

Introduction: 'Leave Not a Rack Behind'

'When Shakespeare said it, it was true: "These our actors . . . are melted into air." True no longer.' So claims the back cover of a book of stage photographs by John Haynes, published in 1986.¹ The publication of a book of theatrical photographs, some of them – though by no means all – representing performances of Shakespeare's plays, is here positioned as a solution to the tendency of performance to disappear when the curtain falls. Photography, it is suggested, can at last prove Shakespeare wrong: the actors will not be allowed to melt into thin air, but instead will be retained in the form of their photographic images, caught in the attitudes of stage performance. Photography and Shakespeare are here pitted against one another. The statement positions Shakespeare as an authoritative originary figure for theatrical history – Shakespeare said it, and it was true. Much later, photography appears as a modern innovation capable of changing the nature of theatre. Photography saves Shakespeare from disappearance and allows his creations to be preserved. The quoted words from *The Tempest* are treated as wisdom received directly from the greatest theatrical authority that can be imagined. Though facetious, this claim establishes a complex relationship, both adversarial and mutually dependent, between Shakespeare and photography, which, in this book, I take seriously.

The same speech from *The Tempest* is quoted in Peggy Phelan's book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*: a foundational text of performance studies in which Phelan treats any form of reproduction, photography included, as a betrayal of the ontology of performance. Phelan deploys Shakespearean language to argue for an essentialist understanding of performance art: 'defined by its ephemeral nature, performance art cannot be documented . . . Those artists who have dedicated themselves to performance continually disappear and leave

¹ John Haynes and Lindsay Anderson, *Taking the Stage: Twenty-One Years of the London Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

2 Introduction: 'Leave Not a Rack Behind'

“not a rack behind”.² Staking the value of performance on its ephemerality, Phelan uses familiar words from *The Tempest* to associate that ephemerality with Shakespeare’s theatrical authority. This brief quotation, like the one from the back cover of Haynes’ book, comes from Prospero’s speech towards the end of *The Tempest*:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and
 Are melted into air, into thin air;
 And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
 The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on, and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep.³

After the masque to celebrate Ferdinand and Miranda’s engagement, Prospero remembers that Caliban and his two companions are still a threat to him and banishes the performance suddenly and completely. The speech is addressed to Ferdinand, who is apparently startled by the quick change of mood, and it is perhaps meant to be reassuring: the performance is over, but it was only an ‘insubstantial pageant’ and, after all, even the apparently permanent structures associated with the civilised life from which the characters of *The Tempest* have been cut adrift must eventually disappear as completely as the spirit-actors in the masque. The speech has often been taken out of context as Shakespeare’s own farewell to the theatre, given its alignment of theatrical erasure with mortality. Phelan draws on this long history of extraction in citing the passage to help her make her claim about performance and reproduction. For Phelan, the ‘rack’ not left behind by performance is a document capable of recording it. Quoting Prospero’s speech (which is itself a fragmentary remnant of any number of performances based on *The Tempest*), Phelan idealises disappearance as a crucial element of performance art’s pristine ontology and

² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 31.

³ Prospero’s musings on the disappearance of the masque have taken on canonical status in performance studies in much the same way that Hamlet’s advice to the players has been incorporated into the literature of actor training. *The Tempest*, IV.1.148–58.

Unless otherwise stated, all Shakespeare quotations are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edn, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2016).

Introduction: 'Leave Not a Rack Behind'

3

dismisses textual, photographic, and video archives as incapable of preserving performance.

