



## Access(ing) the Coordination of Writing Networks

Douglas M. Walls\*

*University of Central Florida*

### Abstract

In this article, I engage the discussion of access within the field of computers and writing and revisit the issue of the digital divide. My discussion of access focuses on operationalizing access as what Annette Powell calls “access(ing)” (2007), a process of enacting and coordination between humans and nonhumans. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory and digital literacy narrative methodology, I present the story of Diana as a problematic case study through which I ask scholars to think about accessing in deeply ecological and newly traceable ways. I end by noting that stories like Diana’s challenge researchers to think of accessing as enacted, distributed, and traceable across networks.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Access; Digital divide; Accessing; Actor-Network Theory; Social networks

### 1. Introduction

Technological access has been a core concern in the field of computers and writing (Berry, Hawisher, & Selfe, 2012; Goode, 2010; Porter, 2009; Ratliff, 2010; Selfe, 1999). As James E. Porter (2009) claimed, many scholars in computers and writing have addressed access both within the university setting and beyond. More complicated than the mere costs of equipment and broadband connectivity, access exists as an issue of materiality but also one of literacy and social practices. Understanding access as embedded in a complex relationship between social and technological material practices has allowed conversations about access to remain productive as a useful research concept despite changes in technology. Access has been kept in the forefront as a field concern while new composing technologies like social media and mobile phones have complicated the issues of access. Yet new writing technologies and the composing practices they demand challenge our ways of theorizing about access. Highly networked writing technologies, like social media platforms, collapse distinctions between private and public texts. Nonhuman writing technologies take up more and more decision making about when our writing is viewed and by whom, which requires new theoretical approaches.

In this article, I argue that the practices of accessing are coordinated across humans and nonhumans in new and complex ways that span multiple social, professional, and technological contexts. Texts are distributed across different kinds of social worlds by coordinating writing technologies like social media platforms. These are social worlds that both humans and nonhumans engage in. Both grant and deny access to authors, texts, and different audiences at different times for different reasons. Annette Powell (2007) has called the process of access, “access(ing)”. I support Powell’s

\* ATTN: Douglas M. Walls; P.O. Box 161345; Orlando, FL 32816-1345. Tel.: +1-407-965-9738.

E-mail address: [douglas.walls@ucf.edu](mailto:douglas.walls@ucf.edu)

work by locating accessing within Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory, or ANT. I then present the case study of Diana, a young woman of color pursuing a PhD who tells the story of her first publication; ANT offers readers an understanding of her digital literacy story as a case of the accessing of networks through nonhuman coordination. Finally, I conclude with implications for further research into access and accessing.

## 2. The Practices of Access

Access in computers and writing can be thought of as a dialogue between two major problems: technological materiality and ideology. When located in "Digital Divide" conversations, access usually involves discussions of availability of hardware, software, and networking infrastructures as well as the policies that govern those discussions. Scholars like Charles Moran (1999) and Cynthia L. Selfe (1999) have explored how underlying ideological assumptions drive national educational and organizational policy decisions about technological access. Smaller-scale ideological access discussions center around material, institutional, and systemic disparities but frame those discussions explicitly along lines of race (Banks, 2006; Blackmon, 2007; Powell, 2007), gender (Aschauer, 1999; Tulley & Blair, 2002), and class (Grabill, 2003). Conversations about access that are related to race, gender, and class serve useful explanatory functions in understanding user practices in digitally mediated writing environments.

Issues of access both generally and in specific contexts, like education, need to be complicated by social elements of literacy; research related to race, gender, and class attempts to do so. For example, Joanna Goode (2010) has found that educational scholarship that locates the digital divide in terms of surveys and other large-scale forms of research is often too superficial in its analysis of access. Although such work might point to educational inequity and opportunity, it also frequently theorizes access within a deficit model, which paints particular populations as lacking either in skills or material technology. Rather than attempt to tackle our conception of the digital divide itself—a concept that many have reexamined (Goode, 2010)—I instead join a chorus of scholarship (Jung, Qiu, & Kim, 2001; Light, 2001; Mossberger, Tolbert, & Stansbury, 2003; Selwyn, 2004; Valadez & Duran, 2007; Warschauer, Knobel, & Stone, 2004; Warschauer, 2003a, 2003b) that asks digital literacy researchers to move beyond views of access constructed in terms of the possession (or lack) of technology or technological skill sets. Powell's (2007) call for research that investigates the process of "access(ing)" situates digital literacy as a series of practices located within the "other Divides" (p. 33) that are part of people's lives.

