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The Merchant in Venice: Shylock's *Unheimlich* Return

The first decades of the new millennium have seen an odd return to origins in Shakespeare studies. *The Merchant in Venice*, a site-specific theatrical production realized during the 500th anniversary year of the “original” Jewish Ghetto, was not only a highlight among the many special events commemorating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death in 2016, but also a more creative and complex response to historicism. With her nontraditional casting of five Shylocks (developed through collaborations with scholars and students as well as her international, multilingual company), director Karin Coonrod made visible the acts of cultural projection and fracturing that Shakespeare’s play both epitomizes and has subsequently prompted. This article, written by a participant-observer commissioned to capture on video the making and performance of Compagnia de’ Colombari’s six-night run in the Campo del Ghetto Nuovo, explores the way this place is—and indeed, the category of place itself is always—a dynamic temporal construct, defying more complacent attempts at simple return (to home, to the text, to the past). Such a recognition allows nuanced, hybrid forms of multicultural theater and Shakespeare scholarship to emerge, and to collaborate more fruitfully.

Keywords: site-specific performance, Jewish Ghetto, Venice, Karin Coonrod, commemoration, The Merchant of Venice online.

The first decades of the new millennium have seen an odd return to origins in Shakespeare studies: to the life of the author, fetishizing of the First Folio, “original pronunciation” of his speeches and “original practices” of dramaturgy, and the “rebuilding” of theaters in which his works were first performed. Beyond a post-postmodern backlash, what can account for this seeming erasure or at least effacement of what we know regarding the comparatively paltry biographical record, the absence of a single “authoritative” text for most or indeed all the plays, the facts that our ears cannot hear nor our eyes see as if we were living in the sixteenth century, and that the theaters are not in exactly the same places—nor could they be—as when the Lord Chamberlain’s Men entertained London audiences?

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The varieties of historicism are many, and no simple answer can capture all the forms of longing implied by these attempts to travel back in time: longings for knowledge, mastery, continuity, attention, funding, authenticity, and more. But among those, the longing to return to a place of origin—to go home again—seems perhaps most paradoxical and worthy of exploration here, at an historical moment when many other artists, scholars, and teachers are striving to find new fields of exploration, new intersections across cultures that were alien and alienated in earlier centuries. Akin to Rebecca Schneider's work on historical reenactments that intersect with her interests in new temporalities within contemporary performance¹, here I look back to move forward, focusing on a particularly fraught place and play for twenty-first-century reclamation: the Venetian Ghetto, and *The Merchant of Venice*. In so doing, I recall a collaborative enterprise involving scholars, artists, students and audiences that became one of the more fruitful results of the myriad commemorative events marking the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016, and want to honor that form of collaboration as among the richest developments to emerge alongside origin-focused studies in recent years. I also want to touch upon not only the difficulties of conveying such event-focused performance and study across time and media, but also the ways our normative vocabularies for describing space and place encourage illusory notions of return, inhibiting the development of more nuanced, accurate conceptualizations of our relationships with early modernity in general, and Shakespeare in particular. In that endeavor, a show with five Shylocks will be my guide.

The show, *The Merchant in Venice*, was a six-night run of Shakespeare's *Merchant* performed outdoors between July 26 and August 1 in the main Campo del Ghetto Nuovo, the site of the Jewish Ghetto that gave the world that word and which commemorated the 500th anniversary of its founding in 2016.² The coincidence of round numbers generated a cluster of programming, including a mock trial presided over by US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco and a *Merchant*-focused summer school held on San Giorgio Maggiore as a collaboration between Università Ca' Foscari (University of Venice) and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. The latter lasted a month during the summer of 2015 and (with predominantly new students and scholars) for two weeks in 2016, overlapping with the run of the site-specific

¹ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Enactment*. London: Routledge, 2011.

