

What Would Media Studies Do? Social Media Shakespeare as a Technosocial Process

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Abstract

This essay explores the topic of social media Shakespeare from the perspective of Media Studies, identifying directions for future research shaped by emerging approaches in this field. Drawing on a range of posthuman, political economy, and cultural studies strands, it conceptualizes social media Shakespearean texts as assemblages of interactions between technologies, human creative subjects, and wider socioeconomic contexts. It proposes exploring memes, videos, tweets, or blog posts as instances of technosocial communication that foreground the interplay of text, algorithms, and users. It argues for moving beyond exploration of signification to understanding the unfixed, processual qualities of these texts, including exploring them through the affective experiences of production and consumption. It further advocates for extending concepts of remediation or adaptation to encompass the cyclical, embodied, and dynamic processes of digital media. This, it argues, is what Media Studies would do to analyze social media's Shakespeares.

When approached by the editors of this special issue of *Borrowers and Lenders* on Social Media Shakespeare to contribute a discussion from the perspective of Media Studies, our initial challenge was to identify how our approach might differ from those commonly adopted in the field of Shakespearean scholarship. There are many connections between these disciplines, particularly in the emphasis on exploring the meanings made by mediated texts and how these may represent a challenge to, or perhaps a reproduction of, authorized social and cultural structures. This intersection is, of course, not newly established. Shakespeare studies has an expanding history of exploring global electronic and broadcast media's interpretations of Shakespeare, often approaching these texts as one would any literary text, albeit with attention to the processes of adaptation and translation (Cimitile and Rowe 2011). In social media, however, the overt and broad distribution of the capacity for production generates a multiplication of Shakespeares and an emphasis on the signifying practices of audiences that has long been the domain of the inter-related disciplines of Media and Cultural Studies. The apparent novelty of these technologies also

brings into relief the importance of any medium's specificity and how this may shape the meaning-making possibilities of social media's Shakespeares. Drawing on this rich heritage in both fields, we thus begin this essay with the assumption that it is not enough to focus on the representational qualities or significance of user-generated digital objects: it is not enough to analyze media as text.

In his study of girls' remediation of Ophelia on YouTube, Stephen O'Neill observes that "each component of the YouTube-Shakespeare-Ophelia triptych is already situated within and inscribed by mass media and consumer culture" and so "becomes another example of the ways in which our (online) lives bear traces of mass media and the marks of the corporate" (O'Neill 2014a). While his analysis focuses on exploring how the textual qualities of amateur Opheliana reflect and speak to dominant modes of gendered identity-making, O'Neill's point that these texts must be viewed in terms of their location in existing ideological, technical, and economic systems is important. Such critiques, however, must be extended and made more complex in order to understand the social and technological architectures used to create, distribute, and consume social media's Shakespearean texts.

In this essay, we reconceptualize these Shakespeares as assemblages of the interactions between technologies, human creative subjects, and the wider socioeconomic context. These elements intertwine in a complex process of creation and re-creation. We explore what can be gained by approaching these processes not solely at the level of signification but also through greater consideration of the interactions between these actors, many of which are not human. We will initially outline the technosocial aspects of digitally mediated communication, and how consideration of the range of actors involved in digital media production generates a trilogical process of development constituted by interactions between user, hardware, and software. We explore the implications of this paradigm, arguing for understanding social media's Shakespearean texts in relation to the apparatus through which they are articulated, rather than as a set of static textual objects. This in turn raises the importance of the relationship of human actors and the conceptual and affective frameworks they bring to their interactions with digital technologies. The answer to the question of what Media Studies would do is, thus, not simple, and it promises difficult methodological reconfiguration. But it is to conceptualize media texts in ways that capture more of the complexity of digital mediation than is allowed by exploring meanings instantiated in texts alone.

