

Live on Film! Recent Trends in Research and Teaching with Mediated Theatre

Jessica Winston
Idaho State University

In Shakespeare studies, as in most fields in literary studies, there is a common pattern to developments in research and teaching. As a general rule across the field as a whole, research trends tend to foster innovations in teaching. These innovations in teaching, in turn, inspire teaching-oriented publications that describe and promote new approaches to course planning and delivery (Winston 320). In other words, while for individual instructors, teaching can spark research ideas, in the field as a whole, research leads teaching, which in turn leads pedagogical publication. For instance, as performance criticism developed as a field in the 1990s and early 2000s, university-level Shakespeare instructors increasingly designed courses with performance-oriented concerns in mind. Those innovations then inspired the documentation and promulgation of new pedagogies in articles and books, which in turn helped more instructors to adopt new performance approaches in their courses (e.g. Riggio; Rocklin). The general trend can be observed in a variety of fields and subfields, such as digital humanities or ecocriticism. Yet this pattern of change across the field—from research to classroom practice to pedagogical publication—is especially apparent in emerging areas. As a field is coalescing, still becoming a part of the broader research discourse at conferences and in journals, there is a gap in time before this new field begins to widely inform teaching approaches, and a still wider gap before these

approaches start to be described in pedagogical publications. Such a pattern is especially evident in one subfield of performance criticism, a subfield that does not yet even have an accepted name (Hunter 16), but which can be referred to as mediated theatre studies.

Drawing on the work of Sarah Bay-Cheng and John Wyver, mediated theatre can be defined as filmed theatre, or more precisely as “any theatrical performance originally created for live performance,” which is then “presented as two-dimensional moving images on screen” (Bay-Cheng 37), whether live broadcast in a cinema, viewed on TV, or on a smartphone or tablet.¹ While mediated theatre has been around for as long as television (Wyver, “All the Trimmings” 106), interest in this form has intensified in the past decade. One reason is the rise of event cinema, which involves the broadcast of live (or recorded live) theatre or other arts productions to cinemas worldwide. Another is the development of streaming services, such as Theatre in Video, Digital Theatre+, Drama Online, Globe Player, and National Theatre at Home, which consolidate and make available professionally recorded and edited theatre for on-demand viewing. Live-to-cinema broadcasts and digital streaming services represent a wide range of theatre, from classical to contemporary drama. Yet in the world of mediated theatre, Shakespeare offerings are especially prominent, likely because they can be expected to draw a large audience. For this reason, mediated theatre has attracted special interest in Shakespeare studies, especially from scholars already engaged in the study of historical and contemporary performance. As the works cited for this article attests, a growing list of articles, edited collections, and books now address a range of questions and topics, such as whether mediated theatre is theatre or how to describe trends and techniques in the cinematography and editing of theatre for film.

Alongside this growing body of scholarship, pedagogical articles have begun to appear that discuss the use of mediated theatre in the university-level classroom. At this point, however, these do not yet routinely frame the use of mediated theatre in terms of questions and debates within the field of mediated theatre studies.² Instead, as I lay out in more detail below, the authors describe employing mediated theatre in a variety of ways, from promoting basic comprehension to analyzing performance. In other words, there is a gap between the coalescing critical theorization and analysis of mediated theatre in research, on the one hand, and the variety of ways that pedagogical articles frame and describe its use in the classroom, on the other. One reason for this gap is the pattern described above: it takes time for new questions and approaches to permeate the field and for instructors to accommodate these ideas in their courses. In this case, however, another reason is access. Although thousands of cinemas worldwide have hosted event cinema screenings, attending these is difficult for instructors and students in rural areas, as well as those who simply do not have the time, means, or mobility to attend. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no screenings anyway. Streaming services, like Digital Theatre+, provide another route for access, but at this point most of these platforms are less than decade old. Some instructors are not yet aware of their existence. Those of us who do have access may not be aware of, or have the critical and theoretical background to utilize, the range of approaches and activities these platforms make possible (Borsuk 33; Carson 116).