² This small island had earlier been a *geto*, or foundry (actually a copper-smelting waste dump), which the Arsenale displaced. It was not the first choice for a Jewish quarter among Venetian Christians (who advocated using Murano) but the Jewish merchants considered Murano too far from the Rialto and their work, and hence negotiated this location in the Canareggio sector. In the 16th century, the fictional Shylock would have had to live here and would most likely have prayed at the Ashkenazi/German synagogue, the oldest of the five.

performance piece. The anchors of this multiyear project were Prof. Shaul Bassi of Ca' Foscari on the academic side, and the Compagnia de' Columbari headed by Artistic Director Karin Coonrod on the theatrical. In addition, Prof. David Scott Kastan of Yale University helped initiate the project along with Bassi, and event co-chairs, an international committee, and an academic advisory board (on which this writer served) worked from abroad and onsite to bring the multiple dimensions of the project to fruition.³

Even in retrospect, the complexity of the project(s), the challenges of international collaboration and communication, the number of moving parts, and the ambitious range of events prompt me to recall the tagline of *Shakespeare in Love*'s Henslowe in describing how theater comes to be: "It's a mystery." But as a participant-observer for the final production, I can also attest to the massive labor, commitment, and cross-cultural exchange that led to its success. A more general sense of place—the attractions of Venice—obviously played a role in drawing attention to the project from scholars and audience members alike, but this was deployed to encourage far more historical awareness than the usual visitor's interest. To achieve this goal required a theater company willing to delve seriously into the specifics of the events and places informing *Merchant*'s 16th-century world, with special attention to the particular performance location in the "original" ghetto, and then an ability to transform that knowledge into living theater. Professor Bassi (who, as a co-founder of the Venice Center for International Jewish Studies as well as a Shakespearean, has written extensively in both fields, at their intersection, and even leads special guided tours through the Ghetto's synagogues) explained in a videotaped interview with our MIT Global Shakespeares team:

The whole point of this was not simply to stage *The Merchant* in the Ghetto. One was to create it here, to have it sort of be born, and to grow here. And so it was so important that we met Colombari, and we met a company that was willing to start from the place itself. We could have probably, realistically also have had some very, very famous Shakespearean company to come here to bring their own *Merchant of Venice* but this had to be a *Merchant of Venice* that was made in Venice. That's why it's called *The Merchant in Venice*. It had to be made in the Ghetto. So last year when we did the summer school it was a very, very exciting moment: some of the Colombari actors came and they started exploring the place, the scholars analyzed the place, the students participated in the discussion, and we tried to bring all these different approaches to Shakespeare together.⁴

³ See the Committees page of *The Merchant in Venice* website for a complete list (<http://www.themerchantinvenice.org/#news>), and a link to the institutional partners.

⁴ Bassi may have been thinking of the contrast with the Shakespeare's Globe touring production starring Jonathan Pryce, which was scheduled to arrive at the Teatro Goldoni in Venice for three nights later in 2016. Interview recorded July 31, 2016. All

His comments emphasize the exchange of perspectives among performers and scholars, to which I shall later return, offsetting what might (especially out of context) sound like a somewhat romanticized notion of organic form based on a timeless idea of the locale and the idea of place as home; in fact, Bassi has been quite careful in his scholarly presentations to emphasize the layers of projection and fictionalization that interweave with the stones of Venice, and also charts the historical changes and disruptions that make the Ghetto a “palimpsest.”⁵ There is no continuous thread through this area’s particularly complex history, which includes multiple waves of Jewish immigration from different regions of Europe and the Middle East, changing levels of surveillance and discrimination, a robust early modern intellectual and artistic community, Napoleonic-era dissolution and subsequent assimilation of most of its Jewish population, deportations of Italian Jews to death camps during World War 2 as now memorialized on a wall in the Campo, and more recently “colonization” of the public areas by proselytizing ultraorthodox sects from America even as the Ghetto’s tenements are occupied by predominantly non-Jewish residents (often with absentee landlords). So, at least for Bassi and numerous others involved, for the production to engage with “the place” is a complex matter. It is not to erase the intervening centuries and pretend to capture 16th-century Jewish life as if Shylock had ever lived there; rather, it is to understand the fictionality of Shylock’s construction yet also its historical consequentiality; the differences as well as resonances between that image and the ghosts of the Ghetto’s actual early modern inhabitants; the ways our back-formations reflect modern issues that need to be addressed, as well as distinguished from Shakespeare’s cultural presumptions; and to think about what a performance in this place in this time is doing, how it can participate in the production of a more vital space and experience of Shakespeare’s play, the Ghetto sites and Venice’s Jewish history, and our intercultural futures. Bassi made clear that if the commemorations merely added the Ghetto to a list of Heritage tourist sites, the enterprise would have failed: the work of intercultural theater and scholarship aspires to a far more extensive contribution, among which (in this case) is to reanimate those dimensions of Venetian Jewish culture that have been overlooked, and to create new works, and new perspectives within a cosmopolitan living Venice—and beyond.

