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# Cultural peer-production: A case study of the Wreckamovie community

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## **Bio**

Alongside her AHRC-funded PhD project on cultural peer-production, Isis Hjorth is working with her supervisor Dr. Eric T. Meyer on a project investigating the consequences of the uptake of collaborative digital tools on theatrical production and practices [jointly funded by NESTA, AHRC and Arts Council UK]. In 2010/11 Isis successfully applied as PI for a SLI grant from the AHRC allowing her to organise an international 2-day conference on Remix Cinema. Isis holds a BA and MA in Rhetoric from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and a MSc in Technology and Learning from Oxford University.

Dr. Eric T. Meyer is a Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute. He has led several research projects on e-Social Science, and has published extensively on scientific networks of collaboration. For ten years prior to joining OII, he was the national (USA) data manager and a researcher working within a large scientific collaboration spanning twelve universities.

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**Application to the WikiSym 2012 Doctoral Symposium**

## **Abstract**

This qualitative PhD project focuses on independent film making in the online community Wreckamovie.com. By testing theoretical propositions, this research seeks to contribute to theories on peer-production in the cultural domain.

## **Keywords**

Peer-production, independent film-making, collaborative practices, online communities

## **Introduction**

In a range of literature, the case of Wikipedia and the development of innumerable open source applications are hailed as examples manifesting the unprecedented transformative powers of networked technologies in combination with the aggregated capacities of individuals [1,5,7,8,14,16].

Such literature points to ways and domains in which the production of information and culture are being transformed alongside the uptake of social technologies and the emergence of new creative practices. Described as voluntary, decentralised and distributed organisations, peer-productions are being contrasted with formal organisations and industries, in which production modes are highly hierarchical and concerned with the creation of proprietary goods.

A growing body of scholars, however, are criticising a number of core assumptions of these accounts. Most

notably is evidence suggesting that managerial mechanisms [9], predefined goals [4] and charismatic leadership [10,11] are all essential for peer-productions to succeed. Further, it has been suggested, that peer-productions are complements to bureaucratic forms, rather than their antithesis [6], and might be seen as extensions to formal cultural industries [6,15].

More recently, we have witnessed the rise of peer-productions of films, animations, and music. These peer-productions of cultural goods differ significantly from peer-production of functional/informational goods in respect to production process, goal and outcomes [2, 11].

### **Research questions & approach**

This qualitative study takes the form of a single case with multiple embedded case studies. It seeks to contribute to a more rigorous understanding of the spectrum of peer-productions in its contemporary forms by focusing on the production of cultural artefacts. Taking a starting point in five theoretical propositions, it poses the overall research question: In independent film-making, when social technologies are used to facilitate cultural peer-production, how do the socio-technical and collaborative properties of the production influence the production process and the artefacts created?

### **Theoretical Propositions**

a) peer-productions are dependent on managerial control and leadership [cf. 4,9,10,11,12].

b) peer-productions are grounded in specific socio-technical contexts with continuously evolving user

cultures, influencing community dynamics, participation, agency and the artefacts produced [cf. 3,9,10,11,13].

c) peer-productions cannot necessarily be contrasted with traditional bureaucratic forms and structures; they might form part of or complement these [cf.6]

d) peer-productions are not non-proprietary per se, but can in seen as forming part of extended cultural industries [cf. 6,15]

e) peer-production of cultural goods differs significantly from that of functional/informational goods in respect to production process, goal and outcome [cf 11,2]

### **Research progress**

The research project is at a mature stage. I have collected most of my data, and have begun preliminary analysis. My data collection period included a seven-week field trip to Finland, where I carried out face-to-face interviews with core Wreckamovie community members.

### **What I hope to gain from WikiSym 2012**

*WikiSym* is the leading conference on open collaboration. Participating in the *WikiSym 2012* Doctoral Symposium will allow me to gain insights into the newest research on peer-production, and go get valuable feedback on the preliminary theoretical contributions I am developing. Lessons learnt through interaction with peers, and from feedback from more senior scholars at WikiSym, are anticipated to directly inform the write-up stage of my thesis.

### Acknowledgements

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