Introduction: #SocialmediaShakespeares

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Abstract

In their introductory essay, Maurizio Calbi and Stephen O'Neill explore the interrelations between social media and Shakespeare(s), providing a theoretical consideration of both categories that ultimately moves toward an argument for their rhizomatic intersections. Shakespeare increasingly "becomes" through social media (in a Deleuzian sense), and indeed, forms of social media are rearticulated through Shakespeare. The essay also guides the reader through this special issue in which the contributors variously map, define, scrutinize, and challenge social media, Shakespeare and their uncanny convergences.

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https://storify.com/mediaShakes/socialmediashakespeares#publicize

Which Shakespeare? Uncanny Return(s)

(A film clip is available in the HTML version of this document.)

To experience "Shakespeare(s)" on social media can be uncanny. Consider the Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare remediated or reanimated as a video, the simulation of moving lips bringing a haunting quality to Jaques's melancholic "seven ages of man" monologue. Or consider the Twitter profile @Wwm_Shakespeare. When we select the profile page of this Twitter handle, the ordinariness of Twitter's dialogue box takes on a ghostly dimension: "Tweet to William Shakespeare." These different screens and boxes, from a YouTube video to a Twitter profile, are just some of ways in which social media produce Shakespeare. Perhaps in the busy, ubiquitous, and networked mediascape of the contemporary moment, "Shakespeare" circulates like a specter. It does not so much appear as re-appear — in terms of its affective presence, it is uncannily close and yet tantalizingly remote (Calbi 2013, 6). This collection of essays addresses the complex, often puzzling, and heterogeneous presence of Shakespeare in social media as an ongoing, potentially reiterable process that deserves critical attention in its own right. First of all, this process prompts questions about the self-evidence of such terms as "Shakespeare" and "social media." What

kind of "Shakespeares" emerge, or re-emerge, through social media platforms that possess their own set of medium-specific attributes? What kind of impact do these platforms have on the ubiquity of the Bard as cultural icon and source of authority? Conversely, what difference, if any, does the specificity and singularity of "Shakespeare" make in the world of social media? As these questions suggest, we are interested in the intersection of social media and Shakespeare, which may be a relation of mutual implication. For our purposes here, we understand "social media Shakespeares" to denote Shakespeare content or digital objects that are variously produced, shared, and engaged with on particular platforms and networks (such as Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube); as such a networked ensemble, they instance the many-to-many communication or multicasting that any user of social media will be familiar with, as well as the narrow-casting one makes to one's network of friends or followers.

These essays combine to underline three interrelated elements of social media Shakespeares. First, social media networks are regarded as increasingly significant sites of Shakespeare's cultural currency and capital, especially considering how such networks entail the convergence of professional and amateur media users and producers. Second, social media networks are understood as teaching and learning resources. Third, the potential for social media networks to function as research tools for Shakespeare scholars is established. Among these categories, there emerges a sense of the different constituencies of audience for social media Shakespeares: that of student, teacher, researcher, fan, and creative producer.

The proliferation of Shakespeares on social media networks licenses Shakespeare scholars to repose a question they never tire of asking: what constitutes "Shakespeare"? The indicative scare quotes around "Shakespeare" often function as a performative gesture, our field's way of differentiating the historical figure from a wider cultural phenomenon, which encompasses adaptations across a range of genres and media as well as citations and appropriations in popular culture. The forthcoming *Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia* (itself a sign of Shakespeare's considerable cultural afterlives and the ongoing critical interest therein) employs the acronyms THWS ("The Historical William Shakespeare") and WSCI ("William Shakespeare as Cultural Icon") for these relational categories (n.d.). There has been considerable scholarly work on Shakespeares' afterlives; recent work goes so far as to problematize the distinction between Shakespeare and "Shakespeare(s)," arguing that (mediatized) survival — or *survivance* — is an intrinsic part of the "life" of the Bard (Burt and Yates 2013, 54), rather than an ex-post-facto addition.[1] This might, in turn, raise another question: are social media in Shakespeare studies something new, or is there a sense of déjà vu as the field takes notice of the latest media

or technologies where Shakespeare is produced, received, and experienced? We can recognize similarities between the current interest in social media Shakespeare and that of Shakespeare and film or Shakespeare and popular culture a decade or more earlier. There have been many critical texts in these areas (Burt 2007; Cartelli and Rowe 2007; Burnett and Wray 2006; Lanier 2002; Lehmann 2002; Shaughnessy 2007); and of course, critical interest in Shakespeare and film continues to be a feature of the field, as evidenced by as evidenced by recent work in this area (e.g. Burnett 2012; Ryle 2014). This is not to imply a "natural" passing of scholarly attention from one sphere of cultural production to another, nor is it intended to suggest a chronological accretion of media accomplishment. In fact, we are willing to concede that the massive speed with which Shakespearean content circulates within social networking platforms may also be read as a sign of how the "newly new" quickly recedes into obsolescence: for instance, the immediacy of the Shakespearean tweet of today becomes the hard-to-retrieve archive of tomorrow.[2] Similar debates occur now as did then: the promise and also threat of a new technology, its heralding of a "post-textual Shakespeare" (Lanier 2011), coupled with a deepening understanding of the specificity of the new medium. However, the advent of social media does mark significant developments in the ongoing story of what "Shakespeare" is and means. In particular, social media involve hitherto unprecedented degrees of scale, connectivity, and distribution that foster and shape how we encounter Shakespeare within the contemporary cultural landscape.[3]

