Shakespeare and Social Media
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Abstract

The field of Shakespeare studies is becoming increasingly interested in the circulation of Shakespeares across social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. An emerging body of scholarship offers important insights into the implications of social media and digital technologies for Shakespearean pedagogy and research. This essay provides a review of the literature and suggests some future directions that theorizations of Shakespeare in/ as social media might take. This essay encourages Shakespeare studies to interpret social media Shakespeares as an object of critical analysis, as well as understanding it as a teaching tool and research resource, while recognizing that these categories overlap. More specifically, the essay argues that social media Shakespeares denote a complex network of specific platforms, technologies, cultural signifiers and the agentive human users that make meaning through these. As users share Shakespeare content and connect with it via social media, they are simultaneously shaping Shakespeare's current formations and being shaped by distinct yet interlinked technologies.

Fair encounter | Of two most rare affections!
Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (3.1.75-76)[1]

In an essay on Shakespeare and Second Life, Katherine Rowe offers an important reflection as to why the brave new world of virtual environments might prove appealing: "what makes *Foul Whisperings* [a Second Life *Macbeth* game] "compelling to *me*, as Shakespeare scholar, might be precisely that it offers what I already know and care about" (67).[2] The sense here –or indeed caution – that the turn to new technologies within Shakespeare studies might contain elements of self-validation is of relevance to Shakespeare and social media. The emerging interest in this subject area within Shakespeare studies is revealing about the state of the field. Perhaps, for Shakespeare scholars, social media platforms are compelling precisely because they constitute the latest locations where the phenomenon we call 'Shakespeare' or increasingly 'Shakespeares' find(s) iteration. Point-in-time searching reveals the reach and frequency of these iterations: 'Shakespeare' is mentioned on average every 41 seconds ("socialmention"). The discovery of Shakespeare within social media, from a fan-page to a Shakespeare character on Tumblr to an auto-generated quotation on

Twitter or the performed soliloquy on YouTube, instances the continuing vitality of our contemporary 'Shakespeares'. As these selective examples suggest, Shakespeare can take various forms on social media. We are not dealing with a homogenous or readily identifiable collective. The cited platforms each entail their own set of medium-specific attributes that shape use and, as such, shape the kinds of communication, connection and participation that occur. They have their own histories too and just because they have a popular currency now is not to say they will do so in the future as new platforms become available. Consideration must also be given to the computational technology, what goes on behind the interface as it were, that enables social media platforms, as well as the production of media content for them. 'Social media Shakespeares' is thus convenient shorthand for a complex network of specific platforms, technologies, cultural signifiers and the human users that make meaning through these. This essay interprets social media Shakespeares as an object of critical analysis, as well as understanding it as a teaching tool and research resource, though invariably these categories overlap. Through a consideration of the emerging body of scholarship on the subject, the essay considers the implications for Shakespeare pedagogy and research, and outlines future directions that theorizations of Shakespeare in/ as social media might take.

Such is the ubiquity of 'Shakespeare' and 'social media' that the two terms can appear self-evident. However, it is important to critically reflect on them and to recognize that they each have distinctive histories and cultural formations. To begin with 'Shakespeare', it is has become a commonplace to note that this term extends beyond the particular playwright and poet and the corpus of texts produced under his name to denote a cultural phenomenon, one often highlighted, as above, through the use of quotation marks. 'Shakespeare' encompasses citations, allusions, appropriations, and uses across a range of media and also cultural strata (including high culture, mass culture and popular culture). Additionally, 'Shakespeare' is suggestive of cultural capital and there is extensive work on the recourse or appeal to Shakespeare's cultural power and authority at points in history, especially the modern period (Bristol; Burt; Garber; Lanier). How 'Shakespeare' as cultural phenomenon relates to Shakespeare the writer and the text has also received scholarly attention. Douglas Lanier proposes the rhizome as a way of theorizing this relationship. For him, the Shakespearean text is part of 'Shakespearean rhizomatics' (30), that is to say a web-like structure in which the text not only interacts with an array of adaptations, citations and reproductions but also is continually displaced and transformed by them. We might detect here the logic of the 'X' associated with the rhetorical figure chiasmus which, as Marjorie Garber reminds us, is itself very Shakespearean (xxxiii). Lanier's model is intended to capture the "multidimensionality of any act of adaptation, its engagement not merely (or primarily or even at all) with the language of the Shakespearean text(s) but with

