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Volume 33  Numbers 1–2  2013

11  Narrating a Nation: Second Wave Immigration, Literacy, and the Framing of the American Identity
C. Kendall Theado

41  Vulnerability, Precariousness, and the Paradox of the 9/11 Imposter
Amy E. Robillard

65  Memories of Hope in the Age of Disposability
Henry A. Giroux

85  A Contradictory Assemblage of Self: James Frey, Creative Nonfiction, and the Empire of Oprah
Kate Birdsell

121  Recognizing the Effects of the Past in the Present: Theorizing A Way Forward on the Israel-Palestine Conflict
Matthew Abramson

169  Watching the Clock:
The Logics of Speed Literacy Practices
Lynn C. Lewis

201  Assuming Differently: Posthumanism, Ent hymene, and the Possibility of Change
Kristen Seas Trader

233  Plagiarism, Academic Mobbing,
and the Manufacture of Scandal
Amy E. Robillard and John W. Presley
Narrating a Nation: Second Wave Immigration, Literacy, and the Framing of the American Identity

C. Kendall Theado

Nationality is a narration, a story which people tell about themselves in order to lend meaning to their social world.

—Uri Ram

Since its revolutionary inception, the U.S. has been regularly engaged in the narration of its nationality—that is, in the process of defining what it means to be an “American” so that an individual can fully participate in the idea of “America.” The broad and ongoing project of nation-building, then, is perhaps best viewed as a simultaneous construction of both the nation’s identity as well as the idealized identity of its citizenry. There is nothing intrinsically unitary about an identity, national or otherwise. Instead, and as Ram observes, it is the narrative process, or the ways in which nations and individuals discursively interpret themselves and each other, that creates the experience of unity and coherence.

This is not to suggest that a continuous sense of self or nation is a superfluous endeavor. On the contrary, narration is a necessary element for the formation of an identity. Social theorist Erving Goffman once remarked that a person’s “continuing biography” ensures, to an important degree, a “traceable life,” which in turn enables an individual to assign meaningfulness to his or her lived experiences (287). Likewise, a traceable national life is essential to the process of nation-building, providing for its citizens the very substance of the stories that can be told. Still, it is important to acknowledge that the discursive overlaying of narration on the various and essentially unconnected historical events in either a nation’s or an individual’s life is but an interpretive construct, regardless of its perceived rootedness in what we take to be “objective” social

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Watching the Clock:
The Logics of Speed Literacy Practices

Lynn C. Lewis

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What does it mean to be literate in the twenty-first century? How can
composition and rhetoric teacher-scholars make sense of the literacy
practices situating students' understanding of writing? These questions,
I argue, necessitate renewed attention especially within the dominant,

JAC 33.1-2 (2013)
frantic rush and roar of speed culture. As Paul Virilio puts it, speed has become "the privileged measure of both time and space," and that measurement, clock-bound, is driving writing cadences and framing writing practices with a barely visible hand (134).

The epigraphs above illustrate competing literacy practices, native to young writers, which inhere in speed culture. In this essay, I demonstrate their prominence and show that their differences are best explained through interrogation of their entanglement within speed culture. I localize my argument to high school and college writers because not only is this group steeped in speed culture, but also their literacy practices demonstrate explicitly different logics in need of critical interrogation. United States government policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act and dominant institutions like the College Board, major architects of students' school writing practices, promote a literacy suffused with clock-time logic, where the inexorable rush of minutes, hours, days, and years, is commodified. Consequently, sprinting at the continuously increasing speed of the clock enacts a literacy measured through quantified individual assessments. In this zone, the valence of literacies is always measured, always individual, and always clock time dictates. The continual development of evermore sophisticated testing technologies instantiate this literacy practice. Yet, this is not the only literacy practice emerging within speed culture.

In contrast to literacies informed by clock-time logic, emerging with startling frequency, appeal, and reach, are literacies informed by network-time logic. These practices, also characteristic of speed culture, explode traditional notions of text and author. They are, as Kathleen Blake Yancey suggested, both kairotic and significant. Indeed, they denote the "creation of a writing public that, in development and in linkage to technology, parallels the development of a reading public. And these parallels, they raise good questions, suggest ways that literacy is created across spaces, across time" (630–31).

Facebook, Tumblr, MySpace, Webs, Twitter, Wikipedia, Googledocs, and the various blog applications, among others, typify these literacies. Network-time logic is mediated through the Worldwide Web. This logic connects time and place differently than literacies informed by clock time. While I acknowledge their imbrication within speed culture, I contend that speed within these contexts affords the possibility of the subordination of clock-time measurement. Further, a significant effect of the logic of the network is these literacies' dependence upon community and interaction, which de-emphasizes the overall dominance of the individual focus.

The interrogation of these literacy practices and, indeed, the (un)presence of clock time in the writing classroom is this essay's fundamental objective. While literacy "crisis" remains a popular trope, as John Trimbur cogently argues, this discourse serves particular cultural and institutional stakeholders ("Literacy"). Focusing on literacy practices rather than crisis discourse, I see speed as common ground. Here, I deploy Deborah Brandt's thoughtful work defining multiple contextual literacies.