Echoing other critical literacy theorists (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Cushman, 1996, 1998; Kucer, 2005), Powell (2007) asks researchers and educators to trouble divide narratives that only see marginalized groups as lacking in both material and technological skills. As Krista Bryson (2012) reminds us, the "literacy myth," the idea that literacy is a precursor to economic and social justice, remains powerful and present even in digital literacy narratives. Indeed, static narratives about access can be dangerous. These myths can limit the view of the problems involved in access by predetermining what problems are important. Predetermining the nature of the problem runs the risk of missing people's adaptations to technologically mediated environments and how networks, both human and technological, constantly adapt to practices of other actors. As Powell (2007) has stated, "We need empirical and longitudinal studies that examine actual practice in technologized contexts, to both measure the varied effects of differential access and to develop a template for African-American technology use that is not based solely on deficit" (p. 33). In other words, there are any number of other divides that can, at any given moment, shape the practices of access especially in the "broader world" (p. 33).

To take up Powell's charge, I ask: how do we locate the practices of access? Attempts have been made to provide more complex views of the roles that access, technology, and other factors have played in people's lives (Berry et al., 2012; Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, & Pearson, 2004; Hawisher et al., 2004). Work like this produces "digital narratives" as the primary unit of analysis in an attempt to create an ecological view of a participant's digital literacy history. While these narratives include moments of accessing, these projects exist at the level of biography. Indeed, their strength is that they tell the life stories of their participants by gathering detailed histories. Digital literacy narratives, like the ones gathered by The Ohio State University's Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, produce stories of peoples' literate lives but biography is not a tale of process. Biographies provide rich detail of large life issues but few very specific details about process. To find processes, the researcher must look closer. I propose the value of a much more fine-grained analysis of the processes of accessing, one that relies on Actor-Network Theory to account for broader networks and moments of accessing within small moments of participants' lives rather than biographies.

### 3. Using Actor-Network Theory to locate access(ing)

The use of Actor-Network Theory is one way to attempt to paint such a detailed picture. Specifically, the work of Latour (2004, 2005, 2010), John Law & Annemarie Mol (2002), and Law (2007) offer ways to trace accessing. The use of Actor-Network Theory in rhetoric and writing studies to understand heavily technologically mediated environments is not new (Knutsen, Martinussen, Arnall, & Morrison, 2011; Reid, 2008; Rice, 2011). In particular, and perhaps most controversially, actor-network theory flattens both humans and nonhumans into a single categorical distinction known as actants. These actants are understood exclusively in terms of how they influence and understand other actants.

However, as Clay Spinuzzi (2008) has pointed out, actants do not simply influence each other; they define each other within the context of research. For example, in the reductive view of access, “broadband” equals access. However, broadband only equals access if there are computers that link to it and people who know how to use those computers. ANT asks us to look at actants’ connective nature by constantly looking at the relationship of each actant to each other. What counts as an actant is a product of the network and therefore should, according to ANT, be exclusively understood and defined within its relationships with other actants in the network under interrogation. The important idea is to define actants exclusively by their relationship to each other in the network. Using the example above, we might define broadband by what work it enables the computer and the person to do in context. Broadband might have many definitions, many meanings in different contexts. For an academic department, it might mean expensive installation or lab costs. For a university’s IT department, it might mean maintenance hours for employees. ANT is interested in tracing how different actants influence and define each other differently. These networks must align and coordinate participants through the social and technological for accessing to happen.

Actants may be stable, but their series of relationships can change to make them unstable. So, for example, broadband might mean expensive installation or lab costs and it might only be those things during budget planning work. The rest of the time, broadband might be something that fades into the background of the writing lab as simply part of the lab. Suddenly the university’s IT team asks departments to foot more of the broadband bill, changing how the network actants think about that lab. ANT is interested in tracing how different actants influence and define each other differently at different times precisely because that influence changes over time.

The idea of networks of actants defining traits of fellow actants is particularly useful in understanding accessing as a coordinated series of practices. These literacy practices are a direct result of a series of relationships and the histories of those relationships. Swarts (2010) has stated that “texts are instruments of coordination” (p. 131) because they represent stable objects where different social worlds come together around the text to make meaning. In other words, texts are actants because they coordinate meaning making. These meaning-making activities are related through the text but may function very differently. For instance, readers might disagree about the meaning of a text but it is the *text* that we are disagreeing about; we understand what it is and stabilize it as an object. Yet objects, like texts, travel through networks keeping some stability. This is why while many people might profess that they love their smartphones, they are perfectly willing to throw them away at the chance of getting a new one—an odd thing to do if you love something. “Their” smartphone is whatever particular phone they happen to have at the time. Their smartphone is an object that coordinates activity but it isn’t the *particular* material phone.

Practices and spaces coordinate activity as well as texts. It is the practices and texts, which are transferable, that make the particular phone that people have “theirs.” That is why histories are so important for understanding accessing. For example, Powell (2007) claims that to study accessing, the researcher should not focus on deficit models of digital divide narratives. Powell asks us to look at the practices of students in a personal historical context to obtain a sense of which “divides” are at play in any given moment. Another way of thinking about Powell’s problem through ANT is to think about in any given moment what actants are coordinating activity rather than looking for what is “missing” e.g. absent broadband. Thus, understanding how students negotiate digital spaces through engagement and resistance is crucial in helping address divides (Powell, 2007). The situatedness of divides demands a theory that can help us locate how and when divides are important in people’s lives. As Pigg et al. (2014) have shown, students negotiate the literacy activity of digital spaces by constantly moving through “personal, professional, and academic memory, sociability, and planning” (95) networks of meaning where actants are all influencing each other. In other words, literacy activity matters *differently* in different practices. ANT might be able to better allow the educator and researcher interested in issues of access to see the complex series of social, political, technological, and professional histories that shape acts of accessing.

