Virtually a Historian: Blogs and the Recent History of Dispossessed Academic Labor

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Abstract • A contemporary history of higher education in the United States is being written on the Internet. Academic bloggers interrupt and circumvent the influence of professional associations over debates about unemployment, contingent labor, publishing, tenure review, and other aspects of creating and maintaining a scholarly career. On the Internet, limited status and prestige, as well as one's invisibility as a colleague, are no barrier to acquiring an audience within the profession or creating a contemporary archive of academic labor struggles. At a moment of financial and political crisis for universities, these virtual historians have increasingly turned their critical faculties to scrutinizing, critiquing, and documenting the neoliberal university. Although blogging has not displaced established sources of intellectual prestige, virtual historians are engaged in the project of constructing their own scholarly identities and expanding what counts as intellectual and political labor for scholars excluded from the world of full-time employment.

Keywords • adjunct, archive, blogging, Internet, labor, neoliberal

In early April 2007, a historian blogging as New Kid on the Hallway received bad news: she was on the job market. Again. Whatever else New Kid[1] did to cushion the blow, one response was to sit down and write three short, dignified sentences. "At least I no longer have to worry about whether I look professional in this space," she typed in the title line of a new post. "Because my third year review was unsuccessful," she continued in the text box. "So I have a terminal year here and that's it."[2] She clicked "publish." The post raced out to hundreds of her virtual colleagues, scholars with whom she communicates regularly but has mostly never met.

The first response came in little more than thirty minutes later. "I'm so sorry," hermance wrote. "I know you don't know me, but I've really enjoyed your blog and want to send you my best wishes, from a stranger across the miles." Other comments included: "Stupid department. Stupid, stupid department" (Kate); "My fingers are sputtering!" (Susan); "I am SO

ANGRY!" (Margo). Over two days, 105 people left expressions of friendship, sympathy, and respect. Three senior scholars (including myself) offered to help her strategize her next move, something that her real-life (or "meat world") colleagues did not do.

This blog post represents a new kind of archive generated by young scholars who increasingly find themselves on the edge of, or being edged out of, full-time jobs as scholar-teachers for which they have been trained. Prior to 2004, when blogging began to emerge as a popular Internet genre that embraced academics—as well as journalists, mothers, organic farmers, soldiers and military spouses, and many other affinity groups—New Kid would have conveyed her sad news and her feelings about it to a few close friends and advisers who would understand that her chances of being re-employed on the tenure track were small.

Virtual colleagueship is altering dramatically the quality and the quantity of evidence we have about academic labor under contemporary neoliberal economic strategies. Although some critics, including frustrated job seekers in the academy, point to the "overproduction" of PhD's as a crucial factor in the poor job market, the efforts to shift the cost of higher education out of public budgets and into family budgets have created the conditions for the elimination of entire fields of study. As part of a strategy that reduced access to education at all levels through market-based justification, neoliberal policymakers and their corporate allies have prioritized the elimination of full-time intellectual work. The promise to end tenure is part of an overall goal to minimize academic labor costs, make higher education pay for itself (or, better yet, turn a profit), and create "flexible" curricula that shape college students to the needs of a private labor market rather than public citizenship.[3] However, the reduced expectations that young scholars are negotiating under these conditions have combined with an enhanced capacity to create community over the Internet to create potentially powerful, interconnected communities of scholars who are writing their own history.

Narrative, I argue here, allows us to imagine what it might mean to reverse the logic of neoliberalism and recreate academic labor outside its terms. For example, making what used to be private sorrow public, the Internet connected New Kid to a large cadre of sympathetic scholars of mixed employment status. These virtual colleagues cared deeply about her right to work, had no interest in the institutional logic for her non-renewal, and speedily and sincerely mobilized on her behalf. New Kid published her post at 8:18 PM. It is likely that the news was read almost instantly by those who received it by RSS feed, an aggregating tool popularized by Microsoft in 2006 that allows bloggers to self-syndicate and individuals to customize their daily reading. Today, such a post would be pushed to an even larger audience of readers through the smart phones that have become cheap and popular since 2007, and via Twitter, a micro-blogging platform.

