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Shakespeare as Community Practice

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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2jf7g952>

Journal

Shakespeare Bulletin, 35(3)

Author

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Publication Date

2017

DOI

10.1353/shb.2017.0034

Peer reviewed

Shakespeare as Community Practice

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*I*n many of its performances across the globe, Shakespearean production is a form of community theater. Such Shakespearean production can thus be described and evaluated according to Mark Weinberg’s definition of “community-based” practice, theater that “closely allies itself with a particular community, develops performances about that community’s concerns, and involves some level of participation from community members” (24). In thinking about “community” Shakespeare, we are thus both thinking about its embeddedness in anthropological communities—the groupings of people with shared localities and/or concerns who participate in, attend, or hear about a particular Shakespearean activity—and also the practice of “community theater” that is often, though not always, carried out by amateurs, students, and others outside of what Martin Orkin calls “the Shakespeare metropolis” of those who perform and study Shakespeare for a living (1).

This essay argues that to understand best how Shakespearean production, to paraphrase Weinberg, allies itself with, involves, and addresses the concerns of a particular community, we need an incorporative methodology that combines tools and values drawn from a number of scholarly practices more closely allied with performance studies than traditional Shakespearean scholarship. These practices are:

1. Ethnography: valuing marginalized communities and local knowledge, taking field notes, working as a participant-observer, understanding cultural practices outside of a theatrical production as forms of performance
2. Practice-as-Research (PaR): working with theater practitioners as co-investigators on research projects, valuing theatrical process as generative of new research questions

3. Applied Theater/Community Performance (AT/CP): creating and investigating projects that are interventionist, that involve and impact local communities not directly or usually involved with theater

Such a combination of research practices can help scholars—and especially scholar-practitioners—create and study Shakespeare as a form of “community practice” (my phrase combines words used in the second two fields). These three scholarly practices share several tools, goals, and ethics, and thus what I highlight as hallmarks of one are often traits shared by another.

Research on Shakespeare as a form of “community practice” is in sync with work across theater studies on marginalized and amateur artists, what some are calling the “amateur turn” (Holdsworth et al. 4). Recent scholarship on amateur Shakespeare is in line with this turn, and includes Michael Dobson’s history of amateur Shakespeare in England; Stephen Purcell’s forthcoming survey of current British amateur production; Niels Herold’s and Robert Pensalfini’s books on prison Shakespeare; a collection of essays on university Shakespeare edited by Andrew Hartley; Gina Bloom and her collaborators’ work on amateur Shakespearean acting in an interactive digital game; and essential scholarship on amateur productions of Shakespeare across the non-Anglo-American globe.¹ This kind of work redefines our sense of whose ideas and interpretations of Shakespeare matter, thus redistributing notions of authority to new communities. As we turn to the world outside academia and the professional theater better to understand the way Shakespeare makes meaning in the twenty-first century, we need a rigorous assessment of which methods might best help us approach Shakespeare as a practice that is performed and consumed by people with different priorities, attitudes, and positionalities.

This essay will discuss the most salient contributions ethnography, PaR, and AT/CP can make to the practice and analysis of localized Shakespeare, illustrating their potential usefulness with examples from my work with the theater group Merced Shakespearefest and with the creation of the project *Shakespeare in Yosemite*. Merced Shakes is a sixteen-year-old amateur company in the heart of the agricultural San Joaquin valley that annually offers free Shakespeare in the Park and two indoor shows. A majority Latino town of eighty thousand, with high unemployment and low education rates, since 2005 Merced is home to my employer, University of California-Merced. Founded Paul Prescott (University of Warwick) and me, *Shakespeare in Yosemite* is a collaboration between UC-Merced, Warwick, and the National Parks Service that in

April 2017 brought a one-hour original show to two outdoor amphitheatres in Yosemite National Park. The free performances combined scenes and monologues from Shakespeare with the writings of naturalist John Muir (whose words and activism saved Yosemite from privatization in the late nineteenth century) to talk about the natural world and the need to protect it. These case studies, I'll suggest, demonstrate well how focusing on non-professional people who create and consume Shakespearean performance, the revelations of collaborative practice, and the impact of performance on specific communities can reveal unique meanings in particular times and places.

