

# Peeking Behind the Digital Curtains: Shakespearean Performance Institutions, Social Media, and Access

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## Abstract

As social media have become integral to the marketing practices of Shakespeare theaters and festivals, these and other digital technologies serve as the means for providing audiences with greater access to institutions' work with Shakespeare and performance. While they create new avenues for audiences to engage with institutions and their work, they also seem to signal a shift to a time of open access, in which audiences can interact with theaters and festivals like never before. However, rather than throwing open the gates and making all of theaters' and festivals' work available to online audiences, these claims to open access are more complex. To understand how access is changing, our definitions of access need to account for not only institutions and audiences, but also the technologies they are using to engage with one another. Institutions that incorporate social media into their marketing practices have to account for how the affordances and limitations of specific technologies, as well as their common user practices, reshape institution-audience interactions, destabilizing the level of control institutions maintain over their online content. This article argues that access should be thought of not in binary terms (open and closed), but rather as a spectrum influenced by institutions, audiences, and technologies alike. Ultimately, I contend that scholars need to consider issues of access further as new technologies and new methods for institution-audience interactions continue to be developed and integrated into Shakespeare theaters' and festivals' online audience outreach.

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*Access, however, means not only the opportunity to enter, approach, or make use of an existing collection or service, but something far more complex and subtle. It demands, in the first place, discriminating selections of resources in light of particular user interests and needs. It requires a more profound understanding than is presently held in the search strategies of those who seek knowledge and information in libraries and other information centers. — Robert A. Colby and Morris A. Gelfand*

Shakespeare theaters and festivals are by nature concerned with their audience outreach, as these institutions rely on their audiences for both cultural and economic relevance. The ubiquity of digital media in today's world has led these theaters and festivals to adopt a common set of

digital technologies as methods for audience outreach; often, these technologies have been made commonplace due to their audiences' expectations. Take, for example, the institutional website. For Shakespeare performance institutions, maintaining and updating an active website for their audiences has become a given. There is a clear set of expectations that institutions or businesses of any import will have established an online presence through a website, which generally acts as a portal to information and materials regarding the institution or business. Though their creation is often a result of audience expectations, institutions obviously benefit as well from operating these websites. For Shakespeare theaters and festivals, websites offer a means of crafting a guided user experience, allowing them to offer information to audiences on individual performances and entire seasons, theater or festival history and context, visitor information, and online ticket purchases.

More recently, one of the most prominent examples of exponential growth in theaters' and festivals' digital media usage has come in the form of social media. While social media continue to expand and proliferate, certain sites — Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest — have become media platforms for businesses and institutions to engage in digital outreach and to interact with their online audiences. It is not surprising, then, that Shakespeare festivals and theaters have also cultivated online presences in these spaces. But while the institution-audience interactions that occur on social media sites may in some ways resemble those that occur on institutional websites, social media are sites of user convergence that destabilize institutional control over materials, as users "are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins 2006b, 3). For institutions, there is a tradeoff that comes with that loss of control: social media offer the means for engaging with audiences in ways that do not often occur on institutional websites. Thus, as Shakespeare theaters and festivals create and maintain active institutional accounts and pages on social media sites, they give up a sense of full control over content in exchange for audience engagement on a greater scale than occurs on their own websites.

By juxtaposing institutional websites and social media against one another, I do not want to suggest that they represent binary sets of interactions for Shakespeare theaters and festivals and their audiences. Indeed, the four institutions that I address in this article — the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare's Globe, and the Stratford Festival — all have expansive institutional websites as well as social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I want to argue that we can learn from the types of interactions facilitated by each type of digital technology. The idea of institutional control over content in online spaces is rooted in a larger conversation regarding digital media and their ability to provide audiences access to institutional content. As Kate Rumbold has argued, digital media allow Shakespeare

institutions to efface their walls for audiences and provide access to their content and materials (2010, 315). While this effacement permits institutions that house physical materials (such as the Folger Shakespeare Library) to generate interest in their holdings while simultaneously reifying their status as institutional holders and safe-keepers of cultural knowledge and value, the same cannot be said for Shakespeare theaters and festivals. For while libraries and museums court their audiences' investment through physical and digital collections, theaters and festivals face a different challenge as their missions and products are distinctly ephemeral. So what exactly do Shakespearean institutions that specialize in performance provide access to, and what role do new technologies play for those institutions as they strive to establish and maintain relevance with digital audiences? The answers to these questions are defined by issues of access, and throughout this article I will establish a theoretical framework for understanding the ways digital media, and in particular social media, influence the process of access and shape audience-institution interactions.

### Shaping Institutional Identities

Access, commonly associated with specific cultural institutions such as archives, libraries, and museums, has also long shaped the practices of Shakespeare theaters and festivals. These institutions cultivate many of the same practices and values common to these other types of cultural institutions, and they are able to do so through their official websites. Institutional websites provide Shakespeare theaters and festivals the means to craft their online identities for audiences; they are able to choose the site design and content, building a certain type of experience for users who go to the site. Institutions can then use this control over design and content to fashion their digital presence in deliberate ways. These institutions have established and continually update websites available for their online audiences, and while each site hosts content unique to the institution, all four sites utilize similar conventions to achieve their goals. The sites for these four theaters and festivals contain a number of common components: prominent sections on current productions and seasons, links to purchase tickets, information on planning a visit, images and videos on performance and theater or festival history, educational links, and content about the current institutional mission and leadership. One of the most common practices is for an institution to have a page on its site devoted to the mission of the theater or festival, which is an interesting inclusion given that audiences are probably not visiting these sites to access such content. Yet each institution provides a clear statement defining its relationship to Shakespeare and approaches to performance, showing an investment in reaffirming the cultural value of both Shakespeare's and the institution's work while establishing its relevance with current audiences. Take, for example, the first two sections of the Stratford Festival's "Mandate" :

With William Shakespeare as its foundation, the Stratford Festival aims to set the standard for classical theatre in North America. Embracing our heritage of tradition and innovation, we seek to bring classical and contemporary theatre alive for an increasingly diverse audience.