Sociotechnical Infrastructures

As media and media analysis have moved from an emphasis on print and electronic forms to the digital, there has been a renewed focus on the material structures of every medium and

their technological infrastructures. The technical qualities of earlier, well-established technologies of television, radio, and print media had been naturalized and the insights of theorists such as McLuhan (1964), Carey (1989), and Innis (1951) that the form of these technologies communicated and effected social change as much as the content they represented had dropped from view. In the "newness" of digital media, though, the underlying technology became visible again, and Media Studies has increasingly focused on the ways in which technological infrastructure shapes and re-shapes what it is possible to think and do when we are engaged with any particular medium. This is particularly important for understanding online social media. Lawrence Lessig (2006) argues that underlying code or technical infrastructure in digital environments can act as "law," determining not only what is possible to do with a technology, but also what can be conceptualized as being possible. He uses the analogy of code as a locked door that one cannot open, but also not see past to know whether what lies beyond is valuable. Like the structural constraints of verse forms such as Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, the uploading limits of YouTube, the 140 characters of Twitter, or the chronological flow of Tumblr feeds are all examples of what is beyond the control of users and shapes but profoundly influence the nature of the "digital objects" (Mhurthy 2013) that they are able to produce. Shaped by such insights, research into digital media has increasingly focused on the affordances of technologies — identifying the practices they enable and/or constrain — in order to grasp the shaping of user agency (Hutchby 2001). The Shakespeares that are produced in social media are thus profoundly influenced by the specificity of each medium's affordances, and attention to this specificity, as cautiously advocated by O'Neill (2014b, 6-7), is an important starting point.

The emphasis placed on affordances here should not, however, be read as a form of technological determinism (Williams 1974; Manovich 2013, 96). The technological infrastructures of social media technologies do not manifest autonomously but are products of social actors, whether these are the individual developers who design the systems or the corporations who hire them. Each of these actors has particular ideological frameworks or agendas that are manifested in the code or technological architecture that users encounter at the level of the interface. These agendas are materialized in the affordances their products extend to users and subsequently into the texts and meanings these users are able to produce. To analyze social media through their affordances is therefore partly to identify the traces of the actors who develop technologies and their ideologies in the outputs and meaning-making frameworks of their users.

But there are other actors influencing the structures of social media. While not understating the influence of code, the affordances of any digital media site are also shaped by the social uses of that technology. As Lucas Graves argues (2007), how a particular technology is

normatively used is influenced by user practices in alliance with, or contravention of, technological affordances. He discusses how blogging practices are as much determined by the cultural meanings and social desires established through their use as by the technological affordances of blogging sites. There is, structurally, no reason for news blogs to call upon reader input, to be used to fix information that may otherwise disappear from the information sphere and to pull together and juxtapose multiple sources. These common structures of news blogging are available within the technological infrastructure, but it is social norms that establish and fix these features as definitive of the genre. Affordances, Graves suggests, are thus sociotechnical, emerging from the interaction of technological objects that materialize certain agendas, and the quotidian practices of users.

The adaptation of Shakespeare through Twitter's affordances — for instance, in the summaries of the plays by blogger Amy Helmes (2012) — illustrates these dynamics. These tweets are the products of a creative opportunity opened up by the technological platform and are inextricably shaped by the character limits that are a fundamental property of the site's infrastructure. Consequently, these tweets do not favor a rich dialogic interaction that generates a profound critical interrogation of the plays. This is because, as Murthy describes, Twitter is "event-driven" and "designed to provoke and call forth regular updates from their users" (2013, 25). However, this is as much an effect of common ways of navigating and engaging with the technology as it is of the limitations of the archive, recall, and comment functions of the technical system. It is technically possible to develop a rich and lengthy discussion about interpretations of Shakespeare using a range of tweets, breaking the discourse into 140-character sequences, uploaded in succession, and to provoke interrogation of the text's meaning, such as in the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* described by Calbi (2013, 137-62). It is, however, simply "not done." Such interventions may function and be experienced as extraordinary art events rather than the richly meaningful, yet normatively structured and encoded, practices of interpretation and citation that constitute the everyday uses of the platform and that make up the bulk of the digital object that is Twitter's Shakespeare. It is more common to see merely spectral Shakespearean traces (Calbi 2013) in someone's username, in the incorporation of a quote, in a promotional tweet, or in any other context where the Bard's cultural valence is drawn upon.

It is important, however, not to over-estimate the agency of users in defining the technosocial affordances of any technology. The capacity of users to influence technological development meaningfully remains much less than that of the companies that produce platforms. True participatory design is rare indeed, and the various controversies of Facebook re-designs, where only rarely have consumer's interests and protests had a real impact on the system's structures, illustrate the unequal power relations between media producers and users (for instance,

Bates 2008; Ionescu 2009). This gives the lie to the notion that the difference between consumers and producers has become less consequential in participatory culture, as implied by theorists such as Jenkins (2006). The agency to restructure the complex algorithms and end-user license agreements that encode activity does not belong directly to the average user. That said, productive agency is extended to users in digital media with greater extensity and intensity than in precursor forms, intersecting with the structuring principles of various other actors who together determine the contours of digital media texts.

