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eShakespeare and performance

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The capabilities of Web 2.0 technology are pushing digital communications into a new phase of development. The social networking environments of Facebook and MySpace seem to invent new strategies of learning and experience, but I argue that the theatre and university pedagogy have been involved in co-ordinating social interactivity for a very long time. In order to develop critical approaches to the online world and its interaction with Shakespeare it is necessary to draw on critical writing outside the boundaries of Shakespeare studies and even outside literary criticism. Drawing together practical examples of new digital approaches with a range of critical writing, this essay attempts to set out a productive approach to dealing with the creative, collaborative and interactive environment of the Web 2.0 world.

Keywords: Web 2.0; interactivity; digital performance; Shakespeare in performance; theatre

A "Responsible Criticism"

In the inaugural edition of this journal, John Joughin states:

> A responsible criticism is one that is willing to acknowledge [a] sense of dislocation and dispossession whilst resisting the dogmatic foreclosure of definitive interpretations. Instead, it risks a form of critique that remains open to the particular without obliterating the wider picture. Indeed the virtue of a situated overview lies precisely here: as such it is neither a reductionism nor an empty relativism. (7)

In my attempt to provide a "situated overview" of the position of eShakespeare and performance, I will address both the changes in performance practices that I believe have been the result of the dominance of the digital and the changes that have taken place in terms of the digital dissemination of the work of many of the large theatre companies. The interaction of the theatre with the digital world has created complex and interesting redefinitions of the relationship between the live and the mediated. A hybrid approach to mediated "liveness" is something we have also been dealing with in recent years in university classrooms. I suggest that the impact of digital technology on both the theatre and on education is profound, pervasive and unavoidable, but I also suggest that these two areas of work have produced useful practical and critical models. The new communication environment has instigated a re-assessment of traditional patterns of understanding and hierarchies of information, resulting in a retrenchment or re-affirmation of principles in some cases and the development of new rules of engagement and ways of working in others. Developing in ourselves and in our students a sophisticated set of strategies for analysing and accrediting the work that appears on our desktops is a pressing concern.

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In the face of so much material it is possible to reach a state of critical paralysis; but the sensation of being overwhelmed must be overcome. The usefulness of critical strategies of contextualization and structured ways of thinking has never been greater. This essay will suggest, therefore, the new kinds of strategies needed to develop a truly "responsible criticism".

Digital technology and the live interaction of performance and teaching seem antithetical and, in many ways, they have been in the first phases of development of online technology. During these initial phases of the Web, the critical understanding of the online world came almost entirely from publishing precedents. However, Web 2.0 is a performative, creative collaborative environment and the theatre has a great deal of experience in this area, as does the university. But it is the classroom rather than the library that we must turn to for experience. This essay will attempt to articulate the essential role of criticism in helping to shape the future of online interaction by combining a critical understanding of digitally mediated performance and teaching with an illustration of how these areas of work are intersecting. I will end the essay by looking at two examples of hybridized approaches to the integration of the live and the virtual which acknowledge the possibility of participants with different levels of knowledge and involvement. The aim of the essay, then, is to put forward a case for the development of a critical approach that acknowledges the performativity of the new online environment and that holds up to scrutiny the new strategies of learning and understanding that are developing in the world in which we now live.

Positioning Shakespeare in a digital context

In order to provide a critical framework for eShakespeare and performance, I will draw first on criticism of digitally mediated performance from Philip Auslander and then turn to criticism of online pedagogic practice from Alan Liu. In order to address the demands of a "responsible criticism" that responds to a socially interactive online world, it is essential to acknowledge the complex nature of the current interaction taking place between the live and the online theatrical worlds, as well as the position of the university within this dialogue. Theatres and universities have been under pressure over the past decade to professionalize their practices to fall in line with the business world and have been drawn into a governmental agenda that sees the creative and educational industries as key players in the expanding "knowledge economy". In this environment the benefits of culture must be quantified and this has generated a debate about the value of the arts as well as the value and purpose of a university education.

As ever, Shakespeare has taken on a central and complex position in this debate. The general push seems to be for culture and education to be made more widely available, more interactive and more appealing to a general audience. In other words, the traditional role of the humanities, to humanize through the creation of a community that shares values and creates a collective understanding of our world, has been replaced by a commodity-driven culture that requires the marketing of specific skills, products and outcomes. The civic, religious, educational and entertainment value of Shakespeare's work has been forced into the harsh light of commercial scrutiny. In order to articulate the complexities of the new world in a useful way I will map out a number of specific examples of working practice that highlight not only the approach taken to this challenging environment but also the pressures and contradictions that are at play. This will illustrate the ways that the skills involved in creating a community through Shakespeare's work are beginning to find favour once again.

The critical debate surrounding digital performance

The profound changes to our society that the shift to the dominance of digital media has instigated have long been felt by commercial publishers. In many ways the theatre is the last refuge and could be seen as the home of conservative retrenchment for those who continue to believe passionately in the importance of a live and communal experience. However, theatre companies, as Joughin points out, have always been driven by both the market and a desire for creative innovation. Joughin usefully quotes Kate McLuskie on this issue:

> When Shakespeare and his fellows deplored the effect on art of an ignorant market, they usually did so in the interests of the kinds of innovation they had brought to the theatre of their own time. Ben Jonson was characteristically sarcastic about those whose love of old plays showed that their judgement was constant "and hath stood still these five and twenty or thirty years". (McLuskie, qtd. in Joughin 4)

The theatre can be positioned to represent a source of opposition to the digital. The "smell of the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd" are precisely what the digital world cannot provide. However, it is not possible for a successful theatre to ignore the social changes of its audiences. In fact the theatre can, as it always has, provide a place to rehearse the social changes that the new dominant media present.