Shakespeare As Social Media, Social Media As Shakespeare

Shakespeare studies has already proved keen to investigate and analyze social media and digital platforms (Carson and Kirwan 2014; Desmet 2008; Calbi 2013; O'Neill 2015), a sign of what we regard as the field's interpretative openness. The discipline has been variously excited, extended, and challenged by social media. It has been appropriately critical, too (see O'Dair 2011), and sometimes beleaguered. The following essays register these different energies and also critically reflect upon them. The contributors are united in a willingness to approach the *interrelation* of social media and Shakespeare, without privileging one category over the other. This "Shakespeare*eccentric*" approach, to borrow Richard Burt's phrase, might worry more traditionally oriented scholars (2007, 1-9). Or, to express the point another way, if social media are regarded as a legitimate mode of engagement with Shakespeare, are traditional ways of experiencing the plays (as texts to be read, or as plays in performance) displaced? Certainly, there are legitimate concerns that as we become "people of screens" (Kelley 2008), Shakespeare is increasingly a post-textual entity. However, this reality need not be framed in terms of loss or dilution (see Smith 2014; Karim-Cooper 2014), but, rather, potential for new challenges and pleasures to be gained

in experiencing Shakespeare through a range of media. Indeed, we understand social media to have paradoxical effects, propelling the Shakespeare scholar away from Shakespeare as a primary object of study, but also bringing him/her back towards it, a return that might be described as Shakespeare*centric*. But, of course, given the dynamic interrelation of Shakespearecentricity and Shakespeareeccentricity (Burt 2007, 1-9), this Shakespeare*centric* movement is not a placid return to an "origin"; it cannot be divorced from an awareness of "Shakespeare" as an unhomely "home," the site of ongoing processes of displacement and mediatization.

The challenges of social media are conceptual as well as methodological. New words and concepts (such as hashtag, meme, the prosumer, medium specificity) are entering the vocabulary of Shakespeare criticism. Social media may even signal new forms of Shakespeare criticism, as scholars increasingly frequent digital environments and use these as additional modes for communicating and exchanging research. The intersection of social media and Shakespeare raises questions about methodology, too, because it appeals to the interests of Shakespeare studies and also media studies. How we approach, interpret and understand Shakespeare's social media footprints may depend on our own methodological perspective. Stepping outside one's disciplinary focus — or gaining a critical distance from it — may prove productive as we theorize and reflect on Shakespeare *in* and also *as* social media. This point is foregrounded in the playful title of the opening essay by Kylie Jarrett and Jeneen Naji: "What Would Media Studies Do?" As editors, we very much wanted to hear from media studies scholars and to use the opportunity of this special issue to develop inter-disciplinary dialogue between scholars of social media and those of Shakespeare. Jarrett and Naji theorize Shakespeare on social media as a series of "interactions between [various] actors, many of which are not human." Building on the familiar hardware/ software/wetware dynamic (see Winthrop-Young 2010), they draw attention to media within the category "social media Shakespeare(s)," and invite us to understand each iteration of Shakespeare in that setting as "trilogical, technosocial communication." Rather than prioritizing the Bard, therefore, Jarrett and Naji invite a consideration of social media Shakespeares as the consequence of a set of interactions between highly dynamic actors and their respective affordances (in the technical and also socio-economic senses of that word).

This approach has intriguing implications for how Shakespeare studies interprets social media, calling on the scholar or researcher to extend her/his existing repertoire of analytical skills. It encourages us to do more than representational analyses of social media Shakespeares, and to pay closer attention to medium specificity, the practices and culture of a particular platform, and the affective human user. For a deeper sense of what Jarrett and Naji's theory looks like in praxis, readers might turn to the contributions by Kirk Hendershott-Kraetzer and Geoffrey

Way in section one, "Shakespearean / Social Media Identities." In his phenomenological analysis of Shakespeare and other Juliets on Facebook, Hendershott-Kraetzer implicitly enacts Jarrett and Naji's trilogical approach as he considers the interconnections between the particular social networking site, agentive users' appropriation of a Shakespearean character as mutable signifier, and identity politics. Facebook Juliets are interpreted as the function of contemporary media culture's "prosumers," where users blur more traditional lines between the media consumer and the producer. Working as an amorphous digital collective, the creators of Juliet pages or avatars on Facebook simultaneously consume the idea of Shakespeare's Juliet and create "it" anew. Here, social media disperse *and* preserve Shakespeare as an always-already mediated thing (Worthen 2008, 55-75), the function of interactions between the technology, the user and context. Social media may have a similar bearing on identity, which becomes or evolves through these cyber-Juliets.