#### 4. Diana's<sup>1</sup> story: a provocation of access(ing)

I offer Diana's case as a provocation for how we theorize and think of access and, perhaps, as an example of how we must once again re-theorize access as a traceable process. By "provocation" I mean that I am not sure Diana's story fits into our theories of what research on access looks like. However, there is something about Diana's story that compelled me to make it a story about access.

In other words, I think it should be a story about accessing but I am not sure the field would mark it as such.

Diana's narrative comes from my attempts to understand the roles that social media plays in the professional lives of women of color. In my research, I explored participants' discourse choices in updating public social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook. I asked my participants for permission to follow or "friend" them on the social media platform that they most frequently updated over a two- to three-week period. I then interviewed them about the data I had collected about their social media networks. During the interviews, I asked questions about participants' specific posts and the rationale/motivation behind participants' discourse choices as well as their literacy histories with social media. I then transcribed the interviews and presented those transcriptions for my participants' approval, asking them if there was any information they would rather not have included. In attempting to capture accounts of accessing, I was attempting to capture how people from similar social subjectivities of gender, race, class, or professions negotiated professional and cultural tensions through both online and offline spaces.

At the time, Diana was a PhD student at a large Midwestern university who had recently finished the first of her comprehensive exams. She is not a native speaker of English but learned it through formal educational means and has degrees from outside of the United States of America. In terms of writing, I followed her Twitter feed where she produced very little writing, far less than any of my other participants. During the interview phase, when I asked her if she used social media other than Twitter she said she had had a Facebook account in the past but had gotten rid of that account—citing the exact year and month she had deleted the account. I asked her why she knew those dates so specifically and she told me it was the same month her first scholarly publication had appeared.

Me: How many publications do you have?

Diana: One, this is the first one.

Me: Right. OK.

Diana: And if this is the piece that identifies me, it [her article] could do me a disservice on the job market. That was the one thing. Secondly, being published... being published just felt like being exposed like I was out there and people were reading my stuff and people were going to be commenting on it and talking about it and it felt like I almost put my body out there? Which is why I felt like this physical fear like I put a part of myself out there. But the piece felt very personal to me as well because it [part of the article] was a personal story. So it felt like I put myself out there. And um, so I stayed away from the [publication] site for a couple of days.

Me: The site enables comments then?

Diana: Yes.

Diana describes an experience of fear. Notice that Diana defines her relationship to the piece ("if this is the piece that identifies me it could do me a disservice on the job market"). While the publication would likely help her professionally, Diana thinks it could also harm her on the job market and cause her to regret having her profession access her personally ("But the piece felt very personal to me as well because it was a personal story").

#### 5. Network Jumping and Access(ing) Across Diana's Online Networks

The publication was messy for Diana. On one hand, she was happy to be published but on the other hand, she thought that her publication might not be well received and perhaps even harm her professionally. New actants become involved in coordinating new networks of meaning. Multiple networks began to access Diana through her publication very quickly. Notice that that the traditional ways that we think of access—as something desirable—begin to collapse for Diana as more actants become involved, each having their own agenda. Others' ability to access her work, and

<sup>1</sup> "Diana" is a pseudonym.

therefore her, becomes a problem as the mere thought invokes a physical fear. When I followed up asking her when she first experienced her fear she answered:

Diana: As soon as it was published I regretted ever having turned it in for publication because I was actually afraid of being exposed.

Me: You were physically afraid or you were professionally afraid or...

Diana: Both.

Me: Really?

Diana: Yeah.

Diana's fear of the repercussions of her work manifested itself in two ways, physically and professionally. Her feelings of unease were not alleviated when a tenured scholar in the field who had published books commented on Diana's piece in a way that felt to Diana as "a really condescending and a very sarcastic" manner. After Diana recalled to me the scholar's quote, I went to look up her article and the scholar's comment; Diana had indeed quoted what this scholar had posted almost word for word<sup>2</sup>. Diana being accessed and critiqued by a scholar's words had left a mark, one that supported all her fears about how her discipline would react to her first publication and therefore her capacity to get a job in the future. Diana's published article, a text, had condensed the professional and the emotional in a single work that had also allowed the senior scholar access to Diana. The journal site and the scholar understand that text very differently. The emergence of the text meant that Diana had accessed the field but also the field had accessed the scholar's practice of reading and commenting on publications enabled through new technological means. Diana's article was accepted professionally as a publication but also rejected professionally by the senior scholar's comment. Even as a location of coordination, different meanings were being made. As her article began to take on new meanings for Diana, others being able to access her and her work become a threat.