the proliferating network of relations that constitute 'Shakespeare' at a given historical moment" (36). In this crisscrossing of text and adaptation (or allusion or appropriation), there occurs a mutual shaping or defining of Shakespeare and, relatedly, Shakespearean. Both can be productively understood as evolving, ongoing processes rather than as stable or singular entities.

The concept of "proliferating network of relations" resonates strongly with our second term, 'social media', since the latter is a network, both in the technological sense of the word and also figuratively, as interrelated media that enable individuals to connect. Lanier's sense of a rhizomatic or networked Shakespeare may provide us with a meaningful way to map the relations between Shakespeare and social media and to think more precisely about the kinds of Shakespeare that social media propagates. But before addressing this further, a deeper understanding of 'social media' itself is needed. Within media studies, the term is subject to debate. As Jeremy Hunsinger and Theresa Senft summarize, "while some use the term quite narrowly to describe person-to-person relations on social networking services like Facebook and Twitter, others use the term to signal socialization aspects of Web 2.0 sites in general" (1). Geert Lovink historicizes the term, homing in what 'social' has come to signify: "The social no longer manifests itself primarily as a class, movement, or mob. Neither does it institutionalize itself anymore [...]. And even the postmodern phase of disintegration and decay seems over. Nowadays, the social manifests itself as a network" (3).

So the term denotes particular applications and / or platforms and their affordances. It also captures the condition of contemporary media more generally. In the current mediascape, there are greater opportunities for media consumers / users than hitherto to participate and to produce content. Users are no longer passive spectators but agentive actors (in the sense that they *do* things with content and identity online) and social actors too (in the sense that they engage with other individuals online by producing content, by sharing, and by expecting response). Participation is not reducible to production but can entail such activities as liking, favouriting, evaluation, and recirculation. Henry Jenkins uses the term 'convergence' to characterize these new flows of media making, as user-generated content intersects with and repurposes the content produced by more traditional media (i.e corporations). Convergence is a productive theory because it enables us to interpret distinctive media platforms as an aggregate, or as interlocking cogs in the media network. Yet for some critics it minimizes the power and profit motive of large media corporations vis-à-vis the media user, whose online profiles become economic assets (Stalder 250-251). A readily accessible social web comes at a price for the media user. Convergence also blurs the distinctiveness of platforms and the particularity of their affordances. Consider Facebook and Twitter for example. Facebook is properly understood as

a social networking platform in that it enables users to maintain "a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system (boyd and Ellison, qtd. in Murthy 7). Twitter creates less bounded communities, with Tweets directed not only at one's followers but also towards the generation of new followers across the Twittersphere (Murthy 7-8). By way of contrast with social *networks*, then, social *media* are "designed to be explicitly public and geared towards interactive multicasting" (Murthy 11). While being mindful of a platform's specificities, however, we can recognize common attributes and attend to social media on a macro level.

