

The Documentary: *Fast Talk*

By Elisa Carrara

Speak until you're breathless, express your ideas so fast your listener can't follow the discourse. It doesn't matter if what you say is incomprehensible to the audience: the idea is to show you're right, crush your opponent and win as quickly as possible. The students of the Northwestern University Debate Team are the best in the nation and can speak at stunning speeds: the more issues you reference, the less your opponent can rebut each separate phrase. The more words you use, the closer you are to victory. Because in the end, one thing counts: win and bring home the trophy. The brilliant documentary *Fast Talk* by director Debra Tolchinsky presents a microcosm both tender and competitive: the students of the Northwestern University Debate Team are true athletes, trained to overcome their limits, compete against adversaries, conquer fear and anxiety. Intelligent, capable, and sensitive, they are able to analyze extremely complex arguments in just a few minutes: many of them will become effective politicians or brilliant lawyers. But speaking at amazing velocity also has its costs: as with any other sport, it can lead to anxiety, stress, and other problems. Speaking fast also has economic costs. "In order to fast talk students need to start training in high school and that means attending expensive summer institutes," explains Debra Tolchinsky. "Consequently, some debaters who don't talk fast claim fast-talking is a tool of the privileged that discriminates against low income and minority students." Additionally, some see debate as a liability for women since being aggressive, fast, and competitive can be a social disadvantage (particularly for women). Culturally, acceleration seems to have become the new criteria for excellence. What happened to slowness, the ability to contemplate, the admiration for a single word or for a single image? They don't seem to have completely disappeared: Fast

Talk... was shot in almost 5 years, with the help of Northwestern students, armed with videocameras. Slowness is still capable of creating small masterpieces.

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