In many ways the online world is becoming increasingly theatrical with the move towards imaginary environments where the participants are expected to take on performative roles. The astonishing popularity of the immersive world "Second Life" indicates how important the imagination is to the online world. Looking at the current position of the theatre within the wider cultural sector it is interesting to consider how audiences approach this art form in a digital world. Philip Auslander in his 1999 book *Liveness* addresses the interaction between live performance and what he calls "media-tized" performance. The central premise of his argument is that we live in a "cultural economy ... in which different media enjoy different degrees of cultural presence, power and prestige at different points in time" (Auslander, "Afterword" 194). He proposes that "audience perception [is] likely to be most influenced by the dominant media of the time and that spectators [will] bring expectations based on that influence to bear on their experiences of non-dominant media" (194).

Auslander's work in 1999 assumed televisual dominance, "while all forms of live performance were relegated to the position of dominated media" ("Afterword" 194). However, by 2006 he has begun to accept the notion that digital media may soon dominate audience expectations and perceptions:

> The current version of this jockeying for position within cultural economy, unfolding as I write this, indeed involves computer games, which either are or are about to become a dominant medium with respect to capitalisation, cultural presence, and power. ("Afterword" 195)

One of the key implications of this shift to the dominance of the digital, as Auslander points out, "is that whereas liveness once connoted a-liveness, that is no longer necessarily the case" ("Afterword" 197). In an environment that confuses and combines the digital and the live, a critical position that accommodates this mixing of communications strategies is necessary. Theatre, despite its lack of dominance, can provide a model to help to humanize and contextualize the changes of the digital world. The theatre already has taken on the role of demonstrating how live and mediated performance can work together to create both a local, specialist audience and an extended community, which are united through an engagement in the issues raised by the plays in performance.

Critical pedagogy and the evolution of the Web

Turning to the influence of pedagogy, I would like to highlight Alan Liu's keynote address "Knowledge 2.0?", at the English Subject Centre's Renewals Conference in July 2007, which maps out the progression that has taken place in the online world over the past decade.[1] Liu points out how moving from the publishing paradigm of Web 1.0 to the dynamic database-driven world of the Web 1.5 has created a crisis in the authority of online information. When an author published his or her work directly on the Web, it was possible to locate both authority in and responsibility for that work. Once technical solutions were developed to separate the author from the audience, a barrier arose in terms of locating the direct responsibility for the content of online information. My own research and several of the other projects described in this special issue fall very much into this pattern. My first large digital project *The Cambridge King Lear CD-ROM: Text and Performance Archive*, which I edited with Professor Jacky Bratton, was a multimedia edition of the play. This edition was larger than a standard edition in that it held 10 texts of the play, it was more integrated in that it included a range of secondary material that could be directly reference, and it was more sophisticated in terms of the navigation possible through the central Finder Text that acted as the spine of the project, highlighting textual variants through colour-coding. However, it was recognizable as a stable and self-contained scholarly edition of the text published by an academic press. It was always very clear where the responsibility for the material lay. Work on the texts of the plays has moved on as the descriptions in this special issue of the Electronic New Variorum Shakespeare and the Internet Shakespeare Editions makes clear, however, the attachment in the online world to a publishing paradigm still exists in these examples.

The Web 1.5 model Liu presents, which draws together material about a particular subject through an integrated but flexible database, can be seen in the work of the Shakespeare Electronic Archive, the Shakespeare in Performance area of the Internet Shakespeare Editions and the Thomson Gale Shakespeare Collection. The four integrated databases of the second digital project I co-ordinated, *Designing Shakespeare: An Audio Visual Archive, 1960–2000*, follow very much this same model. In this resource production information and reviews, images of performance, interviews with designers and VRML models of 10 theatres are all held in separate databases. The information is drawn into production pages using database technology. Although the images, video interviews and VRML models are credited, the production information is not. The format in which the information is delivered is conscientiously flexible to allow for reuse of the material in teaching and research. The project provides an archive of material designed for multiple uses rather than an edited edition. The organizing principle is the creation of a comprehensive body of research rather than a structured argument. There exists then, on the Web, a range of scholarly research and publishing projects that embody this second definition of online understanding.

The shift from the single author single argument model to the collaborative research project model is something I will return to illustrate in more detail; however, first it is essential to look briefly to the future. The movement Liu describes in the Web 2.0 world, in which the dominant communication strategy is of the many to many relationship, disrupts traditional ideas of authority and responsibility in significant ways. If an online resource is created by what Liu calls a "cloud of contributors", as is the case with Wikipedia, how is it possible to invest that resource with the kind of authority that comes with the single authored or edited text or the co-ordinated collaborative research project? Liu asks the controversial question "Is user-contributed knowledge a more robust paradigm than

expert-produced knowledge?'' (abstract). In order to tackle the question of authority in this environment Liu created a reference guide for his students to help them understand the creation process of Wikipedia. This kind of approach to placing in context the many complex resources of the Web, is something I will also return to; however, for the moment I would like to address the issue of why the shift to Web 2.0 is seen as threatening by many academics.

