B–1 and the first
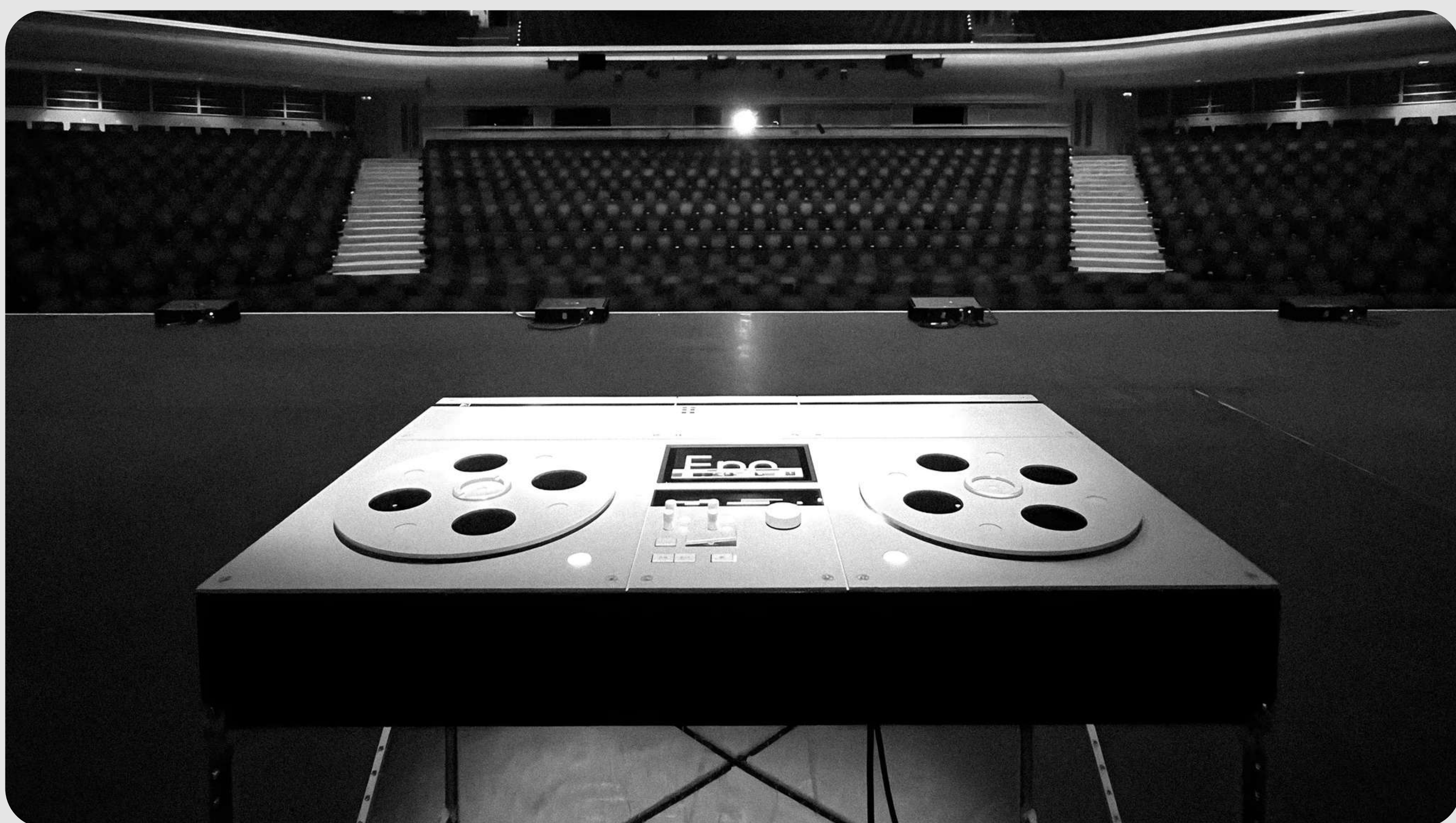# generative feature film.

how do you make a documentary about a prolific artist who has been working for over five decades, across multiple mediums, and holds an archive of over 500 hours of footage? director gary hustwit may have the answer.

GARY HUSTWIT AT A LIVE SCREENING OF 'ENO'.

'eno' is the first documentary about the pioneering artist brian eno, and the first generative feature film. the narrative is structured at the whim of 'brain one', the proprietary generative software created by hustwit and digital artist, brendan dawes. using an algorithm trained on footage from eno's extensive archive and hustwit's interviews with eno, it pieces together a film that is unique at each viewing. as the order of scenes perpetually changes and what's included is never certain, the version you see is the only time that iteration will exist. "in some ways, the film is kind of like exploring the insides of his brain… it's different memories and ideas and experiences over the 50-year plus time frame."

DIGITAL ARTIST BRENDAN DAWES AND HUSTWIT GENERATING THE FILM LIVE.

according to hustwit, brian eno had no interest in making a biographical documentary "because they were always one person's version of another person's story. and he didn't wanna be anyone else's story."

"i started working with brendan dawes, the programmer and digital artist, and we built a demo version of the initial software using a lot of the footage, music and material from 'rams' (hustwit's previous film, scored by eno).

i went back and i showed it to brian, maybe six months later, and he was just blown away by it. he just said, 'this is something that i've wanted to do for so long.' he obviously uses generative technology in his music and in his visual art, but he hadn't done anything with video, and this is sort of a combination of a generative art project and a traditional documentary."

how the software works is a combination of mapping the footage and coding a sense of narrative structure, "looking at scenes and different types of footage and using a taxonomy of what it's doing or representing. it's not just metadata, it's emotional data. and then you have to look at what makes an engaging film: there's a rhythm in the types of scenes and the connections between them, and there's a feeling of progression as you're watching the film."

'ENO' AND B–1 HAVING ITS LONDON PREMIERE AT THE BARBICAN.

given the current discussions around ai and its impact on artistry and authorship, creating a film reliant on the technology is a controversial but inevitable move. however, the software that hustwit and dawes have built may just hit the sweet spot where human meets machine; where the algorithm works to respect the material and facilitate an artistic vision.

"i always say it's artist's intelligence, it's not artificial intelligence. because we've programmed the system, it's not like we trained it on other people's films or something. we programmed it with our intelligence to do a very specific thing, which is to make this film but make it different, make it work from an editorial standpoint regardless of what individual footage and scenes get put in.

"he had 500 hours of footage in his archive that we got access to. you can't even get 1% of that into a normal film. so this approach was a way that we could dip into a lot of that material, or at least have it be in the mix somewhere… it's very good for dealing with huge amounts of information."

B–1 TAPE REELS AND CONTROLS GENERATING THE FILM FOR A LIVE SCREENING.

to accompany this one-of-a-kind viewing experience, we designed a hardware version of 'brain one'. B–1 is a deck with two spinning reels and controls: play, rewind, rec and generate; the latter being used to generate the sequences of the film, which can be seen on the screen in real time.

"people just freak out when they see it, everyone wants to know what it's doing, everyone wants to press the buttons, everybody wants to rock the reels. "[B–1] is now this embodiment of the idea of a generative film. because there's never been a generative feature film before. there's never been a generative feature filmmaking machine before. so i think that both i and brendan, and everybody that we worked with at teenage engineering, just like those kinds of challenges."

you can see B–1 in action at a selection of the <u>'eno' live screening events</u> this year, each audience viewing a one-off version of the film: "there's something kind of special about that. and i also think it's really important to get people back into theaters. this is a way to help that happen, to create a unique communal experience."