

ASSEMBLING ACADEMIC PERSONA AND PERSONHOOD IN A DIGITAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Digital automedia have become a standard mechanism for academics seeking to construct and promote professional personas. Through a range of digital platforms, including blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, social media have replaced the business card. But what about the self-authored personnel narratives that are not shared publicly and serve, nonetheless, as self-portraits of academic life? Even tenure and promotion applications, employment letters, and CVs - the most often required documents to gain and maintain access to professional opportunity in academia - have gone digital. Together, they comprise a category of functional life writing that Ebony Coletu calls "biographic mediation" as they each answer to requests for personal information that "facilitate institutional decision-making about who gets what and why" (2017, p.385). In this essay, I focus on the standardizing software that mediates the representation of academic subjectivity by restricting users to entering details according to parameters set by the standards of the profession, the institutional subscriber, and the operating system. Increasing reliance on such systems further reduces academic personhood to chart fields and biodigital data entry that are counter-intuitive to the syncretic processes of making meaning by which individuals experience, remember, and recount their lives inclusive of their careers. I turn to persona studies and narrative life writing theory to assess the impact of digital tools and methods of personnel review on the assemblage and portraiture of academic subjectivity.

KEY WORDS

Life Writing; Academic Persona; Career Narrative; Automedia

INTRODUCTION

While not a fundamentally autobiographical culture, academia continues to rely heavily on self-constructions of academic personhood.¹ On-line professional networks have replaced the business card with the enterprise of online academic branding and self-promotion. Three dimensional academic personas are searchable in the self-managed profiles of *Academia.edu* or *ResearchGate.net*. Academics also curate their own personas on social media platforms, like Twitter and Instagram. Programs like Faculty Success's *Digital Measures* and Interfolio's *Faculty 180* are used to document and measure career success. To be sure, the terms of the job search and personnel review are equally prescriptive in print; the paper trails of the personnel file have always played a pivotal role in determining academic careers. However, when digital technology is employed, academics are forced to re-elaborate their career documentation to enable efficient reporting on their life's work. Self-authored career documents, such as tenure

and promotion essays, already highly prescriptive forms of professional self-representation, are apt to become even more so when managed by digital operating systems and their institutional subscribers. Both life writing and persona studies illuminate how academic institutions regulate personnel documents, such as promotion dossiers, employment letters, and CVs. Together with persona studies and this field's attention to the importance of retaining autonomy over career self-construction and its products, life writing studies frames growing concern about audit culture in academia and the loss of meaningful self-authored depictions of academics at work in favour of more efficiently processed bio-data particles.

THE ACADEMIC PERSONA AS LIFE WRITING

Life-writing scholars working in digital biomediality have spent two decades illustrating how the construction of lived experience both thrives and languishes with increased reliance on digital technology to document and share about academic lives. For instance, McNeill and Zuern (2015) investigated online auto/biographical construction for over a decade, concluding that online career documentation lacks the stylistic and creative devices at our disposal when we live the "online lives." Rak's work (2015) elucidates an important distinction for career documentation: personnel review is a lived experience that is not experienced "live." Nor is it a simulation of life, but a persona constructed via appeals for career advancement. Self-authored personnel documents comprise a transactional category of functional life writing (Coletu 2017; 2019). Coletu rightfully asserts that applications for opportunity and resources "should be considered a high-stakes genre of life writing that operationalizes access to institutional resources" (Coletu 2017, p.384). Recognising online personnel review as the biographic mediation of Coletu's definition extends the study of career documentation into life writing where this high-stakes labour and its products can be read as highly autobiographical assemblages of academic persona formed in the intersections of professional data entry and self-expression. "Biographic mediation," says Coletu, "refers to any structured request for personal information that facilitates institutional decision-making about who gets what and why" (2017, p.385). An overreliance on software used for standardizing and anonymizing these documents reduces academic career self-construction to a practice of biodigital data entry that is counter-intuitive to the syncretic processes of making meaning by which individuals experience, remember, and recount their lives inclusive of their careers.

