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Introduction
Shakespeare: Overlapping Mediascapes in the Mind

> If you could extract the mental impression made by the Shakespearean strategy of images, you would get a piece of pop collage. The effect is like a word whose letters are written across three overlapping pictures in the mind.
>
> Peter Brook

In a 1966 interview on the topic of Shakespeare on film, Peter Brook offered a contradictory account of adaptation across media.[1] An influential English theatre director, Brook is also a film director and the author of *The Empty Space* (1968) on the art of theatre. In positing once more the complex question of the relation between words and images it is not surprising, then, to hear him declare (in a positive sense) the excessive visual character of Shakespeare's poetry. What is surprising is the media exceptionalism that underpins the arguments of this gifted multimedia artist, as he asserts the necessary priority of one medium (verbal but carrying image-power) over another (visual and lacking the essential plasticity of words), asking "How can the screen free itself of its own consistencies so as to reflect the mobility of thought that blank verse demands?"[2] Describing the relation between cinema and Shakespeare, Brook frames the two oppositionally, the former characterized by constraint and the latter by liberty (in both its senses of liberality and freedom of motion). What Barbara Hodgdon usefully termed an "expectational text"[3] may be lurking here: the notion that Shakespeare's words embody a generative "mobility" and varietas that all other art forms may draw on inexhaustibly, even as they fall short of its copia.[4]

For a long time Shakespeareans working on film rehearsed its semiotic poverty in comparison to literature and live performance; that premise was sustained in part because few of us ventured beyond the increasingly well-defined purview of cinema as a medium. In recent decades, scholars have sought a more agnostic vocabulary for addressing media translation across multiple delivery platforms and in a global context – a turn accelerated by the advent of accessible video archives, the proliferation of new screen formats, and the convergence of screen, print, and performance media at the end of the 20th century.[5] That our vocabulary for thinking about the global traffic in Shakespeare, in multiple media and venues, is still evolving should be taken as a sign of the intellectual richness of this field of study. That said, two recent coinages seem especially apt to the transmedia Shakespeares explored in this issue. Margaret Litvin's characterization of a "global kaleidoscope" of "performances, texts, and criticism traveling from many directions" captures the commitment to multiple Shakespearean sources these essays subscribe to.[6] They share with Alexander Huang's recent work an interest in the unpredictability of

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[1] Peter Brook and Geoffrey Reeves, "Finding Shakespeare on Film. From an Interview with Peter Brook", *The Tulane Drama Review*, 11.1 (1966), 117-121.

[2] Ibid., 121.

[3] See Barbara Hodgdon, "Two *King Lears*: Uncovering the Filmtext", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 11.3 (July 1983), 143-151.

[4] Having "define[d] the problem" of Shakespeare on film, however, Brook gives examples of a cinema that has in itself the potential to 'solve' it, and his reflections and ideas can aptly be projected into our multimedia present.

[5] Digital archives and tools for research and pedagogical purposes have had an increasing impact on Shakespeare studies. Among recent essays, see Peter S. Donaldson, "The Shakespeare Electronic Archive: Collections and Multimedia Tools for Teaching and Research, 1992-2008", *Shakespeare*, 4.3 (2008), 250-260. See also Alexander Huang, "Global Shakespeare 2.0 and the Task of the Performance Archive", *Shakespeare Survey,* 64, (2011), 38-51.

[6] Margaret Litvin, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

performance and in what Anston Bosman calls the "filtering" of the "global flow of Shakespeare … through local environments".[7]

The globalization of culture, as many acknowledge and as Bosman writes again, "is now unthinkable without the media of mass communication", and Shakespeare today circulates mainly through a disembodied, "spacious and volatile medium – a kind of aether".[8] Astride writing and electronic media, Shakespeare's corpus, multi-mediated from the beginning, becomes apt matter for the late age of print and the early era of Web 2.0. Alternatively reduced, magnified, translated, curated, mashed up or hybridized, the corpus is consumed with Baconian voracity or registers its indigestibility to our times. From the elision of the Shakespearean language in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) to the enhancing and updating of its "riot of images" (Virginia Woolf's definition of the Elizabethan theatre) to our present, as envisioned in, for instance, Toneelgroep Amsterdam's *Roman Tragedies* theatre project (dir. Ivo van Hove, 2008-2010); from the YouTube hybrid, multimedia Hulk as Hamlet[9] to the use of Shakespeare as 'matter' for the personal investigation of cinema and its genres in Liz Tabish's *A Cinematic Translation of Shakespearean Tragedies* (2008), the complexity of Shakespeare uncannily emerges in and *as* the 'conjuncture' of media as well as of past and present.

