# Academia Is an Ecosystem, Not a Container: Rethinking (with) Quit Lit

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WHY IS ACADEMIA persistently described as a space that one can either remain in or else leave, totally and forever? Why are people either in academia or out of it?

First of all, we imagine the academy as a space from force of habit. For most of us, academia started out as a space: a campus. It was a place to go, a place to be, a place to work. Not for nothing do colleges celebrate their campuses as catalysts for community.

Now let's look at the campus space: in its classical form, it's enclosed. So it's something to be in or out of. Our habit of thinking about academia as a space derives from the nature of the physical space it so often occupies. Why does this matter? Because when we talk about higher education in spatial terms, our habitual descriptions — beginning with choices as simple as the prepositional phrases we use — reflect and perpetuate many of our current problems with doctoral preparation.

Like the physical campus, the figurative space of academia is enclosed. Sometimes it's even walled off entirely. One tightly closed-off area of academia is the academic job market, whose terms and practices are rife with spatially oriented language. The academic job market's guiding job term is the "tenure track," which someone is either on or off.

We're also prone to describe academia in ways that create space

between the academy and other arenas. There are careers *in* academia and those *outside* academia. People *leave* academia, or *remain in* academia. Still others are *beyond* the tenure track or academia itself — which is a better, more positive descriptor, but still a spatially bound concept.

We're also prone — especially in the humanities and humanistic social sciences — to describe research contributions in terms of "the field," as in "Professor Jones retires after changing the way we see the field." The authors of the bitingly funny *Keywords; : For Further Consideration and Particularly Relevant to Academic Life, &c.* note that in

> the wonderland of Academia, a *field* is a veritable Alice, which is to say, an entity with variable dimensions when measured against subjects and disciplines....The coded assumption of territoriality reinforces speculation that, in fact, an academic field is a deceptively hospitable habitat for competitive gazelles engaged in eternal inter- and intra-generational conflict over circumscribed tracts of grassland.[1]

Spatially bound metaphors and language persist in the quit-lit genre, too, including essays in this volume. Here are a few examples.

When we think spatially, we often do so in ways that restrict rather than free. In "Jailbreaking My Academic Career," Jessica Collier writes about "breaking out once you're in."[2] If you're like me, maybe you last used the term "jailbreaking" when talking about reprogramming a cell phone to allow it to do more than the manufacturer wanted — in short, to expand its capabilities rather than exchange them for a completely different set. That seems like a great way to describe a PhD's relationship to academia. But the idea of "breaking out once you're in" seems more focused on the idea of physical escape. Collier later describes it as "breaking from academia." In general, the tendency is to describe academic worlds as decidedly and spatially different from worlds beyond the academy. Joseph Conley describes a "transition into the 'real' world," as well as "life on the other side" and finally describes a place called "adjunct purgatory."[3]

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[1] A Community of Inquiry, *Keywords; : For Further Consideration and Particularly Relevant to Academic Life, &c.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 29-30 (emphasis mine).

[2] Jessica Collier, "Jailbreaking My Academic Career," *Medium*, April 23, 2013, https://medium.com/altac-chronicles/jailbreaking-my-academic-career-3ec7b0fe1671 [pp. 47-51 in the present volume].

[3] Joseph Conley, "Just Another Piece of Quit Lit," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 8, 2018, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Just-Another-Piece-of-Quit-Lit/242756 [pp. 103-6 in the present volume].

The spatial imagery often operates in very personal ways. In "My Post-Academic Grace Period," Kelly J. Baker (who is editor of "Women *in* Higher Education," emphasis mine) writes first of "walk[ing] away from academia" but later revises this to a "year hiatus from the academy" after which she "can decide to walk away."[4] In between these two spatially driven conceptions of the academy comes much different — and more fruitful — language: "I can decide if there is anything that I will miss about academic life. I can decide to take the parts I like (research and writing) and apply them to other careers." It is this modular thinking that seems to have led to Baker's blended career.