Both Merced and nearby Yosemite are geographically marginal, but the role of myself and UC-Merced within these communities and projects brings up issues of authority—and the need to de-center academic authority about Shakespeare—at the heart of all three of these fields. While my examples necessarily come from California, I ally my approach with that of prior scholarship, such as Martin Orkin's *Local Shakespeares* and Craig Dionne and Partita Kapadia's collection *Native Shakespeares*, that has shown the way Shakespeare matters to non-Anglo-American communities. These studies attune us to the importance of viewing Shakespearean productions as local iterations of the global phenomenon of Shakespearean performance. To do so is to think about the social force of "Shakespeare" as something that transforms communities and is itself continually transformed by them.

Ethnographic Methods: Embedding in and Observing of Community

One of the first contributions of ethnographic methods to Performance Studies is a focus on what "dominant culture neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize," to quote Dwight Conquergood, who was instrumental in bringing ethnographic methods to the study of performance (33). The ethnographic methods adapted from anthropology by Performance Studies scholars—what has been termed "performative ethnography"—ask a researcher to embed herself in the often marginalized community she observes in order to best understand the ways cultural production, and not just theatrical production, makes meaning.² To work like an ethnographer is to do field work: for a theater scholar, that means taking field notes about the actions of actors in rehearsal and audiences as well as one's own interpretations of events as they unfold. It is to approach theatrical productions with the awareness of one's own cultural performance as a spectator or participant, to interview and survey

the communities that create and consume these theatrical performances, and to treat these productions as entire events embedded in particular locations and moments; that is, performative ethnography asks scholars to view cultural practices outside of the stage as themselves performative. To practice such ethnography is thus to work and write within a far more complex field of signifiers than is encountered when one sees Shakespearean production as merely “the communication of an interpretation of the text” (Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies* 11).

Performative ethnographers have long seen *all* performances—from theatrical production and performance art to street protests and gang organization—as “integrated agenc[ies] of culture” rather than distinctive acts (Strine 7). They often focus on how performative practices “produce, sustain, and transform” systems of power, which is a lens that should remain in view for all of those who study the way the work of a white, European, canonical playwright often perceived as symbolic of “high culture” makes meaning in communities marginalized by economics, geography, or even and especially English colonialism. As Performance Studies’ inclusive definitions of performance have opened up attention to a wide range of cultural performances, the field has focused less on traditional dramatic theater. However, comparative analyses of Shakespeare in global communities—what R. S. White calls “glocal” studies of Shakespeare’s regionalization (5)—address many ethnographic concerns, allowing scholars and practitioners to better understand the way Shakespeare both connects local communities to the wider world (i.e. giving actors in a relatively isolated town like Merced the sense of being participants in global phenomena) and also disrupts and complicates the ways communities think of themselves (i.e. when accounts of Shakespearean theater come to displace other cultural activities in the Arts section of a local newspaper). So to work as an ethnographer is to focus not just on the theatrical performance, but rather to see it as part of a set of wider cultural performances that surround it: rehearsals, audience interactions, and the responses of communities at large to the presence of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare’s cultural capital and aesthetic particularities interact with the cultural values and social circumstances of the communities in which these plays are performed. Central to the way Shakespeare makes meaning in communities is the interplay between the plays themselves and the social and political context of the theatrical event. For example, a week before the *Winter’s Tale* I directed in Merced opened, the local news was abuzz with the story of an old man who found a newborn that had been left (by her 13-year-old mother, it was later discovered) in a

dumpster, adding unexpected poignancy to the Shepherd's discovery of Perdita. Ethnographic embeddedness requires one to pay attention to these kinds of interactions between the stage and the world outside it. Too often, analyses of Shakespearean production center on how a professional scholar or drama critic interprets the choices of a usually professional company performing in the closed walls of a theater. But such critical analysis would be inadequate for the study of, for example, Merced Shakes's free outdoor performances. Ethnographic methods, on the other hand, uncover how in community performance, actor identities can matter as much as character choices or directorial interpretation, and the effects of the mere presence of production might reach far beyond the stage. For instance, after Merced Shakes's free performances of *As You Like It* (2014), informal conversations revealed that the child actors in the play made locals proud of the intelligence of local youth and caused audience members to rethink their pre-conceived notions of Shakespeare's accessibility.³ The audience of the production far exceeded the number of people who actually came to watch, for that broader audience included joggers and parkgoers who walked past the amphitheater during performances. Further, townspeople who read about the show in the local press also bore witness to Merced as a community that was home to an increasingly high-visibility Shakespeare festival with a growing UC-Merced collaboration, a notion greeted by many as one sign that the newest University of California was making good on its longstanding promise that it would increase opportunities in this educationally underserved region.