Brandt demonstrates that literacy is best understood as a resource that cannot be analyzed without consideration of the social, political, and economic forces affecting its use. Meeting the accepted standards for literacy gives power to individuals across social, political, and economic realms. Brandt's definition of literacy as resource underscores the power literacy confers upon the designated literate. Literacy gives the ability to transcend identities and move fluidly between personal and communal spaces. Thus, literacy as resource emerges from particular and varying sponsors. As Brandt explains, literacy sponsors

"[a]re delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners. They also represent the causes into which people's literacy usually gets recruited. Sponsors are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, and coercion or at a minimum, contact with existing trade routes (19)."

Brandt sees literacy definitions as "setting terms for access to literacy" and notes that the interests of sponsor and sponsored may conflict. In other words, literacy sponsors may initiate more than one literacy practice for "the sponsored can be oblivious to or innovative with the ideological burden" (19–20). For example, the nineteenth century African-American church sponsored literacy practices that consolidated the power of the
church through indoctrinating members into its Christian faith, yet also “resisted and repaired the insults of racism” (118). The church’s literacy courses functioned as a conservative force, upholding the church’s institutional presence and ideology, yet they also sparked radical resistance to cultural forces, for church members’ burgeoning literacy practices outside of the classroom included protest essays, letters, and manifestos. Similarly, speed in the twenty-first century functions conservatively to uphold arguably mainstream testing corporations and utilitarian definitions of education while also constructing a space for radical resistance to cultural forces. These spaces are informed by differing experiences of clock time.

Speed sets the terms for the actors who sponsor literacy practices; its hegemonic presence operates as a delivery system through which some literacy practices are enforced while others are made possible. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship I trace below. While, as Brandt suggests, the communication revolution in technological society ensures that the rate of changes in literacy is increasing exponentially, I turn to the cultural dominance of speed, its formidable effects on literacy and on the necessary conditions for literacy (24). As I will argue, speed informs the chief actors in young people’s literacy practices: No Child Left Behind-reified testing culture, the College Board, and the network.

Writing students bring these literacy practices—markedly different in their epistemological stances, and, indeed, in what each privileges in writing—to the classroom. I focus on a population whose most frequent composing work can be contrasted starkly through an explicit difference between logics; however, as the white space in Figure 1 implies, speed may undergird varied logics through other literacy practices. Indeed, other sponsors undoubtedly influence twenty-first century composing. However, these are outside the scope of my argument here.

I contextualize this argument through a brief examination of the dependent and frequently contentious relationship between technology and speed. That relationship, as visualized in Figure 1, drives the literacy practices I describe. I then examine the reification of clock-time logic literacy practices through government and educational institutional poli-
Speed Culture

Speed characterizes the world of technology in the twenty-first century: it is technology’s primary value, its haptic experience, its social nexus. For example, technologies such as Apple’s iPad and Nintendo’s Wii burst into popular awareness, promising immediate and intimate connection with digital worlds. Indeed, the Internet’s global presence—phenomena such as blogging, Google, online games such as World of Warcraft, YouTube and viral videos, social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, Wikipedia—are made possible through technologies, valued for their speed, and experienced as speedy.

The contingent relationship of speed and technology frames human bodily and social engagement with technology’s world, although valorized differently at varying historical moments. As Stephen Kern suggests, technological advances have led to “distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space” (1). Louis Mumford emphasizes the invention of the clock as key: “From the moment of waking, the rhythm of the day is punctuated by the clock” (369). Similarly, Kern explains, the move to universal time and a standardized clock came about through technological advances such as the railway and the telegraph (12–13). This early network made space less consequential and time itself more consequential. In other words, clock time, privileged, became the measurement that mattered most despite concerns from nineteenth century physicians that speed could cause physical and emotional damage to the fragile human physique (124–36).

However, this changed when in the early twentieth century, Frederick Taylor’s principles of scientific management became the dominant model for the business world. These principles, based upon “time-and-motion studies,” propose that labor be divided into small, easily reproduced tasks ensuring maximum efficiency: less time and a minimum of effort ensure a higher rate of productivity (“links”). Technology allowed speed; the faster the Henry Ford–constructed assembly line, the better for owner and consumer. Within the Fordist framework, the pleasure of technology and speed had few critics.2

The valorization of speed broadened throughout the 20th century. At an extreme end of the spectrum, Marinetti’s proto-Fascist Futurism movement in Italy melded speed into intoxication with art and politics. While less extreme, Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development in 1945, explicitly fused the value of speed with the inevitable march of progress in “As We May Think,” a text much cited for its prescient technology predictions. In effect, Bush suggests that whatever can be done, will be done best when done faster. His call for better technology through speed can be read, then, as marking the normalization of speed’s irrefutable value within the scientific community.

Nevertheless, speed critiques grew louder as technology’s reach increased. From 1977, Paul Virilio’s critiques of technology speed, what he calls “dromology,” explicitly link speed to machines and particularly to war.3 In the twenty-first century, critiques of speed culture include such phenomena as the Slow Food movement and can be traced in sustainability and Green initiatives.

This uneasy relationship with speed—this seesawing between valorization and criticism—is echoed in the work of English studies scholars. For example, James Berlin notes that “acceleration . . . prevents critical reflection,” essential to social epistemic rhetoric (490–91). Similarly, Cynthia Selfe describes the ways in which speed’s omnipresence in technological change and the rapid profusion of computers in particular, have allowed market and government forces to strengthen their power through the call for technological literacy.4 Enthusiasm for speed’s potential is not difficult to find, however, for speed allows the scholar to ask questions he or she could not previously ask (Hobbs).