Liu asks, "In the era of Google, Wikipedia and other Web 2.0 exemplars, is all knowledge destined to be just "good enough" knowledge?'' (abstract). The world of social networking certainly seems disruptive if one begins with a publishing paradigm as the natural state of being and is wedded to the idea of single or even collective authorship. Many university research committees do not have a model for crediting an open access environment. However, in the theatre and in the classroom, orchestrating social interaction and collaborative creation, where all the participants potentially have a voice, is the norm. For theatre practitioners, the new online world seems quite intuitive. Far from upsetting theatrical practices, the Web 2.0 environment replicates them. However, it recreates them in a way that can dissolve geographic and temporal boundaries. In terms of the projects represented in this journal, MIT's XMAS system that connects classroom interaction and the Shakespeare in Performance blog reviews are the only ones which make a movement towards this postpublication model.

Cultural life in the digital world

To return to the theatre, it is interesting to see how the large theatre companies have tackled the digital world as understood through Auslander's notion of dominance and Liu's vision of authority. Elsewhere I have discussed how digital technology is helping to shift audience expectations creating a demand for information and experiences that extend beyond the theatre building and the moment of performance (Carson, "Digital Technology"). The shift that has taken place in terms of the responsibility for the online activities of the major theatres from the marketing departments to the education departments has helped to extend the specific local theatrical experience both spatially and geographically.[2] Although I have argued that the online archival materials that have been presented by the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company[3] are inherently passive and "televisual" in their presentation, I also concede that they serve to draw an online audience into a dialogue about the creative process of making theatre (Carson, "The Evolution"). The increasing importance and prominence of the education departments in these theatres has been largely the result of the movement towards an interactive engagement with audiences that the online world demands. The issues around power and authority I have highlighted in terms of developing a comprehensive online archive of performance material are increasing in importance ("Digitising Performance History"). The issue of the development of centralized authorities online continues to be of concern in the Web 2.0 world, as Liu's comments on Wikipedia highlight. There is an increasing demand for audience interactivity, which is both driven by the digital world and satisfied by it. Theatrical and educational strategies of communication are helping to structure these digital dialogues.

When commercial publishing conventions determined interaction during the first decade of the Web, the theatre and university teaching environments seemed to have little to offer, but now in the world of social networking, theatrical and pedagogical conventions may well establish the dominant metaphors. The battle for control of the online imaginative world has been raging for some time. The terminology of the computer has

long been arranged around paper-based conventions; (web)pages, files, folders. This has been partly due to the fact that technology has always accommodated text more easily than images, sound and video. The dislocation of time and geography that the online world allows was seen initially as a great advantage, but our attitude towards this "advantage" has changed. Initially, the excitement of being freed from our desks was so great that it took some time to realize the full impact of a boundaryless communications world. Now that technology has successfully broken down the boundaries of space and time, we are slowly trying to recreate them. The Nintendo Wii world of multi-user gaming and the real time interaction of "Second Life" (or "Club Penguin" for the newest generation of online users) indicate that meeting with others in a specific time and an imagined location are on the rise. Human beings are rooted in space and time in ways that are hard to abandon completely. Whereas the first two phases of the Web saw the attraction of losing sight of these locators, increasingly the new social networking world is returning to notions of creating specific communities of interaction for specific purposes, many of them creative.

Culturally, then, we are entering a period of self-examination after a decade of self-exposure. The Internet gives access to a world-wide audience, bypassing the traditional gate-keepers of publishers and television executives, but the result has been a cacophony of information that few users have been able to master fully. The ability to publish information that is of specialist interest may provide an opportunity to broaden exposure to little known works of art, music or poetry. However, it may well reinforce the fact that the interest is specialized. Although social optimists initially saw the online world as a new frontier, the slow steady re-establishment of traditional hierarchies and prejudices has been unavoidable. In fact, the online world has replicated and intensified the tradition of the televisual media reinforcing a perception that we live in a world that is interminably violent and voraciously sexual. While smaller artistic interests may have gone unheard online, the power of formerly socially unacceptable practices has increased dramatically. It is alarming the speed with which digital technology has been used to bully, torment, alienate and prey on insecurities. My office desktop computer is no longer out of bounds to the sellers of Viagra and casual sex. In a print world there is significant protection from the barrage of pornography that we now all experience in the digital world on a daily basis. With television, because of its public consumption, programmes have been regulated and boundaries, such as the watershed, have been maintained, but the Internet as a "private space" has had attached to it all the rights and freedoms of rampant individualism and free trade capitalism.

