

## Persistent Conversation: A Dialog Between Research and Design

Thomas Erickson  
*Social Computing Group*  
*IBM T.J. Watson Research Center*  
*snowfall@acm.org*

Susan Herring  
*School of Library and Information Science*  
*Indiana University*  
*herring@indiana.edu*

### 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 chat, IM, texting, MUDs, email, mailing lists, news groups, web boards, blogs, 3-D VR, and other digital media.

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 this 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 fifth minitrack on Persistent Conversation at HICSS. We received a wide variety of interesting papers for the four previous minitracks (see [1] for the first year's set of papers), and this year continues the trend. This year's papers analyze conversations in media ranging from instant messaging to document annotation systems. They address the design issues raised by familiar applications, as well as proposing novel designs for visualizing individuals and 'crowds' in newsgroups.

This year's papers are:

- Newsgroup Crowds and AuthorLines: Visualizing the Activity of Individuals in Conversational Cyberspaces, by Viégas and Smith.\*
- Wallop: Designing Social Software for Co-located Social Networks, by Farnham, Kelly, Portnoy and Schwartz.
- Digital Artifacts for Remembering and Storytelling: PostHistory and Social Network Fragments, by Viégas, boyd, Nguyen, Potter and Donath.
- The Value of Persistence: A Study of the Creation, Ordering and Use of Conversation Archives by a Knowledge Worker, by Halverson.
- Temporal Properties of Turn-Taking and Turn-Packaging in Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication, by Cech and Condon.
- Speech Act Profiling: A Probabilistic Method for Analyzing Persistent Conversations and Their Participants, by Twitchell and Nunamaker.
- Designing for Deep Conversation in a Scenarios-based Learning Environment, by Siegel, Ellis and Lewis.
- Coherence and Interactivity in Text-based Group Discussions around Web Documents, by Eklundh and Rodriguez

### 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/>

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\* Nominated for best paper award.