Instructors might incorporate mediated theatre more in their courses, or might approach it in different ways, if they were more familiar with the critical discourse in this emerging area and with the available streaming services. The purpose of this article, then, is to promote wider

awareness of this field by offering an introductory survey of it. In what follows, first, I chart broad trends in the research. Next, I review types and capabilities of some digital platforms. Finally, I plot the range of approaches to mediated theatre in existing pedagogical articles. Ultimately, I hope that this survey will help instructors to refine established, or develop new, approaches to teaching with mediated theatre. In particular, where it seems relevant and helpful for students, I hope that this survey can help instructors to design courses that are not only informed by the now established discourse of performance criticism but also by specific questions and topics in mediated theatre studies. It is to these questions and topics that we will first turn.

Trends in Mediated Theatre Studies

Over the past decade, a variety of topics have dominated the study of mediated theatre, such as audience reception and filming techniques. In the most general terms, the arc of the criticism can be understood in terms of a shift from a “discourse of loss” (Wyver, “All the Trimmings” 117) to one of appreciation. That is to say, there has been a shift from an earlier understanding of mediated theatre as a lesser way to experience live drama and toward a current appreciation of mediated theatre as an art form in its own right—one that creates access to, even as it values and promotes, what is unique about the experience of live theatre.

To understand this shift, it is helpful to begin with the discourse of loss. This view grows from of a traditional idea about theatre: it is a unique experience that depends on audience presence and ephemerality. Once a performance occurs, it is gone. Writing in 1993, Peggy

Phelan offered a classic and oft-cited formulation of this point: “Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (146). More recently, Margaret Jane Kidnie has paraphrased this idea, noting that, for a long time, exclusivity, and the mutually reinforcing boundaries of live audience, limited time, and circumscribed place have been integral to the specific experience of theatre (133–34).

If the frisson of theatre lies in presence and non-reproducibility, then it makes sense to understand mediated theatre in terms of loss (Wyver, “All the Trimmings” 117–18). Mediation directly undermines those seemingly integral elements, eliminating the component of shared presence in one space and time, while also allowing for repeat viewing. Looking back on views of mediated theatre in 2014, John Wyver summarized: “the loss of liveness is deplored, the loss of co-presence of audience and actors, and the loss of reciprocal effect of spectators and cast” (“All the Trimmings” 117–18). As a consequence, there has been a “spirited debated” about whether mediated theatre can even “really count as theatre” (Sullivan 628).

The discourse of loss continues to inform current discussions. One example lies in the topic of audience autonomy. In the theatre, directors block scenes to attract and guide audience attention, but audience members are nevertheless free to look where they please—to focus on a minor character or some aspect of the set, for example (Hunter 24). In mediated theatre, however, camera angles and editing wield an “assertive hand” that “formally determines the object of attention” (Hunter 24). In other words, mediation through edited film can reduce the possibility of viewer choice. Mediated theatre, in the words of Bernadette Cochrane and Frances

Bonner, disrupts “the ability, indeed the right, of each audience member to select and compile his or her own edit of the proceedings” (127). The idea of loss thus persists in the notion that filmed theatre results in the “forfeiture of viewing autonomy” (Martinez 202).

Loss also informs a second, related discussion, which concerns whether and how film conveys the dimensions and use of theatrical space. This topic should be understood in relation to a technical feature of film, which is that a camera reverses the normal proportions of a stage. If someone is standing in the middle of the theatre house looking at a proscenium stage, the stage will appear widest at the front and narrower toward the back. But when a camera is positioned in a similar spot, it will register the space in the opposite way, with the area closest to the camera seeming narrower and the area farther away seeming wider. As a result, in much the same way that a sideview mirror makes objects look farther away, on camera, stage action can often feel as though it is receding (Bay-Cheng 41–43). Film directors use and work around this effect with a variety of techniques, such as using close-up and tracking shots, alternating one- and two-shots of characters, intermixing long shots that cut across the audience and the stage, and sometimes adding crane shots for a bird’s-eye view. This mixture of shots makes for more interesting viewing. At the same time, the sense of theatre “as a spatial art” in which the movement through and arrangement of space is significant “simultaneously recedes” (Sullivan 646-647). Such reduction or elimination of the spatial dimension of theatre can be exacerbated when watching mediated theatre on a small screen. Discussing a *Cheek by Jowl* production, Peter Kirwan highlights the loss involved when the production is viewed on a computer monitor, tablet, or

phone: the experience “risks jeopardizing the scale and effect of a company style that is rooted in a distinctly *theatrical* use of the whole ensemble” (Kirwan 163).

