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Literature Review

Tertiary education has successfully distinguished itself from community priorities. In the ivory tower, higher order thinking is presented as more sophisticated, and as a result more important, than the work achieved by any non-institutionalized public. However, as significant community issues such as social justice and environmental sustainability continue to consistently breach academic spaces, the divorce between academy and community becomes futile. Recently, university priorities have shifted and the academy now grapples with the extent to which its knowledge production is socially relevant, mobilized for community engagement, and possesses clear civic duty.

For humanities scholarship specifically, 'public humanities' has arisen as a likely solution for the integration of community and academe through accredited practices such as experiential learning. Yet, as a recently emerging field, public humanities is still attempting to properly establish its aims, objectives, and programming both at the academy and in community spaces.

Through the analysis of "Public Humanities as Third Space: Memory, Meaning-Making and Collections and the Enunciation of "We" in Research", "Language and Literature Research in Regional Comprehensive Institutions", "Knowledge Utility: From Social Relevance to Knowledge Mobilization", *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work*, *Doing Public Humanities*, "I Love the Public Humanities, but…", and "Mobilizing the humanities for diverse careers" this literature review will analyze the definitions and understandings of public humanities, how its

place at the institution is described, and finally the discourse surrounding its efficacy as a suitable future for humanities scholarship.

A primary struggle with public humanities is how to define it. Some scholars in the field such as Robyn Schroeder in her chapter "The Rise of Public Humanists" from *Doing Public Humanities* define public humanities as "the work of moving humanistic knowledge among individuals to groups of people due to the way organizations (politically, academically and otherwise) perceive the public and the academic institution as increasingly separate" (6). Whereas other scholars like Feisal G. Mohammed in their article, "I Love Public Humanities but…" considers public humanities as the university's mission to make their humanities more suitable for consumption by entities outside of the academy (1). Schroeder's idea of public humanities resists the consideration of knowledge production by communities and continues to suppose the public's unreciprocated need to be taught by the academy, but Mohammed's definition twists public humanities as an agenda to commodify the humanities as a response to decreased student enrollments in the humanities and diminished public funding of higher education. Susan Smulyan in the introduction of *Doing Public Humanities* provides a more apt description of the field stating that outside of the publicly available events and programming offered by the public humanities, "[they] thought about public humanities as collaborative and relational, political and personal, happening in public and producing new understandings for the humanities." More importantly: "Public humanities happens in collaboration—between professors and students and between universities and communities" (1). This definition acknowledges the need for public humanities at the academy as well as in community spaces, considers it as a genuine future for humanities scholarship, and destabilizes the notion that knowledge mobilization cannot be mutual between a public and the university.

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Another common question regarding public humanities, from the academic perspective, is where it should fit within existing university structures that already have clear, rigid pathways for academic success, for both students and faculty alike considering public humanities necessitates a level of public-facing engagement that has never before been valued or meaningfully achieved at the ivory tower. In *Language and Literature Research in Regional Comprehensive Institutions* by the Modern Language Association it is noted that while scholars at regional comprehensive institutions want to undertake projects that engage with a broader public, the pressures of tenure and promotion requirements in addition to the lack of training on how to properly undertake public scholarship constrains them (2). Similarly, graduate students tend to lean away from public humanities because their academic success focuses almost entirely on traditional research outputs, such as dissertations. Both Schroeder and Anne Krooke recognize this, Krooke going as far as to suggest that even "given an opportunity to broaden their understanding of their skills and opportunities to help them get the jobs that the majority of them actually will get, many students reject that vision, because they have been trained to spend their energy and time on one type of dissertation for one type of outcome" (4). These two issues feed into each other: faculty do not want to contribute to public humanities because their scholarship evaluated by the academy requires more traditional research and students do not want to contribute to public humanities because their scholarship evaluated by faculty requires more traditional research. These faculty and student concerns create a self-replicating cycle of undesired public humanities work.

Katrina L. R Rogers' *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work* tackles this very issue. She notes that the humanities are evolving, as is the university and its relationship with the public. Therefore the way by which the university recognizes research and valorizes academic work

must shift as well, that is, expanding what the academy appraises outside of the narrow expressions of peer-reviewed journal articles and dissertations. In fact, these formats are attached to ideas of whiteness and elitism, as Rogers claims, and this could be said to contribute to the reason why the university and communities (especially that of marginalized folks) appear antithetical. Rogers calls for a revamp of the way we discuss humanities scholarship, "as long as merit and prestige are measured through the lens of an unquestioned canon and long-standing forms of research and publication, the academy is unlikely to see pronounced normative changes in the ways that the humanities are taught and studied, nor in who chooses to pursue such fields of study. If graduate programs genuinely care about inclusion and the new knowledge that it will bring about, graduate education reform must not only focus on broad career options but also—and more importantly—on true antiracist and inclusive prac- tices within the university" (71).

