Developing Research through Podcasts: Circulating Spaces, A Case Study

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Abstract

In this article, we contend that the podcast serves as an alternative method of conducting and pursuing academic research in an increasingly collaborative, increasingly global era. *Circulating Spaces: Literary and Language Worlds in a Global Age*, a podcast series created, produced, and published by the authors, acts as our case study. The podcast models a complex network of relations by highlighting topics and featuring guests who co-exist within academic and "public" (often understood as non-academic) spaces. These networks help to reshape our understanding of the "publics" of academia by breaking down the binary between the public and academic. They point toward ways in which more nuanced networks of affinity between the academy and the public may be constructed and negotiated by embracing the digital and the open. Finally, we locate our work within the fields of digital scholarship and the Digital Humanities more specifically in order to understand the work accomplished by non-traditional forms of scholarship.[1]

Because of the digital revolution... all kinds of things are happening [in humanities research], and [*Circulating Spaces*] is one example... [*Circulating Spaces* and its] ecosystem of literary worlds are creating new mechanisms for both doing and disseminating research and having conversations about it that didn't exist when I was a graduate student. So [*Circulating Spaces* — and podcasts like it – are] the wave of the future. (Susan Stanford Friedman, *Circulating Spaces* Episode 6, 38:35-39:08)

Highlighting the renewed impetus for the kind of collaborative humanities research made possible by Digital Humanities initiatives, Susan Stanford Friedman describes how the "ecosystem of literary worlds" — including the attendant technologies or media that make the production of literature possible — is revolutionizing the academic "mechanisms for both doing and disseminating research." Digital Humanities scholarship poses foundational questions regarding how new forms of digital media can inform, challenge, and change the ways we do scholarship in the academy.[1] In this article, we consider how the podcast, as an emerging form of scholarship and research in the academy, engages with these central inquiries of the Digital Humanities. We offer our own experiences in creating, producing, and publishing the podcast series, *Circulating Spaces: Literary and Language Worlds in a Global Age*, as a case study, and we reflect on how the podcast has amended our practices as researchers, editors, and scholars. Specifically, we leveraged theories developing in the field of world literature with the affordances of the podcast as a medium to create a series of podcast episodes that attempts to deconstruct the existing binary between the public and the academy within academic thought. *Circulating Spaces* models a complex network of relations by highlighting topics and featuring guests who co-

exist within these spaces. In turn, precisely because it allows us to consider (and serve as engaged participants in) the more complex lives of the actors involved within the multiple ecosystems of literary worlds, we contend that the podcast serves as an alternative method of conducting and pursuing academic research in an increasingly collaborative, increasingly global era.[2]

We begin by looking at the development of the podcast as a distinct form of media that emphasizes consistency in presentation style and theme in order to develop an audience, within the academy as well as beyond it. We then turn to discussing *Circulating Spaces* as a case study that intervenes within discourses around public humanities: it helps to reshape the "publics" of academia by breaking down the binary between the public and academic; and to point toward ways in which more nuanced networks of affinity between the academy and the public may be constructed and negotiated by embracing the digital and the open. Finally, we locate our work within the fields of digital scholarship and the Digital Humanities more specifically in order to understand the work accomplished by non-traditional forms of scholarship.

Part 1: Podcasts as Media

A.   Characterizing the Podcast's Form and Affordances

The term "podcast" is an amalgam of the words iPod and broadcast, and technically speaking, the podcast is simply a digital audio file that people can download from the Internet. But in recent years, the podcast has developed into a distinct form with its own set of rules. The most essential rule of successful podcast production is to make the show interesting enough to keep an audience's attention. Charli Prangley writes, "Building an audience is all about consistency. Consistency in the topics you talk about. Consistency in the style of photographs on your blog. Consistency in the frequency of when you'll post new content. And for podcasts, consistency in your show format" [Prangley 2017]. As Prangley notes, most podcasts are serial, and each podcast series tends to explore or develop a topic or theme from different angles (similar to a TV series, which features the same characters often engaging in similar activities or facing similar tasks).

There are currently three primary podcast forms: the solo podcast, the storytelling podcast (both fiction and non-fiction), and the conversational podcast (featuring at least one host and one or more guests).[3] While there are thus several different styles of podcasts, each of these has developed into a recognizable form that has its own set of rules or conventions. The solo podcast may seem similar to the standard academic lecture. Yet the need to keep an audience engaged across multiple broadcasts without listening aids (such as an accompanying PowerPoint or other video supplements) has resulted in a change to the strategy of delivery: hosts of solo podcasts often use the platform to speak to their audience in a much more informal yet sustained way. Rachel Corbett of *PodSchool* has emphasized the need for solo podcasters to continuously vamp up the energy of their shows, stating that a solo podcast is "a very intimate way to get to know your audience because you are...talking directly to your audience...[The audience] need[s] to feel like they know you and that they can trust you" ("Different Types of Podcast" 8:09-8:25, 11:17-11:24). But this style of podcast "can be tough" to create because it can be difficult "to get that energy and to get that conversational style happening" ("Different Types of Podcast" 11:27-11:36). This presentation style differs markedly from that of the academic lecture, which often features a live audience that can see and respond to the presenter's gestures, facial expressions, and any supplementary visual aids.