Yet it would be inaccurate—indeed perverse, given that this was a creative project—to deny the imaginative power of performing and viewing

interviews in Venice cited herein were carried out by the MIT Global Shakespeares team of Diana Henderson, Cathleen Nalezty, and Daniel Epelbaum.

⁵ This was the theme of Bassi’s summer school talk (July 20, 2016); see also his “Tales of the Ghetto: The Shadow of Shylock” in *Venice the Jews and Europe 1516-2016*, Marsilio 2016: 106-13. That collection, linked with a Ducal Palace exhibit, provides more on the Ghetto and Venetian Jewish history.

the play on the site of early modern resistance, compromise, and many injustices, as well as in the shadow of more recent and ongoing horrors. In other words, if this was not an unambiguously authentic home (for either a production or the fictional Shylock), nor a place where one should blithely use that shifty metaphor of destruction “ground zero,” the Campo del Ghetto Nuovo nonetheless materialized longings and horrors associated with each of those constructs. Behind the temporary audience bleachers stood the Holocaust memorial wall, with barbed wire that signifies more contemporary forms of anti-Semitism; by contrast, the sixteenth-century Ghetto recalled within the piazza’s synagogues and museum was a place of bustling community, curfewed and locked off from midnight until morning by Christian soldiers paid by the Jewish inhabitants but nonetheless better than most contemporary residential alternatives for Jews and a vital part of the Venetian culture and economy. And now? For the most part, daily life includes tourists, artists and scholars, outdoor tables at trattorias, local dogs and children playing in the Campo. Yet during a year of ISIL-inspired bombings and knife attacks across western Europe, the nightly pre-performance area sweep by heavily armed Italian police with sniffer dogs was not merely an inconvenience for props, costumers, and we with video-cameras who had to have all our equipment within the cordoned perimeter well before the audiences arrived; it was a reminder of the dangerously different yet related realities of cultural hatred surrounding our attempt at intercultural and historical understanding.

Within this fraught frame, both actors and audiences felt the doubled force of past and present, some expressing delight at how the play prompted their own forms of imaginative time travel, while others felt the particular pain and complexity of Shakespeare’s words echoing in this place right now. One audience member, an MIT engineering alumnus, reflected afterwards:

For me, I will now link Venice with the Shakespearean play, which I had not before. So when I go to Venice, I will probably make it a point to visit the Ghetto, which I didn’t do every trip to Venice before, and it will link for me more of what was going on in the sixteenth-century, so yes, it will affect me in that sense.

Another, an artist and donor through MIT’s Council for the Arts, added:

When I go to Venice, certainly there are so many buildings that are obviously hundreds of years old, and there’s an appreciation of that ... You see all these art forms ... that have existed since that time, but it was hard for me to envision that time, when Venice was really at its height, [when visiting] in the city, but now I think I do ... I see the city in a dramatically different way, I can almost see past (especially if I’m not in the very crowded areas), I can almost see people in

costume, walking through the streets and living up in those tall thin buildings, not just in the Ghetto but in the city in general, rowing to different islands: you just get a very different sense of it, and I think I will always carry that with me.⁶

If the audience members' sense of place was consciously affected, even more profound was the impact on the performers. Michelle Uranowitz, playing Jessica, noted that she usually tries to block out her offstage surroundings, having been trained to concentrate on the stage world alone; but in this place, playing the Jewish daughter who deserts it and her father to run off with a Christian, she felt that she could not—and not only because the outdoor location meant that daily life visibly continued outside our barricading aluminum fences. Rather, it felt as if she would be replicating the insensitivity, the years and patterns of cultural denial, not to recognize the importance of the living community.⁷ Elena Pellone, whose simultaneous careers as a graduate student at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon and as Colombari's performer of Nerissa afforded her a doubled perspective on the events, captures powerfully the company's experience in rehearsal:

During rehearsal in the ghetto there was a moment when the walls rang back to our ears “dog Jew”, “impenetrable cur”, and all the cast confirmed later that we had all experienced at the same time a profound sense of shame. I had goose pimples and shivers all over my body. No longer could the words be empty lines to be learned, to do ‘magnificent heart-felt’ acting with. The Ghetto took the words and echoed back their cruelty, making the speakers bear the realisation of what it was they had spoken. When Antonio shouts his line about what could be harder than [Shylock's] Jewish heart, spoken next to the memorial list of all the Jews deported and killed during the war, we know exactly who could have harder hearts. Us. It is a moment where the play's question – for it is a question – is answered. And the Ghetto answers us with its imposing buildings. Its silence. Its Synagogues with their five eyes watching us. With their casements listening to us. And shut. I felt that the ghetto changed the play but also the play changed the ghetto in some ways. It opened up to us like a passionate flower in the desert that blooms suddenly. For every night more and more windows were opened. And what was extraordinary was that the house Jessica appeared out of the window from, [when she] threw down her caskets - referred to in Venice as Shylock's house - had reportedly not had its shutters opened for over 10 years. The owner lived in Parma. He was referred to as the Parma man. Would the Parma man let us use his home to betray Shylock from? Even up to 3 days before the performance no one was sure we would get permission to use the

⁶ Interview with Stephen and Karen Kaufman, recorded 29 August, 2016 by Sarah Connell and Cathleen Nalezty.

⁷ Panel on the women's roles organized by Carol Chillington Rutter for Warwick University, Palazzo Papafava, July 28, 2016.

room. And then the word came. And the casement flung open to give the audience one of the most memorable moments of the play. And in our hearts our casements were flung open too. Together. As the buildings changed, as they transformed the play, and as the play transformed us.⁸



Figure 1. Ghetto playing space, with Portia and Nerissa. Courtesy of Cathleen Nalezty, MIT

Rather than evading the uglier aspects of Shakespeare's script, the production thus recontextualized them using place as a primary participant: the Ghetto itself served both as set (the only set) and ghostly, echoing character (See Figure 1). In addition to Jessica's appearance at the window of "Shylock's house," musical director and composer Frank London played his trumpet from a terrace above the stones, wells, and tree trunk of the main performance space; and at the show's conclusion the word "Mercy" was projected as light amidst the night's darkness, in multiple languages (Hebrew, Italian, English) on the walls of synagogues and tenements alike—but accompanied by the harsh blare of the musicians' shofars. Mercy upon us all.⁹

⁸ E. M. Pellone "Merchant *in Venice*/ Community of Strangers: *Ghosts and Fractured Bond*" Master's Thesis, The Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham, Sept. 2016 (unpublished): 14-5. Pellone compares this *Merchant* with Max Reinhardt's 1934 production inaugurating the first *Biennale Teatro*, and provides valuable "insider" information about the Coonrod production.

⁹ After writing this, I was pleased to find my response resonated with that of Prof. Kent Cartwright, cited in Pellone: 35.

Nor was this invocation of Portia's keyword a complacent final word, for all its gathering of languages—and in that too, it echoed the multilingual production as a whole. In its international casting and linguistic diversity, the performance was true to the spirit of the sixteenth-century place, in which Ashkenazi, Levantine and Sephardic immigrants maintained their traditions while interacting with one another and Christian citizens. However, the goal was not simply reconstruction, and the languages functioned differently within the context of a famously English stageplay. The evening began in Judeo-Veneziano (the lines provided by Bassi): “Ancuo in Hazer the se sta un gran tananai. Xe rivà do goym a far moscon al banco e i voeva tanti ma tanti magnod.” Those drawn by the name “Shakespeare”—and even some native Italian speakers—were immediately unmoored, unable to translate the words' meaning (“Today in the Ghetto there was a great commotion. Two Christians came to the banco because they wanted a lot, but I mean a lot, of money”).¹⁰ The lines were spoken by Francesca Sarah Toich, who proceeded to play Lancelot Gobbo as a *commedia dell' arte* Lancillotto moving between tongues and styles throughout; this was after also appearing in the prologue as *Ruzante* from Angelo Beolco Ruzante's *L'Aconitana*, embodying an Italian theatrical as well as linguistic frame to offset the dominantly—and potentially dominating—English Shakespearean script. She (with mask and codpiece) was then joined by the full cast in singing a jolly carnivalesque song composed by London, “*Amore an?*”, doubly framing and thereby mocking Antonio's initial Shakespearean line, “In sooth, I know not why I am so sad” (itself pronounced in punchily-accented English by Stefano Scherini)¹¹. Throughout the evening, patches of various languages (Yiddish, Ladino, Spanish, Arabic and more) interwove with Shakespeare's playtext. The messages if not the words were clear: no one person would likely be able to navigate all the fractures within this gathering of strangers, to assume a position of easy mastery within this intercultural community. Nor from the first scene onward was “fidelity” (to the local performance style *or* to the inherited text) the top value even in the *commedia* stylizations, which when mingled with Shakespeare led to a hybrid form of physicality and speech that displeased some *commedia* purists.¹²

Similarly, for those in search of a dramatic reenactment of local histories with allusive power, there were moments of disorientation. Some historically-minded scholars—and here I will use myself as an exemplary case—might have perceived a missed opportunity to allude, for example, to *il Gobbo di Rialto*, in a play where Shylock famously asks, “What news on the Rialto?” (1:3:34).

