

# FORUM

ISSUES ABOUT PART-TIME AND CONTINGENT FACULTY

20.2 SPRING 2017

CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

## INSIDE

- From the Editor: Privilege, Reflection, and Solidarity** A1  
Amy Lynch-Binieck
- An Interview with Nancy Welch and Tony Scott, Editors of *Composition in the Age of Austerity*** A4  
Jes Philbrook and Michelle LaFrance
- A Rhetoric of Contingency: The Affordances of the Margins in Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Blogs** A8  
Lacey Wootton

### **From the Editor: Privilege, Reflection, and Solidarity**

Amy Lynch-Binieck

Four years ago, I was at a weeks-long academic writing seminar workshopping a research project on the effects of labor status on the curricular choices of composition faculty. I was very proud of this work, focused on an issue I'm passionate about. One of the leaders of the seminar offered me some productive feedback on my study, but then added this: "Be careful, Amy, or you'll make your whole career on the backs of adjuncts."

His words offered me an important moment of critical reflection, a reminder that my status as a tenured assistant professor could lead me to lose sight of the privilege embedded in my writing about contingency. My research into adjunct labor, including the work of editing this journal, allows me to apply for promotions and have positive post-tenure reviews. Even my activism can be exchanged as "service" to spend as academic capital. In a position of relative safety, I'm positioned to disproportionately benefit from such work.

Of course, in some sense, all tenure-track (TT) faculty have careers because of the work of adjuncts. For example, Seth Kahn points out, "All too often . . . colleagues bemoan the exploitation of contingent faculty while making professional choices that directly feed that exploitation" (A12–13). He outlines just a few such choices: "taking on research and administrative assignments that require part-time replacements; opting out of general education courses that are taught primarily by contingent faculty when taking those reassignments; failing to hire and evaluate

**Editorial Board**

Sue Doe, Colorado State University, Fort Collins

Megan Fulwiler, The College of Saint Rose,  
Albany, New York

Vandana Gavaskar, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Dayna Goldstein, Georgia Southern University

Bradley Hammer, University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill

**About Forum**

*Forum* is published twice a year by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Amy Lynch-Binieck, editor of *FORUM*, welcomes you to submit essays related to the teaching, working conditions, professional life, activism, and perspectives of non-tenure-track faculty. Faculty and scholars from all academic positions are welcome to contribute. Of special interest are research, analyses, and strategies grounded in local contexts, given that labor conditions and the needs of contingent faculty vary greatly with geography, institutional settings, and personal circumstances.

Essays should address theoretical and/or disciplinary debates. They will go through the standard peer-review and revision process.

Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than April 1; for the spring issue, the deadline is August 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned. Submit your work electronically to [lynchbin@kutztown.edu](mailto:lynchbin@kutztown.edu) and put the words "Forum article" in your subject line. Submissions should include your name, title(s), institution(s), home address and phone number, institutional address(es) and phone number(s), and if applicable, venue(s) where the submission was published or presented previously.

**For further information and to make submissions, please contact Dr. Amy Lynch-Binieck, Editor, *Forum*, at [lynchbin@kutztown.edu](mailto:lynchbin@kutztown.edu).**

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified. Similarly, opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

© 2017 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Printed in the United States of America.  
ISSN 1522-7502

contingent faculty rigorously, carefully, and supportively" (A13). Making contingency in higher education the focus of one's scholarship, our other academic collateral, adds another layer to the context that not only allows TT faculty careers to exist, but to *advance*. In this issue, Jes Philbrook and Michelle LaFrance interview Nancy Welch and Tony Scott regarding their 2016 collection *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Welch and Scott note that growing attention to labor conditions has led to some significant improvements, but "also led to quite a few scholarly publications, so many that agitation for better working conditions can sometimes look like its own professional career path." I hear in this an echo of the warning I received at that writing seminar.

TT faculty who want to ally with non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty, whether through scholarship or activism, might do well to pause and reflect with each essay composed and each blog posted. As Lacey Wootton examines the rhetoric of NTT bloggers, she notes, "These writers gain their understanding from the vantage point that a marginalized position can afford: the broad perspective of the relative outsider. Their understanding of contingency and critiques of the system that promotes contingency reveal areas where TT faculty might be too sheltered by the privileges of their position to acknowledge the widespread threats to that privilege."

