KairosCast Episode 1.2 – Transcript

[intro music]

Courtney: Welcome to KairosCast.

Harley: Welcome to KairosCast.

C: Hello. Welcome to KairosCast episode 1.2.

H: We're glad you're listening.

C: I'm Courtney Danforth

H: and I'm Harley Ferris. On this, our second, episode, we're excited to feature interviews with the producers and hosts of two of our shows on the KCast network.

C: We hope you've enjoyed the full episodes of *PeoplePlaceThings* and *Plugs, Play, Pedagogy*. We're going to talk to Casey, Kyle, and Nathaniel about how they got started with their shows

H: and what they want those shows to become. Have you listened to their shows, Courtney?

C: I have! They come up in my playlists right alongside all the other podcasts I listen to. The other day I listened to Kyle while I was walking my dog. What about you?

H: Well, I mostly listen at my desk, but yeah, I listened and they're both good shows. Not only are they interesting, but they're tackling current ideas with fresh rhetorical and pedagogical perspectives.

C: And that's kind of the point, isn't it? One of our big goals for KairosCast is the *kairos*-- looking at what's happening now.

[from the television show *What's Happening*, Duane: "Hey HEY hey!"]

H: Right! And speaking of that, we had a request from a listener that WE tackle something current to analyze, so we decided to look at the ALS ice bucket challenge.

C: Yeah…that issue certainly made the rounds recently. And I heard you participated.

H: I did! We sort of turned it into an event.

C: Who tagged you for the challenge?

H: My youngest, Dylan. He's 11, and he was challenged by his 15-year-old brother. So it just sort of swept through our house one weekend.

C: How did you decide what to do with your challenge? Did you choose a theme for your video?

H: Well, that's the thing. You sort of get swept up in it, and, especially later in the season of it, you feel some pressure to avoid just another backyard video, of which there seemed to be plenty already.

[from the film *The Three Amigos*, El Guapo: "Would you say I have a plethora?"]

C: So what did you do?

H: Well, have you seen *Flashdance*?

C: [laughs] Got it! So what made you want to participate?

H: To be honest, I struggled with it. I really hoped that I wouldn't get nominated and could just avoid it. Part of my reluctance, I think, was that I didn't know where it came from, who "owned" it, so to speak, and what the ALS community felt about it. It's so easy to get carried away in the social aspect that you lose sight of the helping part.

C: It's an interesting phenomenon rhetorically for its virality in particular.

H: Absolutely. And to help sort through some of those interesting bits, I sat down with a few people to talk about it.

Brenda Brueggeman: So, this is Brenda Brueggeman from the University of Louisville.

Harley: Brenda began our discussion by telling me about her experience watching someone close to her suffer with ALS.

BB: So, a couple of years ago, I had a brother-in-law who died of ALS and within three years after his diagnosis and he had three little boys, so it was pretty dramatic. And I knew this intellectually, but watching it all closer in the family is about the lack of awareness, education, and resources even available, both him into his family and stuff. So, it was that part of me that was kind of rhetorically pleased to see a very creative, different, original challenge to get people thinking about something that was happening with the ice bucket challenge, yeah.

H: When I first saw it, I was coming at it from an outsider, who only really knew of Lou Gehrig as anyone having Lou Gehrig's disease, and I've just been fortunate it hasn't touched anyone that I know or in my own family, and my initial reaction to the challenge was one of reluctance and reticence and "please don't nominate me" because there's the worry that I have of, "well, I'm not a part of that community; what do *they* think about this?" and then it wasn't long after that that an article began to circulate of what people with ALS really think about this and they were talking about, "well, it does raise awareness; it does raise money" but are there other implications or concerns we should be keeping in mind of, I guess, helping or serving a community of which we are not a part?

BB: Yeah. There's a name for that syndrome of outside. Because in Disability Studies, we talk a lot about the charity model and so part of me, when I saw it too also immediately while it was going up. Who started this and for what real purposes? And again, I thought that too. How would family of someone with ALS feel about this? And I didn't know the answer so I still don't know, like who or where or how it originates. And I think that's one of the things about some of this stuff too, right? Is to find the origination of the original purpose of how it begins to take on a life of its own, maybe even separated from that purpose. And, much like you, any of this social media stuff like that--crazes that circulate or the little quizzes that say "What Color Are You?" and all of those little things that are kind of spammish, that circulate, I never really pay much attention to them. And so I saw the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, I saw it circulate in on a few channels related to that and said, "please, somebody don't nominate me" and I couldn't actually imagine any of my academic friends doing that. And then it was my sister--no it was actually my niece out in Kansas that did it and I went, "Oh! Crap.". And then not only that, she nominated both I and my sister at the same time, so then my sister also added pressure on, said, "Bren, you've got to do this." It's like with family members across the divide, it'd be easier for me to just do it then to sit down and type out the long message about why I'm conflicted to do it. I knew also that it became very personal and would have hurt my niece's feelings if I didn't or if I wrote back to tell her why this was a little… yeah.

H: So there is pressure and guilt and I've seen a few others say that they had trouble with that rhetoric of it as well of pressuring or even bullying or…

BB: a little bullying, yeah, yeah. Maybe not necessarily intended to be bullying but, exactly. My sister said, "You have to do it." Even then watching how people began to critique other people's challenges? "Well, you know, that was a wimpy bucket.", or "You sure there…?". So, to be honest, I actually wonder how many of those people actually went and looked at the website and A) donated money, which was part of the reason for the challenge, or looked up any facts about ALS. I think it really just became about the ice bucket.

I guess I think about this also, Harley, because I'm always talking about how disabilities are relational. It's not just a disability thing that's happening to you and your body, but it's really pinging off not just a context but the relationships you have. That was my experience with watching ALS in the family, how much it really was a whole family thing, and shaking up the family.

