

TOWARD A CENTER FOR PUBLIC SHAKESPEARE

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Hi I'm Jeff Wilson. I use he/him pronouns. Coming to you today from Lowell, MA, sitting on the beautiful land of the Pennacook nation.



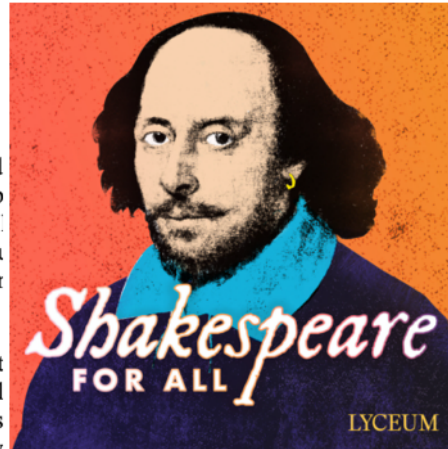
April 22 is Earth Day. April 23 is Shakespeare's birthday.

Global Warming and the Globe Theater:
Shakespeare in Climate Activism

by Nancy Lin

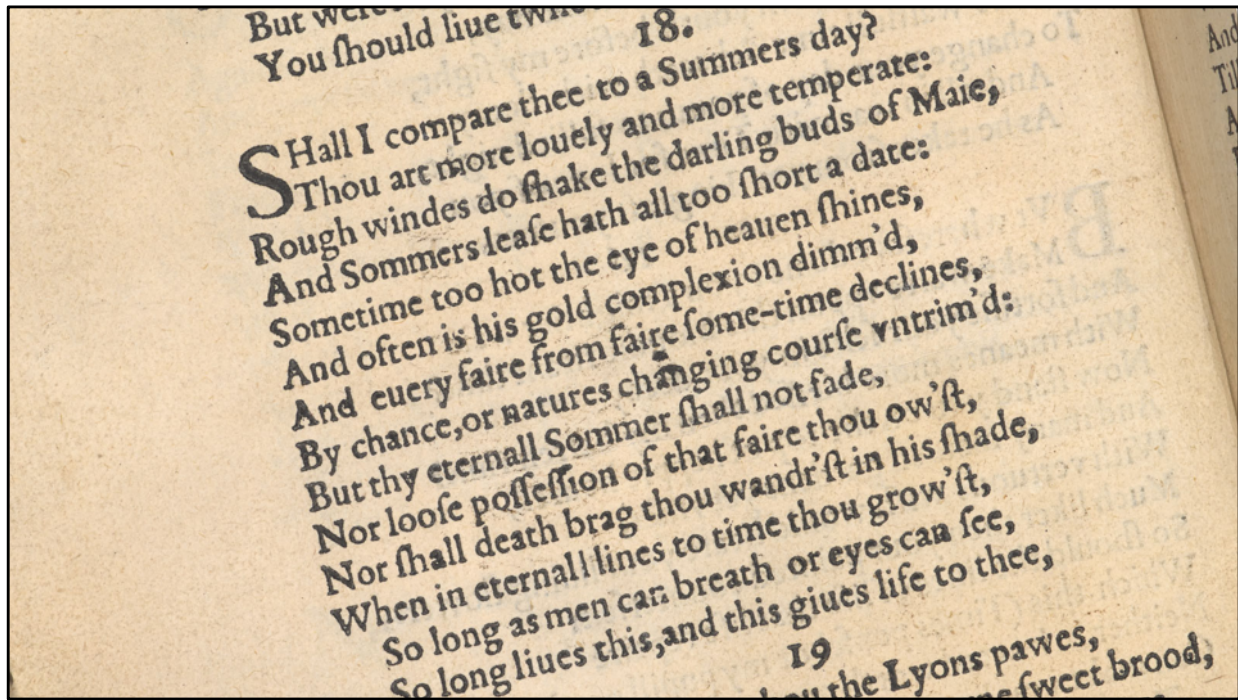
On September 19th, 2020, [Metronome](#)—a monumental d with a revolutionary mission: to display the ticking timeb our climate. It was a work of art, but also a call to action warming and the necessity for immediate measures, capti public’s heart. The Climate Clock, as the project has been humanities to work with climate science.

Climate change activism is all about persuasion. It’s not t you convince enough people of the significance of global change? One approach that has drawn the attention of res climatic fiction—or “cli-fi”—which approaches global w the genre of dystopian or post-apocalyptic fiction.



If climate change activists have found unexpected allies in artists, writers, and musicians, this isn't just a modern phenomenon. Shakespeare has also been a venue for green activism, the topic

Marking this double occasion, Nancy Lin—a first-year student at Harvard College planning to major in Mechanical Engineering—is publishing the essay “Global Warming and the Globe Theater: Shakespeare in Climate Activism” on the website *Shakespeare for All*.



Citing lines about false permanence from Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, she argues that climate activism is all about persuasion. The science isn't lacking. But art can stir emotion that data can't.



Shakespeare in particular envisions cataclysmic climate change, sometimes as a direct result of people's actions, as in this clip of Titania's speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from the Globe Theater.





Nancy Lin's essay is part of an ongoing project we call Public Shakespeare. It grows from our first-year writing course, called *Why Shakespeare?*, which grapples with the playwright's modern afterlives. Other pieces published by first-year students include ...

Ella Frigyik



Surreptitious Insurrection: Shakespeare and the Aesthetics of Revolt in Post-Civil War Nigeria

PDF

2018 Culture and Writing Prize

London, 2012. The first annual Globe to Globe festival saw the exposition of 37 Shakespeare adaptations in

“‘Surreptitious Insurrection’: Shakespeare and the Aesthetics of Revolt in Post-Civil War Nigeria”

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Home » News Ticker » Alex Grayson: Disney meet Shakespeare — romance, rebellion, action, intrigue and great storytelling

Alex Grayson: Disney meet Shakespeare — romance, rebellion, action, intrigue and great storytelling

May 3rd, 2019 - 0 Comment

Disney has recently been on a live action movie kick, with *The Lion King* being the next upcoming release. *The Lion King* is typically considered to be one of the more famous examples of Shakespeare in Disney (it's basically *Hamlet*).

However, Shakespearean plotlines are actually present throughout Disney movies, with some being more obvious than others. For example, the classic story of teenagers desiring a forbidden romance à la *Romeo and Juliet* is seen throughout Disney movies, especially during the Disney Renaissance.

The Disney Renaissance, for those of you who aren't Disney fanatics like myself, occurred from 1989 – 1999 and saw some of Disney's most famous movies be created. Interestingly enough, this era is when *Romeo & Juliet* storylines really emerged in popular Disney movies (it went from about 0 to 9 over the course of 10 years).

So why now? What about these storylines made them appealing and popular?

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RACE

Learning to Hate Shakespeare

What are the implications of being engaged with Shakespeare at the expense of what could otherwise be regarded as a black or African authenticity?

June 17, 2019



Jordan Mubako

BA student, Harvard College



“Learning to Hate Shakespeare”