While a discourse of loss continues to register in the criticism, in general the trend is in a different direction, away from loss and toward an appreciation of mediated theatre as a distinct art form, one that operates in its own way, even as it introduces new audiences to and promotes the experience of live theatre. For some readers, the notion of mediated theatre as a distinct genre of film (or theatre) might seem intuitive, but this perspective has emerged slowly in the criticism, perhaps due to ways that theatres and film directors have played down the presence and effect of cameras and editing. As Bay-Cheng puts it, directors have tried to “mask” the fact of mediation (39). Such masking has been achieved in part, in the words of Hunter, through the public rhetoric of many theatres, which “promis[e] not the artifice of cinema, but a transmission of actual events” (17). For instance, in the first years of the NT Live Broadcasts, the goal was not “making a movie,” but to “make the production look as great on screen as it would on our stages” (Sabel 7:48–7:57). John Wyver, himself the director of many filmed productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company, assesses this tendency, noting that the persistent use by theatres and critics of terms like “relay” implies “the absence in the pathway from stage to screen of either any determining technological factors...or any creative agency” (“All the Trimmings” 109). In his colorful assessment, “It is almost as if the image sequences, which are considered and scripted and rehearsed responses to a host of factors, appear on screen courtesy of some kind of outside broadcast fairy” (109). Perhaps as a result of downplaying mediation, many audience members do not recognize (or minimize) how the medium inflects their experience of theatre.

Bay-Cheng writes that the recording “appears to be the thing itself, particularly for a viewer for whom live theatre is at best an occasional event” (39). Sullivan concurs: for many, there is a “perceived union of a stage production and its screen broadcast” (630).

Mediated theatre is, of course, not “the thing itself” (Bay-Cheng 39). More recently, critics have delineated how the process of mediation constructs the theatrical event. This process has begun with the recognition that mediated theatre is an art form in its own right. Such films are “distinct creative achievements” (Wyver, “All the Trimmings” 118) and “complex forms of artistry” (Sullivan 629) that demonstrate a “unique creative vision” (Aebischer and Greenhalgh 5). Mediated theatre is its own genre, one that has “developed its own conventions in response to pressures and innovations created by originating companies, broadcast teams, and receiving venues” (Aebischer and Greenhalgh 3). Roger Delamere, the founder of *Digital Theatre+*, sees mediated theatre as potentially “a new discipline” (Borsuk 27).

How then to make sense of this new genre? Critics have offered a variety of approaches. Using a formulation inflected by the discourse of loss, Sarah Bay-Cheng suggests attending to ways that mediation “distorts” live theatre (40). Implicitly harkening back to Linda Hutcheon’s influential work on adaptation, John Wyver has regarded such films as “doubled adaptations—adaptations (for the screen) of a text that was a staging of a Shakespeare play that was once, simply as a staged performance, an adaptation in itself” (“All the Trimmings” 104). Aebischer and Greenhalgh propose understanding much recent mediated theatre in terms of “expressive” archiving—that is creatively informed by the “medium’s potentialities” and the “style of the creator” (5). Yet, even as mediated theatre is a distinct genre of film, Margaret Jane Kidnie