For more than half a century, our mission has evolved to address the ever-changing, ever-challenging Canadian cultural landscape. What has remained constant, however, is our determination to create stimulating, thought-provoking productions of Shakespeare's plays, to examine other plays from the classical repertoire, and to foster and support the development of Canadian theatre practitioners. (2014)

The mandate concludes with Stratford's commitment to engaging their audiences in performances that are both "innovative" and "reflective of [their audiences'] lives and communities" (2014). Through their mandate, the Stratford Festival announces an investment in Shakespeare, citing him as the foundation of the festival, while also declaring a commitment to performances by Canadians for Canadians. While Stratford's performers and audiences are not solely Canadian, their mandate positions the Festival as an institution of cultural value to its home nation.

A similar type of positioning can be seen in the mission statement for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. While much shorter than Stratford's mandate, the OSF's mission statement nonetheless displays a similar commitment: "Inspired by Shakespeare's work and the cultural richness of the United States, we reveal our collective humanity through illuminating interpretations of new and classic plays, deepened by the kaleidoscope of rotating repertory" (2009, 3). Again, there is a clear commitment to Shakespeare and to a national identity, in this case that of the United States. Both Stratford and the OSF are committed to performing the works of Shakespeare and to doing so for their respective national audiences. As destination theaters that rely on audiences traveling to either Stratford or Ashland to visit the festivals and see performances, positioning themselves as institutions devoted to preserving a national identity through the performance of Shakespeare's plays is a major part of their institutional identities. These institutions use the reaffirmation of Shakespeare's cultural value as a means of establishing and maintaining the importance of their service, but what exactly that value is remains unfixed: "Because 'Shakespeare' spans and now seemingly transcends categories of text, performance, and material heritage, in addition to symbolizing abstract qualities of beauty, morality, and knowledge, Shakespeare institutions have a necessarily incomplete grasp of his value" (Rumbold 2010, 315). Institutions use their mission statements to frame their conceptions of Shakespeare's cultural value for their audiences

in particular ways, and both Stratford and the OSF locate their institutional value largely in their commitments to Shakespearean performance.

While each institution's devotion to reaffirming Shakespeare's cultural value through performance establishes the two festivals' value for their audiences, both Stratford and the OSF must also continue to attract new audiences to their institutional missions in order to remain relevant. Thus, in their mission statements, both institutions also convey certain approaches to performing Shakespeare's works, framing their performance practices as specifically relevant to their target audiences. This drive for relevance with audiences is clear in their devotion to their national identities, but it can also be seen in the selection of plays they choose to perform and in their descriptions of their performance practices. Though both institutions are devoted to Shakespeare, they also mention a commitment to performing plays beyond Shakespeare's canon, whether it's "classical and contemporary theatre" or "new and classic plays" (Stratford 2014; Oregon 2009). While Shakespeare is an important part of their institutional identities, both institutions recognize that they have to court their audiences through a variety of plays and performances, Shakespearean and otherwise. Along those lines, both festivals also realize that their performance practices need to be relevant for their target audiences, and so Stratford shows a commitment to "creating stimulating, thought-provoking productions" while the OSF is dedicated to revealing the audience's "collective humanity through illuminating interpretations" of the plays they perform (2014; 2009). For both institutions, reaffirming the legacy of Shakespeare and his plays is the touchstone that establishes their cultural importance and value, but it is through their performance approaches that they maintain their relevance with audiences.

These twin impulses of reaffirmation and tailored performance practices are also found in the mission statements of other theaters and festivals, though how they are framed can change based on the identity of the institution and its target audience. The Royal Shakespeare Company's statement entitled "Our Work" is indicative of how the reputation and reach of an institution can reshape these elements in specific ways:

Our job is to connect and help others connect with Shakespeare and produce bold, ambitious work with living writers, actors and artists . . . We believe in taking risks and pushing creative boundaries — finding new ways of doing things and learning through action. Our audiences are at the heart of all we do and we want to challenge, inspire and involve them. Our home is in Stratford-upon-Avon and in 2010 we reopened the Royal Shakespeare and Swan theatres after a £112.8m transformation to bring actors and audiences closer together. We play regularly in London, Newcastle upon Tyne and on tour across the UK and the world. As well as the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we produce new work

from living artists and develop creative links with theatre-makers from around the world. We work with teachers to inspire a life-long love of Shakespeare in young people and run events for everyone to explore and participate in our work. (2014)

The RSC, much like Stratford and the OSF, affirms their commitment to Shakespeare and their approaches for performance. However, the RSC positions itself differently as both a destination theater and a company that tours nationally and globally. The RSC is also able to levy the historical significance of Stratford-upon-Avon to their advantage, and so the reaffirmation of the cultural value of Shakespeare's plays becomes intertwined with the cultural heritage of the Bard's hometown. There is a commitment to creating an engaging experience for the RSC's audience in their statement as well, indicated by both the financial cost of their recent transformation and their dedication to connecting with their audience to "challenge, inspire, and involve them" in performances (2014).