Both pieces in this issue of *Forum* suggest that TT faculty need to take a step back and recognize the nature of this threat. The corporatization of higher education benefits

from contingency, and the continued application of neoliberal policies has changed and continues to alter the structure of the entire university. It's not like faculty haven't been warned—since Bill Readings wrote *The University in Ruins* in 1997, we have seen a slew of critiques, like Bousquet's *How the University Works* and Christopher Newfield's *Unmaking the Public University*, that suggest the growing use and abuse of contingent labor is just the beginning. Wootton urges TT faculty to read the blogs of NTT faculty with a more careful, critical eye, as they “can offer valuable insights into the challenges facing all faculty.” Welch and Scott offer that, “There are very few people in the field whose conditions of daily work and horizons of scholarship remain unaffected by the erosion of job security, program resources, and—as Eileen Schell highlights in her chapter—faculty governance.” TT faculty can no longer position themselves only as allies in the NTT fight for equity, although that front requires our constant attention. In addition, all faculty should be allied in pushing back on the restructuring of higher education writ large.

TT faculty once had the luxury of addressing labor as a social justice issue, an altruistic endeavor, or even as a career-serving move. As Philbrook and LaFrance's interview reveals, TT faculty no longer have the privilege of deciding whether or not the intertwined labor and economic systems of higher education deserve our attention, our scholarship, and our activism. Whether among the new faculty majority of NTT or the dwindling ranks of TT, austerity policies and politics have come for us all. My hope is that this realization may result in greater solidarity and resistance among all workers in higher education.

### Works Cited

- Bousquet, Marc. *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low Wage Nation*. NYU Press, 2008.
- Kahn, Seth. “‘Never Take More Than You Need’: Tenure-Track/Tenured Faculty and Contingent Labor Exploitation.” *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*, vol. 16, No. 2, Spring 2013, pp. A12–A16.
- Newfield, Christopher. *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class*. Harvard UP, 2008.
- Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Harvard UP, 1997.

**An Interview with Nancy Welch and Tony Scott, Editors of *Composition in the Age of Austerity***

Jes Philbrook and Michelle LaFrance

Nancy Welch and Tony Scott are coeditors of the recently released *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, a collection that interrogates the neoliberal underbelly of curricular initiatives, scholarship in composition studies, labor, and the political agenda of our collective work. The essays offered in the collection trace the implications of defunding, corporatizing, and labor restructuring in the field, examining rhetorical patterns and providing locations for resistance, action, and response in light of the neoliberal political economy that has increasingly driven higher ed policy. Chapters by Chris Gallagher, Deborah Mutnick, Jeanne Gunner, Eileen Schell, and Shari Stenberg, among others, are included in this collection.

Nancy and Tony generously answered several questions for us and offered insights for *Forum* readers into the exigencies that led to the development of this collection. Below, you can read our questions in italics, followed by their thoughtful and timely responses.

*Upon reading this collection, we were struck by the variety of perspectives and approaches of the authors. What prompted you to create this collection and bring these individuals together to discuss austerity and composition programs?*

The collection came as we were coauthoring an article about a problem with some of the scholarship in composition that calls itself materialist but obfuscates the very things that materialist theory is supposed to help us see—such as relationships between the global political economy and the working lives of real people. As we worked on that article (“One Train Can Hide Another,” published in *College English* in 2014), we began discussing the “felt sense of crisis” that has become more pervasive in composition since the 2008 economic crisis. We wondered why, especially with so much attention being put on scholarship that was supposed to be materialist, there is such a disconnect between our scholarly research in rhetoric and composition and the political economic terms that are powerfully shaping everyday work in postsecondary writing education.

We decided to start from austerity, a tactical catalyst for neoliberal change, because we felt that it was the best way to frame the challenges people in our field currently face. Higher education has seen steady retrenchment, cuts in per-student funding, and market encroachments on curriculum for decades. The 2008 economic crisis provided a “Shock Doctrine” opportunity for accelerating these

changes. Eight years on, it is clear that we are being conditioned to a new normal of perpetual austerity characterized by diminished funding for direct instruction, the further marketization of curriculum, and the imposition of an audit culture that reduces learning to objectified, measurable outcomes. Scholarship in rhetoric and composition has too often simply ignored these changes—or actually developed rationales and methods that adapt to, or even advance neoliberal goals without acknowledging that the changes extend from a substantially different way of viewing the goals and work of higher education. Given the shifting terrain in postsecondary writing education, we felt that there is an urgent need for new ways of thinking, researching, and directly acting. Toward that end, chapters in the collection chronicle ground-level impacts of such efficiency-driven schema as state-imposed outcomes assessment mandates and competency-based education schemes.