Academic responses to digital dominance

In the academy the response to the digital has been a movement in two opposite directions. Digital technology facilitates new kinds of quantitative research in the Humanities that mimics social science practices. The large archives that facilitate sociolinguistic analysis are examples of this trend, but so too are the examples outlined in this special issue, and my own research work that has tried to present a comprehensive approach to archiving contemporary theatrical performance. Digital technology allows scholars to tackle large bodies of information in a systematic way. This has been supported by a movement towards practice-based research in the Humanities, which takes the scientific experiment as one of its guiding metaphors. The opposite trend has been seen, however, in much recent critical writing, where a movement towards a new aestheticism, an increased awareness of the ethics of critical work and a resurgence of a discussion of the spiritual aspects of the humanist approach have been seen.[4]

There appears to be a danger of repeating in reverse the clashes of the "culture wars" of the 1980s and early 1990s which saw a divide between humanist and materialist critics.[5] This stand-off between critical positions seemed irresolvable at the time but, as Joughin points out, in hindsight Jonathan Dollimore was able to see that this battle was itself "guilty of a form of reductionism" (3):

> The stand-off here is not so much one between the humanist and the anti-humanists, as between a conservative and progressive humanism ... there's a sense in which these arch-enemies, the humanist and the materialist are competing for the same ethical high ground. ... both humanists and materialists would endorse the idea of a society of people educated "for full and intelligent participation in a modern democracy", while disagreeing about (i) what such a society looks like; (ii) the proximity of actual existing societies to that ideal; (iii) the part canonical artworks, and an education based on ideas of the aesthetic as conventionally understood, actually play in promoting democracy and participation. (Dollimore, qtd. in Joughin 3)

I quote Dollimore just as Joughin does in an attempt to support and extend Joughin's premise that critics of Shakespeare have more in common than they might like to admit. I would go so far as to say that given that the circle of criticism has come around on itself quite quickly, with a new push for a reanimation of an aesthetically inspired humanism, that the two ends of this spectrum are not nearly as far apart as they originally appeared. In fact, I would rather redraw the tensions described as circular and interdependent rather than linear and diverging.

So although critical divides within the academy are not as great as they have often been seen to be, the distance between these critical debates and the wider world of social debate is broadening, resulting in new tensions and divergence in practice. We are moving from a distinction between the humanist and materialist traditions within criticism to a divide between those critics who would like to include and those who would like to exclude the wider world of social engagement that is dominated by digital media. Television has always presented a pull for the academic who felt he or she wanted to discuss a personal area of expertise with a wider audience. However, this medium holds onto the authorial voice and presents a contained, contextually coherent, package. The digital world is much more pervasive and much more destructive of traditional systems of understanding. In other words, not only is it possible to access and use academic materials entirely outside of the intended context but increasingly we must teach students (and our online users) the purpose of developing structured approaches to knowledge in the first place. The dissolution of traditional hierarchies has caused some in the academic world to want to reinforce the barriers between academic discourse and public discourse, often becoming more insular and opaque, whereas other scholars have responded with a desire to re-assess these boundaries and to engage with new ways of thinking and working.

The digital world appears to allow for a redefinition of the public perception of the arts and education. As I have already pointed out, in the first phases of the Internet this resulted in the publication of traditional methods and materials to a wider audience. In the new phase of digital development the social networking environments have the power to alter entirely the purpose and function of these areas of endeavour. Liu asks "Does the unstable relationship between scholarly knowledge and Web 2.0 merely reveal underlying problems – and potentials – in the adaptation of the academy to general society that have lain dormant since Web 1.0?" (abstract). Given that the theatre is perhaps more directly controlled by the market, and audience responses to its work, this environment has been dealing with this push towards public interaction for slightly longer than the universities. Initially the response of the theatrical community, like the universities, was to provide

archival access to its current work through the Web. This archival function has moved towards a more open dialogue with audiences designed to foster an engagement with the creative process. Creativity appears to be the new driving force behind the Web 2.0 world and, when interactivity and creativity are combined, the result is seen in the huge success of sites that share creative endeavour and personal details like YouTube and MySpace. The fact that these sites do not differentiate between creative work and biographical detail and that the visibility of either kind of work is based on popularity rather than quality or originality goes to the heart of the problem we are now facing. Google ranks sites based on how many other sites are linked to them or are cited by them, in other words by popular recognition of worth or by popular demand. In the academic world we are not spared this trend, and are equally being pushed towards a metrics of citation to determine the value of our research.

Responding critically to new means of understanding

Given this dramatic cultural shift in knowledge creation, what is an appropriate critical response? A reaction to these changes that goes too far either towards retrenchment or towards the abandonment of notions of quality and rigor has its dangers. In order to illustrate my position through a concrete example, I will take a short parenthetical detour in my argument to chart the parallel between my own developing research work and the education work of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). The example of the RSC and my involvement with this venerable institution provides an interesting illustration of the way these two areas are meeting through pedagogy. On the surface the RSC and I have common aims and goals in that we both are concerned with promoting the value of Shakespeare as performed by contemporary theatre artists as a means of expressing communally held beliefs and pressing social concerns. We are both subsidized by the government to present our work to a specific local audience who have paid to attend our presentations and to a wider audience through a variety of secondary means of dissemination. In both cases we are seen as experts in our fields and we are consulted on our views when policy level decisions are made. The future of the field is, at least in part, determined by our work and the response it receives from the immediate audience and an audience of expert peers whose opinion is valued rather more highly. This structured determination of our separate but equal worthiness to carry on our work has been developed over many years. Therefore, on the surface, the similarities appear substantial. What differentiates these two areas is the longevity and strength of the structures that hold these systems in place. The subsidized theatre has only been around since the advent of the Arts Council in Britain, which was set up after the Second World War. The universities in the UK, on the other hand, have had a number of centuries to develop their processes. As a result the subsidized theatre, even one as large and as seemingly monolithic as the RSC, is in a position to change its practices more rapidly than the university. This theatre is also more directly affected by commercial concerns, which demand quick shifts in line with customer feedback. The outcome of this difference in speed of change has resulted in some interesting variations in approach.