¹⁰ See Pellone:13.

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Leah Marcus. New York: Norton, 2006: 1:1:1. See Pellone 40-41 for more on the prologue and song.

¹² See Pellone 41-2 on the Reinhardt and Coonrod Lancillotti and their reception.

Although moderns usually think of the bridge majestically spanning the Grand Canal and giving its name to a major vaporetto stop (an association which the opening sequence added to Michael Radford's 2004 film *Merchant* reinforces), if Shylock wanted "news" he would be less likely to be thinking about the Ponte di Rialto than about the stone Gobbo ("Hunchback") upholding a podium in the Rialto market from whence public decrees and the names of state offenders were read simultaneously with their announcement in the San Marco sestiere. Carved by Pietro da Salò and unveiled in 1541, the Gobbo, who is hunched in service to the state, obviously resonates with the naming of the servant who shifts loyalties from Jew to Christian, along with Jessica and the play's trial scene itself (See Figure 2). These are the kinds of historical specifics that appeal to me, trying to understand Shakespeare's associations—but of course they do not resonate for a modern audience in the moment, attending a play rather than a museum exhibit. At what point does a return to historical origins become deadening?



Figure 2. Il Gobbo di Rialto. Courtesy of Diana Henderson

Or, as in this instance, merely a different professional's lens of speculation, given that we neither know what prompted Shakespeare's line, nor did the storied speaker derive from the actuality of the Ghetto but from (if anywhere) the mainland area of Mestre in Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's 14th-century source text, composed before Jews could openly live in the central islands of the Venetian archipelago? In other words, for those of us immersed in early modern specifics, participation with a performance such as this becomes a useful antidote to archive fever in its broad sense, encouraging a look out and forward.

Still, the possibility of providing 16th-century style letters for the many *Merchant* scenes featuring such documents proved harder for me to resist: here was an instance where I had access to "authentic" props. As so often in theatrical production, this was serendipitous rather than deliberate on my part; all thanks go to the enthusiastic labors of MIT Libraries' Jana Dambrogio, conservator and a member of an international team that has studied letter-locking using modern technologies and old alike. Hearing of our involvement with less than a week's notice before my departure for Venice, her group worked long hours to create six copies of appropriately textured, printed, and locked letters (plus resealable rehearsal copies), using the sixteenth-century processes that produced handmade paper, seals, and so forth. She delivered these to me to offer to the director, hoping ours could be not only the first *Merchant* in the Ghetto but also the first professional Shakespeare production using accurate replicas of these key signifiers within early modern communication systems. In this instance, pragmatics as much as differences of perspective came to the fore: in a project with so many challenges, rehearsing in the beating sun of July afternoons with less than a week until the first evening performance, incorporating new props was difficult; moreover, authentic process does not translate into theatrical legibility when one considers sightlines, size, and audience assumptions. Even so, it was characteristic of director Karin Coonrod's graciousness as a collaborator that we ended up using one of the letters in performance: the missive Nerissa delivers to the Duke announcing the arrival of Bellario's clerk. (The others have been incorporated into my teaching process and for student scenework, the letters continuing to circulate through space.)

A less directly visible but much more significant indicator of the sorts of scholarly collaboration enriching this *Merchant* demands greater attention. In the interview cited earlier, Shaul Bassi alludes to the 2015 summer school scholars and students' involvement with the company's scene workshops. At the time, Coonrod was focusing on different possible approaches to Shylock (central to the summer school's curriculum as well), including having a confident, comparatively youthful moneylender. Moving through the Ghetto (as well as doing much tablework with scholars in attendance), she experimented with various actors reading the part. Sorab Wadia's energy caught the attention of author Howard Jacobson, among others; it was captured in a BBC documentary