H: And as a member of a disability community as you are, and you can speak to this either personally or professionally or both, but, what goes on inside the community when the outside--outsiders--in a way take control of or take charge of or lead a charge of charity?

BB: Or even attention, called to. It's always unsettling. Even, ironically, if good things are coming out of it. So, to go back, connect it to last year, was it, too, when Mandela died and they had the ASL interpreter that was so horrible, and how that circulated out? Part of the thing happening with the deaf community on the ground is like, "Yeah, we've been saying like this for a hundred years!" And that story has happened to each and every deaf person who's ever been alive, about the interpreter who's not really an interpreter. And we all have

stories, but how suddenly it got cracked open and a story that was about us but it wasn't with us. Yeah.

H: So Brenda and I talked a little bit about the different rhetorical elements in the challenge, but let's a take a closer listen to some of the language used in the videos.

Woman: I am accepting the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge!

Man: I accept Sean's challenge…

Young Man: This is the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Go big or go home, baby!

Young woman: OK, I was nominated by Lauren Albright and Joyce Umbria—I hate both of you…

Young woman: I was nominated to the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge by Max Samoyans.

Young Man: This is the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Thank you for the nomination, Tom Sevidible.

Dave Grohl: Hello, my name's Dave Grohl of the Foo Fighters. I am accepting Zac Brown's ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, and furthermore am challenging Jack Black, John Travolta, and Stephen King.

Young woman: So, I was nominated by Celeste…

George W. Bush: I've been challenged by several Americans to bring awareness to the ALS campaign.

Bill Gates: I'm here to join the people bringing attention to Lou Gehrig's disease by taking the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.

Jack Black: As I understand it, I get to challenge three more people.

Young woman: [laughing] I nominate the people below. Let's go! Oh my god, shoot me.

Dave Grohl: You have 24 hours.

Woman: I can't really—I don't know [interrupted by water splashing; gasping]

Girls: [shrieking] Oh, it's so cold! [man laughing] It's so cold! It's so cold! Oh my…

Jack Black: Taste it, suckas! [water splashing] Rahhh!

[water splashing, bucket falling]

Young man: [prompting] For ALS.

Young man and young woman: For ALS! ALS! ALS!

Harley: Now, after seeing him post a really thoughtful commentary on Facebook, I reached out to another scholar for his opinion.

Paul Kei Matsuda: My name is Paul Kei Matsuda and I'd like to talk a little bit about a viral campaign that's going around. Now, this is a great campaign, fundraising campaign. And it has also helped to raise the awareness of many people. I admire people who participate willingly in this campaign, and I also admire people who came up with this idea--this is brilliant. I don't even mind people who use this for their own purposes, to feel good about themselves or to use this to promote themselves, to improve their social image. That's one of the reasons that this campaign has been so successful.

I have not been nominated for this campaign, but if anybody named me in this campaign to take the challenge, I would have to say, "the bucket stops here." And here's why: I am concerned about how language affects people's behavior, through social pressure, particularly. There are lots of different kinds of social pressure that are applied to people every day and not everybody is affected in the same way. But, when some people are affected, I would be very concerned. And this Ice Bucket Challenge campaign actually makes use of the same principle that drives many of the problematic social phenomena. The basic moves of the general ice bucket challenge involves the following steps: 1. You introduce yourself. 2. You mention that you have been challenged to take on this ice bucket challenge. 3. Dump a bucket full of ice water onto your own head or ask someone to do it for you. And then mention that you have made a donation and challenge a few other people to do the same. And this video gets posted online, on YouTube, Facebook, and many other social media sites, and then it goes around, becoming a viral campaign.

Now, when this challenge is done publicly on video, it puts social pressure on those who are named. When a boss at a workplace does this, it puts social pressure on their employees. When you do this to your friend, you're putting a certain amount of social pressure on your friends. Some people are not bothered by it at all, but it becomes a problem with other people are bothered by it because the way this campaign is designed makes it really difficult to say that you don't want to participate. Because to not participate makes you look like a bad person, as if you're not sympathetic to the cause or you don't have enough money or you don't have a sense of humor. And if it's hard to ignore this campaign, it's even harder to say something negative about this campaign. Because when you say something, when you explain why you are not participating, it sounds like you are making an excuse. It can raise questions about your morality, financial capability, or sense of humor. So most people, even if they don't want to participate, it's far easier to accept the challenge and pass it on to other people and let them deal with the social burden. I find all of these moves problematic because they take advantage of practices that limit critical thinking. And at first it legitimizes those practices. Again, I'm not blaming the intent behind this campaign, but I'm worried about the perpetuation of the kind of social act that takes away people's ability to think critically and to make decisions they are comfortable with.

Now, there are some solutions to this and I have seen several examples of people's reaction to this viral campaign that I think is really effective and very considerate. So I'd like to share them with you.

One of them happened with my daughter's friend and her family. When my daughter was named by a good friend from school, the parents of the friend called us and asked us if it was okay to name our daughter in the video that's publically posted. We thought that was very thoughtful of them and we asked our daughter what she wanted to do and she decided to accept the challenge and she decided to donate for the cause out of her own savings, but she decided not to post the video publically. Instead, she sent it to the friend through text messaging.

Another example comes from a former Japanese athlete and TV personality, So Takei. When he was named by a comedian friend, he decided to post something on Twitter saying that he's not participating in this campaign. But he didn't explain much, and I suspect that the lack of explanation may have something to do with the lack of time--if there was a time limit that was imposed--and also the complexity of the social relationships that are complicated by public act of denial or ignoring the challenge, most of which would have social consequences. But later, he explained that he's making a donation without accepting this ice bucket challenge which, by the way, is consistent with the original design of this campaign. You don't have to dump ice bucket. In fact, you either make a donation or dump ice bucket, ice water on your head, but later it got changed to you dump ice water and then make a donation, which actually made this campaign even more effective probably. And So Takei also said that he'd like to make his own principle decisions about his donations, which is great. I'm glad that he stated that.

