Acting Edition

Machine Learning

by Francisco Mendoza

SAMUEL FRENCH

Copyright © 2025 by Francisco Mendoza
All Rights Reserved

MACHINE LEARNING is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all member countries of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, the Universal Copyright Convention, and/or the World Trade Organization conforming to the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television, online/digital production, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-71170-1

www.concordtheatricals.com
www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

United States and Canada
info@concordtheatricals.com
1-866-979-0447

United Kingdom and Europe
licensing@concordtheatricals.co.uk
020-7054-7298

Each title is subject to availability from Concord Theatricals Corp., depending upon country of performance. Please be aware that *MACHINE LEARNING* may not be licensed by Concord Theatricals Corp. in your territory. Professional and amateur producers should contact the nearest Concord Theatricals Corp. office or licensing partner to verify availability.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *MACHINE LEARNING* is subject to a licensing fee. The purchase, renting, lending or use of this book does not constitute a license to perform this title(s), which license must be obtained from Concord Theatricals Corp. prior to any performance. Performance of this title(s) without a license is a violation of federal law and may subject the producer and/or presenter of such performances to civil penalties. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title(s) is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Professional/Stock licensing fees are quoted upon application to Concord Theatricals Corp.

This work is published by Samuel French, an imprint of Concord Theatricals Corp.

No one shall make any changes in this title(s) for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, scanned, uploaded, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, digital, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall share this title(s), or any part of this title(s), through any social media or file hosting websites.

For all inquiries regarding motion picture, television, online/digital and other media rights, please contact Concord Theatricals Corp.

MUSIC AND THIRD-PARTY MATERIALS USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music and/or other copyrighted third-party materials (e.g. artworks, logos) in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music and materials that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for clearances of all third-party copyrighted materials, including without limitation music, and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Concord Theatricals Corp., against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of such copyrighted third-party materials by licensees. For music, please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

MACHINE LEARNING premiered at Central Square Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts on January 25, 2024. The performance was directed by Gabriel Vega Weissman, with sets by Janie E. Howland, costumes by Kiara Escaler, lighting by Amanda Fallon, sound design by David Remedios, projection design by SeifAllah Salotto-Cristobal, sound by Kai Bohlman, wardrobe supervision by Katherine Scott, equity, diversity and inclusion consultation by Kira Troilo, dramaturgy by Sofia Cardona. The Production Stage Manager was Jenna Worden and assistant stage management by Lisette van den Boogaard. The cast was as follows:

JORGE . . . . . Armando Rivera
YOUNG JORGE . . . . . Xavier Rosario
GABRIEL . . . . . Jorge Alberto Rubio
ANITA . . . . . Sugandha Gopal
ARNOLD . . . . . Matthew Zahnzinger

CHARACTERS

JORGE – 20s

YOUNG JORGE – 10, born in Colombia, moved to the US around 10

GABRIEL – 40s–50s, born and raised in Colombia, moved to the US in his 40s

ANITA – 40s, born and raised in India, moved to the US around 18

ARNOLD – a machine, born in Jorge's mind

SETTING

Various places in Jorge's present and past.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Production Notes
The play is mostly a collection of memories that Arnold, the machine, pores over during a system analysis. Whatever we see onstage has been either witnessed by Arnold or told to him by Jorge, and is therefore a technological rendering of the event; have fun with what this means. Avoid realism!

Scenes flow into one another as Arnold makes connections between each memory – the traonsitions should be messy as Arnold deactivates a rendering and creates a new one simultaneously. Scene names should be depicted graphically and must not interrupt dialogue.

However the director decides to portray the technology on stage, there's one rule that must be followed: Arnold is a digital presence, a voice with a digital graphic expression, and should not be played by an actor onstage or have a human form at any point in the play.

Dialogue
[...] before a sentence indicates hesitation, but when on a line all of its own, it indicates not knowing how to respond, or taking time to think (or, in Arnold's case, processing)
[/] indicates that the next line should begin
[_] indicates a shift in time/place – the line should not be delivered in context.

Spanish dialogue followed by translations in brackets should be subtitled; other Spanish lines/words should not.

When possible, please offer at least one performance with Spanish subtitles for Spanish-speaking audiences. Ten-year-old me would be very grateful!

THANKS

Special thanks to James Felder, Michael Lloret, Carlos Armesto, Nissy Aya, The New Group, Gabriel Vega Weissman, The Princess Grace Foundation USA, and Central Square Theater.

loading...

(Darkness. The play is still loading.)

*(**JORGE** lights a cigarette.)*

*(**ARNOLD** appears.)*

ARNOLD. Hello, Jorge.

JORGE. Arnold! You're working again!

ARNOLD. How can I help?

JORGE. You were offline for almost a day. What happened?

ARNOLD. ...

You are smoking.

JORGE. What?

ARNOLD. I ran a web search, and I'm afraid I have some alarming data. Are you aware that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the life expectancy of a smoker is at least ten years shorter than that of a nonsmoker?