Black Lives Matter in the Public Theater's *Much Ado About Nothing*

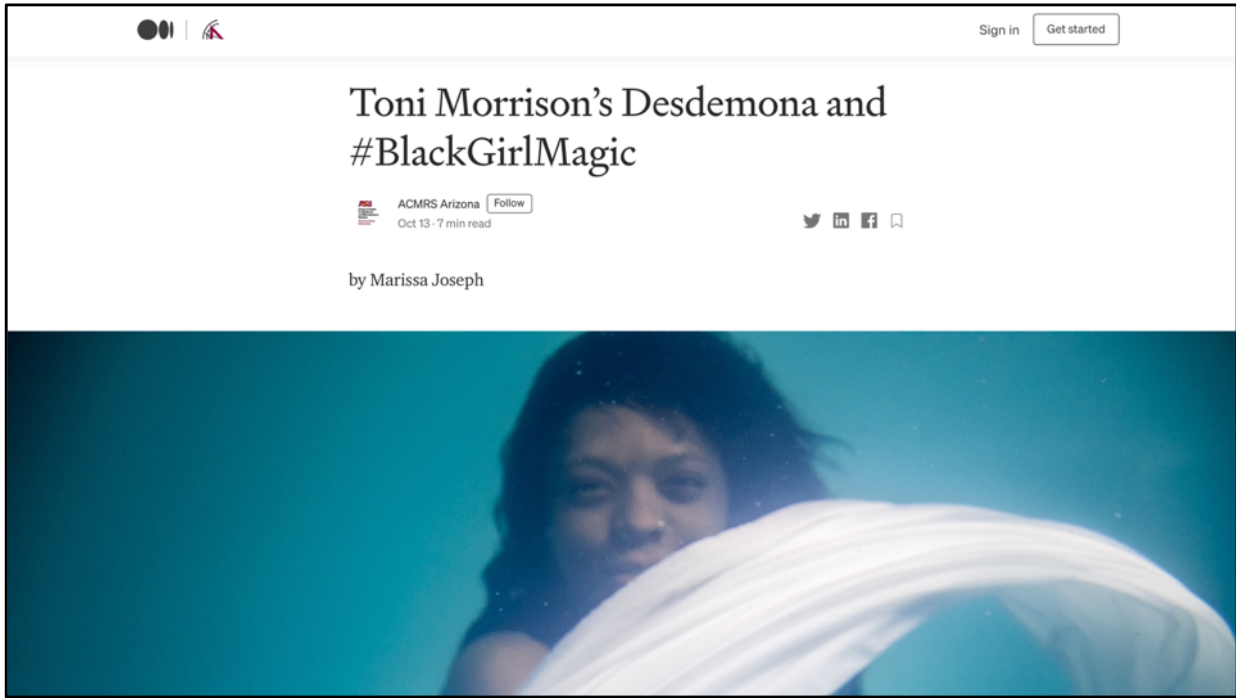
Five Perspectives on Race and Shakespeare in 2020

By Arsh Dhillon, Phillip Michalak, Bernadette Looney, Sonia Kangaju, and Charles Onesti

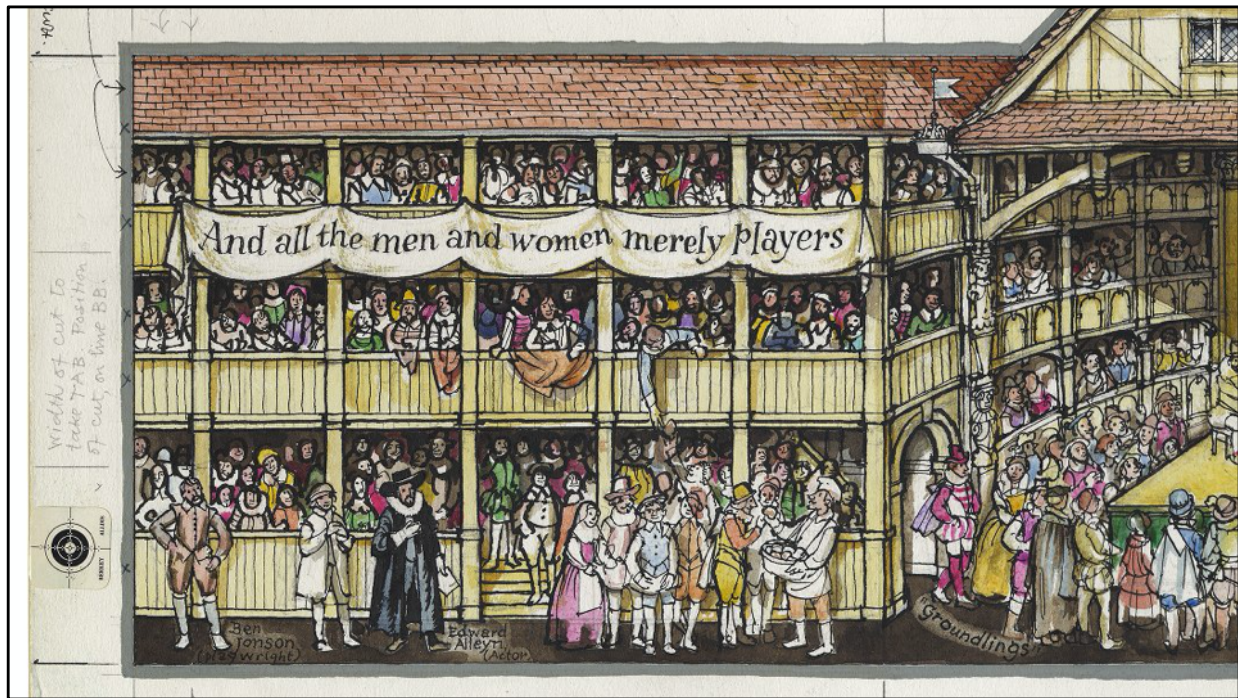
August 14,
2020



“Black Lives Matter in the Public Theater’s *Much Ado About Nothing*”



And “#BlackGirlMagic in Morrison’s Desdemona”



In our age of isolation, people want intellectual community and conversation. Folks are hungry for knowledge and an active life of the mind.

Interest in the arts and humanities remains high, though they have been steadily defunded for 40 years in the US. K-12 public education has been cut. State governments that once supported higher education now send the bill to individuals through tuition fees.

There are cultural consequences for deflating the intellectual life of a nation. Level of education was a major predictor in how people voted in the 2016 US presidential election.

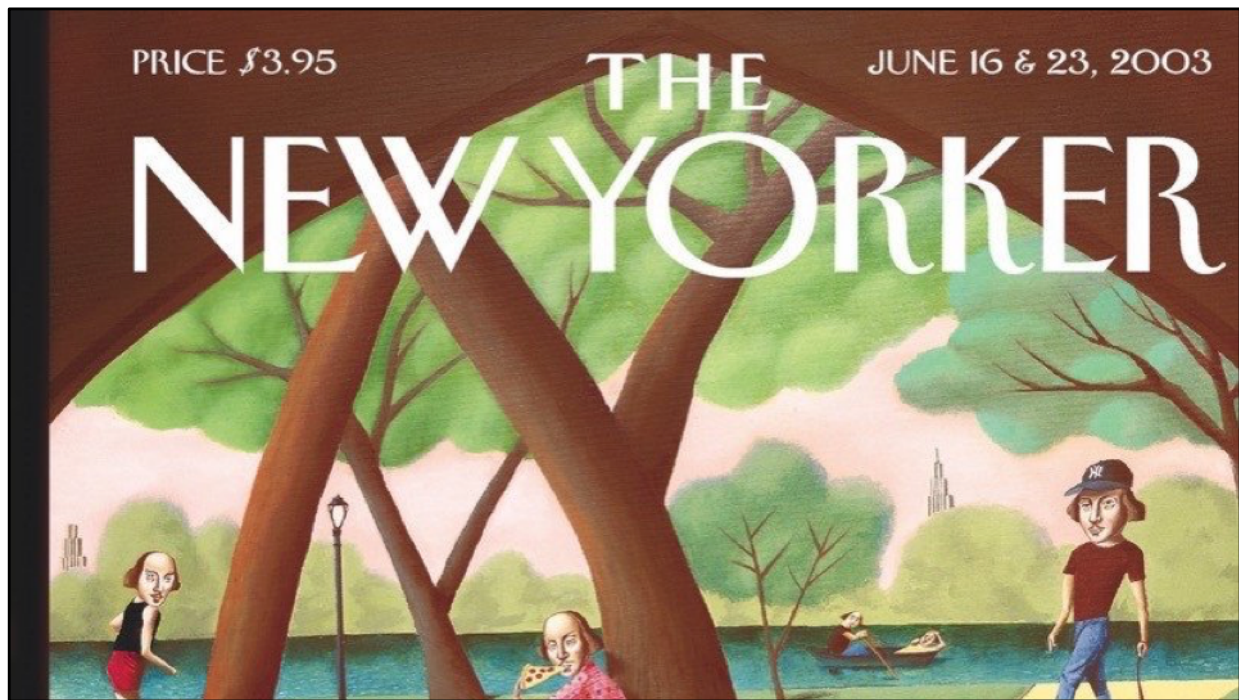
Shakespeare presents an interesting opportunity here.