*Considering this “urgent need for new ways of thinking, researching and directly acting,” how does this collection contribute to conversations about labor conditions in writing studies?*

We feel that the collection contributes in two important ways. First, we aim for the collection to push against the field’s tendency to contain labor conditions within a labor-rights frame, cordoned off from other concerns. The exploitive terms of work for the majority of composition teachers have been recognized since the years before the original drafting of the Wyoming Resolution in 1986. Over the ensuing thirty years, awareness of labor conditions has grown, manifesting in more justice-oriented statements, and in some cases, unionization and other successful efforts to achieve better pay, working conditions, and benefits. It has also led to quite a few scholarly publications, so many that agitation for better working conditions can sometimes look like its own professional career path. Paradoxically, quick recognitions of exploited teachers have become so common in the field’s professional discourses that they can actually sound cliché and dismissive, a means of closing conversations rather than asking new and important questions. And as Lisa Liberty Becker recently pointed out in the *Washington Post*, unionization alone cannot fix the problem of college courses delivered by low-wage precarious labor.

This brings us to the second contribution we hope this collection makes: focusing on austerity regimes and corporate mandates as a concern not only for the field’s “labor activists,” but as profoundly impacting scholarship in the field that doesn’t focus on labor as a social justice issue and that tends to ignore labor conditions altogether. We worry, for instance, that the current trend toward “writing studies” and away from “composition” in scholarship reflects a fundamental disciplin-

ary reorientation in which research is further disembodied from the material sites and concerns of postsecondary writing education—and thus is unable to reflect on and account for how composition's recent embrace of entrepreneurialism, branding, and more are themselves products of a neoliberal sea change.

So we see the chapters in this collection contributing to an expansion of discussions of labor conditions to include how economics, administration, curricula, teaching, and learning interrelate in higher education's emerging learning environments.

*As the collection shows, the age of austerity has significantly restructured the work of composition. How do you see austerity measures impacting the professional lives of non-tenure-track faculty in composition programs?*

Ann Larson sums up the impact of austerity regimes most starkly when she points to “a generation of teachers and scholars who have either left the academy or are working in the bottom ranks of the education factory that elite members of a moribund discipline hardly acknowledge exists” (Larson). But we hope that this collection makes visible to readers, too, that the wide-scale restructuring of higher education has done more than widen the divide between tenure-eligible scholars and adjunct teaching labor. Especially, our intention with *Composition in the Age of Austerity* is to shine a light on how the twin trends of privatization and accountability are changing the terms of work—and the scholarly orientations—of those compositionists retaining a foothold in tenure ranks. The members of composition's professional-managerial class don't operate free from neoliberal constraints. There are the constraints that would have us deliver assessable writing programs or service-learning experiences without program supports and space. And, especially worrisome if composition wants to retain any of its scholarly and social justice ethos, there are those constraints that transform compositionists into entrepreneurs—or rather as itchy zombieified servants to whatever is next and new in the corporate higher-ed market.

Bottom line is that the age of austerity is redefining the terms of work, reconditioning the outlooks, and constraining the visions of all involved in composition. There are moral reasons, social justice reasons, to care about a lost generation of educators and students. But there are material reasons for solidarity, too, across the 99 percent (to borrow the popular sentiment from the Occupy movement) of compositionists who are not sheltered from expanding mandates and shrinking resources.

*In the face of all these challenges, hope can feel fairly elusive. Where do you see opportunities for resistance or disruption of the neoliberal ideologies that are reshaping labor patterns in higher education? What might labor activists in writing programs do to fight neoliberal ideologies and austerity measures?*

For us what this collection underscores is that “labor activism” isn’t and can’t be a track within composition studies that one might choose or leave to others. There are very few people in the field whose conditions of daily work and horizons of scholarship remain unaffected by the erosion of job security, program resources, and—as Eileen Schell highlights in her chapter—faculty governance. Eileen’s chapter is also among those that show the potential for compositionists to build alliances across and beyond campus with other academic and service workers moved to mobilize against contingency and for livable wages and workplace rights. Winning strikes, including at the University of Illinois-Chicago, the development of radical bodies like the MLA Subconference, the waves of resistance from the Wisconsin Uprising to Montreal’s Casserole protests and Black Lives Matter all demonstrate the widespread discontent with neoliberalism’s assault on our lives and the solidarity force that can be mustered to resist.

