional film festivals often celebrate films that demonstrate distinctive artistic vision or innovative aesthetic approaches. However, AI-generated images are typically produced by models trained on vast collections of existing visual data. As a result, generative media often incorporate stylistic elements derived from previous artworks, films, or photographic traditions (Steyerl, 2017). This raises concerns about whether AI-generated cinema can be considered truly original or whether it represents a recombination of preexisting cultural materials (Pasquinelli, 2023).

The question of originality is closely connected to ongoing debates surrounding copyright and intellectual property. Because generative AI models are trained using large datasets that frequently include copyrighted materials, the production of AI-generated images raises complex legal and ethical issues (Crawford, 2021). In the context of film festivals, these concerns extend to programming decisions about whether AI-generated films should be treated differently from traditional works in terms of eligibility and authorship credit (Coeckelbergh, 2020). Some festivals have begun developing guidelines addressing the disclosure of AI tools used in film production, while others continue to experiment with open frameworks that encourage technological exploration.

Beyond questions of authorship and copyright, AI film festivals also highlight the emergence of new aesthetic forms associated with algorithmic media production. Many AI-generated films exhibit visual characteristics that differ significantly from conventional cinematography. Because generative models often synthesize images through probabilistic processes, the resulting visuals frequently display dreamlike transitions, hybridized stylistic elements, and fluid transformations between visual forms (Manovich, 2020; Steyerl, 2017). These aesthetic qualities reflect what can be described as algorithmic cinema, a form of moving-image production shaped by computational processes rather than direct photographic capture (Manovich, 2019; Pasquinelli, 2019).

Algorithmic cinema represents an important conceptual shift in how cinematic images are produced and interpreted. Whereas traditional cinema relies on recording physical reality through cameras, generative cinema constructs images through statistical inference and data-driven synthesis (Flusser, 2011; Manovich, 2019). This shift has significant implications for how audiences interpret cinematic realism, narrative coherence, and visual authenticity. In

many AI-generated films, the visual environment appears simultaneously familiar and uncanny, blending recognizable visual motifs with unexpected distortions produced by machine learning models (Steyerl, 2017).

The curatorial practices of AI film festivals must therefore adapt to new aesthetic and technological conditions. Programmers are increasingly required to evaluate films not only in terms of narrative coherence or cinematographic technique but also in relation to the creative use of generative tools. In some cases, festivals emphasize the originality of prompts or the conceptual design of human–machine interaction within the production process. In others, the focus shifts toward the broader artistic vision that emerges from the collaboration between filmmakers and algorithmic systems (Zylinska, 2020).

These developments suggest that AI film festivals are gradually reshaping the criteria through which cinematic works are evaluated within institutional contexts. Traditional measures of cinematic craft such as camera movement, lighting design, and location shooting may become less central in contexts where images are generated through machine learning systems. Instead, curatorial attention may increasingly focus on conceptual innovation, narrative experimentation, and the creative orchestration of algorithmic processes (Manovich, 2020).

From a broader cultural perspective, the emergence of AI film festivals also reflects the growing influence of artificial intelligence within the creative industries. Generative media tools are increasingly used in advertising, visual effects production, digital art, and interactive media design (Srnicek, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). Film festivals dedicated to AI-generated cinema therefore function as important sites where technological innovation intersects with cultural production. They offer opportunities for filmmakers and artists to explore the aesthetic possibilities of generative systems while simultaneously raising critical questions about the political and economic structures that shape AI development (Crawford, 2021).

Ultimately, the rise of AI film festivals signals the emergence of a new institutional arena within global cinema culture. These festivals operate as experimental spaces where the boundaries of authorship, originality, and cinematic aesthetics are actively contested and renegotiated (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). By curating works created through human–machine collaboration, AI film festivals not only showcase new forms of algorithmic cinema but also contribute to ongoing debates about the future of filmmaking in the age of artificial intelligence.

Understanding these developments requires rethinking the methodological approaches used to study film festivals and cinema culture more broadly. As generative media technologies continue to evolve, scholars must develop new research strategies to analyze algorithmic production processes, digital creative networks, and emerging institutional structures within the global media ecosystem (Manovich, 2019; Crawford, 2021).

