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XENIA: A Metaphor for Sense-Making and Acting in Information Systems Innovation

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Abstract

This paper draws on Ciborra's insightful concept of xenia (i.e., hospitality) to analyze how successful infrastructural service innovation was managed at the local operations of an international financial services firm. The xenia concept problematizes the information system development (ISD) orthodoxy and points to issues and aspects that are often overlooked or considered irrelevant in structured methodologies. In interpreting the findings of the empirical study—in which a highly successful (but radical) big bang transition from one technology platform to another takes place over a single weekend—we suggest that IS implementation and development is an emergent process in which technology and users are continually redefined. This process resembles an emotional “meeting” between host and guest who, over time, develop mutual familiarity and acceptance. Further, we argue that the metaphor of xenia opens space for reconsidering conventional but socially sterile approaches to IS innovation; xenia offers a radically different way for understanding and acting upon ISD. Our analysis highlights the intrinsic socio-technical interplay underlying IS development and implementation, and raises questions

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about the importance of local cultures of “hospitality” and ways they may be cultivated and nurtured in order to alleviate the meeting between technology and organizations.

Keywords Xenia, guest host relations, systems implementation, organization metaphor, hospitality

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, a rich body of literature on information systems development and implementation has generated interesting insights into the role of the developers, users, and technology during the implementation process. However, in this paper, we argue that previous work has often neglected the messiness of IS implementation and the resulting emotional implications for both users and developers. More specifically, emphasizing methods and processes, practitioners and scholars alike overlook the mundane and everyday experience of development and use, thereby missing important features of interest. Our concern is, therefore, to understand how users and developers make sense of new information systems and embed them in their daily work routines.

Traditional models of IS implementation carry with them the assumption that designers, engineers, and users are able to implement requirements directly into technological objects. That is, the material object is understood as perfectly malleable during the developmental process as stakeholders try to shape their intentions into the artefact. For example, informed by the rational social management approach, Lewin's (1952) change model, consisting of a suite of unfreezing, changing, and freezing, has strongly influenced stage-based approaches. These approaches propose to subdivide implementation processes into sequential stages, with each stage having generic, inherent characteristics (see Cooper and Zmud 1990; Kwon and Zmud 1987). In order to achieve the intended outcome, the specific issues of each stage need to be addressed sufficiently. Munkvold (1999), for example, developed a holistic stage model for implementation processes within distributed organizations by mapping the various challenges in the different stages. However, stage-based approaches have been criticized for relying on a rational–economic interpretation of organizational processes and for assuming that the world functions in the form of objective cause–effect relationships with universally applicable rules (Fitzgerald 1996; Walsham 1993). Thus, the stage-based approach is criticized for being too rigid, mainly focusing on explicit economic, physical, or information processing features, and for limiting the social context in which technology is developed according to chosen formal and easily managed relationships (Ciborra 2002, 2004). Furthermore the development and implementation process is presented conventionally as a rational–technological process, but in practice structured methodologies are used as a kind of social defense, where graphics, structures, and diagrams impart complex IS implementation work with the outward appearance of manageability (Wastell 1996).

Disavowing overly rational approaches to IS development and implementation, we align our analysis to an alternative literature that takes the role of technology as well as of the human agents seriously. Drawing upon Ciborra's concept of *xenia* (hospitality relations) allows us to theorize how users, developers, and the technological artefact evoke emotional responses as they relate to and make sense of each other during the

implementation process. We develop the argument that a culture of hospitality needs to be cultivated and nurtured before, during, and after the actual IS implementation. The carefully managed relationship between the host (users) and the guest (technology) can reduce the level of anxiety among potential users and, therefore, increase the acceptance of technology introduction. We develop this argument by referring to a large IS implementation project within an international financial service organization.

In the following section, we describe the concept of *xenia* and emphasize its usefulness for understanding the socio-technical dynamics of ISD processes. In sections 3 and 4, we proceed by presenting an insightful in-depth, interpretive field study of IS development and implementation at the local operations of an international financial services organization. In section 5, we illustrate and develop the notion of *xenia* with reference to the case study. Finally, in section 6, we attempt to summarize the key conclusions of the paper.