Geoffrey Way's essay also addresses how identity is mediated through social media, though the focus here is on how institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival deploy various online platforms to present an institutional identity. Paying close attention to platform specificity, Way establishes how technologies function as mediating agents between these institutions and their users. For institutions whose primary medium is the theater, social media platforms offer practical opportunities to go where audiences already are and, as he puts it, to "perform relevance." There are creative opportunities, too, in terms of affording access to aspects of the production or to the theatrical event itself. Access, as Way elaborates, is not merely technological, but also entails more discrete questions about what content is made freely available and how such decisions reverberate on the institution's identity and mission. Again, the affordances of a particular technology are crucial: for instance, chronological content delivery on Twitter and Pinterest demands a high frequency of posts to maintain audience exposure. Facebook's update culture and the site's algorithmic prioritizing of posts, as Way reminds us, realize a different set of demands to create standout content. As existing platforms change and new ones develop, Shakespeare institutions will need to actively develop clear goals and objectives about the mediating role of technologies in generating and engaging different constituencies of audience.

What emerges in the above examples is how social media platforms are formative to the circulation of Shakespeares. In productions from vernacular cultural or those from institutional contexts, Shakespeare's capital is in flow, the Bard's currency (re)iterated — although, as Christy Desmet argues in her essay on YouTube, the mutations of Shakespeare's cultural capital on social media may be more accidental and less over-determined when compared to other, more established forms of Shakespeare adaptation. We move from an understanding of social media platforms

as content-delivery systems for Shakespeare to regarding Shakespeare as social media (and vice versa), a point we explore in more detail later. What also emerges here is an understanding of social media Shakespeares as a "networked public," in danah boyd's sense of "the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (boyd 2011, 39). In a related formulation, Jeremy Hunsinger notes how "social media interfaces engage us through interactivity and the appearance of co-presence, community, and, in the end, the appearance of social connection" (2013, 9). Inherent in social media, therefore, is the potential for a networked Shakespeare public.

The Shakespeare Network

As "we," an amorphous digital collective, share Shakespeare digital objects, in the form of a Pin on Pinterest, a YouTube video shared to followers on Twitter, or a meme favorited on Tumblr, we embed Shakespeare into our mediated, networked world and key into shared Shakespearean lives. Behind these social media practices might lurk different conceptions of context, and of audience, as in boyd's recent essay on teens' context-driven negotiation of social media, an essay in which she notices how some networks such as Tumblr are imagined as interest-driven, while others such as Facebook are friendship-driven (2014, 225). Yet, considering the intermedial nature of social media, such categories cannot be entirely discrete. Among the myriad of examples of social media Shakespeare networks, the exchanges of scholars on Twitter come to mind, and not just synchronous with gatherings at major Shakespeare conferences such as SAA (the Shakespeare Association of America, where the user-generated hashtag #shakeass has gained official sanction) but also active tweeting by academics such that the tweet itself becomes a mode of scholarly exchange and engagement (and perhaps of criticism, too). Or there is the interactive nature of Tumblr blogs like *incorrect shakespeare quotes* that invites followers to submit their own parodic adaptation as *not*-Shakespeare, as in "What kind of white shit is this? — Othello, the entire play" ("What" 2015).

Jeremy Hunsinger also draws attention to social media as "places . . . that *inhabit us* as we imagine ourselves in them and using them" (2013, 9; emphasis added). This is a useful reminder of the fact that the collective "we" of social media users can hardly be modeled upon "traditional," idealistic notions of the self-sufficient, liberal-humanist subject who is fully present to itself as it moves from one networking platform to another. Even more than "traditional" media (especially mass media), social media, by inhabiting us, articulate "a general mediality that is constitutive of the human as 'biotechnical' form of life" (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, ix).[4] As Mitchell and Hansen argue more generally in connection with notions of "media," they are an "environment

for the living" (rather than "a narrowly technical entity or system") that not only bears witness to the "fundamental relationality" of the human as affective bodily interface, but also instigates an "openness to alterity" (xii).[5]