Diana: And the moment I saw it [the senior scholar's response on the journal website] I felt more exposed and I had like a panic attack. I just... couldn't control myself.

Me: Yeah, you seem upset now.

Diana: Yeah, yeah.

Me: You still ok talking about it?

Diana: Yeah, I am.

Me: OK.

At this point, I still had no idea what the connection was between this experience and Facebook.

Me: Did something happen on Facebook or was it this comment, this professional awful comment, made on this other blog that made you...

Diana: (overlapping) Well...

Me: ...delete the Facebook thing or was... was it something that happened on Facebook too that was a contributing factor or...?

Diana: Well, yeah, uh. So I didn't tell anybody in the program [her graduate program] that I had had a piece accepted but somebody found out and posted on my Facebook wall and said "congratulations" and that sort of led to everybody else in the program commenting on my wall about the piece and I was trying to keep it quiet and then, because I was feeling sort of... because I was feeling sort of irrational, not irrational but I was... because I was feeling so out of control at that point I felt as if people were judging me for publishing it. That they didn't actually mean it when they congratulated me or that they were looking at that comment made by that other scholar and agreeing with her. And, in my head, I started believing that people were, that people were going to think that I was being a whiny bitch and that I should just suck it up.

<sup>2</sup> There are several reasons why I choose not to republish the senior scholar's comment here. First, it would make it much easier to locate both the scholar and Diana's real name. Secondly, seeing the comment would encourage readers to judge Diana's *reaction* and whether we find her subsequent actions as reasonable without taking into account the rest of the actants in the network.

Diana felt she could minimize the impact of the article by not involving other actants (not getting other technologies or people involved). After all, she had time to publish many pieces between when the article was published and when she went on the job market—time to create other works that would identify her to her field. Diana felt that she still could minimize the impact of her first piece, and her perception of that impact, by keeping the news quiet: in other words, limiting accessing of her through her work.

Facebook said otherwise. Her colleagues saw the publication as cause for celebration. Facebook saw that celebration as a way to generate activity by placing those celebrations on her friends' screens. As the initial congratulations built within Facebook, Facebook put the congratulatory comments on more people's screens. Facebook started to expand the amount of people accessing the article through the practice of placing congratulations on Diana's piece in more and more news streams. The network grew. The more streams the comments entered, and the more actants were recruited and coordinated through more congratulatory texts, the more Diana understood what was going on as being accessed. Regardless of the nature of the content, being accessed by more and more people through Facebook's reference to the publication created more and more anxiety for Diana. Each additional comment made the publication, and therefore Diana, much more visible and vulnerable. As a result, Diana deleted her Facebook account in an attempt to stop her being accessed.

Diana, however, did not cut herself off from social spaces and networks entirely. Her Twitter account continued to enact access to professionals and colleagues rather counter-intuitively by limiting the amount of access others had to Diana's work and her. Diana had a private account. She didn't allow just anyone to follow her on twitter because twitter allowed her that control. In listening to Diana's story, we can hear a story of enacted accessing, one where the more things and people that had access to "Diana" as author and as a Facebook entity, the more they came dangerously close to accessing her. By following the association of actants, we can see the more people and things that were involved in accessing her, the bigger the issue/network became. The more coordination of access between actants made a single and knowable presence called "Diana" across networked spaces, the more vulnerable she felt in physical space. The event took on meaning for Diana beyond the article and its reception. The event made visible for her just how exposed she had always been on Facebook.

**Diana:** And I had lots of interactions with people on Facebook. I had like close to two hundred friends on Facebook and it just felt like I was too exposed. And...

**Me:** Yeah.

**Diana:** And there were too many people who knew about me and so all this just snowballed into my deleting my Facebook account.

Perhaps counterintuitively, Diana actually gains professional access by removing her presence from Facebook and increasing it in Twitter use. In other words, it isn't the site, the tool, or the content that determined her reaction; it was the number of associations that were built by actants together, the short amount of time, and the lack of her own participation in those associations that was the problem. Diana recruited Twitter to act as a sort of "firewall" because the article, not congratulations or disciplinarity, became associated with Twitter. Twitter remained "safe." Twitter continued to enable Diana the practices of accessing friends and colleagues by allowing a smaller and knowable amount of them to access her.

## 6. ANT and the coordination of networks

Coordination does not just happen, and it is hard to see in contexts. If, as researchers, we move away from technological access being a constant and universally applied idea, accessing as a practice must be complex and multiple. The processes of accessing must involve many different kinds of histories, activities, and technologies. ANT gives us a way to see what actants, both human and nonhuman, are influential by tracing the connections of activity. The process of accessing includes looking at actants coordinating the activity of other actants. The more people that "Like" Diana's friend's post about the publication, the more Facebook puts that post in users' feeds and the more people like it, the more notifications Diana receives, the more "exposed" Diana feels. Each moment and history, each person and technology, each practice is influencing the other by coordinating activity. Coordination is an act of rhetorical persuasion but, perhaps, a type of rhetorical persuasion to which we are not accustomed.