A third inquiry mode acknowledges both the dangers and pleasures of speed. For example, over ten years ago, Laura Gurak identified speed as essential to cyberspace, yet also as both perilous and exciting. She delineates reach, anonymity, and interactivity as equally weighted action terms. These terms, linked together, create what Gurak calls, “cyberliteracy” (46–48).

More recently, Jim Ridolfo and Danielle DeVoss, examine the ways in which the circulation of texts is changing due to composers’ purposeful use of network speed across time, space, and access boundaries. Focusing on delivery, they draw on Ridolfo’s term, “rhetorical velocity,” which describes a
strategic approach to composing for rhetorical delivery. In the inventive thinking of composing, rhetorical velocity is the strategic theorizing for how a text might be recomposed (and why it might be recomposed) by third parties, and how this recomposing may be useful or not to the short- or long-term rhetorical objectives of the rhetorician.

In other words, they envision a taking advantage of the potentials that the cultural presence of speed allows. Rhetors may enlist speed in order to achieve their purposes. However, as Ridolfo and DeVoss themselves suggest, students write in many contexts. Accordingly, speed acts upon literacy practices differently—the rhythms of the clock privileged, resisted, or ignored.

Within this particular cultural moment—and within the context of twenty-first century composing practices—mapping speed’s pervasive presence among young writers is emerging as significant because desire to live within speed (a kind of speed rapture), both inflected and inspired by the burgeoning digital universe, is setting the terms for access to literacy. Like the African American church Brandt describes, it is a “powerful, multiply performing sponsor” (112). Yet, importantly, time values are differently valued and experienced within varied contexts. Literacy, speed, and technology—their complicated entanglement can be traced from the creation of the American university system and the reification of testing.

Speed-Grown Literacy Practices

As has been widely discussed, the creation of the American university system was quickly followed by Harvard University’s development of an entrance examination in 1874. Significantly, the ability to pass an examination was necessary in order for students to be judged as literate at the university—a pattern still prevalent in the twenty-first century American educational system. Kathryn Fitzgerald traces the evolution of the entrance examination during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, demonstrating how concerns about test regularization elided questions about test content. She concludes:

In Foucault’s terms, the systematizing power exercised through the technology of the examination produced the substance of the school subject. That is, the subject matter was a result of regularizing the testing mechanism, not a cause.

Moreover, regularizing testing technologies necessarily insists upon the efficient use of time—measurements dependent upon such efficiency. This evaluative stance persists, lending itself to an epistemological viewpoint that pronounces truth as objective, static and, therefore, knowable through scientific method.

The allure of speed and cultural dependence on the testing panacea make a potent combination. Literacy thus becomes utilitarian and, as Berlin has suggested, the ability to read and write is therefore connected to individuals’ identities as contributors to the economic system. Literacy is getting ahead, “gaining the edge,” jumping through the hoops of education as quickly as possible in order to enjoy one’s true life—as worker and consumer. The rhetorical marketing strategies of educational testing companies, demonstrated in the opening epigraph, pay tribute to this logic. In fact, forcible boundary blurring between schools and businesses has evolved testing culture so that instead of the 1874 model in which some elite institutions used tests as gatekeeper, the United States government has enacted a law, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), meant to enforce testing as governmental policy. The NCLB, then, enmeshed in the valuation of testing and, more important for my argument, speed, sponsors particular literacy practices, in need of interrogation.

No Child Left Behind: An Approach

On January 8, 2002, President George Bush signed the “No Child Left Behind” Act into law. Then U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige supplied a foreword to the overview of the NCLB in which education was explicitly linked to economic prosperity:

The Founding Fathers were correct: Education is necessary for the growth and prosperity of our country. As education has become more inclusive and of better quality, it has enhanced American economic and political leadership. (NCLB website)
Education has no humanistic gravitas in this formulation; it is, rather, defined as good when it grows the economy and supports political leadership. Accountability and reduction of the achievement gap became key terms, and since the dominant epistemological stance determines how these terms will be measured, testing technologies have been privileged. As a result, the NCLB has redefined education through its deployment of testing technology to encode human beings. Moreover, despite recent moves by the Obama administration to gut the power of the NCLB, testing remains the preferred means to ensure good schools and teachers as well as students ready to take their place within the global economy.

Within the culture of speed, the efficiency of testing—where a student cohort can be secured in a room for a specified amount of time, and a machine can score examinations and produce results rapidly—ensures the viability of NCLB and reifies the objective of excellence. The key terms "accountability," "measurement," "standards," and "evidence-based teaching practices" are servants to excellence. That is, excellence becomes meaningful and concrete with these key terms applied.

Composition scholars such as Patricia Harkin and Christopher Carter have astutely interrogated the term "excellence." Harkin explains, "The empty signifier excellence becomes necessary only in a culture in which somebody wins because somebody else loses" (37). Going faster, instant achievement, sprinting toward the goalposts—these are familiar rhetorical strategies within the culture of speed, dependent on winning. Carter demonstrates the intimate connection between the rhetoric of excellence and accountability and points to the calls for excellence and accountability characterizing the NCLB, noting that this rhetoric both demands attention to winning and privileges the dominant class. He argues that this rhetoric is a feature of "the hegemony of standardization and surveillance [that] interpellates subjects who either endorse their answerability to capital or who cannot build enough collective traction to alter the direction of accountability" (44). NCLB surveillance mechanisms instantiate Carter’s argument. That is, NCLB-sponsored testing culture feeds the profit lines of educational testing companies, drives teaching work, and measures and defines students—a rapid whirlpool of speed-driven relationships that nourish capital efficiently.

