Transnational HCI: Humans, Computers & Interactions in Global Contexts

Janet Vertesi

Society of Fellows/

Sociology Department

Princeton University

104A Scheide Caldwell House

Princeton, NJ 08544 USA

jvertesi at princeton dot edu.

Silvia Lindtner

Donald Bren School of Information

and Computer Sciences

University of California, Irvine

Irvine, CA 92697-3440 USA

lindtner at ics dot uci dot edu

Irina Shklovski

Design, Culture, Mobility &

Communication Research Group

IT University of Copenhagen

Rued Langgaards Vej 7

2300 Copenhagen S. Denmark

irsh at itu dot dk

Abstract

This workshop will consider the implications for conducting research and technology design within and across global and networked sites of technology production and use. In particular, we focus on transnational practices: that is, seeing technology use beyond a single country or culture, but as evolving in relation to global processes, boundary crossings, frictions and hybrid practices. In doing so, we expand upon existing research in HCI to consider the effects, implications for individuals and communities, and design opportunities in times of increased transnational interactions. We hope to broaden the conversation around the impact of technology in global processes by bringing together scholars from HCI and from related humanities, media arts and social sciences disciplines.

Keywords

Transnational; Design; HCI4D; ICT4D; mobility; cross-cultural communication; global; local

ACM Classification Keywords

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation: Miscellaneous.

Introduction

Recent scholarship in HCI has turned to examining computing in non-Western contexts under the framework of ICT4D and cross-cultural collaboration [*e.g.* 5, 11,12,15,21], Over the years, a growing number of interdisciplinary researchers have recognized that the appropriation of technology in such contexts is not defined by a single location, culture, or geographical frame such as the nation state [3,4,8,9,17,20]. In their use of mobile technologies, online game servers, video calls, or social networking platforms, users are intimately tied to people and machines in other countries, cultures and networks. Such forms of human-computer interaction require us to consider technology not only in a national context, but in a *transnational* context.

Why Transnational HCI?

In proposing a *transnational* approach to HCI, we draw upon recent scholarship in anthropology which examines the networks of goods and people, cross-cultural collaborations, the interplay between the global and the local, and political or socioeconomic relationships that move across national boundaries, [*e.g.* 2,10,13,14,19]. Research on global IT such as [4] largely focuses on macro-level changes like the formation of global markets, international organizations and trading agreements. In contrast, transnational studies highlight how a range of people, *e.g.* migrants, IT and knowledge workers and cosmopolitan jet-setters shape and are being influenced by these changes. These works point to ways in which borders are transgressed, but also how power relations lead to inequalities and frictions [2,13]. This understanding challenges research trajectories that assume a strong divide between global and local taxonomic models of cultural communication styles, or define cultural appropriation of technology in relation to geographically bounded spaces like the nation state. Recent work in HCI has followed suit, examining the connections between local technical practices and value systems developing generative models of cultural difference, and describing how national identity is enacted across multiple digital and geographical sites, and new forms of mobility [*e.g.* 3,8,9,11,17,20]. As such, this workshop extends and deepens an existing conversation within the CHI community [*e.g.* 1,18].

Critical Questions

The activities in this workshop will convene around the following questions.

Where is "the local"?

Prior research has shown that space and place are not just material and technological creations, but are socially and culturally produced [6]. As cell phones replace landlines and computing servers create clouds across state lines, the dichotomy between local and global spaces and places must be negotiated in practice. How does technology design and use construct, reproduce, or enforce notions of global connectedness or local community? What practices and networks must we take into account when designing for these social, cultural and technological interactions?

HCI at the borders

Transnational studies often draw attention to boundary-crossings of people, technologies and information. At the same time, a transnational lens also shows that transgressions can be obstructed, not only technologically but also socially or politically. For example, technology workers are often subject to

international and national regulations, such as visas and licenses that control information access and work activities. Regulations and policies shape not only the activities of people but also technological infrastructures. What dynamics of power shape the kinds of borders that can be crossed? What information can be accessed, where, by whom and in what capacity? What implications do these issues have for user studies, technology adoption and innovation?

Spatial and Temporal Mobility and Reach
Online environments can be persistent or ephemeral, depending on how they are interpreted and used [7]. In the face of transnational mobility and rapid urban change, digital technologies can become resources not only for building connections, but also for recovering traces of history and reliving memories. What role do technologies play for people who hold multiple roles and act across places? How do users move across a multitude of sites, digital and physical? What ways of remembering might accompany such movements?

The role of the designer/researcher
The complexity of research in transnational spaces brings up important questions for the HCI designer and researcher who may be accustomed to bounded domains of inquiry and intervention. What methods can we use to manage research and design in complex and sensitive locales? How can we responsibly design for users and communities that span across and negotiate borders? How do we take into account international implications for adoption of our artifacts and findings?

Workshop Goals
We aim to bring together scholars across HCI and related fields to develop shared understandings,

questions and research agendas for the exploration of *transnational* technical practices, with implications for a wide array of CHI subfields. This workshop will foster a space for such interdisciplinary conversation within the rubric of CHI. We aim to develop implications for research, methods, design, development and implementation of technologies in multi-national contexts. Finally, we will present contributions and results of our workshop as original papers in a special issue of a journal in the domain of HCI.

The proposed focus on *transnational* practices in HCI reveals commonalities across different areas of research. Studies of games, collaborative work practices, mobile phones, and social networks are rarely placed in the same panel or paper session at a CHI conference. Yet researchers in each of these areas (and many more) are confronted with the challenges of incorporating transnational processes into analyzing their sites of inquiry and intervention. This workshop will bring these disparate HCI research areas into conversation with an eye to contributing to each domain – through the lens of transnationalism.

This workshop, further, aims to engage technology designers and developers working in non-Western contexts. We also hope to broaden the scope of CHI research on culture and cross-cultural interaction by bringing into the fold researchers and theorists engaged with these critical questions who might otherwise not consider themselves as working within HCI: such as anthropology, media studies, sociology, science and technology studies and social geography. We believe that their work, as well as that of the CHI community, will be greatly enriched by this exchange.

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