2 XENIA

Ciborra highlights the fluidity of social organization and the situated contingencies of ISD initiatives. In so doing, he advocates loosening our grip on the methodological frame to open up other ways of thinking and conceptualizing system development. More specifically, he offers metaphors that can help us make sense of the software developer process and sensitize us to the socio-technical dynamics in ISD (Ciborra 1998, 2002). The concept of *xenia*, or hospitality, is used as a grounding metaphor to explore and interpret the complexities of how we might go about designing, developing, and implementing technologies for organizations or social groups. The idea of host–guest relations opens possibilities for a “new constellation of issues, words, and understanding, referring in particular to existential dimensions, such as life world, identity, and commitment” (Ciborra 2002, p. 104). The notion of hospitality points to the extra effort involved in coping, accepting, and embedding new technologies into work practices. This kind of activity cannot be represented geometrically: “it is made of absorbed coping, care, being there amidst ambiguity, intimacy, sporting hospitality as well as tamed hostility towards what the new and unknown is unveiling” (Ciborra 1998, p. 14).

Xenia encourages turning a critical eye to the process of acceptance and embeddedness of technology in the flow of everyday practice. We can be more attentive to how technologies are invited in and coped with, welcomed (or not), to accommodate and be accommodated, until becoming folded into our taken-for-granted beliefs about technologies. The ambiguous and interchangeable roles of host and guest reveal the dynamic dance between work practices and technology; the way things go is not determined by properties of people, workplaces, or even the technology (Grint and Woolgar 1997). The ISD process becomes an ongoing performance, a process of alignment, adjustment, and subtle transformations of technology and work practices. This vision also challenges a belief that the material side of IT artefacts can be givens, stable or fixed entities (Orlikowski and Iacono 2000), and calls attention instead to the practices in which they are implied, assembled, transformed, and held stable. This is a vision of technology as an “unpredictable and ambiguous guest” that encounters the *host* (i.e., us, the organization) where both become engaged in forms of “reciprocal cultivation by enriching and sharing” their cultures and practices (Ciborra 2002, pp. 115–116).

Ciborra's *xenia* emphasizes alternate interpretations of innovation, ideas of *introduction* or *bringing in*. *Xenia*, hospitality, shifts our concerns about technology and users together, introducing each other, changing and accommodating each other's potential. The drifting and shifting of technology, its changing service or affordance through developers' frequent tinkering and improvisations—intrinsic to system development and system use—are manifestations of the encounter between the guest and the host and their continuous learning about each other; the adjustment of their identities and cultures. Structured models and methodologies, and their assumptions about stable and predictable technology, do not capture the uncertainty of this sometimes emotional meeting and continuous strife (and striving) for symmetrical acceptance, for respect.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This case study considers the occasion of infrastructural service innovation within State Bank (SB), a newly acquired subsidiary of International European Bank (IEB), an international banking firm.¹ The goal of the study was to describe events, attitudes, and actions surrounding a project to integrate the national organization's IS infrastructure with its parent firm. The research was designed to analyze the experience of (successful) radical infrastructural service innovation in the local operations of IEB. In terms of conventional ISD theories, successful outcomes usually lend themselves to seemingly obvious appeals to *success factor determinants*; for example, that systems generally work as designed (technologically determined), or deciding between introducing a system in a big bang or in stages depends on specific factors (social idiosyncrasy). We consider, however, that rich, thickly descriptive case studies of IS successes are important sources of information of the practice (not just factors) of successful projects and so we present a rich case study with the goal of *informing* the practice of developers, users, customers, etc.

The field study phase for this case study consisted of 15 semi-structured interviews with 11 key informants who were identified in a snowball approach (Miles and Huberman 1994). Interviews commenced 6 months after the national innovation project had concluded.² Interviews were carried out within the firm's premises—at the international group headquarters, the national head office, and national branch offices. Interviewees include the VP for technology, VP for treasury, capital/regional manager, regional head of human resources, head of training, and line staff involved in the development, configuration, and use of relevant subsystems.

Interviews are the principle form of data gathering employed by this study. Questions were put to interviewees in a semi-structured manner and ranged over the field of analysis suggested by our reading of the hospitality metaphor. Interview data was validated first by being transcribed and presented to interviewees for separate review, and second by cross comparison with other interviews and against secondary documentary data. Furthermore the researchers read and reviewed all notes, transcripts, and secondary

¹State Bank (SB) and International European Bank (IEB) are pseudonyms.

²It is relevant to note that IEB subsequently commenced a very similar acquisition, assimilation, and integration exercise with another firm the year after its integration of SB.

documentary evidence (press releases, corporate documentation, etc.) to carry out joint analysis and reflection. The process of analysis involved repeated discussions among the researchers to debrief, analyze, and interpret the field data as the case study was being written up.

