**Performing the digital archive:**

***or, how to avoid being pushed from our stools***

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The digital performance archive is manipulable in ways that the analogue one is not. But what does its manipulability do to the history, and the future, of Shakespeare on screen? In this talk, I will suggest that the digital or digitised back catalogue constitutes an invitation to contemporary theatre and film makers that the analogue does not – a tempting invitation to collaborate with the dead. The materials and the occupants of the digital archive – accessible and manipulable as they are – can be claimed, reanimated and re-engaged with from within the dramatic orbit of a new production. Those engagements can be tentative or trenchant, creative or disruptive, playful and/or competitive. To absorb a prior production into a contemporary production in this way is to exceed the intertextual referent and to expand the meaning and operations of the quotation. This is incorporative and trans-temporally collaborative Shakespeare. But what can be purposefully done with and through such acts of incorporation and with the impression of collaboration they generate?

Starting with a consideration of how filmmakers in the pre-digital world consciously subsumed and rendered purposeful aspects of the inherited artistic legacy into their own acts of Shakespearean filmmaking, I will then consider the digitisation and incorporation of prior screen performances into a range of more recent productions, including the Michael Almereyda 2000 *Hamlet*, the Wooster Group stage production of *Hamlet* (first performed 2006) and the Kit Monkman 2018 film of *Macbeth* (co-scripted by Buchanan)*.* To appropriate, showcase and riff off a piece of prior performance history as these productions do is to perform both specific and general work. The specific work will be considered production by production. The more general work accomplished is the implicit acknowledgement that no contemporary production is an entirely singular and contained dramatic entity. All respond not only to a version of the original Shakespeare play but, consciously or otherwise, to aspects of the performance and artistic legacy that has intervened between the play’s first performance and the present moment. The interpretive tradition for any dramatic work is, therefore, both composite and cumulative, informed by a complex set of multiply derivative networks of dependence, emulation, absorption and response as that work bowls through history. Incorporative productions make those dependencies conspicuous by explicitly showcasing a representative of the legacy received. In inviting artistic works to encounter each other within the composite tapestry of a unifying dramatic world, these productions therefore celebrate and interrogate the reciprocal relationship between contemporary performance and the historical archive, identifying themselves as part of the archive’s ongoing creative work. Macbeth was anxious that the dead, in rising again, might displace us at the table and ‘push us from our stools’. These productions posit ways in which the resurrected interloper might be invited to share that stool and place at the table in more hospitable ways. And what do the possibilities of such trans-temporal collaborations do to the sense of their own futurity now embedded in each new addition to the digital performance archive?

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