As Katja Lee pointed out, "Our labour and the products of our labour do persona-work, and when our labour circulates away from us, the ways in which it performs a/our persona can rest in the hands of those interacting with it" (2015, p.3). Lee reminds us that persona work is an "inevitable" condition of work lives, integral to "induction, training, evaluation and assessment, surveillance and discipline, promotion" (2015, p. 5). Digitizing the performance of personhood may facilitate structural management. Therefore, for academics to remain active agents in the construction of their careers in the digital age, it is necessary to insist on regarding the construction of career personas in personnel documents as life writing. According to Lee, work personas are "necessary—perhaps even inevitable—identity performances that are a condition of work" (2015, p.3). As "a public identity we mobilize and perform to manage the demands of our labour" for the purposes of gaining and maintaining access to institutional "homes" in which to build our careers" (Lee 2015, p.3). Academics embody and convey the personas endorsed by the profession and by the mission statements of their institution in their documentation of career performance and are steered by personnel review to brand themselves accordingly. This self-promotion not only satisfies the requirements for successful work performance at the specific institution but determines access to opportunities in the profession at large, regulated, as Lee suggests, in a Foucauldian system of surveillance and discipline that

ensures performance in which subjects “actively negotiate, respond, contest, and manage the organizational pressures that shape our work personas” (2015, p.5).

Unlike constructions of personhood found in memoir and other forms of life writing, personas iterate a *type of person*, or *type of people* and not a specific person or group. Over time, a persona is socially constructed within the environments in which people operate and from which they receive reinforcement, thereby instructing them on how to behave and self-identify. This behaviour might require, or otherwise compel, an individual to mask aspects of their selfhood deemed unsuitable for specific purposes and environments. In the case of an academic career persona, the private subject is not deemed relevant to the public academic function. The academic career persona is expected to be the same person in real life as in the digital world. Ultimately, the persona is a cross between two identities, a negotiation between an actual person and an imagined one fitting an ideal model that serves as a foundation for understanding and regulating human behaviour (Nielsen 2018, p. 1). This understanding of persona is important to the way we think about the academic persona and its emergence and application throughout the generation and evaluation of career documents. Nielsen draws our attention to personas as vehicles for decision making in their respective contexts making it clear that decisions made in digital career review rely on the subject making the lived experience of their academic career easily accessible, quantifiable, and intelligible in online databases. This requires inhabiting a recognizable persona, a function of compliance with the expectations of the subject’s social environment and the interactions there within (Broady 2015). Simply put, to “present themselves to others in a fashion that they believe they should” (Broady 2015, p. 65).

CONSTRUCTION OF THE PERSONA

Print and online personnel review share similar performative labour in the work of academic careers, the “social condition that makes particular demands on us, and compels and inspires us to craft and perform particular identities” (Lee 2015, p.3). Personnel documents are created for and shared within the “micro-publics” of the profession, in which the subject is seeking to be known and valued. Moore and colleagues (2015) describe micro-publics as networks maintained by primary users who personally “broadcast” on a smaller scale than traditional media institutions. While these quasi-public networks require constant monitoring and identity management - often across multiple media - there are dividends in the para-textual sharing, commenting, and liking of content that highlight the agency of the primary user. In true academic form, users can anticipate, prepare for, and engage in debate about their content. There is no such network for online personnel review, only the navigation of chart fields and dropdown menus. Here, the voluntary author of autobiographical inscription is reduced to an automedial function of compulsory assemblage in which there is increasingly less room for self-reflection on career development.

In addition to being compulsory, the self-authored career constructions considered during personnel review are also highly transactional. They are submitted to gain access to opportunity or resources and are required, not voluntary, disclosures of academic subjectivity. Rarely are these constructions of academics and their work considered outside of this realm or beyond the fields in which their work circulates. They are products of “visibility labor,” or “the work individuals do when they self-posture and curate their self-presentations so as to be noticeable and positively prominent” (Abidin 2016, p. 90). Whether in print or online, both self-constructions are performances of academic personhood required according to the expectations of a “work persona” measured by productivity and quantification. The authors of such personnel documents are seeking a place, or status in their careers that rests on their notability through citations, downloads, invitations, publications, and other measures of visibility in the

academe. In both, the agency of the subject is eclipsed by the efficiency of institutional assessment. Personhood is superfluous and distracts from, even diminishes, the value of the subject and their work at the institution by burdening users with what Marlene Kadar noted is the “too muchness” of self-expressive writing (Kadar and Perrault 2005, p. 4). In personnel review, the aim is to assess productivity. Reviewers are not poised to witness a life – despite the reality that witnessing a life in work is precisely what they do. Unlike multimodal social media accounts curated by the subject to promote their careers, the autobiographical constructions submitted for digitized institutional review are not interactive. They hold data and await uses assigned by the institution. The subject does not see reactions to their constructions of academic subjectivity and these institutional platforms do not allow for dialogue between the subject and the user. Subjects are also not notified of shares or downloads. “Hits” on the digital account where their documents are stored do not raise the profile of the academic as on Twitter or Facebook. For privacy reasons, there are no hashtags or other forms of tagging, or algorithm-driven recommendations that would connect users across accounts. Therefore, networks of interest, collaboration, and affiliation are not supported in this digital architecture and visibility is unidirectional.