The unwritten, but well understood, subtext of New Kid's post was the likely end of her career as a fully employed scholar and the beginning of

her career as a highly educated transient laborer.[4] Blogging has emerged in less than a decade as a new form of community and archival space for such "virtual historians," scholars whose prominence on the Internet contrasts sharply with their professional (in)security. As I argue here, it is one of the few primary sources for understanding the way academic work is changing. As Oso Raro, a tenure-track historian living in "Cold City" wrote on the website Slaves of Academe in May 2006, a blog called The Invisible Adjunct (2003–2006) might have been one of the first locations where academics on the margins of power began to share their stories with each other and with those in authority, like myself, who often do not see or hear them. The Invisible Adjunct, Oso wrote, "made visible to me the very possibility of online community, the *communitas* so many of us find lacking in our actual 'Real Time' institutional lives. Her site communicated to us, the avid readers, that in fact we were not alone, that there were other like-minded souls with critical positions and utterances that had no place in the department meeting, the faculty dining room, the professional conferences filled with anxiety and depression."[5]

As young historians struggle to make careers in a time of shrinking higher education budgets that privilege managerial salaries over full-time faculty jobs, the virtual world has become a more secure source of community than either the workplace or professional organizations. Each advertisement in any field draws hundreds of applicants. Post-doctoral fellowships and visiting faculty pools that used to attract fewer than fifty applicants have tripled and quadrupled. But a situation that affects thousands of young and vulnerable intellectual laborers is often surprisingly abstract to those who have permanent jobs. In response to a post at my own blog, Tenured Radical, matt_l posited that tenure is mostly a "non-monetary reward" that encourages people to teach in places like "the rural Midwest." "First rate liberal arts colleges, like Grinnell or Oberlin probably would not have a hard time attracting and retaining faculty," he mused, "but second tier schools with mediocre students in rural Iowa would have to pay a lot more to keep faculty around."[6]

Reading this, I could not help but think of Occupy Wall Street's now-iconic distinction between the privileged 1 percent and the mass of the 99 percent: matt_l's view that any full-time work would be undesirable in this atmosphere seemed naive, if not cruel. The virtual historian knows better. New Kid, for example, immediately understood that the prestige of her next job was not an issue, but that re-entering a swollen labor pool was. Any perception of failure—which, ironically, includes both being unemployed long term in a bad economy and having had a job not work out for any reason—diminished New Kid's chances on the market. Losing a job threw her into a period of professional limbo where she had lost the full attention of her mentors, who had new PhDs to place, and the support of the colleagues who elected not to renew her appointment. In a year, she would not even have an office or a .edu address. Real life limitations on finding and keeping

paid work—which can include disability, parenthood, or the relocation of a higher-paid spouse—can even cause some in the virtual historian's position to "choose" contingent labor or, the academic piece work of the twenty-first century, online instruction.[7]

A failed high-stakes personnel review also points to something the blogosphere emphasizes and scholars rarely discuss offline: the fragility of real-time colleagueship and the ways in which those of us with job security often fail the most vulnerable among us. As New Kid wrote a month later,

> except for my chair—who kind of had to talk to me about it—not one of my senior colleagues has said anything to me about the non-renewal.
>
> Not ONE.
>
> Heck, four out of the five have not even acknowledged the fact that I'm leaving at all, even if they don't want to talk about why.
>
> I'm not looking for them to justify themselves or anything—they don't have to do that, I accept the decision. I'd just like recognition of the fact that I have worked here for three years, and that this is not the outcome that anyone envisioned or wanted when I was originally hired.
>
> So, to make this a little less self-absorbed: if you're working with someone who doesn't get hired long-term/doesn't get renewed/doesn't get tenure, they will probably appreciate it if you at least acknowledge that it's happened.[8]

New Kid's sudden invisibility can define the experience of being a contingent laborer under normal conditions: an adjunct might go for years without ever meeting or having a conversation with any co-worker but the department chair.[9]

A narrative of academic underemployment that has lasted almost forty years, and seems to be permanent, is currently being written on the Internet.[10] On blogs and job wikis (collaboratively written and edited online documents where scholars share information), communities of young scholars who know each other only in the virtual world commiserate, share information, and form communities based on their structural and affective exclusion from a shrinking mainstream of academic life. Virtual scholars often start their own blogs before they leave graduate school. These are meditative spaces where pseudonymous authors express anxieties about the present and the future, share the anger and humiliation of rejection, offer encouragement and praise to each other, and post pictures of their cats (whose unquestioning support calls attention to the failures of virtual scholars' professional networks).[11] Many also seek advice, insight, and comfort from senior scholars blogging at Tenured Radical, Ann Little's Historiann, Tim Burke's Easily Distracted, and "Dr. Crazy's" Reassigned Time.[12]

