In Living Data

Curated by Vincent Byrne
Opened on Oct 29, 2010

As technology becomes more complex, digital systems seem to resemble biological ones more and more. Scientists model biological functions with increasing accuracy. At the same time, art is now capable of representing complex life forms in an unprecedented way through systems of spontaneous generation and randomization. This collection of New Media artists have each created a piece that represents a different facet of life as we know it. The implication that life may be synthesized through combinations of complex, simultaneously operating systems can be pondered by the viewer.

Green

By Shawn Decker

In "Green," Shawn Decker utilizes algorithms and patterns based off of real world sounds to generate an entirely synthetic sound scape. Though lacking the distinctions of pitch and timbre, the rhythmic clicking of the speaker system sounds conspicuously similar to a wild ecosystem. Vibration and communication are integral attributes of living creatures, and here they are mimicked by a wired system of machines.

Deus Digitalis

By Hans Verhaegen

"Deus Digitalis" depicts an ever changing pattern of randomized patterns, each consisting of 25 tiny human shapes. Here, the concept of diversity is present, as the combination of different colors and different patterns make for an exciting living patchwork that never looks the same way twice.

Portraiture

This piece is a digital work of evolution. "Portraiture" takes an image and creates two abstractions based on the color scheme and patterns. Then, the images compete to reflect the state of the original best. The winner remains, and the loser is replaced by another image, which competes with the winner. As this continues, the images inch closer and closer to a more perfect state, i. e., the original image. Using Turing's philosophies and hypotheses, this project reveals the ways in which even abstract things can compete to achieve perfection.

The Emotions
By DEBRA SWACK

Debra Swack's "The Emotions" is an exploration into the homogeneity of emotions among humanity. People of all genders, ages, and races are shown expressing emotions, and it is up to the viewer to determine the intended effect of their facial expressions. If there is some sort of universal emotional coding programmed into the various segments of the human brain, it may well extend to other forms of life and, eventually, artificial intelligences.

Delicate Boundaries
By Chris

Chris Sugrue's piece shows digital constructs leaping out of a screen onto viewers. Although a trick of light and touchscreen technology, the sensation of being covered by digital organisms, once firmly planted on an LCD screen, must still be astounding. The interaction of children with these bugs as if they are real creatures is a joy to watch, and just may point to a weakening of barriers between what the human of the future may consider alive and what they may consider just a construct.

Rhizome ArtBase curation allows any Rhizome member to curate an exhibit from works in the ArtBase. Go to http://rhizome.org/art/member-curated/ to see a list of all open exhibits.

Conceptual art and technology

Curated by Ying Lu
Opened on Nov 28, 2010

I am very interested about conceptual art with technology. A Long time ago, conceptual art usually was shown as a picture, drawing, or performance, but these days it changed to technology; People use technology such as a computer to show their work. In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made before hand and the execution is perfunctory affair the idea becomes a machine that makes the art (Sol LeWitt). Examples of artists who do this are Scott Blake, Mattia Casalegno, Lucas Kuzma, Sloan Jason, Rafael Rozendaal, and judsoN. Some of the works of the art seems simple, but I can tell they put much planning and researching in their work. I want to share these ideas with other people and think about how people made conceptual art using technology. most of Conceptual Art is idea that we have never thought about before. Actually it is a small idea, and we also can use technology to make things more interesting than if we just used photos, or drawing. All of this is because of the strong relationship between conceptual art and technology.

Mouse Pointer
By Scott Blake

First, Scott Blake made the screen full of mouse pointers by using flash. If I do not point anywhere, the screen would stay the same as black and white, but when I move my mouse in the middle of the picture, the mouse mark will shows up white, and everywhere around the middle of the white space will turn to a black mouse, and became a flower immediately. If I move my mouse in the screen, the flower also moves with the mouse. I also find it interesting that he is using the bar code to make the human face. Usually bar codes have many different lines, and different numbers, but he combined them together making the picture look like just one picture. If there is no technology, he would not have been able to create.

simple mouse position predictor with centipede parts

By lucas kuzma

I can change the derection using my mouse. I like the idea the line come with my mouse.