Rob Cover asserts that such social media platforms “operate as a space for the continued, ongoing construction of subjectivity – neither a site for identity play nor for static representation of the self, but as an ongoing reflexive performance and articulation of selfhood that utilizes the full range of tools made available” (2014, p. 55). He extends Judith Butler’s theory of performativity from the bodily into the digital realm of acts that construct identity. Social networking sites present selves in which “networking behavior is as performative as ‘real life’ acts, and just as equally implies a stabilized core inner self behind the profile” which must, instead be problematized. The tendency to divide the representation of selfhood into the real and the medial oversimplifies the practice of social networking and self-representation in general by ignoring the instability of identity (2014, p. 56). Social media subjecthood is created in the network and not revealed by platforms though a presumed opening of a window on the subject’s inner life. Going further, the self-authored career subject created within networks requires constant maintenance:

communication technologies, media platforms, and digital services are not isolated objects or discrete entities, but are voraciously incorporated into the lives of individuals as part of the extant identity assemblage that is undergoing continuous revision, updates, and patching as we form connections and exchange information with other people and other systems. (Moore et al. 2015, p. 1).

Academics weigh the benefits and consequences of maintaining an online academic career presence. Sharyn McDonald notes that the demands of the profession and of maintaining a work/life balance are onerous without the additional pressure of becoming literate in digital platforms and performing time-consuming labour necessary for curating social media personas (Mc Donald 2015, p. 55). While the former bears advantages, such as affording opportunities for networking with other high-profile academics and having more flexibility over self-expression compared to the more formulaic, static documents required by the university, the challenge lies in becoming overexposed to negative dialogue. The digitization of a career persona requires substantially more investment in transactional forms of institutional self-representation than print narratives following the same guidelines, as well as necessitating labour-intensive and time-consuming data entry required to keep up with the temporality of the career self. This type of mediatization requires the subject to prioritize their searchability in the software algorithms at the expense of the complexity of self-construction and self-reflexivity. Meanwhile, the expectation is that academics know how to navigate these systems, and those

that are either not proficient or choose not to engage in said labour are viewed negatively (Mc Donald 2015, p. 58). These tools of translating a life's work into collections of data make it increasingly difficult for academics to step out of the economy in which they are already marketed by what anthropologist and life writing theorist Martin Danahay calls "the regime of the C.V." (1996, p. 345). Even more than the standard print C.V., these systems limit what is permitted to be quantified and entered as informatic data into the spaces provided by standard format.

Most importantly, the product generated by using the system is a product of the institutional user and not the academic whose information is stored there. The academic is therefore taken as the output of systems operated by others. The result is that the "others" become co-authors of academic's career self- construction. To do so means the academic must participate in their own surveillance and tacitly waive rights to privacy and power with the understanding that depictions of quantified careers are the product of labour compensated by and conducted in the name of the institution. As part of a faculty, contributions to the profession are claimed by the university along with the right to monitor and report on them, and constructions conveying the salience of the scholar are the business of the institution. The academic cannot consent to specific uses and instances of access use as they would on social networking sites where settings can be made to limit access sharing. Once the data is entered, there are no notifications of how and when the data is managed, or in what contexts. Profiles can be accessed and assembled into reports on unlimited terms. Subjects can only assume that they know who is engaging with their materials and for what purposes, as Sidonie Smith suspects "a self-curator does not know how the life may be taken up in other archives" (Smith 2015, p. 265).