The storytelling podcast includes both non-fiction storytelling (such as the investigative journalism of *This American Life* or *Serial*) and fictional storytelling. Both of these formats differ from audiobooks in that they incorporate a variety of sound effects and voices rather than relying upon a single narrator. Corbett explains that storytelling podcasts include "the added element of sound design," such as grabs of interviews, ambient sound, phone conversations, and more ("Different Types of Podcast" 20:38-20:42). Specifically referring to fiction storytelling podcasts, Corbett states: "[These podcasts necessitate] more than just somebody reading the story into a microphone. It's got to be audio storytelling. ...You need someone who's going to do a voiceover and really in some ways act out the story rather than just reading it" ("Different Types of Podcast" 22:32-22:43, 22:51-22:57).

Circulating Spaces is an example of the last type, the conversational podcast. The conversational podcast has several different formats, including the interview show and the panel discussion, but each of these generally involves some combination of hosts and guests who dialogue about a topic or event. In the conversational form of the podcast, the host(s) tend to remain fairly constant throughout a podcast series; guests, on the other hand, generally change from episode to episode. The goal of the conversational podcast is to generate discussions new and interesting enough to retain the audience.

B. Podcasts in the Academy

A number of studies have outlined the usefulness and efficacy of podcasts as pedagogical tools. Khe Foon Hew identifies the most common use of the podcast in the academy as a method for distributing course content. Instructors can share "podcast recordings of lectures or supplementary materials for students to review subject material at their own time and place" [Hew 2009, 333]. As one might expect with this use of podcasts, Simon Fietze has argued that because students can listen to podcasts multiple times, podcasts can help students "assimilate the contents of lectures better and more efficiently" [Fietze 2010, 314]. These conclusions certainly stand to reason. However, scholarly analyses of podcasts have largely been limited to understanding how the podcast — which has been strictly considered as a means of communicating information — impacts students' retention of that information. In so limiting the purpose of podcasts within higher education, these analyses often relegate podcasts to mere recordings of lectures or information that can then be used to assist in content retention and "distance learning" [Merhi 2015, 32].

Yet more recently, there have been shifts toward scholarly analyses of the podcast beyond its uses within a pedagogical context. *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media* (2018), an edited collection of interdisciplinary essays, and *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution* (2019) are two recent academic works responding to what is being termed as the "golden age" of podcasting. The former is among the first such collections to critically examine the podcast within the context of digital media and cultural studies. The latter work studies several prominent podcast series in order to probe the distinctive characteristics of the podcast form. Both volumes argue for the uniqueness of the podcast as a creative medium and its consequent potential for influencing the way knowledge is produced and communicated; they also explore the specific meaning-making frameworks employed by the medium.

This shift in direction of inquiry is important, since podcasts encompass a diverse range of production strategies. Some of the most popular literary podcasts, for instance, include *The New Yorker*'s Fiction Podcast series, which is hosted by Deborah Treisman and regularly features a reading by and discussion with a contemporary author; *Dear Book Nerd* (2014-2016), which was hosted by librarian Rita Meade and brought in guests to answer listeners' questions about reading, writing, and publishing practices; and TinHouse and KBOO's *Between the Covers* which is hosted by David Naimon and features in-depth interviews with contemporary American writers. Thus, given the changing face of the podcast and its increasing use to promote and disseminate scholarly content, it has become necessary to reassess the role and affordances of the podcast within the academy.

In the last ten years, academic podcasts such as the *University of Oxford Podcasts: World Literature* series (2012-2016) have begun to extend the function of the podcast out beyond the walls of the academy. An example of an early form of the academic podcast, this series was simply a collection of recorded guest lectures, and the character of these lectures is explicitly academic. The series focused on different kinds of world literature, such as "world literature and the Pan-Asian Empire" and the "status of African literature." Yet even though it reproduced live lectures in recorded form, the *University of Oxford Podcasts: World Literature* series differs from that of other recorded lectures in that its aim was not to aid in *student* course-material retention, but rather to disseminate these lectures by well-known academics to a larger audience beyond the University of Oxford community. The series also capitalized on the easy (and free) circulation of the podcast as a medium to increase these lectures' circulation. In doing so, the creators used the digital affordances of the podcast to expand the usefulness of the podcast beyond the university classroom. The podcast thus fulfilled an aim of what we might consider public humanities, the engagement of a broader and more diverse set of publics.

