

# Extended Abstract Comment Form

## Preconference Symposium "Interrogating Information Realities of Information and Communication Systems" ASIST 2006.

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*Please fill out the following information about the abstract that you are reviewing for the preconference symposium. Use as much space as you think is necessary.*

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**Name of commenter:** Eric Meyer

**1. Title of abstract reviewed:** Appreciating context in social informatics: from the outside in, and the inside out

**2. Eprint # of abstract reviewed:** 1460

**3. The main question or concern this research addresses is:** How is the concept of context applicable to social informatics? What are the different types of context, and how can each illuminate our understanding of social informatics issues?

**4. The most interesting thing about the research described by the abstract is:** The four different alternatives identified by Cole (ICTs in social context, part of social context, having social contexts, and being primarily social) to understand context as part of the relationship between the social and the technical.

**5. The biggest question I had after reading the abstract was:** What is the practical implication of this in SI research? Is it to be aware of the multiple levels of context, or is there an implicit preference for one definition of context over another?

**6. The author should look at the following topics or sources as they continue their study:**

A couple of articles that came in handy for me in a paper I wrote on context a few years ago come to mind:

Dervin, B. (1996). Given a context by any other name: Methodological tools for taming the unruly beast. In ISIC 96: Information Seeking in Context, University of Tampere, Finland.

Dervin (1996) points out, "the only possible conclusion [in attempting to define context] is that there is no term that is more often used, less often defined, and when defined so variously as context."

Kling, R. (1992). Behind the terminal: The critical role of computer infrastructure in effective information systems' development and use. In W.Cotterman & J. Senn (Eds.), Challenges and strategies for research in systems development. (pp. 153-201). London: John Wiley.

Kling (1992) argues that it is important not to view context as a “thing” but as a set of relationships between social situations. One contextual situation (Sc) provides the context for understanding a second focal situation (Sf).

It would be interesting to problematize this issue of context as well: what is the implication of understanding (or misunderstanding) the level of abstraction for context that is operating in one's research? Can a technology be simply operative in a social context in one time and place, but become part of the social context in another time and place?

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