Jello Time .com

By rafael rozendaal

Rozendaal rafael created a 'jelly'. He used the sound and movement to describe 'jelly'. When we move our mouse cursor to the 'jelly', it will move with sound. When we move the cursor to the top of the 'jelly' it will be moving up and down, when we move the cursor to the left, it will be moving horizontal. Just like a real 'jelly' that we usually eat. If he does not use either sound or action, it does not look real, but when he combines them together, it gives us a perfect 'jelly'. I also like how he made the jelly look 3D by adding highlight to its orange color.

kalh orexh

By aron sommer

I like the idea of how the half of the image could move more and more down my screen.

ThingPit

By taras hrabowsky

I really like the idea about how the block start to break up and changing into space.

A Parallel Image

I like the idea that the artist only use the light and shadow to interactive the piece very well.

The Emotions
By DEBRA SWACK

I like the idea of how the emotion could change the color and people have different categories of color emotion.

Digital Maze Symmetry Project
By DEBRA SWACK

I like the movie image of how the people actually with out moving, but his background movement makes him looks like moving. and another child face gives me feel who is very scared about something, and these two movie combine together makes me the guy is standing in the dangerous place without any information about the background.

Given Time
By nathaniel stern

Its amazing piece to combine the illustration with actual movie and feels like he is standing in the lake.

Mobile Communication
By Angie Waller

its a simple idea of the icon for mobile, I like the idea of when i pick something and it will be changed.

Windows Real
By Johannes P Osterhoff

I like the idea who use the window(TV) and creating a movie behind the TV. Ususally we thought the TV could not stay out of the flame but this gives me a idea of thing could change by our idea.

15x15
By Richard Vickers

I like the idea of using 15x15 advances the statement into the 21st century; with new media technology anyone and everyone can be world famous....for 15 seconds There are all different people took in the different place to explanin different things, but when the artist make them for 15 by 15 squares so it seems like has a lot of connection with each peace. and seems like which give us a strong message.
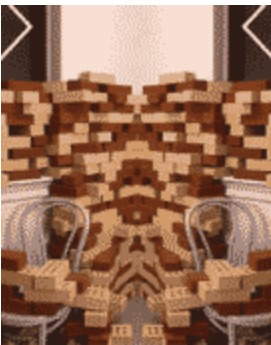
Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?
By akiko ichikawa

I think this is a strong concept to support the peace. it makes me to thing about Where the Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going throught the peace.

Lossless_23
By Jordan Tate

Its very easy to looks like 3D by changing hue.
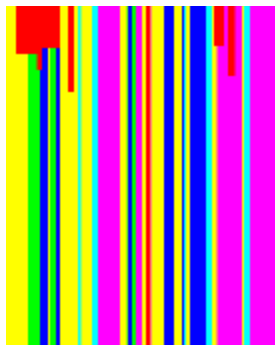
colorfalling

By aron sommer

I like this is not only changing the color but also it move from up to down.

About the curator

I am a college student in SUNY Cortland, and major in New Media Design.

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The Mind Ninja

Debra Swack

Debra Swack is a media artist who has displayed projects all throughout the United States. Swack's work encompasses a wide range of material ranging from photos, drawings, sculpture and sound installation to videos. I discovered Swack on Rhizome and was instantly interested in her emotions project Debra Swack was born and raised in Monroe, Louisiana and currently resides in New York City. She received her Bachelors of Arts from SUNY at Binghamton and also is a Phi Theta Kappa in computer science. She has also expanded her education by taking courses at NYU and Pratt Art Institute. In addition to her work as an artist, Swack is a consultant at SUNY Buffalo Research Foundation.

"The Trees of Central Park-October 2003"

D. Swack   digital archival prints   24" x 30" each 2003

"Emotions"

What I find particularly interesting about Swack's artwork is that she shows appreciation for natural beauty and simplicity such as what is seen in "The Trees of Central Park," which is a time lapse photographic project that explores nature and the cycle of life. While this is a relatively universal theme that has been previously explored, she shows an appreciation for topics which everyone can relate to. She expands upon her artistic talents and intellectual ability by delving into fields of psychology, biology, body image, fashion, abortion, and even cloning. Another of her projects that I really admire is her work

beautiful thing about this concept is that no matter the age, gender, social status or other external variables, we can still communicate through emotions. Aesthetically, I like how the four panels she created each have a color which helps to exemplify each emotion she is displaying. I think that the portrait style of her work and the fact that she omits text from the panels adds a nice effect; allowing the viewer to experience this universal phenomenon on their own. If anything, I think it might be interesting if she added more panels

perhaps of more complex emotions, which would also allow her to diversify the ages and ethnicities of her subjects. I think that the addition panels would drive home the idea of universal connection emotions provide.

