

Programmer has fun with monkeys typing Shakespeare theory

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Sometimes you just have to shake your head at some experiments done in the name of science, and go with the flow, or as Jesse Anderson puts it on his [blog](#), “Keep Calm and Carry On.” He’s conducting an experiment, for fun, to see if he can reproduce some part of the old philosophy question of whether putting infinite numbers of monkeys before infinite numbers of typewriters, working indefinitely, would at some point result in the reproduction of the entire works of Shakespeare. Anderson’s efforts have created quite a stir on Internet, though for different reasons. Some see the humor in his approach, others point out how his efforts aren’t really proving anything at all.

Anderson isn’t testing the theory with real monkeys, that whole idea was pretty much laid to rest when researchers a while back gave a group of monkeys a keyboard and after month of effort found they had little more

than an affinity for the letter “S” and disdain for modern contrivances (they urinated on it). Instead he’s using virtual monkeys on computers and a mathematical algorithm to pick out letter sequences typed at random.

He started last month, using Amazon's SC2 cloud computing system and has already put together one of the Bard’s poems, though it is difficult to ascertain from the experiment just what exactly is being proved. That typing nine random characters as a group will eventually reproduce a nine letter sequence that duplicates nine letters of something [Shakespeare](#) once wrote? That piecing such sequences together will eventually result in the whole work being reproduced? Interesting, but hardly science. But then, Anderson, a homespun [programmer](#), clearly isn’t trying to shake up the world. He’s just trying to have some fun.

What’s perhaps more interesting are the reactions to his efforts from bloggers and reporters for various media and science outlets, especially those that seem to want to point out how proving the theory right or wrong would take more time than we humans will ever have; which seems premature, when you consider that the theory does say something about using an *infinite* number of monkeys after all. Surely using some bit of calculus would show that as the number of monkeys approaches infinity, the number of completed works would be go up pretty quickly as well. Seems to me if you went that route, you could have the whole job done before breakfast. At any rate, the whole point is rather moot, isn’t it? After all, does it really matter if monkeys typing randomly could randomly reproduce anything all? A more important question would seem to be, if you could get [monkeys](#) to type, wouldn’t they eventually, given enough time, tell us all what they really think of us and our crazy use of them for our own experimental purposes?

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