That said, we hope that readers will see this collection underscoring two points more. First, neoliberalism is about more than the reordering of work and the devaluing of labor. Most broadly, neoliberal political economy and its austerity programs are about creating optimal conditions for capital accumulation—optimal conditions that also depend on new generations of students and scholars trained in market logics, an acquiescent faculty that avoids politically contentious topics and pedagogies, and a curriculum that reduces literacy education to a set of discrete, measurable, and also tame skills. Second, the fight for the future of composition is not only something that should happen “out there”—in the realm of public, activist, community-based, and social justice rhetorics and programs—but “in here,” in the daily work and struggles of basic writing, first-year composition, writing centers, writing projects, and more. To be sure, our daily means to resist and reform top-down assessment mandates, resource cuts, and corporate curricular platforms are scant. Yet as Deborah Mutnick observes, refusal of composition’s traditional programmatic and pedagogical work only ensures that this work will fall onto other colleagues, be driven by remote administrations, or continue fitfully and in pockets by precariously employed scholar-teachers still dedicated to literacy’s radically democratic promise.

In the end, we don’t provide in *Composition in the Age of Austerity* a recipe for reclaiming the academy. The creation of a movement to disrupt neoliberalism’s

privatization and corporatization of higher education is a society-wide project. We do hope the collection will raise the consciousness of and provoke continued and deepening discussion among everyone involved in composition studies—not just among those who are concerned with “labor.”

*The interviewers encourage Forum readers to pick up Welch and Scott’s collection, an important contribution to conversations in the field.*

### Works Cited

- Becker, Lisa Liberty. “Adjuncts Are Unionizing but That Won’t Fix What’s Wrong in Higher Education.” *Washington Post*, 6 June 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/06/adjuncts-are-unionizing-but-that-wont-fix-whats-wrong-in-higher-education/?utm\\_term=.0364d3627623](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/06/adjuncts-are-unionizing-but-that-wont-fix-whats-wrong-in-higher-education/?utm_term=.0364d3627623). Accessed 14 Feb. 2017.
- Scott, Tony, and Nancy Welch. “One Train Can Hide Another: Critical Materialism for Public Composition.” *College English*, vol. 76, no. 6, July 2014, pp. 562–79.
- Welch, Nancy, and Tony Scott, Eds. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Utah State UP, 2016.

*Jes Philbrook is a full-time writing instructor and the coordinator of doctoral writing assessment at Walden University Writing Center. Jes is also a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Missouri, writing her dissertation about adjunct labor activism in the history of rhetoric and composition.*

*Michelle LaFrance is assistant professor of English and directs the Writing Across the Curriculum program at George Mason University. Michelle teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in writing course pedagogy, ethnography, institutional rhetorics, feminist cultural materialism, and qualitative research methodologies. She has published on peer review, preparing students to write across the curriculum, e-portfolios, e-research, information literacy, writing center and WAC pedagogy, and institutional ethnography.*

---

## **A Rhetoric of Contingency: The Affordances of the Margins in Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Blogs**

Lacey Wootton

This fall, *Inside Higher Ed* described a survey of college presidents’ and board members’ views of shared governance (Flaherty). Linking to the article on Facebook, the New Faculty Majority commented, “Why would you survey the folks who



have least to gain from shared governance, and completely ignore the folks (part-time and other contingent faculty) who have the most to gain?" This type of bias—which looks to the views of administrators and board members or which assumes that *faculty* only means tenure-line faculty—ignores the perspective of the majority of faculty: those who are not on the tenure track.

Non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty *are* speaking out on their own behalf, but are they sufficiently heard? Certainly, many other NTT faculty, and tenure-track (TT) faculty, too, attend to their concerns. But NTT faculty, particularly adjuncts, are frequently marginalized within institutions, excluded from formal governance and even from informal, day-to-day, collegial interactions.

I would argue that we—all faculty—can listen more carefully to advocacy texts produced by NTT faculty, especially adjunct faculty. We should certainly look at their texts through the lens of labor advocacy, recognizing and supporting their stated needs for material compensation, job security, and professional respect, among others. We can also, however, move beyond direct statements of such material and immediate needs to analyze their texts rhetorically with a more theoretical lens. In doing so, we can view the often-marginalized position of contingency as an affordance, a place from which one can make more systemic critiques that when examined closely, can offer valuable insights into the challenges facing all faculty.