Our usage of spatial imagery often has personal and psychological dimensions. Constantina Katsari, for example, describes her "decision to leave" as a struggle that lasted for quite some time before she "took the first step towards freedom." Later, she describes "escap[ing] the ivory tower." Joe Fruscione writes about "fe[eling] wistful about the prospect of leaving the profession I worked so hard — and spent so much money — to enter." L. Maren Wood writes compellingly about the moment when "we decide we can no longer afford — financially or psychologically — to stay in a system that has no room for us." Erin Bartram writes that quit lit reflects "the way we insulate ourselves from grappling with what it means for dozens, hundreds, thousands of our colleagues to leave the field.... Those left behind ... don't often write about what it means to lose friends and colleagues."[5]

At the outset of this chapter, I listed a few ways that we're inclined to use spatial imagery when describing the academy—and work that somehow occurs "within" academe. Writing in response to Bartram's essay (as well as that of Matt Welsh), Howard Gardner calls it "tragic" that "Bartram is one of thousands of trained scholars who never get the opportunity to teach students who want to learn and to add their own bricks — small and not so small — to the edifice of knowledge in their chosen field of study."[6] Of Matt

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[4] Kelly J. Baker, "My Post-Academic Grace Period," *Chronicle Vitae*, November 5, 2013, https://chroniclevitae.com/news/95-my-post-academic-grace-period [pp. 53-54 in the present volume].

[5] Constantina Katsari, "Leaving Academia: 'I Can Offer More to the Public Outside University System'," *Guardian*, November 22, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/nov/22/leaving-academia-life-beyond-university [pp. 61-62 in the present volume]; Joe Fruscione, "New Game, New Rules," *Chronicle Vitae*, February 12, 2014, https://chroniclevitae.com/news/330-new-game-new-rules [pp. 63-66 in the present volume]; L. Maren Wood, "Walking Away from Academia When It Was Your Dream Job," Beyond the Professoriate, n.d., https://beyondprof.com/walking-away-from-academia-when-it-was-your-dream-job; Erin Bartram, "The Sublimated Grief of the Left Behind," *Erin Bartram* (personal blog), February 11, 2018, http://erinbartram.com/uncategorized/the-sublimated-grief-of-the-left-behind [pp. 97-101 in the present volume].

[6] Howard Gardner, "Two Departures from the Professoriate: A World Apart," *Howard*

Welsh, Gardner writes: "he is [now] working for private industry — admittedly having lots of fun, perhaps doing some good, but the more cynical would say that he has 'gone over to the dark side.'" If Gardner isn't cynical, he's at least skeptical, and his language here suggests he finds "having lots of fun" something that is viewed as a kind of confession, rather than a positive benefit of a workplace environment. (More about Gardner below.)

When we describe academia — and the work scholars do — using spatial imagery, we endorse an imagined separation of worlds. That separation is a pernicious construct: it creates a world within opposed to a world outside. Or to put it more bluntly, it leads to separatism: us and them.

This binary thinking separates academia from society at large and hinders us from imagining ourselves in a productive relation to that wider society. We need to exchange this binary for new, more capacious metaphors. New metaphors will free us to think about new practices. Academia is not one world but many intersecting and overlapping ones — and we need new ways to inhabit them together.

I propose that we examine carefully the ways we describe academia — and our relationships with it. In the next section of this essay, I argue that spatially derived metaphors have stunted the ways we imagine ourselves to connect with academia. Then I look in the following section to the boldest, most imaginative quit-lit essays for how we might exchange well-worn metaphors for new terms, new metaphors, and new practices and ways of inhabiting the complex, intersecting worlds that make up academia — and more important, the lived experiences of those in graduate school. Their experiences require new language, and new policies and procedures with it.

## Academia Is Not a Container

I quoted Howard Gardner's response to Erin Bertram and Matt Welsh in the previous section. Let's look a bit more at his reaction.

Gardner asks, apparently sincerely, what is to be done? Gardner puts forward a suggestion for solving the problems of people either quitting the professoriate, or not making it in at all. One way? Adopt the European model of separating research and pedagogy through the institute and lectureship model:

> But there is a better way, though I have to admit it is no longer the American way: an agreed-upon bargain between our higher-degree-awarding institutions and our talented students who want to be

teachers *and* scholars. If our institutions train you to be a skilled scholar and teacher, you commit to giving back—to staying within the professoriate, barring unusual circumstances. (Presumably Welsh could even come to like, to cherish his Harvard undergraduates.) Conversely, if we take you on as a student and you complete the requirements successfully, we commit to providing a job which makes use of your talents. If that means radically reducing the number of doctorates in history or in Romance languages, better to do so "up front" than to hold out the false hope of a job — and in the process, ensuring many repetitions of Erin Bartram's sad saga.

Let's focus on a few phrases from the "better way" Gardner proposes. The first is his implied definition of "the professoriate" that PhDs would somehow have to solemnly covenant not to leave. But earlier in his essay he writes about "hundreds of young scholars — primarily in the humanities and the 'softer' social sciences" who cannot find "a full-time tenure-track position."