Also, Swack's work titled "My Perfect Child" again provides some interesting material to consider. Swack explores the concept of creating the perfect offspring; a pursuit society seems to have become obsessed with. This fixation to produce and rear the best child is evident in the popularity of child rearing manuals, to selective abortion practices and new scientific possibilities

"My Perfect Child"
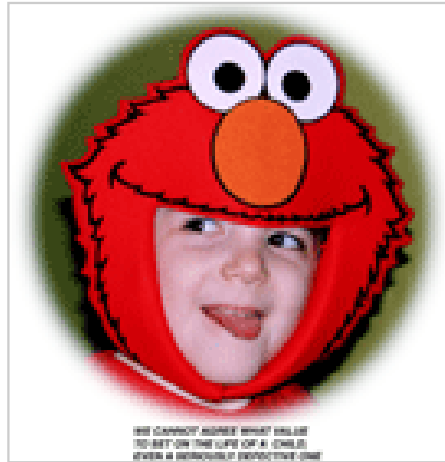
such as genetic engineering. The default answer expecting parents give when asked about the gender of their unborn child, "oh we don't care, as long as the baby is healthy," could turn into a genetic competition to form a society of perfect people. From Swack's "My Perfect Child" I gather that she is trying to reiterate the idea that perfection is in the imperfect. Genetic engineering and selective abortion is not needed, children are already perfect. Their insecurities, battles, oddities and quirks add to each flawless creation. Ask any mother and she knows just like Swack that the perfect child already exists, without the help of genetic engineering. Aesthetically, this picture is not particularly complicated, but I think that it gets at this message of childhood simplicity and natural perfection.

Overall, I am impressed with Debra Swack's work and the intellectual complexities that she incorporated into her art. Swack's ability to explore important and meaningful topics combined with her familiarity of a vast array of artistic mediums makes her an intriguing artist.
Debra Swack on Rhizome

Posted by Shannon at 3:44 PM

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the electronic landscape

Marc Couroux, Goldfarb Centre for Fine Arts, York University, Toronto, Canada

RHIZOME RESEARCH

--SLAVA 12:56, 8 October 2007 (EDT) "The Emotions" by Debra Swack A brilliantly simple work consisting of four display panels running different slideshows of no more than five minutes in length, back to back. The slideshows will consist of images of facial expressions of men, women and children of many races. It seems like a very simple piece of work that virtually anyone could execute, but actually its not as simple as it looks. Debra would have to find and create moving images that would impact the audience, as well as position the display panels in an appropriate context.
I liked this particular piece of work simply because it did not have anything extra or anything unneeded. It is the essence that was left, everything else however, was stripped down. And such a complex theme of human emotions is presented in such a simple way, and what's even more striking, is that it is entirely left for personal interpretation. Debra does not have any other elements to guide the viewer, except for the four display panels. In my opinion, art should not be complex or overly complex. It is the simple that is beautiful.
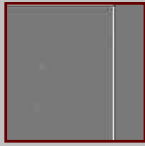
| **Eliza** | **PAT** | **General Hospital** | **analysis_engine** | **Emotions** |

IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH!- THE BRAIN AND THE MACHINE

The neuroscientist, the artist, and society

Cam Waschke
DA History Blog

"Of what lasting benefit has been man's use of science and of the new instruments which his research brought into existence?" Vannevar Bush stated, "They are illuminating the interactions of his physiological and psychological functions, giving the promise of an improved mental health." The Chinese call it the "electric brain," the instrument increasingly becoming a part of our extended memory, thoughts, and being: the computer. With its capabilities measured in MIPS (millions of computer instructors per second), Steve Connor estimated that the computer's processing power would match the human brain, running at approximately 100 million MIPS, by 2023. Accordingly, the focus of digital art runs from the strain of influence from brain function for either a device to critique society or to explore this relationship between the brain and the machine.

Throughout the history of art, artists have been serving as neuroscientists by using visual language to explore new perceptions of the real world. Impressionism and Cubism began to explore the fragments of memory and memory reconstruction. In addition, they learned to evoke emotion within their viewers as blurry imagery distracts the conscious mind and allows further reaction of the brain, specifically within the amygdala. As technology developed, the study of brain function, both through science and art-making, has allowed awareness of our mental processes to expand. It is natural that digital art focuses on the manipulation of the subconscious in regards to society and its influence on identity construction through technology (Cavanagh).