Public Work, a podcast series at Brown University produced and hosted by Jim McGrath and Amelia Golcheski, offers an alternative conception of the purpose of the podcast by focusing explicitly on public humanities engagement. By

doing public humanities outreach, *Public Work* revolves around "education, research, and public engagement initiatives that connect individuals and communities to art, history, and culture." Rather than either recording or disseminating university lectures, this podcast series attempts to engage public communities in conversation on both local and regional levels by broadening the scope of educational research and the range of focal institutions. In doing so, it also brings the community into the academy.

As podcasts like *Public Work* evidence, the podcast is now a tool used widely by both academic and non-academic institutions; as such, the podcast has intimate ties to the field of public humanities, particularly given the fact that it can be circulated easily and without much cost to subscribers (if its producers so choose). Given both this changing understanding of the podcast as a distinct medium with its own set of rules and the podcast's unique role in connecting the academy and the wider public, we launched *Circulating Spaces* to consider questions of longstanding, but increasingly vital, significance: As academics, to whom is our research useful? In other words, who are we in conversation with? How can we involve non-academics in our research? In the production of the podcast, we observed the mutually reinforcing confluence of three fields — public humanities, world literature, and the Digital Humanities (DH) — which together offer a vision for altering the future of humanities scholarship by encouraging more collaborative work and research methods.

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Part 2: Circulating Spaces as Case Study

Circulating Spaces (2017-2019) was hosted, recorded, and produced by the authors of this essay, Christian Howard-Sukhil (née Howard), Samantha Wallace, and Ankita Chakrabarty. The podcast ran for two seasons and has twelve episodes. Season one (episodes one through seven) was co-hosted by Christian Howard-Sukhil and Samantha Wallace. Season two (episodes eight through twelve) was co-hosted by Christian Howard-Sukhil and Ankita Chakrabarty. The episodes continue to be freely accessible on iTunes and the project website.[4]

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Each episode features a new guest (or guests) who is asked to speak about her relationship to the field of world literature, her background within various disciplines, how her work intersects with conceptions of "the public," and (one author's favorite section) about new literature she recommends. Our guests have included Erin Bartnett, then a literary agent, now an editor for *Electric Literature*; Brandon Butler, the University of Virginia's Director of Information Policy and an attorney whose expertise includes copyright and fair use; A.D. Carson, a hip-hop artist and Professor of Hip-Hop and the Global South at the University of Virginia; Lã Linh Chi, a Vietnamese-English teacher and translator; Amitav Ghosh, an award-winning English-language writer; Susan Stanford Friedman, Professor of English and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Favianna Rodriguez, a transdisciplinary artist and social justice advocate; and Nathan Rostron, editor and marketing director of the publishing company, Restless Books. Because the technology required to host a recorded interview — a working microphone, some sort of transition technology (such as Skype or Zoom), a computer, and recording software — were relatively accessible, we were able to interview a wider range of guests than we would have been able to had we been restricted to in-person interviews; such accessibility allowed us to connect to a wider network of people and practitioners around the globe.

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In each episode, we aimed to produce an atmosphere of casual conversation with each of our guests. We hoped our interactions felt intimate, off-the-cuff, and unrevised, as if we were over coffee and in-person discussing issues important to us. This tone is immediately evident in the podcast episodes: where a transcript might not, the audio recording picks up our pauses and hesitations, fluctuations of laughter, collisions of speech, the vagaries of sound traveling across several different mics and recording devices, and verbal ticks, in addition to the content of our comments. Guests changed their minds or revised mid-speech. Some of their ideas were, in this way, very clearly works-in-progress. Furthermore, in editing the episodes after each recording, we strove to retain the verisimilitude of our conversations by leaving in any awkward pauses and verbal ticks, as well as our guests' unscripted responses. We did so in order to reproduce the effect of a casual conversation, but also to co-construct a work that differs in kind and in style from the more manicured prose of, say, an academic essay. These conversations gain from retaining their "unrevised" style in that this "stylistic messiness" comments on the (often unmarked and therefore invisible) number of revisions that go into a work of scholarship. Our unrevised conversations thus allowed us to embark on work that felt more spontaneous and less polished than our written academic work.

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Circulating Spaces was produced as a part of the Graduate Student Public Humanities Lab at the Institute of the Humanities and Global Cultures at the University of Virginia. The Graduate Student Public Humanities Lab was founded in 2017 to address the gap we saw dividing our scholarly work from the broader public. The Lab aims to develop collaboration among departments; to address the issues dividing the University of Virginia from the city of Charlottesville through working groups dedicated to specific projects in the community; and to provide a common space for scholars and the wider community to generate lively discussion, research, and advocacy initiatives.[5] In doing so, the Lab sought to interrogate the way "the public" is perceived as separate from the academy and often simplified within this binary through a lack of nuance by examining this term as a construct: What is the "public?" How is it separate from "the academy?" In what ways do the public and the academy inform one another? In what circumstances is this opposition a false binary, and in what circumstances is it an important distinction to make?

