

Epilogue: Global Ideals Are No Match for Local Realities

Sunday, November 16, 1997

It is finally over and the weather fits my mood. I look out my apartment window at the snow-covered rooftops on Dearborn avenue and watch the flurries swirl in the biting Chicago wind. Winter is arriving early this year. David, Gian, and Teresa have left for Pennsylvania. Paula and Ken have returned to their apartments elsewhere in the city. The group has had its final meeting. Yesterday the others asked me to write an epilogue and bring the TicToc project to closure and I agreed.

During the afternoon editing session, we worked on the symposium section which begins with my remark that the May meeting would be unlike any other because its consequences would be "palpable." I was correct: eworks no longer exists; the group is more or less disbanded; the eworks website has been torn down; as a department, we will take a "wait and see" approach to online coursework. Given these turns of events, Paula, Ken and I agreed that I probably should no longer teach "Introduction to Electronic Pedagogy." Our rhetoric program needs courses in rhetoric.

Last week, when Bill Covino—our Acting Head—announced at a meeting that he had just hired a webspinner to build a webpage for the department, several heads turned in my direction and I felt vaguely uncomfortable. Their glances confirmed my suspicion that many of my colleagues thought eworks was the department's webpage and that probably only a few had understood what the TicToc project was about.

But it is over now. Patricia Harkin and I have signed a contract to co-author a textbook and I will be instrumental in building a corresponding website on Addison, Wesley, and Longman's server whose address begins with "www.awl.com." "Dot Com"! It will feel very odd to work on a commercial site for a company; but I was impressed last month—as a new member of their Higher Education Advisory Board—with their plans for re-configuring their relations to universities. We talked about "revenue sharing." This seems necessary since few funds are available

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in the academy for the kind of work that needs to be done in electronic educational environments. To my surprise, businessmen seem willing to take risks in developing an online presence for their companies.

What does it all mean, you might ask. I think David and I sorted some of it out last night, somewhere 'round midnight. We talked about what a wonderful editorial group we had with Paula, Teresa, Gian, and Ken. That they were the best group with whom we had ever worked. Then it hit home: it's the jazz element—differences are welcome as long as you're playing a variant of the same melody. Our collaborators know how to work together, so we worked as a group, not as individuals. We laughed. We got excited by suggestions others made. We argued over where we would go to dinner and ended up ordering in from Gino's East, one of the famous Chicago pizzerias. Such enjoyable collaboration is an acquired taste that is not cultivated in English departments. Most of the training in English Studies engrains a fierce individualism in its graduates. Academics talk all the time in general theoretical terms about collaborative work; but, at the local level, you need to enjoy collaborating before an endeavor like eworks can flourish. As Phil Jackson—the coach of the Chicago Bulls and the city's Zen Master—might remind us: no music is heard when everyone plays a different tune.

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