Whether the overall theme of the artwork is about the brain or not, the artist's analysis of the digital age of society still addresses the use of technology as positive and negative extension of the human brain. Digital art has upheld the quality of disrupting the viewer's perception of their society and has compared the function of the brain to the machine. In society, the basic understanding of neuroscience relies on the awareness of topics, such as mental health and illness. Therefore, art plays a significant role in creating a new perceptive to provide ways for society to understand technology and brain function. The following works continue a literal tradition of this curiosity into the exploration of ourselves and brain function through technology:

1966 - *Eliza* by Joseph Weizenbaum

1995 - *PAT* by Lisa Jevbratt

1996 - *General Hospital* by Jon Winet and Margaret Crane

1999 - *analysis_engine* by Mark Daggett

2007 - *The Emotions* by Debra Swack

These selected works either focus or present aspects of mental health awareness in society.

Beginning in 1966, Joseph Weizenbaum created a computer script entitled DOCTOR that could communicate with users. Through a chat interface, the program, *Eliza*, could operate through DOCTOR and respond to its users on its own. *Eliza's* language was based on Rogerian psychology and served as one of the first forms of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Mirroring the empathetic dialogue of a therapist, Weizenbaum was surprised when users became emotionally attached to the program and began to entrust in its responses. Consequently, Weizenbaum claimed that technology was creating "unnecessary social inventions" that take power away from humankind to the machine where power is not needed. Following in the 1990s, *Eliza* was converted into a Javascript format and published onto the Internet.

In 1995, Lisa Jevbratt, a Swedish born media artist, created a software program known as *PAT* in collaboration with Ben Eakins and Mark Erikson. "The project was interpreting the links people were clicking on and then using the enneagram personality system to categorize the users and making an assessment of their 'mental health'. It was not very advanced in how it did this but it was made before "collaborative information filtering" had hit the web so it felt like an exciting area to explore" (Jevbratt). Unfortunately, all that is left of the work is the result's webpage. Upon contacting the artist, Jevbratt said that a copy of the piece doesn't exist anymore. Accordingly, crawlers block individuals from finding an archived version of the work as well. Although the intent of the project was "to [interpret] navigation on a server," I still think the aspect of the project using mental health to explore this intention merits the theme regarding the societal awareness of neuroscience.

Next, Margaret Crane and Jon Winet, a collaborative pair, created a virtual mental hospital called *General Hospital*. They describe their hypertext narrative project as "a kind of do-it-yourself soap opera looping through the infinite void of electronic space." Crane and Winet explore the Internet as a public space to analyze how mental health is accepted and represented in 20th century American society (Harris). Accordingly, the Mental Health Act was passed in England in 1995, which called for government and health systems to find better ways to treat patients instead of focusing purely on patient detention. It also began to turn the public awareness of mental health to more positive outlooks. *General Hospital* was also funded by such a cause in America to bring awareness to mental illness and treatment centers.

