Historicism in/as CSCW Method: Research, Sensibilities, and Design

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This workshop furthers the growing adoption of historicism in HCI and CSCW. Inspired by mounting attention to history in the field, we aim to convene a broad range of scholars to advance the discussion around what a specifically historicist sensibility might look like for this research community, and how such a sensibility may be reflected in issues around research methods, evaluation, and training. In so doing, we will continue to trouble boundaries, disciplinary and otherwise, that demarcate what is considered to be history and whose histories are considered, as part of the broader turn to historicism that is underway. This one-day workshop will be in person and participant driven, with a stronger methodological focus than those that have come before. In addition to working groups focused on topics that emerge through workshop papers and initial discussions, we will develop practical next steps for creating a stronger enabling environment for historical approaches in HCI and CSCW research.

1 BACKGROUND

History is having a moment. Calls for attention to history in HCI and CSCW are not new, but are currently appearing with greater frequency and acceptance. A 2019 CSCW workshop [20], CSCW paper [19], TOCHI special issue [1], and multiple recent papers call for historicist sensibilities in CSCW research [6, 15, 16, 18]. As has been argued in these and other venues, the turn to history may contribute understanding of trajectories of technological development, change and decline, temporal contextualization of users and life worlds, and sources for design knowledge. We have also noted that turn is timely and provides a necessary counter to the enduring 'presentism' and techno-optimism of our field [19]. By placing present decision-making within a broader context, it supports interest in questions of equity and justice. History may also be a source of hope, and a counter to catastrophism in contemporary discourses surrounding politics

and climate change, situating current challenges within longer arcs of challenge and change. This workshop will build on the momentum surrounding historicist approaches in order to advance discussions on in this area.

We have previously argued that historicism should be part of due diligence of all HCI researchers [19], even those who do not themselves use historical methods. As with Alex Taylor's [21] early discussion of ethnography in Ubicomp, we position historicism as a sensibility that draws on diverse intellectual traditions, methods, and ideas that challenge, or at least run counter to, many of the broadly positivist assumptions in our field about what counts as valid knowledge, the possibility and importance of generalizability, and the purpose of enquiry itself, by understanding technology and its production as situated within historically specific moments and practices. For those who adopt it, such a sensibility raises a variety of challenges including the challenges of science and technology as themselves historical subjects [2, 3, 9], silences in the archives [5, 7, 10, 12], and the objectifying and instrumentalizing gaze of history [11, 19]. How we as a field respond to these challenges will in turn frame the specific form that historicism takes on in CSCW.

The first historicism workshop [20] set the stage for a general call, further articulated in a subsequent paper [19]. Now, to move the field forward on this topic, we aim to convene this workshop to address a particular, thorny, challenge: how does one adopt a historicist sensibility in CSCW? By 'sensibility', we refer to something more basic and broader than methodology - the intuitive forms of awareness and discernment that come from taking a historicist viewpoint, and which inform all manners of meaning-making in the production of, and training for, research. Such a sensibility will necessarily look different in CSCW, and be practiced differently here than in other fields.

One challenge in adopting a historicist sensibility in CSCW arises around the epistemic goals of this work. At the risk of over-generalization, historical research is often oriented toward producing detailed knowledge about specific times, places, and people. On the other hand, CSCW research is often rooted in a more sociological perspective which seek to identify patterns, lessons, and recurring themes. Thus historical methods cannot simply be adopted from historical research into CSCW; they will need to be attuned to function within CSCW discourse. A second issue is that our methodological tools are oriented to studying 'the now' and the future, while historicist methods are focused primarily on studying the past. For example, while ethnography has been widely adopted in CSCW, it tends to be framed as a tool for studying the present, neglecting the more historical aspects of ethnographic practice. This suggests that historical approaches may be constrained within CSCW to narrowly serve the present and future. Conversely, historicism may allow us to expand the dimensions of existing methodologies like ethnography, by reviving their historical dimensions. Third, because CSCW is inherently interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, the specialized methods that historians use may be challenging to integrate into the CSCW community. Historiographic methods are often a kind of craft skill, and so, how to faithfully draw these from other fields, or impart them to future generations of CSCW scholars?

