e-discourse in online networked communities: structure, timing, tone, and affect

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Abstract

We will discuss the various ways that the Internet has empowered remote, networked, collaborative idea generating, knowledge sharing, and discussion. Through the specific examples of list-serves, e-conferencing, blogging, and e-curating, our assembled group of international specialists will share their experience in managing these online forums. In these virtual collaboratories individual participant contributions create a composite body of knowledge. E-discourse explodes the edifice of code that imposes implicit rules that affect styles of organization and communication -- written, aural and visual. From stream of consciousness writing where individuals simply write random internal thoughts and narratives to conversational styles that engage others from the network, or formal lecture style writing where participants simply copy and paste previously published material, networked discourse displays the electric verve of networked communication. Specially coded interfaces can create a rhizomatic flurry of successes and failures affected by time, tone, regularity, and translation. More complicated are the effects of the apparent intrinsic cultural values of race, gender, affect, and politics.

Heading

We bring together four scholars and artists whose pioneering projects have established exciting practices of e-discourse.
1). the thirteen-year history of the -empyre- listserv begun in Australia and carried on in the US with an international subscriber community of 2,000
2). various approaches to e-curating from Internet art to mobile exhibitions across the globe
3). reflections on a conceptual blog where unfinished artworks seek online collaborators for their completion
4). e-conferencing where an expansive model for international networked symposia is modeled

All of our specialists agree that despite the successes and complications of these projects, the importance of archiving is integral in suspending and extending the life of this networked accomplishment and its effect on scholarship and time. In this panel we will additionally consider the after-life of online archives.

Renate Ferro: the list-serv –empyre- soft-skinned space

In this panel artist and managing moderator, Renate Ferro, discusses the history and relevance of the listserv platform, -empyre- soft-skinned space, which emerged in art and technology networks in 2002. Originally conceived as an open networked community -empyre- soft-skinned space includes nearly 2000 new media artists, curators, theorists, producers, and others who participate in monthly discussions via an email listserv. The online discussions facilitate global perspectives on critical topics revolving around networked media. As it enters its fourteenth year, -empyre- soft-skinned space continues to be a platform dedicated to the plurality of global perspectives encompassing Australia, North America, greater Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Originally designed and implemented by Melinda Rackham and coded to exist in the VRML and Java world of VNET, -empyre- beta version was launched at ISEA 2000 in Nagoya, Japan. It was envisioned as a utopic collective meant to foster discussions where many points of view could be heard. The listserv is currently archived online by the University of New South Wales (Sydney, Australia), and its website is hosted by the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art in the Cornell University Library.

While the over-arching design continues to foster an open-community based network of participants who share their discourse through educational, commercial and independent venues, there is an intrinsic and cumbersome organic life span to –empyre-'s existence. The ebb and flow of the written daily posts sometimes come on fast and furiously while at other times the pacing is slow or even silent. Though the intension was always to strike a tone of informality to allow for

intellectually and culturally diverse participants, realistically over the years, generations of subscribers have posted a blend of styles from casual conversations to at times lengthy treatises designed for conference formats. While the archive of topics has mirrored the evolution of new media practices and technology, the less than ideal physical logistics that are required for it to remain active remains a constant curatorial challenge.

Advised by the current group of four moderators – empyre- remains able and flexible to pick up relevant discussion topics at a moment's notice. Currently our moderators not only generate discussion topics themselves but also comb other areas of expertise to find others who are on the brink of emerging interests and topics. Unlike the burdensome structures of commercial publication, anyone subscribed can suggest a current topic and agree to be a guest moderator.

The front and back-end of –empyre-'s structure has remained overall stable ensuring privacy, protection, and relevance. So amidst the ease of social media this list-serv remains relevant through the persistence of presence and the archived history that it has lived. Relationships are fostered and just once in a while, like at a conference such as ISEA, any subscriber can meet in real time and real space with someone they may have been dialoguing online with for years.

Timothy Murray: e-curating: global networks and curator

Timothy Murray traces the evolution of online curating, from early international collaborations to the development of robust online curatorial exchanges that forever altered the centrality of museum-based curation.

He begins by reflecting on three of his early-networked curatorial projects as a means of highlighting the discursive shifts of e-curating. In 1999, he sent out a call for work over the emergent rhizome network for works for a small exhibition he was planning on CD-ROM art. Not expecting much of a response, he limited the call to a three-week delivery date with the idea that the exhibition may be extended beyond a small group of artworks from Australia, Europe, and the US. Within three weeks, an astonishing 130 works arrived from over thirty countries resulting in the 80-work exhibition, Contact Zones: the Art of CD-ROM, which toured internationally for four years, including ISEA Paris. The ability to expand the initial network with such a range of international artists impacted and altered the conceptual organization of the show. The emergent network of curators and artists also resulted in a relocation of the exhibition in Mexico City for which he developed the first bi-lingual online catalogue (Spanish/English). The catalogue then provided the framework for other international exhibitions deriving from Contact Zones in Macau and Johannesburg.

