

# The White Cube and the Ivory Tower:

## Use and production of online media space as art worlds

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### Executive Summary

#### Focus and Scope

This paper is a contribution to the EDS-LSE innovation research programme's media and communication theme, one aspect of which is investigating how artists migrate into new online network spaces and how they adapt their efforts to these spaces, at the same time, pushing at the technological boundaries to make them more responsive to their specific artistic ambitions. The research focuses on one particular online network called MARCEL. MARCEL is an umbrella organisation of like-minded artists, scientists and organisations interested in exchange and collaboration over a permanent broadband interactive network dedicated to artistic, educational and cultural experimentation. This paper offers a glimpse into the collaborative interactions between artist and technologist as they work together to produce a new kind of art world in online space.

In this paper spatial concepts and the idea of art world conventions are used as a means of understanding one artist's attempt to gain access to and control over resources available within an online space supported by the MARCEL network to produce an online collaborative artwork. Although some conceive of the artist as an anti-institutional maverick who works against the grain, this study shows how the artist is able to negotiate successfully with various institutional interests, in this case those of a university-based computer science department, to produce an artwork through innovative use of the online technological space. It also demonstrates how the experience is mediated by various conventions with respect to how an art world should be organised.

#### Key Arguments

The paper offers three main insights:

- 1) *An artist can become a producer of an art world or online space for artistic work by modifying certain spatial conventions.* These modifications can be introduced when the artist has no technical expertise but this requires a strong willingness to collaborate with other producers of that space.
- 2) *Physical engagement with an online network can be a spatially distributed collective activity which produces artworks.* This engagement should not necessarily only be understood as many isolated individuals sitting at desktops, but can also include many groups of individuals working together in physical locations who collaborate online via information networks.
- 3) *A variety of power relations both constrain and enable the roles of artists and those with whom they collaborate online as well as offline.* These power relations have to be carefully negotiated and the potential of these new spaces cannot be developed without attention to this aspect. This insight has implications for the use of new online technologies in other contexts beyond the art world.

Current developments in digital technologies, particularly in the creative industries where digital design plays an increasingly important role, mean that artists are being seen as potential contributors to innovative uses of online networks in spheres that have commercial as well as artistic potential.