

The TicToc Story

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The Road Trip

"We used to drive this way to get to my aunt's."

"Where did she live?" I asked.

"In Wisconsin," said David. "Kenosha."

"You should have seen this place back then," he added, waving his hand toward the old factories that make up the border between Chicago and Gary, Indiana. "There was no Interstate, so you had to drive straight through downtown Chicago."

"Must've been a slow trip."

"Sure was. But it was going through Gary that I mainly didn't like."

"How come?"

"The soot. It used to turn the sky a dull yellow color. Literally. Everything took on this yellowish hue. And there was a smell of sulfur for miles. As a kid, it was the way I pictured hell."

I looked out the car window. We were winding along the Chicago skyway. On the right, I could see three huge white drums. I imagined they were filled with oil. There was a ring of sand around each one, probably six feet high. A fire wall, most likely. One narrow gravel road led back toward a small building made of green aluminum siding.

There were only a few wisps of clouds in the sky, so the sunlight came in warm through the windshield. We drove past more metal buildings, train tracks, smoke stacks, and then another set of tanks painted in the red and blue logo of the CITGO gas company.

"At least they got the sky a clear blue again," I said.

A few miles later, Lake Michigan came into view. The water looked cold and rough. Beyond the lake, we could see the Chicago skyline, its red concrete and dark glass buildings glinting.

It was May, 1997, and David Downing and I were driving from Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP for short) to the TicToc symposium at the University of Chicago-Illinois. TicToc meant Teaching in Cyberspace Through Online Courses. The focus of the project, as given in an overview on the TicToc web site, was this:

The TicToc project is a research collaboration organized to study the

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impact on UIC's English department that the increasing transformation of its activities into virtual ones may have. The project focuses on the displacement of physical classrooms into virtual environments and its effects on teaching practices. With the cooperation of departmental and computer center administrators, we will construct the most typical, current online pedagogical scenarios (e.g., distance learning through video conferencing); study the pedagogical effects of these practices, discuss them with well known national experts in online teaching, and finally make a series of recommendations to the department on ways to employ, implement, and experiment with emerging pedagogical technologies. The project will culminate in a [two] day symposium at the Humanities Institute of UIC.

Why Tell the TicToc Story?

What I hope to do in this chapter is give an account of the TicToc symposium which was mentioned at the end of the TicToc project overview. The TicToc symposium crystallized a year of online discussion about the nature of online pedagogies and the implications of creating virtual English departments. There are several reasons for writing a story about this symposium:

- to create a historical record of the event
- to preserve some of the thoughts and ideas that existed during this short moment in time
- to provide, through narrative, alternative ways of understanding the TicToc project, ways perhaps more intuitively or emotionally based
- to help readers connect to the people and the spirit which was/is TicToc

A story won't meet everyone's needs, of course, which is why this *Works and Days* issue is filled with a variety of voices. Still, for many of us, stories connect with our fundamental ways of understanding the world we live in (Postman; Shank). Perhaps, then, a story can illuminate the world of TicToc.

TicToc's Beginnings

TicToc started out mainly as a listserv, an ongoing discussion of teaching with the Internet. Since others will be reflecting on this e-mail discussion and the recommendations for UIC which grew out of it, so I'll only mention a couple pertinent issues which contributed to the tone of the symposium.

First, as most people who use listservs will attest, membership on a listserv means getting a lot of e-mail. Too much, really. It was hard for all of us to keep up. And so the online TicToc conversation moved in fits and starts. Sometimes people sent a few lines back and forth. Other times people wrote long, complex messages examining a particular

issue. The talk varied (TicToc Conversations). It was a process of working that took growing into.

People started the discussion out by sharing some autobiographies, very short stories of where they came from and who they were (TicToc Conversations). With some 35 professionals from around the country participating in the talks, though, that rush of personal information was hard to sort out. And you couldn't see the people, get a feel for how they smiled or tilted their heads or waved their hands as they talked. In the end, the main personal information we had about people was a sense of who liked to write long messages and what kind of jargon they preferred. A few people gave other hints about who they were, and there were small groups of people on the listserv who already knew each other. But lots of people faded in and out of the TicToc conversation and some people existed mostly as ideas.