To study Shakespeare ethnographically in communities is to consider all of this: to synthesize analyses of what happened on stage, what happened in rehearsal rooms, what audiences did and said during and after performances, and what community members who didn't see the show comprehended. This kind of heuristic approach to the way performance events are embedded in communities can be performed by participant-observers who operate as fellow audience members. However, embedding oneself as a co-creator in the process of making Shakespeare (which will be discussed more below) allows one access to deeper ethnographic insights. Being a cast member of *As You Like It*, in my case, meant that I knew there were a few homeless people who attended several of the performances. We actors were aware that the play's themes of displacement were particularly resonant for these spectators, and chatting with them before and after performances personalized and intensified my portrayal of Rosalind's banishment and initial entry into Arden. When we arrived for our final performance to find that a few props—Rosalind's backpack,

Celia's umbrella, and a yoga mat—had been stolen from a dressing room, cast members empathetically speculated that whoever had taken the items probably needed them, selecting only props helpful to survival for someone for whom the park in which we performed was their home. The themes and the localized particulars of a production of *As You Like It* together animated discussion of the plight of Merced's homeless population and their needs (and might have unintentionally donated a few helpful items to a member of that community). It is only because I recorded this story and conversations about it in my field notes that I am now able to include it as an example of how community engagement deepens the meaning of Shakespeare's plays, and how Shakespearean production can deepen community engagement.

Embedding in, doing, and theorizing theatrical practice are central tenets to the multi-year research project on amateur drama in the UK currently being led by Nadine Holdsworth, Helen Nicholson, and Jane Milling. The project has investigators using "ethnographic methods that capture the everyday flow of being and doing, bringing our experiences of amateur theatre into dialogue with theoretical concepts" (Walton and Nicholson 20). Their methods and ongoing findings—many of which were published this year in a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review*—have much to teach those of us who do and study amateur and community Shakespeare.

Approaching marginalized and often fragile artistic companies and the communities they serve requires sensitivity on the part of the academic researcher that many ethnographers have addressed. Tami Spry describes Conquergood as laying the groundwork for a "performance-sensitive ... empathetic epistemology" (342). I have found that this kind of empathetic learning requires the scholar to decenter their scholarly authority; to become conscious of their biases; and to listen hard to those whose life experiences, demographics, and perhaps lack of institutionalized training means that they approach Shakespearean characters and plots and themes with different but often no less valuable ways of understanding.

While it is crucial to listen to these voices and ideas, Maurya Wickstrom cautions against an empathy that turns into an "othering," a fetishization of the brave poor or imprisoned or oppressed. Wickstrom encourages scholars of marginalized performers to move "toward a critique of the identitarianism that founds the question of 'the other' in the first place" (3). Such a critique is in line with many performance studies ethnographers' longstanding criticisms of the methods of traditional anthropology, which reproduces the hegemonic privileging of the text

by seeking to “read” cultural activity as text (Conquergood 35–8). Performative ethnographic methods require practices that are truly dialogic and reciprocal: in Conquergood’s words, rather than “peering over the shoulder like a spy,” like a traditional anthropologist, a performative ethnographer is actively “listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity” (38). More recently, Sarah Pink has called for “contemporary reflexive ethnography” that is “practical, creative, imaginative, and empathetic” (xx). Rather than traditional methods of merely observational ethnography, these practices require more challenging and more rewarding practices that are truly reciprocal and embodied. As Soyini Madison claims, “the dialogic performative is charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity, sometimes with pleasure and sometimes with pain. It is a mutual creation of something different and something more from the meeting of bodies in their contexts” (320). For a theater scholar, I think one of the best ways to find this “embodied reciprocity” is to combine performative ethnography with the best practices of what theater studies calls “practice-as-research.”