Shortly after I launched the *Designing Shakespeare* Archive in 2003, the Royal Shakespeare Company launched a similar looking project in its "Pictures and Exhibitions" website. This website, which gained funding from the Lottery's New Opportunities Fund, presents images from the archive of the RSC as held by the Shakespeare Centre Library. The website includes a range of images that illustrate nineteenth- and early twentieth-century productions of the plays including stage designs, props and pages from prompt

370   books. The majority of the images, however, illustrate the RSC's own recent productions.
       The images are searchable or can be accessed through a series of themed exhibitions. It is
       possible to collect together specific images to create a personalized collection, although
       how this function might be used is not made clear. Although a wealth of interesting
       information is provided there is no collection criteria published. By contrast, the *Designing*
375   *Shakespeare* project opens with a statement of intent and a clear sense of what the
       boundaries of the collection are. The intention was to include all professional productions
       of Shakespeare's plays in Stratford and London from 1960 to 2000 in order to provide an
       overview of the kinds of venues and companies that were actively pursuing Shakespearean
       production during this period as well as the creative approaches taken. The aim was to
380   focus on design so, in addition to the images of production and the production details
       made available, interviews with designers and VRML models of the theatres most used in
       performance were included in the archive. The project not only wishes to highlight the
       work of designers but their working environments and creative processes. The project
       consciously embodies the critical movement towards a situated analysis of the creative
385   process and away from an evaluation of the creative product devoid of context. In line with
       the Web 1.5 model outlined above, this project gives public access to a collaborative
       research project, the aim of which is to create a systematic approach to a large body of
       newly created and collected archival material.

           Having made these initial materials available, both my own work and the RSC's online
390   delivery developed in interesting pedagogically driven ways. The initial movement by the
       RSC was away from a static database and towards a much more structured teaching
       resource entitled "Exploring *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*". In this work specific scenes of the
       plays were recorded on video and are presented to the user, some in performance and some
       in rehearsal.[6] While I very much appreciate the skill and time required to develop such a
395   resource in Auslander's terms, I must see this project as very much influenced by a
       "televisual" aesthetic. By this I mean that the user is able to move about on the website but
       the video presentations are designed to be viewed in a linear fashion. There is no possibility
       for the user to enter into the debate or help to frame new questions. The introduction of
       video of the performances and in particular video of the rehearsal process shows an
400   important recognition of the shift towards a process-oriented approach to creation and
       criticism. The involvement of comments by actors, directors and designers helps to
       consolidate this approach. However, the reliance on a presentation of materials in a
       packaged form after the live presentation has finished shows an attachment to a passive
       documentary format coming from television. My own work from this period suffers from a
405   similar drift towards linearity but hopefully one that retains the flexibility to allow the user
       to replace the structured approach to materials on offer. Drawing on the materials created
       for the *Designing Shakespeare* project, I worked with the English Subject Centre to develop
       two teaching packages for colleagues that illustrate how it might be possible to incorporate
       these new kinds of resources in the classroom. The aim of this project was to find a way to
410   create structure and flexibility at the same time, therefore both linear and nonlinear
       approaches to the materials are presented, although admittedly both forms of presentation
       reflect the postproduction period.[7]

           It is interesting to note that the RSC have now removed from the Learning website's
       navigation their initial attempt at creating a teaching package with multimedia resources
415   and have replaced it with a much less prescribed approach. The Complete Works Festival,
       the RSC's year-long celebration of Shakespeare's work, has been illustrated online through
       a play-based resource called "Exploring Shakespeare" that presents a selection of the
       following for each play; an image gallery of performance, an image gallery of rehearsal,

performance video, rehearsal video, interviews with practitioners, quizzes, notes for teachers and information on past productions. Using this new format a great deal more information is being made available for use in a flexible way. This new resource both highlights and celebrates the current season and increasingly makes it possible to place the current production into a context of earlier work by the Company. This approach acknowledges both the need for flexibility of use of the resources made available and presents a framework that enables a structured historical approach to the plays in performance. As this resource develops and grows, it will far outweigh the coverage and access to the creative process that was possible when setting up the *Designing Shakespeare* project; however, it will also consolidate the position of the RSC as the holders of the tradition of Shakespearean performance history in Britain. Whereas the *Designing Shakespeare* project includes small pub productions and the work of experimental theatre companies, the online archive of the RSC increasingly is helping to support the overriding dominance and influence of this one company.

Centralization, homogenization and control online

This example raises an interesting point about the new Internet environment. The self-publishing era of the Web 1.0 era gave the impression that it was possible for anyone to become a published author, but increasing participation in the online world has resulted in the emergence of ever larger centralized authorities. The popularity of Wikipedia and YouTube are an illustration of the fact that a general audience is easily led when faced with an overwhelming amount of material on any given subject. The importance of the online materials presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company lies in the fact that they inevitably overshadow the quantity and quality of materials that can be prepared by any smaller theatre or by an individual research project such as my own. As a result, because of the currency of the information and the centrality of the Company, this source of information has the potential to become disproportionately influential.