where Wadia performed opposite Reginald Cathay's Antonio in act 1 scene 3.¹³ This workshopping process eventuated in the decision to distribute Shylock's scenes among five actors within each performance, reflecting different, unintegrated dimensions of his characterization. Thus in the 2016 production, Wadia appeared first as the witty, energetic and thriving Shylock of act 1 scene 3 (before metamorphosing into his antagonist Gratiano); he was followed by the older Adriano Iurresovich (who doubled as an unusually charming guitar-playing Aragon) anxiously instructing Jessica in act 2 scene 5; then came Welsh actress and singer Jenni Lea-Jones for the first part of act 3 scene 1, including the famed "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech (she would later preside over the trial as the Duke); she gave way to Andrea Brugnara for the more schizoid (or *commedia*-like) end of the scene with Tubal; and finally we confronted Ned Eisenberg (formerly Tubal): impressively impassive, sardonic, and ultimately shaken in the sequence leading from act 3 scene 3 through the monumental trial scene of act 4. This *Merchant* was not the first production to fragment this or other Shakespearean roles, and the broader practice is familiar to students of contemporary playwrights as well (e.g., Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*).¹⁴ Nonetheless, within the Ghetto and as performed by this range of actors, the practice brought a particular form of punctuation and resonance.

In their diversity of nationality, gender, age, accent, appearance and more, these Shylocks extended the thematics of religious, geographical and gendered difference that are dramatized in conflict within Shakespeare's fiction: the structure of their sequential embodiment, however, moved such awareness of categories beyond simple oppositions of "X versus not-X" to a more fluid, complicated arena of perception. It prompted audience members to consider which differences register and which do not (for us, for the play) and which are unmarked or invisible in variable contexts: did the audience recognize Sorab as a Parsi from Mumbai, and what difference would that—or his actual age, versus demeanor—make? Did Ned's New York accent matter? Why was a female Shylock perceived as the most noteworthy variation, and what does that say about historical continuity and change? Clearly the disruptive representation repeatedly reminded us of the enduring but also changing particulars of who counts as an outsider, and why. How did that variation also contribute to audience perceptions of the rest of the company, and scenes of ethnic stereotyping such as the Morocco and Aragon sequence (here, played back-to-

¹³ "Shylock's Ghost" (2015), BBC *Imagine*, broadcast October 27, 2015. See also <http://www.themerchantinvenice.org/news/shylockghost-a-bbc-documentary/>

¹⁴ Sabine Schülting discusses the 1978 German production directed by George Tabori in "'I Am Not Bound to Please Thee with My Answers': The Merchant of Venice on the Post-War German Stage", *World-Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*. Ed. Sonia Massai (London: Routledge, 2005): 65–71.

back)? For those aware of the sixteenth-century history, especially of English/Spanish conflict and putative blood purity, this production's combination of doubling and dispersal of differences further destabilized the play's Christian/Jewish binarism.¹⁵ But it did so in a manner that did not allow continuous access to the outsider, erase attention to appearances, or make it easy to translate what Portia and Morocco refer to as his "complexion" into "temperament".

That last reading was nevertheless the one chosen by the African-American actress playing Portia, when asked about delivering her parting shot about the Prince of Morocco ("Let all of his complexion choose me so." 2:7:80). As, and playing, an extremely intelligent, forceful woman, Linda Powell's interpretation signals a significant tension between the demands of present-moment performing and scholarly analysis. For she is inhabiting two "bodies" simultaneously, and must find a way to bring conviction to whatever lines she is asked to convey; if she is struggling against a text or a directorial vision, the performance will suffer.¹⁶ Whereas I as a scholar may generalize about the ongoing legacies of racism and the problematics of "color-blind" casting, she does not have that luxury: she has to make the line work from inside. This in no way means the production effaced these tensions, nor that its participants were unaware of them. What it does imply is a scholarly responsibility to be aware, when describing artists' perspectives or comments, that ours too is intercultural work, in the sense of crossing professional boundaries and translating between their and our discursive conditions.

So similarly, when director Karin Coonrod in a video interview (having done literally scores of such interviews with journalists during the weeks I witnessed) shares her perspective with me:

Why, how, does it speak to us now? People talk about this play famously as being anti-Semitic. Now, *why* would we do an anti-Semitic play in the Ghetto? If it were *really* anti-Semitic... I think it's a provocation. It is *about* anti-Semitism, it's about the stranger and the outsider, the alien, the weirdo, you know, whatever, but it's about that in all of us though.