Occasionally, a virtual scholar does acquire a face. "Love your blog," a job candidate will sometimes whisper as she or he slips out of the hotel room after a conference interview. But for every scholar who looks to me as a virtual mentor there are those who view it as an article of faith that ten-

ured faculty dispense clueless advice from La La Land. "[Senior colleagues] cannot be trusted and they are always lying," wrote Anastasia (an adjunct and mother of three who lists her location as "On a Trash Heap") in response to a post I wrote about success as a visiting professor.[13] Clarissa, a tenure-track scholar, responded to the same post at Clarissa's Blog: "I really hope that I will never get so out of touch and full of myself that I will start dispensing condescending advice to adjuncts, lecturers, and instructors," she wrote. "[N]o one wants to admit that here, for the grace of Lady Luck, go we all. It's easier to convince yourself that somebody as brilliant, productive, smart, and unique as you could never have ended up in a crappy adjuncting position."[14]

The comments above reflect the fact that we are, as academics, splitting into at least two very different communities that are increasingly unlikely to talk to each other in the real world. At Zuccotti Park, I am the 99 percent; on campus, I am the 1 percent. To be fully employed and tenured today is not necessarily perceived by virtual scholars as a reward for work well done, but as full complicity in an unequal system that spends on the few and withholds salaries, health care, pensions, and research money from the many. This is a view with which the honest university manager would agree, but which tenured faculty find easy to ignore until their own department, or campus, faces elimination in the next round of budget cuts. What we used to call "paying your dues" now seems to be a permanent way of life for many virtual historians: they are, as one organization calls itself, the New Faculty Majority (NFM).[15]

What is the contemporary history of academic employment, as scholars who make community in the virtual world are writing it? And how might the emergence of the virtual community, as it has taken shape after 2004, help us think about the ways in which scholars on the margins can, and cannot, "make their own history"? The vulnerability of the vast majority of young scholars in today's economy, and their fierce defense of their own agency, should remind us of Karl Marx's observation, as he surveyed the wreckage of radical French politics in 1851. "Man makes his own history," he wrote, but not "out of conditions chosen by himself."[16] The academic blogosphere, where debates are raw and the rules of professional deference dissolve, reveals a world that many tenured historians have forgotten or, as Clarissa noted, have never visited at all.

Many bloggers choose a transitional moment to launch themselves as virtual scholars. New Kid began writing online in August 2004 when she made the move to "Small Urban College." Feminist academics already in the blogosphere had inspired her: Bitch Ph.D., a contingent laborer in the humanities; proffgrrrrl; and Dr. Crazy.[17] She expressed the hope that meeting other scholars online would help her evaluate "the academic culture at my new position and figure out how much of what I think I know about academia is really true about academia as a whole." New Kid ended by linking this quest to a recent tragedy: A professor of classics at a liberal arts college

had murdered a younger woman living in his home, and then killed himself. New Kid then highlighted a statement made by a professor occupying a named chair that the murderer:

> resented his lack of tenure despite having taught at the school for more than twenty years.
>
> This was cited as contributing to the professor's depression. Which doubtless played into the whole shooting-your-houseguest thing.
>
> Now, I would never suggest that the system of academic employment is to blame in this tragedy—there are PLENTY of adjuncts who don't decide to shoot their houseguests. But I do shudder to see these two kinds of issues (academic employment, MURDER) connected in this strange way.[18]

As New Kid points out here, stories in the mainstream media that bring the pain of marginal scholars to light skip over a detail that is highly meaningful to the virtual historian: the deforming nature of contemporary academia itself.