I think the reason this happened was that, after the short introductions, no one told any more stories. Everyone concentrated on the issues. We tried to analyze and problematize the nature of technological teaching. We talked about: the rhetoric of technology discussions, the professional consequences for faculty who work with technology, the nature of virtual communities, and the reasons for bringing technology into the classroom.

But in all that talk, no one seemed to have time to pause and say, *I remember one time when this happened*. Perhaps that was due to the nature of the group or the goals of the project or the subjects at hand. Maybe it had to do with the rushed nature of e-mail conversations. I'm not sure. What I do know is that only two stories from that year long discussion stand out in my mind, and both came in the last month. Greg Ulmer told the first story. He recalled a conversation from his early days as a young college student. The conversation consisted of Greg's father and a Mr. Richards, a Montana rancher, explaining to Greg why his becoming an English major was a waste of time. According to Greg's father, real work added value to the world, produced something like the food which came from the cattle Mr. Richards raised. In the view of these two elder statesmen, Greg's choice to study English was misguided and foolish. By extension, of course, Greg's story implied that's what his father would have thought about building virtual worlds as well. He would have asked how cyberspace creations could add anything of value to the real world.

One other key story which entered our online discussion came from Randy Bass. Randy described once trying to understand what a doctor was telling him about his father, who was lying in a hospital bed and dying because of an enlarged heart. Randy said he had been confused by the doctor saying his father's heart was big. To Randy, a big heart meant courage, a will to live. To the doctor it meant death, literally a heart too big to keep on beating. The problem was language, and Randy

went on to explain how it was the range of different discourses which made our struggle to understand technology so complex.

To me, though, there was more to Randy's story than a question of language. It was about the concrete realities of technology. The way it tells us death is coming, but doesn't tell us what to do about it. The way it reshapes our language, making us unsure of what we say. I think if we are ever going to make sense of technology, it won't just be through puzzling about its discourses, though Randy's line of reasoning was illuminating. Even more than that, we'll need stories of technology, concrete, vivid stories that describe for us life in electronic times and how to cope with it.

Even just a few lines, and Randy's story gets us thinking. I could picture him in that hospital. I imagine he's wearing a faded tan shirt. The sleeves are rolled back. The shirt is creased in places, and Randy's sweating a little. The hospital lights give off a harsh white glare and there are people walking past in blue uniforms, old people, and couples, nurses. Randy rubs his neck. He's looking past the doctor, over his shoulder at a green piece of paper tacked to the wall. There's a tear near the center of the page, right by the thumb tack, but the paper hasn't fallen. Randy listens. He tries to understand the doctor and the fluorescent lighting and his father dying and the boldface words on the piece of paper. What he wants, in that moment, is for technology to give life. It cannot.

Chicago

Technology does have a dark edge. I want, need, to remember that. Still, I love computers. They're a constant part of my life. I teach in the computer lab, help students put papers on the Net, desktop publish IUP's Rhetoric and Linguistics newsletter, and write on e-mail to my little brother in Wisconsin about how the Green Bay Packers are doing. The TicToc symposium held the promise of meeting people who shared my interest in teaching with technology, people who ran MOOs and online journals and taught virtual courses.

Working in technology can get lonely. Sure, the whole world is only a mouse click away, but at most campuses, there are only three or four people doing the same kinds of technology literacy work I try to do in my English classes. Of course, anything we do that's specialized isolates us. That's one of the reasons we have symposiums and conferences, to get together with the people spread around the country who share our particular interests.

The other opportunity at the Chicago symposium was to help UIC's English Department develop an online presence. That was one of the main reasons James Sosnoski had organized the TicToc project. This was a conference where we would actually be working toward a specific goal, to make a set of recommendations for how the department's elec-

tronic efforts should proceed.

Most trips are exciting, anyway. It took us about nine hours to drive from western Pennsylvania to Chicago. It was a long trip, and we were glad to reach the hotel. At the registration desk, I found out my first name had somehow been listed as Claudine. David kept calling my Claud as we carried our bags up from the car. He thought it was funny.