cautions against going too far with this view. As she points out, the appeal of mediated theatre has “something to do with” live performance, and this context continues to define the attraction of watching it (142). Thus seeing mediated theatre entirely as its own art form, or even as a specific genre of adaptation, loses something of the live point of origin that makes viewing these adaptations exciting. Providing an approach that recognizes this origin, Sullivan examines how mediated theatre creates a sense of “being there,” and she does this by attending to ways that mediated theatre productions convey “dramaturgies of space,” in addition to a character’s “psychology and emotion” (654). Aligning with this view, John Wyver has also figured onscreen renderings of live stage productions as “translations,” a useful formulation since it recognizes the need for “a strong degree of fidelity to a pre-existing original as well as a recognition of inevitable and intentional creative mediation” (“Screening” 290). More recently, Wyver has returned to the term “adaptation,” recognizing that a screened version of theatre is a “distinctive creative work” (*Screening* 6). Only some of this meaning is “in dialogue with memories of the original production”—that is, with the fact of origination in a theatrical performance. Beyond that, screened theatre prompts “other dialogues,” in relation to other filmed adaptations, the work of a particular director, or other encounters with the playing company (*Screening* 6).

Whatever the specific way of describing mediated theatre, much of the criticism explores how this art form works by examining how the camera work informs interpretation. Such work focuses on analyzing the use and mixing of what can be called “theatrical” and “filmic” perspectives. Writing of theatrical perspectives, John Wyver explains:

[T]he theatrical elements may be understood as the components specific to the presentation on a stage, including the characteristic of continuous performance pitched to an auditorium and of live audience. Theatrical elements, moreover, may also include the image sequences that respect and respond to these characteristics and offer in wide shots an apparently direct and comparatively unmediated form of access to the staging.” (“All the Trimmings” 105-106)

Erin Sullivan provides a similar definition, describing “theatrical point of view” in terms of “a close focus on individual performers” which is underpinned by a steady awareness of the space surrounding them (639). While most mediated theatre incorporates theatrical elements, the form also employs cinematic or filmic elements more associated with film, such as crane shots, close-ups, as well as “more insistent mediations of multiple camera shots framed tightly on individuals and small groups and the editing between these” (Wyver, “All the Trimmings” 106).

Nearly all of what Aebischer and Greenhalgh classify as “expressive” mediated theatre involves both filmic and theatrical perspectives, with some characterized more by one emphasis or the other, often depending on the style of a particular company or director. Thus, some theatre companies, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, rely more on close-up shots to promote the sense of “physical and psychological proximity” that many viewers might associate with film (Sullivan 639). Such shots provide “an intimate, inclusive, and people-centered point-of-view, offering free access to the nuances of facial expressions and other markers of psychological inwardness” (637). For example, in a fascinating analysis of *Hamlet* at the RSC (Simon Godwin, Dir., 2016), starring Paapa Essiedu and directed for film by Robin Lough, Pascale Aebischer

describes how the camera movement during Hamlet’s soliloquies reinforces a sense of psychology. In these moments, she observes, Camera 2 tracked from left to right while slowly drawing closer to Hamlet, “as if drawn into his consciousness by some invisible force” (*Shakespeare* 174). Meanwhile, other productions, such as those from the Globe Theatre, tend to be more “open and mixed” (Sullivan 636) blending “more tightly framed one- and two-shots” with “looser shots of the wider stage space” (636).

While nearly all recent, professional produced mediated theatre mixes “theatrical” and “filmic” perspectives, critics have become especially interested in exploring how productions convey, even promote, what is specific to a theatrical production or to the experience of live theatre. For instance, in a sharp analysis of the broadcast of the National Theatre’s *Hamlet* at the Barbican, starring Benedict Cumberbatch, Sullivan discusses how director Robin Lough used crane shots to “tell the story of this production” (650). For example, the camera work in the nunnery scene captured Ophelia’s effort to write a note to Hamlet about their being watched. In this way, the camera conveyed an important element of this production, their “supportive and mutual relationship” (652). At the same time, it drew attention to a detail that might have been missed by a live audience member, thus conveying this “story” more effectively on screen than might have occurred in-person (652).

