

AHRC ICT Methods Network Seminar

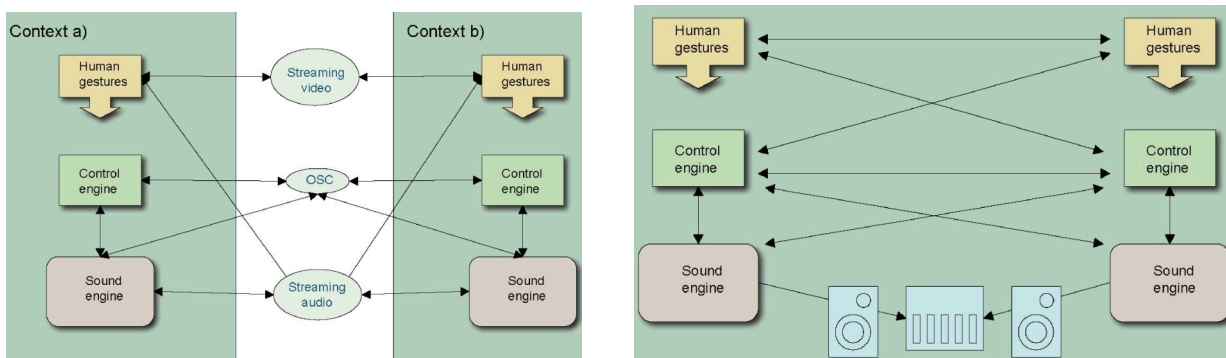
THE POTENTIAL OF HIGH SPEED NETWORKS AS A NEW SPACE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND PRODUCTION

CENTRE FOR COMPUTING IN THE HUMANITIES, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON, 19 MARCH 2007

The seminar explored the potential of the high speed UK Educational Internet Network 'SuperJanet' as a space for creative productions. To achieve this, participants looked at both the opportunities for new research and artistic practice using networks and at the infrastructure that enabled this. The event addressed the structural issues that small and medium arts organizations face for networked access to SuperJanet, and helped these organizations to start the process of applying for funding for networked access through the establishment of a MARCEL working group.

From Passive Audiences to Networked Co-Producers

To discuss these issues, representatives from media arts organizations came together with independent artists and researchers. They looked at different ways of using network technology for artistic practice. An important issue was collaborations between artists and audience, actually transcending these two concepts in the process, Furtherfield's 'VisitorsStudio' was an exemplar for moving from passive audiences to networked coproducers. Paul Sermon presented his work on telematic approaches to art, for instance using H.323 internet video-conference connections. Realtime artistic practice over networks was also explored in Thor Magnusson's presentation about a networked concert between several continents. Kelly Dipple's presentation dealt with the practice of remote collaborations between different institutions as well as different types of institutions (producers of artistic content; curators; galleries; academic institutions and the public).



Examples of co-located and dislocated networked performance from Thor Magnusson's presentation on 'Musical Collaboration Over High Speed Networks'.

Abstracts and papers for all presentations are hosted on the Methods Network website and video recordings are hosted on artshumanities.net.

Outcomes: Connecting Social and Physical Networks

The event helped strengthen links between media arts centres. Participants were interested in learning more about others' projects, recent developments in the field and development of contacts, especially with the academic sector

– and they felt that the event achieved that. A main focus was to explore ways to get access to the SuperJanet high speed network. This led to contacts with UKERNA to confirm that independent arts centres do qualify for access to SuperJanet. The group was also looking for sponsorship for physical connections to SuperJanet. However, this has not yet led to anything concrete. With the changing economic climate, the cost of physically connecting buildings to the network (often £25 000 or more) seems very high for potential sponsors, especially as the leases of many small arts centres are only short term. The group lacked resources to pursue this issue aggressively. It is hoped that connecting people instead of buildings, for instance through new wireless networks, will be a more realistic approach to this problem.

Problems of Funding

Funding is a general problem for small arts organizations and participants felt that it was important for funding bodies to understand the different circumstances under which artists work in comparison to humanities researchers. As the centres cannot guarantee long term planning, funding bodies were advised to use a medium- to longterm approach to the funding of ICT projects. This would enable the development of a cohesive programme instead of unrelated projects. Providing the infrastructure for this was seen as crucial as the independent media centres themselves could not do it. Participants also discussed the usefulness of developing a high performance multicasting platform that is suitable for arts. The Access Grid platform was seen as a good way of hosting meetings and conferences, but as weak for artistic practice. It was argued that involving the arts in developing such a platform might also lead to better technology as artistic practice often explores new ways of using ICT that lead to a push for technological development.