Ironically, my direct interaction with the RSC in terms of developing online awareness has had the effect of reinforcing that authority and undermining it simultaneously. As a result of the ongoing dialogue I have had with the Communication Department at the RSC, I was commissioned to develop an "Internet Resources Guide" for Shakespeare. Like Liu in his guide to Wikipedia, I was keen to point out to users the relative importance of the RSC's work, but I was also wary of creating a rating system. What I developed instead was a travel guide rather than a definitive list of authoritative sites. I tried to map out the way that traditional areas of interest were represented online and to illustrate the range of methodological approaches represented. The placement of this resource alongside the Company's own large database of material in the Learning section of the website gives a context for the Company's work. My willingness to participate in providing this publicly oriented document was driven by a desire to force some recognition of the other work going on in this field; it does, however, also help to consolidate the website's position as a centre of authoritative information. As Peter Holland articulates in relation to his experience working with a large publisher (in his article in the present issue), it was unclear to me whether my role was to provide authority for what the Company wanted to do or to become a real participant in creating a new collaborative way of working.

The relationship between my work and the online work of the RSC therefore presents not only an example of the way that power and influence are working in the new digital world, but also an example of how pedagogic practice figures very prominently in this debate. The new pressures placed on scholars in the UK by the Arts and Humanities

Research Council to work through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with the creative industries makes it difficult to raise the questions of authority and participation, but the issues at stake require some critical attention. Information online is increasingly being "bought" based on the principles of commercial exchange, so brand recognition rather than quality becomes the overriding influence in user selection. As a result, my work has served, in the model of the sciences, to provide a research and development function, which has then influenced the methods of the largest "industry" player. The fact that I was then asked to provide a context for the Company's work shows recognition of an interesting mutual dependence. By banding together, we can support each other's legitimacy, creating our own centralized authorities.

In an online world increasingly engaged in the processes of educational development it has been possible for scholarly projects that received research funding to influence the inherently conservative practices of commercial publishing and, in this case, the subsidized theatre. The freedom that the universities have had to experiment in this area, as well as the knowledge we possess in terms of flexible learning, places performance scholars in a more powerful position than has formerly been the case. The position of the contemporary performance critic has for a long time seemed to be that of the chronicler. The critic could help to highlight a particular area of work or working practice, but the influence that we could have on performance practice was limited. Similarly, the work of performance studies pedagogy has focused on trying to gain legitimacy for workshops and other forms of practical learning. The potential influence of performing arts pedagogy is now changing, and this is largely due to the demands of the digital world. The movement of the theatre into the world of higher education has shifted the attitude towards the work of the critic and teacher in this field, given our experience of creating interactive educational dialogues. Increasingly, academics and arts practitioners are working together in new and innovative ways.

Changes in theatre repertoire and reception

Interestingly, because of the increasing influence of the digital world both in performance and in the critical reception of live theatre, theatre companies and theatre academics have demonstrated a movement towards trying to cater to two kinds of audience simultaneously: first a local specialized audience, and second a general international audience. The development of local specialized knowledge can be seen theatrically in the recent artistic programming of the Globe Theatre and the RSC. The Globe Theatre, for example, has involved audiences in the extended research project to recreate "original practices" on the stage. The Royal Shakespeare Company has programmed a series of seasons in the Swan Theatre that have highlighted the work of other Renaissance writers as well as the extended project of the Complete Works Festival. The role of Shakespeare's Globe in this movement is particularly worthy of comment. The instigation of the Globe Theatre as essentially a scholarly project, but one that was spearheaded by an actor, has developed an interesting approach. This building has forced a return to first principles in theatre practice. The structure of the Theatre is essentially hierarchical; the audience on three levels, with the performers, literally as well figuratively, being lifted above the rest of the crowd by the elevated stage.

The interesting realization that comes as a result of the re-animation of the Globe Theatre's vertical audience is the enactment of a hierarchy within the audience that results in a particular kind of response, depending upon the location of the spectator. The groundlings at the Globe are placed in a position that is physically uncomfortable as well as

highly visible. It is not just the price of admission that differs for these spectators; their entire position and purpose in the theatre is altered by the choice to stand and participate in the play. This highly structured approach to social interaction is moderated by the performers, but it is often the audience themselves who establish and police the boundaries of good behaviour. Rather than creating the passive and harmonious response to the arguments presented that both television and the proscenium arch theatre encourage, the plays, when animated in an interactive space, actually work very well to divide opinion in the crowd. This natural tendency towards creating conflict both on and off the stage has been developed in a way that has re-animated the audience/actor relationship in this theatre. The specific local experience of attending a performance is enhanced but also contrasted by the work of the Education Department at Shakespeare's Globe that has developed a series of communities, both locally and internationally, building up a sympathetic and collaborative exchange with a range of audiences through outreach and online work.

In Shakespeare performance criticism there has also been an attempt to address "local Shakespeares" and "world-wide Shakespeares" simultaneously (Massai; Hodgdon and Worthen) and therefore in print a movement towards the edited collection. Combining an emphasis on the local with a desire to speak to a wider audience has resulted in a number of collections of essays that mimic the drawing together of expertise that exists at a conference seminar. Therefore, both in the theatre and in critical practice we are seeing two opposing trends, on the one hand towards a more specialized audience through local live performances and through critical writing about those specific performances, and on the other towards a large, more general audience through the online world or international publishing projects.

