Mapping Conversations: Art and Understanding

Sara Diamond

Banff Centre, Canada

Artists and designers are using graphics to indicate relationships within data, to show social and political dynamics between individuals and within groups. This work can be applied to on-line conversations, to mapping geographical spaces, and to create technologies that foster interaction within actual physical spaces (dance for example). What levels of graphic abstraction can humans understand? Is it possible to provide access to different understandings about human relationships if we use graphics as our guide? What are effective uses of 2D and 3D images? I will provide examples of a number of artists' and designers' projects, including my own and several developed at The Banff Centre, that make use of graphics and creativity to interpret and interrupt the flow of data.

For example, Scott Snibbe makes use of voronoi diagrams to map social interaction. Alex Galloway creates a constellation pattern connecting ideas within the Rhizome Magazine website. In CodeZebra, my software, I use biological, animal and organic patterns that emerge from the data to indicate relationships between ideas, social networks and emotional states within conversations. Games based on visual patterns provide opportunities to shift conversational dynamics.