These two contrasting deployments of Prospero's speech are my starting point for an investigation into the relationship between Shakespeare and photography – a relationship always conditioned by the apparent incompatibility of permanence, stability, and duration between performance and photography. I approach the Shakespeare photograph initially in the form it is most familiar to us: the 'rack' left behind to confirm the passing of a performance of Shakespeare's work. However, the photograph's function as a preserved fragment of a Shakespearean performance becomes complicated by its capacity to be extracted and taken out of context – to circulate independently as an iconic composition, to function as promotion for an actor or theatre company, or to become attached to the unlikeliest of alternative texts and images. The complex afterlife of Shakespeare's works has been restructured by cultural habits nurtured by the invention of photography. The Shakespearean photograph should not only be understood as a remnant of a past performance; since its invention in the nineteenth century, photography has been influential over the diffusion and evolution of Shakespeare's cultural authority.

The status attached to Shakespeare is what makes the relationship between Shakespeare and photography worth attention in particular, rather than as a facet of a broader study of theatrical or literary inspiration in photographs. Shakespeare's works, and the images associated with them, have been used to validate subject positions ranging from hegemony to revolt. My understanding of Shakespearean 'afterlife' and 'authority' and of the 'Shakespeare phenomenon' is coloured by what Michel Foucault called the 'author-function': 'the aesthetic principle of the work's survival, its perpetuation beyond the author's death, and its enigmatic excess in relation to him'.⁴ The various products of Shakespeare's afterlife – performances, adaptations, editions, paintings, photographs – influence and complicate reception of the works and, consequently, perception of the author; Shakespeare has expanded beyond the limits of his works and speaks in various, sometimes contradictory voices. But the cultural hegemony of Shakespeare is often reaffirmed rather than diluted by this process. As Michael Bristol argues, 'the afterlife of the great work of art is the work of living social agents whose interpretations accomplish the re-accentuation of the author's utterance'.⁵ Recognising that

⁴ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, vol. 2, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 205–22 (p. 208).

⁵ Michael D. Bristol, *Big Time Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 13.

models for Shakespearean adaptation often reproduce hierarchies and fail to account for a complex and shifting field of cultural material, Douglas Lanier proposes a Shakespeare 'rhizome' – a dynamic network of related adaptations including texts, performances, images, and various other media, sometimes coming together to form 'nodes' or clustering around a particular set of values to form 'plateaus' but always, fundamentally, in motion.⁶ This book is concerned with the contribution of photography to that network and process; particularly, its capacity to re-accentuate Shakespeare's hegemonic authority and, at the same time, to diffuse it. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Shakespearean images frequently came unstuck from his works to operate independently. The photograph fixes, as an effect of its stasis, and unfixes, as an effect of its ontological slipperiness, Shakespearean authority.

Shakespeare as Icon, Shakespeare as Index

I suggest that photography contributed to the process that saw Shakespeare expanded from a collection of literary works to a diverse and porous phenomenon. The role of photography in this process is related to the fact that a photograph's citations are always multiple; a photograph is always, to one degree or another, a site of intertextuality. John Tagg describes a photograph as 'a flickering across a field of institutional spaces', emphasising the multiple ideologies and priorities which structure a photograph and the way it is viewed.⁷ When a photograph cites Shakespeare, it never *only* cites Shakespeare. In this respect, a photograph is a site at which Shakespearean material can be forced into a temporally compressed encounter with another text, or with a historical individual, or with an art-historical allusion. The multiple nature of photographic citations, and the facility of photographs for strange meetings of apparently disparate pieces of cultural material, is at least partially due to the fact that a photograph is always already more than one type of sign.

The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce outlined a taxonomy of signs in three categories: icon, index, and symbol; as he explained,

every sign is determined by its object, either first, by partaking in the characters of the object, when I call the sign an *Icon*; secondly, by being really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object,

⁶ Douglas Lanier, 'Shakespearean Rhizomatics', in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, ed. by Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 21–40 (pp. 27–30).

⁷ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 63.

