

# Persistent Conversation: A Dialog Between Research and Design

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## 1. Introduction

Persistent conversation is human-to-human interaction that is carried out over computer networks; it is produced by typing, speaking or other means, and, unlike face-to-face conversation, it leaves a trace -- in the form of text on a computer screen, sound files, etc, -- that persists for varying amounts of time. Examples of persistent conversation include interactions carried out using email, mailing lists, news groups, bulletin board systems, textual and graphic MUDs, chat clients, structured conversation systems, and document annotation systems.

Persistent conversation differs from spoken conversation in interesting ways. For example, because it leaves a perceptible trace, persistent conversation can occur asynchronously with lags of minutes to months between conversational turns, as happens in e-mail. Alternatively, the turns of persistent conversation can overlap, with many participants effectively 'speaking' at once, as often happens in on-line chats. Freeing conversation from the lock-step synchrony of face-to-face talk has major implications both for the ways in which people and groups turn persistent conversation to their own ends, and for the design of systems which support conversation.

Relaxation of synchrony is just one of the characteristics that distinguish persistent conversation from its spoken counterpart. Other characteristics include textual and graphic compensation for the loss of social cues present in face-to-face conversation; the possibility of very-large-scale conversations with hundreds or thousands of participants; and the social and ethical consequences (in terms of responsibility, accountability and liability) of the creation of potentially permanent records of what used to be an ephemeral process.

The particular aim of the minitrack, and of its associated workshop, is to bring together researchers who analyze existing computer-mediated conversational practices and sites, with designers who propose, implement, or deploy new types of conversational systems. By bringing together participants from such diverse areas as anthropology, computer-mediated communication, HCI, interaction design, linguistics, psychology, rhetoric, sociology, and the like, we hope that the work of each may inform the others, suggesting new questions, methods, perspectives, and design approaches.

## 2. Papers

This is the third annual minitrack on Persistent Conversation at HICSS. We received a wide variety of interesting papers for the two previous years (see [1] for the first set of papers), and this year continues the trend. This year's papers examine conversation domains ranging from stock market manipulation to verification of compliance with the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and look at systems ranging from email and IRC to audio 'documents' and 3D Virtual Environments.

This year's papers:

- Radicals of Presentation in Persistent Conversation, by A. Bregman and C. Haythornthwaite
- Backchannel: Whispering in Digital Conversation, by S. Cogdill, T. Fanderclai, J. Kilborn, and M. Williams
- System Features of an Inhabited 3D Virtual Environment Supporting Multimodality in Communication, by I. Naper
- Profiling Turns in Interaction: Discourse Structure and Function, by S. Condon and C. Cech
- 'Making Conversation': Sequential integrity and the Local Management of Interaction on Internet Newsgroups, by D. Reed
- In and Out Scream and Shout: An Internet Conversation about Stock Price Manipulation, by J. Campbell
- Supporting Verification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty through a Persistent Conversation Interface, by S. Guerlain, D. Brown, J. Green, B. Hashemi, R. Rauschenberg, C. Stacy, R. Mason<sup>2</sup>, and J. Bohlin<sup>2</sup>
- Spaces, Traces and Networked Design, by M. Perry, R. Fruchter, and G. Spinelli
- Conference Scribe: Turning Conference Calls into Documents, by P. Wellner, D. Weimer and B. Arons

## 3. References

- [1] Persistent Conversation. Special Issue of the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, Vol. 4, No. 4, June 1999. <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue4/>