In a list of potential outcomes, Gardner ends with this doozy of a descriptor:

some, and one could even call them "lucky," end up teaching at a second- or third-tier school, or a community college, with a teaching (and perhaps also an advising) load so heavy that there is essentially no chance that they can carry out the scholarship that they were trained to do — and that they presumably want to do.

Gardner's desire that PhDs remain "within the professoriate" means, it would seem, that they must all teach at an elite research university with little to no teaching requirements, or else they are "without the professoriate." Changing one's mind about how to spend the course of one's life after accepting an offer of admission doesn't seem to be an option here.

Such a limited description of the professoriate — a binary that excludes just about everyone except a very few tenured and tenure-track professors at R1 research institutions — is the opposite of what we need. Granting Gardner's belief that there should be a social contract ("an agreed-upon bargain") between both PhD-granting institution and the PhDs they produce, we might say that this variant of the bargain restricts PhDs once again to narrow conceptions of how the life of the mind can be lived in the twenty-first century.

Examining language patterns in this area isn't a theoretical exercise. Ideas have legs, and our terminology encourages those legs to take us down certain

paths. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson remind us in *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphors are not usually ornamental. Rather, "human thought processes are largely metaphorical." Thus it is that metaphors like "the mind is machine" are embedded in phrases we use on a daily basis, like "My mind just isn't operating well today," or "I could see the wheels turning in his head." Another metaphor, "time is money," circulates in phrases like "I can't spare the time" and "You need to budget your time" or even "How did you spend your weekend?"[7]

To Lakoff and Johnson's list of metaphors, we might add another that we reinforce every day: "Academia is a place." Or "academia is a container."

But academia isn't a place or a container. It would in almost every instance be better described as a collection of people. The metaphor of academia as container influences us even when we describe the "academic community," because the current version of academic community too often sounds like another class of container that holds certain people and excludes others. The idea of academia as container doesn't capture the interconnected and overlapping relationships that individuals have had with higher education in the past, present and future. (Allow me to pose a quick thought experiment: Was/is Ralph Waldo Emerson "in" academia?)

To reimagine academia for the twenty-first century, we need new metaphors to describe its variegated nature. Here's a suggestion: let's conceive of the academy and the worlds it intersects with as an ecosystem. Doing so allows us more readily to imagine careers that blend academia and other sectors, and find descriptors worthy of them.

We need to rethink our terms because the language we use closely relates to our personal and collective attitudes toward professional development. In the particular case of graduate education, we need to be more attentive to how we describe what PhDs do.

The metaphors we're looking for can't and should not always be spatially derived. There are plenty of better metaphors. Look to the world of music, in which harmonies can produce overtones, and in which notes can be discrete but also blended.

Each discipline should build a vocabulary around career and professional development that is more capacious. We especially need to stop characterizing careers as in or out, and simply describe them as they are.

Such a change would simply meet reality. All signs point to more blended careers for PhDs, who will hold administrative as well as teaching positions, or move between higher education and other employers. Such

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[7] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8–29.

careers feature not binaries or barriers, but interwoven communities and overlapping ecosystems, with people and community — not spaces — prioritized.

This is a matter of language, and also of the actual lived experience of graduate students and graduate alumni. Describing academia differently allows graduate students to rethink their approach to their own graduate training, their relationship to the academy, and the ways that preparing for multiple outcomes is not just "professorial preparation, plus other stuff."

A change in language will open our minds toward how we think about graduate training, the skills and competencies graduate students acquire during it, and the ways we think about our careers. If you think about your training differently, you may shape it differently for yourself.

### Rethinking (with) Quit-Lit Essays

There is, I propose, a relationship between the genre of quit lit and our habit of thinking of academia as a container. We might even argue that thinking about academia in spatialist ways helps produce the conditions and mindsets that necessitate a genre like quit lit.

Space hasn't permitted me (pun intended, sadly) to look at each of the essays within this volume, but in what follows I reference a few more of them — as well as some not included in this volume — and attempt to outline lessons they teach us, lessons that may help us eventually make quit lit a short-lived genre. After all, when we have all moved past the idea that academia is a container, academia won't be something to leave forever, it'll be a part of a range of options that presents itself to PhDs at a variety of points in their careers.