Another example comes from Takeshi Kaneshiro, a Taiwanese-Japanese actor. He did put his video of ice bucket challenge on YouTube, but, at the same time, he added a message in Chinese. It was a written message superimposed on the video. And in this message, he said that he was happy to see this campaign being so successful in raising many people's awareness of ALS. And he also wished that this was not just a one-time thing or that people were doing this out of pressure of the challenge. He also wished that more people would donate to ALS and also to other important causes.

Another example comes from the United States. It was a video posted by Zachary Levi, a US actor and a singer. I didn't know much about this person until I saw his video and looked up his name. In this video, what I thought was great was that he explained what ALS was, which was not part of many other people's moves in their videos. I think it's great because it helps to raise the awareness of this disease right there without people having to look up what ALS stood for or what it was. He then started saying that he was challenged but then he retracted that and then immediately said that he was nominated. He then nominated everyone who was watching this video right now--he didn't name specific individuals, which also was a great way of taking off the course of nature of this video campaign. And then, he also said that, "I'm nominating everyone not to pour ice water on you, but to go to alsa.org and just donate $5." And when he did that, he really turned this campaign from a campaign that uses social pressure to something that's much more positive and much more effective, I think, in my eyes, without creating all these social tensions, which is the cause of controversy over this campaign.

So, learning from these great examples, I'd like to nominate people who are listening to this video right now, watching this video right now, to go to alsa.org and to make your own

donations of $5 or more. $5 is the minimum amount they accept on the website. And I would also like to encourage people to continue to support this and many other important medical research and people who are affected by various forms of diseases that are not sufficiently funded by public sources such as the government funding. Thank you for listening and have a great day.

H: And so finally I sat down with Mary P. Sheridan, professor at University of Louisville, to talk about the social nature of the challenge and whether it counts as activism.

Mary P. Sheridan: So, I also had a friend die of ALS, so I've run three races in my life and two of them were half marathons, one with and one for my friend with ALS. This was interesting to me because no one ever knows what ALS is. I didn't think of the challenge as activism. So I thought of the challenge as an opportunity. I thought it was a goldmine for fundraising and I think fundraising can be parlayed into research, and that's fabulous. So I thought of it as a brilliant fundraising campaign, but I don't really know if everybody contributed. I don't know if they looked and researched what ALS was. But I did think it was an interesting moment where former presidents and movie stars and professional athletes and sisters and children were caught up in this moment of shared participation--low-barrier, shared participation. I thought the social aspect of it was crucial: you were tagged by somebody who knew you and you then tagged somebody else. It became something that brought people together to talk about something. Now, I think of activism as about change and activism is the possibility of change, whether it's education or action and I don't really know if that happened in this particular campaign, but I do think it was a moment of shared participation around raising awareness and funds to deal with a medical issue. So I think it has the promise of that; I don't really know if it had the pay-off of that, if it actually worked that way, but I do think it had the promise of that.

With ALS, there is this constant retweeting. I mean, it was on the news. The number of people, the range of people, I thought was quite astounding. It became this thing but it didn't really include much about education and it didn't really include much about changing attitudes. Perhaps it was setting the ground for future possibilities, because all of us who donated are going to get hit up again in one year to re-up and hopefully there will be some followup with it so perhaps it was setting the ground? It could be part of an arc that could lead itself toward activism, but like most things, in and of itself, wildly popular but I wouldn't call it activism.

H: I think it's also really interesting that the timing of it came when a lot of other really bad stuff was going on. One of the decisions we made about this podcast--y'know, it's *Kairos*, we want to do something timely--so we've got this, then there's the Ferguson stuff and it was instant: "We're not dealing with Ferguson. We're not going to do a segment on that right now." And so we chose ALS and I was wondering "How many people are really appreciating the diversion of this light, entertaining thing right in the middle"? It reminds me of these funny times…

Mary P.: Well, it's interesting because I think Ferguson is where social media is doing good. Ferguson is the retweeting, is the educating, it's the bringing into circles that might not be educated about something happening now, that people should know about, should be participating in these larger conversations. They're taking video clips like an independent

media centres. The IMC is local activism. I think there's a lot of activism going there. *This* [the ALS challenge] all seems to be a diversion in what I consider problematic ways from what can people do. People can become educated and they can fund this research and those are great things. I don't know if everyone who did the Ice Bucket Challenge got educated or even donated, but I think Ferguson is much more about social action and about raising awareness.

I don't begrudge. I don't have this knee-jerk begrudging of the Ice Bucket Challenge. I thought it was playful and silly, but I would not think of it as activism in a way that I do think there has been a lot of trying to overtly raise awareness and I think the Ice Bucket Challenge, why it was so wildly successful, is because it made so little claim on people. The barrier for entry was very low. It wasn't going to disrupt families by talking about race and power. It safe, it was feel-good, it was playful. And so those are wonderful fundraising marketing opportunities and I think it did what it did very well. I don't begrudge it in any way, I'm just not sure it was activism, and I think activism is about change which means it's about resistance which means it's frequently about being uncomfortable. I think Ferguson raises all of those. So social media, like everything else, depends on how it's used. And for Ferguson and for the ALS challenge, I think they were used in radically different ways and I think there's no problem with that. But to conflate because it was social media, I think those practices of the Ice Bucket Challenge and Ferguson are radically different things.

H: That's a lot to chew on for an otherwise simple social experiment.

C: You're not kidding! But you know, if you need some people to chew on an idea in productive ways, you should talk to Casey Boyle and Nathaniel Rivers.

H: That's right. In the last episode, we heard an excerpt from *PeoplePlaceThings*, and this month you interviewed the producers about how they put together their shows, right?