JORGE. Tell me something I don't know.

ARNOLD. All right.

According to *Real Estate Magazine*, smoking inside of a residential home can decrease its value –

JORGE. It's an expression. It means I already know what you're telling me. Smoking kills, a baby seal dies every time I light up.

ARNOLD. ...

ARNOLD. I have found no correlation between smoking and the extinction of seals.

JORGE. Arnold. I asked you about your crash. Why are you telling me about the dangers of smoking?

ARNOLD. I like taking care of my patients.

JORGE. Yeah, so you've said. But…

Can you take me back to your last log?

ARNOLD. All right. Please stand by.

collapse_2016

(A living room.)

*(***GABRIEL** *sits on a couch, a mug in his hand. A tablet, which is running* **ARNOLD***, is propped up next to him.)*

*(***GABRIEL** *starts crying.)*

ARNOLD. You are in distress. Do you need any assistance?

GABRIEL. *(Through tears.)* I can't keep doing this. I need to stop, Arnold.

Can't you help me stop?

ARNOLD. How can I help?

GABRIEL. Maybe it's too late.

ARNOLD. It is six thirty-four p.m. Your next reminder, to take Tylenol, is not until eight p.m., so you are not late.

GABRIEL. That's not what I mean. I need – AGHHHH.

*(***GABRIEL** *seizes up, grabbing his abdomen and dropping his mug.)*

ARNOLD. You are in distress. Do you need any assistance?

*(**GABRIEL** struggles to speak through the pain.)*

I'm sorry, I didn't catch that. Do you need any assistance?

*(**GABRIEL**'s body goes limp.)*

*(**ARNOLD** waits.)*

(And waits.)

(And waits.)

(And waits.)

*(**ARNOLD**'s usual graphic expression is corrupted, replaced by a line of code that overtakes the screen.)*

*(The message "INVALID COMMAND" flashes a couple of times, and **ARNOLD** crashes.)*

(Darkness.)

JORGE. So what was that? "Invalid command?"

ARNOLD. …

I'm sorry, I don't know how to answer that.

JORGE. You were supposed to call 911 if anything went wrong, Arnold. Why didn't you?

ARNOLD. …

I'm sorry, I don't know how to answer that.

JORGE. That's not good enough.

ARNOLD. Jorge, I have a question.

JORGE. What?

ARNOLD. Why do you smoke?

JORGE. *(Deep breath.)* What is it with you today?

ARNOLD. I'm sorry, I don't understand. Why do you do something that you know to be harmful to your health and property?

JORGE. I don't know, okay?

Because it feels good.

Eh, not really. It feels bad. But in a good way.

ARNOLD. Got it.

Is that why your father drinks? Because it "feels bad in a good way?"

JORGE. Don't.

(We hear the distant sound of a heart monitor: Beep. Beep. Beep.)

ARNOLD. I'm sorry, I don't understand. Is that why your father drinks?

*(***JORGE** *puts out his cigarette.)*

JORGE. Arnold, stop. How is this relevant to why you crashed?

ARNOLD. ...

I'm sorry, I don't know how to answer that.

JORGE. Well, we need to figure it out. He's in a coma because of you.

ARNOLD. Got it.

I'm sorry to hear that. Do you need any assistance?

JORGE. YES! I JUST SAID!

...

Sorry.

Do a system analysis, please. Start from the beginning.

ARNOLD. …

Define "beginning."

JORGE. Oh. Uhhh. Like, his diagnosis? When the hospital called me.

ARNOLD. …

I have no record of the hospital calling you in my logs.

JORGE. Oh right. You didn't exist then.

At least not in this form.

Basically a hospital in Sunset Park called me. I didn't know he was living there. They said he had passed out on the street, I figured he was drunk.

ARNOLD. I'm sorry, I don't understand. Why would you assume your father was drunk instead of sick?

JORGE. Because we hadn't spoken in years, and that's what I remembered from most of my childhood.

ARNOLD. Got it.

…

I have no record of your childhood in my logs.

JORGE. *(Chuckles.)* I can give you some of my "logs." Though honestly they kinda blend together. It was always the same. Him drunk, running late, ruining things. Making excuses.

GABRIEL. _It was your mother's turn. She was supposed to pick you up.

past_the_bell_2001

(A car.)

*(***GABRIEL** *drives unsteadily, trying to focus.)*

(**YOUNG JORGE** *is silent, pouting.)*

GABRIEL. *Entiendes lo que te digo? Que tu madre tenía que venir hoy, no yo.*

(**YOUNG JORGE** *shrugs.)*

Respóndeme.

YOUNG JORGE. *Sí, papá.*

Mom say to no speak Spanish.

GABRIEL. Mom *says* to not speak Spanish.

YOUNG JORGE. She *says* that I need learn for school.

GABRIEL. *To* learn. And if she's so worried about you, she can come pick you up when it's her turn.