Profiting from this curatorial and discursive model, he joined co-authors Arthur and Marilouise Kroker to produce CTHEORY Multimedia, which they designed and curated online from the US and Canada. Here again they were able to profit from the emergent

network of international artists to make calls for completed internet art, which then grouping the works around their own conceptual and political categories that mirrored global geopolitical conditions. On a smaller scale, he co-organized an off-line net-art show in Slovenia, INFOS 2000, for which he depended on the same networks for curating, while distributing the exhibition on CD-ROM off-line to reach international cultural centers that still lacked high-speed Internet connections. The challenge of this show encouraged the curators to develop a conceptual framework that challenged the digital divide of the very network on which they depended.

Across the terrain of early e-curating, networked conditions and opportunities altered the discourse of museum-based curating and provided opportunities for curators and artists to enter into active dialogue regarding emergent concepts, practices, and politics. These opening examples will provide the impetus for raising a number of challenging questions pertaining to e-curating at this moment when ISEA finds itself in Hong Kong. While regional archives now guarantee the preservation of an earlier ephemeral history (such as Art Asia Archive in Hong Kong; Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art; Transmediale CD-ROM Art Archive in Freiburg; Rhizome; Langlois Foundation in Montreal), does e-curating continue to find itself limited by the constraints of the digital divide? Are Asian and Western artistic networks still as mutually exclusive (for linguistic and cultural reasons) as they were fifteen years ago? What about the added potential of virtual curating and exhibition for politically challenged populations facing censorial conditions on the ground? How did discursive networks of curators and artists contribute to the Arab Spring and how might they address current challenges in and across Asia?

Maurice Benayoun: the blog- the Memory Dump, the disregarded power of undone art

The Dump.net project is born from the following assumption: as the universe is made of 96 percent of dark matter, the art we know and we see should be made of roughly the same amount of unfinished projects. During the span of two years I converted on a daily basis any thought, art related or not, into political, social, economic or artistic projects. This collection of uncompleted conceptual projects was immediately - on a daily basis - published on a blog: the-dump.net. At the same time the-dump was a way to save, protect, share and discard projects that could encumber the creative process in action. Describing what the work could or should be and at the same time providing justification of the original concept, the-dump became the first blog converted as such into a doctoral thesis about artistic intentions. The thesis was defended at la Sorbonne in front of an international jury of examiners. [1]

Based on the idea that each artist is inspired and nurtured by one's predecessors, undone projects

should be open to other artists to feed their practice. In Poland, a curator, Agnieszka Kulazinska invited 9 artists from 5 different countries to select projects from the Dump and to exhibit their interpretation of the selected dumped concept. [2] Another blog, Opendump.org, allowed artists from different origin to publish their undone projects.

The Dump has become a catalog of possible projects for curators to dig into. Ironically many of my recent works being generated from it. It is also a place were uninteresting projects are also totally discarded. The artist footprint on art history is not only made of the remaining evidences of completed works, it is also a chaotic or structured sequence of decisions, choices and priorities. The-dump is the compost where decaying concepts are fertilizing a pervasive practice. After *Out of the Dump, in 2011,* exhibition including the high-resolution photos of the un-dumped works made by other artists beside of the original caption, in 2011, the Dump has been published with the thesis introduction. [3] [4]

Randall Packer: the e-conference- Collapsing the Walls of the Arts Conference

While online practices for learning and creative production have captured the attention of artists, arts educators and cultural organizations worldwide, techniques for highly collaborative and dynamic peer-to-peer forms remain an area of great potential for academic and artistic conferences. Randall Packer provides an analysis of The Art of the Networked Practice Online Symposium he organized and co-chaired in the spring of 2015 in the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. The event served as a forum for sharing emergent strategies that advance the network in a free and open dynamic space for creative dialogue and artistic exchange.

The Art of the Networked Practice | Online Symposium was held online and onsite, uniting local and remote participants in presentation and dialogue via Web-conferencing. The symposium demonstrated how networked space could be used to stimulate creative dialogue and the open sharing of knowledge through an online global exchange. The symposium events combined performance, exhibition, online discussion, social media, chat, keynotes and panels to explore and debate the role of the network in our individual and collective practice as artists, scholars, and arts educators. The project was sparked from my ongoing exploration of live, trans-global communications as a catalyst for collective art and discourse.

The format of the online symposium, with the potential for extensive reach and inclusivity, is a sorely underutilized medium in the arts today. Most arts conferences require participants to have access to an academic travel budget in order to cover the extensive costs of travel, accommodations, and fees. This is detrimental to giving voice to artists who are not affiliated with well-endowed universities: in essence, the arts conference is generally exclusive to those with economic and professional privilege.

As a free and open form of conferencing, The Art of the Network Practice Online Symposium attempted to radically alter the format: with attendees from over 40 countries across the globe participating. From Singapore to New York to London to Australia, as well many as many less developed countries, the symposium offered access to panels in such topical areas as "collective research," "peer-to-peer cultural production," and "distributed teaching and studio models" to articulate emergent new directions in networked practices in the arts. Activating what he refers to as the "third space," the convergence of the local and the remote The Art of the Network Practice Online Symposium enabled artists who are typically sequestered in the privacy of their studios to share ideas and have access to current thought in the field via a live platform with global reach. The symposium reflected the need for new conferencing models in a fast changing networked culture that is quickly transforming our artistic practice, our teaching, our research, our social relations, our identities, our cultures, and our understanding of the world in the age of global communications.

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