Introduction: 'Leave Not a Rack Behind'

5

when I call the sign an *Index*; thirdly, by more or less approximate certainty that it will be interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a habit . . . when I call the sign a *Symbol*.⁸

The index, deriving its meaning from a material connection with its referent, might describe, for example, a footprint or death mask, whose referentiality relies on a moment of physical contact. The icon relates to its referent primarily by resemblance, the symbol by 'habit' or by social contract. Peirce's semiotics have been influential and 'index' in particular has been absorbed into the common parlance of photography theory. Laura Mulvey suggests in *Death 24x a Second* that 'while the photographic image, in semiotic terms, usually includes the iconic and often includes symbolic aspects of the sign, its aesthetic specificity is grounded on the index'.⁹ That is to say, the photograph is set apart from comparable media such as drawing and painting by the fact that it is at least partially produced by its own referent.

As Mulvey acknowledges, however, the photograph is not solely indexical. A photograph's necessary position at the intersection of all three categories could be taken as a disruption of Peirce's taxonomy. These categories should be understood as the various modes in which a photograph operates: referring back to the unique moment of its making, whilst also representing particular figures and objects, and reproducing familiar compositions and conventions. Though the terms index, icon, and symbol are useful as a refined version of the tussle between science and art, documentation and interpretation, which has dominated photography theory since the invention of the camera, I suggest that in relation to Shakespeare photography these different functions of the photograph cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The photograph's indexicality demands that a different kind of authority and urgency is attributed to the familiar forms it reproduces; age-old compositions take on different meanings when their constituent elements are assembled in real space for the camera.

Their capacity as indices is the primary reason photographs are deployed for recording performance. As a direct imprint of the events unfolding onstage, the photograph is credited with an authenticity to the performance event beyond that of an illustration or a painting. This is the

⁸ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. by James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 251.

⁹ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), pp. 9–10.

6 Introduction: 'Leave Not a Rack Behind'

relationship between photography and performance which is hinted at by Haynes and Anderson when they adopt Shakespeare's lines from *The Tempest*. The photograph represents the saving of a performance which would otherwise have melted into air. In this respect, photographs assert a particular relationship to 'liveness' in performance: the condition of immediacy and simultaneity which, Philip Auslander has influentially argued, only becomes meaningful in relation to mediatisation.¹⁰ The photograph seizes and preserves fragments of live performance, and survives as their index. But if the photograph is conceived *only* as an index, it is the material trace of an event but cannot carry any information about it; as Rodrigue Villeneuve argues, 'the photographic image, at this level, is empty'.¹¹ The content of the theatrical photograph can only be 'read' in iconic or symbolic terms – according to its resemblance to, or its encoding of, comprehensible images of the stage during performance.

Theorists of photography have demonstrated the reductive effect of approaching photographs as *primarily* indexical. Photographic processes in use long before modern, manipulable digital images left room for human intervention, and early processes sometimes left marks on the final print: a blocked-out corner from the photographer's thumb where she held the plate; a cracked surface on an old albumen print. Such reminders of photographs' materiality make it more difficult to see them as transparent windows on halted moments in the past. Tagg points to cases of photomontage and multiple exposures in which the photograph's indexical relationship to its subject is disrupted, and goes on to propose that 'every photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic'.¹² André Rouillé also criticises overemphasis on the index, arguing that it has led to neglect of the photograph's potential to encode '[h]istoricité, pluralité, devenirs: à l'inverse de cette sorte de monoculture de l'indice qui a dominé les discours sur la photographie depuis le début des années 1980' ('historicity, plurality, futures: the opposite of this kind of monoculture of the index which has dominated the discourse on photography since the early 1980s').¹³ A full understanding of Shakespeare

¹⁰ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.

¹¹ Rodrigue Villeneuve, 'Photography of Theatre: Images Always Fail', trans. by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott, *Canadian Theatre Review* 64 (1990), 32–7 (p. 32).

¹² Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, p. 2.