Posing questions about the perceived gap between the public and the academy links our inquiry with the work of public humanities. The aim, as Sheila Brennan points out in "Public, First" is to "place communities, or other public audiences, at their core." A field that arose within the last fifty years, public humanities is most commonly understood to have developed in response to "conservative critiques of the obscurantism and leftism of the academy" [Schroeder 2017]. Public humanities, initially at least, ["aspired] to democratize humanistic knowledge by transforming the capacities of academic humanists and their work in and out of the university" [Schroeder 2017]. While in its earliest stages it was used to convince academics to write for an audience broader than other academics, by the late 1990s, it was academics who were leveraging the phrase to advocate for "alternative methods of engagement against reigning paradigms of humanistic inquiry" [Schroeder 2017]. What this meant was engaging in more research with "practical" applications. As Robyn Schroeder writes, academics "moved, quickly, to learn from the methods of social scientist ethnographers, oral historians, and journalists, as well as from curators, museum educators, genealogists and documentary film makers, and to aggregate those knowledges together under the 'public humanities' tent" [Schroeder 2017].

The rationale for public humanities is still alive and well. In the twenty-first century, public humanities has itself become a formal field of academic study, with a home within elite institutions such as Yale and Brown, and in which students can receive advanced degrees. Additionally, it continues to inflect arguments around the role of the humanities within society. In her recent book *Generous Thinking*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick in invokes the spirit of public humanities as a way of repairing the perceived current divide between the academy and the public, a divide that she characterizes as rampant with anti-intellectualism:

> In public scholarship, members of our chosen communities enter into our projects not just as readers but as participants, as stakeholders, and as partners. Public scholarship allows the venues for engaging with those communities to expand beyond the monograph or the journal article to include a range of forms in which the publics with / whom we work can engage directly with the materials of our fields. [Fitzpatrick 2019, 172]

Fitzpatrick lists alternative "spaces" of scholarly engagement beyond the traditional modes of academic publications to include museum and gallery exhibitions, interactive web archives and other community-oriented publication models that are currently being developed, and notes that the inclusion of such spaces diversify the possibilities of building connections and networks. Thus, as contested as it is ambiguous a term, "public humanities" continues to depend on — as it interrogates — a perceived dialogue between the academy and the "public" — the circulation of humanistic knowledges between grounds and people.

Circulating Spaces reassesses and expands the concept of "public" by exploring what it means to engage with literature as a global-scale community. We were interested early on in illuminating the complicated network of the academy and its counterparts that our podcast guests chart. It is not only literature, but also *people* who circulate in, out, and around institutions adjacent to the academy, as many of our guests on the show articulate when describing their career trajectories. The podcast's self-conscious positioning at the intersection of public humanities and world literature provided *Circulating Spaces* with both its raison d'être and its conceptual framework: the former provided the goal of expanding the concept of what constitutes a "public" by developing a more complicated theory of the "public" through

recent developments in the field of world literature.

Circulating Spaces not only uses the affordances of the form of the podcast to inform its content. It engages with the conceptual and theoretical paradigms developed recently in the field of world literature — focusing on circulation, motion, and (trans)nationalism — in order to reconfigure the form and function of the podcast within the academy. According to the Warwick Research Collective,

> "Global"/"world" literature in its pre-eminent contemporary formulation pushes intrinsically in the directions of commerce and commonality, linkage and connection, articulation and integration, network and system. It thereby distances itself, explicitly or implicitly, from the antecedent lexicon of "post"-theory, which had been disposed to emphasize not comparison but incommensurability, not commonality but difference, not system but untotalizable fragment. [Warwick 2015, 6]

Similarly, Alexander Beecroft, through his concept of "ecologies" of world literature, sees most scholars of world literature not as articulating "competing models for understanding how literature circulates, but rather [as articulating] different concrete answers, emerging in specific contexts, to the same set of problems about the interactions between literatures and their environments" [Beecroft 2015, 3]. In short, by reinterpreting the scope of the public humanities through conceptions developed in world literature, *Circulating Spaces* not only bridges the divide between academic podcasts (such as the *University of Oxford Podcasts: World Literature* series) and public humanities podcasts (such as *Public Works*), but it actively connects the dots between academic institutions and those of us who work within and circulate around them.