It is too easy for an academic to leap to interrogate the final generalization rather than interpret what the full statement does for her in her directorial role in a specific place and time. Arguably, it allows her to move between general and specific perspectives throughout the evening, including the creation of two—and

¹⁵ Barbara Everett provides useful background on the Moorish/Aragonese association in "'Spanish' Othello: The Making of Shakespeare's Moor" *Shakespeare Survey* 35 (1982): 101-12.

¹⁶ I paraphrase from her comments on the July 28th panel cited in note 7 above, as well as an interview filmed July 31, 2016.

only two—theatrical sequences when the five Shylocks appear simultaneously, each dazzling. The first occurs as the transition into Shakespeare's act 3 scene 1, and captures the unstaged moment when Shylock learns of his daughter's desertion. Stefano Nicolao's costume signifier for Judaism in this production hearkens back to the pre-Ghetto yellow badges and then caps mandated by the Venetian state (later shifted to red)—and to the yellow stars of Nazi Germany as well: each Shylock wears a yellow sash, and Tubal a yellow hat. In the transition moment, the five Shylocks are positioned across the playing area and are dressed (by the "black angels" who served as all forms of stagehands and assistants throughout) in their yellow sashes; then they approach one another to become a composite figure out of which emanates an extended, grief-stricken howl. The sound comes from Jenni Lea-Jones, and draws on gendered assumptions about the elemental maternal bond and female emotional expressiveness. It is without doubt a powerful addition to the play, remarked upon by almost every audience member, and the moreso for being the only time within its narrative sequence when the multiplicity of Shylocks is used to overt dramatic effect. In having the female Shylock emerge from the corporate mass and then "speak for" them in the most famous of all passages, the play's own unbridged schism between the sexes (emphasized in this production) as well as the stereotypes of gendered power are at least momentarily upended.

But this emotional appeal was not the last word. The second joint appearance of the Shylocks was even more disruptive, breaking through the play's final dialogue as Portia asserts her power to resolve the male characters' dilemmas. Instead of Shakespeare's facile finale with Gratiano making his lewd ring vow, the five Shylocks emerge from the darkness to repeat Shylock's trial scene speech describing the idiosyncratic "humors" of hypothetical others as being analogous to his own refusal to explain his relentless demand for his bond ("You'll ask me why...I'll not answer that, but say it is my humor...Are you answered?" 4:1:41-63). The lines are distributed amongst the five actors, who march forward between the rest of the cast members to confront the audience directly across the front of "house"; each ends by stepping even further towards us to ask, "Are you answered?" Followed only by the frantic running of Jessica out to face the other characters in desperate isolation, then the sound of the shofars and projections of "Mercy", Shylock's question remains the unanswered final truth of otherness, refusing our desire for empathetic understanding, and challenging us all—without resolution—to find a more humane form of bonding. It is this harsh, bold conclusion that needs to be held in mind and in dialogue with Coonrod's interview, recalling the need for her to reach out to as well as provoke her audiences, and for us to honor the bravery of confronting both the dream and the recalcitrance of our common embodied humanity.

More has and will be said about this production by those who were fortunate enough to be in attendance. But I was there primarily to help commemorate the event beyond the moment and location, through digital capture of rehearsal, production, and interviews with a variety of participants. To these challenges and their intersection with how we do and don't "see" the specificity of place, I turn in conclusion.

The first, most obvious thing to be said is that the collective relationships in space and the sensory surroundings of the event cannot be translated into two-dimensional video in a way that captures their affects and emotions. Be it the cicadas that began each evening in competition with the actors and then stopped as darkness descended on the story and the Campo; the barking of dogs or the cries of children at inopportune moments for narrative suspense; or the clinking of glasses and murmurs of café conversation then hushed: none function now as anything other than distractions when heard on audiotracks, and become a lost part of the experience when edited out. In performance, they sometimes became part of the magic: one evening, audience members revealed they had thought even the lightning flashes in the distance—which caused suppressed panic among production staff and crew anticipating a mid-show washout—were a special effect. The ways these surroundings led to actors' adaptations also become invisible to the online viewer. So do the potential reasons for a flubbed line, a candle or a line removed between one night and the next, as well as the different stage emphases that accompany each distinct filming location within the Campo.