Shakespeare's Globe also uses historical significance in its institutional mission available on the "Our Purpose" page of the Globe website: "The Shakespeare Globe Trust is dedicated to the experience and international understanding of Shakespeare in performance. Uniquely its work celebrates the fact that the greatest dramatic poet in the English language lived and worked in London and that the cradle of English theatre was on Bankside by the River Thames" (2014).<sup>2</sup> This mission statement intertwines the uniqueness of the physical location and its historical significance to the Globe. Whereas the RSC implicitly uses the historical significance of Stratford-upon-Avon in its mission statement, the Globe makes the significance of its location explicit for its audience. Both the RSC and the Globe use the link between their physical locations and Shakespeare's history as a means of establishing relevance with their audiences through claims of Shakespearean authenticity, and they are able to levy this authenticity in a way that the Stratford Festival and the OSF are unable to. All four institutions are invested in reaffirming Shakespeare's cultural value with audiences through specific approaches to performance, but the RSC and Globe also use their physical locations as major selling points for their relevance with audiences. The Globe, in particular, focuses on establishing its relevance with audiences through the historical value of its location rather than its performance approaches, which are covered under the umbrella of the Globe's focus on original performance practices. Even as they do so, each institution's claims of authenticity, cultural value, or performance practices highlight that their websites are part of a mediated culture in which their design and content choices make them "as much creators, as mediators, of 'Shakespeare'" (Rumbold 2010, 335).

The mission statements of these four theaters and festivals provide insight into how each institution positions itself as a purveyor of Shakespearean cultural value through an emphasis on reaffirmation, performance, and history. On their individual websites, each institution is able to shape a specific institutional identity for its online audience, and even though the audiences differ from institution to institution, they are united through their common identity as theaters and festivals concerned first and foremost with live Shakespeare performance. It is their institutional identities as theaters and festivals that set them apart from libraries, museums, archives, and other cultural institutions, as they provide their audiences with access to the ephemeral product of Shakespearean performance, as opposed to physical artifacts or objects safeguarded behind institutional walls.<sup>3</sup> Here, I would return to this essay's epigraph from Colby and Gelfand: while we traditionally conceive of libraries, museums, and archives as information centers, Shakespeare performance institutions also operate as information centers, especially as they generate greater online presences. This is not to say that the missions of theaters and festivals are synonymous with those of more traditional information centers, but that Shakespearean performance institutions also have a vested interest in negotiating the avenues of access to a variety of content that is of interest for their digital audiences. Much of this content is structured around establishing and maintaining the value of live Shakespeare performance with audiences, whether that comes through mission statements and historical information, performance images and video clips, or even video games.

The mission statements of these four institutions also reveal that in recent years, Shakespeare has seemingly become a performance product for a niche audience. Christie Carson has discussed how "the increasing influence of the digital work in both performance and in the critical reception of live theatre" has led to theaters and festivals "trying to cater to two kinds of audiences simultaneously: first a local specialized audience, and second a general international audience" (2008, 280). Each institution also provides different levels of emphasis on the content they offer; as larger, internationally recognized institutions, the RSC and the Globe provide a large amount of educational materials online for anyone interested, while Stratford and the OSF hold more of their educational materials for the classes and groups that physically visit the festivals. Though each institution may work broadly to target a global audience, the audiences that they engage with on a regular basis will usually be more localized, which is evidenced in part by the fact that all four sites are only available in English, and specialized, which is shown by the types and relevance of content available for audiences on each site. Targeting a niche audience brings with it many challenges for these institutions, and chief among them is the challenge of competing in what Richard Lanham calls the attention economy. Lanham argues that given the

massive amounts of information available through digital technologies, we have shifted away from an information economy, and that we are now in a moment when human attention has become the scarce resource being competed over (2006, xi). Thus, each theater or festival is tasked with attracting and maintaining their audiences' attention in order to remain relevant, a significant task when each institution is bound to a physical location that is not always within traveling distance for their online audiences. As a result, these institutions have extended their audience outreach to include digital media, and in particular social media, as new avenues of access for audiences. Shakespeare performance institutions are utilizing digital media outreach to compete in a more global and ever-growing attention economy, but to do so they have to incorporate these media into their existing outreach strategies, renegotiate issues of access both in terms of content and extent, and navigate the various constraints placed on the institutions by their own missions and their audiences. Adopting digital media into their outreach practices brings with it numerous questions: what should audiences have access to, what access will entice audiences to invest in institutions and their missions, and what should remain under institutional control? These questions are all rooted in the concept of access, and therefore it is imperative to establish a framework for thinking about access and its functions for Shakespeare theaters and festivals before exploring the role that social media play within that framework.

### Defining Access

While the term access has been employed in numerous fields and contexts, many of which are not associated with the recent proliferation of digital media, I am specifically interested in the ways that access is applied to digital media and the Internet. Access has been discussed often and at length with regard to libraries, museums, archives, and other traditional information centers, yet it has not been addressed in detail within discussions of Shakespeare performance institutions.<sup>4</sup> Theaters and festivals tend to be left outside the purview of discussions regarding cultural institutions and access that link access to issues of gatekeeping and theorize the role cultural institutions play in granting audiences access to cultural materials and artifacts.<sup>5</sup> However, traditional gatekeeping theories usually adopt a model similar to Adorno and Horkheimer's 1987 "hypodermic" model of culture (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), focusing on a one-way model of access where information is delivered from media outlets to audiences. These gatekeeping models do not account for other important factors that influence the process of access, such as the technologies actually used to provide that access. In order to account for technologies and other factors that shape access, we have to move beyond traditional notions of gatekeeping.

Informatics scholar Karine Barzilai-Nahon's theory of "network gatekeeping" offers a model for such an approach. She redefines gatekeeping as "a dynamic and contextual interpretation of gatekeeping referring to gatekeepers as stakeholders who change their gatekeeping roles depending on the stakeholder with whom they interact and/or the context in which they are situated" (2008, 1494). This formulation importantly recognizes that any study of access and gatekeeping must acknowledge that the role gatekeepers play is dynamic in nature, with various stakeholders negotiating access for different audiences. Network gatekeeping offers a model for understanding the fluid nature of access, accounting for the changing roles and expectations for audiences and institutions that seek to gain access and provide it. As we begin to think of access as a two-way street between audiences and institutions, we can see that the institution's role in facilitating access is not fixed, and that audiences can be influential in the process. The role of gatekeeper is never stable, and as institutions continue to adopt digital media into their outreach practices, the fluidity of gatekeeping roles becomes more apparent. Network gatekeeping theory takes an important step forward by recognizing gatekeeping as a dynamic process influenced by several parties and factors. However, as a theory it focuses more on the influence that networks between institutions and audiences have on the process of access than on the digital media used to create and maintain those networks.