*Be wary of the "just don't go" to graduate school arguments that many quit-lit essays espouse.*

One of the best essays on the dangers of blanket "just don't go" essays comes from Tressie McMillan Cottom, who wrote a post on her website entitled "Blanket 'Don't Go to Graduate School!' Advice Ignores Race and Reality?" In the post, she notes with trademarked clarity that "maybe too many people are going to graduate school but not too many of all people are going to graduate school."[8]

Many nuanced arguments can and have been made for those consider-

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[8] Tressie McMillan Cottom, "Blanket 'Don't Go to Graduate School' Advice Ignores Race and Reality?" *Tressie McMillan Cottom* (personal blog), April 6, 2013, https://tressiemc.com/uncategorized/blanket-dont-go-to-graduate-school-advice-ignores-race-and-reality

ing graduate school. My hope is that, as reforms within scholarly associations, institutions, and individual departments continue to mature, we will move past blanket "just don't go" advice — particularly from those who hold tenure-track jobs, as they are often least suited to making these kinds of declarations. Society needs what PhDs can offer now more than ever, so let's be leery of instinctively steering prospective PhDs away from graduate school. It seems to me that this kind of advice is best given on a personal, one-on-one level, and not en masse.

*Give humanities and social science PhDs the same ability to move in and out of professorships as science and engineering PhDs often have.*

Matt Welsh's blogpost — "Why I'm leaving Harvard" — written when he announced he was resigning his tenured faculty job at Harvard to take up a post at Google — shows very clearly the ways that for many PhDs in the sciences, academia isn't a space to be in or out of, but rather a career choice that one can leave and occasionally return to with much more ease than in the humanities or social sciences.[9] (Since the essay's publication, Welsh has also worked at the Seattle-based startup Xnor.ai as well as Apple and OctoML.) This type of flexibility is possible in the humanities — I'm thinking of one of my former professors who has taken up the presidency of a foundation. Another example is the career of Ann Kirschner, currently on the faculty at CUNY, whose circuitous path and entrepreneurial deployment of her PhD in English is perhaps the boldest vision of career fluidity.

Terran Lane's essay "On Leaving Academe" gives a litany of reasons one might quit the academy — the essay's sections are "making a difference," "work-life imbalance," "centralization of authority and decrease of autonomy," "budget climate," "hyperspecialization, insularity, and narrowness of vision," "poor incentives," "mass production of education," "salaries," and "anti-intellectualism, anti-education, and attacks on science and academe." Lane's reasons for leaving academe point provide a clear list of areas that need to be improved.[10] One area that doesn't seem as problematic for Lane is the either/or choice often faced by humanists and social scientists as they consider "quitting" academia.

Lane concludes their essay by noting that the choice to leave — it was a

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[9] Matt Welsh, "Why I'm Leaving Harvard," *Matt Welsh* (personal blog), November 15, 2010, http://matt-welsh.blogspot.com/2010/11/why-im-leaving-harvard.html [pp. 19-22 in the present volume].

[10] Terran Lane, "On Leaving Academe," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 19, 2012, https://www.chronicle.com/article/on-Leaving-Academe/133717 [pp. 29-34 in the present volume].

choice in this case — is neither permanent nor constrained:

> Nor am I necessarily done with academe forever. I'm going to give the industry track a try for a while, but I could well find myself back in higher education in the future. There are certainly many things I still find beautiful and joyful about faculty work. In the interim, I will look for other ways to contribute to society, other ways to help educate the future, and other ways to change the world.

And Lane's essay again reminds us that — at least for now — career flexibility means something different for computer scientists than it does for historians or English PhDs.

*Create a flexible model for engaging PhDs beyond the tenure track so that our best minds can teach and research without always moving to locations that don't work for them.*

While academia isn't a space, most universities and colleges exist in very real, very fixed locations. One of my favorite pieces of quit lit was written by Alexandra M. Lord. In "Location, Location, Location," she brings together the spatial and attitudinal dispositions that can hamstring careers and warp affections. Lord notes that

> academe is ... a culture in which those who leave are often treated with disdain.... Which is why it rankles now when I hear people urge graduate students to "try the academic job in the place they never dreamed of living" or when I read a piece telling PhDs to "embrace their inner North Dakotan." That is poor advice for most people, esp-ecially when it comes couched in an assumption that the failure to be "open-minded" in one's job search is a professional or even moral failing.[11]

Like Lord, Karen Kelsky also left a position in academia. The location dynamic was at work here as well: "my partner and I made a joint decision. If she found a job back in our beloved Pacific Northwest good enough to support the family, I would leave behind academic work entirely."[12]

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[11] Alexandra Lord, "Location, Location, Location," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 12, 2012, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Location-Location-Location/134264 [pp. 35-40 in the present volume].

[12] Karen Kelsky, "Death of a Soul (On Campus)," *Tech in Translation*, July 18, 2011,

If navigating the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that many jobs can be done remotely, and that includes certain kinds of teaching. This need not mean that we shift entirely to a virtual environment, as short, intensive seminars can be scheduled to allow for PhDs to parachute into an institution to deliver a course in a time frame that allows them to maintain their life elsewhere. And technology certainly allows for us to create palimpsestuous courses and seminars, which would allow for cohorts of graduate students to share lessons and findings with those who follow.