It is difficult to fully separate out social networks from social media, or to narrowcast social media as "person-to-person relations". Sharing is the fundamental requirement for social media (Benkler 17). This is a feature embedded into social media platforms and visualized on the interface, as in the share icon that appears below a YouTube video. The sharing of information or content is predicated on three interconnecting elements: the wetware (the agentive human users referred to earlier) the software (in the form of the front-end applications) and the hardware (the various devices through which we access and use media). All social media are connected – and intersect – through the hyperlink, the fundamental organizational element for the Web (Halavais 39). It is primarily the hyperlink that allows users to move or share content across media platforms so easily, which is why it becomes difficult to categorize social media narrowly. The hyperlink realizes "spreadable" media (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 1-46). Yet, the front-end or interfaces of specific social media platforms are equally important facilitators of spreadability through such common features as usability and accessibility: "social media interfaces engage us through interactivity and the appearance of co-presence, community, and, in the end, the appearance of social connection" (Hunsinger 9). As such, they become "places we inhabit and that inhabit us as we imagine ourselves in them and using them, and their designers imagine us doing the same" (ibid). Aimee Morrison makes a similar point about Facebook, describing it as a "coaxing" technology that teases us into disclosing information through status updates, for example (117, 123). At issue here is not just how social media become internalized and habitual to daily expression, to how information circulates, and to a sense of connection with others. These technologies are not merely descriptive but also performative tools (Wegenstein 22). Bringing new scales of distribution and connectivity, social media platforms act as conduits for vernacular or amateur media productions. At the same time, they are catalysts for user-generated media, incentivizing or coaxing media consumers into participating, into producing and into sharing content.

What that information or content actually *is*, on a literal level, does not matter to the computational network, to which everything is binary code and HTML. This

is as true for Shakespeare content on social media as it is for any other content online. From this perspective, content serves and plays suitor to connectivity in and of itself (Hansen 2010). Yet, social media content is never simply about connectivity. It takes on meaning through the particularity of its iterations and through users' experience of it. Shakespeare content on social media offers an interesting case of meaning making, for reasons to do with Shakespeare's cultural ubiquity and iterability. Users variously make, share, circulate, produce, or perform Shakespeare through social media. They may do so in ways that reaffirm and/or challenge Shakespeare's already established ubiquity as cultural icon and source of authority.

An emerging body of scholarship within Shakespeare studies offers important insights into the implications of social media and digital technologies for Shakespearean pedagogy and research. Scholars have focused attention on the potential effects of social media on Shakespeare as text, and as an object of study or critical analysis. Thus far, YouTube constitutes the most assessed social media platform within the literature, a fact that is unsurprising given how readily YouTube can be used as a teaching and learning resource. Shakespeare studies proved quick to respond to YouTube and to reflect on the implications of the video-sharing site for Shakespeare pedagogy and research. Christy Desmet's work represents the earliest analyses of YouTube Shakespeare. In a 2008 essay for *Shakespeare Survey*, Desmet identifies parody as the recurring aesthetic of YouTube Shakespeare videos, thus initiating a critical analysis of vernacular and amateur productions. In a follow-up essay, "Teaching Shakespeare on YouTube", Desmet focuses on questions for pedagogy and learning. She notes that while educators were alert to the platform's potential as a teaching resource, they had yet to make YouTube Shakespeare videos an explicit subject of classroom analysis. Students might not simply use YouTube as an archive of past performances but also undertake video production themselves and begin to critically analyze productions by other students. YouTube Shakespeare can thus encourage close reading and peer review (68). Furthermore, "participating in a virtual new world of Shakespeare artists, both as producers and critics, gives students a real stake in the shaping of Shakespeare for our time" (69).

This understanding of YouTube as a significant site of Shakespeare's current and indeed future directions is pursued in Barbara Hodgdon's "(You)Tube travel". For the Shakespearean, YouTube offers a wunderkabinet or "Shakespeare as (highly addictive) snack culture" (317), but Hodgdon is interested too in the opportunities for students. Travel becomes a metaphor for Hodgdon's own experience as a YouTube user – surfing Shakespeare videos transports the viewer back to prior performances, which now acquire "an extensive afterlive" (317). In this sense, YouTube is a library or archive, and a niche one at that. But it also a competitive laboratory (327) where new forms of response to

Shakespeare such as the video mashup vie for our viewing attention, where users demonstrate media competency, and where they might also learn "forms of Shakespeare literacy, developing a critical eye and ear" (326) through production and commentary. Hodgdon explicitly identifies YouTube Shakespeare's learning potential here and, implicitly, gestures to its social dimensions, its capacity to generate discussion, exchange and debate.