Trilogical Technosocial Communication

That the question of agency in relation to affordances is so complex is crucial to emphasize. It serves to indicate the range of actors — technological, human, and institutional — that is implicated in digital media production. We argue here, however, that it is the *interactions* between these actors that need to be interrogated in order to bring social media's Shakespeares into view. Social media Shakespeare can be considered a cybertext, defined by Espen Aarseth (1997) as a text that is created and experienced through a computer. This is the central point of Jenny Weight's article "I, Apparatus, You: A Technosocial Introduction to Creative Practice" (2006). Weight (2006) suggests that the specificity of interactive digital media and its creative uses lies in a trilogical relationship between the user, the machine that they manipulate, and the software or code through which expressions are processed. Media Studies has long recognized the active role played by audiences and their gendered, classed, raced, or otherwise socially embedded decoding practices in the creation of meaning. It is in the relationship between the encoding of meaning by producers and the decoding practices of audience members that meaning emerges. However, rather than exhibiting this two-level structure of meaning-making, Kerr et al. (2006, 68) argue that digital media instead exhibit a three-level structure. In between the traditional two-levels of encoding and decoding is the physical manifestation of the user's individual choices that are inextricably tied to the technological systems with which they interact.

N. Katherine Hayles's (2004) position is particularly relevant for understanding this point. She suggests that due to the effectiveness of the computer as a simulation machine, it is seductive to think of text on the screen as similar to text on the page. She argues that this is misleading, however, because the creation of digital text is in fact a process, an event that is only ever emerging from the interactions between different factors such as software, hardware, and wetware (the human actor) (Hayles 2006, 181). In print media, although there is a process to arrive at the text, once the end result is achieved the texts do not change at the level of material structure and maintain a certain consistency over time and space (Hayles 2006, 183). Like the live performance of a Shakespearean

play (Worthen 2006), on the other hand a digital text is a particular articulation, the end result of specific interactions with specific programs at that specific moment. As with the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' belief that you cannot step in the same river twice, neither can the same digital text be repeated, for each time a process is carried out there are inevitable variations (Hayles 2006, 186). For instance, perhaps the platform or software is drawing on a different personalization algorithm from the previous articulation; perhaps the machine lags; perhaps the affective response to the screen by the user is less intense. It is only in the particularities of these interactions that a digital text can take form. Each textual event is, effectively, the interaction of technosocial actors, confirming the importance of considering all three partners in the communication process in any analysis. This leads to consideration of two important qualities of the assemblages that are social media texts: the text's relationship to the apparatus and the user's interaction with that text/apparatus.

Text as Apparatus

Weight's argument is that interactive digital texts "cannot be understood separately from the apparatus that displays and performs them" (2006, 413). They become inextricable, with each informing the other: they become, as Weight terms them, *text-as-apparatus*. Lev Manovich argues that this happens because in "cultural communication, a code is rarely simply a neutral transport mechanism; usually it affects the messages transmitted with its help" (2001, 64). Weight (2006, 431) reminds us of three commonly identified features of text as apparatus: the interface, the database, and the algorithm. The interface is the apparatus screen such as the computer monitor or device touch screen, or the particular view encountered by the user on that screen. Odin (2007) reminds us that while in the print medium content is the same as the interface, the digital medium needs an interface to make the content accessible to the user otherwise they would be presented merely with screens of code. The second common feature of the text-as-apparatus that Weight (2006, 431) outlines is the database: "a collection of items that constitutes the content of the work and exists in binary code on the computer" (Odin, 2007). In interactive digital media, the database contains the foundational elements of the narratives assembled at the interface. The third feature is the algorithm, a series of instructions that determine the qualities of the interaction, including that which manifests at the level of the interface. Weight describes algorithms as interactivity; in other words, the algorithm dictates the extent to which the user is given freedom within the environment. Algorithms thus link the user to the database and so allow them to form new relationships.