Virtual historians rescue forms of commentary that are typical of nervous, highly verbal intellectual insiders and transform them into analysis, and weaving that analysis into a contemporary history of the twenty-first century neoliberal university. In this way, as Aaron Barlow argues in his work on political blogs, Internet publishing returns the interpretive authority being exercised over news to a "diffused popular control" more characteristic of nineteenth-century journalism. Pseudonymous printers who wrote, published, and distributed their own views in taverns and coffee houses "were performing something of the same function as contemporary bloggers." An historian taking the long view might also find similarities between bloggers and the raucous world of polemical eighteenth-century pamphleteers depicted in Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,* or the pseudonymously written slave narratives that were not infrequently written by white abolitionists.[19]

Academic blogs are also culturally related to twentieth-century Left alternative publications, such as I. F. Stone's *Weekly*; the Xeroxed sub-cultural "zines" distributed by hand in graduate student ghettoes; and *Lingua Franca,* a gossipy, fin-de-siècle academic magazine founded at Yale University that closed in 2001. Technologically, blogs descend from early Internet phenomena like Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and the "Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link" (WELL), a progressive West Coast BBS begun by *Whole Earth Catalogue* founder Stewart Brand in 1985. The possibilities for creating communities from these platforms that went beyond the walls of a single university expanded dramatically with the creation of national networks by CompuServe and America On-Line (AOL) in 1991, and the World Wide Web in 1993. In 1994, personal journals began to emerge on individual Web pages: initially known as Web logs, they became Weblogs and finally, blogs.[20]

Academics had begun to experiment with forms of virtual collaboration, community formation, and shared information prior to the invention

of blogs, and might have had fewer reservations than other professionals about the real-world consequences of Internet writing. Although bloggers were initially perceived as "narcissistic social losers who had to hide behind their websites in order to deal with the world,"[21] the lure of community might have easily overcome a stigma that often burdens scholars anyway. In a more positive sense, blogging emerged early on as argumentative and fast-paced, characterized by intimacy, but also by nasty, pseudonymous exchanges that "weren't cloaked under a mantle of collegiality and false respect."[22] These qualities might have appealed to academics trained to argue but who too often held their tongues in real life for fear of damaging their careers.[23]

In the academy, blogs are leveling spaces that reveal many things you will never learn from a colleague, from the archives of a professional organization, or even—as we shall see below—from an academic press that reports intensively on the employment crisis. Pseudonymous and without gatekeepers, blogging and commenting encourage the most vulnerable, silenced, and self-silenced scholars to speak their minds. Not surprisingly, sites that detailed the travails of PhD candidates and contingent laborers who make up the ranks of virtual historians became an early subgenre of academic blogging. Of course, this electronic archive might contain a great deal more about the mass of frustrated job seekers than successful ones, those who fear the judgment of their elders rather than those who face the job market with confidence and who overcome setbacks. Another concern about this written history is the fragility of the archive. It is difficult to track the paths of young scholars who stop blogging, or those whose careers have taken a turn for the better and decide to delete their history as adjuncts. Adjunct Whore was finally hired out of the adjunct pool when her husband (Mr. Whore) received an outside offer. Not wanting to put her own path to tenure at risk, Adjunct Whore closed what had been a daring blog about life on the margins.

What happened to Adjunct Whore? Has a tenure-track job been everything she wanted it to be? We don't know. In April 2010 her pseudonym was taken up by a far darker blogger whose self-description recalls the scabs trucked in to replace striking farm workers in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1936): "I do tricks, my adjunct legs spread wide," she writes. "Should I make waves, I will be dismissed, for the next adjunct whore is standing in line, waiting for my crumbs."[24]

Blogging may also allow contingent faculty who struggle with finding the time or community to support a research agenda to commit to writing, or to digital humanities projects, as their primary paid work. Bitch, Ph.D., an adjunct who debuted in July 2004 on Blogspot, became as famous for her biting political feminism and polyamorous adventures as she was for her critique of university life. After briefly turning the site into a group blog, she closed it down in 2010. Like a dissertation, she explained, it was now "a more or less complete body of work." The group had "reached a kind of closure of the parts of our lives that the blog served … We may not all be

living happily ever after, but I think we're all at transitional stages and ready to move to something new."[25]