I have chosen to analyze two blogs, one written by a current adjunct faculty member and the other by a former adjunct faculty member, in part because others frequently link to them or they are mentioned by other bloggers on NTT-faculty websites, and because they focus on topics central to NTT-faculty advocacy; these bloggers are part of the NTT faculty-advocacy conversation. Moreover, while some NTT-faculty blogs focus on personal stories, often using emotional appeal to strong effect, these two bloggers take more logical, analytical approaches, though they are not devoid of emotion.

### **Burke's Dramatistic Pentad**

Kenneth Burke's concepts of motive and identification and his dramatistic pentad prove especially useful in analyzing NTT-faculty advocacy rhetoric and in understanding the potential affordances of the margins. In its original and most common form, Burke's dramatistic pentad includes five elements that interact and affect each other: scene (setting or situation), agent (the person or actor), act (what happened), agency (the tool or means used by the agent), and purpose (Burke, *Grammar*). Burke calls these elements a "generating principle" for a discussion of motive (xv). What interests Burke the most are the "internal relationships which the five terms bear to one another . . . their range of permutations and combinations" (xvi)—or "ratios." The ratios among the pentadic elements can serve as a heuristic to under-

stand behaviors and motives, both textual and extra-textual. And, as Burke notes, these elements and the ratios are fluid: something can be either scene or act, for example, depending on one's perspective, and a different ratio will lead to a different interpretation. Burke implicitly foregrounds the ratios among scene, agent, and act; I will concentrate on the scene-agent ratio in my analysis of NTT blog posts.

Blogs such as the two I've chosen offer NTT faculty freedom to communicate their opinions and experiences, freedom they might not have in the academic workplace. The blogs are places where NTT faculty can exercise more textual power, where they can rhetorically construct themselves as agents and create their version of their employment and their contingency—in other words, they create their working conditions as a “scene” with a power and freedom that they might lack in the workplace.

### ***Adjunkedprofessor: Messages from the Trenches of Academia***

The blog *Adjunkedprofessor* reveals the basic pentadic elements. At the most basic level, in Burke's terms, the scene is the blog itself—the rhetorical space—and the author is the agent. The blog is agency, too, the means by which the author “acts” textually. Her purpose appears to be to engage in systemic analyses. *Adjunkedprofessor* reprints some postings from other publications but generally features the author's own posts. She is anonymous, although repostings of other texts she has written diminish her anonymity. I will analyze two posts from her site: “Adjuncts Are but a Symptom” and “The Doublespeak of Let's Get Together.”

In these two posts, this author appears as an agent who acts with more logos than pathos; in other words, her posts rely less on her personal experiences and more on her own and others' systemic analyses. Nonetheless, “Doublespeak” begins with a personal anecdote: a description of a TT colleague who issued the invitation of the title, “Let's get together,” and then verbally accosted her. *Adjunkedprofessor* describes memories of her alcoholic husband here, as well as her confusion and anger at the verbal assault and, later, at her chair's refusal to address the problem. Here, the agent is a target, a victim, and the scene is overtly hostile.

Within that hostile scene that she has presented, though, the author asserts control, constructing herself as an agent who removes herself from the hostility to examine the bigger picture: the system that fosters intra-faculty hostility. She urges her readers to “think about how much easier it is to be taken advantage of while we're at each other's throats.” Instead of pointing to privileged and oblivious TT faculty or administrators as the problem, she looks to a system of increased privatization of public education. She doesn't name individuals or even particular groups in this post; she refers to “our oppressors.” To resist those oppressors, she calls on all faculty, TT and NTT alike, to re-examine their advocacy efforts—“to commit

[themselves] to building bridges rather than constructing walls." In other words, she constructs herself-as-agent clearly as an advocate for *all* faculty, a caller-to-arms within a scene that is detrimental to both faculty and students; she might be speaking from the academic margins, but her claims are central to faculty concerns. Her scene is highly politicized, albeit with a clear human element as evidenced in her opener. Problems are systemic, and while there might be clearly individuated "villains," those villains are also oppressed by the system. And in fact, she extends this system-scene beyond academia, claiming that "our lives are being legislated in favor of private interests" and describing "the abuses of a privatization complex." Here, she allies herself with Dwight Eisenhower, who "warned us to stay alert and keep informed because he could see that greed + access to public funds not only creates economic disaster for the lower and middle class but undermines our democracy"; she widens the scope of both her scene and her advocacy, constructing herself as an agent whose purpose includes saving democracy. Surveying the academic landscape from the marginalized vantage point, she can observe the dangers that encroach upon it.