¹³ André Rouillé, *La photographie: Entre document et art contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 14–15. My translation.

photographs demands attention to the effects of history, ideology, and plurality which constitute the complex twenty-first-century Shakespeare phenomenon. The Shakespeare photograph, with its heightened relationship to iconographies inherited from art history or theatre history, offers a collision between the index of real events and the familiar, clichéd, and iconic. The ideological weight of Shakespearean tradition is at odds with the conception of photography as a chance encounter with a camera. This dissonance leads to new ways of interacting with Shakespeare.

The index is only one of the semiotic modes in which the photograph operates. But indexicality has often been celebrated as its unique essence; indexicality is the key attribute which sets the Shakespearean photograph apart from the drawings, paintings, and prints which are its precedents and interlocutors. One of photography's inventors, William Henry Fox Talbot, emphasised its capacity as index in his book *The Pencil of Nature*, conceiving the camera as a mechanical eye and the photograph as an inscription of nature's pencil, produced without intervention by human agents. Despite generations of resistance to this model from artists and theorists keen to demonstrate that photographs are art and that they can be deceptive, the idea of the 'pencil of nature' still has great conceptual and ideological significance. The indexical understanding of a photograph affords it a semi-devotional connection with the occasion of its making, whether this was a theatrical performance or a staged photocall. In this respect, the photograph reframes our encounter with the familiar visual clichés of Shakespearean iconography in terms of their material relationship to the non-fictional world.

The Age of Mechanical Reproduction

The impact of photography on encounters with Shakespearean material should be situated in the context of broader shifts in the ways that cultural material circulates and is consumed. In Shakespeare's plays, we have a set of early modern texts which, by the time photography was invented, more than two hundred years after the playwright's death, had already attained extraordinary cultural status both in print and as performance texts. This book is concerned with the period from 1850, when the earliest Shakespearean photographs began to appear, until the present. Most of my examples date from earlier than 1980, and as a result most are analogue photographs rather than digital ones. The advent of digital photography since the last decades of the twentieth century has made the limitations of photographic indexicality more visible, establishing a new conception of

the photographic image as subject to unlimited manipulation. The tangible negatives and noxious chemicals associated with analogue photography invite us to imagine a kind of material continuity from the subject to the image that imitates theatrical liveness: there is, somewhere, a glass plate or a scrap of film that was in the proverbial 'room where it happened'. As Chapter 1 will argue, theatre photography teaches us to respect the ideological potency of liveness whilst remaining deeply suspicious of its claims to be synonymous with authenticity. Digital photographs, in effect, extend a capacity present since the earliest days of photography to manipulate images. Shakespearean iconography can be traced through the whole history of photography and its manipulation, evolving with the emergence of new technologies. My emphasis on the earlier decades of photography allows this mutual influence to be considered in the broader context of the transformations brought upon Shakespeare by modernity.

Walter Benjamin's works have provided influential explorations of the effect of modern technologies on the circulation of artworks. In particular, his essays 'A Small History of Photography' (1931) and 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) discuss the effects of photography on culture. In the former, he argues that great works of art 'can no longer be regarded as the work of individuals; they have become a collective creation, a corpus so vast it can be assimilated only through miniaturization'.¹⁴ Benjamin's understanding of the modern work of art as disconnected from any notion of the individual, independent artist is startlingly compatible with today's understanding of early modern writing for the theatre as necessarily collaborative – a reminder, if one was needed, that the authority which is put under pressure by remediations of Shakespeare's works is not necessarily early modern in vintage.¹⁵ Benjamin remarks on how readers 'miniaturize' this multiplicity in order to make an artwork legible, in a way comparable to the photograph's multiple citations becoming suppressed when it is treated as a direct index of reality. In the later essay, he develops these ideas in relation to the ritual quality of 'aura' associated with the presence in time and space of a particular work of art – a quality eroded and complicated

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'A Small History of Photography', trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in *Philosophers on Art from Kant to the Postmodernists*, ed. by Christopher Kul-Want (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 102–17 (p. 115).