ANT is also useful in keeping us as researchers honest in our research descriptions about accessing. Our discussions of access have a tendency to slip into the possibilities of intervention, assuming we always know all the actors and subjectivities involved. Some of that is to be expected because those of us interested in digital access are interested in addressing systematic social injustice. However, assumptions can be dangerous as Powell points out. ANT forces the researcher to listen to the network of associations at particular moments rather than depending on predetermined categorizations of what is important. That is one way to avoid what Powell calls research “based on general demographics and Divide narratives” (32). In Diana’s case, it means seeing how the process of accessing takes place without isolating Diana/Twitter as the hero of the case or the senior scholar/Facebook as a villain. ANT asks us to look at networks’ effects of influence and coordination, forcing us to look at barriers of accessing in context. Removing heroes and villains means we must begin to think not about what could an individual (bootstrap narratives) or technological agent (broadband) do differently but instead ask how we can intervene at the level of system(s).

## **7. Listening to networks in peoples’ lives**

For Diana, the publication of her article was a double-edged sword that gained her professional access through a CV line but also could have denied her professional access (as evidenced by the senior scholar’s comments). Diana knows that the article will coordinate certain kinds of activity. At the same time, the underlying Web 2.0 design of the journal with its comment system enabled that moment of disciplinarity to occur. Diana’s goal, like most PhD students, was to obtain a job and she was, at first, worried about what the article would do to her prospects on the job market. Her professional fears of being exposed were so great that they led her to feelings of physical discomfort. While disciplinarity is an activity all scholars experience, it is partly the underlying networked nature of the online journal that she submitted to that created this situation. The journal, through its comments section, allowed a scholar’s mundane thoughts to casually take on much more significance. Additionally, the threat of the online journal is manageable for Diana. For Diana, the article existed in a network of not only professional associations but also, literally, on one low-traffic website with only one comment. From an ANT perspective, the journal and its comment structure does not coordinate a great many actants.

As new texts are associated with the article (Facebook posts), new forms of activity are coordinated. For Diana, the congratulations did not matter; what mattered was the number of actants, the number of congratulations. That the Facebook comments were positive does not matter. What matters is the sheer amount of coordination that Facebook is supporting about the article. Literally the more people and technologies involved, the more actants were coordinating to access Diana—and the worse the situation was for her. What Facebook does is index a person’s amount of exposure through congratulations and “likes,” placing the congratulatory text in front of more people. In terms of ANT, Facebook does a great deal of coordinating other actants like people and texts. For Diana, one person commenting on the academic site was bad enough; she committed that senior scholar’s comment to memory. Then Facebook coordinated access to Diana’s work as well as to Diana herself.

Diana understands Facebook as “exposing” herself and her body, not just her work, while Facebook only understands that many people “Like” Diana’s colleague’s congratulatory wall post. Diana could see how much coordination was happening as well as how many actants became involved in a short amount of time. In fact, the more Facebook users who had access to the article by knowing it existed, the more influence, fear, and panic that access created in Diana. Regardless of whether their comments were positive or not, it was the activity of coordination that ANT helps us see (actually seeing more and more coordination) that drove Diana to eliminate Facebook.

The entire episode is not simply in Diana’s head either. As access researchers, we must understand what Facebook “wants” as an actant; Facebook as a technology was recruiting, showing, indexing and coordinating the amount of exposure to Diana. Facebook used the text of the congratulatory wall post to coordinate people around the event of the publication. Diana’s Facebook account coordinated multiple social and technological networks as well as access to Diana herself.

As I hope Diana’s story shows us, multiple forms of access (that is, the process of accessing) happen at the same time by both humans and nonhumans. Their overlap can have serious effects on both the sense of self and the emotional life of the person involved. Actor-Network Theory asks us to understand and trace the network of actants involved in the processes of accessing. Doing so means that we might discover that those processes are not always beneficial or are, at least, very complex forms of activity.

The effort to try and locate these moments of coordinated access is worth it because these moments are literally the stuff that builds up and into careers. These mundane moments are also the place where oppressive structures are inscribed on oppressed groups, what psychologists have called microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). These microaggressions can have devastating effects as they built up with experience and over time. Recent conversations about privacy (Narayanan & Shmatikov, 2009) and surveillance (Gandy, 2011) cause us to question our assumptions about access always being positive. Socially networked writing environments like Facebook and Twitter purposefully collapse social, professional, educational, and cultural issues for users. Such technologies prove access to be a “two way street” where one gains access (to professional networks, distant family members, etc.) but at a price; the price of being accessed by technology. Contrary to a lack of critical awareness that some scholars claim (Maranto & Barton, 2010), many students are well aware of these collapses of audiences and lifespheres and are constantly weighing and negotiating their rhetorical actions (Pigg et al., 2014). In this sense, access takes on a deeply online/offline ecological nature (Turkle, 2011).