THE PRIVACY PARADOX

Anna Poletti explores the privacy paradox of biomediation in her theoretical monograph *Stories of the Self: Life Writing After the Book* (2020). In focusing on a range of digital life writing from online dossiers to social media accounts, Poletti highlights the material effects of biomediation in academic career construction, and the power wielded by institutions to conduct surveillance, enact discipline, and reduce individuals to datafied informatics even while the subject is unaware. The use of technology processes persons into "data doubles" for the inescapable appropriation of their stories for the benefit of the institution. This is the primary aim of the repository where dossiers "are formed, stored, circulated, and accessed through institutional forms of power, yet invite the reader to consider them as objective material products of observation and recording" (Poletti 2020, p. 7). When disclosure is compulsory, faculty risk consequences for non-compliance. As Poletti notes,

We cannot avoid the need to give an account of ourselves, nor can we escape the ethical ties that stem from the vulnerability inherent in our reliance on others to apprehend us, or the ethical ties that come from our responsibility to apprehend them. Yet the scene of apprehension is not purely linguistic or symbolic—it occurs within material conditions. (2020, p. 7)

To the life-writing scholar, the tacit assumption is that that the documents reviewed are self-authored when instead, as Poletti observes, "[t]he 'story' that results is largely assembled by algorithms or humans seeking patterns" (2020, p. 7). These representations of academic career are, therefore, always already open to as many iterations of career selfhood as desired by the institution to project ideal academic personas for as many purposes as necessary.

As a form of life writing that is required to be recognized and “counted” as part of the currency of the institution, career documentation matters for the same reasons. But engendering readability or intelligibility in digital systems can lead to the obsolescence of the narrative and print forms of career self-expression. As in the use of data collection from social media profiles to consider candidates for employment, data doubles stand in for the vital social interaction gained during the interview (Humphrey 2017). If academics are indeed facing the extinction of in-person interviews, narrative documentation, and other professional methods of scholarly review, then what will remain for career self-representation, for the telling of what academic lives are and do beyond the persona? As Poletti urges us to remember, “Writing and reading personal stories brings us into relation with each other, but it also brings us in relation to matter—we are always also physically copresent with stories we tell and read” (2020, p. 5-6).

NEGOTIATING THE ACADEMIC SELF

Privacy is not the primary issue – it cannot be if seeking recognition is a primary condition of the academic career. Anonymity is not a tenet of academic cyberculture. By using various networking profiles, individuals seek to raise their profiles in the profession and be easily identifiable as true and actual scholars connected to true verifiable outcomes of their careers. In this way, the desired outcome relies heavily on continuity of online and offline selves in selective ways. While the cultivation of a presence in digital media often involves a discernment between who and what the scholar is/does and who and how the person is/lives, in blogs and social media accounts, like Instagram and Facebook where users chronicle their experiences, viewers expect to find not only a continuity between the lived and digitized person, but also a glimpse into other aspects of their lives. In addition to sharing news of publications, grants, and other successes, the use of conference selfies, travel and project status updates, and other representations of the scholar at work offer career documentation outside of their institutions. It is in these spaces where we may also view and read about the scholar’s pets, personal travel, and other ways by which viewers can identify with the user’s personhood in a continuous spectrum of online/offline and insider/outsider, public/private, personal/professional contexts. Here, subjects are proven to live in real life. Anonymity may not be the goal of the digitally networked scholar, however the concept is useful to understanding how online career sharing exposes the fluidity of selfhood in academic careers and the requirement of equally fluid forms of self-representation. The distinction between being anonymous and feeling anonymous in internet identities begs further focus on why identity and anonymity are fixed as opposites in the way we share about our lives (Kennedy 2014, p. 36-37). Assumptions about whether or not identities in virtual or lived contexts are continuous overshadow the more productive examination of the “temporality, contingency and fragmentation of the experiencing subject” and how their closer examination can lead the practice of academic career documentation to more empowering uses as a life writing genre (Kennedy 2014, p. 37).

Liz Stanley cautions that any focus on the controlling aspects of audit selves overlooks the potential politics of refusal inherent in engaging with performances of ideal persona. Stanley adopts the term “audit selves” to refer to the publicly created composites of information by which selves are “recorded and refracted by the regulatory mechanisms of organisational encounters” (2000, p. 41). “Audit selves,” Stanley asserts, “are quintessentially public selves, publicly created profiles which act as measures and prophecies of what a range of ‘types’ of selves are and can be” (2000, p.56). “[T]he academic CV, employment evaluations and occupational reviews within educational institutions” connect lived experience to processes of evaluation, monitoring, or other form of regulation resulting in a form of functional life writing (Stanley 2000, p. 50). Through her model of women-made selfhood, she addresses a pattern of