Barzilai-Nahon's theory begins to intertwine the concepts of gatekeeping and access, and in doing so, accounts for the active roles audiences and institutions play in defining access; yet with the proliferation of digital media in all facets of our lives, network gatekeeping theory does not account in any sort of depth for the role that those media play in shaping access. For as technological access has become a given for many audiences, we now see access appear in conjunction with words and phrases such as "open," "universal," and "behind-the-scenes." Access is often paired with other concepts, such as participation and creativity, as Rumbold has discussed, and these pairings emphasize the positive aspects of digital media and what they can offer for digital audiences, particularly for the audiences of these Shakespeare performance institutions (2010, 324).<sup>6</sup> These reappropriations of access and associations with the positive rhetoric regarding the potential of digital media have in essence shifted the connotation of access from gatekeeping to gate-opening. While this shift represents what many institutions and audiences see as the perceived potential of digital media and their ability to change the contexts and expectations through which access occurs, this shift either relies on the notion that access is still a binary — access is either opened or closed — or that digital media are nothing more than the gateways through which access

occurs. Such approaches to digital media and access usually assume a priori that new technologies passively offer open access, and that this access is always beneficial for all involved.

As informed by the content-driven notions of access I mentioned above, these approaches also fail to recognize the need to understand access as a spectrum influenced by several factors, especially the technologies that provide such access in the first place. Moreover, these approaches do not address the fact that a proliferation of content is not synonymous with an increase in access. As Richard Burt has argued, we need to recognize "that Shakespeare's reproduction in mass culture is not identical with greater public access, whether or not the form Shakespeare takes in a given medium or subgenre is thought to be intelligent or stupid" (2002, 5). We cannot focus solely on the amount of Shakespearean content available for online audiences at the expense of understanding and theorizing how that content is accessed by audiences. For example, we may have more filmed versions of Shakespearean stage performances available now than we have had access to at any time in the past. However, if those performances are accessible only through technologies that mimic traditional notions of access (e.g., expensive paywalls or programs and websites with specific technological requirements), then no significant shift in access has occurred. Since these models of access are common practice for numerous businesses and institutions online (Shakespearean and otherwise), we cannot simply assume that digital media provide access that is automatically free, open, or universal. To account for how digital media influence the process of access, we have to move beyond traditional conceptions of access and gatekeeping while addressing the influence digital media have on that process.

Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory offers a model for considering the effects digital technologies have on the dynamic nature of access (2005, 9). Instead of focusing solely on human actants (that is, audiences and institutions), actor-network-theory also accounts for the influence of non-human actants, such as technology and media. This is not necessarily to say that technologies, media, or objects have their own agency within the scope of actor-network-theory, but that they do exert influence on the interactions and relationships of the actants within those networks. Latour's theory shifts us away from a focus on one-directional relationships and towards a consideration of the complex and ever-evolving negotiations among audiences, institutions, and the technologies and media they use. Using actor-network-theory, we can theorize how digital media operate as mediators, shaping the interactions between audiences and institutions in different ways. In the remainder of this article, I will focus on how three specific social media sites — Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest — serve as mediators between these four Shakespeare performance institutions and their audiences to highlight the influence of digital media on the process of access.

## Social Media and Access

As discussed above, the institutional website offers a space of control for institutions, allowing them to post the content they want to share and frame their identities in specific ways. However, though Shakespeare theaters and festivals may want their websites, or at least certain aspects of these sites, to become spaces of deep institution-audience engagement, the specter of institutional control may very well deter audiences from engaging with the institutions in these online spaces. For instance, on the RSC's blog *Whispers from the Wings*, cast and crew from current productions write posts about their experiences during the rehearsal and performance process. Each post on the blog has the option for users to provide responses to the post, though the posts have generated little response from users on the site. For the posts from 2013, the largest number of comments on a post was six (which only happened once), while the majority of the posts had no user comments at all. One reason for this might be the process for commenting on a blog. Users are asked to provide their names with comments (including an email address is optional), complete a Captcha to confirm they are personally writing the post, and also agree to the following statement: "We reserve the right not to publish your comments, and please note that any contribution you make is subject to our website terms of use."<sup>7</sup> While this language is in place to deter users from flaming, spamming, or posting inappropriate or negative comments, it can make users feel that their comments are being monitored in such a way that their responses to blog posts must be positive in nature. These constraints may also discourage users from commenting on posts if they feel that the space is not open to the full range of audience feedback. Looking through the responses reveals that this may be part of the issue, as most are short and overwhelmingly positive in nature, whether indicating excitement about a performance, wishing luck to the cast and crew, or commenting on the experience of seeing a live performance at the RSC.

Though I do think this institutional control over the user activity on theater and festival websites is a factor in the low amount of comments and interaction in these spaces, the fact is that these websites are designed first and foremost around providing audiences with a wealth of information regarding the institutions, their productions, and visitor information. The homepage of each institution's site includes numerous links to other pages, and while one of these links directs users to the institution's blog, these links are often buried among the others on the homepage. For example, on the homepage of their institutional sites, the Globe, the OSF, and the RSC all provide links to their respective blogs. However, these links are located the bottom of the homepage, and so users must scroll down to find them, something they may not do given the number of links available at the top of each page (see Appendix: Image 1). Even though institutions have created these spaces

on their sites to generate an interactive user experience and engage with their online audiences, users' attention is not being drawn to those spaces. At the same time, users are often visiting these sites with specific purposes in mind, such as buying tickets, finding information about visiting the theaters or festivals, or locating teaching materials. The institutions may create online spaces where they hope to generate interaction between the institutions and their audiences, but those audiences are not regularly navigating to institutional websites looking for those types of interactions. Thus, these spaces are inactive more as a result of the audience's inattention to these spaces, rather than to the constraints placed on interactions by the institutions.

