

From Modular to Distributed Architectures: Centaur and Smeci Experiments

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***From Modular to Distributed Architectures:
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PROGRAMME 2

Calcul symbolique,
programmation
et génie logiciel



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Programme 2 — Calcul symbolique, programmation et génie logiciel
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Abstract: In this report we point out the reasons that lead us to distribute modular applications, why we think that modularity is a critical step – but not a final one – in the design of distributed applications, and how we distribute. We illustrate our ideas with two experiments developed in the CROAP and SECOIA projects at INRIA***. They concern respectively CENTAUR and SMECI tools.

Key-words: Programming environments, expert systems, distributed systems, communication protocols, client-server architecture.

(Résumé : tsvp)

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Le passage d'une architecture modulaire à une architecture distribuée : exemples des systèmes Centaur et Smeci

Résumé : Dans ce rapport, nous présentons les raisons qui nous ont amené à répartir des applications modulaires existantes, pourquoi nous pensons que la modularité est une étape essentielle mais non suffisante dans la conception d'applications distribuées et nous décrivons la démarche que nous avons suivie pour réaliser cette distribution. Nous illustrons ces points par nos deux expériences qui concernent les outils CENTAUR et SMECI développés respectivement dans les projets CROAP et SECOIA.

Mots-clé : Environnements de programmation, systèmes experts, systèmes distribués, protocoles de communication, architecture client-serveur.

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1 Introduction

Distributed systems began to appear in the 1970s, following the availability of computer networks. Since, the key computer technology has been information gathering, processing, and distribution [37] [10]. The idea of distribution is relevant to many areas of computing, indeed all of them. We can find distributed database systems, distributed artificial intelligence systems, distributed software engineering tools, etc. Perhaps the most well-known distributed application in the computer world is the X window system [6].

In this report, we discuss the common concepts as well as the most striking differences between modular and distributed systems. We describe the advantages of distribution, and some reasons for choosing this approach. We also offer some guidelines for the design of such distributed applications. We illustrate each of our points with concrete examples from our design and implementation experience with the distribution of two applications, a programming environment generated by the CENTAUR system [4] [18] and the SMECI expert system shell [19].

2 Description of used tools

In addition to SMECI and CENTAUR, which will be described in detail in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2, we work on SUN workstations under the UNIX operating system and an X Window environment. So we are concerned with neither parallel languages nor parallel machines.

2.1 Smeci Experiment

SMECI is an expert system shell used for design and planning, which is considered as a multiformalism environment for developing knowledge based applications. It groups several concepts, namely, frames, inference rules, tasks and states. It has been chosen as an example for distributing an expert system shell.

The frame language is needed to structure knowledge, the rule language infers new facts in the knowledge base. The task-oriented programming allows the decomposition of one problem into several sub-problems, and consequently