However, when speaking of the potential relationality and openness to alterity inscribed in social media, one often has the feeling that one may be dealing with the *appearance* of connection rather than the thing itself. Among the consequences of this dynamic is the possibility that as users/practitioners of social media, we feel a diminished responsibility to the absent/present other. The repercussions of this aspect of social media for Shakespeare scholars are pursued in the second section, "Responsible Networks." Valerie Fazel's essay alerts scholars to the ethical complications around researching YouTube Shakespeare, especially in relation to videos featuring human subjects. Noting that a fundamental of ethical research is responsibility to the other, Fazel importantly asks what later risks are being generated now through the capture, archiving, and analysis of videos in scholarly publication. For a discipline like our own, accustomed to literary and cultural studies approaches, social media productions require new methods and ethics. Taking account of developments in media studies, Fazel concludes with a useful checklist for the Shakespeare scholar to reflect upon. Among the items raised here is whether, as scholars, we should make contact with videographers, a question that is not only an important one of research ethics but also about the potential of social media as a point of exchange between the Shakespeare scholar and producer/user/fan.

Lisa Starks-Estes's essay also considers social media as a site of exchange — in her case, between Shakespeare scholars. Starks-Estes set up "Shakespeare Friends" as a group on Facebook in 2010. Her essay reflects on the group, which now has over 500 members worldwide. Starks-Estes attends closely to Facebook's affordances and culture, but more interestingly still, teases out the implications of facing the other through this mediated communication. Turning to Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of intersubjective ethics, an ethics informed by recognition of and responsibility to the other, Stark-Estes invites us to interpret the mini-networked public that is "Shakespeare Friends" as a supportive space characterized by a spirit of exchange and connection to others. This runs counter to familiar critiques of Facebook, which regard it as less the social than the narcissistic network (Lovink 2011, 38-49). Starks-Estes considers the platform's deleterious aspects but eloquently suggests how, in the case of an affinity group like "Shakespeare Friends," Facebook can coax us into collaborative, collegial, and responsible modes of communication.

Social Media Shakespeare As Teaching Platforms

Shakespeare scholars have, unsurprisingly, shown interest in exploring the teaching and learning affordances of social media networks and platforms, as well as the genres and cultures of vernacular productions shared in these settings. The essays in section three, "Modes and Models of (In)Attention," offer detailed assessments of social media as Shakespeare learning resource and as cultural practice from a range of perspectives. With Christy Desmet's essay, we return to YouTube Shakespeare; here, though, the concern is with the attrition of vernacular productions. The title of Desmet's essay alludes to Richard Lanham's influential account of the information age as an economy of abundant content but a scarcity of human attention. In this scenario, we become the resource being competed over (Lanham 2006, xi), and the nature of content changes accordingly. Situating YouTube Shakespeare videos within YouTube's attention economy, Desmet reflects on what might be losing out — in particular, vernacular or amateur productions emerging from various cultural contexts (such as school and youth culture to fan practices and home-video production), the kinds of videos one associates with YouTube's formative years. However, Desmet is interested in the wider (and less cited) dimension of Lanham's argument, where he considers digital productions as enabling dynamic modes of expression (combining text, image, and sound) that call upon the viewer/reader to notice — and also take pleasure in — the competing modes that are in play. Applying this model to YouTube Shakespeare allows for a more nuanced understanding of vernacular productions on the video-sharing network. As Desmet demonstrates, a range of factors account for why some videos generate high view counts and others don't (including YouTube's algorithmic determination of relevance, chance, competition from commercially produced content, and the imitative nature of some amateur content). Shakespeare videos need not be valued or attended to in terms of a crude economics of views or hits. Nor should amateur Shakespeare videos be regarded as enclosed within YouTube, which emerges in Desmet's analysis as a host rather than a perdurable archive. The meaning and significance of these videos might be more productively related to the mutable networks of affiliation (encompassing peers, teachers, parents, and self-identifying Shakespeare fans) that are fundamental to their production and reception.

The value of video productions as modes of engagement with Shakespeare are highlighted in Kyle DiRoberto's essay. Drawing from her own teaching praxis and the experiences of learners in her class with YouTube and Twitter as well as debates about new media technologies in education, DiRoberto unfolds a suggestive correlation between Shakespearean drama and social media as mutually productive loci of liberatory "new" literacies and a sense of play. The YouTube video, either as an item produced and then shared on the platform or as a performance to be viewed and analyzed as part of in-class assignment, becomes a powerful catalyst for student engagement. And when combined with Twitter, engagement can evolve into questioning supposedly set or received

interpretations of the texts. Through these and other examples, DiRoberto's advocacy of social media as enabling technologies for literacy and critical thinking is persuasive and, indeed, salutary. Suggesting that Shakespeare teachers leave behind older anxieties about the predations of the digital, she indicates that the real risk lies in denying students the opportunity to learn more about online environments, to develop new literacy skills, and to discover how they might interact and collaborate as learners and in learning communities.