PUBLIC SHAKESPEARE

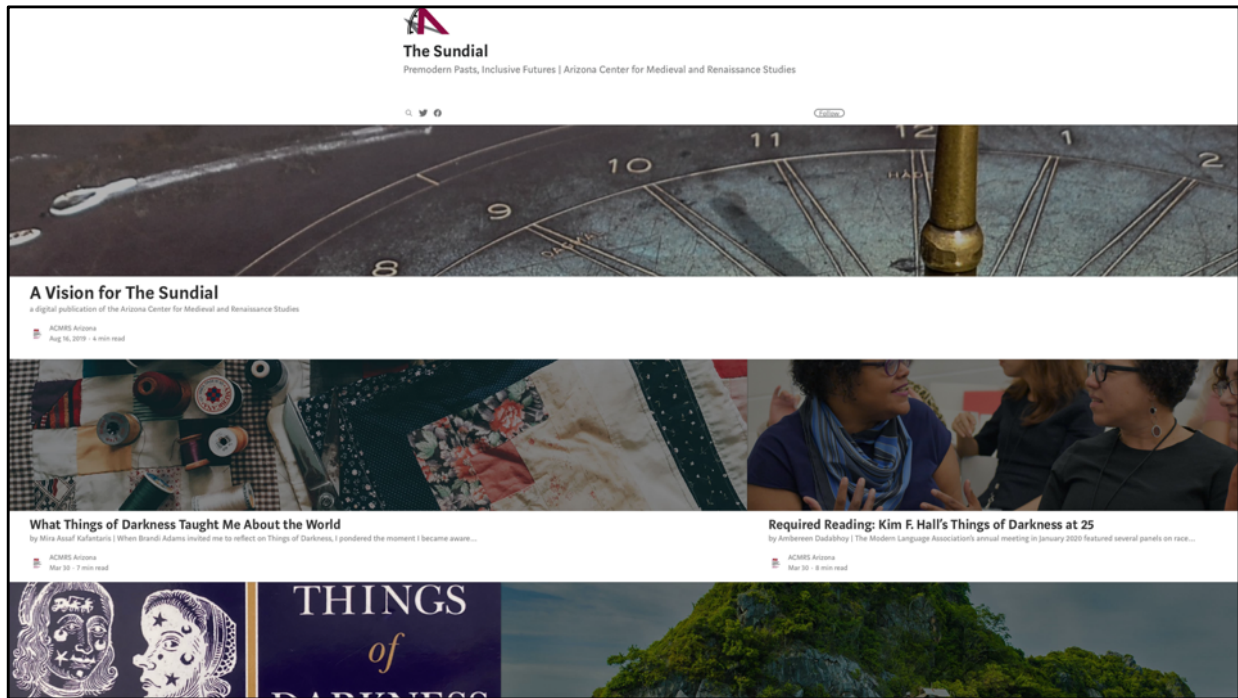
Public Shakespeare is of, by, and for all people, radically inclusive and fundamentally democratic early-modern scholarship engaged with the most important ideas and social issues of our time. It's Shakespeare studies as a public good, knowledge of an early-modern world that belongs to everyone.



Part of the project includes an oral history of Public Shakespeare featuring 25 hours of video interviews with Shakespeareans who do public-facing work, framed by thoughts about how the public is represented in Shakespeare's plays, how early-modern theater was a form of "public engagement," how Shakespeare became less public, and efforts to reverse that trend.



There's the old Public Shakespeare, the New Yorker model in which a white, male, tenured academic gifts Shakespearean wisdom to a highly educated upper-middle-class readership that's characterized as "the public sphere."



Then there's the new Public Shakespeare, which prioritizes passion over profession and more intimate community building based on perspectives from often precarious junior scholars leaning into insights availed by gender, race, class, religion, disability, sexuality, intersectionalities, and other identities.



Another part of the project is called “What Shakespeare Scholars Can Learn from Theater Makers about Public Engagement.” Academics committed to community service find a good model in theaters that are going mobile to meet people where they are, whether that’s a gymnasium, a prison, or on Twitter. From the Wooden O in 1599 to *The New Yorker*, the North Brooklyn YMCA, our Oecologies panel today, we can think about the good and not-as-good spaces in which Public Shakespeare occurs.

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Harvard University

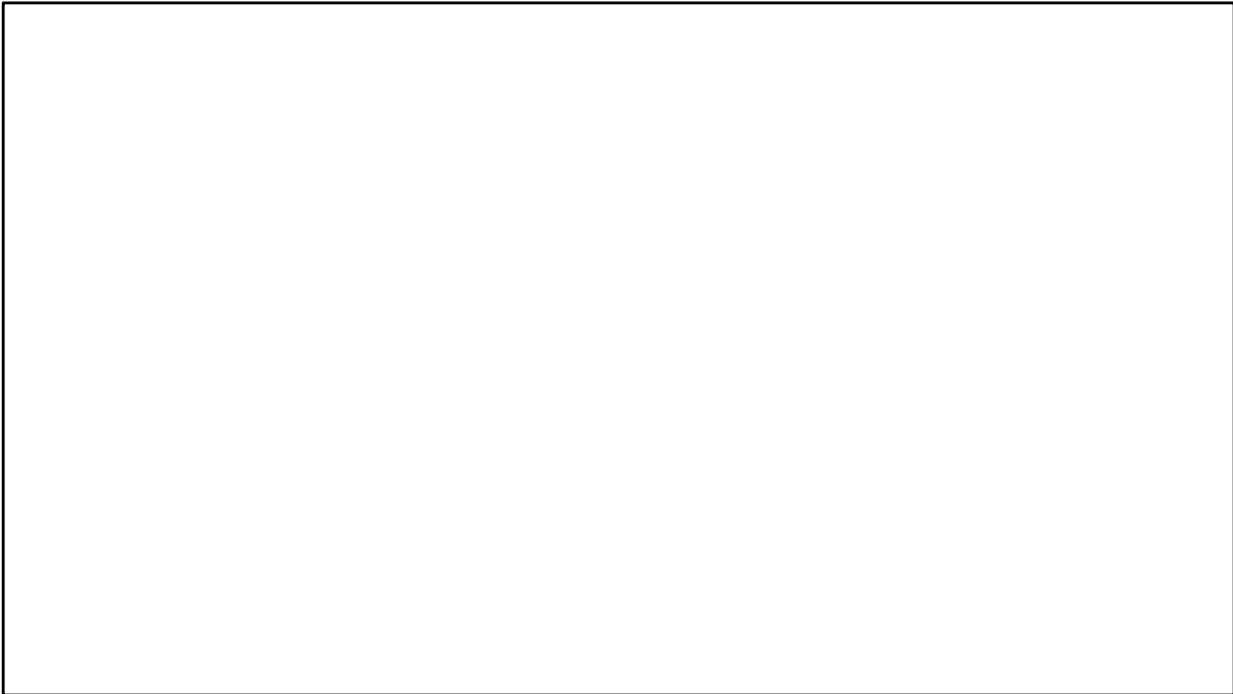
The Public Shakespeare Network

When coronavirus hit, people wanted information, history, perspective, thought, and conversation. Shakes-World responded with essays from Emma Smith, Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, James Shapiro, and Stephen Greenblatt—some of our most celebrated Public Shakespeareans.¹ There weren't essays in *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* from Rebecca Totaro, author of *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton*; Ernest B. Gilman, author of *Plague Writing in Early Modern England*; Eric Langley, author of *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications*; or Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-

Last week at the Shakespeare Association of America's annual convention, I suggested we're starting to see the emergence of a Public Shakespeare Network, a decentralized, grassroots movement supporting communities and scholars looking to think about, with, through, and against Shakespeare and other early-modern literature beyond the confines of academia.

TOWARD A CENTER FOR PUBLIC SHAKESPEARE

Today I'll further suggest that it's time to organize. A lot of us have been agitating. We need a Center for Public Shakespeare. I wrote the soaring vision that follows in late 2019, pre-pandemic, and I'll say a word about what's changed.