¹⁵ Shakespeare's position as a venerated author might instead be considered to have its inception in the eighteenth century, when scholarly publications and theatrical pageantry elevated him over his contemporaries as a genius. See Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 2008) and Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

Introduction: 'Leave Not a Rack Behind'

9

by processes of mechanical reproduction including photography and film.¹⁶ Benjamin suggests that widespread mechanical reproduction allows the democratisation of artworks, as they are encountered by a greater range of audiences, enabling politicised consumption of artworks rather than their passive reception as 'auratic' objects of ritual value.

Benjamin's work also interrogates the relationship between an artwork and time. The notion of the 'dialectical image', developed in the unfinished *Arcades Project*, describes an encounter 'wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation'.¹⁷ The sense of temporal dislocation Benjamin identifies in the 'dialectical image' is always relevant to the photograph, whose capacity to produce uncanny experiences of time has been observed frequently, notably by Roland Barthes, who described the encounter with a photograph in *Camera Lucida* as an experience of 'the vertigo of time defeated'.¹⁸ When it comes to Shakespearean images, drawn from a set of texts associated with tradition and heritage, photography causes an abrupt collision of past and present and allows early modern, modern, and postmodern facets of a single image to be experienced simultaneously. The photograph refers to an early modern text, testifies to a modern performance and, in its collage of different temporalities – early modern drag in the Victorian photographer's studio, sixteenth-century captions on images of contemporary actors in modern dress, etc. – invokes the playful spirit of postmodern citation, pastiche, and parody.

Benjamin's term 'aura' has been adopted for discussions of live theatrical performance. Matthew Reason uses 'aura' and 'distance' as alternatives for the more familiar terms 'live' and 'disappearance', and Rebecca Schneider describes 'non-reproducible' performance art of the 1960s and '70s as 'auratic'.¹⁹ Repurposing Benjamin's term for artworks in a performance medium presents a problem, particularly given the temporal distance between Benjamin's writing and that of the performance scholars who cite him. The politics Benjamin associates with aura – conservative, 'art for

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 7.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 462.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 97.

¹⁹ Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 25; Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-Enactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 28.

art's sake' attitudes to original works of art – are punctured and opened to the possibility of reinterpretation by reproduction.²⁰ In the late capitalist context of 1990s and early 2000s performance studies, those politics are inverted so that the potential for reinterpretation relies upon the performance moment remaining insulated from economies of reproduction and transaction, which homogenise the art event, make the performance moment more legible, and transform it into something that can be possessed and consumed. Twentieth-century performance photographs exist against the grain of this political shift: they petrify performance, contain it and, necessarily, market it – but they also democratise it, allow it to circulate and proliferate, and cause its meaning to be renegotiated, polluted, and remixed outside the privileged space of the Shakespearean auditorium.

Benjamin was writing almost a century after the invention of photography, and the significance of nineteenth-century images to the restructuring of the Shakespeare phenomenon should not be overlooked. Jacques Rancière observes in the nineteenth century 'an unlimited proliferation of the vignettes and little tales in which a society learns to recognise itself'.²¹ Photography contributed to a society of iconographic cliché, which homogenised visual culture but which, by way of mass reproduction and repetition, established the conditions under which postmodernism could become possible. By the nineteenth century, Shakespearean images had become familiar enough to then be inverted, cut up, pastiched, and remade. This book is concerned with both the confirmation and the disruption of the familiar forms of Shakespearean cultural material; both these processes were made possible by photography. The long-term effects are evident in the varied but iconic status of Shakespearean images today, which reappear as signifiers of tradition and consistency *and* as postmodern reversals of tradition, reimagined in new forms.

Approaches to Shakespeare Photography

Relatively little critical attention has thus far been given to the relationship between Shakespeare and photography. The most important precedent for this book is the work of the late Barbara Hodgdon, in her two important essays 'Here Apparent: Photography, History and the Theatrical

²⁰ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, pp. 27, 38.

²¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 16.