Virtual historians might know something about the possibilities for intellectual connection in the virtual world that senior scholars ignore at their peril, a point also made by religious studies scholar Mark C. Taylor.[26] While Taylor—who has joined the faction promoting the end of tenure—has been criticized for ignoring, and promoting the "adjunctification" of academic labor that the Web facilitates[27] (it is a networked world, after all, that allows an ill-paid adjunct to teach in multiple states without leaving her home), he sees significant potential in technology's ability to transform hierarchies of knowledge. The university, he argues, is intellectually frozen at the top of its hierarchy but fluid and adaptive at the bottom. Taylor points out that the younger an academic is, the more likely that individual has been intellectually shaped by and open to forms of networking that will be crucial to twenty-first-century knowledge production. Virtual academic communities can free pedagogy from discipline, from traditional forms of evaluation, from the limitations of curricula, and even from barriers that keep faculty from working together across and between campuses.[28]

Given that the most networked academic generation is also the most marginal to a university-based system of rewards, it doesn't seem like an accident that blogs written by graduate students and adjuncts are proliferating even as professional organizations in the humanities are admitting that they have no answer to the job crisis. For example, in the fall of 2010 Anthony Grafton (a blog reader since at least 2006) and James Grossman of the American Historical Association (AHA) took seriously the complaint of many virtual historians that they might never obtain full-time work.[29] Faculty mentors must be honest with their students, Grafton and Grossman argue. They must tell them that the depressed job market in history is "not a transient 'crisis'" and that "graduate programs have proved achingly reluctant to see the world as it is."[30]

The world that graduate programs have been slow to acknowledge is where the adjunct army of historians that haunts the blogosphere has lived for several decades. We can only guess how many there are. According to the AHA, as many as 63 percent of historians who completed their doctoral work after 1989 have either abandoned the search for an academic job, or are working as contingent faculty.[31] As Robert Townsend has noted, there are affective costs to widespread un- and under-employment. Graduates of top-tier PhD programs were least likely to enter the "new proletariat of the history profession." Surveys "have consistently shown a profound sense of bitterness and alienation among faculty employed part-time in history departments . . . One might reasonably wonder whether some of this distance and aloofness is derived from a bit of snobbery not only about their employment status but also about where they received their degrees."[32]

Even this blunt assertion (with which Clarissa, quoted above, would agree) masks generational and status divides that may be recoverable only in

the virtual archive. Many adjuncts are graduate students who never complete the PhD; being available to answer an AHA survey suggests membership in the organization and some continuing attachment to both a professional identity and the status quo. As Invisible Adjunct has argued, much of the mainstream news about adjuncts does not reflect the experiences of the majority. "Instead of the success stories or 'good enough' stories about adjuncts we see in the *Chronicle* [*of Higher Education*]," she wrote in 2004, "the discourse on Invisible Adjunct focuses almost exclusively on adjuncts and post-academics who express their anger at the current state of the institution of higher education." Resisting the "bootstrap, personal responsibility rhetoric" that mirrors larger neoliberal transformations of the public sphere, she promised that her blog would "[aim] squarely at the institution … While the stories in the *Chronicle* are selected by the editors and more ideological gatekeeping takes place, the utterances on Invisible Adjunct are moderated by Invisible Adjunct only, thus allowing for other arguments to be made and other critiques to be stated."[33]

Virtual historians might have no other choice but to embrace the margins, but their critiques help to crystallize a radical perspective on the battles that fully enfranchised scholars are also waging across the country. Neoliberal initiatives have driven a move to contingent labor that is, because of the global economic crisis, raising alarms about whether graduate students enrolling in top-tier programs now will succeed in finding tenure-track jobs.[34] Federal and state policymakers, eager to offload remaining higher education budgets subsidized by tax dollars, are actively seeking to fund two- and four-year colleges through corporate foundation grants. Such philanthropic organizations, whose philosophy for reform is based on a business model, not only cannot comprehend the notion of tenure, but also see the cultivation of any long-term commitment to labor as illogical, unnecessary, and spendthrift.