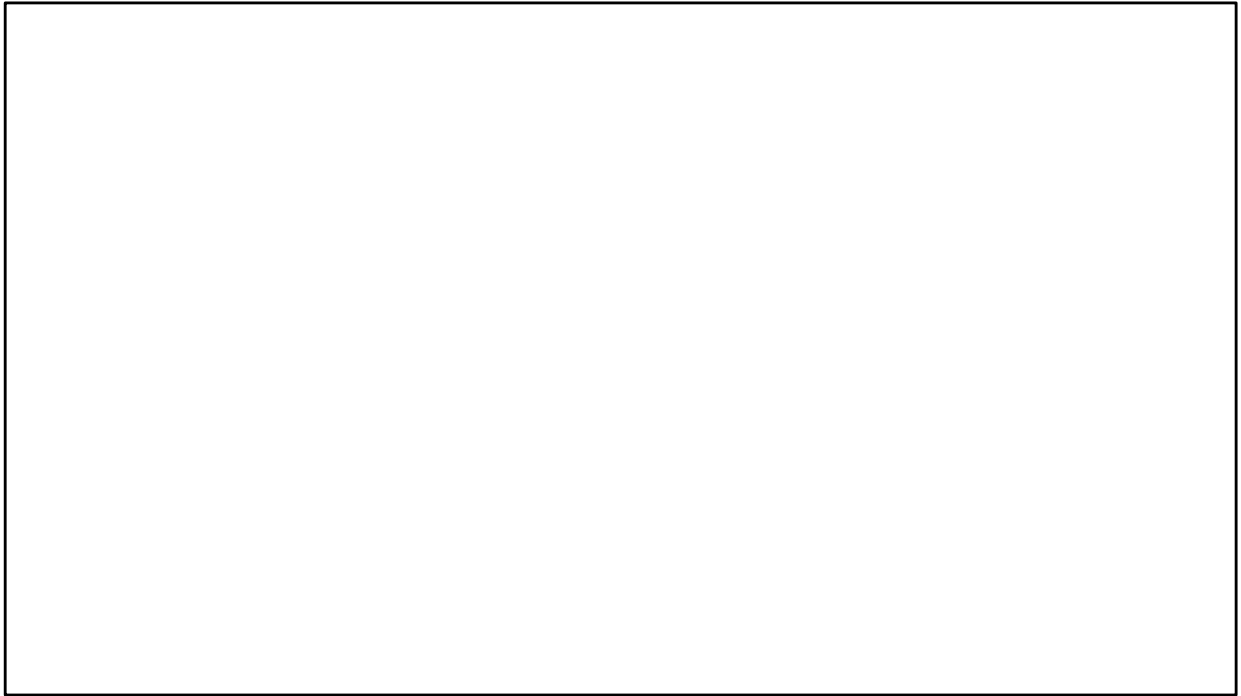


But the Center for Public Shakespeare would fight day and night to make space for Shakespeare studies that belong to everyone.

It would be fundamentally democratic: everyone has access; everyone belongs; differences are not just accepted but celebrated, deliberately pursued, and well-funded.

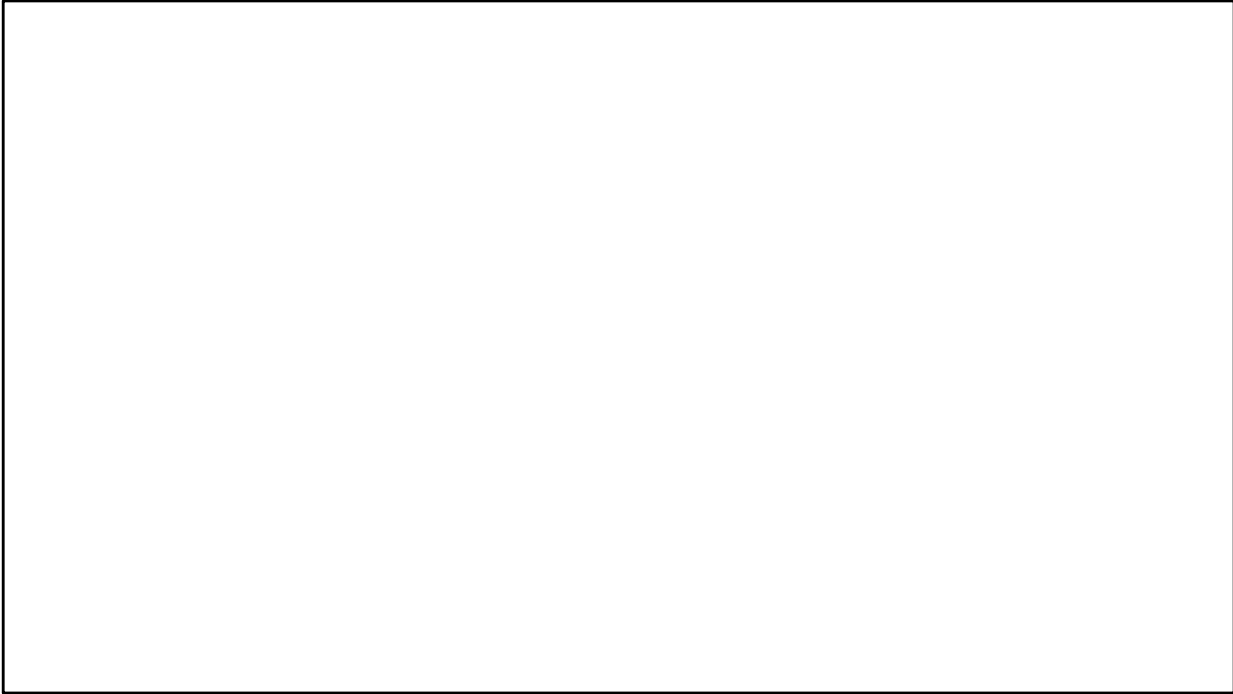
The Center would exist to knock down walls and open up doors in Shakespeare studies, broadening the idea of who is in the field and who it's for.

That means that we are never done making space for new scholars, new perspectives, new meanings, and new manifestations.



The Center would connect Shakespeare studies to today's most pressing questions.

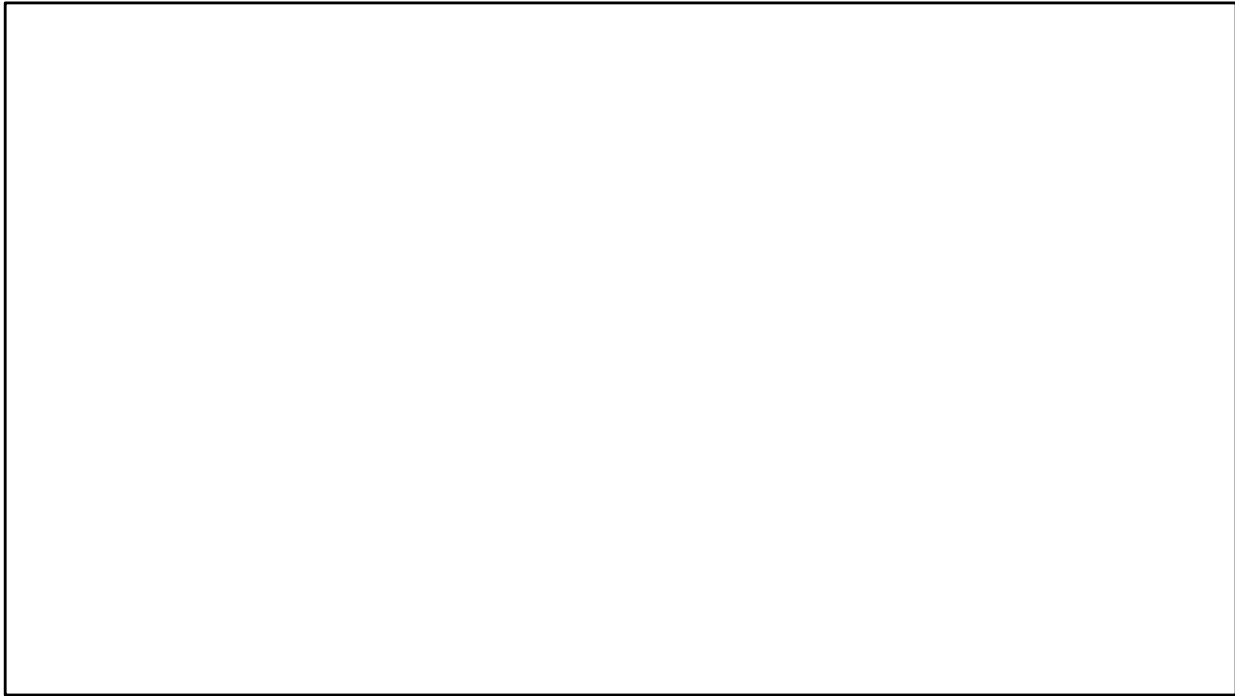
It would ask what conflicts are most alive in our world, what new truth can we glean, whom do we reserve empathy for, whom do we leave out, and whom can we turn to for scholarship that brings us closer to our humanity.