C: Yep. We want to encourage the Kairos community to produce more content like this, so I talked to Casey Boyle and Nathaniel Rivers to see how they have gotten going with their project. I started off by asking them both how they came up with the title for their show. You'll hear Casey speak first as they answer.

Casey Boyle: So the title. We wanted to have a show that was about situations. What's implied in the title *PeoplePlaceThings* is the idea of the rhetorical situation. Now, we didn't want to call it "Rhetorical Situation", but we thought "PeoplePlaceThings" summed up what rhetorical situations are. They're different configurations, different relationships, different events of people, place, and things. The way that came out is that Nathaniel and I were talking about the title and we thought "people, places, things" and then Nathaniel, I think it was Nathaniel? Right?

Nathaniel Rivers: I believe so.

Casey: ...who [made] a typo in an email back and forth that said "PeoplePlaceThings" and so I went off and looked for the URL for "PeoplePlacesThings" and it didn't work so I looked at his email again and it said "PeoplePlaceThings" and so I went ahead and bought the URL for that. And then I told Nathaniel, "Hey, this is great," and he was like, "Wait a second, it's supposed to be 'PeoplePlacesThings' but then he looked at his email and declared his brilliance, so…

Nathaniel: It had been my plan all along.

Courtney: It's nice because "place" works as both a noun and a verb, so it's in a great grammatical place within the title of your show. It works both ways.

Casey: It's a sentence too.

Nathaniel: Yeah. Although, what's interesting about the title is that so often, at least the episodes we've done so far, is actually, work against the logic of that sentence, which seems to suggest that it's people that are placing things, and oftentimes, things that we're exploring on the show are doing the work of placing people. So, it's oftentimes that we're actually working against the title of the podcast itself.

Casey: Yeah, I think each podcast, if we're successful, will read against that every single time, right?

Nathaniel: Hopefully.

Casey: Yeah, I'll claim that one.

Nathaniel: No, the title is full of unintentional brilliance and then the show itself will be full of… not brilliance.

Casey: [laughs]

Nathaniel: It's both of our interests in how things take part in rhetorical situations and that's what we explore in our own research but it also seemed to be an interesting way of doing an engaging podcast about rhetoric that would look at rhetoric and rhetorical situations by picking up a series of mundane objects, so there's also a sense in which one of the goals of the podcast is just relating rhetoric to everyday life in a new kind of way.

Casey: Yeah, if I could build on that for a second, I think that's another reason we didn't go with something along the lines of "rhetorical situation". That's a pretty specialized term and one thing we wanted to do was to be that--I don't want to say "mediate", because that's a bit too high of a term, but we want to be accessible to all kinds of different audiences: certainly our friends in rhetoric and writing and media, but also, perhaps, to folks who just want to hear an interesting take on some kind of current topic or event or object.

Courtney: Well, from the pieces that I've heard so far--one--the object that you chose to look at is not exactly what I would call "mundane". Y'know? A rover? A space rover?

Nathaniel: That's true. We cheated!

Casey: But "mundane' is relative, right? "Mundane", y'know, think about… well.. yeah. Maybe the rover isn't all that mundane. But it's kind of mundane to itself, right?

Nathaniel: Although its task is just to drive around and take pictures of stuff and collect rocks, so it does sound mundane. Well, and just as we talk about it, it's been doing it longer than anyone thought it was going to and so it's outlived its mission parameters. So now it's doing all that it's doing out of "habit" for the lack of a better word. But, at this point, it has a high enough mundane, habitual kind of movement across Mars.

Casey: And that habit was fueled by Mars itself, right? I mean, the reason why it is able to keep going is that Mars' winds blows the dust off of the solar panels.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Casey: At some point, I think they thought that the solar panels would get dusted up and clogged and you wouldn't be able to see anything but the winds help clear it which helps it keep generating so…

Courtney: I was about to ask if there was anything… if the people were mundane and the thing was mundane in that episode, is there anything mundane about the place?

Nathaniel: Hmm.

Casey: Mars?

Courtney: Well?

Casey: Mars has become mundane, right? I mean, yes and no, I suppose. It's become mundane.

Nathaniel: Which is what was interesting about the whole, the whole rover thing is Mars all of a sudden became mysterious again.

Courtney: That's true.

Casey: Yeah.

Courtney: Alright. How did the two of you get started with the show to begin with? What was your original idea and how did you get going with it?

Nathaniel: Part of it was just wanting to do something like this. We're both avid podcast listeners, so we're both big *99% Invisible* and *Radiolab* podcast listeners and we just like that audio aesthetic that they have. But also, the model: they take very complicated issues and make them fully engaging. And the show themselves, as we listen to them, have a kind of rhetorical quality. They always bring in other people, they're very dialogic in interesting ways, and so I think we just wanted to do that. And then it just became, well, let's do one

about the kinds of things we're interested in, and so, I think that's the way it came about--just thinking more interestingly about other ways of doing scholarship.

Casey: Yeah, and I think there was kind of a moment when it was born, in my basement during Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference in Salt Lake City last year. Nathaniel had come down for the conference and stayed at my house and one night when we came back from going somewhere for conference events, we were up in my basement drinking beer and talking for probably three hours and it just kind of came up. We were talking about scholarship and different forms of scholarship and this is one of them that came up. What about a podcast? And we just started talking about the idea of a podcast. So, I think it was October 28, 2013 that the idea was born.

Nathaniel: There you go.

Casey: There you go.

Nathaniel: And then, I think the logo came next.

Casey: Yeah, the logo came next, but I think if we'd thought about it. There's a bunch of these shows that have come out, like *Drunk History*? And *Drunk Anthropology* now? There's a podcast called *Drunk Anthropology*. I think if we could go back and redo anything, we'd probably call our show *Drunk Rhetoric*, and just start taping these things while we're drinking and let that be what it is.

Nathaniel: That's actually a big conference mode.

Casey: It is, absolutely.