Going beyond ways that camera work might reinforce a specific point of theatrical interpretation, Lyndsey Brandon Hunter argues that mediated theatre often emphasizes aspects of production that are distinct to the physical creation of live theatre, like capturing an actor spewing while speaking, or an actor’s sweat. To be sure, some audiences have reacted negatively

to seeing this level of physical work. For instance, after Disney+ released *Hamilton*, there was a Twitter firestorm about Jonathan Groff's spit (Ingolfsland), which freaked out viewers especially in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic when the film was released. At the same time, this kind of spewing is what happens in live theatre, and in this way mediated theatre "often conserves and reifies traditional norms and expectations attached" to live drama (16).³

Globe Theatre filmed productions provide good example of the way that films can aggrandize the space and moment of a live theatrical performance. These films, which are frequently recorded over multiple nights and then edited together and released a year or so later (Sullivan 640; Aebischer, "South Bank" 124), tend to use editing to emphasize the unique nature of the theatrical space. For instance, Globe films often begin with an exterior shot of the unique building and then a shot of the audience, especially the groundlings, gathered around and leaning on the stage (Aebischer, "South Bank" 125). Because of the universal lighting and proximity of the audience members to the stage, the films include the audience frequently (124). For film viewers, these patterns create "a level of spatial awareness that is comparable, if not exactly identifiable, to that of their in-house counterparts at the Globe" (Sullivan 641). At the same time, by constantly presenting the live audience, as well as the sweat and physical work of the actors, viewers can also feel excluded from the Globe, "separate" from the "experience" of the play in situ (Aebischer, "South Bank" 128). In so doing, the Globe productions, while creating a sense for viewers that they are *not there*, also promote and elevate the idea of being there. In this way, going back to the observations of Lyndsey Brandon Hunter, they "convey" and "reify" what is distinctive about the live experience of theatre at the Globe. Indeed, many instructors incorporate

Globe productions in their teaching for just this reason. For instance, in a recent essay, Stephanie Pietros observes that she often uses Globe productions because “they make concrete my lessons about the mechanics of Shakespeare’s theater,” while also “invit[ing]” consideration about factors unique to any live performance” (92). Where then might instructors turn if they too want to help students to consider those factors unique to live performance?

Resources

Some instructors might be able to arrange for students to attend an event screening of a Shakespeare play at a local cinema. But for those for whom travel is not a feasible option, it is still possible to create for students a sense of what live theatre is like using a range of on-demand platforms. These include Theatre in Video, Globe on Screen, Digital Theatre+, Drama Online, National Theatre at Home, as well as reportedly a forthcoming site from Cambridge University Press. Here I briefly survey of the first four of these, the ones that are most established, in terms of content and functionality.

The most barebones site is Theatre in Video, published by Alexander Street. At this point, the site advertises a collection 800 hours of plays, documentaries, and interviews (“Theatre in Video”). The collection is available via institutional subscription at two, tiered price points, Volume I and Volume II, or as part of a larger, umbrella collection, Theatre Performance and Design. My institution has a more restrictive, Volume I subscription, which I have used regularly. This subscription provides access to some historical theatre and film productions, such as the 1948 Olivier *Hamlet* as well as (in my geographic region), some recent productions from

the Stratford Festival (Ontario, Canada) and from the Royal Shakespeare Company. The collection also includes interviews with directors, designers, and writers. Such contextual resources can enable exploration of performance history and changing approaches to interpretation, directing, and acting. The site has interesting features for teaching and learning, such as a tool for bookmarking scenes with a unique web address that links directly back to that moment. The tool can help instructors or students link to a specific scene in a presentation or paper. Overall, my experience of it has been hit and miss. I use it most to find relevant, recent productions, and these offerings are helpful but still limited.

