From E-mail Exchanges to MOOCs: Evolutions and Convolutions in Peer-to-Peer Online Interaction

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E RE CON volutions

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Ludic Moments at the Very Beginning of the Very First Computers and Writing Online Conference

Item 1   23:12 Apr15/93   17 lines   88 responses   Bill Condon
Getting Started--Welcome!

If you've gotten this far, the hard part is over--congratulations! At this point, your options are

    (R)espond, to type in something in response to this item;
    (F)orget, to tell the machine you never want to see this item
       again (DON'T TYPE F FOR FORGET!!); or
    (P)ass, if you don't want to respond to what you've just read.

Why don't you type 'R' for Respond and say a little something about how you feel about communicating with others in this electronic conference. How does it feel?

When you finish your message, hit the RETURN key an extra time to let the machine know you're finished, and then type 'D' for Done. Also, remember to hit RETURN at the end of each line you type(If you forget now and then, don't worry; we'll all be understanding about that, since we'll forget from time to time too).

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Apr19/93 01:33
1:2) Eric Crump: Like John, I feel a little awkward in this system and suspect that if this were a nonvirtual parlor, I'd probably knock over a vase or track mud on the rug. But it's also sort of thrilling to discover features or figure out how something works. Of course, I've mostly been following Bob Child around watching him make discoveries.
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Apr19/93 01:38

1:4) Michael Day: After learning so many systems, I feel disoriented in this new one. I keep typing in commands that should work, but then discover that I am confusing the commands for unix, or IRC, or a MOO, with those for CONFER. I'm not knocking over vases or tracking MUD on the carpet of this virtual parlor, so much as trying all the wrong doors with keys that wouldn't fit anyway. In short, I'm following Eric following Bob, and I hope we're roped together...
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Apr19/93 12:24
1:7) Chris Hult: I'm having so much fun on this conference that my colleagues are beginning to worry about my sanity. Wish I could just drop everything and play in your virtual parlor all day. But alas duty calls (and I'm nothing if not dutiful).
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Apr19/93 16:25
1:8) Bob Child: Yikes! Follow me at your own risk... I'm the one who
overloaded the network Sunday night and got us all dumped out :-). I did make a fortunate stumble and find something called a MEETing, which allows for (psuedo)synchronous discussion. I'll post some instructions soon.
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Apr19/93 16:46
1:9) Idana Hamilton: I, too, am feeling more comfortable than I did, but to wander away from the virtual parlor analogy, I sometimes feel like a spelunker whose lamp flickers or goes out leaving me feeling somewhat "in the dark." But I'm getting more adept at this.

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Apr20/93 23:25
1:15) Facilitator: Ann Green: I spent so much time setting this thing up that I'm behind in reading it! Help! I've fallen into virtual space and I can't get out! This FORUM is getting off to a slow start, but it will pick up soon. We co-chairs can't believe how complicated this has turned out to be--a warning to Eric Crump, next year's chair!
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Apr21/93 10:09
1:16) Eric Crump: Warning taken. My head's spinning already just thinking about it. But of course *I'll* have the advantage of your experience and precedent, which may help some.
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Apr21/93 10:21
1:17) Susanmarie Harrington: In fact, all the complication has caused one of us co-chairs to forget to CHANGE NAME out there in Virtual Space. Is your whole family changing last names to Ann Green, Bill? ;)

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Apr22/93 06:52
1:20) Mike Morgan: Ok Eric and Jeff--Let's not keep it to ourselves; let's share: What the heck is MediaMOO? Some kind of multimedia cow? A bovine cousin of Apple's Agent?
...

Apr22/93 09:30
1:23) Glenn Mayer: Initial reactions...hmmm. I'm a bit worried to see that Eric Crump had some trouble with the system. I lurk on a few lists, and I've followed Eric's instructions to some interesting places, including MOOland.In fact, I thought I was going to talk to him there yesterday, in the T/R lounge, but the virtual Eric turned out to be a duck.
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Apr22/93 13:52
1:24) Eric Crump: hey Glenn. That duck IS me ;)   And we could all be in big trouble here, because I'm following Bob Child around and you're following me around and if Bob makes some really wrong move we could all go tumbling off some some virtual cliff. Don't trip, Bob!

And the playful tropes of the ropes, the caves, falling off cliffs (Glenn Mayer suggests to open a virtual parachute, John Slatin asks if Fred Kemp has fallen off a cliff in MediaMOO since Megabyte University, one of the precursors to TechRhet, has gone silent), and the fact that Eric's MediaMOO character is a duck leads to a series of comments about us newbies to the MOO being like ducklings.