The NCLB expanded a vast bureaucracy, notable on the website. This apparatus, a kind of clockwork, sustains itself through the power of the state. For example, the state of Oklahoma receives letter after letter requiring adjustments, deadlines, formulae, and standards for the Department of Education’s approval. As numerous scholars have argued, not only did the NCLB increase the government’s power and reify its ideological agenda enormously, it also ensured that testing drives the work of school districts, individual schools, administrators, teachers and children. How, then, does time emerge within this context?

Testing technologies complicate the human relationship to time in both concrete and abstract ways. I analyze this relationship in terms of literacy practices below. However, on a practical level, note that because school curricula are designed in such a way that students will have the maximum opportunity to score well on the tests, teachers devote school hours to train students to perform well on the tests. In other words, the State owns classroom time. Indeed, American high school students, immersed in NCLB’s pervasive testing culture, practice their test-taking skills both inside and outside of school, and the increasingly powerful grasp of the College Board, particularly in regards to the prevalence of Advanced Placement examinations, invites the conclusion that young writers’ time is owned by this much criticized organization. The following section considers in detail the nature of its literacy sponsorship.

The College Board

Founded in 1900, the College Entrance Examination Board was organized by the presidents of several universities and colleges as well as some heads of secondary schools in order to design a uniform college entrance examination. As a May 1900 announcement in the New York Times reports, questions were to be designed and agreed to by committees, and designated readers would score the examinations. The fee for examination was five dollars, from which the expenses of the examiners were to be paid; the organizers expected about one thousand students to sit for the examination that year, although some were expected to want the certificate of examination only rather than actually attending.
college ("For Entrance"). The College Board's website frames the move to a standard examination as democratic in origin: now all students would have the opportunity to attend college regardless of family background or school—as long as they passed the examination ("About Us—History").

In stark contrast today, the College Board's examinations are necessary rites of passage, and a student's score plays an enormous role in where he or she may attend school and whether or not he or she will receive financial aid. Parents of means may pay thousands of dollars so that their children can take test-taking courses and score well. The organization itself has grown and diversified enormously.

In particular, with the creation of the Advanced Placement program, the College Board's examinations now influence school curricula. The College Board's site consists of designated advanced placement courses and examinations. High school students are now urged, as this essay's epigraph demonstrates, to win back some of the time college requirements may leach from them. Begun in 1952 and institutionalized by the College Board in 1955, the program's original intent was to synthesize and enrich the educational offerings in high school and college curricula. According to the College Board's website, Educators from Andover and Exeter urged an initiative to encourage the two to work together "as two halves of a common enterprise" (qtd. in "A Brief History of the AP Program"). This was meant to be, as Stanley Katz has explained, the crux of liberal education—a seven-year intensive program with examinations used only for the purpose of placement in college. There has been a dramatic change, however.

Today, students intending to apply to college take Advanced Placement courses in order to prepare to take Advanced Placement examinations. I do not intend here to make the reductionist argument that Advanced Placement courses only prepare students for examinations. Some teachers may work toward this goal, some may not. However, understanding the agenda behind the College Board's Advanced Placement program explains the literacies sponsored in first-year college students—and ought to inform the curricula of first-year writing programs.

The number of students taking the examination is staggeringly high. In 2008, approximately 2,168,185 students took at least one Advanced Placement examination. The College Board's 2008 "Fifth Annual AP Report to the Nation" tells a tale of progress, as more and more high schools develop Advanced Placement courses and more and more students take the examination. It also reveals the usual story: students from wealthier states, who are white and economically privileged, take the examination more consistently and are more likely to receive passing scores. As of 2009, the College Board offered thirty-seven courses and exams. More than one kind of exam is offered in many fields; for example, within English studies, students may take either the English Language or the English Literature examination. Although the scope of offerings I describe here comes from the Advanced Placement website, high schools typically give a selection of AP coursework instead of all the possible AP courses. In my town in Oklahoma, Norman High School, a school of 1,900 students in a midsize suburban area, offers thirteen different AP courses. Interestingly, when the Education Oversight Board of the Oklahoma Department of Accountability releases the NCLB-mandated school report card, a separate category for AP test-takers reveals how many students have taken and passed advanced placement examinations. In other words, the more students pass the examination, the more highly regarded the school.

Clearly, the powerful speed culture-informed Advanced Placement program privileges particular literacies. In order for students to achieve excellence—that is, a score of three or better—they must enact a very specific genre of literacy within a particularly rigid context: the timed examination. The English Language examination deserves particular attention since it measures students' abilities to write at college level and—parents, students, and high schools hope—receive credit for first-year writing so that they need not take the courses. How then is writing ability measured?

As of 2009, the three-hour and fifteen-minute examination has two sections. The first hour, students respond to fifty-five multiple-choice questions. These questions, as the Advanced Placement program website explains, "test how well students are able to analyze the rhetoric of prose passages." For the remainder of the examination, students write two free-response essays. They receive seven sources from a variety of writing
genres, and an essay question for the first essay and one four-paragraph excerpt for the second. Time, then, is a student’s most precious commodity. The student must read quickly, know the approved essay form, and be able to apply it. The particular skills the student must depend upon are an ability to read, think, synthesize and write fast. While the College Board does provide alternative testing situations for students with documented disabilities, I note that the Advanced Placement examination’s methodology mimics the kind of writing situations typical of the essay examination only. Reasoned, researched writing based on inquiry is not deemed essential to first-year writing: a contention that is inarguably anathema to scholars of first-year pedagogy. Indeed, the typical first-year writing course does not include essay examinations but rather asks students to write researched papers in which they locate and synthesize sources in order to draw a conclusion and write a persuasive argument.

