

Generated Texts: Reading Strategy and Interpretational Options

The paper is devoted to the reading and critical reflection of the generated electronic literary texts. From the structural point of view all textones of generated texts can be divided into standard schemes or patterns (word combinations or the whole sentences that are switched according to the software algorithms). Authors use these schemes to make generated texts close to the natural human language. If we look closer, for example, at generative elit works, most of their verbal patterns look like meaningful expressions. But what makes them meaningful and what kind of meaning can readers get from these patterns? Is it possible to catch the esthetic idea of the whole generated work analyzing these verbal patterns? One of the strategies to reveal the author's aesthetic concept of the generated work is to identify the key words grid of the separate textone as well as of the whole work. The key words grid allows to catch the thematic dominant and then move to the interpretive strategies of the whole literary work.

Key words: generative, verbal, key words, thematic grid, interpretive strategies

Generative electronic literary texts are works of electronic literature in which textones are generated by a software application based on text databases and syntactic models. Generative texts are one of the very first forms of electronic creativity. The mechanism of text generation in generative electronic poetic works is based on the following categories:

- * strophic organization (for rhythmized and rhymed electronic texts);
- * meter and verse size;
- * text generation algorithms (algorithmic syntax, phrase matrix, etc.).

As for the generative method, it was used around 700 BC, namely in the "Book of Changes" – one of the earliest Chinese philosophical texts. The concept of generative texts was applied in the 1920s. It was a kind of "slicing method" created by the founder of Dadaism T. Tzara. Pre-electronic attempts in the field of generative literature can also be attributed to the work of the French group ULIPO - "Workshop of potential literature" (OuLiPo, Ouvroir de littérature potentielle). In the modern world of digital technologies there are undoubtedly more opportunities for implementing generative algorithms. Invention of software code has made it possible to develop systems that generate text variants according to specific parameters, and the Internet has created a limitless environment for experiments and opportunities to share them.

The first copies of electronic generative texts show that very often at this stage generative works were created by author groups that included technical specialists, designers, and poets or writers. One example of such collaboration is the "House of Dust" (Knowles, Tenney), published in 1969 as a result of the collaboration of the American writer and poet – Alison Knowles and programmer James Tenney, who in 1967 took part in the workshop of the Fluxus group (Fluxus). Thus, J. Tenney presented an electronic generator based on the FORTRAN-IV programming language. He demonstrated how the algorithm of interchangeability and recombination of verbal elements can become an independent work of art. The "House of Dust" algorithm is a fixed structure in which a single recombination scheme of verbal elements is implemented, and no variations or data input is allowed. The work is not interactive. A. Knowles, in turn, developed a scheme of elements recombination, which is a poetic stanza with the following structure:

house (list of materials)
in (list location)
use (list of light sources)
inhabited (list of residents)

The elements are selected from the database and inserted into the specific line of the quatrain. The resulting variants are non-rhymed, but rhythmized stanzas that have a meaning, for example:

A HOUSE MADE OF TIN

IN THE DESERT
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY VARIOUS BIRDS AND SPECIES
or
HOUSE OF BROKEN DISHES
IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE
USING CANDLESTICKS
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO EAT TOGETHER
or
THATCHED HOUSE
IN A VERY CROWDED AREA
USE OF ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP MOST OF THE TIME
or
THE HOUSE OF DISCARDED CLOTHES
AMONG THE HIGH MOUNTAINS
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY FISHERMEN AND FAMILIES (Knowles, Tenney).

This type of electronic generative text can be called gap-based texts, since each line of the quatrain contains a gap, which in each new generated texton requires the substitution of the necessary element from the database. Each quatrain of "House of Dust" uses attribute constructions with the semantics of non-sensory features related to the sphere of knowledge or experience (A HOUSE OF BROKEN DISHES / IN SOUTHERN FRANCE / USING CANDLES / INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO ENJOY EATING TOGETHER; A HOUSE OF TIN / IN A DESERT / USING NATURAL LIGHT / INHABITED BY VARIOUS BIRDS AND SPECIES, etc.).

Most of the adjectives denote the state of things and events in the real life, which indicates their denotative, rather than qualificative structure. The present participle of the verb 'use' and the past participle of the verb 'inhabit' are used in the third and fourth lines of the "House of Dust". Both sentences convey the semantics of knowledge gained as a result of observation or experience. The paralinguistic component of the "House of Dust" is the capitalization technique, which does not have a meaning-forming potential, but is used by the author to isolate and segment individual stanzas and quatrains formed from them.

One of the most common types of electronic art generative texts are combinatorial works based on the technique of rearranging verbal fragments (words, phrases). For example, the "Storyland" by N. Wylde. This is one of the few electronic generative texts that has an audio component integrated into its structure. The audio plays an important semantic function in the work, sets its leitmotif. The sound component is represented by the melody which is called "Entrance of the Gladiators" composed in 1897 by the Czech composer Julius Fučík. This melody became widely known all over the world. It was repeatedly used in circus performances (accompanying performances of clowns). The audio evokes additional cultural connotations in the semantic structure of the work. Associations with the circus environment are projected on the "Storyland" semantic structure, supporting a certain range of interpretive lines, which are determined by the words belonging to the thematic group 'circus'. This thematic group can be divided into two parts that form the directions of "Storyland" interpretation. On the one hand, the emphasis is on the specifics of text production based on machine intelligence (the associations with such components as 'trick' and 'stunt'). On the other hand, the words 'performance', 'laughter', 'entertainment' form the emotional attitude of the work perception.