Although the apparatus is being directed by the human, there is also the possibility of the apparatus itself contributing unanticipated elements to the process and for this interaction to define, at least momentarily, the text/apparatus. For instance, Aimée Morrison (2014) describes

how unheralded changes to the affordances of Facebook's status update field "coax" different kinds of self-disclosure. She notes the shift from the elicitation of factual information associated with the original form of "<user name> is . . ." (e.g., Mary Jones is updating her status) to the openness allowed by the more recent disaggregation of user name, verb, and update field. Morrison suggests that the form of the autobiographies we assemble, and we would add the desire to constantly assemble and re-assemble these stories, emerge from the varying interactions of user and plastic, dynamic machines. The apparatus here is involved in the production of digital texts as much as other, more sentient, actors.

In a context where the text cannot be wholly distinguished from the hardware and software through which it is generated, and where those apparatuses have certain agency, we find a new communicative and, indeed, expressive process that is quite different from previous traditional analogue texts. To pull a particular arrangement of images, texts, or sound from the underlying database of the system is to experience and generate a unique text that remains malleable by virtue of its continued relation to the apparatus. The creation of memes through a meme-creating platform such as *memegenerator* is a useful example. The user may select a Shakespearean image from those available within the networked databases of the internet, add content by using the provided meme-generating technological platform, and then distribute it through various embedded mechanisms such as Facebook links, or use the drop-down menus of their computer to cut and paste this image. To experience this meme in your Facebook feed is also to engage with the interface of another database, determined by the algorithms that calculate your personal preferences and determine what is visible in your newsfeed. The meme as a text therefore remains embedded in, connected to, and shaped by the apparatus in varying ways across its life cycle, as is made overt in the overlaying of branding.

This maintenance of the link with production technology makes for particularly unfixed texts with often-indeterminate distribution patterns. Consequently, as Lister et al. maintain, digital media offer new textual experiences, including "new kinds of genre, textual form, entertainment, pleasure and patterns of media consumptions (computer games, hypertexts, special effects cinema)" (Lister et al. 2003, 12). Social media Shakespeare, when understood as embedded in the processes of the apparatus, is indeed a new textual experience, but also a new object of analysis. As merely a manifestation of a particular, and dynamic, algorithmic logic, each iteration is more than a single aesthetic object, or collection of objects, that can be explored thoroughly using existing strategies of textual analysis. As Kerr et al. suggest, "new media cannot be understood simply by adopting existing approaches and concepts . . . rather these concepts need to be carefully adapted to reflect the specificities of new media text, the experiences they engender and their varied concepts

of use" (2006, 78). This fluid, multilayered approach means, for example, that Shakespearean tweets must be considered in conjunction with the current shape and form of Twitter itself. The examination of the materiality of texts and its implication for the production of meaning is nothing new. However, the expanded and mutable interconnected potentialities of meaning now apparent in the "text-as-apparatus" evoke a confusing, dynamic, and intriguing network of meaning-making and actors in social media's Shakespeare.

User Interactions

It is not, however, only the lack of fixity associated with the particular qualities of digital, interactive media that limits textual analysis as an analytical tool. It is also because the meaning of any digital text cannot be found in qualities that inhere in the actors involved in its production, but instead develops in the interactions between them. Weight describes the trilogical relationship between users, machines, and software as meaningful and rewarding for its human interpreters, at the same time referring to a creative agent that is not solely human. This actor emerges during the particular interactions that occur between technological interface and human operator. She states: "The creating technosocial subject collaborates with the apparatus to create new media or communication. The interpreting technosocial subject interprets media or communication performed and disseminated via (but not initiated by) the apparatus" (Weight 2006, 415). In the same way that the text cannot be clearly differentiated from the apparatus, the actor involved in producing digital texts, who emerges as an actor from that activity, is not distinct from the enabling and constraining technologies with which they are interacting. Together they constitute the technosocial subject involved in production.

To understand social media Shakespeare through such a trilogical, processual framework, it is vital then to place the human actor in relation to their inputs and manipulations of the technological infrastructure. These actions must be interrogated not for their mechanical properties — which button is pushed when — but for the ways in which they make meaning in and of themselves. In their complication of media effects, Stuart Hall (1980) and others in the so-called Birmingham School have re-centered the study of media on the active meaning-making practices of audiences rather than assuming that the intention of producers and their ideological ideals could be simply read from the text or from the production practices themselves. This focus on the "active" rather than passive audience is at the core of the concept of participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) associated with social media. This paradigm emphasizes the need to focus on the socially embedded conceptual frameworks individuals bring to their engagement with media, but also how the dialogue between audiences and primary texts *becomes* the text as an experiential process

of meaning-making. In social media, that engagement includes the active production of original content rather than merely post hoc interpretations.