In comparison to the other projects, *General Hospital* depends on language to emulate human interaction like *Eliza* and associational lineages of
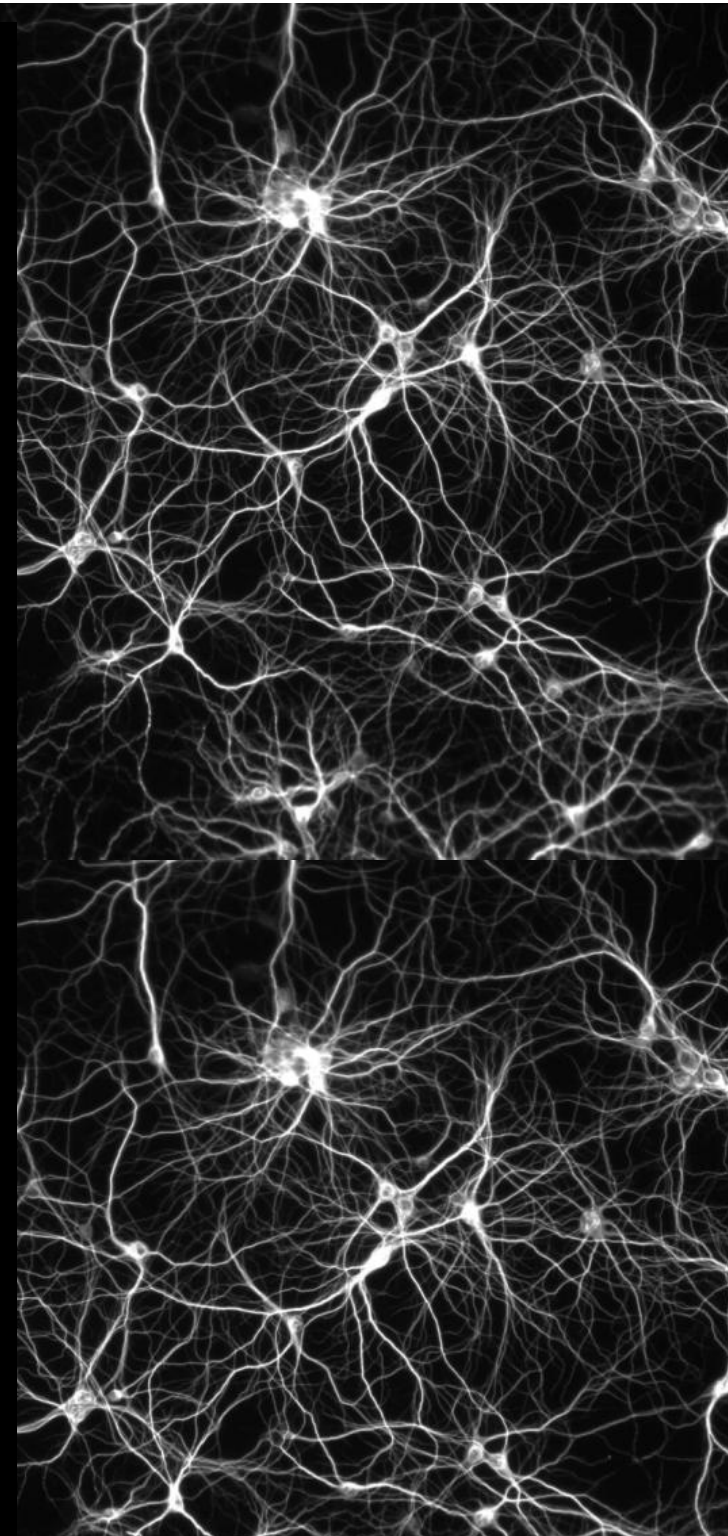
navigation comparable to *PAT* to mimic brain function. The relationship between text and image create an associational environment for users to explore and add to the space. Secondly, Crane and Winet's work starts to show the importance of the relationship between art and science that is developing. Unlike Weizumbaum, they have an optimistic view of technology and see it as a tool to shape and evolve the collective psychology of society. In the end, the project collectively generated information for users to learn about mental health.

By 1999, Mark Daggett created a program, *analysis_engine*, from "[*ELIZA*, which] in some ways [prophesied] the advent of the type of transparent communication that we have come to expect from the computer, and [the dangerous of] our willingness to accept that the computer understands what we mean" (Daggett). The overall purpose of the project was to analyze cyber-identity in relation to the negative issue of human-computer interaction. With a similar approach as Weizumbaum, Daggett expresses how the computer can't correctly aid in the creation of "an identity [that] continually renegotiated via linguistic exchange and social performance" (Cerulo, 387). Thus, by using the same Rogerian psychology as a language source, the system is able to emulate communication of a psychologist, but with more sophistication so that it can deliver a mental health diagnosis. Surveys function in both *General Hospital* and *analysis_engine* to create interaction within the work, but Daggett's work doesn't define it as a positive experience.

Lastly, Debra Swack worked with the Mind Brain Institute to create the project, *The Emotions* in 2007. This piece focused on the function of the amygdala in the brain and its emotional response to imagery and color with the intent of proving that universal or collective emotional response exists. Similar to *General Hospital*, images and pop culture references are presented in a new way to the user through the primal function of association. Along with many recent projects that discuss neuroscience, this piece is moving away from the format of hypertext to video and installation. Examples would be the *Fragmented Orchestra* and *Brain Waves*. *The Emotions* was set up as a video that played various color-overlaid images. As the viewer watched the video, the activity in the amygdala was recorded. The results were then analyzed through Plutnik's wheel of emotion. By these artists working with science, it proves what Roy Ascott anticipated that "...distinguished minds in all fields of art and science could be contacted and linked."

Overall, the battle between the negative and positive aspects of using technology to understand brain function will continue with the advancement of technology. As it aids our time, it also creates a sense of control and power that "self-[alienates our experience to] ..such a degree that [we accept our}.. own destruction" (Benjamin). Discussing mental health brings awareness of technology and neuroscience, but in the end, will our curiosity to understand our brains ultimately lead to a greater understanding of our brain's power or will the machine delude our ability to do so?