5. Turkey and the Emerging AI Cinema Ecosystem

While much of the global discussion surrounding artificial intelligence and cinema has focused on developments in North America, Europe, and East Asia, emerging media ecosystems in other regions are also beginning to experiment with generative filmmaking technologies. Turkey represents an especially interesting case in this regard. Positioned at the intersection of European, Middle Eastern, and global media markets, the Turkish audiovisual sector has historically demonstrated a capacity to adapt to technological transformations in film production and distribution. From the industrial structure of Yeşilçam cinema to the more recent international success of Turkish television drama and independent art-house filmmaking, the Turkish media landscape has repeatedly integrated new production technologies and creative practices.

The emergence of artificial intelligence in media production is now generating new forms of experimentation in Turkish film culture. Although AI-generated cinema remains in its early stages in Turkey, a growing number of filmmakers, artists, and media practitioners are exploring generative tools as part of their creative workflows. These experiments often occur at the intersection of film, digital art, and interactive media rather than within traditional commercial film production. As a result, AI cinema in Turkey currently develops primarily through experimental short films, digital art projects, and interdisciplinary collaborations between filmmakers and technologists.

One of the most visible areas where these developments are emerging is within film and media education. Universities and film schools increasingly incorporate artificial intelligence tools into courses on digital media production, visual storytelling, and creative technologies. Students and early-career filmmakers are experimenting with generative image systems, AI-assisted editing tools, and algorithmic animation platforms as part of their training in contemporary audiovisual production. These educational initiatives play a significant role in shaping the next generation of filmmakers who will engage with AI-driven media environments.

Film schools and communication faculties have historically served as incubators for technological experimentation in cinema, and this pattern appears to be repeating itself in AI filmmaking. In many cases, student projects represent the first stage of experimentation with generative storytelling techniques before such methods become more widely adopted within professional production environments. As AI tools become more accessible and user-friendly, they are likely to be integrated into broader pedagogical frameworks that combine traditional filmmaking skills with computational media literacy.

In addition to academic settings, media labs and creative technology initiatives have begun to play an important role in fostering AI-driven media production in Turkey. These spaces often bring together artists, programmers, designers, and filmmakers interested in exploring new forms of audiovisual expression enabled by machine learning systems. Media labs typically operate as interdisciplinary environments where participants experiment with emerging technologies such as generative visual models, real-time interactive systems, and AI-assisted animation tools. Such collaborative environments create opportunities for filmmakers to engage with technical expertise that might otherwise be inaccessible within conventional film production contexts.

Digital art festivals also contribute to the visibility of AI-generated media within the Turkish cultural landscape. Over the past decade, several festivals and exhibitions focusing on digital culture, media art, and interactive technologies have emerged in major Turkish cities. These events frequently include installations, experimental films, and audiovisual performances that explore the relationship between algorithmic systems and artistic creativity. Although many of these projects are not strictly categorized as “films” in the traditional sense, they often incorporate cinematic techniques such as narrative sequencing, audiovisual montage, and screen-based storytelling.

The presence of AI-generated works within digital art festivals suggests that generative cinema may initially gain institutional recognition through interdisciplinary art contexts rather than through conventional film festivals. Historically, many technological innovations in moving-image culture have first appeared in experimental art spaces before being incorporated into mainstream cinematic production. The growing presence of AI-driven media installations and audiovisual experiments within digital art exhibitions, therefore, indicates a potential pathway through which generative cinema may gradually enter broader film culture.

At the same time, Turkish film festivals are increasingly demonstrating interest in technological innovation within audiovisual storytelling. Some festivals have begun organizing

panels, workshops, and industry discussions focused on artificial intelligence, virtual production, and digital media transformation. These events often bring together filmmakers, scholars, and technology professionals to discuss the future of audiovisual storytelling in an era of rapid technological change. Although dedicated AI film competitions remain relatively rare in the Turkish festival landscape, the growing visibility of AI-related discussions suggests that festival programmers are closely monitoring developments in generative filmmaking.

Short film competitions provide another important entry point for AI experimentation within the Turkish film ecosystem. Short films have historically served as spaces where emerging filmmakers experiment with new technologies and narrative formats. Because short-form production typically requires fewer financial resources than feature-length filmmaking, it allows filmmakers to test innovative techniques without the economic constraints associated with larger productions. AI-assisted short films, therefore, represent a likely avenue through which generative storytelling practices may gain broader visibility within Turkish film culture.