A different approach is evident in Jennifer Roberts, Shawn DeSouza-Coelho, and Toby Malone's essay on the authors' experience of designing a pilot virtual game with embedded links to social media called *Staging Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet edition)*. The primary objective of the game is to develop Shakespeare literacy among young learners (11-15 years) and, in particular, to instill in this cohort a sense of theatricality and the semiotics of the stage through a range of interactive features. Like DiRoberto, then, the authors are persuaded by the logic that teachers should go where learners, as denizens of the digital, already are, and integrate Shakespeare into their habitual uses of new media. However, reflecting further on the theory and praxis of "social pedagogical game design," Smith, DeSouza-Coelho, and Malone ultimately find themselves wondering about the efficacy of their prototype design and its social media features (for example, players can post to Facebook about their status or adopted role in the game). The authors express epistemological doubt as to whether game worlds can generate the illusion of theatrical experience, or indeed if such a goal is even desirable. This is less about a presumed hierarchy of theatrical experience over a virtual experience of theatricality, or about a hierarchy of affective intensities, than about asking if we need to alter expectations around what a Shakespeare game should look like and do in the first place. To this end, Smith, DeSouza-Coelho, and Malone outline a new aesthetic for social gaming Shakespeare.

Are We Being Social Yet? Content, Connectivity, and Exchange

The essays combine to suggest several recurring and overlapping issues about social media Shakespeares. Among the terms and concepts we suggest are central to a consideration of social media Shakespeares, as a critical object of analysis in its own right, are networked publics, connection, collaboration, platform specificity, affect, pedagogy, and the interface and/or the ethics of facing the other. Where contributors focus on a particular platform, they remind us that social media Shakespeares are a convenient collective for particular, platform-specific iterations of Shakespeare; as such, it becomes appropriate to refer to Facebook Shakespeare, YouTube Shakespeare, Twitter Shakespeare, and so on to recognize how their respective generic features shape use and, therefore, forms of communication, connection, and participation. Alert to the

relation of the micro to the macro, contributors are also mindful that social media platforms are not discrete entities but rather converge with and spread into each other (Jenkins 2006).

Fundamentally, then, social media are networks, and their computational operations are geared toward the flow of information or content. As Lev Manovich reminds us, the efficient flow of content is crucial for the commercial organizations that create social media platforms — as is the generation of more visitors/users, since these constitute lucrative data to be sold on to advertisers or other companies (2009, 326). Moreover, one could argue, the interaction among these visitors/users is not alien to the "neo-liberal" economic imperatives that subtend the expansion of social media. As Tiziana Terranova lucidly identifies, from a largely Foucauldian perspective, the development of digital social networks goes hand in hand with the "direct integration of the social relation into a market-oriented economy," the "capture" of the "social relation" (as interactivity amongst participants, for instance) "within the marketing and monetizing mechanisms of technology companies such as Google and Facebook" (2015, 114).[6] Yet, as she also emphasizes, one cannot exclude "alternative deployments of social network technologies" (125), and, by extension, alternative productions of the "social" that somehow exceed economic imperatives without claiming to be entirely separated from it. As we have begun to describe, Shakespeare in/as social media may be such an alternative deployment. We also want to consider here a related argument within theorizations of social media according to which the content flowing from individual nodes — whether "Shakespearean" or not — may be of secondary importance to the fact of connection itself, to the articulation of the "social relation" *as* (mere) connection. Indeed, Mark Hansen identifies "sheer connectivity" as new media's operational logic (2010, 180).[7] If content primarily — or even merely — serves and plays suitor to connectivity in and of itself, what then of the various Shakespeares shared across social media? Is Shakespeare incidental?

From a literal perspective, the answer is yes, because to the computational network everything is binary code and HTML. This reality applies to Shakespeare content on social media as it does to any other content online (O'Neill 2015, 275). As the essays here suggest, Shakespeare as cultural phenomenon is increasingly a consequence of, or something that *happens* (to think more precisely about "incidental"), because of social media. Although the network might be indifferent to Shakespeare's cultural prestige, we would caution against regarding Shakespeare as mere data, or as a secondary, minor actor in the dynamic. The inherent risk in the sheer connectivity argument is that content is reduced to data, and so too is the agency of the users who variously engage with or produce that content, doing so from particular social and cultural contexts. Mark Hansen also stresses that "sheer connectivity" is not the whole story, and that there is plenty of room for the

political and aesthetic transformation of new media (2010, 181-184).[8] According to Manovich, media content can be interpreted "as *tokens* used to initiate or maintain a conversation" (2009, 326; emphasis added), broadly, across time and space. For Manovich, this is sign and symptom of the primacy of (mere) "connection"; it represents some kind of phatic function within social media — of media transmitting themselves, as it were — over and above the specificity of content. But his argument can also be interpreted differently and suggests itself as a productive way of thinking about Shakespeare on social media. Within digital social networks, Shakespeare content can become a gift, a means of communing with another — as in Starks-Estes's consideration of "Shakespeare Friends" on Facebook, but also in terms of habitual practices such as sending a YouTube video or a Tumblr meme to a friend by email or a messaging app, or sharing such items on a social media platform. As with Derrida's understanding of the problematic of the gift (1992), this is a "gift" that does *not* necessarily reinscribe itself in an economy, be it "neo-liberal" or not; it does not unproblematically belong to a circuit of exchange that closes in upon itself. In other words, this "Shakespearean" gift can be seen as part of a largely "an-economic" exchange, like the "infinite" love and bounty Juliet speaks of in *Romeo and Juliet*: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep: the more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite" (2.2. 133-35).