Practice-as-Research: Making and Sharing Theater and Knowledge

It is often the case that there is a discrepancy between what those of us who write about Shakespeare in performance for a living think we are seeing on stage or in rehearsal rooms and what directors and actors think they are doing. And the vast array of responses to theatrical moments exceed the grasps of any one theory, be it a critical theory, a performance theory, or the kind of theory an experienced spectator formulates about what they think a production is doing. Theory is not particularly good at being surprised. And if our conditioning as professional scholars prevents us from viewing community Shakespeare on the same terms as many in a local audience, then practice-as-research (PaR) offers tools to work with and through our biases, especially if it is practiced reflexively, collaboratively, and with self-awareness.

PaR centers on learning with (rather than merely *about*) theater artists, be they professional, amateur, or student.⁴ PaR uses creative practice as a form of inquiry: it is reflexive, experimental, and interdisciplinary. Co-creating theater within communities allows scholars to, in PaR practitioner Mark Fleishman’s words, explore “certain epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through performance itself” (28). Stephen Purcell argues that the ideal model for PaR involves not only co-creative theatre, but also co-investigative research. It thus moves beyond merely ethnographic documentation of process and towards a mutually

transformational collaborative process that equally values the expertise and insights of the scholars and practitioners (“Whose Experiment is it Anyway?”).

To be truly co-investigative, scholar-practitioners must make way for different kinds of authority and different ways of evaluating what is valued and successful. Authoritative notions of Shakespeare can undermine genuine creativity, insight, and knowledge generated by these community practitioners—who were not trained to interpret Shakespeare according to academic conventions—and cloud the scholar’s ability to see different kinds of values. Alan Read explains that in community theater, it is often the local participants and not, say, the playwright, who command the most cultural capital in performance (25). Indeed, the involvement of a Mexican dance troupe in Merced Shakes’s *Romeo and Juliet*, or the presence of an African-American Kate in *Henry V*, legitimized those productions to some local audience members more persuasively than “Shakespeare,” whose name can be met around Merced with anything from indifference to intimidated awe. In W. B. Worthen’s terms, while institutions like the RSC and Globe justify themselves by professing some kind of proximity to an authoritative “Shakespeare” (be those claims geographic, historical, or professional), a Merced audience has much less stake in this kind of authority, which allows productions to make meanings in different and perhaps less inhibited ways (Worthen, *Authority* 3).

I’ll use the process of creating *Shakespeare in Yosemite* as an example of the way such practices can decenter authority and utilize some of the tools of PaR. As Purcell documents in his essay in this issue, PaR begins with a hypothesis, a starting point of adaptable beliefs (placeholder ref.). Our initial questions for *Shakespeare in Yosemite* were: 1) What was naturalist John Muir’s relationship to Shakespeare and how could that relationship be performed? 2) Can Shakespeare, performed in Yosemite, resonate in the context of the particular environmental threats of 2017? and 3) Would performance in Yosemite change perspectives of Shakespeare for participants, audience members, and those who heard about the project? Central to these three questions—and to the questions I ask as I work with Merced Shakespearefest, too—is the overarching concern of community impact: what can Shakespeare be made to do in and to communities: by those who make plays, those who view them, and those who become aware of their performance in a particular context?

The first part of the process of making *Shakespeare in Yosemite* was to research and write the script, which meant addressing our initial question. Prescott and I knew we wanted the show to be as accessible as possible

to people of all ages with little experience of the theater, while also being rewarding to those familiar with more traditional Shakespearean production. And we knew that the figure connecting Shakespeare to Yosemite, and justifying the project to the park rangers whose permission and cooperation we sought, was John Muir. We began with traditional scholarly methods: reading Muir writings and biographies, searching archives for letters, eulogies, and newspaper clippings illuminating Muir's relationship with Shakespearean texts. Our primary collaborator was Lee Stetson, an actor and Muir scholar who has portrayed Muir in Yosemite and around the world for thirty-four years. As we began rehearsing the script, our team of twelve student and community actors tweaked and rewrote many of the narrating speeches for clarity and punch, resulting in a collaborative writing process that valued diverse kinds of knowledge, including the perspectives of those who were less familiar with Shakespeare and could point out when glossing was needed to help a line have a wider impact.