Krooke, too, offers that for graduate students their issue requires institutional change. She proposes four (4) practical changes:

1. shorten the dissertation, so book-length monographs are a product of research faculty and so graduate students can enter the non-academic workforce sooner, if they need to;
2. test new forms of the thesis, and recognize the faculty's role in hitherto validating only the standard form when gauging student resistance;
3. train graduate students to address non-academic audiences in writing and in spoken presentation;
4. support graduate students when they seek professional work outside academics, and train their supervisory faculty to support them (5).

For faculty, Schroeder argues that while faculty members at 'more reputable' research universities or elite colleges may be evaluated solely on specific publication requirements, other

smaller institutions have taken publicly engaged work into consideration for tenure and promotion. In this case, although traditional publication continues to be the dominant form of scholarship for faculty members at regional comprehensives, research shows that institutional priorities can consider scholarly productions that are more experimental, creative, and public-facing. In addition, humanities fields have an opportunity to develop and advocate for tenure and promotion guidelines that account for public scholarship since model guidelines for such might be found in other recent fields, such as public history and digital scholarship (4).

The practical aspect of public humanities is also brought into question in scholarly discourse on the field. Most scholars agree that for public humanities' programming to succeed there must be emphasis placed on knowledge production and events built through a collaborative effort between both parties. Ron M. Potvin and Marjory Gomez O'Toole in *Doing Public Humanities* discuss hyperlocal history as a process used to analyze and understand the communities and people that have existed within a specific geographic location. Using this hyperlocal history methodology they analysed two case studies and revealed that with the use of community engagement, shared resources among scholars and institutions etc. one can uncover the stories and histories of peoples that would have otherwise been overlooked by traditional history retellings/discoveries. Hyperlocal history then can be understood as a process by which the university can start to not only gain a deeper understanding for surrounding communities who predate the university, but also function as a form of epistemological revision.

Monica Muñoz Martinez's essay in *Doing Public Humanities* also underscores the necessity of including communities in a holistic, multipronged, informed, and nuanced way so as to respect the histories and descendants of surrounding communities. She writes that the engagement of the researcher in collaboration with relevant community members made for a

better exploration of the history of racial, state sanctioned violence and the problematic relationship between Mexicans, Indigenous peoples, and Whites in Texas. The collaboration ultimately led to a new tejano monument in remembrance of the victims with an emphasis placed on respecting the vernacular history from affected communities in equal parts with the academically traditional research done by faculty at the university.

The takeaway from Martinez and Mohammed's argument is that public humanities provides an opportunity for the university to reconcile its history of peripheralizing people of colour and other marginalized groups. Engaging with more local communities there is an increased chance of gaining the perspectives from identities who are often excluded from academic/scholarly thought, i.e. people of colour, and this may dismantle the Eurocentric academic canon. It should be acknowledged, however, that the academy has more work to do to revise the Eurocentric academic canon than requesting unpaid marginalized peoples to rethink their traditions.

Finally, in the practice of public humanities, though building programming is key between the university and the community, Krmptich offers guidelines for ways to navigate this new and historically problematic relationship. Beyond the actual work, organizing programming, and research, Krmptich notes the importance of activities such as sharing lunch together, and engaging in prayer, song, and storytelling so as to build trust between both parties and also genuinely bridge each other's understandings. These activities take place in what Krmptich calls a 'third space'.

Krmptich illustrates that "third spaces of enunciation may occur when there is interaction between people otherwise opposed or asymmetrical owing to, for example, class, political, cultural, or religious differences," (87). Krmptich adds that a third space, a term coined by Homi

Bhabha, means one party does not demand the other party change, or as Bhabha describes it, the productivity of the third space does not expect that a person or group will be ‘‘persuaded or ‘educated’ out of’’ their beliefs. Krmptich argues this characteristic potentially makes for more genuine engagement. A third space, therefore, where all participants’ beliefs and perspectives are valued should be a requirement for the public humanities. If the university is to meaningfully attempt to work with communities with the aim of collaborative knowledge production, then a space must be provided that acknowledges both parties’ histories with one another and encourages knowledge exchange, in contrast to the way in which the academy historically operates which is teaching the public.

In conclusion, the literature on public humanities is currently concerned with suitable ways to define and practice relationships between the community and the academy. Public humanities’ place within the institution is largely dependent on the reconsideration of what constitutes credited academic work from both students and faculty. Further complicating the issue, the future of public humanities rests within its ability to reconcile with marginalized communities, re-envision methods of knowledge production and mobilization, and collaborate equally, not teach, the community.

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