Ayanna Thompson's work on YouTube Shakespeare is invaluable in this regard.[3] For Thompson, YouTube crucially signals a move from passive student viewing towards "response and dialogue" (146) and indeed to social interactivity. Through videoed performance and video production, students can enact their responses to Shakespeare and perhaps have greater license to register an attenuated relation to a play or a problematic aspect of it (such as race or gender politics) than they would otherwise have in the classroom. Thompson importantly identifies the classroom inspired performance video (145) as a new phenomenon within Shakespeare learning (in the sense that students are now making their own productions as assignments for class) but also within Shakespeare studies more generally (in the sense that scholars are increasingly interested in critically analyzing these videos). Thompson acknowledges that for scholars, the analysis of such productions raises methodological questions (148-150). She decides to omit URLs and usernames from her own analysis. Anonymizing productions protects the identity of those featured in the videos but it presents difficulties for Thompson's readers and for future researchers seeking to locate the videos in question. There are wider issues here for Shakespeare scholarship as it begins to take seriously a myriad of productions in an online setting, where the distinction between what is intended as public and what is intended for private or more discrete circulation is far from clear.

Questions of audience and the future reception of videos, perhaps regarded by their makers as ephemeral objects, are addressed in Lauren Shohet's "YouTube, Use and the Idea of the Archive". Shohet shares Desmet and Thompson's interest in YouTube's value as a learning resource, noting that it "reveals how many ways there are to perform a single Shakespearean scene" (69) and that the aggregation of past performances available fosters historical consciousness (71). Shohet invites us to understand these (valuable) effects upon users as a function of the medium or, more accurately, a function of a use-medium dialectic. One example of such medium effects is the way the YouTube interface, with its array of small screen grabs awaiting viewer selection, homogenizes different forms (70). Another is YouTube's status as an unbounded, user-generated archive. In posting to YouTube, users are not only broadcasting but also engaging in a type of archiving as they tag those posts. Shohet 's terms may be dated here – 'upload' and 'share' more typically describe YouTuber practices – but they highlight how users generate a databank or archive and commit their production to potential

re-distribution or broadcast in the future (74). Shohet finds parallels between this aspect of YouTube culture and the practice of scholars undertaking archival research. Both experiences involve building social relations: "we [researchers] hope to speak with the dead (homologous to the vlogger's conversations with others, always in the optative and the future) or to use the dead to speak with one another (homologous to YouTube replaying, remixing, and posting)" (75). Both activities are technologically mediated. Using YouTube potentially heightens our medium consciousness, alerting us to the fact that Shakespeare has always been mediated rather than a stable, pre-ordained thing (Worthen 55-77).

Medium-consciousness also informs the present author's *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard*. This monograph examines YouTube culture to assess the aesthetics and politics of user-generated Shakespeares in that setting. The book's interest lies in YouTube as a platform for vernacular expression and as an instance of Shakespeare's vitality and interpretative openness. At the same time, attention is devoted to the site's commercial drives so that YouTube Shakespeare is understood in relation to the commodification of individual expression and to a certain acquiescence to branding associated with mass media culture. *Shakespeare and YouTube* addresses YouTube as teaching and learning resource, including suggestions for possible assignments. It also addresses potential opportunities for scholars: "[YouTube] can become a become a space where Shakespeareans disseminate and share their work or where different roles – of tuber, fan, and creator – might be assumed, thus enabling scholars to bridge the gap between popular culture and Shakespeare's more institutional markings" (3-4).

As a collective, YouTube Shakespeare studies has identified how, admittedly through the lens of Shakespeare, YouTube is a community of vernacular Shakespeareans, as well as a new type of research network offering scholars connection, or the appearance of connection. While offering a deep analysis of a single platform, on reflection this work underplays the intermedial nature of contemporary online participation and expression, where users navigate and connect across a range of platforms and networks. Future work on YouTube Shakespeare might contextualize it further as a form of *social* media. In part, the difficulty here is in balancing attention to a platform's specificity with a consideration of it vis-à-vis the wider network. In part, too, it's a methodological issue as Shakespeare studies makes forays into media studies and theory.