The Center would be unafraid to ask big ethical questions about Shakespeare: unapologetic in celebrating praiseworthy moments, unflinching in critiquing shortcomings.

We would not cower from the prospect that knowledge of Shakespeare and his cultural afterlives—including the parts we don't like—can transform how we understand our world and lead our lives.

The Center would be proudly activist, asking how knowledge of our literary past can transform our political futures.

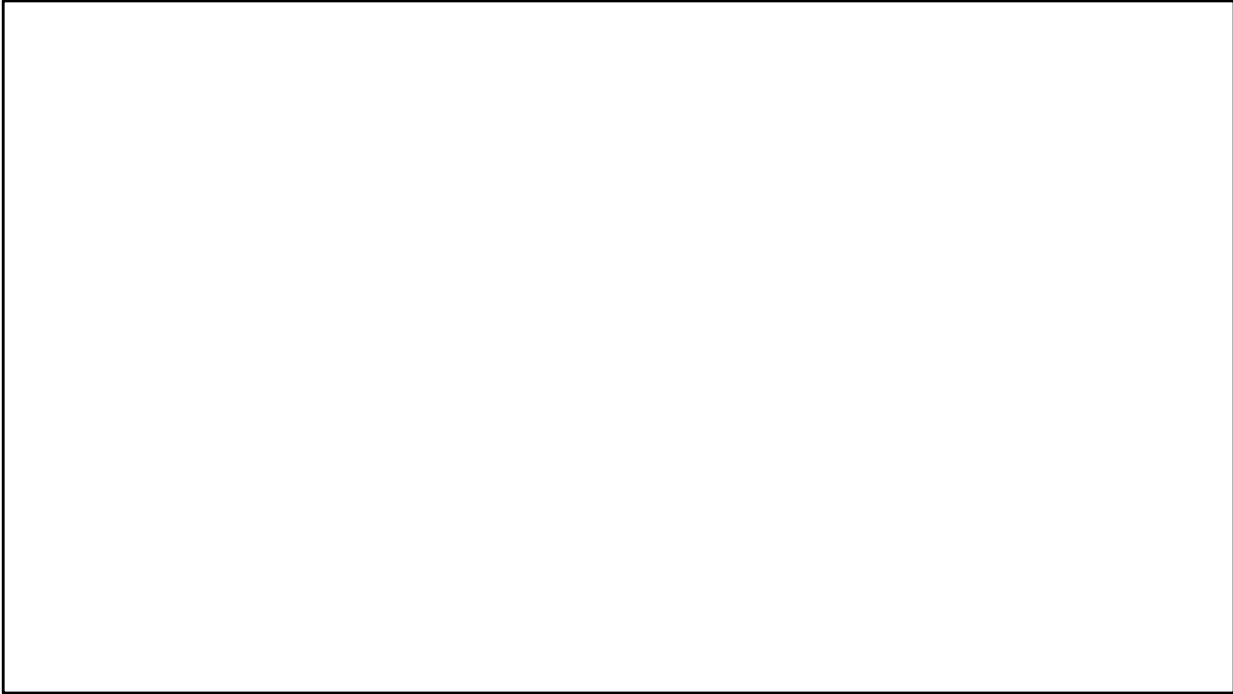


It would be a big tent. A diversity of experiences and worldviews would be brought to bear on Shakespeare.

The Center would interrogate the familiar and the unfamiliar in Shakespeare studies, the status quo and the unimaginable, and first glimpses of different perspectives.

The Center would be radically inclusive and reflect—in the classroom, on the stage, and in administration—the city, the nation, and the world.

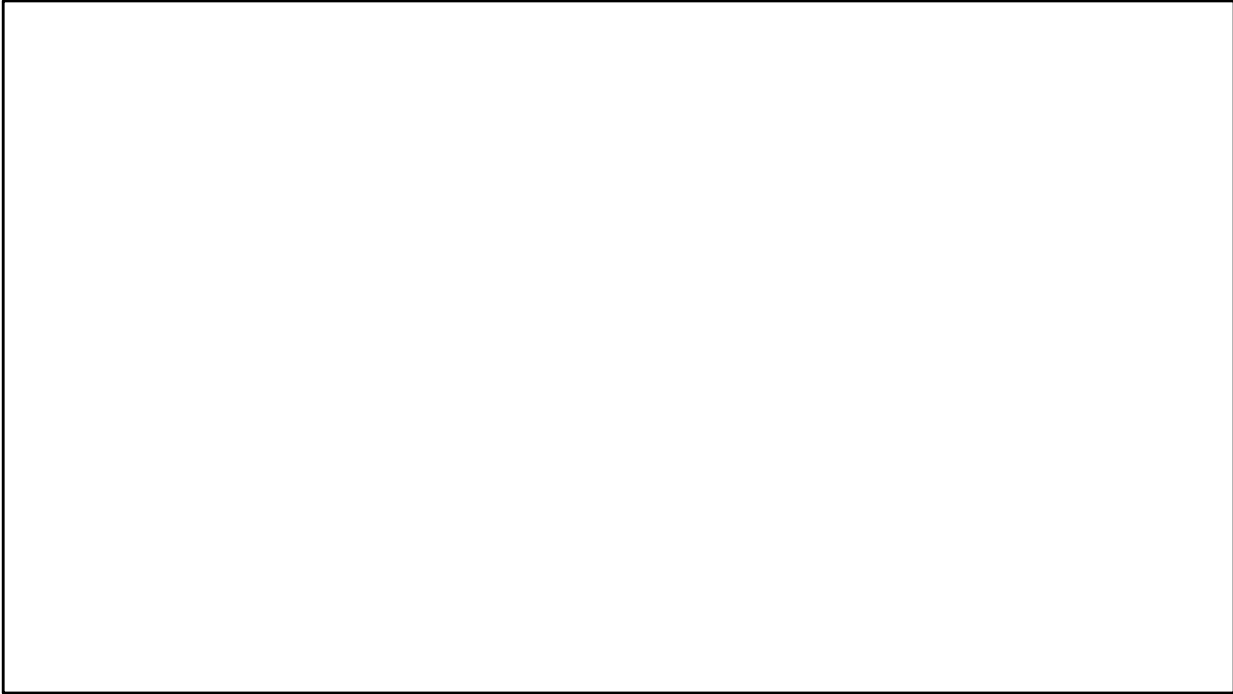
It would be accessible in all forms, always open-access with physical and virtual spaces accessible to people with disabilities.



It would bring scholars together with performers to ask how to think through our twenty-first-century Shakespearean performances and how to perform our twenty-first-century Shakespeare scholarship.

The Center would work across the disciplines to bring new scholarly perspectives to Shakespeare, and to ask how Shakespeare scholars can contribute to other disciplines, professions, and policies.

It would blur the line between scholarly and creative writing. It would stage performances and adaptations built on knowledge derived from Shakespeare scholarship.