The emergence of AI cinema in Turkey reflects developments in creative industries policy. Governments and cultural institutions increasingly recognize the economic and cultural significance of digital media industries, including film, animation, gaming, and interactive media. Artificial intelligence is frequently positioned within policy discourse as a strategic technological sector capable of driving innovation and economic growth. In this context, investments in digital infrastructure, creative technology education, and research initiatives may assist in the development of AI-driven media production.

However, the integration of artificial intelligence into creative industries also raises complex questions about labor, authorship, and access to technology. As in many other countries, the Turkish media sector faces challenges related to funding, technological resources, and international distribution. The adoption of AI tools may offer new opportunities for independent creators to produce visually sophisticated works with limited budgets. At the same time, the concentration of AI technology development within global technology companies may create dependencies on external platforms and proprietary software systems.

Despite these challenges, the early stages of AI experimentation within Turkey’s audiovisual sector demonstrate a growing interest in the creative potential of generative media technologies. The combination of film education initiatives, digital art experimentation, media labs, and festival discussions suggests that an emerging ecosystem for AI cinema is gradually taking shape. While this ecosystem remains fragmented and exploratory, it reflects broader

global trends in which filmmakers and media artists are increasingly engaging with artificial intelligence as both a creative tool and a subject of critical inquiry.

The study of AI cinema in Turkey, therefore, offers valuable insights into how technological innovation interacts with regional media cultures. As generative filmmaking technologies continue to evolve, Turkey's position within global media networks may allow its filmmakers and artists to contribute distinctive perspectives on algorithmic cinema. By examining these developments, scholars can better understand how artificial intelligence is reshaping not only the aesthetics of cinema but also the institutional and cultural infrastructures that support audiovisual creativity.

6. Rethinking Festival Studies: New Research Methods

The emergence of AI-generated cinema requires a significant rethinking of the methodological frameworks traditionally used in film and festival studies. Existing approaches have largely focused on institutional analysis, programming strategies, audience reception, and geopolitical circulation (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2013). While these frameworks remain valuable, they are insufficient for addressing the complexities introduced by algorithmic media production.

Generative filmmaking fundamentally alters the ontology of the cinematic object. Films are no longer solely the result of human-directed production processes but are increasingly shaped by machine learning systems, training datasets, and computational infrastructures (Manovich, 2019; Pasquinelli, 2023). As a result, studying AI cinema requires methodological approaches capable of analyzing both cultural and technical dimensions of media production.

One key approach is digital ethnography, which enables researchers to examine how filmmakers, artists, and programmers interact with AI tools within creative workflows. This includes studying online communities, production platforms, and collaborative networks where generative filmmaking practices emerge. Unlike traditional ethnography centered on physical production environments, digital ethnography allows scholars to trace distributed forms of creative labor across platforms and digital infrastructures (van Dijck et al., 2018).

A second approach involves platform analysis, focusing on the technological and economic infrastructures that shape AI filmmaking. Generative tools such as Runway, Midjourney, or OpenAI systems operate within platform ecosystems governed by proprietary algorithms and data-driven business models (Srnicek, 2017). Analyzing these platforms reveals

how technological affordances, access restrictions, and economic structures influence both creative possibilities and limitations.

Another important methodological direction is the analysis of algorithmic aesthetics. AI-generated images are shaped by statistical patterns embedded within training datasets, resulting in visual forms that differ significantly from traditional cinematography (Manovich, 2020; Steyerl, 2017). For example, researchers might compare AI-generated short films exhibited at festivals such as the Runway AI Film Festival in order to identify recurring visual patterns, stylistic repetitions, or prompt-driven aesthetic conventions emerging from generative image systems. Studying these aesthetic characteristics requires new analytical frameworks capable of examining probabilistic image generation, stylistic hybridity, and the emergence of machine-influenced visual language.

In addition, production workflow analysis becomes crucial for understanding human–machine collaboration. Rather than focusing solely on the final film text, researchers must examine how prompts are constructed, how outputs are selected and refined, and how creative decisions are distributed between human agents and algorithmic systems (Zylinska, 2020). This shifts attention from finished works to processes of interaction and iteration.

Finally, dataset analysis represents an emerging methodological frontier. AI systems are trained on large-scale datasets that often include culturally specific visual materials. Examining these datasets can reveal how biases, stylistic conventions, and historical visual patterns are embedded within generative systems (Crawford, 2021). This approach allows scholars to connect questions of aesthetics with broader issues of power, representation, and data politics.