The live and online worlds working together in the digital environment

Therefore, to bring my argument back around on itself, I suggest that the theatre and the university worlds can accept or reject the use of technology in the classroom or onstage, but they cannot ignore the impact of technology on our lives. The social world has changed and, as Auslander argues, the digital is quickly becoming the dominant mode of interaction. Both theatres and universities are struggling to provide entertainment, engagement, education and interaction for audiences who are increasingly driven to demand value for money. As I have argued here and elsewhere, the digital environment offers a perfect opportunity to illustrate, to a general audience, the possibilities of the depth of research the academic environment supports but it can also offer something to the interested browser. The key appears to lie in connecting the activities of the local and/or specialized audience to the wider online audience in a way that supports and extends the central core ideas and ideals of that work. The theatres are showing ways to develop the skills of an ever-growing and engaged audience.

The bar has actually been raised intellectually of late by the practical experiments in "original practices" of the Globe Theatre and the interesting contextual series of plays programmed at the Swan Theatre by the RSC. An audience that is increasingly well versed in the language, culture and theatre practices of the Renaissance period has developed in Britain over the past decade. At the same time these theatres are making their work more financially accessible to a wider local audience. The Globe Theatre offers five pound tickets to anyone prepared to stand to see the performances, and the RSC have begun to offer five pounds tickets to anyone who is under 26. These two practices together help to show how it is possible to open a creative and cultural experience to a wider local audience, and provide

560 a flexible yet structured environment that can slowly build up a body of greater knowledge on a given subject in a wider community. The online activities of these theatres serve to extend the work but increasingly also the working practices of these theatres, creating an online dialogue that seeks to entertain and educate. Online academic projects should try to have the same effect.

565 In order to demonstrate how it is possible to use digital technology to unite the real and the virtual world through a creative use of hybrid approaches to live and digital resources, creating specific communities around particular subjects, I will conclude by drawing attention to two examples, one from the Royal Shakespeare Company and one from the Globe Theatre. This integrated approach, of not presupposing an environment of cultural 570 harmony but one where there is an active desire to learn, has been taken up by the libraries and museums for some time. The social interaction offered by these organizations is one that encourages engagement and identification but does not presume prior knowledge. What these examples present is a response not only to the new interactive nature of the Web world but also recognition of new ideas about learning. In education we have been 575 moving for some time towards an understanding of the many different ways we learn and the many ways it is both possible and necessary to motivate students in their learning. The shift towards a student-centred learning process has developed a generation who are not satisfied with a singular approach to developing new skills or acquiring new knowledge. The demand for interaction is partly driven, then, by the ability of the technology to 580 facilitate this kind of communication but also by a sense of entitlement to express an opinion that has been instilled in a new generation of students. It is interesting to see the response of large institutions to this intellectual environment. What seems apparent is that when an attempt is made to accommodate these new demands through the development of a focused but varied approach to a single topic or task, a productive hybrid outcome 585 develops.

The first example then of the increasing movement towards using the communications properties of the new digital world to influence the creative process can be seen in the recent coproduction between the RSC and the National Arts Centre of Canada to create a production of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. This production involved actresses from 590 the UK and Canada working together to produce a new piece of theatre that was then performed in both countries. This straightforward coproduction was enhanced by two different uses of digital technology to form two different communities. The first created interaction between the actors and the author: "Atwood has kept away from the process, choosing to do her rewriting via email and video-conferencing" (Ouzounian 12). The 595 second was between one of the actresses and the online community through a blog that traced the rehearsal process. Therefore, the technology in this example became both a tool of collaboration and a means of disseminating information about the creative process, engaging a wider audience than might ever see the play in performance.

The second example of this kind of approach comes from the Globe Theatre. Perhaps 600 the most interesting shift in our understanding of Shakespeare's work in performance that has come from returning to this older theatre building is the recognition of its inherent interactivity. The lively performance style created at the Theatre at Bankside is not just restricted to its London location. The Globe Theatre has extended its geographical reach through a touring season that includes a range of outdoor locations across the UK. But 605 perhaps even more interestingly Globe Education, for the first time in March 2007, mounted its own abridged but fully produced professional production on the Globe stage that was geared specifically towards a student audience. This production has been used as a part of an ongoing training programme for teachers developed through the Department

for Children, Schools and Families (formerly Education and Skills, DfES), and as a result the educational production of *Much Ado About Nothing* mounted in the Theatre is available through podcasts from the Department's website. This hybrid approach both to theatre and to live and mediated forms of teaching and learning highlights some interesting ironies. The live performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*, its subsequent podcast and the Globe Education-led teacher training combine to instil a new pedagogical approach to Shakespeare in performance across the country. The work of the theatre as an educational experience, and the specific role of Shakespeare in that relationship, is interestingly problematic. In a somewhat ironic way the imperial uses of Shakespeare by the British Empire could be seen to have circled back on themselves coming out of the work of an American actor's efforts to redevelop the original Globe Theatre. The emergence of this commercial alternative theatre as a new centralized authority, but one that accepts an interactive approach, is both intriguing and instructive.