My conversations with my children’s Advanced Placement high school teachers provide anecdotal evidence. For the most part, they are seasoned and dedicated teachers, many with Master’s degrees in education. Many have thoughtful criticisms of the advanced placement course system. Even so, in parent-teacher conferences, they uniformly emphasize the importance of speed in a child’s ability to perform well in the assignments they give. These assignments imitate the sections of the advanced placement examinations: the DBQ or document-based question is typical. In it, students must use seven primary sources in order to answer an essay question. They follow a particular formula to do so, much akin to the five-paragraph theme. For example, the thesis statement must come as the first sentence and contain very specific language while the conclusion must restate the thesis. The response is timed.

The consistent emphasis on timed writing situations rests on two assumptions. First, that time must be carefully measured in order for writing to be judged effective. Clock measurement dominates: writers do not choose the amount of time they need to create the text they think meets the assignment criteria. In this sense, the text belongs to the clock, and the writer’s agency is contingent upon his or her ability to beat the clock. Good writing, therefore, marches to clock time, its cadences, its sweeps, its textures determined from outside the writer. Clock time—and technologies that promote clock time—are presumed essential.

Second, it must be uniformly measured; that is, all writers must perform to similar standards within the same amount of time. Therefore, the writer’s individual identity itself is erased: the writer must demonstrate designated characteristics and merge a sense of individual self with a kind of any writer in order to be assessed as having achieved mastery over the literacies first-year writing courses teach. The writer does not invent or construct knowledge. Rather, he or she must decide as quickly as possible how to put words in the right order in the correct amount of time. The writer’s agency is less important than the ability to meet the demands of the timed writing situation. The audience is faceless and uniform; they are judges who will assess the writer’s ability to follow the formula within the prescribed length of time.

I do not suggest that timed writing examinations lack merit entirely. However, their wide application as evidence for good writing in any context means they deeply troublesome products of speed culture. Edward White, while writing of the benefits of timed writing assessment, also argues, “But no assessment exists outside of its contexts, its uses, and its effects; no tests or assessment systems have value in themselves” (33). As White explains, the timed writing assessment should never be too widely applied; time constraints do carry with them both benefits and challenges. Such benefits include the ability to decide whether basic English or first-year composition is best suited for the entering student. That is to say, the exam may be appropriate under very particular conditions for very specific goals involving placement.

However, the culture of Advanced Placement courses and examinations now dominates. In fact, students in first-year writing courses have come to understand that time is the most precious of commodities and that writing should be as efficient as possible. Can this be understood, then, as more evidence of the “habit of seeing” described by Fleckenstein? Certainly, writing contexts tied to clock-time dominance is the familiar in-school experience of many young writers. As Fleckenstein puts it, “Visual habit and educational policy converge in the Spellings report to ensure that a culture’s young adults are successfully trained in the way of seeing (the ways of reading, writing and thinking) that ensure their business-like participation in that culture dominated by the elective affinities of capitalism and science” (104-05). As a result of both the
power of this visual habit and the political realities evoked in the Spelling's Commission report, Fleckenstein argues, the English studies reply to this visual habit must be dialectic. It must complement Cartesian perspectivalism, accepting its "insights" while seeking to acquaint policy makers with perspectives derived from English studies. Indeed, young writers enact multiple literacy practices and experience clock time variously. Acknowledging these multiple literacy practices ought then to produce a dialectic of seeing while allowing space for valuable critiques of literacy practices informed by this logic.

Speed informs literacies situated within this environment as value, as a marker for efficiency (Lyotard's minimum input to maximum output), achieving the measurement of excellence de facto demands as little time investment as possible. For the College Board, students are speed culture's consumer citizens. Indeed, the Board uses bullet points, a fast and easy checklist in order to explain the nature of good writing, a practice that is familiar to writing classroom instructors and students as well. The privileging of the clock and valuation of speed-frame literacy practices is informed by market objectives and can also be traced in iterations of online writing courses and programs as well as in some institutions' first-year writing courses. Composing work situated here has little use value for writers.

The normalization of speed culture raises ethical issues as well. The presumption that young writers live in and desire the presence of speed affects attempts to categorize and quantify their composing work. As a consequence, speed culture normalization elides access issues. In other words, the questions asked are shaped by speed normalization. The Pew surveys of teen use of digital tools and Horizon Report are cases in point.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project set out to determine how teens view the impact of technology on their writing. Their 2008 report, sponsored by the College Board Commission on Writing, notes that ninety-four percent of teens use the Internet as a research tool "at least occasionally," quotes two high school students talking about how they have used it, and notes that access difference between teens in households with an income of less than $30,000 and more than $75,000 is only eleven percent and the differences between races are virtually inconsequential.
indeed, influence policy fail to provide adequate contexts for essential questions. In what contexts should in-school writing privilege clock time? To what extent and when should in-school writing de-emphasize clock time?

Literacy practices sponsored through the logic of the network—and made possible because of speed—push clock-time rhythms to the background. As the second epigraph from Webs, a website construction site, suggests, the characteristics of these literacy practices are markedly different. In addition, network-time logic practices may resist or oppose capital. I explore this in the following section.