As institutions work within the attention economy to draw users to their websites, they also have to consider what content on their own sites will attract their users' attention. With multiple spaces on each institutional websites vying for their audiences' attention, users are more likely to visit these sites, find the information they need, and then move on, rather than spend time exploring the various spaces the site has to offer. While institutions are able to bring audiences interested in Shakespeare theaters and festivals to their sites, these websites are not designed primarily as spaces for audience-institution interactions. This does not mean that these institutions are unable to interact with their audiences in these spaces, but that these are not spaces designed to sustain audience engagement over long periods of time. However, these institutions are finding more success by entering into online spaces where such engagement already occurs and seeking out their audiences in these spaces. Hence, Shakespeare theaters and festivals are finding it beneficial to establish their presence on certain social media sites, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, sites that Aimee Morrison identifies as "coaxing technologies" (2014). These three sites rely on their users' active participation, and coax them to post status updates, share content, and engage with other users, institutions, and businesses. For Shakespeare performance institutions, it makes sense to enter into these spaces, as they are already sites of heavy user activity among their audiences. These institutions broadcast their social media presences on their websites through buttons that consist of the recognizable logo for each social media site, and occasionally through embedding the feed from their social media accounts on their homepage, as the Globe does with their Twitter feed (see Appendix: Image 2). They also coax their audiences into engaging with them on social media with phrases like "Keep in Touch," "Connect with Us," or "Get the Latest News." By creating and establishing various social media presences, theaters and festivals hope to engage with their audiences in ways that are not as easily facilitated on their institutional websites.

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>Twitter</i>	<i>Pinterest</i>
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Oregon Shakespeare Festival	30,850	5,699	436
Royal Shakespeare Company	41,337	89,974	434
Shakespeare's Globe	59,734	49,091	601
Stratford Festival	42,128	12,903	330

*Table 1: Shakespeare Performance Institutions' Digital Audiences as of 29 May 2013*

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>Twitter</i>	<i>Pinterest</i>
Oregon Shakespeare Festival	34,301	6,987	539
Royal Shakespeare Company	51,823	136,978	716
Shakespeare's Globe	92,929	72,780	1,140
Stratford Festival	48,921	14,930	453

*Table 2: Shakespeare Performance Institutions' Digital Audiences as of 18 February 2014*

These institutions are gaining a foothold in the attention economy by establishing a presence on social media and going to where their audiences are already active. Instead of competing for their audiences' attention to come and engage on their individual sites, theaters and festivals utilize the fact that their audiences are already in these spaces. As institutions move onto social media sites, they have to renegotiate their expectations and come to terms with the fact that they are not able to exert the same type of control on social media sites that they are able to on their institutional websites. As Shakespeare theaters and festivals enter these spaces, they relinquish some of their control over content in order to tap into a larger online audience base and engage more effectively with their audiences in order to compete in the attention economy. They gain access to an audience base that is dynamic and continually growing, as is evidenced by the two tables above. However,

competing for their audiences' attention in these spaces requires more than just creating an account on a site or posting content. Institutions looking to grant their audiences access to content in these spaces must do so effectively, and this means that they must be aware of the affordances and limitations not only of the general technology they are using (e.g., social media) but also of the individual platforms they provide access through (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest) (Norman 2002, 9). For while there are elements that link these social media together under a common banner, acceptable and effective interactions on each site are defined by a different set of technological affordances. If theaters and festivals want to engage with their audiences through social media, it is imperative that they understand how to interact effectively with them in these online spaces. It is the affordances and limitations of these platforms that shape how access occurs on these sites in varying ways. Moreover, by understanding the affordances of these social media and their effects on the process of access, we can see just how social media operate as mediators among these institutions and their online audiences.

A quick look at Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest reveals some elements common among the three sites. As examples of what danah boyd and Nicole Ellison call social network sites, all three allow users to establish their own personal networks, of which they are the center (2007, 211). All three platforms rely on a type of feed on their homepage that present users with content and posts from other members of their networks. Content updates come in the form of text, images, videos, and hyperlinks to external content, and each site makes it simple for users to share content and posts with others. Those who do not look closely at each site may assume that they are simply three versions of the same thing, but in doing so they fail to understand the distinct differences among how the sites work. Although each site is an example of social media, they use separate sets of technological constraints that shape how users create their own social networks on the site. Facebook requires users to friend others they want in their network, and then other users must accept the friend request to be added to the network. On Twitter, users can follow other users without needing permission, and they can also be followed by others without reciprocation. Pinterest operates under a logic similar to that of Twitter, though users are also able to follow an individual board of a user without having to follow the actual user on the site. The differences between the three sites are not limited to how users create their networks. All three sites have content feeds for their users, but Facebook organizes that content based on an algorithm, while Twitter and Pinterest present posts chronologically. Though these feeds initially present content to users in fixed ways, each site allows users to search posts and access content through other methods, such as the hashtag on Twitter (a feature later adopted by Facebook) and the personalized

lists on Facebook and Twitter that users can create to build smaller, more focused newsfeeds. On Pinterest, users are able to search on a term and find all the public pins related to that term.