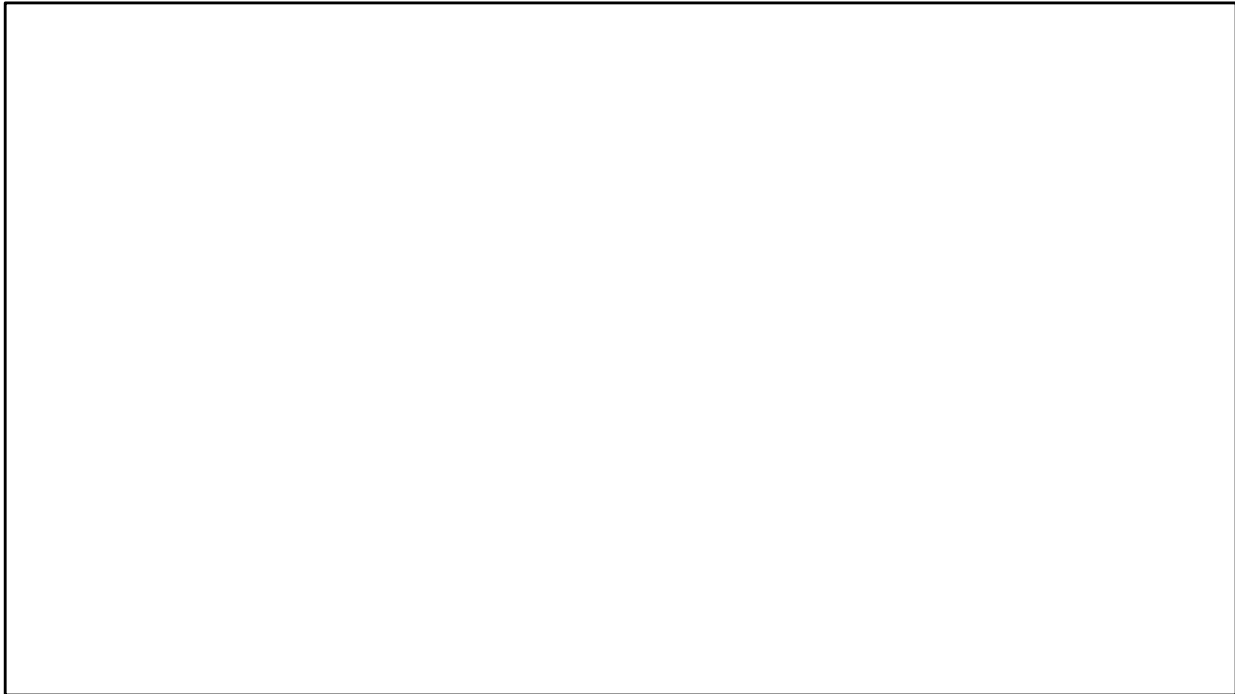


The Center would be mobile, local, digital, and global. It would centralize the decentering of Shakespeare.

We would go from the kindergarten classroom to the retirement home asking how Shakespeare studies can deepen and enliven education.

Our Mobile Unit would go into local neighborhoods, community centers, schools, veterans organizations, homeless shelters, and correctional facilities, but also into regions of the nation and world that don't have access to big institutions of higher education.

Our Digital Unit would be active on social media.

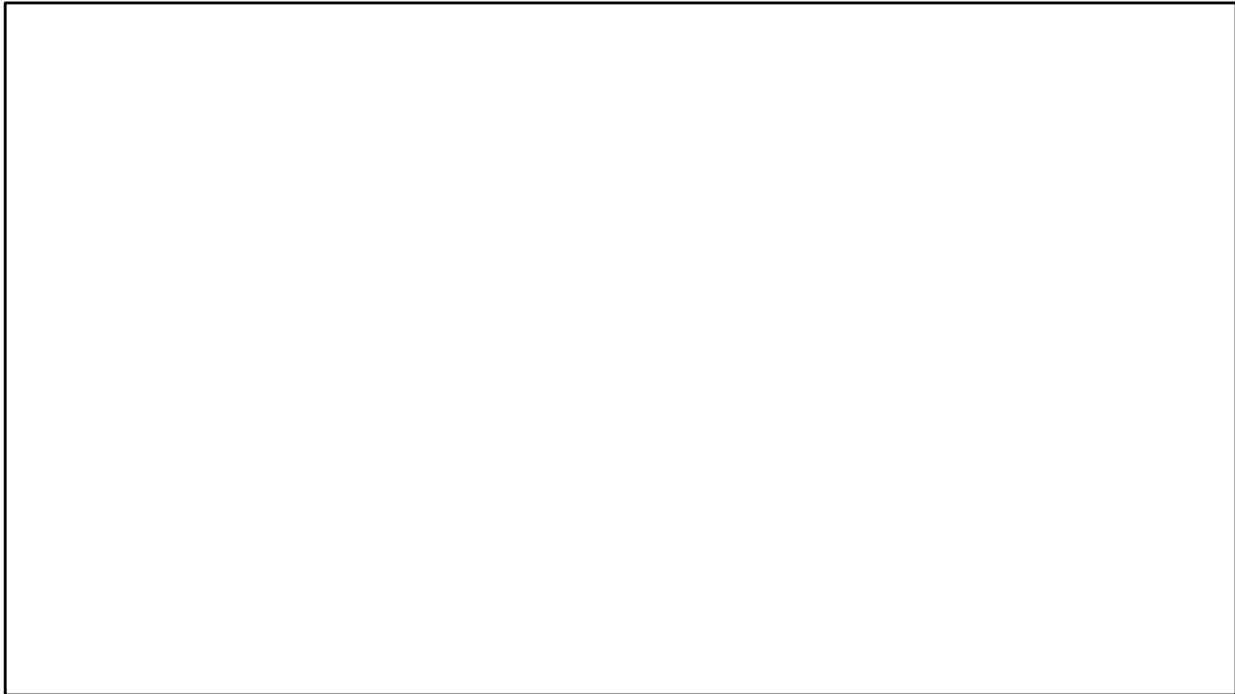


An academic center that is of, by, and for all people isn't merely a space for scholarship—it's a living, breathing part of the community.

Here Shakespeare creates conversations, inspires action, and explores pressing and complex issues. The Center would coordinate and materially support the scholars revolutionizing Shakespeare studies by doing the work of Public Shakespeare.

It would make space for scholars to connect, explore, and further develop their ideas and their resonance with society's issues, struggles, and futures.

It would channel resources to the Shakespeare scholars whose work is most closely bound up with the biggest issues and ideas of our own day—which to me right now are social identity, climate change, and computer science.



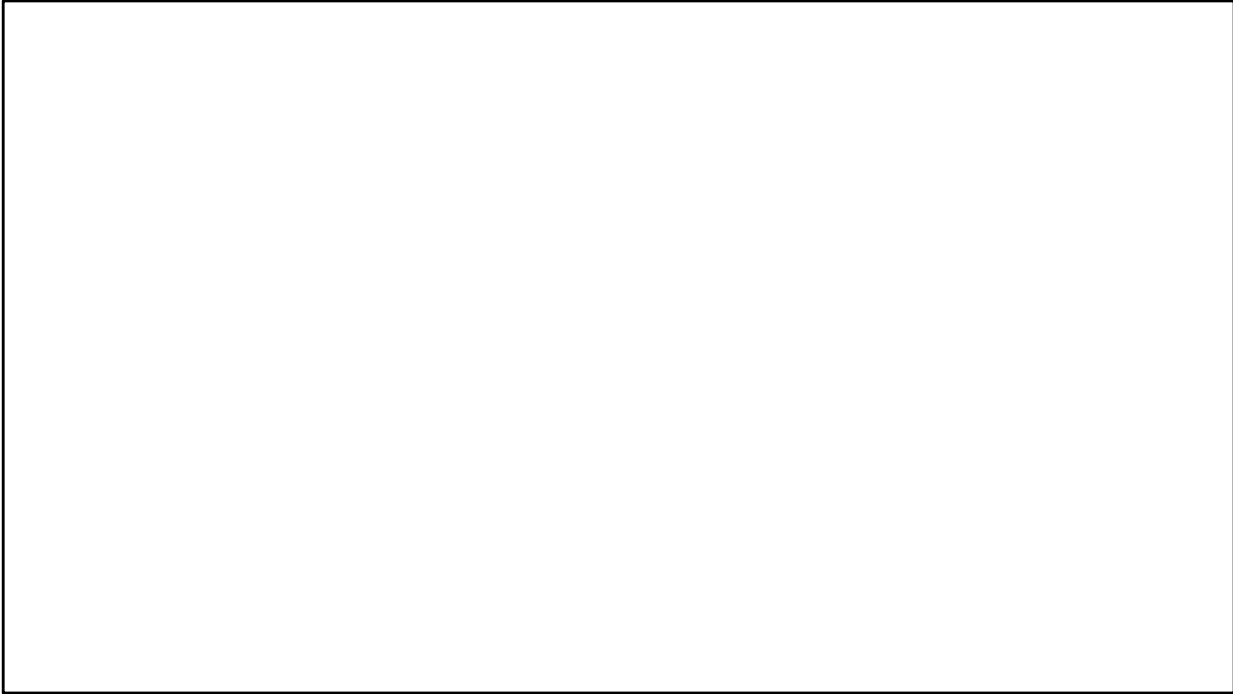
And then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As Sharon O’Dair and Timothy Francisco say in an upcoming piece about Public Shakespeare, “You never want a good crisis to go to waste.”