While we have yet to see an inter-disciplinary approach to the subject, there may be opportunities for collaborative research that would bring together media studies scholars and Shakespeareans. Shakespeare studies has already proved keen to engage with new media studies' perspectives (Rowe 2010), though there

are some understandable anxieties that the turn to multimedia forms entails a departure from the primacy of the literary text (O'Dair 2011). The pace of development in terms of praxis, as Shakespeare-in-performance integrates with social media, also means that Shakespeare criticism and theory can find itself playing catch-up. To be productive, however, criticism requires time, reflection and deep consideration. Several recent contributions from Shakespeare critics have enhanced understandings of what is happening in online environments to Shakespeare (as cultural icon) and to Shakespeare-in-performance. Kate Rumbold critically reflects on how institutions like the RSC and The Globe, among the traditional guardians of Shakespeare's cultural value, use their institutional websites and social media to engage with audiences and to reclaim that value. Through their online presence, these organizations are as "much creators, as mediators of 'Shakespeare'". (335).

Other critics consider the implications of theatre companies using social media not simply as part of the promotional strategy for a production, or even as interactive tools designed to generate audience interest and response, but as a dimension of live performance itself. This is becoming a common enough practice, yet one still sufficiently novel to make news headlines (Levitt n.pag). In the conclusion to their important volume of essays *Shakespeare and the Digital World*, Christie Carson and Peter Kirwan cite the RSC's collaboration with Google Creative Lab for its June 2013 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Titled *Midsummer Night Dreaming* and using the hashtag #dream40, the project combined live theatre performance with digital performance, making extensive use of social networking site Google+ to reconceive what is meant by a stage. For Carson and Kirwan, the project "made explicit the idea that social media is not subordinate to live performance, but an entirely different mode of performance. The paradigmatic shift being enacted in this brief moment is one from social media as gateway *to* the Shakespearean performance to social media *as* the Shakespearean performance" (Carson and Kirwan n.pag.). Daniel Fischlin considers *Hamlet Live*, produced in Toronto 2012, which in addition to a live-streaming of the performance, involved a YouTube channel, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and an online chat room where audience members interacted with the onstage action (15-16).[4] *Hamlet Live* blurs the distinction between the live and the mediatized to the extent we are dealing with liveness as an effect, to invoke Philip Auslander's terms. As Fischlin elaborates, the use of social media as "instant response techniques" available during performance "radically change[s] the nature of the multiple forms of interaction that a traditional staging proffers" (17).

Is something being lost here? Perhaps the integrity of live performance as rooted in the text? Like Carson and Kirwan, however, Fischlin's interest lies in the adaptive and transformative capacities of social media, in how they might

extend what counts as Shakespeare-in-performance and as Shakespearean text(s). What constitutes a performance extends beyond a stage and embodied actors and audience. Yet, as with more traditional stage performances, social media performances carry their own temporality. *Midsummer Night Dreaming*'s social media Shakespeare stage can still be viewed online but a pop up message tells viewers "Soon this stage will be replaced with an audio and image timelines to archive this experiment" (dream40). The immediacy of social media today becomes the archive of tomorrow. What constitutes Shakespearean text is also extended and elasticated to denote a recognizable (though contested) textual entity like *Hamlet* but also chat room exchanges, Tweets, or comments on a YouTube video. As intermediated via live performance and simultaneously through social media, where it remains long after the performance and production run is over, *Hamlet Live* captures some of the wider effects of social media for Shakespeare. Social media disperses Shakespeare across different but inter-connected platforms. It disrupts Shakespeare as the play coincides with other media content available in those settings. Yet, perhaps because of such coincidence with other content and integration into new technologies, social media preserves Shakespeare too. It may even confirm the irreducibility of the Shakespearean text. As "vessel for content never previously imagined, vessel for intermedial representations yet to be invented", writes Fischlin, the text "becomes that much more irreducible, that much more open to interpretative reshaping, adaptive rescripting" (17).