The Logic of Network Writing

When I walk toward our computer workspace, my thirteen-year-old daughter hides the screen from me with her hand. "Mom," she says, "It's private." About twenty minutes later, she finds me and says, "Come look at what I wrote. It's awesome." She has been using a website now called Webs (formerly FreeWebs) and created her own webpage a few months ago. She chose her favorite color, pearl blue, for background and writes in a script font. On the website, her name is Silver Star. As it turns out, she is an elfin princess, madly in love with a human boy who has an evil twin brother and magic powers he is just beginning to discover. She blogs her adventures, text along these lines:

Today we met in the whispering woods and listened to the wind sobbing. I told him of the painted horses of Niumulini and he agreed that he would see them with me one day. He drew his short sword and I drew mine. We cut our palms and placed them together and swore that we would never part. Then we said good-bye."

Her website includes a survey with questions about likes and dislikes, pictures she has uploaded, and links. Most of her links connect to her friends' pages where they blog their pretend adventures too, upload sketches and photos, and survey visitors about favorite movies or songs. Most fascinatingly, she and her friends read, critique, and share their critiques of their websites through text messaging, chatting, and some-

times even phone conversations. This is writing subject to the logic of the network. It is audience-directed, interactive, and the writer herself determines who may read what she writes. It is grounded within the space that the writer chooses—her authorial intent. The collaborative, interactive space of digital composing has been of great interest to new literacy scholars for the last ten years. For example, Knobel and Lankshear describe a heuristic in which contrasting mindsets exemplify the differences between an older "scarcity model of value" and the newer "relativeness model of value," resulting in "new ethos stuff" in which production trumps consumption. Their focus on the lack of hierarchy and fluidity of these spaces along with the valuing of audience response and relationships usefully categorizes this new literacy practice (11–15). Yet, this space could not (and for many does not) exist without fast Internet. Speed opens the door to this literacy practice.

Indeed, time is experienced differently when the writer not only focuses on audience, but assumes quick response. Jack Petranker's "presence of others" insight similarly foregrounds how immediacy invites the possibility of experiencing others. He suggests that real intimacy, rather than its simulacrum as described by Baudrillard and Virilio, is made possible through speed. However, Petranker's focus on the contrasts between network time and what he calls "Frankentime" or a kind of mechanical slavishness to the clock, overlooks the composing act necessary to these instances of presence (173–91). The instant e-mail reply, the quick comment on the blog entry, the volley of Twitter tweets and replies, and the fast Facebook notification are all examples of composing work. In addition, speed makes dialogic interaction, essential to these genres, possible. Therefore, the relationships Knobel and Lankshear emphasize are dependent upon speed's presence and valuation.

The audience is not passive here. In the Facebook social networking space, the status lines, comments, and notes written by users are meant to provoke response. Blog entries typically include a place for comments, and Twitter, an application in which users communicate their status across Blackberries, cell phones, iPhones and computers, in 140 characters or less, connects users and their self-designated followers, instantly. Interaction is therefore essential and though the generic characteristics of
each kind of composing vary, the quantity and quality of replies determines the value of the composing act. A Facebook status line with ten comments is more highly valued than one with no response at all. Moreover, instead of privileging clock time and the ability to compose speedily, these texts and the literacies they demand privilege the network. Indeed, the larger the network, the more effective the composing act within these spaces.

These characteristics emerge despite the fact that the virtual spaces within which these writers work are subject to advertising, and surveillance through cookies deposited on Internet-linked computers. The power of communication through writing defines the worth of these sites for the writers. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace—all networked spaces that are redefining writing because of their relationship to speed. Although I have demarcated speed literacies into two categories, I deploy this binary only in order to tease out important characteristics. Particular literacy practices may blur, obscure, or add to these qualities. I lay out the boundaries between the two in order to foreground the ways in which speed informs composing spaces differently. In effect, the clock dominates in some spaces, particularly in school-based writing. Yet, although speed may be more privileged on Twitter or Facebook and less so on Webs, the clock does not dominate. This is composing according to the logic of the network. Table 1 demonstrates these characteristics.

When working within the logic of clock time, the writer composes in response to an outside force that sets time limits, as well as writing criteria. Efficiency is a chief objective. The Advanced Placement examinations I have detailed represent this logic, as do many writing assignments common to the composition classroom. Yet, in this age of writing, when more and more composing spaces are erupting into being, when people are engaged in writing more than ever, the question of speed and of the dominance or subjugation of clock time deserves prominence. The many calls for multimodal composing work can only be enriched through focusing the speed lens and through identifying the logics informing composing work. How does speed enter into current teaching practices? Composition textbooks provide some insight to a response to this question.

As Lester Faigley has suggested, composition textbooks themselves in their drive to "sell" the writing process continuously emphasize good management techniques resulting in frequently conflicting advice (153–56). Textbooks typically deploy some version of the process movement’s mantra: plan, research, draft, revise, polish. Writing according to the process should mean that students take a good amount of time to complete each step. Yet, the issue of time is rarely addressed directly, and when considered, as Faigley suggests, is contradictory. I look briefly at four composition textbooks for first-year writers below and focus on the books' discussions of the writing process in order to demonstrate typical approaches.