The script itself was a research output. Little has been published on Muir's relationship to Shakespeare, and rather than write a scholarly article about the connections we found through archival digging and close reading, we shared the knowledge we gained on the subject with a different kind of community by performing it for an engaged public of Yosemite rangers and parkgoers. By virtue of their being in Yosemite over Earth Day weekend, these spectators, numbering over six hundred, constituted a particular place-based community invested in theater tailor-made for the national treasure saved by Muir. If "to publish" literally means "to make public," we were performing free, original research for a particular community who had gathered in one of America's most famous public lands.

Our second two questions could be summarized as "what is Shakespeare to Yosemite (and to the environment more broadly) and what is Yosemite to Shakespeare?" While our work was informed by research on ecocritical Shakespeare, we also collaborated with park rangers—particularly interpretive ranger and novelist Shelton Johnson—to approach the question of how Shakespeare might matter in Yosemite. Johnson's very presence at the performances (and on the posters for which he agreed to pose) gave our production needed cultural capital for spectators who were skeptical of Shakespeare. In an online survey and in person, audience members revealed that the prologues and epilogues Johnson wrote and delivered about Shakespeare and Muir as writers of the natural world—presented by an African-American park ranger and not a scholar or actor—reassured them that the show would be comprehensible and relevant to Yosemite.

The process of creating, rehearsing, and performing yielded several insights into how Shakespeare can be used to address issues of land management and climate change. It was because of the work of making this project—of reading Muir’s impassioned pleas to save Yosemite Valley and nearby Hetch Hetchy valley—that I realized that John of Gaunt’s dying speech about “this fortress built by Nature for herself” being “leased out” could be re-contextualized to take on new meanings (*R2* 2.1.43, 59). We gave the speech to Stetson, who performed it as if Muir were reading it aloud in response to the news that Hetch Hetchy would be flooded to become a reservoir for San Francisco—as indeed it was, devastating Muir right before his death. Changing the speech slightly so that it ended “America has made a shameful conquest of itself,” we discovered that its impact was newly profound, reminiscent of both Muir’s battles and newly revived debates over the privatization of public lands (2.1.66). As Stetson’s Muir stood on an outdoor stage and raised his hands to the famous granite structures and waterfalls of Yosemite Valley, the cast and audience felt ourselves in an “other Eden, demi-paradise” indeed (2.1.42). The impact of hearing about the leasing and conquest of that piece of earth—further contextualized by a Muir line about politicians making “everything dollarable” (257)—was heightened by the context of its performance in a particular environment, and for a particular—if temporary—community of those who ventured to a National Park on the first Earth Day weekend after the inauguration of Donald Trump, a president who had already begun to follow through on his campaign pledge to eliminate environmental and public land protections. Several spectators commented that the production reminded them that, particularly given the current political moment, “Yosemite has to be protected and cherished,” as one respondent put it, indicating that at least for some, the event was able to effect an ecologically-minded response (“Shakespeare in Yosemite Response”).

Putting Shakespeare into dialogue with Muir and Yosemite opened up new understandings of the plays. Re-contextualizing everything from Timon’s speech on the corrupting power of money to Hotspur and Glendower’s dialogue about the earth’s reactions to their births caused us to be newly aware of the ways Shakespeare writes the natural world and can be newly meaningful in particular times and settings. Audience members reported a similar experience. Several “seasoned” Shakespeare fans said that they hadn’t quite realized how “environmentally aware” Shakespeare is, and others commented that they found the performance more enjoyable than “regular Shakespeare plays” (“Shakespeare in Yosemite Response”).

Shakespeare in Yosemite thus relied on diverse kinds of expertise to be made; embedded itself in a particular time, place, and community; and was a form of co-investigative research that valued outsider perspectives on Shakespeare. De-centering institutionalized Shakespearean authority, it allowed Shakespeare to be consequential in a place that, in Ranger Johnson's words for the prologue, "Shakespeare could only visit in his dreams," and to communities of people who might not otherwise have considered Shakespeare to matter to them or to their world.

As is implicit in the above account, PaR might not just be of mutual benefit to researchers and practitioners—the co-investigators of a project—but also to a wider community of those who attend or even hear about theatrical activities. That Shakespearean practice can be thus applied to larger aims leads me to my final set of methods, those of Applied Theater.