Spreadable Shakespeare, or the Rhizomatic Bard

It is also useful to return to *converge* and particularly *spread* here as metaphors for social media, and to Jenkins's emphasis on the circulation of content through formal and informal networks. Updating his earlier work on media convergence, Jenkins (writing with Sam Ford and Joshua Green) cautions against interpreting media users as "data sets" and instead advocates user agency in spreading media. How networked individuals or communities of media users variously produce, discuss, appraise, or circulate content is generative, the authors argue (2013, 177). At the same time, they share Manovich's consciousness as to the commercial imperatives of social media. The spreadable media model encourages us to regard social media Shakespeares as not simply a consequence of a new media desire or logic to connect, but also as the product of agentive users (not exclusively "human"), and indeed of Shakespeare's cultural ubiquity. The Shakespeare quotation as Tweet or the Juliet Facebook page may be incidental within the overall superabundance of social media content, but as social media practices, they may carry deep resonances for the creator as well as the viewer. Moreover, certain semantic units carry greater cultural resonance or authority over others. The selection of a Shakespearean digital object as conduit for connectivity involves participation in Shakespeare's meaning and ongoing circulation. Social media platforms are conduits for iterations of Shakespeare in that they enable the distribution and sharing of

content, and they are also catalysts in that they incentivize media users to participate and produce content themselves. To reiterate, we see social media Shakespeares as a trilogical dynamic of user/technology/context.

We want to conclude with a further conceptualization of social media Shakespeares, and with a Twitter exchange (using the hashtag #SocialmediaShakespeares) that in a sense becomes an enactment of Shakespeare criticism as social media. Douglas Lanier's idea of "Shakespearean rhizomatics" to conceptualize adaptations of Shakespeare lends itself interestingly to social media Shakespeares as an interrelation of a range of dynamic agents. Lanier draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome as a web of connections in which individual points or nodes retain their distinctiveness, but may also move bi-directionally, or even take other "lines of flight." As applied to Shakespeare, the rhizome entails a more complex relation of Shakespeare — as writer or as text — to the cultural phenomenon of "Shakespeares," or what we earlier referred to as the interrelation of THWS ("The Historical William Shakespeare") and WSCI ("William Shakespeare as Cultural Icon"):

> a rhizomatic conception of Shakespeare situates 'his' cultural authority not in the Shakespearean text at all but in the accrued power of Shakespearean adaptation, the multiple, changing lines of force we and previous cultures have labeled as 'Shakespeare,' lines of force that have been created by and which respond to historical contingencies (Lanier 2014, 29).

Shakespeare is understood here as an ongoing process, but not construed as timeless or free-floating. As Lanier emphasizes, in a rhizomatic approach, "'Shakespeare' becomes ever-other-than-itself precisely through the varied particularities of its manifestations, which proliferate according to no preordained teleology" (2014, 31). For him, adaptations are most effective firstly when they lead us to question assumptions about the anchoring authority of the "original," and secondly when they realize a "conceptual transformation" (2014, 35). The attractiveness of this model to a theory of social media Shakespeares should be evident, not least because as a network, social media is essentially rhizomatic. (As Lanier notes, the "decentred structure of the Internet provides an apt example of rhizomatic structure" [2014, 29]). More significantly, the rhizome enables us to think about social media / Shakespeares as a non-hierarchical relation of distinctive, yet crisscrossing, potentially mutually defining forces. Shakespeare *becomes* through social media, and social media *becomes* through Shakespeare.