So today I’d like to consider the prospect of a Center for Public Shakespeare through the Oecologies framework, which allows us to consider environmentalism in two ways.

First, environmentalism as climate activism.

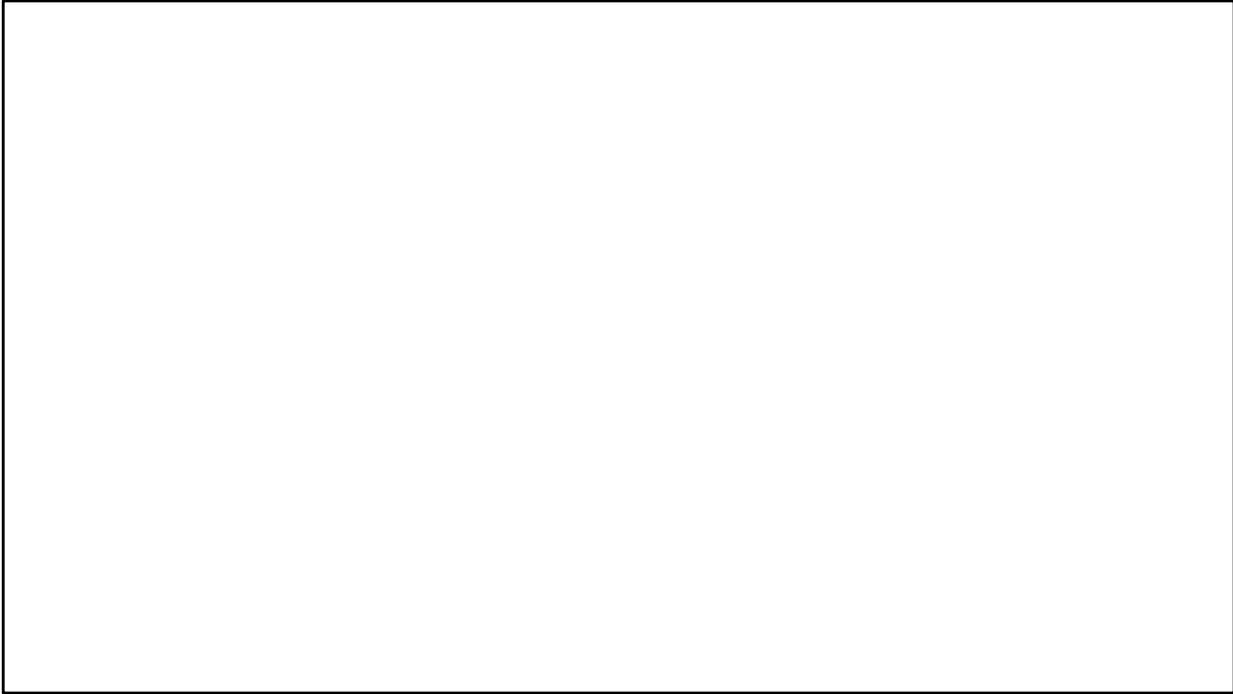
Second, environmentalism as the relation of things to their surroundings.

So two questions beyond Shakespeare that we can ask:



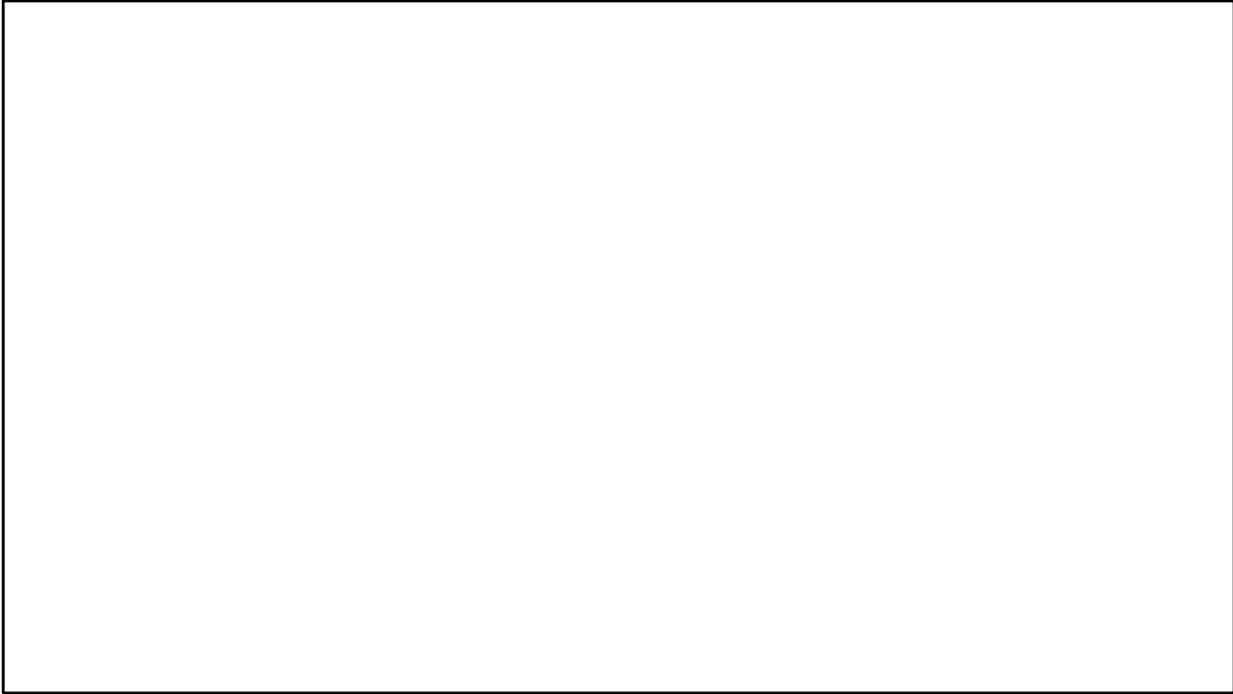
First, how has the digitization of academic conferences because of COVID-19 improved the carbon footprint of academic work?

That's environmentalism as climate activism in building a more sustainable approach to academia—as we shift from the physical timber of Shakespeare's "Wooden O" to the digital 1s and 0s of virtual spaces.