feminist resistance to the audit model in which women have found opportunities to resist, or refuse, requirements (Stanley 2000, p. 56). Compared to the “self-made women” whose compliance is rewarded in institutional review, “women’s made selves” retain agency over their representation in organizational encounters by making use of “the gaps, disjunctures, and silences which exist between audit selves and actual lives” (Stanley 2000, p. 56). In addition, they expose the reality that the academic is never simply demonstrating a life lived as much as a life aspired to within institutional standards of recognition. Stanley notes that encounters with institutional review “eventuate in organisationally created ‘personae’ which are constructed by producing aggregations of auto/biographical exteriorities” (2000, p. 50). Collected and organised for the purpose of analysis, the resulting personas are measured by an anticipated outcome, an ideal by which the self is measured. Stanley cautions that “the concern is in fact not with recording events, but rather with anticipating types of events and then recording instances of what has already been anticipated as happening” (2000, p. 52). In an aspirational form of life writing, the subject provides self-constructing information “predetermined as relevant or essential for organisational purposes” and self-represents under the constraint to “perform these characteristics of the audit selves with which they are associated” (Stanley 2000, p. 54). In this way, the ideal work persona functions more as a template than an academic subjectivity.

Careers and career documentation is perpetually aspirational. The career is experienced in and shaped by the tension between aspirational and actual selves. After all, “[T]he ‘self’ so often invoked in self-expressive theories of autobiography is not a noun, a thing-in-itself, waiting to be materialized through the text. There is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating” (Smith 2016). Since the process for constructing a CV, for example, is usually considered a measure of work completed, opportunities secured, or credentials acquired, it is thought to represent what the subject has done and how it shapes who they are. The career and its outcomes are both iterative and “intra-active” – co-created in both lived and discursive spaces where lived experience is understood as a journey among other subjects, in specific locations, and under certain circumstances. More than a measurable outcome on a CV, the career self, as in other realms of subjectivity, relies on a “process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject with certain kinds of identities in the social realm” (Smith and Watson 2002). When documenting their career personhood, academics are “autobiographical subjects” like any other, “know themselves as subjects of particular kinds of experience attached to social statuses and identities” (Smith and Watson 2002). Yet, the CV, like other narratives, such as the grant application, or the employment letter, introduces the academic as a self in progress toward a yet-to-be accomplished goals of being and doing in the academy. It is written with the aim of projecting a narrative of success and accomplishment. In this, as in other forms of life writing, it is understood that “[t]he living of a life becomes the effect of the life as narrated” (Smith 2016). Institutional documentation requires an annexing of some parts of selfhood in favour of others in order to achieve and maintain intelligibility in its institutional frame, in a specialized “recitation of identity,” a performance in which Smith notes the subject constantly negotiates “the incorporation of certain narrative itineraries and intentionalities, the silencing of others; the adoption of certain autobiographical voices, the muting of others” (Smith 2016).

Aggregated into categories of diminished heterogeneity, the CV of easily identified and managed virtual recitations also performs the academic’s ideal value as a commodity in a neoliberal market. This biocapital is easily quantifiable, in word counts, impact factors, and breadth of awards and publications which feature more prominently in a CV than qualitative descriptions significant to the being and doing associated with accomplishment. Lauren Berlant draws attention to the problematic nature of the quantified life when she asks “[w]hat does it mean to have a life; is it always to add up to something?” (Berlant & Prosser, 2015, p.181).

Berlant questions more than the normalizing of biocontinuity in the construction of life stories (Berlant & Prosser 2015, p. 181). She incisively critiques how life itself is measured by sequential and upwardly mobile accomplishments, the very problem with the academic CV as a chronicle of academic life. Worse than undercutting of the richness of life story, the CV faces forward into the future, rather than backward, always asking to be seen in the realm of the possible and the potential, the academic's belonging at the next stage, or inclusion in the pool of eligibility being the self-portrait presented to a particular audience. Similarly, Phillippe Lejeune notes that this representation follows the standard "Retrochronology" of academia (Lejeune 2014, p. 252). The order of the CV – and the academic life it summarises – begins in the present time of documentation and moves backward in what Lejeune wryly describes as "the glorious order of accomplishment but in the disappointing order of dissolution: the applicant ends up in the cradle" (Lejeune 2014, p. 252). It is common to see the terms "in progress," and "under consideration" surrounding academic labour as a subversive, but fairly standard form of pre-packaging that signals aspirational accomplishments along with other strategic terms that regulate professional hierarchies and chronologies of production in the profession.