Nathaniel: I think if you go back, probably a lot of things that have happened in our field can be traced back to post-conference-talking-late-at-night-under-the-influence-of-alcohol-as-a-rhetorical-agent.

Courtney: Well, that brings up one of the questions I wasn't going to ask you, but, what's your drink?

Casey: It depends on the situation!

Courtney: Not right now…

Nathaniel: Well, what time is it?

Casey: Yes. Normally, I'm a beer drinker, but when the shots come out, I have to go to tequila every time.

Nathaniel: I'm a beer drinker myself.

Courtney: All right, let's modify this question to say "What is the most rhetorically productive drink on your menu?"

Casey: Beer. Has to be beer. Beer is the drink where it's a slow drink, right?

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Casey: You don't drink a beer. You don't just down a beer. You drink many beers. You never have just one.

Nathaniel: Mmmhmm. I find that it loosens you up but also slows you down. You're a little more limber but you're not overwhelmed by that.

Courtney: Does it make a difference what type of beer it is?

Nathaniel: I don't think so. I normally just adjust beer to the weather.

Casey: Yeah, same here. My usual go-to is an IPA.

Nathaniel: Hoppier, the better.

Casey: Yeah.

Nathaniel: I think hops is underrated as a rhetorical agent.

Casey: [laughs] Go back and look at the Henry Louis Gates stuff and that cop who arrested him. When Obama brought them down, they had beers.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Casey: Horribly staged red, white, and blue beers, but yes, they were beers.

Courtney: Alright, back to the serious questions.

Nathaniel: That was a very serious question.

Casey: It was!

Courtney: It was, actually. I would like to suggest that you do an episode on hops specifically.

Nathaniel: Okay.

Casey: We can do that.

Courtney: The rhetoric of hops.

Casey: That'll be our Drunk Rhetoric episode, Nathaniel.

Nathaniel: Yes. I just like the idea of… I want to use this to measure people: the "international bitterness unit".

Casey: [laughs]

Courtney: Bitterness of beer, not general bitterness, right?

Nathaniel: Well, I would like to make it a more general category. IBUs for all sorts of stuff: a television show or a...

Casey: Being around them makes me bitter?

Nathaniel: or a paper or something. Yes, that person's IBUs are really high. Although that would be the question--is it their IBUs or…

Casey: Or yours.

Nathaniel: or is the IBU somehow relational?

Casey: It's always relational.

Nathaniel: See? This episode is already writing itself.

Casey: I know, right?

Courtney: So, you mentioned *99% Invisible* and *Radiolab*--those are two of my favorite shows also--what else do you like to listen to podcast-wise?

Nathaniel: I've been getting into lately, *Backstory*, which is, and Casey and I think have talked about this, it is three academics. It's actually, I think, they've got a grant. They're in Virginia and one of them is a twentieth-century, one's a nineteenth, and one's an eighteenth, and they're all historians, American historians, and they pick some issue and then they trace it historically. They did one on time, so they did things about how time zones develop in the nineteenth-century and how that changed things and basically take some contemporary issue and then, essentially, they historicize it. It's called *Backstory*; it's pretty cool.

Casey: And one I really like is called *Archipelago*? I think that's how you say it. Archipelago? Or archipelago. As in the islands, right? It's a podcast of… I'm blanking on his name… but he goes around and it's a theory-oriented podcast but it's a really good interview where he just does interdisciplinary theory, critical theory, podcast. And it centers mostly around architecture. It's a really fantastic podcast and usually each episode's about an hour long and it's usually an interview about whatever the guest is working on.

Nathaniel: Another one I like, and I've only heard a few episodes, is *Sound Exploder*?

Casey: Ooh! That's a good one.

Nathaniel: Where they bring on a composer or a musician and then they basically just work through one song, and all that went into composing it and putting it together. And it's pretty fascinating.

Casey: So the idea would be kind of like an exploded diagram. You take a machine of some sort and explode the diagram where each individual piece is separated out from the hole and you can see in one glance how the thing operates as a unit, right? But with its constituent parts. Well, *Sound Exploder* is sort of the same thing where it takes one song and isolates and expands and focuses in on a particular aspect. It's a really good podcast. Good call.

Nathaniel: The one on the *House of Cards* theme song was really good.

Casey: Yes.

Courtney: So, as you've gotten started with your show, certainly my experience so far has been that there are any number of surprising challenges that come up such as how do you record audio, exactly? Y'know, things as fundamental as that, so what challenges have you encountered? How have you gotten through them? And what resources have you been using to get to where you are with the show?

Casey: Yes, we have encountered challenges. As Nathaniel said, we recorded one entire episode and we've recorded several episodes that just haven't really gone anywhere--we didn't put them together. The first one we recorded was great but I don't think we did enough prep work for it and we were just sort of waiting for each other to talk. That was the one on *Her*, do you remember?

Nathaniel: Episode zero.

Casey: Yes. That's somewhere. We have it.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Casey: Episode zero. And we let it be zero. And then the next one we recorded, one of us forgot to turn their mic on…

Nathaniel: That was me. I'll cop to that.

Casey: And it was good too! That was a good one. It clicked.

Nathaniel: It was.

Casey: It was good.

Nathaniel: We nailed it.

Casey: But then we had to redo the whole thing again.

Nathaniel: Which was better, I think, because what we realized was that practicing is important.

Casey: Well, the rhythm and the notion of creating a podcast is difficult because it's serial--it's something that you've got to keep going with. It's got to be a side project that's constant. And when you have big life events like moving, it cuts into that aspect of the seriality that's really important. It's just the repetition of getting this thing done, right?

Nathaniel: Which is different, I think, than regular scholarship. Most regular scholarship isn't serial. You work on it for a while, you might revise it, but the idea of doing something that comes out every month or every two months, and kind of has a schedule to it--it's a different academic model than academics are used to.