History and other humanities departments have become low-hanging fruit in a political environment that positions them as dangerously left wing, or college itself as a detour on the route to productive labor. On 4 October 2010, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched a thirty-five million dollar education initiative intended in part "to devise and implement new approaches to make the college experience more responsive to today's student."[35] As Melinda Gates explained to Public Broadcasting Service journalist Judy Woodruff on the *News Hour*, the foundation would help colleges shut down "programs where they aren't seeing the jobs for their students, and they will reopen with a new program. And that's one of the great things they can do. It means they can adapt really quickly."[36]

Most *News Hour* viewers would not have been aware that closing a department, something you might do at Microsoft if Windows suddenly became wildly unpopular, is one of the few legitimate methods for firing tenured faculty and is being expanded as a practice. Through bureaucratic maneuvers that attach core humanities requirements to other units, or make them

available online, tenured faculty can then be replaced with contingent or contract labor teaching higher course loads for less money and few (or no) benefits.[37] Although community colleges are already major employers of the adjunct army, strategies financed by corporate philanthropies reframe contingency on these campuses as "education reform." Ignoring substantial cuts to public budgets that have made college less accessible over the last several decades, adjunct labor has been reframed as a "flexible labor force" that is good for students because it supplies "relevant" courses at a lower cost. Humanities curricula are portrayed as particularly irrelevant to converting an associate or bachelor's degree into a twenty-first-century job. Journalist Anya Kamenitz emphasizes that "people with technical majors earn much more than liberal arts grads." Even insiders like Mark Taylor believe that a commitment to tenure in all fields freezes resources in (unnamed) programs that are irrelevant to the needs of today's undergraduates.[38]

In an ironic twist, contingent laborers have also become vilified within the same discursive logic that articulates them as necessary to the survival of higher education. Students, other critics argue, pay for prime rib and get hamburger in return when they are taught by contingent labor. In 2010–2011, Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus write, 48 percent of Harvard's history faculty was "off doing research, leaving many students to be taught by adjuncts and visitors," as were four out of seven members of the Williams College Religion Department. These "elite schools" set the tone for lowering standards everywhere. The authors see research that translates into books, rather than patents, products, and licensing fees, as selfish and detached from the teaching mission. It is "done," they argue, "to bulk up resumes, win promotion, or otherwise promote careers" and is scandalously "underwritten by students' tuition payments."[39]

As we can see, virtual historians are writing against a paradoxical set of identities that are produced by values that do not prioritize the interests of any member of a conventional university community. Viewed by some as the "solution" to the economic woes of higher education, contingent laborers are simultaneously perceived as a "problem" for undergraduate consumers and the "victims" of PhD programs. Policymakers, neoliberal public intellectuals, and often full-time, tenure-stream faculty who work down the hall, tend to not see contingent academic labor as anything but replaceable disembodied parts.[40]

In fact, the increasing division between online and on-campus instruction means that full enfranchised faculty may literally never see the virtual historian at all. The move to what is called "centralized content" (one course taught online by multiple adjuncts) points in this direction. Such courses are often staffed from nearby PhD granting universities where, as Piss Poor Prof (who blogs at Burnt Out Adjunct and lists his occupation as "consultant") notes, "there is a steady supply of cheap labor, relatively well-educated." In a few weeks, Piss Poor Prof explains, "you … push a semester-ish amount of content." This, he notes, is "the true underbelly of adjuncting," as the in-

structor uses assembly line techniques to spend as little time on students as possible. Centralized instruction also raises "the specter of offshore instruction," particularly in math and science, and even cheaper labor costs.[41]

When we look to the job market that does still exist, we can see how the familiar, unwritten, and private functions of academic hierarchy are now archived and subjected to public, real-time scrutiny on the Web. Perhaps one of the most riveting annual online dramas is the Academic Jobs Wiki,[42] where job seekers share pertinent information about advertised positions, rebuke those who treat them poorly, and point each other to employers with a reputation for treating faculty well. Those who do not spend time among virtual historians might be surprised to learn how badly candidates are treated, even in our own searches. Simple information about the progress of searches is often not provided to candidates in a timely, respectful manner. For example, expenses are not reimbursed for months; dissertations disappear and have to be re-sent; and candidate pools are often not informed that a search has been canceled, semi-finalists have been contacted, or an offer has been accepted.