Conclusions

The opposition between live performance and the digital world is easy to articulate. The specific communal nature of an event which will never be repeated stands in direct contrast to digital technology which confuses the issues of location, time and perhaps most dramatically of "liveness". The early developmental period of this technology has proven that breaking down barriers can cause as many problems as it solves. As the online world moves towards developing social spaces that recreate the ideas of time, space and community it is important to think again about what we mean by "liveness". It is useful at this point to return to Auslander, who maps out the development to date of our understanding of what it means to be live:

> With the advent of broadcasting, the concept of the live referred only to a temporal relationship (as in a live broadcast) ... Now, when a website becomes available for interaction online, we say it has "gone live" regardless of its content. This suggests that the defining quality of the live at this point is feedback – we accept any situation in which we receive a signal in response to one we have sent out as a live interaction. We have, as Baudrillard suggests, moved decisively from a cultural order characterized by "relations" among things to the digital order characterized by "connections" between things. ("Afterword" 196–97)

The reinvention of real-time liveness online must not, however, be allowed to forget the lessons learned about "relations" and "connections" made through other social forms of engagement. The fact that the online world no longer simply emulates the publishing world is a great freedom for those of us who believed it was a performative communication environment in the first place. However, the questions of authorship, authority and structure must not be lost in this new world.

The examples of the production processes involved in *The Penelopiad* and *Much Ado About Nothing* provide evidence that theatre companies are now working with digital technology to provide the kind of animated documentation of their work that I have been working towards in my own research. The exposition of the creative process that results from this, as well as the use of the web as a public distribution channel, illustrate productive uses of digital technology. The playful and creative nature of the offerings on sites such as YouTube illustrates the potential of a world that is drawn together as audience members. In much less structured ways than previously it is now possible to find a community of like-minded individuals online through the sharing of creative work. Although there are certainly examples of destructive and unhelpful uses of this technology, the movement towards an online environment seen as a social and creative sphere presents

hope for the future. The advantages of collective environments, where acceptable practices of behaviour are established over time by the participants, must be recognized. I have argued that both the theatre and the university classroom environments provide positive examples, and critical thought must not rely only on established frameworks to deal with the complexity of the online world. The activities of the current digital world have many parallels in terms of earlier technological and social developments. What is crucial at this juncture is to develop a critical dialogue that engages with new developments without falling into hyperbole, describing these events as entirely without precedent or parallel, and most importantly without context.

What the current online world demands is the drawing together of the strengths of the materialist and humanist critics. The analysis of the means of production has never been more important than in the digital world. But neither can we lose sight of the fundamental humanism involved in social interaction. The lack of structure online provides a worrying and misleading homogenization of content on the Web. It is essential to point out that hierarchies have not gone away but rather they have become more sophisticated and complex, as the examples of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe Theatre and also YouTube and Wikipedia indicate. The digital world has invigorated theatrical practices and audience expectations. Similarly, it has tested the boundaries of critical debate. Rather than giving in to the pull towards homogenization and centralization, it is essential that a "responsible criticism" provides more robust means to continue to hold the processes of cultural engagement under the spotlight. The work of performance critics who are addressing hybridized forms of digital performance[8] may help to shore up the defences of a literary criticism that is struggling in the face of an almost entirely performative world, but so too might the ideas of a critical pedagogy.[9] Literary criticism of Shakespeare must not shy away from the performative because in the digitally dominant world it is increasingly inescapable. Rather, it is essential that new strategies to acknowledge and assess performance, in all its forms, are developed in this new environment, where there is so much important critical work to do.

Notes

1. In form this talk illustrates the hybrid nature of online communication in that the full talk is available in video format from the English Subject Centre website, as is an abstract of the talk and a blog response to its presentation (Liu).
2. Audience members can read about productions in advance of attending the theatre. Teachers and students are able to prepare for their visits through online activities and, in the case of the Globe Theatre's "Adopt an Actor" scheme, can even enter into a dialogue with the company during rehearsals.
3. The Stagework project highlights the work of the National Theatre online, and Web materials are made available through the Royal Shakespeare Company's Learning Department website.
4. The recent work of John Joughin, Ewan Fernie, Graham Holderness and Hugh Grady (amongst others) reflects this movement. A wide range of this critical writing is usefully drawn together in Fernie *et al*.
5. During this period most of the high profile criticism was political. Prominent critics in this debate include Catherine Belsey, Graham Bradshaw, and Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. See also Margareta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass and the debates that followed. Again, Fernie *et al.* provides a useful overview of this period of critical writing.
6. In this teaching resource, the video image, at regular intervals, has questions super imposed on the scene. When the user clicks on this question a new window opens up, which contains a series of interviews with the actors, the director and the designer all engaging with the question posed. Once this window is closed, the parenthetical debate ends and the scene carries on until the next question arises, which the user can then choose to accept or reject. This resource now appears in the "past productions" area of the RSC's Learning website.

7. The first of the English Subject Centre teaching packages looks at "Images of Violence in *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*" in order to help students address the difference between reading about violence and seeing it enacted (in person as opposed to on the screen). The second teaching resource looks at "Performance Approaches to *King Lear*" and involves drawing together the resources of the project to address the different creative processes undertaken by an actor, a director and a designer. An article describing the exploratory approach taken to developing these resources appears in the English Subject Centre Newsletter.

8. Collections such as Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon, and Colin Beardon and Gavin Carver. Also see Steve Dixon for a comprehensive overview of the topic.

9. The book series "Teaching the New English" published by Palgrave Macmillan and edited by the English Subject Centre offers a variety of discipline-specific critical perspectives on pedagogy.

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MySpace <http://www.myspace.com/>.

Nintendo Wii <http://wii.com/>.

The Penelopiad blog <http://thepenelopiad.wordpress.com/>.

Royal Shakespeare Company Learning Department, including "Exploring Shakespeare" <http://www.rsc.org.uk/learning/Learning.aspx>.

Second Life <http://www.secondlife.com/>.

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