Considerations about what social media does to the Shakespeare text are also at the forefront of Maurizio Calbi's analysis of Twitter Shakespeare. Through a case study of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, a professional production of *Romeo and Juliet*, Calbi addresses the implications of the micro-blogging platform for Shakespeare. In the Twittersphere, Shakespearean language "cohabit[s] with other languages, including media languages, and is thus recontextualized and repurposed" (153).[5] By way of media theorists Lev Manovich and also Mark Hansen, Calbi wonders if Shakespeare has become another "token" (Manovich) through which communication is instigated? Is Shakespeare reducible to social media's logic of "sheer connectivity" (Hansen), where content matters less than connection? Via a Derridean theorization of Shakespeare as ghostly trace, Calbi suggests that the "language of the 'original' does not so much appear as *re*-appear", that is it "re-emerges as the spectral effect of the process of adaptation" on Twitter (153). Twitter Shakespeare may be at "its most effective when it inscribes a double-edged movement toward and away from Shakespeare" (153), where it leads us to think about the medium itself, or demonstrates the aesthetics of its own medium-specific adaptation. Calbi does not address the teaching and learning possibilities here but there is evidence elsewhere of Twitter's successful integration into the classroom (Barker n.pag). Calbi's analysis provides a type of Shakespearean criticism that regards its more traditional subject matter (in this

instance *Romeo and Juliet*) as being enlivened through new technology but also something that returns through it, haunting the newer form. His own analysis registers the circular move that, I would argue, social media Shakespeare generates for the critic, as it propels her/ him away from their primary object of study and back towards it too, as it is returned in a new guise.

Thus far, we have seen how social media Shakespeares constitutes an object of critical analysis and a teaching tool. The literature also signals its potential as a research resource. However, these categories cannot be separated out fully, nor would it be desirable to do so. For instance, the current scholarship not only addresses the pedagogical value of social media but in undertaking such an exploration, becomes a teaching and research resource itself. It will be noted that the scholarship surveyed here takes the form of traditional scholarly publication routes: the monograph, the peer-reviewed journal article, and the essay. However, social media and digital technologies more generally are already beginning to alter how scholarship and research is disseminated and how it is regarded too. As Carson and Kirwan ask, what happens when "the terms of discussion are generated by 'users', rather than by authors" (n.pag)? Some critics have expressed anxiety that in the context collapse of Web 2.0, where distinctions between different modes of communication are no longer absolute, there is a decline in academic writing and deep thinking (O'Dair 2014). Others have highlighted the value of social media and digital technologies for scholarly networking but a related pressure, especially acute among early career scholars, to maintain an online profile as a Shakespearean in tandem with traditional publication (Collins).

In practice, these are increasingly interrelated activities. We don't have to look very far to find examples of considerable overlap between traditional and newer publication modes. Open-access blogs and websites are informing criticism and vice versa. Luke McKernan's Bardbox, an archive of online Shakespeare video, has frequently been cited in peer-review studies of YouTube Shakespeare.[6] Alan Young's website *Ophelia and Popular Culture* informs several critical analyses of Ophelian iterations via YouTube, Tumblr and Facebook (Desmet and Iyengar; O'Neill 2015). Shakespeare scholars are blogging about Shakespeare but also producing critically reflective essays on what participation in the blogosphere might bring to teaching and research (see Kirwan; Sullivan). Scholars are sharing information, posting news items, and engaging in conversations through accounts on public networks like Twitter, and within less public forms through private networks such as "Shakespeare Friends" on Facebook (Starks-Estes, forthcoming). Shakespeare is now a hashtag, a hyperlink, a digital object that can be shared across different platforms and networks. Yet, these online conversations have their own discrete contexts and formations.