Taken together, these methodological approaches suggest that the study of film festivals in the age of artificial intelligence must move beyond traditional textual and institutional analysis. AI film festivals should be understood as hybrid environments where cultural, technological, and economic processes intersect. By integrating digital ethnography, platform analysis, algorithmic aesthetics, workflow studies, and dataset analysis, scholars can develop more comprehensive frameworks for understanding how cinema is being reshaped by artificial intelligence.

7. Discussion: AI Film Festivals as Institutional Innovation

The emergence of artificial intelligence film festivals represents a significant institutional development within contemporary cinema culture (de Valck, 2007; Crawford, 2021). While these events are often framed as technological showcases demonstrating the

capabilities of generative media tools, their broader cultural significance extends far beyond mere displays of technical novelty. AI film festivals increasingly function as experimental institutional spaces where new cinematic practices, aesthetic forms, and creative collaborations are actively negotiated (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). In this sense, they should be understood not simply as platforms for showcasing AI-generated films but as laboratories of cinematic experimentation where the future grammar of moving-image storytelling is being explored (Manovich, 2019).

Historically, film festivals provide platforms for cinematic evolution, where new aesthetic movements gain visibility and legitimacy (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2013). Movements such as Italian neorealism, the French New Wave, and various forms of digital cinema were all initially circulated through festival networks before becoming widely recognized within global film culture (Elsaesser, 2016). AI film festivals appear to serve a similar function today, albeit in a technological context defined by algorithmic media production and human–machine collaboration (Zylinska, 2020; Manovich, 2019). By curating works created with generative systems, festival programmers are actively helping to define what constitutes legitimate AI-driven cinematic expression.

The institutional role of AI festivals is particularly significant because generative filmmaking challenges many of the foundational assumptions that have historically structured cinema culture. Traditional filmmaking practices rely heavily on camera-based image capture, physical production environments, and clearly defined creative roles within production teams (Elsaesser, 2016). In contrast, AI-generated cinema often involves distributed workflows in which filmmakers interact with machine learning systems through prompt design, dataset selection, and iterative refinement of outputs (Pasquinelli, 2023). These hybrid creative processes complicate conventional ideas about authorship and artistic agency (Zylinska, 2020).

Within AI film festivals, questions of authorship become central to curatorial decision-making. Festival juries must evaluate films that may have been partially generated by algorithms trained on vast archives of cultural material (Crawford, 2021). This raises complex questions about how creative credit should be assigned and how artistic originality should be understood in contexts where computational systems play an active role in image production (Coeckelbergh, 2020; Zylinska, 2020). The debates surrounding authorship in AI cinema, therefore, extend beyond individual films to broader questions about how creativity is conceptualized within contemporary media industries.

Closely connected to these discussions are emerging concerns about intellectual property and copyright. Generative AI systems frequently rely on training datasets that include large numbers of images, videos, and artworks sourced from existing cultural materials (Crawford, 2021; Pasquinelli, 2023). As AI-generated cinema becomes more visible in festival circuits, questions arise about the legal and ethical implications of using such datasets in creative production. Film festivals are therefore increasingly confronted with the challenge of developing curatorial guidelines that address issues of transparency, disclosure, and ethical use of generative technologies (Coeckelbergh, 2020).

Artificial intelligence tools are rapidly becoming integrated into various sectors of media production, including advertising, animation, visual effects, and interactive media (Srnicek, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). By providing public platforms for exhibiting and discussing generative films, AI festivals contribute to the broader cultural normalization of AI-assisted creativity (Manovich, 2019; Zylinska, 2020). These events bring together filmmakers, technologists, investors, and policymakers who are collectively exploring how algorithmic tools might reshape the economics and labor structures of creative industries (Crawford, 2021).

The implications of these developments extend to cultural policy as well. Governments and cultural institutions increasingly recognize the importance of digital technologies in shaping the future of media industries (Srnicek, 2017). AI film festivals may therefore function as important spaces where cultural policy discussions intersect with technological experimentation. Through industry panels, workshops, and collaborative programs, festivals can facilitate dialogue between policymakers, artists, and technology developers regarding issues such as digital infrastructure, creative labor, and technological accessibility (van Dijck et al., 2018).

From a broader cultural perspective, AI film festivals also contribute to redefining the aesthetic boundaries of cinema. Generative media tools enable forms of visual expression that differ significantly from conventional cinematic imagery (Manovich, 2020; Steyerl, 2017). Algorithmic processes often produce hybridized aesthetic styles that blend elements of animation, photorealistic simulation, and abstract digital art. These new visual forms challenge traditional expectations of cinematic realism and open new possibilities for narrative experimentation (Flusser, 2011; Manovich, 2019). By curating such works, festivals help audiences and critics develop interpretive frameworks for understanding these emerging aesthetic practices.