The research was designed as an interpretive case study. The case method is closely associated with interpretive information systems research and is suggested for settings where existing theoretical models are inoperable, contradictory, or only weakly informative. Walsham (1993) recommends interpretive research methods where research attempts to produce “an understanding of the *context* of the information system, and the *process* whereby the information system influences and is influenced by its context” (pp. 4-5). The approach accepts that researchers obtain only indirect access to actors’ interpretations of their lived work, histories, and contexts. This knowledge is subjective and co-constructed through the researcher’s interaction with those actors. The researcher’s role is one of sense-making and framing a narrative from interviewees’ experiences and historical events; to present events, context, and processes in rich detail.

The following section presents a narrative composite of interviewees’ accounts of the origination, introduction, and implementation of the radically new IS infrastructure within SB. This account is based on interviews carried out with members of the organization (identified by pseudonyms) some months after the “big bang.”

4 IEB: A CASE STUDY OF SERVICE INNOVATION

The financial industry’s modes of organization and business models are widely held to be malleable and engineered. They avail of advances in technology, competitive environments, and regulatory change, responding to changing opportunities in global markets as new offerings and potentials are realized (e.g., outsourcing, self managed bank accounts, real-time financial transactions). On-going restructuring of the financial industry, its modes of organization and business models, has taken place in response to new entrants, new markets, and the further evolution of the global financial industry. These changes have been facilitated, if not driven, by IS and ICT (information and communications technology) innovations.

In the early 2000s, IEB acquired a national banking firm, State Bank (SB). This acquisition led to a period of dramatic change for the national operations of the now integrated firm. The organizational structure within IEB is a classic hierarchy, with IEB group management having ultimate responsibility for organizational strategy. A subsidiary like the national operation of SB, with its own operational hierarchy, reports into the group function. At the national branch/subsidiary level, the structure devolves into individual functions or departments such as human resources, marketing, business, and local branches; however IEB group headquarters is the nexus of the whole organization with responsibility for key functions like business development, IT, and finance.

IEB’s seemingly smooth integration of newly acquired subsidiaries has been a defining characteristic of its continuing success as a leading financial services company both in Europe and abroad. The acquisition of SB initiated a substantial technology investment into SB’s operations by IEB. The project to align the two organizations’ IS infrastructures began in earnest once the acquisition was completed. IEB’s approach to

integration required the complete replacement of SB's existing infrastructure and the adoption of new technology and work practices by the national workforce. However, rather than conforming to conventional wisdom for deploying large scale IS implementations³ IEB employed a big-bang roll-out approach to the project. The big bang event happened over a single long weekend one year after the acquisition. At this point they also shut down and decommissioned all previously used systems; these were removed *permanently* from operation over the same weekend.

While the process of development and configuration of the new IS infrastructure commenced immediately after the acquisition, it was paralleled with a period of preparing for the anticipated change. This parallel work consisted of systemic and systematic planning and development impacting all levels of the organization. While the financial industry is global, it must adapt to local (i.e., national) regulations, arrangements, and behavior. Anticipating this need for local knowledge, staff in SB had conducted extensive research of the domestic market and details of this research were fed back into the development and adaptation plans for IEB's centralized system. Throughout the organization and at multiple levels, staff referred to the need to customize IEB's standard services to the local market. This customization or configuration was identified as a major factor in the claimed success of the overall project.

The group business development unit takes any issues from a local level and formulates an appropriate strategy. The local groups are important because they are close to the market and will get feedback directly from this market.
(Joe, Business Development Manager)

Within the overall change program, as many as 60 to 70 individual projects were ongoing at any one time. This system of implementation was very structured and was adapted from previous similar ventures by IEB.

The system was in operation in IEB and they have introduced it to other firms and subsidiaries previous to our takeover, so they were aware of the issues and processes before they began. It was easy to see this wasn't the first time they had done this type of integration. (Sean, Senior Cash Manager)

The project team supporting the development and implementation of the new IS and services initiative was organized along different lines than IEB's overall organizational structure (i.e., as a network as opposed to a hierarchy). In the project team, functions and individuals were fluid and transferable, originating from a variety of locations within the organization. While a single overarching project manager was responsible for ensuring the whole project was delivered in a timely manner, the overall project consisted of 60 or 70 subprojects addressing different organizational levels and functions. Expert guides familiar with the system from IEB's other international branches were drafted in and

³Conventional deployment policies range over phased introductions (introducing greater functionality in stages) through staged roll-out (switching or upgrading sites separately). Big bang IS transitions are rarely recommended, particularly where a firm's entire operational and production capacity is actualized through software and IS.

placed in positions where they could move within the national operation as and when required. A customer task force was also set up to deal specifically with customer issues and was responsible for supporting the transition to the new system.