Guided by this world literature model, *Circulating Spaces* likewise attempts to point toward ways in which networks of affinity between the academy and the public may be constructed and negotiated. All too often, the "public humanities model" creates a hierarchical relationship in which the academy intervenes in public spaces in order to share research or offer their insights on an issue. We oppose this hierarchical model and instead advocate for a more connected and fluid understanding of the ways in which individuals circulate around various institutions linked with the academy. *Circulating Spaces* presents a model of the academy that is not unilateral (as if "the academy" were one, static space), but that instead highlights the ways individuals circulate around various institutions connected to the academy. For instance, we saw how Sarah Rodriguez moved from the University of Virginia to an elementary school classroom; how Erin Barnett transitioned to a literary agency; and how Brandon Butler went from law school to a university library. As we traced a rhizomatic network of connections between guests, ideas, and world literature texts made possible through the technology of the podcast, it became ever clearer to us that the divide between the academy and the public was not only a false divide, but one that is not intellectually productive or even necessarily accurate. For example, despite moving out of academia, many of our guests, such as Erin Bartnett, Sarah Rodriguez, and Brandon Butler, have careers that intersect with the academy. Their circulation — and the ideas they take with them — belies the strict divide between the "academy" and the "public." People, ideas, and spaces, as world literature theory has argued, are much more fluid.

Part 3: Toward a New Vision of Scholarship

While the public humanities and developments in world literature have informed the purpose and scope of *Circulating Spaces*, the Digital Humanities (DH) provide us with a useful model for how to frame the kind of scholarship that podcasts like *Circulating Spaces* can accomplish. At first glance, it might appear that discussions about the podcast — an innately digital medium — belong more broadly to the field of digital scholarship rather than the Digital Humanities. After all, at many institutions, DH is subsumed under the larger initiative of digital scholarship. Loyola Marymount University, for instance, describes the relationship between digital scholarship and the Digital Humanities thus:

> Digital scholarship (DS) and Digital Humanities (DH) are scholarly activities that involve the extensive use of digital methods and tools to conduct research, analyze data, and present scholarship. ...Digital humanities may be seen as falling under the umbrella of digital scholarship. It involves using digital tools and methods to analyze, synthesize, present and teach humanities scholarship. [Loyola 2020]

According to definitions such as this, DH is a subset of — and differentiated from — digital scholarship more broadly simply on the basis of its focus on humanities subjects. *Circulating Spaces*, which broadly considers issues related to global literary circulation, would thus only be a DH project because the production strategy is digital even as the subject matter of the podcast is humanities-based.

But there is an additional element of DH scholarship that expands the function of this field. That is, more than simply using technology to focus on or address humanities-based questions, DH has a charge to reflect critically upon "how digital information technologies influence perspectives in and on research in the humanities" [Clement 2018]. Alan Liu puts this imperative in slightly different terms by highlighting the need of Digital Humanities work to both "assist mainstream humanities critique" and to "use technology self-reflexively as part of the very condition, and not just facility, of critically knowing and acting on culture today" [Liu 2016]. Thus, while *Circulating Spaces* may participate in DH and be classified as a DH project simply in reference to its method of production and entanglement with humanities-related questions, *Circulating Spaces* is more explicitly enmeshed in the work of DH through its questioning of how the podcast as a tool helps us reevaluate scholarly processes and the production of humanities scholarship.

In fact, DH scholars have long discussed the need to expand what constitutes scholarship, especially when it comes to tenure and promotion review.[6] In "Episode 3: Public and Digital Spaces," Brandon Walsh, the Head of Student Programs in the University of Virginia's Scholars' Lab, discusses how digital technology is changing how we conceive of humanities scholarship.[7] As Walsh puts it, DH scholarship not only "gives you a different means of disseminating things," but it also requires that "you...think in a different way" [Howard and Wallace 2017c, 12:57–13:10]. For Walsh, this means specifically that he thinks more "publicly." He explains more fully:

> Over the past several years that I've been working in Digital Humanities, probably the most profound shift in how I work is that it's all public all the time. So whenever I teach or am working and thinking through a problem, I try and think about how I might reframe that for a public audience, like either in a blog or gathering my materials together so that other people can see them. And that's not something that I was necessarily thinking about during the rest of my time as a graduate student. …Working in an increasing digital space for me has meant that you have to be willing to put yourself out there. [Howard and Wallace 2017c, 13:17–13:58]

By being, as Walsh puts it, "public all the time," Digital Humanities has pushed Walsh to consider public engagement with his own research. As we've argued, a model for academic work that is "public" shouldn't merely be public-facing; it should make visible the intricate connections between people and ideas.

Friedman too points out in her episode [Howard and Wallace 2018c, 35:18–25] that fields such as Digital Humanities and world literature urge us to rethink and to alter our academic practices. Acknowledging the move toward collaborative scholarship in the humanities, she states that efforts are currently under way to support more communal academic projects.[8] However, while journals, including *PMLA*, increasingly feature author interviews,[9] which could be compared to the work of podcast interviews (esp. see *Circulating Spaces*, Episode 10, which features an interview with author Amitav Ghosh), these published, written interviews are short (generally running between three and six pages) and tend to polish the voices of both author and interviewer. Additionally, the work of the interviewer in researching and preparing questions often receives only a passing acknowledgment.