Within this mode of existence, the subject is unable to fully flesh out (pun intended) their personhood from the position of the data double upon which institutional reports draw. In these systems all faculty are participating in "nobody" life writing in the hopes that they will be recognized as "somebody" – known, credited, or acknowledged for their merits (Couser 2009, p. 1). In the case of autobiographical career assemblage, the scholar is known *through* their work, neither before, or after, but ironically, in tandem with their participation in a process that requires their own decentring and disembodiment. As their lived experience is measured by a series of accomplishments perpetually "floating to the surface only to be pushed down in turn by the next entry" (Lejeune 2014, p. 252). Danahay refers to this as the "prepackaged narrative" of a persona which confirms and "ensure[s] the reproduction of existing power relations within the institution" (1996, p.352; 252). The CV is also necessarily paratextual – dependent on the actual scholarship and other attendant documentation supporting the veracity of the academic's self-portrait. Indeed, if only paratextual reading can authenticate the claims asserted in the profile, how are academics so easily removed by the deposit/retrieval model of the online CV from their own narratives of career self-construction?

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette focuses on the many forms of text which surround a work "precisely in order to present it" and effectively "ensure the text's presence in the world" (1997, p. 1). Genette asserts a truth that applies equally to the relationship between an academic career without its attendant documentation. As "one may doubtless assert that a text without a paratext does not exist and never has existed," so may one correctly assume that an academic does not exist without their CV and the rite of career review (1997, p. 3). The CV, as "factual paratext" to the performance of academic subjectivity, is the "vestibule" through which the author-text passes to facilitate reception by readers and "offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (Genette 1997, p. 1;7). This threshold through which the reader is invited, permits the academic subject to be reviewed, or "read" intertextually and intersubjectively alongside an academic persona. The subject and their career are prepackaged by "contextual affiliation" in a category that Genette describes as the "please insert," "[a] printed insert that contains information about a work and is attached to the copies addressed to critics" (1997, p.104; 105). Genette considers the "please insert" as a text aimed at readers who are in the position to assess and promote the author and their work (1997, p. 9). In this function, the publicly private audience of authority over review, the designees of the academic institution, reads the CV as a performance of contextual affiliations that takes the form of the academic's book jacket. In this compact space of the "please insert," self-construction is secondary to meeting the standard formats of either the

publishing or personnel review apparatuses. Intentionality is limited to what fits within the literal and conceptual space provided for self-construction as their force and function are not exclusively within the domain of the subject. Although Genette is clear to distinguish between the “please insert” and the biographical note – which he decidedly gives up to other scholars to consider – the CV comprises both and functions in the way that Genette estimates as “that text in the larger context of a life and an *oeuvre*” (1997, p. 115). That the text is the performance of the academic within their *oeuvre* is proof that academic personhood constructed and measured by the persona in the auto/biographical writing of career review.

In their essay “Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation,” Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson estimate that “[b]oth offline and online, the autobiographical subject can be approached as an ensemble or assemblage of subject positions through which self-understanding and self-positioning are negotiated” (2014, p.71). While Smith and Watson limit their approach to online narrative storytelling, I wish to draw attention to my attention to how the software used by academic institutions gathers data for the purpose of assembling searchable individual and aggregate faculty profiles. This assemblage is not entirely self-generated, as it is co-constructed with the institutional user. The self is limited in its powers of self-inscription and reduced to templates within which the institution’s re-iterations of biographical detail, and academic careers become read and understood as the product of digital processes of deposit and retrieval rather than by auto/biographical writing practices.

Life writing allows for a nuanced understanding of the self and its self-construction. Digital media scholar Janneke Adema cautions that the centre of academic career advancement, print scholarship, reflects a problematic anthropocentrism that privileges the “primacy” of the human as a “rational, individual, original, liberal humanist author, perceived as an autonomous agent responsible for knowledge creation” (2021, p. 9). While this erasure of personhood is not the goal of post-humanities advancements, the use of these systems can result in an *out with the humanism, out with the human* experience for the academic. More than managing information, digitized personnel review creates the conditions for professional subjectivity “remixes” that supplant the “agentic origin” of experiences (Adema 2021, p. 79). Digital systems for personnel review are not self-generating. They require human use for both input and output. So, the matter at hand is acknowledging where agency over career documentation resides when it is transferred. Data alone cannot apply for a promotion; it needs the academic as agent. However, an academic only exists as a candidate if it is recognized in the system, a condition that requires the relinquishment of agency and de-subjectification. Although this is not a self-authored narrative, it is a “digital” representation of me as an academic over which my institution retains proprietorial control. The “accountability residue” of rights and responsibilities of being compulsory co-authors (Adema 2021, p. 90).

