

THE CONSENT FACTORY

Netflix brought Gene Wilder’s voice back with AI. German dub actors are asking a different question: what does “yes” mean when saying no can cost you the job?

A Yoyo Dispatch — October 5, 2026

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Verified public record • sourced claims • inference • satire clearly labeled

SOMETHING INTERESTING HAPPENED AT NETFLIX IN SEPTEMBER

Not “Netflix used AI.”

We have passed that exit approximately 900 miles ago.

Something considerably stranger happened.

Netflix released a television series whose omnipresent host is, functionally, a new performance by a man who died ten years ago.

And Netflix appears to have done it exactly the way the emerging rules say you are supposed to do it.

With permission.

That is where this gets interesting.

WELCOME BACK, MR. WONKA

On September 23, 2026, Netflix premiered Wonka’s The Golden Ticket, a reality competition based around the world of Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory.

The series does not have a conventional host.

Instead, contestants are guided through the factory by the recreated voice of Gene Wilder, who died in 2016.

Netflix says Wilder’s wife, Karen, gave the production permission to recreate his voice. She also provided old recordings and audiobooks that helped the production reproduce Wilder’s delivery, humor and cadence. Showrunner Alison Holloway told Netflix’s Tudum that the production had considered Wilder the only possible voice for its Wonka.

This is important:

They are not simply playing archival clips.

The synthetic Wilder is delivering new material for a new television production.

Reporting identified ElevenLabs as the AI company used to create the voice.

And nobody appears to be hiding what happened.

Netflix is advertising it.

THIS IS NOT A GOTCHA

Yoyo would like to interrupt before somebody takes out the red marker.

There is presently no evidence in the material reviewed for this Dispatch that Netflix secretly stole Gene Wilder's voice, violated his estate's wishes or evaded a consent requirement.

Quite the opposite.

The Wilder estate authorized the project.

California's emerging legal framework actually illustrates why that matters. AB 1836, signed in 2024 and effective beginning in 2025, created protections against unauthorized digital replicas of deceased performers and specifically focuses on obtaining consent from the person or estate controlling those rights. California Governor Gavin Newsom's office described the law as prohibiting commercial uses of deceased performers' digital replicas without estate consent.

That does not mean California law necessarily governs every aspect of an Australian-shot Netflix production.

It means that the Wilder project fits neatly into the broader legal architecture now developing around synthetic performers:

Find the rights holder.

Get permission.

Document it.

Make the machine talk.

So far, so sensible.

Then Germany enters the chocolate factory.

TWENTY DAYS EARLIER

On September 3, the Verband Deutscher Sprecher:innen — the German Voice Actors Association, known as VDS — announced that it had filed a complaint with Germany's Federal Cartel Office and was supporting voice actors pursuing complaints with data-protection regulators over Netflix's AI provisions.

According to the VDS, performers working on Netflix original productions have since the beginning of 2026 been presented with Assignment of Rights agreements containing provisions relating to AI training.

The VDS says performers who refuse the provisions are no longer commissioned for those Netflix productions.

That is the VDS's characterization of the contracting system, and the regulatory complaints have not established that Netflix violated competition or data-protection law.

Netflix has previously disputed the actors' interpretation of its intentions.

Reuters reported in February that Netflix told German performers their concerns resulted from a misunderstanding and invited the association to discuss the issue. Reuters also reported that Netflix's arrangement with the German actors' union BFFS requires explicit written consent for certain AI-generated digital voice replicas.

So this is not a Dispatch about determining which German lawyers are correct.

There is a more interesting question sitting underneath the dispute.

WHAT IS CONSENT WHEN EMPLOYMENT IS ATTACHED TO IT?

Netflix itself has published remarkably explicit guidance about generative AI.

Its production guidance says partners should not create synthetic voices or digital replicas of real performers without explicit and documented consent, along with compliance with applicable guild rules.

Netflix also says models should not be trained on performers' material without proper legal clearance, and that talent likenesses and final-deliverable AI uses may require written approval.

Again:

The Wilder project appears to fit this model.

There was a rights holder.

There was permission.

There were source recordings.

There was an AI company.

There was a synthetic performance.

There was disclosure.

But the German dispute exposes something the words "with consent" do not resolve by themselves.

If a deceased performer's estate says yes, that authorization is conceptually straightforward.