The 2009 edition of The College Writer by VanderMey, Meyer, Van Rys, and Sebranek, representing the current-traditional epistemological stance, leads with a chapter on the writing process followed by chapters on the modes, descriptive, narrative, analytical, persuasive, and reports. Their six-stage process begins with "Getting Started," followed by "Planning," "Drafting," "Revising," "Editing," and "Submitting." In their overview of process, the writers emphasize the importance of spending time at each step of the process and draw urgent attention to the
need to spend plenty of time revising. Next, they provide four to five pages of text to explain each step thoroughly as well as planning checklists at the end of each section, so that students may be sure they have followed the prescribed pathway correctly. They do not mention rhetorical context, but rather include a paragraph explaining that “thinking rhetorically” is important. Time is not mentioned again.

In the 2006 edition of The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers, author Stephen Reid sees collecting, shaping, drafting, and revising as the essential steps to the writing process. Reid emphasizes the recursiveness of the process and suggests that individual writers and their particular contexts will determine how much time to spend on each step of the process. Although Reid usefully foregrounds rhetorical contexts, the constraints of those contexts, including those calling for speed, are invisible.

Similarly, the 2008 edition of The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing by Axdorp and Cooper delineates the writing process as invention, draft and revision. They add research to invention for the research-based chapters. They narrate the writing process of a student and note several times the amount of time that the student spent on each stage of writing. In later chapters, in overviews of contextual writing processes, the authors mention neither time nor the exigencies of speed at all.

The 2009 Norton Field Guide to Writing foregrounds rhetorical contexts and genre as does The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers but its “Processes” chapter includes a section on “Getting response and revising,” in a nod to the practice of peer revision in the first-year writing classroom. Moreover, authors Bullock and Weinberg also suggest students create a deadline schedule at the drafting stage and explicitly acknowledge that considering time matters. However, in an echo of Fagley’s warning about contradictory advice, Bullock and Weinberg next follow this with a section on “Starting to Write” that suggests writers should “expect surprises” and “expect to write more than one draft.” They do not explain how establishing deadlines and expecting surprises ought to connect with one another, however. Nor do they consider the question of speed-dependent writing situations, except for the obligatory section on writing essay exams—a section common to all four textbooks—always located at the back of the book.

In essence, then, this quick look at first-year writing textbooks suggests a widening fissure between the dominant literacies students bring to the classroom and the composing work privileged in the writing classroom. The urgency of clock time—the hegemonic cultural presence of speed—is invisible. Writers composing to the logic of the network, although dependent upon speed, work in spaces where their purposes determine the place of clock time: their rhetorical contexts and audiences dominate. Robert Hassan notes that “time is social” and argues that people on the Internet construct network time because of their connectedness; he therefore sees time as a living entity (38–46). In this sense, network time is more deeply social, more rooted in the writers’ purposes, more driven by individual exigency than composing to the logic of clock time. Webs exemplifies composing work according to the logic of the network: dialectical, interactive, contextual; and, most significantly, circulation is essential.

Trumbur argues that “thinking not only about the production of writing at the point of composing but also about the circulation of writing and its relation to the unfinished business of democratic communication” is important work (“Composition” 217); scholars such as Ridolfo and DeRose, among others, have engaged with this task. Consider then how speed literacies in network spaces foreground circulation—and the possibilities of privileging student writing in these spaces. Participants composing to the logic of the network uniformly presume that the more one’s work circulates, the greater its merit, although some, such as my daughter and her group of friends, want their work to circulate in smaller social networks than others. Developing opportunities for students to compose for the purpose of circulation and the study of the contexts of delivery becomes possible within the logic of network composing. How is meaning inscribed and reinscribed as it circulates? How might this invite engagement in social change? How might change in student composing work if students wrote for the purpose of deploying technological speed and circulating writing? In a similar vein, I argue that circulation is an essential feature to composing according to the logic of the network. However, alphabetic texts are not the only products of circulation.

Visual texts circulate with dizzying rapidity and, indeed, the "visual
turn" in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries continues to draw the attention of English studies scholars. That turn is effected by speed. As Kevin DeLuca notes, "Our image world is made possible by and privileges speed." For DeLuca, speed operates as a "mode of orientation," and he suggests that "glance" and "distraction," working with speed, become "a relationship of simultaneous becoming" (87–88). However, only within the literacy practices shaped by the logic of the network, can this be true. The College Board, for example, pays tribute to the assumption that images have fixed meanings, readily definable and evaluated.

Recently recognized as a critical object of analysis in the College Board’s English Advanced Placement program, visuals in this arena employ what Bradford Vivian has termed "representational logics" in which visuals may be evaluated in terms of linguistic categories, such as appeals, persuasiveness or argument (475). Vivian argues that considering the virtual presence of images, their function as "a mode of action or material practice" is an equally valuable and under-utilized methodology, noting "they not only represent existing arguments or discourses but also enact conditions for novel, unanticipated attributions of sense and value in the future" (479). Internet memes spreading through the digital networks—composed, remixed, and remixed again—demonstrate the power of the virtual presence of images. Similarly, while images uploaded to Flickr, a photo sharing social network site, frequently include contextual information for the image, such as date, place, and photographer, they may also be tagged by any viewer. The screenshot in Figure 2 captures a photograph, "City, personnel, IBM Room," of a first IBM computer with contextual information posted below. A helpful user has tagged the photograph, "The very first time an IBM locked up in an office." The image’s meaning is thereby remade into a satirical comment on IBM machines.