Why is this important information for virtual historians to share? Not because these are new problems, but because of all the burdens they carry, the one they may resent most—and can do something about through distributing information—is false hope. For example, a frequent question raised in job wiki posts is whether there is an "inside" candidate for a given position, and the search a ruse. For a job at Lewis and Clark, one potential candidate asked for "inside info … I know that being a visiting prof isn't always a good thing, but still." A second commenter urged the first to "JUST APPLY … it's a waste of energy to stew about whether a VAP or some other potential candidate will get a given job." A third chimes in with "a stock sarcastic response to this question. If there are indications that it might be an inside hire, it is nice to know … for those of us who are on the fence about whether to put the time into applying it's good to have as much information as possible, which is what this website is for. Personally, I don't have unlimited time to put into applications."[43]

Like all gossip, these online rumors document larger concerns. Virtual historians insist on narrating both new and long-tolerated conditions of academic labor to reflect an urgent contemporary reality: they are structurally excluded from the professional conversations and policy debates that determine whether they will ever have the careers for which they have been trained. Their economic reality is governed by hidden agendas, secret personnel procedures, and searches that are not searches at all. By creating alternative information networks over the Internet, and hence an online archive of their historical moment, they both resist and embrace their marginality. Mild-mannered by day, virtual scholars rage by night at gatekeepers, wherever they are found. In the pseudonymous blogosphere they cannot only speak and be heard on their own terms, they can also create an archive that accurately reflects their own views. As Invisible Adjunct explained be-

fore she deleted her blog and vanished forever, "anonymity enables posters to be more honest than they would be otherwise," to create "a forum that, while public and visible, is also underground."[44] Embracing the paradox of their own existence, they challenge the scholarly establishment to address chronic underemployment, to explain why they have been educated only to join a reserve army of academic labor, and to justify the many hoops on the job market through which they jump only to be rejected. In the virtual world, they ask us to "see" them as they are not seen by search committees or by tenured faculty where they are already employed.[45] Insisting on telling their own stories, and not being spoken for, they tell tenured faculty like myself (like you?) things that the visitors, post-docs, and adjuncts who pass through our departments—quickly, politely, unobtrusively—never will.

Notes

The author thanks "Clarissa," "New Kid," Antoinette Burton, Linda Mitchell and Daniel Gordon for their comments on this article.

1. Use of a blogger's online identity indicates that she or he is pseudonymous.
2. "At Least I No Longer Have to Worry about Whether I Look Professional in This Space," New Kid on the Hallway, 3 April 2007, http://newkidonthehallway.typepad.com/new_kid_on_the_hallway/2007/04/page/2/.
3. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); and Joyce E. Canaan and Wesley Shumar, eds., *Structure and Agency in the Neoliberal University* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
4. In fact, New Kid went to law school. As of the spring of 2012, she is clerking for a federal judge, but has no idea where she will have a permanent home with her partner: "Life Continues To Be Exciting," 8 March 2012, http://newkidonthehallway.typepad.com/new_kid_on_the_hallway/2012/03/life-continues-to-be-exciting.html.
5. Oso Raro, "The Invisible Adjunct: An Appreciation," Slaves of Academe, 17 May 2006, http://slavesofacademe.blogspot.com/2006/05/invisible-adjunct-appreciation.html.
6. "History and the Politics of Scholarly Collaboration, Part I: Or, Why Anthony Grafton Is a Rock Star," *Tenured Radical,* 19 December 2011, http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/tenuredradical/2011/12/history-and-the-politics-of-scholarly-collaboration-part-i-or-why-anthony-grafton-is-a-rock-star/.
7. See, for example, Tedra Osell's description of why she left her tenure-track post, "Introduction," Mama PhD, 4 August 2008, http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/mama_phd/an_introduction__1. For the history of piece work, and domestic concerns that have caused women in particular to choose it, see Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
8. "A Little Self Absorption," New Kid on the Hallway, 18 May 2007, http://newkidonthehallway.typepad.com/new_kid_on_the_hallway/2007/05/index.html.
9. Professor X, *In the Basement of the Ivory Tower: Confessions of an Accidental Academic* (New York: Viking Press, 2011), 210–215.

10. Anthony T. Grafton and Jim Grossman, "No More Plan B: A Very Modest Proposal for Graduate Programs in History," *Perspectives on History* 49, no. 7 (October 2011). http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2011/1110/1110pre1.cfm (25 April 2012).
11. See, for example, moria at *moria in excelsis,* http://moriainexcelsis.blogspot.com.
12. http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/tenuredradical/; http://www.historiann.com; http://blogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/; http://reassignedtime.wordpress.com.
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