It is this emphasis on the dynamic emergence of meanings through the interactions of various human and non-human actors that extends the frameworks already applied by Shakespearean scholars in understanding the reception of the texts. When conceived as a cybernetic process — a process of feedback between user and machine both at moments of production and consumption — interactive media move attention away from understanding this process primarily in terms of its representational output. The inputs — the desires, motivations, concepts, pleasures, and, importantly, the embodied performance of that user — are worth exploring if we are to understand fully what it means to interact with Shakespeare through social media. As Aarseth says, the trilogic nature of meaning-making "renders traditional semiotic models and terminology, which were developed for objects that are mostly static, useless in their present unmodified form" (1997, 26). This is not only because the texts themselves become increasingly unbounded, fragmented, and polyvocal, so that authorship and intention become unclear, but also because digital media insert the embodied subjectivity of the user into the circuit of meaning-making, often in quite material ways.

The history of computer games studies is illuminating here, as it maps a shift from attempts to focus on games as narratives to an emphasis on ludology — on understanding games as play. It is argued that a computer game cannot be understood without understanding the experience of its game-play. As Sundén (2010) documents in her study of the massive multiplayer online game, *World of Warcraft* (WoW), the "wetware" on the other side of the computer keyboard is as much a part of the gaming, the meaning, and the system that is WoW as is the code, the interface, and the narrative trajectory of the game. She elaborates:

Games are played, not merely read or watched. They perform a simultaneous splitting of the subject, as well as perhaps a re-joining of their parts. As a player, you are an embodied subject on the outskirts of the game. At the same time, in most games you perform in and through a different body, a screen-based representation which becomes your vehicle for game play. Game play consists of consecutive actions and reactions, of endless cybernetic feedback loops in which you and the game are entwined and altered. You are not only playing the game: the game is also, most concretely, playing you. (Sundén 2010, 47)

The player is more than an effect or function of the game-design but an embodied and particular subject for whom the meaning of play is quite specific. To understand these texts, then, increasingly involves "close play," the exploration of the affective, desiring body involved in gaming, as well as

attention to the multiplicities of that subject as s/he moves through various modes of engagement and relations to the text/apparatus.

Social media Shakespeare can, and perhaps must, be interpreted in a similar way, as more akin to a live performance than to a static textual inscription (Worthen 2006). If we are to know what it is to transform a Shakespeare sonnet into the 140 characters of a tweet, to video-record Hamlet's soliloquy in your bedroom and distribute that to friends and strangers alike, to receive the affirmations of likes and shares of your meme, or to engage with the "haters" and "trolls" who scorn lovingly crafted interpretations, we need to know what it is to produce these texts. We need to know the physical and mental processes involved, and also how it feels to generate such texts through each particular technology. For instance, a friend reading a tweet such as "'How poor are they that have not patience? What wound did ever heal but in degrees? — William Shakespeare'" by @ToumaMusic" in the context of a personal newsfeed is wholly different to our experience encountering it by searching under the #Shakespeare hashtag. For us, this is a simple quotation amongst many, without any significant affective resonance. It slips easily into the background noise of Twitter's Shakespearean texts. However, for a friend this quote may speak eloquently to the particularities of @ToumaMusic's life, rendering this textual encounter a profoundly moving experience. For @ToumaMusic himself, the writing of this tweet may be a more or less emotionally expressive act, done in more or less engaging circumstances — on a phone with a frustratingly intermittent 3G signal while waiting for a coffee, at a desktop during work to kill time, or on a tablet while drinking wine on the sofa after a difficult and emotional day. The thirty-six retweets and thirty-eight favorites may similarly inflect this text with significance, as these are interpreted as signs of emotional support, or perhaps because of the ego boost that comes from such online recognition. That the author of this tweet is a singer-songwriter signed to a commercial label with 86,000 Twitter followers adds further layers to the embodied experience of all receiving and producing this tweet, and this must also be negotiated in understanding this instance of social media Shakespeare. If nothing else, the desiring body of the fan must be taken into account. To interpret this text, then, requires a close reading of the various embodied, institutional, symbolic, and technological dimensions through which its production and consumption are articulated. As this example indicates, mapping the social and affective intensities that mark moments of production and consumption adds a great deal of complexity, both theoretical and methodological, to the study of Shakespeare. It requires not only finding the meaning of the texts in the experiences of the "collective subject" produced by the "horde of individuals on a single site," or across platforms, as advocated by Hendershott-Kraetzer (in this issue), but also knowing the multiple, collected,

and fragmented subjectivities and practices of each of those individuals at different determinate moments of the production and consumption processes.