Importantly, and central to the goals of this workshop, adopting or translating methods from historical research into CSCW may not be the only way to adopt an historicist sensibility. We aim to use the workshop as an opportunity to think broadly about what kind of work fits in here; various flavors of CSCW work may have much to contribute to how we think about historicism. Some examples might include network analysis and revisiting of old software by running it on a virtual machine, or how to incorporate historical methods in the design of artefacts, or via speculative methods. How might the diversity of CSCW method toolkits function alongside historicist methods from fields such as history or Science and Technology Studies (STS)?

2 WORKSHOP GOALS AND OUTCOMES

This workshop aims to convene CSCW scholars to think through what an historicist approach in CSCW can look like in practice. More specifically, we will continue the groundwork to develop a community of scholars working towards some of the following challenges identified both during the last CSCW workshop and in the intervening years:

- Improving community understanding, adaptation, and development of historicist methods
- Identifying the unique contributions of CSCW to historicist research
- Developing and disseminating tips and tricks for grappling with the challenges that arise where historical and design/CSCW methods meet
- Valuing history in/of our own field
- Differentiating and fostering historical sensibilities beyond narrow questions of method
- Articulating the fit between historicist approaches to CSCW and funding opportunities in CSCW/HCI and beyond

This workshop is methodological, both in the traditional historiographic sense, but also by seeking to expand the definition of historicism to the full range of how it may manifest within our specific field of CSCW. One of the goals (or gaps) that past programmatic publications on historicism in CSCW have identified is capturing the full range of ways that an historicist sensibility may be incorporated into CSCW work. We are particularly interesting in moving beyond classical approaches to historical research, for example, to reveal how historicism can be used to inform design, to bring forth voices that are traditionally marginalized in technological projects, or to expand the methodological range through unconventional historical methods such as by looking at old software or digital logs.

This workshop thus differs from the first CSCW workshop on historicism via its focus on methodology and historiography, and actively seeking to encourage participation by those who bring an historicist sensibility to CSCW work in orthogonal, inventive ways. This goal in codified into our draft call for participants (see below). We will also seek to showcase such approaches (which may demand demos, or participatory exercises) by having unstructured time within the workshop that can be adapted to the needs of non-conventional presentation styles.

3 WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

3.1 Workshop Agenda

Activity	Timing
Welcome and Introductions	9:00-9:30am
Panels 1 and 2	9:30-10:30am
Coffee Break	10:30-11:00am
Panels 3 and 4	11:00-12:00pm
Lunch	12:00-1:30pm
Working Session 1	1:30-2:15pm
Working Session 2	2:15-3:00pm
Coffee Break	3:00-3:30pm
Next Steps Brainstorming	3:30-4:30pm
Closing Discussion and Reflections	4:30-5:00pm

Table 1. Workshop Agenda

3.2 Activity Description

Welcome and Participant Introductions: By way of introduction, participants will be asked to bring an artifact (digital or not) drawn from their own research interests, and to discuss its historical role, methods for unpacking it, or concepts to frame it.

Curated Panels: A selection of panelists and organizers will be grouped into 4 panels, according to how their submission addresses the question of historicist sensibilities in CSCW. Each panelist will give a brief "lightning" talk, followed by open discussion amongst all participants.

Self-Organized Working Sessions: In keeping with the effort for this to be a participant-run workshop, we will reserve 2 sessions in the afternoon for self-organized breakout groups or unconference sessions. Focus areas will be drawn from workshop paper submissions as well as themes from the morning discussion. Ahead of the workshop, the organizers will group people with similar topics to begin working together to share ideas and plan breakout sessions.

Next Steps Brainstorming Exercise: The final event of the day will be organized around next steps, as seeded ahead of time by workshop organizers and discussed over the course of the day. Next steps will be aimed at interventions that can support broader adoption of historical sensibilities within HCI and CSCW. Examples include: a) planning a history summer school for HCI researchers, or b) organizing an NSF workshop to improve funders' understanding of the role of history in computing research.