Twitter's 140-character limit affords quick, aphoristic modes of exchange. A blog or personally curated website allows for more extensive posting. Tweeting about Shakespeare can become a virtual supplement to physical conversations at conferences, or a means of accessing those conversations remotely. Tweets might be indices of research in progress, as questions are posed and arguments tested. They are traceable (since as digital objects they can be found) and spreadable (in that they can be easily shared to one's followers and beyond). Yet, considering Twitter's prioritizing of temporal immediacy, they are ephemeral too and risk being lost amidst the mass chatter of social media. A network such as "Shakespeare's Friends", where access is controlled by a group facilitator, allows for more focused exchange and connection. However, given the (current) limits of search within Facebook, locating a past can prove difficult.

We are beginning to encounter Shakespeare studies and even criticism *as* social media, rather than as a response to it. There are implications here for understandings of scholarly expertise and the authority that has traditionally flowed out from that. With Web 2.0, what counts as or who self-identifies as 'Shakespearean' has broadened considerably in ways that could bring (further?) interpretative openness to Shakespeare studies but potentially dilute specialist forms of knowledge that have long been central to the field. If social media brings challenges, it also offers opportunities. The full potential of social media and Web 2.0 for new forms of scholarly writing and exchange has not yet been realized. However, there are already indications of what forms Shakespeare criticism might take via social media. In a video for the Folger Institute's YouTube channel, Katherine Rowe suggests that new media provides authors, as students and as scholars, to "embed one's evidence" through hyperlinks (Rowe 2012). We can get a sense of what this embedded argument looks like through online journals such as *Borrowers and Lenders*, where readers can view video clips or images as part of the written argument. But this can be taken further. As scholars, we could learn from the Tumblr fan page, for instance, and move towards the photographic essay or an image-oriented criticism. Twitter hashtags could be included in the digital form of scholarly articles, where these are open-access, enabling an exchange between the author and the reader and the development of an interactive reading community. New social media applications or improvements to existing ones could bring affordances and opportunities as yet unimagined. If currently we are witnessing the growth of work on new media and intermedial Shakespeares, the next phase might be a form of criticism that is itself intermedial.

Social media not only represents a new subject area within Shakespeare studies. It is also a new technology that may further alter what, as scholars and students of Shakespeare, we do and how we do it. The "proliferating network of relations" (to once again borrow Lanier's terms) that make up social media Shakespeares

therefore pose methodological questions for our field. What methodological and theoretical directions might the field take? Writing from a media studies' perspective, Kylie Jarrett and Jeneen Naji invite us to approach social media Shakespeares as "trilogical, technosocial communication" (forthcoming). We are dealing with "assemblages of the interactions between technologies, human creative subjects and the wider socioeconomic context". More provocatively, social media Shakespeares are interpreted as a series of "interactions between actors, many of which are not human". Jarrett and Naji here fine-tune the familiar hardware/ software/ wetware dynamic to offer Shakespeare studies a framework for thinking about the interrelations between social media platforms and Shakespeare. This may seem to imply a level of technological determinism and a reduction of user agency. Instead, the emphasis is on how the kinds of Shakespeare that are variously created, experienced and re-circulated on social media are a function of the *interaction*s between specific technologies and agentive users who produce, communicate and share content in and from particular contexts. "It is about viewing each performance of Shakespeare on social media", write Jarrett and Naji, "as a particular negotiation between the biological, psychological, affective, social, economic and technological affordances of a range of highly dynamic actors".

What would this approach look like in practice? Consider "Hamlet Gone Viral", a video made by Leia Yen for a high-school assignment and posted on YouTube. Published to YouTube on May 30 2012, the video has 1, 017 views. Statistics for views and shares are disabled but the comment feature gives some sense of reception, with one viewer noting positively that the video was shown at a Shakespeare conference. The video can easily be circulated beyond its host platform. This is Shakespeare as spreadable media. Yen's production references the most prominent social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube) and applications (Google search, Google maps, Yahoo, Gmail), unfolding the *Hamlet* plot through a series of media screens (Yen 2012). Certain technologies are associated with certain characters: Hamlet uses Facebook and its update status to express his grief; Laertes' advice to Ophelia is presented as tweets; Hamlet communicates with Ophelia through the more private form of email. The characters' social media profiles are illustrated using *Hamlet* films (David Tennant as the Prince for example) and film clips are also incorporated. The video is indicative of a more pervasive movement towards post-textual Shakespeare (Lanier 2010, 106) in the sense that the text is largely being left behind. Interpreting the video as trilogical- technosocial communication would be to focus on how *Hamlet* emerges here as an intermediated thing, the effect of the interaction between user, computer technologies and context but also an expressive technology that prompts media making. Context refers to the video as a Shakespeare assignment for school, its posting on YouTube, where its reception cannot be narrowed to this institutional setting. Context also entails

