

Minitasking

MINITASKING BY GERMANY-BASED COLLECTIVE, SCHOENERWISSEN VISUALLY ILLUSTRATES THE COMPLEXITY OF A FILE SHARING NETWORK

INTERVIEW

Interview by: [Jarrett Kertesz](#)

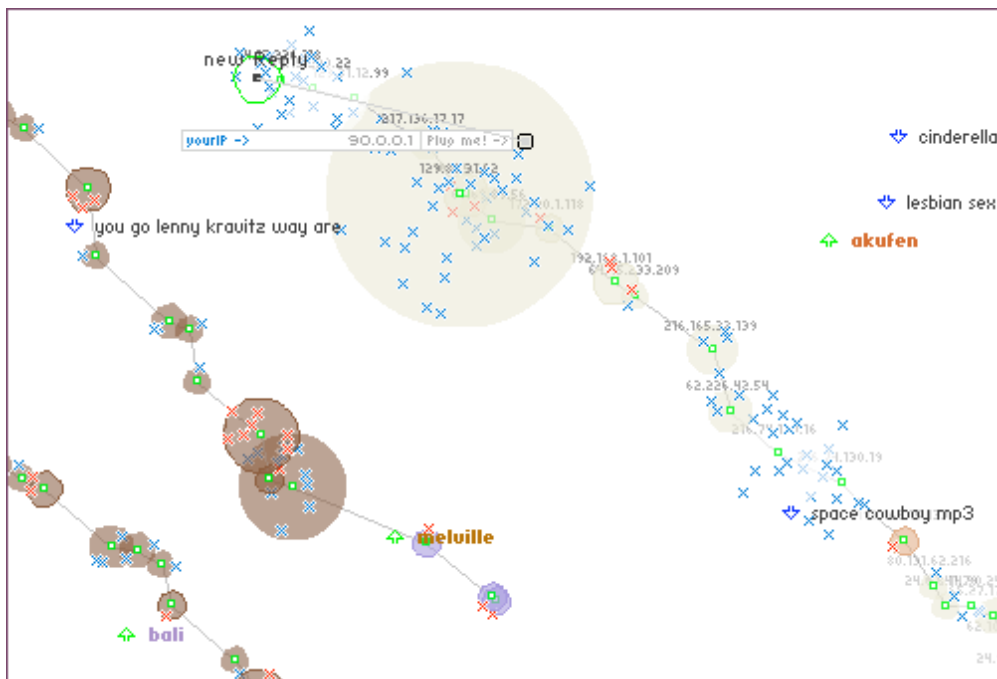
We've recently interviewed Marcus Hauer and Anne Pascual to find out more about their visual Gnutella client, Minitasking. Based in Germany and working under the name of Schoenerwissen, they are one of the few groups that are exploring alternative approaches to application design.

Who and what is Schoenerwissen?

Schoenerwissen is a collaboration between Anne Pascual and Marcus Hauer. We've worked together since 1998 with the focus on the processes of computation, visualization and generation. By the way, the translation of the German "Schoenerwissen" (schöner Wissen) is "more beautiful knowledge". We understand Design as a method to create awareness about communication and knowledge systems.

Can you give us a little background on Minitasking, the people that created it, and what it does?

Our objective was to develop a modular tool to be employed in everyday use which simultaneously also makes available the way software usually functions. Minitasking is a software package, which in its first version uses the Gnutella protocol and provides a visual manifestation of its characteristics to allow the user a new and different view of data movements—which also has an effect on its use. Minitasking was created as part of a degree dissertation in 2001 at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. It is planned to carry on research and development on further modules in future projects.



Screenshot from Minitasking application

How long did it take to create?

One Year. The first theoretical reflections on how ideal software should function in 2001 paved the way for the further design process, until we finished the project in January 2002.

What have you learned about distribution and dynamics of content on the Gnutella file sharing network and the way people use it?

In a peer-to-peer protocol, the distinction between client and server is no longer drawn. A dynamically organized structure is temporarily set up. This constantly changes, and the distinction between consumer and producer is further blurred by decentralized structures. Both ensure increased 'production of information'. However, the quantity and the kind of information are only meant to be of secondary importance. The technical conditions for the use of file sharing software are at stake here. It is clear that protocols create information by the kind of access they facilitate. Only information complying with the standard is routed and recognized, and is made part of the network.

We have developed a software package that takes data and produces a visual manifestation in order to introduce transparency to computing processes and protocol dynamics on the one hand, and heighten the sense of risk—inherent in computing and decision making, on the other. The visual operating interface displays only one of several possible 'test beds'. It is meant to direct (and entice) the user to observe processes, and to select and exchange data, so that criteria—that will have an impact on the access to information, as well as its production and dissemination—can be discovered or developed. For the development of knowledge on a digital basis, this study merely constitutes as an initial attempt in the analysis of the processes in which knowledge is embedded.

Do you see any parallels in offline systems and the visual representation of a file sharing network, that you've created with the Minitasking application?

Mappings in general create representations of space and time. They define your perception. This applies similarly to digital, fictional, hybrid or real spaces.

Do you think that the visual representation of network transfers will scare music and software industry people even more? What kind of feedback have you received?

We don't think so. No one has contacted us until now, because to the music and software industry we are only distributing another Gnutella client. They target their attacks more on the whole network with fake files, such as the famous Eminem case which took place earlier this year.

Where would you like to see Minitasking go? Are there other applications that you are planning to build?

Yahoo lists Minitasking in the file sharing directory, which means to non-experienced computer users, it appears as a funky way to share files. We liked that. Others asked us if it contains spyware. That shows they take it for real.

Currently we are developing a visual text tool, to read and edit big amounts of text in an online environment.

When will we see a Mac OS version?

The Mac OS X Version is delayed until Macromedia releases a faster implementation of the Flash Player, because Minitasking is a hybrid consisting of Java and Flash. Anyone want to help us make it a Java-only build?

Thank you both very much+

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