The title of this special issue of *Anglistica* emphasizes the always polychronic nature of media practices – including those of which our own scholarship is necessarily a part. How do we as critic-audiences acknowledge our necessary embeddedness in a mediascape as varied as the one in which we now operate? How do the bookish, deconstructivist, close and "deep attention" readers, the readers in 'slow motion', relate to/engage with hyperreading and the modes of attention required by new media textualities? Although hyperattention is generally understood as a phenomenon of online reading, it is not exclusive to digital formats. It is better understood as a longstanding form of attention intensified by new media practices.[10] There is a middle ground between deep attention and hyperattention, where reading resides and where not only deep reading but also hyperreading is redefined. Shakespeare is a privileged site for literary scholars who want their reading to be continuously challenged, defied even, by the object of investigation and who prefer to engage complex writing: unpredictable, multifarious and 'living'. When Shakespeare is reinvented in other media, from classic cinema to social networks, it meets other complex textualities and forms. The encounter produces what we should learn to treat no longer as an 'adapted' Shakespeare but Shakespeare in/as the present-past of new media.[11]

The essays in this special issue attend with care to the long and uneven *durée* of specific performance idioms that define and constitute 'Shakespeare' as a polychronic corpus in this way. Sarah Sheplock, for example, explains the way the *benshi* of Japanese silent film provides a dominant performance vocabulary for Kurosawa's late-century films *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*. Maurizio Calbi's introduction to and interview of Ashish Avikunthak explore the reciprocal hybridisation of "Shakespeare" and "Kathakali" in the artist's film *Dancing Othello* (2002). In the

[7] Alexander C. Y. Huang, *Chinese Shakespeare: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). Anston Bosman, "Shakespeare and Globalization", in Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells, eds., *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 290.

[8] Ibid., 295.

[9] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCmcCtB1Wco>

[10] N. Katherine Hayles probes the differences between "deep reading" and "hyperreading" both in conventional print and online. She sees advantages in both and argues for a reciprocal transfer of abilities from one mode to the other. See, among other essays, "How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine", *ADE Bulletin*, 150 (2010), 62-79.

[11] For a recent discussion of the complex space opened up by the encounter between old texts and digital media see Richard Burt, *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

film, the encounter of both artistic forms with street theatre produces an "entanglement" or "discordance" that is nevertheless "*asserted* as an ethico-political and artistic force" and that owes its power to what Avikunthak defines, in the interview, as a "disjunctural narrative" prevailing in the film. Spanning cinema, television, recorded performance and the internet, the essays explore the ways Shakespeare in and as media provokes the search for a vocabulary adequate to the sense of 'excess' and loss generated by its restless trajectory across platforms. Thus Alessandra Marino's cultural analysis of two TV series – respectively Italian and British, dealing with intercultural relations – adopts the concept of "brand" to enhance the "understanding of the phenomenon of quotations of Shakespeare's plays and plots". In exploring very different conjunctions of old and new media, these essays skirt their way around the attractions of media exceptionalism of the kind all of us may be prone to, while still finding ways to value the specificities of different platforms and modes of performance.

As a group, the essays broach an important array of questions about the comparative media history of Shakespeare. What new methodological approaches are required by the traverse of Shakespeare across media, from silent film to TV series, to YouTube and video archives of performance? Should we insist on a sense of continuity between the new and the old, or rather on difference and discontinuity? Are there 'things' (matter, contingency, the material world) that can be analysed in or via new media Shakespeare and that are specific to it? In his article, Stephen O'Neill offers a reading of self-generated Shakespeare on YouTube as producing forms of agency that re-form notions of subjectivity and the 'I' in the new medium. Li Lan Yong investigates two non-English performances of Shakespeare's plays (Korean and Kelantanese Malay) as reproduced in the A | S | I | A digital archive; her cultural analysis relies on the uploaded versions of the productions, which, by circulating in the internet, and because of the added English translation script, become autonomous texts, new media performance editions of local stagings. Here are some specimens of Shakespeare from the global mediascape; the opportunity to engage with and reflect on such new plaforms for performance, reception, and scholarship is the most urgent and compelling in Shakespeare studies today.