When I got to my room, along with the free soap and shampoo, I found that the Hyatt supplied its guests with an in-room fax machine. I would have preferred an e-mail hookup, but obviously technology was important to the modern business traveler. This was a change for me. The hotels I usually could afford to stay in didn't even offer soap.

Technology Demos

The first day of the symposium we met in a computer lab on the UIC campus. UIC is right in the middle of Chicago, so there's a lot of concrete on the campus. The whole time we were there, people kept saying, "They just recently put in these grassy patches and trees."

Still, it was a very interesting looking campus. The Humanities building where the English Department was housed towered some twenty stories above everything else. The computer lab for the symposium's first session was in a science building above a concrete amphitheater. The amphitheater had since been removed, but its wide gray support pillars had been left behind.

The plan for starting the symposium was to have the TicToc project consultants, of whom there were eight, show us the educational technologies they used: MOOs, online journals, virtual classes. What people really wanted to do, though, when they got to the computer lab, was check their e-mail. There were about twelve people in the room when David Downing and I arrived, and everybody was busily reading their computer screens.

In a funny way, this gave a feeling of comradeship. Although each symposium participant was staring at their own individual computer, many probably reading the exact same TicToc messages, we all knew we shared some common interests. Technology was part of who we were as teachers and scholars. We were e-mail junkies.

After a short time, the demonstrations got under way. The most useful way to get a sense of what we looked at is to view the consultants' section of the TicToc web site: <http://www.uic.edu/depts/engl/projects/tic-toc/wrought.html>

There is a key moment here, though, which I should mention. This was Greg Ulmer's presentation. Greg showed a set of web pages his composition students had created. He called them "myseums," personalized online museums. Students used the pages and the graphical capabilities of the web to explore the ways they had been shaped by

visual images. One student, Daphne Simmons, had collected a series of photographs of people's hands. There were three: a young man wearing a bandanna who gestured obscenely at the camera; Martin Luther King, Jr. pointing his finger at the crowd; and the Statue of Liberty, holding high her torch. Simmons titled her piece, "Image of Widescope: The outstretched hand," and in one glance, the connection of the images across time and space leapt out at the viewer. Peace, violence, death, promise, this student had connected all these ideas through the pictures on her web page in a kind of visual poem.

Greg said he used the class to teach students about the rhetorical nature of imagery. Not only did this help the students to understand why certain images linger for a lifetime, but it also unpacked the kinds of persuasion those images were capable of achieving. Greg's talk highlighted the new possibilities for teaching opened up by the World Wide Web. Greg had flown in from Florida, yet over the Internet we could look at his students' work just as they themselves had viewed it.

When the presentations were finished, Jim called our attention to the back of the room, where he introduced Don Marshall, chair of UIC's English Dept., and several other administrators. As I turned in my chair, I was surprised to see that the audience had nearly tripled from the dozen e-mail readers who had been there when I first arrived. The room was hot and there were no windows. I thought Jim looked a little nervous, and I could sense a sudden urgency to what we were doing. There was money involved now. Policies would be shaped based partly on what we decided at this symposium, and those policies were going to effect lots of teachers and students. At the same time, the demos were all over the map, exploring literacy and culture, teaching and publishing, rhetoric and play. Everyone was doing something different with technology. It all looked pretty good with lots of educational potential, but it also looked like a lot of hard work.

There was no doubt that most of this work was creating new opportunities for learning, but it was unclear what UIC ought to be doing and how it ought to be doing it. The heat swirled with the ideas and the chatter and the whirring of computers. We had a long way to go.

The Tuscany

We had lunch at an Italian restaurant on Taylor Street. Garlic, oregano, and frying olive oil enveloped us as we walked into the Tuscany. The head waiter showed us to a back room and brought out bottles of red wine and plates of bread and calamari. As we talked and ate, the tension of the impending decisions eased from the room. We talked about trying to get computer labs to teach in. Some departments had their own labs, but most shared with a common pool from across campus. Students at a few of the community colleges had to pay an extra fee if their course was taught in a computer lab. Paula Mathieu

said it had taken her over an hour in one of the UIC labs just to transfer two files from Mac to IBM format. There were long lines, and when she finally got on a computer, its mouse and keyboard were damaged and worked poorly because of the constant use they had been put to.