Adjunkedprofessor continues this line of argument in "Adjuncts Are but a Symptom," both questioning current advocacy emphases and critiquing what she describes as the neoliberalist trends in higher education. She links public education to freedom: "Adjuncts are a white collar symptom of systemic and deep global wounds to freedom." She again calls on faculty to turn their attention away from the two-tier system because in this neoliberal system, "we are being conditioned to accept a norm that says there is no public good, only allegiance to oneself." In this post, the scene again often extends beyond academia, and it is explicitly—and unfortunately—neoliberal. And the author again presents herself as an agent who advocates, who calls to arms her colleagues, NTT and TT alike.

In this post, she is also more clearly part of a "we"; in fact, she doesn't use "I" at all. Although she recognizes the often-marginalized position of NTT faculty, she refuses to remain on the margins. In addition, she employs others' voices as agencies, from Diane Ravitch to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In this way, she constructs yet another scene-agent ratio. Here, the scene is a conversation, one that expresses dismay and concern about the rise of neoliberalism in the US; at the same time, the scene is neoliberal higher education, within the context of a neoliberal US. These overlapping scenes—the textual and actual—foster agents who are compelled to speak out, rationally but also urgently. Adjunkedprofessor constructs herself as an agent who *must* explain the problem to her colleagues and persuade them to turn their attention from "academic infighting" to the real threats not only to their academic employment but also to freedom and democracy. Despite her clear and urgent call to action, as in "Doublespeak,"

she doesn't provide a specific object for resistance or any exact means to do so. She mentions "business-political elites," "big business," "big politics and business," "Jeffersonian free markets," and the Foundation for Economic Education (a libertarian think-tank), among others. The larger scene, therefore, the field of play for advocacy, remains somewhat shadowy and, perhaps more importantly, feels unassailable. Even though Adjunkedprofessor is an agent who takes control in hostile situations and issues clarion calls for unity and resistance, she has (perhaps inadvertently) constructed a scene that seems to highlight her relative lack of power to effect change. And yet, her power to observe, analyze, critique, and rally—her textual power—remains.

### **Gordon Haber**

Gordon Haber's eponymous blog differs somewhat from Adjunkedprofessor's. For one thing, he does not currently teach; although his subtitle is *Writer, Teacher, Mediocre Guitarist*, he is, in the parlance, "post-ac." He blogs about a variety of topics, including education and teaching, and his approach in his "teaching" posts is often to argue directly with another text, frequently one that criticizes NTT-faculty advocacy. I will analyze three such posts: "Adjuncts! It's Your Own Damn Fault! That Arrogant Libertarian Troll Is Absolutely Right!"; "The Soothing Stroke of the Invisible Hand"; and "An Open Letter to Catherine Stukel."

It might be clear from the titles of the blog posts that Haber's politics align with Adjunkedprofessor's. But his tone differs significantly from hers; he is angry, frustrated, and above all, sarcastic. As the agent in these texts, he is fed up. In "Adjuncts!" he writes about "hyper-rational bullshit," "pointless cruelty," and adjunct work as a "shitty job." In "Soothing" he refers to his students as "dunces" who didn't do the reading and to "the sneering dismissal of adjunct rhetoric." This agent acts with little restraint; he takes full advantage of the textual freedom a blog can offer, and his agency—his language—is a weapon.

But this is not to say that Haber is irrational or that he relies purely on anger. His preferred technique is to take individual points from the text with which he disagrees and attack them, often with sarcasm but also with evidence and reasoning. For example, "Soothing" argues with a blog posting by Phillip W. Magnuss, a George Mason University professor, which claims that adjuncts are paid more than the minimum wage. Haber acknowledges the technical validity of that claim but then goes on to describe the "hours and hours and hours of reading and grading until you feel you might puke" required of composition teachers. To Magnuss's point that adjuncts, like all faculty, have generous vacation times, Haber sarcastically replies, "If by 'generous schedule' you mean 'months without pay' you are indeed correct!" Haber-as-agent takes control of the argument—and control of the

original text—in order to demonstrate not only that it is inaccurate but that it is mean spirited and ignorant, too. His purpose, in part, is to vanquish and shame his opponents. He might technically be on the margins, but from that position, he can dissect the flawed arguments of his opponents.

The scene in these blog posts, then, is highly adversarial and hostile. Haber doesn't acknowledge allies, only enemies. He constructs a scene that is a textual battlefield, one in which he assembles the various parties to fight it out. One might be tempted to accuse Haber of populating his battlefield scene with straw men, except that his adversaries represent a view of NTT faculty which Haber summarizes as "I did it, so how hard can it be." And "if you don't like it you can always leave." That view certainly exists and has adherents—and, perhaps more importantly, might be tempting for the general public and policymakers to support. The battlefield scene is not simply an exercise in ego or an intellectual competition; it has consequences for NTT faculty who are dismissed or criticized by Haber's TT faculty opponents.