Sharing Emotion: Affectivity and Social Media Shakespeares

In looking for examples of such rhizomatic relations, one can perhaps more readily find evidence of the impact of social media platforms on Shakespeare (in terms of how platforms contribute to the Bard's ongoing circulation or how digital technologies retroactively foreground how Shakespeare has always been mediated) than of Shakespeare on social media. Examples of the latter occasionally fall back on familiar narratives, especially when represented as news items, as in the headline "How Shakespeare invented 'unfriend' 400 years before Facebook" (Furness 2015). The story relates to David Crystal's lifelong work to familiarize contemporary readers with Shakespeare's language. Crystal refers to Shakespeare's fondness for using "un" as a prefix, and goes on to remind his audience that this construction is not arcane. "Unfriended" (used twice in the canon, in *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night*) takes on a particular currency in the context of social media practices, such as deselecting or dropping a person on Facebook. Perpetuated here is an idea of Shakespeare as both our contemporary and uncannily proleptic. For a more complex relation of Shakespeare to social media, we can look to how professional theater companies are using digital technologies as platforms for new types of performance. Referring to *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming* (2013), a joint digital theater project between the RSC and Google+ that made extensive use of social networking platforms, Christie Carson and Peter Kirwan have drawn attention to the shift from "social media as gateway *to* performance to social media as the Shakespearean performance" (2014, n.pag.). Moreover, online platforms now carry multiple functions — as paratext, intertext, and supplement — in relation to live performance (Aebischer 2013, 153).

In such instances, the affective intensity of a Shakespeare play becomes entangled with the affective range of social media. An earlier, revealing example is the use of Twitter in *Such Tweet Sorrow* (2010), a production of *Romeo and Juliet* primarily for Twitter by the RSC in collaboration with professional digital media companies. When actors tweet in real time as characters from the play, Shakespearean language is subject to Twitter's 140-character constraint. This illustrates the inextricability of text/apparatus that Jarrett and Naji foreground in their essay. The effect was to render the "'original' as a ghostly trace" that "cohabit[s] with other languages, including media languages, and is thus recontextualized and repurposed" (Calbi 2013, 153).[9] Shakespeare's words, as remains, become condensed reflections on these other (media) discourses and, more interestingly still, on the conventions of Twitter itself. Through Shakespeare adaptation, Twitter invites consideration as more than a micro-blogging platform, news feed, or networked public. To interpret *Such Tweet Sorrow* as an allegorization of its own medium is to note similarities with earlier filmic adaptations of Shakespeare that thematize media issues to the extent that the story line of the original play becomes displaced (Donaldson 2008, 23). There are striking correspondences,

too, between this Shakespearean reflection on Twitter and the history of Shakespeare's use on older, broadcast media as launch-content or as a legitimating force (Galey 2014). *Such Tweet Sorrow* thus becomes part of the long history of appropriating "Shakespeare" to reflect on the "nature" of the medium or media. However, the interactive, participatory features of social media imbue social media adaptations-as-media allegory with an additional force, since the users or "tweeple" of the medium are themselves implicitly allegorized: the "Shakesperean" characters following and interacting with each other are not only characters but also "tweeple" following and interacting with other "tweeple." A related example is the practice within YouTube culture of performing a Shakespeare soliloquy as a vlog, a practice that combines and remediates distinctive modes of communication with their own histories but that is also one in which Shakespeare "becomes" — to return to Lanier's sense of rhizomatic relations — a means of negotiating what it is to be online (see O'Neill 2013, 93-95).

Therefore, among Shakespeare's rhizomatic affects on social media is the Bard's function as metalanguage for negotiating and reflecting on social media. This can also be evidenced in the desire to use Shakespeare as an "answer to the banality of the everyday tweet", as Joshua Strebel remarks of the @IAM_SHAKESPEARE profile he created in 2009 (2014). A bot tweets the Shakespeare canon, in order, line by line. This translates into 295,000 tweets to date. As Leonardo Flores observes, "Part of what is so brilliant about the project is that it weaves a little bit of the Bard's lines into the Twitter stream of its followers, placing it in circulation with everything else that is going on in that environment, making it shareable, remixable, readable" (quoted in Strebel 2014). With individual Shakespeare tweets carrying the status of networked digital objects, Twitter and social media more generally act as sites where Shakespeare variously remains, survives, and circulates.

It is important to add that we do not see social media here as merely platforms that enable Shakespeare's circulation. They also become part of how Shakespeare is encountered, experienced, and re-produced. It is precisely in such entanglements that we can apprehend how the affect of a Shakespeare play converges with the affect of social media. The commonplace use of YouTube videos in the classroom or the assigning of a production task to learners is one instance of such entanglements: there is the potential for an associative connection between the video and the Shakespearean play that is being studied. Within user-generated Shakespeare productions on social media, we find evidence of emotional identifications with and investments in Shakespearean characters. For the producers — and for the networks of viewers engaging with their content — social media become Shakespearean in the sense of being part of what Shakespeare means, and by extension, the hermeneutics of Shakespeare. Sara Ahmed's consideration of affect, and more

particularly emotion, "as an effect of circulation" (2004, 120) is relevant here. Emotions are not just an effect of the present but entail a complex set of interactions: "they move sideways (through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures, and objects) as well as backward (repression always leaves its trace in the present — hence 'what sticks' is also bound up with the 'absent presence' of historicity)" (Ahmed 2004, 120). Holly Dugan adroitly captures this dynamic when she notes that each iteration of a Shakespearean play "adds new kinds of metaphoric and material meanings" to its sensory world (2009, 729). The affective capacity of a social media production should be understood as function of the *interaction* of the social media Shakespeare object, past associations of Shakespeare and emotion, and the situated, responsive, networked individual. If, to adapt from Ahmed, we experience the "accumulation of [Shakespeare's] affective value over time" (2009, 120), then social media need to be identified as among the key spaces in contemporary culture where Shakespeare acquires affective power.