Another important resource is Globe on Film, available through the Globe Player or by institutional subscription via *Drama Online* or *Digital Theatre+* (both discussed below). The site offers a collection of professionally produced versions of Globe plays, usually filmed over a couple of nights and then edited and mixed to eliminate ambient noise and to capture the best takes. At the time of this writing, the site has at least one filmed version of many, but not all, Shakespeare's plays, including landmark productions, such as the 2012 revival of an all-male *Twelfth Night* starring Mark Rylance as Olivia and Stephen Fry as Malvolio. There are two versions of some plays, such as of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. Most of the films are of Shakespeare productions, but at the time of this writing, there is also filmed version of *The Duchess of Malfi* and a new play, *Metamorphoses*. The individual subscription is affordable, and it is also possible to rent or purchase individual productions. I have had luck requiring students to rent a couple of the plays as part of the required materials and supplies for the semester. I have also found it helpful to teach the plays in conjunction with other resources

on the Globe's website, such as the podcasts, actor interviews, and lesson plans. As of this writing, the site also provides access to ten of the multinational and multilingual performances produced for the Globe to Globe festival (part of the cultural Olympiad connected with the 2012 London Olympics), which is discussed further below.

Two commercial services are especially robust, providing more functionality and ways of engaging with the plays. Both are only available via institutional subscription, and have catalogs and collections at various price points that include Shakespeare and other classical and modern drama, including plays from the Globe Theatre, the National Theatre, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. *Drama Online*, published by Bloomsbury, aims at a higher education, and describes itself as a “high-quality online research tool for drama and literature students, professors, and teachers” (“About Drama Online”). According to the *Drama Online* website, the collection “features 2,750 playtexts from 1,000 playwrights, 400 audio plays, 345 hours of video, and 370 scholarly books,” thereby offering “a complete multimedia experience of theatre” (“What’s Included?”). Like *Theatre in Video* and the Globe Player, this resource allows for repeat viewing of productions, as well as the ability to create clips of scenes to use for discussion in class. Because the resource allows viewers to access text and performance simultaneously, it offers a helpful way into to comparative analyses and discussion of cuts (and additions). As Niamh O’Leary mentions in her essay in this roundtable, while expensive, this institutional resource can save students money, since editions and plays are available through a single, institutional subscription (see also Lonergan in “Case Studies”). Most drama is available only in English, although *Drama Online* aims to add more international content (Carson 117).

Digital Theatre+ is an independently produced, commercial platform, available through institutional subscription. Like *Drama Online*, this resource features productions by major companies such as the Globe and RSC. While *Drama Online*'s content caters to the university- and post-graduate user (Borsuk 31), *Digital Theatre+* caters more to secondary schools. As Amy Borsuk observes, this platform was “designed with the principal of promoting global access to theatrical performances to inspire students to engage with theatre creatively, and to teach them the necessary elements of theatre scholarship in line with UK educational standards” (27). Robert Delamere, the founder of the site, observes that it usefully facilitates comparative analysis, “reference back and repeat scenes and play speeches and reflect on the heart of the drama or the key questions of the drama” (Delamere in Borsuk 30). He also views the platform as a space where students can remix Shakespeare (or any other drama on the site)—that is, play with the content in their own way, by using a tool that allows students to “curate more adventurously” (in Borsuk 30) by mixing and combining scenes or parts of scenes from different productions in their own “mixed tape” (30).

Individually, or in combination, each of these services offers students and instructors opportunities to view multiple productions, which makes it possible to compare different theatrical interpretations of the text, as well as to explore other elements of theatre, such as stagecraft and acting styles. While these resources are profoundly important, there are also some issues that publishers are still grappling with. One is that publishers are working to keep up with the need for accessibility (Bartley in Carson 118). Most productions available now across platforms have professionally edited, accurate captions.. On the Globe Player, for some time,

none of the English language productions had subtitles, but with a recent reboot of the site, all videos are now available with English captions, and some are available with audio description, but audio description remains less common.

Another issue is that all of these sites are dominated by productions from major British theatres, which can have the effect of establishing a single-British standard for what Shakespeare should look and sound like. Many of these platforms are seeking to diversify by adding more international content (Carson 117). Yet currently, as Christie Carson observes, “there is the danger of providing a canon of texts and performances that reinforce mainstream ideas and conservative values” (121). She goes on to ask, “Does the convenience and flexibility of having these resources as a stable starting point for discussion outweigh the issues of potential canonical entrenchment?” (121). Beyond entrenching a British version of Shakespeare, such productions, if they are not careful to attend to design and lighting, can also engrain a vision of what the Shakespearean actor looks like. Pascale Aebischer makes this point in her analysis of the RSC production of *Hamlet*, starring a racially diverse, primarily Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) cast. In this production, the design and broadcast teams paid little attention to skin color, with the result that the performances of black actors became “inherently less visible, legible and (re)markable than those of their lighter-skinned peers” (*Shakespeare* 190). When lighting, costuming, and set choices mean that the bodies of white actors stand out more than other bodies of actors of color, it makes those white bodies seem more legible as especially suited to Shakespeare.

