

Persistent Conversation: A Dialog Between Research and Design

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Persistent conversation is human-to-human interaction carried out over computer networks; it is produced by typing, speaking or other means. Unlike face-to-face conversation, however, 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, news groups, web boards, blogs, wikis, 3-D virtual environments, 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 online 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 that support conversation.

Relaxation of synchrony is only 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.

This is the sixth minitrack on Persistent Conversation at HICSS (see www.pliant.org/personal/Tom_Erickson/HICSS_PC_History.html for a complete list of downloadable papers for each year). We received a wide variety of interesting papers for the five previous minitracks, and this year continues the trend. This year's papers analyze conversations in media ranging from chat to web logs. They address the design issues raised by familiar applications, as well as proposing exploring the use of social network visualizations for the analysis and navigation of persistent conversations.

This year's papers are:

- *Beyond Personal Webpublishing: An Exploratory Study of Conversational Blogging Practices*, by Lilia Efimova and Aldo de Moor
- *Conversations in the Blogosphere: A Social Network Analysis "from the Bottom Up"*, by Susan C. Herring, Inna Kouper, John C. Paolillo, Lois Ann Scheidt, Michael Tyworth, Peter Welsch, Elijah Wright and Ning Yu
- *NusEye: Visualizing Network Structure to Support Navigation of Aggregated Content*, by Brian M. Dennis and Azzari Callier Jarrett
- *Leading Conversations: Communication Behaviours of Emergent Leaders in Virtual Teams*, by Fay Sudweeks and Simeon J. Simoff
- *Email Chronemics: Unobtrusive Profiling of Response Times*, Yoram M. Kalman and Sheizaf Rafaeli
- *Cohesion and Reference in English Chatroom Discourse*, Carlos M. Nash
- *Augmenting Online Conversation through Automated Discourse Tagging*, by Hannes Vilhjalmsson
- *Digital Photos as Conversational Anchors*, by Ryan Sit and James D. Hollan