Applied Theater/Community Performance

Conquergood lays out three braided-together ways of knowing that he finds essential to the practice of Performance Studies: critique, creativity, and citizenship (41). While all three methodologies I discuss here ideally enact all three of these ways of knowing, ethnography is centered on analysis and interpretation of cultural activity (critique) while PaR focuses on the making of culture (creativity). What's variously called Applied Theater or Community Performance (AT/CP, also sometimes called Social Practice), then, is the citizenship strand, which Conquergood and others also call "interventionist" (Conquergood 41; Pollock 325).⁵ Like other interventionist practices, community Shakespeare—whether through explicit intention or unintentional effects—can work as a form of outreach and activism. Shakespeareans can engage with a longstanding set of practices for carrying out this kind of work, and with a recently emerging set of critical tools for analyzing it.⁶

As Baz Kershaw explains, AT/CP emerged out of responses to neoliberal economies to create performance practices whose goals and rewards were not market-driven (16). As Nicholas Ridout's work on "Passionate Amateurs" and Wickstrom's on marginalized theater groups in the "Blockades of Neoliberalism" have shown, these performance practices are resistant to capitalism. Further, Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson encourage AT/CP scholar-practitioners to adopt a "critical perspective [that] starts from a recognition that theatre-making is inevitably entwined in networks of power and exploitation" while also seeking resistant

practices that do not “flatten” critical reflection (4). When it comes to Shakespeare—long a money-making enterprise, an instrument of colonialism, and a blunt force in high school education—such self-awareness about issues of commerce, power, and authority are especially crucial. Not only do we need to practice the de-centering of academic authority at the heart of all of these methods, but also AT/CP requires us explicitly and relentlessly to ask and answer specific questions about issues of power in the communities in which we work. In Merced, for example, I continue to investigate whether Shakespearean performance might be seen as a sign of burgeoning educational opportunity in an underserved region without overshadowing the vitality of cultural activities rooted in a community that is predominantly Latino. Questions like that will never be answered in just one way, but through practice and analysis I strive to be aware of and responsive to the way the community reacts to the increasing presence of Shakespeare. Can community Shakespeare live up to Hughes and Nicholson’s definition of AT/CP as practice that “emerges as a creative force that responds imaginatively to the ways in which the loci of power have become diffuse and fragmented in the twenty-first century, and to new questions about how increasingly nuanced ideas of authority can be harnessed for social change” (2)? Responding to the displacements of late capitalist and global unrest with “nuanced” ideas of how Shakespeare can encourage positive social change seems, at least, a worthy and important goal for community Shakespeare.

Hughes and Nicholson’s focus on the “loci” of power resonates with Salley Mackey’s emphasis on the way AT/CP practitioners and researchers “engage with people in their contexts and locations” (107). She describes the way that performance can “subvert and reframe locations of the everyday” by “building a palimpsest of memories that would, in the future, prompt positive, wry and even fond memories of performance-in-sites each time the site was encountered” (118). Mackey’s ideas about the animation of space by performance resonate with our experience in Yosemite, where that park’s theatrical possibilities created lasting changes of perspective for a community of temporary visitors. One audience member commented on the way the show’s articulations of natural beauty came back to them “in flashbacks” as they explored the park over the weekend, and another said the show made Yosemite “feel more accessible, like visitors are really a part of the place.” Shakespearean performance may thus allow audiences to deepen their interactions with their local environment—to *apply theatrical* experience to the world—and also, for some, to feel included or connected to a place, to operate as *community performance*.

The practice and analysis of both the “applied” and the “community” aspects of AT/CP require a different set of priorities than is usually valued in Shakespeare studies, which tends to evaluate performances based on aesthetics, literary and historical “accuracy,” and professional execution. Shannon Jackson explains that terms like “social practice”—or community performance—are often used derisively, to signal “dumbed down” art for the masses, “capitulations to accessibility and intelligibility that can occur when art practice and social practice—aesthetics and politics—combine” (137). Jackson observes that discourse becomes confused when a simultaneous discussion of politics and aesthetics is underway, and that such discussion is provoked by a “‘categorical crisis’ around performance as both an aesthetic form and a social one” (137). I propose that these tensions Jackson discusses be embraced, and that an ideal hermeneutic lens views the performance event’s aesthetic and social meanings as inextricably bound up in each other. For one example, such an analysis could be applied to *Shakespeare in Yosemite*. If one were to evaluate it merely on the basis of its artistic merits, she might note a few “solid” performances among some of the more experienced actors, a few awkward moments, and the low-budget costuming of uniform navy blue T-shirts. Interpreting the performance only on the grounds of its social context—the mere fact of performing live theater in a breathtakingly beautiful National Park in 2017—underestimates the fact that the Shakespearean context matters, too. The charge of the production came from blending words with a long artistic history with the present ecological moment, with having a young woman re-imagine Titania fiercely to proclaim to group of people sitting meters away from the flooded Merced river in the spring of 2017 that the “progeny of evils” that is seasonal confusion “comes / From our debate, from our dissension; / We are their parents and their original” (*MND* 2.1.118–20). The social context and the play’s content both matter: the “applied” and the “theatre” are equal makers of meaning.

