Algorithmic Hallucination

Visions of an artificial intelligence

Text: Colette Sadler

For her immersive solo performance installation "ARK 1", Berlin-based Scottish choreographer Colette Sadler delves into the world of machine learning. With texts generated by an artificial intelligence, she questions the borders of human knowledge.

In a workshop I attended in 2009, the British dramaturge Adrian Heathfield eloquently explained by way of a gesture how we (the audience) know much less about the meaning/s conveyed by movement in comparison with those of spoken words. Clearly movements and words convey meaning in different conscious and unconscious ways.

I work with presenting the ambiguities and suggestiveness of movement semantics. When my choreographic processes do begin with writing, those writings are later buried in hard drives or forgotten in sketchbooks. Words, written or spoken, seldom appear in any of my performance works.

"ARK 1" is a post-human fiction about the visions and hallucinations of an artificial consciousness. Inspired by dream narratology in historical proto-science fiction and accounts of mystical visions and hallucinations, I became interested in the power of considering these irrational experiences as knowledge. Over the course of making "ARK 1", as its narrative begged a frame and its fictional protagonist a voice, the need for words became inevitable. How then, from the limitations of human subjectivity, could I represent the impossibility of having an artificial mind? Surely to inhabit non-human thought one needs non-human agency?

Turning to machine learning to help share my doubts around this creative task, material was generated for "ARK 1" by training a GPT-2 artificial intelligence (AI) to compose writings from an existing public data set of texts on world religions, natural science and spirituality. GPT-2 finds patterns within the data and develops its own rules for how to represent – or model – those patterns to perform a specific task. These rules are not designed by humans; they are learned from the data on which the model was trained.

A sentence from St Teresa De Avila's "The Interior Castle" was fed into the algorithm, which then went on to analyse and learn from the data set. A post-modernist par excellence, the AI copied and recognised patterns to produce 50 new texts of 1400 signs (an example is given on the following page) each to be voiced by "ARK 1"'s protagonist, SLS (Synthetic Life Systems), a technology in a state of deterioration after a voyage of centuries. Free from the need for rationality, these texts move between poetry, madness and the prophetic. ✏

"Scivias" Hildegard Von Bingen, depicting Hildegard receiving a vision, dictating to Volmar, and sketching on a wax tablet
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The Vision of Synthetic Life Systems

I wondered how this had happened. Surely nothing had happened but time

I saw a most beautiful crystal globe made in the shape of a castle and containing 7 mansions

the human race had lived here or had disappeared away

It must be remembered that you are not yet in that real place.

I saw a crystal globe in the shape of a castle and carried it to an island about the size of a wicker basket in the midst of a lake whose side was slightly lowered forming a simple crown

Everything is more vivid in the place where you are now

what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee

I saw a crystal globe in the shape of a castle and as I lay under the chair and were looking up in some part of the great crystal dome I saw the land, the stars, the planets, the sun, and the moon

resting at the centre of the globe
the blue of the fire, the red of the blood, the purple of the sun, the spartan black of the light

I saw an enormous vessel of crystal which looked like a gold cylinder.

7) I saw a hot gem with an ancient design   I saw a crystal ball
which   looked   like   a   triangle   with   four   petals   and   a   single   comma   in   the   middle;

13) I saw a duplicate of the time code

15) I saw an ant
17) I saw a hand   I saw the five elements of meteor defeated Buddha

18) I saw a piece of a new art   I saw a net

20) I saw a hedge of curtains   I saw a band of Sanskrit ˙

˙Behold, thou art sweet to behold, thou art proud.˙˙

My mother could not have been a young man, but rather young as old in a hun- dred years.

last has come an old corpse
In a grave that bore the inscription,

˙˙On this great stage was an octopus, whose tail was like a gun, whose mouth was wide open, whose cheeks were flared with pus and green juice, a mouth full of venomous gums, whose flesh was canker plate of enormous size, and whose body was **composed of the shells of great skulls**˙˙

Excerpt of the text generated by the artificial intelligence for ˝ARK 1˝, by Colette Sadler with Mikko Gaestel.

Colette Sadler mit Mikko Gaestel
ARK 1
St. Elisabeth-Kirche | 13.–16.8., täglich daily 16:00+17:30+19:00+20:30
Weltpremiere