We resorted to finding ways to represent ACTION as follows:

May11/93 21:31
60:25) Tyanna Lambert: ***ACTION**** nods as well but says---" But on
internets our personal relationships with the people we meet are created out of the EXISTENCE of text- Maybe
WE are created out of text. In a way, when we quit talking -typing- we no longer existe- (exist). We can't
just nod, smile, frown etc. We are still formless except for our thoughts rather than our actions- Here,
actions don't speak louder than words- Ty TyAnna Herrington Lambert
 - - - - -
May13/93 16:28
60:26) Elizabeth Sommers: ***DELAYED ACTION***Nods vigorously in agreement and wonders if we are write.
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May14/93 22:05
60:27) Irvin Peckham: Teachers have a hard time shutting up. They learned to get good grades by inserting
themselves into the conversation (oraly orally or textually). So after decades of noise, how do we learn to
be silent?
  Irv
 - - - - -
May15/93 12:45
60:28) Russ Hunt: The only way I could learn to be silent was to get out of the classroom. When I go back
in, now, I know I'm not necessary. It's a little easier for me to shut up when I know that.
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May16/93 00:26
60:29) Elizabeth Sommers: Last semester I found myself raising my hand in a class I was teaching but I STILL
couldn't get a turn. Everybody laughed, though.
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 May18/93 22:50
 60:30) Paul Connolly: *******ACTION******Silence.

It's Fun to Have Fun But You Have to Know How! or, How Cavorting on the Net Will Save the Academy *

A web of texts by Rebecca Rickly (becky.rickly@umich.edu), Eric Crump (wleric@showme.missouri.edu), and others

Becky:

People love Star Trek. And if you ask most folks why, they'll answer simply: Because it's *fun*. They won't talk about its forward-thinking, intellectual foundations; instead, they see it merely as an escape. Yet in the mid-sixties, Gene Roddenberry (with the help of Ray Bradbury) had predicted the use of desktop and voice-activated computers, as well as LANs and WANs, and all in the midst of a tribble-infested fantasy world.

Granted, what we do on the Internet isn't quite Star Trek, but what we do, whether we admit or not, is fun. Think about the hours we sit in front of the computer, reading email, communicating on-line with friends, colleagues and even strangers, looking up interesting tidbits, seeing what picture we can call up. We can choose to be part of a particular academic community and read only serious listserv lists, or we can pick and choose among newsgroups that range in topic from Pulp Fiction (and a HUGE discussion of "who shot who first") to the Grateful Dead (and a series of semi-reliable concert reports/reviews from each show). We can go head to head with someone real-time on IRC or a MOO on just about any topic you can think of. On MOOs, we can build a connected virtual environment using only words: people can metaphorically "move about" and interact with you, others, or the environment itself. We can build a "home" on the Word Wide Web, complete with any kind of media our computers will allow--then link it up to anyone/anything we can find. I find all of these activities exciting, and I spend far too much time (at least according to most folks in my profession) playing with them. But when you think about it, the common denominator in all of these examples is *language*--and it's because I lo language, because I find it *fun,* that I chose my profession: teaching writing (and teaching it with networked computers whenever possible).

Yet no one wants to talk about having fun in this profession (or most others in the academy)! In an article merely entitled "Fun?" Lex Runciman wondered in the pages of *College English* why we didn't concentrate more on the fun of writing, rather than seeing it as a "negative, difficult, problematic, error-ridden, and therefore ultimately joyless activity" (p. 160). Our profession seems to be suspicious of anything that isn't "difficult or problematic," and we're downright against anything that's playful or fun. There have been exceptions in print, to be sure ("Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research" comes to mind), but for the most part, we equate seriousness with success, and we've frozen this definition in the freezer trays of our memory.

But while print is frozen, the net is a hotbed of movement and changebility, a place where nothing stays the same, and the people who frequent it like that continual re-definition. Still, though, when people ask what I do, I make sure I include just enough jargon in my response to make what I do sound legitimate, even though, truth be told, I'd probably be doing this even if it weren't my profession. You see, I especially love language PLAY. I love the beautiful, the witty, the deep, the informative, the rational, and the sublime. I love to read it, to study it, and to try to understand why it affects us the way it does.

Recently, Liz McMillen published an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about CREWRT-L, a creative writing list owned by Eric Crump, and they experienced a surge of interested folks who joined the list. Each one of these people, I'm sure, loved language, or they wouldn't be joining a list about creative writing. Yet because many of these newbies learned of the list through a traditional print medium (the *Chronicle* piece), they wei

At Play in the Fields of Writing

A Serio-Ludic Rhetoric

Albert Rouzie