## 8. Understanding Diana’s Story as a Provocation

How does Diana’s story challenge our notions of access? How is her story a provocation? First, from a methodological standpoint, Diana’s story is hard to discover because while important to Diana, it doesn’t fit well into the ways we have thought about locating access in the research we typically do. Narratives like Diana’s exist at a sort of middle level ecologically. They are usually not significant enough to become part of a digital literacy biography (like obtaining a first computer, learning how to use the internet, etc.) but at the same time they are larger stories than following a user in only one online space such as a discussion forum or Facebook.

Diana and I talked about three different websites over the course of the interview (the online publication where her work was published, Facebook, and Twitter), all of which she accessed constantly from both a laptop and her smartphone. In fact, Diana’s case was problematic for my research initially as her lack of social media activity meant that she did not give me much data. But even this has implications for how we might view access away from narratives of deficit. Similar to the young ladies in Powell’s (2007) study, a shallow digital divide narrative might describe Diana’s marked female body of color as one that simply did not have a history of “access” and therefore did not understand how to “use” social media professionally. As I hope her account shows, however, Diana had a deeply complicated and active set of practices that were a direct result of her experiences both within and outside of technological context.

ANT provides the researcher a way of understanding this sort of middle ground of accessing and coordination. The case itself involved many actants that needed to be coordinated to enable accessing. They built up over time; in other words, the process of accessing is made up of many small moments of access practices. The initial moment of accessing was Diana’s publication, which illustrated how Diana had access to a career, professional networks, and the right technological networks that counted in her field as “legitimate” (as well as her now being a published scholar), but her field also gained access to her through her work. The second moment of accessing was the response to Diana’s piece by the senior scholar that enforced Diana’s worst fears about her first publication: that instead of helping her get a job, the publication had the potential to harm her chances of getting a job. Here her discipline, in the form of the scholar, was accessing Diana’s work to rebuff her directly and “publicly” because the online journal allowed comments.

What is important to realize here is that her first publication being released, or even the senior scholar commenting on her work, is *not* the reason Diana deleted her Facebook account. The event called attention to what Facebook does as a site; index and coordinate through writing. Facebook exposed her, enabling others to access her life in totality without her control of the nature of that access. For Diana, that was a much larger and more important danger than the damage the article could do. After all, she could have just deleted the “congratulations” post from her colleague. The problem is control: not in the traditional sense of access to our information, but in terms of who and what is allowed to access us and when that activity is coordinated.

Additionally, the role of social media and the widespread adaptation of distributed social writing platforms across desktops, mobile devices, and smartphones multiplies the number of networks and the speed that can be involved. Stephanie Vie (2008) lists social media sites like Facebook and Twitter as sites of digital literacy practice that are yet to be understood fully in students’ lives. Digital practices become more complicated with the emergence of pervasive and mobile socially networked writing environments. Amber Buck (2012) has found, for example, that particular kinds of student power users engage in a number of adaptive literacy practices based on particular kinds of social networks they are involved in. Frequently, this management involves manipulating and adapting the “interfaces of social network sites” (p. 32) in an attempt to work more effectively; this includes those interfaces that dictate privacy and sharing of



content—to say nothing of how or when that content is reappropriated and reassociated with other entities. [Jim Ridolfo and Dánielle Nicole DeVoss \(2009\)](#) have noted that texts composed with and in heavily technologically mediated sets of practice are frequently remixed, remediated, and delivered by other authors; as a result, digital rhetors must pay attention to the “rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces” (n.p.). In other words, social writing technologies make decisions about who our audiences are. Those decisions not only affect who we have access to, but also who has access to us.

When understood as practices of accessing, social media produces new challenges for those who are interested in issues of access. New writing technologies such as social media mean that issues of social, cultural, and technological accessing can express themselves much earlier in students’ lives and remain pertinent throughout their professional careers as students are being accessed. [Sherry Turkle \(2011\)](#) has called the compelled practice of maintaining and coordinating textual performances across social media platforms a sort of “the anxiety of always” (p. 256). These writing technologies collapse moments of accessing in rhetorical activities that are enacted across traditional private/public divides and affect different types of users differently depending on ethnic, racial, gender or class background. We do not all experience being accessed the same way.

## 9. Conclusion

Stories like Diana’s challenge how we think of access, even challenging our notions of what practices are a part of accessing. When we look closely and carefully at a story like hers, we notice that accessing is enacted, distributed, and coordinated differently across networks of people and things. Simply put, access to Twitter is easy. Accessing the professional networks that Twitter is a part of is hard. Accessing the parts of those professional networks that take place away from, but are deeply linked to Twitter, is even more difficult. ANT provides us a way of seeing how professional networks are accessed and coordinated. Sometimes people enact access by introducing people to each other, sometimes texts like articles coordinate accessing by placing work on colleagues’ screens, and other times social networks like Facebook can coordinate a great many people giving them access to our lives and our work.