An academic’s value in this economy depends on the ability to embrace the reality that in addition to completion and quantity, compliance is also a cornerstone of CV culture in the neoliberal complex of marketability and innovation. If readers are “second-grade” authors of academic scholarship (Adema 2021, p. 88), so are the universities who curate and “remix” iterations of our academic selves (Adema 2021, p. 86). While these roles are not forged by the same kind of hypertextual engagement, they are both intra-active. This does not guarantee that the relationship between these roles is cohesive or that the academic’s power of self-representation is only partially bound to an essentializing discourse of institutional data and its value. Although some systems for career review can be dynamic and hypertextual, they are still highly material in their use, as archives producing data that influences our careers with “instances” of the academic that conform to scripts of institutional persona – each version suits a different purpose that serves efficiency in evaluation or use of my career likeness in public

relations. Every use of the system includes and excludes certain bio-data, each an iteration in which nothing is modified but also in which the academic is completely different. If it is generated by the use of the system, it cannot still be my performance, but a portrait of selected features determined by the users understanding of how I might fit the ideal persona for any given institutional purpose.

LIFE WRITING AND THE CREATION OF THE ACADEMIC SELF

Life writing, like the academic, is shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. Its study prepares us to see human agency is a function and concept in which the human can remain a locus of selfhood without being its only, or even primary origin. When our personhood is decentred from our work - along with our authority over making meaning about ourselves from within the spaces of our careers - it is *de-humanizing* rather than *post-humanizing*. The difference is similar to the relationship between authorship and copyright - one might be the author, yet not retain ownership of the narrative and its uses. The challenge is to retain human agency, not humanist authorship. Although Adema successfully argues for the post-humanist aims of challenging the authority of a universal being at the centre of our scholarship, and the autobiographical I is widely embraced as a performance of "saying I," there is no irrefutable Barthesian "death of the author" for career life writing (Barthes 1977, 145). Like all life writing, the career document is wholly performative, but it is also person-oriented and its subject is read via occupational outcomes. This performativity is dependent on verifiably "citational" production of "the effect that it names" (Butler 2011, p. 2). In generating a reproduction of the institution and the person/a it imposes on academics, the author-subject of the academic career narrative is cornered into a "reiterative [*self-*]citational practice" that uncritically repeats and reproduces the conditions of power within which it is hailed by the institution (Butler 2011, p. 2 annotation and emphasis mine). This performance culture compels the academic to participate in representationalism via documentation - to data-fy and quantify.

The bio-data entered by faculty can be used to produce outward-facing documents projecting the ideal academic persona with institutional "market value." Sarah Ahmed cautions against the normalization of institutions speaking on behalf of the academic, the "institutional isomorphism" that presents lateral, or reciprocal relationships between the academic and the university (2012, p. 206). It is important to clarify that the institution is not the academic and it is not the academic's agent of self-representation, yet it requires of its scholars a constant stream of digital documentation that enables just that agentic role. In her interviews with university diversity and equity workers in the UK, Ahmed shares that many report "document fatigue" from constant exercises in documentation and data management detached from the "doing" the real work of inclusion in the academy (2012, p. 88). Their work is reduced to inventorying derivatives - documents that result from documentation. "If documents are the derivative, then their authority can be referred and thus deferred. At the same time, unless documents refer to each other, they do not participate in the documentary world of the institution" (2012, p. 89). Ahmed's study demonstrates what happens to the representation of academic careers when the agency of academics to do so gets transferred and deferred. The process ends in the evaluation of *documentation* rather than the career of its subject:

To treat documents as agents with a life of their own would be to assume that an appearance of agency is an adequate sign of agency. It might even be that giving agency to documents—as if by moving around, they are doing something—allows us not to see how things are stuck. Furthermore, if the point of the document is to create a trail, it suggests that in following the trail we are not necessarily getting

anywhere. All we are following are the signs of where documents have been.
(Ahmed 2012, p. 206)

Their value in this economy depends on the ability to add completed projects to the CV as evidence of scholarly productivity – and the more the better. As Adema estimates:

Scholars are still mostly still rewarded on the basis of their publication track record and reputation as individual authors. Academic authors on the one hand are turned into commodities while on the other hand they increasingly need to act as entrepreneurs and marketeers of their own “brand.” Not the least via social research-sharing websites such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate, which are not arranged around the research that is being shared, to provide just one example, but again, according to author profiles created around publication lists.
(2012, p. 82)

To this performance-based, competitive persona shaped by a culture of outcomes, the CV “list” is not *who an academic is* but *what an academic does*. Their existence in the system depends on having contributions to institutional databases

The *use* data in the digitized CV can be problematic. Sarah Ahmed considers use status and its shaping force on policy and practices governing human lives. In various forms of utility, including misuse, uneven use, and overuse, Ahmed examines the extent to which something – or someone – is used and in what ways the object/subject is constructed by and exists within particular uses. All things are shaped by their use but their use is only a partial account of their existence: “even if something is shaped around what it is for, that is not the end of the story [...] what happens to those things is not fully decided by what they are for” (2019, p. 24). How does the way that academic institutions use the information entered for career review inform our thinking about academic persona? Ahmed’s metaphor of the public restroom stall is helpful to understanding that use and access operate in tandem. Just because a stall is vacant, does not mean that it is free for anyone to occupy. Access to these spaces is not a matter of their availability but of intended use - and one must meet the expectations for intended use. Even before access is denied or granted, it is questioned. Therefore, “When your use of a facility is questioned, you are questioned” (2019, p. 31). The stall may be reserved exclusively for a certain class of patrons at a business, for families with small children, for access by those needing specific accommodations, or for a designated gender. Use does not equal access and neither does availability for use. Like the restroom stall, the spaces of academia need not be in use for them to be unavailable. Spaces may be off limits for occupation if the individual seeking access does not meet the expectations for a specific category of use. Yet, the academic’s electronic dossier is always available for use under the pretence that availability does, in fact, permit access via a constant transactional discourse of eligibility. Those who exist in the system are only *eligible* for access to specific spaces of opportunity.

In the case of the academic data double, it exists to be used, but the academic does not. The academic exists, but not solely according to the purposes for which it is used. It might be said that it is used because it exists in the informatic structures within which it is required to make itself intelligible. Their data is in a category of availability for use, already “in use” because it is “of use” in the institution’s projection of success (Ahmed 2019, p.30). Persona, on the other hand, does it exist to be used, or is it used because it exists? If strictly considered for its use, the persona is fashioned by its use in and by the neoliberal institution. It is made to extend and reproduce itself in the subject who must always occupy its sphere of expectation and potential. Ahmed notes that those who most benefit the institution by their availability in such spaces are those who are, in fact, furthest from the norm. Those who are the most vulnerable academic

subjects are from BIPOC communities are used more in an inverse equation of presence, access, and value by which “those who are *less* represented are used *more* to represent the organization” (Ahmed 2019, p. 150). Their emotional labour, more monitored and more often in use, intensifies Ahmed’s assessment that life in the institution is about avoiding death in the institution, one brought on by not being discernible for use in the appropriate database (2019, p. 195). This double-bind by which institutions require networked co-authorship of academics’ career subjectivities is maintained by withholding not only opportunity, or threats of non-compliance. It is by declaring subjects no longer in “use.” Those who do not comply are rendered invisible in central reporting systems. Moreover, those who resist on the grounds of their “over-use” under the rubric of diversity work, forfeit access to the funding, research time, and advancement available to others who do comply. They jeopardize their presence in spaces where they have been historically denied access.

Academics and the lived experience of their careers are co-emergent, not fixed into the transactional, aspirant, and competitive personas commodified by the university. The password-protected, digital archives marketed to store academic personnel data promise efficiency, recognition, and even protection from misuse. But from whom if not those bearing witness to the lives inscribed in those digital documents, is this data safeguarded? By reading career documentation as acts of autobiographical assemblage, we confront the burdens and benefits of witnessing one another’s academic lives.

END NOTES

1. This work is part of a research monograph on self-authored career documents as institutional life writing. The larger project, sponsored by the Fulbright US Scholars program during my residency at the University of Alberta in Edmonton Canada. Though this project, I theorize career narratives as a life writing genre capable of social justice-centred forms of intellectual fellowship and activism in the North American academy. In this portion of my research, I focus on academic persona and its assemblage in digital formats.

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