Because there were members of the implementation team over from [head office], all staff were given adequate opportunity to become familiar with the system. It was essentially a hand-holding exercise in many cases. (Sean, Senior Cash Manager)

It was good because we recognized that not everybody had all the answers and we knew that we had to deal with different people for different things. We had people called "super-users" and "champions" who were an expert in a particular area. (Mary, Branch Manager)

To ensure a culture of fear or indifference did not develop, IEB put in place a *learning infrastructure* that both enabled and encouraged staff to learn and become familiar with the new system and its functions. Personal laptops and Internet access were given to staff for use at home, enabling staff access to IEB's new systems and complete their training programs either at work or at home. On completion of training program stages, staff were given financial incentives; with laptops to keep and fully paid-up home broadband, the staff had an additional impetus to learn and explore the new systems on their own time. Supplementary material was also put in place to assist both staff and customers throughout the transition process. This material included IT support data, the website, pamphlets, training courses, and seminars.

Some internal issues and conflicts arose during this period of preparation as the centralized IS was configured and adapted to the requirements of the local market.

When we were launching the system, IT originally drafted the training manual. However, I had to re-write the entire document to translate it to English or to "user-friendliness"! (Sarah, HR Manager)

Meanwhile, staff from a variety of departments and professional roles (e.g., the trade union, HR, IT, communications, legal) took on significant tasks in customizing, generating, and developing facets of the local system.

One year after the acquisition, IEB's new system went operational nation-wide over a single weekend. The new system completely superseded the technology, processes, and practices previously in use.

Essentially, it was a big bang concept.... Obviously as well, if there are requests from customers to changes or further products from the system, these will be communicated to the group and developed at that level. Our requests to the development team are driven by customers and markets. We are continually trying to evolve. (Sean, Senior Cash Manager)

On Monday, staff (and customers) were faced with new technology and systems and had to entirely change their working practices—practices that were a necessary component of the successful delivery of IEB's services and products.

There is no comparison with this system to our previous system. This system was introduced over a long weekend and essentially what happened was we left the building on the Thursday evening and when we came back there was an entirely new system in operation—no similarities. This system provided new thinking for cash management. Although this was a serious change for us internally, it was also a serious change for our customers also. They were also moving to an entirely new system. Although, they were able to immediately see the benefits and these were made very clear to them. (Sean, Senior Cash Manager)

Overall it was a real mind set change for both customers and staff. (Mary, Branch Manager)

While all interviewees referred to the roll-out or big bang event, they generally considered it to be unremarkable. The change-over to the new systems seemed to be obvious and inevitable from the employee's point of view. And while the underlying technology of the IS was also very important and necessary, its presence and shape seemed both *obvious* and *given* as far as they were concerned. The biggest challenge referred to was in the *mind set change* and the *new thinking* demanded of customers and employees to use it effectively.

Positively for IEB, the changeover appeared to be a success; there were few apparent adverse effects and all involved claimed that the transition process was smooth and problem free. In assessing the impact of the new system, benefits and new prospects conferred on the organization were cited.

It is hoped to give more information, and empowerment to management and staff...greater access to information and more efficient methods of performance management and reporting...more efficient for the HR department. Because it is a centralized system and there is one structured form for all, this will lead to greater transparency across the organization...greater flexibility for management and staff. (Sarah, HR Manager)

Contrasting the previous system to IEB's new system, the difference and improvement conveyed by interviewees was palpable. They claimed the new technology has led to benefits and efficiencies, both internally and externally.

The system enables greater transparency, with customers seeing the same information on their screen as the business managers internally within the bank. (Sean, Senior Cash Manager)

The main thing is that everything is much more immediate...everything is now done in real time....The system is far superior to what we had....Another substantial benefit is the fact that we now have e-mail. With the old system, we only had internal e-mail, which was rarely used; we had no electronic access to the outside world. (Mary, Branch Manager)

Previously, the organization had a primarily paper-based system, coupled with an online system with limited functionality. In the new regime, staff operated a completely online system, managing real-time events and constructing new capabilities, services, and products for customers as a result.