The hostility and adversity extend beyond the individual disagreements between Haber and the particular writers with whom he takes issue, however. Haber is angry at them and, by extension, all TT faculty who ignore the plight of NTT faculty or dismiss their problems as their own fault. In "Soothing," he describes the "endless, clueless picayune droning of tenured faculty," and in "Open Letter," he refers to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as the "Chronicle of Tenured Douches." The broader academic scene, according to Haber, contains exploited NTT faculty and privileged TT faculty; one struggles, and the other dismisses their struggles. While Haber alludes to larger ideological forces at work in academic employment, mentioning libertarianism and the free market, those forces don't take center stage in his scene. Instead, there are individuals who lack empathy or are cruel, and Haber-as-agent steps in, rhetorically, to defend those whom they would attack while simultaneously creating the battlefield scene for his defense. By taking on individuals, not "the system," Haber can assert control and, rhetorically, cut down privilege. His arguments can help his readers see and question versions of the status quo that disadvantage NTT faculty in general and adjuncts in particular.

### **Marginal Vantage Points and a Rhetoric of Contingency**

An examination of the pentadic elements of the two blogs—particularly the scene-agent ratio—reveals a scene characterized by hostility, adversity, and oppression, as well as agents who are angry, marginalized, and oppressed—but not rhetorically powerless. The bloggers do not use their rhetorical powers to defuse the hostility and oppression; instead, they construct scenes that capture the hostility and highlight the oppression. In doing so, Adjunkedprofessor seeks to create solidarity with

other NTT faculty (and occasionally with TT faculty or students), and both bloggers work to prompt outrage at injustice and neoliberalist exploitation and to diminish the power (rhetorically) of those who have higher status and authority. The “rhetoric of contingency”—a rhetoric that speaks from the margins of academia—thus far arises from a position of relative powerlessness to express anger and disdain; it is a means of criticizing and instructing but not, in these cases, of offering plans or solutions. In the absence of explicit advocacy “action items” in the blogs, Burke’s pentad can also help us understand motives.

Burke highlights the roles of identification and division in rhetoric and considers identification to be not only purpose or a rhetorical device but also a possible deeper motive: “Identification can also be an end, as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other” (“Rhetoric,” 203). With whom do these bloggers—and NTT faculty in general—yearn to identify themselves, and to what extent is that identification their primary motive?

In the past, one might have assumed that, of course, the bloggers’ motive is identification with TT faculty—or tenure itself. Traditionally, tenure is in many ways the ultimate motive in academia, that blessed state—according to conventional wisdom—toward which all faculty strive. In an academic institution, tenure can have an almost heliotropic effect on faculty: whether or not faculty are on the tenure track, “tenured” is the supposedly desired state and the foundation for all professional categories and identities.

Even though contingency has become an academic-labor norm, and contingent employment (particularly term contracts) an often viable career path, not all NTT faculty continue to yearn for tenure. The blog posts I’ve discussed, particularly Haber’s, indicate more division than identification with TT faculty. In Haber’s blogs, TT faculty are privileged, but they are also elitist, ignorant, and mean. Even *Adjunkedprofessor*, who constructs a scene of identification, locates the consubstantiation in oppression, not in the expected areas of privilege and security. Of course, any attempt at identification with one group (such as fellow NTT faculty) can lead to division from another group (such as TT faculty). But the division in these blogs seems deeper, an indication of a fundamental turn from tenure.

This is not to say that the bloggers, like many other NTT faculty, don’t want the material and professional benefits that come with tenure: fair compensation, employment stability, institutional respect and support, and academic freedom. They just don’t present tenure as the one truth path to achieving a meaningful, rewarding academic career, and they even reject tenure in its privileged, elitist form. Part of the bloggers’ motive, then, is not to argue for tenure for NTT faculty; it is to argue for respect, stability, and compensation whether they are tenured or not. In other

words, the bloggers' identification-as-motive seems to be "faculty": a body of academic professionals.

But Gordon Haber and Adjunkedprofessor have other, rhetorical motives besides identification. In these blogs, we can see the value of critique from the margins, of "calling out" oppression and privilege, particularly for those who might not recognize their own oppressive acts and privileged positions.

