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# Methods of mapping the digital field of Shakespearean cultural production

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## SUMMARY

The present report aims to analyze the extent to which democratic cultural policies of the past two decades have been assimilated in the production of Shakespeare in the digital realm. The underlying argument of my research is that the new digital media are instrumental in strengthening the democratic political model, and cultural memory, embodied by our case study in Shakespeare, is one of the main pillars for implementing the democratic socio-political principles. Building a democratic model online through shakespearean productions, created by public institutions, publishing houses and users, is proven by tracing the strategies used for implementing four fundamental democratic principles in the making of digital Shakespeare: access, participation, inclusion and deliberation. As derived from political theory, these principles lay at the core of the theories of democracy, and their implementation becomes a driving force for rethinking cultural memory in the wake of the new technologies.

Using the digital technology (ICT) in transposing culture from various media of production and dissemination into digital media draws a continuous negotiation and redefinition of what we call cultural memory. The dynamics within cultural memory, always situated between two forms of preserving the past, namely keeping the past as present, or as canon, and keeping the past as past, or the archive<sup>1</sup>, make the field extremely fluid, accelerated and decentered once the global process of digitizing culture kicks in. Remediating the cultural archives into digital formats imposes a reconsideration of what is valuable from our past, considering that the digitized corpora will circulate along with an unprecedented number of past and present works within the digital medium. The canon, „actively circulated memory which keeps the past present”<sup>2</sup>, enters a democratic, participatory, remix culture, and comes to assimilate new rhetorics, practices and policies of the medium. Following this interaction between tradition and innovation, heritage and active cultural production, cultural institutions practices and governmental policies, what we call cultural memory ends up reformed in the wake of the unity in diversity ethos. Given the more and more extensive use of digital technologies in the cultural production and consumption, I consider it is essential to understand the ways in which the production mechanisms affect cultural memory as it is formed and exhibited online; this is useful not only for a critical awareness of the medium

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<sup>1</sup> Aleida Assmann, “The dynamics of cultural memory between remembering and forgetting”. In Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Assmann, „The dynamics”, p.98

policies directing cultural production, but also for a mapping of their results and effects on cultural value and canon. In order to achieve these ends, I am investigating the ways in which the main cultural memory agents assimilate and promote democratic cultural policies in the digital production. The choice of shakespearean cultural memory for my analysis is based on a series of specific traits the shakespearean works have acquired in time, of which we briefly mention: a) Shakespeare is considered to be part of the world literature<sup>3</sup>, given the global circulation of his works, which become thus part not only of the anglo-saxon cultural memory, but of the global one; b) Shakespeare is actively circulated cultural memory, maintained along centuries through its uses in education, and through the ongoing stage performances and adaptation; c) his works have been translated and adapted in a variety of media, from page to page, to film, to theatre stages, images, comics and video games, always adjusting to various languages and literacies; d) Shakespeare Studies as an academic field has given a great deal of attention to local productions, translations and appropriations, making room for the inclusion in what is called the shakespearean canon of archive material and rewritings bearing specific cultural traces; e) the shakespearean archive together with new adaptations are part of larger critical conversations on cultural globalization, differences and meeting points between cultures, and transnational cultural agents.

In the present research, I define the digital cultural production of Shakespeare as the field of production which encompasses the activities of digital reproduction (or digitization) of the shakespearean archive, as well as the activities of editing, rewriting and adapting Shakespeare in digital formats. The digital cultural production includes, thus, both the remediation of the archive for the digital sphere, and the new digitally-born cultural works inspired by or adapting his works. The digital cultural production of Shakespeare includes digital archives of older editions, textual, stage, audio or video adaptations, of production materials, stage scripts, translations, electronic texts, digital adaptations into computer games, images or fan-fiction, but also critical works and conversations. Each of these has their own genre of production and rather than analysing them textually, we look at the environment of production and the interplay between producers favoured by the connectivity in the digital sphere. The accessibility of the new technology greatly diversifies the producer community, and the cultural democracy ethos invites these to an open participation to the production and consumption of culture. However, not all cultural productions based on Shakespeare's works

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<sup>3</sup> David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003

gain the same cultural power and legitimacy, and this becomes visible when looking at the cultural field.

In order to identify the main producers of digital Shakespeare, and the types of digital productions which are considered cultural memory online, I used a mixed methodology, which combines a quantitative research method of acquiring and delimiting the primary sources, with the critical framework of interpreting them offered by cultural sociologists – the field of cultural production (Bourdieu<sup>4</sup>, Bolin<sup>5</sup>). This model offers a distanced view upon the extent to which the democratic principles of access, participation, inclusion and deliberation are applied in reconstructing and representing cultural memory online.

In the first chapter of the present report, I will draw a brief overview of the main literature tackling the intesection of Shakespeare with the digital technology of information and communication. Useful conceptual delimitations of the notions of archive and editing prove the existence of continuation, as opposed to radical shifts, in editorial production from old to new media. The second chapter circumscribes shakespearean cultural memory within the context of contemporary cultural policies, which are seen from a diacronic perspective following the relation between culture and mass-media in 20th century Western civilizations. The last chapter of the report explains the originality of the method of analysis employed and offers a sample of the web sphere analysis, as well as some preliminary conclusions on the production of cultural memory in the light of new media and democratic policies.

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Columbia University Press, 1993

<sup>5</sup> Bolin, Göran, *Value and the Media: Cultural Production and Consumption in Digital Markets*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2011