Fostering Historical Research in CSCW & HCI

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Abstract
This day-long workshop aims to support and grow the community of CSCW and HCI scholars that investigate the past to inform the design, critique and conceptualization of technology. At this workshop, we will learn from examples of historically-based CSCW and HCI work, explore issues in historical method that come up in such work, share methods and techniques, provide feedback and support to ongoing investigations; and define a shared agenda for future research on this topic. The workshop will also highlight research and methods that focus on non-Western contexts and that give voice to historically marginalized groups. Based on the workshop, we will develop a white paper and a website that will collect resources to support CSCW based historical investigations.

Author Keywords
History, Methods, Humanities

ACM Classification Keywords
CCS → Human-centered computing → Collaborative and social computing → Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms

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Workshop Theme

This workshop will contribute to the development of a under-utilized source of inspiration for CSCW and HCI research and design practice: history and historiography of technology. The design and evaluation of technology, as practiced in CSCW and HCI, tends to focus on the immediate present and near future. Our field's emphasis on the design of new technology, experimenting with emerging tools, and the development of critical speculations about the future, has positioned us as a largely forward-looking community. A focus on the present and future of technology is crucial for CSCW and HCI, but the lack of historical view threatens to leave out a wealth of resources that can inspire design, provide exemplars for comparative analysis, and help develop a deeper understanding of technology development. This workshop will convene researchers from the growing number of CSCW scholars that have sought to investigate the past to advance technology research, articulate and develop theory and method for incorporating historical investigations in CSCW, and set an agenda for future historically informed work in CSCW and HCI.

Historical research is positioned to contribute to our field in a number of ways. First, and most fundamentally, it can provide in-depth understanding of contemporary socio-technical systems through knowledge of how things came to be as they are. In doing so, this work can demonstrate that the current form of these systems is not inevitable, but the result of historically situated, contingent events and processes. Working from classic work in the history of science [e.g. [20]], we will also discuss what we stand to gain in our understanding of technoscientific knowledge production in CSCW when we take seriously historical actors' epistemologies. This may in turn also surface alternative, or forgotten, design pathways. Such 'paths not taken' can expand our sources of design inspiration and increase our capability for critique and reflection. This in turn provides insights into the values and politics of contemporary technology design, and thus offers opportunities for CSCW research and practice to more conscientiously engage with the social and political consequences of our work.

This workshop will build upon significant prior work, including past calls for an increased development of historical methods in CSCW and HCI [[6],[9],[26]], critical evaluations of technology based on their historical evolution [[2],[7],[13],[17],[18]], design methods that leverage historical understanding [[5],[8],[16],[26]], and to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past [[1],[3],[12]]. In addition, important work has been done to trace the trajectory of CSCW and HCI [[10],[11],[21]] or particular methods or subareas of these fields [[4],[15],[19],[22],[23], [25]]. Finally, several recent papers have raised the question of how CSCW and HCI tools and techniques can themselves serve to support the doing of historical research [[14],[24]].

This workshop will help support the incorporation of historical method and insight in CSCW and HCI by convening researchers who are currently working, or seek to begin working, with historical topics and methods. Over the course of the day, organizers will foster discussions that articulate the various ways in which CSCW can productively connect with history. Participants will also share resources, guidance, and tricks of the trade around relevant research methods in history and science and technology studies. Following the workshop we aim to produce materials (web resources, educational tools, short articles, or a publication) to highlight key insights from the discussion and share them with a wider audience. In particular, this workshop will seek to accomplish these goals by convening researchers to engage with the following questions:

- How can historicizing CSCW and HCI research support design, evaluation, and critique of technology? What are the points of connection between the discipline of history and CSCW research and practice?
- What constitutes valid historiography in this context? What should we be thinking about if we want to incorporate this suite of methods into CSCW's research toolbox? What do we need to learn from historians if we want to approach this kind of work in a rigorous fashion?

- Where and how are CSCW and HCI researchers already doing this kind of work, even if not described as such?
- What can we gain from historicizing the science of CSCW/HCI itself, such as shifting objects of study, changing disciplinary participation, models of sociality & cognition, funding sources, etc?
- Whose history, and by whom? This question opens avenues for discussing power, representation, inclusion, and the values of historical research itself.
- What institutional challenges do participants envision, or have encountered, for doing rigorous historical work in CSCW? These might include challenges in teaching/learning historical methods, developing collaborations with historians, working around different publishing conventions in CSCW vs history, and broader disciplinary differences in computer and information sciences versus history.

Organizers

Robert Soden is a Postdoctoral Research Scientist in Computer Science at Columbia University working in the areas of crisis informatics, human-centered computing (HCC), and science and technology studies (STS). His research examines the ways that the technologies that inform our understanding of environmental challenges shape societal responses to disasters and climate change

David Ribes is associate professor in the Department of Human Centered Design and Engineering (HCDE) and director of the Data Ecologies Lab (deLAB) at the University of Washington. He is a sociologist of science and technology who focuses on the development and sustainability of research infrastructures (i.e., networked information technologies for the support of interdisciplinary science); their relation to long-term changes in the conduct of science; and, historical transformations in objects of research.

Maggie Jack is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Information Science at Cornell University where she researches the creative use of digital tools in post-colonial and post-conflict settings. Her dissertation, *Infrastructural Restitution: The Action, Form, and Geopolitics of Cambodian Postwar Media Reconstruction*, charts the critical role of media and its technologies in the historical political landscape of Cambodia and in commemoration and healing from the trauma of its conflicts in contemporary Cambodia.

Will Sutherland is a doctoral student in the Department of Human Centered Design and Engineering (HCDE) at the University of Washington. He uses historical and ethnographic methods to investigate infrastructure in collaborative science, particularly the development and maintenance of software tools and the broader emergence of computational methods.

Vera Khovanskaya is a graduate student in the Department of Information Science at Cornell University. Vera studies how social implications are built into technology through technical decision-making, and develops methods to identify and alter underlying values in technology through critical technical practice.

Seyram Avle is Assistant Professor of Global Digital Media at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she studies the situated practices and discourses of digital technology culture and innovation in the global south. This includes examining the various ways that digital technologies are designed, produced, used, and distributed transnationally in the global south, and taking a critical approach towards unpacking the socio-economic and political implications of changing techno-cultures.

Participation

To apply, please send a 4-page position paper to cscwhistory@gmail.com before September 21st 2019. Position papers should be the ACM Extended Abstract format and take one of the following forms: 1) description of an ongoing historical research project which seeks to make contributions to CSCW and/or HCI; 2) engagement with questions of how one or more historical methods can be carried out in our field, including discussion of validity and evaluation of historical research; 3) discussion of specific contributions that historical research can make to CSCW and HCI.

The workshop will take place as part of the 22nd ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing in Austin, Texas during November 2019. More information about this workshop can be found at: https://cscwhistory.wordpress.com.

Please email any questions to: cscwhistory@gmail.com.

Phoebe Sengers is an Associate Professor in Information Science and Science & Technology Studies at Cornell. Her group integrates ethnography, history, and design to explore rural, working-class, and Global South experiences of technologies; trace emerging entanglements between people and data; and speculate about alternative pasts and futures.

Susanne Bødker is Professor at the Department of Computer Science at Aarhus University in Denmark. She co-manages the interdisciplinary Center for Participatory IT, and heads the ERC project on Common Interactive Objects. She does participatory design, computer supported collaborative work and activity theory. Susanne has a strong interest in revisiting the history of HCI and CSCW, and she reactivates historic research in her current project.

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