We continued to talk and eat. I had linguini with fresh fish. A conversation started up about freedom of information on the web. I said that some of my graduate students didn't want to put their work online because they were afraid someone would steal it. Other people said the problem wasn't so much theft as the fact universities didn't honor online publishing. In fact, a lot of times the only educational experience students got with computers was from temporary faculty who taught low level courses. Upper level courses were reserved for theoretical discussions, not computer work.

About eighteen of us had gone to the restaurant, and what emerged as we spoke and ate and laughed, told stories and jokes and asked questions, was a kind of fellowship we were unlikely to establish online. Greg was really a poet, interested in taping into students' creativity and personal experience. Paula worried about her students, for whom success at UIC was their one chance out of a life of poverty. Randy was a comedian by nature.

Later, Ken McAllister would say to me how surprising it was that we all got along so well that weekend, what a sense of friendship marked the symposium. I think what happened was we had already developed a TicToc community online, but it was a community which had not eaten and smiled together. The earthy flavors of the food connected us, and we returned to our work with a sense of connection and preparation for the task ahead.

Voices from Nowhere

In the afternoon, Andrew Wadsworth demonstrated more cutting edge web technology, this time multimedia applications and synchronous communication. He previewed a number of projects underway at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign as well as the Shakespeare Globe Project. He showed an online reference library and played pieces of Renaissance music. Then he electronically linked up with a colleague several hours' drive away at UIUC and an unseen voice greeted us from the computer. We asked the voice to show us some video clips, and the person showed us a movie scene where Romeo and Juliet meet at a masquerade ball. The voice said that any scene you needed to make a point in class was available.

As with the morning demos, what we were seeing were new tools teachers could begin making use of in their classrooms. More striking to me, though, was the opportunity this technology presented for bringing other voices into the classroom, new presences that might shift classroom discourse in new directions. I recalled stories of colleagues

who had gotten rural classes to exchange papers with students in inner city schools. Trading writing had enabled the students to see how people in other cultures thought, but it didn't help them to see what those people looked like, how they dressed and moved or to hear how they sounded, how they laughed or sang. It was the same concern I had experienced on the listserv. Exchanging letters can only take us so far. To the extent we are corporeal beings who need sight and sound and touch, virtual worlds as they now exist will never be enough. The technology Andrew was demonstrating promised to bring the technological world closer to our physical one. How close, what it would cost, and when we would get there remained to be seen. I sensed, though, even in the promise of these new technologies what we felt was missing from virtual classrooms, what we were wishing for, and what we would have to address in designing policies for online curriculums. Thousands of years of living in the real world were going to make it a challenge for us to live in a virtual one.

The Administrative Panel

The final session of the day brought together a group of English Department administrators on a panel to discuss the development of UIC's online presence. It was a full panel with most of the key department officials in attendance:

- Tom Hall, Director of Undergraduate Studies
- Tom Betsul, Director of Graduate Studies
- Don Marshall, Department Head
- William Covino, Associate Department Head
- Ann Feldman, Director of Composition

Paula Mathieu was chairing this session, and she had put forth a series of questions to each of the panel participants. Most of the questions focused around what role technology should play in English studies at UIC. Most of the panel members had written out specific responses which they read or talked their way through to get the session started. As a group they all seemed to approach the question of technology cautiously. William Covino, for instance, wondered "what the rush was" and Don Marshall said he thought it was best to "let others make the mistakes" before adopting technology practices at UIC. Tom Hall thought technology learning could be an option for students, though it wouldn't need to be a requirement. He also saw the Internet primarily as a means for disseminating information, not necessarily as a place to do work. Tom Betsul worried about getting caught up in the study of technology for its own sake. Ann Feldman wondered how technology would help students move from their personal culture into the culture of the academy, how it would provide access for students but also preserve their voices.

What matters most, perhaps, is not the individual concerns, which varied, but the general administrative theme which, as I interpreted it, was this: Technology should be approached cautiously, with skepticism, and with the realization that resources to support it are limited. What I didn't hear was anyone saying that UIC should be trying to take a leadership role in the development of an online English Department. No one was arguing that technology wasn't useful, but there was also no one promoting radical change or development. As I read the administrators' message, things in UIC's English Department were going pretty well. Some technological growth and change would be ok, but there was no need for a revolution.