Contingency—this state of being dependent on external circumstances or even chance—can deny NTT faculty the standing on which to build identification or even to demand to be heard. If the tenure track is the core of the academic hierarchy, then contingency is peripheral; it is "other." Within this context, then, the hostile and adversarial agents of these blogs make more sense: they are developing a rhetoric of contingency that affords them the periphery as a position of rhetorical control, where they can claim the marginalized stance available to them as a place from which they can argue, criticize, correct, and instruct.

This rhetorical positioning—the power of the periphery—can offer clarity of perspective that becomes crucial as the larger academic landscape changes. The professoriate itself, as traditionally conceived, is now "contingent": dependent on external forces, subject to chance and change. Adrianna Kezar and Elizabeth Holcombe implicitly emphasize this broader contingency as they explore possible alternatives to the current academic hierarchy, division of labor, and opportunities for professional development and scholarship. Their research suggests that despite adherence to the tenured ideal, most stakeholders recognize that the professoriate as we know it will have to change; whether tenure will survive that change remains to be seen.

As part of that process, that reconceiving of the professoriate, the voices of all faculty—TT and NTT—matter; as faculty, we can use this opportunity to protect our traditional strengths and add new ones. The criticisms, suggestions, demands, and insights of NTT-faculty blogs and advocacy groups—and of individual NTT faculty—will be a valuable resource for any faculty who want to thrive in changing institutional landscapes. These writers gain their understanding from the vantage point that a marginalized position can afford: the broad perspective of the relative outsider. Their understanding of contingency and critiques of the system that promotes contingency reveal areas where TT faculty might be too sheltered by the privileges of their position to acknowledge the widespread threats to that privilege. Fellow TT advocates can attend to their systemic critiques to remind themselves that true advocacy must consider not only local, material concerns, but also the preservation of independence and stability for all faculty. These advocates can follow the bloggers' example in seeking vantage points from which to analyze the environments they inhabit; they can look for areas in need of critique as well as openings



for shared efforts. Some measure of consubstantiation between NTT and TT faculty will be essential to the survival of the core values of higher education; how much better it would be to create that consubstantiation in shared understanding rather than in shared oppression.

### Works Cited

- Adjunkedprofessor. "Adjuncts Are but a Symptom." *Adjunkedprofessor*, 15 December 2014, <https://adjunkedprofessor.wordpress.com/2014/12/15/adjuncts-are-but-a-symptom/>.
- . "The Doublespeak of Let's Get Together." *Adjunkedprofessor*, 10 March 2015, <https://adjunkedprofessor.wordpress.com/2015/03/10/the-doublespeak-of-lets-get-together/>.
- Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. U of California P, 1969.
- . "Rhetoric—Old and New." *The Journal of General Education*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1951, pp. 202–09. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org.proxyau.wrlc.org/stable/27795349>.
- Flaherty, Coleen. "Shared Governance, Not Shared Power." *Inside Higher Ed*, 29 Sept. 2016, [www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/29/survey-presidents-and-board-members-suggests-shared-governance-matters-they-could-be?utm\\_content=buffer5c09b&utm](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/29/survey-presidents-and-board-members-suggests-shared-governance-matters-they-could-be?utm_content=buffer5c09b&utm).
- Haber, Gordon. "Adjuncts! It's Your Own Damn Fault! That Arrogant Libertarian Troll Is Absolutely Right!" *Gordon Haber*, 28 April 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150826025503/http://www.gordonhaber.net/that-arrogant-libertarian-troll-is-absolutely-right>.
- . "An Open Letter to Catherine Stukel." *Gordon Haber*, 3 July 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160303184535/http://www.gordonhaber.net/an-open-letter-to-catherine-stukel>.
- . "The Soothing Stroke of the Invisible Hand." *Gordon Haber*, 7 May 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150709084745/http://www.gordonhaber.net/the-soothing-stroke-of-the-invisible-hand>.
- Kezar, Adrianna, and Elizabeth Holcombe. "The Professoriate Reconsidered." *Academe*, vol.101, no. 6, 2015, pp.13–18.
- New Faculty Majority. "Why would you survey the folks who have the least to gain from shared governance." *Facebook*, 29 Sept. 2016, [www.facebook.com/newfacultymajority/](http://www.facebook.com/newfacultymajority/).

*Lacey Wootton is a Hurst Senior Professorial Lecturer in the Department of Literature at American University. She is pursuing a PhD in writing and rhetoric at George Mason University.*