Likewise, we need to use technology to ensure that opportunities, strategies, feedback, and so many other aspects of graduate education that are often shared by word of mouth are now shared in more equitable ways. Opportunities for funding, access to feedback, ratings of PhD advisors — these are all areas in which information can be much more legibly circulated provided we think through the user experience and the technologies that would allow such information to reach those considering graduate school, as well as those navigating the various stages of doctoral training.

*Reform careers for PhDs to allow for differing strengths and interests to be accommodated in colleges and universities.*

We can do this work by asking PhDs to create career portfolios that would work for them, not by asking them to fit into outmoded categories.

Howard Gardner's essay — quoted at length earlier — notes that Europe has long deployed a dual approach to the job of a professor that he suggests we consider in the US, namely divorcing research and teaching responsibilities. Give research to one group, teaching to another. Neat and tidy.

But such a hewing asunder of teaching and research approaches things from the needs of the institution, and not from the perspective of the twenty-first-century labor market, in which many of us expect more from our employment than did someone in, say, 1843. Here, the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) report on *Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments* is instructive: their 2010 guidance notes that "*the best practice for institutions of all types is to convert the status of contingent appointments to appointments eligible for tenure with only minor changes in job description*," meaning that those with teaching as the central component of their workload should be tenure-eligible based primarily on their work as teachers.[13] Importantly, the AAUP guidance includes the following coda:

http://techintranslation.com/guest-post-death-of-a-soul-on-campus [pp. 23-28 in the present volume].

[13] American Association of University Professors [AAUP], Committee on Contingency and the Profession, *Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments*, 2010, https://

In the long run, however, a balance is desirable. Professional development and research activities support strong teaching, and a robust system of shared governance depends upon the participation of all faculty, so even teaching-intensive tenure-eligible positions should include service and appropriate forms of engagement in research or the scholarship of teaching.

Gardner's suggestion that we reach back to the European model also ignores the fact that higher education in the US has its own history, which shapes what people think of it today. In the US, higher education and teaching are indivisible in the popular imagination. The public often sees universities primarily as spaces for undergraduate training, and funds them with this in mind. What's more, those who would occupy today's teaching and research positions have more diverse needs, interests, and commitments than the professoriate of the past. To hew to a system designed for a largely homogenous group would be simply unjust. We need to resist the desire to approach new kinds of tenured positions in any way that starts with the needs of university systems that are rooted in medieval organizational patterns.

We would do well to flip the ways we think about careers within universities and colleges: *how might the academy get better at accommodating and benefiting from the strengths and interests of PhDs, rather than creating a raft of nearly identical positions — some with security, others mercilessly contingent?*

Here Jessica Collier's realization is particularly instructive. She writes in "Jailbreaking my Academic Career" that

> a year or two ago, I realized that I did not self-identify as a teacher.... When I thought about my occupation, however, my mind reverted to "writer." Working with words is intensely difficult — anyone who tells you otherwise is probably not very good at it — and that difficulty for me is analogous to an endorphin rush. All of which is a complicated way of saying that, while teaching is enjoyable, writing makes me happy.

How might academia create jobs to retain someone like Dr. Collier? How do we create spaces for someone who, not finding academia receptive to her entrepreneurial and leadership skill sets, has gone on instead to be the

www.aaup.org/report/tenure-and-teaching-intensive-appointments; emphasis in original.

CEO of Spot, and to co-found All Turtles, a mission-driven product studio? As Collier notes,

> the world is smarter than academics are trained to believe. In my best moments in private industry so far, the work is stimulating, challenging, intense. It is akin to the best parts of academic life: the moment that you bust through a knotty argument in a chapter or talk, the collegial swelling as strong minds come together at a conference.

How do we create jobs and careers within academia that take the "moments" Collier describes and extend them?

My worry here is that if we keep losing entrepreneurial PhDs (either because they haven't applied in the first place, or because academia isn't accommodating their skill set and inclinations) we will never have the diverse range of faculty and para-faculty university employees to come alongside graduate students to mentor them into this new moment for the PhD.

*We won't have real reform until we listen to PhDs who have made it in other careers and industries.*

Reimagining humanities and social science PhD programs will be most effective when we center voices like Kelsky, Lord, and many, many others who have quit — but clearly still have a vested interest in academe's overhaul. That's because their perspectives are more nimble, more attuned to circumstances within startup worlds, within government, and within all the various fields that they interact with.