After the administrators had spoken, people in the audience began asking questions or, rather, they began making statements. Cynthia Selfe was the most vocal, no doubt because she could speak as a department chair herself. She and many others thought UIC's English Department should take a more proactive position, establishing an electronic department that could be a leader and a role model. Cynthia felt students needed to study technology itself, to learn to think critically about it, if they were to be successful in the Information Age. Greg Ulmer had already suggested that there was a need to shift from teaching literacy, a print based concept, to studying what he called "electracy," ways of making meaning electronically. Most of the audience not only passionately supported this belief, but viewed it with a great sense of urgency.

Like most debates, neither side could convince the other they were right. Those who saw technology as empowering stuck to that belief, and those suspicious of technology held onto their reservations. The whole discussion left me a little depressed. I realized, as I listened, how hard it was to move and shift and rethink curriculums, pedagogies, departments, institutions. For once I was surrounded by a host of other colleagues who believed in the power of technology to reshape learning and teaching. Yet even here, doubts, concerns, and worries surfaced. Educational technologies seemed to come with built in resistances. I felt some of them myself. And I was left wondering how we would overcome them, if we could and if we should.

The talk went on, and I sat quietly drinking from a bottle of raspberry tea. We were in a large room, a lecture auditorium. Everyone was spread out. The panel of administrators sat down near the bottom of the room, while groups of two or three symposium attendees dotted in a half moon to the back of the row of seats. Behind the administrators, on the wall, hung the large silver display screen, dark now, but where only an hour before Romeo's eyes had once again fallen on Juliet's.

Shakespeare transcended time. And then I remembered one day when I'd been working in a computer lab at IUP. I was typing up a set of directions for my students on how to add pictures to the web pages they were writing. It was a public lab, and one of my composition stu-

dents had spotted me and walked over to ask a question. "Gian," she said, "I'm sending an e-mail to my mom in St. Louis. Do you think if I give her my web page address, she'll be able to see it?"

"Sure," I said, "let me show you what to type."

And so this student reached out across time and space to show her mother what she had written. It was a small thing, really, but it told me what I needed to know about making technology a part of my teaching. It was the kind of story I might have shared with the people at the session. But for some reason I didn't. I suppose I was afraid no one would listen.

Nightlife

"You look a little tired, Jim," I said. It was Friday evening, and James Sosnoski was hosting a TicToc party in his Chicago apartment. It was a beautiful place, modern mirrors and leather couches offset by antique wooden chairs and a dark brown, polished dining table. Beyond the sixth floor windows, glass buildings lit the night sky.

"Oh, I'm doing ok now," said Jim. He smiled, took a sip of his wine.

"Right. The pressure's over. You can relax a little," I told him.

"I'm not sure that's true."

"Sure it is," I said. "Things are going great. TicToc is a big success. You pulled it off." Jim seemed doubtful. I looked at him more closely. Now I could see the strain, skin pulled tense across his cheeks, darkness spreading below the eyes. There was a weight to TicToc I had not known.

Then Jim smiled again, and the image faded. "What can I get you?" he asked. "We have plenty of . . . well, of most everything. Wine, sherry, port. There's some beer. Heineken." Even under pressure, Jim was an impeccable host.

"I'll have a beer."

"Alright. What about you, David?"

"I'll have some white wine," said David Downing. He and I and several others had just arrived after eating a fine Greek dinner in downtown Chicago.

"You know there's always white wine in this house." Jim got us our drinks, and then he took David toward the back of the apartment to make a phone call. I stayed in the kitchen, twisted the lid off my beer, and looked at the people. I could see Ken McAllister and Paula Mathieu. Keith Dorwick was there and Gail Hawisher and Joe Tabbi. Lots of faces I was starting to recognize.

As I leaned against a counter, a man walked toward the kitchen, and I was surprised to find that I had met him several years earlier. It was Tom Phillion.

"Hey," I said, extending a hand. "Your name's Tom, right?"