Ultimately, the rise of AI film festivals signals the emergence of a new institutional arena within global cinema culture. These festivals operate as experimental environments where filmmakers and artists test the creative potential of generative technologies while simultaneously confronting the ethical, legal, and economic questions raised by algorithmic media production (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into audiovisual storytelling, AI film festivals play a role in shaping the cultural meanings associated with algorithmic cinema.

Rather than viewing these festivals merely as temporary technological curiosities, it is more productive to understand them as sites where the future structures of cinematic production and exhibition are being negotiated (de Valck, 2007; Manovich, 2019). Through their curatorial decisions, institutional networks, and public discussions, AI film festivals are helping define how cinema will evolve within the broader technological transformations of the twenty-first century. At the same time, critical perspectives continue to question whether the growing integration of AI into cinema ultimately reinforces platform dependency, weakens creative labor conditions, and accelerates the commodification of cultural production within digital capitalism.

8. Conclusion

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence technologies is profoundly transforming the landscape of contemporary cinema (Crawford, 2021; Manovich, 2019). As AI tools become increasingly integrated into creative production processes, the boundaries between human authorship and algorithmic generation are being redefined (Zylinska, 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). This article has examined how these technological developments intersect with film festival culture, arguing that the emergence of AI film festivals represents a significant institutional shift within global cinema ecosystems (de Valck, 2007). Rather than functioning merely as technological showcases, AI film festivals should be understood as cultural laboratories in which new forms of cinematic expression, creative collaboration, and institutional practice are actively explored.

Throughout the article, it has been argued that film festivals have historically operated as key gatekeepers within global cinema culture, shaping the circulation, visibility, and cultural value of films (de Valck, 2007; Wong, 2011). In the context of generative media, this curatorial role takes on renewed significance. AI film festivals not only showcase works produced through human–machine collaboration but also help define the aesthetic and conceptual boundaries of algorithmic cinema (Manovich, 2019; Zylinska, 2020). By selecting and evaluating AI-

generated films, festival programmers help shape emerging norms regarding authorship, originality, and the creative use of generative technologies (Coeckelbergh, 2020).

The rise of AI film festivals also highlights the need to rethink methodological approaches within festival studies and media research more broadly. Traditional frameworks focusing on institutional structures and programming strategies must now be complemented by methods capable of analyzing computational media production (Manovich, 2019; Crawford, 2021). Approaches such as digital ethnography, platform analysis, algorithmic aesthetics analysis, and dataset studies offer valuable tools for understanding how AI-generated films are created, circulated, and interpreted within festival environments (Pasquinelli, 2023; Zylinska, 2020). These interdisciplinary methods allow scholars to examine not only the cultural dimensions of film festivals but also the technological infrastructures that increasingly shape contemporary media production (van Dijck et al., 2018).

The discussion of Turkey's emerging AI cinema ecosystem further illustrates how generative technologies are beginning to influence regional media cultures. Although AI filmmaking remains in its early stages in the Turkish audiovisual sector, growing experimentation across film education, media labs, digital art festivals, and short film competitions suggests that a new creative ecosystem is gradually taking shape (Manovich, 2019). These developments present opportunities for Turkish filmmakers and creative institutions to engage with global technological transformations in cinema while contributing distinctive cultural perspectives to the evolving field of algorithmic media production.

At the same time, the integration of artificial intelligence into creative industries raises important questions regarding authorship, intellectual property, creative labor, and cultural policy (Crawford, 2021; Srnicek, 2017). As generative tools become more widely used in film production, cultural institutions and policymakers will increasingly need to address the ethical and legal implications of AI-driven creativity. Film festivals are likely to play an important role in these debates by serving as spaces where technological experimentation intersects with cultural and institutional reflection (de Valck, 2007).

AI film festivals should therefore be understood not merely as technological showcases but as institutional sites where the cultural, aesthetic, and economic futures of cinema are actively negotiated. As generative technologies continue to evolve, these festivals will play a central role in shaping how algorithmic media is produced, evaluated, and understood within global film culture. Recognizing this transformation requires both theoretical and

methodological innovation, positioning AI film festivals as key objects of study in contemporary media and communication research.

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