My goal here is not to chart an exhaustive list of the differences between these three social media sites. Rather, it is to highlight that each site operates under its own logic for creating networks and searching and delivering content among those networks based on its particular affordances and limitations. As Shakespeare theaters and festivals have established their presence on these different sites, they have had to negotiate with the technological affordances of each one. On Facebook, each institution is able to make a public page from which users can choose to receive updates. On Twitter and Pinterest, the institutions are able to establish public accounts that users can follow in their feeds. However, once they become part of users' networks, these institutions still have to utilize the technology effectively to stay engaged with their online followers. To stay competitive with other institutions in an attention economy, they must work on updating their social media accounts consistently to remain current with their online audiences; to this end, all four institutions have staff member positions dedicated to running their social media accounts, and it is their job to work on navigating the individual attention economy of each social media platform. Since users have content delivered chronologically on Twitter and Pinterest, institutions that post frequently are more likely to gain greater exposure with their online audiences. However, Facebook's Edgerank algorithm uses three different aspects — affinity, weight, and time decay — to determine what posts a user sees and in what order (Applum 2014). Edgerank calculates what posts from an institutional site the user will see based on the number of interactions the user has had with the institution's account, the amount and types of feedback a post has received, and the age of the post. The user's interactions and the feedback a post has received are key factors in the algorithm, so in a sense a quality post that receives a lot of user feedback outweighs numerous posts that receive no user feedback, especially if institutions are striving for greater exposure with other Facebook users. Though Edgerank provides institutions with insight into how their audience members interact with their content, the audiences themselves are often less aware of the algorithms that determine what updates they see and in what order.<sup>8</sup>

Social media also influence how institutions structure access to their content in another important way: the need to understand that the materials they share online become what Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green call "spreadable" content that audiences can share with others "for their own purposes, sometimes with the permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes" (2013, 3). Unlike institutional websites, where content is embedded in the site, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest all facilitate easy and straightforward methods for users to share content from

other users among their own individual networks. This ease of sharing means that institutional content can spread away from the institution's site and therefore from the institution's control, and so each institution has to be aware of exactly how content spreads on these sites and adjust their interactions accordingly. Pinterest is actually designed as a social media site that emphasizes sharing content as its primary function. To pin any sort of content to the site, there must be an image to feature in the post, and the users' Pinterest feed itself emphasizes the images over the text (See Appendix: Image 3). While each pin is usually accompanied by some written text as well, the text is often secondary to the image. Pins can be spread very quickly between users and through Pinterest's recommended pins, which are provided to users based on the content of what they pin. A user may pin many pieces of Shakespearean content to their own accounts that come from any number of other users on the site, so institutions have to account for this and craft posts that include important information with the pin. Content shared via Pinterest also exemplifies Douglas Lanier's "post-textual Shakespeare," as the images are what operate as "Shakespearean" for users on the site (2011). For example, a Stratford Festival pin from their 2014 season production of *Antony and Cleopatra* features a picture of the two actors playing Antony and Cleopatra in costume. Embedded at the bottom of the image are the names of the two actors. In the text accompanying the image, users are provided with numerous pieces of information: the name of the play, the director, the dates and theater for the production, and a summary of the play. Stratford crafts their pins in a way that highlights the image and information they hope will be spread by users throughout the site, recognizing that the image, more than the information, will lead to users spreading their content and sharing it with others.

Compared to the image-heavy focus of Pinterest, Facebook provides more of a balance between text and images in its posts. The platform also facilitates simple methods of sharing content among users' networks, though unlike on Pinterest, the posts shared by Facebook users must be posted by someone in their own network before they may share it with others. However, the content of a post also influences whether the audience may respond to it, and how that post may then be received and shared by other users. Facebook is more conducive to users responding directly to content shared on the site. Yet given the sheer amount of information that comes through a Facebook user's news feed and the Edgerank algorithm's method for organizing that information for users, theaters and festivals may feel pressured to produce stand-out posts that grab audiences' attention and to engage an online public in institutional content. The most popular method is to include an image or video with every update. For example, during the month of February 2014 (which marked the start of their 2014 season), of the over fifty status updates shared by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival on their Facebook page, only four did not have an image or video embedded in the post. While

individual posts varied in terms of the responses they received on the site, some receiving numerous likes and comments while others less so, the inclusion of images and videos makes these posts more likely to stand out among the numerous other posts individual users will see in their personal feeds and facilitate the audience's engagement with their content (See Appendix: Image 4). Much as Stratford did with their post on Pinterest, the OSF structures the content shared with audiences on the site to grab their attention, in hopes of having them engage with it.

Twitter presents a different type of challenge for Shakespeare theaters and festivals than either Pinterest or Facebook. Creating effective content on Twitter requires knowledge of both its technological affordances and its common user practices. While Twitter posts can and do include images and videos in their posts, this content has only recently become more visible for users in their actual feeds. Any user of Twitter will be familiar with its conventions and the ease with which it allows users to share media. Tweets are usually text-based (and limited to 140 characters). However, Twitter is habitually used to share images or videos that now appear users' feeds, as they can create posts with embedded images, video thumbnails, and hyperlinks to other pages containing content. While the text of a post may catch a user's eye while scrolling through the feed, institutions can now rely on the images in their posts to grasp the audience's attention along with the text, and doing so can greatly increase user response.<sup>9</sup> A successful post on Twitter will not just meet the platform's character limitation; while Twitter's limitations circumscribe how content is formatted and disseminated to users, it is the users themselves who regulate what the accepted user guidelines and practices are for the Twitter community. As Nancy Baym states, "Community norms of practice are displayed, reinforced, negotiated, and taught through members' shared behaviors," and so while institutions can share content with their audiences on the site, to do so effectively means that they have to participate in a way that the user community finds meaningful (2010, 80). When institutions are aware of the common user practices on social media sites like Twitter (and Pinterest and Facebook), they are able to engage their audiences in these online spaces and not simply deliver content to them. Examples of these practices are evident in the recent posts shared through the Stratford Festival's Twitter account @stratfest.<sup>10</sup> Stratford is able to participate in the site by adopting common practices such as following their own followers on the site, replying publicly to posts from their followers, retweeting what those followers have posted about Stratford for a larger audience, and crafting engaging updates for their followers using 140 characters or less.