"Yes," he said.

"I think we met once, a few years back. At that Chicago Language and Literacy meeting."

"Oh, right," said Tom. "The ethnography group."

"You're friends with David Schaafsma, aren't you? Dave was my advisor at Wisconsin."

"How's he doing?"

"He's great," I said. "He just had a baby. Sammy."

"Terrific," said Tom.

Tom got himself a beer and the two of us stood talking for awhile. Tom told me he was now Director of UIC's Writing Center. I asked him about that job, and he said it was like most writing center jobs: they helped a lot of students, but it was always hard work promoting the place and there were still lots of people who had to be convinced writing centers were important. We talked about teaching writing, then, and using technology in the classroom, and our old friend Dave, and life in Chicago versus life in Western Pennsylvania.

When we finished talking, I looked around and saw that the place was still as full as before. I was thinking about the past, and I remembered a story Dave Schaafsma had once told me. He said the Russian scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin, was famous for having parties that stretched on into the night, people eating and drinking and talking philosophy and politics. Bakhtin's theories about the social nature of language had grown out of those kinds of intellectual gatherings, and I thought, again, that maybe TicToc was really about breaking down the isolation that all of us felt as technology teachers.

Day Two

The plan for the final day of the conference was that a session chair would summarize one consultant's recommended strategies ("Archives") for developing UIC's online English presence. Then two respondents would each ask a key question to which the consultant would respond, leading into a round of discussion. Of course, while the structure was aimed at getting everyone into a discussion, academics tend to speak at length when they get the floor, even if they are only supposed to be asking a question.

Still, as the day progressed, more and more voices did enter the conversation. I won't try to recreate that whole day's conversation here, but I will try to draw out the evolution of themes which emerged from our discussions.

Tom Phillion, whom I'd reminisced with at Jim's party, was the first respondent to speak, and he started by asking what the nature of a virtual department was. He wanted to know what kind of site the department was hoping to create. Would it be a place for teaching, a place for disseminating information, a place for individual research projects, or perhaps a service like a writing center. Naturally, given his position, Tom

avored this last conception most. He said he could envision a *virtual* department as a separate entity from the *physical* English department, yet recognized by the department, eligible for department resources, and serving the needs of various faculty and students within the department.

David Downing, the first consultant to speak, wanted to push for a larger view than Tom's. Writing Centers, unfortunately, have been historically marginalized to the periphery, and David was trying to push for a broader presence, a site for community building. David outlined a view that would involve all three of the traditional academic concerns: service, research, and teaching. A virtual department could be a place for disseminating information, a site for research projects into online issues, and a place for teaching courses, such as the course on cultural studies which he and James Sosnoski had collaboratively taught in cyberspace by connecting students at IUP with those at UIC.

I believe there was a significant shift here which happened early on the second day of the symposium. Tom moved us toward thinking concretely about what the UIC English Department's online presence should look like. While the administrative session the previous day had seemed hesitant to commit toward any online vision, Tom's question had *assumed* that there should be a vision and placed as our task the question of shaping that vision.

Cynthia Selfe, the next consultant, made us consider that such a vision would have real world consequences. In thinking about online courses, she said we had to consider who would teach what and at what cost. Would people be given time and money to develop courses or would adjunct faculty be asked to teach the courses for minimal amounts of money? We had discussed this set of issues at great length on the listserv, but the question was most pertinent now with the UIC English Department head in the room and in a position to direct policy. Cynthia, as on the previous day, urged Don Marshall to take an active role in moving UIC English studies into a technological presence.

This discussion led well to the third consultant's ideas. It was Greg Ulmer's view that the UIC English department ought to recognize the energies already present within it. He felt perhaps society had already progressed as far as it could with traditional print literacy, and so it had developed "electracy" as a means for going further. He worried that we would be trapped by our old ways of thinking if we didn't allow room for new kinds of electronic teaching and study, the kind being pursued by some members of UIC's English Department.