It bears mentioning that most museums, research libraries, and major foundations and nonprofits related to the humanities, social sciences, education, and the arts are led by PhDs. And PhDs in these roles are often faculty, or were for years before — like Elizabeth Alexander, prior to becoming president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, or like Daniel Weiss, prior to taking the helm of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 2011 Anthony Marx, a Princeton PhD in politics, professor, and erstwhile president of Amherst College, became the president and CEO of the New York Public Library.

Increasingly, PhDs may turn to para-academic careers without ever going the faculty route. Will Fenton, a 2018 Fordham PhD in English, continues to engage with his dissertation field, early American literature, first as the director of research and public programs at the Library Company of Philadelphia, and now as program officer in the Office of Challenge Programs at the National Endowment for the Humanities. Similarly, John Paul

Christy, a 2010 University of Pennsylvania PhD in classics, remains involved with academic professional development and public scholarship as senior director at the American Council of Learned Societies. And Nathanial Peters, a Boston College PhD in historical theology, continues to engage with students and intellectual life as director of the Morningside Institute in coordination with Columbia University and Riverside Church.

Of course, the fields of publishing, journalism, and media are a natural fit for PhDs who have demonstrated expertise in research, writing, editing, and project management.[14] For example, we might look to Cameron Collins, a Princeton English PhD and current film critic at *Rolling Stone;* Michael Dirda, a Cornell English PhD, Pulitzer-Prize winner, and longtime book reviewer at *The Washington Post*; and David Zurawik, a University of Maryland PhD in media studies and TV and media critic at *The Baltimore Sun* since 1989. In publishing, PhDs of note include Anette Bickmeyer, a University of Hanover (Germany) PhD in English, American studies, and history and program director at Bertelsmann (owner of Penguin Random House). Nicole Gervasio, a Columbia PhD in English, has also found an avenue that runs parallel to the academy as manager of the PEN America Literary Festival and Public Programs.

For examples of PhDs who have found purpose and success beyond the academy, we might also look to private industry and consulting. Maria Bezaitis, a Duke University PhD in French literature and senior principal engineer at Intel, discusses the merits of thinking across disciplinary boundaries in her TED Talk, "Why We Need Strangeness."[15] In the consulting space, Kevin Stevens, a Fordham PhD in English, applies project management skills honed while writing a dissertation to his role as advisory manager at Deloitte. Brendon Reay, a Stanford PhD in classics, is a principal at HarbourHouse Partners, a financial services consultancy.[16]

When you connect with enough PhDs beyond the academy, it becomes

[14] PhDs in journalism can transform the organizations they join and help lead. For example, in 2017, Columbia English PhD Radhika Jones became editor-in-chief of *Vanity Fair* and has enhanced the publication's already literary reputation by increasing engagement with contemporary authors — in particular Black authors like Ta-Nehisi Coates, who guest-edited the September 2020 issue.

[15] Maria Bezaitis, "Why We Need Strangeness," TED, 7:47, April 2013, https://www.ted.com/talks/maria_bezaitis_why_we_need_strangeness

[16] A particularly intriguing consulting opportunity for academics seeking to apply their research chops is ReD Associates, a boutique firm with offices in New York City and Copenhagen that seeks to bring the perspectives of social scientists to bear on issues in business, branding, and marketing. The majority of ReD Associates employees and leadership have advanced degrees in the humanities and social sciences, including Camillo de Vivanco, an Oxford PhD in comparative literature and a New York City-based manager at ReD.

abundantly clear that there are many ways for PhDs to remain connected to research and scholarship. Just as importantly, there are many ways — most of them currently untapped — for these PhDs to help reimagine graduate education.

How do we harness this collective experience? Let's start by adding a PhD working beyond the professoriate as a supplemental advisor who can advise on extra-academic concerns — ideally in concert with the academic advisor, and, when appropriate, adding them to dissertation committees. Given the numbers of PhDs who currently hold jobs beyond the tenure track, this won't be difficult. Finding ways to recognize the labor of these PhDs will likely prove an issue, but my sense is that re-engaging PhDs beyond the tenure track will have a variety of positive impacts, including but not limited to the donation of time, talent, and in some cases, money.

*Let's find more ways for scholars to teach and publish.*

We've seen from quit-lit essays in this volume that part-time tenure-track positions do exist. Expanding them, both in number and flexibility (a half-time tenure track, or a quarter-time tenure track), could allow for PhDs to re-engage in the teaching and research life of universities and colleges. Currently, the prestige economy — shaped in part by *U.S. News & World Report* and other rankings — limits the use of these positions at most "elite" institutions, one of many structural barriers that inhibit systemic, sustained change in the academy.