It is important to note here that the specific affordances and limitations of Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest, and the common user practices that I have discussed above, are by no means fixed. Users of any of these or the numerous other social media sites available online

know that change is the only constant on these sites. The technological constraints are continually undergoing change, and the user community responds by incorporating these new changes into the common user practices of each site. Shakespeare theaters and festivals using social media to facilitate access for their audience have to be able to adjust to the technologies they use and to how those technologies mediate their interactions. Whereas institutions may currently operate using a specific set of practices to provide audiences access by sharing institutional materials on these sites, future changes made to any of these sites can drastically alter the methods for sharing and distributing content. Though there may be overlap in the institutions' audiences on the three sites, they cannot assume a singular notion of the audience-as-users; they must be able to interact with the individual audiences on each site, while also being aware of the fact that newer sites for engagement may appear and take the place of older ones (van Dijck 2009, 54). Thus, to actively engage and maintain audience interest through social media, Shakespeare theaters and festivals must continually adapt to the new ways that social media influence the process of access, while also being aware of and ready to work with newer social media and user trends.<sup>11</sup>

As social media sites offer institutions new avenues to provide access to and engage their online audiences, they also shift the role audiences play in the process of access. As is evident above, users exert considerable influence by establishing and maintaining the common practices of a given site, as well as determining the sites for such access. Shakespeare theaters and festivals are finding it necessary to engage their audiences online, and so they are going to the sites on which their audiences are already active, instead of hoping that their audiences will always come to their institutional websites. This change emphasizes the role audiences can and do play in determining sites of access, as they are able to influence the sites through which access occurs. Digital media, and social media in particular, have helped "to shift audience expectations creating a demand for information and experiences that extend beyond the theatre building and the moment of performance" (Carson 2008, 274). It is the audience's expectations that determine where institutions place their time and effort in using digital media to generate content; the fact that these theaters and festivals have established active presences on these social media sites indicates a shift away from the idea that audiences are only passive entities waiting to receive content. Social media and other digital media do not operate only as mediators for the shaping of content in the process of access. They are also allowing audiences to exert influence on the process by determining the sites and defining the practices institutions have to use when engaging with their audiences on these sites.

### Performing Relevance

In the final section of this article, I want to return to the questions I introduced earlier: what exactly is it that Shakespearean performance institutions provide access to, and how do social media help them to establish and maintain their relevance with digital audiences? For while social media may represent a middle ground between institutions and audiences where institutions lose some control over their content, the fact is that institutions gain quite a bit more by entering into these spaces. Through the practices outlined above, we can see that Shakespeare theaters and festivals show how, as Rumbold states, "Embracing the positive discourse of the Internet — interactivity, participation, creativity — can alter a cultural organization's relationship to its own value" (2010, 314). As they compete in an attention economy to maintain their relevance with their online audiences, these four institutions are not able to rely on audiences coming to their own websites, and so they have had to reconsider their methods for audience outreach. However, since these are institutions that specialize in live Shakespearean performance and rely on audiences physically attending those performances, they have to find a balance between providing audiences access to engaging performance materials online and enticing audiences to visit the theater or festival and attend those live performances. If institutions offer too little content online, they risk losing the audiences' attention and possibly becoming irrelevant in these online spaces; if they offer access to too much content, their audiences may not see the need to visit the theater or festival and see the performance live. This tightrope is one that Shakespeare theaters and festivals must negotiate more and more as they position themselves to remain relevant with online audiences in an attention economy.

One move that Shakespeare theaters and festivals have made to engage their online audiences is to open up the rehearsal process and grant more behind-the-scenes access. The rehearsal process has traditionally been closed off to audiences, particularly in western theater, and to share images and video clips from the rehearsal process with audiences represents a break from tradition (Holland 2009, 258). So when the Globe shares an interview with Gemma Arterton on her performance in the Globe's 2014 run of *The Duchess of Malfi*, or the OSF posts images of the actors rehearsing on set for their 2014 production of *The Comedy of Errors*, they offer the audience a chance to access the rehearsal process by peeking behind the curtains during the weeks leading up to the performances.<sup>12</sup>

In providing this access, they are simultaneously keeping their online audiences engaged and also generating interest in their current and upcoming performances. Both institutions still maintain control over what they provide access to and to what extent, but they, as well as the RSC and Stratford, recognize the benefits of opening up access to keep their audiences interested

and invested in their current and upcoming productions throughout a theatrical season as well as their overall institutional missions. While the move to open up behind-the-scenes access to the rehearsal process is a recent development for Shakespeare theaters and festivals, it also represents a moment in which these institutions are adopting long-standing marketing practices used by film and television. Film and television have long understood the effectiveness of sharing behind-the-scenes content throughout the rehearsal process leading up to the release of a film or show to build the audience's interest and keep them engaged until the actual release. In recent years, these techniques common to film and television have become more prominent in the practices of theaters and festivals, to the point where it has become standard to create film trailers for both individual productions and entire theatrical seasons. Though in some ways, theaters are catching up to film and television by adopting practices to engage their audiences throughout the rehearsal process, they are also participating in a longer trend of remediating the practices of other media into their own (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 55). The trailers themselves do not represent an entirely new approach to providing access for audiences, but they remediate live performances and, as Philip Auslander argues, continually shape the audience's definition and expectation of what it is that constitutes the live performance (2008).