3.3 Practicalities and Resources required

This fully in-person workshop will require standard conference room facilities including space for 15-20 participants and A/V equipment. Ideally the seating would be in rounds and other resources such as whiteboards or sticky-notes would be available to facilitate group discussion.

4 WEBSITE

The website for the workshop is located at: https://cscwhistory.wordpress.com. It will host the call for participation, relevant resources and background, details on the rationale and goals of the event, desired outcomes, and information about the organizers. Closer to the conference, it will also host the accepted position papers and relevant logistical information for participants. During the workshop, 'live transcribers' will document the insights and resources generated during the workshop to further populate the website.

5 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Prior to the workshop, the website will be used to solicit participation and provide background information. The website, along with the Call for Participation (see below), will be circulated through CHI and CSCW Announcements, PhD-Design, the ACM SIGCHI and CSCW Facebook pages, the ACM Special Interest Group on Computers, Information, and Society (SIGCIS), the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S), the Society for History of Technology (SHoT), and other relevant channels, including the organizers' social media accounts, to generate interest.

5.1 Call for Participation

This one-day workshop will convene CSCW and HCI researchers to collaboratively develop a practical agenda for expanding the adoption of historical research methods within and across our field. Existing scholarship has used CSCW methods to examine historical phenomena: code spelunking [8, 14], examining moments of software maintenance over time [4], materially tracing silenced histories [13], and speculation as a means to interrogate the past [6, 17, 18]. The workshop builds upon this significant prior work, and seeks to take advantage of the many opportunities that historical research offers for improving our understanding of technology development, tools for design, evaluation and critique of socio-technical systems, and appraisal of the social consequences of technology.

Outputs of the workshop will include a white paper and a website that will collect resources to support CSCW-based historical investigations. In developing these resources together, we seek to attend to specific practical and conceptual challenges of adopting historical approaches as CSCW researchers.

To apply, please send a brief position paper to cscwhistory@gmail.com before August 21st 2023. Position papers should be in the ACM Extended Abstract format and address one or more of the following: 1) Describe an ongoing research project that draws on history to make contributions to CSCW and/or HCI; 2) What does an historicist approach/sensibility look like in your work? 3) What challenges do you face in incorporating history in your research? Optionally, also name a topic for a breakout group that you would like to facilitate, or participate in.

The workshop will take place as part of the 22nd ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing in Minneapolis, Minnesota during October 2023. More information about the conference is available at http://cscw.acm.org/. At least one author of each accepted position paper will be required to register for the workshop and at least one day of the conference. More information about this workshop can be found at https://cscwhistory.wordpress.com. Please send any questions to cscwhistory@gmail.com.

6 WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

Robert Soden is an assistant professor in the Department of Computer Science and the School of the Environment at the University of Toronto, where he organizes the Toronto Climate Observatory. Robert's work draws on human-computer interaction, science and technology studies, and design to evaluate and improve the information systems we use to understand and respond to socio-environmental challenges such as climate change and disaster.

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.

Seyram Avle is Associate 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.

Sarah Fox is an Assistant Professor at Carnegie Mellon University in the Human Computer Interaction Institute, where she directs the Tech Solidarity Lab. Her research focuses on how technological artifacts challenge or propagate social exclusions by examining existing systems and building alternatives.

Phoebe Sengers is a professor in Information Science and Science and 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. Her current primary project is a design history and ethnography of rural infrastructure in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada.

Shreyasha Paudel is a PhD student in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Toronto. Her research draws from Human Computer Interaction and STS to critique and re-imagine information infrastructures in the Global South, particularly in applications related to disasters and climate change.

Megh Marathe is an assistant professor in the Department of Media & Information and Center for Bioethics & Social Justice at Michigan State University. Their research seeks to foster inclusion in expert practices and technologies by centering the experiences of marginalized people. Their work critically examines classification, time, and expertise.

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