There is no hiding with this system...from a customer's point of view they can customize their [service]....Essentially, it is a self-service for customers. (Joe, Business Development Manager)

The services provided with this new system were claimed to be unrivaled within the local market. Interviewees claimed the switch-over has facilitated the introduction of new financial product offerings for customers. The customers experience of IEB's systems is functionally equivalent to that of its employees; the IS constitutes a common infrastructure shared by all. Since its introduction, SB has benefitted from continued market success, with customer numbers increasing at a higher rate than competitors, increased efficiencies for staff, and prestigious award recognition for its innovations.

5 DISCUSSION

IEB's big bang event happened over a long weekend one year after the acquisition, at the same time all previously used systems were shut down and decommissioned, gone forever. But how did IEB achieve this seemingly simple outcome? Were employees simply *made* to adopt the new technology? Was it a matter of a new infrastructure being technologically superior to an outmoded one? Was user adaptation simply an individual cognitive exercise—where *use* was somehow appropriated *through use*? What can we learn from IEB's approach to handling the high risk strategy for a step transformation of its entire IS/IT infrastructure?

It is evident that the local operations of IEB underwent a radical transformation in the period subsequent to the acquisition. These transformations were associated with the swift transition from one suite of IS/IT infrastructural services to another. But a big bang approach to deployment or implementation of an IS project is conventionally regarded as bad practice (Beck 2000; Yardley 2002) and so IEB presents us with an unusual case. Their experience was successful, with minimal disruption to customer services, employee performance, corporate operations, and interbank operation. The outcome of this case is contraindicated in terms of conventional ISD theories and lends itself to trite or obvious appeals to success factors. Conventional analyses may offer nice histories, but they are often poor indicators for practice. When the case is interpreted through the lens of *xenia*, however, we are presented with a rich palette of descriptive possibilities and understanding that illuminates and informs both what happened *and* informs how actors might engage in future. We suggest that employing the lens of *xenia* to analyze what happened reveals interesting aspects that may otherwise be ignored or considered irrelevant to the origination, development, and management of infrastructural innovation. The following highlights insightful episodes before, during, and after the meeting of the host and the guest.

As described by Ciborra, a meeting between users and technology—between host and guest—can be traumatic, especially if the host's identity is threatened. The "hostility

and anxiety” (Ciborra 2002, p. 109) caused by the potential meeting with the foreign visitor (new technology) was addressed in IEB by crafting a learning infrastructure. This learning infrastructure appeared to cultivate a culture of solidarity and encourage acceptance, that is, “to extend their (staff) internal network of solidarity to include the outsider” (Ciborra 2002, p. 112) in order to stimulate positive expectations and feelings toward the guest and mitigate conflicts and frictions during the meeting itself. Different materials and resources, such as IT support data, pamphlets, and websites, were put in place to enable the staff to learn and become familiar with the new guest (i.e., the system and its functions). Incentives were also offered to encourage the host to learn more about the guest and therefore be prepared for their future meeting and cohabitation. Developing familiarity and knowledge of the Other (technology), through different learning programs, incentives, and resources, was initiated from the beginning of the project. These activities of “managing boundaries between what or who is known, and what and who is unknown” (Ciborra, 2002, p. 110) were part of the overall agenda of IEB to create and sustain hospitality and friendliness in order to enable the staff to be receptive and adopting toward the new technology as a guest.

IEB, apparently, knew that despite careful planning and design, new technology “appears to the user suddenly as an ambivalent, threatening stranger” ” (Ciborra 2002, p. 115). Developers in this particular case can be understood as *mediators*, mediating between the technology as a guest and the users and clients as hosts. As argued by Ciborra, “if the project goals, and plans, do not make sense to those called on to implement them, only perfunctory or distracted compliance will follow. This can lead to many unexpected consequences for both successful and failed innovations” (2002, p. 108). In order to overcome such potential problems, IEB put efforts into developing hospitality that would alleviate the meeting between the host and the guest. The perceptions and attitudes, associated with the previous guest, and the related institutionalized ways of acting and perceiving work practices had to be changed and new hospitable and friendly attitudes toward a new guest would have to be nurtured. Efforts in this direction were put in place in the local offices immediately upon acquisition by IEB.