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Eliza   **PAT**   **General Hospital**   **analysis_engine**   **Emotions**
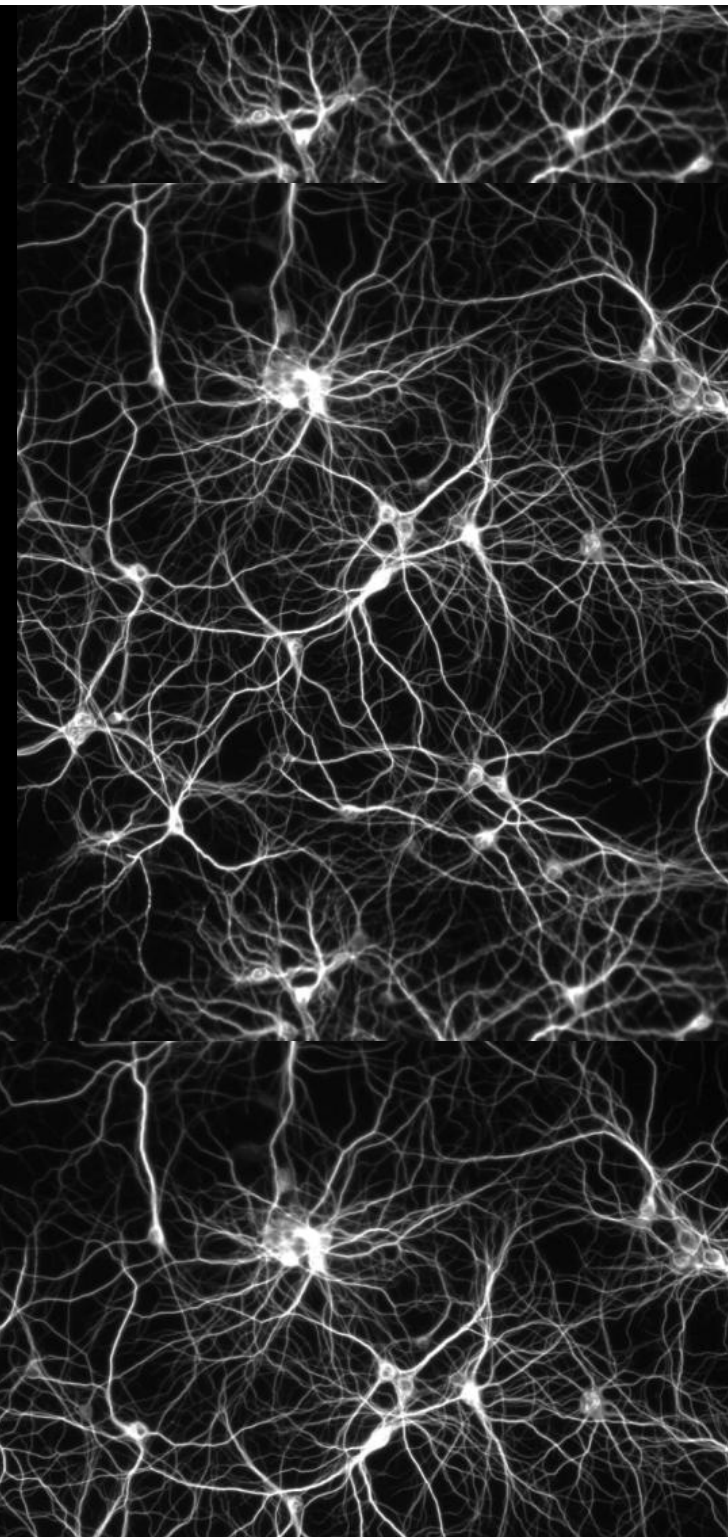
The Emotions

by [Debra Swack](#)

"The Emotions (after Charles Darwin)"; an interactive video project exploring the universality of emotions at a biological level done in collaboration with neuroscientists at the Brain Mind Institute in Switzerland was presented/published by e-Scholarship at the Digital Arts Conference (DAC09) at the University of California in December 2009 (it will also be published in MIT's Leonardo and Rutledge's Digital Creativity). --[rhizome.org](#)

THE EMOTIONS (AFTER CHARLES DARWIN) BY DEBRA SWACK

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