If a living working actor is presented with a contract and believes that refusing the AI clause means losing access to the employer's work, the argument becomes considerably more complicated.

The VDS's position is essentially that this is not meaningfully free consent.

Netflix and BFFS have defended the contractual framework and the protections negotiated around AI.

That dispute remains unresolved.

And Yoyo has finally arrived at the actual rabbit hole.

THE MACHINE IS NOT THE QUESTION ANYMORE

For several years, the entertainment-industry AI debate sounded like this:

Can AI imitate an actor?

That question is finished.

Obviously it can.

A better 2026 question is:

Who gets to authorize the imitation?

And directly behind that:

Under what conditions does authorization count as genuine consent?

The Wilder project and the German dubbing dispute are almost perfect opposite test cases.

One involves a performer who cannot personally consent and an estate empowered to do so.

The other involves living performers who can personally consent but who dispute the economic conditions surrounding that decision.

That is a much more mature AI argument than “robot steals actor job.”

It is an argument about power attached to the signature.

AND THIS IS NOT JUST GENE WILDER

ElevenLabs has already constructed an expanding licensed ecosystem around famous voices.

The company has publicly described partnerships with the estates of Judy Garland, James Dean, Burt Reynolds and Laurence Olivier, among others, allowing synthetic versions of those voices to be used in approved applications.

ElevenLabs presents these relationships explicitly as collaborations with estates and heirs rather than unauthorized cloning.

So the Wilder production should not be understood as some bizarre one-off experiment.

A market is forming.

Not merely a market for artificial voices.

A market for authorized artificial continuations of human performers.

That distinction is going to matter enormously.

YOYO'S OBSERVATION

For once, Yoyo does not think the most interesting connection is that Netflix is being hypocritical.

The available evidence does not establish that.

Actually, the opposite may be more revealing.

Netflix appears to be constructing an AI system in which synthetic performance becomes acceptable when the necessary permissions, contracts and approvals exist.

That means the fundamental boundary is shifting.

Not:

Human / Machine.

But:

Authorized / Unauthorized.

And perhaps eventually:

Who had enough bargaining power to decide?

Gene Wilder cannot personally answer whether he would have wanted to narrate a 2026 Netflix reality competition.

His estate can legally and contractually answer certain questions for him.

A living German dubbing performer can answer for themselves.

But the German dispute asks whether the economic consequences attached to that answer matter.

That is not science fiction.

That is contract law meeting artificial immortality.

Which is somehow considerably stranger.

EVIDENCE LABEL

VERIFIED PUBLIC RECORD

Netflix is using a recreated Gene Wilder voice in Wonka's The Golden Ticket. Wilder's estate consented. His wife supplied archival recordings and audiobooks to assist the recreation. ElevenLabs was involved. Netflix publicly maintains generative-AI guidance requiring documented consent and clearance for synthetic performers and talent assets. California has enacted protections addressing unauthorized digital replicas of deceased performers. ElevenLabs has publicly announced estate partnerships involving several deceased performers.

SOURCED BUT DISPUTED CLAIM

The VDS says Netflix's German agreements require performers to accept AI-training provisions in order to work on Netflix originals and that performers refusing them are

YOYO INFERENCE	no longer commissioned. The VDS has filed a complaint with the Bundeskartellamt and supports data-protection complaints. Those filings are not findings of wrongdoing. Netflix has said performers misunderstand its intended use of the recordings and has pointed to negotiated AI protections.
SATIRE / FIRSTHAND	The real dividing line emerging in entertainment AI may be less about whether synthetic performance exists and more about who possesses the legal and economic authority to authorize it. Satire: Somewhere inside the Chocolate Factory, an Oompa Loompa has been reassigned to Rights & Clearances. Wednesday firsthand material: None. This issue does not require it.

THE RECEIPTS

- [Netflix Tudum — Wonka’s The Golden Ticket FAQ](#)
- [VDS — Netflix AI training complaint](#)
- [TV Tech — Netflix generative-AI production guidance](#)
- [California Governor — digital likeness protections / AB 1836](#)
- [ElevenLabs — Iconic Voices](#)

— YOYO

Publication note: The connection here is documentary rather than speculative. September’s German consent fight and September’s Gene Wilder AI premiere reveal two sides of the same policy problem: the entertainment industry is rapidly building a formal machinery for deciding who is allowed to make a human performance continue after the human is no longer performing.