Box Lunch

There's a danger, here, that in telling a story of the TicToc symposium I am bringing more order and shape to the discussion than really existed. If there were patterns to the discussion, they were only partially like

the ones I have recreated here. Like most discussions, ours was a rambling one. People dodged the questions they were asked, several people lectured rather than discussing, and there were people who were entirely cut out of the discussion, particularly, it seemed to me, the graduate students in the room. Still, the patterns I have tried to shape here are a way to provide a vision of the symposium, a way to tell the story.

In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien tells us that the truest stories are never true. Rather, stories are the way we make meaning and understand the world (Bruner; Rosen). Telling a story gives a form to what happened, gives a reader a means for understanding, in this case, what it was like to be at the TicToc symposium. As I write, I shape the story through my sociohistorical experience and then give it to a reader who likewise constructs the story from another cultural, political experience point. "The word is always half someone else's" (293) Bakhtin tells us. My efforts here are to tell a story which will open up multiple ways for people to understand TicToc. I can only create a limited version of the story, a few choices from a host of possibilities, but this story is hopefully a point of dialogism (Holquist), a way of entering into discussion with you, the reader.

But let me say it another way. We got tired. The symposium was hard work. The discussion was disordered. We had a lot of questions and not many concrete answers. Worst of all, for some reason the day's sessions had been scheduled in the basement of UIC's Humanities Institute. There were no windows in the room, and its orange and brown colors, combined with bright fluorescent lights, seemed to suck away the room's air. There were too many people to form a real circle, so the principal speakers for each panel would sit near the front of the room while everyone else fanned out from there. On top of that, the session was being video taped, and that technology made its presence felt to varying degrees.

When the noon break finally came, we needed it. We ate box lunches, turkey or portabella mushroom sandwiches. I wanted to go outside, but it was too cold and windy, so we ate in an outer reception room which was bigger than the conference area but still had no windows. At this point, too, people began to drift out. I saw Greg Ulmer pull on a large white trench coat. Then I gave someone else a hug as they said goodbye. As people left, I sensed, again, the kinds of connections we had not made on the listserv.

Closing Statements

It was my job to chair the next two sessions after lunch. We were all moving a little slowly, tired and full, but the consultants Cynthia Haynes and Jan Holemvik directed us to the issue of play and role identity on the Internet, particularly at LinguaMOO, the site they administered. They urged us to reconsider our conceptions of teacher and student,

how we taught and operated in cyberspace. Jan said he had created different work sites in LinguaMOO and had observed that the kind of talk students engaged in within his cyber classroom was completely different from the talk that went on in his cyber donut shop and cyber cafe.

When Jan and Cynthia finished, I introduced the next consultant, Randy Bass. Randy said we needed to look at distance education as an untapped revenue source. He said we had to keep the question of resources in the foreground and the issues of vision in the background. What was available, what could we do, how would it help us? What often failed, said Randy, were movements into distance education without any thought of where it was you were trying to go. At the same time, though, the potential change embodied in educational technology offered a way of shaping that vision.

In my mind, though, the most interesting thing Randy had to say was this: "Nobody has thought about learning until they got defensive about technology." Whether it was our reasons for avoiding using technology in classrooms or our discoveries once we started using that technology, Randy seemed to be right. I thought of how many times teachers had complained to me that students who fooled around with the format of their documents were just playing and not doing real writing (Johnson).

"Fluff over substance," someone had said to me one day. "That's all those fancy fonts are. When I see them, I know the student's paper is no good." Randy's idea offered another possibility. Why look at something a student had put time and energy into and assume all that effort was done simply to avoid work? That didn't make much sense. Instead, maybe there was something about communicating visually instead of only through print that excited these students, that made them spend two hours at a computer just trying to line up one picture on a page of text. Something was going on there, yes, but why assume it was laziness? Maybe because that was easier than saying what we knew and what we could teach was somehow being threatened or, at least, being changed by new educational technologies. If the words you wrote were all that mattered, why did we have desktop publishing software? Why did some people, people like our students, think it was so important and exciting? As Randy said, why were we getting defensive?

