

OPENING REMARKS on May 8, 2026

AI + Live Arts Summit — Nimoy Theater



Dean Celine Parreñas Shimizu on stage kicking off the AI + Live Arts Summit

Good afternoon, UCLA TFT. Welcome.

This is our eighth AI summit of the year. The fourth public one. We have been thinking, talking, and leading — and every day I am elated to be alive for this work we must do together

We asked our staff to talk about productivity. Faculty to share their creative and research uses. In January we convened on film — you can read about that on our website. We held a hackathon. And last weekend we went to Atherton — a salon — where Rick Carter joined us. Double Oscar-winning designer. The creator of worlds that populate our imaginations. He said something that shifted every one of us there — community philanthropists, tech leaders, film and theater makers alike.

Rick Carter reminded us that we are never alone as authors. We are always relational when we create. Always in conversation. That changes how this summit opens today. I ask you a question

I've been sitting with since Sunday at our Atherton summit: what if AI is not a tool — not a resource — not just a collaborator? Rather, what if it is something more like a subject alongside us? Anticipating us in all our senses? I know that may sound strange. So let me bring in some help from our own stellar colleagues.

Our own Vivian Sobchack — UCLA professor, administrator and film philosopher — argued in *The Address of the Eye* (1992) that cinema is not merely an object we look at. In our presence, it becomes a sensing, sense-making subject. Two viewers viewing: the spectator and the film, each existing as both subject and object of vision. The film looks back. It addresses us. It anticipates us. That is what she means by phenomenology — in the concrete, lived, bodily experience of being in relation to something that is also, in some sense, in relation to you.

What if we asked the same question of AI? Unfeeling, yes. But present. Responsive. Something we are in conversation with — not a mirror, not a machine, rather a new kind of interlocutor. Rick Carter grounded us in this. He calls it authorial intelligence. We are never alone when we make. And AI is now part of that relational web. So, what happens when we stop asking what AI does for us — and start asking what we make together?

AI is the electricity of our century. It has already rewired everything. Every day the ground shifts. And AI opens possibilities that genuinely did not exist before. What filmmaker David France at our January summit calls the unmakeable film can now be made. And for me, last night — directed experiences catered entirely to your tastes, your habits, your memories. I asked Claude to write stories from my own history. It whispered back exactly what I wanted to hear, to recall and to feel. A jolt — so precise to my desires. Something made only for me. A new kind of pleasure generated. A new kind of intimacy enabled. Reading it

out loud was almost embarrassing — my own rom-com, drawn from the bottomless well of my own fantasies.

This addictive pleasure, similar to other forms of entertainment, arrives alongside harder questions our students are asking. About climate costs. About protecting the imagination and critical ability. They are both wary and brave. And they are right. You need a strong analytic mind — a formed self — before you can use a technology this powerful. It is the concern I feel about my brown sons watching *The Jungle Book*.

The rote is not rote. The slow, difficult, repetitive work of forming yourself — analytically, expressively — cannot be what AI replaces. That is the torment of study that makes you indispensable. You better do that work to gain the capacity to reflect and narrate your own experience. Your Voice Our Story, remember, is the banner of my deanship to push through difficulty. To cook yourself into someone with a voice. It is what it means to be baked and laundered by your education. How do we protect that formation — for our students, for K-12 children, for our undergrads and graduate students? For what is at stake is the future of citizenship and leadership that affects us all. These are the questions we are here for today.

We are not here, not only because of AI however. The AI age is a time of crisis. ICE on our campuses. Immigrant families experiencing terror. Federal attacks on higher education. The elimination of DEI. The systematic targeting of women leaders — while so few who lead look like me and come from the margins when we usually are in the crosshair of abusive power. That is the world outside and inside this room. And that is why this room matters—we will engage what it means to participate, to speak and to lead in this moment.

Which brings me to why live arts are the center of this conversation — and perhaps its answer. Is live performance the

vaccine to AI? That is the question we explore together today. But it is also the answer to something larger.

Vivian Sobchack showed us that cinema senses us back — addresses us, anticipates us. I believe that. AI may be something like that too. These are not passive technologies. They are relational ones.

Theater however asks us for something more. Theater is not just mutual address — it is mutual risk. The performer cannot be edited. The audience cannot disappear. To me, there is an incredulity that happens in live performance — watching a human being do something before you that you cannot quite believe is happening — and that incredulity is a bridge. It pulls you toward the person in front of you and the people all around you. It invites connection as necessary.

And that is what democracy requires. Not spectators. Participants. The theater artist Peter Sellars — our own colleague here in the Arts at UCLA — has spent fifty years arguing that theater is the last bastion where grassroots politics can have a presence. That the power structure does not want you in a room together, face to face, speaking for yourself. Not being represented — but present. Being witnessed as you watch. Each person able to appear, speak, and be heard. He argues that Greek theater was democracy — one of its primary cornerstone institutions — giving citizens not just information rather the experience of participation. The first performance of Euripides' *Children of Herakles* in Athens in 430 B.C. was a town meeting about refugees. Poetry and civics were the same act.

To bring us back from Athens to LA: this school TFT has always known that. The LA Rebellion — born here, in our Ethnocommunications program — Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, Haile Gerima, Alile Sharon Larkin, Bob Nakamura, Sylvia

Morales— taught us that aesthetics is civics, what our colleague Chon Noriega calls social action cinema! The movement and the scholarship show that the camera, and the stage, in the hands of the unheard, is a democratic act. That social action and art are one.

Live arts are the antidote to fascism. When people gather to witness and be witnessed — especially here at UCLA TFT, where the voices on stage are so often the unheard, the unseen, the unfelt-for — that is democracy practiced. That is what we protect when we defend the live arts. The creative freedom we see in our students, in our classrooms, every day. That is why I make work too and write books—they are expressions of and desire for freedom and sovereignty. And that is what we do here today beyond just witnessing — instead we have the kind of live, incredulous, face-to-face encounter that moves us from spectatorship into conversation. Into action. Into each other. We must turn to each other which why AI helps us rethink audience.

Jeff Burke is already doing this: using AI as a reactive surface for live performance, generating images in real time from what the audience brings into the room. Theater that has never existed before.

So let me close with some Dean Celine-isms. Your Voice, Our Story. Independence, Innovation, and Impact. These are UCLA TFT stories. And our philosophy for AI: Don't wait for the flood. Channel the river. The UC system is the home of AI. We are here to lead together—community, industry, higher ed. The conversation is democracy. Let's begin

It is now my honor to introduce Scarlett Kim — an extraordinary multi-hyphenate artist who recently led the AI + Live Arts Hackathon at UCLA TFT alongside Zoe Sandoval and Matthew Ragan.

She is Co-Founder and Executive Creative Producer of the Center for Unclassifiable Technologies & Experiences — C.U.T.E.; an Interdisciplinary Fellow at the Royal Shakespeare Company; a Visiting Artist at Stanford Arts; Co-Founder of the Independent XR Distribution Coalition at MIT's Open Doc Lab; and Co-Founder and Co-Producer of Worlds in Play. Her work extends to Los Angeles Performance Practice, The Kilroys, and NEW INC, where she mentors emerging voices. Previously she served as Director of Innovation and Strategy at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and led artistic programming at CultureHub — a global art and technology community.

Scarlett Kim is actively building our AI future.