IEB brought in experts who were already familiar with the system from its other international branches in order to increase workers’ familiarity with the new technology and inculcate a proper habitus of the organization (Bourdieu 1977). These experts were boundary spanners (Levina and Vaast 2005) who were supposed to bridge the knowledge (cultural) gap between the host and the guest. They were familiar with the guest, his habits and ways of action, and although their own knowledge of the system/guest was situated and bound to their own contexts, they were still able to cross the socio-technical boundaries and facilitate a process of developing familiarity and hospitality where “hospitality is about crossing a boundary and reaching out to the Other, stranger” (Ciborra 2002, p. 112). The boundary spanners were also important in sustaining the host’s confidence and trust and reducing his (organizational) anxiety at a future meeting with the ambiguous stranger. The presence of experts that had already dealt with the guest improved the emotional atmosphere in the host’s house.

The meeting, moment of truth, or catastrophe point Ciborra 2002, p. 112) took place all of a sudden, over a weekend, and climactically brought the host and the guest together. Faced with the guest (new system) at their table, staff and customers adjusted to a new way of working, a new practice and identity. These processes were shaped through hospitable exchanges, gifts (computers to keep), and commitments in the process

of serving the guest. The guest also passed through preparation for the meeting. The developers, by familiarizing with the objectives of the system and structures of the organization, “endowed (it) with affordances... that trigger a network of commitments by the host” (Ciborra 2002, p. 114). Despite the developers’ attempts to accommodate the host, the situated nature of the meeting with these affordances can become either constraints or enablers for the host. In contrast with the straightforward command and control typical for structured methodologies, the developers—being here the puppeteers of the meeting—created an open-ended process in which the host showed hospitality and “serves the guest” but the guest will also begin to “align the host to certain needs and constraints” (Ciborra 2002, p. 114). Ciborra argues for acceptance of the guest’s intrinsic ambiguity and mystery, he encourages its acceptance as a practical way of coping with technology: “To be sure, an effective host must be able to exercise various forms of care depending upon the unpredictable circumstances in the unfolding of hospitality” (Ciborra 2002, p. 115).

The aftermath of the project showed that the skillful crafting and cultivating of hospitality that served the guest, reciprocally resulted in well accepted affordances, enablers, concessions, privileges, and freedoms for the host and its identity. The process of change and adjustment always involves conflicts and friction. The interviews with staff showed that the new system drew and compelled them to use completely new ways of working but interviewees also appreciated the new system and its affordances. In Ciborra’s terms, the project was successful because the host was prepared and met the guest with trust and friendliness, coupled with “releasement of control” so that he remained the “master of the house” (2002, p. 114). In other words, the potentially hostile and ambiguous stranger had demands and requests, which were fulfilled by the host, but the guest was prepared and bought gifts that encouraged the hospitality and facilitated the initial meeting and acceptance by the host. In this case, IEB overcame the challenges of a high risk infrastructural cut-over through the practices of cultivating or nurturing hospitality, for example, by encouraging friendliness between the guest and the host, to enable the seeming inevitability of a successful result..

6 CONCLUSIONS: XENIA, A METAPHOR FOR PRACTICE

This paper aims to show how subtle and slow *reciprocal cultivation* (Ciborra 2002, p. 116) is carried out through the sharing and enriching of cultures and practices. It also reveals the messy and heterogeneous nature of the socio-technical hosting relationship and coexistence and points to aspects of technological innovation that are ignored or considered irrelevant in the structured methodologies. The emotional meeting between the fluid technology and its hosts was alleviated by a preparation that involved the creation of cultural tolerance to the Other, stimulating gradual familiarity and understanding. The meeting itself involved unexpected turns and mutual reshaping of socio-technical identities, which resulted in an amalgamated coexistence through the dynamic repertoire of practices.

The metaphor of xenia (or hospitality) shifts our conceptions to a concern for technology and users together, introducing each other, changing and accommodating each to

the other's potentials. The user (host) is here but the developer as well; the developer is both inside and outside the tent of hospitality. The developer becomes a double or triple agent, an interloper in the technological, the broker in the middle who introduces the stranger; a puppeteer behind the stranger (guest, technology) who reconfigures it on the fly. The performance is dynamic, the technology is fluid, the user may approve or be offended but the performance goes on as the guest and host explore each others' stances to find a fit. This approach implies changed technology, but also changed users; it opens the possibility of larger narratives, accounts that spotlight emotions, identities, power, interests, and action implicit in the sociality of introduction.

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