Culturally dominant speed pervades literacy practices peculiar to this moment in the twenty-first century. (Un)watching the clock provides a lens that, I argue, can provoke writers and teachers of writing into reconsidering, revising, and rereading composing practices situated within speed culture. The logics I have sketched out suggest that young writers today possess multiple literacies embedded within contexts in need of further research. What logics inform our teaching practices? How do they frame our understanding of literacy? These old questions offer new and productive lines of inquiry, once we acknowledge the necessity of interrogating the culture of speed.19

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Notes

1. For further sources on literacy crises, see Rebecca Moore Howard's excellent bibliography at http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/Bibs/Crises.htm.

2. Gramsci is one notable example of a critic. The Digital Fordism web site notes that Gramsci called Fordism "an ultra-modern form of production and of working methods such as is offered by the most advanced American variety, the industry of Henry Ford," and he offered it as an ingenuous example of coercion through persuasion and consent.
3. Virilio explains, "... dromology appears today like a science whose theories take the form of vehicles" (129).

4. Critiques of speed are evident in numerous fields. Jameson, Lyotard, Barber, Erickson, and Lefebvre are among the many scholars who have concerned themselves with the problem of speed.

5. Lofty develops the concept of timescapes, "contrasting temporal structures," in order to analyze how time values are differently valued and experienced. He proposes the development of classroom timescapes (17–18). Similarly, I emphasize the importance of time values within contexts. However, the effective implementation of Lofty's pedagogical strategy depends upon careful parsing of the literacy practices most prevalent among young writers.

6. As Berlin points out, such a stance elides analysis of ideology and privileges language selected in order to adhere to accepted standards that derive from the dominant class (7–9). Because objective Truths are, by definition, measurable, this epistemology favors testing while allowing the paradoxes of testing, its ideological contingencies, to be easily elided. Thus, for example, because tests themselves are inviolate, they are less likely to be evaluated for bias even when empirical evidence shows that particular groups fail the test at a disproportionally high rate.

7. Even though speed functions as a cultural dominant, information bytes and visual rhetorical objects whizzing by, even though language itself is clearly adapting at breakneck pace, literacy, as understood in arenas of policy-making and legislating, seems caught in stasis. Although careful and important scholarly work on literacy studies has been and continues to be created, the American educational system continues to fail to take it into account. Noted scholars such as Peter McLaren and Harvey Graff have remarked on the gap between scholarly work on literacy and its application in the educational system for the past thirty years (qtd. in Tyner 31–33).

8. Indeed, NCLB codes, manifest in mathematical formulae or images along with language that calls upon scientific findings based on mathematical formulae, define the rational world. This Cartesian perspective, Fleckenstein argues, is "a visual habit characterized by disembodied rationality, quantifiable realities, and linear causality" (85–86). While Fleckenstein focuses on the Spelling Commission Report on the Future of Higher Education, the perspective is also evident in the NCLB. Like the Spelling Reports, the NCLB repeatedly invokes "measure" or "measurement" on its website and is peppered with references to standards and evidence-based teaching practices.

9. Fleckenstein traces this same relationship in her analysis of the Spelling Report.

10. Government ownership of time recalls the time pressure phenomenon Ben Agger calls "time fascism" (230). Agger proposes that solving issues of social justice and freedom can only occur with interrogation of time fascism.

Since the ownership of time is necessary to capital, the entanglement of educational policies with time fascism underscores the urgency of deciphering how time ownership affects literacy practices.

11. While the College Board is officially a not for profit membership organization, it has been criticized for selling test preparation materials, over-compensating its top executives, and over-charging for its testing. See, for example, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing and Americans for Testing Reform websites for specifics.

12. Examinations are free for those who receive school lunch subsidies, but otherwise cost $86.00 each.

13. For example, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Virginia and California report that 20% or higher of their high school students scored a 3 or better on an AP exam. Only 0 to 4.9% of Louisiana and Mississippi students did as well. The pattern is consistent across states and across the years since the AP Report to the Nation became available in 2005. The gap between the overall high school student population taking the examination and different ethnic groups is similarly revealing.

14. As of 2008, the College Board reports that Montana, Vermont, and Wyoming have eliminated the "equity and excellence" gap between African American and European American student achievement. Excellence is the achievement of a 3 on an AP exam, while equity occurs when the number of African American students with a 3 or better matches the proportion of African Americans within the state. In fact, all three of these states have miniscule African American student populations. I note, in addition, the return of "excellence" rhetoric here, coded as a number so that each student is quickly and easily measured and categorized.

15. Gallagher's critique of this argument is worth noting here. He sees both philosophical and political difficulties with Fleckenstein's conclusions. Fleckenstein proposes a "dialectics of seeing" in which English studies scholars work to both complement the Cartesian perspective as well as open possibilities for less functional definitions of literacy. Gallagher argues convincingly that the Cartesian way of knowing by definition does not permit differing ways of seeing. Moreover, he notes that science itself is not limited to one perspective or approach in its methodologies. Nevertheless the accepted perspective for school-based literacies does insist upon the way of seeing I have described so far.

16. Here I define access narrowly in terms of availability of digital tools.

17. These words capture the style and spirit of her writings, which I did not wish to appropriate here. I have similarly approximated her chosen pseudonym.

18. Speed of circulation, a constant theme in the media, has increased with stories emerging of how people use these spaces to distribute news and warnings of disasters. New Scientist magazine reported that a University of Colorado study
showed that Facebook and Twitter were used to share updates and warnings during the spring 2008 California fires as well as the Virginia Tech shootings (Ingram R3).  

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Lynn C. Lewis