However, it is important to temper any exploration of the desiring, active user of social media with the recognition that these interactions happen in commercial contexts. Increasingly, we spend our time on-line in proprietary walled gardens (Anderson and Wolff 2010), engaged in banal and quotidian interactions with pre-defined, pre-scripted options for engagement coded into software. Social media are, as O'Neill (2011, 73) reminds us, largely commercial entertainment platforms intended to generate profit rather than tools designed to facilitate complex, unfettered, creative expression. This is despite the potential, and promise, of digital media to offer an almost unlimited agency. For instance, interaction is constrained by text boxes that shape and narrow our capacity for interaction with the apparatus, and by modes that primarily feed the corporate machinery that sells the qualities of that interaction to marketing and advertising companies (see Fuchs 2008, 2009, and 2014; and Scholz 2013). Our use as producers and consumers is overlaid by economic and legal systems such as copyright that also generate powerful constraints. For instance, at the time of writing, the user-generated YouTube mashup "Death Scenes from Shakespeare" (Roberts 2008) is underlined by an orange text box, stating: "This video previously contained a copyrighted audio track. Due to a claim by a copyright holder, the audio track has been muted." The video still plays, but with no sound, fundamentally transforming this user's self-expression and the experience for the text's audience. The interfaces through which we interact are technosocial actors, so commercial agendas such as this animate their contribution to each particular digital media interaction. The text/apparatus that social media Shakespeare's users interact with is also a machine for making money and this is also an important aspect of the experience of use that constitutes the technosocial subject.

Beyond Remediation

Our argument thus far has taken us away from understanding the medium-specificity of social media Shakespeare primarily through representational output and shaping by purely technical affordances. It has also taken us away from the concept of remediation that has become an important means for understanding Shakespeare's presence across electronic and digital media platforms (e.g., O'Neill 2011 and 2014b; Burt 2002; and Donaldson 2006). As conceptualized by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000), remediation is the process by which emerging media forms incorporate prior forms, partly because it is only through comparison to earlier media that we are able to understand any new medium (Fagerjord 2003, 1). Bolter and Grusin also suggest that new forms in turn re-shape pre-existing forms (as evidenced, for example, in the increasing incorporation of multimedia elements in live theatrical productions). They argue that

such mutual incorporation is a necessary part of the evolution of media, as shown in the remediation of painting by photography; stage production and photography by film; and film, vaudeville, and radio by television. As Larissa Hjorth (2011) reminds us, Bolter and Grusin's remediation theory in fact builds on McLuhan's formative suggestion that the content of new media is that of the previous technology; he suggests that all media are translations and that in the electric age, we are continuously translating ourselves into more forms of information. Rather than leaving the past behind, as we may initially perceive, we in fact see echoes of the past in new technologies and the uses we make of them (Hjorth 2011, 442; Booth 2012). Thus, in each new media form it has been possible to trace the changes and persistence of particular formal properties in order to interrogate the significance of new textual formations and to assay how each new iteration reproduces, complicates, challenges, or even queers a previous meaning-making system.

We find some evidence of the same process occurring in relation to social media Shakespeare, but while there are elements, such as text, buttons, pages, and screens, that can easily be recognized as deriving from older forms of media, there is also evidence of something entirely new at play. The interactive communication loop we have described here (as opposed to the linear transmission afforded by traditional media) is not something that can be identified as a remediated form of what has gone before. As Chun states, new media is not "digitized forms of other media (photography, video, text) but rather an interactive medium or form of distribution as independent as the information it relayed" (2006, 1). Merely viewing social media Shakespeares as remediated forms of what has gone before does not account for the cyclical, dynamic, embodied, and interactive communicative process that digital environments invoke.

