It is not disclosed in the text when this paper was written, but otherwise my suspicions that this happened in the area of 1998-9 were confirmed when Karrie disclosed its vintage in class. The idea of conversation visualization has been limited in my experience to lines of text and sometimes sprinkled with cute pictures of avatars when I choose to have them displayed, and this is 2009. For something created in 1999, Chat Circles was truly something resembling a breakthrough in social computing when popular chat interfaces included the Palace. What resonates, however is its metaphor in simulating conversations in large areas containing other people who you are not interacting with.

The simplest analogy to Chat Circles is a party wherein you are speaking to a finite group of people proximal to you, are fully aware of their conversation, and can glean the overall feeling of the conversations going on around you but not the meaning or specifics details. In real life (IRL), we are conscious of those around us who are speaking and their rhythms and are especially attuned to both noise and quiet - where normal conversation is expected, those who dominate or those who attend to conversations without adding their own say is made sonically apparent, and this is represented proportionally through the interface's geometric approximations. Though not salient in a manner that reveals something remarkable and not understood through presence, Chat Circles translates this feature of IRL communication from electronic communication.

My question, however, lay in the choice of this design - was this considered in the development process? Was Chat Circles intended as an ersatz simulation of this social cue? Or was it meant to reveal something completely different and unique to online communication and only interpreted as such in order to make the metaphor more understandable? In my understanding, the technology of electronic communication has moved towards near-complete simulation of IRL communication with full audio and video channels being transmitted between communicants. What textual online communication actually reveals is something completely opposite in that we can transmit meaning that can simulate speech or the writing of notes, but only faster, necessitating a whole new vocabulary of accelerated "speech" that in turn enters our verbal vernacular (ex: I say "LOL" instead of laughing). Eventually our language will be dominated by these memetics, and a generation of people will be fighting against the same kinds of cultural shifts they themselves advocated for in their youth.
What my interpretation would reveal is something in this vein - the inability to understand the intent of the application (I needed to reread it a few times) and the coping mechanism to overcome it. In novel forms of communications such as Chat Circles, it is easier to extend an existing schema to understand it than creating a new one. Perhaps the failing of Chat Circles or any underappreciated communication system is the frustration involved in learning its mores and thus appreciating its intended function.

*Managing the Virtual Commons: Cooperation and Conflict in Computer Communities* - Kollock and Smith

What's running through my head when reading this article (and I'm about two-thirds through currently) is my idea of a "virtual economy of information" within the virtual commons. What is advocated as prime use of the virtual commons is the equal collection and imparting of information based on an understanding of common good, a sort of online agrarian commune. As an information libertarian, I would be wary of any enforced electronic Marxism (one reads and creates threads according to need; and responds to threads according to ability) because of its encroachment on my rational self-interest. If I so desire to read or create threads, I will do so without consideration to the frequency my of posting in response to threads. In this described marketplace of ideas, information is exchanged in equal proportion, almost like in a barter economy.

The analogy begins to break down before I even get to mention anarcho-capitalism - this is because information is (or should be) free and infinite; only that which is finite and scarce need be economized. There is no "free rider" problem if one considers that common goods such as information are, by lack of substance, infinite. Unfortunately, there is some truth to the article's application of social dilemmas to online communities. (As an extension to sociopsychological concepts, I will make reference to the bystander effect: In as large of fora as those found in Usenet, the unaddressed thread written by the hapless newbie will die and be pushed out for those threads that are frequented by more reputable users. In other words, there is a diffusion of responsibility among informed users in aiding those who need to "lurk more.")

If a newsgroup is to flourish, it needs diverse membership and rules. A newsgroup with little members would simply be a glorified chatroom or die from lack of interest. For example, I participate vicariously in a thread consisting almost exclusively of a few people I know from high school that
had been hijacked from its original owners - it can be described as anything besides interesting or other than a posting of minutia that only we would be interested in - an information cartel that is the opposite of flourishing. A group needs rules for the reasons identified in the paper but those can be readily circumvented. For that reason, the spirit of a common good instilled in its users is imperative for the virtual commons.