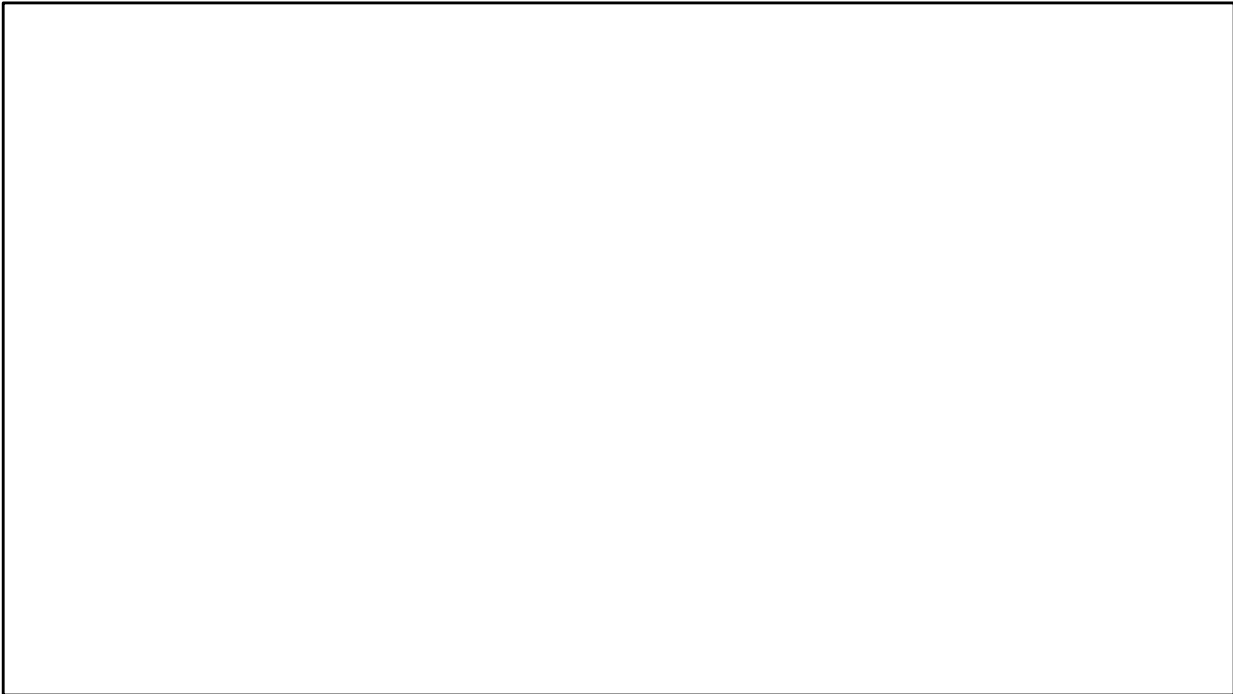


Second, how has the elimination of physical presence at academic events been a challenge to the quality of intellectual exchange?

That's environmentalism as the relation of things to their surroundings, and I'm thinking especially of those informal moments at conferences and events where people connect, build relationships, and develop ideas outside the official program.



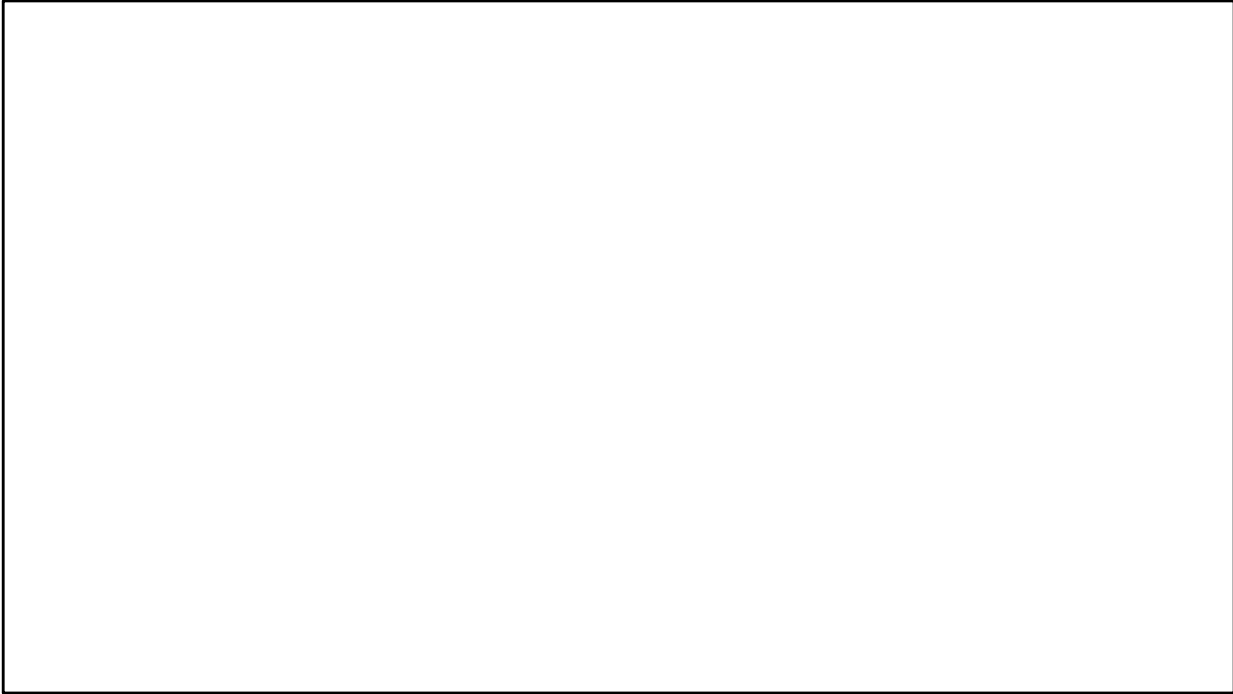
And then a third question: What would a born-digital, entirely virtual, publicly engaged academic research center look like?



The final thing I want to say is that I've been really inspired by folks who have thrown caution to the wind and launched initiatives during the pandemic. And I'm kind of in an asking-for-forgiveness rather than -permission mood.

So I'm just going to go ahead and say that it gives me great pleasure to announce the establishment of the Center for Public Shakespeare.

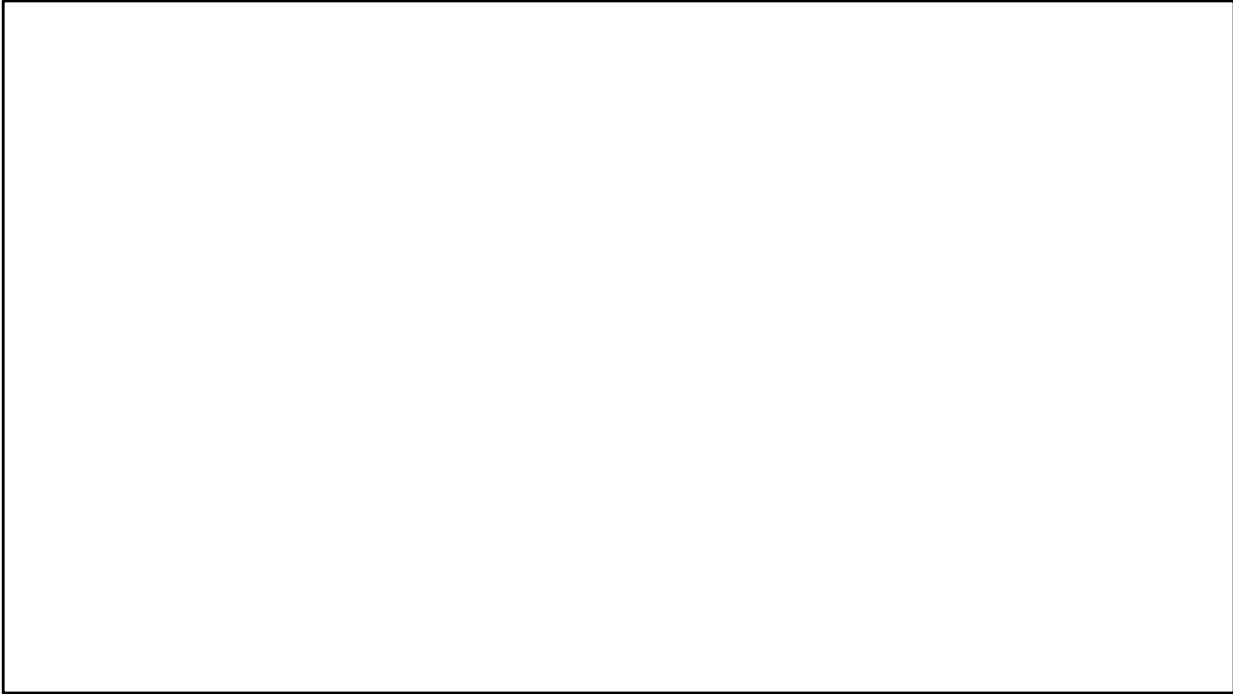
We've got no budget, no by-laws, no board of directors, no permission, and in a month my limited-term contract maxes out and I'll have no job. We've just got a vision, a chip on our shoulder, no fucks to give, and a plucky can-do attitude.



So thank you all for attending the launch of the Center for Public Shakespeare, although you had no choice.

You're all now honorary lifetime members, which includes perks like a 100% discount on all items in our non-existent gift shop, and free access to everything that we do, which will always be 100% open-access anyway.

I look forward to the hour and the years ahead in which we can chat about, among other things, the variety of ecological considerations of a fully virtual academic center.



For now, in our pandemic year, perhaps we can say to Shakespeare what Hamlet says to the spirit of his father: “Remember thee? / Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe.”