Casey: Except maybe teaching.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Casey: But teaching has that sort of… well, it's institutionalized and you have the expectations that you have to be there at a certain time. And so there's all kinds of infrastructure there to keep you on that serial path, but starting up a podcast from nothing, and really for, y'know, nobody in particular, it's tough because there isn't that infrastructure other than the actual podcast itself. Which, if you're relying only on that, then sometimes it's tough to keep it going.

Courtney: Well, I think that brings up a related question, which is, where does podcasting fall within your scholarship plans? Is this a recognized part of your tenure processes? And will it be recognized as valuable by your institutions or are you hoping to move it in that direction? Where are you with that?

Casey: I think that's a really good question, and I don't really know the answer. I think one of the things that Nathaniel and I have talked about with this show is that, yes, we want it to be scholarly, but we don't necessarily view it as scholarship. And so how does that fit in to someone's professional profile? I'm not quite sure yet and I think some of that's going to come down to where the show goes to, where it evolves. *PeoplePlaceThings*, at least the way we began with it, is that it doesn't have a distinct identity quite yet. I think we're going to evolve toward that, and Show 1 is going to look very much different than Show 10. And yes, we might fall into some kind of routine of it being more academic than it currently is, or it might not. That goes back to the idea of seriality--we don't quite know what it is yet.

Nathaniel: Yeah. I think the serial thing is actually really interesting. And I don't know if I ever told Casey I'd signed up for twenty episodes--I appreciate his optimism--there's a way in which, particularly as you're working towards tenure that doesn't really reward long-term projects. There's a kind of immediacy to getting stuff out. And then one of the supposed benefits of tenure is you can take a couple of years to work on something because you've got a little more wiggle room. You can start working on something that won't necessarily produce results, whereas if you're untenured, that's too risky a move. But as far as professional trajectory, I'm looking forward to being in a position where I can say things like,

"We'll just see where this goes," and that's a perfectly viable research agenda. Because it might be that twenty of these…

Casey: I was looking at a hundred.

Nathaniel: …collected and stacked up together actually is a serious scholarly project. Doing it on a serial basis, that's kind of hard to make a case for and to measure what the impact is going to be, so in many ways, whatever value this has for us professionally, or at least institutionally, seems long term. Although, professionally, I think there are a lot of short term, immediate benefits. That we get to do this together. That's in and of itself a benefit. This-- the conversation we're having right now, the ways in which this podcast is already connected us or connected me or connected Casey to people or audiences we didn't have before. And I think the benefit of just going out and having to promote your work differently: creating the Tumblr account, tweeting it, sharing it with people, like actually sort of pressing the flesh to promote your work, because, as Casey said, there's no, uh, I mean up until now there's no necessarily institutional channels that you can put that work into it and so there's that, I guess, additional risk.

Casey: And for me, one of the reasons why, and why I was so keen to do this was the practice of doing itself, right? I teach audio editing in classes here and there, right, and yeah, it's pretty easy to do certain things, but to get the experience of doing a serial, long, long-term kind of project affords you a kind of experience that you can pass on and knowledge that you generate from doing that, that might help students as well, right? So, it's definitely a teaching opportunity for me too.

Courtney: So, why is PeoplePlaceThings on the KairosCast network?

Casey: For me, anyways, one of the benefits is having that infrastructure, right? Having the expectation, the expectation of having it done, having an audience that's already there, and being able to be published alongside other similar or dissimilar shows, right? Being in a network. I think that's really important.

Nathaniel: And I think too, it's given all the other stuff that people do in *Kairos*--what *Kairos* has been doing now for relatively quite a long time--it's good to be at a place where, not only will people exploring those kinds of things be appreciated, but also expected. There's a nice, actually, not only institutional home, but a certain kind of institutional pressure too, to be doing something interesting and taking advantage of the medium and things like that. So, it's not just a place to put it, but also keeps you on your toes in some important ways.

Casey: Absolutely. And I think also that the venture itself, of KairosCast, is something that's interesting for *Kairos*. Despite being an online journal that has done great great great work in multimedia scholarship, it's still published along print-based journal frequency. Two times a year. Three times a year. Whatever, right? Whereas, we all know that we don't need to have that frequency of publication in digital publications, so I think what KairosCast does and what I hope our show helps to do as well is to push the boundaries of multimedia scholarship even further in allowing for a different kind of frequency of publication as well.

Courtney: That's very much what we're hoping to do. Well, I have a related question which is, you two started up this podcast, there are a lot of people in our fields who are starting up podcasts. What is it about this moment that makes either audio media or podcast format appropriate for rhetoricians?

Casey: I don't think you can discount the ease and accessibility of the technology available, right? It's cheap and easy to produce quick podcasts. But also, I think--and one thing you're starting to see, and it's happening outside of academia mainly--is that the models have become really good. We always refer to *99% Invisible*, and that's… when we look back ten years from now, that's going to be a really important series that we'll point back to and say that showed a new model of what podcasting could be and could do.

Courtney: There does seem to be a trend that's moving here for either academics, specifically rhetoricians, I'm not sure, but there are a lot of people who are very interested in audio content. Is every field moving in this direction? Do you have any sense of that?

Nathaniel: I think part of it is that people just want to do a podcast because they like listening to podcasts. I mean, I think there's something about the medium itself that pulls people in.

Casey: There's a certain ambience you can bring in with a podcast that of course you could bring in with a video or even with a well-designed journal article or whatever, even with a regular journal article, but there's a certain exploration to be done, at least with academic podcasts, or pseudo-academic podcasts that deals with the non-signifying, extralinguistic aspects of sound. That's the real work of what *PeoplePlaceThings* is trying to do.

H: Sounds like they're working on some of the same ideas we are.

C: I guess it's sort of unavoidable… audio is still a pretty special case for us in this business.

H: True. I'm certainly learning a lot.