wider affordances, in the technological and economic senses of the term, that enable the user to produce the video in the first instance.

Jarrett and Naji's formulation also encourages us to think about the video's affective capacities: what might its impact be on viewers? Affect is also contextually contingent. Viewing Yen's "Hamlet Gone Viral" on the YouTube interface, we begin to notice related videos through YouTube's system of tags and its algorithmic determination of relevance. Yen's conceit, it transpires, is linked into a wider practice, as evidenced by such titles as "The Internet Tells the Story of Hamlet" (Boyles) and "Hamlet's Social Network" (GSWFilmProductions). YouTube functions as a social space, where the presence of affinitive videos prompts and encourages a user to post his / her own production (Lange 70-88). As an aggregate, the affective power of the videos might relate to their treatment of media more so than to Shakespeare, which emerges as the conduit for medium-as-content. The medium *is* the message. Using Facebook's update culture as their primary narrative device, these videos are indices of how posting online through social networking and media have become habitual communicative acts. They gesture towards the tension or paradox of those acts, which are enabled by communication brands (from Facebook to Google) and also framed by them and serving *their* visibility and value as much as *our* expression.

The videos also say something about the role of media in knowledge construction: Google in particular emerges as a form of authority and search takes on epistemological standing (Hillis, Petit and Jarrett 54). In the process, something is also being done to Shakespeare and *Hamlet*. What these mean culturally and the value that they carry become linked into the technologies a la mode, since it is through these technologies that our contemporary Shakespeares are iterated and circulated. Videos like "Hamlet Gone Viral" offer allegories for social media Shakespeares as the consequence of the *interactions* of technosocial actors, some of whom are not humans. This bold reality reminds us that the thing we call Shakespeare is not only a process or a becoming but is also technologically mediated. As users habitually hashtag a Shakespeare quote, or create a pinboard about a Shakespeare character on Pinterest, or use YouTube to access past performances, they are simultaneously producing social media Shakespeares and being shaped by these distinct yet interlinked technologies. Future research might pursue social media Shakespeares as a network through which Shakespeare circulates and mine the data in order to deepen our understandings of the (Shakespearean) connections that are occurring in this setting. Scholars might consider social media as an unwieldy digital archive, a virtual space where Shakespeare survives. Or, in light of anticipated trends in social media toward the "higher presence and immediacy of the user" (Chan), scholars might pursue social media as haptic technologies that realize new modes of encounter with Shakespearean texts. In this sense, social media

becomes a laboratory, a potentially creative space that prompts new responses to Shakespeare in forms yet to be encountered. For Shakespeare studies as a field, then, there are intriguing implications ahead as it assays a Shakespeare that may increasingly look post-textual and post-human too.

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[1] Quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Complete Works*. Ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

[2] Rowe's article is also available at <http://www.brynmawr.edu/english/Faculty_and_Staff/rowe/CrowdSourcing.html >

[3] Thompson's article ('Unmooring the Moor: Researching and Teaching on YouTube', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.3 [2010], 337-356) is updated in her book *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race and Contemporary America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011). Page references are to the latter.

[4] Further details are available at <http://www.hamletlive.com/>

[5] Tweets from the 2010 project can be viewed at <https://twitter.com/such_tweet>

[6] McKernan made his final post to Bardbox on 23 September 2014. See "Our Revels Now Our Ended". < https://bardbox.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/our-revels-now-are-ended/>