Secondly, the quality of audiovisual capture is deeply constrained in ways both typical and specific. My MIT contingent was small and amateur: two newly minted MIT graduates with some undergraduate video and theater experience respectively, but neither a major in those fields; my colleague Shankar Raman, and myself. We know our Shakespeare, and I have professional theater experience, but that is about it. The "gathering of strangers" motto for the project fortunately extended to our domain, and we benefitted greatly by working with the Chicago-based documentary filmmaking team of Ted Hardin and Elizabeth Coffman throughout our two weeks onsite; this also helped us gain the trust and access of a company who had worked with them for nearly two years. Meanwhile, all six of us had to negotiate around the many professional media crews, whose shooting schedules limited our own (both in time and positions). In addition, outdoor site-specific theater does not come with green rooms or interview rooms, so most of our encounters took place over restaurant tables with distractions aplenty. None of this undermines the richness of content to which we had access, but it affects the quality of how much can be shared, how engaging it is, and how labor-intensive to edit. Nonetheless, even as high-profile a production as this one became will have to rely on the six of us for a complete view rather than just selected scenes, because professional film units

from RAI, the BBC, and more wanted to film only parts, not the whole. The economics of exposure favor established companies such as the RSC or venues such as the National Theatre, not intercultural, multinational experiments and non-profit theater groups.

As a result, it seems all the more important for scholars to think about which productions they use their verbal skills to memorialize as best they can. All of us are approximating, whether we have cameras or not, and the illusion of presence remains mediated no matter the form. There is urgent need for more scholars to enter into dialogue with artistic performers in the ways I hope I have indicated through this case study. Blogs and social media need to be part of the archiving process, and the work done more collaboratively.

Finally, as Thomas Wolfe reminded us years ago, these technological hurdles are merely illustrations of an ontological and political reality: we can't go home again. We cannot do so because the place itself, like this show's Shylock, is a collection of discrete images of which no two are exactly alike. More than 100 years after Einstein, too seldom do we take seriously the conception of four-dimensional spacetime, recognizing each imagined point's indivisible combination of distinct matter, time and space, as well as its interrelation with an infinite number of other such points. To invoke this model fruitfully complicates the texture of all historicist approaches, not just those involving site-specific theater, and of all intercultural exchange, in that it refuses a static version of limited ownership over expertise regarding any place, tradition, or practices. All of us are crossing spaces as well as identities, and making choices about which lines of continuity and change to highlight: although the Ghetto, with its layered history and transmuted name, makes more evident than most the fluidity of temporospatial identities, the same *unheimlich* consciousness should haunt our use of phrases like "Shakespeare's London" and "the Globe" as well.

As I have argued elsewhere, reconceiving Shakespearean performances within a four-dimensional unified field, we can focus attention on the multiplicity of relationships among individual "points" in ways that expand that field.¹⁷ This effort resonates with Barbara Hodgdon's phenomenological emphasis when she recalls Leonardo Bufalini's 16th-century architectural overlays of Rome, not as a special and particularly obvious case, but as capturing the palimpsestic nature of *any* place (Rome, the British Library, Broadway)¹⁸. Furthermore, in recognizing the particularity of each performative instant while tracing lines and resemblances among them, rather than

¹⁷ For more on this conceptual frame, see "EPILOGUE: Star Wars and Shakespearean Spacetime: Mentors and Our Collective Future", *Shakespeare Studies* 44, ed. James R. Siemon and Diana E. Henderson (2016): 137-48.

¹⁸ Barbara Hodgdon, *Shakespeare, Performance and the Archive*. London: Routledge, 2015, 31.

emphasizing the past/present dualism as the singular variable (as, arguably, even Bufalini's overlays do), every single place becomes dynamic. This befits the dense phenomenology of theatrical performance: it can also reconnect canonical scripted theater with other performance events (rather than setting Shakespeare in opposition to non-scripted ones—yet another of those familiar, unhelpful binaries that locks “him” in the museum, the Folio, or the Derridean conception of the archive). My emphasis then in “returning” with Shylock to the Ghetto has not been to emphasize the murky ghosting and haunted quality of “performance remains” still current among performance scholarship, so much as to spark the productive energy and collaborative potential yet to come from temporospatial reconceptualization. Exorcising the demonization of the other, refusing to allow anyone a “proper” home at the expense of others (whether we can empathize or not) unleashes the energy to create new crossings in spacetime. And by reducing or extending those events into approximations across media, scholars alongside artists can give them another lease on life.