Tracing the moments of accessing, where a moment is given epistemological heft in the mind of a person, should not be thought of as just a “mental” moment. These moments refer outward from the subject and are about the world and the technology as well as the individual’s interpretation. Thus, ANT can be useful for us to trace the process of accessing as one of coordination when these moments come to organize, and make sense of rhetorical actions because someone or something makes it an association. Access never just happens. As with Diana, something or someone is always coordinating that activity between technologies and people. If our theories are tuned to looking for both the people and things involved, we might better map the processes of accessing more accurately within their respective social and ecological landscape.

I have oriented myself to access by trying to articulate access as a process of activities enacted by people and technologies in the world. That is to say, access is a trait but is an enacted trait made up of processes of coordination. Access happens when technologies, careers, identities, spaces, cultures, and ideas interact and influence and define each other. Looking at accessing means understanding access not in terms of that which is possessed but instead as examining practices of the everyday, listening to the relationships that form and influence those practices. In essence, I am asking us to look at the lives of networks and the lives of social worlds to understand access. Researchers and teachers can strip valuable context from other “divides” as well as fail to see the deeply networked series of relationships that need to be present to capture how people enact technologies for themselves, from their own histories and perspectives.

At the same time, the histories we gather can be put in dialogue with current practices. Accessing practices can be located in moments that are coordinated and knowable. Actor-Network Theory provides one way for researchers in computers & writing to trace the complicated processes of accessing as they occur across human and technological networks. ANT can help us trace not only who also but what is involved in those practices as well as what directions access flows.

We should, as instructors and researchers, pay attention to the moments our students use to coordinate their own histories to make sense of access, rather than focusing on the surveys about broadband households that make up most Digital Divide discourse. These moments of coordination exist in material and traceable networks of rhetorical production and material technologies. As with Diana, we can listen for stories where people deny and reject one form of access only to build another. We do not have to “guess” at histories based on stories about divides that may or may not be the case for any given individual. Accessing is knowable and can be turned into accounts if we, perhaps

counter-intuitively, do not seek to define what accessing is but rather locate when and how access is coordinated for our participants and our students.

Douglas M. Walls is an assistant professor in department of Writing and Rhetoric and core faculty member of the Text and Technology program at the University of Central Florida. His research interests is digital rhetoric, especially in social networks, and user experience of traditionally underrepresented or marginalized groups. His work has appeared in both traditional and new media forms in *Computers and Composition*, *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, and *The Journal of Business and Technical Communication*.