But we also need ways to keep scholars not on the tenure track engaged with the academic community. Hosting guest lectureships for PhDs beyond the academy would add options for PhDs working part time or full time beyond the tenure track to keep their hands in the teaching and research mission of universities and colleges. Make no mistake: PhDs beyond the academy have much to offer. Take the case of Natalie Berkman, a Princeton PhD whose own quit-lit piece ("The Stigma of Silence") outlines her search for multiple kinds of positions post-PhD, and her ultimate choice of a job in Paris, where she works as *directrice pédagogique* (academic manager) at SAE Institute Paris, a leading educator in creative media industries.[17] She continues to produce academic work such as her award-winning monograph *OuLiPo and the Mathematics of Literature.*[18]

PhDs like Natalie Berkman are ideal partners for reimagining and

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[17] Natalie Berkman, "The Stigma of Silence," Connected Academics, September 11, 2018, https://connect.mla.hcommons.org/the-stigma-of-silence

[18] Berkman, *OuLiPo and the Mathematics of Literature* (Oxford, UK: Peter Lang, forthcoming).

retooling the programs and opportunities that will equip PhDs for a range of opportunities, including but not limited to:

- internships and other experiential learning opportunities for PhD students, such as my own institution's (Princeton) GradFUTURES Fellowship program, which places fellows at institutions including XPRIZE, New America, and the American Society on Aging;
- exposure to and validation of a range of careers while in PhD programs, including the integration of graduate alumni into the lives of departments and graduate schools via profiles, meetups, and mentorship programs;[19]
- ensuring graduate student fluency with LinkedIn, creating personal websites, navigating job boards, networking, and other professional development essentials.

Increasingly, professional development is bridging the academy and the worlds supposedly divorced from it. One compelling example in the entrepreneurship domain is the Princeton Startup Bootcamp, a recent initiative in which graduate students and postdocs worked on entrepreneurial ventures in very early stages of development. Each participant benefited from mentorship and feedback from seasoned founders, and the experience culminated in a pitch competition, with a $10,000 prize. Lucy Partman, a 2021 Princeton PhD (art and archeology) notes that "one of the key reasons I took part in the bootcamp was to work with people from different disciplines. I believe deeply in the potential of interdisciplinary work, which is something we often talk about conceptually in academia. I think that it really can and does happen in the entrepreneurial space."[20]

Participants in these kinds of programs — whether they land tenure-track jobs or turn to other careers — are poised to both be better, more informed advisers for graduate and undergraduate students alike. Because of an experience that stretches them outside of a typical PhD's preparation, they can themselves imagine a greater range of flexible ways to engage with the departments, graduate programs, and institutions they will serve. PhDs who are equipped with a range of experiences in graduate school need to be pro-

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[19] Princeton's GradFUTURES initiative provides examples of all these kinds of alumni engagement; see https://gradfutures.princeton.edu.

[20] Quoted in Wright Señeres, "New Princeton-Techstars Boot Camp Boosts Entrepreneurship for Grad Students and Postdocs," Princeton Innovation, March 10, 2021, https://innovation.princeton.edu/news/2021/new-princeton-techstars-bootcamp-boosts-entrepreneurship-grad-students-and-postdocs

vided with ways — even if only in stretches of their careers — to teach, research, and shape the future of the academy.

*Let's reimagine how we circulate the knowledge produced in a PhD.*

My advisor and I have remained close, post-PhD. We write together, edit each other's work, and connect regularly for meals and phone calls. We recently had a conversation about who reads dissertations. When I was dissertating, he told me (and wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*) that few people read dissertations. This was supposed to allay my anxieties about the process. And to a certain degree it did. But that was when we both felt that the dissertation would — in a few short years — turn into a book published by a university press. That's not likely to happen for some time now, if it ever does.

The good news is that knowledge produced by PhDs has never been as accessible as it is now. In researching this essay, I found the introduction to Erin Bartram's dissertation on her website. The arguments it outlines are helping me a great deal. I'm also reviewing a book for an academic journal, and the content of Bartram's dissertation deals directly with the book's central arguments. I mentioned Natalie Berkman's monograph earlier: it is by no means the only book published by an academic press that is written by someone who has "quit" academia. As Michael McGandy notes, "PhDs on career tracks beyond the academy, because they are in jobs that connect them to the media, public programming, and policy and outreach professionals who can promote and disseminate their work, are oftentimes more likely to command sizeable readerships."[21]

For these and many other reasons, we need to think less about embargoing the knowledge in dissertations — though in some cases this is of course important — and more about creating openly accessible dissertations that touch a range of audiences while and after the dissertation is being produced. The dissertation, now more than ever, needs to have a public life. So much of what is lost when someone "quits" academia is the knowledge generated in a dissertation. Let's solve that problem.