All sentences in each texton of "Storyland" are generated according to a certain scheme. For example, for the first of the six paragraphs, this scheme looks like the following: [Tense] [Character A] [past-tense predicative] [preposition] [object] / [adverbial structure]. Since all textons look the same in terms of grammatical and syntactic structure, let us consider one of them as an example:

"Long ago and far away, a down-and-out writer developed emphatic skills. The writer was openly hostile.

Fashion shifted.

The writer made callous remarks to a co-dependent lover. The co-dependent lover also was openly hostile but didn't care.

Unaware of their influence, the most valuable player created an image. The most valuable player was greedy.

Assumptions were made.

The most valuable player spoke disparagingly of the writer. The write wanted a relationship with the co-dependent lover» (Wylde).

As you can see, the text demonstrates the informative register that is indicated by the temporal and spatial localization of events at the beginning of the work ("Long ago and far away") and predicates with the meaning of an unobservable state and action ("developed emphatic skills", "was openly hostile", "Fashion shifted, was greedy", "Assumptions were made", "spoke disparagingly", "wanted a relationship with the co-dependent lover"). All sentences are characterized by a low level of detail, just the general impression of what is happening and assumptions about the events development.

All textons in "Storyland" have the same grammatical and syntactic structure with small changes of predicates and objects. Despite the fact that the textons present several disparate events in which three actors are involved somehow, they can be interpreted as a coherent text in the genre of a modern parable. To combine the events described in a separate text fragment requires the interpretive efforts of the reader, who needs to fill in the gaps, to imagine the missing event series and to deduce the appropriate moral of the story (Rettberg). The author of "Storyland" offers the reader a sketch of the plot with a lot of space for interpretation. The reader is supposed to seek and restore the semantic thread of the work. Minimalistic generative texts in this sense are a kind of provocation for the recipient, initiating the emergence of the fictional world in his/her mind with independently constructed internal connections.

Some electronic literary generative texts are based on classical literary texts, fragments of which are modified using various recombination options. For example, the "Sea and Spar between" by N. Montfort, S. Strickland which is based on the corpus of texts by E. Dickinson and "Moby Dick, or the White Whale" by H. Melville. Here are some examples of the generated the "Sea and Spar between" stanzas:

" oh, time
Immaculate go and go-
oh, time
nailed to the board";
"oh, time,
no suits, turn around and warm up,
oh, time
nailed to the sash";

"How to maintain the course of the pink jay
, nailed to the room
by a whirlwind for
eternity! cancel!";

"How to maintain the course of the pink jay
, nailed to the mast
of the dive into
eternity! a dowry!";

"turn

on the stride without the suit and go,
turn
on the nailed to the deck”;

“The wheel is on
Step and dance without costumes
The wheel is on
Nailed to the coffin”;

“You too
Without the suit, turn around and leave
You, too.
Nailed to the groove”;

“You, too
Silent turn and climb
You, too.
Nailed to the mast” (Montfort, Strickland).

From the structural point of view all texts are easily parsed into typical schemes used by the software algorithm to form unique textons. So, the textons that are given above, it can be seen that the first two stanzas correspond to the scheme:

[noun]
[noun + less - verb Past Simple - verb past simple / noun + less – verb/ present tense - verb/ present tense]
[noun]
[nailed] to the [noun].

The next two stanzas have a scheme:

[How to withstand the jay pink course]
[nailed to the – noun / object]
[verb + preposition / on]
[noun! noun!]

In the following two stanzas, the scheme is the following:

[verb – preposition / on]
[noun + less – verb – verb]
[verb – preposition / on]
[nailed] to the [noun].

Each stanza consists of four non-rhymed lines with no punctuation marks, except for dashes, which facilitates the process of combining verbal elements. The use of refrains (repetition of individual words / whole lines) leads to the formation of a thematic grid of the work, which contributes to the decoding the semantic content of both a single texton and the whole set of textons in the work. The lexemes that form the thematic grid in the "Sea and the Spar between" include groups of nouns with the meaning of a large space / unlimited number, etc.: (time-sky-eternity). The second group of lexemes includes both nouns and verbs with the semantics of space restriction (coffin-nailed). The third group is formed by predicates with the meaning of an incentive to an action aimed at getting out of a closed space / situation of restricted movement (the wheel is on - the dive is on – the loop is on). Stanzas are verbal blocks containing calls to perform certain

actions. The first two lines of the textones in the "Sea and Spar between" usually contain calls for action directed outside (for example, "Costumeless turn and climb"; "Costumeless turn and leave"; "Costumless step and dance"; "Flawless walk and leave" and etc.). The lastt lines, on the contrary, implement the semantics of attachment, lack of freedom, no movement, inability to leave a particular place ("nailed to a mast"; "nailed to a coffin"; "nailed to a groove"; "nailed to a to the table").

The textones generated in the "Sea and Spar between" can be easily interpreted into a set of meanings with the help of the recipient's interpretive efforts. The involvement of the reader in the semantic formation of the generated texts is one of the immutable conditions of electronic generative art. One of the probable interpretations of the "Sea and Spar between" is to implement the idea of contrast, which is generally common to the world order. In the technocratic era it is becoming more and more obvious that the vast space (it is compared in the work with the infinity of the sea, sky, eternity, the virtual space of the World Wide Web) is contrasted with the isolation of a particular person, the limitations of natural communication in the modern world. The interpretive tactic in this case is like haiku interpretation. When the first line uses a keyword / image or action (in haiku, a seasonal word). In the second and third lines, this image is distributed within a single sentence. The last line is a metaphor. The keywords in this case are 'primitive texts', like minimal models of the text content which they are the key. The interpretation of keywords suggests their consideration as indicators of the work content and even its style.

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