

Access Grid retreat abstract

Examining the Use of Experimentation: Artists' networks and the Access Grid

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Keywords: artist, Access grid, collaboration, social construction

Extended Abstract

One method for engineers and scientists to communicate the importance of networks and network technologies is by collaborating with outside communities of users (For an overview of recent European research on this subject, see Jaume-Rajaonia et al. 2003). Examples of this type of collaboration include research projects involving technological experiments conducted by computer engineers in collaboration with artists. These collaborations, when successful, may ensure that emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Access Grid are appropriated by non-scientific communities. But what remains unclear is how experimentation is itself framed in such exchanges and whether participating communities have the same understanding of what it entails. Although technological innovation seems to be the driving force in such experiments, it is arguably the social dimension of the technology that is most at play. Access Grid's future may lie in the way experimentation is itself socially constructed (Gooding, Pinch, & Schaffer Eds. 1989). My presentation will explore some of the challenges facing this kind of experimentation by examining recent findings of a case study of artistic experimentation using Access Grid by an organisation known as the MARCEL Network as part of my doctoral research.

The MARCEL Network is a group of like-minded artists and scientists who want to create a permanent broadband network for artistic experimentation. The presentation will examine how the group created spaces for experimentation using Access Grid and how they developed relationships with academic institutions to test Access Grid's application as a platform for artistic performances. Access Grid may afford these artists with an empowered place in emerging new media institutions: the platform was designed to provide virtual venues for flexible, semi-immersive, real-time

collaboration between two or more Access Grid nodes (similar to videoconference rooms) using IP Multicasting (Stevens & Future Lab Group 2004). There have been some successful attempts to use it for temporary artistic events such as the SC Global 2001 event *Dancing Without Boundaries* (Oliverio, Quay, & Walz 2001) but Access Grid remains relatively unknown outside the scientific community.

Using a theoretical framework based on a combination of Production of Culture (Becker 1982, Peterson & Anand 2004) and Mediation Theory (Silverstone 2006), this paper will argue that the physical and institutional articulations of Access Grid nodes in universities and research centres restrict their development as a set of tools for cultural experimentation. Using document analysis and interview excerpts from the case study, the presentation will look at instances of work with Access Grid by these artists. It will focus on the institutional context, as well as the spatial and temporal arrangements for each event in order to understand how the artist's role was framed in the process of production. The presentation will then demonstrate how the social and technological construction of Access Grid nodes in both space and in time mediated the scope of cultural conventions for its design and use. In much of these collaborations, the artist role is called upon to test parameters of use for engineers and designers without considering the implicit institutional constraints embedded within the process of experimenting itself. More research is needed into the dynamic negotiations that take place between participating artists, scientists, institutions and technologies in order to better understand these events. Finally, the presentation will suggest possible strategies for change based on success stories and disappointments encountered over the course of the research.

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Vitae

Frederik Lesage is a PhD student at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE) who's research interests include new media and organizational structures in the cultural and creative industries. After completing an MA in Cultural and Creative Industries at the King's College London, he was awarded the EDS MARCEL Studentship to study at the LSE. In the past two years, he has presented in conferences at Westminster University, King's College, as well as in Edinburgh as part of the *Lighting the Blue Touchpaper for UK e-Science closing Conference of ESLEA Project*. (Forthcoming: presentation and publication for the TERENA Networking Conference 2008.) He has also published work online as part of the *EDS Innovation Research Programme – Discussion Paper series*.