What Can A *Nános* Do? Viewing *AND* Recommending *AND* ...

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ABSTRACT

This position paper presents a reflection based on a philosophically-informed research project on creative hubs. As a co-located space for different elements such as human (e.g., startup founders, hub management, mentors/investors and other tenants), activities (e.g., mentoring meetings, networking events and informal talks) and infrastructure (e.g., physical facilities, digital infrastructure and layout), a creative hub represents a collectivity. Accordingly, using Assemblage [6] as an analytical lens seems reasonable. However, instead of only describing the interrelations that corresponds to the collectivity, Assemblage brings us to fundamentally think *virtually* on these creative hubs. Consequently, this research project then literally stands in the in-between (of *virtual* and actual practice, and of humanities and HCI research). Through this project, we reflect the intersection of Assemblage and HCI in terms of viewing or understanding and design recommendation or strategies. Still, a question remains: What can an assemblage-informed research project do further than these two?

KEYWORDS

assemblage, creative hub, HCI, design strategies and recommendation, analytical framework

INTRODUCTION

The title above represents a reflection of a philosophically-informed research project on understanding creative hubs. Firstly, what can a *nános* do? is a paraphrased Spinozist question regarding a body: "what can a body do?" [4] [7][5][1]. Drawing from these works, a body can be anything such as a physical body, a biological body, a social body, and a linguistic corpus; in this case, it refers to a research project that employs a philosophical concept (i.e., Assemblage) to understand interactions in creative hubs. Secondly, a *nános* is a Greek word that means dwarf, in which it appears in the phrase: 'like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants'. Next, viewing and recommending arose from this project when applying assemblage as the analytical lens for the empirical findings (we explain these two in the sections below: The Project and Reflection). Lastly, the use of the term "*AND*" and the "..." in the title represents how an assemblage works like a rhizome that it keeps making connections across boundaries and can open for new potentiality [6].

THE PROJECT: UNDERSTANDING CREATIVE HUBS

We define a creative hub as a co-located and digitally-mediated space in which startup companies come together to interact with a network of other startups, hub managers, venture capitalists, trainers and mentors, hub facilities, activities, and events etc [9]. A creative hub can take a form as, e.g., an incubator, an accelerator, a co-working space, an innovation space, a workshop or a creative center, and a virtual hub. In terms of the purpose, this project aims to understand how the assemblage works to define the interaction of heterogeneous elements (or bodies) in creative hubs in order to provide support for its members.

Assemblage

We clarify first the term *"Assemblage"*. It comes from the French word, *"agencement"*, as it appears in the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and some works with Félix Guattari. As translated, assemblage is better understood as arrangement, as in a "working arrangement", in order to give a sense of processual and contingency rather than a static situation [2]. Moreover, in applying this concept as an analytical tool, an assemblage is "a virtual entity with actual effects" [3].

In analyzing the findings, we use the form of expression and form of content, and both forms are in a state of reciprocal presupposition [6]. As Ian Buchanan writes, "in practice, the assemblage is the productive intersection of a form of content (actions, bodies and things) and a form of expression (affects, words, ideas)" [2]. Both co-exist in "reciprocal presupposition" [6][7][2][3]. The form of content is reducible not to a thing, but to a complex state of things, bodies, and action, while the form of expression is reducible not to words, but to a set of statements, discourses, and ideas arising in the

Regarding the previous studies in HCI that have employed assemblage, there are works such as assemblage and affect in improvisional didigtal music making [12], sociotechnical assemblage [11], sociomaterial assemblage [10], and big data as a data assemblage [8] that contribute to HCI discourses.

Thematic findings "*more than just space*"[9]:

- Working in Small Teams was a Necessity, but also Valuable
- Neutrality of Hubs was Important, and Enforced through their Funding Model
- Value of Infrastructure in Supporting Relational Aspects
- Activities and Events Brought and Catalyzed Effective Collaboration
- Experience Sharing Related more to Business, than Technical Knowledge
- Community Values are Important and May Need to be Enforced to Preserve a Supportive Atmosphere

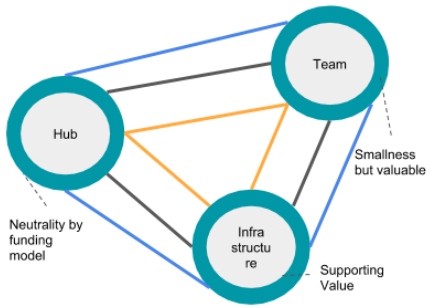

Figure 1: Relational Aspects

Three lines above represent:

— Activities and Events

— Experience Sharing

— Community Values

social field [6]. Therefore, two assemblages exist where one organizes relations of the content plane and another one organizes the expression plane.

Field Studies on Creative Hubs

We applied multi-method in each field study: (i) interview and observation of the creative hubs in the UK, (ii) ethnography in an intensive hub in Jakarta, Indonesia, and (iii) website categorization and interview on the recruited global virtual hubs. We then built a set of thematic findings/patterns for each study.

In this position paper, we use the first study to illustrate our points. The first study is about understanding relational aspects from the three creative hubs. As an assemblage-informed research project, we frame those aspects as the in-between aspects. Through the empirical work, we formulated six key terms: working in a small team, neutrality of hub, value of infrastructure, activities and events, experience sharing, and community values. The way we construct the themes as relational aspects is influenced by Assemblage (*see margin text*). We define those themes in such a way so that they are interrelated, having a processual meaning, having an in-action context, and more importantly, we position them as "conditions" [3] for the interactions in the creative hubs.

REFLECTION: WHAT CAN A *NÁNOS* DO?

A field study above portrays the viewing 'role' assemblage can play. Assemblage enables to view the *in-between*-ness of the relational aspects (Figure 1). It allows us to view the findings in a *virtual* lens, which means the 'nodes' and the 'lines' are the bodies, and the relational aspects are the 'conditions' that bring all of the bodies/elements together. This perspective, we argue, looks closer to the humanities concern, such as the post-human approach, but this does not mean it has nothing to do with the HCI analysis. On the other hand, the implications of this viewing looks closer to the HCI side—implications come out after our assemblage analysis.

In our work, the recommending role is seen in the two strategies for design [9]. One strategy to employing these findings in the design of a virtual hub might be to provide virtual tools that seek to functionally replicate aspects of these elements and activities as they were observed. For instance, identifying the forms of content and expression that make an aspect of a co-located hub function the way it does, and remaining reflective of the reciprocal relationship between them, could help sensitize a designer to how that aspect may, or may not, translate in a particular virtual hub technology or configuration. Second, an alternative, or complementary, strategy to design in this context may be to not directly target the functional elements of existing creative hubs as the core focus of attention. Instead of seeking to replace existing online collaboration tools with new systems, designers might instead analyze the qualities that arise from their assemblage and, where those qualities diverge from

those observed to be beneficial in co-located hubs, conduct targeted design interventions that aim to reconfigure these relations.

Finally, as we indicate in the title, this assemblage-informed project is just an example of what can a researcher do with a philosophical concept. We believe by participating in this workshop, we can productively engage to explore further the intersection of Assemblage and HCI.

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