This paper describes different social-interaction applications which are designed to display more social cues to users. The authors briefly describe some inherent differences between online and real-world social interactions. In real-world interactions, people pick-up on implicit social cues. Body language and relative physical closeness in a conversation are two examples of these social cues. People are cognizant of their surroundings, and the positioning of those around them. The applications presented in this paper are designed to convey the personal surroundings of a given social context. The applications presented are used for simple group chat rooms, lectures, line queuing, and auctions.

The Babble program provides a good layout for chats involving a small group of people. It provides a simple way of telling who has been recently active in the chat room. I am not sure why it lists the logged off users in the right screen pane though. This seems like a waste of space and does not provide much information. The pane has so many users, that what little useful information it provides is buried in a haystack.

I am not sure that Babble is a very scalable solution. It provides a unique color for each user in the chat room. With only 4 users, this looks fine. I wonder how this would look with more than 10 users. It may be difficult to near impossible to know which circle indicates which user. Also, the small diagram may become crowded and ineffective.

I do not like the lecture visualization. I think it does not have a real use. Lectures are not really presented telecast with an interactive computer audience. There are lectures in person, where students fill an auditorium, and prerecorded lectures where students download a video. I have not seen interactive online course offerings. Furthermore, what limited use the visualization could have, I think it might have a deleterious effect. If a system is designed where students login to a live broadcast and have the ability to talk (or type) statements during class, then there is a specific reason for these “interruptions.” If a student is then pushed “out of line” for asking questions or making statements, then they will be less likely to do that. Getting students to participate in class is hard enough as it is without making them publically notorious.

The auctioning system would actually be quite interesting to watch for eBay bids. I am not sure it would have much influence on bidding patterns, but it would be nice to know how many people are competing on a certain item. It would also be interesting to add chatting capabilities to it. Imagine if one person starts begging others to stop bidding. It could have interesting effects on bidding outcomes.

The line queuing visualization has limited use online. Most sites do not have wait times for buying products. I have noticed a few online help chats for troubleshooting products. I think this visualization would be excellent for these help chats. The few times I have used them, I always have no clue how long it will be until they have someone help me with my problem.
This paper is a more abstract and higher-level account of the previous paper. It focuses more on the theory behind digital and non-digital social interactions than the previous paper. The authors elaborate more on the use of physical space in social contexts. The physical boundaries and surroundings of a social gathering have an impact on how people behave. They may speak louder or softer depending on the ambient noise levels. If their actions are being observed by many individuals, then they may adjust their behavior appropriately. There are also social cues that people pick-up on about the people around them. They can see if the people around them are bored, interested, or anxious. The cues of surrounding people further influence the behavior of an individual. Digital social spaces do not adequately provide any of the above social cues and thus pale in comparison to face-to-face interactions.

Face-to-face conversations have several advantages and differences than digital conversations. Real life conversations allow facial expressions, are more open to rephrasing or clarifying statements, there can be a tone in a person’s voice, and the conversation is not persistent. When a person finishes talking, people cannot later hear what they said, unless the conversation is being recorded. There are three ways of presenting social cues in this paper. The abstract method is most described in the paper. I believe that a fusion of the mimetic and abstract methods could provide a more sound and expressive social environment. Mimetic cues are used all the time in the form of emotes and back-channel expressions. I think adding more support for these cues along with an abstract representation of a conversation could provide a very expressive environment. I agree that teleconferencing is still a ways out in terms of technology.

Babble is presented again in this paper. It is a good first step toward extending social context to digital mediums. It does not do enough to immerse people in their digital environment. There needs to be more features to imitate real life conversations and social interactions. Face-to-face conversations are still much more expressive and preferred at conveying information. In terms of the post-talk visualizations, I preferred the ticker tape timeline over the “contrails”. The contrail timeline did not express as much information, and was not as intuitive as the ticker tape timeline. The contrails were ambiguous and could be interpreted as acting in reverse. The circles could either flow from where they pictured toward the faded circles or vice-versa. I felt the ticker tape timeline instantly and easily showed who was contributing to a conversation, and when.

I believe there is a flaw in the discussion of social awareness and accountability. They claimed this helped regulate people’s actions. I believe Wikipedia has shown that this is only true when users care about reputation. In Wikipedia, there are vandals who destroy information, even while knowing that their actions are open and notorious. Social awareness does not appear to play as big a role in the digital world as it does in the real world.