Another way to approach this question is to understand that performances create what Dani Snyder-Young calls “unintended byproducts” of meaning (8). She writes about how what a seasoned theatergoer might see as an error may be the source of a performance’s power for others in the audience. By way of example, she cites Paul Heritage’s account of staging *Romeo and Juliet* with boys in a juvenile prison. Heritage felt the performance before prison officials and families was failing when several of the incarcerated teenagers still needed to sound out words phonetically. But audience members saw the boys’ willingness to work hard on something as complex as Shakespearean language as a moment of redemption

for the boys and a powerful bit of advocacy for prison arts and education (8).⁷ It is relevant that Snyder-Young's example is Shakespearean: with their textual and conceptual difficulty, cultural prestige, and English-ness, Shakespeare plays do particular work—for good and ill—that other kinds of theater do not do.

Indeed, while Shakespearean AT/CP has the added challenge of being perceived as inaccessible or too difficult to comprehend, it has advantages in terms of the way the overcoming of those challenges can feel and be perceived as real achievement, the historical perspective Shakespeare brings to a project (for example, many in Yosemite commented on how powerful it was to hear ecological ideas echo across the centuries), and the ways in which Shakespearean practice works as a global phenomenon that connects very specific characters, plots, themes, and words across prisons, elementary schools, small town parks, and urban theaters.

The hybridized methodology I propose for the study of localized Shakespeare thus involves embedding oneself in and observing the communities in which Shakespeare is made (ethnography), collaborating and sharing in the process of making (PaR), and facilitating and analyzing the performance's wider community impact (AT/CP). Such methods are starting to be applied to the study of marginalized Shakespeare practices around the world and the study of local-global Shakespeare will only expand as scholars share knowledge about the way Shakespeare matters to communities in the twenty-first century. This kind of work also allows Shakespeareans to join researchers across our campuses in practicing Community Engaged Scholarship (CES). On American campuses, the Carnegie classification for CES is defined as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" ("Carnegie"). Such practices link us to scholars in all fields—from bioengineering to anthropology—who are doing work of mutual benefit to scholar and researcher. At its best, this kind of work motivates public participation in university life, ensuring that research is conducting *with* rather than *on* communities. As my UC-Merced colleagues Robin DeLugan, Stergios Roussos, and Geneva Skram write, "recognizing and valuing the knowledge of community members and finding meaningful opportunities for their participation in research—including the co-creation of knowledge—

is transforming many traditional modes of conducting academic research” (158). As we embed ourselves in the communities that allow Shakespeare to make the promiscuous new meanings that interest us, we can ensure that both the productions we may work with and the analysis of them are collaborations bringing together the global and the local; the historical and the present; the academy, the stage, and the world.

Notes

¹See, for example Kapadia; Orkin; Wright.

²See Spry 339 and *passim*. for an overview of the relationship between performance studies and ethnography, as well as the entire special issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly* (vol. 26, no. 4) focused on performative ethnography.

³Such comments were made to the author and other cast members in informal conversations in September 2014. For these informal audience communications, interviews, and surveys, I have received a waiver of IRB approval from UC-Merced.

⁴Practice-as-research (PaR) is sometimes called performance-as-research (PAR) in the US (see Riley and Hunter xv).

⁵See Kershaw 16 for the “Applied Theater” and “Community Performance” distinctions (Kershaw also uses the abbreviation AT/CP), and Jackson 137 for an explication of the term “social practice.”

⁶A 2016 volume of essays, *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre*, edited by Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson, lays out best practices for critiquing and theorizing these kinds of performance.

⁷For a related discussion of the racial politics of casting in prison Shakespeare programs, see Thompson 119–44.

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