This is precisely where the affordances of digital humanities can come into play. Podcasts like *Circulating Spaces* offer a different take on ideas of community engagement and conversation in terms of academic publishing. Indeed, the form of conversation afforded by the podcast stands in counterpoint to the model of the single-author scholarly monograph, which continues to be the gold-standard for academic work despite shrinking university library budgets and rising costs associated with traditional publication. The processes of research and "publication" occur almost simultaneously during the creation of the podcast itself. This is significant because the podcast's immediacy and informality suggest a model of "publication" that is less hierarchical than traditional scholarly publishing. Even the sheer number of contributors to *Circulating Spaces* challenges the traditional model for authorship of traditional humanities research. More so, podcast interviews record voice intonation and pauses, providing a richer experience and giving voice to both interviewer and

interviewee alike. The immediacy and informality of the voices in such conversations not only distinguish the podcast from the traditional scholarly monograph, but also put into relief the otherwise invisible work of drafting and revision that goes into the scholarly monograph. In short, the podcast does work that the scholarly monograph does not — work that should not replace, but rather stand as a companion to the scholarly monograph.

Podcasts, given the relative ease of collaboration even across distances, also lend themselves well to community or collaborative development. Llinares, Fox, and Berry locate the transformative potential of the collaborative podcast within "the medium's hybridity of thought, sound and text" [Llinares et al. 2018, 2]. These features "perhaps even foster a reinvigoration of the dialectic, an exchange of ideas beyond what is possible in purely written form — be it in a magazine or academic journal. Podcasting, for us, taps into something fundamental about oral communication, argument and even the tension between subjective and objective knowledge that has been amplified in the digital age" [Llinares et al. 2018, 2]. In addition to being visibly co-produced projects, the conversational nature of the podcast captures the popularity of oral forms of communication in the digital age.

Taken together, the podcast's public, communal, and conversational affordances make it possible for subsequent episodes to build on the preceding episodes' conversations with relative ease. In this manner, *Circulating Spaces* brings together Favianna Rodriguez, an interdisciplinary artist ("Episode 11: Designing Global Activism") and Amitav Ghosh, a novelist and climate-change activist ("Episode 10: The Climate of World Literature") into conversational proximity. Ghosh expresses surprise and dismay at the conspicuous absence of climate change in contemporary global fiction, and he stresses the critical need for contemporary fiction to engage in the discourse of climate change in the present time [Howard and Chakrabarti 2018d, 27:17–27:32]. During the following episode, with Ghosh's comments in mind, the co-hosts asks Rodriguez to comment upon the role of climate change in her artwork. Rodriguez concurs with Ghosh's assertion that there is a lack of art about non-human subjects [Howard and Chakrabarti 2018f, 31:47–32:00]. She further states: "We can help to transform the current course, and in order to do that we need to just feel our stories in relation to nature...This is why, actually, I am so serious about creating art with plants and with climate, and I am a beacon now because I want to share these stories" [Howard and Chakrabarti 2018f, 31:10–31:33]. Rodriguez's interest in the imagery of nature in contemporary art resonates strongly with Ghosh's call for contemporary fiction to wake up to the realities of the time, as evidenced by her enthusiastic and hearty endorsement of Ghosh's emphasis upon the necessity of storytelling in helping combat climate change. The conversations in the podcast episodes thus become multi-directional, not simply in terms of the movement of ideas and opinions, but in the very process of conceptualization. In this way, each conversation can become intricately connected to the larger conversation that the podcast series, as a whole, constructs.

Finally, podcasts such as *Circulating Spaces* participate in the "new scholarly digital ethos" in another distinct way, namely, through their commitment to open access [Liu 2016]. If digital technologies make dissemination relatively easy, and if, as we've argued, the networks between the academy and neighboring institutions are constituted by individuals who circulate between these institutions, do we not have an obligation to make the results of our academic labor open and accessible to as broad a public as possible? Shouldn't we honor, through open accessibility, the collaborative relationships established by work like *Circulating Spaces*?

Brandon Butler, the University of Virginia's Director of Information Policy, breaks down the case for open access in "Episode 5: Copyright and Open Access:"

> We now have… two things that make possible what was not possible before. We have the technology to make all knowledge instantly and very, very cheaply, essentially freely available to anyone, anywhere. And we have a community of people...who make knowledge for a living and who don't expect to get paid by the readers who read it... So, we can have a publishing system that does not need to pay authors. All we have to do is find a way to finance the marginal cost of distributing something on the Internet. And it's nothing!... And so, all [open access does is] put two and two together, and say all scholarly literature should be freely available on the web to anyone with an internet connection. [Howard and Wallace 2018b, 22:45-23:56]

We agree with Butler and argue that the open sharing of scholarship will be mutually beneficial, especially as it pertains to scholarly work such as a podcast, which can be produced with low overhead cost, is relatively cheap to maintain, and can easily be made open access, that is, freely available without the cost of subscription.[10] Doing so will help encourage collaborative research; adequately reflect and make visible the complex network of people and ideas that circulate in the broad ecosystem of humanities work; and encourage, as Walsh indicated, scholars to consider broader audiences for their research, in a time in which the value of the humanities is often debated.[11] As Walsh, Friedman, and Butler all imply, scholars in fields as diverse as world literature, public humanities, and the Digital Humanities are all pointing individually toward this conclusion.[12] It is a work in progress.

