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Abstract Update, Chicago Colloquium on Digital Humanities and Computer Science

The Emergence Project (Daniel Sauter, Mark Hereld)

Originally commissioned by the Chicago Humanities Festival
(please include the credits above in related media/publications)

Abstract

The Emergence Project is a software art installation exhibited at Hyde Park Art Center's digital facade gallery from October 11 until December 31, 2008. The piece investigates how complex patterns arise out of a series of simple interactions, without apparent direction or plan. Rising from the actual as-it's-happening discourse emanating out of the Chicago Humanities Festival, the presentations, performances, and panel discussions are captured, analyzed, and processed into visualizations that dynamically evolve from minute to minute. The generative artwork uses simple morphological rules to animate word clusters, based on linguistic proximity, similarity, and difference.

In the work, hundreds of organic digital creatures embody contributions from panelists and the audience, captured by natural language processing software and the World Wide Web. The digital creatures, or idea clusters, continuously interact with each other, evaluating qualitative proximity in regards to their meaning and frequency. Thousands of local interactions between the creatures, as well as autonomous creation of new creatures, eventually generate patterns, that represent 'big ideas' emerging from the discussions throughout the festival. The piece continues to evolve over time, reflecting the evolution process in form of graphical patterns, statistics and maps.

Emergence has become one of the liveliest areas of research in philosophy and science. Examples of apparent emergent phenomena range from colonies of ants to the popularity of a particular hairstyle, and life itself. The Emergence Project interrogates the very concept of Emergence by reflexively adopting emergent behavior simulations to contemporary discourse on Emergence.