The criticism on mediated theatre registers one, albeit limited, way to recontextualize and expand student interaction with multi-racial and global Shakespeare, which is through “Globe to Globe” productions, which is a collection of the 2012 Globe performances of Shakespeare by companies from around the world, produced in conjunction with the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Performances are by companies from around the world and in languages other than English. At the time of this writing, films of ten of these productions can be rented or purchased through the Globe Player. (They are also available through Drama Online.) All ten are filmed in the original language of performance and available with English subtitles. Tom Bird, Director of the Globe to Globe Festival, observes that these productions go beyond the Anglo-centrism of most digital Shakespeare. He hopes that the “an international approach” represented in Globe to Globe “just makes you irreverent toward the plays” (Bell 70), while providing a broader “spectrum of what you could do on stage with Shakespeare” (Bird in Bell 71).

Trends in Pedagogy

Whichever resource one uses, one thing is clear: at this point, there remains a gap between “producer expectations for a platform and the reality of student and instructor usage” (Borsuk 33). One reason for this gap lies the digital skills of teachers and students as well as lack of sufficient pedagogical preparation for teachers in how to use these platforms (33). Distributors have suggested that they need to add more features and do more to help instructors use existing features. In the meantime, it is useful to catalog some ways that mediated theatre has already emerged in pedagogical articles. Many instructors are using these resources, but they are doing

so in a variety of ways and for a variety of ends, ranging from analysis of the language of the text to analysis of theatrical performance and acting styles. Writing in 2007, Sarah Bay-Cheng observed that “no survey yet exists cataloging the use of mediated theatre in the classroom” (38). This portion of the essay goes some way to addressing this gap, but it is not a comprehensive catalog.

Instructors have for some time used films of live theatre in their courses, although these have tended to be used to enhance textual interpretation, and this trend remains strong. Thus, Bruce Brandt discusses teaching a film of the 1976 American Conservatory Theatre production of *Taming of the Shrew* that works to “complicate[] students’ reactions to the text” (174). Another example emerges in the 2020 article, “Of Text and Tech: Digital Encounters with Shakespeare in the Deree College Classroom in Athens, Greece.” Here Anastasia Logotheti surveys a variety of textual and performance-based online resources for teaching Shakespeare to non-native speakers of English. These include the British Library’s digitized items, such as early printed books, manuscripts, annotated play-scripts, and photographs of the filmed performances available through *Drama Online*. In a way that prefigures Elizabeth Charlebois’s essay in this roundtable, Logotheti emphasizes using editions and performances to help students to learn that Shakespeare is constructed through editions and performance. At the same time, while she observes that these approaches can help students to learn more about theatre and theatrical practices, the specific discussion seems to emphasize using digital resources to enhance critical and textual analysis. For instance, Logotheti observes that “students approach textual analysis”

differently, with more “awareness” (44), once they have watched more than one performance and that viewing multiple productions enhances ability with “critical analysis” (45).