Coda

As the outcome of an academic lab model of collaborative research, we have not been particularly mindful about the number of subscribers *Circulating Spaces* gained during the course of its production. While statistics detailing subscribers, downloads, etc., can be helpful indicators of the growing influence of a podcast, our criteria for "success" was based on the production process itself — the development of the theoretical framework for the podcast, constructing the episode outlines and the interview questions, and networking and collaborating with a diverse group of individuals all working broadly within the humanities. *Circulating Spaces* has also established networks of connection which continue to persist and can be worked upon and expanded in the future. [31]

While our assessment of the podcast's participation in this new way of thinking of and conducting research has been largely celebratory — indeed, we consider collaboration as well as research and publication that is more democratic and spontaneous to be of obvious positive value — it is important to consider the shortcomings and limitations of such projects as well. We want to be particularly cognizant of and transparent regarding how the academy has structured our own social networks and therefore the curation of guests on a podcast such as *Circulating Spaces*. As academic scholars with institutional funding, the very creation of *Circulating Spaces* is fundamentally grounded in a North American system of institutional support, which, although fortuitous for us, is not accessible to anyone seeking to replicate such a project. As a result, we want to acknowledge our own roles in creating these networks, which are not neutral, but inflected by our own positions within the academy. Indeed, on a practical level, we observed how much easier it was to work with guests in a domestic context (and even easier when they were at our home institution) than with our international guests: the further the distance, the spottier the sound quality, the more difficult to schedule a time to speak or to guarantee the compatibility of computer equipment. The inertia of the metropole is strong. Our attempts to deconstruct the binary of academic versus its public by constructing a more nuanced network of relations were tempered by this gravitational pull toward the University of Virginia's resources, including, most importantly, its human resources. We hope, however, that beginning to make connections between far-flung guests within our own localized networks here will enable future audiences to make similar connections and expand the network out beyond our hub at the University of Virginia. [32]

In *Teaching Community*, bell hooks writes, "One of the dangers we face in our educational systems is the loss... of a feeling of connection and closeness with the world beyond the academy" [hooks 2003, xv]. *Circulating Spaces* models a more open, collaborative model for the humanities through the practice of the Digital Humanities, the theories of world literature, and the spirit of public humanities. We have seen how the affordances of the podcast have shaped our conversations — and by extension, our research — while also enabling us to theorize and practice more nuanced relationships between what is "academic" and what is "public." We reconnect with the "world beyond the academy" even as we show that this world is not, in fact, separate from the academy. These connections are increasingly important for the future of humanistic studies. While *Circulating Spaces* itself provides a modest, two-season long run of conversations between academics, teachers, librarians, artists, and more, as we have hoped to demonstrate in this essay, it suggests the potential for much broader and robust work with the podcast as a form of research that participates in the creation of these feelings of connectivity and closeness. [33]

Notes

[1] A note on author attribution: Christian Howard-Sukhil and Samantha Wallace originally drafted and equally contributed to the ideas

expressed in this article. Ankita Chakrabarti, who joined the project team a year after the initial collaboration, was instrumental in ensuring that these ideas coalesced, especially given the new presentation of materials in Season 2 of *Circulating Spaces*. Christian Howard-Sukhil and Samantha Wallace were co-hosts and co-producers for Season 1 of *Circulating Spaces*; Christian Howard-Sukhil and Ankita Chakrabarti were co-hosts and co-producers for Season 2 of *Circulating Spaces*.

[1] See, for instance, N. Katherine Hayle's *How We Think*; Ted Underwood's *Why Literary Periods Mattered*; Matthew Kirschenbaum's "The .txtual Condition: Digital Humanities, Born Digital Archives, and the Future Literary"; Alix Keener's "The Arrival Fallacy: Collaborative Research Relationships in the Digital Humanities"; Tom Schofield, Mitchell Whitelaw, and David Kirk's "Research through Design and Digital Humanities in Practice"; and Matt Erlin's "Digital Humanities Masterplots."

[2] In this way, podcasts participate in other forms of emerging digital scholarship - such as TEDx Talks, blogs, and Twitter - which enable academic conversations to reach the broader public.