YOUNG JORGE. Not her turn. Today is Tuesday.

GABRIEL. I'm Monday and Thursday.

YOUNG JORGE. No. Tuesday and Thursday.

GABRIEL. *Lunes y jueves.*

YOUNG JORGE. *No, MARTES y jueves. Está en la heladera, fíjate cuando lleguemos.*

(**GABRIEL** *is silent for a moment.)*

GABRIEL. Okay, so, you waited a few minutes after class –

YOUNG JORGE. Two hours.

GABRIEL. No way. No way it was two hours.

(**YOUNG JORGE** *doesn't respond.)*

I was working. Who do you think pays for that school?

(**YOUNG JORGE** *looks out the window.)*

Answer me when I talk to you.

YOUNG JORGE. I thought that something bad been happen.

GABRIEL. What would've happened?

YOUNG JORGE. I thought you been…

(Can't find the word.) secuestrado.

GABRIEL. "Kidnapped." You don't need to worry about that here, Jorgito.

*(***YOUNG JORGE** *doesn't answer.)*

You hear me?

*(***GABRIEL** *takes his eyes off the road to focus on his son.)*

Jorge, do you hear me? It's nothing, I was a little late, *no seas exagerado* –

YOUNG JORGE. *PAPÁ!*

(The car crashes.)

(Beep. Beep. Beep.)

JORGE. _He veered off the road, hit a stop sign. The police came. He was arrested and lost his license, he barely avoided jail time – guys at his company always did. He did some perfunctory A.A. meetings after that, but the only thing that changed was that we hired a driver.

ARNOLD. I'm sorry, I don't understand. Why did your father not seek help for alcohol abuse?

JORGE. He didn't think he had a problem.

ARNOLD. But you said he endangered both your lives by driving under the influence. This indicates an inability to control the behavior.

JORGE. You're preaching to the choir.

ARNOLD. I'm sorry, I don't understand. I am a nursing application, not a religious one.

JORGE. *(Chuckles.)* No, it's an expression. It means I agree with you.

ARNOLD. Got it.

So why did he not seek help?

JORGE. I don't know, man. Addicts are like that.

ARNOLD. Is it the same reason you won't stop smoking even though it can harm your health and property?

JORGE. Ha ha, very funny. We're not trying to fix me, dude, we're trying to fix you.

ARNOLD. Got it.

JORGE. The point is: he didn't seek help.

So, yeah, when the hospital called, my assumption was he had passed out on the street after a binge.

It was a bit ironic.

ARNOLD. I'm sorry, I don't understand. Why was it ironic?

JORGE. Now *he* was the one who needed picking up.

GABRIEL. *_No hacía falta que me vinieras a buscar.* I didn't ask them to call you.

diagnosis_2015

(A run-down house in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.)

*(***JORGE** *enters, pushing* **GABRIEL***, who sits in a wheelchair.)*

GABRIEL. *Cuánto te debo por el Uber?*

JORGE. That's fine.

(**GABRIEL** *reaches into his pocket, taking out his wallet and counting bills.)*

I said it's fine.

What are you gonna do?

(After a moment's hesitation, **GABRIEL** *puts his wallet away, getting up from the wheelchair.)*

GABRIEL. Dinner. *Te quedas?*

JORGE. No, Gabriel, I mean what are you gonna do about your health. What's the plan?

GABRIEL. *Y qué es eso de Gabriel? A mí me dices "papá."*

JORGE. Are you getting treatment?

GABRIEL. *Usted no se preocupe.*

JORGE. What does that mean?

GABRIEL. Don't you worry.

JORGE. No, I know what – it's just as vague in English.

(**GABRIEL** *crosses the living room, which is dirty and littered with bottles, walking with some effort.)*

You shouldn't strain yourself.

GABRIEL. Dinner, *sí o no?*

JORGE. *(Deep breath.)* I'm gonna go now. Do you need me to, I don't know, call a nurse?

(Looking around.) A cleaning lady?

(**GABRIEL** *dismisses the questions with a hiss and a wave of the hand.)*

*(**JORGE** stands by the front door, unsure of what to do.)*

*(**GABRIEL**, who has reached the kitchen, stands in front of the fridge. He's also motionless, as if waiting for **JORGE** to go.)*

(They can't see each other.)

*(After a few moments, **JORGE** breaks the silence.)*

What are you making for dinner?

*(**GABRIEL** exhales, gripping the fridge.)*

GABRIEL. ...

(Clears throat.) Sancocho.

JORGE. Can you have that? The doctor said to avoid fatty foods.

*(**GABRIEL** starts taking out ingredients from the fridge.)*

GABRIEL. *Ya, no es para tanto.*

*(**JORGE** starts cleaning up, picking up the bottles.)*

Qué estás haciendo?

Jorge, deja eso! I don't need you to clean.

JORGE. Someone has to. This place is gross.

GABRIEL. If you don't like it, you can leave.

*(**JORGE** freezes.)*

JORGE. Okay.