C: Me too! I learned a lot when we interviewed Kyle about his show too.

H: Right—since Kyle's podcast is about learning, that's kind of a requirement. I started this conversation by asking Kyle Stedman what he wants to learn.

Harley: What skill do you most want to learn? I'd be interested to know this. What's something that you want to be able to do that you're not doing right now or that you want to get better at?

Kyle: I want to get better at everything! I want to learn more about actual audio recording. I play around a lot, you know? I plug my $15 USB headset into Audacity and I apply all the effects and I do all the things that I can do, but when it really comes down to knowing if I

were a professional, what kind of mics would I use for what situations and what kind of processing would I do to a voice or to a guitar or to a piano… what are the ways I could record these things better? What are the professional responses to that and how can I mess up with the professional responses and make them more low-key for my situation--which in some ways feels very unprofessional, like I'm someone who's just playing around or doesn't want to spend any money. I want to read books and talk to people and get invited to studios and invite myself to studios--that kind of thing.

Courtney: If your current profession were unavailable, what other career would you like to attempt?

Kyle: My first thought was, "Oh, I really want to be like a writer." But, am I not a writer already? Well, I'd like to be a creative writer, an essayist, and go to creative writing conferences and go to the woods for a week and write about life and fun things. But that just seems like the most expected answer, so, I think if it were more fun, I would want to be… I went on the best tour of my life the other day. Maybe that's extreme. I went on the best tour of my last many years. In Rockford, where I live, there was free tour. We walked up and down the main street downtown with this architect who knows about every single building, and he just told us the stories of the people who lived there, when it was built, what it used to be, and how many bars there used to be and what used to happen there. So I would love to be that guy--I want to take people down the street and know a lot of cool things that I tell people and give them that experience.

Harley: So, Kyle, why don't you tell us a little about what you're thinking about for this show? What's it going to be about? Who's it for? All that good stuff.

Kyle: Definitely. I want to talk about teaching with no doors closed. I want to talk about whatever comes up and I think of myself as a teacher. You know, I'm at a teaching school, I'm teaching 4-4, mostly first-year composition, junior-level rhetoric, technology, and creative writing. Those three mixed together. So I have a lot of ways that technology intersects with that and a lot of ways that it doesn't. I want to especially think about what tools I use. I want to think about what people I collaborate with. I want to think about what resources I turn to. And I kind of want to figure out that stuff out loud. I think I'm approaching less like a "I have all the answers to tell you" because I clearly don't, but I'm a practitioner who likes to talk to people and who likes to make friends and likes to learn things, so I think this is kind of a me-learning-things-out-loud process with other people and with you.

Courtney: That sounds like the most fun kind of way of learning a new skill I can think of.

Kyle: Well, I have been thinking a lot about… As someone who's studying sonic rhetoric, someone who's studying sound and music and have been for a while, I am really passionate about trying to do work in sound. I don't want to just write things about it, I actually want to produce it and I've been trying to do that more and more so a podcast is a natural way to get my voice out there, to get practice in recording, editing, interviewing people, and actually in putting some of these possibilities that I've been dreaming about in writing into practice.

Courtney: Say some more about your interest in making sound and how you're predisposed to want to take me up on the offer. What made you ready for it?

Kyle: There's a short answer and there's a long answer. The medium answer is that a lot of the work I've been doing for a long time has been building towards a study of sound. I'm really interested in remixes. I'm really interested in fan communities--people who get together online and share the ways that they're taking the media they love and doing cool new things with it. A lot of times that involves using sound in a video. I'm trying to think how can I pair these visual texts that I love with new sounds and put together in a community.

When I was in graduate school and I was trying to think what was going to come next from that interest in remixing and fandom, it was very natural to think, well wait, I was a music minor in undergrad. I've always been the classical Western concert music world, but also interested in any other weird music that I could find. So it was very natural to take that idea of remixing and multimedia and fandom and making new things and think, well, wait a minute, let's see what the music theorists have to say. Let's see what all these other bodies of scholarship that are really about creating texts, creating non-discursive texts, which is something we talk about in rhetorics. It made a lot of sense to take some of that scholarship and start applying some of it to the rhetoric and composition world. So, I've been thinking about that and writing about that for a long time now. So, it's natural to want to do that out loud--not just be musical but to be using sound, to be using my voice and body to create effects in people.

Harley: Yeah, yeah. And I think that segues nicely to one of the other questions on the list. Thinking about rhetoricians and teachers of rhetoric and digital multimodal composition--the people who we are--what are the advantages to working in audio or podcast media?

Kyle: Well, I think the simplest answer is the practical answer: the portability of it, how it's so easy to grab a podcast and listen to it in the car or on the headphones when you're moving around. I think what I am more interested in is the way that audio can give you a connection to the emotions, can give you a connection to effecting people in more than just this logical way. We can add music, we can add sound effects to build a sense of tension, to build a sense of comfort and meaningfulness and all of those good things that we do with sound. We do it with our tone of voice almost naturally. You can hear the excitement someone has about something without having to be trained in it. There's a lot of ways we can grab hold of a listener. I like that idea. A lot of people who write about sound talk about how you can't close your ears. Sound is something that surrounds you and, "attack" is too strong and angry a word, but it's all around you no matter what. When you're creating sound for someone you have that responsibility to take that heavily, to not take that lightly, to realize that you're creating more of an experience than you can with just words.

I think, this almost sounds silly, I think I don't know my audience that well yet and I don't know myself that well yet which makes me not sure how weird to be. In the last few weeks, I've been doing a lot of writing of exercises that students could do with sound. To help them explore the possibilities for manipulating recordings and creating something new. I've been telling myself, "just let it all out" --dream and don't stop and think oh this has to be something they can do; this has to be something that isn't too weird. I've been in the very "everything's okay" dreaming phase. So part of me expects to come to a podcast in that

same way and think, if I want to throw in a sound effect, if I want to be sort of *Twin Peaks*-y with someone talking backwards, if I want to do this, then YES. Do it. This is the time to let sound do what sound can do, that you couldn't do on paper. Then part of me, the more conservative part, says "Well, wait a minute". Let's think of how many people are listening to this. Let's think about how different levels of comfort with technology different listeners might have and try to approach people at where they're at. So, I think the challenge for me is a rhetorical challenge. It's what do I actually want to do and who do I want to help and how do I want to help?

