

Empyre : Structure and diversity

Title	Empyre
Subtitle	Structure and diversity
Lead-in / Abstract	<i>-empyre-</i> sprang into life in 2002 to fill a void on the net. It presents diverse topics with guests discussing aspects of networked culture in a non-hierarchical constantly refreshing monthly format, and is moderated to maintain thematic integrity.
Participants and speakers	Rackham, Melinda (AU / GB)
Short biography of participants	<i>-empyre-</i> www.subtle.net/empyre was instigated in 2002 by Melinda Rackham a network artist, theorist and curator based in Sydney. It is currently facilitated with transmedia artist Christina McPhee of naxsmash.net who lives in California; visual, sound and net.artist Michael Arnold Mages who teaches at the University of Denver; programmer-artist Jim Andrews from the University of Victoria, Canada and vispo.com; and Felix Sattler , new-media theorist and cultural producer based in Weimar, Germany. u:sun at ueda.nu designed the interface and Nigel Kersten at 4trak.net keeps the server running.
Full text	<p>About 3 years ago, when I was thinking of starting the <i>-empyre-</i> discussion list, Jordan Crandall told me that running a good list was like hosting a good dinner party. This was the best piece of advice I've ever been given as it extrapolated on my experience as the author of the 3D multi-user virtual space, empyrean, in that you can a build a space and just leave it there for something to happen randomly, or you can assist in developing that community. Setting up the list for me involved providing an environment conducive to social interaction, strategically inviting interesting and diverse people to join and introducing them to each other, ensuring they feel comfortable and safe, enthusing them with juicy theoretical, emotional aesthetic and critical topics.</p> <p>So <i>-empyre-</i> is a piece of considered virtual social engineering, designed as a platform to present a range of works, texts and concepts in a friendly research environment. Guests range from people who do interesting and challenging work which isn't always well know; well established and well represented practitioners and writers, those who are just emerging, to those who are brilliant but only recognised in their specific niche. <i>-empyre-</i> seeks to be inclusive of those whose first language isn't English, and has a policy of incorporating guests and issues from</p>

outside the US-European media Arts Axis. *-empyre-* endeavours to not build hierarchies of any one form of media over another, or the opinion of any one poster or group over another by moving to a fresh topic monthly. Within this structural container a cohesive functional networked social life-form has been born, attracting many new members, and true to AI principles, *-empyre-* 's whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

As the instigator, I could not maintain the workload for the growing baby list and *-empyre-* is now facilitated with Christina McPhee and Michael Arnold Mages (US), Jim Andrews (Canada) and Felix Sattler (Germany), all of whom contribute an abundance of knowledge and skill. I believe we have a responsibility when creating a public space, and inviting people into that space to see that etiquette, ethics, structure and lack of hierarchy are maintained, and on this panel I am interested in pursuing some self-reflexivity on my own role as facilitator.

I did not want to use text, or the voice of the facilitator or list administration as a way to steer or regulate discussion. For a while I invented another persona from which to ask questions, pose provocations, put forward contradictory or humorous positions, or say something very politically incorrect which a facilitator could never get away with. But I kept forgetting the personas password and eventually gave it up, opting to just post from my own "melinda" address. I m not quiet comfortable with this as I think having multiple roles and multiple functions doesn't always work. I guess its the same dilemma faced by those in the class room of assuming a role to draw a diversity of opinion from people who are otherwise quiet.

I find now that I am often posting something as facilitator where I put forward a position that I personally would never hold, but its one that I think needs to be included into the dialogue. It feels weird that im playing devils advocate often, yet I continue to do it. Is it control or laziness? Should I stop imposing conflicting opinions onto the list and retreat again behind the anonymity of an assumed persona, rather than confuse the facilitator role and my personal identity? Perhaps I could abandon all interaction and just read from the sidelines? I'm not sure. This panel may make it clearer to me.

Related internet addresses

<http://www.faces-l.org>
<http://www.fibreiculture.org>
<http://www.subtle.net/empyre>