Importantly, recognizing that social media Shakespeares might produce or elicit their own affects enables us to move beyond regarding them in terms of dilution or loss of more traditional ways of experiencing Shakespeare, such as live performance or close reading of a text. Instead, we see that social media Shakespeares entail their own degrees of affective intensities. For anyone invested in the ongoing vitality of Shakespeare's works as things to be experienced and enjoyed, social media iterations invite consideration as dynamic and generative — and, indeed, pleasurable. We revert to Shakespeare parody videos available on YouTube for one type of affect — laughter, or a sense of play that comes with such postmodern knowingness — but other affects are available, too. As Erin Sullivan notes, "Digital media constantly makes us laugh, but can it also make us cry? If so, what might that artform look like?" (Sullivan 2014, n. pag). Sullivan poses the question in response to primarily comic examples of YouTube *Hamlet* featured at a conference she attended. With Shakespeare scholars turning to such productions and such platforms as objects of critical analysis in their own right, there is an increasing recognition that the genres, politics and affect of YouTube Shakespeare cannot be limited to parody or irony. Sullivan's question invites us to think further about the sensory capacities of the Shakespeare productions we can encounter through social media. At the same time, while social media Shakespeares provide examples of user-creativity, they may generate a sense of ennui: do we want or need yet more iterations of "To be or not to be"? We might find it useful to reflect on our assumptions about and expectations of social media by asking what we want from social media Shakespeares, and what we want them to do or aim towards.

The essays in this issue elaborate on such questions in their deep consideration of social media Shakespeares as technosocial communication; as the loci of user-generated content; as

generative spaces where Shakespeare institutions cultivate audiences; as a network for Shakespeare researchers; as a teaching and learning tool; and as a virtual encounter with theater. Social media Shakespeares may present to us the most current, contemporaneous iterations of the Bard, but they are quickly becoming the past, and need to be historicized. This special issue of *Borrowers and Lenders* undertakes such a project and, it is hoped, also provokes the field of Shakespeare studies into thinking about the affordances that social media networks, either in refined forms or new ones altogether, might bring to the Shakespeares of the future.

Notes

1. The authors borrow the word survivance — what exceeds, and is heterogeneous to, both life and death — from Derrida (2011, 130). For Derrida, "Like a trace, a book, the survivance of a book, from its very first moment on, is a living-dead machine" (2011, 130). This "survivance" also concerns "everything from which the tissue of living experience is woven, through and through" (2011, 131).

2. In this sense, social networking platforms are an implementation of what Jacques Derrida calls the "anarchivic"; they show, that is, the extent to which the archive "works . . . against itself" (1995, 12).

3. Besides, nowadays social media platforms such as YouTube often *mediate* the way we encounter previous media iterations of Shakespeare such as filmic adaptations.

4. On the correlation and mutual constitution of the human and (what he calls) "technics," see especially Stiegler (1998; 2010). Stiegler insists, from a Derridean perspective, that technics is "constitutive of life as ex-sistence" (2010, 72); it is "life by means other than life" (2010, 71), thus paradoxically constituting the fundamental exteriorization of the human qua human.

5. Of course, relevant here is also Katherine Hayles's groundbreaking work on the necessary embodiment of information and her discussion of the imbrication of bodies and machines (1999; 2012).

6. Speaking of the "political tragedy of interactivity," Alexander Galloway goes so far as to argue that "interactivity is one of the core instruments of control and organization," and that "networks ensnare in the very act of connection" (2010, 291).

7. For a more extended reading of Hansen's argument, see Calbi (2013, 13-16; 150-154).

8. See also Hansen 2004, where he underlines the role of "the affective body as the 'enframer' of information" in the epoch of new media, arguing that "the body's centrality increases proportionally with the de-differentiation of media" (20). "De-differentiation" is akin to what we call here "convergence" and "spread."

9. *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s tweets are no longer available on the official website. The performance was archived by one of the followers, whose Twitter name is @citizenbleys, and can be accessed at http://www.bleysmaynard.net/suchtweet. Tweets connected with the project, including the Q&A that followed the performance, can be viewed at https://twitter.com/such_tweet. That both *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming* are no longer fully available as archive or otherwise difficult to find online returns us to the earlier question of how quickly the "newly new" of social media, in spite of its initial impact, recedes into obsolescence.

Online Resources

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