When it comes to the technology side of things, the putting things together, I'm not the expert, but I have enough experience with layering things together, recording interviews, fixing levels and mixing and exporting and that stuff feels good and kind of fun actually. It's more the rhetorical challenge.

Harley: I would be curious what podcasts you listen to and, perhaps, draw inspiration from.

Kyle: You know, I don't listen to that many podcasts. Is that really bad to say that? When I catch *RadioLab*, I love *RadioLab.* When I catch *This American Life*, I love *This American Life.* I think of those as kind of--if I'm doing the dishes and no album sounds good, I'm like, "What do I want to listen to while I'm doing the dishes or cooking dinner?" That's kind of my standard. And if ever I'm like, "Well, I don't think I feel like *RadioLab*, I'll just put it in," I've never once been disappointed. And I think partly I love both of those because of the way they work music in to help affect emotions, like I said before, I like the embracing of weirdness. I just love that moment at the end of every *This American Life* where they take a clip from earlier in the episode and take it and act as if that clip is answering some other question. They take it out of context and make it say something that it wasn't originally saying. And that, I mean, that's my dream! I've been doing that since 9th grade. I would invite friends over and say "Hey, talk in the microphone for a little while." And then I'd take that tape and rerecord little clips of it to make it sound like they were saying dirty stuff. You know, because it was 9th grade and that was so fun. But that idea of manipulating what I record and what I got. I get excited when I hear about other people doing it really well.

But besides that, I keep seeing other podcasts and I say, "Oh, I should listen to that more!" And I've listened to *This Rhetorical LIfe* a few times but it's not part of my daily what I think about. There's not like a routine of "On Mondays, I'll download the most recent ones. I'll listen to it in the car on this day." Not that you only listen to them during a commute, but I feel like that's when I listened to more was when I was commuting to my PhD program. I had a really long drive. And then besides that, if I'm in front of the computer, I've got something else to do--I can't listen to something.

Courtney: So Kyle, what do you think the relationship is going to be between your show, *Plugs, Play, Pedagogy* and *Kairos*?

Kyle: I think part of *Kairos*'s mission includes teaching, includes pedagogy, so I like the idea of slotting into that. On my campus, I've kind of accidentally become one of the technology people. You know how that happens, how you go to a school and you're not afraid of technology and I like it, sure. So I go to a conference called Computers and Writing every year. So everyone is like, "Oh my goodness, you can help with all the things we need help

with!" And deep down you're like, "I remember thinking about that six years ago." (You don't say that.) So I think I fit in as someone who is an everyday practitioner of technology as part of my teaching in an integral way and someone who wants to share what I've got and wants to learn more from other people about what they're up to. So I think my down-to-earthness, my wanting to get and share ideas fits well with the kind of way I think of *Kairos*. That's what I go to *Kairos* for. I go to the wiki to find out about what other people are up to, and I go to every section in a way that feels like sharing. I see stuff and think, "Oh this is like someone I just saw at a conference last month" and he's by buddy now, and now I want to know what he can tell me. So it's kind of giving back.

C: We think you'll enjoy both of these podcasts. You'll find links to their first episodes on the KairosCast page, kairos.technorhetoric.net/kairoscast, and more will be coming very soon.

H: And we're going to add another podcast to our schedule aren't we?

C: We are--we're excited to share *Not Your Mama's Gamer* with you coming up soon.

H: Cool. And we're going to talk to host, Samantha Blackmon, on an upcoming episode of KairosCast. I'm really excited about this--she was one of the keynotes at this past Computers and Writing in Pullman, and she was outstanding.

C: She's terrific. But we can't get all our content from these folks. We want to encourage KairosCast listeners to send us segments for upcoming shows too. We'll take your ideas, but we'd like it even better if we could hear your voices.

H: Yes, please do. If there's a topic you want to see addressed, something timely, put together an audio piece and send it to us.

C: If you aren't sure if your idea is right, email us at kcast@technorhetoric.net and we'll talk through it with you and help you get started.

H: KairosCast is, after all, a section of Kairos just like Praxis or Disputatio or any of the others--it's just that your submission to KCast might be shorter, more timely, and audio or video without another webtext component.

[exit music fades in]

C: We're eager to get some tutorials from you, too. Or maybe go do a quick interview with a colleague. We'd love to hear what you can make.

H: So visit the KairosCast page at kairos.technorhetoric.net/kairoscast for resources from this episode, including links to the shows we featured.

C: And… your ice bucket challenge video? Are we going to put that up there?

H: Ehhhh... OK, I'll put it up.

C: Thanks for listening to KairosCast. I'm Courtney Danforth

H: and I'm Harley Ferris. We'll talk to you again s—

[tires screech, music stops]

C: Hey wait a second everybody, not so fast! I forgot to tell you about two other podcast episodes that address the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge in interesting ways. Look for links to *Culture Gabfest* "Mmmmm, Simpsons" edition from Slate, and the "ALS Ice Bucket Challenge: How Things Go Viral and the Neuroscience of Mindfulness" from The Torch in the resources section of this episode of KairosCast. OK, you can turn the music back on now, Harley!

[exit music returns]

C: KairosCast is produced by Courtney Danforth and Harley Ferris.

H: It is distributed by Kairos, Doug Eyman, Senior Editor.

C: Our editor is Cheryl Ball.

H: If we had interns, their names would go here.

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[music ends]