*We need to deal with the emotional aspects of graduate training.*

It's tricky to write about quit lit. I see much of myself and my emotions in many of the essays. And those that I disagree with are written by real people,

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[21] Michael J. McGandy, "Diverse Careers, the Waning of the Prestige Regime, and the Rise of the Influence Economy in Academy Publishing," in *The Reimagined PhD: Navigating 21st Century Humanities Education*, ed. Leanne M. Horinko, Jordan M. Reed, and James M. Van Wyck (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 24.

who, when they wrote the essays, were going through an emotionally charged time.

Erin Bartram's essay is so well known in academic circles that she has an entire section of her website dedicated to "Responses to That Piece." And rightfully so. "The Sublimated Grief of the Left Behind" deserves (and will continue to deserve) our attention and respect.

One of the reasons Bartram's essay resonates is its emotion. Leonard Cassuto describes its "beautiful rendering of her sadness" in one of the many responses to the piece. Gardner describes it as a "soul-searching evocative piece."[22] Significantly, even writing that challenges quit lit's propensity for grand gestures does so in language that harnesses, generates, and releases emotion. Katie Roiphe's "Thesis Defense," dubbed an "odious rebuttal" to "Thesis Hatement," describes Schuman's essay as a jeremiad, and then a "polemic."[23] But the essays aren't antithetical, and both Roiphe and Schuman (and Bartram, and many others) have found ways to fashion careers that still intersect with the work of traditional academics on a regular basis.

Those who wrote some of the best quit-lit pieces didn't leave academia, exactly. Or perhaps it's better to say that they've refashioned a place within an ecosystem that we need to recognize as connected to, informing, and compatible with an expanded definition of what "academia" is and can be. For example, as of this writing Bartram works in public history as school programs coordinator at the Mark Twain House and Museum.

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If we resist the tendency to think about the academy using spatial imagery — or at least adapt more fluid language and more expansive metaphors — what can be gained? Non-spatial thinking means jettisoning a lot of what we've inherited and thinking more creatively. It also means connecting this recalibration to other ways we're limiting the PhD.

For example, consider the phrase "going to graduate school," with all of its implications about uprooting your life and committing to a course of full-time study. What would the PhD look like if it were unmoored from time-bound considerations such as semesters? What if the best PhD programs adapted strategies now practiced primarily by for-profit and often predatory institutions, providing working professionals the opportunity to earn a PhD

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[22] Leonard Cassuto, "The Grief of the Ex-Academic," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 25, 2018, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Grief-of-the-Ex-Academic/242612 [pp. 149-53 in the present volume]; Gardner, "Two Departures."

[23] Katie Roiphe, "Thesis Defense," *Slate*, April 8, 2013, https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/04/a-literature-ph-d-is-not-a-waste-of-time.html

on a schedule that works for them? In my professional development role with the Princeton Graduate School, I've worked with an increasing number of PhD students who begin their programs with prior experience in public historical venues or other jobs that connect directly with the public. How many more PhDs would choose to maintain these jobs if a part-time PhD wasn't something looked at with suspicion? Again, institutions may be inhibited by the current ways we judge and rank PhD programs: any dip in time to degree would hurt a program's rankings. But this needn't sink the idea: adjusting the metrics to include part-time PhDs would take some doing, but it could be done. And this needn't be a one-size-fits-all approach: part-time and flexible ways of doing a PhD will work better for some institutions, not at all for others.

We're right to decry silos and ivory towers, both as metaphors and as reflections of practices we've clung to as academics. Often-rehearsed narratives that build on these metaphors occlude possibilities for us all—for particular institutions, programs, and individuals. Instead of "tracks" let's think about variegated career paths that branch and intersect. Instead of debating whether or not "alt-ac" is a viable way of capturing a slew of career trajectories (it doesn't come close, I'd say) let's use bespoke titles and talk specifics.

Let's create modular experiences and develop the requisite language to describe these experiences. In doing so, we'll honor the trailblazers with PhDs who found careers of all kinds — mostly with little attention from their departments and institutions. And we'll start to unmake the conditions that made quit lit: the conditions that have led so many PhDs whose careers have not followed a single, hyper-specialized trajectory (let's call it the tenure track) to enact a public declaration of their existential separation from the academy.

But they are the academy. And so am I.

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