Social media, therefore, are not only concerned with the adaptation or translation of Shakespeare by the socio-technological parameters of the new medium, or about how the new and the old intersect to create particular meaning-making frameworks. They also consider how the diffusion of the agency to generate these adaptations is experienced and articulated as a technologically and biologically embodied logic within that intersection. While a valuable framework, Bolter and Grusin's argument fails to shine enough light on these processes. They remain overly influenced by the traditional communicative model of two-level texts, ignoring the dynamic potentialities of the digital text/apparatus and its relationship to and interactions with the embodied subject of the producer and the consumer. This oversight needs to be acknowledged and addressed within Shakespeare studies as scholars approach the vast array of social media's Shakespearean forms. To draw on game studies again, Giddings (2007) posits that although in both academic and popular criticism, it is often argued that electronic and digital screens capture the surfaces of objects and phenomena, in fact "their essence, their reality, their intangible and invisible

operation (economic, social, political) are jettisoned" (Giddings 2007, 422; see also Fagerjord 2003, 28). This indicates that while on the surface some online Shakespearean content — with its simulations of page turning and screens that look like picture frames and book pages — may look like older forms of media, beneath these surface similarities lies a very different beast.

What Media Studies Would Do

To understand the medium-specificity of social media Shakespeare, but break from the concept of remediation and the interpretation of digital texts as objects, as we have proposed here, generates significant methodological and conceptual challenges. It is no longer about mapping the meanings and desires of a unified and complete subject that are then expressed in an object. It also cannot claim a singular static object as its focus of study. In the dynamic cybernetic exchanges of digital media, what is created is an ever-shifting human-machine assemblage that cannot be reified and examined as a discrete object. To approach social media Shakespeare as a trilogical technosocial communication process is about mapping shifting affective resonances and meaning-making registers as subjects move in and out of immersion, engagement, distance, and abstraction in the various processes involved in producing and consuming digital texts.

To take one example, the intensity of engagement with a Shakespearean sonnet that manifests itself in speaking to the camera in the production of a vlog must be understood in concert with the level of engagement experienced in the manipulation of the various technologies involved in its production and distribution. For example, onefoolshead's Shakespeare vlog (2013) is recorded in the very personal space of the user's bedroom; on the wall behind her, we see posters from Harry Potter films. She sits on her bed in her school uniform and she introduces us to her cello named Henry VII because, as she says, "it's Shakespeare." Vlogger onefoolshead is not only introducing us to Shakespeare in a different format, she is introducing us to *her* Shakespeare, as it is shaped and transmitted from her world using the tools and technologies available to her and selected by her. As Sloane tells us, in the past "reading was a matter of responding to a locked visual field, a habit of responding silently within one's own skull and body, to a prefigured text . . . traditional engagement with text is more private than public" (2000, 98). Now, however, "the materials of interactive fiction have made reading become a public and responsive act of visibly inscribing self on text" (Sloane 2000, 98-99). Vlogger onefoolshead is very visibly inscribing herself on the Shakespearean text by not only recording her vlog in her bedroom but by the recording and editing she conducts using her specific technologies and also the selection of YouTube as her chosen vehicle for communication and expression. To approach Shakespeare from a Media Studies perspective is, then, to explore these public inscriptions of self into technology and technology into self. This brings into play

Hayles's (2012, 102) concept of *technogenesis*, which maintains that humans and technics have evolved together.

However, it is also more than this. It is also about interrogating those experiences where the technosocial apparatus inserts its own agency, generating another, perhaps less desirable, suite of experiences, such as constrained agency, frustrating lag-times, and exploitative data gathering. Not only does the wetware of human subjectivity offer a dynamic range of potentialities for exploration, but so too does the hardware, or the digital text/apparatus. It is about viewing each performance of Shakespeare on social media as a particular negotiation between the biological, psychological, affective, social, economic, and technological affordances of a range of highly dynamic actors. Using a variety of textual and ethnographic methods to identify the specific qualities and outcomes of these negotiations is thus the means by which to understand social media's Shakespeares.

What Media Studies would do, then, is undeniably messy, particularly because its methods decenter the researcher's ability to define the signification of these texts. Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School would suggest, however, that generating an adequate understanding of popular mass mediated texts has always been messy. This is the heritage of playing to audiences whose varying interactions as individuals, and en masse, co-produce the text, a particular quality of live theatrical production that should be no stranger to Shakespearean scholars. This effect is amplified by global, mass distribution as well as by interactive technologies that intensify the ability of those audience members to produce and re-produce texts, in which each reproduction is a unique event rendered by the dynamism of the digital apparatus. Human expression, such as that which can be found in examples of social media Shakespeare online, has come a great distance from the realm of traditional media, and researchers need to make that journey, too.

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