Social translucence

A question that stuck in my mind until the conclusion of the article was, “What if people wanted privacy over visibility, and that’s why they’re interacting online in the first place?” What I failed to consider was that the focus of the analysis may have been solely on groups whose online interactions were limited by the medium of communication and not intentionally by the participants. All of the example interfaces and proxies including Babble were meant for meetings which have physical counterparts but lose social cues when formed online.

Still, I think a better example could have been used in place of waiting in line. I would much rather wait in a virtual line than a physical one because of the advantage of not losing my place if I wanted to do something else while waiting. A better system to compare the proxy against might have been a ticket system where, instead of simply standing in at the end of a line, people draw numbered tickets and are served in the order directed by the tickets.

It would be interesting to see various implementations of these social proxies run simultaneously. Some could allow users to opt out of the visualization in order to preserve privacy. Doing something like that may be able to tell whether the visible social cues are really necessary for a more successful online exchange (no matter if that exchange is of words, goods, money, or something else).
Supporting community and building social capital

I believe humans are intelligent enough to be able to do things like interpret context, emotion, and sarcasm in text-based conversation and as such should not be regarded as “socially blind” in the digital world. While we may not be able to view the same social cues and are thus crippled in some way when communicating via online interactions, it is often a more convenient and quicker way to connect people and certainly offers its own set of advantages. There are different clues people give which may signal the same things, though: for example, silence may mean somebody is ignoring someone else. Since the paper is on social translucence in interfaces where people deliberately choose information over privacy, that is all I’ll remark upon the decision to use this type of communication medium (digital) for this purpose (full social awareness).

This paper is smart in acknowledging the aspect of privacy affecting how people behave. The studies seem to be not as ambitious as other ones in which projects aim to be completely transparent and end up failing. Translucence maintains the level of privacy that users may want while allowing them access to the missing important social cues they’re looking for. Again, I think this attribute of a communication protocol/program is situational and is not of high importance to anyone content with using probably-more-advanced systems of today (and, once again, I don’t know the exact date of this paper so I can’t say much else in that regard).

Overall, reading this felt like going through a verbose version of the previous reading. I think some segments were even identical. The door metaphor proved appropriate and very helpful in both papers, and it’s probably the best example to think of when attempting to come up with effective social cues and signals. We really do need more windows rather than walls.