However, even as they remediate these practices from other media, theaters and festivals are also changing the nature of the live performance event itself. In *Theatre Audiences*, Susan Bennett establishes the two frames that define the theatrical audience as the outer frame, containing the "cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event," and the inner frame, containing "the dramatic production in a particular playing space" (2003, 139). Bennett argues that it is at the intersection of these two frames — the meeting between these cultural elements and the live dramatic production — that a particular theatrical experience occurs for the audience. Social media offer the potential to extend the outer frame of the theatrical event, providing audiences access to behind-the-scenes content, marketing materials, personal and professional reviews, so that while the audience may come together in a physical space for a live performance, their engagement with the performance can long precede them stepping through the theater doors, and continue long after they leave the theater at the end of the performance. Institutions must also be aware that while social media and other digital media can extend the outer frame of a theatrical event, the reach of that extension is not infinite or global. As theaters and festivals utilize social media to create new avenues for audience access, they "expand the territory of a production, rather than de-territorialize it" (Li Lan 2003, 52).<sup>13</sup> So even as these institutions work to target both a local and global audience, social media are more likely to help them expand the territory of both a particular production and

the institution's audience, but that territory will still have boundaries. By expanding more and more into social media and other online spaces, these institutions and their audience also generate a wealth of content that can help institutions and performances scholars alike to reconstruct what Margaret Jane Kidnie refers to as the "bombsite" of performance (2008, 108).

For Shakespeare theaters and festivals, social media are a means of facilitating audience engagement with the institutions, their performances, and their overall missions to establish and maintain their relevance with online audiences. Using social media to provide audiences access to institutional content means that theaters and festivals may have to relinquish some of the control over their content and materials. At the same time, institutions gain the ability to engage with audiences more directly and on a larger scale than they have been able to in the past. As Shakespeare institutions continue to expand their online presences through the use of digital media, they will need to address how audiences are able to influence directly the sites of access and to reflect on what their institutional goals actually are when it comes to digital access. If theaters and festivals hope to engage their online audiences through social media in meaningful ways, they cannot rely on traditional notions of access when structuring their methods for digital outreach. In analyzing these and other online interactions between audience and institutions, we as scholars must also be able to understand the factors that influence access, and the ways that the media themselves can become mediators in the interactions between Shakespearean performance institutions and their audiences. We must also continue to be aware that the affordances and limitations of these technologies are continually changing, and that while the Globe, the OSF, the RSC, and Stratford are cultivating their presences on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, newer technologies and social media may supplant the popularity or usefulness of these sites in the future. Above all, institutions and scholars alike need to recognize that access is not simply a one-way street for mass media institutions to deliver content to passive audiences. Rather, it is a complex process, one continually shaped and influenced by the technologies, the institutions themselves, and their audiences, both online and offline.

## Appendix: Images

## Notes

1. Though I have chosen these four institutions mainly for their level of online engagement with their audiences, I recognize that all four can be considered traditional Shakespeare theaters and festivals. This overlap is not coincidence; instead, it speaks to the fact that even in an increasingly global context, established Anglophone theaters and festivals enjoy an advantage in building and maintaining their online presences and audience engagement.
2. On this page of the Globe's website, one finds both this short statement and a longer one that defines their "purpose through three central and inter-dependent activities": offering exhibitions focusing on Shakespeare and theater historically; maintaining excellence in international performance; and operating as a research hub for all interested in Shakespeare and performance (2014).
3. This is not to say that these theaters and festivals do not have a commitment to preserving and safeguarding their performance artifacts and materials (as each has a more traditional information center under its banner devoted on the preservation of both physical and ephemeral performance materials), but that this objective is usually secondary to the main goal of promoting live performance.
4. For more on how audiences use access as a means of appropriating the digital content of cultural institutions, see Feinberg 2011; on the benefits of open access models of scholarly publication, see Fitzpatrick 2012; for a look at the present and near future of access, see Hosek 2008; and for discussions of access for cultural institutions (particularly libraries) in an attention economy, see Lanham 2008.
5. For a brief history of gatekeeping and discussions of its current usage in journalism, see Shoemaker and Vos 2009. For an in-depth study of the history and use of the term "gatekeeping" among different disciplines, see Barzilai-Nahon 2009.
6. Other examples of this are Pierre Lévy's concept of "collective intelligence" (1997), which has led to much of the current thinking on concepts such as "crowdsourcing," and to a lesser extent, Henry Jenkins's definition of participatory culture (2006a).
7. This statement can be found on the bottom of every blog post on the Whispers from the Wings blog. Similar language can be found accompanying individual posts on the Globe's Adopt an Actor section of their site. While the OSF's blog and Stratford's Wordpress site do not explicitly include such language, the same set of guidelines seems implicitly to guide user activity on these sites.
8. For more on the news feed, see Chris Taylor's article "Why Facebook Won't Give You a Straight-Up News Feed" (2012).

9. Though the addition of inline images is a fairly recent development, several social media strategy sites have discussed the potential impact of the change. For more, see Cooper 2013, Elahi 2013, and Maher 2013.
10. See feed at <https://twitter.com/stratfest>.
11. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that Shakespeare theaters and festivals have to not only adapt to changes in social media, but also they must navigate various union and copyright issues when sharing content online featuring actors and performances.
12. The Arterton interviews can be found on the Globe's Adopt an Actor site. The OSF images have been shared through their public Facebook page.
13. Li Lan also asks, "Yet as photographs, illustrations, reviews, interviews, cast lists, and even in some cases video clips are mounted on the web, can we continue to think of a performance event as (only) occupying a local geographical and cultural space, when its audience community (that defines it as a performance) is not 'naturally' confined to its theatre audience, but artificially extended to everywhere else (and no specific place) as well, 'globalized', as we call it?" (2003, 48).

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