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## Hacking the Academy

Cohen, Dan , Scheinfeldt, Joseph T

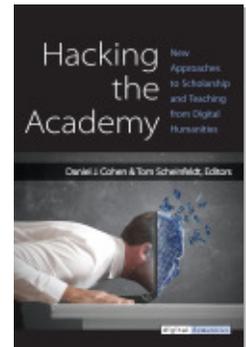
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# Voices

## BLOGGING

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum,  
Mark Sample, Daniel J. Cohen

The science fiction writer Harlan Ellison once described a stunt in which he sat in the window of a bookshop all day, writing a story. He was curious about what would happen if writing became a public spectacle rather than the mysterious, solitary endeavor it usually is. That scene piqued my imagination and stuck with me, enough so that when I explored the idea of writing an electronic dissertation in the mid-1990s—at the same time the web was emerging as a popular medium but before the term “blog” had been coined—I immediately decided to do it live, in real time, on the network; that is, I would simply publish drafts of my work, revise them, and the whole would take shape as a massive, interlaced hypertext. The idea was to keep myself motivated. By writing in a fishbowl, I reasoned, I would have some real, external pressure to keep at it. I would never know who was reading (watching). Yes, the fishbowl was also a panopticon. Was I worried about plagiarism when I published drafts of my dissertation online? Nope—red herring. I was branding my ideas, imprinting them with my name, and putting them into public circulation. Sure enough, there followed conference invitations, citations of my work in other scholars’ work, and contacts and connections that to this day form the basis of my professional community. What I really wanted, of course, was a blog.

—MATTHEW G. KIRSCHENBAUM

I don’t expect my blog to affect my career one way or another. It’s not like I’m spreading gossip, sharing dark fantasies, or posting my neuroses. Many of my posts are simply observations—the kind I would talk about with a group of friends, if I still had the time. But I’m too busy teaching

and writing to sit around anymore and talk about these kinds of things. So I steal a few random minutes, spit them out on my blog, and then I forget about them. The posts that aren't simply observations are usually ideas in incubation that will eventually surface—peer-reviewed, documented, cited, bleached of personality—in a conference paper, journal article, or someday, a book. The posts are placeholders, in a sense, for the real intellectual work that lies ahead.

—MARK SAMPLE

When I was in graduate school, a mentor once told me that the key to being a successful scholar was to become completely obsessed with a historical topic, to feel the urge to read and learn everything about an event, an era, or a person—in short, to become so knowledgeable, energetic, and even obsessed with your subject matter that you become what others immediately recognize as a trusted, valuable expert. The most stimulating, influential professors, even those with more traditional outlets for their work—like books and journals—overflow with views and thoughts. As it turns out, blogs are perfect outlets for obsession. Shaped correctly, a blog can be a perfect place for that extra production of words and ideas. The best bloggers inevitably become a nexus for information exchange in their field.

—DANIEL J. COHEN