Sometimes a faculty member might incorporate mediated theatre to promote analysis and understanding of performance, but find that students have other needs, which are also met by digital resources. This point emerges in Chris Thurman’s essay on digital Shakespeare in the teaching of university-level Shakespeare in South Africa, a country where, he observes, many primary and secondary schools lack basic educational infrastructure. As a result, many students arrive at the university having never seen a play whether live, in a mediated recording, or in an adaption for film. As he puts it in his 2020 article, “Such are the conditions at hundreds of South African schools that even the taken-for-granted practice of playing a DVD is not a feasible option” (53). Beyond this, because of a wider “literacy problem” (54), students have faced a lack of books and other resources in their previous schools. For Thurman, mediated theatre can address some of the challenges to reading and understanding Shakespeare that grow out of these systemic issues, since such films make possible a “multimodal approach to literacy,” one that “incorporates viewing, listening to and participating in the play’s performance,” and can also help with multilingual contexts by “promoting the translation of Shakespeare’s works” (54). Yet, Thurman observes, working in these contexts sometimes requires aiming at high-level analytical discussions, while meeting students where they are. Thus, he has taught classes exploring the politics of performance, such as the filmed adaptation of the RSC’s “African” *Julius Caesar* (2012) which was filmed partly on location and partly on stage, and set in a generic, contemporary African dictatorship. Thurman was interested in the representation of Africa in this

production, and his students “concur that the production was problematic in treating Africa-as-a-country” (58). Yet, as with many productions, his students appreciated this and other films because the productions helped them to understand the basics of plot and character.

Other faculty incorporate mediated theatre by bringing students to see event cinema, as in Peter Kirwan’s essay in this roundtable. Similarly, Ann Martinez writes about taking students in Ohio to the cinema see the National Theatre’s *Hamlet*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch. Both Kirwan and Martinez consider how event cinema conveys, and relies on, the idea that it is presenting a live event. This point comes across as well in Geoffrey Way’s discussion of RSC Schools Broadcasts, which airs prerecorded performances at a set time followed by a live Q&A with cast and crew. It is interesting to note that each of these essays, focusing on teaching in an event cinema context, have elements that support both older and newer research frameworks for understanding mediated theatre—that is, they present mediated theatre as a loss, a falling away from an original experience, and a gain, a way to access and have a taste of, the real thing. Moving beyond these articles, there is still much to be explored. In particular, there is significant opportunity for instructors to develop pedagogical articles that explore ways of addressing the British-centricity of the current mediated theatre landscape or the questions prompted by filmed productions involving a BAME cast, such as the questions (mentioned above) about lighting that Aebischer in her analysis of the RSC *Hamlet*, starring Paapa Essiedu (*Shakespeare* 180–90).

Yet, for instructors to write such articles, they need access, and there remain issues of access to mediated theatre as it exists now. Even as event cinema has widened access to world class mainly British productions, these are difficult to access for everyone. Where I teach, the

nearest event cineplex for viewing “event cinema” used to be fifty miles away. These showings have not returned with the reopenings after the shutdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic. The events I attended prior to the pandemic had an audience of three or four, including me. Thus it is worth keeping in mind Joe Falocco’s criticism of event cinema. As he points out, outside of metropolitan areas in the U.S. and Britain, such events will never be commercially viable. The crowds they draw are negligible. Furthermore, Falocco observes, students often prefer to see Shakespeare on demand, a point also made by Thurman (55).

What Falocco wrote in 2017 seems even truer now: “The future for Shakespeare on Screen[s] in the twenty-first century lies in open access and interaction with an educational system, rather than in restrictive efforts at cinematic distribution” (65). As we have experienced with Covid-19, we are all more dependent on screens now—even to access, support, and enjoy what was once live theatre. For this reason, the future of Shakespeare on stage likely will rely more and more on screens, especially via “open access” platforms and through “interactions with an educational system.” Instructors, students, and the general population are currently, and perhaps increasingly, likely to be, accessing “live” Shakespeare via mediated theatre. For this reason, it will be useful for all of us to learn more about how this mediation works and for educators to teach these films not solely in terms of text and performance, but with attention to the techniques, possibilities, and limits this particular mode of transmission.

Notes

¹ While Bay-Cheng discusses recordings, Wyver adapts her definition to add the possibility of simultaneous live broadcast (“All the Trimmings” 105).

² An exception is Peter Kirwan’s article in this roundtable.

³ In a related vein, Pascale Aebischer has recently examined how seemingly “‘new’ performance modes” hearken back not only back to the early modern theatre itself, how such modes are “related to and adapt the spatial configurations and modes of spectatorship that govern early modern dramaturgies” (*Shakespeare* 3).

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