## References

- Aschauer, Ann Brady. (1999). Tinkering with technological skill: An examination of the gendered uses of technologies. *Computers and Composition*, 16(1), 7–23. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615\(99\)80003-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615(99)80003-6)
- Banks, Adam J. (2006). *Race, rhetoric, and technology: Searching for higher ground*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Barton, David, & Hamilton, Mary. (1998). *Local literacies: reading and writing in one community*. London: Routledge.
- Berry, Patrick W., Hawisher, Gail E., & Selfe, Cynthia L. (2012). *Transnational literate lives in digital times*. Computers & Composition Digital Press. Retrieved from <http://ccdigitalpress.org/ebooks-and-projects/transnational>
- Blackmon, Samantha. (2007). (Cyber) conspiracy theories? African-American students in the computerized writing environment. In P. Takayoshi, & P. Sullivan (Eds.), *Labor, Writing Technologies, And the Shaping of Competition in the Academy* (pp. 153–164). Hampton Press.
- Buck, Amber M. (2012). Examining digital literacy practices on social network sites. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 47(1), 9–38.
- Cushman, Ellen. (1996). The rhetorician as an agent of social change. *College Composition and Communication*, 47(1), 7–28. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/358271>
- Cushman, Ellen. (1998). *The struggle and the tools: Oral and literate strategies in an inner city community*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gandy, Oscar. (2011). Matrix multiplication and the digital divide. In Lisa Nakamura, & P. Chow-White (Eds.), *Race After the Internet* (pp. 136–152). Routledge.
- Goode, Joanna. (2010). The digital identity divide: How technology knowledge impacts college students. *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 497–513. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444809343560>
- Grabill, Jeffrey T. (2003). On divides and interfaces: Access, class, and computers. *Computers and Composition*, 20(4), 455–472. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2003.08.017>
- Hawisher, Gail E., Selfe, Cynthia L., Moraski, Brittny, & Pearson, Melissa. (2004). Becoming literate in the information age: Cultural ecologies and the literacies of technology. *College Composition and Communication*, 55(4), 642–692. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4140666>
- Jung, Joo-Young, Qiu, Jack Linchaun, & Kim, Yong-Chan. (2001). Internet connectedness and inequality beyond the “divide”. *Communication Research*, 28(4), 507–535. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009365001028004006>
- Knutsen, Jørn, Martinussen, Einae Sneve, Arnall, Timo, & Morrison, Andrew. (2011). Investigating an “internet of hybrid products”: Assembling products, interactions, services, and networks through design. *Computers and Composition*, 28(3), 195–204. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2011.07.002>
- Kucer, Steven B. (2005). *Dimensions of literacy: A conceptual base for teaching reading and writing in school settings* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Latour, Bruno. (2004). Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical Inquiry*, 30(2), 225–249. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA112358648&v=2.1&u=orla57816&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>
- Latour, Bruno. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. (2010). An attempt at writing a “Compositionist Manifesto.”
- Law, John. (2007). Making a mess with method. In William Outhwaite, & Stephen P. Turner (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social science methodology* (pp. 595–606). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Law, John, & Mol, Annemarie (Eds.). (2002). *Complexities: Social studies of knowledge practices*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Light, Jennifer S. (2001). Rethinking the digital divide. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(4), 709–733.
- Maranto, Gina, & Barton, Matt. (2010). Paradox and promise: MySpace, Facebook, and the sociopolitics of social networking in the writing classroom. *Computers and Composition*, 27(1), 36–47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2009.11.003>
- Moran, Charles A. (1999). Access: The a-word in technology studies. In Gail E. Hawisher, & Cynthia L. Selfe (Eds.), *Passions, pedagogies, and 21st century technologies* (pp. 205–220). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Mossberger, Karen, Tolbert, Caroline J., & Stansbury, Mary. (2003). *Virtual inequality: Beyond the digital divide*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Narayanan, Arvind, & Shmatikov, Vitaly. (2009). De-anonymizing social networks. Proceedings from the 2009 30th IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (pp. 173–187). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/SP.2009.22>
- Pigg, Stacey, Grabill, Jeffery T., Brunk-Chavez, Beth, Moore, Jessie L., Rosinski, Paula, & Curran, Paul G. (2014). Ubiquitous Writing, Technologies, and the Social Practice of Literacies of Coordination. *Written Communication*, 31(1), 91–117. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0741088313514023>
- Porter, James E. (2009). Recovering delivery for digital rhetoric. *Computers and Composition*, 26(4), 207–224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2009.09.004>
- Powell, Annette Harris. (2007). Access(ing), habits, attitudes, and engagements: Re-thinking access as practice. *Computers and Composition*, 24(1), 16–35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2006.12.006>
- Ratliff, Clancy. (2010). Open source and the access agenda. *Computers and Composition Online*. Retrieved from [http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/OpenSourceAccess\\_Ratliff/OpenSourceAccess.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/OpenSourceAccess_Ratliff/OpenSourceAccess.html)

- Reid, Alex. (2008). Portable composition: iTunes University and networked pedagogies. *Computers and Composition*, 25(1), 61–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2007.09.003>
- Rice, Jeff. (2011). Networked assessment. *Computers and Composition*, 28(1), 28–39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2010.09.007>
- Ridolfo, Jim, & DeVoss, Dánielle Nicole. (2009). Composing for recomposition: Rhetorical velocity and delivery. *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, 13(2). Retrieved from [http://www.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo\\_devoss/intro.html](http://www.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo_devoss/intro.html)
- Selfe, Cynthia L. (1999). *Technology and literacy in the twenty-first century: The importance of paying attention*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Selwyn, Neil. (2004). Reconsidering political and popular understandings of the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 6(3), 341–362. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444804042519>
- Spinuzzi, Clay. (2008). *Network: Theorizing knowledge work in telecommunications*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sue, Derald Wing, Capodilupo, Christina M., Torino, Gina C., Bucceri, Jennifer M., Holder, Aisha M. B., Nadal, Kevin L., & Esquilin, Marta. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Swarts, Jason. (2010). Recycled writing: Assembling actor-networks from reusable content. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 24(2), 127–163.
- Tulley, Christine, & Blair, Kris. (2002). E-writing spaces as safe, gender-fair havens: Aligning political and pedagogical possibilities. In Pamela Takayoshi, & Brian Huot (Eds.), *Teaching writing with computers: An introduction* (3rd ed., pp. 33–54). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Turkle, Sherry. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Valadez, James R., & Duran, Richard. (2007). Redefining the digital divide: Beyond access to computers and the Internet. *High School Journal*, 90(3), 31–44. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=EJ757023>
- Vie, Stephanie. (2008). Digital divide 2.0: “Generation M” and online social networking sites in the composition classroom. *Computers and Composition*, 25(1), 9–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2007.09.004>
- Warschauer, Mark. (2003a). *Technology and social inclusion: Rethinking the digital divide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Warschauer, Mark. (2003b). Demystifying the digital divide: Scientific American. *Scientific American*, 289(2), 42–47. Retrieved from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=demystifying-the-digital>
- Warschauer, Mark, Knobel, Michele, & Stone, Leeann. (2004). Technology and equity in schooling: Deconstructing the digital divide. *Educational Policy*, 18(4), 562–588. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0895904804266469>