

Science and theatre: an experiment with *The Frozen Sea*

Can AI create art pieces? Theatre as a medium to provoke technology discussions

This unique session will consist of two parts: first, a dramatic reading of *The Frozen Sea*, a comedic play in development by San Francisco playwright Maury Zeff that explores the convergence of art and AI in the near future. It is set in 2030, and wunderkind computer programmer Dashiell has set for himself the difficult task of producing technology with human instincts. When he meets rising painter Annelise, he hits upon the idea to create software that can render artistic masterpieces. This play wrestles with questions of how far to allow technology to creep into human endeavours and whether you can still call something art if human beings cede its creation to machines.

The Frozen Sea has been previously workshopped or received readings in the Berkeley Rep Theater Lab, the San Francisco State University's theatre department, the San Francisco Playhouse, and elsewhere. The reading will be immediately followed by a panel discussion about how we can use theatre and other creative mediums to bring non-technical people into important conversations about the science and technologies that will shape our future. This session is offered jointly with the Fête du Théâtre.

About the Playwright

Maury Zeff is a San Francisco playwright and fiction writer whose work has been performed and published throughout the United States. He formerly worked in the tech industry in Silicon Valley and Asia, most recently as the managing director of Yahoo! Southeast Asia. His previous career left him deeply fascinated by digital technology, which he frequently explores in his plays and fiction.

Presented and reported by:

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Report

In the theatrical work *The Frozen Sea*, Maury Zeff explores the intersection of art and AI and what constitutes the authenticity of art and intelligence. In a provocative twist, the experimental stage-reading was performed not by professional actors, but by Tomorrow.Life staff and invitees with highly technical backgrounds.

The cast included Cody Sheehy, a documentary filmmaker whose education and training is in conservation sciences, Marcia Fiamengo, the programme director for Tomorrow.Life, a nuclear engineer by training with a career in hard science communication related to NASA and space exploration, and graduate student Joseph Maggiore, who is pursuing an MD/PhD in medical bioengineering with a focus on integrative systems biology. Samira Kiani, the director, provided stage direction interjections.

Working closely with Maury Zeff to maintain his theatrical vision and context, the cast presented a future where AI is used to create art, and exceeded the bounds and intentions of both the developers and artist's intentions over the course of an hour. By introducing the story through the voices of technical developers inexperienced in performance art, a transformative occurrence was achieved.

The round table discussion at the conclusion included the general public, and a rousing debate was held not only about the capability of AI to perform art, but the cathartic nature of scientists and technologists performing theatre in a space designed to elicit changes in approach and thinking on development topics. The cast reflected on the personal impact of being involved in the production and noting affinities and personal connections with the characters they portrayed.

The consensus amongst discussion artists and scientists alike was that this methodology, akin to conflict resolution theatre for veterans and those victims of war crimes, was likely to create spaces in bridging cultural gaps between scientists, artists, and the communities they represent and impact. A call to action was heard to include interactive performances of a similar nature in future GESDA summits and for Tomorrow.Life to incorporate this novel methodology in dialogues to be held in the future.