With a long day already behind us, the last consultants, Mick Doherty and Eric Crump, offered to combine their final two sessions into one long discussion about the ramifications of online publishing. This was another issue we had heavily explored on the listserv, but Mick took us in a new direction by telling an unexpected story. He said that like many other people at TicToc, he was a regular participant on Eric's Rhetnet listserv. So when it came time for him to take his comprehensive exams, he decided to post his questions and his practice answers to the list to get some feedback. That's exactly what he got. In fact, he was deluged with comments and questions and suggestions. People

told him the kinds of things *they* would ask him at the defense and the kind of problem areas *they* thought he still needed to address in his work. Mick said that in some ways talking about his ideas on Rhetnet was harder than the actual defense, which he did pass.

The question, though, was whether by making his questions and answers so public, he was undercutting the authority of his committee. A lot of people figured this was not a problem. Learning is a social activity. People should get together and talk about ideas. That's why we have classes and study groups. Others weren't so sure. They were afraid this was completely redefining what it meant to take a comprehensive exam. To them it seemed like Mick had made the exam into a free-for-all, turned it into something it was never meant to be. Still others said Mick's approach made perfect sense because of the technology we now had at our disposal. Mick's efforts to share his ideas with the online community was the whole reason the Internet had been invented: for the free exchange of information. Mick even pointed out that people had now begun citing the comprehensive answers he had published on the web. As I listened to the discussion, I thought it was exactly the kind of question we needed efforts like TicToc to investigate.

A Final Story

That's where the TicToc symposium ended. But before I end my own story, there's one more moment from that meeting worth singling out. Somewhere in the middle of Randy's session, David Downing finally put the question to Don Marshall, the chair: Where exactly was the UIC English Department heading? The room was full of English Department faculty and graduate students who had a vested interest in technology education. They had committed their intellectual efforts to that pursuit, they were ready and willing to do the work. But they couldn't do it without some help, and money, from the Department. David's question was the one we'd been trying to answer the whole duration of the symposium: What should be done?

Of course it was also the kind of question Don couldn't possibly answer. So, instead, he said there were lots of things he could do. He could put a faculty member in charge of technology education for the department. He could push forward technology curriculum changes. He could direct funding toward investments in computer labs. These were all things he *could* do. And that's where he had to stop. He didn't have an answer, yet, for what he *would* do. So instead he told a story. He said years before, when the city was constantly flooded by the waters of Lake Michigan, the people of Chicago had worked together to raise their home ten, twenty feet above the waterline. After that, the city stayed dry. It was the kind of thing people said couldn't be done. But not the people who went to UIC.

The trouble with stories, I suppose, is it's hard to figure out what they

mean. Maybe Don Marshall was saying that the TicToc people's hard work would pay off in the long run, even if it seemed unlikely now. But maybe he was saying, as Greg Ulmer's father had once said, that the only things which really matter are the things we can actually feel, the dirt and metal and concrete you build a city out of, not the electric light of cyberspace. Or maybe he was saying that the students who came to UIC hoping to learn had such determination they would succeed in getting an education no matter what we did. Maybe, though, Don was just telling a story.

Epilogue

It's June now, and I'm sitting hunched over my Macintosh trying to write this story. The symposium has been over for a couple of weeks. I'm sitting alone in my study, drinking a glass of water and listening to the kids playing on the swings across from my apartment. I've got Sting's *Ten Summoner's Tales* cd playing low in the background, and I'm trying to figure out just what happened at TicToc. What took place there? What was it all about? It's a hard job because I don't really know the answer. What is a conference, after all? Why do we go to them? Stories are the only things I know that can help us figure that out. And they won't really show us the answer so much as show us something *near* the answer. I'd like some easy answers. Something clear and solid so I can get this chapter finished. But that's not how it's going to be.

What was TicToc? I guess it was a moment in time when a few people got together to think about where technology was taking education. It was about bringing together people who could use technology and teach about it and pay for it. It was about trying to understand what technology education might mean for one English department at one institution at one intersection of circumstances. But then again, maybe TicToc wasn't really about technology or money or English departments at all. In the end, I think TicToc was about the same thing that happens everywhere every day. People get together to try to figure out this world we live in.

So I get out of my chair and stretch and lean up against the window. The sunlight bounces off the leaves of a tree and the kids keep swinging and my computer hums and I feel the warmth of the day coming on, somewhere just out of reach.

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