[3] There are two other accepted forms, the "hybrid" (which combines aspects of the various other forms), and "repurposed content" from other kinds of media productions. For more information, see Mark Leonard's "The Seven Most Common Podcast Formats."

[4] *Circulating Spaces* is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) license, which gives users the right to freely share or redistribute the podcasts with proper attribution, as well as to adapt the material (as long as the adaptations are distributed under the same license). For more information, please visit the Creative Commons CC-By page (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/). We have also worked to ensure the long-term preservation and sustainability of the *Circulating Spaces* podcast episodes and website. About such long-term preservation needs, Claire Carlin writes: "Besides archiving in multiple repositories, long-term curation requires preservation not only of static data such as XML files but also of the experience of using a given web application and its associated tools" [Carlin 2018, 1]. We have accordingly stored the podcast episodes in multiple locations and ensured their accessibility through several platforms. For instance, the podcasts are stored through the University of Virginia's Mandala Collections (see https://mandala.shanti.virginia.edu/) and through a private Amazon Web Services (AWS) account. The podcasts can also be accessed and downloaded through the project website (www.circulatingspaces.com) and through iTunes (https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/circulating-spaces/id1334697425?mt=2). The "look and feel" of the website are being preserved through two different archiving sources: the Internet Archive (see https://web.archive.org/web/2019*/https://pages.shanti.virginia.edu/Circulating_Spaces/) and the University of Victoria's private research computing server (the *Circulating Spaces* website was downloaded to the UVic server in June 2019 by Matt Huculak as part of the Digital Humanities Summer Institute course on "Project Endings").

[5] In August, 2017, Charlottesville and the University of Virginia, the home institution of the podcast's principle investigators, became host to alt-right, men's rights, and white supremacist groups, protesting the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate States Army. For the principle investigators of *Circulating Spaces*, this event highlighted the pressing need to think through radical division all the more strenuously, and to theorize more nuanced networks of affinity and difference based on a more complex understanding of "public."

[6] See, for instance, the special issue of *Journal of Digital Humanities*, "Closing the Evaluation Gap," that deals with this topic (Fall 2012, Issue 1.4); the American Historical Association's "Guidelines on the Evaluation of Digital Scholarship"; the College Art Association and the Society of Architectural Historians' "Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital Scholarship in Art and Architectural History"; Joseph Raben's "Tenure, Promotion, and Digital Publication"; the Modern Language Association's "Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media"; and Cathy Davidson's "How Can a Digital Humanist Get Tenure?"

[7] Walsh defines the digital humanities as "research or teaching that engages with technology in some way" [Howard and Wallace 2017c, 5:04–5:07]. Digital humanities work is not only "the use of technology in the pursuit of humanities questions" — it is also "humanities-based interrogation of technology" [Howard and Wallace 2017c, 5:14–5:22].

[8] See, for example, the MLA's Prize for a Scholarly Edition, which supports collaborative projects.

[9] For examples of author interviews in *PMLA*, see Raymond Williams's interview with Gabriel García Márquez ("The Visual Arts, the Poetization of Space and Writing: An Interview with Gabriel García Márquez" in *PMLA* 104.2: 131-140); Z. Esra Mirze's interview with Orhan Pamuk ("Implementing Disform: An Interview with Orhan Pamuk" in *PMLA* 123.1: 176-180); and Jean E. Howard's interview with Lynn Nottage ("Interview with Lynn Nottage" in *PLMA* 129.4: 847–849).

[10] For a foundational manifesto of open access values, see the *Budapest Open Access Initiative*.

[11] This typically conservative view of the role of the humanities is not new, and as referenced in the discussion on the origin of public humanities, was a critique to which the public humanities sought to respond by demonstrating the wide applicability of humanities-based

research. Organizations like Humanities in Action, a branch of the National Humanities Center, continue to make the case for the importance of the humanities by highlighting how humanities research and teaching provide valuable perspectives on topics of public concern. See, https://action.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/what-are-humanities/. With that in mind, efforts are underway to develop more open-source platforms. The Manifold Scholarship platform, for example, jointly developed by the University of Minnesota Press, the GC Digital Scholarship Lab at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and Cast Iron Coding (Portland, OR), is a particularly promising open-source platform that offers a framework of academic publishing that is focused on community engagement while encouraging discussion between readers.

[12] The material affordances of the digital, of course, are not just limited to the podcast. Picking up the idea of community, open access, and collaboration enabled by digital humanities, in "Episode 3: Public and Digital Spaces," Christian Howard-Sukhil relates new developments in digital literature – which she defines as "literature that is created on and for digital devices" – to the growth of new digital spaces, or "the networks of people that are created through technological applications," e.g., communities in spaces such as online chatrooms [Howard and Wallace 2017c, 20:30-34; 7:18-7:22]. In other words, digital humanities and digital literature more broadly open themselves up to community engagement and development.

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